III

MEMETIC REFRAMING
Christian Patterson's *Redheaded Peckerwood*

In December 1957, Charles Starkweather and his girlfriend Caril Ann Fugate embarked on a murder spree that shocked the US population. And even today, more than sixty years later, the so-called 'Starkweather case' keeps haunting the North American people as part of the country's collective imagination. This situation is testified to by Christian Patterson's evolving photobook *Redheaded Peckerwood* (2011, 2012, 2013),[404] which contains a visually diverse selection of photographs, each of which points suggestively to the Starkweather case.[405]

The historical murder spree is undoubtedly *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s narrative centre. However, I argue that the criminal case merely serves a reflection on how 'frames', which are sets of conventions that govern the representation of historical events, are disseminated in culture.[406] That argument, I claim, is conditioned by a memetic principle of rereading that allows the frame to appear multiple times according to the meme's emergent logic of imitation through variation.

'Memes', according to Richard Dawkins's initial definition of the phenomenon, are units of cultural transmission that propagate themselves in ever-changing form by leaping from brain to brain, often via magazines, computers, movies, and other technological platforms.[407] Humans cannot entirely control these processes,[408] and I argue that the same might be said of the process of rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood*, since it is partially governed by algorithms.

The smartphone revolution around 2010 introduces the so-called 'post-digital' era, that is, the situation wherein humans no longer control the digital realm, since portable digital devices allow for a permanent extension of subjectivity across the Internet.[409] Within this contemporary context, I contend that humans are habituated to meeting ambiguity and elusiveness with immediate online searches. The way I see it, Redheaded Peckerwood's suggestive relationship to the Starkweather case presupposes this situation. And as such, online searches are conceptualised as a part of the work's very definition. This conceptualisation does, on its part, imply that agency is partially ceded to the algorithms of the World Wide Web, which makes *Redheaded Peckerwood* suitable for a discussion of the cultural level of photobook rereading that is the focus of this chapter.

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[404] Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2011, 2012 and 2013).
[405] The photograph on this chapter's front page is '24th Street Road (Road at Night)', from Christian Patterson's *Redheaded Peckerwood*, n.p.
[406] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 10–11.
[407] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 206.
[408] Ibid.
[409] See: Florian Cramer, 'What is "Post-digital"?', *APRJA*, 2013, http://www.aprja.net/what-is-post-digital/ (accessed 14 January 2019).

The thesis's third chapter proceeds according to four loosely defined stages. First, I provide a detailed description of *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s material structure. Second, I explain how the work's material structure entails a conception of extensive online searches as an integrated dimension of the photobook network. In the chapter's third section, I explain how a memetic principle allows for a rereading of the Starkweather case in light of a set of constantly mutating frames. And to demonstrate this constant mutating, I shall – fourth – trace the so-called 'cinematic frame's' four-stage journey according to the memetic principle of rereading, and hence shall trace four consecutive versions of the Starkweather myth in relation to Hollywood cinema.

The photobook and its backstory

Redheaded Peckerwood is made and designed by Christian Patterson and published by MACK, one of today's most high-profile photobook publishing houses. The photobook measures 19 x 24 centimetres and its hard cover with linen binding is screen-printed with a photograph of a young, smiling couple in shades of black and grey.[410] The endpapers and the first and last pages of the photobook have a pink, skin-toned colour. In between, we find 172 unnumbered white pages with 95 photographic plates in colour and in black-and-white, and a list of captions gathered at the back.[411]

Most of the photographs are presented over one or two pages and framed by white borders, but there are also a few unframed reversible reproductions in other sizes, with the look and feel of original weathered documents. The visual material is organised into an introductory sequence and four main sections separated by white pages decorated with a black abstract pattern. The work also includes a loose tucked-in illustrated booklet that appears as a part of the work in the sense that it is written in old typewriter font and printed onto pink sheets that match the photobook's endpapers. The booklet contains two untitled essays by, respectively, cultural critic Luc Sante and photography curator Karen Irvine, which provide context to the project.

Redheaded Peckerwood came out in 2011, but the success of the first edition made it possible for the photographer to realise a second edition already in 2012. The second edition has improved picture quality, a subtly darker cover, and is printed with a different kind of black ink. Also, a light gloss varnish is used instead of the matte varnish used for the first edition. In

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[410] Fig. 3.1.
[411] MACK does not release figures for print runs.

addition, the photographer has included a few drawings in the accompanying essay booklet. For the third edition, which came out in 2013, Patterson also included four new photographs and a separate postcard.

In a 2013 interview about *Redheaded Peckerwood*, Patterson explains how he considers the project, which he also presents in an exhibition format, as a continuing and expanding work:

> I made this work to share it, and I see no reason to not share new material as it comes my way – as long as it adds to the work in what I feel is a compelling way. I can't imagine a fourth edition of the book but if that opportunity presents itself I'll consider adding any worthy new discoveries to the mix.[412]

The quote suggests that each new edition is an elaboration of the same work. And I shall thus take the latest and to date most expansive version of the photobook as the point of departure for my discussion.

The photobook revolves around the historical events surrounding a 1957/58 murder spree conducted by then nineteen-year-old Charles Starkweather, possibly with the aid of his five-year-younger girlfriend Caril Ann Fugate. Starkweather was born into a working-class family of low income in the small American town of Lincoln, Nebraska in 1938. A slight speech impediment, and severe myopia that was not detected until he was a teenager, made him struggle academically and drop out of high school at sixteen.[413] Both, in addition to his bowed legs – the result of a minor birth defect – were also said to have made him an easy target for classmate bullies. And the title that Patterson later adopted for his photobook, *Redheaded Peckerwood*, is one of the monikers that Starkweather's classmates threw at him.[414]

While 'redheaded' refers to Starkweather's red hair, a 'peckerwood' (similar to 'redneck' or 'white trash') is a derogatory term that is primarily used by Southern blacks and upper-class whites as a nickname for poor, white, undereducated Middle Americans.[415] Starkweather was very sensitive about this humiliation, and about the poverty he was born into, his working-class background, and the garbage-man occupation he took on. Over time, he thus

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[412] Rebecca Bengal, 'Object Lessons: A Conversation with Christian Patterson', *The Paris Review*, 24 June 2013, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/06/24/object-lessons-a-conversation-with-christian-patterson/ (accessed 5 January 2018).

[413] James Melvin Reinhard, *The Murderous Trail of Charles Starkweather* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1960), 43.

[414] Op. cit., 18.

[415] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Peckerwood, *n.* and *adj.*', September 2005, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/139423;jsessionid=F8703B9380A1ED7440D0C9A85F1B4E05?redirectedFrom=peckerwood#eid (accessed 15 January 2019).

developed a violent rage that stretched beyond those who bullied him, and to anyone who made him feel inferior.[416]

Starkweather's rough behaviour impressed the then thirteen-year-old Caril Ann Fugate, whom he met in 1956. She made Starkweather feel better about himself and his life soon came to revolve around his relationship with her.[417] Still, despite his relationship with Fugate, Starkweather never got rid of the feeling of inferiority and estrangement. In order to earn respect, and to get out of the poverty and the abject conditions he found himself in, he gradually decided to become a criminal.[418] On the night of 1 December 1957, Starkweather robbed and killed the gas-station attendant Robert Colvert, who became his first victim. Previously, Colvert had refused to sell him a stuffed-toy dog on credit. Angered and embarrassed by the rejection, Starkweather came back with his shotgun and forced Colvert to hand over the contents of the cash drawer before driving him to a remote area where he killed him with a shot to the head.[419]

Starkweather later testified that this first kill made him 'feel different',[420] and on 21 January 1958, he slayed Velda and Marion Bartlett – Fugate's mother and stepfather – and their baby daughter Betty Jean. Due to Starkweather's constantly shifting testimonies, Fugate's role in the murders of her family, as in the succeeding events, is uncertain.[421] Yet it is established that she knew about the murders before she hit the highway with Starkweather in his 1949 Ford six days after.[422] That trip left seven more innocent people dead in their wake, before the two were finally captured in Douglas, Wyoming on 29 January 1958.[423]

Tried and found guilty only of the murder of Robert Jensen, a teenager who unsuspectingly offered the couple a ride during their escape,[424] Starkweather was executed in the electric chair at the Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln on 25 June 1959.[425] Fugate was the youngest female in America ever charged with first-degree murder. [426] While she persistently insisted – as she does to this day – that she was held hostage by Starkweather,[427]

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[416] Reinhardt, *The Murderous Trail of Charles Starkweather*, 13.
[417] Michael Newton, *Waste Land: The Savage Odyssey of Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998), 57–58.
[418] Reinhardt, 1960, 3–4.
[419] Jeff O'Donnell, *Starkweather: A Story of Mass Murder on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: J & L Lee Publishers, 1993), 6–9.
[420] Reinhardt, *The Murderous Trail of Charles Starkweather*, 138.
[421] Op. cit., 138–139.
[422] Op. cit., 132.
[423] Op. cit., 138.
[424] O'Donnell, *Starkweather*, 141–144.
[425] Reinhardt, *The Murderous Trail of Charles Starkweather*, 3.
[426] O'Donnell, *Starkweather*, 145.
[427] Op. cit., 159.

she was sentenced to life imprisonment as his accomplice.[428] But after serving nearly eighteen years behind bars, she was paroled for good behaviour and released from the Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in May 1976.[429]

Patterson's method

Redheaded Peckerwood came out of numerous journeys that Christian Patterson conducted in Starkweather and Fugate's footsteps. Travelling at the same time of year, though nearly half a century later, the photographer made his way from Lincoln, Nebraska to Douglas, Wyoming multiple times, stopping at all the places the murderers had stopped.[430] Working as a detective, Patterson visited the archives of newspapers, historical societies, and police departments en route, and met with and interviewed various individuals with knowledge of the case.

What Patterson searched for was objects and anecdotes with either a direct or a more symbolic relationship with the historical events. And the information he gathered on the journey served as the basis for a visually diverse collection of photographs that he made either on site or afterwards in his studio. As Karen Irvine explains in the booklet that accompanies *Redheaded Peckerwood*, some of the photographs in the photobook are reproductions of found photographs and paper objects, and the rest are original photographs that Patterson made specifically for the photobook.[431]

The photographs in the latter group, which consists of Patterson's own photographs, re-enact historicised techniques, genres, styles, and motifs drawn from various photographic fields, such as photojournalism, forensics, advertising, art, the law, archival science, and the cinema. However, the photographer does not provide information on the source or origin of any particular photograph. Therefore, readers cannot be entirely sure whether they are looking at a reproduction or at one of Patterson's original photographs when leafing through *Redheaded Peckerwood*.

While the photobook's pages are unpaginated, a linear movement through the work suggests a loose correspondence between the photobook and the chronology of the underlying historical events. Still, each photograph holds merely an elusive and enigmatic relationship with the case, which the captions contribute to. Patterson himself has thus compared *Redheaded*

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[428] Op. cit., iv.
[429] Newton, *Waste Land*, 346.
[430] Daniel Augschöll and Anya Jasbar, 'Interview with Christian Patterson', Ahorn Magazine, no. 9 (2012), http://www.ahornmagazine.com/issue_9/interview_patterson/interview_patterson.html (accessed 15 January 2019).
[431] See: Karen Irvine's untitled essay in the unpaginated essay booklet that accompanies Patterson's *Redheaded Peckerwood*.

Peckerwood with Dennis Wheatley and J. G. Links' equally mysterious 1930s Crime Dossier parlour games.[432] These games were produced as cardboard folders reminiscent of detectives' files, and contained cryptic collections of texts, pictures, and physical clues that the players were invited to decipher in order to solve fictional crimes.[433]

As a visual analogy, the comparison between *Redheaded Peckerwood* and the Crime Dossiers is apt, and several commentators have hence reproduced it in articles on Patterson's photobook.[434] But conceptually, the work is clearly more similar to Truman Capote's 1965 'non-fiction' novel *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences*, which it has also been compared with on several occasions.[435] Like *In Cold Blood* does, Patterson's photobook also refers to real murders. And this reference to reality charges the work's contents very differently from how the fictional crimes of the Crime Dossier parlour games are charged, even though the Starkweather homicides are already solved and the killers tried for their crimes.

Not even the comparison with true crime novels like *In Cold Blood* does entirely capture Patterson's project. The true crime genre lays claim to documentary truth and a correspondence between the elements in the book and the actual underlying events. *Redheaded Peckerwood*, however, does not suggest a similar level of realism as the true crime genre does, since Patterson openly draws from the visual languages of fiction and from traditional documentary styles. Rather than a classic documentary, I argue that what we have is thus a work that mirrors how information technology makes all kinds of data available on the same level, without apparent hierarchy and without the possibility for immediate verification of the elements' truth.

More than anything, I contend, *Redheaded Peckerwood* resembles the results of a Google image search or 'a random collection of images thrown together on a Facebook page', as Gerry Badger puts it.[436] Like Google, Patterson's photobook brings pre-existing cultural objects and figures into a new constellation, without consideration for each elements' source. And I contend that the artistic tendency that Nicolas Bourriaud, in 2002, referred to as the 'art

[432] Sean O'Hagan, 'Christian Patterson goes on the Trail of America's Natural Born Killers', *The Guardian*, 1 December 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/dec/01/christian-patterson-photos-redheaded-peckerwood (accessed 17 December 2018).
[433] Fig. 3.2.
[434] Jörg M. Colberg, 'A Conversation with Christian Patterson', Conscientious Photography Magazine, 30 April 2013, http://cphmag.com/a-conversation-with-christian-patterson/ (accessed 5 January 2018).
[435] See for example: Jacob Pastrovich, 'Christian Patterson by Jacob Pastrovich', *Bomb Magazine*, 18 March 2013, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/christian-patterson/ (accessed 8 January 2018) and Erin Kelly, 'The Chilling Images in Christian Patterson's "*Redheaded Peckerwood*"', All That's Interesting, 31 August 2013, https://allthatsinteresting.com/christian-patterson-redheaded-peckerwood (accessed 15 January 2019).
[436] Badger, 'It's All Fiction', 33.

of postproduction', thus appears as the most appropriate reference for Patterson's work.[437] The term 'postproduction' refers to an artistic tendency that emerged in the early 1990s as a response to the development of the World Wide Web, with exponents such as Pierre Huyghe, Maurizio Cattelan, Gabriel Orozco, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft, and Liam Gillick.

Bourriaud argues that postproductive artists are comparable by the way they turn production into a form of consumption by remixing pre-existing cultural forms into new constellations that mirror the increasing cultural chaos of the information age. [438] That description fits well with *Redheaded Peckerwood* too. And Bourriaud's description of postproductive art's ideal of digital sharing does the same. Indeed, without informing his readers of the origins of any particular element, Patterson – like the artists discussed by Bourriaud – unashamedly reproduces historicized styles, motives, and techniques associated with various photographic fields, as well as actual photographs, without informing his readers of the origins of any particular element.[439]

Framing and navigation

Redheaded Peckerwood's most salient feature is the myriad frames that proliferate throughout the photobook, such as window frames ('House at Night', 'Death Figure', 'Curtains for You'),[440] door frames ('*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar', 'Broken Home', 'Broken-Down Door', 'Store Door'),[441] and picture frames and drawn frames ('Burned-Out Room', 'Caril Ann (Captured)', 'Charlie's Bloody Ear', 'Sheriff Heflin', 'Sisters Kissing').[442] I contend that these myriad frames metaphorically point to the way in which Patterson's remixing of historicised material, styles, motives, and techniques makes us aware of how our experience of photographs relies on such sets of cultural conventions that are known as frames within sociology.[443]

A 'frame', according to sociologist Erving Goffman's 1974 *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, is a set of conventions that governs events and phenomena and how we engage with them, such as media, advertising, and religion. Frames are valuable in the sense that they allow subjects to make sense of complex information by directing perception

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[437] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005).
[438] Op. cit., 13.
[439] Op. cit., 86–89.
[440] Fig. 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5.
[441] Fig. 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, and 3.9 (recto).
[442] Fig. 3.10, 3.11 (verso), 3.12, 3.13, and 3.14.
[443] The photographs in *Redheaded Peckerwood* are referred to by their captions throughout the chapter. The captions are mainly provided in the main text, but sometimes in parentheses.

and suggesting forms of interpretation. Yet as such they are also highly selective and differential, and an instalment of a frame necessarily delegitimises other equally valid frames.[444]

The meaning of the term 'frame' is related to the meaning of the word 'context', which refers to the circumstances that form the setting for an object or event. But while the context can be entirely abstract, the frame is a specific and immediate kind of context that encompasses not only the representational structure that the event relies on, but also the event's material properties.[445] When we open *Redheaded Peckerwood* and start considering the visually diverse photographs it contains, we become acutely aware of how the work offers more than just one frame in light of which to read the photobook's account of the Starkweather case. Therefore, I argue that that the criminal case as such serves a more wide-ranging reflection on the frames that govern the cultural representation of the spree, even though the Starkweather murder spree is *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s undisputable centre of narrative gravity.

Considering its relatively recent publication, *Redheaded Peckerwood* has received massive attention from reviewers and photography commentators. Nonetheless, Emma Bennett's 'Photographically Unconcealing the Crimes: Christian Patterson's *Redheaded Peckerwood* and Heidegger's *Aletheia*' is to date the only scholarly article to thoroughly analyse Patterson's work.[446] Like me, Bennett acknowledges that by centring on the historical case, *Redheaded Peckerwood* serves as a reflection on how our experiences of photographs are conditioned by frames. She describes the relationship between photographs and frames like this:

> However little distortion it displays, a photograph is always a specific framing of a specific moment, excluding other framings and moments. It is by thus framing the world that the photograph presents an image: the photograph encloses its subject-matter in order to disclose its particular view.[447]

For Bennett, the frame provides a static grid in light of which readers can understand the particular photograph's level of *truth*, which she conceives as *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s primary theme.[448] Still, she does not consider the way in which *Redheaded Peckerwood*, as a

[444] Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 10–11.
[445] Monica Westin, 'Keyword: Frame (2)', The Chicago School of Media Theory, https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/frame-2/ (accessed 11 January 2018).
[446] Emma Bennett, 'Photographically Unconcealing the Crimes: Christian Patterson's *Redheaded Peckerwood* and Heidegger's *Aletheia*', *Philosophy of Photography* 4, no. 1 (2013): 47–71.
[447] Op. cit., 67.
[448] According to Bennett, *Redheaded Peckerwood* suggests that a straightforward notion of the photograph's transparency to the world is insufficient to explain photography's truth, which comes closer to Heidegger's notion of truth as a process of 'unconcealing'.

photobook network, invites an emergent process of rereading, which allows readers to encounter different reconfigurations of the same frames during their interaction with the photobook. As a result, Bennett ignores how the frames Patterson's photobook invites us to use in considering the photographs' relation to the murder case cannot be conceived as static elements.

This emergent conception of the frame is what I, for a twofold reason, seek to demonstrate in the current chapter. First, because attention to the frame's emergent character leads to a conception of Patterson's photobook that challenges Emma Bennett's conception of *Redheaded Peckerwood* as a reflection on the photograph's documentary dimension. Second, because attention to the frame's emergent character allows me to test this thesis's overall hypothesis regarding perception of structural unity in photobooks: that such perceptions result from emergent patterns that unfold in and by rereading.

In the case of *Redheaded Peckerwood,* the process of rereading relies extensively on cultural agency. This reliance, which is the focus of the present chapter, is a consequence of the post-digital situation that the work comes out of, which – in this case – encodes a process of rereading that extends across the World Wide Web's vast cultural network of nodes and links. The notion of the 'post-digital' refers to the period that followed the 2010 smartphone revolution, whereby most people became able to share the possibility for constant digital connection.[449] Within this situation, people have become used to meeting uncertainty with immediate Web searches on smartphones and tablets. I contend that *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s contextual sparseness and enigmatic take on the Starkweather case presuppose this habit, and that the work thus conceptualises extensive Web searches as an integrated part of its very definition.

According to Bourriaud, the artworks that result from postproductive methods cannot be considered as the endpoints of creative processes, but rather as portals that imply an active form of readerly activity that he compares with online navigation.[450] Like postproductive artworks, I claim that the network of visually diverse photographs that are juxtaposed within the covers of *Redheaded Peckerwood* encourages a form of active readerly engagement. However, while online navigation is merely an analogy for the reading processes that Bourriaud

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[449] Cramer, 'What is "Post-digital"?'.
[450] Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, 19.

addressed in 2002, I contend that actual online navigation is a fundamental premise for the reader's repetitive interaction with *Redheaded Peckerwood*.[451]

Interestingly, Bennett provides multiple references to online interviews with Christian Patterson. She also refers to supplementary 'research' activity that she assumedly conducted online, in order to detect how the various frames that the work invites allow particular aspects of the Starkweather case to come forth.[452] Nonetheless, she explicitly defines the work as the outcome of the relationship between the physical photobook object and the reader's shifting positions within it.[453] And since she considers the online searches that *Redheaded Peckerwood* invites as external to the work's constitution, Bennett states that readers without prior knowledge of the Starkweather case experience Patterson's work 'in a state of naivety'.[454] However, I claim that people rarely experience *anything* in a state of naivety in the current 'post-digital' era, and not photobooks.

To engage in a photobook is an intimate and generally slow-paced affair that requires a high degree of performativity on the part of the reader in order to establish meaningful connections between its various elements. This requirement for readerly participation implies that the process of rereading both historical and contemporary photobooks might easily be supplemented by online searches. This was the case when I reread both Schorr's and Goldin's photobooks in the first and second chapters of this thesis. Still, these former forays across the World Wide Web led me quite rapidly back to the space between the photobook and the reader, while the searches that I performed when rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood* did not.

Actually, the process of rereading Patterson's work extends across the Web to such a degree that I contend that the larger part of the system's nodes is encountered online, that is, within a digital realm that – like *Redheaded Peckerwood* itself – is constantly changing and expanding. In *Redheaded Peckerwood*, the artwork's limits are thus at stake because of Patterson's conceptualisation of online searches as an integrated dimension of the network. That is, they are at stake because the results of online searches are governed by algorithms readers cannot control, even while the readers decide on the terms they type into the search field in order to understand the connection between the work and the Starkweather myth.

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[451] In the artworld, the concept 'Post Internet' tends to be coined as a description of artworks that are about the effects of the Internet on aesthetics, culture, and society. Patterson's work is not so much 'about' the Internet. Instead, I argue, *Redheaded Peckerwood* is fundamentally reliant on a contemporary condition where readers are generally immersed in a digital sphere through the Internet.
[452] Bennett, 'Photographically Unconcealing the Crimes', 58.
[453] Op. cit., 53.
[454] Op. cit., 52–53.

Since the process of rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood* is partially governed by algorithms, the reader cannot entirely control it. Still, this uncontrollability does not lead to a situation of total entropy whereby the work thus becomes indistinguishable from its cultural context. No matter how far the rereading process ventures into the World Wide Web's gargantuan network of connections, I argue that the process is held in check by a memetic principle of rereading that allows the reader to encounter the same frames, and thus the Starkweather case, in multiple different forms.

A memetic principle of rereading

Darwin's theory of natural selection suggests a mechanism for evolution without a designer. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins's 1976 *The Selfish Gene* expands the use of Darwin's principle of evolution to genetic transmission, which he thus considers as a 'selfish' process that carries itself out with necessity, whether transmission is beneficial to the gene's host or not. Interestingly, within the context of this thesis, is the fact that he extends the same evolutionary mechanism to the cultural realm too, where he proposes that it governs the transmission of what he calls 'memes', and thus the evolution of the human brain.[455]

The term 'meme' is modelled on the Ancient Greek concept 'mimeme', which means to 'imitate' or 'mime'. The term refers to cultural units that spread from person to person through a process of imitation, often via technologies such as computers, books, and paintings.[456] The concept of the 'meme' can thus refer to all kinds of recognisable cultural entities that are passed on, no matter their size and complexity.[457] To paraphrase psychologist Susan Blackmore: if you hum the famous first notes of Beethoven's *Fifth* in an elevator, and thus infect one of your fellow passengers with them, that is a meme. But if you buy your friend a ticket to hear the whole symphony in a concert hall, whereupon she enthusiastically plays the entire piece to another friend on her home stereo, the whole composition is a meme.[458] And, I add, the symphony still counts as a meme if humankind has collectively forgotten it, as long as it is stored somewhere.[459]

Memes, as Dawkins explains, are 'units of convenience', rather than stable structures. Like genes, they can incorporate smaller units within themselves, and form complexes within

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[455] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 206.
[456] Ibid.
[457] Op. cit., 210.
[458] Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 53–54.
[459] Op. cit., 210.

which the component units mutually reinforce each other's survival and propagation.[460] Within our shared culture, myriad such memes compete with each other to get into our brains, which is the condition for their survival.[461] While I describe memes as competing with each other, this does not, however, mean that memes are conscious, purposeful agents in the way that humans are. It merely means that memes copy themselves if they can, in a process that humans cannot entirely control.[462]

Consider for example the way in which a hit song that plays repeatedly on the radio might stick in your brain and make you hum it distractedly on your way to work, although you find the melody annoying and the lyrics outright chauvinistic.[463] Or think about how certain diets become fads, although they are clearly harmful. Without our being fully aware of it, memes might turn us into vehicles for their replication, and memetic transmission is thus analogue to Dawkins's conception of 'selfish' genetic transmission.

Despite the analogy with genetic transmission, the process of memetic imitation is, however, not the particulate, all-or-none transmission that we have with genes. When we imitate a meme, as Dawkins explains, the meme tends to combine with other memes or to otherwise mutate.[464] One example could be the so-called 'gestural brush stroke' typical of abstract expressionist paintings. Each particular stroke is indeed different, yet on one level all strokes are recognizable as the same; otherwise they would not have been versions of the same meme. This quality of imitation through variation, which is characteristic of the meme, implies that it must be considered as a fundamentally emergent figure.[465]

The recently emerging field of 'memetics', the study of memes, seeks to answer the question of what it is that allows certain memes to occupy people's attention more successfully than other memes. According to Davi Johnson, prominent scholars in the field propose that the meme's success does not have to do with truth, but with two other things. The first of these is

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[460] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 209–212.
[461] Op. cit., 211.
[462] Op. cit., 210.
[463] Given Dawkins's reliance on the comparison between memetic transmission and biological processes of gene transmission and evolution, his original definition of the term was associated only with unintentional forms of human agency. Like Susan Blackmore, I shall, however, delimit the analogy between genes and memes to a shared principle of Darwinian replication. Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, 66.
[464] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 209.
[465] My conception of the meme as an emergent figure is supported by Dawkins's indication of an alternative etymology for the term, which relates it to the French term 'même'. 'Même' means 'same', and the indicated connection to the meme thus points to the latter's reproductive quality. However, since 'même' is also the second part of French personal pronouns, the same root also indicates that imitation is not to be conceived of as a one-to-one process, but rather as an emergent form of reproduction that allows for variation between each particular example of the same meme. That conception of the meme is also supported by Dawkins's indication of a link between the meme and 'memory', if we consider the latter to be an emergent figure prone to constant variation, as I did in the preceding chapter of this thesis. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 206.

the meme's psychological appeal.[466] While this appeal obviously varies from one context to another, the most common topics for searches on the World Wide Web indicate that humans are generally drawn to sex, food, and fighting.[467] This attraction suggests that people will *want* to copy a certain meme if it is related to either sex, food, or fighting, and that it is hence more likely to replicate successfully than are memes unrelated to these three factors. And the more people that copy the meme, the more people will be exposed to it, and the chances that it will catch on will thus increase exponentially.

According to Johnson, the other thing that increases the meme's capacity for effective circulation is ambiguity.[468] When there is more than one way to understand a cultural unit, people spend more time contemplating it, thus increasing the chances that people will remember it, and hence pass it on to others. Furthermore, ambiguity makes the meme flexible and adaptable to multiple situations of use, thus also increasing its chances for successful replication in other contexts than the original one.[469] However, as Johnson makes clear, ambiguity only ensures success to a certain point. Like a teenage fashion item that suddenly catches on among members of the parental generation, the meme loses its appeal if its ubiquity becomes too pervasive.[470]

I argue that *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s reflection on the frames that govern the representation of historical events – in this case, the Starkweather murder spree – unfolds according to an emergent principle that is analogue to the dissemination of memes. Speaking about this emergent principle, which I refer to as a 'memetic principle of rereading', I consider the overall photobook network as a competitive environment analogue to the human brain, and the frames that strive against each other to achieve hegemony over our conception of the work as memes.

What provides the photobook network with structural unity, despite its extension across the immense World Wide Web, is the way in which these frames repeat themselves by variation when we search within *Redheaded Peckerwood* and online in order to grasp how the photobook relates to the Starkweather murder case. Within each frame, several smaller memetic units do, however, replicate with a similar level of variation as the more expansive frames do. And while I refer to these smaller cultural figures as memes too, I conceive of their replication as sub-

[466] Davi Johnson, 'Mapping the Meme: A Geographical Approach to Materialist Rhetorical Criticism', *Materialist Rhetorical Criticism, Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2007): 42.
[467] Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, 217.
[468] Johnson, 'Mapping the Meme', 42.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Ibid.

processes, in the sense that they merely support the constitution of the frame*s* that *Redheaded Peckerwood* revolves around.

Since Patterson's photobook suggests multiple equally valid frames in light of which we might understand the Starkweather case, I argue that which particular frame eventually establishes hegemony over particular readers' conception of the work depends on what they – consciously or unconsciously – find most appealing in their current situation. Different readers thus choose to approach the work, and hence the criminal case, in light of different frames. Still, the effects of their choices are the same: they ignore other and less interesting frames, even if these other frames allow for equally truthful representations of the case.

With the most appealing frame as their point of departure, readers embark on their online search for links that connect the photographs in the photobook with the Starkweather case. While it is the readers that decide which terms to type into the search field, they do not control the results that the Web provides them with. And usually, searches do not return just one, but rather multiple results that might all point towards a connection between *Redheaded Peckerwood* and the Starkweather case. However, if the chosen frame is appealing, I contend that readers will unconsciously choose to go further with the result that fits best into the already-selected frame, which will thus repeat itself. And if the frame retains its appeal, this process can happen several times, and the same frame will thus repeat itself more than once.

There is, of course, a level of variation that distinguishes the readers' various encounters with the same frames from each other. But as long as these various encounters are recognisable as versions of the same frame, they support the same version of the Starkweather case. At certain stages of the readers' interaction with the photobook, the frame will, however, no longer lead to more information on the Starkweather case and thus gradually loses its appeal. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the reader abandons the frame altogether.

If the frame is appealing, we unconsciously seek to retain it as a grid for our interaction with the work, and thus for our conception of the criminal case. And if the frame is not just appealing, but also ambiguous, we have the possibility to do that. That is because ambiguity allows for a reconfiguration of the frame that makes it relevant for whole new sets of search results or nodes, which we might encounter in the photobook or online. This reconfiguration of the frame is radical, and thus it requires us to reread the Starkweather case. And this requirement speaks to an emergent conception of the frame, and of the historical events that it represents.

Eventually, even the most appealing and ambiguous frame does, however, lose its grip on the readers' imagination. At one point or another, the frame becomes too expansive. And when the frame can mean nearly anything, it tends to become uninteresting. This, however,

does not imply that we have reached the network's outer borders, but rather that we have arrived at the starting point of another of the network's contours. The exhaustion of one frame – after a longer or shorter time, and after a varying number of mutations – leads to it being replaced by another frame, which is, however, prone to travel according to the same memetic principle of rereading. And given the predictability of that memetic principle, I argue that readers are allowed to experience a pattern that provides *Redheaded Peckerwood* with structural unity. And that pattern carries a reflection on how frames and the historical events they represent spread within a nation's collective imagination.

Reframing history

The last photograph in *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s three-picture introduction is captioned '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar'.[471] It appears as a classical documentary photograph in black-and-white, showing an underground storm shelter from the outside. The most interesting aspect of the photograph is, for me, its function within a visual structure that stacks three material frames on top of each other: the wooden door frame that the photograph represents, the thick white frame that supports the photographic entity, and the even thicker white frame that surrounds the photograph on the page. The reason why I am intrigued by this visual structure is that it reads as a particularly explicit illustration of the way in which frames compete and replicate during the readers' interaction with *Redheaded Peckerwood*, according to a memetic principle of rereading.

A structure that supports the entrance to an architectural construction might be referred to as a 'frontispiece'.[472] The photograph's caption, '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar', might thus be considered as a reference to the wooden door frame that occupies the photograph's centre, where it creates a 'repoussoir' effect that draws the readers' eyes towards the disorderly inside of the storm cellar. That architectural frame is, however, doubled by the thin white frame that runs around the photographic entity, which redefines the visual field. In light of this second frame, the readers' eyes no longer centre on the barely visible furniture in the storm cellar, but on the photographic structure that governs the representation of that motif.

There is, however, also a third frame that strives against the other two in order to achieve hegemony over the readers' conception of the visual field that presents itself in relation to the caption '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar'. This third frame is constituted by the unprinted and thick

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[471] Fig. 3.6.
[472] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Frontispiece, *n.*'. 1989,
http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/74941?rskey=O6wFoj&result=1#eid (accessed 15 January 2019).

white border of the page that supports both the architectural frame and the photograph's frame, and lodges them within a more expansive visual context equal to that of the photobook itself. That framing of the visual field is also supported by the caption's reference to a frontispiece. For while the term could be read as a reference to the wooden frame seen in the photograph, it can also be conceived of as a reference to the photograph's proximate position in relation to the photobook's title page, and thus to its location within a photographic sequence.[473]

Within '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar', the simultaneous presence of an architectural frame, the photograph's frame, and the frame that surrounds the photographic entity suggests three competing and equally valid ways of delimiting the readers' field of vision. Readers cannot take all these three frames into account simultaneously, and since they are all valid, it seems reasonable to argue, in line with memetic theory, that they focus on the one they find most appealing. The material frames that appear in relation to the caption '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' thus exemplify a desire-driven, rather than rational selective mechanism that synthesises *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s overall mode of functioning. That is, the material frames exemplify how the readers, at all stages of their interaction with the photobook, choose more or less consciously between a range of available frames. And since these frames might all lead to valid conceptions of the Starkweather myth, that choice is primarily governed by each frame's individual appeal to the readers.

Since the cinematic frame is the frame that appealed most strongly to me, it came to dominate my conception of *Redheaded Peckerwood*. In the following and last part of the current chapter, I shall thus trace my repeated encounters with the cinematic frame during the process of rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood*. But before I start tracing this particular frame, I will outline how my exploration of *Redheaded Peckerwood* evolved from my initial interest in '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar'. That is, how it evolved from an interest triggered by the photograph's appealingly complex material construction.

Pondering the material structure of the page that Patterson presents under the caption '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar', I ultimately found myself engaged in extensive online searches for a relationship between the photograph of the storm shelter and the Starkweather case. No matter how intensely I stared into the cellar's opening through the wooden frame at the photograph's centre, I discerned nothing but a few overturned chairs and some scattered sheets of paper. And this contextual sparseness, which the photograph's caption did not remedy, encouraged me to search the Web for clues about how to read the photograph.

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[473] Ibid.

Given *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s reliance on the Starkweather case, I immediately assumed that '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' is a crime-scene photograph taken by a detective or by a forensic technician on one of the murder sites. My first online searches were thus conducted in relation to a forensic frame. These searches revealed that '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' is a photograph of the storm cellar where the bodies of Starkweather victims Robert Jensen and Carol King were found, since I discovered another photograph of what seems to be the same storm cellar, with Jensen's dead body.[474] This discovery confirmed my initial experience of Patterson's photograph as a reproduction of a piece of evidence, while also suggesting that quite a few of the photobook's other photographs are the same (such as the inserted postcard, and such as 'Confession Letter' and 'The Election is Over', which all appear as reproductions of original, weathered documents).[475] However, my online searches also suggested other frames in light of which to approach *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s representation of the Starkweather case.

In addition to the information on Jensen and King, which confirmed the forensic frame as an appropriate framework for my conception of '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar', my online searches resulted in a photograph that shows a group of photographers who point their cameras into the same storm cellar.[476] The photographers capture the scene from a similar perspective as the one that we find reproduced in '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar', which suggests that the photograph in *Redheaded Peckerwood* is the result of one of the photographers' work. This possibility suggests a reading of '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' in light of a journalistic frame that leads to a conception of Patterson's picture as a press photograph. That narrative seems to be supported by several photographs in the photobook that either show journalists, or that refer to their role in the investigation and murder trial (such as the inserted postcard, and the photographs that are captioned 'The Press' and 'Emotions').[477]

Further online searches also revealed a relationship between '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' and a selection of photographs of similar architectural constructions in the geographical area where the Starkweather homicides took place.[478] These photographs are not limited to one style, yet they might all be said to support a geographical framing of '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' as a topographical index of the so-called 'Tornado Alley': the arid and storm-ridden landscape that threw Starkweather's family into poverty and thus nurtured his growing feeling of

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[474] Fig. 3.15.
[475] Fig. 3.16 and 3.17 (paper object inserted between pages).
[476] Fig. 3.18.
[477] Fig. 3.19, 3.20, and 3.21 (recto).
[478] Fig. 3.22.

alienation. [479] That framing of the relationship between the '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' photograph and the murder case also seems to be supported by a range of other photographs in Patterson's photobook, such as '24th Street Road (Road at Night)', 'Landscape on Fire', and 'Prairie Grass Swirl'. [480]

The forensic-, journalistic- and geographical frames all appeared as valid entries into '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar', and thereby into *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s story of the Starkweather homicides. The memetic association that appeared most appealing to me during my searches for a connection between the photograph in the photobook and the murder case, however, manifested itself on the basis of a movie still from American film director Jules Dassin's 1948 film noir *The Naked City*. The movie still is conducted in a similar black-and-white style as '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' is, and it shows a similar storm cellar. But where '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' is taken from a position outside, the movie still is taken from the inside and shows the body of a criminal played by Ted de Corsia, who is about to enter. [481] And this is where I too – though unknowingly at that first stage of the process of rereading – entered into the cinematic frame that increasingly came to claim hegemony over my conception of the Starkweather events.

In the following, I shall trace this cinematic frame, which appears in four different guises during the memetic act of rereading, before finally losing its appeal. Within the analysis of *Redheaded Peckerwood*, I shall repeatedly refer to unverified online information. Some readers might find such references speculative and un-academic, yet I contend that this approach follows from the work's reliance on extensive navigation within the World Wide Web's post-factual realm. Before I begin, I shall also ask the readers to keep in mind that a similar plethora of competing frames appear at all stages of the rereading process, as they did during my initial searches for a link between the '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' photograph and the Starkweather case. But due to spatial limitations, I shall describe only the results that support a memetic rereading of the Starkweather case in light of the cinematic frame, which I initially conceive of as a reference to American film noir.

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[479] Wikipedia, 'Tornado Alley', 6 January 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tornado_Alley (accessed 15 January 2019).
[480] Fig. 3.23, 3.24, and 3.25.
[481] Fig. 3.26.

I: The film noir

The term 'film noir' refers to a particular kind of Hollywood crime drama that explores the dark sides of human psychology, and that emphasises cynical attitudes, feelings of estrangement, and sexual motivations. The classical period of film noir extends from the early 1940s to the late 1950s, which was a time of great unease in the United States. Society was attempting to readjust to the post-war era's redefined political and social climate, [482] and film noir's characteristic aesthetic, which includes high-key lighting, deep focus, dark shadows, silhouettes, disorienting 'mise-en-scènes', vertiginous angles, and extreme close-ups,[483] seems to be expressive of this disquieting post-war situation.

In the 1930s, the use of flashbulbs, new kinds of cameras, and faster shutter speeds allowed newspaper photographers to capture the dark underbelly of the city during night, resulting in a particular style and subject matter that greatly influenced the film noir.[484] No photographer is more representative of this form of tabloid photography than Arthur 'Weegee' Fellig, who influenced Dassin directly through his 1945 photobook *Naked City*. Weegee's photobook, which compiles a series of New York crime scene photographs, provided Dassin with inspiration for the style, setting, and contents of his depiction of a police investigation that followed the murder of a young woman in New York City.

The visual unfolding of *The Naked City*'s plot is accompanied by the disembodied voice of producer Mark Hellinger, who wraps it up with this iconic line: 'There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them'.[485] Similarly, *Redheaded Peckerwood* carries the potential for numerous versions of the Starkweather story – far too many for anyone to tell them all. And the film noir frame allows one of these stories to unfold by drawing a range of pictures external to the photobook into the network.

With my recognition of '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' as a memetic equivalent to the still from Dassin's *The Naked City*, several of the photobook's other black-and-white photographs, conducted in a similar style and with a similarly sinister mood, reappear for my inner eye. Patterson's telling 'You Know Who',[486] which shows a window with those same words pasted

[482] Unnamed author, 'The Postwar Period Through the 1950s', *Encyclopedia of American Social History*, eds. Mary Kupiec Cayton et al., Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/BT2313026907/UHIC?u=sain62671&xid=1535711f (accessed 22 January 2018).

[483] Campany, Photography and Cinema, 141.

[484] J. I. Bake, 'How Tabloids Inspired Film Noir', LIFE Books, 31 August 2016, http://time.com/4460487/tabloids-film-noir/ (accessed 11 January 2018).

[485] Wikipedia, 'The Naked City', 3 November 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Naked_City (accessed 15 January 2019).

[486] Fig. 3.27.

onto it, provides a noir-like and chilling feeling of approaching danger. The dark shadows that cover the grounds of a country road in *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s 'Shady Lane (Meyer Farm)' become a foreshadowing of Starkweather victim August Meyer's death. [487] A bedroom destroyed by fire in the photograph captioned 'Burned-Out Room' mirrors the raw crime scenes that appear in film noirs of the time. [488] And several other photographs in the photobook memetically reproduce the particular aesthetics of film noir, which tends to read as shorthand for the film noir itself.

In light of the film noir frame, the historical events of the Starkweather case come across as the downwards-spiralling plot characteristic of the genre. That plot structure mirrors a particularly American form of existentialism that gained ground in the 1950s, a form based on the idea that life has no meaning or purpose, or any given morality, and that one is therefore left to exercise the principle of free will.[489] Yet this perspective also implied that one had to accept the consequences of every decision made, rather than blaming misfortunes on something like 'the system' or somebody else. And in the film noir, this interlinking of sin and punishment is conventionalised in multiple films where we see how one bad decision can get out of control.[490]

Dassin's first film noir, *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1941), is based on Edgar Allan Poe's novel with the same title. Dassin's film is representative of the film noir's downwards-spiralling plot. The film centres on a murder that was not conducted for pleasure or money, but rather was triggered by emotional and verbal abuse over several years, until the victim was no longer able to take it. Yet his decision to kill the offender leads the film's protagonist into a spiral of guilt that ultimately makes him confess his crime to the police, whereupon he receives his due punishment.

One of *The Tell-Tale Heart*'s most iconic frames shows a close-up of the protagonist's ear as he hears the phantom heartbeats of the man he has murdered.[491] That picture establishes a memetic relationship between the frame that shows the protagonist's ear and the photograph in *Redheaded Peckerwood* that is captioned 'Charlie's Bloody Ear'.[492] The latter photograph was assumedly taken directly after his capture, and it shows the back of Starkweather's head and bloody earlobe. In the context of the film noir frame, the black-and-white style of the

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[487] Fig. 3.28 (recto).
[488] Fig. 3.10.
[489] Shanovitz, 'Introduction to film – Genre Study I. Film Noir', 13 November 2014,
https://www.slideshare.net/shanovitz/introduction-to-film-genre-study-1-film-noir (accessed 11 January 2018).
[490] Ibid.
[491] Fig. 3.29.
[492] Fig. 3.12.

photograph reads as a take on the film noir aesthetic and the close-up of the back of the murderer's head and his earlobe as a memetic reproduction of one particular movie frame from *The Tell-Tale Heart*. This connection suggests a reading of Starkweather as the tormented victim of his own actions in the sense that one bad decision – the murder and robbery of his first victim, gas station attendant Robert Colvert – led him into a killing spree that he found himself unable to stop.

Starkweather's killing spree, as does the protagonist's doomed trajectory in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, ends in a confrontation with the police. This confrontation is what we apparently see in 'Charlie's Bloody Ear'. The photograph shows a police officer, towering up in front of the stubby murderer, as an incarnation of his awaiting punishment. The photograph demonstrates how '[y]ou can't run away from anything', as Fugate allegedly said upon their capture.[493] This demonstration leads me to the photograph Patterson has titled 'You Can't Run Away from Anything (Tire)',[494] which doubles the typical film noir fatalism and existential bitterness of Fugate's phrase by allying it with a tire. That is, by allying the phrase with a circular figure that reads as a pun on the saying that 'what goes around comes around', which means that you get what you deserve.[495]

During my online investigation of the relationship between a set of tropes associated with the film noir and the 1957/58 murder case, I discover that Starkweather insisted on being tried in his hometown rather than in Wyoming, where he was captured. Thereby, he might unknowingly have signed his own death sentence. While Wyoming Governor Milward Simpson was a staunch death-penalty opponent, Nebraskan authorities were not, and uncompromisingly sentenced Starkweather to death by the electric chair. On 25 June 1959, the police deputies led Starkweather to his destiny,[496] thus confirming the necessary relationship between punishment and sin that is staged in the film noir.

Converse County Sheriff Earl Heflin, the police officer who led the hunt for the killers and the investigation of the case, represents the punishment that Starkweather and Fugate duly received. According to online searches, Sheriff Heflin was the one who stopped Starkweather's

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[493] Transformer Station, Checklist, https://www.transformerstation.org/downloads-2/files/Checklist.pdf (accessed 29 January 2019).

[494] Fig. 3.30.

[495] *Merriam-Webster*, 'What goes around comes around, idiom', https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/what%20goes%20around%20comes%20around (accessed 21 January 2019).

[496] Lesley Wischmann, 'The Killing Spree that Transfixed a Nation: Charles Starkweather and Caril Fugate, 1958', Wyohistory.org, https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/killing-spree-transfixed-nation-charles-starkweather-and-caril-fugate-1958 (accessed 8 January 2018).

escape, by firing his gun out the window of the police car.[497] Afterwards, Heflin is said to have remarked scornfully that the reason Starkweather stopped was that he noticed the drops of blood on his earlobe and assumed he was bleeding to death. Thereby, the sheriff describes the prisoner as a coward, stating that the story describes 'the kind of yellow son of a bitch he is'.[498] Yet simultaneously, he portrays himself as a rough and uncompromising lawman. That portrayal, and the verbal wit that Heflin's comment exemplifies,[499] is adaptable to a reading of the sheriff as the hard-boiled detective hero who is a conventional character in classical film noirs such as *The Naked City*.[500]

In the photobook, Heflin is pictured in a black-and-white photograph captioned 'Sheriff Heflin',[501] where he poses in typical film noir fashion as a lone figure behind a desk with a cigarette in his mouth and a telephone in his hand. The telephone, another common film noir prop, allows for a technical connection between the police detective and his witnesses. Nonetheless, the hard-boiled hero remains an alienated figure, and while the telephone provides him with other people's information, he must process that information on his own.[502] In the context of the film noir frame, Sheriff Heflin's gesture of putting a telephone to his ear – the ear thus appearing as a thrice-repeated meme – engenders a reading of him as a figure for isolation and estrangement.

The feeling of isolation is representative of the film noir, but also of a more general sense of estrangement that ran through post-war American society. Given the existential perspective that underpinned post-war society in the United States, people tended to see themselves as individual beings forced to create their own selves bit by bit. And this pressure resulted in feelings of futility and estrangement that fed into an already-rising feeling of alienation that came from industrialisation and the development of mass society.[503]

Charles Starkweather might be conceived of as the doomed villain, and Sheriff Heflin as the hard-boiled police detective of the film noir. Moreover, *Redheaded Peckerwood* allows for a reading of Caril Ann Fugate as a film noir character. In classical film noir, the villain tends

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[497] Anthony Galvin, *Old Sparky: The Electric Chair and the History of the Death Penalty* (New York: Carrel Books, 2015), https://books.google.no/books?id=ZduLDAAAQBAJ&pg=PT150&lpg=PT150&dq=sheriff+hefli n+shooting+out+of+window+starkweather&source=bl&ots=Z251pGpHTD&sig=32vu9o_oeqeYav2KdNhDIoY EpuE&hl=no&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjPxprltezYAhWLBSwKHSx5C48Q6AEIOTAH#v=onepage&q=sheriff%2 0heflin%20shooting%20out%20of%20window%20starkweather&f=false (accessed 20 January 2018).
[498] Wischmann, 'The Killing Spree that Transfixed a Nation'.
[499] Shanovitz, 'Introduction to film'.
[500] Ibid.
[501] Fig. 3.13.
[502] Götz Kihr, 'The Significance of the Telephone in Film Noir', Grin, 1998, https://www.grin.com/document/105375 (accessed 19 December 2017).
[503] Shanovitz, 'Introduction to Film'.

to be a male character. But the course towards his destiny tends to be the result not only of his own actions, but also of the manipulations of a female character known as a 'spider woman' or as a 'femme fatale'. Rather than the typically weak and supplemental female characters that are normative of Hollywood films of the same era, the femme fatale is a deadly, sexy, mysterious, duplicitous, double-crossing, predatory, tough-sweet, unreliable, irresponsible, and desperate figure that unlovingly entangles the masculine protagonist in her spider webs of deceit.[504]

The femme fatale is said to become a cultural figure in post-war film noir as the result of a particular historical situation. American women entered the workforce during the war, but they did not go quietly back to the kitchen when the war ended. Instead, they started to claim their rights and a place for themselves beyond the family home. This trend involved an emergent post-war feminist backlash that threatened the stability of sexual relationships and their inherently patriarchal biases, engendering a widespread feeling among husbands and sons that masculinity was under threat.[505] The conventional film noir character of the femme fatale seems to be representative of this situation, given her opposition to the female standard that conservative forces sought to preserve at the time.

At the beginning of film noirs, the viewer is typically tricked into adoring the femme fatale for her sexual appeal. Yet the conception of her as a simple prop for the male's benefit lasts only until she commits deeds that challenge the viewer's initial expectations of her as a compliant object for a male eye. In a well-known film noir by Tay Garnett, titled *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), the archetypically femme fatale character Cora Smith exhibits what Christine Gledhill describes as 'a remarkable series of unmotivated character switches and roles'.[506] In her introductory shot, she is seen as the desired object of male attraction, but also as a hard-working woman. And later, she is seen successively as a 'loving playmate in an adulterous relationship; a fearful girl in need of protection, [a] victim of male power; [a] hard, ruthless murderess; [and a] mother-to-be'. That is, she is seen according to the multiple roles and double roles typical of the femme fatale.[507]

Fugate's position between childhood and adolescence, and the uncertainty of her role as victim or offender, makes it plausible to read the fourteen-year-old Caril Ann Fugate as a femme fatale, that is, as an unpredictable female figure whose reckless manoeuvres and rapid switches between character roles led Starkweather into trouble. Patterson's photograph of Fugate's

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[504] Ibid.
[505] Wikipedia, 'Portrayal of Women in Film Noir', 30 October 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrayal_of_women_in_film_noir (accessed 11 January 2018).
[506] Ibid.
[507] Ibid.

grimacing face in the photo-booth portrait, captioned 'Caril Ann (Funny Face)',[508] speaks to this image of her as a scheming trickster who challenges conventional behaviour. The other photographs of her in the photobook demonstrate a similarly wide spectrum of roles as the one that Gledhill associates with the femme fatale, where Fugate's appearance ranges from the sweet smiling teenager that we see on the photobook's cover to the small-town child in 'Caril Ann (Captured)',[509] the loving sister in 'Sisters Kissing',[510] and the haughty sex bomb in 'Caril Ann (Tear-Stained)'.[511]

Fugate's roles as a version of the femme fatale is supported by the story of how she ran towards the police when captured, shouting that she had nothing to do with the killings and that she had been kidnapped by Starkweather. That is a version of the story that Starkweather initially confirmed, but that he later contested. The fact that his withdrawal of his first testimony followed after he discovered Fugate had refused to stand by him in court as his accomplice questions the veracity of his final testimony.[512] Actually, this fact suggests that Starkweather's final statement was fabricated in order to take revenge on his disloyal girlfriend. And this information raises the question of whether the jury was right in sentencing Fugate to life in prison.

When I type 'the postman always rings twice' into the search field online, I find that Cora ended up as the victim of the judicial system's misogynist prejudices against unpredictable and unconventional women like her.[513] My discovery of an imitational relationship between Fugate's posture in 'Caril Ann (Tear-Stained)' and a posture assumed by Cora in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* – where she similarly turns her body towards the camera, but her eyes away – suggests that Fugate was prejudged by the jury too.[514] They prejudged her perhaps for: her unwillingness to share the responsibility for the murders with her man; her unpredictable, yet typically girly character shifts (she was only fourteen at the time of the homicides); and her explorative personality, which opposed widely held conceptions of 'proper' forms of femininity.

In light of the conception of the cinematic frame as a meme configured by a range of cultural figures related to the film noir genre, the Starkweather case comes forth as a story of

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508 Fig. 3.31.
509 Fig. 3.1 and 3.11 (verso).
510 Fig. 3.14.
511 Fig. 3.21 (verso).
512 Wikipedia, 'Charles Starkweather', 18 January 2018,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Starkweather#Trial_and_execution (accessed 22 January 2018).
513 Wikipedia, 'Portrayal of Women in Film Noir', 30 October 2017,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrayal_of_women_in_film_noir (accessed 11 January 2018).
514 Fig. 3.32.

changing gender structures in the post-war era. This version of the story interestingly implies a conception of Charles Starkweather as the tormented victim of his own actions, rather than as a cold-blooded murderer, and a reading of Fugate as the victim of a patriarchal legal order. Still, this conception of their roles was to change during my continuing memetic interaction with *Redheaded Peckerwood*.

II: The staged narrative tableau

My methodological reliance on extensive Web searches might seem to involve a position of absolute readerly freedom. But this is not the case, as an analogy with computer games illustrates. In a computer game, players are often confronted with a number of optional routes, for example, a set of doors they must choose between. Although players can select freely whether to enter door number one or door number two, they cannot determine the outcome of their decisions, and the choices that follow from it. Similarly, I freely chose the terms I entered into the search field in order to discern how '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' relates to the Starkweather myth. Yet I did not control the results they generated, and thus did not control every aspect of my journey within and beyond *Redheaded Peckerwood*.

At the current stage of my rereading process, my online searches lead to Cindy Sherman's '# 4', '# 21', '# 27' and '# 53' from the series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977 – 1980).[515] These four photographs all come across as memetic adaptations of the film noir aesthetic, and they show the photographer herself ironically imitating the pose held by Fugate in 'Caril Ann (Tear-Stained)' and by Cora in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*: the curious way they both turn their cheeks towards the viewer while they stare at a point beyond the photograph's frame, as if refusing to acknowledge the camera's frontal presence.[516]

David Campany tells us that this so-called 'directed gaze' is standard in mainstream narrative cinema, where it serves to suspend the viewer's acknowledgement of the film's fictional conditions.[517] The purpose of the directed gaze is, however, redefined by Sherman, as I shall argue, by the way she makes a virtue of how this cinematic convention is stylised and estranged by the camera's fixity. She does so to investigate the still photograph's capacity for narrative. Taking her cue from the film still's dramatic sense of possibility, Sherman relies on the viewer's cultural ability to recognise a certain combination of motif, setting, and props as a

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[515] Fig. 3.33.
[516] Fig. 3.21 (verso) and 3.32.
[517] Campany, *Photography and Cinema*, 137–138.

pregnant moment in a narrative.[518] While imitating the iconography of classical cinema, the static quality of Sherman's photographs does, however, provide her 'faux-cinema' moments with an awkward stillness that underscores the fictionality of the scenes in question. And when I recognise these same features or memes in Patterson's 'House at Night',[519] I become aware of their relevance to the process of rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood*.

'House at Night' shows a disintegrating American house typical of the small-town era that Starkweather grew up in. Yet it is not this particular motif that connects the Starkweather events to Sherman's photographs, but rather the way in which the photograph reproduces the broad horizontal shape of the movie screen itself. Thereby, 'House at Night' speaks to a quality of narrative tension and to the potential for association that we find in moving images. The sinister and melodramatic mood of the film noir is recognisable in the photograph too. But Patterson replaces the film noir's unbalanced compositions and semi-documentary black-and-white aesthetic, which Sherman adopts, with a clearly staged, saturated colour aesthetic. Similarly, the focus on the actor's narrative posing is replaced by a scene that is entirely devoid of people, yet that suggests a narrative beyond the frame through a row of symbolic elements.

Every important element of Patterson's scene is rendered in equal focus and without blurring. This quality denotes the large-format cameras of expensive film sets rather than the low-budget production of film noirs. When I find these motivic and stylistic traits again in a larger group of photographs in the photobook, including 'Telephone', 'Curtains for You', 'Motel Sign', and 'Ray of Light',[520] I thus realise that the cinematic no longer reads as a photographic reflection of film noir conventions, but rather as a shorthand for a highly influential style in art photography known as the 'staged narrative tableau'.

The staged narrative tableau, which boomed in the 1990s, is underpinned by an explorative attitude towards the still photograph's potential for implicit narrative. In the following, I shall describe the gradual appearance of the set of conventions that I associate with this notion of the cinematic, as they unfold over the memetic rereading process that extends from 'House at Night'. That is a framing that supports a truly nightmarish vision of an American 1950s small town on a winter night, threatened by approaching danger. And that framing in turn allows for a reframing of the Starkweather case as a reflection of the suburbanisation, developing car culture, and increasing economic differences that gave rise to the group of so-called 'redheaded peckerwoods' in the immediate post-war years.

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[518] Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, 49.
[519] Fig. 3.3.
[520] Fig. 3.34, 3.5, 3.35, and 3.36.

'House at Night' is taken on a winter evening, and it shows the back of a slightly deteriorating 1950s-style American small-town house with wall shingles and vertical two-pane windows. While the pulled-down blinds prevent visual access, the green light of a television screen inside emanates through the ground-floor windows. Furthermore, the basement windows shed a reddish light onto the snow-covered ground outside, as a foreshadowing of the scene represented in the photograph with the telling caption 'Bloody Snow'.[521] Footprints in the snow contribute to the feeling of approaching danger, of which a road sign with the words 'dead end' becomes a tongue-in-cheek commentary. Yet the same words also point to the small-town setting's claustrophobic feel and sense of confinement, which are expressed by the telephone wires that criss-cross over the small portion of sky visible in 'House at Night'. The wires thus suggest that the inhabitants of the house are trapped in a situation from which they cannot hide. They can only wait.

Web searches reveal that the motif, style, and mood of 'House at Night' are indicative of a complex of memes reassembled often within art photography after 1990. Among the multiple photographs that reassemble this network of properties into a series of similar compositions, Todd Hido's '#2844-D' is the one that appeals most strongly to me.[522] I shall thus present these particular memes through Hido's photograph.

'#2844-D' is part of a photographic series with the title 'Homes at Night', which is published in Hido's 2001 photobook *House Hunting*.[523] The photograph shows a scene similar to the one I see in 'House at Night'. That is, it shows a deteriorating 1950s-style house with two-pane windows similar to those in the house in Patterson's photograph. The blinds are down in Hido's photograph, as they are in Patterson's, and a glaring light falls from the windows and onto the ground outside in much the same way as in 'House at Night'. Moreover, similar traces of footprints are seen in the snow on the ground here too, and a similar mesh of telephone wires in the air above the house. In addition, a road extends around the corner of Hido's building, as one does in Patterson's night scene.

Although Hido's photograph memetically reproduces several of the same cultural elements we find in Patterson's 'House at Night', the most appealing similarity between the two photographs is for me the artificial light that wraps both night scenes in a theatrical atmosphere that – for one reason or another – provides me with an uncomfortable feeling of impending danger. A similarly eerie feeling is engendered by the vertical field of light that falls

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[521] Fig. 3.37.
[522] Fig. 3.38.
[523] Todd Hido, *House Hunting* (Portland, Oregon: Nazraeli Press, 2001).

upon the walls of a closed-down 1950s diner or motel from an artificial light source beyond the frame in Patterson's 'Ray of Light'.[524] That photograph reinforces my conception of the cinematic frame as a reference to the staged narrative tableau, since I find several of the same memes repeated there: a web of telephone wires in the air, an unreadable road sign next to the building, and closed curtains, all of which for me speak to a claustrophobic sense of approaching and inescapable danger.

The photograph's caption, 'Ray of Light', converts the light itself into the photograph's protagonist in the same way as the caption 'Untitled (Ray of Light)' (2001) does in one of the photographs in Gregory Crewdson's *Twilight* series (1998–2002).[525] That photograph takes the memetic process further, since it imitates several of the same visual elements I found in Patterson's and Hido's photographs: the small-town 1950s-inspired American setting, the narrative cropping, a web of telephone wires in the sky, a road sign with an unreadable message, and a clear-cut beam that falls from an undefined light source beyond the photograph's frame, in this case upon a deteriorating roadside house where light emanates from a two-pane window in the same way as in the other two photographs.

Working with a cast and a crew, as if on a film set, Crewdson carefully staged the scenes in the *Twilight* series for the camera. Online searches unsurprisingly reveal that Crewdson was inspired by the magnetic mood and the exaggerated 1950s-style vision of America that is characteristic of American filmmaker David Lynch's films. In Lynch's works, darkness is constantly lurking behind the trimmed hedges and picket fences of white middle-class suburban homes, a description that seems equally appropriate for the aforementioned photographs by Patterson and Hido.

The association between Crewdson and Lynch is interesting. It leads into a complex web of inspiration and influence through which the cinematic increasingly comes to appear as a set of iterable memetic conventions reassembled in a range of different, but recognisable ways. As it turns out, Lynch included Patterson's 'House at Night' in his Paris Photo 2012 compilation, *Paris Photo vu par David Lynch*, a selection of his favourite photographs from the fair.[526] Searches also reveal that Lynch's 1990 *Wild at Heart*, which is representative of the paradigmatically Lynchean combination of 'the very macabre and the very mundane', as David

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[524] Fig. 3.36.
[525] Fig. 3.39.
[526] José Raúl Pérez, 'David Lynch en Paris Photo 2012', Fotolamm, 11 November 2012, http://fotolamm.blogspot.no/2012/11/david-lynch-en-paris-photo-2012.html (accessed 11 January 2018).

Foster Wallace puts it,[527] was inspired by the Starkweather case.[528] And when I watch *Wild at Heart* on my laptop, I find that Patterson's 'Ray of Light' actually quotes a frame from that movie: a night-time scene where Sailor and Lula, two misfit young lovers on the run, arrive at a 1950s-style roadside motel with two-pane windows and a deeply threatening atmosphere.[529]

The association of the house in 'Ray of Light' with the motel in *Wild at Heart* allows for a metaphorical connection with Patterson's 'Motel Sign',[530] which is a photograph of a 1950s-style neon sign. All the light bulbs in the first letter 'M' is burned out, which reads as a pun on 'lights out', which is a euphemism for death.[531] Yet the burned-out bulbs also enable a reading of the sign's 'Motel' as the phrase 'O'tell!', and thereby as a reference to the photograph's narrative dimension that is characteristic of the staged narrative tableau.

In a later scene in *Wild at Heart*, the roadside motel where Sailor and Lula spend the night is seen from the inside, as a confined space with drawn yellow curtains.[532] The motel's confined space and drawn yellow curtains bring to mind the photograph that Patterson has captioned 'Curtains for You'.[533] The caption is a literal description of the yellow curtains that cover the window represented in Patterson's photograph, but also another metaphor for death.[534] For me, the combination of words and photograph thus reads as a prefiguration of the Starkweather killing spree that would shatter the small-town idyll of Lincoln. And this reading leads me to online searches that uncover a 1974 article titled 'Badlands Revisited: A 1974 Memoir of Murderous Days in Nebraska'.[535]

'Badlands Revisited' is written by Marilyn Coffey. It tells the story of the Starkweather murders from the point of view of a Lincoln resident who experienced the fear that the murder of the Wards – a respected middle-class couple – triggered in her hometown:

> My father called. He'd been trying to reach us, he said, but was unable to get through from his office (he was state purchasing agent then) in the Capitol building. The lines were too busy. We didn't know it yet, but the news of the

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[527] Goodreads, 'David Foster Wallace > Quotes > Quotable Quote', https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/533858-an-academic-definition-of-lynchian-might-be-that-the-term (accessed 11 January 2018).

[528] Murderpedia, 'Charles Starkweather', http://murderpedia.org/male.S/s/starkweather.htm (accessed 11 January 2018).

[529] Fig. 3.40.

[530] Fig. 3.35.

[531] The Free Dictionary, 'Lights out', https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/lights+out (accessed 21 January 2019).

[532] Fig. 3.41.

[533] Fig. 3.5.

[534] The Free Dictionary, 'Curtains for (someone or something)', https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/curtains+for+you (accessed 23 March 2019).

[535] Marilyn Coffey, 'Badlands Revisited: A 1974 Memoir of Murderous Days in Nebraska', *The Atlantic*, December 1974, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1974/12/badlands-revisited-a-1974-memoir-of-murderous-days-in-nebraska/483318/ (accessed 21 December 2017).

Ward family deaths piled up the heaviest traffic on Lincoln telephone circuits since V-J Day.[536]

Coffey's account of the Starkweather events describes small-town inhabitants who call their loved ones, only to find that the telephone lines had broken down under the pressure; people who jump into their cars to get home and behind closed doors; drawn blinds; feelings of approaching danger; and Lincoln residents, old and young, who follow the criminal events on their newly acquired television sets.[537] These elements of Coffey's story are aptly illustrated by those of Patterson's photographs that are called into the open in and by the staged narrative tableau frame. And this connection, between Coffey's account and a selection of the photographs in *Redheaded Peckerwood*, allows for a conception of Patterson's photobook as a story on the connection between the Starkweather killings and the 1950s small-town context that the murderers grew up in.

According to online searches, the post-war years saw a radical increase in higher education and expanded training for corporate society. These changes led to the rise of a large middle class in the United States, a development that was also aided by the growth of unions, which allowed industrial workers to achieve middle-class wealth. The rise of the middle class meant that an increasing number of people acquired the economy to purchase cars, and a greater number of cars meant a rapid expansion of the American road system was necessary. This expanded road system in turn allowed regular US citizens to set up comfortable lives in some of the rapidly expanding American small towns and suburbs, since the automobile could bring them comfortably to work in the city by day, and back to their homes for dinner in the evening.[538]

One of the two-sided reproductions in *Redheaded Peckerwood*, 'Little Town',[539] appears as a reproduction of the receipt found in the pocket of Starkweather victim Robert Jensen after he was murdered. The back of the receipt contains a short poem that provides an idyllic image of small-town life:

I like to live in a little town / where the trees meet across the street / where you wave your hand and say 'Hello'! [*sic*] / to everyone you meet.

[536] Ibid.
[537] Wikipedia, '1950s American Automobile Culture', 7 December 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1950s_American_automobile_culture (accessed 11 January 2018).
[538] Wikipedia, 'United States in the 1950s', 6 December 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_in_the_1950s (accessed 11 January 2018).
[539] Fig. 3.9 (paper object inserted between pages).

I like to stand for a moment / outside the grocery store / and listen to the friendly gossip of / the folks that live next door.

For life is interwoven / with the friends we learn to know / and we hear their joys and sorrows / as we daily come and go.

So I like to live in a little town / I care no more to roam. / For every house in a little town / is more than a house, it's home.

Ironically, the poem describes a situation of public interaction that was already disappearing at the time of the murder spree. As the automobile emptied the city of people, public life was simultaneously replaced by television screens and by a lifestyle centred on the home and the private car.[540]

Within 1950s America, happiness was measured in terms of the family's capacity for acquiring the material goods that the corporately owned television channels advertised on a large scale. Yet consumer society provided a highly alienating setting for those who could not reach middle-class wealth. While a large number of Americans enjoyed the fruits of increasing post-war prosperity, poverty was relatively widespread. Many undereducated manual workers thus suffered from feelings of estrangement and rage, which increased the level of social unrest in the United States.[541] The staged narrative tableau's play with stillness and narrative, light, shadow, colour, and cropping seems to express those feelings, which posed a threat to the fabled scene of tranquil small-town life.

Charles Starkweather, the 'redheaded peckerwood' who is referred to in Patterson's photobook's title, typified the group of manual workers who did not fit into the picture of a prospering post-war society. According to Jack Sargeant, Starkweather was

acutely sensitive […] to his family's low social position and poverty […]. For Starkweather poverty was a trap, he could map its confines, and trace its borders, but Charles could see no escape from it for himself […]. He believed that his very life was rigidly controlled: he saw that he would not be able to flee the bludgeoning poverty which had characterized his working class childhood but instead would be condemned to repeat it, eventually finding himself a manual job, a wife, having children and then simply dying.[542]

[540] Wikipedia, '1950s American Automobile Culture', 7 December 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1950s_American_automobile_culture (accessed 11 January 2018).
[541] CliffsNotes, 'The Affluent Society', https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/history/us-history-ii/america-in-the-fifties/the-affluent-society (accessed 11 January 2018).
[542] Jack Sargeant, *Born Bad: The Story of Charles Starkweather & Caril Ann Fugate* (London: Creation Books, 1996), 14.

Sargeant claims that Starkweather felt alienated from the middle-class majority of his hometown, since he was a garbage collector without higher education.[543] And the postcard that comes with *Redheaded Peckerwood* suggests that Starkweather's increasing desperation with his economic situation was the condition that led him to grab his gun and hit the road.[544]

The inserted postcard appears to carry a note allegedly written by Starkweather to his working-class parents after his and Fugate's capture, where he tersely states that 'all we wanted to do is get out of town'. While the fatal consequences of Starkweather's escape were singular, the staged narrative tableau frame indicates a reading of the murder spree as the horrible consequence of desperate feelings of discontent that the murderer shared with a much larger group of similarly disadvantaged working-class people in similar small towns all across the United States.[545] In this version of the story, Charles Starkweather and his girlfriend Caril Ann Fugate thus appear as two alienated souls imprisoned within a pocket of poverty in an otherwise affluent post-war society.

III: The couple on the run

The car was a condition for the suburban lifestyle that provided the setting for Charles Starkweather's growing feelings of desperation and entrapment. Yet the car was also the means he sought to escape the estranging situation he found himself in, and onto a journey that was not motivated by a particular destination, but rather by travel itself. When watching *Wild at Heart*, I uncovered a memetic relationship between Lynch's film and Patterson's 'Ray of Light'.[546] I also found a range of connections between *Wild at Heart* and a selection of memes that collectively constitute an image of the car and the open road as symbols of freedom and self-determination, such as photographs of endless roads, headlights in darkness, and vast land- and skyscapes. These are memes that proliferate in *Redheaded Peckerwood*, such as in '24th Street Road (Road at Night)', 'Headlights', and 'Landscape on Fire',[547] as in numerous works of American art and popular culture. And in an American cultural context, these memes connote the figure of the 'Great American road trip', a figure that relies on the association between the American interstate highway system and the American ideals of personal freedom and individualism.

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[543] Ibid.
[544] Fig. 3.19.
[545] Murderpedia, 'Charles Starkweather', http://murderpedia.org/male.S/s/starkweather.htm (accessed 11 January 2018).
[546] Fig. 3.36.
[547] Fig. 3.23, 3.80, and 3.24.

The roots to the conception of the American road trip as a symbol of freedom and individuality were laid down as early as 1856, with the publication of Walt Whitman's poem 'Song of the Open Road', where he puts it in these words: 'Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road / Healthy, free, the world before me, / The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose'.[548] Though Whitman introduced the trope, it was the mass production of cars that made purchasing a vehicle more affordable, and the related post-war expansion of the national network of roads that made long-distance journeys across the country practically achievable for the first time. As a result of these two developments, the road trip started to appear prominently in American art and popular culture in the 1950s:[549] in music such as Bobby Troup's 1946 'Route 66', which was made famous by Nat King Cole's vocals; in literature such as Jack Kerouac's iconic 1957 *On the Road*; and in numerous photobooks of which Robert Frank's 1958/59 *The Americans* is arguably the most seminal.[550]

The American road trip is also central to the 'couple-on-the-run' movie genre, which adds a particularly violent edge to the motif. The couple-on-the-run genre, which *Wild at Heart* is exemplary of, spans several periods and styles. It is, however, characterised by a series of basic plot elements that were outlined by Nicholas Ray's *They Live by Night* (1948) and Joseph H. Lewis's *Gun Crazy* (1950), and firmly established with Arthur Penn's iconic movie *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). These films all include a doomed romance that flourishes as the young couple flees the law on a deadly crime spree through America, which is the genre's basic figure.

When I recognise an analogy between the narrative structure of the couple-on-the-run genre and the events of the Starkweather killing spree, as well as with *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s loosely chronological structure, I find myself increasingly drawn into a rereading of the Starkweather killing spree as an extreme expression of the American quest for personal freedom and individuality. That is to say, I begin to understand the Starkweather case according to the cinematic frame conceived of as a reference to the couple-on-the-run genre.

Couple-on-the-run movies are usually marketed by posters that show a picture of the movie's male and female protagonists as a young, smiling couple. *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s cover has a similar picture of Fugate and Starkweather.[551] And when I open the photobook, the couple-on-the-run frame allows for a reading of the introductory sequence as a version of the

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[548] Walt Whitman, 'Song of the Open Road', first published in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1856.
[549] David Campany, 'The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip', Artbook.com, http://www.artbook.com/9781597112406.html (accessed 11 January 2018).
[550] *The Americans* was first published in France in 1957, and the year after in the United States. Robert Frank, *Les Américains* (Paris: Robert Delpire, 1958). Robert Franks, *The Americans* (New York: Grove Press, 1959).
[551] Fig. 3.1.

cinematic 'cold open', which lays down the motif of travel as the basic organising structure of the events that follow, through a map of the murderers' journey ('Map of Nebraska').[552] Like the teasers that usually introduce this kind of film, the introduction also introduces the photobook's storyline. The 'Confession Letter' that follows after 'Map of Nebraska' tells us of two young lovers on the run 'to the end', as they put it, and of the crime spree to follow.[553] And the cold open concludes, still in line with the movie genre, with an intriguing shot intended to draw the reader into the narrative, a function that the open-door motif of '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' – the photograph that precedes the photobook's title page – simultaneously performs and comments on.[554]

Considered as an analogy for the couple-on-the-run movie, the main part of *Redheaded Peckerwood* recounts a string of murderous deeds that unfolded one by one as Fugate and Starkweather fled from the law through the American heartland. In this section, photographs of violence and weapons (shotguns, bullets, jackknives, and fires) alternate with panning shots of infinite land- and skyscapes, car tracks, tires, and headlights. As is typical in the movies, the story of Charles and Caril Ann ends with the murderers' capture, which the young lovers' confession letter predicted from the start. That ending is also the endpoint of their journey, which is lyrically represented by Patterson's 'Surrender Clouds',[555] which is followed by a final section that tells us of the prisoners' trial and punishment.

In couple-on-the-run movies, the storyline is generally modulated by sections with action and by slower sections, and by shifts between scenes that install different moods by means of colour and light. While the speed with which the photobook reader progresses through the work varies from reader to reader, *Redheaded Peckerwood* does seem to mime the couple-on-the-run's transitions through the shifts between pages having photographs and pages that are blank, and by shifts between sections that each groups together photographs with a similar colour palette.

Redheaded Peckerwood's storyline gathers a series of memes that are associated with the couple-on-the-run genre, which gradually reinforce the link between the historical events of the killing spree and the cinematic frame. The first of these tropes is the motif of the 'doomed romance' fuelled by a mutual love of weapons. This motif allows for an intertwinement of young love and a desire for destruction that is symbolically represented as flames or flaming

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[552] Fig. 3.42.
[553] Fig. 3.16.
[554] Fig. 3.6.
[555] Fig. 3.43.

skies in *Redheaded Peckerwood* and in a range of couple-on-the-run movies that turn out to be inspired by the Starkweather killing spree. These are James Landis's *The Sadist* (1963), Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973), David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (1990), Dominic Sena's *Kalifornia* (1993), and Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994).

In these same movies, we also find an interesting twist on the female protagonist, who is not conceived of as a scheming spiderwoman who tricks men into committing crime, but rather as a female figure who is as equally lethal and active as the male protagonists. The lethal female was established as a trope already with *Gun Crazy*, for which the highly fitting original title was *Deadly is the Female*, and it has been memetically reproduced within the genre since. The trope did, however, reach its momentary apotheosis with Ridley Scott's 1991 *Thelma and Louise*, which replaced the heterosexual couple at the heart of previous versions of the couple-on-the-run with two female friends.

The image of the cold-blooded female villain that is paradigmatic of the couple-on-the-run genre has also found its way into *Redheaded Peckerwood* through 'You Can't Run Away from Anything (Tire)'.[556] Patterson's photograph shows a tire that bears Fugate's words 'you cant't run away from anything' in capital letters.[557] In light of the couple-on-the-run frame, I read the tire as a memetic reference to the tire that Bonnie, in the couple-on-the-run movie *Bonnie and Clyde*, smilingly shoots through to practice her marksmanship.[558] The connection between Fugate and Bonnie thus lends credence to Starkweather's description of Fugate as 'the most trigger-happy person' he had ever seen.[559]

The couple-on-the-run frame reconfigures my conception of the meaning of Fugate's words, 'You can't run away from anything', and of her role in the murder spree. In light of the film noir frame, Fugate's words read as a reference to the necessary connection between the punishment that awaited her and her sins. But in light of the couple-on-the-run frame, I read the same words as a smug reference to her shooting skills, which made it impossible for her victims to escape. Instead of appearing as the victim of a patriarchal legal order, Fugate hence appears as a contributor to the murder spree on equal terms with Starkweather, and as a ruthless lover of weapons. That image is confirmed by Patterson's 'Confession Letter', where Fugate's

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[556] Fig. 3.30.
[557] Transformer Station, Checklist, https://www.transformerstation.org/downloads-2/files/Checklist.pdf (accessed 29 January 2019).
[558] Fig. 3.44.
[559] Wikipedia, 'Charles Starkweather', 20 January 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Starkweather (accessed 21 January 2019).

Freudian replacements for the words for 'knife' and 'bullet' were intricate drawings of such objects.[560]

In the same confession letter, the identities of 'Chuck' and 'Caril F' blur together, as a result of the way the one's handwriting intersects with that of the other, and since the letter's argument is alternatingly voiced by him and her. This strange fusion points to the way in which the romantic couple forms a united front against the world and against the authorities in couple-on-the-run movies.[561] This connection reinforces the couple-on-the-run frame and supports a conception of Starkweather and Fugate's joint opposition against the police as a wild expression of the American ideals of freedom and individualism, of which the young couple's escape from their hometown authorities becomes expressive.

The smiling young couple on the cover of *Redheaded Peckerwood* wears similar cowboy boots.[562] No piece of clothing is more symbolic of the American ideal of freedom, self-fulfilment, and self-reliance than high-heeled cowboy boots. Such boots are thus frequently worn by the protagonists in numerous couple-on-the-run movies, where they work to romanticise the murder spree as a quest for freedom and individuality. Patterson's photograph of 'Charlie's Boots' memetically speaks to a reading of the Starkweather murder spree as a similar quest.[563] That reading is supported by the way in which Patterson's caption makes Starkweather's name strange by referring to him as 'Charlie' rather than as 'Charles' or 'Chuck', as he was usually called. That is, by a name that is derived from Charles, which means 'free man'.[564]

The use of the name 'Charlie' in the caption also suggests the possibility that the boots in Patterson's photograph might not have belonged to Starkweather at all. The idea that the boots are someone else's is supported by how the boots' toes point inwards in a way that suggests knock knees rather than Starkweather's bowed legs. This hunch is supported by extensive online searches that leave me unable to find a photograph of Starkweather with those exact same boots. Still, what I do find is an emergent network of figures that come out of a series of couple-on-the-run movies that are all said to have been based on the Starkweather killing spree. And these movies collectively represent a connection between the American ideals of freedom and individualism and sadism.

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[560] Fig. 3.16.
[561] IndieWire, '25 Films About Lovers on the Lam', 21 August 2013, http://www.indiewire.com/2013/08/25-films-about-lovers-on-the-lam-94572/ (accessed 11 January 2018).
[562] Fig. 3.1.
[563] Fig. 3.45 (recto).
[564] Nameberry, 'Charlie', https://nameberry.com/babyname/Charlie/boy (accessed 11 January 2018).

The first indication of a link between the two American ideals and sadism is brought about when I note that Sailor, the male protagonist in Lynch's *Wild at Heart*, wears a similar pair of cowboy boots as the pair in 'Charlie's Boots' with his snakeskin jacket.[565] As Sailor states twice in the movie, the jacket is worn as 'a symbol of [his] individuality and [his] belief in personal freedom',[566] and the protagonist's complementary boots thus take on a similar meaning. The fact that the jacket is made of snakeskin also connects these beliefs to sadism, which the snake is a common symbol of.

The symbol of the snake is repeated in Stone's *Natural Born Killers*, where the male protagonist and spree killer Mickey wears cowboy boots decorated with a snake and has a snake tattooed on his body.[567] Also, actual snakes appear in the movie after a particularly inhumane slaughter of a Navajo Indian who had attempted to expel the demon he perceived in Mickey. The connection between cowboy boots and sadism is implicitly expressed in the movie *Badlands* as well, where the Starkweather-inspired protagonist Kit wears cowboy boots. This connection is suggested when Kit light-heartedly tells his girlfriend Holly about his job at the feedlot, where livestock are fed and fattened up prior to being slaughtered: 'Yeah, well, at least nobody can get at me about wearing these boots anymore'.[568]

In *Badlands*, Kit wears his boots, which obviously go well with his job at the feedlot, with a blue denim outfit, which is an equally strong symbol of Americanness and freedom.[569] Interestingly, an almost identical outfit is worn by the male protagonist in the Starkweather-inspired movie *The Sadist*.[570] The protagonist of *The Sadist*, a movie whose title explicitly refers to sadism, does not wear cowboy boots. Still, his name connects my sequence of online searches directly to *Redheaded Peckerwood*, since the name of the sadistic killer in the movie is Charlie. Charlie is the same name as the owner of the boots seen in the photograph in *Redheaded Peckerwood*. And thereby, Patterson's 'Charlie's Boots' comes to appear as a chilling symbol of individuality and freedom gone feral.

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[565] Fig. 3.46.
[566] Fig. 3.47.
[567] Fig. 3.48.
[568] Hannah Patterson, 'Chapter two. Two Characters in Search of a Direction: Motivation and the Construction of Identity in Badlands', in *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America*, ed. Hannah Patterson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 29.
https://books.google.no/books?id=TCdnNGPsYzUC&pg=PA29&lpg=PA29&dq=Yeah,+well,+at+least+nobody +can+get+at+me+about+wearing+these+boots+anymore+badlands&source=bl&ots=mxvlqGcHTp&sig=ACfU3 U1iYQu9U8PY_w3y3OXvj-sUe9_dA&hl=no&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiy2qar2f7fAhVLFCwKHSAWDHMQ6A EwB3oECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=Yeah%2C%20well%2C%20at%20least%20nobody%20can%20get%20at%2 0me%20about%20wearing%20these%20boots%20anymore%20badlands&f=false (accessed 21 January 2019)
[569] Fig. 3.49.
[570] Fig. 3.50.

In the couple-on-the-run genre, the idea of 'stealing the American dream and getting away with it', as a commentary on the genre reads, becomes thrilling and desirable.[571] This glorification of a life of crime mirrors what David F. Schmid sees as a particularly North American fascination with true crime and murder sprees.[572] The genre's frequent reliance on real criminal cases feeds into this picture. North America's appetite for the true crime goes a long way back, according to Patricia Donovan. Yet, she continues, it got a boost with the post-war development of American mass media. This development brought TV shows such as the immensely popular *Dragnet*, which was based on real police department files, to every corner of North America.[573]

In *Redheaded Peckerwood*, I find that the media's increasing habit of turning cold-blooded murderers into desirable objects of consumption is memetically represented by Patterson's 'Modern Man (Folded Magazine)'.[574] The photograph shows a magazine with photographs of Starkweather and Fugate appearing next to a photograph of a naked pinup whose downcast eyes mirror both Fugate's and Starkweather's gazes in their photographs. The Starkweather-inspired movie *Natural Born Killers* provides a similar commentary on the media's glorification of murderers. The movie, whose tagline describes the United States as a country 'obsessed by crime',[575] adapts the Starkweather story to a critique of the sensationalist approach to murder that *Modern Man* magazine and *Dragnet* represented in the 1950s. That is, a sensationalist approach that Sarah Koenig's immensely popular podcast *Serial* and Laura Ricciardi and Moira Demos's TV series *Making a Murderer* do today.[576]

Patterson's photograph of 'Caril Ann (Tear-Stained)',[577] which is retouched and cropped for the tabloids, presents the female convict as a glamorous and flamboyant movie star with a microphone to her face and a detached gaze. Within the couple-on-the-run frame, 'Caril Ann (Tear-Stained)' memetically reproduces the connection between the Starkweather case and mass media's glamorizing of crime and murder. On the preceding spread, 'The Press' appears

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[571] IndieWire, '25 Films about Lovers on the Lam'.

[572] Stephen Levy, one of the scriptwriters for Dominic Sena's *Kalifornia*, which was inspired by the Starkweather case, also commented that their intentions were 'to scare an audience, to comment on our national obsession with "true crime" stories, and to punish myself for my morbid preoccupation with the subject of murder and murderers'. Tim Metcalfe, 'The Real "Kalifornia" Got Lost in the Filmmaking Journey'. *Los Angeles Times*, 27 September 1993, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-09-27/entertainment/ca-39503_1_writers-guild (accessed 11 January 2018).

[573] Patricia Donovan, 'America's Fascination with Murder', UB Reporter, 6 September 2007, http://www.buffalo.edu/ubreporter/archive/vol39/vol39n2/articles/SchmidMurder.html (accessed 11 January 2018).

[574] Fig. 3.51.

[575] Fig. 3.52.

[576] Aya Tsintziras, 'Top 10 True Crime TV Shows to Watch Right Now', Screen Rant, 12 November 2018, https://screenrant.com/top-10-true-crime-tv-shows-watch-right-now/ (accessed 4 March 2019).

[577] Fig. 3.21 (verso).

as this photograph's pendant.[578] 'The Press' shows hordes of press workers who compete for the best photo opportunity in the courtroom on the day of Fugate's trial.

The crowd of onlookers who gather in the courtroom in 'The Press' memetically reproduces the crowds of people that made it difficult for the criminal Bonnie Parker's family to reach the grave at her funeral in 1934.[579] *Bonnie and Clyde*, the couple-on-the-run movie based on Bonnie Parker's and her partner Clyde Barrow's real-life exploits, self-reflexively comments on how the public's greedy interest in the case was fired by the press. What the movie shows is how the number of violent actions the couple performs leads to an increasing number of newspaper articles that describe their exploits, which turns the violent couple into minor celebrities.

Criminal deeds made Bonnie and Clyde famous. Yet fame took on national proportions with the Starkweather case, which was the first crime spree to be broadcast on national television.[580] That aspect of the story is memetically reproduced in the Starkweather-inspired movie *Natural Born Killers*, where Fugate's flamboyant pose for the press in 'Caril Ann (Tear-Stained)' is memetically reproduced by the movie's male protagonist Mickey. When he makes his way onto the stage for his appearance on a TV show called *American Maniacs*, Mickey's gaze is similarly drawn to the side, as a movie star tired of attention from the camera.[581] That notion of the criminal as a celebrity is further underlined by one of the film's taglines, which is 'The media made them superstars'.[582]

Redheaded Peckerwood's cover photograph suggests an intertwinement of the Starkweather case and the media similar to the one we find in *Natural Born Killers*.[583] The photobook cover's black-and-white linen binding provides a low-quality effect reminiscent of 1950s newspaper photography. This effect leads to the dissolution of the young killers' smiling faces into the photograph that supports their appearance, as if they were literally 'consumed by the media', as another tagline for *Natural Born Killers* puts it.[584]

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[578] Fig. 3.20.

[579] Wikipedia, 'Bonnie and Clyde', 11 January 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonnie_and_Clyde (accessed 11 January 2018).

[580] Wischmann, 'The Killing Spree that Transfixed a Nation'.

[581] Fig. 3.53.

[582] Fig. 3.54. While director Oliver Stone sought to criticise the relationship between murder and the media, *Natural Born Killers* ironically turned out to inspire a number of 'copycat killings'. The two most notable 'copycat killers' to claim inspiration from Stone's movie are Ben Darras and Sarah Edmondson, two Oklahoma teens who murdered businessman Bill Savage in Mississippi and then shot and paralysed convenience store clerk Patsy Byers in Louisiana. Xan Brooks, 'Natural Born Copycats', *The Guardian*, 20 December 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/dec/20/artsfeatures1 (accessed 11 January 2018).

[583] Fig. 3.1.

[584] Fig. 3.52. A similar effect results from the actual newspaper clipping I found on the wall in Patterson's *Redheaded Peckerwood* installation at Transformer Station while watching a YouTube walk-through of the

In *Redheaded Peckerwood*, a plate that reproduces a 1950s-style painted billboard shows the words 'What happens after the shot is fired?', which are the same words as those in the photograph's caption.[585] The billboard sign reads as another comment on the media's retrospective sensationalisation of the Starkweather killing spree, and the way in which the killers became objects for a mediated form of consumption. Yet the plate also provides a meta-commentary on Patterson's photobook, through the reference to a widespread 'viral meme'.

In the early twenty-first century, Web culture hijacked the term 'meme' as a description of cultural units replicated and transmitted across the Web, typically by e-mail, social media, and websites. These viral memes contain cultural information deliberately altered by human creativity, and often imbued with ironic content.[586] 'What happens after the shot is fired?' might be read as a reference to 'Shots Fired!'. This is a common viral meme that indicates someone has been insulted in a particularly cutting manner.[587] And the inserted postcard, apparently a reproduction of a note that Starkweather sent to his parents, suggests that the offenders in question are actually the reporters who constantly hung around the killers after their capture.[588] In the postcard, Starkweather writes this: 'The cops up here have been more than nice to me but these DAM ReportERS [*sic*]. The next one that comes in here is going to get a glass of WaTER [*sic*]'.

In the 1973 movie *Badlands*, Terrence Malick's take on the Starkweather events, the couple on the run eagerly follows the press's coverage of their violent actions. The couple's interest for the journalists' accounts of their misconducts suggests that the media's reporting on the unfolding criminal events and on the trial later was not just an expression of an all-American appetite for crime, but also what made murder desirable for Starkweather and his girlfriend in the first place. That reading is supported by the fact that newspaper clippings about the murders were found in Fugate's pockets upon their capture.[589]

In the 1950s, nationwide news provided a previously inaccessible opportunity for a poor, uneducated boy like Starkweather to realise the American ideal of individualism in a moment of infamy. The couple-on-the-run frame suggests that this might be one of the factors

exhibition. Yet in that case, the effect resulted merely from the weathered condition of the paper and a scribbled-down note on top. Transformer Station, '*Redheaded Peckerwood* Installation Walk-through', YouTube, 2 June 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M93rQMuA5g (accessed 11 January 2018).

[585] Fig. 3.55.

[586] Wikipedia, 'Internet meme', 27 March 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_meme (accessed 28 March 2019).

[587] Fig. 3.56. Molly Horan, 'Shots Fired: Part of a Series on Internet Slang', Know Your Meme, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/shots-fired (accessed 11 January 2018).

[588] Fig. 3.19.

[589] Wischmann, 'The Killing Spree that Transfixed a Nation'.

that triggered the spree. Patterson's photobook memetical*y* touches upon this subject through a series of studio photographs that present objects related to the case or to its cultural history, as desirable fan collectibles. These include Starkweather's car's hood ornament ('Hood Ornament'); a pair of cowboy boots attributed to 'Charlie'; and the lighter ('Zippo') that the Starkweather-inspired protagonist Kit in *Badlands* gave out as a souvenir to the National Guardsmen upon his capture.[590]

Within the couple-on-the-run frame, the photograph 'Caril Ann (Handwriting Sample)' appears as a page of Caril Ann's autographs,[591] thus mirroring the celebrity status that radio, newspaper, and television provided her with. 'Caril Ann (Funny Face)',[592] which is the second-to-the-last picture in the photobook, also comments on the 'it girl' status that the media provided Fugate with. The caption points to a memetic connection between Fugate and Audrey Hepburn's character in Stanley Donen's iconic 1957 movie 'Funny Face', which was released the same year as Fugate and Starkweather embarked on the killing spree.

'Funny Face' is not a couple-on-the-run movie, yet the memetic link between it and Fugate supports the reading suggested by the couple-on-the-run frame. In the movie, Hepburn plays a shy young girl who is transformed into the latest 'it model' after being discovered by a photographer. And the connection between her and Fugate indicates that press photographers turned Fugate into the 'it girl' of the moment too. And similarly, Starkweather became the object of a form of celebrity worship, of which 'A Crowd Gathers (Recto)' is indicative.[593] This black-and-white photograph shows a group of young men gathering in front of the penitentiary on the night of Starkweather's execution in 1959. While some of the young attendants might have supported the execution, others attended because they idolised the killer, as Daniel LaChance points out, since Starkweather had already become some kind of cult phenomenon through the media.[594]

In light of the 'couple-on-the-run' version of the cinematic frame or meme, the Starkweather myth comes across as the result of an American appetite for crime and murders. Within this account of the story, Starkweather's and Fugate's equally ruthless behaviours read as expressions of a desire to achieve individuality through national media. This rereading

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[590] Fig. 3.57, 3.45 (recto), and 3.58.
[591] Fig. 3.11 (recto).
[592] Fig. 3.31.
[593] Fig. 3.59 (verso).
[594] Daniel LaChance, *Executing Freedom: The Cultural Life of Capital Punishment in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 39.
https://books.google.no/books?hl=no&lr=&id=Vw1PDQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=daniel+lachance+exe
cuting+freeedom&ots=LL7SoGxgLp&sig=feYODWogibB4JRcjVO20vGJ3Q3Y&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=d
aniel%20lachance%20executing%20freeedom&f=false (accessed 11 January 2018).

appears particularly disturbing in light of contemporary American mass shootings, some of which seem to be driven by a similar desire for fame, however, with an expanded possibility for broadcast, with social media's worldwide reach.[595]

IV: The 1950s teenage drama

In *Outlaw Tales of Nebraska*, T. D. Griffith describes how 'Starkweather walked calmly to his death for the worst murder rampage in Nebraska history, [while] a band of fifty teenagers gathered outside the penitentiary walls, with rock 'n' roll rhythms blaring from their car radios'.[596] Griffith's description of the young people outside the penitentiary as a 'band of teenagers' draws my attention towards the greaser-style rolled-up sleeves and neatly combed quiffs of the young, smiling men in 'A Crowd Gathers (Recto)',[597] as this particular style was typical of male 1950s teenagers.

The greaser-style signalled identification with the youth culture that developed after the Second World War, and opposition to the parental generation's standards. This opposition also involved hostility towards the parental generation's conservative values, which I now conceive the young men's interest for the teenage killer's execution as an expression of. And that conception draws my reading of *Redheaded Peckerwood*, and thus of the criminal case, onto a new track, which is governed by a redefined conception of the cinematic frame as a reference to the 1950s Hollywood 'teenage drama'. That is, as a reference to a movie genre centring on the conflict between the post-war generation of teenagers and their parents.

Online searches reveal that the end of the Second World War greatly reduced unemployment and boosted the North American economy. Couples who could not afford to have children during the Great Depression made up for lost time, resulting in a baby boom that lasted from the early 1940s until the mid-1960s.[598] In the mid-1950s, the relatively large number

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[595] APA (The American Psychological Association), '"Media Contagion" Is Factor in Mass Shootings, Study Says', 4 August 2016,
http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2016/08/media-contagion.aspx (accessed 8 January 2018).

[596] Tom D. Griffith, *Outlaw Tales of Nebraska: True Stories of the Cornhusker State's Most Infamous Crooks, Culprits, and Cutthroats* (Guilford, Connecticut: TwoDot, 2010), 140.
http://scholar.google.no/scholar_url?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fbooks%3Fhl%3Dno%26lr%3
D%26id%3DD0GLBAAAQBAJ%26oi%3Dfnd%26pg%3DPP1%26dq%3DTom%2BD.%2BGriffith%3A%2BO
utlaw%2BTales%2Bof%2BNebraska%3A%2BTrue%2BStories%2Bof%2Bthe%2BCornhusker%2BState%25E
2%2580%2599s%2BMost%2BInfamous%2BCrooks%2C%2BCulprits%2C%2Band%2BCutthroats.%2B%26ot
s%3DVzVFSa-3xq%26sig%3Dxe5LlnixkS43TyKZvZ7xY9MFjug&hl=no&sa=T&ct=res&cd=0&ei=x6JXWsI
O0rmYAZPjkCg&scisig=AAGBfm17f7_rsLMFeR9OkRVtIazdDtyVfQ&nossl=1&ws=1920x1082 (accessed 11 January 2018).

[597] Fig. 3.59 (verso).

[598] Wikipedia, 'Mid-twentieth century baby boom', 20 January 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mid-twentieth_century_baby_boom (accessed 21 January 2019).

of early baby boomers became teenagers. And with rock 'n' roll as their preferred soundtrack, they began to forge an identity of their own in opposition to the parental generation's conservative values.[599]

Within the context of *Redheaded Peckerwood*, the divide between members of the teenage generation and their parents is expressed by the inclusion of a handwritten political verse, captioned 'The Election is Over'.[600] The verse was allegedly written by Starkweather victim Robert Jensen, and found in his pocket after his death:

> The election is over,
> the result is known.
> The will of the people
> has clearly been shown.
> Let's forget our quarrels
> And show by our deeds,
> that we will give 'Ike' all
> the help he needs.
> Let's get together and let
> bitterness pass,
> I'll hug your elephant,
> and you kiss my ass.

The verse ironically mocks the parents' admiration for the newly elected president, and it thus refers to the younger generation's hostility towards their parents' set of values, of which Eisenhower was symbolic. But more than anything, the adolescents' opposition to the parental generation was expressed through the development of a particular teenage culture.

With the rising economy, teenagers no longer had to work to contribute to their family's household. Instead, many teenagers started to receive monthly allowances to spend on non-essential goods, and some had part-time jobs that provided them with additional money. Teenagers' spending power made for a new and desirable group of consumers. Recognising the commercial potential of the teenage generation, marketers thus began to encourage teenagers to express a shared identity.[601] Thereby, a youth culture associated with particular fashions, cars, sparkling chrome accessories, fast food, and drive-in cinema emerged in the United States.

The new-fangled youth culture spread rapidly to all corners of the United States through motion pictures, radio, and the recently available cable television. This distribution gave rise to a genre of movie drama that took the emerging gap between members of the parental generation

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[599] Ibid.
[600] Fig. 3.17 (paper object inserted between pages).
[601] The National Museum of American History, 'Teen markets', http://americanhistory.si.edu/american-enterprise-exhibition/consumer-era/teen-markets (accessed 21 January 2019).

and their teenage offspring as its point of departure. The genre, which I shall refer to as the 'teenage drama', comprises films such as Lázló Benedek's *The Wild One* (1953), Richard Brook's *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956), Georg Tressler's *Teenage Woolfpack* (1956), Robert Altman's *The Delinquents* (1957), Jack Arnold's *High School Confidential!* (1958), and Edward L. Kahn's *Riot in Juvenile Prison* (1959).

Although the teenage drama genre originated in the 1950s, it still flourishes today. Nevertheless, I shall delimit my reading to the relationship between *Redheaded Peckerwood*, the Starkweather killing spree, and teenage dramas set in the 1950s. The movies mentioned above are set in the 1950s, but so is the period movie *Badlands*. Although Malick's movie was made in 1973, it thus writes itself into the teenage drama frame by setting the story of Kit and Holly in the same decade as the Starkweather killings.

No genre is completely pure, and the couple-on-the-run genre and the teenage drama genre obviously have several memes in common, such as a traditional cause-driven plot structure, romance, reckless young men and women, fast cars, and weapons. Some movies might even be described both as couple-on-the-run movies and as teenage dramas. Yet in light of Redheaded Peckerwood, the two genres appear as separate configurations of the cinematic frame. The couple-on-the-run genre, on the one hand, involves a reading of the Starkweather case in light of the media's glamorisation of the murder spree and a more general American obsession with crime. The teenage drama, on the other hand, allows for a reflection on the relationship between the criminal case and the generation gap that started to manifest itself at the time of the Starkweather homicides.

There are obvious differences of content as well as of quality within the 1950s teenage dramas. Yet there are a given set of memes that repeat themselves frequently throughout the genre. In the following, I shall read *Redheaded Peckerwood* in light of those memes, beginning with the high school classroom. This is the setting for *High School Confidential!* as well as for the iconic drama *Blackboard Jungle*, where it makes for a rough teenage environment that is memetically alluded to through Patterson's 'Calendar Girl'.[602] That allusion results from the way the photograph, which shows a 1950s pinup, memetically connects to one of the hand-coloured movie stills that promoted *Blackboard Jungle*.

'Calendar Girl' shows a pinup poster on the wall of a room that looks like it could be the classroom shown in the still from *Blackboard Jungle*, where a group of teenagers gather around a lecturing teacher.[603] The connection between Patterson's 'Calendar Girl' and this

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[602] Fig. 3.60.
[603] Fig. 3.61.

particular scene in the movie suggests that Starkweather's rage emerged from a similarly rough environment as the one the movie describes, and from his classmates' relentless bullying. That reading is supported by *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s 'Jackknife', which shows an old switchblade knife stuck in a wall.[604] That photograph brings to mind Starkweather's account of how he, after killing the Bartlett family, 'threw a knife at the wall for something to do until Caril came home'.[605] However, the photograph of the 'Jackknife' also brings to mind a central scene in *Blackboard Jungle*, where a rebellious teenager threatens a teacher by holding a similar knife to his face.[606]

In the 1950s, the switchblade knife was a symbol of in-group complicity among greaser teens.[607] Starkweather allegedly had one too, for he stabbed to death both Clara Ward and her maid, Lillian Fencl, during the murder rampage.[608] And at this stage of the rereading process, the introductory '*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar' brings to mind a still from *Blackboard Jungle* that shows a classroom filled with scattered-about objects like the ones seen inside the Storm Cellar.[609] This connection between *Redheaded Peckerwood* and *Blackboard Jungle* is reinforced by the relationship that further online searches reveal between Patterson's photograph of a toilet's wall at a Nebraskan school ('The Writing on the Wall') and the partially erased writing on the blackboard in the background of the movie still from *Blackboard Jungle*.[610]

The toilet's wall seen in Patterson's photograph is covered with names of high-school sweethearts, but also has the chilling word 'slaughter' written on it. The photograph's caption, 'The Writing on the Wall', plays on the dual sense of the phrase as a literal description of the motif on the one hand and on the other hand as a colloquial phrase meaning that something bad will happen. That sense of the term relies on the biblical story of Daniel, who interprets the

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[604] Fig. 3.62.

[605] Linda M. Battisti and John Stevens Berry, *The Twelfth Victim: The Innocence of Caril Ann Fugate in the Starkweather Murder Rampage* (Omaha, Nebraska: Addicus Books, 2014), 49–50, https://books.google.no/books?id=eVhjAwAAQBAJ&pg=PA50&lpg=PA50&dq=threw+a+knife+at+the+wall+f or+something+to+do+until+Caril+came+home%E2%80%99++starkweather&source=bl&ots=RIpt5_nB6L&sig =ACfU3U1odXIYo6A8QE0tAg_-GQBG_Z-smA&hl=no&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiq0MXbsJPgAhVRposKHftW C6UQ6AEwB3oECAgQAQ#v=onepage&q=threw%20a%20knife%20at%20the%20wall%20for%20something %20to%20do%20until%20Caril%20came%20home%E2%80%99%20%20starkweather&f=false (accessed 29 January 2019).

[606] Fig. 3.63.

[607] Robert Palmer, 'The 50s: A Decade of Music that Changed the World', *Rolling Stone*, 19 April 1990, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/the-50s-19900419 (accessed 5 January 2018).

[608] Murderpedia, 'Charles Raymond Starkweather', http://murderpedia.org/male.S/s/starkweather.htm (accessed 29 January 2019).

[609] Fig. 3.6 and 3.64.

[610] Fig. 3.65 and 3.64.

mysterious writing of a disembodied hand on the wall of King Belshazzar's palace as a sign that the king was about to be overthrown.[611]

The reference to the biblical story signals the changes that the emerging teenage generation pictured in *Blackboard Jungle* was going to bring about. In the photograph with a student threatening his teacher with a switchblade, the boys in the background wear their hair in typical 1950s quiffs or sleekly combed into crewcuts.[612] The boy to the left stands out for me, since I find his look memetically reproduced by the boy who leads the crowd that gathers in front of Starkweather's prison in 'A Crowd Gathers (Recto)'.[613] They both sport black, oily quiffs, which allow the boy in the classroom to partially melt into the blackboard behind him, and the boy outside the prison almost to melt into the black night sky.

At this point of the memetic rereading process, the black colour seems to take on a presence of its own, as it enters into dialogue with the black shoe polish that seeps from an overturned bottle in Patterson's 'Shit from Shinola'.[614] The liquid shoe polish creates a black figure, reminiscent of a Rorschach inkblot, on the white paper underneath the bottle, which I now conceive of as a reference to Starkweather's growing rage. The caption, 'Shit from Shinola', refers to a colloquial phrase popular in the 1950s as a description of another person's ignorance: 'You don't know shit from Shinola'. Within the 1950s teenage drama frame, the phrase speaks to the hostile comments that Starkweather's classmates threw at him, that is, comments that produced a murderous rage in him, which eventually led to a killing spree during which he dyed his reddish hair black with shoe polish, like a movie criminal.[615]

On the one hand, 'Shit from Shinola' points to classroom bullying, which is a meme that recurs in a range of 1950s teenage dramas. Yet it takes on another dimension when I find out that also Elvis Presley – a hick truck driver turned rock 'n' roll idol – dyed his hair with black shoe polish, before he came to money and fame in the mid-1950s.[616] This information memetically links 'Shit from Shinola' to another dimension of teenage culture that rubs off on the 1950s teenage drama genre, rock 'n' roll.

The combination of the black colour and the term 'rock 'n' roll' allows the Rorschach inkblot to form a particular image for me at this stage of the memetic rereading process. 'Rock

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[611] Wikipedia, 'Belshazzar', 20 January 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belshazzar (accessed 21 January 2019).

[612] Fig. 3.63.

[613] Fig. 3.59 (verso).

[614] Fig. 3.66.

[615] Wischmann, 'The Killing Spree that Transfixed a Nation'.

[616] L. Fernando, 'Ten Things You Didn't Know About Elvis Presley', *The Sunday Leader*, http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2011/12/25/ten-things-you-didnt-know-about-elvis-presley/ (accessed 5 January 2018).

'n' roll', the quintessential symbol of the 1950s teenage generation, was originally *black* slang for sex, a secret 'shared by disc jockeys, the performers and the kids', as Robert Palmer recounts.[617] In this light, the blot of shoe polish comes to read as a sperm stain, but also as the shadow of the large US underclass of blacks who were starting to demand equal rights under Martin Luther King Jr. in the mid-1950s.[618] In the 1950s, the black population was repressed in all areas of US post-war society. However, rock 'n' roll performers such as Little Richard and Chuck Berry managed to exert a level of influence on the teenage generation and thus to pierce a small hole in the all-white picture of the United States.[619]

Though the inkblot metaphorically seemed to suggest a connection between the Starkweather case and the black population's struggle for equality, online searches proved unable to flesh out this connection. A memetic connection between rock 'n' roll and the 1955 *Blackboard Jungle*, which has been referred to as a 'rock-and-roll social drama', seemed promising at first.[620] One of the lead roles is played by Sidney Poitier, who became the first black Oscar nominee for Best Actor four years later and a genuine movie star.[621]

Nevertheless, most of the teenage dramas that appeared in drive-in theatres across the United States at the time were dominated by white stars. And during the memetic rereading process, Poitier's name does not lead to a connection between the Starkweather murders and the racial issues of the time, but rather leads further into the generational conflict that remains at the heart of the teenage drama. That is, it leads further into the generation conflict since Poitier's white T-shirt is memetically reproduced on the white actor James Dean, the most iconic teenage star of them all, in *Rebel Without a Cause*.[622]

In 1956, Charles Starkweather watched *Rebel Without a Cause* and somehow found a kindred spirit in Dean's movie character, Jim Stark. Not only did Stark's name resemble his own, but Stark also seems to have mirrored Starkweather's sense of alienation and infringement.[623] Hence, Starkweather started to imitate the movie character's clothing, and to

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[617] Palmer continues: 'Astonishingly, "responsible adults" didn't seem to "get it". Certainly, nobody who was in on the joke was going to spell it out for them'. Palmer, 'The 50s'.

[618] U.S. History, 'Martin Luther King Jr.', http://www.ushistory.org/us/54f.asp (accessed 21 January 2019).

[619] *Malay Mail*, '60 years on, hearing anew explosive Little Richard', 17 November 2017, https://www.malaymail.com/news/showbiz/2017/11/17/60-years-on-hearing-anew-explosive-little-richard/15121 45 (accessed 21 January 2019).

[620] Warner Archive Instant, 'Happy 90th to Sidney Poitier! Watch Him In BLACKBOARD JUNGLE on Warner Archive!' YouTube, 20 February 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxJR4prB68g (accessed 10 January 2019).

[621] Ibid.

[622] Fig. 3.67 and 3.68.

[623] Charles Montaldo, 'Profile of Charles Starkweather', ThoughtCo, 26 March 2017, https://www.thoughtco.com/profile-of-charles-starkweather-973102 (accessed 11 January 2018).

groom his hair as Stark did, as is obvious from the close-up of the murderer's thick quiff in 'Charlie's Bloody Ear'.[624]

Starkweather's adoption of Stark's appearance implies a reflection on how the real events of the Starkweather killing spree were intertwined with the cinematic all along, and not just after the fact, since quite a few motion pictures were based on the real-life murder spree. This interweaving of fiction with real life is one of the central themes of the drama *Badlands*, which was promoted by this tagline:

> He was 25 years old. *He combed his hair like James Dean*. He was very fastidious. People who littered bothered him. She was 15. She took music lessons and could twirl a baton. She wasn't very popular at school. For awhile [*sic*] they lived together in a tree house. In 1959, she watched while he killed a lot of people [my italics].[625]

Starkweather mirrored not just Jim Stark's appearance, but also his rough behaviour. However, the 'Confession Letter' reveals that Starkweather applies his knife as an actual murder weapon, and not just to threaten other people, as Jim Stark does in *Rebel Without a Cause*.[626]

Rebel Without a Cause provides a picture of 1950s American youth through the movie's portrayal of a group of three teenagers who meet at the juvenile division of the local police station where they were being held for various delinquencies. The subsequent storyline explores the relationship between a detached parental generation and the ethical deterioration of American adolescents in the same period. According to online sources, a so-called 'permissive' parental style is characteristic of the 1950s, meaning that parents allowed their children free reign of the neighbourhood, with few questions asked regarding their whereabouts and activities. At the same time, parents enforced a rigid, top-down rule structure that Patterson's 'No Nothing' reads as a comment on,[627] and they imposed strict punishment for violating these rules.[628]

Rebel Without a Cause speaks of a parental generation unwilling to take responsibility for the budding disintegration of the American family. The same subject is referenced in *Redheaded Peckerwood* by a series of photographs of deteriorating homes (such as 'Meyer Farm' and 'Broken Home').[629] These photographs suggest a reading of the Starkweather case

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[624] Fig. 3.12.
[625] Fig. 3.69.
[626] Fig. 3.16 and 3.70.
[627] Fig. 3.71.
[628] Motherhood: In Point of Fact, 'The 1950s: The Age of Permissive Childcare', http://motherhoodinpointoffact.com/the-1950s-the-age-of-permissive-childcare/ (accessed 5 January 2018).
[629] Fig. 3.72 and 3.7.

as being the result of a detached parental generation. That reading is supported by the 'Confession Letter',[630] where Fugate and Starkweather jointly recount the circumstances of his murder of Fugate's family. Here they tell us about killings that took place for no good reason other than Starkweather's feeling of being misunderstood and distrusted by his girlfriend's parents. A part of the letter written by Fugate narrates the situation thus:

> chuck came down that tuesday happy and full of joke's but when he came in mom said for him to get out and never come back, chuck look at her, "and said <u>why</u>." at that my dad got mad and be gun to hit him and was pushing him all over the room, then chuck got mad and there was no stoping him, he had his gun whit him cause him and my dad was going hunting [*sic*: this applies globally to the error-laden passage].

According to the confession letter, Starkweather was sorry after the murders, since he did not want to commit them. But, as the letter shows, the way the older generation denied him access to their home triggered a rage he could not contain.

In light of the memes that connect various versions of the 1950s teenage drama, Starkweather's violent actions read as a reflection of an increasing recklessness that was characteristic of his generation at large.[631] While this recklessness seems to have been a partial result of the parents' detached relationship with their children, the older generation did not take responsibility for their children's violent actions. Instead, 1950s parents and authorities alike seem to have blamed popular culture, and particularly motion pictures.[632] Starkweather's adoption of Jim Stark's violent ways confirms that the movies might be one reason behind the younger generation's violence. Yet a reading of *Redheaded Peckerwood* in light of the teenage drama genre implies that Starkweather's brutality might also have come out of the parental generation's detachment, which tragically left the kids to follow their own moral compasses.

The fatal consequences of leaving children to find their own way through life are illustrated in the movie *Badlands*. When Holly's stern and forbidding father finds out that she has been seeing Kit, he kills her dog as punishment for her breaking his rules. The dog's death tragically ignites a range of destructive deeds that Holly recounts in an emotionally distanced voiceover. This destruction starts with Kit's murder on Holly's father and proceed as he sets

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[630] Fig. 3.16.

[631] Lisa Wiseman, 'Historiography: Teenage Attitude of the 1950s', http://www.oc.edu/dotAsset/c8e169a2-7e76-4ce0-9856-8005081ae11e.pdf (accessed 21 January 2019).

[632] James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1988), 143. https://books.google.no/books?hl=no&lr=&id=O5fJDgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=gilbert+a+cycle+of+outrage&ots=QlJyLtiSfy&sig=tdOz_YD5EscLe7PdexTRgfO9Cyw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=mass%20media%20and%20delinquency&f=false (accessed 12 January 2018).

fire to the house and thus to Holly's childhood, which goes up in flames together with her doll's house and the father's body.[633]

The fire scene in *Badlands* symbolically represents the disintegration of the American family in the 1950s, which the Starkweather killing spree and the teenage drama are representative of. The same scene, which precedes Kit and Holly's escape, is memetically alluded to in *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s black-and-white 'Burned-Out Room', which shows a bedroom after a fire.[634] This photograph speaks to a conception of *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s account of the Starkweather case in light of the teenage drama. That conception is reinforced by the photograph of Fugate and her sister kissing at Caril Ann's trial ('Sisters Kissing').[635] Within the 1950s teenage drama frame, that photograph becomes symbolic of how young people were left to find comfort and trust in other teenagers rather than in the older generation.

The feeling of being deprived of the parents' protection and left with only the support and trust of other teenagers, is memetically reproduced in *Rebel Without a Cause*. In a scene towards the end of the movie, the protagonist Jim and his friends Judy and Plato hide in a deserted mansion where they act out the fantasy of the warm and peaceful family that their parents could not provide.[636] That scene is memetically reproduced yet another time by the domestic idyll that *Badlands*' Kit and Holly temporarily plays out in a tree house at one point of their journey away from the small town where they grew up.[637]

Hiding, Kit and Holly play out the roles of a conventional 1950s married couple. He makes sure that the two have food on their table, and she prepares the food with her lips painted and her hair rolled up in curlers. Yet, as Holly understands over time, the ideal of the 1950s married couple is an ideal they will never be able to realise together. And when bounty hunters discover their hide-out and they are forced to get back into the car and onto the road again, their fictional family is broken up. And thereby they memetically reproduce yet again the motif of the broken home that runs through *Redheaded Peckerwood* as a series of disintegrating American houses.

Before Holly's family home went up in flames, Holly's dad made a living by painting bright billboard posters.[638] One of the photographs in *Redheaded Peckerwood* is a photograph of a similar billboard poster painted with the phrase 'Let's all go out and get a steak', which is

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[633] Fig. 3.73.
[634] Fig. 3.10.
[635] Fig. 3.14.
[636] Fig. 3.74.
[637] Fig. 3.75.
[638] Fig. 3.76 (recto).

also the photograph's caption.[639] Smoke rises from the letters, as from a chargrilled steak. By way of this picture, the story in *Badlands* is folded onto the real events of the Starkweather case that inspired it, since online searches reveal that Charles Starkweather's father morbidly suggested that the family should go out and get some steak immediately after hearing that his son was sentenced to die in the electric chair.[640]

Starkweather's father's comment signals an emotional distance from his son, but also an unwillingness or inability to recognise his own responsibility for the teenager's horrible deeds. The teenage drama frame suggests that his stance is representative of the 1950s parental generation at large, who would not or could not hear their children's cry for help. That desperate cry is represented by the photograph that Patterson has captioned 'Help (Gas Can)', which shows a crushed red petrol can that bears that same word.[641] In *Rebel Without a Cause*, the teenager's denial by the adult generation is played out thrice. First, when the father refuses to stand up for Jim Stark against Jim's mother, who wants to uproot the family by relocating again. This led the son to storm off to the police station, where he was refused a second time, by the police. And then he was refused by adults a third time when he called his friend Judy's home, and her father hung up on him.

As Peter in the New Testament denied Jesus three times, adults denied Jim Stark on three occasions. That coincidence suggests a memetic relationship between Jim Stark and Jesus Christ that is reinforced by one of Stark's poses at a later stage of the movie. This is where he, in a white shirt, stares into the headlights of a row of police cars in a scene that is memetically reproduced by Patterson's 'Headlights'.[642] Stretching his arms out like Jesus on the cross, Stark attempts to protect his friend Plato from the armed police officers,[643] but they shoot and kill Plato nonetheless and Stark then falls crying to the ground.

The association between the teenager and Jesus is also repeated in *Badlands*, where the Starkweather-inspired character Kit carries his shotgun across his shoulders as if it were the transverse bar of a cross.[644] The references to Jesus imply a nod to the high degree of religious commitment that characterised 1950s US society.[645] Yet the references also suggest the

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[639] Fig. 3.77.
[640] Bengal, 'Object Lessons'.
[641] Fig. 3.78.
[642] Fig. 3.79 and 3.80.
[643] Fig. 3.81.
[644] Fig. 3.82.
[645] Miles Mullin, 'The Religion of the 1950s', Patheos, 31 July 2013,
http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2013/07/the-religion-of-the-1950s/#QT2rCUCvoQZU5syL.99
(accessed 6 January 2018).

provocative conclusion that Starkweather, in and by his death, took his generation's sins upon his shoulders like a modern day martyr for the parental generation's neglect.

In light of the conception of the cinematic frame as a reference to 1950s teenage drama, the Starkweather myth comes across as the horrid result of a generational conflict between teenagers and their parents. In this account of the story, Starkweather and Fugate play the roles of victims of the parental generation's neglect. However, neither this conception of their roles sticks with them for long. When I continue my online searches, I find that the scene where Kit carries the shotgun across his shoulders memetically imitates James Dean's movie character Jett Rink's pose on a film still for George Stevens's epic Western drama *Giant* (1956).[646]

Like the 1950s teenage drama, *Giant* is about generational conflicts as well, within a Texan family. But in Stevens's film, those conflicts are subordinate to a more universal narrative that unfolds beyond the 1950s time frame, which concerns privilege, race, and class. And this discovery marks the point where the cinematic frame breaks down altogether and ceases its hold on my process of rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood*. That is, it ceases its hold because I begin to approach Patterson's photobook, and thus the Starkweather case, in relation to the American legal system and the question of right and wrong.

Concluding remarks

Redheaded Peckerwood comes out of a post-digital era where obscurity is customarily met by online searches on smartphones or other portable digital devices. Within this post-digital context, I find that the suggestive relationship between the photographs in Patterson's photobook and the underlying Starkweather myth conceptualises online searches as a part of the work's definition. The World Wide Web allows for a potentially unlimited process of navigation. Nonetheless, I contend that *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s memetic principle of rereading secures a sense of structural unity that allows readers to distinguish the photobook network from the context that the work unfolds within. And by considering the memetic principle that structures the process of rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood*, I have challenged Emma Bennett's conception of the frame as a set of static features that each of Patterson's photographs is steeped in. By tracing the cinematic frame's multiple appearances during the memetic process of rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood*, I have argued that the work allows for an emergent conception of the frame, and of the logic that sustains the frame's distribution in a cultural environment.

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[646] Fig. 3.83.

The cinematic frame is a set of conventions that allows the Starkweather myth to appear and reappear in relation to Hollywood cinema. While this particular frame's hold on my own rereading process was constantly threatened by other relevant frames, such as advertising, art, and media, it managed to establish hegemony over my conception of *Redheaded Peckerwood* and to maintain its appeal for the larger part of my interaction with Patterson's photobook. The cinematic frame was, however, on the verge of exhaustion at several stages of the rereading process, in those situations where I felt I had explored every photograph in the photobook that seemed even remotely relevant for a cinematic reading. But each time that happened, three times over, the cinematic frame's ambiguity allowed the frame to mutate and thus to impose itself on photographs it had hitherto been unable to explain, and onto new ranges of motives, genres, and technologies. Riding on the back of the work's memetic structure, the cinematic frame thus appeared successively as a set of conventions related to the film noir, the staged narrative tableau, the couple-on-the-run genre, and 1950s teenage drama.

The frame, as Goffman emphasises in his definition of the phenomenon, is inseparable from the contents of its representation.[647] This means that the cinematic frame that governs my conception of *Redheaded Peckerwood* is indistinguishable from the criminal case that it represents, a criminal case that successively appeared to me in relation to various aspects of 1950s society. This case appeared in relation to four different elements: gender biases, suburbanisation and alienation, an all-American appetite for true crime, and, finally, as the result of generational conflict. And by outlining these four readings, my analysis of *Redheaded Peckerwood* suggests several conclusions as to what might have been Charles Starkweather's and Caril Ann Fugate's respective roles in the horrid murder spree.

The applicability of the Starkweather myth to the various versions of the cinematic frame proves that the criminal case is as equally ambiguous a figure as the frame that allows it to appear is. And furthermore, the case seems to have a comparable ability to connect with already-circulating conventions and cultural figures. Within the work, the association of the cinematic frame with the criminal case thus allows for a mutual reinforcement of the frame and the Starkweather case, a reinforcement which supports the continued distribution of each over the act of rereading.

While rereading *Redheaded Peckerwood*, I actively looked for traces of the burgeoning civil rights movement that started to manifest itself in the late 1950s. However, I could find only one brief suggestion of a link between the Starkweather case and the contemporaneous

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[647] Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 10–11.

struggle for blacks' civil rights, a link which I was unable to flesh out through online searches. This paucity of linkage, of course, might indicate that race was irrelevant to the events of the murder spree. Yet the extension of my searches also suggests what recent studies confirm: that the algorithms of the World Wide Web covertly reproduce deeply ingrained racial biases.[648]

In 2015, software engineer Jacky Alciné pointed out that Google Photos' picture recognition algorithms were unable to distinguish black people and gorillas.[649] And a test run by *Wired* almost three years later revealed that Google Photos' search for 'black man', 'black woman', or 'black person' merely returned black-and-white photographs filtered by gender, but not by race.[650] Disturbingly, research confirms that online representations not just of race, but also of gender and a range of other subjects are similarly biased by algorithmic prejudices and inequities.[651] And as my analysis of *Redheaded Peckerwood* shows, this bias obviously has far-reaching ethical implications in the photobook field, where the rereading process is increasingly steered by algorithms after the popularisation of smartphones.[652]

In the post-digital era, even historical photobooks are likely to be supplemented by nodes provided by the World Wide Web. Therefore, we must ask whether photobooks are thus forced to reproduce the prejudices of their cultural contexts. The question is disturbing, but my analysis of *Redheaded Peckerwood* allows the present chapter to end on a positive note. Although the World Wide Web, in this case, provides most of *Redheaded Peckerwood*'s nodes, the network's overall meaning is not the sum of the qualities of each node. Rather, as I have showed in this chapter, meaning is the result of the pattern that emerges from my combination and recombination of these same nodes according to a memetic principle of rereading. And what that pattern carries is a reflection on how particularly appealing frames mutate into ever-new configurations over time – in a process that seems to be radically accelerated by the World Wide Web – thereby exerting hegemony over our collective imagination and thus over our shared history.

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[648] Aylin Caliskan, Joanna J. Bryson, and Arvind Narayanan: 'Semantics Derived Automatically from Language Corpora Contain Human-like Biases', *Science* 356, no. 6334 (2017): 183–186.

[649] Jacky Alciné, Untitled post, Twitter, 28 June 2015, https://twitter.com/jackyalcine/status/615329515909156865 (accessed 7 January 2019).

[650] In fact, the only search terms that provided results that seemed to select for people with darker skin tones were 'afro' and 'African'. Tom Simonite, 'When it comes to Gorillas Google Photos remains Blind', *Wired*, 1 November 2018, https://www.wired.com/story/when-it-comes-to-gorillas-google-photos-remains-blind/ (accessed 7 January 2019).

[651] Caliskan et al., 'Semantics Derived Automatically from Language Corpora Contain Human-like Biases'.

[652] Ibid.

Figure 3.1.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
cover, booklet and postcard.
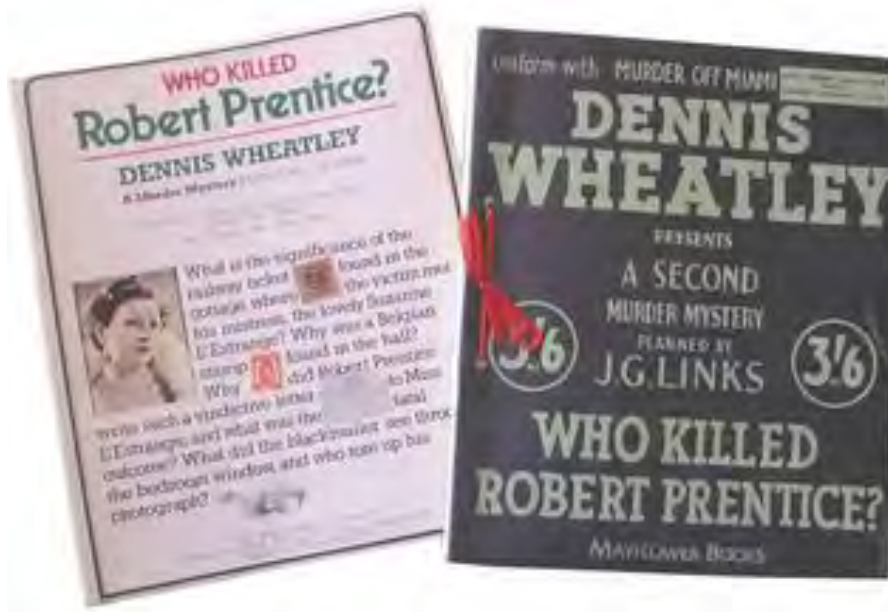
Figure 3.2.
Two of Dennis Wheatley and J. G. Links's 1930s *Crime Dossiers*.
http://allegrobookcollection.typepad.com/allegrobookcollection/history.html
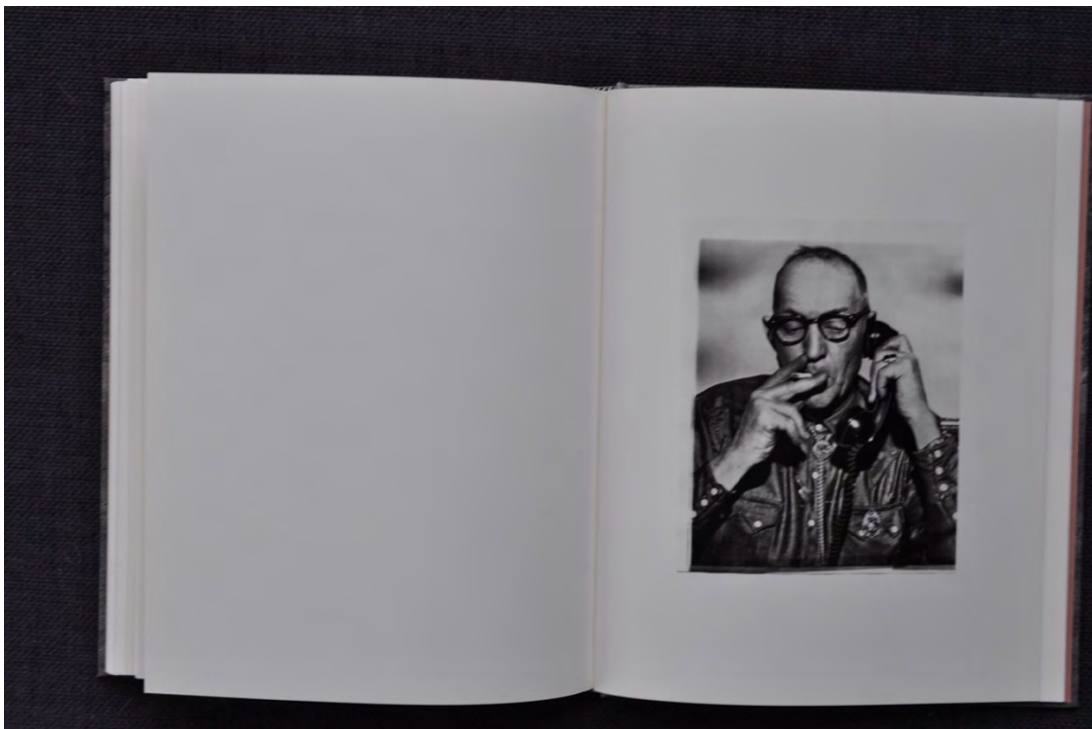(accessed 19 February 2018).

Figure 3.3.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'House at Night'.

Figure 3.4.
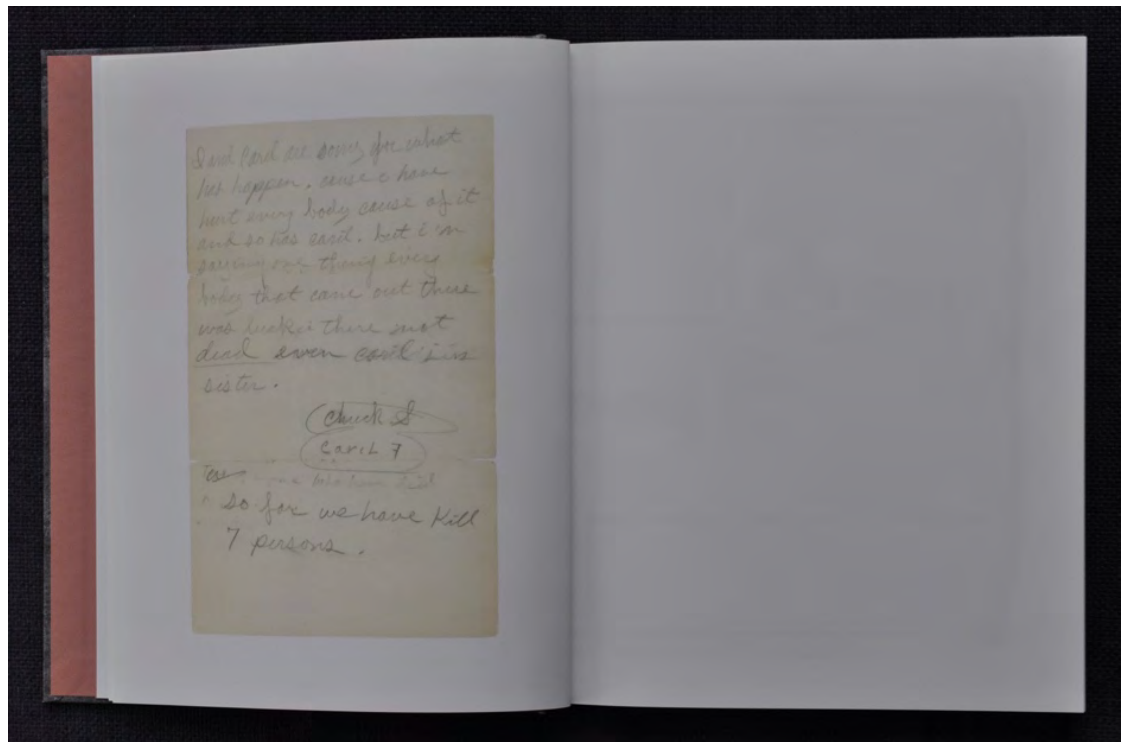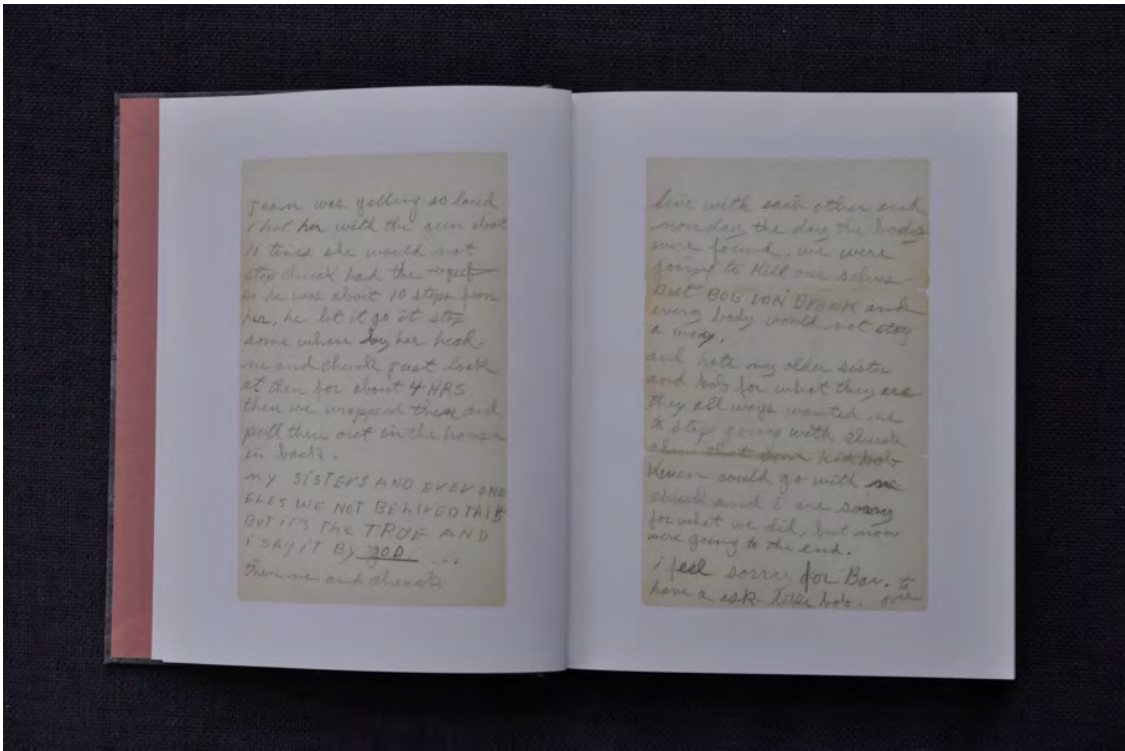Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Death Figure'.

Figure 3.5.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Curtains for You'.

Figure 3.6.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'*frontispiece*: Storm Cellar'.

Figure 3.7.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Broken Home'.

Figure 3.8.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Broken-Down Door'.

Figure 3.9.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'Little Town' (paper object inserted between pages) and 'Store Door' (recto).

Figure 3.10.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Burned-Out Room'.
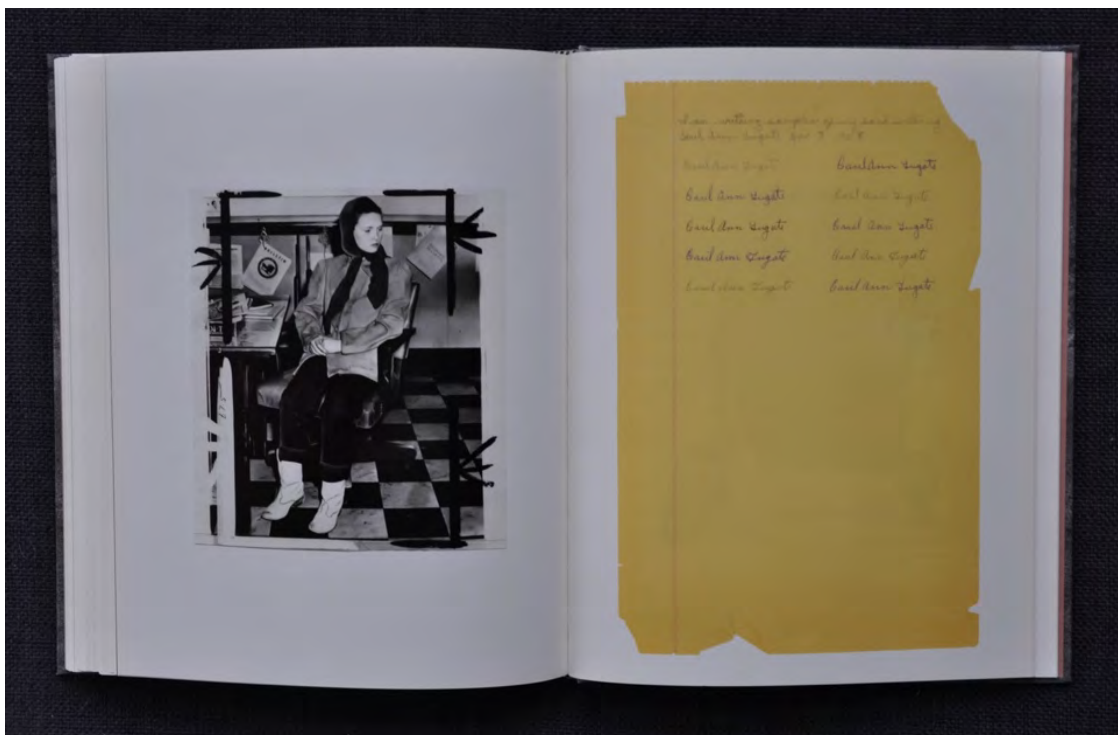
Figure 3.11.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'Caril Ann (Captured)' (verso) and 'Caril Ann (Handwriting Sample)' (recto).

Figure 3.12.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Charlie's Bloody Ear'.

Figure 3.13.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Sheriff Heflin'.

Figure 3.14.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Sisters Kissing'.

Figure 3.15.
Unknown photographer, storm cellar with Starkweather victim Robert Jensen's body.
https://www.lidovky.cz/ln_lidovky/foto.aspx?r=lide&c=A170318_223644_lide_gib&foto=GI
B6a0b3a_jensen.png (accessed 21 March 2019).

for the law only
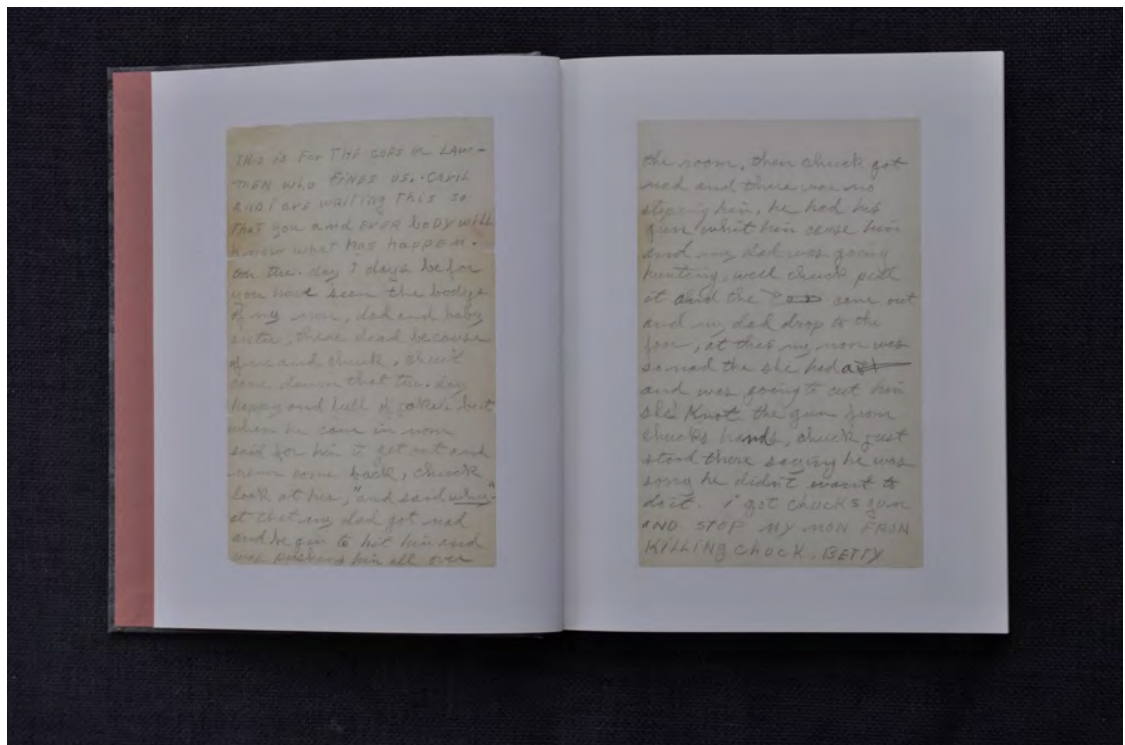
THIS is FoR THE cops or LAW-
MEN wHo FINDS US. CECIL
AND I are writing this so
THAT you and EVER boDY will
know what has happen.
on tue. day 7 days befor
you have seen the bodys
of my mom, dad and baby
sister, there dead because
of me and chuck, it all
took down that tue. day
happy and till dad/father
when he came in mom
said for him to get out and
never come back, chuck
look at her, "and said when-
at that my dad got mad
and be gun to hit him and
was pushing him all over

the room, then chuck got
mad and there was no
stoping him, he had his
gun whit him cense him
dad my dad was going
hunting. well chucks pick
it and the [   ] came out
and my dad drop to the
flor, at this my mom was
scared the she had a [   ]
and was going to cut him
she knot the gun from
chucks hands, chuck just
stood there saying he was
sorry he didn't want to
do it. i got chucks gun
AND STOP MY MON FROM
KILLING CHUCK. BETTY

Figure 3.16.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Confession Letter'.

Figure 3.17.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'The Election is Over' (paper object inserted between pages).

Figure 3.18.
Unknown photographer, journalists looking into the storm cellar where Starkweather killed
Robert Jensen and Carol King. https://www.pinterest.se/pin/773634042210306551/
(accessed 19 March 2019).

Figure 3.19.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), inserted postcard.

Figure 3.20.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'The Press'.

Figure 3.21.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
Caril Ann (Tear-Stained)' (verso) and 'Emotions' (recto).
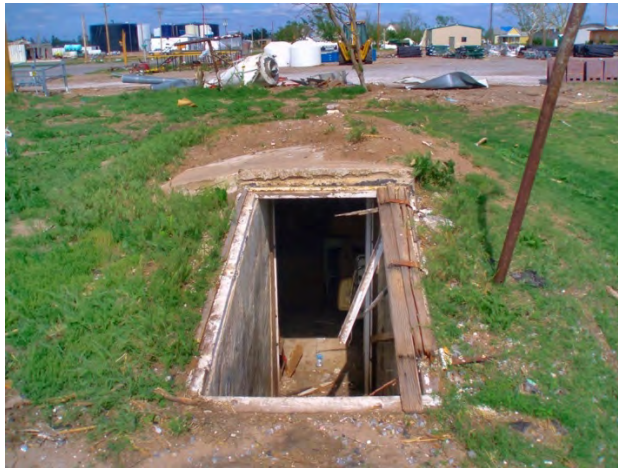
Figure 3.22.
Unknown photographers, storm shelters.
https://stormsafeshelters.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/tornado-shelters1.jpg;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storm_cellar;
https://images1.dallasobserver.com/imager/u/745xauto/9239251/texasstormshelterguy_courte
sydavidgallup.jpg
(all accessed 19 March 2019).

Figure 3.23.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
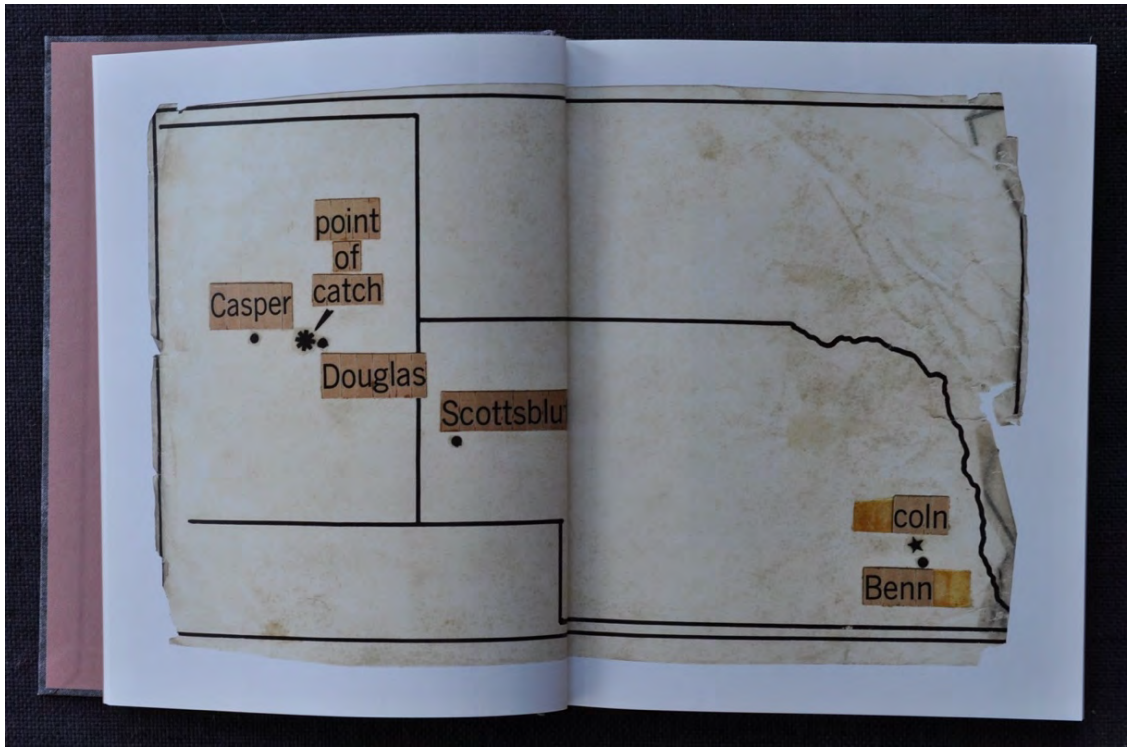'24th Street Road (Road at Night)'.

Figure 3.24.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Landscape on Fire'.

Figure 3.25.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Prairie Grass Swirl'.

Figure 3.26.
Actor Ted de Corcia in Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948), movie still.
http://www.stopsmilingonline.com/story_print.php?id=1011
(accessed 19 March 2019).

Figure 3.27.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'You Know Who'.

Figure 3.28.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'Shady Lane (Meyer Farm)'.

Figure 3.29.
Actor Joseph Schildkraut in Jules Dassin's movie *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1941).
http://www.weirdovideo.com/tag/jules-dassin/ (accessed 19 February 2019).

Figure 3.30.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'You Can't Run Away from Anything (Tire)'.

Figure 3.31.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'Caril Ann (Funny Face)'.

Figure 3.32.
Lana Turner as Cora Smith in Tay Garnett's movie *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946).
http://classiq.me/style-in-film-lana-turner-in-the-postman-always-rings-twice
(accessed 22 March 2019).

Figure 3.33.
Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Stills* # 4, 21, 27 and 53.
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/56525;
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/56618;
https://www.moma.org/collection/works/56659;
https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/untitled-film-still--53/1B92BC51466D7316
(all accessed 18 March 2019).

Figure 3.34.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Telephone'.

Figure 3.35.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Motel Sign'.

Figure 3.36.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Ray of Light'.

Figure 3.37.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Bloody Snow'.

Figure 3.38.
Todd Hido, *House Hunting* (Portland, Oregon: Nazraeli Press, 2001), '#2844-D'.
http://www.americansuburbx.com/2009/09/theory-todd-hido-art-of-darkness.html
(accessed 19 February 2018).

Figure 3.39.
Gregory Crewdson's 'Untitled (Ray of light)' (2001) from his *Twilight* series (1998–2002),
digital colour coupler print mounted on aluminum.
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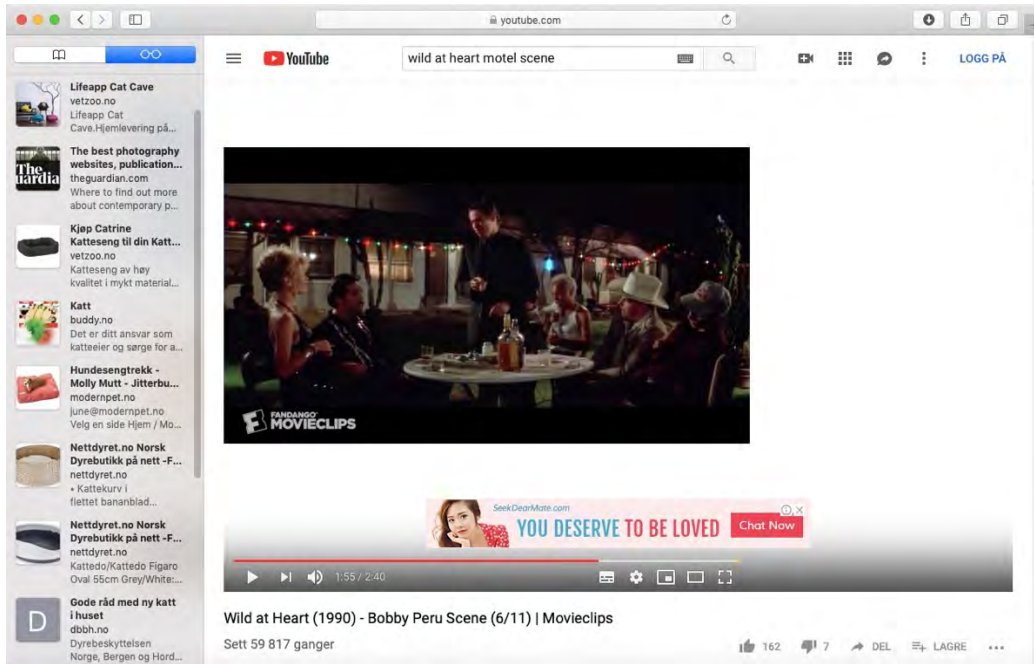
Figure 3.40.
Outdoor motel scene, David Lynch's movie *Wild at Heart* (1990).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2YCseaZK0Q (accessed 20 March 2019).

Figure 3.41.
Indoor motel scene, David Lynch's *Wild at Heart* (1990).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvE-_utxEzc (accessed 20 February 2018).

Figure 3.42.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Map of Nebraska'.

Figure 3.43.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Surrender Clouds'.

Figure 3.44.
Bonnie (Faye Dunaway) practicing her marksmanship in Arthur Penn's movie *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). https://mubi.com/films/bonnie-and-clyde (accessed 20 February 2018).

Figure 3.45.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'Snowy Branches' (verso) and 'Charlie's Boots' (recto).

Figure 3.46.
Nicholas Cage and Laura Dern as Sailor and Lula, David Lynch's movie *Wild at Heart*
(1990). https://no.pinterest.com/pin/496029346427852876/?lp=true
(accessed 22 March 2018).
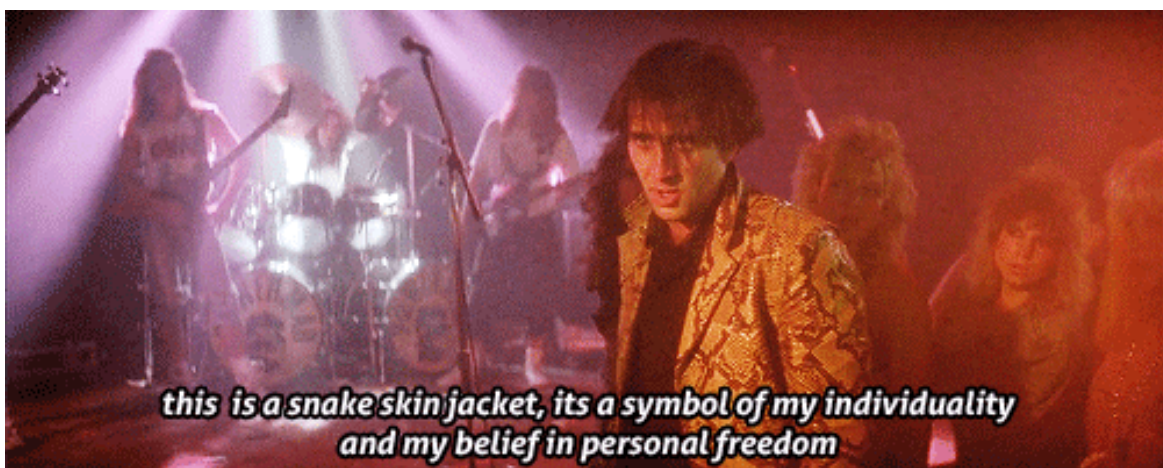
Figure 3.47.
Nicholas Cage as Sailor, David Lynch's movie *Wild at Heart* (1990), screenshot from video.
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greatness#.06kBtWFR8 (accessed 9 March 2018).

Figure 3.48.
Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis as Mickey and Mallory, Oliver Stone's movie *Natural Born Killers* (1994). http://virginiescinema.blogspot.no/2013/07/natural-born-killers.html (accessed 9 March 2018).

Figure 3.49.
Kit (Martin Sheen) in his denim outfit, Terrence Malick's movie *Badlands* (1973). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069762/mediaindex (accessed 22 March 2019).
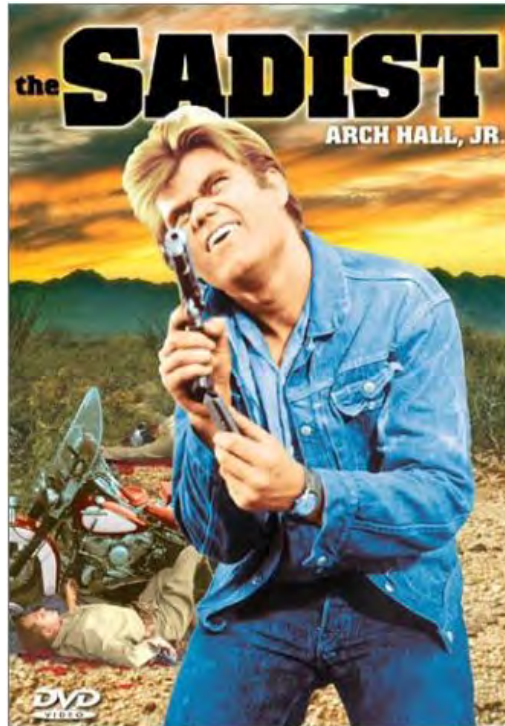
Figure 3.50.
Charles (Arch Hall, Jr.) in his denim outfit, James Landis's movie *The Sadist* (1963).
http://www.aintitcool.com/node/42889 (accessed 9 March 2018).

Figure 3.51.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'Modern Man (Folded Magazine)'.
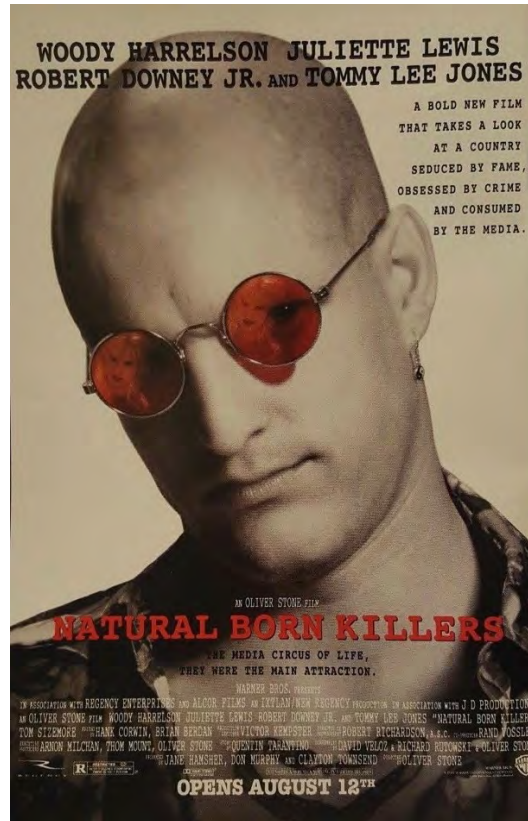
Figure 3.52.
Movie Poster, Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994).
https://www.ebay.com/itm/1994-Natural-Born-Killers-movie-promo-Woody-Harrelson-
photo-vintage-print-Ad-/113479779955 (accessed 21 March 2019).

Figure 3.53.
Mickey (Woody Harrelson) making his way onto the stage for his appearance on television in
Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994).
http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-natural-born-killers-mickey-und-mallory-sind-das-
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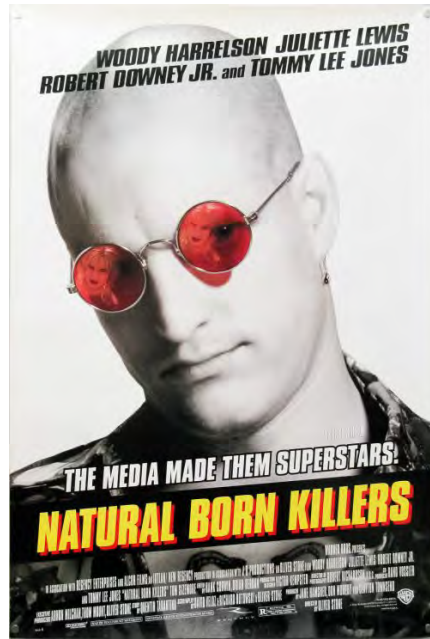
Figure 3.54.
Movie poster, Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994).
https://www.filmonpaper.com/posters/natural-born-killers-one-sheet-styleb-usa/
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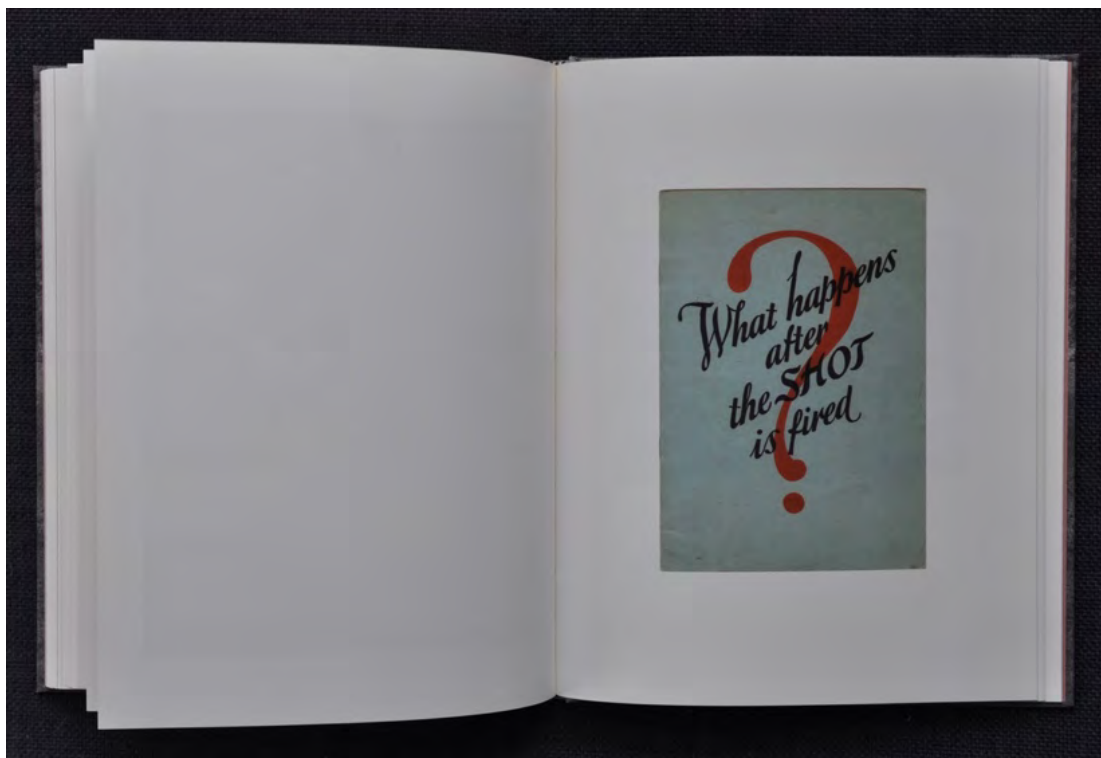
Figure 3.55.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'What Happens After the Shot is Fired?'.

CANT TELL IF SHOTS WERE FIRED

OR IF THEY ARE JOKING TOGETHER

memecrunch.com

HELLO OPERATOR?

I'D LIKE TO REPORT SHOTS FIRED. memegenerator.net

Figure 3.56.
Versions of the meme 'Shots fired!'.
https://memecrunch.com/meme/179KI/shots-fired;
https://memegenerator.net/instance/57315757/liam-neeson-taken-hello-operator-id-like-to-report-shots-fired;
https://memegenerator.net/instance/65324015/yoda-fired-shots-were
(all accessed 22 March 2019).

Figure 3.57.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Hood Ornament'.

Figure 3.58.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Zippo'.
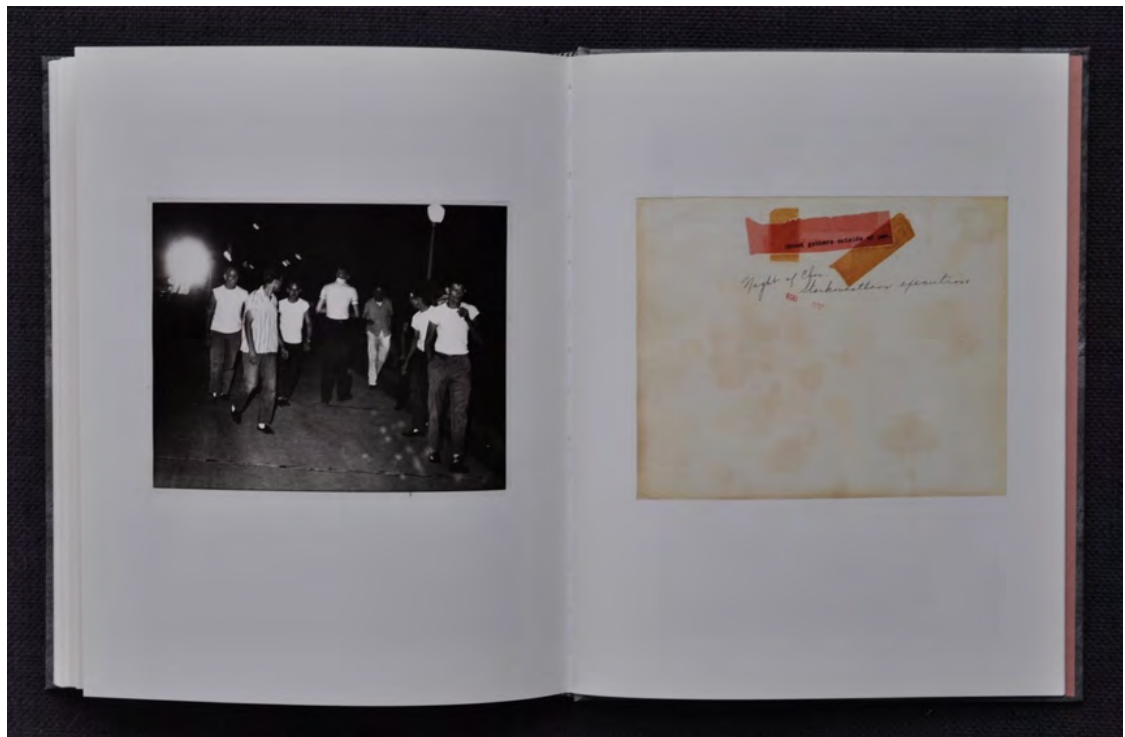
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Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
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Figure 3.60.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Calendar Girl'.

Figure 3.61.
Movie poster showing students listening to their teacher (Glenn Ford),
Richard Brook's *Blackboard Jungle* (1955).
https://boogiechillen.wordpress.com/%E2%80%9Coh-daddio%E2%80%9D-how-blackboard-
jungle-changed-rock-roll/ (accessed 9 March 2018).

Fig. 3.62.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Jackknife'.

Figure 3.63.
Movie poster showing student (Vic Morrow) threatening his teacher (Glenn Ford), Richard
Brook's *Blackboard Jungle* (1955).
http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-blackboard-jungle-movie-poster-124305344.html
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Figure 3.64.
Classroom scene from Richard Brook's movie *Blackboard Jungle* (1955).
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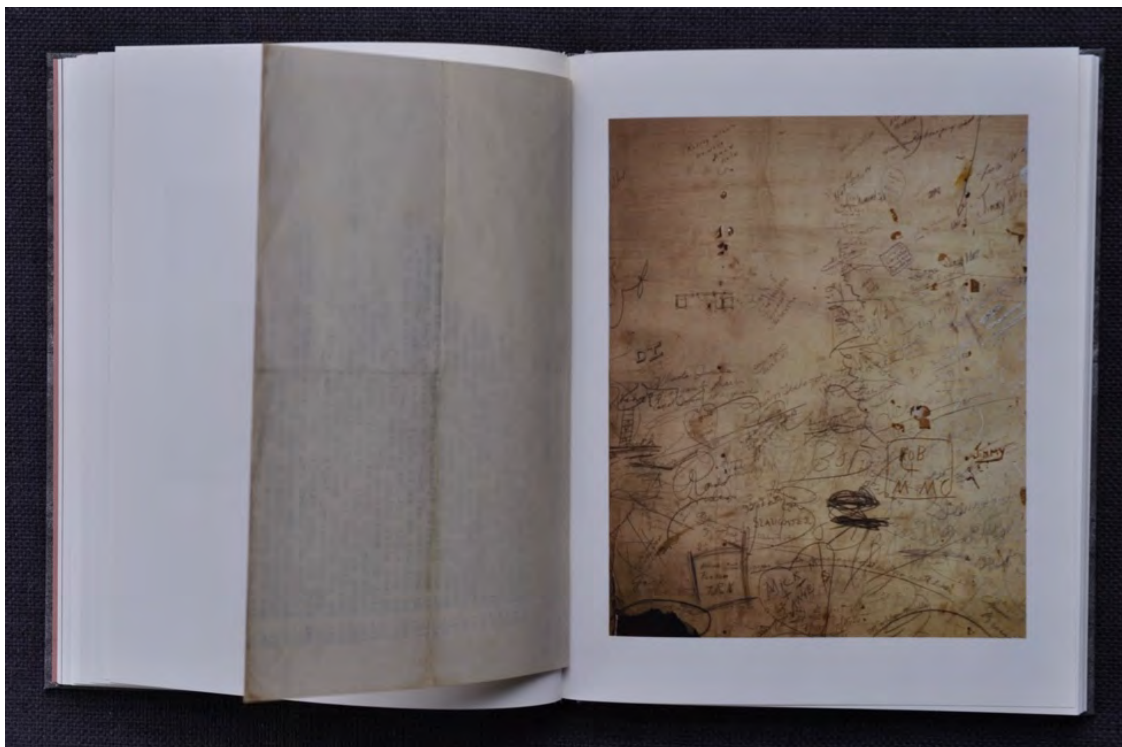
Figure 3.65.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
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Figure 3.66.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Shit from Shinola'.

Figure 3.67.
Actor Sidney Poitier as Gregory W. Miller in Richard Brook's movie *Blackboard Jungle*
(1955). https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/blackboard-jungle (accessed 22 March 2019).

Figure 3.68.
Actor James Dean as Jim Stark in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956),
movie poster.
https://www.poster-rama.com/products/james-dean-rebel-without-a-cause-movie-still-poster
(accessed 10 January 2019).

Figure 3.69.
Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973), movie poster.
https://eu.movieposter.com/poster/MPW-30111/Badlands.html (accessed 8 March 2018).

Figure 3.70.
Actor James Dean as Jim Stark in Nicholas Ray's movie *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956).
http://www.navhindtimes.in/rebel-without-a-cause-coming-of-age/ (accessed 22 March 2019).
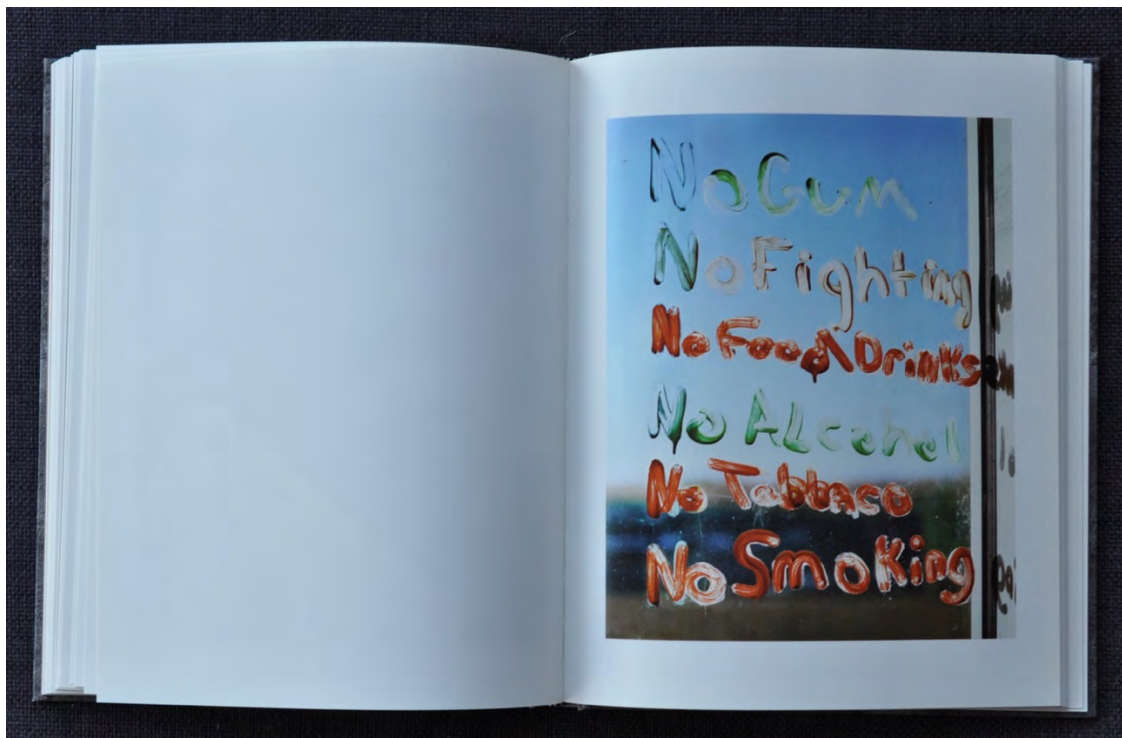

Figure 3.71.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'No Nothing'.

Figure 3.72.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Meyer Farm'.

Figure 3.73.
Fire scene, Terrence Malick's movie *Badlands* (1973).
https://michaeljcinema.wordpress.com/2013/07/04/badlands-1973/ (accessed 8 March 2018).

Figure 3.74.
Plato (Sal Mineo), Jim (James Dean), and Judy (Natalie Wood) hiding in a deserted mansion
in Nicholas Ray's movie *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956).
http://thefineartdiner.blogspot.no/2011/11/james-dean-vs-charles-darwin-rebel.html
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Figure 3.75.
Kit (Martin Sheen) and Holly (Sissy Spacek) hiding in a tree house in Terrence Malick's
movie *Badlands* (1973). https://michaeljcinema.wordpress.com/2013/07/04/badlands-1973/
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Figure 3.76.
Holly's father (Warren Oates), the signpainter (recto), in Terrence Malick's movie *Badlands* (1973). https://elanmorgan.com/blog/2008/2/8/a-complete-and-utter-spoiler-of-terrence-malicks-1973-badlan.html (accessed 8 March 2018).
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Figure 3.77.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013),
'Let's All Go Out and Get a Steak'.

Figure 3.78.
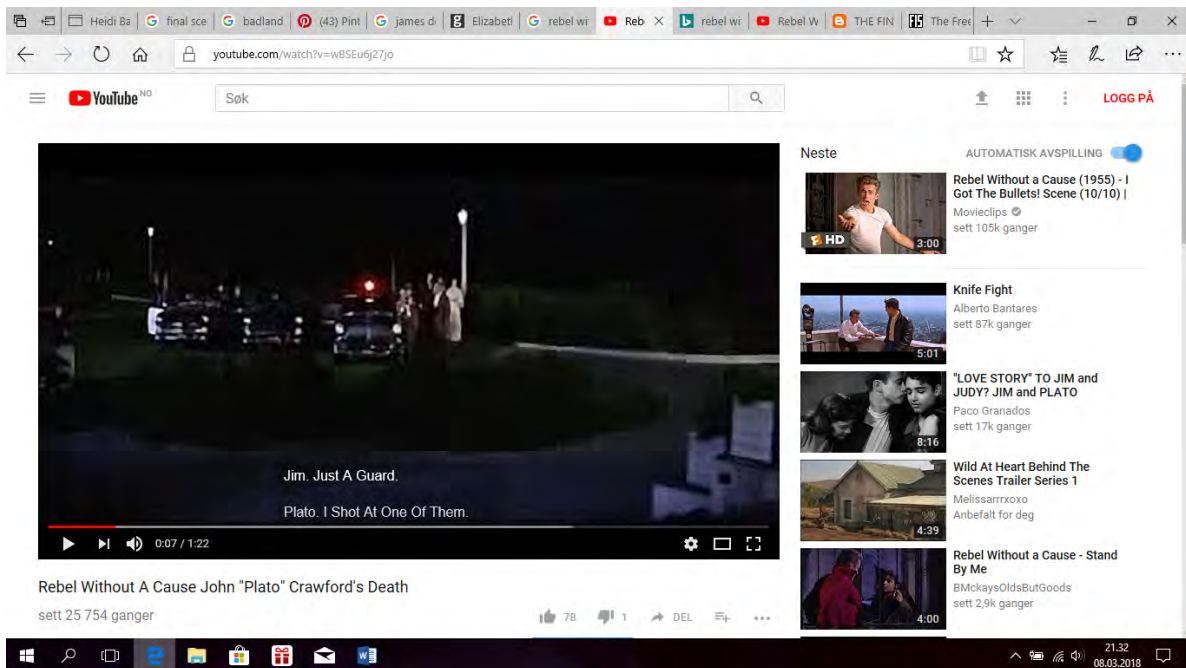Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Help (Gas Can)'.

Figure 3.79.
Police car headlights in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956), screenshot from video.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBSEu6j27jo (accessed 8 March 2018).

Figure 3.80.
Christian Patterson, *Redheaded Peckerwood* (London: MACK, 2013), 'Headlights'.

Figure 3.81.
Jim Stark (James Dean) in Nicholas Ray's movie *Rebel Without a Cause* (1956).
http://thefineartdiner.blogspot.no/2011/11/james-dean-vs-charles-darwin-rebel.html
(accessed 8 March 2018).

Figure 3.82.
Kit (Martin Sheen) in Terrence Malick's movie *Badlands* (1973).
https://michaeljcinema.wordpress.com/2013/07/04/badlands-1973/ (accessed 8 March 2018).

Figure 3.83.
Leslie Benedict (Elizabeth Taylor) and Jett Rink (James Dean) in George Stevens's movie
Giant (1956), film still. H
ttp://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-29107/photos/detail/?cmediafile=18918757
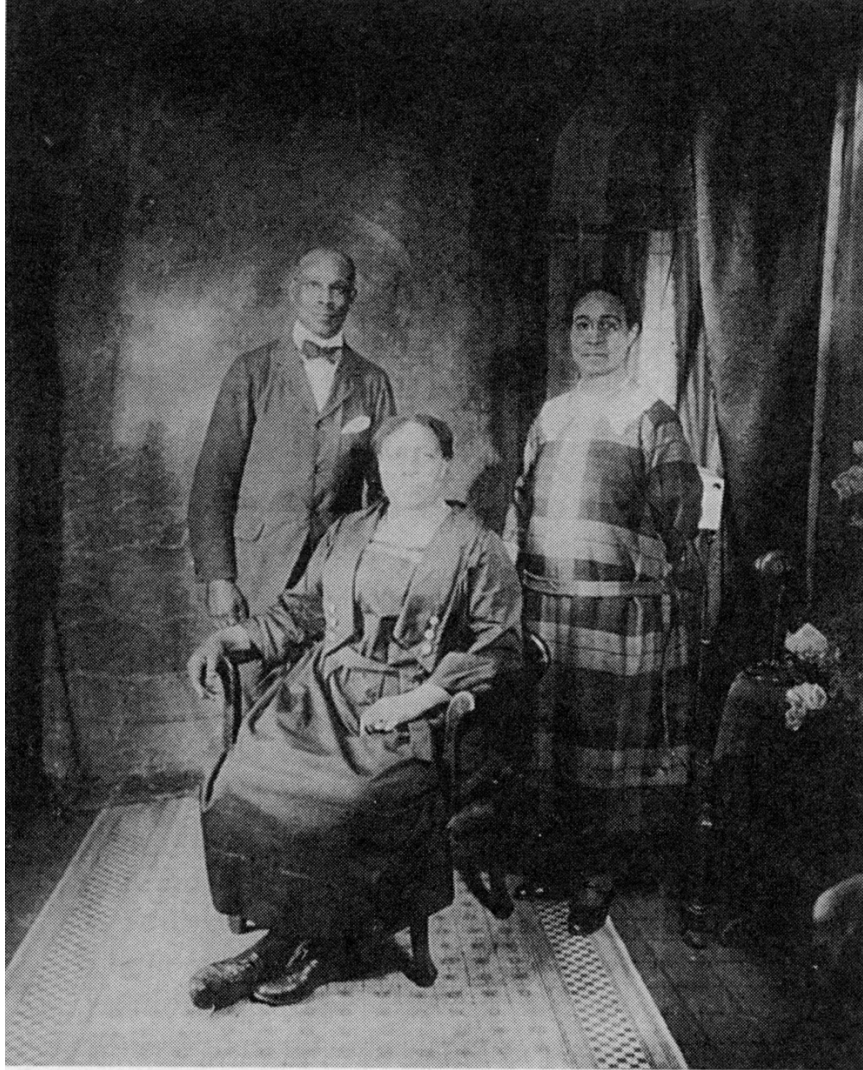(accessed 8 March 2018).

Figure 4.1.
James Van Der Zee, *Family Portrait* (1926) from Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), 44.