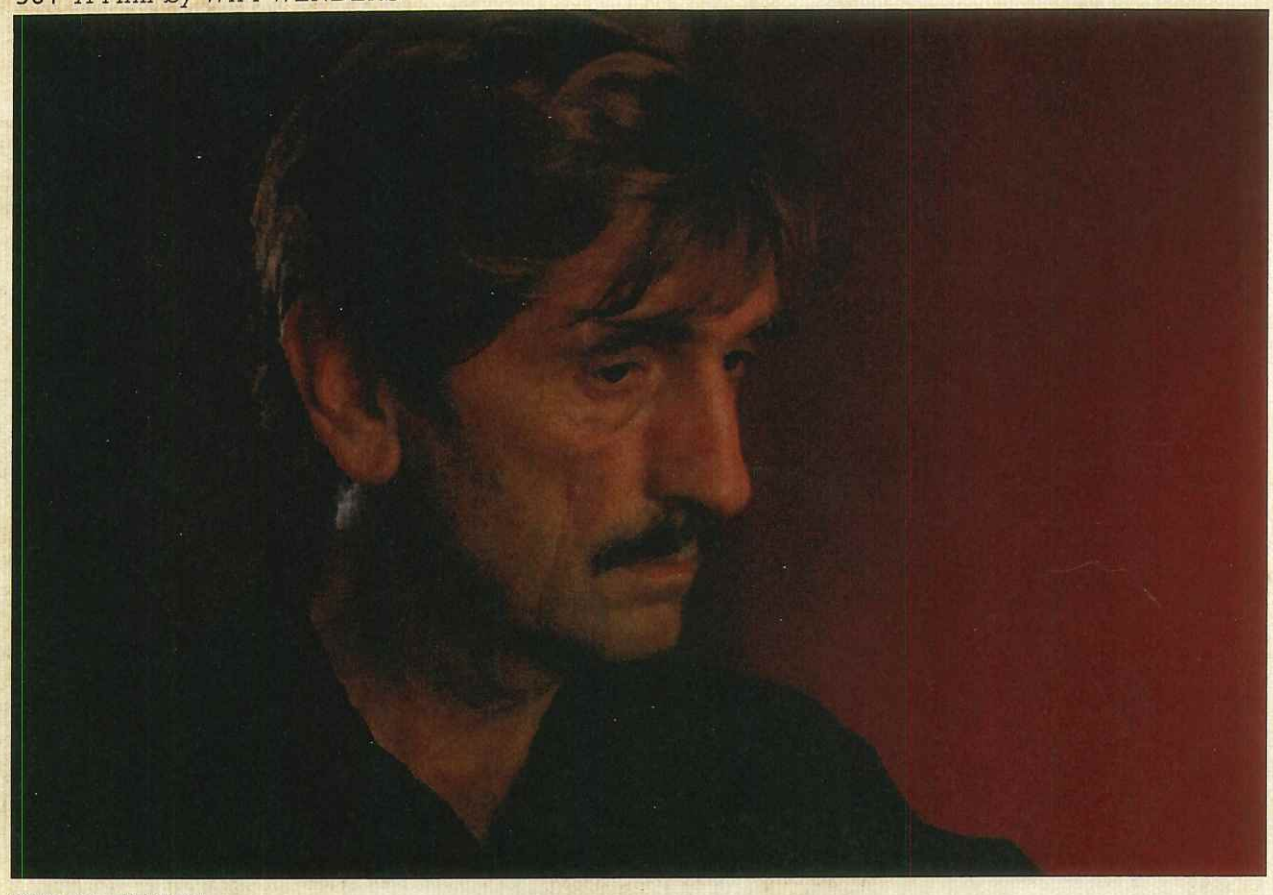
501 *A Film by WIM WENDERS*



PARIS, TEXAS

501 *A Film by WIM WENDERS*



PARIS, TEXAS

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Post Card

PLACE STAMP HERE

His feet were sweating in the night. He could feel the presence of the automatic pistol, of cattle, of barbed wire, of dice, of riding the night range without a flashlight, of bars plunged into prairie night.

He turned off all the lights in the room and lay on the floor between the two beds. His feet were sweating. He punched the switch of the Realistic tape machine and Stevie Wonder answered the darkness: "Songs in the Key of Life."

He watched an Apache Sand Painting appear on the wall out of nowhere. Colors from the land: pale orange sand, chocolate topsoil, pale blue like a tear.

He could see the glint of Abalone shimmer off the pistol stock. Threads of rosy light. Spinning. He could see his own heart.

He could feel the demonic attachment of a man for his only woman.

3/79, San Marcos, Texas

Sam Shepard, *Motel Chronicles*

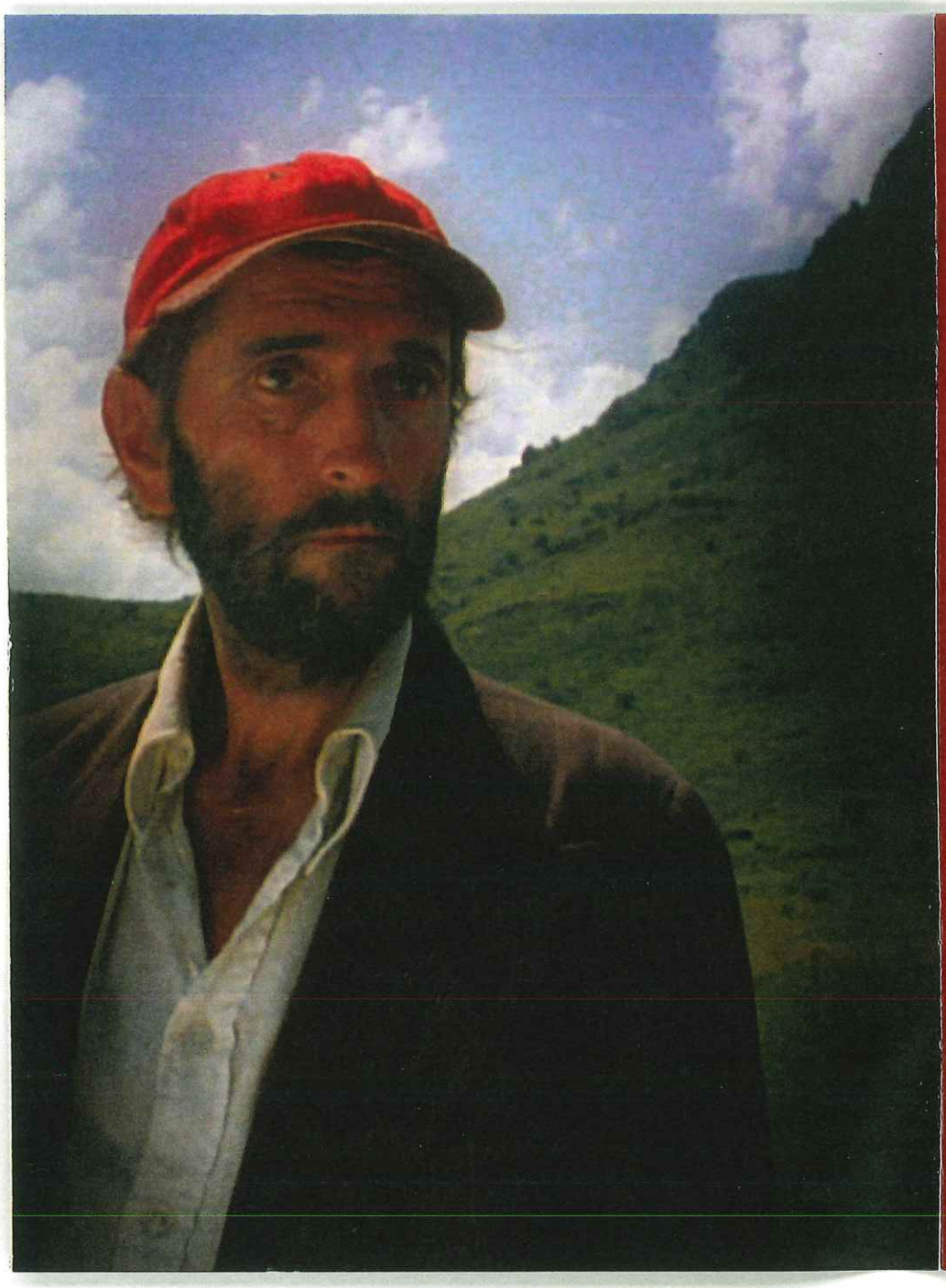


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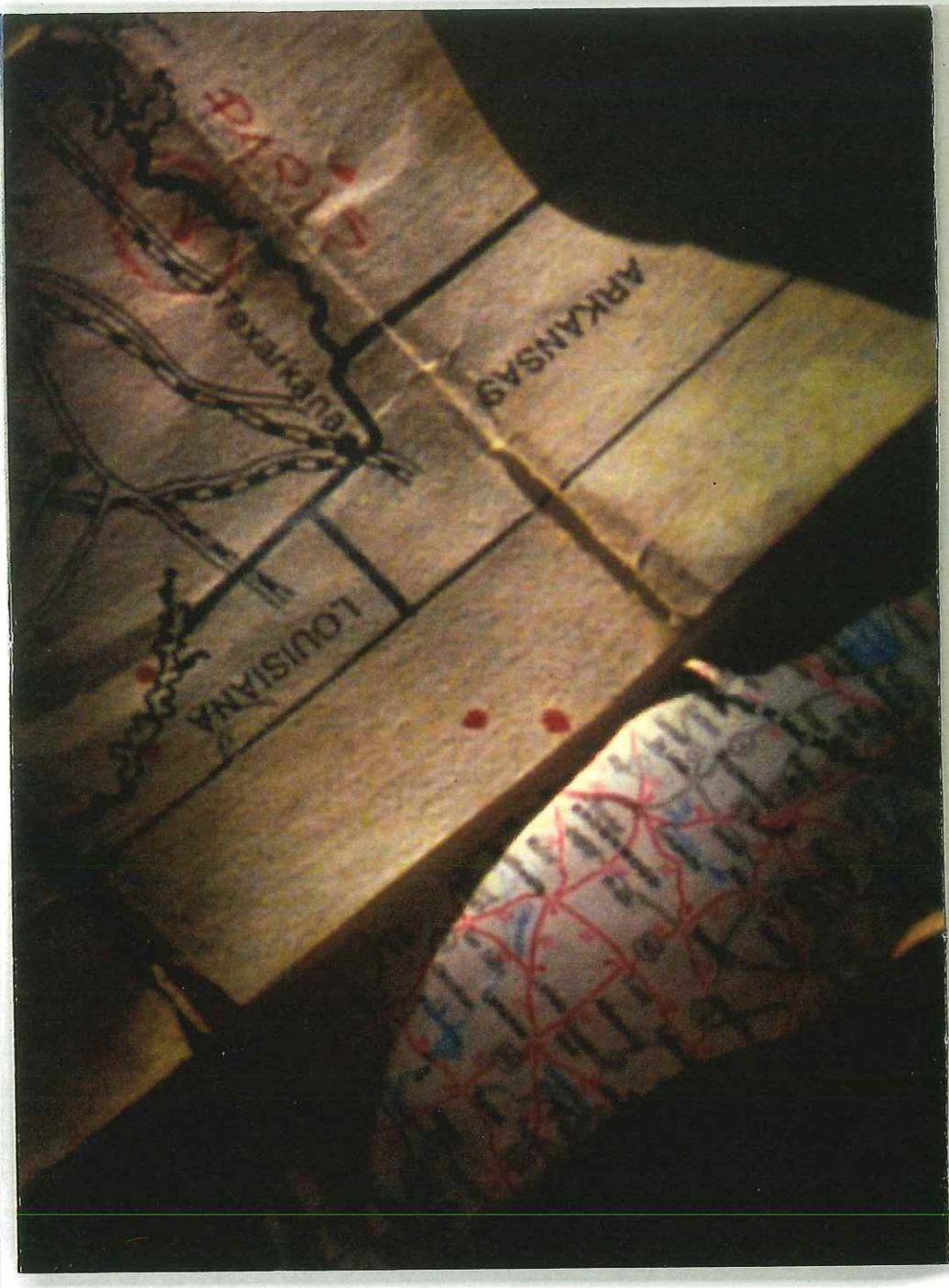
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CAST

TRAVIS
Harry Dean Stanton

JANE
Nastassja Kinski

WALT
Dean Stockwell

ANNE
Aurore Clément

HUNTER
Hunter Carson

DR. ULMER
Bernhard Wicki

CREDITS

DIRECTED BY
Wim Wenders

PRODUCED BY
Don Guest

WRITTEN BY
Sam Shepard

ADAPTATION BY
L. M. Kit Carson

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Chris Sievernich

MUSIC
Ry Cooder

EDITOR
Peter Przygodda

ART DIRECTOR
Kate Altman

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Robby Müller


On the
ROAD AGAIN
By NICK RODDICK

I have been going to press screenings at the Cannes Film Festival for more than twenty-five years, but only twice have I been absolutely sure—blindingly, heart-racingly certain—that I have just seen the future winner of the Palme d'Or. Cannes is a distorting lens that can give an undeserved boost to an ambitious but flawed film, just as it can smother a smaller or more conservative one. But on those occasions, there was no room for doubt; it was like falling in love.

My first such love affair was with *Paris, Texas,* shown in 1984 (the second was with Emir Kusturica's *Underground,* a decade later). The festival jury, which that year included the veteran cinematographer Henri Alekan, who would go on to shoot *Wings of Desire* for Wim Wenders, duly awarded it the Palme d'Or; it even garnered the affection of a far more persnickety group, winning the International Critics Prize. The awards were all the more surprising in that the film is an unabashed love letter to America, coming halfway through the Reagan era, when Europe in general, and filmmakers in particular, were anything but pro-American. Of course, one might argue that *Paris, Texas* is in love with a certain *idea* of America. But in truth, Wenders would probably not have concerned himself with that distinction: the personal always trumps the political in his films.

The plot of *Paris, Texas* is disarmingly simple, focusing on the dramatic after-effects of a marriage's breakdown on young Hunter (played by Hunter Carson, son of writer L. M. Kit Carson and actress Karen Black); his father, Travis (a name that still had sinister resonance eight years after Scorsese's *Taxi Driver,* and played with shell-shocked intensity by Harry Dean Stanton); and his mother, Jane, a plain name almost willfully ill suited to the fragile, feral character embodied in the film by Nastassja Kinski. Travis is found wandering in the desert by his brother, Walt (Dean Stockwell), is reunited with Hunter, sets off with Hunter to find Jane, finds her, and disappears again. That's about it. What turns this fairly ordinary-sounding family drama into something on the edge of epic is its use of landscape and setting—the desert Southwest, California's San Fernando Valley (also the setting for Wenders's 1997 *The End of Violence*), and the concrete canyons of Houston—reinforced by the stunning cinematography of regular early collaborator Robby Müller and a plangent slide-guitar score by Ry Cooder (with whom Wenders would later make the Oscar-winning documentary *Buena Vista Social Club*).

A lot of the action takes place on the road, long a staple of American culture, as much in the novel as on the screen. Think of Rabbit Angstrom's overnight drive south as he "runs" in the first of Updike's Rabbit novels; or, earlier, of Kerouac's generation-defining classic *On the Road;* or, earlier still, of the Joad family's doomed westward odyssey in *The Grapes of Wrath.* But the road is a theme that, for obvious reasons, works better in cinema than in literature, and came into its own in such iconic works of the 1960s and 1970s as *Easy Rider, Two-Lane Blacktop,* and *Five Easy Pieces.* The American road is as much a state of mind as a highway: an almost infinite strip of possibilities that helps the traveler reach—or (as in *Easy Rider*) fail to reach—the heart of America.

Highways have been central to Wenders's films almost from the start. He christened his first production company Road Movies, and nearly all his films are about movement: most of them are on the road to somewhere; not all of them arrive—by which I mean that the characters' journeys are incomplete rather than that the films fail. In 1975, a decade before *Paris, Texas,* Wenders made *Falsche Bewegung,* about whose English title no one seems able to agree. Released in the UK as *The Wrong Move* and in the U.S. as *The Wrong Movement,* it translates literally as "False Movement"—a much better rendering and a title that could apply to most of Wenders's films, with the proviso that movement, however false it may be, is the only option available. This is as true of his early masterpiece *Kings of the Road* (1976)—about two loners thrown together on a drive northward through what was then the border region of West Germany—as it is of his most recent feature, *Palermo Shooting* (2008), about a German fashion photographer rather too obviously pursuing love and death to and through the Sicilian city of the title. What is more, the road itself is frequently a character in the films, whether as a counterpoint to meandering voice-overs, as in the opening of *Alice in the Cities* (1974), or as the visual equivalent of a character's restless anomie, as in *Paris, Texas,* with its many, many scenes shot in or from a car. Even *A Notebook on Clothes and Cities* (1989), a documentary about fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto, is punctuated with long sequences of driving on freeways. (The only real exception is 1987's *Wings of Desire,* set in Berlin two years before the wall came down, and for that reason a reflection not on movement but on stasis—or rather, on dreams of movement in a place of stasis.)

Born in the Ruhr area in 1945, Wenders is the best known of that group of young filmmakers who emerged in the 1970s and were dubbed the New German Cinema, a movement whose trigger was the 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto. Like most rallying cries, the Oberhausen Manifesto was about freedom and the need for a break with the past. "The old film is dead. We believe in the new one," it intoned. Wenders was only seventeen when the manifesto was signed, but his early films, from *Summer in the City* (1970) through to *Kings of the Road,* are all about breaking with the past. *Paris, Texas* is one of the most fully realized and exhilarating examples of this break—which is ironic because it has none of the political ambitions of Oberhausen, and because it comes at the very end of the New German Cinema's shelf life. Indeed, by the time he shot it, Wenders had moved a long way from Oberhausen, having already made two films in the United States.

The origins of *Paris, Texas* lay in one of those earlier American films: his failed attempt, under the not-always-benign aegis of Francis Ford Coppola, to convert New German into New Hollywood with *Hammett,* which took up five years of his life and was finally released in 1982. Wenders had wanted Sam Shepard for the title role of that film; the studio said no (its default response throughout the making of *Hammett*). But the two stayed in touch. The first inklings of their eventual collaboration came in a screenplay Wenders wrote based on Shepard's *Motel Chronicles.* The final script, however, was an entirely fresh start, with Shepard's epic sense of the American West finding perfect expression in dialogue whose rhythms are at just the slightest of removes from everyday speech. The final telephone-and-mirror scene between Travis and Jane is one of his best, and if there is one thing that holds at bay the sentimentality that occasionally threatens to creep in, it is Shepard's language.

The playwright and director shared a sense of movement as escape—a traveling away from, not toward. While the constant movement in Wenders's films—and in this one especially—seems to hint at a final narrative coming together, any such resolution or redemption usually proves unattainable. Compare *Paris, Texas* with Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), which it superficially resembles. Travis, like John Wayne's Ethan, comes out of the desert and is slowly weaned back onto normal life. But in Wenders's film, the threat to normal life comes not from outside—not from a character like Scar, the Apache warrior who abducts Ethan's niece—but

from within Travis himself. As the last part of *Paris, Texas* makes clear, traditional redemption is not on the menu. Following that final long dialogue scene through the telephone and one-way mirror of the peep-show dive to which he has finally tracked her, Travis, visible to Jane when she turns the lights off on her side of the mirror, simply disappears by walking into the darkness. He repeats the action in the film's closing shot: having engineered a reunion between mother and son, Jane and Hunter, in a downtown hotel room, Travis disappears into the greenish gloom of the parking lot below. It is a quintessential Wenders scene, at once bleak and borderline sentimental. Travis, briefly pinned down by the domesticity of his brother and the emotional needs of his son, is moving on.

Wenders has sometimes tried to re-create this feeling in Europe. But Europe, big though it is, is divided by so many frontiers, languages, and cultural differences that any movement is always "false" (one of the themes of *Kings of the Road* is highways and railway lines that lead nowhere, cut off from their former destinations by the fact that those places are now in East Germany). Still, he keeps trying, as in the wonderful driving montage at the start of *Lisbon Story* (1994), when the director's alter ego, Phillip Winter (played by Rüdiger Vogler, star of so many of the early films), heads south to Portugal.

In *Paris, Texas,* there are no borders, and Wenders's exhilaration is palpable. When Travis's fear of flying gets him and his brother thrown off a plane and he insists they drive to Los Angeles, you can almost sense Wenders punch the air and say "Yes!": they're on the road again. Even that troublesome border a few hundred miles to the south doesn't really seem to have had any meaning for Travis: from what we can gather in the opening scenes, he has simply walked across it back into the United States. I guess you could do that then. But Mexico and the desert have one thing in common in American culture: they are places people go when they want to get lost. And Travis, in the film's wonderful, soaring opening shots, is clearly a man who would rather stay lost.

It is, of course, hard to think of those opening shots without hearing Cooder's score. Cooder is a musician's musician whose career has only occasionally overlapped with commercial success, as in his session work for the Rolling Stones (his is the slide guitar you hear on *Sticky Fingers*'s "Sister Morphine"). His score for Wenders's film is not only unforgettable: it seems somehow to have burned itself into the landscape of the

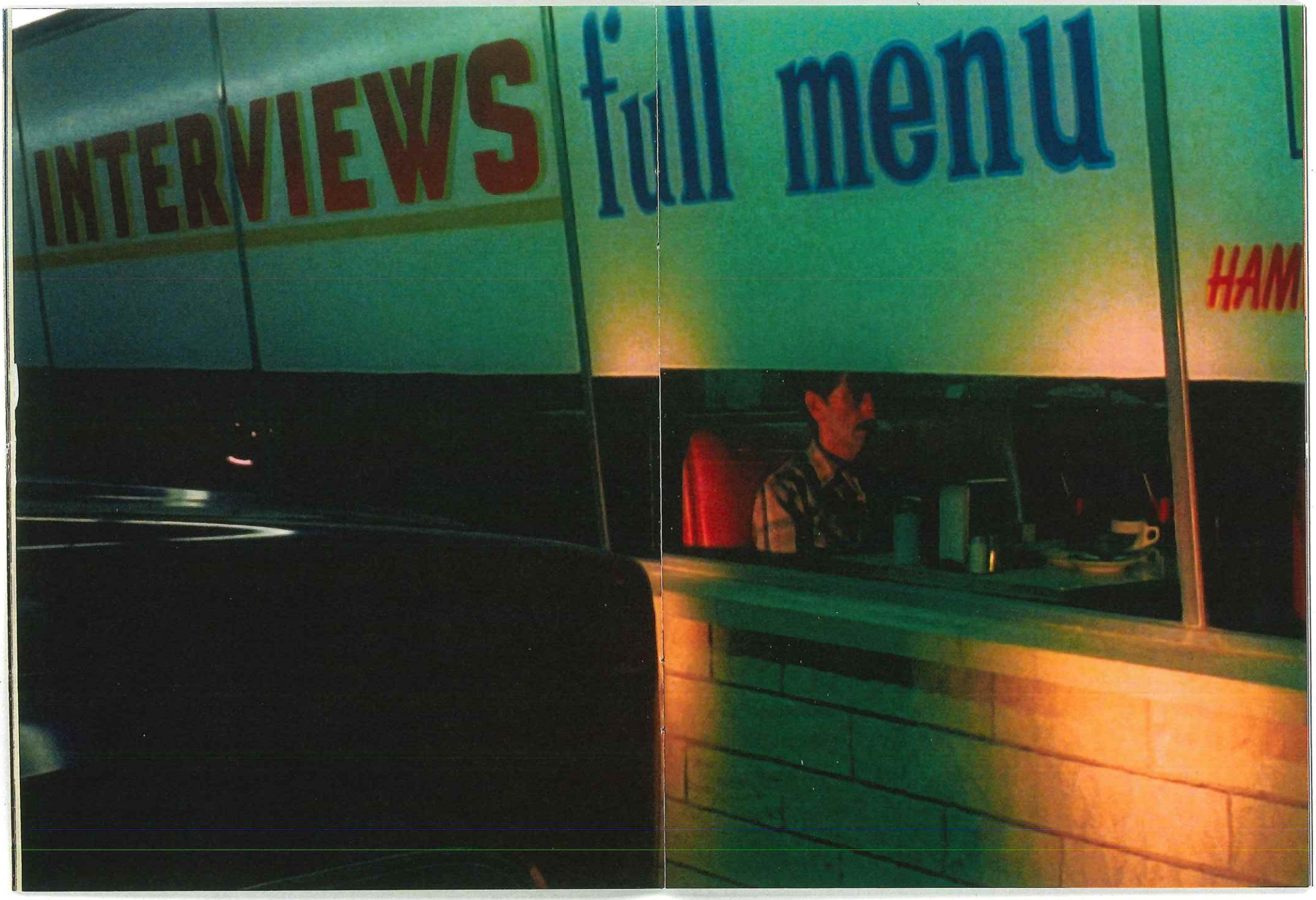
Southwest, to the point where footage of that dry red terrain, with its wind-eroded mesas, can hardly appear on an editing console before someone reaches for the Cooder button. Heard here for the first time, it adds a quality of yearning to the bleakness of the landscape. Absent through much of the middle part of the film, it creeps back in at the very end, as Travis retreats into the darkness—a perfect thematic resolution that removes (or maybe obscures) the need for a narrative reconciliation, turning Travis into one of the mythical figures of American cinema.

But if *Paris, Texas* is a love letter to America and American cinema, it now also has something of the feel of a farewell. The world to which Wenders pays homage is vanishing fast: not the desert, which is close to eternal, but the pay phones and diners and motels that used to line the approach to every small U.S. town, now replaced by cell phones and McDonald's and multistory Doubletree Hotels and Quality Inns. All offer a sterile, branded comfort—and all deny the lure of the road, the impulse to keep moving, by affirming that, nowadays, however far you go, it's still going to look just like home.

Maybe, as he fades back into the Texan darkness, Travis knows more than we thought. These days, *Paris, Texas* is not just an odyssey: it's an elegy too.

Nick Roddick, a former editor at Screen International, *taught film and theater at universities in the UK, Ireland, and the U.S. before becoming a journalist in the early eighties. He contributes regularly to the* London Evening Standard *and* Sight & Sound.




INTERVIEWS
full menu
HAM

The following interviews with screenwriter Sam Shepard and actors Nastassja Kinski, Harry Dean Stanton, and Dean Stockwell were conducted by film historian and translator Bernard Eisenschitz in 1984 and first appeared in the press book for that year's Cannes Film Festival screening of Paris, Texas.

A LONG RIDE

SAM SHEPARD

What is the history of Paris, Texas*?*

It began, I guess, with our meeting for *Hammett.* Wim had originally wanted me to work on the screenplay. I didn't want to do that; I don't like working on screenplays in a studio situation, when you're kind of commissioned to do something, so I turned that down.

And then he wanted me to act in *Hammett,* and we went through this series of absurd screen tests because Coppola wasn't satisfied that I was the right one for the part. At some point, Wim said he'd like to work with me on a science fiction film of some kind, because he'd seen this play called *Angel City* and he thought maybe we could work in that kind of genre. So I said, "Great, I'd like to work with you no matter what," because I liked his films.

And then I showed him the manuscript of *Motel Chronicles; Transfixion,* it was called. And he liked the manuscript a lot and said he wanted to make a film out of it. And he showed me a kind of rough adaptation. I didn't like it that much, and he, I could tell, wasn't that thrilled with the way he adapted it. So we got together and said, How can we adapt these stories into a film? I said, "Well, rather than adapt them, why don't we take some of the essence of the stories, in terms of character, rather than making a literal adaptation of stories." And he said fine. So we started to play with the idea of a character or two characters.

We started with this idea of brothers: one a brother who is suffering from a kind of amnesia, although it wouldn't be explained in those terms—it was kind of a . . . removal from the world and reentering the world—and another brother who's very much in the world. These two opposites. So it really began

from an idea about brothers, and it turned into a whole other thing about the relationship between men and women. Basically, it has more to do with men and women than the original brother issue. And I think it's stronger because of that. There's a long ride, though—the script is really a long, difficult . . .

It was funny because our first draft just went like wild, just went like a prairie fire, raced to the end. I guess about 160 pages after the first three or four weeks. And then we started to think about it more and more, and saw a lot of snags, and a lot of places we were trying to manipulate the story. It had several endings . . . The second half of the film was always the most difficult, conception-wise.

The whole process of the writing was getting rid of most of the external anecdote.

Wim and I, alternately or sometimes cooperatively, come up with extravagant ideas that . . . won't go and play. We may be very excited about them because they're externally very, kind of, full of activity. But then we reach a certain point where the gaps . . . It's only exciting in this external way. So we keep saying, "What is it that we really want?" So it's a great exercise in continually coming back to the original source and going from there, coming back where we found it to begin to lose its honesty and veer off into this other direction. So it's quite a journey, that experience.

Was the first draft the one with the preacher?

There was one story I wrote in *Motel Chronicles* that had to do with a preacher who I saw down in Texas and who was speaking a sermon and signing with his hands at the same time for the deaf. And it was fascinating because there's different signs, like for Christ, where—the sign for Christ is tapping here and here, on the hands, which means the nails on the cross. And there was something so explicit about the sign language, as opposed to the verbal language. And then we got into this whole thing about a fanatic preacher, which always verged on some kind of cliché, and we tried to get away from it one way or another, and finally ended up throwing it out.

Another idea had to do with the main character, Travis, tracing kind of a mysterious family lineage through an old scrapbook, and visiting different people all over the place; Wim wanted to take it to the Northwest

Territories and Alaska, and even at one point to Europe and back. And that just became too extravagant. Then there was another idea that I wrote up that had to do with her father being one of these big Texas moguls, one of the land barons, trying to keep her under wraps, and *that* didn't work.

It was Kit Carson and Wim who finally conceived this ending. And they actually came up with this concept of talk booths, the booths where the girls talk to the customers, and I wrote all the dialogue, but they had this idea.

There was also a so-called mythological ending, where the father was going off in the desert with the son.

I'm not sure who thought this up, but I think Wim got most attracted to it. And for a long time we thought, No matter what, no matter where the film goes, we're going to have this mythological walk where they walk to Paris, Texas, with the kid on his shoulders, and the father was telling him stories and these legends. And that fell away. But that's okay. Because the ending as it is now, I think, is a lot truer to itself. This fact that he still has to face something alone.

This ending is open to several interpretations.

For me, it comes out of this realization that even—patching up something that was broken isn't enough. The real thing that's broken is in him. And in order to fulfill that, in order to see what the nature of that is, he has to see it alone. And by patching everything up and staying with that, in a way he's just going to re-create the same thing that was there before. Even pulling together the broken pieces of his past isn't enough; what has finally to come about is to bring together the broken pieces in himself. And he has to do it alone. So that's basically what he comes to: he brings them together, but then he has to bring himself together.

In the end, it's not the story of a family but of people dreaming up their own family. Even the title points to that.

I hope that comes across in the film, this idea that there's an imaginary partner and an imaginary life that's always superseding the real one. I think that's the real important—not only an idea but an emotional context to the film . . .

It's an awfully big thing in this relationship between men and women, the idea that each partner has of the other, the idealistic situation that's always at play in the real context of what it's like to be together. These two things are always in juxtaposition with each other. You know, the idea of who I'm with and who I'm actually with.

It was an interesting situation, this meeting with Wim to write a story together, when Wim has this reluctance about telling a story . . .

Me too.

And taking Motel Chronicles *as a starting point . . .*

Yeah, broken stories.

When I worked with Joe Chaikin, he said a really interesting thing about this whole concept of storytelling. He said, "At the turn of the century or something, storytelling was a real form that people felt fit their lives in a way: this long thing—beginning, middle, and ending—really meant something in their lives. And maybe now we're in a time where that doesn't fit anymore, that demands something new, other kinds of concepts; maybe the story has to do with moments rather than this long, epic form which just doesn't match our lives anymore, because everything's so fragmented and broken . . ."

And it's a hard pill to swallow because I really still migrate toward that old, classical form, although I can't do it. I've tried over and over again to make this kind of sweeping thing, and it just doesn't . . .

Because we grew up with it. Godard is the classical example for that.

The oral thing, a story being told from one person to another, is still very strong, I think; it still has incredible value. But the whole idea of making a long panorama just doesn't fit. The Japanese are the only ones who can do it, Kurosawa. But he comes from a tradition of storytelling. And Americans really don't come from that grand style. It's more an oral thing. Legends, maybe.

It's funny now because Hollywood persists in trying to make it work. And I think it's just failing more and more, this idea of a literary story adapted in film.

The way this script was conceived, actually, was moment by moment. It's very much a moment-by-moment thing in its original form. Until we got halfway through, we just never started thinking in terms of "Where is it going?" Just this moment, and the next, and the next—it was a great way to work. Because most directors you work with and most people who are trying to develop a script are continually thinking about the future, the ultimate destination . . . Because of that, particularly the beginning of it seems to have a certain kind of intensity. Once we got past the Los Angeles sequence, it started to break. But then I think it was solved finally.

It was a real good experience. Best experience working on a screenplay. We felt a lot of things in common; it was surprising. Even in music. We took a trip once down to Los Angeles: We drove down to L.A., and I had a bunch of tapes, and Wim had some tapes with him, and we had sometimes exactly the same tunes, that were fairly esoteric blues, I guess. Like Skip James and stuff like that. But not only Skip James, the same exact cut. And that was . . . Little things like that kept sort of . . .

Wim has this fascination with America that I have, in a way. But I feel that, because of his . . . Europeanness, there are certain qualities about American culture that . . . ordinarily, certain American directors would totally overlook. They wouldn't find a neon sign of a stagecoach going like this that fascinating. But because of his European background, I guess, this thing suddenly strikes him as having an obsessive quality about it.

SANTA FE, APRIL 15, 1984

VOICES UNDER YOUR SKIN

NASTASSJA KINSKI

Do you see a link between your characters in Wrong Move *and* Paris, Texas*?*

Maybe you see it more than I do, but there may be a sort of longing, being isolated and not knowing how to really communicate, a longing for love that may be a little animal-like . . . She didn't talk in *Wrong Move,* that was the animal about her . . .

How would you tell Jane's story before the beginning of the film?

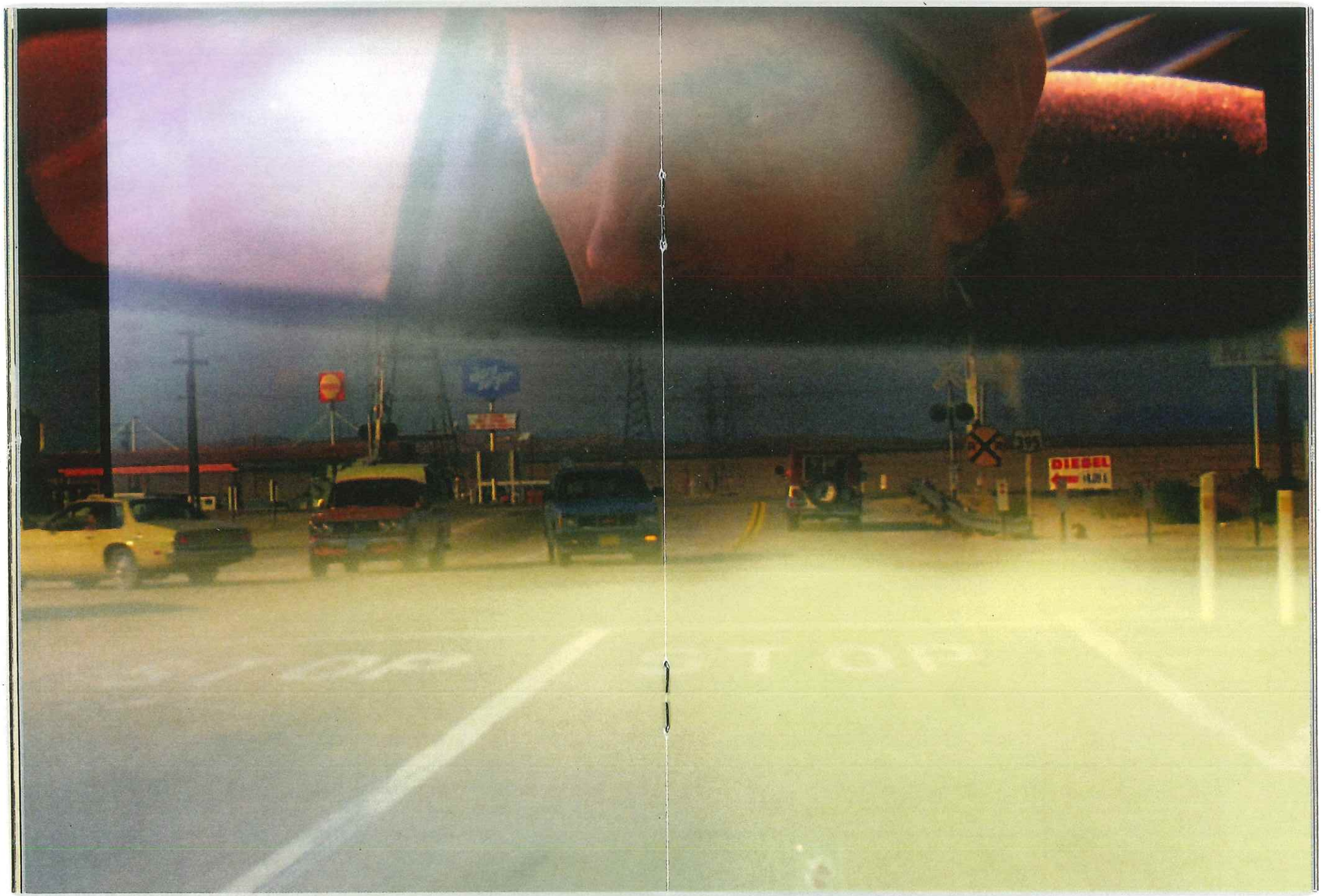
I wrote a whole diary about what happened to her before. I just think she was a young girl, maybe coming from Europe, and when you meet someone, everything seems possible, crazy things happen that you never think could happen, and you just start to live. She met this man who made her laugh, and there was no wait, no demand or questions, no why or how. And somehow, for him, she was this young person who gave life to his world, and for her, he was this one person who gave her love and light. As soon as they have the baby, he starts to change. When a man needs someone, he tries so much to hold on to that, not to let it go, that his love becomes strange and overpowering. Love can be very threatening, suffocating; you can't breathe anymore. And I saw the story that way: it just became a web around this woman with her child. He would not let the world touch her or spoil her; he would destroy this most precious thing in the world with his overpowering care; and she would become crazy, she would suddenly become violent, she couldn't live anymore with herself, nor give to the child the love that he needed . . . So she left the man, she left the child—she left him in good hands, and in a way she never left him . . .

I don't think she ever experienced any love or emotion, except the memories, after that relationship. Through that strange job and that strange room, with all those creatures and men, she may have tried to understand Travis, to get through to him through other men, through the work of helping other men, in whatever silly way. Helping these men is like communicating her love to him . . . It's not at all an accident that she would work in that place . . . She guided herself to that town and that place to do what she would do. There was nowhere else to go . . .

How do you see the ending?

To me, that's really a sign of love and a sign of a possibility of a new beginning. Through that act of his, she can really learn to love them again. A child is really the most important thing in a woman's life. If your child is gone, there is no life—you torment your mind and your fantasy.

In your final scene, you act for several minutes opposite a mirror. What was that like?


DIESEL

It was very strange. You always keep looking at yourself; it's as if you're talking to yourself . . . But it was helpful that it was done the way it should be seen in the movie, and not with a trick. Because you feel totally isolated from the world. In a way, sometimes it seems to me a deeper communication than sitting in front of somebody talking. It became very intimate, like voices under your skin . . . You got used to the fact you couldn't see the person, so the fantasy went deeper than just physical . . . If you only hear a voice, like blind people, you become much more sensitive to what you hear, what you feel. It was the same here. And it always seemed, like she says, "every man had your voice" . . . They have to act sweet—one day like this, one day like that—and she's a big pretender, an actress. But each time, I think, the men left something that she would connect to him.

ROME, APRIL 24, 1984

LOSS OF INNOCENCE

HARRY DEAN STANTON

What was your impression with the first script you read?

I was very intrigued with the fact that Sam's first description of Travis was as a guy who doesn't talk. I liked the type: he didn't talk, period. Forget motivating—the "Why doesn't he talk?" is beside the point, in a way. He just doesn't want to talk. Everybody talks too much.

In the film, it's not explained.

That's good, no? And that was a problem for me, acting-wise. I talked to this girl, she was a student filmmaker, and she told me that she had been through a catatonic state when she was in her teens, and put into an institution; she had a rough time. She was very helpful, and that's the way I tried to do it. All your system is closed down, and you don't talk. She said she could hear her mother and father talking—you know, "Why doesn't she talk?"—but she just couldn't relate to it.

And it's been a favorite feeling in my whole life to be able to communicate without talking. When I was doing *Missouri Breaks,* Marlon Brando and I had a talk, and he told me about American Indians coming into town. One would come in and be standing there, another one would join him, but they wouldn't say anything. They might stand that way for twenty minutes, and one would leave, or one might start talking and talk for five minutes. Or he might stop, and the other one—there was no form to it—and then the other one would leave, without a word.

That kind of thing impressed me. Communicating in silence is a powerful thing.

It's a film about basic feelings or reactions.

But also, as always I find myself ending up playing, how I personally feel. All this material is very close to me, this whole situation. I have a son I've never seen. And Nastassja, I worked with her before, on *One from the Heart*—I was very affected by her. Who isn't? She's magical . . . Of course, everybody knows the child, hopefully. And I think that's a big theme in Sam's work, the loss of innocence.

So there's not much acting involved in it. Really, all my feelings about innocence, children, Nastassja, having a brother . . . It's my life, it's the story of my life here we're talking about.

I've been saying this same thing for quite some time, and for the last few years, I've progressively evolved into that point of view, and it won't change—unless I do some stylized work.

I think most actors do that. Good artists do it—painters paint from their soul—and good actors will pick parts that will correlate with what they are inside. Some people let themselves be influenced by the external; they just go along and do what they're told. I can't do that. I don't think any creative person can.

This started with my personal relationship with Sam Shepard. I gravitated toward this material because, I told Sam Shepard, I played a lot of negative characters over the years, a lot of hostile killers, a lot of angry people, because I was angry.

Also, you were typecast.

Yes, and I hate that. It's boring, it's life-negative. I'd better be dead.

So I was telling Sam all of that down in Santa Fe. And I think that's why he called me a few weeks later and said did I want to do the lead in his film.

I'm an amateur professional, you know. I'm trying to work like a documentary. The painful part, with Sam's writing, was to understand how to do it. Because you don't have to act his writing. Finally, Wim said, "Don't act these lines. You just say them, like poetry, say it with a meter," and that's what Nastassja and I tried to do at the end, just say the lines. That's the problem, I think, with people who do Sam's plays. They try to act it, and his writing you don't act. You don't even have to motivate it if you can just be simple, because all that needs to be said is in the writing.

I think that an actor is more effective on the screen the less they do. Even though you want to give it a documentary feeling, that's an art too—to make it appealing and compelling to watch and still keep the feeling of reality.

LOS ANGELES, APRIL 11, 1984

ME AND MY BROTHER

DEAN STOCKWELL

The balance of your part changed a lot during the shooting.

At the beginning of production, my character, Walt, went all the way through the film. Anne and Walt followed Travis and Hunter in the desert. There was a violent confrontation between Travis and Anne. She went back to Los Angeles, and Walt, after some hesitation, decided not to go back. He followed Hunter and Travis instead. He was still seen until the end, always following them but never catching up, and he got lost in this huge country. And at the end, Walt was a little like Travis at the beginning.

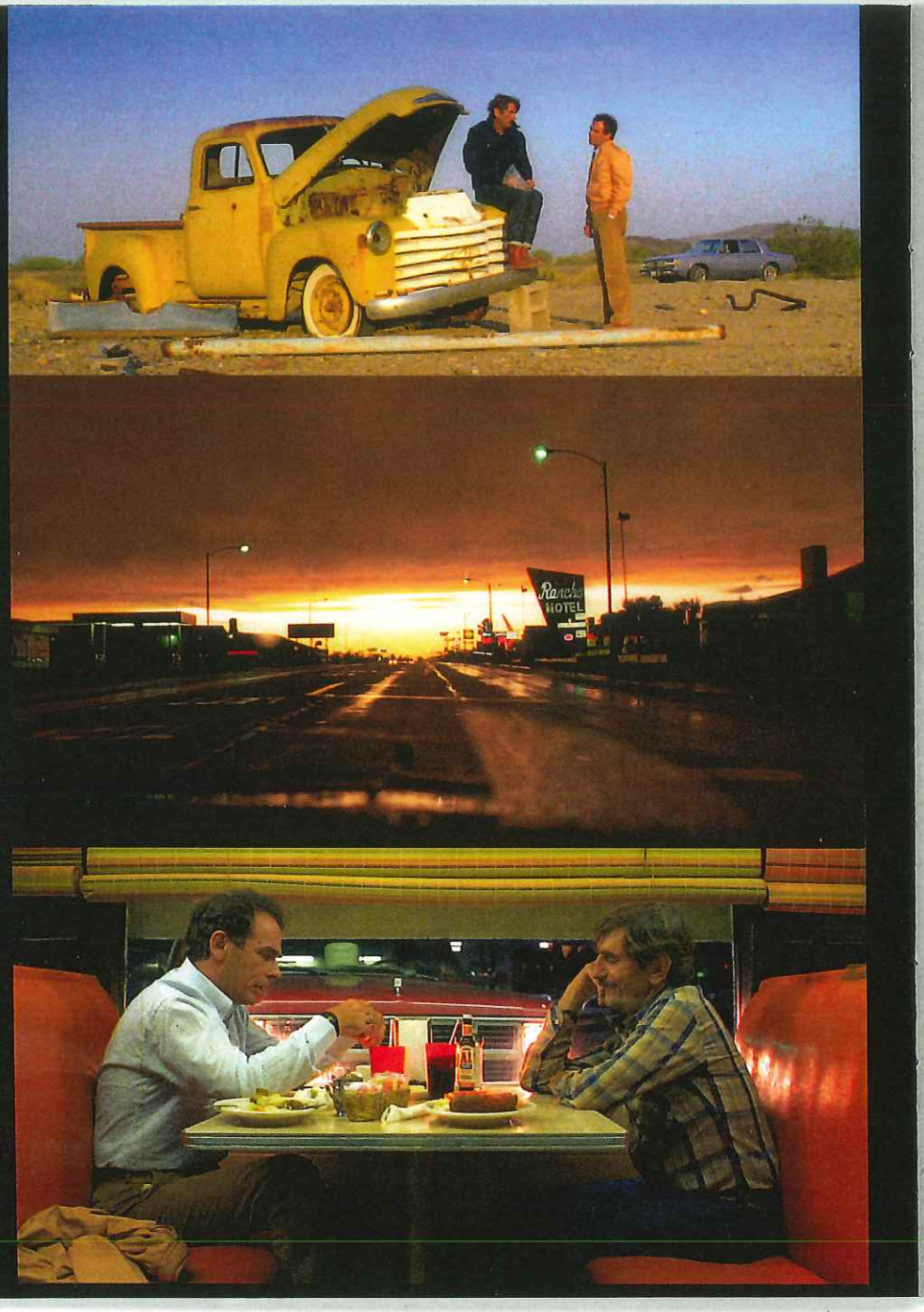
Now, this whole episode was dropped, and I was confronted with this sort of unique problem for an actor, where you take a role from point A and, instead of developing it to point Z and going through the letters in between, it only gets to about F, and it's flubbed off. So I tried to make as complete a character as I could, without the possibility of fully developing the character. That was the problem, and the only way I could find to approach it—and it seemed to work with Wim very well, and to work with Harry very well—was to literally approach it scene by scene, and moment to moment within the scene, so that I had a fix on this basically ordinary, relatively successful, relatively happy, relatively young middle-aged American, who is dealing with a problem outside himself.

Now, between you and me and the wall, or anyone else who's interested, this made it relatively simple to do. The problem was that an actor doesn't really like it to be simple to do; he likes to find the complexities and the difficulties, and work them out so that at the end he says, "Jesus! That was a tough one, but I licked it." Well, I didn't have that advantage; I had to approach it the other way, in this very simple manner. So I played off the relationships with the wife, the son I was going to lose, and the brother whom I was trying to bring back into a sense of reality and into this life, if I could.

Harry had enormous difficulties because all the workings of his character were internal, and a lot of them were based on events that happened prior to the commencement of the film, and were of an extraordinary rather than ordinary nature. So I found myself just trying to help Harry. My attitude in working, after forty-two years of doing it, is I'm able to, if not make light of my work, to work very lightly. In between takes, I don't appear to take it very seriously. Harry's just the opposite. When you are not filming, Harry is constantly worried about the role, constantly trying to find this or that. So I would try to help him work out the problems if I had any suggestions, but a lot of times, I was very light . . . And I don't know if it threw him off from time to time, but I think in the end, it made it easier for him.

This reflects on your on-screen relationship.

In this particular role, I let it slop over a little bit into the character, because I felt that the character . . . I wanted this person—I had the freedom to choose, of course—I wanted him to be a good person, morally and spiritually, and sort of a good space. And it seemed that in dealing with



this older brother, who was in a very messed-up condition, I would do my best to create a light atmosphere around him, until he came around.

Did you relate to the child because of your experience as a child actor?

Not in my acting, no. Off camera, I related a little bit. I found that he was very capable of handling the job he was doing. I did tell him, very early on, that I had done what he was doing, even at an earlier age than he. And every once in a while, I gave him little tips and stuff. I told him it was going to be harder work than he thought it was going to be, and there were going to be a lot of times when he would hear one phrase over and over again, which is "Oh, that was great. One more time." I remember that used to drive me nuts when I was a kid. So I tried to prepare him for a few things I knew he was going to find difficult. And he did. Very soon, he hated hearing "Just one more time. One more time and you can go on playing."

But he was working in an atmosphere that was much more relaxed than what I was working in when I was a kid. Because I was in the MGM high-powered studio era, where it seemed like there was a lot of tension all the time. This movie was like a family on the road. That didn't exist in '43, '45, '46.

Wim is a very gentle man. He creates a great atmosphere for the shooting among the crew and among the cast. So there was a great deal of cooperation above and beyond the call of duty. Because there were some problems. When you shoot a film in the U.S. that's being financed from Europe, difficulties can arise. And there was one of the unions, the Teamsters union—which is the most uptight union that we have—they wouldn't drive the damn trucks . . . So we said, Okay, we'll wait a couple of days. And sure enough, everything turned out fine. But unless the person at the top creates the proper creative atmosphere, you're going to have an acrimonious feeling as a result of that. That didn't happen. It was a relatively rough shoot. It wasn't the most difficult film I've ever done, but it wasn't a luxury film, with soundstages in Hollywood. It was done in a lot of locations. A lot of traveling by car . . . We got to see some new country . . .

SANTA FE, APRIL 14, 1984


FROM
WRITTEN IN
THE WEST

In 1983, Wim Wenders went on a location-scouting trip for Paris, Texas. *The photographs he took on that trip were collected in the 1987 book* Written in the West. *The following is excerpted from the preface to that book, a conversation between Wenders and film scholar Alain Bergala, and is accompanied by a selection of the images. A gallery of more of the photographs appears as a separate supplement on this release.*

In 1983, I started traveling crisscross all over the American West, for two or three months, as part of the preparation for *Paris, Texas*. It was another way of preparing for the film, too, a different kind of research that had less to do with locations than with the light in the West. I had never made a film in that landscape and was hoping that taking photographs would sharpen my understanding of the light and landscape, my sense of empathy with it. So although these photos were taken in connection with the film we made in that part of the country, they are quite independent of it, despite the fact that a lot of the photos were taken in places such as Houston, Los Angeles, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, or California, where we did in fact shoot the film. But these large-format photos were my own personal, private way of preparing for the film.

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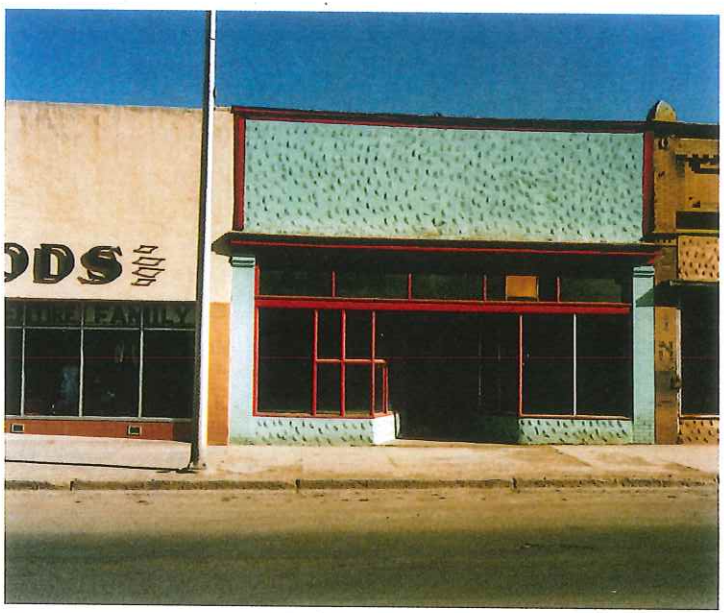
Solitude and taking photographs are connected in an important way. If you aren't alone, you can never acquire this way of seeing, this complete immersion in what you see, no longer needing to interpret, just looking. There's a distinct kind of satisfaction that you get from traveling alone, and it's connected with this relation of solitude to photography. If you're not alone, you take different photos. I rarely feel the urge to take pictures if I'm not on my own. That trip looking for material was sheer pleasure. I'd get up in the morning and drive off into the blue and just keep driving all day. For long distances, I didn't even have any music to listen to. There was nothing I needed but to look and take photographs. The combination was unusual anyway: those two beautiful cameras, the Leica and the Makina, with their different functions. Really there were three of us on that trip. A few of the pictures were taken later, after the filming of *Paris, Texas,* during the editing. I was still missing a few inserts, mostly motel signs, so in March 1984, I went back with my assistant, Claire [Denis], and a camera assistant to shoot some of the takes again. I'd almost say you could see the difference between the photos I took when I wasn't alone and the others. They don't radiate the same concentration or happiness. Yes, when you take photographs, solitude is often tied up with a particular feeling of happiness, a quite specific kind of contentment that I've occasionally noticed in other people I've met taking photos on their travels too. Usually, they're fairly quiet people, not as het-up or agitated as other travelers.

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Photography enables you to grasp a place first time round. In fact, photography often tends to become impossible in a place you're already familiar with. Going back somewhere seldom accompanies a desire to take photos. For me, the familiarity of things, knowing them, almost rules out photography. It is a means of exploration; it's a vital part of travel, almost as essential as a car or a plane. The photo camera makes arrival in a place possible.

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When I take photographs, I often feel a short while beforehand that the photo is going to happen. You arrive someplace and stop, and you're kind of excited even before you've located the actual motif. You can sense a place even before you're there—that particular light, an atmosphere. My photos often begin on a particular "surface" of a landscape, town, or street. The surface structure is apparent to the eye even before the actual shot location has finally been found. For example, I was once in a small town in New Mexico called Las Vegas, just like the famous Las Vegas in Nevada, and I took the photo of an empty store in blue and red [plate 31]. It's one of my favorites. When I set out, I sensed beforehand that I would find that building. And when I arrived in that godforsaken town, in that afternoon light, with the streets deserted and



31. "FAMILY," LAS VEGAS, NEW MEXICO



39. "SAFE WAY," CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS



5. "WESTERN WORLD," NEAR FOUR CORNERS, CALIFORNIA



16. LOUNGE PAINTINGS, GILA BEND, ARIZONA

the house fronts weather-beaten, I knew I would stay, that I had to find a hotel, because I wouldn't be able to get free of the place so fast. The town itself wasn't right for the film, because it was too far off the beaten track, but I'd driven there anyway because I just had to see this other Las Vegas.

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Melancholy is an integral part of the American West. Photography does have spiritual links with the "end of the world," more than film. Nicholas Ray once told me the advice he gave actors he was training. He'd say: "Even if you're only asking for a light, even if you're only saying good day, you have to do it as if you thought it could be the last time." That idea impressed me. The way I see it, it's a vital part of photography, seeing something and recording it as if it were the last possible chance to do so. To my mind, that's the "end of the world" side of photography. But there's a converse, too, which is that then a photo exists, which perpetuates the existence of the world.

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I think that films narrate history. Films especially. All films are ultimately documentaries because in passing, unintentionally, they record the clouds crossing the sky or a flock of birds somewhere in the background or someone walking by who doesn't notice he's being filmed. Or else animals: I'm always very affected when I see animals in a film. They are simply there, even more innocent than children, and they have no idea whatsoever that there are such things as cameras. But if you're making a film and you shoot the same scene ten times, the fact that the clouds cross the sky ten times devalues every one of those takes, seen for itself, just as much as the fact that it's been endlessly rehearsed does, or that it can be cut at any point during the editing. If you film landscape, the shots very often aren't in the final film, and the negative will be destroyed. So filmmaking is not as definitive an act as photography.

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Nowadays, it has become rare to see action from a distance, in a landscape context, in cinema films. In photos, on the other hand, long shots are a real pleasure, particularly in medium format. With that resolution and depth definition, you can make out even the smallest details, such as the cigarette butts in the street in the picture of the Safeway supermarket [plate 39]. In film, you can never achieve that resolution. The picture quality of 35 mm film and the size of the screen impose limits. These days in cinema, you rarely see a 35 mm picture as it could be. In 90 percent of cases, you see the texture of the screen, the film may not be absolutely in focus, there may not be enough light hitting the screen, or the light from the projector may have a slight element of blue or red. What makes photography so enjoyable is that the quality of the prints is up to you. No one can change anything. People will see them exactly as you produce them.

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There aren't many people in these photos, but there are a lot of signs and lettering. In a way, they are a substitute for people in this landscape. The omnipresence of signs and advertisements is typical of the American West. People weren't able to establish proper settlements, but it seemed to me that they had painted big signs everywhere so that they wouldn't feel so isolated and to prove that they had really conquered the country. It's like getting to the North Pole or the top of Mount Everest and finding a dozen flags planted by those who have been there before, to prove *the fact that* they've been there. In the U.S., the culture of lettered monuments is overwhelming and fairly advanced. It involves a lot of imagination, originality, care, and detailed work on shadows and outlines. The pains that are taken and the sheer love of lettering that is apparent in neon writing or ads are extraordinary, and the result often has a real beauty.

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The Americans say, "A man must build a house." And they really do. They build like crazy. The houses may not last long, but they're there. But in America, you often have the feeling that a man will paint a big

sign first of all, and then the sign often counts for more than the building. The house may be crooked, but the sign is superb. I find it touching when you see writing left in the middle of the country, a message in the midst of emptiness. In the Californian desert, I came upon a huge vacant plot with nothing on it but a sign reading "Western World Development" [plate 5]. They were obviously trying to sell the land, but no one was buying. The sign has been there for ten years, it will still be there in ten years' time, and sooner or later the wind will blow it down. In five hundred years, an archaeologist will find it and try to decipher it.

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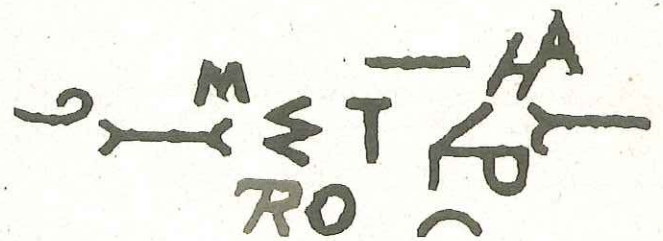
Photography is always an immediate translation of an existential state, of happiness, loneliness, or boredom. At times, I only register things when the frame makes them visible. At other times, when I'm framing a composition, the things vanish from my sight, or they're destroyed. Sometimes you're bored because you're taking photographs; sometimes you feel bored till at last you can take photos, and you revive. At times, it's as if you were dead till the moment you see something in the viewfinder. At other times, you feel very alive, and you frame something in a photograph only to have it die on you, like picked flowers.

In the case of the lounge in a little hotel, with the colorful armchairs [plate 16], I was passing the hotel and looked in the windows. They were very dirty because the hotel had been closed down for a long time, but I saw all these incredible armchairs in all those colors. I tried to get in, but it was all locked up. At last I found an old man who had the keys. He was very suspicious, and it took a long time to persuade him to open up for me. I took a lot of photos. The "surface" that interested me was the colors of the armchairs, four or five different colors. They were in a semicircle, which looked slightly theatrical in itself. You didn't even feel that the characters were missing, because it was as if the armchairs were talking to each other.

The main thing I learned was not to distrust colors anymore. These photos helped me accept colors the way they were. It means the problem of taste no longer arises. That's the worst thing about colors, especially when you're working on films but in life too: the way questions of taste automatically arise. You've hardly arrived at a hotel and someone's saying, "I can't stay in this room: I can't stand that shade of green." In films, it goes even further, and you try to establish a color dramaturgy. But colors are always linked to personal taste—the set designer's, the cameraman's, the director's—so they're always limited somehow or other. And in the American West, where no limits are imposed on color, you just have to learn to put questions of taste behind you and accept colors.

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To be honest, I have no memory for colors. I never remember colors. I noticed that afterward, I was never able to describe the colors. When I see the photographs, my memory of the actual colors is erased. It must be connected with the fact that, in my memory and dreams, the pictures tend to be black and white. I have no memory for colors, and with every photo, I'm amazed that the colors are as they are.



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Paris, Texas is presented in the director's preferred aspect ratio of 1.78:1. On standard 4:3 televisions, the image will appear letterboxed. On widescreen televisions, the image should fill the screen. Supervised and approved by director Wim Wenders, this new high-definition digital transfer was created on a Spirit Datacine from the original 35 mm camera negative. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches, splices, warps, jitter, and flicker were manually removed using MTI's DRS system and Pixel Farm's PFClean system, while Digital Vision's DVNR system was used for small dirt, grain, and noise reduction.

Presented in a surround format, the soundtrack was remixed under the supervision of the director using the original audio stems. Clicks, thumps, hiss, and hum were manually removed using Pro Tools HD.

Telecine supervisors: Lee Kline, Wim Wenders
Telecine colorists: Joe Gawler/Deluxe New York; Kerstin Kellner/CinePostproduction, Berlin
DVD mastering: Criterion Post, New York; Gentuza, Inc., Rochester, NY
Blu-ray disc mastering: Radius60, Los Angeles

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In Rapid City, South Dakota, my mother gave me ice cubes wrapped in napkins to suck on. I was teething then and the ice numbed my gums.

That night we crossed the Badlands. I rode in the shelf behind the back seat of the Plymouth and stared out at the stars. The glass of the window was freezing cold if you touched it.

We stopped on the prairie at a place with huge white plaster dinosaurs standing around in a circle. There was no town. Just these dinosaurs with lights shining up at them from the ground.

My mother carried me around in a brown Army blanket humming a slow tune. I think it was "Peg a' My Heart." She hummed it very softly to herself. Like her thoughts were far away.

We weaved slowly in and out through the dinosaurs. Through their legs. Under their bellies. Circling the Brontosaurus. Staring up at the teeth of Tyrannosaurus Rex. They all had these little blue lights for eyes.

There were no people around. Just us and the dinosaurs.

9/1/80, Homestead Valley, California

Sam Shepard, *Motel Chronicles*

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