

“And down now, down...”: the Wildernesses of “Burning Chrome” and *Inception*

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From the genesis of the American Gothic genre, the wilderness has been a point of personification for human fear and anxiety. Though this wilderness “contains fabulous wonders and treasures,” it is also “a gothic realm of terror and metaphysical disorientation,” where “the pursuit of dreams often turns to a grotesque nightmare” (Mogen 103). Despite lacking any natural, organic wilderness, William Gibson’s 1982 short story “Burning Chrome” reproduces these characteristics through its portrayal of cyberspace. Unlike the traditional American frontier wilderness, cyberspace is created entirely by man, and is thus itself an extension of man. Seen as “mankind’s extended electronic nervous system” (Gibson 181), cyberspace, as a product of multiple individuals, functions as a connecting space that links those who contribute to this space. This man-made wilderness both allows for the pursuit of dreams and “offers unlimited opportunities to recreate or edit one’s own dreamscapes and to display them to anyone willing to watch” (Packer 52)—an opportunity that becomes literal in Christopher Nolan’s Gibson-indebted 2010 film *Inception*. However, while “Burning Chrome” expresses anxiety concerning cyberspace’s tendency to make one vulnerable to infiltration by the wilderness, *Inception* assumes that this infiltration is inevitable for anyone participating in a technologically-driven shared space. As a result, *Inception*’s dream structure forgoes any buffer zone between minds and instead combines these

minds directly, thereby also combining the wildernesses within each dreamer, and reformatting these wildernesses into a shared space that underpins the communal dream.

In both “Burning Chrome” and *Inception*, the descriptions of directional orientation reflect conceptions of technology-induced sharing of minds: while the presence of a “buffer zone” causes both vertical and horizontal directional indicators within “Burning Chrome,” *Inception*’s elimination of the space between minds results in a primarily vertical emphasis. An analysis of the texts’ differing directional orientations confirms that while “Burning Chrome” is concerned with the characters’ increasing reliance on technology, and fears cyberspace’s ability to alter those who rely on that technology, *Inception* fears the disorientation that the wilderness can cause. By extending the sense of disorientation that affects the characters within the film to encompass the audience viewing the film, *Inception* participates in the same process of disorientation that it fears. Ultimately, then, both works warn readers that a technological wilderness of mankind’s own making poses a greater threat than that presented by the organic wilderness of earlier American Gothic narratives.

While “Burning Chrome” and *Inception* are both concerned with technological rather than organic wildernesses, their technological wildernesses recall patterns seen in earlier works of Wilderness Gothic. Traditionally within American Gothic literature, the wilderness is a “hostile and even actively malevolent...” space (Murphy 7) where the boundaries between human and nonhuman become unclear (Murphy 2). This blurring of boundaries and interaction with an uncontrollable environment has resulted in a perception of this wilderness “as a place where a person was likely to get into a disordered, confused, or ‘wild’ condition” (Murphy 20). Though disorientation can result

in a wilderness experience that allows the subject to eventually undergo a positive “transformation of consciousness” and “spiritual metamorphosis” (Mogen 100), the wilderness may also generate an experience that “shakes the soul to its foundations” and “ravishes the... frontier heroes with horror and shock” (Mogen 95). Yet, despite the dangers of the wilderness, those interacting with it have often found it “both threatening and alluring,” to the point where the attraction they feel toward the space unsettles them (Mogen 100). While in *Inception* and “Burning Chrome” this attraction occurs in a manmade environment, the characters’ reactions to the technological landscapes that they enter contain the same sense of mingled horror and attraction.

While both works arguably owe a debt to previous works of Wilderness Gothic, they are also notably rooted in Gibson’s hugely influential visualization of automated technological networks. From the coining of the term “cyberspace,” (Concannon 441) to his contributions to the formation of the “cyberpunk” genre (Adams 164), Gibson’s depiction of cyberspace networks (which appeared in a number of his novels and short stories) have become “So widespread... a topic for movies, books, and games that [his] infamous description of it as a ‘consensual hallucination’ seems to have become reality” (Adams and Warf 141). Scholars of the late eighties and early nineties quickly addressed this constructed “reality,” producing a large corpus of scholarship primarily concerned with Gibson’s use of networks, his contributions to the rise of cyberpunk, issues of globalism, and the postmodern themes of his stories (Dalton 37). As technology continued to progress, later works of scholarship began to center on his texts’ anxiety concerning the consequences of technological advancement (Swanstrom 17). The majority of these scholarly works also acknowledge the continued influence Gibson’s

works have had on subsequent films and fiction, including *The Matrix* and *Blade Runner*—and, upon its 2010 theatrical release, *Inception* (Tan 411; Blouin 324).

Though the corpus of scholarly research concerned with *Inception* has thus far been relatively small, scholars (Fisher 39; Tan 409, 411), movie critics (“Inception Review”), and even by William Gibson himself (Thill, “William Gibson Talks Zero History”) have recognized *Inception*’s debt to Gibson’s works. The scholarship that does exist on *Inception* generally addresses the same themes discussed in earlier Gibson scholarship, (Blouin, “Western Wake”; Fisher “The Lost Unconscious”; Tan, “The Only Way You Can Dream”). While this previous scholarship has solidly established a connection between Gibson’s works and *Inception*, and has created precedent for interpreting *Inception* as a natural evolution of the themes and concerns of Gibson’s works, no substantial scholarship has yet considered how *Inception*’s sharing of minds and “Burning Chrome’s” shared digital space both function as gothic wildernesses.

The Human Condition: Wilderness Infiltration in “Burning Chrome”

Though “...the contrast between the wilderness and the ‘handiwork of man’” has historically been one of the major themes of American Gothic (Punter 19), cyberspace within “Burning Chrome” collapses this distinction entirely: it is a gothic wilderness that *is* “the handiwork of man,” and which possesses an infrastructure fundamentally influenced by humanity—including the darker aspects of the human psyche. Not only does cyberspace recreate “in speculative contexts the nightmares and visions the wilderness subject evoked in nineteenth century authors,” but, as David Mogen claims, cyberspace actually incorporates this inner turmoil, as the space absorbs and reproduces human anxieties (102-103). While Mogen correctly claims that cyberspace is capable of

absorbing and reproducing the turmoil of the human person, cyberspace's capabilities within "Burning Chrome" exceed this: because cyberspace is created by man, human turmoil is built into the very foundations of the space. If, then, cyberspace is a gothic wilderness, it is only because it is an extension of the "wilderness"—the anxieties, nightmares, and hauntings—that existed first inside the humans that created and contributed to the space.

Understanding cyberspace as an extension of the space's creators implies that cyberspace is a melting pot of the contributions of multiple individuals. If multiple individuals created and continue to access the space, then unlike the frontier wilderness, where one is likely only to meet with his or her own demons, or with the dangers of the physical landscape, in cyberspace any contributor's darkness may transfer into the shared space and into the immediate proximity of anyone else accessing the space. "Burning Chrome" hints at this possibility early in the text when it describes cyberspace as "mankind's extended electronic nervous system" (181). The plurality and possession denoted by the term "mankind's" confirms that cyberspace is a shared space both created by and belonging to the multiple individuals that comprise humanity. While, as "Burning Chrome" indicates, the leavings of these multiple individuals may be positive—information, electronic funds, incredible infrastructure—there is an equal chance of encountering the demons brought in by anyone who has previously entered or contributed to the space. In "Burning Chrome," these "demons" can range anywhere from gothic-themed infrastructure (194) to mimetic viruses (179). Cyberspace thus becomes an extension not only of man's nervous system and of his potential positive contributions, but of his fears, anxieties, and darker traits—of the wilderness within him.

This connection between cyberspace and the individuals that contribute to it becomes increasingly apparent within “Burning Chrome” as Bobby and Jack reach and begin to infiltrate Chrome’s network. The lack of distinction in the text between Chrome-the-person and Chrome’s electronic network illustrates the blurring between cyberspace and the person contributing to the space—and indicates that, while the two are distinct entities, a complete separation between them is impossible. Jack and Bobby recognize this, and bluntly accept that burning Chrome virtually is equivalent to killing her in reality. Jack readily admits that he knows “we’d killed her, murdered her, as surely as if we’d slit her throat...” (202), and even imagines that he can hear her physically reacting when her network is infiltrated (200). By the time Bobby finally declares, “Burn the bitch down,” (200) neither he nor the readers need distinguish whether “the bitch” is Chrome herself, or her network, as burning one inevitably results in the destruction of the other.

While “Burning Chrome” often describes cyberspace using horizontal adjectives that emphasize its status as a connector between individuals, as Jack and Bobby attempt to enter Chrome’s network, the directional indicators describing their surroundings begin to shift, generating disorientation and signaling that the root of Chrome’s network lies not within the horizontal plane of cyberspace but somewhere on the vertical spectrum. This shift first becomes apparent when Jack and Bobby must leave the uncontested shared space of the matrix and enter the guarded space that Jack describes as “Chrome’s castle” (186). Here horizontal and vertical begin to mix, as “The core data tower around us [looked] like *vertical* freight trains, color-coded for access. Bright primaries... linked by countless *horizontals* in nursery blues and pinks” (189, emphasis added). The disorientation only increases when Jack introduces a sense of depth by claiming that “ice

still shadows something at the center of it all: the heart of all Chrome's expensive darkness, the very heart" (189). "Center" suggests that the object is surrounded entirely, and that one can approach it either by digging down, digging up, or approaching from the sides—but Jack does not specify the direction from which he approaches, intensifying the sense of directional disorientation.

As evident from the above example, cyberspace's function as a connecting space results in a concept of "center" that is dependent upon personal orientation. The person's location in reference to an explicitly represented position (as opposed to a frame of reference in which the spectator has no particular orientation to the scene being described, but hovers, god-like, outside the scene, able to view it from any direction) governs this frame of reference (Bruhn 395-396). This perspective is defined by "'up,' 'down,' 'left,' 'right,' 'in front,' and 'behind,' with the *origin* identified as 'here'" (Bruhn 396, emphasis added). However, if everyone must move through cyberspace in order to reach the minds of others, then it follows that not everyone originates from the same location, thereby destabilizing the concept of "here." "Here" for Jack will not be the same "here" experienced by another individual, whose point of origin differs from Jack's. Jack's perception of "center" is, then, equally unlikely to correlate with another individual's "center." Additionally, because "center" depends on the individual's destination, Chrome's depths become Jack's "center," merely because they are the focus of his efforts. Even this contains a sense of disorientation, as Chrome is also Jack's "destination," which suggests the end of a trajectory, rather than the middle. Cyberspace therefore engenders overlapping circles of perception, with one person's "center" functioning as another person's periphery, beginning, or end.

These differing ideas of what constitutes center causes “Burning Chrome’s” mixed use of vertical and horizontal indicators. Because the minds of the characters are not combined but are only interacting within a shared space, in order to invade the mind of another individual, one must do what Bobby and Jack did with Chrome, and leave the shared section of cyberspace to enter the specific target’s consciousness. Thus, while the text describes cyberspace itself using horizontal adjectives that characterize the space as a link between the individuals who access it, when Jack and Bobby begin to infiltrate Chrome’s network the directional indicators become, as we have seen, mixed. It is not until the men fully enter Chrome’s network that these indicators orient into a primarily vertical pattern.

The shift toward a vertical orientation is precisely what we might expect in a text involving a man-made gothic wilderness, as the gothic often involves digging downward to explore anxieties, hauntings, and nightmares buried beneath the surface—the wilderness hidden within man (Punter 17). If man’s wilderness is buried within himself, and cyberspace is an extension of man, then based on previous frontier wilderness encounters in which man projected the buried parts of himself onto the wilderness (Mogen 99), cyberspace will follow the same pattern with one significant modification: turmoil emerges *up* out of man and *into* cyberspace. This explains why once Jack and Bobby proceed from cyberspace and completely into the network that represents Chrome, the sense of directional disorientation resolves itself into a solidly downward trajectory as they proceed more deeply toward the most closely guarded parts of Chrome. “And down now, down,” Jack narrates, “the program a roller coaster through this fraying maze of shadow walls, gray cathedral spaces between the bright towers” (194). As we would

expect, this downward progression leads to imagery that becomes increasingly gothic the deeper Jack and Bobby go: the text makes reference to abandoned monasteries or churches, shadows, mazes, and a general sense of decay (194). Bobby and Jack have, then, entered Chrome through the point where her wilderness extends up and into the connecting space, and are digging down toward where that wilderness originates inside of her.

Chrome's infiltration exemplifies "Burning Chrome's" central fear: like the various insects that periodically annihilate themselves in proximity to neon throughout the story (179), the text fears that, by relying too heavily on technology and automated networks, humans become akin to those insects, battering themselves against a potentially immolation-causing creation of their own making. We see this through Chrome's eventual destruction as a result of Bobby and Jack's ability to enter her combined person and network via cyberspace: because cyberspace is, fundamentally, a link between its contributors, Bobby and Jack's ultimate destruction of Chrome is merely the natural consequence of this linking of oneself into a shared technological network. Because Chrome is accessible to them through the shared space, as soon as Bobby and Jack enter that space they are able to "rush straight for Chrome's database" (180), and, once they have disabled her security, proceed directly into a conflation of her technological network and her own person. What she has helped build destroys her—which the text emphasizes by identifying the technology used to burn her as "a mimetic weapon, designed to absorb local color" (179). Jack and Bobby burn her using her own wilderness, littered with shadows and mazes, and located within the depths of herself. Chrome thus exemplifies the text's concern that, the more automated a person becomes,

and the more one relies on shared networks, the greater the chance of unleashing wilderness traits into a shared space where others absorb them. Worse, once these traits are unleashed into the shared space, a person's own buried anxieties, fears, and repressions can lead to his or her destruction.

Though destruction may come quickly in the form of cyberspace contributors like Bobby and Jack infiltrating others via the network, this destruction can also occur slowly, through the continual absorption of cyberspace's wilderness. Those entering cyberspace may share the same goals as frontier pioneers, who Mogen suggests came "to transform the wilderness, not to be transformed by it" (95), but, just as frontier settlers learned that the wilderness was capable of transforming a person in return, "Burning Chrome" worries that those who access cyberspace undergo a similar, though amplified, experience. Not only does darkness unearthed from within an individual and projected up into cyberspace remain there, in the open, ready to terrorize anyone who encounters it in the shared space, but, as was the case with Chrome, that darkness can also enter anyone linked into cyberspace, to the point that it physically alters the person. Chrome, for example, builds in cyberspace, but eventually cyberspace begins to build in her as well. Before Bobby and Jack even attempt to infiltrate her network, the human condition has already become one "she didn't exactly aspire to" (192), and readers are given the sense that she has become machine-like, conflated with the matrix and technology to the degree that her physical self is so altered that she perpetually looks like a teenage girl and functions with a metabolism controlled artificially. She has not only inputted parts of herself into cyberspace, but cyberspace has also returned the favor, leaving her

permanently altered by and tied to the network—and thus vulnerable to whatever else is within the network.

Similarly, both Bobby and Jack, while they succeed in destroying Chrome, have also already begun to be infected in this way. Jack’s prosthetic arm suggests that he engages in the same kind of physical modification and automation in which Chrome engaged, and Bobby, because he is no longer able to conceive of human relationships that exceed an artificial connection, overlooks everything “totally real” about the object of his affections (188). As Mogen suggests, “Technological change has become inseparable from human change, and the boundaries between machinery and humanity are increasingly obscure” (103)—a reality that has already led to the demise of Chrome, and that threatens to overtake not only the protagonists of the story but also all who enter the cyberspace medium.

Shades of Reality: Disorientation and the Absence of Connecting Space in

Inception

Though *Inception*’s conception of the “human mind as a physical space which is conceptualized through technological metaphors” does owe a debt to Gibson’s works (Tan 409), the film does not base its dream-sharing network on a connecting space, as is the case in “Burning Chrome’s” cyberspace. While in “Burning Chrome” minds interact within cyberspace, and any infiltration into the mind of another requires crossing through cyberspace first, in *Inception* one person’s consciousness combines with that of another without any buffer space between them. Feedback thus becomes immediate: what was previously a person’s personal wilderness is directly introduced into any other minds that have combined with the person’s own via dream-sharing. We see this nearly immediately

within the film, as Cobb is unable to prevent his subconscious projection of his dead wife, Mal, from infiltrating any dream in which he shares. Though the dream may be rooted within the mind of one of Cobb's colleagues, his participation introduces Mal—or his thoughts and memories associated with her—into the dream, allowing her to shoot his colleague and sabotage their mission. Though she originates from the wilderness of Cobb's mind, the lack of a buffer space between the minds of him and his dream-sharing colleagues permits her to become part of the communal wilderness associated with the dream and harm everyone within the space without having to cross a connecting space to reach them.

Inception's elimination of the connecting buffer space between minds, while potentially dangerous, does resolve the disorientation created by “Burning Chrome”'s differing perspectives on “center.” The overlapping circles of directional perspective that exist in cyberspace converge in *Inception*, as everyone hooked up to a single PASIV device has the same point of origin and participates in the same dream within the same mind (one dreamer hosts the dream; another populates it with “projections” of people; and, usually, yet another dreamer designs the landscape of the dream). By drawing all participants into the same dream at the same point of origin, and by combining their actual consciousnesses, *Inception* thus orients all participants within the dream toward the same central point.

While a lack of connecting space resolves differing ideas of center, this lack of a buffer zone also results in a world that has absorbed the wilderness and lodged it within the shared dream, meaning that *Inception's* dream world has already partaken in the central fear of “Burning Chrome.” Sharing a dream with others without a buffer space

between minds inevitably means inheriting whatever the other dreamers have buried within their subconscious. We see an illustration of this when Ariadne enters Cobb's dream and finds that Cobb keeps key memories from his and Mal's past stored within his mind, neatly constructed as levels, to which she can descend via elevator. Upon entering Cobb's dream, Ariadne is, without permission from Cobb, immediately able to penetrate down into Cobb's wilderness: his wilderness has become her wilderness, insofar as it is the wilderness buried beneath their shared dream, and which is therefore accessible to anyone within the dream.

Just as Chrome's deepest buried parts are reminiscent of the gothic, we find that Cobb's buried memories of Mal also recall the gothic. She is the uncanny, the return of the past, and a double all in one figure, as she is what Dom eventually admits is "just a shade of my real wife"—a memory double of Mal that lives within his subconscious, and whom he interacts with as if she were his real wife. However, even Cobb recognizes the uncanniness of his projection. At one point he tells her "I can't imagine you with all your complexity, all your perfection, all your imperfection... You're the best I can do; but I'm sorry, you are just not good enough." Despite recognizing that Mal is a pale imitation, altered by his own guilt, he refuses to banish her and allows her to become "a setting for nightmarish encounters with powers of darkness in... the self" (Mogen 99). In order to avoid "spiritual annihilation" and instead undergo the positive transformation that a wilderness experience potentially promises (Mogen 100), Cobb must, as he states, "let go... I have to let you go." He must find his way out of the gothic wilderness within his subconscious by facing Mal, the embodiment of the gothic. Through that encounter, he

can undergo a spiritual revelation and change that will allow him to disentangle reality from dream and move past his guilt in order to ascend, transformed, to reality.

As the movie quickly shows, this “ascent to reality” is quite literal, and is symptomatic of *Inception*’s concern with primarily vertical directional indicators. After the dreamers “go under” to enter the first layer of the dream itself, they then enter the mind of another individual within the dream, and descend down to a second level. They can even repeat the process a third time, descending to a third level. Whereas in “Burning Chrome,” one can move between spaces, or can move both down and up out of them, movement between the dream levels in *Inception* requires the characters to go down in order to move up—a fundamentally counterintuitive directional concept. This aspect of *Inception* is what is called a “kick,” and refers to the sensation of falling, which wakes the characters from their dreams. Methods include falling off a bridge, dropping in an elevator, and plunging off a building. Though the person begins by plummeting downward, he or she never hits the ground, and instead wakes either in the next dream level up, or, if the person is in the top level of the dream, in reality. Disorientation occurs, however, when the person forgets how far down into the dream he or she has gone. The disorientation that this can cause is potent enough to confuse the person into thinking that the dream is truly reality—or, in the reverse case, to make the person believe that reality is a dream. Mal’s death illustrates this possibility: despite presumably having returned to reality, Mal is disoriented, and continues to believe she is dreaming. Convinced of this, she jumps off a building in the mistaken belief that dream-rules of verticality still apply and that she will be “kicked” upward, back into reality.

The very structure of the dreams themselves reflects this fear of disorientation. Even when they are disobeying the laws of physics, the dreams are still oriented primarily vertically, emphasizing the film's concern that losing track of reality will result in forgetting how to exit up and out of the dream. For instance, when Arthur instructs Ariadne in the use of paradoxes, including the Penrose stairs, we see how "up" and "down" can become easily confused: if the stairs are not viewed in their entirety, the person controlling the paradox can manipulate the space to deceive others into thinking they are walking upward when they are in fact moving down, or vice versa. This illusion forms a continuous loop, so that one could climb infinitely without ever ascending or descending to the intended point. This reliance on vertical orientation is further emphasized when the van in the first level of the dream tips over, and the gravity in the second level of the dream shifts to reflect the rolling of the van, resulting in a fistfight that occurs on the ceilings, walls, and hallways of a hotel. In this instance, the concept of "down" changes according to whether the van is located upright at any particular moment, and Arthur and his opponent are forced to shift with the changing gravitational pull. Yet, even as gravity shifts, and the dreamers are alternately pulled toward the walls, ceiling, and floor, the concept of "down" always exists—a point which is emphasized by the general notion that the shift in gravity is controlled by the dream level "above." Even when the van goes into free fall, and the dreamers are stranded in zero gravity, Arthur's primary objective becomes inventing a way to simulate gravity, in order to drop the team and propel them up out of the dream.

The ultimate disorientation occurs at close of the film, when the film introduces the possibility that Mal may have been right. Cobb, upon being reunited with his

children, fails to check his totem to ensure that he is truly in reality, allowing for the possibility that he remains in a dream. The final shot is a view of his totem—a spinning top—but the movie cuts to the credits before it becomes clear whether or not the top falls and confirms that he has indeed exited the dream. As a result, the film’s vertical disorientation is never actually resolved, as it becomes impossible to determine whether Cobb has ascended up out of the wilderness.

The Lies We Tell Ourselves: *Inception*, “Burning Chrome,” and the Cinematic Experience

While “Burning Chrome” reflects a larger cultural anxiety about the rise of cyberspace and technological networks, *Inception* reacts to society’s increasing use of technology as an escape from everyday life. Just as the characters of *Inception* participate in a dream, moviegoers immerse themselves in film, and this technologically-generated, artificial reality then seeks to disorient the viewer to such a degree that, like Cobb, he or she potentially forgets what is real. Movie critics have gone so far as to propose that *Inception* is directly commenting on this process, with the film acting as a direct metaphor for cinema and its attempts to disorient audiences and thereby draw them into a fictional world: Cobb acts as the director, Arthur as the producer, Ariadne as the screen writer, Saito as the entity funding the film, Eames as the actor, and Fisher—the mark that Cobb and his team unabashedly seek to disorient and fool—as the audience (Faraci “Never Wake Up”; Fisher 40). Thus, by expressing anxiety that disorientation may prevail, and that those who participate in this “consensual hallucination” will be unable, or unwilling, to perceive that they have become lost in a manmade wilderness, *Inception*

suggests that society has become disoriented by film, and no longer separates fact from technologically-perpetuated fiction.

Even more problematically, the themes of *Inception* imply that this disorientation is a condition that movie viewers may not truly desire to either recognize or correct. As Mark Fisher proposes, “Nolan’s films are preoccupied with... the lies that we tell ourselves to stay happy.” Yet, “It’s one thing to lie to oneself; it’s another to not even know whether one is lying to oneself or not” (38). *Inception*’s end, in which Cobb never turns to look at the spinning top, hints that Cobb may not *care* whether he is in reality. Similarly, moviegoers, by failing to perceive the disorientating effect of a technology-fueled movie-going experience, do not comprehend that this experience means potentially remaining lost in a wilderness that, as “Burning Chrome” believes, will infiltrate us, change us, and leave us vulnerable. The film raises questions concerning whether, like Cobb, we *want* to believe the technologically-generated artificial reality and *want* to become disoriented and lost within it in order to escape the reality of our everyday lives.

This, then, brings us full circle to the origins of Wilderness Gothic: as noted previously, there has always been a tendency, beginning with the Puritans, to see the wilderness “as both a heaven and a hell” (Murphy 5), and to experience a strange attraction to what is a potentially damaging space (Mogen 100). To suggest that the audience desires to become lost in a wilderness merely addresses the same concerns held by America’s earliest settlers. The distinction between this desire and the wilderness attraction experienced by early American settlers comes through “Burning Chrome’s” suggestion that those involved in the “consensual hallucination” made possible through

technology are actually building the wilderness itself, rather than projecting fears and anxieties *onto* a wilderness. Bolstered by *Inception*'s notion that the film depicting this process may itself be an instrument of disorientation, we are able to see how a technological wilderness is self-generated and all-consuming to a degree that the organic wilderness may not be. In the organic wilderness, one will meet only with one's own fears and with the actual dangers of the landscape, but in an automated wilderness, built by man, one can meet with the fears of multiple people. Additionally, though an organic wilderness may act as a strange point of attraction, reflect one's fears, and annihilate one's body, a person is unlikely to forget that he or she is within the wilderness. A manmade wilderness, as a product of man himself, is far more difficult to distinguish from reality.

Ultimately, while the wilderness has beckoned, terrified, and acted as a point of personification for human fear and anxiety since the beginning of the American Gothic genre, "Burning Chrome" and *Inception* show the degree to which the prospect of mind-sharing technology has created a new wilderness that poses a greater threat than that offered by the natural wilderness of earlier narratives. By depicting cyberspace as a wilderness created entirely by man, and itself an extension of man, "Burning Chrome" warns that anyone operating in this shared space is vulnerable to infiltration and alteration, and that mankind's ready acceptance of this technology is therefore potentially dangerous. *Inception* builds on this suggestion by assuming that infiltration is inevitable for anyone engaged in technology-driven mind-sharing, and explores the disorientation that this wilderness can cause, in order to finally express concern at the prospect that society itself has become disoriented and lost within a technological wilderness of

mankind's own making. Though the idea that the film itself partakes in this perpetuation of disorientation by embroiling a consenting audience within a state of confusion recalls early Wilderness Gothic's acknowledgement of the wilderness' draw, those viewing the film are meant to recognize the degree to which losing oneself in a wilderness of one's own making is significantly more dangerous and all-consuming than a foray into the organic wilderness ever could be.

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