



National College of Art and Design Fine Art Print

The American Cowboy as an Icon

By Valerie Nolan

Submitted to The Faculty of History of Art and Design & Complementary Studies

In Candidacy for the Degree of Fine Art, Printmaking, 1999

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the library staff at N.C.A.D. and Professor John Turpin for his patience and guidance with this thesis.

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Introduction

A grand and nasty irony is the inevitable consequence of analysing the emotional content of any image in terms of its material form.

Barrett Watton, Richard Prince's Imitation of Life (Magazine), Art Week, July 8 1993

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the figure of the American cowboy and to find possible explanations as to why it is such a popular icon. He is not limited to his defining medium of film but appears across the board, from the fine arts to advertising.

Through the course of research it became apparent that in order to reach any sort of conclusion it was necessary to be more specific and find a focus point in which to centre an argument. Consequently Richard Prince's *Cowboy series* became the starting point. However the cowboys which feature in his work are a result of a long process of development. This started first with the birth of the cowboy 's image in American Western films. Chapter one explores Western film in relation to this idea. It establishes what has been presented and accepted as the archetypal cowboy.

Secondly, Chapter two discusses the cowboy in another stage of development, the advertising star. It assesses why the cowboy was a suitable choice for an advertising campaign. Also it acknowledges that by moving from film to advertising, the cowboy has cultural identity implications.

Finally Chapter three examines Richard Prince's *Cowboy series*. This specific body of work seems to comment on both the figure itself and the mediums of film and advertising. It is hoped that by exploring these three different areas in which the figure of the American cowboy appears a wider understanding of this icon and what he reflects will be reached.

Introduction

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Chapter One The Cowboy image in Western films

When discussing the cowboy as an icon the genre of the Western films must be discussed. The western genre is the point from which the figure of the cowboy became popular. When discussing the West as it portrayed in film it is important to discuss western literature which proceeded film. This, together with graphic images such as painting, influenced the style of many and possibly all Westerns. In early Western literature and art one can see the first real documentation of 'the Old West'. In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrup Frye discussed the characteristics of narratives, in which he describes five types of narratives.

The first type is called 'Myth'. The protagonist/hero is superior to other men and his environment. The hero has godlike qualities. The second narrative is called 'Romance', where the protagonist/ hero is superior to a certain degree to other men and his environment. He is usually mortal (with "marvellous actions" which suspend nature). Thirdly there is the "High Mimetic Mode" narrative, where the protagonist/hero is superior to other men but not to his environment. He is also subject to the laws of nature and social control. There is an epic feel or sense of tragedy to these narratives. The forth type of narrative is described as "Low Mimetic Mode". The protagonist/hero is superior neither men nor his environment. In this narrative there is a sense of realism and it is often described as realistic fiction. Finally the fifth type of narrative is "Ironic". The protagonist is inferior both to other men and his environment. He is also inferior in power and intelligence to that of the reader.

It is a scale of types from the 'Romantic' to the 'Ironic' and from these modes major sources of conflicts emerge. What classified a particular genre depended on the conventions of the story, such as plot; other structural features (day/night, action/response); character; time and space; iconography and themes. The western narrative evolves by using these conventions within the

Chapter One The Cowboy image in Western films

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The popularity of the Western is largely due to the fact that it offered real settings for the grounds of a myth. This mythology was the making of America. It was a much more dramatic setting for American heroes than the eastern coast, which reminded the audience of America's European origins. The West was ennobling to its people because the frontier was often portrayed as a last paradise. The West also asserted a primitive innocence in its people because it was far from the civilised world. The West supplied its audience with a possible alternative to modern American life. This assumption can explain the nostalgia linked to the West. However much the west was documented, to this day the west has never been realistically defined. In an account of Remington's paintings, Philip French points out that even though Remington's work was based on primary sources, he was selective in his choice of subjects. For example fights over watering holes seemed more important than say a westerner washing his/her clothes.

Frank Gruber classified westerns as fitting into seven basic stories. These were the railway story; the ranch story; the cattle empire (which stems from the ranch story); the revenge story; cavalry versus Indian; the outlaw story; and the marshal/law and order story. All of these define character and are a development from Frye's five modes and plot conventions mentioned earlier. However as more westerns were made the stories developed further and became more character defining i.e. epic, realistic, sociological, satirical, spaghetti.

When examining themes, it should remember that we are dealing with a particular representation of the West, a myth largely portrayed for American audiences. It must be realised that this myth is far from reality. What is found in the Western is a set of standards. These idyllic virtues were

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The myth is thereby separated from the everyday concerns and actions of most people, who cannot constantly be plagued by that particular psychological strain. Yet it is precisely these everyday concerns and actions that the myth is designed to make more bearable through the reinforcing power of what we call entertainment.¹

The American film industry and it's international dominance can be seen as another aspect which influenced western themes. The classical western era coincided with the studio era in Hollywood (1940's – 50's). Ultimately the studios made the decisions as to what type of Western was made. The studio's decision was usually based on what the audience wanted to see but film makers were also constrained by budgets. As a result the studios were setting certain conventions and artistic limitations to filmmakers. A small group of directors, actors and cinematographers were continually involved in Westerns. For example, the actors- John Wayne, Henry Fonda, and Gregory Peck; the directors- John Ford, Anthony Mann, and Sam Peckinpah. The fact that the same people were making Westerns meant that components such as characters and setting were seen more that once. This proved to help the audience associate even more with the films. A prime example of this is John Ford and Monument Valley. Both of which became synonymous with each other. The repeated use of Monument valley in Ford's films asserts an immediate

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familiarity with the audience. The valley itself and the familiar characters developed into icons. Westerns produced for television serials only proved to further this phenomenon, because now audiences could watch there favourite hero weekly as opposed to monthly or yearly.

Another reason for directors to use familiar characters or setting was a conscious decision to accept the audiences associations. At first these were reinforced and then manipulated for the director's own ends. For example, for a known hero who features in many films, to suddenly become a villain or die would have dramatically affected the plot. However it would also have a drastic effect on the audience. The hero abided by the audience's desires and was relied upon to act according in the films. This generated a feeling of ease with the hero. For the hero to betray the solid ideals associated to him, meant the hero betraying the ease of the audience. This ease of association could almost be mistaken for trust.

However these associations could work against the director as well. Casting a famous person such as John Wayne could contribute to difficulties with specific character definitions. This is because John Wayne fits into a larger, more generalised class of western hero, due to the sheer number of films in which he featured. This worked against the actor also, for example if Wayne wanted to play a gangster. It is almost impossible to imagine this because Wayne has become the image of the quintessential cowboy. Nowadays, this would be called typecasting.

An interesting development occurred through the use of the same actor. The cowboy/hero was seen to age, which he had not previously done. Consequently the themes developed too. New dilemmas arose for the ageing cowboy. Previously these had not been of concern for him in his youth. The theme of modern society versus the old way of life is explored. New generations of young and inexperienced (new actors) are presented. They are to be compared with the older more knowledgeable cowboys (established actors).

The West became a status symbol. The west and the frontier experience depicted in these films were uniquely American. Americans could finally define themselves relation to a national

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The West leasants' sectors spinded. The version of the frames expension designed in their dimesectors and the sectors of the science with finally define the sectors relation in the network. mythology, which was depicted for them. America had the monopoly of film at the time. This meant that along with the novelty of film, this mythology was easily asserted internationally.

Film was a commercial enterprise. What the audience wanted the audience got. Unpopular films were not very profitable. Consequently this meant that the Western like most films were subject to audience dictation. The Western satisfied social needs. In simpler terms the Western became a game of match. Linking the audience's expected archetypes with the new characters introduced by a new film. The success of a new Western depended upon the ease in which the audience could impose its own preconceived notions and ideals on new characters.

Another important development to consider is the psychology behind the Western. Which was another result of the expectancy of the audience. The westerns of the silent era had little complexity of character and followed the standard expected modes, that is the hero in a white outfit who saves the day. However in the 1940's and 50's sociology and psychology were influencial forces and became a plot necessity. Heroes and villains became victims of circumstance and childhood environments.

Westerns were consequently ill equipped to confront certain areas of American life such as complex political ideas, because the film belonged to the audience. This audience may have viewed politicians as ideally corrupt, and this may have been reflected in some films. However even if Westerns tended not to deal with politics directly, it often made references to American politics and government. The civil war era featured in many Westerns as a setting in time. During the Un-American Activities Committee investigation (1940's and 50's) Western became very patriotic, promoters of American ideals, even more than they had been previously.

When discussing political influence, Philip French links the content of Westerns to those who had strong political influences at the time. For example he refers to 'Kennedy westerns' (e.g.

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(An experimental and the Strengthen When the and their winted the antibered get. Explored in Conenter network (a) that is Consequently, this mean that the Western file most film), experimitive to and an exact the Consequently this mean that the Western file most film), experimitive parts strengther three whereas are the second needs for angles terms the Western ¹, since a general transition of the Westere are the externing the terms the Western ¹, since a parts at match three whereas are the externing the terms the terms the terms the Western ¹, since a parts at match the second method with the term the terms the terms the terms the parts of the second term of the restriction of the terms the term of the terms the parts of the second term of the term of the term of the terms the term of the terms to be at the term of the term of the term of the terms the term of the terms.

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With all this in mind a chart of the general development of the Western can be formed. The start of which can be called the pre-Western or the early Western. This type of Western celebrated the taming of the wilderness. It also celebrated the pioneer virtue. They were usually silent. They also contained little or no character complexity. The mature Western celebrated the salvation of civilisation. Stories explored the defeat of the wilderness and what was lost as a result. The mature Western also saw character development (e.g. Indians were seen as either noble or ignoble savages). The late western saw the closure of the frontier. They often eulogised the wilderness. The wilderness was seen as a place of truth and the town, corruption. Which is almost a reversal of what early and mature Westerns believed. Late Westerns damned the coming of social order.

What should be recalled at this point is Frye's, *The Anatomy of Criticism*. What can be noted is that the Western developed structurally as it moved through each of the narrative modes chronologically. Now in the post –Western era, films move around the modes in no set order. Filmmakers today rely generally more on the preconceived notions of the audience. They can pick and choose from a number of components, themes, style, themes, characters and settings. They can follow conventions, break conventions or do mixture of both. It all depends on the filmmaker's particular aims (i.e. to make a profitable film, an artistic, film, or a comic film etc.).

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In order to discuss the figure of the cowboy, the typical Western must be established and examined. The typical or model Western is important for two reasons. The existence of this type of Western is a result of expected audience conventions. Secondly the cowboy who features in the model Western can be accepted as the archetype. He too is subject to audience enforced conventions. The model Western is closely linked to the early/mature Westerns mentioned previously, because it promotes the western life style. What must be established is a clearer definition of characters, which featured in the model Western.

Firstly the environment and landscape can be described as a separate 'character'. The land is an integral part of the Western because it adds to the dramatical action and appeal of the genre. Howard Momford Jones in *O Strange New World* sums the west up in five words, 'astonishment, plenitude, vastness, incongruity and melancholy¹². It also possesses a surreal quality because it is foreign to most viewers, particularly non-Americans. However this is not the case all the time. Places such as Monument Valley became familiar to audiences although they had never visited there. Monument Valley became Ford's own moral universe. The Western scenery enables this microcosm through its size and vast expanse. Also the fact that it was so far removed from the civilised cities of the American east Coast. Open land became associated with freedom and a relaxed association with nature. The town is consequently associated with social form and conformity. Secondary to these two settings are places such as mining towns and ghost towns. Which highlight concerns of American life: the impermanence of life and problems of putting down roots. The wilderness cannot be ignored. All other environments are set up as contrast. The landscape shows the true importance of the events presented in the film. Which at times become squalid. Nature's way is to continue regardless if the events in the character's lives.

The villain in the Model western was the exact opposite to the cowboy in theory. Compared to the cowboy he is ugly and dirty. He has no respect for law, order or other people. He is often a

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• La paper, P. grand of story of a line story register take off size masses to be a line model of a system of a large story of the story and full temper on so half within movies story and defense in the smooth talker. The villain is mainly concerned with advancing his own cause at any cost and by any means. He often opts for the easy way out and is prone to make mistakes. He is normally doomed to failure or death. His surrounding also reflects his character i.e. hideout, abandoned town, rocky wilderness. The villain serves as an antithesis of the hero.

The original types of women in a western were on a parallel. On side there was the virtuous wife, virginal daughter and schoolteachers. On the other side there were the whores, saloon girls and dancers. The hero had the virtuous woman and the whore was for the villain. Virtuous women were in short supply but there seemed to be plenty of whores. The development of the western saw the development of female roles. However this was only proportional with other secondary characters such as the Indian.

The Western was the male perspective on the American way of life and was male oriented (this is very important to not for reasons which will be discussed later). Women did not pay heavily for their sins. Philip French points out that redemption is a male prerogative. Just as the defining lines of the male characters blurred throughout the course of the genre's development, so too did the females. The result was the inability to recognise the difference between the good female characters and the bad ones. Virtue was seen in the whore who marries the cowboy. The law abiding, townswoman is seen as a bitter and twisted, old maid. The good guy plays with the whore and the bad guy rapes the virtuous woman.

The relationship between the hero and a particular woman is dubious. A settled life would seem to appear as a compromise. Marriage lures the cowboy away from his defining independence, the company of men and his horse. A woman is often seen as the voice of reason. Therefore she can be subsequently be linked to law and order then the town. The difficulty in which the cowboy deals with the town is similar to the difficulty he feels around women. Like the town, the cowboy will never fully understand women. The town highlights a fear of conformity that the cowboy feels. This fear is also then associated to women

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Finally we reach the character of the Indian who is the subject of much controversy when it comes to his character. Particularly the way in which it was depicted in Westerns. However this thesis wishes only to discuss the Indian in relation to the hero. The Indian developed from savage to enemy to victim and then to a friend. In early silent Westerns the Indian was more a symbol than a particular character. The Indian was the personification of the wilderness. A particular character's opinion of the Indian depended on his/her opinion of the wilderness. 'It needed to be tamed, it teaches, it was the source of problems', are various examples of opinion. It is also worth pointing out that the Indian figure could never be truly happy in the constraints of the town.

The cowboy is the hero of the western. He is the image of the survivor. He is the closest America can get to an archetypal or ancestral image for it's mythology. In the model Western the hero is the embodiment of good. He is usually attractive, upright and clean living. He respects law, order, women, and the American way. The audience can take comfort in the fact that the will win. The qualities of the land can also be associated with him. The hero rides a horse that he masters with ease. The horse is crucial to the cowboy. Consider the cowboy who is dispossessed of his horse. He is left to face the land on foot, which is near impossible due to its size.

Westerns developed to question the very notion of heroism. They adapted in response to shifting social/political/historical climates. For example since the 1950's the possibility of the hero's defeat/death was addressed. The hero lived in a society where winning was everything. The only way the audience could accept the hero's defeat/death was if the hero's defeat death was seen as some sort of moral victory i.e. the hero remained true to himself and paid the ultimate price. Therefore the concept of the hero was modified but not destroyed. Consequently the defeat/death could be seen as a positive attribute of the hero. Death was a fact of life. The death of the hero furthers his association with nature. Death is the hero's ultimate fate and is depicted in all its

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The hero is very complex and cannot be viewed in isolation. Practically all the components of the film contribute in some way to the hero's character. Costume in particular is used to describe character. The good guys were clean and the bad guys were dirty. It was important to have a visual distinction between the cowboy/hero and the townspeople. The hero's costume became more striking. To contrast, the townspeople's' costume became simpler. Occasionally the hero's costume appeared more artificial. J.G.Cawetti describes the cowboy costume as a meeting of utility and dandyism. Costume, like the landscape added to the visual impact of westerns.

The cowboy experienced many conflicts; these can be highlighted when discussing themes. Examples of which are father versus son; former comrade versus comrade; upright man versus evil gang. The role of the cowboy went through many developments. There was the cowboy who protects the people against the savages. He identifies more with the savages but through the course of the film, he changes his position. He becomes an ally of the people. There is also cowboy who revenges and tries to reject the ideals of the town but cannot. Also there is the cowboy who seeks material gain by using his savages instincts. However his moral involvement wins in the end and he becomes a champion of the townspeople. There is also the 'used' cowboy. The townspeople used his knowledge of the wilderness and skill for their own purpose. They still rejected hid way of life.

To sum up it must be accepted that the Western film was the crucial defining medium of the cowboy, both theoretically and visually. It continually established and reinforced the mythology of the West. This was achieved on a national and international scale. The novelty of film helped to bring the Western to a much wider audience than the fine arts and literature ever could. Film also associated a magical quality to the American landscape and ideals.

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The Western became idealised because it was subject to audience expectancy. It featured idealised characters and stories. One fact became apparent, there was a gap between the represented reality of American life and lived reality. Therefore successful and popular Westerns were less realistic. However this was also a result of fixed conventions placed by the studios. Although they varied on themes and style most Westerns show the evidence of a basic prototype. This model Western presents the viewer with what has been accepted as the model cowboy. The figure of the cowboy is basically a hero. However because of the Western this hero is uniquely American. He is presented as standing by a uniquely American code.

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Chapter Two Masculine Mythology, Advertising and the Cowboy

The dilemma of the sexes defined by Freud is the oedipal concept of the mother. Both sexes start life with a love/desire for the mother. For the girl, this is then transferred to the father. The rejection of this desire by the father leads the girl to look for another male to desire. The new desired male becomes the husband. For the boy, the desire for the mother is transferred to the father because of fear. The boy fears the father's reaction (which Freud states as castration). However the boys desire for the father is rejected because of the jealousy of the father. The father sees the son as competition. The son therefore looks for an alternative female, which results in the wife. Following this path is considered part of growing up. These are psychological explanations of masculinity. Ideas of masculinity and femininity also have social and historical roots. This is the idea of the distinction between work and home. This generates a separation between production and consumption. This asserts a parallel between workplace for production and home for consumption. Changing the assumptions of this parallel is a question of politics, social and radical change. An example of which is the feminist revolution. Although definitions of masculinity are accepted as fixed and resistant to change, the contrary is true. These definitions of masculinity often change. This is due the fact that masculinity is subject mostly to cultural influences.

The masculine ego can be described as the desire to dominate or master everything other than itself, such as people and nature. The masculine ideal is what features in the advertising campaign of Marlboro cigarettes and is a conceptualisation of masculinity. It highlights the romantic myth that man is most a home when at one with nature. Who better personifies this than the American cowboy? According to Western films, the cowboy is more in touch with the landscape than any other type of American. However, the use of the cowboy still preserves the desire to dominate.

Chapter Two Macufine Mythology, Advertising and the Cowboy

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Figure 1 (top) Marlboro Advertisement, 1995 Figure 2 (bottom) Marlboro Advertisement, 1997


At this point it is important to establish what these Marlboro advertisements looked like and how the figure of the cowboy is generally presented. Figures 1, 2, and 3 are all examples of advertisements that appeared in *Vanity Fair* magazine during the course of 1998. Figures 1 and 2 are similar because they both concentrate on the figure as opposed to the environment. Figure 1 shows the cowboy in action; here he is showing the viewer his skill of lassoing. Figure 2 is the cowboy at rest, casually smoking a cigarette. What should be noted is that in both occasions is that the background is blurred. The viewer is forced to concentrate on the figure and the text only. In both occasions the figure obstructs parts of the text. This suggests that the figure of the cowboy is whom the advertisers wish the viewer to acknowledge first.

Figure 1 was published in 1995 and figure 2 in 1997. In the space of two years the figure of the cowboy has changed little. Both are wearing chaps, denim jacket, glove, hat and spurs. The 'Marlboro man' is very recognisable. His face is obscured by the hat on both occasions, this suggests that these particular adverts are more concerned with the physical features of the cowboy. In both cases he is presents physical dexterity. In Figure 1, he is jumping through a rope and in figure 2; he sits on a wooden fence.

Figure 3 is an example of the 'Marlboro man' on his environment. This advertisement is a particular example of man's desire to dominate nature, specifically his horse. Both horses are under the control of the cowboy. The horse on the right has been saddled and the horse on the left although rearing (a sign of resistance) is contained within fencing. The cowboy is in complete control. This control of the horses is transferred to the mountains in the background, more subtly. The shapes and contours of the mountains are very similar to that of the horses. The dip in the saddle on the horse on right is shadowed by the dip in the mountain range behind. The height of the rearing horse on the left is repeated again in the peak of the mountain behind. This suggests a similarity between the horses and the mountains. Both are seen to be at the same, subordinate level in relation to the cowboy. Again this is suggested in the colour scheme. The horses and the mountains are in cool colours and the cowboy is in contrasting, warmer ones.

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Figure 3, Marlboro Advertisement, 1997



This cowboy is similar to the cowboys in figures 1 and 2 in many ways. His face is not clearly defined. More importantly is the text in relation to the image. In this case there is no obstruction of the text. Therefore how does the advertiser make the viewer concentrate on the image first? The advertisers have used the size of the text in relation to the size of the image. This advertisement spreads across two pages of the magazine. It successfully projects the expanse of the west in reality. The text on the other hand is considerably smaller. Of course the viewer will notice the image first.

Another component of all the advertisements is worth mentioning - the government health warning. Most would suspect that this would hinder this campaign. However as Rosetta Brooks points out.

By a brilliant slight of hand, the reality of addiction is reversed in these commercials. The cowboy who originally represented the weathered mask of survival proves himself a *real* man once more by rejecting the medical mask of dependence; a man who survives the dangers of smoke and proves himself invulnerable. He re-emerges again as a survivor figure. Dependence is transformed back into an image of independence¹

The cowboy figure embodies the fantasy of man and the masculine. He is the man who made himself from nothing. The cowboy life style is the determination of the male ego. These ideas are also embodied in the myth of the American dream. J.D.Rockefeller, one of America's most affluent men, is quoted in saying that the growth of a large business is merely a question of survival of the fittest. J.K.Galbraith called this social Darwinism.

Social Darwinism bore more importantly on the attitudes which Americans brought into the age of affluence... here if, any where the ordinary man had a chance.

However all types of economic lifestyles are a struggle. In excepting the fact that he or she might fail. Failure is the reality of debt, hunger and death. This highlights inequalities and insecurities. Those who enjoy prosperity and success are therefore perceived as better.

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(a) we are the original of the second second second second second second second to the second second to exact the "many second secon The ideal of male heroism is not a new idea and can be seen in classical Greek sculpture. Previous to Greek classical period the figured was portrayed in two forms. Firstly as fertility objects, which were associated with nature and had over emphasised genitalia (i.e. the Venus of Winnendorf). Secondly in a more androgynous, god like figure (i.e. Egyptian god, Thoth). What the Greeks achieved was an ideal human form. The Greeks believed that the gods took similar forms to these perfect examples of men when they wanted to achieve beauty. Therefore the idea that beauty was the common bond between man and god was suggested. This idea still remains today. One type of man that the Greeks concentrated on was that of the muscular man, The Hercules figure.

Kenneth Dulton suggests that there are fundamentally two types of figure in Greek art. One who was similar to the figure of Hercules, who was active, physically strong and brave. Secondly there was the figure that was similar to the character of Narcissus, who is seen as beautiful, soft and submissive. He states that they were seen as aspirational figures. This is because they are examples of men who achieved immortality in Greek mythology. Hercules achieved his by rising above human suffering and setting fire to his own funeral pyre. Narcissus achieved his because he drowned himself in waters, which were the source of his own reflection. The image he saw was the realisation of the god within himself. The first is an example of rising above oneself and achievement through exploits. The second is an example of absorption through knowledge and inwardness. Dulton also suggest that the ideology linked to the form of Hercules is a reflection of eastern cultures. Whereas the ideology linked to the form of Narcissus was a reflection of eastern cultures. This is very much the issue with regard to America and the figure of the cowboy. The cowboy is very much an example of the Herculean form of man. Physically stronger than the horse he rides and the people he protects. He lives the American dream of struggle and survival against the backdrop of a magnificent landscape.

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Abigail Soloman-Godeau also discusses two generic types of male in an investigation of masculinity and classical French painting. One was a masculinized male and one was a feminized male. The first was purpose and active, like David's Horatio. The second was young and passive like Guerin's Eros. Both figures were similar to the forms of Hercules and Narcissus, which Dulton put forward earlier.

In today's images of mass culture there are widespread and varied expressions of what is masculine and aspirational. Soloman-Godeau suggests that the male figure 'has returned after an absence of nearly two centuries as compelling presence in postmodernity. Morphologically restyled and culturally reencoded, conscripted to the services of a commodity culture.'² Consequently it becomes apparent that the media has been incorporated into what was the sole realm of the fine arts. The portrayal of gods, royalty and civil authorities has had to give way to the images that the media promotes (i.e. the movie star, the cowboy). The two types of male figures presented earlier are still present today. Soloman-Godeau puts forward the Versace model as an example of the feminized male. It can therefore be concluded that the Marlboro man is example of the masculinized male.

Accepting the cowboy as an icon means accepting the cowboy as a metaphor. The cowboy was a metaphor of the American ideal. Consequently, this makes the cowboy a national icon. In a discussion of national icons in America, Albert Boime states that, ' national icons preserve historical, religious and biographical memory'³. However it is a specific memory which the West represents. For example it fails to address the slaughter of thousands of Native American Indians. A belief in the icon of the cowboy is the belief in the idealised West, regardless of the facts. This is the subsequent power of icons. In Further discussions Biome refers to the American flag as an icon. Political attacks on a national icon such as this, is not only an attack on an object itself but it is also an attack on a whole belief system. The burning of the flag is consequently an attack on an American identity, which the flag inspires. This idea can also relate to the cowboy. An attack on

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the figure of the cowboy can be seen as questioning of the myth's reliability. Therefore it questions the idea of American identity and masculinity. Loyalty to icons such as the flag is everything. Loyalty is the reinforcing power. An example of a loyalty enforcer is the soldier. He is ready to lay down his life in the name of his flag/icon and country/ideal.

Icons possess a dark side in their ready-made text designed to enlist blind obedience to the government who purport to represent them and embody their ideals.⁴

Examining icons such as the American flag and the American cowboy highlight a gap. This is the gap between the American promise/ideal and the American reality.

The most powerful influences in advertising are myths such as these. Advertising doesn't sell an object it highlights the desire to buy. It works on the idea of the need of the consumer to obtain objects that denote a certain lifestyle. This life style must be seen as better than the consumer's existing one. Advertisers assume a basic insecurity in the consumer. This is the driving force behind advertising. By constantly projecting ideal lifestyles the advertisers constantly reinforce this insecurity. The quest to live the lifestyle portrayed in advertising will never be fulfilled in its entirety. This is because the advertisers can suggest to the consumer that a new object will bring them one step closer to their desired lifestyle.

Advertisements that work the best are subtle interruptions in the consumer's daily routine. A good advertisement is a complex message reduced to its simplest form. The faster the penetration the message the greater the potential impact. Successful advertising like successful film shows an awareness of the consumer. Think of the public arenas in which we meet advertising. A consumer riding a bus will be presented with the same images everyday. The constant repetition of messages makes the consumer remember them when not on the bus.

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To sum up we can conclude that the cowboy is part of a broader sphere of cultural ideals. He therefore is generally an attractive figure because he typifies what is seen as masculine. Masculinity is something to which conventional society has always aspired.

The cowboy is also the perfect choice for advertisers. Marlboro has successfully associated its product with the Western lifestyle and the cowboy. This is largely due to the fact that they do not have to establish the cowboy's masculinity. That had already been done for them, largely by Western films. Marlboro only had to convince the consumer that the cowboy smoked Marlboro. This they achieved through the repetition of the advertising style. What the Marlboro campaign represents is the successful manipulation of a widely accepted cultural image for it's own commercial purposes.

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 ² A. Soloman Godeau, Male Trouble; A Crisis in Representation, Thames and Hudson, 1997, P.23
 ³ A. Boime, The Unveiling of National Icons, Cambridge University Press, 1998, P.7
 ⁴ A. Boime, P.13

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Chapter Three Richard Prince's Cowboy series

Richard Prince's *Cowboy series* was first shown in 1983 at the Baskerville and Watson Gallery, New York. It featured the rephotography of the Marlboro advertisements; however the images were cropped so that they only featured the image of the cowboy and his environment, with the text removed. Prince's images were presented as large format colour photographs (ranging in sizes). By presenting an image that was formerly associated with text, Princes main objective was to engage the viewer's primary reaction or associations to that image. He was less concerned with the secondary message implicit in the original advertisements – that like you, this cowboy smokes Marlboro cigarettes. At this stage, the medium that Prince used for his work will be examined.

It may be useful to explain here that rephotography is when an artist photographs an existing image and presents it as his/her own. This is now a recognized art form. It received its inspiration from the pop artists of the 1960's who used painted and printed media and advertising images as part of their work. Prince took this process a step further. He used the original image itself in the form of a photograph. "I didn't want to alter the original image, but I wanted to change the perception of the original image"¹.

Artists and intellectuals have often dismissed photography as a legitimate art form. This elitist attitude is rooted in history. When photography was invented during the Industrial Revolution, purists asserted that because the hand of the 'artist' was assisted by a 'machine', its originality was in some way diminished. Prince added to the confusion by further seeming to copy a copy. However, Prince defends his work by asserting that while photography is associated with realistic views of the world, these can be manipulated to the artist's own ends. In an interview for *Aperture*

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magazine, he commented that the camera believed 'visual lies' and reported them as 'truths' to the viewers. Coincidentally, this is how advertising images succeed, because the viewer/consumer is usually encouraged to accept them as truths. Baudrillard further suggests that photography is not the representation of the subject, but the transformation of the subject into an object. Therefore photography as an art form is achieved through the object created and not through the subject represented. With this in mind, should the cowboys whom Prince has rephotographed be perceived not as real people, but as representations of people?

To gain a better understanding of the rationale behind Prince's work, let us examine his thoughts as expressed in his book, *Why I Go to the Movies Alone* (1983). This was book of inner monologues with a common theme. Prince is addressing no one in particular, but seem to express the same meanings as his photographs, i.e. the reality and fictions of identities.

The calculation was about business, the desire to project the right image an image that would sell.... The bad girl, the sympathetic slut, the girl from the wrong side of the tracks. The trouble was the fiction was always about five seconds from coming apart and X thought that at any moment, Connie A. Connie would be found out for what she was...a basically serious funny woman with about as much chance for a "rep" as a spayed puppy.²

The reader eventually realizes that a definitive explanation of Prince's writing is difficult, there can only be individual interpretations. The same can be said of his art.

It is at this point that we must take a broader look at Prince's work. The Marlboro series is only a part of a larger body of work, in which he uses commercial images to comment on American cultural identities. What is apparent is that Prince has offered the viewer a pause in the continuous flow of images. The viewer has been given a chance to acknowledge a particular commercial image, out of context.

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Figure 4, Untitled (cowboys), Richard Prince





Figure 5, (top), Untitled (cowboy), Richard Prince Figure 6, (bottom), Untitled (cowboy), Richard Prince



In Figure 4 the viewer is presented with the cowboy, the horse and the landscape. By removing the text, the image that was partially obscured in the original advertisement can be examined in greater detail. What is evident is that the image contains a cinematic feel. This could be a result of a comfortable association with Western films. Marlboro advertisers may have consciously used this style of photography for that reason. Figure 4 looks a lot like a film still or a pause in a continuous piece of movement or development. The removal of the text has given an ambiguous quality to the image; something is missing. Or perhaps, something is concealed from the viewer? What is clear is that the image relies on the viewer's input to finish the story. As a result the viewer can imagine a whole scenario to follow the image. By referring to Western films the viewer may have seen, he or she can create a whole identity and purpose for this cowboy. Figure 4 also presents the viewer with a cowboy riding a horse across a magnificent landscape. The imagination conjures up all sorts of scenarios. Perhaps the cowboy is riding off to save a woman from the 'savage' Indians, he may be returning after saving the day or he may be riding through the depicted landscape in search of a new adventure. The cowboy's purpose is unclear. What is clear, however, is that Prince is presenting a hero. However, by choosing the 'Marlboro man', Prince is not presenting a new hero. Through his choice, he is highlighting a hero which has been already chosen by society (particularly the commercially orientated American society). Figure 4 has been chosen to illustrate this point; however it can be applied to the other images which featured in this particular series (for example, Figures 5 and 6).

They preserve all their cultural baggage because they are common, easily recognizable in short, found images. They already exist ... Prince doesn't force ulterior meanings upon them.³

The fact that all the images used by Prince are rephotographed advertisements ensured the public's familiarity with the subjects. It would suggest he was jumping on a bandwagon, but this

From presence all their simularly bugging bootieve they are common, and be a see invalue in deart (nonel images, "They closed, even," Protect docords (see) mintor (mathing) upon them."

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Another reason why Prince selected media images for his work is that he may be suggesting that perhaps today's media creates too many fictions, 'we perceptually experience too many worlds, too many histories at once'⁴. This consequently can lead to confused identities and even more insecurities for the viewer/consumer. Prince has attempted to redress this situation. He allows the viewer/consumer to stop and think and choose. He encourages introspection and analysis in relation to the images, a feat previously made impossible by the pervasive power of advertising.

By putting these images into a gallery space, Prince applies his name as an author to a previously commercially authorized image. The presence of an author, in general, brings about an awareness of image manipulation. The viewer consequently becomes aware of the origins of these images, because Prince has rephotographed them from advertising. The result is that the viewer begins to question the motives of the original advertising campaign and hopefully gains new insights on advertising techniques and agendas. Barrett Watton states in his review of Prince's

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¹ R. Prince, 'Social Science Fiction, An Interview with Richard Prince', Art in America, 1997, P.88
² Anonymous, Why I Go to the Movies Alone, Tanam Press, 1983, P.24
³ D. Salvioni, 'On Richard Prince', Flash Art, 1988, P.89
⁴ J. Rian, 'Social Science Fiction, An Interview with Richard Prince', Art in America, 1997, P.88
⁵ B. Watton, 'Richard Prince's Imitations of Life (Magazine)', Art Week, 1993, P.4

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Conclusion

The American Cowboy was presented as a uniquely American hero and because of the influence of American film, he became a globally recognised symbol. He signified the idealised narrative of endurance and persistence in relation to an American mythology and he became a metaphor for survival and success.

The Marlboro advertising campaign saw the cowboy in this heroic light, the epitome of strength, skill and control. The notion of the cowboy as a hero brings us to the universal ideal of the powerful figure of the Herculean male. How ever a critique of advertising would suggest that this as a manipulation of the idea of the hero for commercial purposes. The fact that the cowboy can successfully be translated from film to advertising is evidence of just how popular and credible of an icon he is. He embodies what is perceived to be truly masculine and truly American, and at the same time.

The work of Richard Prince, specifically his *Cowboy series*, examines the psychology behind this film and advertising ideal. He encourages the viewer to look behind the façade of the cowboy figure and recognise the image as a representation. Which would lead the viewer to consider the gap between the presented reality and the lived reality, of media images such as these. He achieves this by forcing the viewer to acknowledge the cowboy as the advertising 'star', an image with a function (i.e. to sell objects). As a result of this the cowboy becomes less believable, a falsity is attached to him. This is what is important about his work.

Is this the 'grand and nasty irony' to which Barrett Watton refers? Is it that the American cowboy, which society has found to be an attractive and aspiratinal figure, is fictitious. From this thesis this would be apparent. However this investigation has only really addressed the presented

Conclusion.

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The American cowboy is a hero, to be compared with Hercules and Horatio. However because of the age in which we live, the cowboy is the most accessible and therefore the most popular. He reflects the unchanging need for heroes, men or woman to better than ourselves. These types of figures will always be aspirational. The more widely an image such as the American cowboy is presented and manipulated, the more generalised and idealised it becomes. This is acceptable as long as there is an ability to recognise these stereotypes and not to accept them blindly. reality of mesorehot. Instimute, it has not usgon to address the lived wality of this (spire from this is not what these particular images dust, used address

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APPENDIX

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