CENTRAL PARK IN FILM: ARCHITECTURE AS THE STRUCTURE OF DESIRE

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by
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Abstract

This thesis aims to trace Central Park’s filmic structure on two accounts:

(A) The park – as the most filmed location in the world – consists of specific spatial and landscape configurations – of solids and voids – which enable it to bring surprise through a fluid intertwined system of framed views. In directing the eye by what it can’t see, the park inherently becomes resistible to definition. An explanation of the park’s resisting features shows how the park works as not only an opening in the city, but also as a lens – an optical quality that allows the park to produce dynamic rather than static boundary conditions.

(B) Furthermore, this thesis aims to delineate not only the spatio-cinematic qualities of Central Park, but also how filmmakers use them to turn Central Park into a spatial structure for the movies’ form and development. Therefore, this research aims to propose a filmic-driven methodology of exploring these views through an analysis of movies rather than through conventional architectural vocabulary.

This thesis uses an application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to film and media in exploring the structure of the park’s ocular logic deployed in films. Structure describes the specific relationships between interiority and exteriority, as well as the diagrammatic functions of psyche that are triggered by void-ness, movement and appearance. Discussing films such as Portrait of Jennie, Marathon Man, Manhattan and Wall Street, this thesis provides explanation of filmic techniques and dissection of the films’ structure and form. It describes not only relationships between characters, space and the storyline, but also the structural relations that make the park an inseparable part of the films’ cinematic space.
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Literature Review

The threads of intellectual inquiry do not, generally, weave together in a regular fashion. The knots and tangles are evident, particularly, when research is interdisciplinary. Chronology of thinking does not match the chronology of reading; neither match the chronology of presenting ideas in writing. My thesis begins with threads from architecture, landscape, media, critical studies and cinema. Conceptually and in reading, the earliest question was about the city and the subject: how the former structures the latter, but then how the latter reconstructs our understanding of urban space. “How do humans come to understand cities” is also the question of how cities re-conceive us as subjects, by invisibly shaping our desires and fantasies. The subject and city are two sides of a coin that is minted over and over.

No matter how autonomous we might feel when walking in a city or watching a film, the formal qualities of both the film and urban spaces limit and shape our conception and physical movements. We are constrained within imaginary visual, temporal, and spatial frames. We don’t consume the material world in any linear fashion. We cannot resort to a “cognitive” explanation of perception and response. As Ernesto Laclau has put it, the subject–object duality eventually breaks down into problematic distances between “undecidable structures” and “decisions.”

This review of literature maps the subject–object connection as it takes up various thinkers who have written about urban space in different theoretical and critical contexts. Those who have focused specifically on subject–object relations are the main features of this map, particularly when they involve cinema’s constructions of the uncanny as the central dimension of these relations. As modern technologies of communications media expanded in the 20th century, cinema gained the first and most effective access to our psyches and modes of thinking.

Dziga Vertov

The idea of transforming the idea of the city by extending the eye’s specific experiences through cinema began formally with Dziga Vertov’s “Cine—“ or “Kino–Eye.” The new optic captured something inaccessible to the ordinary eye by editing together fragments of daily life. The Kino–Eye idea anticipated Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (1927) and Walter Ruttman’s Berlin: Symphony of a Great City (1927), and condensed its logic in Man with a Movie Camera (1929). Both fiction and documentary, it formalized a new idea of urban modernity: the city itself was

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2 Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt.
like a filmic *montage* of unrelated quotidian fragments, people intersecting with machines in a kind of collective visual/temporal unconscious.

Mladen Dolar has noted that “There is a specific dimension of the uncanny that emerges with modernity ... and which constantly haunts it from the inside” [emphasis mine]. This is, in essence, the reverse transfer of representation to the represented; a realization that what was captured and reassembled by the accident of filming had been “there all the time.”

In his essay “Uncanny Spaces” Carsten Strathausen studies Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* and Ruttman’s *Symphony of a Great City* in the context of modernity’s project in domesticating the uncanny. He underlines the dynamics between revelation versus repression and presence versus absence in the cinematic exploration of urbanization. Strathausen contrasts Ruttman’s characterization of the city as meta-organism to Vertov’s relocation of subjective consciousness in the camera’s eye, liberated, mechanized, and mobilized to focus on specific uncanny urban encounters.

I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see. Now I, a camera, fling myself along their resultant, maneuvering in the chaos of movement, recording movement, starting with movements composed of the most complex combinations ... My path leads to the creation of a fresh perception of the world. I decipher in a new way a world unknown to you.

**Walter Benjamin**

Influenced by Vertov’s notion of the Kino-Eye and Experimental Cinema as well as with Surrealist attempts in achieving a meta-consciousness of daily life is Walter Benjamin, one of the first major theorists of technology’s influence on human perception. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (1936) he argued that film was central to this new mode of understanding:

Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception.” “This much is certain: today, film is the most serviceable vehicle of this new understanding. Certain, as well, is the fact that the historical moment of this change in the function of art—a change which is most fully

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4 Tony Fitzmaurice and Mark Shiel, *Screening the City* (London: Verso, 2003), 15.

The fascination and awe of experiencing a real life location only after you have seen it in film is an evidence of this new mode of looking at the landscape and city. Therefore, the change in the function of art to something exhibitory would also mean a different way of looking at the landscape, with the new lens that tries to re-locate scenes or frames according to a visual repository. Such a repository — the accumulation of ways of looking — is what Benjamin believes trains humans (ideologically) in their quotidian comprehensions: “The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily.”

Later in the text he highlights a main point about the nature of the filmic medium: the ability to reconstruct — temporally or spatially — the order of visuals. This makes the film structurally and symbolically different than previous modes of representation: “The finished film is the exact antithesis of a work created at a single stroke. It is assembled from a very large number of images and image sequences that offer an array of choices to the editor; these images, moreover, can be improved in any desired way in the process leading from the initial take to the final cut.”

Henri Lefebvre

In his forward of The Critique of Everyday Life (1947), Henri Lefebvre takes up Charlie Chaplin and Berthold Brecht as major figures of cinema and theater known for their ability to re-frame a mundane condition as both significant and comic or uncanny. In Chaplin’s “reverse image” of the Tramp and Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt, they swap inside for outside, expected for unexpected, un-extraordinary for extraordinary, resulting in an exchange an effect of strangeness.

From this early work to The Production of Space in 1974, Lefebvre focused on how urbanism was concentrated in the ways that spatial, social, and psychological boundaries were produced, sustained, and developed. With the Everyday as a research lab, he encountered both risks and opportunities in critiquing the physical and conceptual products of capitalism. In Rhythmanalysis (1992), he writes: “In order to grasp and analyze rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely: be it through illness or a technique. A certain exteriority enables the analytic intellect to function. However, to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have

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7 Benjamin, Work of Art, 26.
8 Ibid., 28.
been grasped by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its
duration.”⁹ Lefebvre distinguishes the view from the window from the perspective of the
street-walker whose experience of the entropic flow cannot separate and consider the separate
dynamic elements: “He who walks down the street, over there, is immersed in the
multiplicity of noises, murmurs, rhythms .... By contrast, from the window, the noises
distinguish themselves, the flows separate out, rhythms respond to one another ....” This could
be compared to the not only the place of the camera in the city, but also the temporal
distortions that editing produces. Lefebvre’s thought depends critically on the connections of
space and time. For him, urban space is produced dynamically.

The Situationists

Before parting ways with Lefebvre, the Situationists acknowledged their debt to him. Their
mutual dialogue spanned from 1958 to 1963. Conversely, the second volume of The Critique of
Everyday Life (1961) as well as his Everyday Life in the Modern World (1968) was partially
influenced by the Situationists.¹⁰ The origins of the Situationists can be traced in left-wing
Avant-garde movements such as Surrealism and Letterism. Their Marxist-motivated agenda
argued for the creation of “Situation” not just as a narrative entity in the everyday life but as
the construction of a "a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the
collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events."¹¹ This opposition to
separation, fragmentation and alienation caused by capitalist modern planning was explored in
various forms of discourse and mediums.

Psychogeography

The view that geographic elements could have special effects, consciously identified or not, on
the emotions and behavior of individuals was carried forward from the “environmental
determinism” of the early Twentieth Century to the first edition of the Internationale
Situationiste, June 1958.¹² One of the Situationists’ main constructs was that of the dérive. Like
Benjamin’s flâneur, a transient passing through varied ambiances liked to prototypical urban
conditions absorbs or activates a higher awareness. This magical realism was extended through
Guy Debord’s determinist transfer of a “psychogeographic” map of Paris, segmented and
deconstructed, to reveal the truths of the The Naked City (1957), inspired by a film of the same
name. Later, he elaborated the logic of the dérive in The Society of Spectacle (1967) and his
experimental film, Critique de la separation.

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¹¹ Ken Knabb, ed. Situationist International Anthology (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007).
¹² Ibid., 51 – 52.
Bernard Tschumi

The May 1968 student protests and initiatives of the Situationists influenced not just the politics of France and all Europe; there was enormous impact on theory and art practices. Bernard Tschumi, teaching at the Architectural Association in London during the early 1970s rethought architecture in terms of distilling its constitutive elements. Influenced by the Russian avant-garde filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, he adopted a disjunctive approach to system analysis. Space, event, and movement/activity were converted to the graphics of the way a “football player skates across the battlefield.” Critical, like the students of the ‘68 protests, of Structuralism, his emphasis on the dissociation and the polysemy of multiple readings gave rise to the idea of the Post-Structuralist City, more in tune with the Situationists but more susceptible to the idea of environmental determinism.

According to Tschumi, urban experiences, untreated, already possessed important scenes and dynamic moments with multiple levels of movement and event. Arguing that the film was “already present,” Manhattan Transcripts converted the architecture of New York City into a filmic story-board. Reading the urban experience as a filmic narrative, Tschumi aimed to tie space, event, and movement to the idea of sequence. In his critique of conventional methods of representing urban experience, he wrote:

Their final meaning is cumulative; it does not depend merely on a single frame (such as a façade), but on a succession of frames or spaces.14

Tschumi held that narratives could, in uncovering repressed elements in the urban scene, release their uncanny energy. In Parc de la Villette, on the northeast edge of Paris, he superimposed a tight geometrical system of post-modernist “markers” that Mark Wigley described as “a series of ambiguous intersections between systems ... in which the status of ideal forms and traditional composition is challenged. Ideas of purity, perfection, and order become sources of impurity, imperfection, and disorder.”15

Michel de Certeau

Tschumi’s technique of revealing the city’s uncanny content through overlay and clue-like precision of post-modernist markers was contrasted in Michel de Certeau’s uncanny, evident as the mismatch between the visible grid of streets and the subjective lived experience of the inhabitants of that grid.16 Although both connected the city’s reality to filmic narrative

structure, De Certeau characterized the grid as a fantastic bird’s-eye-view, while the citizens living within created a stain or mar of the cohesion of the grid. Like Vertov’s movie camera, “streaking” through traffic and cityscapes, the stain had the power to liberate the otherwise inaccessible reality invisible in the plan view. De Certeau’s distinction of the god-like plan view from the ground–level experience (see “Walking in the City,” Chapter 7 in The Practice of Everyday Life) is about the subject–object relationship, in terms of separation. Being positioned atop a tower “puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes.”17 The desire to read the urban text as a single, whole image is, however common a desire it is, impossible:

To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong? Having taken a voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what is the source of this pleasure of "seeing the whole," of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts .... The desire to see the city preceded the means of satisfying it.18

De Certeau sees the holistic image atop the tower as a fantasy-like illusion — as something missing a “real” piece that will never be fully complete: “The panorama-city is a ‘theoretical’ (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices.”

In this light, places “inside” the city which allow an outside-view to it become key in allowing for an urban collective inner-consciousness; as will be argued about Central Park in future chapters. But while De Certeau mapped subjectivity in the urban space as part of his bigger project on combining cultural studies and Psychoanalysis19 and despite his readings of Freud and Lacan, he didn’t deploy a singular theory of the subject or unconscious to his writings.

**Psychoanalytic Film Theory**20

Since the 1970s, the psychoanalytical subject, specifically the Freudian-Lacanian subject, played a central role in the study and analysis of film. Theorists such as Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry, and Laura Mulvey used the concept of the gaze to describe the “misguided look of the spectator” and “the male protagonist’s look” of desire and control.21 Despite clear evidence in Lacan’s writings to the contrary, these “Lacanian” theorists positioned the gaze on the side of the spectator sitting in the audience. Not until Joan Copjec, Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič, and

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18 Ibid.
19 Ben Highmore, Michel De Certeau, Analysing Culture (London: Continuum, 2007), 57.
20 This thesis presumes some familiarity with Lacanian concepts. In practical terms this isn’t possible, so some readers would need to refer to standard sources such as Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis by Dany Nobus and The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan by Todd McGowan.
Slavoj Žižek was Lacan’s actual position clarified. Because the gaze was actually on the side of the object, *inside* the filmic illusion, some thirty years of film criticism was discredited. Todd McGowan summarizes:

> In Lacan’s conception of desire, the gaze is ... a blank spot in the subject’s look, a blank spot that threatens the subject’s sense of mastery in looking because the subject cannot see it directly or successfully integrate it into the rest of its visual field. This is because, as Lacan points out, the gaze is “what is lacking, is non-specular, is not graspable in the image.”

When the actual position of the gaze is corrected, the role of desire can be seen in its relation not just to the void of the gaze but to other aspects of the environment where voids, absences, losses, etc. serve to sustain desire. Desire is independent of the process of seeking and possessing various objects of desire. The object, once possessed, becomes unsatisfactory, not so much because it is “not what we wanted,” but because it has terminated the process of desiring, which was the actual source of pleasure. Desire can be caused and sustained by an imaginary object, but once an actual object is possessed, desire disappears. Žižek, in *Looking Awry*, summarizes:

> The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed — and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: through fantasy, we learn bow to desire.

Again, in *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*: “Our desires are artificial. We have to be taught to desire. Cinema is the ultimate pervert art. It doesn’t give you what you desire, it tells you how to desire.”

Although his theoretical framework is highly politicized, Žižek has very convincingly deployed Lacanian thinking to critical and cultural studies, specifically cinema. Žižek’s emphasis on the ideological agency of the medium in structuring the subject is crucial to his discourse. In *Looking Awry*, Žižek presents an analysis of works of cinema, literature, theater and other cultural modes in which he traces Lacanian concepts such as Fantasy space, void and its relation to desire, extimacy and gaze. He, like Copjec before him, distinguishes the Lacanian gaze from the Derridean and/or Foucauldian gaze by positioning it on the side of the object rather than

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24 The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema, directed by Sophie Fiennes (2006; Mischief Films, Amoeba Film, 2009), DVD.
the subject: The gaze is, so to speak, a point at which the very frame (of my view) is already inscribed in the "content" of the picture viewed.  

Žižek and another Lacanian film theorist, Todd McGowan, have provided theorists working outside psychoanalytic theory to access Lacanian concepts without doing violence to the original concepts or “over-psychoanalyzing” the objects of their own studies. Wherever there is a relation between subjectivity and the structure of space, the roles of the gaze, desire, and fantasy, played out through uncanny inside–out transformations, are useful and even critical. A landscape described as “sublime” or “grotesque” in the usual art–historical fashion holds back something from the viewer; yet, this holding–back is precisely what attracts us. This surplus/lack relationship, theorized in terms of psychoanalysis, is more successfully understood in terms that relate directly to subjectivity’s fundamental condition. The “strange familiarity” that pulls the viewer in yet retains its ability to shock or horrify is what seems to offer an inner truth about subjects themselves.

**Methodological Approach**

Central Park could be said to be the “most urban park in the world,” considering its size and enduring qualities. Most of its original design elements still exist. Its service as an opening inside the compact excess of high-rise structures makes long–distance views possible; urban “victims of the grid” can escape to enjoy the sensation of being outside the city while being at its most celebrated center. The park is not merely picturesque. It is cinematic, in terms I hope to make clear in the thesis. Its ability to convert picturesque qualities into cinematic ones, proven by the fact that the park is one of the most filmed locations in the world, constitutes the basis for my claim, that the park’s psychoanalytical status as a central void also makes it primarily and profoundly optical.

Within the context of filmic form and by looking at the key concepts, this thesis treats the park as almost a psychic void in the city; one that allows for its discovery and self-consciousness, and one that is situated inside but has the potential to look at the city from outside. Such an estimate (reversible between inside and outside) relationship similar to that of an inside frame is most literally apparent in the panoramic cityscapes seen from the park, where the three layers of foreground (park’s space), mid-ground (threshold of trees) and background (Manhattan’s skyline) visualize the estimate condition of the park. This thesis argues that cinema can be utilized as a research tool for the study of such landscape-effects, as cinema

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itself engages our desire and offers clues for how subjectivity can be situated by means of
technicality and structure.

The conjunction of these parallel discourses became a fruitful field of inquiry and prompted me
to think of films as examples — data - that could potentially expose the correlation between a
subjective structure and a spatial structure, therefore allowing me to map out the possibilities
of connecting the two. This lead to looking at the most favored location in the world of cinema
— Central Park — as a site of structural potentialities. *Structure* in this sense is used to describe
not only the specific relationships between *interiority and exteriority*, but also the diagrammatic
functions of psyche that are triggered by void-ness, *movement* and *appearance*. These
functions are constantly utilized by the creative mind — that of a director or an audience — to
frame encounters, foreshadow future perspectives and drive the story forward. These pre-
existing frames into the psycho-spatial qualities of the park — opportunities of discovery,
closure, motion, etc. - constitute what becomes the collective civic gaze of the landscape — one
that wouldn’t exist if it wasn’t for its design, and cinema shows how the park can function as
such.

The main argument of this thesis is twofold:

1) The presence of “seeing/not seeing” opportunities (of appearances and disappearances,
layers, staging, etc.) collectively structures audiences and subjects. This can be
delineated by analyzing the similar psychic structures (desire, fantasy, void, inside-
frame, extimacy, etc.) that exist both in our head and in the world outside.

2) The cinematic quality — or opportunities — of a particular landscape (the park) are a
result of design choices made by the landscape architect, many of which are conscious
and influenced by his ideological thinking and artistic references, which have utilized the
same concepts in previous eras and forms. This is what is referred to as “proto-
cinematics”.


Chapter 1: A Void to Fill in a Void

It is 161 years since the construction of Central Park began. It now sits like a massive void of 51 Manhattan blocks long and about half a mile wide, making up the 843 acres of the land area.27 Buying the park’s 843 acres cost New York State legislature about 7.4 million dollars total, which was more than what was paid for the state of Alaska.28 Considering the 2814% cumulative price change, this would equal to almost 20 billion dollars today.29 The Central Park Conservancy has overseen the investment of more than $1 billion into Central Park since its founding in 1980 and has a $ 79 million annual budget. Central Park is also the third most visited tourist attraction in the world, with about 37 million people each year, behind Las Vegas Strip and Times Sq.30 Elizabeth Barlow Rogers who has published widely on Landscape Architecture and the park speaks of its popularity in the early days of its construction:

Central Park achieved immense popularity in no time at all. By far the most attractive place in all of New York, it became the subject of frequent reports in the journals of the day, the setting for novels, short stories, and moral essays, the site for celebrations, parades, picnics, games, festivals, riding, boating, promenading, and romance. It filled a heretofore enormous void the city never knew it had.31 [Emphasis mine]

In 1908, Vitagraph Studios produced the first film version of Romeo and Juliet made in America. It was also the very first film to be shot in Central Park. As of 2011, 305 films have been shot in Central Park, making it the most filmed location in the world.32 All these numbers, and the popularity of the park as a filming location raises the question of why it is an interesting place for filmmakers to make films in. Of course there is no one single answer to this question, as the status of New York as a cultural hub plays a key role, but this chapter aims to illustrate some of the key features of the park within the context of its design and development that make it contain a kind of proto-cinematics — an anticipation and analogy of the presence of camera and of being filmed. These features will be connected to psychoanalytic film concepts in the second chapter and will be further followed up and explored by filmic examples. These examples — among many others — prove that the consistency of the park as a site of structuring desire — in itself and in films — is no happy accident. It is a result of Olmsted and Vaux’s mastery of design, the transformation in the park’s landscape by the peripheral ultra-dense urbanization, and the potential for

31 Elizabeth Barlow, Frederick Law Olmsted’s New York, (Praeger/Whitney Museum, 1972), 98.
being wandered by the eye of the camera. But before delving into the analysis of these features of the park, it is important and helpful to introduce relevant context into how the park’s idea came into being and how it was actualized. In order to do this we would need to look at New York in 1850’s, the process of the park’s design as well as its transformation throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

**Argument for a New City Park**

In the mid 1800’s New York was the rising commercial capital of the US. For this accumulation of investment, population and workers, it was suffering from excessive pollution and densification. The city’s urgent need for a civic living room was advocated for not only by scholars and legislators, but by the media as well. The arguments in favor of this addition were mainly related to pollution, over-population and a lack of recreational public spaces, but also New York’s status as a metropolis competing with ones in Europe such as Paris and London. An 1852 New York Times column titled A New Park spoke of such concerns:

> We hope that the efforts to establish a new and extensive park in our City will be crowned with success. It is one of the things New York needs, and needs imperatively. She has almost everything else...Her streets are crowded to suffocation. Amid the rolling wheels, the pedestrian is in hazard. On two sides of the isosceles she has reached her utmost capacity of growth. In those directions she can expand no further, unless she trespasses on the unstable directions of the sea. She can only spread upward...We shall think, that, if the project, of establishing a new, extensive and beautiful Park should be successfully carried through, something will have been accomplished towards diverting the concentrated attention of the public from the affairs of business towards teaching us, that trade is not the whole end and aim of life.

> We have no competent breathing-place... Not the least of these causes is corrupted air and the indoor seclusion... We want public places of resort, where the pure air may circulate without obstruction, and which our citizens may frequent for the purposes of recreation and pleasure.  

> We have no Park, now, worthy of the name or commensurate with the magnitude and requirements of the city... New-York should have a Park of amplitude and magnificence, on a scale corresponding with her position and population, having special reference to the future that awaits her.

Downing, a long time advocate for the development of urban parks in America was visiting England in 1850. Impressed with the parks of London, he wrote — with a tone Barlow Rogers considers as provocative to his reader’s subtle cultural cringe: “What are called parks in New York are not even apologies for the thing; they are only squares or paddocks.”

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In addition to New York’s lack of public spaces and health problems, parts of the town were in poor environmental conditions. The land where Central Park is now was deteriorating. It partly consisted of what was labeled as wastelands and “shanty towns” inhabited by mostly African-American and Irish immigrants. The notion of overturning the “squatters” into the great park became a potential maneuvering situation for adjacent landowners — mainly rich white New Yorkers — to lobby for this site as the building ground for the New Park. The elites — and also Downing himself — argued that the park’s location should be “central”, as opposed to what was initially proposed: A lush Upper West side neighborhood called Jones Wood. According to Rosenzweig and Blackmar “It was agreed that a central park of whatever boundaries would offer economic as well as cultural advantages over the mere sectional improvement of Jones Wood.” This meant that Seneca village had to be razed in order to make way for construction of the Park. About 1600 residents had to relocate their residences. This was not the first time that black New Yorkers were victims of “redevelopment” campaigns, and there’s controversial debate on how justly they were treated with regards to their properties on the Park’s land and their displacement. Seth Kamil, who runs Big Onion, a company that has led Central Park tours for 25 years, believes that the motive behind the location of the park was not merely physical and mental improvement. “Much of the land in what is now the park was useless for much of the 19th century, so I’d argue that the park was chosen to bolster property values of the land surrounding the park.” Sara Cedar Miller, author of Central Park, an American Masterpiece also comments: “The rich wanted New York to be a major metropolis, and a park was de rigueur, as in Paris and London, and visionaries saw the park as an outdoor classroom in urban reform. They thought immigrants would witness the fine clothes and the carriages and would want to work hard to be part of the American dream.”

After two years of meticulously surveying and assessing the 17,000 lots that made up the mammoth Central Park site, in 1856 the city government finally authorized the payment of $85,069,694 to the tracts’ 561 owners. One-third of that sum was to be covered by the landowners whose property adjoined the site, on the assumption that the value of their land would soar once the park was built. The remaining two-thirds of the purchase price were to be met by the city’s taxpayers. With most newspapers cheering the removal of “the insects,” overturning the wasteland into the city’s crown jewel became a kind of reverse remedy for fixing the city’s problem and the creation of an spatial void. Yet those who dwelled on the park site, mostly poor immigrants and African Americans, had no power to make or influence policy decisions. Picking the immigrant-occupied Midtown over Jones Park shows how for rich New Yorkers, the worst site became the best site to pick. It was an attempt to kill two birds with one stone: Get rid of the stain uptown and have a new, grand park. The vision of an idealistic picturesque fairyland created on top of—and instead of — existing “shanties.”

36 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, The Park and the People, 89.
37 Alex Van Buren, “12 Secrets of New York’s Central Park”.
Olmsted’s Commission and the Greensward Plan

When the plan for the construction of Central Park was commissioned, Egbert Viele — a civil engineer and at the time the park’s chief engineer in charge of surveying topographical surveying — proposed a self-initiated pragmatic design to the consulting board. One of the highlights of his plan was a Circuit Drive that followed the terrain of the site all around. Yet Calvert Vaux, an English Architect who had immigrated to the States and been Downing’s partner before his death, used his connections on the board and politicked against the Viele’s plan. Vaux believed that it had no consideration for establishing lines of vision and framing landscapes, as well as having no coherent “artistic conception.” This was because Viele’s design gave priority to vehicle circulation and muddled the pedestrian’s spatial comprehension of the park. Following criticism of Viele’s plan deficiencies, the board of commissioners initiated a design competition. Vaux teamed up with Olmsted, who was working as the park’s construction superintendent under Viele. Together they designed their vision of the park during the winter of 1857-58 — what came to be known as the Greensward plan, a design unique for some of its qualities among other contestants. The submitted proposals differed greatly in their overall approach to the aesthetics of the park — from French-esque boulevards to vehicle-dominated networks. The Greensward plan dominantly stood out in the competition because, unlike other submissions with divided the park into five zones separated by street traffic, submerged their “traverse” roads below ground level and created a continuous expanse of park differentiated by designed topography.

In the plan herewith offered to the Commission, each of the transverse roads is intended to be sunk so far below the general surface that the park drives may, at every necessary point of intersection, be carried entirely over it, without any obvious elevation or divergence from their most attractive routes.

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40 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, “The Design Competition” in The Park and the People.
41 Ibid., 102
Figure 1: Sketch showing the scheme of grade separations at the south end of Central Park, G. J. C. Dell 1927, in Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Central Park, ed. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Theodora Kimball (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973), 378.

Although the plan is the product of their collaboration, one historian tells us that "the actual design work in the park was functionally divided — Vaux handled all the structures — pavilions, boathouses, bridges; Olmsted handled all the rest." Vaux had "deferred to Olmsted in areas of aesthetic decision." The cohesion of such artistic decisions and Olmsted’s overall vision was not created from scratch but in fact inspired by Olmsted’s travels to England and visit to its public parks, namely the Birkenhead Park, designed by Sir Joseph Paxton. Olmsted had visited the park in 1850 and had praised it in his writings. Many of the fundamental concepts he utilized were things he had observed in England: the idea of a Public park which used private funds, the naturalistic and pastoral aesthetic, and infrastructural considerations and details. In addition, the teachings of Price, Gilpin, and Repton, who had written on Landscape Gardening in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s greatly influenced Olmsted’s developing interest in a picturesque theory of landscape. Yet Olmsted was an independent thinker and did not cater to existing fashions. His ultimate goal was the definition of an urban park — a *rus in urbe*, “country in a city” — which allowed for a physical and mental detachment from the city and supplied the metropolis with refreshment and open fields. The theoretical framework of these endeavors came together in his *Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns*, published in 1870. Olmsted’s most vivid and significant physical contribution however, was to be the actual space, Central Park, which 160 years after its birth still remains a hallmark of design genius and the site of awe and wonder for the many who traverse its grounds.

44 Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, 121.
Design Features and Influences: Resisting Features

In this part I wish to explore — from the perspective of potentialities — what I argue are the park’s qualities which expand it by, in effect, making it undiscoverable. These resisting features constitute what I argue are the park’s key structural qualities and include: (1) scale (exceeding containment with vastness), (2) Variation (exceeding uniformity through a diversity of views), (3) picturesque design (exceeding standard ideas of landscape beauty through the sublime), and (4) void-ness (exceeding the idea of a surplus space with the more complex addition of a “negative”). With these at work, the park resists being fully defined and leaves room for imagination to explore.

The idea of “proto-cinematics” is that of a potential of being filmed. This means that the park has inherent qualities, invisible to the eye, which — through the camera and editing — can be visualized. Cinema does not merely record what’s there; it realizes what has been present but invisible as a potentiality “waiting for a new medium” to expose. Such an argument claims landscape to be the predecessor of cinema in the ways it situates the subjects with relation to an exteriority (of objects). The variable connections between subjects, objects and voids exist through the means that the park has structured as elements of its layering. These elements activate the cinematic imagination which has preceded it. Yet, as is argued in this chapter, such principles and systems of structuring elements go back to influences that Olmsted experienced through landscape, painting and theater. The optical devices in the park are analogous to those of a diorama, in that by establishing foreground — background relationships they evoke a sense of distanciation — the insertion of a theatrical space between the viewer and viewed — that distills and magnifies the park’s act of self-revealing.

Proto-cinematics means that the park establishes an organizational system of framings of the rural view, through which the spectator is led to appreciate the view but desire for more. Not all is given to him. In other words, he is driven by what he can’t see, not by the immediate view in front of him. The viewer is, ideally, dissatisfied. Therefore, uncertainty also creates the potentiality of the park as something that should be comprehended in motion. Certain features of the park, not describable in a still image, require a moving eye, on foot or conveyance.

1) Scale

The “comparative largeness” of Central Park was essential, since a park should “be a ground which invites, encourages & facilitates movement.” The giddy impulse you feel, upon arriving at the Great Lawn or Sheep Meadow, to burst into a full-out sprint — that is by design.45

In the first glance and looking from above, one cannot help but feel astonished at the sheer size of the park. It covers sixty-one blocks from Midtown to Harlem — almost similar in size to the Golden Gate Bridge — and takes about an hour to walk non-stop. In the beginning part of their submission of a

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descriptive report, Olmsted and Vaux raise the question of why such a big chunk of Manhattan needs to be dedicated to the purpose of park-ness:

To find such a general motive of design for the Central Park, it will be necessary to go back to the beginning and ask, for what worthy purpose could the city be required to take out and keep excluded from the field of ordinary urban improvements, a body of land in what was looked forward to as its very center, so large as that assigned for the Park? For what such object of great prospective importance would a smaller body of land not have been adequate?\footnote{Ibid., 45.}

When in 1811 the Manhattan grid — the commissioner’s plan — was approved, no such space was thought of as necessary. According to Burrows and Wallace, “The commissioners admitted that it ‘may be a matter of surprise that so few vacant spaces have been left, and those so small, for the benefit of fresh air and consequent preservation of health.’”\footnote{G. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, \textit{Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 421.} Yet the test of time proved that the urban conditions that arose from the technical supremacy of the grid did not satisfy the greater needs of the city. The gridded Manhattan before Central Park was in dire need of some open-air development. In the descriptive report for the Greensward plan, Olmsted continues to describe his strategy for the development of the park’s scheme by visualizing it not only as an opening in the city’s fabric, but as a \textit{void that generates energy} and sub-conscious engagement:

Provisions for the improvement of the ground, however, pointed to something more than mere exemption from urban conditions, namely, to the formation of an opposite class of conditions; conditions remedial of the influences of urban conditions …. Two classes of improvements were to be planned for this purpose; one directed to secure pure and wholesome air, to act through the lungs; the other to secure an antithesis of objects of vision to those of the streets and houses, which should act remedially by impressions on the mind and suggestions to the imagination.\footnote{Olmsted, 45.}

It is exactly these \textit{impressions} and \textit{suggestions} that Olmsted sets as the goals of the park which distinguish its potentialities in structuring the gaze of the viewer. This explains why Central park is not only ungraspable at first sight but even after numerous visits. It expands upon entry because of the way it is sheltered from the street view. Olmsted’s deliberate design choice, of visually separating it as much as possible from the urban-scape, turned a space limited by the city that surrounded it into a nature unlimited “from within”:

Natural objects were thus required to be interposed, which while excluding the buildings as much as possible from view, would leave an uncertainty as to the occupation of the space beyond, and establish a horizon line, composed, as much as possible, of verdure.\footnote{Ibid., 46-47.}
Olmsted admires the value of “a broad stretch of slightly undulating meadow without defined edge” not just because it provides separation from the chaotic conditions of the urban but also “because the imagination, looking into the soft commingling lights and shadows and fading tints of color of the background would have encouragement to extend these purely rural conditions indefinitely.”

From a formal and motional standpoint, if the static yet flexible grid of Manhattan is a thesis, Central Park is the antithesis to it. Expressing the grid’s abstractedness, Rosalind Krauss states “It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature” in her essay “Grids.” The grid — an island of about 15000 acres, has an irregular boundary, but an orderly network of lines inside, whereas the park is violently defined by a rectangle, and is fluidly structured by a free flowing system of passageways and routes. It sits at the center of the commissioner’s plan of 1811 — not having been accounted for initially. The park’s grounds and outlines flow harmonious to the actual topography of the land, whereas the grid defines modules of land irrelative to their form. In describing such form of artificiality, Stoppani argues:

As it builds itself in its own artificiality, the Manhattan grid intentionally confounds its relation with an origin. There is no “origin” in Manhattan, but rather the continuous repetition of foundational acts whenever the Grid is traced on the ground (confirmed or transgressed).

This exaggerated artificiality of the Manhattan grid is, I argue, due to the particular containment it has —the extension beyond the borders. Compared with other examples of rigid urban planning structures, the Manhattan grid runs almost all the way to the island’s edges making it seem like it is a fragment of a never-ending network. It is as if the outline of the island is the frame of a window from which we are looking at a larger-than-life order of geometry and neutralization. Likewise, Central Park’s landscapes extend beyond their actual boundaries because they are concealed from the peripheral streets — only to be surrounded by the cityscape above the lush horizon line limitlessly expanding the park outwards. However, both are fabricated. The constructed flatness of the grid is artificial, and so is the pastoral landscape of Central Park. Yet, neither have an origin. But Central Park becomes the artificial center of the abstract grid. The two are contested: one abstract and the other naturalistic, yet both the grid and the park seem to want to extend beyond their visible boundaries. Central Park, because of its size, provides what the grid lacks — filling in for the loss of something the Commissioners grid never had in the first place.

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50 Ibid., 250.
52 Teresa Stoppani, Paradigm Islands: Manhattan and Venice: Discourses on Architecture and the City (London: Routledge, 2015), 66.
54 Krauss, “Grids”, 60.
2) Variation

From south to north, the park is laid out to create distinct visual experiences, helping the visitor navigate the vast space and creating picturesque variety in strong contrast to the rectilinearity of the gridded city around it.\textsuperscript{55}

![First Study of Design for Central Park](image)

Figure 2: "First Study of Design for Central Park", The Olmsted and Vaux Greensward Plan, in Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Central Park, ed. Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Theodora Kimball (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973), 214.

In visible contrast to the grid, the park doesn’t follow a rigid structure of modulations, and it owes its seamless quality to the designers. When the competition for the park was launched, the brief asked contestants to include features such as playgrounds, gardens, lakes, terraces, etc. Unlike some of the proposals submitted for the design by other contestants — which situated such functions in lookalike pockets of formal design — Olmsted’s approach tackled the problem from a quite distinctive approach. The overall conception and the aesthetics of the plan are coherent, yet there is not one formally geometric center or axis that defines the placement of other elements. This informality in design that Olmsted himself has referred to, implicitly points to his notion of a people’s park, a place where all the classes can come and feel belonged. His vision for a democratic America was inspired by Birkenhead park in England, which was the first to be publicly funded and excited Olmsted in that its beauty was shared “about equally by all classes”:

... You will find all classes largely represented, with a common purpose ... each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each.\textsuperscript{56}

This non-hierarchical notion is grounded in Central Park’s layout. The park is divided into sections with different characteristics and experiential qualities based on the specific shape of the land. Studying the surveys by Viele and through his own knowledge, Olmsted divides the park to two sections, Upper and


\textsuperscript{56} Frederick Law Olmsted, Frederick Law Olmsted: Essential Texts, ed. Robert C. Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 32.
Lower (relative to the old reservoir) based on how the topographic properties of each were characterized. According to him:

The horizon lines of the upper park are bold and sweeping and the slopes have great breadth in almost every aspect in which they may be contemplated. ... As it is in most decided contrast to the confined and formal lines of the city it is desirable to interfere with it, by cross-roads and other constructions, as little as possible ... a unity of character should be studiously preserved in all the gardening details.\(^5^7\)

Contrary to his observations of the upper park, the lower park “is far more heterogeneous in its character and will require a much more varied treatment. The most important feature in its landscape is the long rocky and wooded hill-side lying immediately south of the Reservoir.” He then goes on to describe different portions of the lower park and the distinct individual qualities about each. Olmsted is deliberate about his reference to the existing topography, and we can look at his words in describing the outline of the lake: “... this arrangement has been suggested by the present nature of the ground, which is low and somewhat swampy.”\(^5^8\) In his writing, he is concerned with how the changes in topography could instigate imaginative reactions in the park-goers heads, tempting them to discover what could potentially lie beyond. Characteristics expressed in terms of spatio-visual qualities such as “graceful undulations” or “flat alluvial meadow” create a vocabulary for how these elements can be dispersed throughout the site and structure a language of the park.

Hence, the park doesn’t equalize by means of regulated visuals. Contrary to a formal French garden/boulevard, the pastorality of Central Park equalizes movement by things which are hidden, or anticipated, and become (partially) revealed successively. Such a distribution of looking and moving opportunities further enhances the park’s resistance to definition and goes hand in hand with the picturesque tradition that had originally inspired Olmsted.

\(^5^7\) Frederick Law Olmsted, *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture*, 214.
\(^5^8\) Ibid, 224.
3) Sequentiality and the Picturesque

In Gilpin’s words, “Picturesque composition consists in uniting in one whole a variety of parts.”\(^{59}\) The picturesque is the main component in the park’s overall aesthetic that explains its diversity of experiences. The concept of the “picturesque” was first introduced by William Gilpin (1724–1804), the English artist and writer in his art treatise, *Essay on Prints* (1768), in which he tautologically defined the picturesque as “that kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture.”\(^ {60}\) In his later publications Gilpin developed the concept more fully, explaining it as halfway between both the *beautiful* — associated with smoothness, regularity, and order — and the *sublime*, which concerns vastness, magnitude, and intimations of power. The picturesque must combine aspects of both of those.\(^ {61}\) A picturesque landscape would have characteristics of roughness (which includes textured or variegated surfaces) — indeed, Gilpin wrote that “roughness forms the most essential point of difference between the beautiful and picturesque.”

While there is a detailed complex history of the development of picturesque in different art forms and theories, the important point here is that the Picturesque is a representational concept: it is an aesthetic that almost does not exist independently in nature, but only in its perception by the viewer — and particularly in its arrangement. Unlike the “beautiful,” which “please the eye in their natural state,” picturesque sights “please from some quality capable of being illustrated in painting.”\(^ {62}\) The picturesque is concerned with how a particular effect is thought of by the designer in the way that is perceived by the subjective mind. It therefore has to do with the positioning of the subject in a particular frame or setting through which a desired quality can be transferred.

One of the English gardeners — among many — who greatly influenced Olmsted was Humphry Repton.\(^ {63}\) Repton, who wrote *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1803), was fascinated by the optics and illusion of landscape design, both in manipulating perspective to recast the physical landscape and in the ‘magical’ performance of unveiling, central to his hinged illustrations.\(^ {64}\) His proposals included watercolor illustrations that contained hinged overlays that, when removed, would reveal the potential he envisioned for the landscape. Repton’s interest in theater and spectacle is evident in the drama underneath these overlays provided for his clients. Repton was also interested in what he referred to as the “axis of vision” — the range of depth and perspective by the human eye — a

\(^{59}\) William Gilpin, *Three essays : on picturesque beauty, on picturesque travel and on sketching landscape, Volume 8* (London: Printed for R. Blamire In the Strand, 1792), 19

\(^{60}\) William Gilpin, *An Essay on Prints* (London: A. Strahan, 1802), xii


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 3.


driving force shaping his landscape proposals. He would draw diagrams showing crafted perspectives, in particular, depicting the reflective effect of water in a landscape.65

Downing’s influence on both the actualization of Central Park as well as Olmsted’s thinking is also evident. The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste were first published under Downing’s editorship in the summer of 1846.66 In the 8th Volume of the Horticulturist magazine, Downing describes the plan of Hunting Park, noting that “The object of a city park is chiefly to afford the inhabitants’ means and facilities for healthful recreations.”67 It was in this journal that Downing first argued for a New York Park, which in time became Central Park. Olmsted’s essay on Birkenhead Park first appeared in The Horticulturist magazine, in which also a review of his book Walks and Talks was also published.68 If Downing had not died in a steamboat accident on the Hudson River in 1852, he would have probably been the prime candidate for designing Central Park.69 Downing’s fondness for the gothic also goes back to romanticism and “the wild.” He was closely associated with Gothic Revival architecture and had published his book Cottage Residences: Or, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and Their Gardens and Grounds, Adapted to North America, in which he provided a pattern typology of house designs based on a combination of romantic architecture — Gothic, bucolic, rustic, etc. — with the picturesque.

The terms Gothic and Picturesque are by no means limited to their usage in architecture and landscape. At their heart, wilderness as an idea had in fact existed for a long time, but new readings of the relations between nature and the sublime were theorized. In works of Gothic literature (e. g. Shelley, Wilde, Poe) there is the notion that wild exists as a portable element we carry within us, not as a left-over, and it was precisely this inseparable element that the picturesque tradition aimed to evoke by means of the unseen. According to Kant, nature is “called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature.”70 John Conron concludes that:

... The picturesque house is conceived both as a part of the scenery around it and as an arrangement of rooms each composed like sets in a theater, with its own distinctive effect, its own palette and “props,” its own mise-en-scène. Picturesque parks and gardens, too, are conceived as sequences of scenes, with foliage both creating the frames and converting sunlight into dramatic lighting — thickly planted spaces producing dark shadow; open lawns, meadows, clearings or lakes, brilliant light; and openly grouped plantations, chiaroscuro.71

66 http://www.fredericklawolmsted.com/ajdowning.htm
67 The Horticulturist and journal of rural art and rural taste. (Established by A.J. Downing, 1846). Devoted to horticulture, landscape gardening, rural architecture, embellishments, pomology, floriculture, and all subjects of rural life, literature, art, and taste, Vol VIII, P 460
68 A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century, Witold Rybczynski, p
The technique of chiaroscuro (from Italian: chiaro, “light,” and scuro, “dark”) is best known for its use in not only painting and landscape but also photography and theater. It involves a dramatic display of depth — background and foreground — through contrasts of light and shading. The English landscape painter John Constable believed that “chiaroscuro, or the contrast between light and dark was a principle of nature, and therefore crucial to landscape painting.” Thomas Cole whom Olmsted admired also applied the technique to his painting to separate the different layers in the landscape depicted. Often, chiaroscuro is used to bring attention to a particular element in the frame by positioning it at the border of foreground and background, involving elements that are lit from one side and shaded from the other, or shaded elements framing one’s that are lit. This in effect creates a distinction between what’s inside the viewers’ space (foreground) and that which remains beyond of it (background). In landscape design, one of the most-used forms of chiaroscuro has been the use of the shadowy recessed leaves and branches of trees in the foreground to frame the pastoral open meadow beyond. This creates a blur between the viewers’ inside view and outside view, bringing the exterior openness in to the interiority of enclosure.

Olmsted was familiar with many of such proto-cinematic optical and scenic devices through his studies on painting, theater and mainly landscape gardening — through the writing and principles of picturesque previously taught by Capability Brown, Repton and Downing. In fact, many of his readings re-appeared to him in a revelatory fashion when he travelled to England. In describing his fascination in visiting an English farm in his book Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England he writes “It seems constantly like dreaming to see so many of these things that we have only known before in poetry or painting.” So, it is fair to say that Olmsted’s intensive theoretical interest in the picturesque and chiaroscuro was highly influential in shaping his Central Park’s scheme — in which he set Picturesque as a complement to the pastoral. Their dual relationship is highlighted by Olmsted various times in describing them as different classes of landscape elements, as in “meadows” versus “forests.” In defining this binary as one of Olmsted’s signatures, Samuel Bowne Parsons wrote:

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Its shadowy forests and wide-skirted meads were so endowed in time with the elusive spirit of nature that here in the midst of a great city one felt an inspiring, sanative influence akin to that of some sunny valley in the Catskills or the Adirondacks.⁷⁵

Below is a passage from Olmsted and Vaux’s letter to H. G. Stebbins — then president of the Department of Public Parks — written in 1872, entitled “A Review of Recent Changes and Changes which Have Been Projected in the Plans of Central Park.”⁷⁶ Throughout the text, Olmsted not only illuminates the essential quality which he assigns to the “central motive” of the plan, but also differentiates and associates simultaneously the different elements of his design by tracing out how they operate independently, yet have a meta-theory that connects them:

The pleasing uncertainty and delicate, mysterious tone which chiaroscuro lends to the distance of an open pastoral landscape certainly cannot be paralleled in rugged ground, where the scope of vision is limited. But a similar influence on the mind, less only in degree, is experienced as we pass near the edge of a long stretch of natural woods — the outer trees disposed in irregular clusters, the lower branches sweeping the turf or bending over rocks, and underwood mingling at intervals with their foliage. Under such circumstances, although the eye nowhere penetrates far, an agreeable suggestion is conveyed to the imagination of freedom, and of interest beyond the objects which at any moment meet the eye. While elements of scenery of this class would both acquire and impart value from their contrast with the simpler elements of open pastoral landscapes, their effect, by tending to withdraw the mind to an indefinite distance from all objects associated with the streets and walls of the city, would be of the same character.⁷⁷

So although Olmsted distinguishes the \textit{pastoral open meadow} from the \textit{interwoven picturesque mingle through the woods}, he considers both to have the effect of “drawing the mind to an \textit{indefinite} distance from urban space.” And in either of the two, the key (design) element is what the eye \textit{can’t} see — the \textit{absence} of such vision — engaging the imagination. Between the two, however, he considered the highest degree of such anticipation to the chiaroscuro-ed open landscape, or \textit{the framed void}, something we see plenty of in Central Park.

4) Void-ness

Having listed the three previous resisting qualities of the park, it is crucial to delve deeper into its most obvious truth: The Park sits like a \textit{hole} inside the grid. It constitutes an \textit{absence} of built land, which is excessively present around it. This absence, I argue is the key element in its resisting function, something that disallows its holistic definition and forms a new kind of Cartesian relation to the gridded city. All that cannot be fulfilled in the city is in the park, and this is its purpose. Olmsted and Vaux, by thickening the border between the park and the city with trees and hedges and by directing the park’s

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⁷⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted, \textit{Forty Years of Landscape Architecture}, 240.
⁷⁷ Ibid., 250.
visual lens towards nature itself situate its land as a central void inside the grid. And so, by being a void, Central Park becomes in some way, the origin of the Manhattan grid: a grid which had seemed from the start to precisely forbid the possibility of open space.

The debate about a lack of open spaces in New York City had been relevant decades prior to the construction of Central Park. In 1838 Francis Nicholson, the city surveyor, calculated that the City’s eighteen public squares, parks, and places comprised a total of 7,415,739 square feet, or all of about 170 acres. A dozen years later, in 1850, with the urgent need for more open space attracting the press and broad public interest, the Common Council decided to publish these in order to raise public awareness and attention. This, coupled with Downing’s advocacy for a New York Park, led to the dedication of a big-enough open land for the park, which came to be realized in the Greensward plan.


The Greensward plan, as well as Olmsted’s notes shows that the void idea, for Olmsted, is central. He uses it not just as an empty hole but as an optical portal — between interior and exterior — and his use, as illustrated in this text, is not limited to the park as whole, but also in smaller scale design choices, such as the conscious choice of void-like spaces inside the park (such as meadows) as well as his tree-planting strategies and spacing between them. Olmsted talks of the void not just as a hole (or empty space), but as a generative force:

Provisions for the improvement of the ground, however, pointed to something more than mere exemption from urban conditions, namely, to the formation of an opposite class of conditions; conditions remedial of the influences of urban conditions.

Two classes of improvements were to be planned for this purpose; one directed to secure pure and wholesome air, to act through the lungs; the other to secure an antithesis of objects of

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vision to those of the streets and houses, which should act remedially by impressions on the mind and suggestions to the imagination.\(^{79}\)

The classification of landscape elements based upon their *enclosure versus openness* — as previously expressed in the duality between pastoral meadow and picturesque forest — is another important theory in Olmsted’s design — also known as solid/void theory — which is based upon teachings of Capability Brown.

Many of the trees in the park have a high canopy percentage, such as Elms, Black Cherries and Black Tupelos. This means that they cover a significant amount of space above the park-goer’s head while allowing openings from inside/between their branches once they’re recessed. They are framing trees. Furthermore, because of the high overall percentage of canopy in the park’s trees, the optical and spatial effect of the voids in the park is amplified. They act as vast *releases* from corridors of shaded walks, and through their contrast their void-ness is accentuated. But the trees ultimately perform the service of framing views and showcasing the spaciousness beyond the foreground of vision. It could be said that Olmsted planted trees where he did to emphasize precisely where he *didn’t* plant trees. According to the authors, “the planting generally is designed to give from the greatest number of points of view, within the park, the broadest effects of light and shade which can be obtained upon the ground, and to produce the impression of great space and freedom.”\(^{80}\)

In bringing this spacious exteriority into the space of the subjective viewer — who observes the scenery from inside tree-branch frames — the *extimacy* function of the voids is at work. They interiorize what lies beyond and in doing so, tickle the imagination with uncertainty. Philippe de Montebello, former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, states that their plan was named "Greensward" in recognition of its open areas of rolling lawns.\(^{81}\) Unlike many proposals for the design competition which considered open land to scarcely deserve design attention, Olmsted and Vaux’s provision of numerous empty fields such as Sheep Meadow and the Great Lawn aimed specifically to encourage unconstrained and spontaneous recreation in those open areas.\(^{82}\)

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\(^{79}\) Frederick Law Olmsted, *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture*, 240.

\(^{80}\) Heckscher, *Creating Central Park*, 28.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 23.
Olmsted and Vaux actively opposed filling these spaces with statues, buildings and decorations. Vaux believed in “Nature first and 2nd and 3rd — Architecture after a while.” But, in the years following Olmsted’s death, the tendency to fill the voids with objects of immediate pleasure, such as statues and monuments grew to an extent that it came to be known by a special designation, as the “encroachment issue.” However, most of such attempts failed, because Olmsted had emphasized the urgency of keeping the park clear of these decorative objects. In a 1924 article in The New York Times, an empassioned author voiced his concern over the trend to fill up parks with “eyesores” and refers to Olmsted’s original notion of rural landscape:

At any rate, we venture to submit to it what Frederick Law Olmsted wrote in 1895, when it was a Question of placing a battle monument in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. In a letter to the Park Commissioner, Mr. Olmsted said: “... You can readily see that if the tendency continues, and more and more monuments and architectural features are introduced, the time will come when the beautiful, quiet, rural landscape of the park will be to a great extent marred and the park made to resemble a confused and fussy-looking garden or the best of our rural cemeteries....” There we have, in condensed form, the whole artistic gospel as relates to public parks. They ought not to be thought of as convenient or cheap “Sites” for this or that statue or monument. Central Park is already afflicted with some bronze and stone erections that are eyesores and that all sensible people would like to get rid of. Fewer monuments rather than more in Central Park should be the watchword.84

Olmsted’s genius was in the long term vision he head. Rather than designing for the moment, he anticipated the changes that New York was about to go through in the next decade and even century. This is exactly why Central Park has been sustained while allowing for change around it.

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83 Ibid., 28.
Urbanized Picturesque: Central Park as a Lens

Olmsted designed Central Park considering the conditions of the city at the time, influenced by theories that had come before him; yet, his understanding of the metropolis seemed to be directed to a much grander time scale. He could foresee the transformation of the city in time to come, specifically that which affected the park: the built skyline around it. Even though this effect was beyond his control, he could devise the conception of the park’s versatility in its function as an inside frame within which pieces of the city could come together:

The time will come when New York will be built up, when all the grading and filling will be done, and when the picturesquely-varied, rocky formations of the Island will have been converted into formations for rows of monotonous straight streets, and piles of erect buildings. There will be no suggestion left of its present varied surface, with the single exception of the few acres contained in the Park. Then the priceless value of the present picturesque outlines of the ground will be more distinctly perceived, and its adaptability for its purpose more fully recognized.85

No longer an open suburb, our ground will have around it a continuous high wall of brick, stone, and marble. The adjoining shores will be lined with commercial docks and warehouses: steam boat and ferry landings, railroad stations, hotels, theaters, factories, will be on all sides of it and above it: all which our park must be made to fit.86

New York as a metropolis is ever-changing; as Michel De Certeau has put it “Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future.” Yet at its center lies its most consistently resistant piece: Central Park. Although the park’s relation to city had altered as a result of increasing commerce, transportation and uptown Manhattan population, still in three decades after the death of its creators, park-goers would still find the terrain familiar — almost unchanged — but their view towards the park’s edges had transformed remarkably, into a surreal vista, as the poet Sara Teasdale expresses in her 1917 poem “Central Park at Dusk.”87

Buildings above the leafless trees loom high as castles in a dream, while one by one the lamps come out to thread the twilight with a gleam.

Herein, the analogy between the high-end apartments seen from the park in winter and “castles in a dream” resembles the uncanny effect of such visual adjacency between nature and the man-made — specifically accentuated in wintertime because there is less visual barrier. In looking at the park borders, one is able to transpose the peripheral towers from their original context being the street into an imaginary naturalistic land. The park’s edges become the threshold for this transfer between urban reality and the imaginary.

85 Frederick Law Olmsted, Forty Years of Landscape Architecture, 46.
86 Ibid., 216.
87 Blackmar and Rosenzweig, The Park and the People, 375
While pointing out the significance of the new skyline in transforming “Central Park’s visual relationship to the city,” Blackmar and Rosenzweig cite guidebooks from 1890’s suggested that “such views offered park visitors a new aesthetic pleasure” and label the cityscape “handsome hotels and flats [that] line the street” and “a massive fairy vision before the rambler through Central Park,” — the latter expressed towards Hotel Majestic depicted in the famous photograph by “Byron.”

Figure 7: The Dakota, as seen from Central Park in 1894, Museum of the City of New York/Byron Collection/Getty Images.

88 Ibid., 377
Fantasy Vision: To be Seen from the Park

From the late 1800s to the first three decades of the 20th century, the land around Central Park saw what was the rise of many distinctive luxury Apartment towers built by richest elites in the city like Astor and Carnegie. Adjacency to the park’s landscape had long been used to validate social prestige and financial success, pushing more and more investment in building mansions and high-rises that would make up the park’s skyline. This created a new mode of enjoying the park, in which one wouldn’t need to actually enter it and walk its grounds. The New York Times agreed: Central Park was contributing to the “vogue of the multiple-family dwelling,” since “along the periphery of the park one might build up into the air and multiply by four or five times the number of residents profiting by this greatest of front yards.” Fifth Avenue and Central Park West were occupied with new towers that touted their “permanent view of beautiful Central Park” and their “unrivaled view of woodland, greensward and lake.”

With few town houses surviving, perhaps the majority of the apartments are built in an Art Deco style, which was prominent in the US in the 20s and 30s. There are, however, ones that stand out, such as San Remo and Eldorado, both designed by Emery Roth, in the shape of twin towers incorporating some beaux-art detail and decorations. Roth began his architectural apprenticeship as a draftsman in the Chicago offices of Burnham & Root, working on the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, the layout of which was designed by Olmsted.

What do some of the real estate advertisements tell us about the way that Central Park becomes desirable? This happens in a multitude of layers. First, having an apartment adjacent to the park expresses the desire to be seen from the park- an exaggerated iconicity. It’s by no accident that many famous rich people live in Central Park West. It is not only the enjoyment of the view at the park that justifies the hefty price of these houses. It is also a desire of wanting to be seen/included in the skyline, looking from the park. In the dense New York where vision and lines of sight are lost in between the skyscrapers, the ability to brag by pointing at one’s apartment “that’s where I live in” becomes a virtue, especially if it’s from inside the city’s one and only Central Park.

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89. Blackmar and Rosenzweig, The Park and the People, 377.
90. Ibid.
In the 50’s Plaza Hotel advertisement we can see how the presence of the park at the foreground layer (with the tree silhouettes) becomes the frame through which the real estate is to be enjoyed/looked at.

“Directly facing the park” is what the ad in the middle says, yet the photo is taken from inside the park. “New York is Central Park by dawn” is the opening line of the 1960s ad on the right. Followed by “The opulent shops of Fifth Avenue” and “glitter of Lincoln Center”, living on the Park’s peripheries didn’t only include its own enjoyment. It was a whole package that included the best of both worlds — urban and natural satisfaction. The night view rendering showed how the enjoyment extends from day to night, in showing the bright glitter behind the carriage, romanticized even more by the lit-up apartment at night.

What these show us is how the different modes of enjoying the park are presented as images. That is perhaps the park’s post-environmental cultural project, which includes not just the park, but the cultural (modernity) artifacts that it can contain: carriage rides, concerts, baseball matches, the MET, boat rides and even casinos; saturating the pre-existing excess of commercial interest around Midtown Manhattan.

In all of these ads, the rhetorical device is using the park not only as a front yard for the estates, but also as a *lens* to look at them. In bringing both the lush greenery and the fancy mansion, the image composes a fantasy wherein the coming together of man-made and nature is immediate — almost as if the two exist side by side — or, rather, one inside the other.
Redefining the Spatio-visual Aesthetics of the Park

In this part, I argue that since the park’s construction, the *picturesque* mode of apprehending the park has been significantly altered — redefined, actually — by two devices: the cityscape and the cinema. Each of these has greatly transformed the ways of looking at the park. Nowadays, one doesn’t necessarily go to the park only to enjoy nature. In fact, many of famous Central Park images, postcard, and even selfies are taken with the built landmarks in the skyline framed by the trees. On the other hand, with the global rise of cinema as an industry since the beginning of the 20th century, more and more people have become used to seeing moving images of places they have never been to. Images of Central Park, as the most filmed location in the world, owe a great deal of their *construction* to the number of movies it has been represented in. Both the transformation of the park’s peripheral scenery and the introduction of new mediations via the filmic image have re-framed Olmsted and Vaux’s traditional picturesque and pastoral aesthetic scheme and have turned it into a site of optical potentialities.

The rise of the towers around the park turns the park from a *scene* into a *lens* for seeing the city from a unique perspective. It becomes a place inside the city from which one can look at the city *as if from viewed outside*. Such a view is inherently uncanny. The cityscape seen from the park, overlaid by the lush nature, is an image simultaneously familiar and strange. It is familiar because we have seen skylines of our cities from afar, but its strangeness arises from the *Olmsted effect*: the extension of nature outbound, to an indefinite border. Yet as Rosenzweig and Blackmar explain in their book, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*, there was a great difference of opinion and debate about the favorability of this change at the time:

To Olmsted’s son, Frederick, Jr., who followed his father into landscape architecture, the skyline seemed “inherently ugly, restless, and distressing,” and he felt that it destroyed the unity and serenity of the park’s romantic design. Many tried to come up with ways to try to “obscure the skyline created by the new buildings.” But those critics who saw the naturalistic aesthetic as old-fashioned suggested that now that the “visible frame” had become “hopelessly un-rural and insistently architectural,” the design of Central Park itself should be allowed to become more “frankly urban.” While architects and landscape architects debated the aesthetic implications of the skyline, thousands of parkgoers welcomed the towers as *navigational aids* in negotiating the park’s wandering paths.93

The skyline visually contextualizes the park. If previously we would have had the sensation of going far outside the city, we are now constantly reminded of our circumference inside it. It is important to note that this works, because all the voids that were left in sight by the designers served as placeholders for the buildings to come. If the park lacked its spaciousness and empty frames, the addition of towering buildings would have made little to no impact on the visual relationship of the park to the city. Because of this very reason, we are now able to see the landmarks — significant buildings — from multiple points

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93 Blackmar and Rosenzweig, *The Park and the People*, 377.
in the park. This turns the outer skin of the park — the panorama — into a navigational device that works not only for way finding and orientation, but also for a sense of disposition when editing as a filmic technique is utilized.

The major change — the redefinition of the tradition — comes though because of the particularities and the essence of the medium of film in its ability to spatially and temporally create disjunction in the apprehension of the park. Previously, it seemed obvious that routes determined how specific views were to be seen. In a sense, they taught people how to use the park. The manifestation of Olmsted’s control over the picturesque tradition is exactly such manicured scenery of the park, were layers of elements — hills, trees and lawns — were used to construct a naturalistic landscape. The efficiency of such design techniques depended essentially on Olmsted’s knowledge of balance between solids and voids and their composition — which were effectively based upon English traditions of painting.

Now, through the lens of the camera, a new reality of the park awaited to be discovered. The camera, with its ability to manipulate the conventional point of view of the park-goer, and by constructing formal motions through the park, could challenge the uncertain uncanny in the park differently. But, such proto-cinematic potentialities exist exactly because they were somehow unconsciously anticipated by the designers. Filmmakers had the ability to jump from a romantic vision of the park to a thrilling one through the alteration of light and point of view. Part of this was designed by Olmsted — the potential to hide something from the view that ends up structuring the desire to see it, to discover the unknown element — and part of it was out of his control. Towers rising at the edge of the park made it possible to evoke fantasy, nostalgia, or romance through the reverse–angle connection to the city; so it seemed that the non–park “cooperated” with the park’s interior agenda. The camera — formally (through filmic techniques such as matte painting) or temporally (editing) — fragmented the park. It could now adapt and convert the “unified whole” that Olmsted created into components of a bigger project re-framing the view of the urban.

Both of these, the cityscape and the camera, redefined the picturesque in the park and situated it as a portal — as a frame controlling motion into and out of situations. The portal functions can be seen in multiple works of art. In Robert Nathan’s 1940 novel Portrait of Jennie, the artist Eben Adams meets a girl which, he learns, time-travels to him from the turn of the century. His choice of the park as the portal for her appearances and disappearances contrast the park’s unchanged grounds to the transformed metropolis containing it. I discuss the film version of Portrait of Jennie in the next chapter in terms of how the park is framed to stage Jennie’s trajectories into and out of time. In Jack Finney’s 1970 novel of time travel to the 1880s, Time and Again, the author used Central Park as the place where his protagonist could travel back into the nineteenth century. These examples showcase how the brand new park for the city turned — in a couple of decades — into the sustained void where atemporal relations could be evoked.

This composite image of man-made and natural creates an extimacy — an inner-frame quality — about the park’s landscapes. The visual uncertainty about the distance between the park and the city — when applied through cinematic devices such as depth of field and framing — makes the expression of not just
fantasy, but also of antagonism, alienation and privacy, possible. These techniques will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

**Conclusion: The Proto-Cinematics of Central Park**

This chapter has aimed to define proto-cinematics as *ways of looking* in the landscape that revolve around the visual and spatial structure of the park — or the park’s *resisting features*. Olmsted's "accidental" creation of proto-cinematic potentialities in the park was not entirely an accident. His familiarity with romantic landscape traditions (Capability Brown etc.) conditioned his talent for building spaces into spaces, and to planning scenes that were hidden and gradually divulged themselves. Also Andrew Jackson Downing's influence (in culture generally, but directly to Olmsted) surely must have engaged his "gothic" imagination, emphasizing concealment, mystery, and drama.

While Olmsted consciously looked forward and set up safeguards to keep the park design intact, his idea that the "picturesque/gothic" experience should be preserved lent itself to cinematic use in terms of (1) release and suspense in openings and closures, (2) tracking shots "built into" the paths and connections of spaces, (3) layering of the city and trees, and (4) the creation of an interior edge that worked like an outer edge. In the bigger scale, by operating as a void in the city, the park allows for its surroundings to change while it remains unchanged and stable. Furthermore, the park itself resists definition by sustaining desire and allowing the gaze to function as something that is unseen.

Such are the park’s proto-cinematic qualities, and many of the concepts Olmsted integrated into the park’s design originally contributed to its structural role, capacity and potentialities. These qualities however are re-defined with two important changes: the transformation of the park’s landscape by high-rises, and the arrival of film as a medium and cinema as an industry.

In the next chapter I will discuss how a topological framework of analysis can be useful for the structural role of space in cinema, followed by examples from four films which illustrate the park’s status as an ocular void. From a disciplinary cinematic standpoint, there are particular and rhetorical difficulties in discussing Central Park not only as one of the spaces represented in the films, but also through specific moments from the films’ narrative. However, these specificities prove useful in illustrating the dynamism behind the creative choices of designers and filmmakers alike, and how two distinct accounts of imagination from seemingly different mediums can overlap.
Chapter 2: Filmic Medium, Method, and Space

Shooting a film in the park can be regarded as an activator to the perceived experience of the park’s space. In order to push the narrative forward and carry its ideological load, the film has to liken itself to that which the eye would see in the park through situating itself in park’s pre-conditioned frames. Yet, the cinematic medium provides much more than mere replication. A film elevates the spatial experience through manipulations in image and time, both of which create visual dispositions that situate the work of cinema as something that is pre-assimilated upon its presentation to its audience much more than works of other mediums. For this very reason, films are not necessarily accurate or close to “reality.” Some works attempt at simulating in order to provide a reference for identification, yet others break the conventional image by challenging the pre-existing structures. No matter the orientation towards ideology, film opens the door to fantasy wider and faster. They engage audiences in an immersive imaginary scenario through which they are positioned to desire. The void-ness of desire is a concept that films challenge differently: Some will try to hide it through phantasmal formations and some will expose it, putting the audience in a direct encounter with the trauma of its primordial loss.

As shown in the previous chapter, the engagement of audiences in a fantasy that sustained their desires is a schematic and formal choice that Olmsted consciously made throughout the park’s design. Olmsted was indeed a pre-Lacanian. In this light, psychoanalysis provides a useful frame for answering the question: How do specific features of the park’s layout relate to the films’ ability to re-stage them in favor of their own structural agency? What does the usage of the park’s spaces in films tell us about each?

The idea behind creating the park was to use it as a supplement to what the city couldn’t provide. Cities are inherently incomplete and imperfect. Therefore the park it was not just a cover-up or an add-on plugin for the city. It gave the city an original that it never had. It continues to operate in two dimensions: On the bigger scale it serves as a void in the center of the city that allows for a release, and on a smaller scale, it functions as a portal to fantasy — a romanticized arrangement that sustains desire, similar to a film’s structure. But, there can be a fundamental antagonism in a fantasy — a conflict — which makes you think you got what you wanted, whereas you actually didn’t. This is not to say that all films sustain desire. Classical Hollywood films often follow the opposite. They satisfy the audiences by giving them all they demand — most exemplified by a final act that resolves the conflict and makes for a happy ending. Had the park been designed in a formalistic manner, it would have been analogous to a conventional cinema plot. But, by incorporating the uncanny “wild” that is to found in the constructed naturalistic layout of the park, it provides not just the fantasy, but also the unknown/lost void. This effect is — as discussed in the park’s resisting features — is also a result of its bigness and inside-frame quality and incorporates an unattainable residual element which makes desiring possible. Domesticating the fantasy, however, still happens in the park. When a particular alignment — especially of high-rises around the park — happens (a building is viewed through the natural frames), one is tempted to stop and take a selfie. But, because the park’s design and serpentine paths invite the viewer to move and traverse its grounds, it can be said that it structurally resists domestication.
Benjamin and others would be tempted to say that the park, like a film, would have a predominantly ideological value. This approach — as discussed in the literature review — goes all the way through French film criticism. But, as Copjec argued, the gaze is on the side of the object, not on the side of the audience, therefore the fundamental function of the films — and the park — is utilizing the gaze to organize the view of spectators through something they can’t see or acquire.

Just as the perception of space is dependent on movement — it shrinks and expands as we go faster or slower- it can also be analyzed relative to the story being deployed. A subject’s hysteria can transform a place as grand as sheep’s meadow or the water reservoir to an experience of captivity and enclosure, as is the case in Wall Street and Marathon Man respectively. A normal Central Park can be triggered by a character to be turned into an uncanny Central Park, familiar yet unknown, such as in the Portrait of Jennie. In these transformations and in the interplay of Fantasy and desire — excess and void — the scenic elements of the park play a major role, as well as the cinematic devices. These include the cinematography, story (screenwriting) and editing. Most this chapter will illustrate how filmic medium, form, and technique reconstruct Central Park, and how Central Park structures the cinematic space of the films. What it comes to express, is that these two are inevitably interconnected.

Structure as Topology: Subject as a Torus

In this part I wish to illuminate further the key concepts that were touched on in chapter 1, in order to provide for a connection to the filmic medium and structure. I’m referring to Lacan because his theory of the unconscious is useful in analyzing subjectivity, whether in space or in film. As the application of painting and filmic techniques in works of arts show us, masters of the trade constantly utilize them in order to travel from a real state of mind to a fantastic one. It is important to highlight in simple terms how these concepts are structurally universal and can be used to describe the relations between subjects and the apparatuses (landscape or film).

In The Rome Discourse, Lacan describes how “a torus’ peripheral exteriority and central exteriority constitute but one single region.” (Écrits, 321). For Lacan’s son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller, “The torus is introduced as a figure that allows the fundamental relationship of internal exclusion to be sustained.” The topology of the torus illustrates certain features of the structure of the subject. One important feature of the torus is that its center of gravity falls outside its volume, just as the center of the subject is outside himself; he is de-centered, ex-centric.95

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But what is topology? As stated in L’Étourdit, 1972, Lacan makes a bold assertion, that “Topology is not ‘designed to guide us’ in structure. It is this structure.” Topology is about a delimitation (separation) of space. It studies spatial relations and properties that relate to self and otherness — hence a marking of boundaries between interiority and exteriority. It becomes useful in psychoanalysis, because psychic space and material space are indeed interrelated, and structures that exist in the external world of the psyche determine a lot about how the interior mechanics of the mind function. This interconnection between the two spaces is the basis for what Lacan calls extimacy. In “The Extimacy of Space,” Paul Kingsbury explains:

Jacques Lacan coined the neologism ‘extimacy’ (extimité) in order to theorize two interrelated modes of psychical apprehension: first, how our most intimate feelings can be extremely strange and Other to us. Second, how our feelings can be radically externalized on to objects without losing their sincerity and intensity. Describing this duality, Lacan states that “The Other is something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me” (S7, 71). He uses the figure of a torus to provide a visual explanation. Lacan wrote that the uncanny — as the unhomely or the other in the self — places us “in the field where we do not know how to distinguish bad and good, pleasure from displeasure.” Visual tropes like ghost, twin, time travel, déjà vu, doppelganger that appear widely through works of fantasy and fiction are examples of uncanny figures. The uncanniness of such figures triggers desire because one is curious to overcome the uncertainty about their resemblance and dual nature.

In Seminar 6, Desire and its Interpretation, Lacan defines fantasy as the frame of desire. If desire can be mapped in the empty void at the center of the torus, the fantasy is the required staging for the subject to move towards the void, without knowing one exists. Therefore, although the desire is impossible to satisfy, fantasy provides a scenario in which makes it seemingly possible to do so. If the subject puts the fantasy to test and traverses it, he would have an inevitable encounter with the void at its center. Although the encounter is traumatic, it is liberating, as it frees the subjects from the constraint coordinates of the fantasy and reveals the real truth about its inherent lack.

**Fantasy and Void in the Park**

With this being said, this thesis will attempt to map out the spatial elements of the park in conjunctions with the psychoanalytic space (topology) of the film’s text — that of its form. Olmsted’s vision was that, if, through the use of picturesque design, the park didn’t exactly give the spectator a definite goal (satisfy the subject’s desire) and instead, hold it back, it would liberate the viewer as a subject free to

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fantasize about the possibilities of such a view. The whole dynamics of the medium of (narrative) film works on the holding up and release of suspense. This dynamic is analogous to the one in the park and in the balance between solids and voids. A picturesque path has to generate enough uncertainty and suspense, only to be released upon the arrival at a meadow or an open field. The Olmstedian meadow in itself is a non-object. As he explained about its ability to establish a horizon line of verdure and the uncertainty in its extension (fractured by the new skyline) he made a point about the interest lying “beyond the objects that meet the eye.” The moment of arriving at the meadow is the moment of realization upon that the picturesque path’s final “thing” or “goal” was, indeed, an empty voided meadow. But the park doesn’t end. It keeps recreating itself, for the subject — now free — always comes across a new path and a new desire.

The intention behind a naturalistic park was to make people feel as distanced as possible from the conditions of city through a notion of endless nature. But as discussed, the appearance of cityscape at the park’s edges turns the relationship into an estimate one: Urban grounds which were once considered “far” for the park-goer are now “so near, yet so far.” The skyline effect turns the park from a hole into an inner frame. By marking the edges, the void bends in and turns into a torus. Now the subject can see and be reminded that beyond the desire paths and voided meadows upon which he arrives, lies the remainder of the city that he first walked in. This allows him to reach self-consciousness in knowing how the city where he lives looks like from outside. But this is an outside that is not nearly as detached from the city; quite the contrary, an outside that is at the very inside.

The modern skyline replaces the previous green horizon line. It gives form to the otherwise indistinct edges of the park, suggesting where buildings “might be.” Perhaps Olmsted and his successors feared the encroachment of tall buildings at the park’s edge because it would undermine the ability of the park to generate fantasies within its isolated void. The static buildings contrasted with the seasonally changing trees forces views of the park to circulate internally, where lighting effects such and depth of field of camera lens could, like the fog, make the park forget about the city.

Because the aim of the current chapter is to explore and show the subjective structure of space through filmic form and techniques, several themes stand out: (1) discovering the park’s resisting features (voidness, inside frame, etc.), (2) the redefinition of picturesque, and (3) structural qualities made evident in films that have been made in the park. My methodology involves a disaggregation of the films’ formal qualities: scene-by-scene analysis tracing the optical functions of the park in cinema. I am to answer how does park’s deployment of the inside frame idea come together with filmic inside frames? By rendering visible the way in which a scene or sequence uses a particular structural device — such as Void — I aim to uncover part of the magic behind the mechanics of fantasy and desire production.

Films can reveal ways of structuring audiences that themselves can demonstrate how space collectively structures us. This is not reductive — subjects can evade such attempts to manipulate them. But, these structures exist, and an analysis of choices made by presumably creative minds can explain how space regulates boundaries and thresholds to give the illusion of free choice. Following Lacan’s key ideas of gaze, Other, and topology, any study of subjectivity — in filmic spaces and actual space — is consistently about the idea of inside vs. outside. By structure I mean the set of rules for these boundaries and
connections. In relating to audiences, structure does not determine an end result. It is an existing condition that — unlike the Foucauldian notion of the apparatus — can be followed or not. It is a specific mode of address present in works of cinema and — as this thesis argues — in landscape. This thesis ultimately calls for a topological exploration of the park and films, rather than a cognitive one — stochastic rather than deterministic.

The Park as Portal to Fantasy

The portal is like an optical passage consisted of layers. In order for it to function, all the layers have to fit each other in revealing and concealing what’s travelling inside. In fantasy and fiction literature, the portal operates as a doorway from one world to another. In cinema, filmic techniques are often used to make the transition possible. Among them, mise-en-scène is critically important, as it constitutes the conditions of the two worlds. Central Park as a setting operates as a portal to Fantasy, in order to situate the protagonist in a stage where he can purse his desire. To show this I study two films and explain the use of filmic techniques in the representation of the park as an optical device.

Portrait of Jennie

Portrait of Jennie is the story of a depression-era New York artist named Eben Adams who meets a girl from the past in Central Park. In this film, the two worlds constitute a similar topological structure to that of a torus: The exterior cold New York which is at the same time very intimate to Eben as it resembles his own state of mind; and the interior subjective imagination of Eben in the park, through which he is able to envision Jennie, an uncanny figure so far away and exterior to him that she has to travel in time for him to see her. In this exchange of internal exteriority and external interiority, the park functions as the site where the pendulum swings from one to the other. Central Park’s liminal quality is in connecting distant spacetimes. Jennie is a girl from the past - who is dead — but the imaginative space of Eben’s subjectivity has to travel back in time in order to retrieve her image. This travel happens first and foremost in Central Park. It becomes the portal to Fantasy.

What does this tell us about desiring? What is Eben missing? What does he look for in Jennie and in Central Park? “New York is a cold place in the winter...yet there is a type of suffering for the artist which is worse than anything a winter or poverty can do ... it is more like a winter of the mind.” The narrator speaks these words at the beginning of the film to set up the tone to Eben’s quest. He’s not only after his creative and artistic imagination and flair, but there is an extra — one he never had in the first place — that was offered by fantasy and that which drives him — ultimately at the end of the film almost costing him his life- to find Jennie. Halfway through the film, as Eben — having failed to find Jennie — runs into the painting shop owner in the park, he has a conversation with him that is expressive of this inner lack:

“...Sooner or later, they (artists) want recognition. They want to sell their work.” “... But I don’t think that’s all that’s bothering you.” “Mr. Matthews was right. There was something else. My memory was beginning to play tricks on me...”
Temporal disjunctions are interwoven in the film with Central Park and fostered with the devices that catalyze the process of transition such as the scarf, Jennie’s old dress, and old newspaper and the park itself. Central Park is the perfect site to go back in time because of its distance from the chaotic, ever-changing city of New York. Words by the narrator in the beginning of the film “...Time itself doesn’t pass but curves around us...” signify the non-linearity of the subjective thought through which Eben experiences Jennie’s vision. The painting seller also mentions that Eben sketch of Jennie reminded her of “long ago” and “something eternal in all the great portraits of the past.” The film is divided into sections defined by Jennie’s presence or absence. In between her emergences, Eben is transferred back to the real world — the cold, miserable New York. Every time this happens, the director uses a long shot of the city as a transition between the two states of mind — fantasy and real. The “city” shots serve as disjunctions not only in space but also in time “Cold, cold months followed each other that year.”

![Figure 10: Portrait of Jennie (1948), Dir: William Dieterle. Screenshots from the film (above)](image)
Jennie is made to appear *magically* in between the towers. Such an effect is achieved through a combination of devices: The near-symmetrical *framing* of the shot illustrates a gap in between the two towers, which is further emphasized by the motivated *silhouette lighting* behind Jennie, which turns her into a shadowy figure, heightening the drama of her appearance. Such fantastic alignments of spatial elements are a work of visual effects using matte technique. The use of matte painting as a filmic technique goes back a long way, to Georges Méliès, as means to decompose the image and create *blanks* in the film using a glass pane painted black. Matte painting and lighting effects are used to make the appearance and disappearance more dramatic. The film’s extensive use of mattes to create “magical” set effects, largely the work of Clarence Slifer, won it the award for Best Visual Effects.100

The park’s potential in the utilization of matte painting derives from its already-present layered-ness. The filmmaker is able to separate different elements — the cityscape from nature — and recompose them to form a new combination. In doing so, he re-reads the picturesque landscape put in place by Olmsted. In using the new skyline, the filmmaker turns the park into a *lens* for seeing the fantasy of Jennie.

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However, Central Park is not just a portal to fantasy in Portrait of Jennie. There are multiple occasions in which Eben is in the park by himself or with someone else. He cannot find Jennie there. This uncertainty about her emergence is what makes the park truly magical. Uncertainty transfers the role of agency to a point out of reach of both Eben and the audience, a point imagined to inhabit a supernatural zone.

There are instances before Jennie’s appearance when the filmmaker uses a canvas texture over the film to make the screen seem more like a painting. This romantic effect means that while the world outside is radically other to the subject, there is something about its image that is more familiar than reality itself. Apart from these aesthetic choices, point-of-view and framing of the shots are crucially important per visualizing the park’s fantasy function. When Eben and Jennie are in the ice skating rink, tight framing and a low POV is used to isolate the two characters without having to mask the people around them. In another occasion, as Eben — wondering about Jennie’s reality — approaches “Jennie’s bench” in the park, he becomes “conscious of an unaccustomed atmosphere, as though time was melting with the snow.” The camera then cuts to Jennie crying, and Eben rushes to embrace her. Throughout the conversation, the camera avoids showing the cityscape until Eben manages to comfort Jennie. Then, cutting from an over-the-shoulder shot to a 50-50 shot, the skyline is revealed at the background, in between the trees. The distant lights foreshadow the next shot: The sky and night stars as Jennie tells Eben to “Listen to the stars coming out” before she disappears.
What the comprehensive use of Central Park as a setting in *Portrait of Jennie* tells us is that the filmmaker can utilize the tools at hand to represent scenes in the park as romantic, miserable or contemplative. He can externalize or internalize the park’s space using the camera’s POV and matte painting. Because of the park’s structural potentiality as a void surrounded by the city, it has the ability to function as an *optic portal* — from being *so near to the city* to *so far from the city* — in order to stage the act of desiring. The act of desiring ultimately reveals a mismatch. As it has been discussed, Fantasy’s role is in showing the mismatch — the void — between protagonist and the girl as something that is fillable. It creates a staging in which the protagonist seems in a position to feel complete — to desire. This happens by the positioning of the girl in fantasy. The void between the protagonist and the girl — the mismatch — is indeed a repressed that the protagonist resists and is unable to control. In the case of Eben in *Portrait of Jennie*, this is tied to his artistic self-doubt and the “winter of the mind” that has plagued his imagination. Zoom forward thirty years to the case of Isaac in the film *Manhattan*. The neurotic pessimism generated by his divorce comes up against the bold, fearless expression of a similarly young girl’s optimism, filling the gap long enough to allow the protagonist a brief fantasy of wholeness.

In this light, Central Park’s role as the activator for fantasy — the staging required for the protagonist to view himself as complete, and his reversion from discipline to instinct — is incontestable. Central Park is not simply an antithesis to the orderly grid of New York. It constitutes a chiasm in relation to the excess of built-up land around it. It functions structurally as the place where the “excesses” of New York can be released yet restructured and preserved. The park is contained by the city, but at the same time its emptiness affords a visibility and openness that re-frames the city from the inside. Thanks to its centrality and size, the park’s lush naturalism easily gains the upper hand over the city’s man-made grittiness. This, combined with the inside–out conversion of the point of view, constitute an *anamorphic fracture* that connects directly with the protagonist’s own internal gap. In essence, the little girl functions through this connection between the park’s anamorphic fracture and her father/lover’s internal conflict. Once the frame is relocated from outside to inside, it joins the psychological problem of transformation with the physical transformative capabilities of the park.
Manhattan

Similar to *Portrait of Jennie*, *Manhattan* also depicts the transformation in the relationship between an older man and a (much) younger woman, in this case Isaac (Woody Allen) and Tracy (Mariel Hemingway), a conversion of paternalism into romance. He is dating a much younger girl who loves him deeply, but he gets interested in a woman his friend is seeing, an extra-marital affair. Isaac, however, turns from this binary to challenge the extra-marital relationship of his academic friend, Yale Pollack. As Isaac becomes interested in Yale’s new girlfriend, Mary, the film’s romanticized aesthetic framing of New York contrasts with scenes of ego conflict. Throughout these conflicts, the young girl, purest of them all, stays faithful to Woody Allen. Despite his neurotic pessimism, partly in reaction to their great age difference—“I’m 42 and she’s 17. I’m older than her father!”—Isaac becomes increasingly attached to her. The scene of transformation — or the most romantic encounter — happens in Central Park when the two are enjoying a carriage ride.

Figure 14: *Manhattan* (1979), Dir. Woody Allen. Screenshots from the film showing the relationships between characters and space using framing and lighting techniques
The Cinematography of Gordon Willis

In both the intro and closing montage scenes, panoramic views of the city — several of which are wide shots of Central Park — are shown with the narration voice-over of Isaac’s monologue about the book he’s writing. This establishes the romantic tone of the film towards New York. “Well everything is based on selectivity .... You look for all the things in this movie that were by nature the romanticized visions of Manhattan,” Willis explains in an interview published in The American Cinematographer. The voiceover ends with “New York was his town, and it always would be.” We reach the climax of Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue with several Central Park scenes. This in effect creates a fantasy-like image of New York as a city of lovers; an image that is going to be challenged by the antagonistic relationships later depicted in the film: anti-romantic characters in the story swinging from one situation/relationship to another. Parallel storytelling (jumping from one sub-plot to another) and exaggerated J-cuts (voice before image) are two of the filmic devices used in the film to lace these together. In the essay “1979: Movies and the End of an Era,” Lester Friedman explains this contrast between the portrayal of the city and the characters:

New York provides dynamism, context, romanticism, and a certain amount of distance to the story of Manhattan, for one imagines that multitudes of people are experiencing the same problems as Isaac and his friends.101

One of the first and foremost visual qualities of the film that captures the eye at the very first shot is its Aspect Ratio at 2.35 to 1. It not only determines the look of the film (providing us with some magnificent panoramic shots of New York), but also determines how the story is to be told, emphasizing the importance of the locations. The horizontality of the frame grounds romance in the space that it is happening, by allowing the setting to show itself simultaneously with the main narrative act. This being-grounded in space is probably what the cinematographer Gordon Willis calls romantic reality, explaining:

There are all kinds of ways to shoot the city of New York. In the case of Manhattan, the concept was to lay the picture out in what I call romantic reality. The second decision after coming to that was how to graphically get the best visual structure on the screen. I felt that Panavision wide screen, 2.35 to 1 was the most appropriate form ... It was a better way to deal with scale; people in the city, and the city in itself.102

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This is visible in the majority of the film through background action going on combined with ambient sounds. Many times, characters are pushed to the side in order to open up room for the location to be read as a character. Therefore, the widescreen Cinemascope (which uses an anamorphic lens) becomes the liberator of the cinematographer in providing him with a variety of choices in depicting the characters in their environments — where they are most inseparable. On his choice of the wide Cinemascope aspect ratio, Willis explains:

Intimate movies can be shot really well in Scope because you have so many choices related to using people in space — that's where it's quite wonderful .... It's the graphics that mean something to me. That can mean something in a little room between two people and it can mean something in a large shot of a city with two little people.

In the case of Isaac, the setting is expressive of his psychological status — similar to Eben in Portrait of Jennie. This is particularly visible in one of the final scenes of the film, when Issac rushes through the
bustling streets of New York — descriptive of his previous mental fluctuations, doubts and contradictions — to get to Tracy who is leaving soon on a plane to go to England. The orthogonal dolly following him is expressive of the urgency of his drive. He is mostly kept to the left side of the frame. The empty space on the right signifies the absence of Tracy which has made him engage in desiring.

Figure 16: *Manhattan* (1979), Dir. Woody Allen. Shot from outro sequence of Isaac (Woody Allen) rushing through Manhattan to get to Tracy before she leaves for England.

Sometimes, the film uses visual absence to suggest an unconscious spatialized presence of the characters that are off the screen. As a particular example, in one of the shots where Isaac and Mary are supposed to be having a conversation, Willis suggests a blocking theme to Woody Allen. He proposes that Allen moves from one room to another as the camera statically shows Mary. Allen says “But they (the audience) can’t see me.” “Yeah, but they can hear you” said Willis in response to Allen. This auditory device of presence-through-absence happens in the Central Park scene as well, which I will later discuss.

The second aspect of dealing with people in space is the issue of depth, which became a challenge for Willis due to anamorphic lens’ shallow depth of field. Willis explains:

> You can stop those lenses down all the way and still not get anything depth-wise, depending on what the shot is. But, you use to your advantage, aesthetically. You tend to structure things so you get the most out of it.

The “structuring things” that Willis refers to is many times reflected in orthogonal blockings of scenes, for example having the characters equally as far away from the camera — on the same plane — so that they are both in focus, without using a narrow f-stop which in effect would darken the scene — impossible for night scenes.
Often, when shooting interiors, Willis uses a top-down lighting which produces a dramatic display of the characters faces, sometimes just a rim light exposing their profile. The lighting is almost always underexposed, making negative space even more important than lit space. Willis uses this to create silhouetted characters that appear and disappear in the spaces. This, applied throughout the whole film, further strengthens the attachment between the two. Willis explains:

In some sections, I just let 'em go black for a little bit and then bring the light up on the dimmer for a beat or two, and then back down again as they come into other lighting.

In light of the vision behind all these aesthetic choices which determine the visuals of the film, we can now move on to an in-depth analysis of the Central Park scenes.

**Scene Analysis: Carriage Ride**

In this section I wish to illustrate the mechanics behind this shot using a cinematic mapping of the carriage and camera’s movement. While the aesthetics of the shot stay consistent throughout, it is important to look at the dynamic elements that advance the scene. The lighting is underexposed — like much of the film — in order to produce silhouettes from the trees and the buildings. Therefore their actual shape and position only becomes visible through movement. The camera is mobile as it traverses the park in the carriage. The green pane which resembles the foreground of trees moves across the bigger pane which orthogonally translates to the background of buildings — covering a much wider distance. This partly has to do with the oblique angle, because it allows for more of the street-side buildings to fit inside the frame — versus a perpendicular angle like that of the trees.
The camera is positioned on one side of the void, looking towards the fantasy screen, which is the trees framing the cityscape. Although almost perpendicular to the layer of trees in front, the movement is at a skewed angle, relatively consistent to the buildings in the background. This creates an effect of a wandering pleasure drive — a promenade — rather than a deliberately approaching the city. The consistent angle also means that while foreground changes, the background stays almost the same. The foreground seems to move much faster than background. This has the unconscious effect of having the city look back at the camera. The location of the shot is near the southwest corner of the park facing south, which at the time of production was one of the tallest edges of Central Park.

The wide aspect ratio emphasizes on the panoramic view outwards, and on the horizontal motion of the camera which gradually reveals the spatial elements. The fact that this is a POV shot with voiceover (rather than one that would show the actors) internalizes us as the audience into the scene as if we were riding the carriage and gliding into space ourselves. It is a long take — about 40 seconds — and the absence of a cut works in favor of this immersion. The focal length is 40mm Panavision Scope which equals 55 mm DSLR. Although slightly more telephoto, it is relatively close to what the human eye sees.

The cityscape is at a distance where it can be said to be near, yet far, and is visible through the empty pockets of space in between the trees, creating a chiaroscuro — frame-inside-a-frame — effect. As the scene progresses, the voids in between the trees shrinks, and this turns the night skyline into twinkling stars produced by a moiré effect. This uncertain view works again in favor of blurring the distance, as it is reminiscent of the night sky, whereas in fact we are now closer to the street. The voiceover which started in Allen whining that “This is so corny” ends by “If I had been with a girl, this would have been an incredible experience.” All these visual and auditory effects set the tone for the progression of the scene. Once the trees block the view, the
space becomes private and intimate, which, together with the dramatic change in the music, ushers in the scene of the couple kissing.

As shown by the long exposure manipulated images below, the scene progresses from right to left, with the twinkling effect revealed towards the end of the shot mostly occupying the left side of the frame. The diagram below illustrates the path of the carriage (which leads to the Grand Army Plaza), facing Midtown Manhattan.

Figure 20: Long-exposure images created from overlay of frames in the carriage ride scene. Software used: Adobe Premiere Pro

In the next shot, the camera sits opposite of the two characters as they make out and continue talking. “You’re God’s answer to Job.” They are dimly lit by the light in front of the carriage. It is important to notice the significant lighting change on the actors’ faces and bodies as they transition from kissing to talking, simultaneously with the change in their background. This in effect separates them even more from their surroundings in an almost theatrical setting.

Figure 21: Diagram showing the camera’s field of view during the Central Park scene. Software used: 3Ds Max

Figure 22: Manhattan (1979), Dir. Woody Allen. Screenshots from the Central Park carriage ride scene highlighting the change in lighting

Yet similar to Portrait of Jennie, Central Park isn’t always successfully as a place of fantasy. In the scene in which Isaac is enjoying a seemingly peaceful boat ride with Mary, he has his hand in the water. He suddenly feels something funny and pulls his hand out of the water, to realize that it is covered with mud. Such an act hints implicitly at his to-be-failed relationship with Mary. The shot’s framing starts with a wide angle and slowly zooms in as it progresses in order to isolate the two characters and remove
them from their peaceful setting. It also switches the position of Isaac and Mary on the frame, bringing the former from the middle to one-third — and vice versa for Mary. The visual and aesthetic result of this is that it positions Mary in front of the trees and brings Isaac at the foreground of the empty void behind the layer of trees, visually separating the two.

It’s interesting to compare the larger-than-life setting of Isaac and Mary’s dialogue in the Hayden Planetarium (a set manufactured especially for the film) versus that of the carriage ride with Tracy. With regards to the character’s and their relationship, the romanticism in the former is fake, implied by both the fact that we know it’s the fake stars and galaxies in the planetarium, versus the city’s light in the carriage ride, as well as Isaac’s words, which also imply that he doesn’t quite believe in a relationship with Mary. In the carriage ride scene, characters are lit and background is dark. In the planetarium it is the opposite. Here once again the visuals and the space are important storytelling devices. Willis Explains:

> These graphics aren't really in the planetarium. We wanted to create a bigger-than-life illusion on something that was fun and fatter than real life. So, the sequence is built out of props and mirrors and stars and mirrors, and big models of the moon and things like that.\(^\text{103}\)

I thought it was interesting, to cut him in partial silhouette; and to deal with her caught in the ring, as opposed to doing it the other way, where you see them both clean.

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\(^{103}\) Goodhill, “Manhattan” in American Cinematographer (1982)
The underexposed shots — with the black cut in between Isaac and Mary — reveal vividly the void that exists between the two characters. The relationship with Mary is doomed to fail, because she stands opposite to Issac’s innermost drive. The framing is also important here, which is in favor of Mary — in the center as a narcissistic, manipulative and disruptive character — almost as if she’s pushing Isaac to the side. In this scene she advocates for “rationality.” Isaac objects, claiming that “the brain is the most overrated organ.” The contrast between the female characters is also spatially expressed in the places Isaac meets them (Mary: museum, gallery, planetarium versus Tracy: Chinese food vendor, coffee shop and carriage ride in central park).\(^{104}\) This hints at their personalities and how Isaac perceives them to be. Tracy is pure, while Mary is manipulative, sophisticated and uptight.

Overall, in both of the films discussed, I have illustrated how the role of space — specifically Central Park — is key to the structuring of desire in the character and the audience. Desire is sustained through the park’s function as a place of and for fantasy, which as *Portrait of Jennie* could be activated as a portal, or as in *Manhattan* could function in the creation of an immersive audio-visual effect which — by making use of the park’s optics — represents a romantic scenario.

The Park as an Empty Void

In the films discussed in this part – Marathon Man (1976) and Wall Street (1987) the park is a void both in the city and in the films’ structure. The void, a spatial condition, allows for a release, a psychic and cinematic condition. Release happens after a confrontation in a space that allows for the two (protagonist and villain) to come together. Such scenes, however, require isolation. The park’s void-ness provides a certain distanciation and privacy needed for the protagonist to confront his trauma. If, in the previous part, the park was explored as a fantasy screen which hid the void, here it becomes the very opening that exposes the void to full extent. As we will see in this chapter, the cinematography of Conrad Hall in Marathon Man and Robert Richardson in Wall Street use blocking and lighting to match the park’s topological void to a cinematic void of isolation and antagonism.

The diagrams below summarize the topological structure of exposing the void in the two films discussed in this part. In Marathon Man, the reservoir isolates Dustin Hoffman in his distant/historical mental trauma, and also becomes the site where this conflict is exposed and resolved. In Wall Street, the privatized meadow is the literal actualization of the gap between the characters. Distance makes antagonism and identity possible. On both these occasions, the Olmstedian “void” becomes the key spatial element which structures desire, and I will attempt to illustrate the filmic techniques used in conjunction with the role of the void as an inside frame.

![Marathon Man and Wall Street diagrams](image)

Figure 16: Diagrams illustrating two different modes of addressing the filmic void in Marathon Man and Wall Street. In Marathon Man, the protagonist orbits around the void (represented by the Reservoir), unable to overcome his trauma until the very end of the film. In Wall Street, the antagonism of the characters and the void at the center of their relationship is actualized in Central Park’s Sheep Meadow.

Marathon Man

Marathon Man (1976), made three years before Manhattan, presents a harder, grittier, more resistant view of New York. New York in Marathon Man bears little resemblance to Manhattan cinematographer Gordon Willis’s fantasy construction of New York as romantic reality. This gritty and violent aura is present from the very beginning of the film — the Central Park intro sequence — and extends throughout the script. The script, based on a novel by William Goldman, narrates the story of Thomas
“Babe” Levy (Dustin Hoffman), a Columbia graduate student in History who trains around the Central Park Reservoir to run a Marathon. He is oblivious to the fact that his older brother, Doc (Roy Scheider), is a government agent chasing down a Nazi war criminal (Laurence Olivier). By pursuing the same studies as his father — the use of tyranny in U. S. politics — Tom is paying homage to his deceased father, H. B. Levy. The father had committed suicide while under investigation by the McCarthy Committee on Un-American Activities. The persecution was partly political, partly anti-Semitic. While at Columbia, Tom meets and begins to date Elsa Opel, a foreign exchange student also in History. While out for a walk in Central Park late one day, Tom and Elsa are mugged. Tom will learn that the mugging was not a random attack. Shortly afterward, his brother is murdered. From here, Tom is thrown into an international plot concerning a World War II Nazi in hiding, Christian Szell, and a large cache of diamonds. Szell’s associates believe that Tom’s brother gave him sensitive information just before he died. As Tom’s desire for revenge intensifies, he is drawn towards a personal confrontation with Szell in the South Gate House at the Central Park Reservoir.

**Significance of the intro scene**

Early on, the intro Central Park scene sets up the tone of the film. The reservoir — a key location of the film — is depicted as a place of conflict, challenge, and resolution. It is a long, stretched-out path allowing the cinematographer to “carry” the interactions of a few characters along, against a continuous background. This “sliding action,” where characters’ movements are neutralized by the camera’s movement across an unchanging background, implies and foreshadows the long/hard-fetched challenge — Babe’s trauma from the past: the guilt over the death of his father. The idea is to show how efforts are frustrated and neutralized by contexts, either from the present or the past. Therefore, the reservoir is a key location for the film in not just constituting part of the story but also summarizing it: the film starts and ends at the reservoir. The place is also the idea. In running after another runner around the reservoir, he is shown as struggling and desiring. He is faced with a challenge he cannot overcome. This effect is emphasized by the fanatic movement of camera and cutting from almost every angle: POV, front, side, low shot, etc. The twirling movement of camera around him and the curvy reservoir path, which resists showing what lies ahead, are two filmic and spatial elements that describe his inner state. This scene foreshadows the rest of his challenges that happen in the film.

Visually, the space around the reservoir is made up of the background (cityscape), the mid-ground (water) and foreground (fence). These could also metaphorically define temporal dimensions of the story. The present (fence) operates as buffer in stopping him from resolving his traumatic past. However, when he finally manages to overcome his fear at the end, he throws the gun — representing his trauma — into the water, and walks away.

The act of running is also a metaphor for his conflicted mental state. Although he runs a long distance, what’s visually noticeable is that the routes are not direct, but winding. This wobbly-against-straight quality of the pathway around the reservoir makes the path able to create surprises and new visual

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105 Adapted from IMDB: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074860/plotsummary
conditions. Filming this scene wouldn’t have been possible without the Steadicam. Marathon Man was one of the first uses of the Steadicam in a theatrical feature. The Oscar-winning camera stabilizer was invented by Garrett Brown, who used it to shoot over a hundred movies including Rocky (1976), the same year he shot Marathon Man. The shots of Dustin Hoffman running — in Central Park and up to his apartment — would have been impossible without the Steadicam. As Bruce Mamer explains in Film Production Technique: Creating the Accomplished Image, this shot would require “[either] a handheld camera or extensive track. In the first case, the shot would have reflected each of the camera operator’s footsteps. In the second case, conventional track would often be in the shots and could not easily accommodate things like the shape of a staircase.”

Working hand in hand with the Steadicam follow-shots at the reservoir and the excessive use of cross-cutting in this sequence is the use of sound effects. In an interview, the film’s editor Jim Clark explained how the temporal composition of shots in his work was greatly influenced by the audial experience of a film:

Music has also played a major role; it influences the rhythm of my editing. The pacing of a film and its dialogue have a lot to do with music, and the act of going from one shot to another has always fascinated me — when and how you do it, the reason for an edit.

The use of non-diegetic horror sound effects — a screeching high pitch, a low bass and chimes (a soundscape constructed with electronics, harp, piano and percussion) which become audial tropes in the film — are used in conjunction with ambient noise. This is used to create intrigue, internalize (seclude from environment) and exteriorize (include within the environment) Babe’s frustration as he’s struggling to catch up with the runner in front of him.

In the larger scale of the shot, the remote skyline creates a vastness that contrasts with the over-proximate confining fence. Babe’s bodily interaction with the fence at the beginning of the film — when he can’t pass the other runner — signifies his inner/exterior struggle. Conflicts are connected to meshes that confine but, at the same time, permit see-through vision. At the very end, following Szell’s death, he picks up the gun, then the scene transitions from the metal mesh of the flooring to the metal fence around the reservoir. When he throws the gun into the water, he leans on to the fence, and then walks away. His face is fully lit as he walks into the distance. The fence embodies the inaccessibility of the past.

The other important factor is the relation to the edges of the park and city. Surrounding the reservoir, the cityscape marks the borders around which the void-ness of the park is visually exaggerated. Yet the reservoir is close to the borders of the park and overlooks the street. Therefore Babe can peek at the aftermath of the accident in which the motive for Szell to come to New York is established: The death of Szell’s brother in a car accident over a street rage with a Jew. He was the only one in New York who had access to the diamonds. From a storytelling standpoint, this connects him to the other parallel story —

106 Bruce Mamer, Film Production Technique: Creating the Accomplished Image (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2013), 18.
as well as show that how space can quickly morph from at the edge to deep inside. This is also important in the final sequence, where babe walks Szell from the zoo to the pump-house — which in reality are very far. These transactions between an interior state of mind versus a violent exteriority further defines the park as an inside-frame to the city: a location where the character becomes self-conscious of his inner lack.

Figure 17: Marathon Man (1976), Dir. John Schlesinger. Screenshots from the intro scene showing the deep depth of field.

One of the main tools at the disposal of the cinematographer is depth of field. Although the cinematographer uses a relatively deep-focus throughout, the changes in the blurriness of the background as well as lighting constantly switch between showing Babe both spatially externalized and separated. A very deep depth-of-field shows a sharply focused cityscape in the background, emphasizing the void behind him. The fence and the skyline seem to stretch the vastness of the water to an extreme. The water “opens up” not just as a void but ultimate void-ness. At the end of the film, he is able to overcome his fear (guilt) and through his father’s gun into the void-ness (i. e. not just the void) of the water. The skyline wraps the city around the reservoir/park void, declaring the void at the center of the city, not on the side or some outskirt/outlandish condition. It signifies that the void lies at the core of the subject, just as the reservoir lies at the core of the park. It makes it extimate: that which I fear is at my inner most core, and it is a hostile stranger to me.

In addition, the constant changes in lighting signify the dynamics of his struggle. He is following his shadow at first. Throughout the course of his trajectory which circles around the reservoir, the lighting of his face changes from shaded to side-lit. The sun’s hard lighting casts shadows and highlights on him, fragmenting him and visually implying his inner divided state, between trying to run away and being stuck, “running in place.” Had the film been shot on an overcast or cloudy day, or had the running path been straight, we wouldn’t have noticed such changes in the tones of the shots. Therefore the spatial qualities of the park coupled with the filmic device of the cut become the production structures that shape the film’s form.
Figure 18: Marathon Man (1976), Dir. John Schlesinger. (Above and Next Page Up) Screenshots from the intro scene showing the multitude of angles in which Babe is filmed while running around the reservoir.
Central Park however is not only a site where the void is exposed. Similar to the previous films where the park functions per a multitude of purposes, the use of locations such as the Zoo, terrace and pond reveal that, even though in Marathon Man the park functions primarily as a void, is not limited to this role. Almost a third into the film’s duration, Babe and Elsa are enjoying a romantic evening in the park, when Szell’s men assault them. Later in the film, Babe walks Szell at gunpoint through the park’s zoo and towards the south gate pump-house at the reservoir, where their final confrontation happens.

Figure 19: Marathon Man (1976), Dir. John Schlesinger. Central Park’s pond, Bethesda terrace and the zoo in the film.
This final confrontation scene

After confronting Szell in the pump-house, rather than kill Szell, Babe informs him that he will allow Szell to live and keep as many diamonds as he can swallow. Szell relents and swallows one diamond, but then refuses to cooperate further — although Babe has both the gun and the diamonds in his possession — Szell confronts him with Babe’s central trauma: “Your father was weak in his way, your brother in his, and now you in yours. You are all so predictable!” Szell then pulls out his hidden knife. Just as he charges towards Babe, Babe throws the suitcase of diamonds into the water. Szell panics, dives for them but stumbles, and fatally falls on his own knife blade. Babe walks out of the reservoir, but the camera — instead of following him — cuts from a shot of the metal mesh on the scaffolding in the pump-house to the metal fence outside. We then see him, as he throws his father’s gun into the reservoir — very much like a sea in the middle of the city — and watches it sink. With his face fully lit, he then walks away, his profile moving against the skyline of New York. This is not a happy ending per se: Babe’s face is certain, but rugged and bruised. We do know that the object representing his historic trauma, which he kept in the most intimate of places (wrapped in a cloth, in a drawer in his room) is now at the depths of the reservoir — the exterior, inaccessible void inside the void of park. The situation of the intro and final scenes of the film in Central Park’s reservoir visually externalizes Babe’s innermost fear and insecurity. It allows him to face it, challenge it and finally overcome it. Just as my text has aimed to follow the chain between the park’s spatial signifying techniques and the film’s, the narrative effects of the film have followed the cinematographic logic of each scene.

Figure 20: Marathon Man (1976), Dir. John Schlesinger. Screenshots from the confrontation scene at the pumphouse in the Park.
Figure 21: Marathon Man (1976), Dir. John Schlesinger. Screenshots from the outro scene at the reservoir.
Wall Street

Just as Marathon Man characterized Central Park as the space where the void in the character’s subjective space was substantiated, Wall Street too shows us how the physical void can coincide with the subjective void. Wall Street narrates the story of Bud Fox, an ambitious stock trader who will do just about anything to get into the big leagues. He has been actively courting Gordon Gekko, one of the biggest stock speculators on Wall Street. Gekko manipulates the market using insider information. His motto best describes his approach: greed is good. Nothing will stop him from pursuing a good deal, and he takes advantage of Bud’s burning to desire to succeed. Soon, Bud finds himself getting information from any source and using it to gain an advantage. It all comes to a head however when Gekko targets Blue Star Airlines, the company where Bud’s father has worked for twenty-four years. Gekko secretly plans to break it up and plunder the employees’ retirement fund.109 As Fox is faced with the dilemma of money vs. morals, he grows into character and faces Gekko in what’s to be the resolution of the antagonism between them.

Figure 22: Wall Street (1987), Dir. Oliver Stone, Screenshot from the film using a spatial montage technique to depict the idea of excessiveness at the core of the film.

109 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094291/
The theme of excess is present all throughout the film: excess of money, luxury, phone calls, numbers, digits and “quick bucks.” These representations of “too much of something,” embodied also in Fox’s quest to gain Gekko’s trust, is essential to the development of the gaze. The gaze allows for conversions, reversions and reversals, because it produces excess that’s out of control. Excess always has a void inside it, and that is where the real nothingness — or in Oliver Stone’s terms, moral nothingness — can be exploited. In the analysis to follow, I discuss how the aggregation of events, patterns, and filmic form and signification devices can be used in assessing Central Park’s role in the confrontational sequence between Gekko and Fox, shot in Sheep Meadow.

Stone, having from an early age watched his father work in the brokerage business, became a critic of right-wing polices and capitalism. The character of Gekko condensed his critique into the perfect, greed-driven villain. The film’s release magically synched with the stock market crash of 1987. “There are so few good business movies,” says Stone, “and Wall Street is an especially hard subject. To tell a story of financial manipulation on Wall Street is one of the hardest things you can do.” However, the director failed to persuade his audience of the devil in his greedy character, Gordon Gekko. Stone: “Gordon Gekko was supposed to be a villain. Instead, he became a Wall Street folk hero.” Much to the surprise of the director and screenwriter, many Wall Street brokers identified with the character of Gekko following the release of the film.

However, detailed study of the film shows how the popularity of the villain may not be that strange. Gekko in this film is a character who never fails. Oliver Stone’s morality fight is pitched between the two father figures (Gekko and Fox’s Father, an airline union member). This battle brings into focus the many dualities that reside in the filmic narrative space — Fox and Gekko, young versus established, honest versus cynical, hardworking versus easy money — but it doesn’t have a winner. If we compare the ending of this film to Wolf of Wall Street for example, the morally miserable consequences of being the greedy guy aren’t as explicit. Also, the character of Bud Fox lacks the backbone to be a moral hero who antagonizes Wall-Street-ism. Although in the end he turns Gekko in by secretly recording his voice when the two are having a confrontation), Gekko’s character is almost always shown in control of his business and of his psyche. Unlike American Psycho (1991), which depicts the degrading psychological condition of the film’s main character into a self-imagined serial killer, not only is Gekko’s greed functional, it’s essential to his boldness and solid state of mind.

**Filmic Technique**

The cinematography of this film is at times as frantic as a war documentary. The camera is passed between characters like a ticking bomb. Fluid and dynamic movements, using fast pans to navigate between the characters abstracts the space in between them like a liquid thread, rather than establishing “set” or “static” points of view. It’s as if the characters are constantly invading each other’s space, submerging the two into one. It’s as if the action has the dynamics of the trading-room floor, where bids are shouted from traders in a frantic atmosphere of buys and sells. So in one continuous take we have a couple medium shots, some close-ups, some pans, all tied together without a cut. This action-driven style of shooting which simulates the quick movement of one’s head in a battlefield, is probably influenced by some of Stone and Richardson’s earlier collaborations on two war movies *Salvador* (1986) and *Platoon* (1986), the latter winning him the Best Cinematography Academy Award. Richardson had adopted a *cinéma vérité* documentary style of shooting which emphasized continuity over *looks* in filming: “I don’t care if my work looks gorgeous ... I want to make good films, not good-looking.” This form of visual storytelling is also visible in the Central Park sequence.

The confrontation scene in Central Park is a showdown. After Gekko breaks his promise — of reviving the airline company’s stocks — and instead boosts his own benefits. Bud Fox decides to stand up to him. Through a manipulation of market and using insider information, he tricks Gekko with the help of another elite broker and — by saturating the market — manages to persuade Gekko to dump all the airline stocks for a much lower price than he had initially bought them. Gekko soon realizes Fox’s betrayal and confronts him in Central Park’s Sheep Meadow.

Figure 23: *Wall Street* (1987), Dir. Oliver Stone, Screenshots from the film showing the dramatic silhouette lighting in Gekko’s office used to hollow out his figure (Left) and the vast, empty space of Sheep Meadow when he confronts Bud Fox (right).

The emptiness is striking at first. Sheep Meadow is one of Central Park’s most favorite lounging places — especially on sunny days — and that is how the setup of the scene, the foggy-ness and the cloudy weather “empties it out.” The shot faces south, towards Midtown Manhattan, the densest and tallest side of the park in terms of high-rises — implicitly standing for the idea of Wall Streetism. The filmmaker’s choice of a wide lens highlights the distance of not only the camera from the characters, but the characters themselves from the background of the cityscape. If a lens with longer focal length had

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYvW2nAOVM
been used, we would have seen the characters in a plane closer to the skyline and therefore not as much separated from it.

If we look at blocking, we can see that Fox is the one who walks to Gekko, who’s waiting for him. Gekko is in the center and Fox on the side, approaching. This intro shot is the setup for the scene. Where else in New York could the filmmaker distance the two characters far enough from the excessiveness of the city (while still being inside it) and have a chance to create a conflicted distanciation between them? The privacy for them becomes this distance. The vastness and emptiness of the meadow highlights Central Park’s function as a void — an antithesis to the city: the place where you can be far from the city, but still be — and radically so — inside it.

Ideas of using the void to contrast the excess happened also in Scorsese’s Casino (1995), also shot by Richardson. In the showdown between De Niro (Sam) and Pesci (Danny) — who share a similar power structure to Gekko and Fox (established, principled versus rebellious) — happens in a desert outside Las Vegas. Scorsese himself recognized how, that in that scene, the nothingness of the desert would formally and conceptually negate the excess in the rest of the film. This nothingness is also at the core of the relationship between the two characters in Wall Street, and that is how the space becomes the character of the relationship.

![Visual parallels of void in Casino (1995), Dir. Martin Scorsese and Wall Street (1987), Dir. Oliver Stone (Right). Richard Robertson was the Director of Photography for both films.](image)

Sheep Meadow, like the reservoir in Marathon Man, resembles the void inside the void. This is where the gaze becomes clear, and Bud Fox seems to throw himself into it by confronting Gekko inside it (which we would come to know in the following scene, that he was just recording Gekko’s voice so that he could turn him in). “Confronting” Gekko, or in other words, discovering the clash between the two
fathers was the gaze. Central Park situates itself as a space that offers an inner-frame to the resolution and the coming-to-self-consciousness.

Throughout the confrontation scene, Gekko is mostly kept to the left of the screen, maintaining his weight and power. He is seen fully, whereas Fox is kept incomplete and to the side. As Gekko’s temper rises, the camera closes in on the characters, turning the vast space of the park into a confining interrogating room. The camera spins and pans convulsively as Gekko punches and shoves him multiple times.

The camera crosses the 180° line twice, before Gekko throws him to the ground. We are then shown a medium shot of Gekko as he lists the things he gave to Fox: “The girl, manhood, everything!” His speech is more like an angry father than an enemy, as he tells him “I look at you, and I see myself ... Why?”

The question of identity is one of the key issues of this film, as Bud Fox struggles to position himself between his real father — the hardworking union member — and his ideal father — a successful Wall Street broker. About midway through the film, while looking out his terrace to the city, he asks himself “Who am I?” This question is challenged many times. It comes to an answer — seemingly so — in the pan shot.

The next shot is a wide pan from Gekko’s close-up to Fox’s medium close-up, visually distancing the two characters by showing the empty field in between them: an explicit portrayal of the gaze. Gekko and Fox are held together with the nothing in between them, and when it’s laid out open, that is when Fox delivers his line. “As much as I wanted to be Gordon Gekko, I’ll always be Bud Fox.” This growing into character, however is not so heroic, as we come to see in the following scene when Fox walks out of the park and to the police, to hand them the hidden recorder he had worn.
Figure 26: *Wall Street* (1987), Dir. Oliver Stone, compositied image of successive frames, showing the wide pan from Gekko to Fox, highlighting the voided space in between them.
Formal Analysis: Shot by Shot

Figure 27: *Wall Street* (1987), Dir. Oliver Stone, Diagram showing the layout and duration of the shots in the Central Park scene

In this next part, I would like to discuss how, through the use of editing, blocking and framing, the cinematographer is able to create a *filmic* void that coincides with the spatial void of Sheep Meadow and the subjective void of the story. Throughout the sequence, a total number of ten shots are composited in two minutes and sixteen seconds. Other than the establishing shot in the beginning, which uses a wide frame, the rest of the shots are close-ups or medium close-ups. This shows how by *tightening the frame* on the two characters, the filmmaker is able to isolate them in order to show their conflict. Most of the shots are handheld, and the high-paced and tense *movement of the camera* resembles the dynamics in the argument. Yet the blocking and framing situate each character according to their traits. We first see what seems to be a POV shot of Fox approaching Gekko, but as the scene progresses and Fox appears from the right side; the shot clearly turns into an over-the-shoulder one. Gekko is positioned on the left side and facing the camera. On the contrary in Fox’s exit shot, he is positioned from, seemingly, the POV of Gekko — but then similar to the intro shot, it becomes an over-the-shoulder shot once Gekko picks up his napkin from the ground. Fox is positioned on the right side with his back to the audience. This framing serves to fixate their *ideological* position (left versus right) against their distorted and fluctuating “in-between” spherical space, which is a void.
Figure 26: *Wall Street* (1987), Dir. Oliver Stone. Composited image of two shots showing Fox entering (left) and exiting (left) the meadow. Blocking of the shot is important in contrasting the two characters and highlighting the space between them.

Figure 29: *Wall Street* (1987), Dir. Oliver Stone. Screenshot from the film (left) versus 3D reconstruction of the shot without the trees (right). These two images show the role of the park’s horizon line (of trees) in framing the spherical space between Gekko and Fox. The center of the frame (camera’s target) is pointed at the Meadow’s corner; therefore the two-point perspective removes the Manhattan skyline from the portion of the frame which is left of Gekko.

In terms of framing, the filmmaker is using the 40 mm lens to separate the characters from the space as much as possible. Furthermore, the specific chosen angle (facing south / southeast) uses the trees on either sides of the characters as a second frame for their detachment from the cityscape. Looking at the shot on top right, we can see how at the very center of the frame is the southeast *corner* of the meadow. In the constructed 3D model renderings here, we can see how different this distance would have been perceived if the trees did not exist. The trees and the cloudy atmosphere of the set work as instruments of the mise-en-scène to push the city further away from the two characters.

Figure 27: 3D reconstructed model of the scene, showing the position and angle of the camera, and how closer the skyline would have seemed to be if we removed the trees.
Figure 28: 3D reconstruction of the camera position and angle in the Central Park scene in *Wall Street*.

The *pacing* of the shot follows a long/short rhythm. In terms of *shot duration*, the editor follows up short shots with long ones to temporally disorient the viewer. This disorientation is more visible if we study where the cuts of each shot happen and how the camera moves and crosses the 180° line. By starting on/ near the 180° line and crossing it twice, the cinematographer is able to produce the whirling motion that defines the antagonism present in the encounter. It jumps from one character to the other — constantly switching left and right — implying a spherical space around them. The closeness of the camera to the character minimizes the visible portion of the park during the punch scenes and, because of the consistent presence of the cityscape as a background, the audience becomes further disoriented with each cut, until eventually Gekko punches Fox to the ground (shot 4 in the diagram below).

![Diagram showing the position of the start and end (cut) frames of successive shots in the punching scene.](image)

Figure 29: Diagram showing the position of the start and end (cut) frames of successive shots in the punching scene.
Thesis Conclusion

The purpose of concluding is not just to summarize but to open up new territory and raise new questions. This thesis aimed to: (1) present an overview of how different thinkers have tackled the complex domain of subject-object relationships in urban space as well as film; (2) argue that the ways of looking at landscape can be implemented in the design and in holding back desire could constitute proto-cinema: an anticipation of the presence of camera; and (3) show how film’s use of space reconstructs the park’s topological structure in the films’ narrative using techniques and tools specific to the medium of film. Therefore, there would be two possible threads of future scientific inquiry to be considered, a new kind of analysis based on the “subjective topology” of interiority, exteriority, and boundary conditions that stem from the (Lacanian) idea of extimacy, and, through this redefinition of spatiality, a full integration of the idea of the subject into studies of places, their landscapes and their built forms. In elaborating these two potential areas, I will speculate using examples correlated to possible relevant sources.

This study has accomplished two important things in regard to this transition to a new view of subjectivity. It has shown how “design thinking” can anticipate new media by realizing, in the terms of its own age, the topological implications of the imagination — how, in effect, desire and the experience of surprise require specific architectural configurations. This study has shown that Olmsted was, in effect, a “proto-cinematographer” able to know without knowing how a space would be useful to a medium and technology that had not yet been invented. This was more than a “lucky guess”: it was the application of an idea of “optical place” that would be central for any kind of optical expression: not just painting and photography but poetry, literature, and behavioral patterns. His knowledge in shaping the park’s gaze – the disposition of “what lies beyond” that cannot be apprehended through sight but through subjective imagination – made Central Park into a kind of eye in the city. In the park, the idea of an eye as “opening” in the city’s fabric has combined with the dynamics of the eye as a “lens” by which subjects imagine themselves to exist as visible/invisible, appearing/disappearing entities in physical space. Olmsted’s knowledge has been available for a long time before him. He did not invent it, nor did he need to articulate it as a theory; he simply had an operational knowledge of how it worked.

The second accomplishment of this study was to show how this dynamics of places working as eyes has been carried out in cinema, using examples that could not have succeeded without this idea. By analyzing the physical/optical operations of scene construction in particular narrative layouts, this work has shown how “optics” must be defined in terms of a fluid, overlapping set of practices that use whatever lies at hand to fix key transactional “moments” of the film’s logic, such as the combination of distanciation and (intimate) antagonism. Stretching and shrinking the scale of space requires any explanation to emphasize topology over projective geometry. And, since topology engages the logic of extimacy, as we see in the model of the torus, the technological (filmic) manipulation of scenes to “tell the story” in these selected films has led directly to the topological structure of subjectivity itself. The incontestable historical fact of Central Park’s utility and favorability for film production cannot be

113 These concluding thoughts developed within a conversation with my advisor, Donald Kunze.
explained by any addition of the Park’s “attributes.” Rather, it is a matter of the Park’s status as, itself, an *ocular device*, a core of functionalities that, when extended by the technological film apparatus of particular cinematographers, becomes evident in specific films that connect, emotionally and rationally, with audiences.

At the level of technique — at the broadest level of how the film as idea is assembled, presented, and received — the park’s ocularity is evident. Ocularity emphasizes (1) the eye in motion, free to use space to map anticipated events and also track recent memories; (2) the eye correlated to figure/ground shifts that locate the viewer and the viewer’s motions — manipulation of these can create “uncanny” effects when the figure-ground relation is disjointed, as for example when the lens length is altered to flatten the scene, or when tracking shots curve or the 180° rule is violated; (3) Just as Olmsted is proto-cinematic, film is retroactively reviving traditional practices in theater, photography, painting, literature, and poetry. The doctrine of *ut pictura poiesis* (pictures and poems have an equivalency), a dictum of Horace, is still operative. Modern technical means use ancient ideas of form and motion, consciously or unconsciously. Cinema continues to draw from many painting conventions, such as chiaroscuro, layering of foreground, mid-ground, background, where scenes inside scenes are framed by inside frames; and dynamics that, shown statically, imply motion that can be developed in film.

The thesis calls for a new idea of subjectivity in architecture but does not (negatively) critique the accepted models (phenomenology, cognitive behaviorism, etc.). Rather, it develops a positive alternative using ideas from the Freudian-Lacanian field (and the critical theory that is based on it); then it demonstrates this alternative with examples from film production. The psychoanalytic function of the estimate applies to subjectivity in general, and is not specific to any particular historical period or artistic movement or medium. The inside-out in psychoanalysis means that the unconscious is "out there," and not trapped inside the head as a kind of repository. And, while there are many kinds of subjects, differentiated by gender, ethnicity, cultural background, economic level, education, etc., Lacan’s emphasis on subjectivity as a process affects everyone, making extimacy a general if not universal term transcending particular ways of looking at the park that would be considered specific to certain subject types.

Unlike current models of subjectivity, this model can be refuted, and is in this sense a “scientific” model. Refutation is not a matter of finding new captions for the imaginary conditions proposed, but in showing that, for example, Olmsted *did not anticipate* new technologies that would extend the “landscape ocularity” he derived from painting, literature, and landscape practices. Refutation would also have to apply itself to showing that, of the many directors who have used Central Park in their films, the park has been a “place like any other,” offering nothing for the essential performative combinations of distanciation and antagonism, or appearances and disappearances that are not just presences or absences but uncanny and miraculous.

The optical potentialities constituted by the Park design were so clearly a void condition that the theatrical development seemed quite obvious. Preserving the void was akin to preserving the hidden spaces built into the park at the smaller scale. To disprove the optical quality of Central Park would be to deny its special status as a Void and not just a “hole” in the grid of Manhattan. This would involve
denying the fundamental function of all voids. For example, when Babe, in *Marathon Man*, throws his father’s gun into the reservoir, he is throwing it not just into the physical water of this clearly objective feature of the park, but into a psychological and existential Void with clear relations to his father’s persecution and death. His action would not be understandable without this function of a “void-within-a-void” that is the reservoir in the Park. The importance of the function of the reservoir is further visible when we consider how the director of the film used the mesh of the fence, the filming of the runners on the path close to the fence, and the exaggerated distance of the city’s built horizon from the foreground to stand in for the Park’s spherical antagonism within the gridded space of the city.

The "link" between Olmsted and film is itself an uncanny crisscross of an older creative mind able to anticipate not-yet-developed technologies of visualization and, concurrently, modern creative minds haunted by older ways of representing time and space, even without the film production apparatus. Perhaps because lenses, like points of view, engage and extend the idea of the sphere, cinema will always “know in advance” how to extend the idea of Voids that it finds in the landscape.
Bibliography:


