3-22-2016

Constructing the West: *The Hired Hand and McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and the Challenge of Public Space

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Constructing the West:

The Hired Hand and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and the Challenge of Public Space

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in American Studies
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Date of Approval:
March 10, 2016

Keywords: 1970s American Culture, Peter Fonda, Robert Altman, Masculinity, Corporatization

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The Western has been an important and iconic part of American culture since the opening of the frontier. However, very few scholars have looked closely at the way the genre constructs the past through public and private spaces like frontier towns and settlements.

The 1971 films, *The Hired Hand* and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* are two texts that revitalized, and in the process revised, the Western genre in the early 1970s. My paper examines the ways in which conflicts between public and private spaces in the films reflect the social and cultural conflicts in America at the time. Both films feature lead male characters that strive to, but ultimately fail to resurrect an older idea of public space as they attempt to reclaim their place in it. The men attempt to navigate changing ideas of public space by retreating in to domestic or feminine space and resisting the corporatization of public space.

This paper uses the works of Nancy Fraser and Richard Sennett to explore the different approaches to the nature of public space in post World War II America and sheds new light on the ways in which men adapted or, in some cases, refused to adapt to the changing social conditions of the second half of the 20th century.

CHAPTER ONE

This project looks at the construction of frontier communities in Western films of the early 1970s, specifically the films: *The Hired Hand* and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, both from 1971. Through the construction of the settings, each film depicts its protagonist and his ability or inability to navigate those spaces. This project will look closer at why these men struggle to fit in to these communities and what the larger implications of their failure has for American society during the 1970s.

The Western in the 20th Century

Referring to the western genre, Michael Coyne describes it as the "quintessentially American melodrama." (2). Slotkin writes "The Myth of the Frontier is our oldest and most characteristic myth…produced over a period of three centuries" (10), And in her survey of the western genre, *West of Everything*, Jane Tompkins claims that "Westerns-novels and films- have touched the lives of virtually everyone who lived during the first three-quarters of [the 20th] century," That the images and archetypes of the genre are so well known in American culture that they continue to "shape our world and govern our behavior" (5-6). Westerns are so pervasive, that much of how we perceive the world is shaped by them. They are rooted in the unique experience of American history. After Americans had won their independence "the infant American discovered the unique milieu that Europeans had not experienced for centuries: a virgin land that stretched to what might well be infinity – with the possibilities seemingly infinite

as well." (Parks, 7) Or at least that is how the myth has been preserved for many centuries. But even before that, the Western genre has been one of America's most iconic genres since the first European settlers arrived.

> From Jamestown in 1607 to statehood for New Mexico and Arizona in 1912, three hundred years of the nation's history chronicled westward movement, settlement and development; and, as the journey to a new homeland was part of Americans' own or ancestral experience, Westerns appealed both to national identity and to individual heritage. (Coyne, 2)

In reality, this myth was and continues to be nothing short of a fantasy of "white male primacy" (Coyne, 2), but the idea of the virgin West continues to be a seductive one, as there have been thousands of Western stories across all mediums of art, but most popularly in novels and later films and television.

As the 20th century wore on, Westerns became increasingly popular and increasingly formulaic. As Rita Parks writes, "If you see one western, you see them all." (30). But despite this "stock repertoire" (Parks, 30) the genre remained reliably popular with American audiences for a long time. Richard Slotkin writes of how Americans in the early 1960s viewed the concept of the Frontier [or the Western], as a way to justify the increasing popularity of the form: "The 'Frontier' was for them a complexly resonant symbol, a vivid and memorable set of hero-tales – each a model of successful and morally justifying action on the stage of historical conflict." (3). For these Americans, and many others, Westerns weren't just an escape from the complexities of reality, they were also morality plays, stories in which heroes would undertake heroic action in an important struggle.

Michael Coyne suggests that there are essentially two different kinds of Westerns, what he calls the "Town Western" and the "Odyssey Western". "Westerns with a community setting [Town Westerns], despite their smaller geographical scale, were better suited to celebrate or

criticize contemporary US politics, values and national identity [*High Noon*, etc], while odyssey Westerns – though frequently ranging wide over frontier terrain – tended to favor narratives of personal obsession [*The Searchers*, etc.]" (Coyne, 6) This project will be primarily concerned with films that fall in to the "Town Western" category.

The classic Western depiction of the town is an important one for Tompkins. For her, the hero is perpetually drawn away from the town to the open landscape of the west to escape to a place where he can live out the masculine ideal of violence, control and survival. But the town is equally important in these stories,

> There is a tremendous tension in Westerns between the landscape and town. The genre pulls toward the landscape- that, in a sense, is its whole point. But because there's so much emphasis on getting away, town also exerts a tremendous pull; otherwise there would be no reason to flee. So there's a paradox in the presentation of town. Town is a mecca, a haven, a journey's end…Town is a magnet; it draws people. (85-6)

In classic westerns, the town must exist as an alternative to the landscape. The landscape, or "the road" as I will refer to it, is what has drawn these western heroes to the west in the first place, and it is where they must prove themselves by braving the elements, fighting savages and outlaws, and civilizing their patch of ground.

Depictions of the frontier and Western stories have nearly always been an optimistic genre for the perceived state of American society. In the Western films of the 1940s and 50s, there is a great deal of optimism, often used to validate American exceptionalism, "a justification for present opulence." (Coyne, 3) Americans saw an idealized version of themselves in these Hollywood Westerns and their depiction of a simpler time, "Hollywood Westerns have furnished spiritual respite from the complexities of twentieth century society, simultaneously soothing, feeding and thriving on romantic frustrations…if life in America failed to match its promise, Westerns implied past and - often, but not always – future greatness." (Coyne, 2-3). Whatever

present frustrations American audiences were feeling, they could look back at a time when Americans were free of those frustrations and perhaps find optimism for the future of the nation.

The emptiness of the road "reflects the Old Testament sense of the world at creation…God creates the heaven and the earth and then the light, the constituent elements of the Western landscape. In the Western as in Genesis, the physical world comes first." (Tompkins, 70) This reflection of the world at creation suggests all the new beginnings that drew men to the frontier, both the real frontier of the past and the constructed frontier of Western films, and novels. It can be a harsh landscape, "but the negations of the physical setting – no shelter, no water, no rest, no comfort – are also its siren song. Be brave, be strong enough to endure this, it says, and you will become like this – hard, austere, sublime." (Tompkins, 71) That was the draw, the opportunity to survive on the road and to become better and stronger for it. For many, both in the historic past and the audiences of the 20th century and beyond, the Old West and the road especially represented a Garden of Eden, a "return to innocence" (Parks, 18) that many yearned for.

The town, then, is the unpleasant alternative to the road. It is a reminder of East coast civilization and all of its weakness and temptation (alcohol, gambling, women, etc.) that the men try to escape, but are often called to protect as well. In the 1940s and 1950s, films like *Shane* and *My Darling Clementine* depict characters risking their lives to defend towns that they have little connection to. The title character in *Shane* was just passing through the area when he gets involved to help a group of settlers defend their town from a greedy rancher, and Henry Fonda's character in *My Darling Clementine* at the start of the film has just retired as marshal of Dodge City, Kansas before coming out of retirement to save Tombstone, Arizona from a gang of cattle rustlers. In both cases, while the men get little help from the townspeople (Shane goes alone to

fight the film's villains and Fonda's Wyatt Earp is helped by his brothers and Doc Holliday), the townspeople remain grateful and help celebrate when the bad guys are defeated. However, once the enemies are dead the hero rides off in to the sunset. Having saved the town, he's free to roam again.

Malaise: Change and Disillusionment in America, 1960-1971

The early 1960s were, perhaps, the most optimistic time in American history "it seemed that there was nothing America couldn't do" (Hine, 2), it was a time of "tremendous confidence in managerial competence" (Hine, 189). Americans believed that the same great bureaucracy that had won World War II and was now the most dominant super power in the history of the world could solve any problem. Nowhere was this more apparent than in its greatest social program: the Great Society of 1964. "The premise of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society was that through a concentration of money and expertise, it would be possible to solve a large range of chronic social problems, from poverty to underachieving schools and students to health care." (Hine, 190) This was a massive effort, aimed at harnessing the power of American ingenuity to solve a problem that had never been solved. The successes of the program are a testament to that optimism. The Great Society programs managed to reduce "the overall poverty rate from more than 20 percent in the late 1950s to 12 percent by the early 1970s" (Schulman, 5). But by 1973, "23 million Americans still lived in poverty, including 10 percent of whites, 22 percent of Latinos, and 33 percent of blacks." (Murolo and Chitty, 270). Despite the program's successes, the sixties had not lived up to expectations and as the decade wore on, much of the optimism began to wane.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, and what followed was "an explosion of racial outrage…that brought smashed windows and tense confrontations between

police and protesters within a few blocks of the White House" (Schulman, 2) These riots were only the latest in what was "the fourth consecutive year of massive racial violence in America's cities" (Schulman, 2) or every year since Johnson's Great Society passed in to law. The unrest was not strictly racial. Radical student movements, like Students for a Democratic Society, emerged on college campuses across the country. The students were reacting against "the war in Vietnam…restrictive campus policies…and traditional curricula and courses." (Schulman, 2) The war in Vietnam had escalated in 1965 with the deployment of US combat troops. In 1968, despite an overwhelming technological superiority, and signs that the end of the war was in sight, the North Vietnamese launched the Tet offensive which took "the Americans by surprise, seized the city of Hue, and struck at more than one hundred targets throughout Vietnam." (Schulman, 6) With this new sign that the enemy had hardly been pacified, Americans began to turn against the war with 40% of Americans now opposed to the war, up from the 28% opposed prior to Tet. (Schulman, 7)

Compared to the feeling in 1960, as the seventies began "it seemed that the United States couldn't do anything right." (Hine, 3) The uprisings and upheavals of the mid-1960s were a turning point for many Americans. They combined to "gradually demolish faith in American invincibility" (Coyne, 121). This disillusionment led more and more people to distrust the government bureaucracy which they saw as not looking out for the interests of the individuals. Many popular genres began to reflect this as "the second half of the sixties saw an increasing movement toward the glorification of the loner or outsider hero whose values, methods, and allegiances were more and more often in direct opposition to those of the establishment." (Parks, 101) By the end of the 1960s, the disillusionment had finally seeped in to the old west.

In the late 1960s, and early 1970s, the Western genre changed and the anti-Western or the demoralized Western emerged. In these new stories, there was no longer as sharp of a distinction between good and evil, and the good did not always win, "overall, mid-1960s Westerns were characterized by cynicism or pessimism and, increasingly, brutality.' (Coyne, 124) Besides affecting narrative, this change had an enormous effect on the depictions of frontier towns. Early Western films introduced the traditional Western town that functioned as a microcosm of American civilization, but by this time, the town Western nearly disappeared.

> In the 1930s and 1940s, the town Western had been a vehicle for patriotic celebration…The town Western's principal concern during the 1950s had been the exigencies of U.S. domestic policies and society. During the 1960s, however, the Western focused increasingly on frontier parallels of the war in Vietnam. Town Westerns still appeared in the 1960s, but their cumulative ideological import diminished. (Coyne, 125-6)

In the demoralized Westerns, towns became much more complicated, a blend of good and bad qualities that in one sense made them more realistic places, but also darkened what had once been the most optimistic of genres.

Richard Slotkin lays the blame for these disillusioned Westerns at the feet of the failure in Vietnam, and specifically the My Lai massacre of 1968 in which American troops "deliberately wiped out nearly an entire village, including old men, women, children, and infants." (Slotkin, 580) Slotkin asserts that much of the senseless violence in Vietnam, and domestically (race riots, student protests, political assassinations, etc), stemmed from both a disappointment with the way the 1960s had turned out, as well as the acting out of the western genre's classic display of masculinity. Western men are men of action, who cannot fail. They have an unswerving confidence in their own rightness. "The hero is equally skillful in handling events that come his way…doing 'what he must do' and then departing from the scene." (Parks, 57) When those values failed to culminate in a swift victory in Vietnam, many of the men there

became frustrated and the outlets of their frustration blossomed into the massacre of 1968. This reasoning translates well to the domestic issues plaguing the US. When the heroic values of the Western failed to culminate in a swift victory in the war on poverty, racism, etc, many of those people became frustrated and that frustration exploded in to the riots and protests of 1968.

Slotkin sees this frustration "mythographically expressed in a group of Mexico Westerns which had been developed in the wake of the Tet Offensive. Since they were released *before* the My Lai revelations, they were current in the American movie-houses while the news of My Lai was being assimilated." (591). Among the films Slotkin uses to illustrate this point, he writes at length about Sam Peckinpah's 1969 film, *The Wild Bunch*.

In the opening scene of the film, the audience watches as the Wild Bunch rides into town dressed as US Cavalry officers. They are seen being cordial to a group of children in the street as well as an elderly woman who drops her bag. Peckinpah's opening is meant to "invoke a traditional expectation about heroic outlaws: that they are actually Robin Hoods who live by a Boy Scout code of chivalry that is nobler than mere obedience to civil codes of law", this notion is further reinforced by the appearance of the posse that pursues the Bunch who are portrayed as "an undisciplined rabble" (595). Compared with the Bunch who act politely and appear clean and proper in their cavalry uniforms, the viewer is clearly not meant to empathize with the posse. As soon as the Bunch enters the bank that they are attempting to rob, the audience's expectations are flipped as the Bunch is revealed to be equally bad and equally violent as anyone else around them when the leader threatens to kill anyone who makes a move against them.

Starting with their bloody escape from the bank, in which the Bunch uses innocent people as human shields, the rest of the film is non-stop, hyper realistic violence including "new special effects technology to render as literally as possible the effects of bullets on human bodies."

(Slotkin, 593) This preoccupation with violence, the inversion of genre expectations (the noble outlaw, etc.) and the depiction of town as a bloody battlefield where no one is safe does echo many of the revelations of conditions in Vietnam, and the My Lai massacre. In addition, it is a clear reflection of the late 1960s feeling that the world doesn't work the way it once did, and the great bureaucracy that Americans once thought could solve all the world's problems was no longer trusted.

The reactions against the Vietnam War were indicative of a larger movement happening in American politics during the 1960s. The counter-culture of this time grew out of "the larger culture's defects. War, poverty, social and racial injustice" (O'Neill, 265) One critique at the time was that the culture at large had become too impersonal. For much of the early 20th century, politics in America had moved further and further away from the interests of the people. The emphasis in the 1940s and 50s on "opinion surveys and… television advertisements, separated politics from the people…transformed politics into tactics and manipulation." (Jamison & Eyerman, 182) Politics and the political realm had become an abstract exercise, a bureaucratic problem to be solved, "Politics became the realm of the expert adviser and the professional politician" (Jamison & Eyerman, 182). Nowhere was this more apparent than in the administrations of Kennedy and Johnson from 1960 to 1968, with their Ivy League cabinets that set out to solve all of America's problems. With the student protests and race riots described above, many Americans felt that this cold and calculating bureaucracy was no longer in their best interests. Many public intellectuals like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were "preparing the way for the rebirth of participatory politics" (Jamison & Eyerman, 183) when the people would be heard.

People wanted to band together to make interpersonal ethics a basis for a political vision through participatory democracy. A famous symbol of this was the hippie movement of the mid

1960s. "Hippies lived together, in 'tribes' or 'families.' Their golden rule was 'Be nice to others, even when provoked, and they will be nice to you" (O'Neill, 252). Or, as one organizer at the famous Woodstock festival described, "Everybody pulls together and everybody helps each other and it works." (Schulman, 18) The retreat from conventional politics had begun and it led directly to an emphasis on greater participation. "All sorts of people came together during this time in order to try many different approaches to life. Some people removed themselves from the society and went to live as families or communities in remote places" (Hine, 17). The hippie movement made clear that for many of America's young people, the old ways of living weren't going to work anymore and that change could be found by being closer together.

In addition to the hippie movement, the call for participatory democracy was made famous years earlier by the 1962 Port Huron Statement released by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In the words of the statement, the group claimed that it

> Would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstances by power and uniqueness rooted in love, electiveness, reason, and creativity. As a *social system* [they sought] the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation. (Hayden, 53)

The members of SDS had come to believe through their time at universities all across the US that the "proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo" (Hayden, 46). According to SDS, the United States was heavily invested in maintaining the country as it was. There would be no official action on the part of the government to seriously address issues of poverty, race, or gender inequality without a substantial movement by the people and the Port Huron Statement was meant to motivate people to that end. SDS proclaimed that instead of government "of, by and for the people" the current system had created a population that was "apathetic and manipulated"

(Hayden, 47). Despite the overwhelming economic power of the United States, SDS maintained that the elites and the ruling class would never consent to revolutionary change, and would instead actively educate people against such change, "the message of our society is that there is no viable alternative to the present." (Hayden, 47). This document was one of the first steps of the American New Left movement that had grown disillusioned with the United States and sought to incite action on several fronts, among them economic reform, racial justice, and anti-imperialism.

SDS and the New Left were heavily influenced by the work of sociologist, C. Wright Mills,

> Mills provided the promise of a new politics. His analytical framework gave students the conceptual oppositions that would animate the New Left: face-to-face politics versus the politics of a mass society; "person-to-person discussion" versus mediated reality; the participatory democracy of "primary publics" versus the "organized irresponsibility" of bureaucracy; civil society versus the state; grassroots power versus the power elite; decentralization versus the centralization of state and corporation; solidarity with the powerless versus the promises of consumerism; engaged intelligence versus detached specialization; plain speaking versus intellectual jargon. (Farrell, 150)

With the hippies' emphasis on family and community and C. Wright Mills and the Port Huron Statement's emphasis on participation by the people, for the people, the movement began to take shape around the idea of interpersonal ethics. The hippie's emphasis on family was an attempt at acting out SDS's call for greater participation. By living as large family-style communes, the people were able to get to know everyone in the community and gain a greater understanding of their wants and needs. They were using a private or domestic interpersonal ethics to change the political or public space. By changing the nature of political and public discourse to better reflect their familial relationships they were experimenting with a radically new way of understanding the public and private dynamic.

It is interesting then, that one of the fronts left out of the SDS Statement was the issue of gender equality. Women, who were closely associated with the private or non political realms were still being left out of the counter-culture's call for greater familial connections in public. This issue was picked up by many radical feminists in the 1960s, but the issue was summed up well in Carol Hanisch's 1970 essay "The Personal is Political", in which she discusses the need to advocate a Pro-Woman line in the emerging movements of the New Left. Hanisch was responding to other radicals at the time, both men and women, who claimed that the emerging Women's Liberation movement was a waste of time; the meetings are referred to by outsiders as "Therapy" which "assumes that someone is sick and that there is a cure, e.g., a personal solution." (1) This is the opinion that Hanisch was arguing against: the belief that women need only take responsibility for themselves and the revolution of the student protests and Civil Rights movements will take care of them, that their status as an oppressed class was not recognized by many people, even those within the movement. Hanisch argues that women "need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them." (1). Women have been effected by the conditions of society just as adversely as any other group that is fighting for greater rights and representation (racial minorities, workers, etc), and that

> The bad things that are said about…women are either myths (women are stupid), tactics women use to struggle individually (women are bitches), or are actually things that we want to carry into the new society and want men to share too (women are sensitive, emotional). Women as oppressed people act out of necessity (act dumb in the presence of men), not choice. (2)

Women deserve the label of oppressed class based on Hanisch's assessment, and thus deserve to have their problems fought for in the public realm and shouldn't be relegated to private "therapy" as Hanisch describes.

Public Sphere(s)

This conflict over the adequacy of domestic and interpersonal relationships as the basis for political life is important for this study because of its implications for the nature of public space, both physical and theoretical. To examine this, I will be looking at Nancy Fraser's 1992 essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere". In it, Fraser gives an overview of Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public space and offers a critique of that view and an alternative approach to thinking about public space in the real world. Fraser is specifically arguing in the same vein as Hanisch that the public sphere needs to be replaced with several different public spaces to prevent people in general and women in particular from being marginalized by the power dynamics of Habermas' modern bourgeois public sphere. I'm also going to be looking at the work of Richard Sennett, whose 1977 book, *The Fall of Public Man* details his interpretation of the causes of the 1970s malaise that he has seen develop, and why he disagrees with the need for mutual understanding, and supports a return to a traditional impersonal public space.

Fraser uses Habermas's concept of the public sphere from his work in the early 1960s, and summarizes that the idea of the public sphere,

> Designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is completely distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. (519).

For Fraser, this idea is useful for avoiding certain real world problems. She specifically points to contemporary feminists who use the concept of the public sphere in a way that is "less precise and useful than Habermas's" (519) by which she means that it is common for people to use the term public space to refer to everything that is outside the domestic sphere. Fraser claims that "the public sphere on this usage conflates at least three distinct things: the state, the official

economy of paid employment and arenas of public discourse." (519). Fraser is quick to point out that these three separate entities should remain separate, and looks to Habermas's definition of public space to focus on its aspect as an arena of public discourse.

With this idea that public space refers specifically to a space for public discourse, Fraser sets out to show the ways in which this concept has failed us. Despite Habermas's optimism, his vision of the utopian potential of public discourse has never come to pass, and Fraser goes on to explain why. Fraser sketches the exclusionary practices, "rooted in the processes of class formation" (521) on which Habermas's public discourse is founded. People who were not a part of the male bourgeois had limited access to this public discourse, most notably women. "Women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation on the basis of gender status, while plebian men were formally excluded by property qualifications. Moreover, in many cases women and men of radicalized ethnicities of all classes were excluded on racial grounds" (524) so the arbitrary methods of distinguishing the bourgeois public sphere served to exclude significant portions of the population.

 But, most important in Fraser's mind, was that what Habermas missed was the existence of multiple, competing public spheres. Women, for example, "were innovating, since they creatively used the heretofore quintessentially 'private' idioms of domesticity and motherhood precisely as springboards for public activity." (522). In Fraser's view, groups that had been marginalized by the concept of the bourgeois public sphere created their own public spaces, or "subaltern counter-public" (Fraser, 527) to safely engage in discourse in a space in which their voices could be heard.

These spaces are necessary in order to communicate with other individuals within a group. Fraser again uses the example of feminism. Women created a separate "subaltern counter-

public…with its variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks…and local meeting places. In this public sphere, feminist women have invented new terms for describing social reality, including 'sexism', 'the double shift', 'sexual harassment' and 'marital, date and acquaintance rape'. Armed with such language, [they] have recast [their] needs and identities, thereby reducing, although not eliminating, the extent of [their] disadvantage in official public spheres." (528) so the official bourgeois public space still exists, and remains the main space for political discourse at present, but it would be a mistake to think of it as the only public sphere.

Fraser's work makes the case for abandoning Habermas' traditional public sphere as a tool for enforcing power and status in society. Using the model of the counter-publics, Fraser is suggesting that we think of the world as a series of interactive public spaces and that none of them should be any more important than the other. This approach is similar to the movement to make the political personal, by opening up a wider public discourse with each of these smaller counter-publics that represent groups previously not allowed in to the common discourse.

This is challenged by Sennett; although his book was published several years earlier it is dealing with many of the ideas that would later influence Fraser, who writes that the introduction of multiple interpersonal spaces in public is what can replace the public sphere over time. Fraser's work seems to advocate for better understanding between populations and a greater sense of equality in the public space, but Sennett argues that that isn't how the world works, and Fraser's optimistic vision cannot come to pass.

Sennett's book begins with a long historical survey of how the notion of an arena for public discourse has evolved over time, beginning in Europe and leading to his writing in the 1970s. What Sennett saw was the change in this public arena from a time of strict societal

standards of dress and behavior that coded public interactions and allowed for people to interact with strangers in public. Sometime in the 19th century, this began to change for Sennett who believes that it began with the emergence of personality in public. Before this great shift, people wore masks of behavior and presentation that shielded their inner selves.

But then people began to put an emphasis on interpersonal closeness instead of the more transitory interactions of the past. This closeness would be arrived at "after a process of testing them: the relationship is both close and closed. If it changes, if it must change, there is a feeling of trust betrayed." (260). Because of the lengths of vulnerability needed to establish these close relationships, more and more people became exposed to psychic harm if anything happened to the relationship, resulting in an "immense fear of public life" (260). Sennett does identify a real phenomenon of the late 20th century, in the retreat from public life, which can be seen in many of the disillusioned town Westerns of this time.

The other aspect of Sennett's theory is that the greater reliance on personality and the interpersonal ethic as advocated by the emerging counter-publics fails to account for the stranger. Because of the retreat from public space, people are no longer able to interact with strangers or those outside of their own counter-public. This poses problems for real communities, because it leaves them no way to communicate with other counter-publics and would lead to the slow demise of nations and communities. (Sennett, 28-9)

It wasn't just women who were replacing the public space with more intimate counter-publics "All the marginalized groups whose suppression had been thought to be necessary for men to build secure identities began to rebel." (Kimmel, 174) and in doing so, they placed men in general, but white men specifically in the uncomfortable position of having to give up the privileges that they had come to expect as their entitlement through their monopoly of the public

space. "The notions of success, masculinity and being a good (i.e., sole) provider were still too tightly intertwined for men to give up the last without compromising the first two." (Ehrenreich, 103). Many men were supportive of the women in their lives being able to do more in society, but not at the cost of their own feelings of importance and masculinity. It would take a whole new understanding of masculinity to even begin to undo centuries of male entitlement.

Westerns, which had for generations been a white masculine domain, had now come to reflect the cultural anxiety felt by many men during this time about the encroachment of a domestic counter-public on these traditionally masculine spaces. If the public realm is a realm for discourse and interaction as both Fraser and Sennett seem to agree, than it immediately puts the traditional Western hero at a disadvantage. Traditional Westerns favor men of action over men of words. Many Westerns go out of their way to prove how lawyers, bar tenders, and other sociable men are less heroic and masculine than the strong, silent hero. The two anti-Westerns I am looking at seem to have a great preoccupation with town and with the women who live there and their relationship with the male heroes.

The Hired Hand **and** *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*

This project will examine two films that depict men and their attempts to start new lives in the public realm only to find them dissatisfying in some way and their attempts to adapt. For these men, both the traditional public sphere and the emerging interpersonal counter-publics prove inadequate and the films attempt to address alternatives. Each of these men are threatened and challenged by the collapse of the traditional public sphere and the emergence of Fraser's feminine counter-publics, but Sennett's public life is equally if not more stifling for them. These films, in depicting the challenges associated with a changing public sphere, attempt to solve the problems elsewhere articulated by Fraser and Sennett. In the changing world of the late 20th

century, with its greater emphasis on the interpersonal interactions, women who are traditionally associated with discourse and sociability have an advantage, which is born out in these films.

Very little scholarly work has been dedicated to exploring the role of the town in these Westerns. My interest in these constructed spaces will lead to a better understanding of the ways in which public and private spaces were being challenged in the late 1960s and early 1970s and what implications that has for the 21st century by examining one of the 20th century's most iconic and reliable genres and what caused it to undergo such a radical change.

I will be looking closely at both Robert Altman's *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* and Peter Fonda's *The Hired Hand*. Both films fall in to what Slotkin calls the "neorealist" category, which "though it is seriously 'historical,' looks behind the façade of Western mythology to portray some of the grittier, darker, even meaner sides of cowboy life." (629). Both films also fit Michael Coyne's definition of a "Town Western" which according to Coyne "largely conform to the narrative structure…labeled the 'classical plot', i.e., featuring a skillful, self-assured hero ultimately driven to violence to defend a community he will subsequently consider home." (Coyne, 7)

The films each construct frontier communities in different ways, and depict the different challenges that emerge there. One of the salient things about these films is the way their depictions of towns contrasts with Tompkins' depiction of them in the classical Westerns as a magnet from which men are trying to break away. In both of these films, the men are trying to stay in their towns and resisting forces that would remove them. They also both deal with the failure to resurrect an older image of the public sphere in which men dominate, and they do this in different ways.

Both directors, Fonda and Altman, were influenced by the times in which they lived. While neither one of them set out to make films that explicitly addressed the ideas of Fraser and Sennett, both men did set out to make westerns that were different from ones that had come before. Both men, as did many other artists of the early 70s, grappled with alternative ways of living to the status quo, as well. Fonda had long been associated with the counter-culture of the 1960s, and Altman was known by the early 70s as a director fond of deconstructing genres. In creating these two films that attempt to create more realistic visions of an iconic genre, both films would bear traces of the various counter-publics of the world, but the general pessimism of the day prevented either film from experiencing a truly happy ending.

In *McCabe & Mrs. Miller,* McCabe (played by Warren Beatty) comes to town to establish a new life. At first he is unsuccessful, until he partners with a woman, Mrs. Miller (played by Julie Christie). McCabe arrives in to town as a classic Western hero. He is a lone gambler with a vague reputation as a gunfighter, but instead of proving himself in the wilderness or surviving in the landscape, McCabe wants to build his life in town. Unfortunately, his attempts to start a business by building a saloon and a whorehouse prove woefully inept until he meets Mrs. Miller who provides a much needed business acumen that McCabe lacks.

Once the pair succeed in building and running a successful business, however, a pair of agents from a mining company arrive and attempt to buy up all the property in town and convert the town into a company owned camp. McCabe refuses to sell, and the company sends three bounty hunters after him, prompting a final shootout in which McCabe ultimately dies. *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* takes place almost entirely in one town, the town of Presbyterian Church in Washington Territory. The film was shot in sequence so as the film progresses the town of Presbyterian Church literally grows and springs to life with each additional scene.

Altman's film explores the way the town changes over time, becoming more civilized and complete thanks to the efforts of McCabe, but at the same time McCabe himself is never fully welcomed in to the town, and remains an outsider. The film also highlights two important conflicts that were relevant to audiences in 1971, first the reaction of domesticity as an alternative to the public space, and second, the backlash against centralized bureaucracy and authority, personified here as the mining company that seeks control of the entire town and attempts to push out the small, private landholders.

Peter Fonda's *The Hired Hand* is about a man, Harry Collings (played by Peter Fonda) who ran away from his family and has been on the road, in the wilderness for seven years before deciding to turn around and go home. Instead of being welcomed back by his family, Harry is hired back by his wife to be a field hand on her farm. The film depicts the conflict between traditional masculinity, the image of the roaming and independent Western hero, and domesticity as he must choose to stay with his wife and daughter and fill the role of husband and father that he abandoned seven years prior or save his friend who has been kidnapped by the film's villain. Ultimately, Fonda's character chooses to be the hero, and like McCabe, is killed for it.

Chapter two examines *The Hired Hand* and explores the four locations featured in that film: the two towns, the ranch, and the road. Harry Collings drifts through each one, trying to find a place to stay before ultimately dying. Unlike McCabe who has found a place where he wants to stay, Harry is still searching for a place that will have him. His quest leads him to the end of the road. A town called Del Norte, an evil place where Harry must fight to save himself and his friend from a senseless death. In looking at each of the film's locations, this section will explore the reasons why Harry is unable to adapt to any of them and how his inability to fit in is

a reflection of the changing role of women in this period of American history as well as the demise of the counterculture movements of the 1960s.

Chapter Three deals with *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*. I will describe the physical setting of Presbyterian Church as it appears when McCabe first arrives, as well as how it changes and grows over time. McCabe arrives there looking to build a life and his role in that growth will also be examined. Most of the chapter will consider what has drawn McCabe to Presbyterian Church and why he desperately wishes to hold on to his life there once it is threatened. McCabe builds a life and a business in Presbyterian Church, but despite his best efforts, he cannot fully integrate himself in to the community that he has helped to grow there. Because he remains an outsider, McCabe's fight against the mining company proves futile, revealing Altman's sense that the public space cannot be resurrected.

CHAPTER TWO
"HOME…MAYBE THERE AIN'T NO SUCH COLOR"

Following the huge success of the film *Easy Rider* in 1969, Peter Fonda chose to follow up by directing his first film, a low budget Western called *The Hired Hand* in which he also starred. If *Easy Rider* represents the perfect film for the 1960s, then *The Hired Hand* encapsulates many of the post 60s feelings of the early 70s. Fonda does this through his construction of four separate spaces in the film: the road, an unnamed New Mexico town, the ranch, and another town called Del Norte. Much of the conflict of the film revolves around Fonda's character, Harry Collings' ability or inability to navigate each one successfully. The first three locations each prove inadequate for Harry, and ultimately drive him to his death in Del Norte.

The film has constructed this conflict to address, consciously or unconsciously the real issue of the retreat from public life described by Sennett. A retreat caused by the fear of public life. Harry, prior to the start of the film has left mainstream society to live on the road in his own counter-public space. When this space ultimately fails him, he returns home and in an attempt to recreate the roles and rituals expected of him as a husband and father, but is challenged by his estranged wife, Hannah.

Harry is reacting to a need that Sennett describes as a search for personal, individual meaning. Being unable to find this meaning in the world outside, people like Harry "therefore sought to flee, and find in the private realms of life, especially the family, some principle of

order in the perception of personality." (259). having fled from the road and the town, Harry returns to his lost family, but finds that they, too, have changed. He places too much pressure on his relationship with his family to help him, and they ultimately fail him as well. This is, according to Sennett, a typical reaction, "When the relations cannot bear these burdens, we conclude there is something wrong with the relationship, rather than with the unspoken expectations" (260). Sennett here suggests that the problem is not on the relationship, but on our unrealistic expectations of what that relationship will do for us. Harry cannot reconcile the relationship with Hannah, and he finds that it, too, does not give him what he is looking for, and must leave again.

Fonda has constructed a film that features a conflict between emerging and competing domestic counter-publics and larger, more traditional public spaces. Harry has fled from the latter, but finds that he is still unfulfilled by the former. In the end, he reacts by throwing himself in to the roles of the traditional public space, and must face the consequences of those actions.

The Road

Harry has spent the last seven years on the road trying to be the Western hero. He has wandered around from place to place, but never been able to find a purpose. He resigns himself to returning home after seven years because he expects it will be a respite from the harsh world he has just left, but instead finds the home he knew turned upside down. In this way, the film becomes a reflection of real fears and anxieties present in the United States during the time this film was made. For Peter Fonda, the director and star of the film, this can be seen in the

relationship between the depiction of the road in *The Hired Hand*, and his previous film *Easy Rider*.

The two films share many similarities in their narrative structures, both films feature two male protagonists riding across a desolate American Southwest. Both films feature a third companion who is killed for seemingly no reason, and both movies end with one of the main protagonists being shot and killed. In 1969, *Easy Rider* was a sensation. It quickly became a favorite film of the counterculture crowd who idolized its protagonists (played by Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper) and their free lifestyle. By 1971 and the release of *The Hired Hand*, however, Peter Fonda had changed from the easy going, mysterious drifter on a motorcycle to the world weary Harry Collings.

The critical difference between the films and the one that is most telling of the 1970s cultural malaise is the destination at the end of the road for each of the films. In *Easy Rider*, the riders are heading towards New Orleans because they want to see Mardi Gras. That's the only explanation that is given, but when they actually arrive in New Orleans, they spend most of their time in a bizarre acid trip sequence before leaving and heading back to LA. The purposelessness, the doing something just to do it and for no other reason, is what the film so dramatically captured about the late 60s counterculture. In contrast, Harry Collings just wants to go home. He has had enough of his purposeless life on the road, indeed it's pointed out in Del Norte that he has literally been riding in circles the last seven years and he's finally sick of it.

The 1960s were a time of immense change in America, but many things still had not changed. The Vietnam War had not ended, Civil Rights issues still plagued the population, and many of the alternative lifestyles championed during the decade were shown to be unsustainable. Many of the counter-cultural figures of the 60s, like Fonda, got tired and just wanted to go home.

Easy Rider is typical of the films that glorify the counter-culture's counter-public. The Counter-culture had created a number of different alternative lifestyles. In *Easy Rider* the main characters experience drugs, spend time at a hippie commune, as well as a small family farm. All three form examples of alternative lifestyles popular at the time, but the film never settles on any of them and continues to stress the motorcycle journey eastward as the destiny for its characters.

In *The Hired Hand*, Fonda shows the emotional appeal of going home, but also presents the complexities and difficulties of doing so. It's true that many things survived the 60s unaffected, but some things did change and refused to go back to the way things were. Hannah Collings does not simply accept Harry immediately, and Harry himself finds it difficult to reassert himself as a traditional masculine figure. Harry, having found that the mainstream public sphere doesn't work for him and that the domestic alternative has been complicated by Hannah seeks to take on the rituals and roles of the past. In this case, he attempts to be the father, husband, and gun fighter. In doing so, Harry begins to act out Sennett's solution to the problems of the excess personality in the public sphere.

Harry's flight from his family is similar to a cultural phenomenon of the late 20th century that Barbara Ehrenreich describes in her book, *The Hearts of Men*.

> To describe the change very briefly and oversimply: In the 1950s…there was a firm expectation that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives. To do anything else was less than grown-up, and the man who willfully deviated was judged to be somehow 'less than a man (11-12)

This is the role that Harry is trying to fulfill. He thinks this way, and sees himself as "less than a man" because of his having left his family, and abandoned his responsibility as breadwinner. However, as Ehrenreich writes, "by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the

1980s, adult manhood was no longer burdened with automatic expectation of marriage and breadwinner." (12). the film, in commenting on current issues, shows that Harry's thinking is out of place. Things have changed since he left and his ideas don't fit anymore. Hannah has been liberated by Harry's absence and refuses to simply go back to the way it was before. Thus, the film becomes about Harry's attempt to impose an old-fashioned ethic on his family, to reclaim his lost manhood and the conflict between this quest and Hannah's defense of her new liberation.

Hannah is a tough and resilient woman who has worked for seven years to run her farm and raise her daughter with only an occasional hired hand to help her. She has decided at this time, that because of all she's been able to do, that she no longer needs a man and her ambivalence at Harry's return causes Harry to recoil. He wants to go back to being a husband to her, but when she refuses, he doesn't know what to do except stay and wait.

Oasis of Civilization

Traditional public space is represented by the unnamed town in the film which is located on the New Mexico frontier. It was once Harry's home, and where he wants to return. Physically, it seems to be a fully functioning community with multiple businesses, and other amenities, even a Sheriff's office and a Justice of the Peace. The bar is full, and there is a general store and a functioning blacksmith shop. When Harry and his traveling companion Arch ride in to town we can see other people moving around in the street and there are other people riding horses besides the team pulling Harry and Arch's wagon. There is a sense of movement here. The people in the street are walking and acting with a purpose. They have somewhere to be and things to do. One can begin to see the sense of communal energy that exists here. The town is clearly striving for

something more. It has the hallmarks of civilization and the people seem to obey rules and norms that would be familiar in any larger or more established community. Traffic stays to the right, people walk on the sidewalk, and the buildings look solid and well maintained.

The bar itself is a site for public discourse. Despite that it is a business it is also a place where people can gather and exchange information. It is separate from the state, as Nancy Fraser suggests it must be to be an effective public space. The bar serves as the confluence of both the theoretical realm of public space that I have thus far described with the physical public space. It embodies all of the theoretical conditions needed for effective public space, while also being a physical location.

It is here that Harry and Arch first learn about Hannah's sexual liaisons from one of the men in the bar. This is pretty typical of the genre, as bar tenders often serve as figures of sociability. Bars and saloons are historically some of the earliest establishments to move west, and bar tenders quickly became trusted sources of information about a town and its inhabitants. In Harry's absence, rumors have spread that Hannah has been sleeping with several of her hired hands. When confronted about this, Hannah confirms the rumors.

The next time we see the town, Harry begins to hang up signs all over, saying that hired help will no longer be needed at the Collings' ranch because he has returned and plans to remain there permanently. Here, Harry is once again using the town as a space for public discourse and his action of hanging signs around town is his way of reasserting his masculine prerogative. Since Harry cannot assert his masculinity over Hannah at the farm, he is left to use the traditional public space to do so. His assertion of his masculine role is a weak one, as he does not confront Hannah directly, nor does he speak with anyone in town beyond the signs, but he still utilizes the public space as a forum to do so.

Harry's inability to interact with anyone in the town is indicative of what Sennett described as the failure of the interpersonal ethic, the fear of the stranger. Here, by never interacting with anyone in town, Harry shows those shortcomings. His assertions of his manhood are weakened by his inability to communicate and it prevents him from becoming part of the community as well. Harry is also clinging to his ideas about the past. Harry has very little dialogue in the entire film. This immediately puts him at odds with the rest of the world of the film. In order to navigate these counter-publics requires that he drop his guard and interact on a personal level, but Harry sticks to his idea of the traditional man, the strong silent type.

The town is also a restrictive place because it is beholden to public opinion. An old woman, Mrs. Sorenson, from the town goes to the Collings' ranch to congratulate Hannah on Harry's return and to invite her to rejoin her old social circles in town. The two exchange thinly veiled barbs initially.

> Mrs. Sorenson: Mrs. Collings? Oh I just thought I'd drop by, I never seem to catch you in town, somehow.
> Hannah: Hello, Mrs. Sorenson-
> Mrs. Sorenson: *sigh*
> Hannah: It's not often that I get visits from your good self.

It's clear from their dialogue and the positioning of their bodies in the shot, that these women have avoided each other for some time. Mrs. Sorenson stands in the door frame, to the left of the camera frame and never makes eye contact with Hannah, who stands opposite her, in the kitchen with Janie. Hannah, in turn, barely looks up from her work in the kitchen as her guest sits at the table. The pleasantries, like "I never seem to catch you in town, *somehow*" suggests that Mrs. Sorenson knows why Hannah never comes to town, but polity prevents her from saying so.

Similarly, Hannah does the same thing by saying that "it's not often…" because, presumably Mrs. Sorenson has not visited since Harry left.

Mrs. Sorenson represents the double-edged nature of civilization, on the one hand it represents stability and a safety that Harry has been longing for, but it also brings with it a crushing sense of conformity that Hannah has been rebelling against since Harry left. For Mrs. Sorenson, Hannah's refusal to remarry and her insistence on being a single parent and openly acknowledging her own sexuality are a challenge to the social norms and conventions

Since Harry's departure, Hannah hasn't been to town very often. The old woman is representative of the social conventions and high society standards that come with civilization. Now that Harry has come back, suddenly Mrs. Sorenson appears and invites Hannah back to town to come to the "quiltings" and other activities taken up by the women of the town, claiming that "folks are always saying, 'what a pity you never get in to town". She is judgmental and rude to Hannah because of the way that she has subverted social customs. If the people of town had really felt pity for her, then why has it taken seven years and the reappearance of Mr. Collings to prompt someone to visit? Mrs. Sorenson herself later says that "we'll be looking for you in town! Folks will be looking out, now that your man's come home!" revealing her true feelings that now that she has a husband again, Hannah is once again worth the attention of the women of town. When Hannah says goodbye, her back is turned to Mrs. Sorenson.

Hannah has created a domestic counter-public for herself and her daughter. Hannah and Janie live in a domestic alternative to the mainstream public space. It is a response to Hannah's overwhelming fear of being ostracized from the mainstream. By the time Harry arrives, this arrangement has worked well for Hannah.

Hannah's ranch represents the domestic for Harry, but is still a wayward counter-public compared to the town. This space is a threat to the primary public space of the town because Hannah's example could undermine the authority of that public space. If other individuals from groups normally outside the social mainstream, like Hannah, could have a stronger voice in public affairs it could upset the status quo.

Hannah, Janie, and the Ranch

Hannah's farm is important to understanding the relationship between the two towns in the film and Harry's relationship with all three spaces. The Collings' farm is a typical frontier homestead. It consists of a main house, a large barn that also serves as a stable, an outhouse, windmill, pens for animals, etc. It is implied that the farm was built by Harry and Hannah together when they were first married, but has since been maintained by Hannah alone in the intervening years. Most of the actual farm, the fields, livestock, etc. remain unseen in the film, but through several montage shots, Fonda relays the size of the farm through the hard work that Arch and Harry can be seen performing to fix the mechanical equipment and run the operation. The size of the farm is important to show that, despite her best efforts, the farm could not be run by Hannah alone, creating the necessity for hired help. The farm's separation from the two towns is also important, as it is a separate space, not quite fully civilized, but also distinctly separate from the wilds of New Mexico.

There is nothing unusual about the physical construction of the farm, but rather with Harry's role in it. When Harry is initially rebuffed by Hannah and sent to sleep in the barn with Arch, he retreats to avoid confrontation. Over the next several days he works hard on the farm

and communicates with Hannah as little as possible. Harry hopes that his work ethic and the quality of his work will prove to Hannah that he is committed to her and the farm, and that this will somehow lead Hannah to reconsider their relationship and invite him back in to the house to reconnect with her and their daughter.

Harry's return is an embrace of a particular role, in this case of the father and husband. It is one of the traditional roles advocated by Sennett. Harry is embracing this role because his life outside the mainstream has not been as fulfilling as he imagined it. His attempt at creating his own public space outside the traditional public has left him with nothing to show for his wanderings, and he reacts by turning back to the old roles. In doing this, he threatens Hannah's own attempts to sustain her newly created alternative domestic life.

Harry assumes that they will be able to pick up where they had left off, but is quickly rebuked by Hannah who tells him that he can sleep in the barn and work the farm as a hired hand. She even refuses to reveal to their daughter his true identity. Hannah tells Arch at one point that it wouldn't matter if she slept with Arch or Harry, that they are interchangeable.

Harry's frustrations stem from his preconceived ideas about what his return home would be like and his understanding of the domestic male role. Harry believed that Hannah would be so thankful to have her husband returned to her that she would welcome him back with open arms. Her refusal to do that confuses him. With Arch's encouragement, Harry attempts to assert himself by posting the signs around town, and eventually asking Arch to leave.

Hannah forces Harry to choose between herself and Arch, and tells him that he cannot have both. Here, Fonda is expressing the inadequacy of the domestic counter-public as a model for social space. The farm has become Hannah's domain, she controls that space and she does

not have enough room to share with both Harry and Arch. She makes a point of telling them that it matters little to her which of them stays, but that only one can, while the other must leave.

Harry's relationship with Arch is reminiscent of other film tropes from this period, specifically the buddy film. The buddy film, like Western films have a long history, but in the late 1960s and early 70s, "they were more popular when they offered twists on their own standard formulae…the male bonding celebrated in these films is a defensive reaction to traditional masculine failure; the men turn to each other because the world (and women) have failed them." (Kimmel, 189) Harry's relationship with Arch cannot be integrated into a domestic counter-public. This refusal to allow both of them to be a part of the counter-public is a challenge to Harry and Arch's responsibilities to each other.

With the rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s, men "had to face new social conditions: renegotiating family roles at home and confronting women in the workplace, the political arena, the club, and the classroom. By challenging ideas about femininity and women's nature, feminist thinkers also made clear that conceptions of masculinity were up for grabs." (Schulman, 176-7)

Almost immediately after Arch leaves, Harry moves back in to the house and he and Hannah consummate their new relationship. Very quickly Harry's new masculinity is called in to question by the messenger who delivers the news that Arch has been captured by the men in Del Norte. Because of his commitment to his idea of the traditional male role, Harry must now go out and put himself at risk to rescue Arch. Harry is compelled toward Del Norte because of the inadequacy of the town, the road, and the farm.

The town is stiflingly traditional, and Harry can no longer fit in amongst the townspeople. His relationship with Hannah is not a traditional one, either. Hannah herself has fled the town for her farm because it offers her independence from those traditions and the people who enforce them. The farm is also inadequate for Harry because there is no room for his friend so he leaves to find Arch at the end of the road, the only place left to him: Del Norte.

The End of the Road: Del Norte

Del Norte is a poor, dusty town where nothing good happens. The most important feature of Del Norte is the lack of action, especially compared with the other town. When Harry and Arch first arrive there with their friend Dan at the beginning of the film, there are a few people there, but no one is doing anything. When they enter the bar, again we see that there is no talking and nothing is happening, save a silent card game at one table. This is an important parallel scene between Del Norte and the unnamed town. The scene in Del Norte is incredibly tense. The bar is very quiet and no one is doing anything. Fonda further establishes this atmosphere by giving close-ups of some of the other bar patrons whose shifting eyes create the sense of unease compared to the scene in the other bar where the camera remains steadily focused on Arch and the bar tender, while the other patrons are clearly playing a game of poker in the background. Here in Del Norte, the bar tender doesn't attempt much conversation beyond telling the men that he doesn't have the kind of drinks that they want, compared with the other bar tender who goes out of his way to make small talk with Arch.

It is here that Dan is killed by the villainous McVey (played by Severn Darden). It's implied and then later confirmed that Dan is killed so that McVey can steal his horse. What is

most striking however is that as the dying Dan falls into the bar, none of the other patrons even look up from their tables as he dies on the floor.

Upon Harry's return to Del Norte, the town is even more desolate than before. There are even fewer people walking the street and it seems like everyone that we do see is simply sitting around and waiting for Harry to show up.

Del Norte is a hyper-masculine and hyper-violent place, it is a failed counter-public. The final confrontation, and the construction of the town of Del Norte, itself, does not offer a viable third alternative to domesticity and the traditional ideas of public space. There is only one woman, who is there against her will, and there is nothing there besides the saloon. Del Norte can only burn itself up in violence. The only people who live there are only ever seen waiting for Harry to show up so they can kill him. The town is constructed as the ideal arena for feats of masculine confrontation, since there are few innocent people there and no possibility of collateral damage to any businesses or homes.

When Harry finally arrives, the shooting immediately begins. The initial gunfight lasts approximately ten seconds, and leaves Harry mortally wounded and the gang unhurt. When they go to inspect Harry's fallen body in the street, Arch escapes and manages to kill one of the henchman and distracting McVey long enough for the dying Harry to shoot him in the back. This entire sequence lasts fifty-five seconds, incredibly short by the standards of the genre, and leaves Arch alone with the dying Harry. This is a very critical scene for the film, and that is in large part due to how quickly the scene is over. Being less than a minute long, it's striking to compare it to the final shootout scene in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* which takes up the final thirty minutes of the film. But its length is important to emphasize how unfit Harry is to play the role of the traditional hero.

Conclusion

At the beginning of *The Hired Hand* we see Harry Collings living outside the mainstream of society. Like the counter-culture figures of the 1960s, he and his companions have formed their own counter-public to the mainstream, and it is based on their mutual understanding and love for each other. Like the hippies and others of the 60s, theirs is based on their own interpersonal relationships. It's never stated directly why Harry left, but based on his actions it seems that he withdrew from society after being emotionally overwhelmed at the risks of so much personal interaction.

After seven years, Harry gives up the interpersonal counter-culture counter-public he has with Arch and Dan. He has found nothing in it and reacts by returning to his home and his old role. However, in his absence Hannah has created her own domestic counter-public and Harry's return threatens to destroy everything that she's done. She eventually relents and allows Harry to resume his duty as husband, but despite her best efforts to show him another way through his relationship with her, Harry leaves to save Arch because the domestic counter-public does not recognize his responsibilities to his fellow man, nor does it provide a way to interact with those outside the counter-public. In the end, he is defeated.

Through this film, Fonda demonstrates the inadequacy of Fraser and Sennett's alternatives. Harry is not fulfilled by his separate counter-public, but he is also killed by following Sennett's rituals of the past.

Perhaps in Arch, Fonda is showing a third way to navigate through these issues of space. Arch has been able to fill the stock roles of fighter, husband and father throughout the film, but he has also shown to have a greater connection emotionally with Hannah and Janie. In fact, Janie

is shown interacting with Arch more than any of the other adults in the film. At the end, Arch

returns the Collings' horses. It's unclear if he intends to stay and take Harry's place, but the

audience is left with the sense that Arch may be able to carve out a new way in the way that

Harry could not.

CHAPTER THREE
"THIS HERE'S AN INTERESTING TOWN"

Like *The Hired Hand*, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* was a follow-up to another popular film by its director. In the summer of 1971, fresh off the success of *M*A*S*H*, director Robert Altman released *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, based on Edmund Naughton's 1959 novel, *McCabe*. The film attempts to address many of the issues that *The Hired Hand* addresses, but in subtly different ways. Unlike *The Hired* Hand, which takes place in multiple locations in the New Mexico territory, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* takes place almost entirely in the town of Presbyterian Church, a mining town in the Northwestern frontier. McCabe arrives at the start of the film to find a dark, rainy, muddy town. Through the course of the film, McCabe, and later Mrs. Miller, work to turn this wayward outpost into a thriving community.

Paul Arthur described Robert Altman as "the American director most clearly identified with the revisionist ethos…whose critical cachet during the Seventies boasted an anti-establishment…edge." (18). Robert Altman's films in the 1970s were known for the way they "juxtaposed people with very different goals and attitudes, none of them wholly wrong, or wholly right." (Hine, 69) His three most famous films from the decade (*M*A*S*H, McCabe & Mrs. Miller,* and *Nashville*) all feature large ensemble casts (many of whom appear in all three films) with individual storylines. At least a quarter of the scenes in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, for example, do not directly advance the plot, but merely provide more detailed character sketches of the inhabitants of Presbyterian Church.

M*A*S*H, which premiered in January of 1970 was a comedy film set during the Korean War, and consisted mostly of a two hour string of pranks pulled by the film's ensemble, notably, Donald Sutherland and Elliot Gould. Despite being set in Korea, *M*A*S*H* was clearly meant to recall images of the ongoing war in Vietnam, and Altman's approach to that conflict was to emphasize the insanity of war with black comedy. *M*A*S*H* works as a comedy because it stops short of attempting a solution to the problem of American involvement in the Far East, and sticks with the basic premise of following army doctors who are just trying to make the best of a terrible situation.

McCabe & Mrs. Miller doesn't deal with Vietnam, but with the changing nature of public space on the home front. Just as in *M*A*S*H*, Altman presents his vision of a current cultural anxiety, in this case the encroaching of the corporate economy in to the public realm. The film shows people fighting back, but since they're ultimately unsuccessful Altman still avoids proposing a solution to the crisis. Instead, the film focuses on presenting the crisis itself.

Corporate Liberal Economy: McCabe versus the Mining Company

This film adds a concern about the corporate liberal economy to the already existing debate about the nature of public space. In *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, the bad guys are outsiders employed by a large mining company that wants to buy up all of McCabe's property. The mining company's actions are an illustration of the way that many feared the corporate economy would encroach on the separate public space as described by Fraser and Habermas. This anxiety stemmed from the same sources that influenced much of the disillusionment in the late 60s. As C. Wright Mills wrote, "The rise of modern society may readily be understood as the story of the

enlargement and centralization of the means of power – in economic, in political, and in military institutions." (25).

During the Second World War, the United States government had deemed it necessary to accelerate the process of centralization to improve the efficiency of the war effort. The government spent an enormous amount of money, and "these expenditures all helped to win the war, and they made sense as a means of mobilizing the nation's resources quickly and efficiently." (Lipsitz, 58) Once the war ended, the centralization of government decision-making did not change. It was thought by many that this bureaucratic machine "might involve employing the power of government to guarantee access to raw materials, stable markets, uninterrupted production, and adequate capital for big business." (Lipsitz, 59) The goal of maintaining this system was, in short, "to prevent economic instability" (Lipsitz, 59) and economists at the time believed that this system could indefinitely prolong the economic success of the United States.

In the 60s, the large bureaucracies were the way of the future, a future "based on technological and organizational mastery" (Hine, 189). The bureaucracies represented progress through technology. "Belief in the inevitability of progress through technology and speed was a major part of the shared consciousness of the post-World War II era" (Hine, 89). But as early as the 1950s people like C. Wright Mills were wary of the process of centralized decision making, Mills wrote in his 1958 essay "The Structure of Power in American Society", "That the facilities of power are so enormously enlarged and so decisively centralized surely means that the powers of quite small groups of men, which we may call elites, are now of literally inhuman consequences." (26). Mills was concerned that in the United States, a very small group of people controlled so much power (specifically the power of nuclear weapons) and had so few checks on their power that the decisions they could make had consequences more far reaching than any

before in history. Despite this thinking, many Americans bought in to the concept of the corporate liberal economy because they still believed in its promises. Once this myth of inevitable progress was broken in the late 60s, however, those instruments of progress became more damaging than good. At the root of all of this was the bureaucratic model, "the ruthless competition and selfishness promoted by an enterprise-oriented society too often leaves individuals adrift and unconnected to any broader community or purpose." (Lipsitz, 1).

Mills wrote that the fall of the middle class or what he terms the "demise of the public must be seen in connection with the rise of centralized organizations." (37). the problem facing the American people is a complete disengagement with anything beyond their own lives, "They lose their will for decision because they do not possess the instruments for decision; they lose their sense of political belonging because they do not belong; they lose their political will because they see no way to realize it." (Mills, 37).

When Mills writes about the demise of the public he's addressing the way that centralized organizations strip away the political power and will of individuals. Without that power and will, the realm of public discourse can no longer function as independent of the economy and the state. Centralized authority and the corporate economy attempted to collapse the state and the economy in to one entity, by stripping the people of their will and power, leaves only the combined economy and state and powerless, disenfranchised individuals. This specific disillusionment with corporations and businesses is played out in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* where McCabe is the "traditional enemy [of corporate liberalism]: competitive small business" (Lipsitz, 60).

The film is mostly concerned with public discourse as it relates to economic transactions, "A shocking percentage of dialogue [in the film] involves monetary transactions, property

relations, and McCabe's pecuniary arrangements." (Arthur, 19) indeed, even the presence of the ampersand in the film's title suggests that the relationship between the two title characters is not just any kind of relationship, but a business partnership.

The film begins as many town Westerns do with the arrival of the hero in the town. The first half of the film is concerned with McCabe's efforts to make money by building two separate businesses. When McCabe arrives, the town of Presbyterian Church is little more than a few shacks, a church that is half finished and an inn that doubles as a restaurant. McCabe's plan calls for the construction of a saloon and a brothel. In order to begin to finance the operation, McCabe brings three prostitutes from the nearby town of Bearpaw to get his business off the ground. At first construction is very slow, and McCabe's prostitutes are living in muddy tents in the middle of town, and one of the women even repeatedly stabs a would-be client until McCabe disarms her.

McCabe's eventual success attracts the attention of the Harrison Shaughnessy mining company. The company sends two agents to negotiate with McCabe to buy all of his property in the town. McCabe attempts to negotiate a higher asking price, but the agents refuse and leave town. Harrison Shaughnessy sends three mercenaries to Presbyterian Church to kill McCabe so that the company can seize his property without sale. Thus the film's main conflict reflects the cultural anxiety around the bureaucratization and the corporatization of America. McCabe is an individual entrepreneur who has been a successful businessman, but when the corporation wants to take over it is willing to literally kill to achieve its ends.

What is at stake, however, is not just McCabe's businesses but the future of the town itself. The first half of the film has watched the construction of this particular place of public discourse, but it's now threatened by the corporate entity of the mining company. This drama is a

literal representation of the collapsing of the theoretically separate spaces of economy, state and public space. If Presbyterian Church is bought up by the Harrison Shaughnessy Corporation, it would give that company control of the people there as well. And if the town becomes a corporate entity then the public space will lose its privilege as a space where one can be critical of both the economy and the state. That's no longer possible when the company is willing to send bounty hunters to kill anyone who disagrees with their point of view.

Presbyterian Church and the Construction of Public Space

The plot of the film involves the construction of a frontier town, and because Altman shot the film in sequence, the town literally grows right before our eyes. McCabe and Mrs. Miller literally construct a new space for themselves. The town is a space for public discourse in the way that Fraser described such space; it is "a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction." (519). but in this film, it shows the construction of the space from the beginning. McCabe and Mrs. Miller create a new space that tries to be different, to create their individual counter-publics.

The town is an example of an idealized version of participatory politics. There is no government of any kind in Presbyterian Church, there are several notable individuals who live there, but no one has any real far reaching power outside of his or her own domain, and beyond money their doesn't seem to be a marked difference between individuals. Although, the vast majority of the people we see in town are men and almost all of them are white. There does not seem to be any particular class tensions among them.

The film examines several aspects of public life in this frontier town, including the existence of several counter-publics as described by Nancy Fraser. These are a form of "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs." (527) I will be looking at two of the counter-publics within the film and their consequences for the plot of the film, first a counter-public that consists of the town's prostitutes, and second the counter-public consisting of McCabe and Mrs. Miller who are never able to integrate fully in to the town's main public sphere[1].

Their need for emotional closeness leads to a fear of getting hurt and a withdrawal from each other. Sennett saw this need for emotional closeness as a kind of tyranny of intimacy, "domestic routine soon produces one image of intimate tyranny; it is claustrophobia" (337). The withdrawal from public life would lead people in to the domestic life and according to Sennett, that domestic life is claustrophobic and unfulfilling. The other version of this tyranny of intimacy is that which leads people away from public life in the first place. "a kind of political catastrophe, the police state in which all one's activities, friends, and beliefs pass through the net of governmental surveillance." (337) this view of government surveillance is only possible,

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[1] There are two other racial counter-publics present in the film, as well, but each figures less prominently than the two mentioned above. There is a sizable population of Chinese workers living in Presbyterian Church, but they are almost never seen during the film (with the exception of one Chinese prostitute working for McCabe) until Mrs. Miller's final appearance in the opium den. They have formed a population within the town that has been so excluded from the public discourse that for most of the film they are only mentioned in passing. The other group is a black couple that arrives in town with the prostitutes from Seattle. The man is a barber, but little else is learned about them. After their arrival they are mostly seen in group shots, but they are never seen in any of the town's other businesses. And in the final scene, they become the first people to leave the scene after the church fire is put out. They do not participate in the euphoria that erupts immediately afterward.

Sennett asserts if one believes that the public realm is a place for personal emotions and personality.

The film illustrates McCabe and Mrs. Miller's guarded interactions as they attempt to create a domestic alternative for themselves. Much of the film is concerned with McCabe and Mrs. Miller's relationship and here there are many echoes of the relationship between Harry and Hannah Collings. Mrs. Miller is a strong and independent woman, and McCabe, like Harry Collings, cannot express himself fully with her and ultimately proves that he is inadequate to the task of protecting the town that he's helped to create. Unlike the strong and silent Harry Collings, however, McCabe is constantly talking. Even when he is alone, he is muttering to himself. McCabe's constant talking doesn't help him any more than Harry's silence does. He hardly makes any sense and although he's always interacting with others, his inability to communicate effectively or follow social cues leaves him no better off than Fonda in *The Hired Hand*.

McCabe and Mrs. Miller build up a successful enterprise and as the film progresses, Presbyterian Church changes from a muddy group of shacks to a place with real buildings and businesses. The people who live there, at first were so covered with dirt and mud that they were hardly recognizable, by the midpoint of the film, appear clean, many of them wear suits and hats. The "film suggests that it is not merely capitalism that fuels the advance of civilization…but specifically prostitution. In its wake, the burgeoning whorehouse brings better housing, better hygiene and clothing, specialty retail stores, and a modicum of middle class music and dance." (Arthur, 19) McCabe's dream has only been realized because of help from Mrs. Miller.

The first of the main counter-publics that I will examine is the prostitutes. Prior to the arrival of the prostitutes in Presbyterian Church, there are only a handful of women that can be seen in town. Immediately after their arrival they have made a significant demographic shift.

However, due to their status as prostitutes, they cannot enter the main public discourse. Thus, for both financial and physical protection they work together to support themselves. They live together in the whorehouse and rely on themselves to maintain it. With safety in numbers, the prostitutes can make their voices heard in the community. Mrs. Miller initially lobbies for a bath house, the purpose of which is to make sure that the women can stay clean and relatively healthy, as well as for the client's health and cleanliness. This proposal wouldn't have been considered without Mrs. Miller's status as a prostitute herself, and her ability to speak for the group even when they aren't present.

As the film progresses, the prostitutes are able to work together to further integrate their counter-public with the larger public sphere. When one of the men in the community dies after a fist fight, the prostitutes attend the funeral and organize a choir to sing. Beyond being united by profession, the prostitutes continue to greatly outnumber the other women in town and because of that they take it upon themselves to make the town more suitable for women of high class such as themselves. They celebrate each other's birthdays, they attempt to help McCabe keep his businesses by sleeping with the mining agents (who politely decline), and look out for each other, they even agree to bring in the widow of the man buried at the funeral. She had been a mail-order bride, and without her husband she has nothing but continues to live in Presbyterian Church with the prostitutes. The prostitutes even serve as an attraction for people to come to town. It's implied that since the arrival of the women there has been an influx of capital in the town, and at least one character has arrived solely because of what he's heard about the brothel.

During the film's climax, the church is set on fire and the entire town comes out to put out the fire. In this scene, the prostitutes work together along with the miners and other people of Presbyterian Church to save the church. It is here that their integration has become complete.

Through banding together they have come to be accepted as an important part of the town. But by the end of the film, they have become an integral part of the town's success, they have formed relationships with the other people who live there, they have helped to make the town in to a real place where American civilization can grow with them as a part of it.

The integration of the prostitutes in to the larger town indicates another, more direct consequence for the public realm. In Fraser's model, the public realm is one that should be "analytically distinct" from the economy and the state. (519). However, through the corporate take-over of Presbyterian Church, the brothel is left as the last vestige of a public realm. This public space is compromised by the corporate takeover because any relationships or discourse that takes place there is mediated by the exchange of money and the nature of the brothel as a place of business.

Mrs. Miller and McCabe also form their own microcosm of a counter-public. The relationship between the two is an attempt to create an alternative domestic space that the two of them can inhabit. They are each presented as loners who separate themselves from others. But in this way, they fit Sennett's description of modern people with their "tremendous fear of public life" (260).

They are afraid of betraying their true emotions, and at first their relationship seems like a place that they can share together, over time it also breaks down. To begin with, although they have a physically intimate relationship, it is always mediated by the exchange of money. While they're together, Mrs. Miller is always on the clock. As McCabe begins to develop feelings for her, he finds himself unable to express those feelings to her for fear of rejection. The two of them never reach the level of intimate tyranny described by Sennett, because they are unable to shed the emotional barriers required to creating Fraser's counter-public.

So whatever partnership might have come out of their union is sabotaged by both of them, as described by Sennett, because they were too "fearful of betraying their emotions" (261). They are both outsiders who, upon arrival, instead of attempting to integrate with the rest of the town, build a business to profit off of the residents of Presbyterian Church. This is illustrated by the funeral scene mentioned above.

The scene takes place the morning after the Harrison Shaughnessy agents leave town, and McCabe begins to grow paranoid that they will send someone to kill him. We see McCabe and the rest of the town gathered together in mourning at the gravesite. During the funeral, a stranger rides in to town. McCabe nervously approaches the man alone, believing that he has been sent there to kill him, only to have it revealed that the stranger is just a cowboy who has heard of McCabe's famous brothel.

The music in this scene serves to emphasize both the closeness of the community (the men and the prostitutes), as well as McCabe's separation from it. Opening with a shot of the head stone of the deceased, the camera slowly pans out to reveal the gathered crowd. During this shot, the only sound we hear is the preacher's prayer. At the conclusion of which, a violin begins to play the traditional funeral hymn "Asleep in Jesus". The violin emphasizes the sadness and loss felt by the town, but also McCabe's feelings of having made a terrible mistake the night before by not making a deal with the Company. The violin is joined after a few seconds by the voices of McCabe's prostitutes who lead the entire town in the singing of the hymn.

The singing of the hymn fills the soundtrack for the majority of the scene, while we see a distant rider entering the town. Despite McCabe's obvious unease at the sight, the sad song continues on to become something of a counterpoint. Up until the rider appears, the scene has focused on how the town as a whole has come together to mourn their collective loss. McCabe is

only one of many people gathered to pay their respects. Once the rider appears, the scene focuses more and more on McCabe and his sense of foreboding, and less and less on the other citizens. After he spots the rider, McCabe leaves the funeral, and another man asks him if he has a gun, presumably for protection which further informs the feelings of unease. As this is happening, we see several close-ups of Mrs. Miller in the crowd, looking equally uneasy on behalf of McCabe. It's unclear whether she's seen the rider, but her reaction suggests that she, like McCabe has shifted her focus from the funeral and the townspeople to McCabe.

The images of McCabe and the rider, as well as McCabe's dialogue with the man near him about carrying his gun and Mrs. Miller's reaction shots to all of this create a sense of unease and nervous tension about the nature of the rider and why he's come to town during the funeral, and so soon after the mining company agents had left. But as all of this happens, the townspeople continue to sing "Asleep in Jesus".

McCabe's plight is his alone, and his loneliness is emphasized by the sound of the entire town united in song around him. Even more importantly, McCabe goes alone to confront the rider, while no one from the town makes an effort to assist him. The sadness of the song changes from a song about the loss of a neighbor, and combines with the images of McCabe to emphasize his sense of being alone and despite his efforts to start over in Presbyterian Church, he is still alone and no better than when he first arrived. He is a stranger in the town and by refusing to sell to the company the night before despite the other property holders in town having settled with the company; he and Mrs. Miller have positioned themselves as apart from the rest of the population. Thus, despite the potential threat of the rider, the town remains oblivious and focuses their attentions on the burial of one of their own. After all, if the company sends bounty hunters, they will only be after McCabe, and will leave everyone else well alone.

Like Fonda, Altman sees the domestic counter-public as an inadequate substitute for public space. The film's finale sees McCabe failed attempt to resurrect the public by reenacting the rituals of the impersonal past by assuming the role of the gunfighter.

"That man? That man never killed anybody": Shootout in Presbyterian Church

At the end of the film, Altman presents a thirty minute shootout sequence as the bounty hunters pursue McCabe through the town. This pursuit is juxtaposed with the burning of the church and the town's efforts to save it. Altman will alternate shots of McCabe in the snow, stalking through abandoned streets and hiding in abandoned buildings with scenes of the entire town working together as a fire brigade to save the church. The townspeople and the prostitutes are so caught up in saving their church that no one seems to notice that McCabe and the mercenaries are trying to kill each other in the streets.

McCabe's fight is hardly a conventional gunfight. Reminiscent of town western shootouts, like *High Noon*, Altman creates a scene with a hero who is outgunned, left with nothing but his wits. But at the end, we see McCabe shoot two of the mercenaries in the back, and the last by surprise after feigning death. These are the acts of a survivor, not a hero. And at the end, as McCabe succumbs to his wounds, and the town has saved their church, the audience is left to wonder about why? As Paul Arthur writes,

> McCabe's foolishly noble motive must be tempered by the possibility that he enters the lopsided battle not for love – or freedom or justice or any other windy abstraction – but because that's what protagonists in Westerns do to fulfill their *generic* oath, marking his death as senseless and ignominious. That is, McCabe succumbs to admittedly suspect, socially conformist codes attached to aging Hollywood movies. (20).

This ending preserves the original ending from the Naughton novel in which McCabe dies after defeating the mercenaries. McCabe is driven to his own death because that's what he is supposed to do and it's what his audience expects of him.

McCabe is reacting to his failed attempt at forming a relationship and counter-public with Mrs. Miller and his inability to protect his newly formed public space from being taken over by the corporate economy. In doing so, he is following Sennett's model of a return to the impersonal public realm by playing a stereotype instead of a three dimensional human. The role of the lone gunfighter is just one of the rituals from Sennett's version of the impersonal past. McCabe looks the part, and his actions so far in the film suggest that that is the conclusion, but Sennett's solution of a return to the rituals and roles of the past is equally flawed in this case because McCabe only gets himself killed.

Conclusion

The film has shown his inability to navigate the public domain of Presbyterian Church, and this final grasp at conformity also falls short. McCabe dies on one level because he dared to challenge the bureaucratic authority of the territory, but he also died because that's what he was supposed to do. It is his job as the film's protagonist and the town's "leading citizen" to defend that town. Even if no one in town notices or seems to care.

Leaving the conflict unresolved is a staple of Robert Altman's work from the 1970s. Even though McCabe is successful in killing the bad guys, there is every indication that the company will be back to take over without him. Altman doesn't propose a solution because there isn't one; neither the work of Sennett nor Fraser can remedy the situation. He can only show how

pointless McCabe's actions are, and the terrifying lengths that the company is willing to go to to take over.

As McCabe is fighting for his life, Mrs. Miller is nowhere to be seen for the vast majority of this sequence, a significant departure from the original novel in which she is at McCabe's side as he dies. She is not seen fighting the fire, and she is not helping McCabe. The audience has last seen her with McCabe the night before, she seems distant, and having resigned herself to knowing the McCabe will be killed. She had vainly tried to convince him to first settle with the company and then to leave town. After McCabe falls asleep, she wanders off in the night.

It is revealed in the film's final shot that Mrs. Miller is in an opium den in the Chinese section of town, a place that we only see in this last scene. For the last sequence, Altman shows alternating shots of a wounded McCabe dying alone in the snow, and Mrs. Miller laying in the opium den.

Despite being surrounded by people, there is no sound beyond the non-diegetic music (music that the audience can hear, but the characters in the film cannot) by Leonard Cohen. This song combines with the tracking close-up of Mrs. Miller's expressionless face juxtaposed with McCabe's lonely death highlights Mrs. Miller's feelings of being alone as well. She is lost in her world. It doesn't seem that she has any idea about the church or about McCabe. She had warned him about the mercenaries, but his refusal to leave town drove them even further apart. At the end we see her staring at the pipe, spinning it in her hand, and the final shot of the film as the credits roll is an extreme close-up of the surface of the pipe.

By placing her here, and not at McCabe's side prepared to continue the fight, Altman seems to be suggesting that there is no point to combating the corporate takeover. By

emphasizing how alone both McCabe and Mrs. Miller are, with these final shots there is a sense of hopelessness for them. Their attempts at bucking the system have failed; they have failed to integrate themselves in to the community. Presbyterian Church will go on without McCabe, but what its future holds is still to be determined. The townspeople have proven that they can rally around a common goal, but even this final act is undercut by the fact that none of them have ever actually attended service in the church that they've just saved. They've only saved it to preserve the status quo.

Altman's illustration of Fraser's counter-publics shows how those attempts at creating new spaces for discourse are ultimately unsatisfying, and unable to resist the encroaches of the corporate economy. McCabe is dead and Mrs. Miller is lost in an opium high. The women who had created their own community are successfully absorbed by the larger community by the film's end. Here, Altman shows how those separate publics are vulnerable. The women have not done anything to improve their standing or station, and by being absorbed they've lost their leaders and their unique voice. Instead of being actively punished like McCabe or driven away by grief like Mrs. Miller, the prostitutes have been taken in by conformity. Once they are part of the town, the whole town is absorbed by the company. Their brothel remains as the last site of public discourse and the last place for meaningful public interactions, but those interactions and relationships will always be mediated by economics.

Sennett's approach hardly seems better. In the end, McCabe attempts to act out the ritual that should be expected of him, the gunfighter, but he fails. Altman suggests that neither of the solutions seem to work for the changing landscape of postwar America. Fraser's promise of the interpersonal counter-public cannot withstand outside pressures, and Sennett's return to the past leaves people similarly unequipped to handle the problems of the present. Instead, Altman leaves

the audience thinking about what went wrong, how it could have been averted and how any of us

can navigate the changing nature of public space.

CONCLUSION

The Hired Hand and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* are both grappling with similar issues of the construction of public space. In both films, we have protagonists who attempt to operate outside of the mainstream public space. Fonda's Harry Collings has already left the mainstream at the start of the film, and much of the conflict involves his attempt at returning to the strict rituals and roles of the past. Unbeknownst to him, his estranged wife, Hannah, has also been living outside of the mainstream public space. She has created her own parallel counter-public to Harry's. But Harry cannot full realize his masculine responsibilities there, as Hannah asserts herself as an equal and Arch is forced to leave. *The Hired Hand* is primarily concerned with Harry's inability to navigate alternatives to public space and the domestic counter-public. He retreats from public life initially to form his own counter-culture counter-public, but eventually tires of that, too.

McCabe & Mrs. Miller addresses many of those issues, McCabe and Mrs. Miller form their partnership and create a space away from the mainstream, but they also are unable to fully express themselves in front of each other. *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, however adds an additional dimension to the challenges to public space by addressing concerns about economic space. Robert Altman fills his film with anxiety about the corporatization of public space. McCabe and Mrs. Miller are unable to withstand the pressures of the corporation and as they fall, the last authentic public spaces in Presbyterian Church disappear with them. In their wake, they've left

behind the brothel as the only remnant of the counter-public, but this counter-public is tarnished by its relationship with the town's corporate economy.

Both films bring up the issues that Fraser and Sennett have wrestled with, and both films seem to suggest that neither thinker is completely correct. *The Hired Hand* leaves Arch as a potential third alternative, a combination of both solutions, but the ending of that film is ambiguous as to Arch's ultimate fate. *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* on the other hand seems to revel in the inevitably of the demise of public space. Even as the corporation takes over the town, the people who live there are still able to find community and happiness in the saving of their church.

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