

## Wim Wenders - Paris, Texas (1984)

### 1. Introduction: *Travis shows Walt his Photograph of Paris, Texas*

#### 1.1. Key characteristics of Travis and Walt

- Travis: childish, naive, has head up in the clouds, secretive
- Walt: gown-up, rational, sober, dismissive
- Relationship: Brothers (probably not recognizable here)

1.2. *Synopsis*: By the time this scene takes place, 30 minutes of the film have already gone by. Nevertheless, this is pretty much the first conversation that takes place between Walt and Travis. In the beginning of the film Travis, the protagonist, is pretty much a complete mute. It takes Walt the first half of the film to travel with his brother to L.A. where Travis eventually manages to 'make friends with' his own son Hunter. Travis then decides to try and go find his ex-wife Jane and even takes Hunter along. Travis eventually finds Jane: She is now earning her living by fulfilling men's wishes in a peep-show booth.

Up to this point, Travis has gone from a complete mute to somebody who at least speaks as much as is absolutely necessary. In the peep-show with Jane, however, he finally manages to speak very elaborately with her about the time he left her and Hunter and ran off into the desert. This way Jane and Hunter are reunited. Travis, however, does not join the reinstated family but instead drives off into the sunset.

### 2. *Explicit dramaturgy vs. implicit dramaturgy*

2.1. *Explicit dramaturgy* refers to the *plot* of a movie: the actions and reactions of protagonists and antagonists.

2.2. *Implicit dramaturgy* refers to a concept or an idea that is being developed or elaborated upon while the plot progresses. It's what takes place *behind the scenes*, so to speak. *Implicit dramaturgy* is often what makes a movie worth watching more than once.

### 3. Wim Wenders' poetic essay *The American Dream*

#### 3.1. *The essay itself*

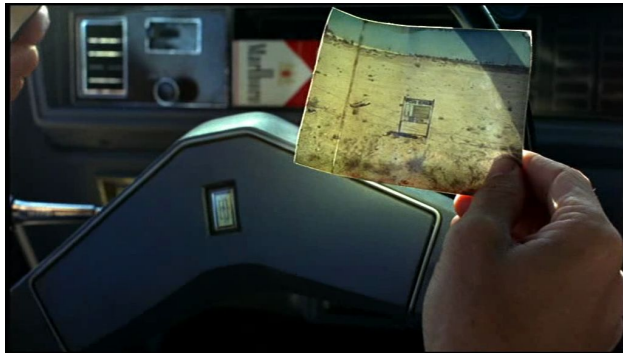
„*The American Dream*“.  
Auch ein Traum besteht aus Bildern,  
viel mehr als aus Worten.  
Träume SIEHT man.  
Wie soll dann ein Traum aussehen,  
von einem Land und von Menschen,  
die zu SEHEN verlernt haben,  
weil sie sich schon zu lange an das  
GEZEIGT BEKOMMEN gewöhnt haben.  
Auch ihren Traum sehen sie nicht mehr;  
sondern bekommen ihn nur noch gezeigt.  
Vorgeführt.

[...] nachdem das Fernsehen aussah wie permanente Werbung,  
sah der Spielfilm bald so aus wie Fernsehen.  
Film und Fernsehen hatten nun ein und dieselbe Form:  
die des Commercials.

So to Wenders, American commercialism abuses images by reducing them to one function only: selling products. *He is afraid that movies will no longer open up our vision to vast landscapes and interesting details but that instead they will restrict our field of vision like all commercials do.*

#### 3.2. *Themes of this essay within the discussed scene from Paris, Texas.*

→ The photograph Travis shows Walt displays an empty lot. To Walt it is completely useless. To Travis, it is strangely fascinating. (We later learn that he believes that Paris, Texas is where he was conceived = a private myth of his own creation, so to speak)



*Walt holding photo*



*Travis holding photo*

→ Walt's pack of Marlboro cigarettes in the background!

→ Through Walt's eyes, the American West has already deteriorated to a mere setting for Marlboro commercials.

→ Through Travis' childlike-eyes, the empty spot in the desert is still what it actually is: empty, wide-spaced, completely free of rules and regulations.

→ **implicit dramaturgy: Wenders is showing how commercialism changes how one and the same picture is being viewed!**

#### **4. Discussion between Travis and Walt in front of giant billboard**

##### *4.1. Explicit and implicit dramaturgy in this scene*

*explicit dramaturgy:* Our protagonist Travis is at the point where he has to depart from his 'assistant' Walt and has to find his own way of achieving his goals. Walt is upset because Travis won't tell him whatever happened between Travis and Jane before they broke up.

→ *implicit dramaturgy:*

construction workers assembling the giant picture of a woman:

- sexually attractiveness
  - spreading her legs
  - sexual connotations of "I'm at my peak"
  - Her head is cut off
- **this woman has been completely robbed of her identity and has been reduced to the sole purpose of selling a product.**



*Billboard "I'm at my Peak!"*

As we will see in the next scene, this *foreshadows exactly what has actually happened to Jane.*

#### **4) Final conversation between Travis and Jane (01:53:55 (01:55.40) – 02:07:02)**

→ *before* Travis and Jane can see each other: Jane has pretty much completely degenerated into a billboard-poster come to life: she depicts a sort of waitress in a coffee shop – fulfilling the conservative role of a functional American household. She is completely at the disposal of men's fantasies.



→ *after* they can see each other: The situation is reversed: the 'image of a woman' has turned back into an 'authentic woman'. For a short moment the faces of the two overlap in the mirror. They are able to see each other just the way they are, for they manage, for the first time since their brake up, to speak to each other about their decisions and why they made these decisions.



## 5. Summary

Scene 1 serves to depict the status-quo: Wenders' criticism of the degeneration of images through something he have dubbed 'commercilisation' oder 'inflation' of images: while the amount of images each and every one of us is confronted with one a daily basis is still steadily increasing, the amount of things we are able to *see* in them is decreasing: most images are being reduced to one single function, one single meaning

Scene 2 elaborates upon this criticism: it is (at least for this film) especially woman and their emotions which are being abused to sell products. The connection this has to the characters in the movie is not made completely clear but it is being foreshadowed.

Scene 3 solves the problem (if only for a few utopian moments): Travis and Jane are able to reverse the effect of the one-way mirror. Communication is still possible.

## 6. From Western to Road Movie: *The first and the final sequences of Paris, Texas.*

### 6.1. Allusions to the Western genre

- Establishing shots: desert landscape is reminiscent of John Ford (e.g. *The Searchers*)
- Final scene: stereotypical endings of Westerns: with the mission fulfilled (=traditional American values restored), the lonesome hero rides off into the sunset. The horse has been replaced by the car.

6.2. The transformation from the Western-genre into the roadmovie-genre:

Both genres	Roadmovies	Westerns
violence and movement: accepted modes of solving problems	'progressive' structure: traditional order of things → 'hero' disrupts order → new order of things (usually in private terms)	'conservative' structure: traditional order of things → disruption of order → hero reinstates traditional order
negotiate key American values (freedom, family, society)	negotiate private problems (traumas, individual freedom, finding ones place in the world)	negotiate problems of society (
have an open, episodic structure (instead of a purely casual and linear one)	take place in <i>present</i>	take place in <i>past</i>

**Reasons for this transformation:** The Vietnam War and the civil rights movement destroyed the illusion that America's values (freedom, democracy, traditional family life) were working out for everyone. Therefore, the 'creation myths' of how civilization gradually spread across the American continent lost their attractiveness. Road movies revealed a new way of looking at America and the American Dream.

## 8. Bibliography / further reading

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