"You're the great Western Barbarian, stepping forth in his innocence and might, gazing a while at this poor corrupt old world and then swooping down on it," Mrs. Tristram tells Christopher Newman, the protagonist of Henry James’s 1877 novel *The American* (James 1978, 45). The novel opens in Paris, in 1868, as Christopher Newman peruses the Louvre with avid eyes and an aesthetic headache caused by the encounter of his curious though rather unsophisticated mind with too many paintings. The Parisian museum is part of the American’s superlative grand tour of Europe in which he is questing for “the biggest kind of entertainment a man can get, people, places, art, nature, everything!” (James 1978, 33). As he further proclaims, “I want to see the tallest mountains, and the bluest lakes, the finest pictures and the most handsome churches, and the most celebrated men, and the most beautiful women” (James 1978, 33). Christopher Newman is, as both his name and surname suggest, a man of remote European origins regenerated, reborn, into a new man in the matrix of the land he now comes from, the American West: he is a Westerner from San Francisco and he is the American. He is also an American capitalist, a man of executive power who has “come abroad to amuse [himself],” though he admits he doubts whether “[he] know[s] how” (James 1978, 28). He wishes to acquire and possess that which his native land has not given him and which he eagerly and hyperbolically lists. Henry James, the sophisticated American expatriate, pokes fun at Newman who gets to be called a “Western Barbarian,” a “Barbarian” coming from the remotest displacement of the frontier in the United States, a place where, as James would say, “History, as yet, has left … but so thin and impalpable a deposit that we very soon touch the hard substratum of nature; and nature herself, in the western world, has the peculiarity of something rather crude and immature” (James 2004a, 417).

In this early novel, James commences with a series of characters—from Christopher Newman to Winterbourne, John Marcher and several others—that would enable him to explore the transnational cultural differential between the United States and Europe. *The American* is an example of what Leslie Fiedler called an “Eastern,” that is, a novel that tackles the relation of the young American republic to its cultural and political pre-history through “the return of the American to the Old World,” for “only then,” Fiedler notes, “does he
know for sure that he is an American” (James 2004a, 19). James’s novel further suggests that America, and the American West in particular, is both politically and aesthetically amorphous. For James, the absence of history and political community is related to the absence of aesthetic formation, which leads to his famous indictment of his nation; in America, according to him, there is,

No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no diplomatic services, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor mansions, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class, no Epsom nor Ascot!

(James 2004a, 419)

This passage is nearly as hyperbolic in its negativity as Christopher Newman’s eager desire to imbibe the aesthetics of the old world is hyperbolic in its enthusiasm, and James muses, “one might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left” (James 2004a, 419). James’s Christopher Newman is a barbarian who lacks not only aesthetic formation—hence his headache—but also political and ethical formation. This is what Newman will demonstrate in the novel through his poor judgment about art, and this is also what his fictional followers, Winterbourne or Marcher, will demonstrate in their poor understanding of communal and sexual politics, and the reciprocal absence of aesthetic and political formation leads in James’s works to the deaths of Daisy Miller and May Bartram. In both cases, the flowery and pastoral women, Daisy and May, are killed by the barbarianism of the men ignorant of both aesthetics and politics.

James’s post-Civil War novel thus poses the question of aesthetic and political forms in the United States and what I will be calling the “prosodic performance” of these forms. Rather than dissociating them, James suggests that aesthetics and politics (in the broad sense of the life of a community in a polis) are related, and that the absence of forms—for after all, both aesthetics and politics are essentially formal—is the source of tragedy and violence against those (women, the poor, the disenfranchised) who cannot find their place in the community. To remedy that, James, like many of his characters, turned to Europe to find the aesthetic and political forms he felt his nation to be lacking. He turned to Europe and to the history of European aesthetics (as his examples that combine history, art and politics suggest) to provide forms to the American novel and American history.¹ From what he perceived as his barbarian land James does not appear to expect anything; with its thin historical substratum America does not seem to be able to produce the aesthetic and political forms that may inform the nation, that is, give it the shape and the semblance of a modern cultured nation state; these forms could only be retrieved from Europe, hence the Eastern tropism of James’s characters and James himself.

Going back to Europe to find the forms that could inform amorphous America is a movement that Leslie Fiedler identified as one of the cardinal points of American fiction. In The Return of the Vanishing of the American, Fiedler coins the names “Eastern,” “Southern” and “Northern” as literary genres and spatial orientation points to complement the “Western,” the popular genre most people are familiar with (Fiedler 1968, 16). Fiedler’s study thus reminds us how central geography and the sense of space are in any definition of American culture.²

Fiedler’s study reminds us that James’s intricate Easterns, his novels and stories that present us with US characters traveling “back” East to Europe, are contemporary both in their writing and their narrative temporality with the short historical period of the American

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Western as it was framed by cinema. While the musings of a Newman, Marcher or Winterbourne seem very remote from the spurred strutting of Ethan Edwards, Wyatt Earp or Ringo Kid, we are reminded that these characters are all contemporaneous with each other, even though they represent opposite cardinal points of American history and culture. They are representatives of opposite ways of informing the US, either by extracting European forms out of its historical non-American past, a sort of American prehistory, or by inventing America’s idiosyncratic forms out of their new cultural geography. The new direction would require not only a new sense of orientation in space, but also a new medium to produce new symbolic forms: cinema.

The new geographical direction would account for different artistic productions. For today’s readers and viewers, it might prove all the more difficult to conceive of Christopher Newman and Ethan Edwards, the protagonist of John Ford’s The Searchers, as two contemporaneous “Western Barbarians,” insofar as James’s novel and Ford’s movie do not seem to belong to the same cultural categories. Although critics have sometimes deemed The American flawed, especially in its melodramatic second part, James’s novel belongs to the tradition of high culture and to a genealogy of artistic expression that prefigures (high) modernism. Henry James is a representative of the world of rarefied fiction, an aesthete who draws his readers into a maze of psychological and emotional nuances and ineffable historical effects. Nothing seems more remote from the riddled musings of James’s protagonists than the violent actions of characters impersonated by John Wayne, Gary Cooper, or Charles Bronson on the silver screen; nothing seems more remote from the unfathomable “hmi’s” of Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl than Ethan’s mantra, “That’ll be the day,” in The Searchers. The difference of genre between the Eastern and the Western, especially in its filmic version, is also a difference of cultural category. The former addresses a cultural elite; the latter is a popular art. The former is predicated on the studious reading of a notation by an elite; the latter depends on the iterative performance of a popular form.

While the protagonists of James’s Easterns belong to a highbrow culture mostly unavailable to the philistines they deride, the forms of the Western procure the performance of popular forms that inform the nation that James found, precisely, so devoid of form. And it does take a bit of imagination to realize that the dense psychological plotting of The American, The Wings of the Dove, “Daisy Miller” and “The Pupil,” to name just a few, are contemporaneous with the showdown at the OK Corral between Wyatt Earp and the Clanton brothers. But while the cushy salons of James’s novelistic writing take us back to a political and semantic régime of the past that American artists like James felt they could only belatedly imitate, the rugged landscapes of the West and the rustic interiors of the ranch framed by Ford’s or Howard Hawk’s cinematography would give the US its original popular aesthetic and political forms.

The opening scenes of The American and of The Searchers show Christopher Newman roaming through the Louvre while Ethan Edwards is arriving at his brother’s ranch in Texas. While Newman is looking for art in Europe, searching for the signs of high culture that are missing in the US, Edwards is searching for Debbie in the American West, thus interpreting the signs of the American West and translating them into an American aesthetic and political narrative told—or framed—by Ford’s camera. The contemporary time setting of this classic Eastern and this classic Western contrasts not only their themes and geographical settings, as Fiedler suggests, but also two ways of providing America with cultural forms: while James sends his protagonists out to quest for “the items of high civilization … which are absent from the texture of American life,” John Ford sends Ethan in search of Debbie, and in this quest his camera invents popular, idiosyncratically American aesthetic and political forms, whose performance has been informing the nation for the last century.
It would be idle to seek to adjudicate superior merit to the Eastern or the Western, just as it would be unavailing to compare the artistic achievements of Henry James and John Ford. On the other hand, we can compare how the different geographies of American art forms have determined the public addressed by that art and its performative effects in US culture. James’s novels are constitutive of the corpus of high art whose dogma is “that there are some books … an appreciation of which distinguishes the elect from the vulgar, the sensitive from the gross” (Fiedler 1968, 20). On the other hand, as one of the best critics of the genre put it, Western movies have often been perceived as “formulaic, empty, the enemy of art” (Kitses 2007, 1). These statements catch the often-repeated dichotomy between art and entertainment, between high culture and popular, or, between the notation of culture and its prosodic performance.

In what follows I propose that the new symbolic forms of Western movies bridge the gap between what has been considered in the wake of Modernism as the dichotomy between high culture and popular culture. This is not to say that Westerns provide some sort of synthesis between the two, or that their aesthetics or their political message has a superior redeeming value. It is rather to say that the opposition between high and popular culture was defined by critics such as Theodor Adorno, and that cinema, which is both art and an industrial process, invented new American symbolic forms for which this opposition is no longer valid.

In Modernism and Popular Music, Ronald Schleifer sheds light on the dichotomous relation between high and popular culture by emphasizing the latter’s implicit political and ethical dimensions. Schleifer extols the performance of popular culture and its leading artists and he quotes Alfred Appel who calls these artists the “‘alchemists of the vernacular’” (Schleifer 2011, 1). It is certainly true that “original cultural forms” such as jazz, the musical, and sports such as baseball “testify to the American genius for the popular” (Kitses 2007, 1), and whoever has spent any time pondering American culture and its historical development must come to the realization that “The Western is one of America’s grandest inventions” (Kitses 2007, 1). Directors such as Ford, Hawks, their national followers such as Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, or Sam Peckinpah, and their international followers from Sergio Leone to Alejandro Iñárritu are indeed alchemists of the American vernacular who have transformed and informed the culture, turning what James saw as the “hard substratum of nature” into the nation’s golden aesthetic and political forms.

As even a cursory reading of James’s statements about American culture suggests, aesthetics and politics are closely enmeshed, and they show that the aesthetic is the political, or, that it is through the performance of aesthetics that political performance takes place. In a representative democracy such as that of the US, the role of popular art cannot be overestimated, for its forms “foreground[d] the dynamics of performance and gesture in the experience of human being” (Schleifer 2011, 1). Critics who find popular genres such as the Western “empty [and] an enemy of art” forget—repress or ignore—that unlike high culture that depends essentially on notation and semantics, popular art depends on performance and prosody. This is why the aesthetic and political forms of high and popular culture are different, and this is why also the latter flourished so remarkably in the U.S. Western movies like the popular music, for they too are “a special case of the popular arts precisely because [they are] a performance art as well as a commercial art” (Schleifer 2011, 33). It is worth noting in this context that the rise of American cinema and the rise of the Western is contemporaneous with the phenomenon of popular music that Schleifer analyses, even as it is contemporary with the establishment of many National Parks and National Monuments that enshrined in three dimensions the symbolic forms of American geography celebrated by the Western. And yet like the blues, the Western travels; the transnational mobility of both forms—American music and American cinema—underscores the trace of their origins not
just in the space of their innovation, but in their capacity to engender new contexts of performance. Unlike the need to return to Europe to partake in culture, these forms perform anywhere but always already inform us of the American aesthetic.

The performance of art and its relation to iterativity has been one of the main questions of modernism at least since Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (Benjamin 2008, 1936). When it can be reproduced ad infinitum, the commercial or poietic value of a work of art no longer depends on its uniqueness, but rather on its dissemination and the possibility of its repetition. This is something that technological development made possible to an unprecedented level in the twentieth century, which saw the commodification of culture by a “new social class of low-middle-class information workers (engaged in the institution of finance capital) possessing an individualist ideology that made certain kinds of material self-fulfillments personally and popularly imperative” (Schleifer 2011, xii). However, the performance of modern art forms “engenders infinitely new contexts” (Derrida 1982, 321). The iterative performance of modern art is thus not merely a repetition of the same, but rather the inaugural performance of symbolic forms that inform the polis where this performance takes place.

Following Jacques Derrida, cultural critics such as Judith Butler have shown how the iterativity of cultural forms are central to any given culture to the point of being embodied in the individuals of that culture. Thus, popular arts such as the Western do not merely reflect and commodify the hard substratum of the nature of the nation (to paraphrase James), the spirit of the place, or the psychology of its population. In the best or most ambitious Western movies we see significant cultural forms as much shape the nation as they are produced by it. By informing the nation, they reach far beyond their original goals that include the entertainment of the spectators, viewers, and listeners, the promotion of ideologies and political agendas, the profit of the industries that produced them. It follows that original cultural forms are not only idiosyncratic to regions of the world, but rather that they are “original” because of the relation between what they mean—their semantics—and how they mean—their prosody. This relation, that we may call the “alchemy of the vernacular,” produces inaugural symbolic forms that perform in the space of the culture shapes that space, its community and political bodies.

Although Western movies can be, and often have been, read as a (mythopoeitic) reconstruction of America’s past, they are really a site of production of symbolic forms that have informed the present. A number of studies have explored how Western movies have recast America’s past with an aura of myth, and how the industrial power of Hollywood has contributed to the dissemination of these myths. This is an important aspect, and the question of the relation of works of art to their modes of production in the capitalist system of the second industrial revolution cannot be ignored; it cannot even be overemphasized.

I wish to underscore that the inaugural symbolic forms that the best Western movies have produced to suggest that they still perform in American culture and inform it. Gilles Deleuze has proposed that cinema “imposes new points of view” on the problem of the classification of signs (Deleuze 2004, 7); the symbolic forms of the Western have been projected into the future—our present—as proleptic allegories that have been informing American culture within its national borders and transnationally beyond these borders.

Cultural texts such as the Western are performative speech acts that produce tangible effects in the world. The difficulty in studying them consists in seeing how intangible forms (poetics) produce a tangible performance that affects bodies, lives and communities (politics). Symbolic forms appear to us as tangible signs, but these signs are but the traces of their performance that has been taking place in time and space and has contributed to generating that time and space. Thus, the landscapes of Monument Valley of Ford’s movies are constituted as
the landscapes of Monument Valley by his camera and his poetic followers. The framing of the landscape constitutes it as landscape, even as the movement of the camera and the movement of objects in the frame bring forth symbolic forms that make the Western relevant to the “distinctly American imaginary” (Pippin 2010, 11). Thus, Monument Valley is of course tangible: it is visible, it is material, and it is made of solid Cenozoic rock that has preceded by some 60 million year the stampede of Ford’s cavalry or the rattling on his stagecoach. But the forms that hold it together as a formal symbolic landscape are intangible, just like the mathematical laws that project a three-dimensional perspective on a two-dimensional piece of paper. The symbolic forms of the Western perform the alchemy that transforms rocks, sand, bushes and skies; it imposes what Deleuze calls a new classification of signs and thereby transforms them into significant cultural forms. These forms have constructed in turn the sense of political community of the nation, even as they have constructed the time and space in which this political community is deployed.

In his founding essay “The Western; or, the American Film par Excellence” (1953) Bazin proposed that the origins of the genre are “almost identical with those of cinema” (Bazin 2004, 142) and that it was centrally concerned with singing the American national character. Bazin wrote at a time when the mythographic character of U.S. culture and cultural politics had been highlighted by critics such as R.W.B. Lewis or Richard Slotkin. The American Adam (1955) or Regeneration Through Violence (1973) were seminal cultural critique books that insisted that representations of the U.S., and of the American West in particular, were not grounded in ascertainable historical reality, but rather in myths elaborated after the fact and resulting from the confrontation of European settlers’ imaginary with the American frontier. Many travelers and historians have since then brought “a sobering corrective to the ubiquitous and purple prose of the western land and town promoters of the post-Civil War years” (Wrobel 2013, 1). Bazin insists that “the Western was born of the encounter of myth and a means of expression” (Bazin 2004, 142), and Robert Pippin whimsically sums up the question:

The Greeks have the Iliad; the Jews, the Hebrew Bible; the Romans, the Aeneid; the Germans the Nibelungenlied; the Scandinavians, the Njal saga; the Spanish have the Cid; the British have the Arthurian Legends. The Americans have John Ford. (Bazin 2004, 224)

The question one needs to ask is why did so many European commentators find it necessary to align the Western with European foundational myths. The answer might be that myths like narratives or metaphors travel and when they arrive they assume forms they didn’t have before. They produce something which is new, inaugural and incalculable. It is therefore not surprising that the Western resembles so many other mythopoeic narratives that have preceded it, but by pointing to these similarities one misses the more important point, which is the way in which the Western produces something new and unexpected, something that precisely differs from the mythopoeitic models that precede it. The Western has much in common with the structure of older myths, but even more importantly, it generates new forms that have informed and transformed American culture.

In Bazin’s definition of the Western the latter partakes of the mythopoeic character of the nation, and is itself wrapped in myth: to Bazin, the cameras of celebrated directors such John Ford or Howard Hawks had captured what D.H. Lawrence had called “the spirit of the place” (Bazin 2004, 1). At the same time, Bazin proposes a mythic birth for the Western as the result of the encounter of meaning (American myths) and popular poetics (the cinema). Bazin acknowledges that “the Saga of the West existed before cinema under literary or folkloric forms [and] the multiplications of Western movies has not killed Western literature” (Bazin 2004, 219). But cinema is not merely another way of telling a story; it is a new way of
seeing, apprehending and comprehending the world. In something that may sound like a tautology but that has often remained unexplored, Bazin sums up the radical change that Western movies make: “It is easy to say that the Western is ‘cinema par excellence’ because cinema is movement” (Bazin 2004, 218; emphasis added).

Bazin’s definition also entailed that the Western deserved to be—indeed, had to be—taken seriously, just as any of the foundational myths mentioned above have been. While nobody takes these myths to be strictly historical, they are recognized for their poietic and performative role in the culture(s) they are a part of. However, when in the 1950s Bazin was vehemently arguing that the Western should be taken seriously, he was really saying that cinema as a form of popular art was worth serious intellectual and philosophical consideration, just like the recitation of the travels of a cunning sailor or the singing man in arms. Pippin thus rightly argues that myths are “about events in the remote past” but that their “decisive significance [is] for the present” (Bazin 2004, 225). Myths bring us characters and set them in narrative as the construction of the temporal dimension of lived experience, and thus literally create the time and the space in which we live. It is the projection of the narrative of myth into the future, beyond the wall of an ever-fleeting present, that makes their origin inaccessible and turns it into a performative event and a narrative that we access through symbolic forms.

That myth should give access to a sense of origin is a particularly sensitive issue for The United States, a new country by historical standards. Although John Winthrop has been called “The American Moses” and Walt Whitman has received the moniker of “American Bard” by reference to Shakespeare, it is apparent that these are only somewhat self-aggrandizing metaphors. America’s “ancient times are not very ancient” (Pippin 2010, 62); the country cannot claim the depth of such historical references as Moses or Shakespeare, and one of America’s “mythic forms of self-understanding … could be said to be the very best Hollywood westerns” (Pippin 2010, 62). American Westerns are, unlike the most ambitious traditional works of arts by which we define an era or a culture as a whole, the depositaries of the symbolic forms that have shaped the nation and extended its power transnationally, precisely because their pastness (even if only a little more than a century) is more remote than the pasts of most cultures.

The relation between mythic construction in art and myth was centrally explored in Perspective as Symbolic Form, a very important short book Erwin Panowsky (1925). Panowsky adopted the vocabulary of Edmund Cassirer to propose that the perspective and the perspectival representation of the world was a symbolic form. Perspective, Panowsky proposed, changed the way signs of the world were classified and imposed itself as the realistic and historically accurate representation of the world. He further argued that Gothic cathedrals were the realization in three dimensions of the aesthetics and the politics of the Renaissance: not only did they reflect the world of the Renaissance, but they also contributed to defining it and projecting it into the future. By analogy, one may say that the best American Westerns are the realization of twentieth-century cultural forces, of the past inhabiting the present, and while they reflect the state of the union of the nineteenth-century US, they inform it and project it into the present.

We need to bear in mind, then, that Westerns do not only evoke a time and a place in a way that is biased by hegemonic ideology: they create the time and place they appear to simply evoke. The historical period depicted by classic Westerns goes from the end of the Civil War to the official closing by the Census Bureau of the frontier in 1890. Thus, the narratives Westerns evoke have very different locales: it can be the Missouri River as in Howard Hawks’s The Big Sky (1952), the Arizona desert as in Ford’s Fort Apache (1948), or in the arctic cold of the Klondike in Alejandro Iñárritu’s The Revenant (2015). In all cases, they are about being on the always already closing frontier. They are not, however, only nostalgic
evocations of a time that is no more, but really about a time that has never come to be, for the frontier is not a separation between or even a conflagration of civilizations, but rather something that is itself constantly moving. Rather than valorizing and stabilizing the ideologi- cal hegemony, the most ambitious Westerns put it in motion and deconstruct the white male patriarchal dream of political control of the land and its community. The best movies in the genre portray the transition from a feudal and patriarchal world to a more fraternal—and possibly more feminine—world, not just because that is what they are about, but because of the relation between what they are about and cinema as a means of expression constitutes their very power.

As cinema became the dominant cultural form of the twentieth century, the Western reflected the post-Civil War era, even as it shaped the century by inventing the dominant forms of American culture. The other great post-Civil war popular genre is the blues, which captures the freedom of movement of recently emancipated slaves in the “rail-road” rhythms of lyrics and beat. The horse-travel of Westerns rather than the train-travel of the blues nicely demarcates the American racial divide. In any case, the Western did for America what other genres have done at other cultural moments. And just as the international presence of Shakespearean drama is tied to the English empire, so Westerns have spilled over to the globalized world in which America has become dominant.

It is difficult to assess how many Western movies have been made because many have gone unregistered or missing, and also because the very definition of what constitutes a Western film is constantly revised. The Western became a prominent filmic genre and a major cultural product even as the US was rising to become the world’s politically and economically hegemonic nation state. Not long before the production of The Great Train Robbery (1903), US Steel overtook all of British steel production, and since the time of the film that opened the era of the Western, the US film and entertainment industry has grown steadily to become the nation’s second export industry, thus securing the US world cultural hegemony and ensuring thereby the performative iteration of the symbolic forms developed by the Western.

This aspect is central, for not only has cinema ensured that the US cultural presence has been on a par with its economic and military presence on the world stage, but the Western has also played a major role in the transnational dissemination of the symbolic forms of US culture. Among the thousands of Westerns few may have remained as significant works of art; some might be unjustly disregarded for a while before being rehabilitated, most will be forgotten and lost forever. But the miraculous survivors, these “significant works of art,” realize the past of the US, and it is out of that past that our contemporary imaginary has emerged to situate us in the world. As such, they bear witness from the past to our future and tell us where and when we live; they tell us also what imagined communities—national, transnational, cultural, religious, ethnic—we belong to. They have outlived wars and natural disasters, changes of taste and oblivion to tell us not about the past in which they were written, but rather about the future, that is, our present.

Notes

1 The inseparably common character of history (and therefore politics) and aesthetics is an ever-present theme in James’s writing, and it is articulated in particular in his 1884 essay “The Art of Fiction” where he writes:

The only effectual way to lay it to rest is to emphasize the analogy to which I just alluded—to insist on the fact that as the picture is reality, so the novel is history. That is the only general
description (which does it justice) that we may give the novel. But history also is allowed to compete with life, as I say; it is not, any more than painting, expected to apologize. The subject-matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian (James 2014b, 429)

2 It is noteworthy that any sense of direction in the US is predicated on these cardinal points. When heading for a destination, a map (or the GPS) will give the traveler directions in terms of north, south, east and west; rather than saying go toward the city of town X or Y, the traveler will be told head north or west. It is unsurprising, then, that narratives should follow the same narrative paths. It may even be, as Jean Baudrillard suggests, that “the map … precedes the territory,” and that these narrative paths precede the trails and highways that trace their progress across the north American continent even as they trace the contours of the nation (Baudrillard 2006, 1).

3 Schleifer insists that music is performative in ways that other popular forms, including cinema, may not be. On the other hand, as Schleifer acknowledges, popular music owns much of its performative impact to the second industrial revolution, that is, to the rise of a consuming middle class and the availability of cultural goods such as gramophones, records, or even printed music sheets. While the differences with music that Schleifer shrewdly analyses are significant, I believe that cinema, and singularly the Western, has depended on “performance as [its] primary modality” which, as in the case of music, “underscores the performativity of modernist art forms” (Schleifer 2011, xi).

4 Despite the recession since 2008, what the report calls “the copyright industries” have continued to grow faster than other business segments. The core copyright industries grew an annual rate of 1.1% from 2007 to 2010, and the total copyright industries (and those dependent on them) grew at an annual rate of 1.47%. The overall economy during that period grew only 0.5%. According to the report, copyright industries added over $931.8 billion in value to the US economy last year, which is about 6.4% of the nation’s total gross domestic product. http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cop

5 Stephen Greenblatt notes, speaking of Shakespeare, that “works of art, by contrast [with] ordinary texts most of which are virtually incomprehensible when they are removed from their immediate surroundings,” contain directly or by implication much of [their cultural] situation within themselves, and it is this sustained absorption that enables may literary works to survive the collapse of the conditions that led to their production” (quoted in Schleifer 2011, 112).

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