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Psychological landscape films: narrative and stylistic approaches

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This discussion serves to address the narrative and stylistic approaches to imbuing natural settings in films with a psychological dimension, or, in other words, cinematically mobilizing landscapes to function beyond their usual function as a backdrop. "Narrative" here indicates that certain storylines, according to their psychological elements, configure characters within given natural settings differently than do conventional modes of storytelling. And "stylistic" indicates that such approaches to visual representation tend toward a character-centered, subjectivized point of view, as opposed to more observational and/or objective means of cinematic depiction. Ultimately, then, both a certain *kind* of story and the *manner* in which this story is presented cinematically determines when a given film should be deemed what I am calling a "psychological landscape film." Instead of human characters portrayed within an authenticating wilderness, as in the classical Hollywood Western, the precise topography of the landscape in such films becomes reflective of a particular human consciousness. As such, it is productive to consider these narrative and stylistic approaches as akin to the larger subjectivity suggested through the skewed and contorted sets found in Robert Wiene's seminal German Expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1921), whose narrative context is only clarified when we learn the narrator is actually a patient in a mental asylum. This film's psychological wonderland of human derangement, however synthetic, becomes analogous to certain techniques of re-contextualizing *natural* outdoor settings beyond the mere establishment of setting. But rather than depending on a climactic narrative twist to indicate a subjective mode as in *Caligari*, a psychological landscape film typically relies on the established premise of a protagonist's introspection, ranging from serene contemplation to dramatic internal conflict. As we shall see, I find global and historical tendencies lean toward the latter extreme.

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Image 1: *Caligari* uses abstract mise-en-scène to establish a psychological universe. A psychological landscape film seeks to accomplish the same effect with realistic, natural outdoor settings. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1921)

For my part, affirming the existence of any such landscape-oriented film, regardless of the cultural circumstances of its realization, begins with a generic set of narrative considerations, which are then substantiated through particular stylistic gestures. As I have suggested, we could begin with an evaluation of the protagonist's disposition toward the natural setting. For example, does this natural setting present itself as an obstacle toward the protagonist accomplishing a goal? And, accordingly, is the landscape featured prominently as such, assuming a dual function as both visual spectacle *and* "antagonist"? For my purposes, these are productive questions to be addressed initially in assessing the precise relationship between human characters and natural settings. The casual viewer, on the other hand, tends to arrive at the notion of a "landscape-oriented" film by simply noticing when a natural setting is featured more than viewing experience would dictate. As I strive to point out, however, not all such films are psychological, per se. Many landscape-oriented films seek to merely *authenticate* outdoor settings by combining real locations with widescreen cinematography, as in so many Hollywood Westerns, as I have said, as well as in so many historical epics of the 1950s and '60s, such as *The Vikings* (1958), *Spartacus* (1960), or *Genghis Khan* (1965). 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 the visceral *aspects* of landscape, in order to engage a subjective narrative mode, or, more precisely, a psychological allegory of inner human experience. The latter "type" of film should be recognized as a global phenomenon, not restricted to particular cultures or epochs, even if there are, indeed, particular cultural contexts and/or epochs apparently more prolific than others with these films.

Whether we have embraced a given film initially as "landscape-oriented" or not, to affirm an allegorical dimension becomes a task of corroborating a psychological premise for the film's storyline. In other words, we must attempt, as soon as possible, to recognize a subjective mode as somehow compulsory beyond the usual objective mode of narration. Again, it is productive to consider the disposition of the central character. Is he or she experiencing any form of internal conflict, for example, in the form of a moral dilemma or existential crisis? If so, we as the audience are compelled not only to observe that character's experience from a distance, but also to perceive it more directly, intimately, and *viscerally*. Accordingly, such a narrative placed in a cinematic context, encourages the mobilization of visual correlatives, or, more generally, a "subjective" means of portraying this character's inner experience on screen. So, a psychological premise is typically revealed through the narrative conventions of plot and dialogue, *and then* cinematic techniques are employed to accentuate the internal conflict, or rather, to render "external" what is conventionally perceived and treated as internal. In this way, psychological struggle per se, becomes action-oriented, or at least has the potential to be when a character enters or *progresses* into a given domain of "otherness," positioned as "antithetical" to his or her point of origin (typically a city or populated zone). This particular narrative progression, in its capacity for allegorical import, then finds its most effective fruition through a number of cinematic techniques that more definitively establish a subjective mode.

If and when a psychological premise can be corroborated, it then becomes a question of detecting these stylistic strategies employed to "mobilize" the landscape beyond its usual function as backdrop, or in other words, to associate it with human psychological activity, namely that of the protagonist. I am referring specifically to *two* such cinematic choices: *juxtaposing* characters against a natural setting in such a way as to emphasize the landscape while still maintaining human presence, and the even more aggressive editing technique of *superimposing* images of characters with the landscape, as if to remove any ambiguity regarding their implied correlation. The rigor I apply to these evaluations proceeds from tracing psychological narrative paradigms in a given film *and then* taking stock of stylistic techniques arguably positioned to "psychologize" landscape settings that already assume a more visceral function as spectacle. Typically, what makes a natural landscape setting visceral, as I've suggested, are the very qualities constituting "otherness" vis-à-vis the trappings of "civilization" as it is culturally perceived. As a thoroughly human construct, then, potential "wilderness" zones such as deserts, mountains, jungles, the open sea, and even outer space may become "landscapes of the mind," not for what makes them sublime or beautiful in their apparent essence, but for what differentiates them from urban and other zones made hospitable by humans. In other words, their essence *becomes* poignant precisely in a perceived,

inhospitable "exoticness." In this context, a cultural differentiation may be explored between a "civilized" or "modernized" society and one more intimately tied to the natural environment, as in Nicolas Roeg's 1971 film *Walkabout*, about two Sidney youths encountering an Aborigine while lost in the Australian outback, or in Akira Kurosawa's 1975 film *Dersu Uzala*, about a Russian explorer becoming dependent on the survival skills of a nomadic Goldi tribesman in the Siberian wilderness. In these films, a critique of modernization reveals itself through the notion that aboriginal cultures retain a more intimate connection to the environment, and so are less prone to feelings of alienation or existential angst.

Before I offer a systematic breakdown of my approach to psychological landscape films, I should also mention that this article represents a continuation of sorts to my book-length investigation *Landscape Allegory in Cinema* (Palgrave 2010), which attempts to delineate occidental trajectories of landscape depiction from the Middle Ages to the present, across the mediums of literature, painting, photography, and (mainly) cinema. I intended this study as a general "introduction" to what I see as a vastly unexplored area of aesthetic research, particularly in cinema studies, since up to that time, no such single-authored study existed. Although, two essay collections on the topic had also emerged, namely *Landscape and Film* (2006) and *Cinema and Landscape* (2010), both of whose entries can be associated only vaguely. Here, I make an effort to objectify my approach a bit further, for example, by focusing more on the formalist techniques I see as recurrent in these films, regardless of their cultural context. Also, there were any number of psychological landscape films I had (and still have) yet to discover, so I want to "append" my study with some fresh examples. Among these are Asian films I excluded categorically as "non-western" and so beyond the scope of that book, but which I am now in a position to consider within a more generalized context. In other words, my updated consideration of landscape allegory reviews some of the same findings I had restricted to an "occidental" context, but here attempts a less culturally specific or symptomatic approach to understanding how cinema "globally" transforms and manipulates natural settings in the ways I have already pointed to. By the same token, this is no attempt to bring "everything" up to date. This is an inexhaustible area of discovery in cinema alone, not to mention in interdisciplinary considerations of landscape allegory across the arts.

Narrative Paradigms of Psychological Landscape Films

Let's consider the notion of a psychological premise a bit further toward exploring the mobilization of landscape as metaphor. Again, a film typically establishes a psychological mode of narrative through a protagonist suffering an internal conflict. Such an approach at least

partly characterizes the larger transformation from the "classical" pre-war Hollywood narrative to the more psychological and subjectivized post-WWII film narrative, as in the case of the Western genre. Take, for example, John Ford's 1939 film *Stagecoach*, the director's first attempt to further authenticate "frontier" settings by shooting among the awesome buttes of Monument Valley, in the border region of Arizona and Utah. John Wayne's character and his itinerant white companions are pitted against a band of marauding Apaches in a purely thematic and typical celebration of American manifest destiny. Of course, at the hands of the U.S. Cavalry, the whites ultimately persevere. However, in Ford's 1956 film *The Searchers*, the same essential conflict between "good" white settlers and "evil" Native Americans is complicated by John Wayne's character's quest for his abducted niece (Natalie Wood), who has since assimilated Comanche culture, even becoming one of the chief's several squaws. This unanticipated development establishes a psychological conflict in the vindictive white protagonist, revealed in terms of whether to "rescue" his kin, or treat her newly as one among the "enemy" Comanche nation, and so exterminate her accordingly. His internal struggle is meted out within the selfsame Monument Valley terrain, but in this latter psychological context, the "frontier" wilderness takes on a metaphorical dimension beyond simply authenticating historical realism. Now, the labyrinthine contours of the desert's towering pinnacles emulate the moral complexity of the human psyche, and the terrain itself becomes more than a physical obstacle merely to be traversed, as in the previous film. In a postwar context, then, this latter film recontextualizes its natural setting as a palpable moral universe—a widescreen "spectacle" of inner moral conflict. I should clarify here that this attempt at "re-contextualizing" the landscape is not only a matter of this film's psychological premise, but is also a matter of framing John Wayne's character in more intimate ways within the landscape than in John Ford's earlier film. I shall elaborate on these and related stylistic choices in due course.

Once an internal conflict is established, a psychological landscape film eventually propels its central character away from his or her "civilized" point of origin and into an "uncivilized" wilderness. In the latter natural setting, this protagonist is finally able to bring his or her internal struggles to some form of resolution, as in *The Searchers*, when John Wayne's character ultimately decides against slaying his "Comanche" niece. This particular storyline has a somewhat fluid evolution within the Western genre, traceable at least as far back as David O. Selznick's 1946 production of *Duel in the Sun*. That film portrays a female protagonist (Jennifer Jones) struggling between social responsibility and self-interest, thematically reflected through her "half-breed" status as both white and Native American. She eventually faces her dually configured nemesis/lover (Gregory Peck) in a climactic showdown within the rugged metaphorical domain of "Squaw's Head Rock." The two of them die in each other's arms, alt-

hough only after the determined protagonist has successfully crawled up a rocky incline to reach him. The anthropomorphic reference here to the protagonist's divided conscience, combined with her attendant physical struggles within this natural setting, make for a somewhat overstated landscape allegory. But perhaps this provides all the more reason to interpret this film as launching a "duel in the sun" paradigm, which would reappear most apparently in a pair of Anthony Mann Westerns, namely *Winchester '73* (1950) and *Man of the West* (1958), which also exploit rocky wilderness enclosures as the climactic "site" of their protagonists' inner psychological struggles. In the former film, the protagonist (Jimmy Stewart) must eventually confront his father's murderer, who is also his brother (Stephen McNally). In the latter film, the reformed protagonist (Gary Cooper) must finally gun down his own uncle, who had raised him to be an outlaw. The evolution of this particular Western landscape allegory would appear to find its logical conclusion in Monte Hellman's 1966 film *The Shooting*, wherein a similar concentration of craggy pinnacles is mobilized as the "arena" for the protagonist's climactic existential shootout with his doppelganger (both played by Warren Oates). These Westerns, despite their varying thematic agendas, exploit the anthropomorphic quality of rocky enclosures also characteristic of the American "frontier" in order to lend visual currency to narratives of internal crisis.

My concerns thus far have been with the larger approach of combining specific storylines with certain visceral aspects of landscape, in order to accomplish psychological allegory. The enduring genre of the Western is a productive means by which to trace the postwar transformation of natural settings from backdrop into metaphor, or, more precisely, from wilderness as an external "frontier" to be conquered and colonized into a subjective reflection of internal crisis. It is precisely through the dichotomy of "civilization" and "wilderness" that the psychological landscape Western becomes categorically equivalent to so many other films exploring different eras and cultural contexts around the globe. In other words, a larger allegory is potentially mobilized in *any* human progression away from a civilization and into a particular wilderness landscape, specifically as an inward psychological progression toward some deeper moral realization or existential truth.

This is where the space/place theories explored in the writings of Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward S. Casey, and others become particularly useful. Space/place theory springboards from the fundamental notion that any physical "space" only becomes a "place" once it is endowed with human presence. Tuan, in his study *Space and Place*, for example, asserts, "If we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place" (Tuan 2001, 6). And so, whereas Ford's earlier film *Stagecoach* establishes "space" by way of a

mere passage of its white characters through a hostile Apache wilderness, *The Searchers*, with its protagonist's various "pauses" (or confrontations with Comanches), allows the same natural landscape to become a "place." In other words, the former film behaves as a national allegory of westward "passage" for its own sake, authenticated by the frontier landscape as "space." The latter film, however, becomes a *postwar* allegory of internal crisis, for which the inhospitable landscape is an external manifestation—both an actual *and* metaphorical "place." Similarly, in several other Westerns pursuing this "duel in the sun" paradigm, the protagonist must venture away from any vestiges of civilization or settlement and into an inhospitable wilderness in order to eventually confront his or her psychological nemesis within a rocky enclosure. It is this particular transformation of objective wilderness "space" into a subjective metaphorical "place" that is fundamental to these and other psychological landscape films.

Psychological Juxtaposition

At this point, I have discussed the psychological landscape film in terms of a specific relationship between narrative and mise-en-scène. That is, a protagonist must mete out some form of internal conflict (the plot) precisely through the transformation of an inhospitable wilderness "space" into a temporary "place" of self-confrontation (mise-en-scène). Moreover, any human antagonists to be encountered within such a natural terrain, such as the Native Americans in John Ford's films, become merely aspects of the hostile landscape itself. Such an approach to visual allegory in cinema is typically substantiated through additional techniques of cinematography and editing, namely the subjective visual conventions of *juxtaposition* and *superimposition*. The first of these, in this context, involves the framing of human subjects against a natural landscape in such a way as to imply a direct psychological (or spiritual) relationship with the wilderness. Juxtaposition, of course, has an extensive legacy in the visual arts, particularly in paintings associated with the European Sublime. German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, in particular, demonstrates the aggressive extremes of framing human subjects against a landscape in meaningful ways. For example, in his 1818 painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, a male subject is positioned in the middle ground atop a promontory with his back to the viewer, facing a vast mountainous landscape, as if he were looking out from one of its higher peaks. This configuration implies the human figure's contemplative disposition toward the wilderness. Charles Sala explains:

> Friedrich, like Schelling and the other philosophers of Romanticism, considered the visible and tangible phenomena of nature to be manifestations of the invisible and the ineffable, like shadows of God. Progressively, in study after study, his landscapes appear as frag-

> ments of the monologue of a lonely man dealing with the fundamental questions of life, and in particular the relationship between Man, Nature and God. (Sala 1994, 85)

Through this unusual approach to anthropocentric juxtaposition, then, our attention is not only directed away from the human subject toward the landscape beyond, but, the subject's contemplative embrace of this vast, misty landscape also establishes his psychological association with it. We are ultimately called upon to recognize and pursue our individual potential for spiritual communion with the natural universe and so achieve a kind of transcendence. The cinematic analog for this painting can be found (atypically) in a classical Hollywood example of landscape allegory, Frank Capra's 1937 film *Lost Horizon*. After a difficult journey across sheer Himalayan mountainsides, the protagonist (Ronald Colman) and his party arrive at the mythical domain of Shangri-La, where, in a similar framing, he stands in contemplation of the majestic mountain city before him, with his back to the camera. Eventually torn between loyalty to his "modern" civilization and a new invitation to assume the High Lama's function in this "enlightened" community, the protagonist must finally struggle upward through the treacherous landscape once more in order to rediscover this externalized representation of inner peace and transcendence.

Another form of psychological juxtaposition, also having its legacy in landscape painting, emphasizes the natural universe by diminishing the graphic proportion of an individual human presence, so that the figure is virtually overwhelmed by the surrounding landscape in the frame. Again, the work of Caspar David Friedrich is exemplary here. An earlier painting, *Monk by the Sea* (1808 – 1810), depicts a tiny human figure in the foreground and slightly off-center against the backdrop of a vast stormy sky encompassing the entire middle ground and background of the canvas. According to Sala:

> One gets the feeling that his monk plays essentially the role of an intermediary; although small, he brings a sense of human scale, and so reduces the impact of the hostile sky. Like the lonely wanderer, the spectator experiences both fear and fascination in the face of this implied infinity. (Sala 1984, 129)

While I agree with Sala's interpretation of the viewer's "sublime" experience, I do not see how the monk's presence diminishes the "hostility" of the natural universe. If anything, it is the very juxtaposition of the diminutive human figure against an oppressive sky—and this figure's awestruck reaction to it—that affirms the intended psychological correspondence between the individual and the wilderness. In other words, the monk's response to the external "hostility" of the stormy sky becomes a confrontation with his own internal crisis of faith, so that one is a merely a reflection of the other. A similar seaside framing can be found in Jerzy Skolimowski's 1978 film *The Shout*, about a transient (Alan Bates) in a rural British village

who seduces another man's wife (Susannah York) through metaphysical powers acquired from an Aboriginal shaman in the Australian outback. After demonstrating the lethal powers of his "terror shout" to his rival (John Hurt) near a rugged coastline, the antagonist wanders on further toward the sea and stands in embrace of the natural universe he would appear to have mastered. As in Friedrich's painting, this human figure is framed as insignificant against the awesome presence of the coastal landscape and so, a psychological correspondence is similarly substantiated through the character's physical orientation toward its vastness while, at the same time, facing away from the viewer. The only notable difference here is that the shoreline topography takes up more of the frame than the sky above the ocean's horizon, with the human figure positioned off-center in the middle ground. Nevertheless, a similar sense of sublime infinitude persists.

Image 2: Diminished anthropocentric juxtaposition of the antagonist against a coastal landscape. *The Shout* (Jerzy Skolimowski, 1978)

The Shout would otherwise bear little resemblance to *The Searchers* and the other Westerns I have mentioned. However, we can affirm a similar storyline of a male protagonist in crisis, per se, who must ultimately resolve his internal conflict within a peripheral wilderness zone. So, essentially, this film also pursues a "duel in the sun," paradigm, except the antagonist here is confronted in a more metaphysical context, which becomes the landscape itself. We can also find similar stylistic approaches to framing characters against the landscape here. I ascribe these psychological landscape films, beyond the Western genre, to a greater "postwar" tendency of films, at least in the Occident, toward subjectivized depictions of male characters in crisis. In the case of *The Shout*, this tendency becomes evident

in the adaptation process from the original pre-war source material. Robert Graves wrote the short story entitled "The Shout" in 1929. Graves is known mainly for his poems, but also for certain of his historical novels, namely *I, Cladius* (1934), which many would recall from its 1976 BBC adaptation for television. "The Shout" takes place in a provincial English hamlet called "Lampton." This is the sort of setting that, typically for England, would demonstrate little indication of urban development over the years. In other words, it is the perennial "village" of the British cultural consciousness. Thus, aside from the sparse appearance of automobiles, this coastal setting is just as viable in the 1970s (or now) as it was when the story was penned. The premise for the narrative is that the soul is not restricted to one's physical body and is capable of existing independently, and even within nonliving objects such as common stones. A similar notion of a free, migratory soul, which, in turn, may humanize a natural landscape, can be found in Goethe's 1795 hermetic allegory of *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*. In it, the author explores the literary realm of free imagination, which attempts to perpetuate the Rosicrucian impulse toward a practical science of spirituality. In "The Shout," however, such a premise is contained within a context of insanity, as if Graves could not commit himself to such atavisms and so restricted them to "exotic" aboriginal cultures. Nevertheless, the author establishes a crucial link between the human psyche and the natural landscape in this story. In describing his dream while napping on the beach, the protagonist expands this concept further:

> These sand hills are a part neither of the sea before us nor of the grass links behind us, and are not related to the mountains beyond the links. They are themselves. A man walking on the sand hills soon knows this by the tang of the air, and if he were to refrain from eating and drinking, from sleeping and speaking, from thinking and desiring, he could continue among them forever without change. There is no life and no death in the sand hills. Anything might happen in the sand hills. (Graves 1929, 13)

The author's descriptive prose here is too literary to be rendered effectively on screen, and though it serves to affirm a poetic impulse in the reader's own imagination, it must find its visual corollary in a dynamic relationship between mise-en-scène, cinematography, and/or editing, which, in this case, is the said use of juxtaposition between human characters and the coastal setting near the protagonist's home.

A particularly powerful form of cinematic juxtaposition employed in *The Shout*, similarly to be found in such seminal landscape entries as *Lost Horizon* (when the protagonist ascends through the precipitous terrain to Shangri-La) and *Duel in the Sun* (when the female protagonist crawls up the rugged incline to meet her lover in death), is that of a "Sisyphean" struggle between the protagonist and the landscape itself. According to Albert Camus' philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1940), a striving for striving's sake is the only

available redemption for an otherwise vapid existence. Accordingly, Camus embraces the Greek mythological image of a man condemned to push a boulder up a mountainside after it rolls back down repeatedly:

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (Camus 1942, 217-218)

In other words, the struggle of life itself is sufficient to provide a sense of purpose for humankind. Most apparent in Stan Brakhage's American avant-garde film opus *Dog Star Man* (1962), wherein a sequence of the filmmaker having difficulty ascending a snow bank is shown repeatedly, this allegory of perpetual human struggle against a resistant universe is one of the most definitive forms of landscape allegory to be found in cinema. Of course, many narrative films incorporate natural landscape obstacles within the context of a protagonist's attempt to reach a certain destination or overcome antagonists, but such a struggle also becomes allegorical by depicting a character's introspective process by way of his or her outward progression through natural wilderness surroundings. Beyond avant-garde contexts such as *Dog Star Man*, however, this Sisyphean archetype of an uphill struggle with the natural landscape, as a "postwar" statement of existential futility, has also appeared in an international mainstream context. In *The Shout*, this visual sequence is actually executed in three stages: the basic silhouette of an incline with the two figures ascending steadily, the protagonist's recurrent stumbling behind his nemesis, and finally, the protagonist's tumbling back down the sand dune as a final statement of futility. Afterward, the antagonist ventures on alone toward the sea as if to suggest he is simply another aspect of nature itself (as I discussed), and so he leaves his victim behind to negotiate his displaced, fractured soul. This sequence also incorporates outward zooms of the two figures in the sand dunes until they become secondary to the landscape itself. Further mainstream film examples of this Sisyphean allegory are particularly noticeable in: *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962), *Woman in the Dunes* (1964), *Deliverance* (1972), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), among others.

Beyond its use of Sisyphean juxtaposition, the brevity of Graves' twenty-page story becomes an opportunity for *The Shout* to flesh out certain characters, add or expand events, and complicate the larger narrative toward a more cynical, "postwar" impulse. We encounter a good example of this in the film's added dialogue, when a local parish preacher introduces his sermon as follows:

> We find ourselves living in disturbing times. The foundations of our society are not firm. We're like a rudderless ship—no direction. No one has any conviction anymore. You see we don't believe anything. We are in a period of moral starvation... (*The Shout*, 1978)

Beyond a crisis of faith, which has a vastly more complex cultural trajectory, harkening back, for example, to Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea,* and much further to 17th Century Dutch naturalist painting, are psychological traumas oriented around the post-WWII male consciousness. We can locate such internal struggles, of course, in Hollywood film noir tendencies. But more immediate to this film is a confluence of political upheavals and cultural modernization in the postwar era, culminating in a pattern of similarly paranoid and existentialist films within the 1970s occident. Two dimensions to this cultural paranoia are technological in the public sphere and heterosexual in the private sphere. Specifically, *The Shout* fleshes out its protagonist beyond the book's mere establishment of a happily married husband by taking us much deeper into his quotidian experience. An extramarital relationship with another woman in the village is inserted into the film's plot, along with a suggestion that the husband is either impotent or sterile. We also witness several scenes revealing the husband's professional experimentations with sound, using the most advanced audio recording equipment, and this only becomes poignant when contrasted with the intruding stranger's ability to use sound in a much more impacting way—a skill acquired through non-western, non-technical means. And so, a breach of domestic trust goes hand in hand with a distrust of technological advancement. The stranger refers to the husband's music as "nothing," (*The Shout*, 1978) and then, after delivering his "terror shout" as a response to it, moves into the latter's home and employs similarly acquired methods to seduce his wife. Well beyond the intentions of the source material, then, this film becomes an allegory of *emasculation*, and the final contest for psychological recovery is meted out within the coastal landscape itself, where the protagonist must physically unearth and destroy the "soul stone" of his enemy. In other words, Skolimowski's film adaptation expands this story quite effectively to become a "postwar" critique of occidental culture—situated comfortably among so many similarly brooding existentialist films in this period.

Psychological Superimposition and its Legacy

I arrived at the Sisyphean allegory of existential futility by way of *The Shout*, which emerged in my discussion of cinematic juxtaposition and its legacy in Sublime landscape painting. Another cinematic means of mobilizing psychological settings is the technique of superimposition. In this context, I shall define it as a process of film editing allowing two or more images to be seen simultaneously, specifically to establish a psychological correspondence between a protagonist and a natural landscape. Unlike juxtaposition, such a pro-

cess does not have any legacy in landscape painting. Rather, its legacy derives from the photographic technique of double exposure, specifically in the popular "spirit photography" of the later nineteenth century, wherein the semblance of a ghost was rendered by under-developing one image and combining it (or developing the same film stock) with another image. (A notorious example of this is the *Mary Todd Lincoln* photo, with the "ghost" of Abraham Lincoln standing behind her with his hands on her shoulders, circa 1870.) In cinema, the technique of superimposition became particularly useful in fulfilling the ultimate intentions of the French Impressionist movement of the 1920s, whose filmmakers sought to disassociate cinema from the theatre as much as possible through cinematic techniques the latter could scarcely accomplish on a stage. Furthermore, combining two or more moving images in a single frame in this way allowed these filmmakers to portray psychological activity as contradistinct from the normal objective mode of visual narrative. Such a sequence could be cued in either of two ways. First, a close-up of the typically female protagonist with an outward contemplative gaze would *precede* a superimposition sequence of her lover, as in the second "chapter" of Epstein's 1927 film *La Glace à Trois Faces*, wherein a sculptress looks past the camera with an expression of longing before the film's serial womanizer becomes visible in the frame. Or, in much more direct sense, the film could simply superimpose images against a close-up of the protagonist's visage, as if to imply rather literally that they were inside her mind, as in the case of Epstein's *Cœur fidèle,* from 1923. The former approach to superimposition, of course, relies on a logical ordering of shots, whereas the latter is contained within a single frame, akin to a still photograph. Both approaches are nevertheless contextualized as psychological narrative through the inclusion of a character's contemplative outward gaze. These melodramatic narratives encouraged these and other experiments with cinematography and editing in order to portray the inner emotional lives of lovelorn females and similar characters in volatile heterosexual relationships.

Since the time of these and other French Impressionist films, superimposition has become rather conventional as a means to depict psychological activity in cinema, namely in the form of flashbacks, dreams, fantasies, and/or visions, but it wouldn't really serve to psychologize natural landscapes until the postwar decades of the 1960s and '70s. In the latter context, rather than portraying the actual thought process, superimposition serves to establish a more immediate metaphorical association between a human psyche and the particular topography of a wilderness landscape. Again, this is inherently experimental and relies on the audience's acknowledgment of a psychological conflict at stake. In such a sequence, this can be reinforced through voice-over narration. Two mainstream examples, both major Hollywood productions from the 1970s, are noteworthy here. The first is William Friedkin's 1977 film *Sorcerer*,

the attempted follow-up to his enormously successful 1973 film *The Exorcist*. This is also a remake of (and tribute to) Clouzot's 1953 French film *The Wages of Fear*, about four men tackling a series of jungle obstacles in their attempt to convey a truckload of nitroglycerin back to a distant South American village in order to extinguish an oil refinery fire. Whereas the original film is more a character study of male camaraderie, Friedkin's remake transforms the surface-level adventure through this hostile wilderness into an allegorical odyssey within the troubled psyche of the central protagonist (Roy Scheider), as he makes a futile attempt to realize a sense of greater destiny and perseverance. Late in the film, after his accomplices have all been killed, his inner struggle is depicted through an aggressive superimposition sequence. In it, his forlorn visage, intercut with flashbacks from his recent ordeal, appears against anthropomorphic desert rock formations somewhat inconsistent with the lush, tropical landscape he had only just emerged from. At the same time, his overdubbed voice can be heard exclaiming, "Where am I going?" (*Sorcerer*, 1977) It is the very inconsistency of this "otherworldly" terrain, along with the supportive voiceover content, that affirms the psychological mobilization of the landscape in this sequence.

Image 3: Here, the contemplative visage of the protagonist is superimposed against a desert landscape of anthropomorphic pinnacles (Angel's Peak, New Mexico), akin that of *Duel in the Sun* and subsequent Westerns. *Sorcerer* (William Friedkin. 1977)

Eventually, his truck breaks down and he is forced to carry a single box of explosives on foot to the distant oil well's towering conflagration. In *Sorcerer*'s climactic departure from the original French film's portrayal of the sole survivor driving over a cliff in reckless exuberance, the hit man hired earlier to hunt down the protagonist arrives by helicopter to the ramshackle village, just after the latter has received his passport for home. An added scene of Sisyphean jux-

taposition, although not precisely an uphill struggle, occurs earlier in this film when the protagonist manages to guide the truck across an impassibly derelict suspension bridge in the jungle—only to arrive at a similar sense of existential futility in this "updated" finale.

While *Sorcerer* has managed to achieve a degree of revival house appreciation in recent years, its immediate box office failure reflected a waning popular interest in these heavy-handed, allegorical, and defeatist films, moreover in the wake of escapist blockbusters like *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1978). Nevertheless, a more widely received attempt at a psychological jungle allegory was, of course, Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, from 1979. Instead of the previous film's eventual desert landscape, this film associates a serpentine jungle river with the protagonist's inner turmoil. As with *The Shout*, this film's adaptation of the literary source material is worth considering here. In a particular passage of Joseph Conrad's 1902 novella *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator Marlow observes:

> The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down towards the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress; and Kurtz's life was running swiftly, too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time . . . I saw the time approaching when I would be left alone of the party of 'unsound method.' (Conrad 1902, 185)

Here, the river flow of the Congo is compared to blood flowing from the human heart, as an attempt to associate the protagonist's nemesis with the surrounding jungle landscape itself. As before, the literary mobilization of metaphor must be translated into a dynamic visual context, yet, in Coppola's film, by way of superimposition. Coppola re-contextualizes Marlow's pursuit of Kurtz in a nineteenth century African jungle into the "modern day" Vietnam War and its similarly inhospitable wilderness. Captain Willard (Martin Sheen) spends a good deal of time "discovering" the soul of his nemesis through the latter's military dossier, whilst traveling in a small patrol boat headed for Kurtz's compound in Cambodia. In one particular sequence, as Willard reads over the files, the right side of his face is superimposed against an overhead shot of the patrol boat navigating the twisting bends of the jungle river. Beyond contextualizing his whereabouts amidst these investigations, this sequence establishes a direct association between his psyche and the serpentine river, as if to suggest a winding psychological "corridor" into a deeper realization of an affinity with the man he must eventually confront and execute "with extreme prejudice" (*Apocalypse Now*, 1979). Indeed, the boat's trajectory appears to be headed straight into the protagonist's mind, followed by the rest of his face gradually coming into view and then dissolving again against a tighter shot of the jungle's dense foliage. And similar to *Sorcerer*'s superimposition sequence, the protagonist's voiceover conveys his analysis of Kurtz's

dossier directly to the audience, thus affirming the contemplative mode of this sequence.

In the same way as *The Shout* uses juxtaposition to pursue a more generalized critique of occidental culture and modernization, the superimposition in this film ultimately calls attention to a similar critique of western imperialism. As is the case with the 1965 Hollywood release of *Lord Jim*, as well as John Huston's 1975 film *A Man Who Would Be King*, *Apocalypse Now* is an adaptation of a fin de siècle narrative about the exploitation of the developing world and the characteristically "western" imperialist impulse. In both Joseph Conrad narratives, the protagonist pursues a river's course taking him deeper and deeper into a jungle wilderness, wherein he eventually confronts darker aspects of his larger cultural sensibility. Unlike the earlier film's adaptation of a Conrad novel, however, Coppola redirects the historical treatment of the British Empire's exploitation of natural resources in the African Congo to the postwar context of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Such an adaptation embraces the source material's attempt at a universal message more emphatically than portraying a megalomaniac whose *historical* context could be applicable to the present, as is the case with David Lean's epic treatment of an actual persona in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Audiences may not be expected to recognize *Apocalypse Now* as an adaptation of Conrad's novella, but if they do, the essential subject matter becomes a clearer reflection not only of one nation's politics but of the western imperialist impulse as a larger cultural phenomenon.

Apocalypse Now also departs from the earlier examples of the "imperialist" psychological landscape allegory in its treatment of the main character. Like Peter O'Toole's characters in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Lord Jim*, the typical protagonist in this allegory develops an increasing megalomania as he ventures deeper into a wilderness setting, where he eventually acknowledges the futility of his characteristically "western" proclivities. In this film, however, Willard must seek out and destroy a pre-established megalomaniac, the mysterious and elusive Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando). As Willard pursues the serpentine course of a river leading to Kurtz's indigenous community in Cambodia, he gathers more information about Kurtz's godlike persona. Steadily, he develops an admiration for Kurtz and appreciates the reasons for Kurtz's eventual defection from the U.S. military. At the same time, military encounters along the river only serve to disillusion Willard further toward becoming the heir apparent to Kurtz's jungle empire. Akin to the protagonist in Monte Hellman's Western *The Shooting* (1966), Willard confronts a personification of his darker nature, or his doppelganger, in a climax of violence and death. Postwar jungle allegories like *Apocalypse Now*, such as John Boorman's 1972 film *Deliverance* and Werner Herzog's 1972 film *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*, typically incorporate a river by which characters most easily navigate the particularly dense terrain. In this context,

the notion of psychological introspection derives from the river's course, which begins in a "civilized" zone and then travels deeper into an uncharted wilderness or jungle interior. Such a circuitous, inward progression is ideally suited to emulate the protagonist's personal journey toward the depths of his own psyche. In Robert Enrico's French avant-garde film *La rivière du hibou* (1962), based on an American Civil War story by Ambrose Bierce, the protagonist escapes from his execution down the "river" of his own thought patterns only to discover the truth of his demise when he finally reaches the "home" of his psyche. In the same way, Captain Willard travels this winding river through various jungle obstacles until he reaches the "heart" of the landscape or, rather, the core of his inner psychological universe.

By using similarly aggressive camera and editing techniques as can be found in Enrico's experimental film, Coppola's big-budget narrative film infuses the jungle settings with an allegorical dimension. In addition to the said use of superimposition, another form of cinematic manipulation can be found when the film depicts Willard's boat moving very slowly along the river and straight into a layer of mist, emanating from the surrounding foliage. Of course, the cultural currency of misty wilderness landscapes is traceable back to Friedrich's paintings and the larger Romantic Sublime movements in Europe and America. Invariably, such scenes suggest an ethereal "otherworldliness" to be associated with the mysteries of the mind's deeper recesses. But while Friedrich's paintings can only offer a static image of an observer contemplating the misty landscape, Coppola's camera brings the onlooker progressively deeper into it, creating a dynamic visual corollary to the process of introspection. In other words, since the static medium of painting can only connote introspection through the framing of an idealized landscape, the dynamic medium of cinema is better suited to convey the *process* of psychological transformation. (An exception, of course, is nineteenth-century American Hudson River School painter Thomas Cole's *Voyage of Life* cycle (1842), which also attempts to capture the progressive nature of river allegory, albeit in a series of static frames.)

As long as character interaction is maintained, psychological landscape allegory in cinema is able to transcend an avant-garde context and become accessible enough for mainstream consumption. Whereas Enrico's film spends its duration developing the notion of its protagonist's inward progression amidst a solitary wilderness, Coppola's film assumes a more conventional narrative format by establishing a series of encounters with various persons along an otherwise similar river odyssey. In this latter context, the indigenous "Third World" characters become obstacles in their own right and thereby increase the setting's potential to become meaningful for its own sake. In the allegory of the "western" megalomaniac, these peo-

ple are positioned as those who "should" be conquered, yet it is the surrounding landscape that behaves as the ultimate arbiter. Toward the end of *Apocalypse Now*, Willard acknowledges that Kurtz "takes his orders" from the jungle itself, as if to echo the film's initial reference to Willard's own obsessions with the wilderness. In this way, the landscape becomes the outer reflection of both men's corrupted souls. For caricatures of "megalomania" such as Colonel Kurtz, T.E. Lawrence, and Lord Jim, any attempt to assume a divine role within a "Third World" culture is really the struggle, however futile, to overcome one's own earthbound limitations. In the context of this particular landscape allegory, these definitively human limits become the indomitable wilderness itself.

Psychological Landscape Films in Recent Years

Apocalypse Now's allegorical comment on American politics should have been enough to convey a universal message. In 2001, however, the director decided to release a "Redux" version with previously excluded footage. Together, the added segments only serve to lighten the otherwise heavy-handed tone of the narrative. One of these in particular, rather than underscoring Willard's introspective river odyssey, behaves as a diversion from the allegory. Pausing to bury one of the riverboat's crew near a French plantation along the river, Willard and the rest of the crew accept an invitation to have a meal and stay the night in the large house there. Amidst the dinner table conversation, their French hosts point out that America "has yet to learn its lesson" (*Apocalypse Now Redux*, 2001), i.e. the same political lesson the French have already long since taken from their own colonial pursuits here and elsewhere around the world. This blatantly literalized offering of the film's larger message only undermines the subtler allegorical dimension to the narrative. The French plantation sequence also includes an incidental romance wherein Willard copulates with a beautiful French woman there, as if to suggest the allegorical mode would repel mainstream audiences without the inclusion of some form of heterosexual coupling or otherwise conventional narrative content. Coppola's latter-day decision to reinsert this and other lighter scenes is a manifestation of corporate Hollywood's more recent pandering to escapist tastes. Whereas the director's original version embraces a probing sense of pessimism about western politics and humanity in general, the *Redux* version embraces a more escapist mode of narration—less heavy-handed, existential, and/or allegorical.

According to continuing trends of escapist cinema in Hollywood, there might appear to be less of an audience for psychological landscape films today. Similar to the difference between the 1979 *Apocalypse Now* and its 2001 *Redux* version, the cultural shift between postwar critique and escapist spectacle can be traced in

contrasting the recent landscape-oriented blockbuster *The Revenant* (2015) with its 1971 predecessor *Man in the Wilderness*. Loosely based on the same historical source material about the 1818-20 Missouri Expedition across the Northwestern frontier, both films depict a man barely surviving a bear attack and eventually rejoining his fellow trappers against all odds. The earlier film, according to the tendencies of wilderness-oriented films of its era, introduces a psychological conflict in its protagonist (Richard Harris), who struggles between his frontier enterprises and the young son he left behind. Although a vengeful conscience certainly propels him to persevere so he may confront the comrades having left him for dead, it is really his desire to return to his young son that becomes the purpose of his survival. In the recent film, however, there is less of an internal struggle, since the protagonist (Leonardo DiCaprio) becomes monomaniacal in his determination to avenge the life of his murdered half-Pawnee son Hawk (Forrest Goodluck), who had accompanied him thus far on the expedition. So, really, this film becomes merely an action-oriented spectacle (albeit a beautiful one) of a man surviving in the wilderness in order to finally face his enemy (Tom Hardy) in violent mortal combat. The surrounding wilderness landscape certainly behaves as an obstacle impeding the protagonist's goal in this context. However, it never becomes metaphorical as such. Besides, the real antagonist of the film is clearly positioned as a human individual, rather than the landscape itself.

In *Man in the Wilderness*, on the other hand, the protagonist's crucible in the wilderness becomes much more psychologized, since it is interpolated with flashbacks of his wife and (still living) son, so that his "exterior" struggle mirrors his "interior" struggle. At one point in the film, there is even an extended Sisyphean juxtaposition sequence of a slow, upward progression along a snowy mountainside, akin to that found in *Dog Star Man*. As in *The Shout*, a slow zoom-out shot steadily diminishes the human figure against a broad landscape perspective, so as to emphasize their metaphorical correlation. *The Revenant* also includes sporadic subjective sequences, wherein the protagonist is visited by his also-murdered Pawnee wife, but these only serve to reinforce his bloodthirsty determination for vengeance. And, the action-oriented pacing of this latter film certainly eschews any similar attempt at a contemplative Sisyphean sequence. Even Jerzy Skolimowski's recent landscape film *Essential Killing* (2010), about a Middle Eastern fugitive struggling to survive in a snowbound Polish wilderness, hardly compels its audience to interpret a meaning beyond his physical contest with the elements. Psychologically speaking, these films and their landscapes remain aloof, thus conforming to escapist audiences' orientation toward visceral action sequences sans any allegorical import.

Even if psychological landscape films have steadily diminished in mainstream Hollywood since the 1970s, this is by no means a

global pattern. One only has to search among films produced outside of Hollywood, such as the 1993 South Korean film *Seopyeonje*. In it, the protagonist (Kyu-chul Kim), the stepson of an accomplished Pansori singer/performer (Myung-gon Kim), searches rural villages for his sister (Jung-hae Oh) who has allegedly gone blind. His progress from town to town is interspersed with scenes from the past, beginning with a Pansori master's courtship of his mother and his eventual attempt to raise the two foster kids as Pansori artists themselves. The protagonist's sister does achieve a level of greatness as a singer, but only through immense suffering and self-sacrifice. The quest for his lost sister reflects this character's inner struggle to reconcile his adult existence with the more "authentic" experience of his youth, which she comes to personify. On a thematic level, the film points toward the phasing out of rural folk traditions in exchange for the steady influx of modern, urban, and mostly western culture.

Similar to the occidental examples I have considered, this psychological landscape film establishes the premise of a character's internal struggle, and then builds an increasingly subjective association between its characters and the natural setting itself, through stylistic visual techniques such as juxtaposition. In the very first shot, the camera pans across a broad mountainous landscape, although this is merely to establish the protagonist's arrival in a village where the quest for his sister would begin. Then the narrative advances through a series of rustic dwellings where Pansori performances typically happen. The first of these involves a woman who learned her own vocal technique from the protagonist's sister. She sings of a lost lover, which becomes archetypal across subsequent folk songs in the film. Also, there is an established connection between the natural universe and human suffering, as if the weather serves to acknowledge the tragic predicament of the Pansori characters through its seasonal transformations. Then, in a pivotal instant, the narrative jumps back in time to the protagonist's youth and the arrival of the wandering Pansori performer who would, in turn, raise him as his own. It is a warm and sunny day in the countryside and the farmers are busy with the harvest. The deeper symbolic significance of a spring or summer landscape here does not, however, become apparent until later in the film. The storyline resumes its alternation between interior and exterior scenes. The Pansori man copulates with a village woman, and subsequently, they must depart from her village across an appropriately windswept and turbulent landscape, only to finally arrive at another interior scene of her death (from childbirth). The determined character pursues an odyssey from village to village, taking along his deceased lover's two children, to whom he attempts to impart his fading art form. This becomes the narrative pattern of the entire film.

As the film progresses, the natural landscape becomes increasingly prominent. At one point, the traveling family becomes much

smaller in the frame, as father and daughter sing in the distance together of life's unhappiness. But as they progress toward the foreground of vast, unending farmlands, we see that they are smiling and, for the moment, happy. Just prior to reaching their next village, however, the film offers a glimpse of a slightly snowy winter landscape. With the encroaching cold comes a marching band down the main street playing western music, followed by a throng of excited children, all serving to overwhelm the father's street-corner Pansori recital. The family retreats further into the wilderness, and a barren landscape frames the son's final disillusionment with his foster father, as he looks back one last time at his pleading sister before abandoning them. Another great tree features twice at this midpoint of the film, standing near the family's temporary shanty, as if to reinforce the natural universe's intimate connection with these characters. They stand beneath it, diminished by its dazzling limbs, just as human figures would appear if this framed tree were a painting. In a powerful example of juxtaposition, father and daughter become increasingly diminutive as they plod onward across another barren landscape, and, at this point in the film, the natural setting has clearly transcended its function as backdrop and is now behaving allegorically.

The monotony of this wasteland topography actually serves to anticipate the daughter's developing blindness, which results from herbs her father serves her to deliberately maintain her dependence on him. This state of blindness confirms her role as a tragic figure, even as a would-be character of a Pansori song herself. Her transformation becomes complete as she pursues her father holding an extended rope and tapping a stick across a partially snow-covered wilderness. Appropriately, he sings of passing into old age, which not only reflects his own status, but hers as well. Similar to the previous songs' emphasis on the natural environment, this song explores the seasonal change from fall to winter, as reflected in the barren trees. In the very moment that the father sings of trees losing their leaves, the image cuts from a landscape of light frost to a completely snowbound vastness. He now sings of "snow" as we watch it fall upon them, and how it "reminds an old man of his condition" (*Seopyeonje*, 1993).

Their newly discovered shanty in the mountains would offer little more than an opportunity to practice their craft undisturbed, but it is here that the father offers his daughter a final Pansori lesson. His so-called "Pansori of Seopyeonje" is purported to be the most authentic expression of a grief-stricken existence. Accordingly, his foster daughter, having been bereaved of her true parents and subsequently her vision, is finally in an ideal position to achieve this authenticity as a folk singer. It is at this late point in the film that she becomes one with the natural universe. We witness the perfection of her singing in a scene where she sings out across a mountainous

slope, in a poignant example of anthropocentric psychological juxtaposition. Here, she sings directly toward the wintery landscape with her back to the viewer, similar to the protagonist in *Lost Horizon* when he first embraces Shangri-La, both as if to enter into a direct communion with the natural universe.

Image 4: Again, using juxtaposition, the female character's psyche is directly associated with the landscape, especially in positioning her back toward the viewer, as in Friedrich's Sublime landscape paintings and in the Hollywood film *Lost Horizon*. *Seopyeonje* (Im Kwon-taek, 1993)

Her dying father suggests that her life's misery can be assuaged only through the experience of having perfected her Pansori artistry, but at the same time, her grief is essential to the pathos of her singing. He defends his act of having blinded her for this reason, and expects her forgiveness accordingly. I would go further to suggest that Pansori performance served traditionally to assuage the suffering of rural, agrarian life in Korea, similar to how Blues spirituals eased the struggles of African American slaves working in the cotton fields. In both contexts, human existence is intimately tied to the natural environment. With the rise of modern, urbanized conditions, however, this cultural connection to landscape has long since faded. Her brother's departure from Pansori life reflects this transformation, and his return to these rural areas becomes an attempt to recapture the lost intimacy of agrarian family life, also compromised in modern, and especially westernized, existence.

Seopyeonje, a relatively recent film, encourages us to look further for psychological landscape films outside of Hollywood and other mainstream contexts. Like other metaphorical narratives or allegories, these films ask us to interpret what we are watching, rather than to assume a passive disposition toward what seems to be an increasingly visceral agenda in mainstream cinema, especially with such a predominance of digital effects-oriented films nowadays. The

foundation of all poetic art forms, really, is an association with the natural universe. I, for one, take much intellectual and even emotional gratification from the humanization of natural space. In this way, landscape settings, when they are allowed to function beyond backdrops, become psychological wonderlands—landscapes of the mind even, as I have attempted to show here. I hope this discussion will encourage other scholars to track down, interpret, and share other landscape allegories from other countries and periods—and to see them in terms of their common tendencies—especially since there is still so much opportunity to do so. To arrive at such films through an embrace of psychological landscape depiction can be a transcendental experience, akin to that of Friedrich's "wanderer," and a few other wanderers keeping their backs to us.

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