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Review Paper

Space and Identity in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*: A Deleuze and Guattarian Reading

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate relationship between space and identity in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, utilizing the geocritical concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. By examining his novel, the study investigates how the interaction of smooth and striated spaces shapes and reshapes characters' identities. Through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari, the research highlights the fluidity and dynamism of spaces, focusing on the continuous interplay without rigid distinctions between space and place. As the integration of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the war machine, nomad, and rhizome is essential to understanding the influence of space on characters' identity, this study begins with examining these key concepts. The rhizome concept parallels the non-linear, interconnected narrative structures in McCarthy's work in which the nomadic existence of characters underscores their search for meaning and survival in a world of constant flux. Through detailed analysis, this study aims to uncover the ways in which McCarthy's characters grapple with their identities amidst perpetual change, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between space and identity in contemporary literature.

Keywords: Blood Meridian, Cormac McCarthy, Deleuze, and Guattari's Geocriticism, Identity, Space

این مطالعه رابطه پیچیده بین فضا و هویت را در نصف النهار خون کورمک مک کارتی با استفاده از مفاهیم جغرافیایی ژیل دلوز و فلیکس گاتاری بررسی می کند. این مطالعه با بررسی رمان او بررسی می کند که چگونه تعامل فضاهای صاف و مخطط هویت شخصیت ها را شکل می دهد و دوباره شکل می دهد. این تحقیق از طریق لنز دلوز و گاتاری، سیالیت و پویایی فضاها را برجسته می کند و بر تعامل پیوسته بدون تمایزات سخت بین فضا و مکان تمرکز می کند. از آنجایی که ادغام مفاهیم دلوز و گاتاری از ماشین جنگی، چادرنشینی و ریزوم برای درک تأثیر فضا بر هویت شخصیت ها ضروری است، این مطالعه با بررسی این مفاهیم کلیدی آغاز می شود. مفهوم ریزوم به موازات ساختارهای روایی غیرخطی و به هم پیوسته در آثار مک کارتی است که در آن وجود عشایری شخصیت ها بر جستجوی آنها برای معنا و بقا در دنیایی با جریان دائمی تأکید می کند. هدف این مطالعه از طریق تجزیه و تحلیل دقیق، کشف راه هایی است که شخصیت های مک کارتی با هویت خود در میان تغییرات دائمی دست و پنجه نرم می کنند و درک دقیقی از تأثیر متقابل بین فضا و هویت در ادبیات معاصر ارائه می دهد. کلیدواژه ها: نصف النهار خون، کورمک مک کارتی، دلوز و ژنونقدیسم گاتاری، هویت، فضا

Introduction

Cormac McCarthy is widely regarded as one of the most significant contemporary American authors, known for his distinctive writing style and exploration of complex themes. Born in 1933, McCarthy's works often delve into the darker aspects of human existence, exploring themes such as violence, survival, and the human condition. A defining trait of his writings is the detailed depiction of violence and death, which he believes is essential for serious literature (Buráková & Pavol, 2020).

Examining the landscape in McCarthy's novels is a new trend in recent studies. His novels deal deeply with the American landscape and identity, which is undergoing a redefinition in 21st-century America, especially through studying space and place (as cited in Buráková and Pavol, 2020). Gabriella Blasi (2014) declares that "McCarthy's novels often depict landscapes that are not just settings but active participants in the narrative, shaping the identities and destinies of his characters"(95).

Blood Meridian, first published in 1985, is often considered McCarthy's masterpiece. The novel is set in the mid-19th century American West and follows the journey of "the Kid," a nameless protagonist who joins a brutal gang of Indian hunters led by the enigmatic Judge Holden. The narrative is both a historical epic and a philosophical exploration of violence and morality, drawing heavily on real events and figures from the time. Referring to Dana Philips' study, Polívka (2014) asserts that Philips suggests The novel portrays a world where everything, including people, animals, and the landscape, is treated equally and factually. This equal treatment removes any distinction between their fates, making it impossible to explain the meaning behind the violence.

The novel's vivid and often harrowing depiction of the American frontier challenges the romanticized view of the West, presenting instead a brutal and unforgiving landscape. McCarthy's use of richly descriptive language and a sparse, unflinching prose style brings the violent world of "Blood Meridian" to life, creating a visceral reading experience.

The novel's exploration of space and identity is particularly compelling, with the harsh and desolate landscapes serving as both a backdrop and a character in their own right. Through the lens of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theories, *Blood Meridian* can be seen as a profound exploration of smooth and striated spaces, the fluidity of identity, and the existential struggles of its characters. The fluidity of space and the porous nature of identity in the novel underscores the profound influence of environments on personal and cultural identity, making it a rich text for Deleuzo-Guattarian analysis of criticism.

This study aims to explore the dynamic relationship between space and identity in McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, employing the Deleuzo-Guattarian geocritical framework to reveal how characters are continually reshaped by their environments. By examining the transformation of smooth spaces into striated spaces in *Blood Meridian*, this study seeks to uncover the ways in which McCarthy's characters grapple with their fragmented identities in a world marked by perpetual change and uncertainty, in accordance with the principles of Deleuze and Guattari's theories of geocriticism. Through this analysis, the enduring quest for meaning and the existential challenges faced by McCarthy's characters are brought to the forefront, offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between space and identity in contemporary literature. As the importance of understanding Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the war machine, nomad, and rhizome provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between space, identity, and transformation in McCarthy's works, this study begins with examining them.



Methodology and Approach

In the realm of literary studies, geocriticism offers a compelling framework to explore the intricate relationship between space, place, and identity. This approach underscores the significance of physical locations in shaping characters and narratives, highlighting how landscapes and environments influence cultural and personal identities. Place, as Keller Estes points out, "is defined by a meaningful human attachment, social interactions, and a distinctive topography; space is rather a geographical abstract, located specifically but without effect"(Keller, 2013,18). However, when viewed through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari, the distinction between space and place becomes less pronounced. Their concept of criticism delves into the fluidity and dynamism of spaces, focusing on the interplay between smooth space which is "vectorial, projective, topological"(Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 361) and striated space which is "structured, segmented, and organized"(474) without rigidly distinguishing between the two.

Moreover, the integration of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the war machine, nomad, and rhizome is essential to this analysis. The war machine is totally against the state. They describe it as "a celerity against gravity, secrecy against the public, a power (puissance) against sovereignty, a machine against apparatus"(352). The war machine, evident nomad characters underscore the fluid and unstable nature of identity within striated and smooth spaces. Meanwhile, the nomad, as a figure of perpetual movement and resistance to fixed structures, encapsulates the characters' ongoing quest for meaning and survival in a world in constant flux.

The concept of the nomad symbolizes a fluid existence that challenges the rooted and conventional structures of society. In elucidating this concept, Deleuze and Guattari used the term "rhizome." The rhizome, with its interconnected and non-linear structure (1980), reflects the fragmented and multifaceted identities that emerge in McCarthy's narratives, such as *Blood Meridian*.

They introduced the term rhizome from biology into philosophy and literature, using it to lay new theoretical foundations in various fields, including geocriticism, thereby creating a profound transformation in Western thought. According to them (1980), a tree has a vertical structure, whereas a rhizome has a horizontal structure. In the past, human thought possessed a tree-like, vertical structure; however, in the postmodern era, with the expansion of communication and social networks, thought and social actions have acquired a rhizomatic, horizontal structure. Therefore, the postmodern world provides an appropriate context for the growth of the rhizomatic structure.

Deleuze and Guattari's contribution to cartography in literature is undoubtedly remarkable because their innovative concepts challenge traditional, hierarchical ways of understanding. By applying these concepts, Deleuze and Guattari have provided literary scholars with powerful tools to explore the intricate relationships between space, identity, and narrative in a way that traditional cartography cannot.

The transition from a rooted existence to a wandering nomad, as will be examined through the perspectives of Deleuze and Guattari's geocritical theory, symbolizes the ever-changing nature of American cultural identity. This evolution mirrors the ongoing formation of an American cultural identity that is constantly molded by events and experiences. Consequently, McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* can be studied as a cartography of American identity through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology.

Review of Literature

Geocriticism reveals a relationship between space, place, and literature. It attempts to examine "the role of place in the life of literature, and the role of literature in the production of place"(Luria, 2011,67). According to Tally (2011), it "explores, seeks, surveys, digs into, reads, and writes a place; it looks at, listens to, touches, smells, and tastes spaces"(3).



In Deleuze and Guattari's work, particularly in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), however, the concepts of space and place are more fluid and interconnected. They emphasize the idea of smooth space (nomadic, open, and continuous) versus striated space (structured, segmented, and organized). This framework doesn't strictly separate space and place but rather looks at how they interact and transform each other.

Tamsin E. Lorraine, in her work, *Smooth Space* (2010), examines Deleuze and Guattari's notion of smooth space, highlighting its fluid and continuous nature in contrast to the segmented and organized striated space. She discusses how smooth space embodies dynamic and open-ended qualities, applying these concepts to various aspects of life and thought.

In their introduction to *The Smooth and the Striated* (2012), Flora Lysen and Patricia Pisters delve into Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of smooth and striated spaces. They illustrate how these ideas can transform our understanding of space, blending nomadic and settled elements. The sea serves as a key example, initially representing smooth space, which becomes structured and mapped over time.

Julian Reid's *Deleuze's War Machine: Nomadism Against the State* examines the concept of the war machine as described by Deleuze and Guattari. Reid explores how the war machine operates on nomadic principles, often in opposition to the structured and hierarchical nature of the state. This work highlights the conflict between nomadic societies and state mechanisms, emphasizing the war machine's role in resisting state control and promoting alternative social structures.

The desire to depict space and landscape and their impact on the creation of identity is a recent focus of critical studies, a theme addressed in geographical criticism. Many scholars have endeavored to unveil the influence of American space and landscape on the creation of an American identity.

Jay Ellis' *No Place for Home: Spatial Constraint and Character Flight in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy* (2006) focuses on the reading of space and place and their influence on the identity of the characters in the novels. In this book, the author goes beyond traditional interpretations of characters and landscapes in McCarthy's novels. He argues that not only are the characters in McCarthy's novels simple, but the landscapes are also deeply intertwined with the characters' emotional and social isolation. Ellis examines how McCarthy's descriptions of space shape the motivations and actions of the characters. This book covers all of McCarthy's novels and provides a detailed analysis of how spatial restrictions and characters' escape from these restrictions are essential to understanding McCarthy's works.

John Kant (2009), in his book, *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism*, delves into a deep analysis of Cormac McCarthy's works, particularly focusing on the role of space and place in these works. He examines how McCarthy uses natural landscapes and various environments to express complex themes such as identity, violence, and displacement. Kant shows how characters in McCarthy's novels strive to find their place in an unstable and ruthless world and how these efforts often lead to failure.

Andrew Keller Estes's *Cormac McCarthy and the Writing of American Spaces* (2013) examines the role of space in McCarthy's novels. It argues that his novels offer a dialectic perspective of nature, portraying it as utopian or dystopian. Estes suggests a biocentric map, advocating for an egalitarian perspective of nature within McCarthy's narrative.

In *Religion of War: The Disruption of Telos in Cormac McCarthy's Blood Meridian* (2014), Bakala'rskā' Polivka focuses on how McCarthy's novel challenges traditional narratives of American history and identity. The thesis examines the themes of war and violence, showing how they disrupt the notion of a purposeful, goal-driven history. He highlights McCarthy's



depiction of the chaotic and brutal aspects of westward expansion, questioning the moral and ideological underpinnings of Manifest Destiny.

Dianne Luce (2017) discusses how Cormac McCarthy uses the landscapes in *Blood Meridian* to add depth to the narrative. The detailed descriptions of the environment reflect the brutality and violence of the character's actions, as well as the broader themes of Manifest Destiny and human nature. These landscapes act almost like a silent observer, providing a backdrop that invites readers to ponder the events unfolding in the story.

The Significance of Nomads as a Cunning Character in Blood Meridian, The Border Trilogy, No Country for Old Men, and The Road (2018) by Tooke Christopher- Lasswell Andersen is one of the few works that examines several concepts introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, such as nomads, lines of flight, and the war machine in McCarthy's works.

Despite previous studies, this research attempts to examine Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of nomadic existence, rhizome, smooth space, striated space, and rooted life to provide a cartography of American identity through detailed investigations of narrative spaces. The smooth space, clearly observed in Cormac McCarthy's novels, contrasts with the traditional rooted space, which is the striated space. Contrary to previous studies that focus on the influence of space and place on a character's identity, this research examines how smooth spaces can become striated spaces and the way in which the interaction of smooth space and striated space transforms a character's identity and his sense of self.

The interaction of these two spaces creates profound changes in the characters' cultural identities, such that the characters are constantly in motion and transformed within the smooth and striated spaces of the novel. The importance of this subject in contemporary literary studies is quite significant, as in the postmodern era, where we witness continuous spatial changes, the characters' identities are also constantly evolving in response to these spatial changes.

War Machine: Nomadism Against the State

Set against the backdrop of historical events on the Texas-Mexico border in the 1850s, *Blood Meridian* (1982) follows the journey of the Kid, a fourteen-year-old from Tennessee, as he navigates a horrifying world where Native Americans are being slaughtered, and their scalps are in high demand.

This novel is the manifestation of both the state war machine and the nomad war machine, as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari. The war machine challenges conventional boundaries and disrupts norms. The state, however, lacks its own inherent war machine. Instead, it appropriates one by creating a military institution that focuses on control and order. Captain White and his company, who have the implicit support of Governor Burnett of California (*Blood Meridian*, 1982), as he claims, and have the mission to destroy Apaches, is an instance of the state war machine. They were supposed to occupy North America to ensure the state the power it desired to have over it, to civilize the natives, and to bring freedom to the benighted land. To justify the aim of this domination, Captain points out: "We are to be the instruments of liberation in a dark and troubled land. That's right. We are to spearhead the drive"(33). More importantly, to dominate it, the state intends to construct the boundary between their country and Mexico, which, manifestly, acts out Deleuze and Guattari's idea: "One of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space "(Deleuze & Guattari,1980, p. 385).

The kid is an example of the war machine. Initially, he joins Captain White's company - the state war machine- when it has been annihilated by Comanches, he joins Glanton's gang -the nomad war machine.

A fundamental distinction between the state war machine and the nomad war machine is the "discipline" of a warrior of the former. However, in the nomad war machine, the same as



Glanton's gang, there is no discipline. Therefore, there is no central leadership that governs the group, and the leader doesn't have a stable position (1980). Lack of leadership leads the band toward the chaotic situation, a highlighted feature of the rhizome. In his novel, McCarthy repeatedly represents such decentered nature and chaos. Glanton's gang, an amoral band with the business of scalping and, therefore, another manifestation of the nomad war machine, consists of a few smaller bands such as Delaware. The smaller groups leave the gang or join it whenever possible, bringing to mind Deleuze and Guattari's statement. Consequently, what is highlighted in Glanton's gang that designates it as a nomad war machine is the "indiscipline of the warrior, a questioning of hierarchy, perpetual blackmail by abandonment or betrayal"(358). It is a band without a main leader, and it consists of smaller bands.

There are even conflicts between members, which is evidence of a sense of chaos. The conflict between black Johnson and white Johnson, for instance, eventually leads to white Johnson's murder by black Johnson, while no one punishes him, or the conflict between Judge Holden and Toadvin or between Holden and the kid. In the following example, McCarthy acts out the lack of discipline in the nomad war machine accurately:

A legion of horrors, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stockings and a bloodstained wedding veil and some in the headgear of crane feathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn back Ards and otherwise naked and one in the armor of a Spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pauldrons deeply dented with old blows of mace or saber done in another country by men whose very bones were dust and many with their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts until they trailed upon the ground and their horses' ears and tails worked [...](Blood Meridian, 1982, p. 49).

What is significant in this long sentence, according to Andersen (2018), is the numerous conjunctions the writer applies to describe Comanches. Deleuze and Guattari assert that "The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and.. . and... and..." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, 25). They go on to say "and" is a special form of every possible conjunction and brings into play a logic of language. [...] "and," on the way it challenges the primacy of the verb "to be"(526). This sentence, as Andersen (2018) notes, connects the phrases using "and" without using even one "to be" verb.

Glanton's gang is hired by Mexican authorities to destroy Apaches, who conducted relentless raids across northern and central Mexico. Therefore, the state can dominate the smooth space. However, slaughtering and scalping become their only aim. Hence, "they are completely outside the field of the values of the hierarchically organized "state," where laws have to be followed" (24). As is depicted, they even slaughter a group of peaceful Tiguas on the river, or they kill an old woman remorselessly: The Mexican takes a knife from his belt, goes to where the old woman has fallen, grabs her hair, wraps it (Blood Meridian, 1982).

Numerous pictures expose the brutality of Glanton's band, so much so that they are regarded as the enemy by the state and are "subject to arrest"(Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 284). And some of them are executed. They slaughter everyone remorselessly, even children and women, then scalp the dead. When Apaches are killed at the white salt shore, Holden saves an Apache boy for fun and, after a few days, kills him. They destroy the restrictions that become obstacles to their movement, as Deleuze and Guattari assert.

Knowing them a righteous band who struggles for their safety, the inhabitant of Chihuahua initially respects them. The governor's lieutenant and his retinue come down into the



courtyard to welcome them and admire their work. They are promised full payment in gold at the dinner held in their honor that evening at the Riddle and Stephens Hotel. With this, the Americans cheer and mount their horses again (*Blood Meridian*, 1982). But soon, they cause so many problems in the city with their drunken and violent revelries, and the nature of their behavior becomes clear to everyone.

The furious citizen addresses their complaints to the governor, although he is unable to stop the brutal band. When they leave, the words "Mejor los indgenas"(171) are written all over the town. The civilized inhabitants of this Mexican city believe that the native people were better than these brutes. The nature of their behavior exposes Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a Rhizomatic nomad. They ignore law and moral values, and they "do not provide a favorable terrain for religion; [...] always committing an offense against the priest or the god"(Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 383). They slaughter everyone, and they don't follow the rules. To justify this brutality and disregard, Holden overtly mentions, "Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn. A moral view can never be proven right or wrong by any ultimate test"(*Blood Meridian*, 1982, p. 210). Therefore, Cormac McCarthy uses landscape scenes in his novel to provide narrative insights into the Ganton gang's violent exploits, America's quest for manifest destiny, and the inherent tendency of humans toward violence (Luce, 2009).

Nomadology and Rhizome

In *Blood Meridian* (1982), McCarthy narrates the story in a Rhizomatic smooth space. The activities mostly are depicted in the desert, an open space with no end which highlights Deleuze and Guattari's description of smooth space:

Smooth space is precisely the space of the smallest deviation; therefore, it has no homogeneity [...]. It is a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact, rather than a visual space like Euclid's striated space. Smooth space is a field without conduits or channels. A field, a heterogeneous smooth space, is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, centered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without "counting" it and can "be explored only by legwork. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, 371).

Referring to the rhizomatic space depicted by the writer, some critics suggest that the *Blood Meridian* landscape is "a place of disappearance"(Andersen, 2018,27). Everything, even the characters in this landscape, is subject to annihilation except Holden. At the end of the novel, when he murders the kid, he begins to dance with women while he repeatedly says, "I will never die."

A rhizomatic space, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is nameless, contrary to places that are determined by name and striation. The following sentence describing *Blood Meridian* landscape is an example of such a nameless rhizomatic place: "The riders could hear the mutter of thunder in some nameless distance, and they kept watch on the narrow shape of sky overhead for any darkness of impending rain"(*Blood Meridian*, 1982, p. 121). Even in two parts, we face the statement of absolving someone or something of memory after annihilation: One of the mules slips off the edge of a cliff and falls into the valley, disappearing from view. With its death, it is completely forgotten by everyone. (1982).

The world McCarthy depicts represents the first two principles of rhizome that deal with the idea of connection and heterogeneity. The novel portrays a variety of characters: judge, kid, captain, priest, rancher, Indian, Apaches, Comanches, etc. The writer acts out the interconnection between multiple characters. The sympathy between characters, in some parts, is presented as well. When the kid and the boy from Georgia are in the prison, a woman gives them bowls of beans. Despite her fatigue, she smiles at them, secretly hiding sweets beneath her shawl (1982).



The rhizomatic relationship between characters is overtly depicted. The way McCarthy describes the Glanton's band justifies this rhizomatic thought:

They rode like men invested with a purpose whose origins were antecedent to them, like blood legatees of an order both imperative and remote. Although each man among them was discrete unto himself, conjoined, they made a thing that had not been done before (130).

In this heterogeneous rhizomatic space, everything is equal and interconnected. Desert, dead bones, carriages, vultures, stars, sand, etc. Nothing is hegemonic.

The world of McCarthy's novel represents "the awful darkness inside the world"(100), which implies darkness and hollowness in the world. Nothing is stable, and nothing has a definite meaning, even good and bad. This instability is portrayed in his description of different spaces:

Out there dark little archipelagos of cloud and the vast world of sand and scrub shearing upward into the shoreless void where those blue islands trembled, and the earth grew uncertain, gravely canted and veering out through tinctures of rose and the dark beyond the dawn to the uttermost rebate of space (46).

Arborescent relationships, on the other hand, are opposed to rhizomatic relationships because of the state's desire to dominate society and have power over it. Individuals' desires and willingness are regarded as the entryways of the map and, therefore, of rhizomatic thought. The only way to stop an individual from having desires is to prevent him from being in connection with the outside world by breaking his rhizome. As Deleuze and Guattari (1980) argue, "once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborized, it's all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desires moves and produces"(14). Therefore, since it is a rhizome that arouses and reproduces desires, no desire arises anymore when the rhizome is broken, and the individual is obliged to follow a constructed way. Although Holden is regarded as a nomad war machine, at the end of the novel, it turns out that he wants to control the world and to root everyone to his own law, "as though Holden manages to exert a great deal of control over the space"(Polivka, 2014, p. 53). Accordingly, regarding the kid as an enemy and threat after breaking the root and leaving the band, Holden tells him:

You came forward,[...], to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself. You sat in judgment on your own deeds. You put your own allowances before the judgments of history, and you broke with the body of which you were pledged a part of and poisoned it in all its enterprise. Hear me, man. I spoke in the desert for you and you only, and you turned a deaf ear to me. If war is not holy man, it is nothing but antic clay. Even the cretin acted in good faith according to his parts. For it was required of no man to give more than he possessed nor was any man's share compared to another's. Only each was called upon to empty out his heart into the common [...] (Blood Meridian, 1982, pp, 257-8).

Or, when killing a free bird, Holden, who intends to control nature and the world overtly, notes that there shouldn't be any desire or freedom in his territory. He further mentions that the liberty of birds offends me. I would confine them all in zoos (1982).

Space and Identity

In *Blood Meridian*, the transformation of smooth space into striated space can be observed through the actions and interactions of the characters, particularly in the desert scenes and philosophical dialogues. When the Glanton gang encounters and kills the Indian people, the smooth space of the desert is violently transformed into a striated space. The act of territorial conquest imposes boundaries and structures, creating zones of control and dominance. This transformation is marked by the presence of the gang and the aftermath of their actions, which impose a new order on the previously unstructured landscape. This transformation leads to a loss of innocence for the characters. The open, unstructured space that once allowed for freedom and



possibility is now marked by the harsh realities of conflict and domination. This loss of innocence is a significant aspect of the character's identity transformation, as they are forced to confront the brutal nature of their world. In this regard, Hanssen (2017) argues that McCarthy's narrative of violence is not senseless but is tied to a broader struggle for meaning and moral articulation. The characters' violent actions are depicted as part of a larger existential quest, reflecting the harsh realities of the frontier and the human condition.

The characters, particularly those in the Glanton gang, develop a sense of ruthlessness as they navigate the striated space they have created. Their identities become intertwined with the violence and control they exert over the landscape, shaping them into figures defined by their capacity for brutality and dominance.

Judge Holden's philosophical statements often impose a conceptual structure on the characters and their environment. His speeches and ideas introduce a form of intellectual striation that adds depth to the characters' identities, as he attempts to impose his worldview and order onto the world around him, creating a complex interplay between physical violence and philosophical dominance. As Polivka notes:

this is a part of Holden's overall intention, to let the characters carry his teaching without understanding it.... It is the intricacy and grandeur with which the sense is delivered and the semblance of authority which it derives from the elitist philosophical discourse that finally overwhelms the sergeant and achieves Holden's pragmatic end (Polivka, 2014, p. 42).

This can be seen as a metaphorical transformation of smooth space into striated space. This intellectual striation shapes their understanding of the world and their place within it, creating mental boundaries that influence their actions and decisions.

The Kid travels through the vast, open desert, which represents a smooth space, where he experiences a nomadic existence. Each encounter with other characters, such as the Glanton gang or Judge Holden, imposes new structures and boundaries on the Kid's journey that limit his autonomy. These interactions transform the smooth space into a striated one, marked by zones of control and influence. For example, The Kid's involvement with the Glanton gang introduces a violent and hierarchical structure to his journey. The gang's actions and territorial conquests impose boundaries on the previously open desert, creating a striated space defined by power dynamics and conflict.

Moreover, the interactions with the Glanton gang and Judge Holden present moral and ethical challenges that impact the Kid's sense of self. Judge Holden, for instance, reverses the biblical statement and ridicules its assertion of holding universal wisdom and providing moral guidance (Polivka, 2014). He must navigate the violent and nihilistic ideologies imposed by these characters, which influence his own beliefs and actions.

These examples highlight how human actions, interactions, and meanings can transform smooth spaces into striated spaces, aligning with Deleuze and Guattari's concepts. Each instance in *Blood Meridian* where the characters impose order, control, or conflict on the landscape serves as a testament to this dynamic transformation. Regardingly, through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari, the characters transfer from being rooted in a nomadic existence. It portrays a testing ground where traditional markers of identity are dissolved, and individuals are thrust into an existential quest to redefine themselves.

Conclusion

Blood Meridian follows "the kid" as he joins the Glanton gang—a group of scalp hunters along the U.S.–Mexico border. In this novel, McCarthy ties the engagement of smooth space and striated space to identity, which is a fragmented entity. Through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari, McCarthy's novels not only depict the struggle for survival but also engage in the malleability of identity. His novel depicts to what extent the character's identity, such as the kid as a war

machine, is unstable and fragmented, both lost and rediscovered. The interaction of smooth spaces and striated spaces creates profound changes in the characters' cultural identities.

As the characters traverse the 'smooth space' of a world, they search for meaning and purpose in an ever-changing landscape. This journey is not just physical but also deeply psychological and philosophical, challenging the characters to consider what it means to be American when the very fabric of society has been altered beyond recognition. McCarthy's novels thus become a cartographic exploration of identity, charting the uncharted territories of the human condition and discovering the profound impact of their environment on their sense of self.

Through the interaction of smooth and striated spaces, McCarthy's characters are constantly reshaping their identities, illustrating the fluidity and fragmentation of the human experience in a landscape that is as volatile as their own inner worlds. This dynamic interplay not only underscores the instability and malleability of identity but also reflects the broader existential and cultural crises that define the American experience in McCarthy's oeuvre. Ultimately, McCarthy's novels invite readers to ponder the essence of identity in a world where the boundaries between self and space are perpetually shifting, offering a poignant commentary on the enduring quest for meaning in an uncertain and ever-changing world.

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