'Forget the Alamo': history, legend and memory in John Sayles' *Lone Star*

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History is inseparable from the earth [*terre*], struggle is underground [*sous terre*], and, if we want to grasp an event, we must not show it, we must not pass along the event, but plunge into it, go through all the geological layers that are its internal history . . . to connect it to the silent layers of earth which make up its true continuity . . . It is therefore now the visual image, the stratigraphic landscape, which in turn resists the speech-act and opposes it with a piling-up.

(Gilles Deleuze)¹

John Sayles' *Lone Star* examines 'life beneath the ashes or behind the mirrors' by excavating the 'geological layers' of what is remembered, who remembers and how these memories are constructed and recycled to form a particular history within the border community of Frontera ('frontier'), Texas, 'a pretty lively mix' of ethnic histories.² The US/Mexico borderlands are a 'kind of dysfunctional family . . . [with] all these secrets that go way, way back' and yet, as in the US itself, a dominant history has emerged by 'generalized assent . . . to regulate the present . . . [until] for better or for worse, history increasingly became the discipline of memory' and the burier of secrets.³ *Lone Star* begins in the earth, its pre-title sequence shows two soldiers collecting spent shells at a disused firing range stumbling across a skeleton, a Mason's ring and a sheriff's badge buried in the desert. Their conversation jokily mentions the 'Coronado Expedition', locating the significance of colonial history to this film and suggesting its continued relevance to the present day lives of this border community; 'This country's seen a good few disagreements over the years', we are told. Digging for relics of the past, to transform into art-objects of the future (the bullets will make sculptures), one comments, 'You live in a place, you should learn something about it'. In their archaeological resurrection of the 'buried' and

'forgotten' they set the tone for the film's interest in sites of memory and their relationships to official history, as well as to its critique and expansion via 'learning' about place through its stories and uncovered memories. Similar 'collectors' throughout the film, like Otis Payne, Wesley Songbird, Bunny and Sam Deeds himself contribute to this 'piling-up' of alternative, buried voices and versions of the past, providing a framework for Sayles' reconsideration of relations of memory and history. As the skeleton of ex-sheriff Charlie Wade is exhumed from the desert, Sayles enacts a process of revision, layer by layer through the community's 'stratigraphic landscape', that 'conceives historical understanding as an after-life of that which is understood, whose pulse can still be felt in the present'.⁴

Through these acts of retrieval, Sayles' film can be seen as in dialogue with the 'culture wars' debates of the 1980s–90s in which issues of identity politics, multiculturalism and the representation of US history came to the fore, often embedded in the looser exchanges and controversies over so-called political correctness. George Lipsitz cites Lynne Cheney, E. D. Hirsch, Allan Bloom and others, who began to attack new forms of history teaching for betraying particular established knowledges about America and its past. As Cheney wrote in 1988, history textbooks needed to be like those of the 'early decades of the century . . . filled with stories – the magic of myths, fables, and tales of heroes', providing 'symbols to share . . . help[ing] us all, no matter how diverse our backgrounds, feel part of a common undertaking'.⁵ Cheney's belief that national identity was best served by the articulation of history as 'heroic' and unidirectional was at odds with the growing emphasis upon multicultural representations insisting upon 'the complex realities of American history itself'.⁶ A similar debate emerged specifically around the way American Western history was represented in 1991 at the art exhibit in Washington, D.C., 'The West As America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier', in which the very 'heroic', 'shared' and 'common undertaking' that Cheney appreciated in the traditional version of westward expansion as the producer of national identity, was re-cast as a quasi-imperial project whose artifacts were in need of a revisionist interrogation. As William Truettner, the curator of the exhibition, put it, 'myth functions to control history, to shape it in text or image as an ordained sequence of events. The world is rendered pure in the process; complexity and contradictions give way to order, clarity, and direction', and, therefore, it is vital to examine these

mythic formations and the ideological assumptions they maintain.⁷ Sayles' film responds to these tensions within American cultural life re-situating the debates over identity, memory and myth on the frontier itself where a multiplicity of histories collide and struggle for prominence in a society traditionally dominated by the very ideological vision of the West that the exhibition sought to critique. It was for these reasons that *Lone Star* was referred to as a 'prophetic allegory' by Mary Helen Washington in her Presidential Address to the American Studies Association in 1997, offering a new approach to studying America in which the 'differences of language, politics, historical vision' were not allowed 'to dissolve in a soothing movement toward consensus', but instead 'presents the multicultural moment as one of tension, struggle, discomfort and disagreement'.⁸ The following year Janice Radway re-iterated the significance of *Lone Star* by using it too as a locus for her questioning of the meaning of 'American' within American Studies and the possibility of an interdisciplinary practice of 'intricate interdependencies' reflected in the 'cultural menudo' of Sayles' frontier community.⁹ All these examples testify to the centrality of *Lone Star* as a document engaging in a popular dramatisation and exploration of major cultural themes of history, legend and memory and how they might relate closely to wider redefinitions of power relations and personal/national identity within the shifting cultural landscapes of the USA.

Lone Star is a story of multiple borders, from the ever-present geopolitical southwest border, to those drawn through the diverse lives that intersect within the community of Frontera. As Sayles said, '[i]n a personal sense, a border is where you draw a line and say, "This is where I end and somebody else begins". In a metaphorical sense, it can be any of the symbols that we erect between one another – sex, class, race, age'.¹⁰ The film interrogates these spatial and communal tensions as complex contact zones, 'space[s] of colonial encounter' where 'disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other' and 'subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other . . . in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices'.¹¹ Indeed, the film ultimately questions the rigidity of these borders and frontiers by demonstrating that their apparent authority can be challenged by individual choices and collective, communal change. Annette Kolodny, in the spirit of revisionist history, argued that 'both geography and chronology must be viewed as fluid and ongoing, or as a continuously unfolding

palimpsest' in which 'hybridised forms and tropes constitute the focus of textual analysis'.¹² For her, the revised 'frontier' breaks down 'our grand obsessions' about territorial identities, separated lives and unrelated histories and re-thinks border space as 'that liminal landscape of changing meanings on which distinct human cultures first encounter one another's "otherness" and appropriate, accommodate, or domesticate it through language . . . [in an] inherently unstable locus of . . . environmental transitions and cultural interpenetrations'.¹³ Sayles' characters are perpetually engaged with the consequences of living amid centuries of 'intercultural crossing and mixing', through which particular stories and memories become 'official' whilst others become marginalised.¹⁴

Central to this '*transfrontera* contact zone' is the mixing of history and memory and the 'borders' that run between them.¹⁵ The notion that history is fixed and final, 'out there' and official, written down in textbooks and taught from one generation to the next, is questioned through the intersecting and contradictory memories of Frontera's multicultural citizens whose different 'versions' structure the complex layering of the film. Memory, according to Sturken, is always 'entangled' with history; 'Indeed, there is so much traffic across the borders of cultural memory and history that in many cases it may be futile to maintain a distinction between them'.¹⁶ Sayles' film articulates this 'border traffic' showing how official history is dialogised by alternative versions and counter-memories that emerge in the unravelling of a murder mystery in which the subject under enquiry is much more than the dead sheriff, Charlie Wade. The film's sheriff-detective-historian, Sam Deeds, delves into the past, as history and memory, to discover that there are many 'boundary crossings' between the two making 'true distinctions' impossible.¹⁷ Hence, he discovers that memory, as Raphael Samuel argues, 'far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force . . . dynamic' and 'what it contrives symptomatically to forget is as important as what it remembers . . . [for] it is dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some kind of negative other to it'.¹⁸ In making these discoveries, Sam's own memory-journey directs the audience into a wider reconsideration of borders and of the nature of history itself.

De Certeau claims 'the historian is no longer a person who shapes an empire . . . [but] comes to circulate *around* acquired rationalizations

... works in the margins ... becomes a prowler. In a society gifted at generalization, endowed with powerful centralizing strategies, the historian moves in the direction of frontiers of great regions already exploited ...'.¹⁹ He theorises the 'historian' as 'playing on the borderlines', discovering 'lapses in the syntax constructed by the law of a place',²⁰ just like the hesitant and confused figure of Sam Deeds often filmed 'on the edge of things, looking on, observing ... unsure of himself, so often off-center' and pushed to the margins of the actual frame to underline his position.²¹ Sam is a man haunted by his dead father, literally and metaphorically the 'law', the ex-sheriff Buddy Deeds, who in the official, dominant, white history of Frontera is a 'legend', 'a unique individual' with a reputation born from a benign dictatorship in which a kind of equality was maintained within very strict rules about race and power. As his ex-deputy Hollis tells Sam, 'Mexicans that know, that *remember*, understand what Buddy was to their people'. Sam's efforts to explore the 'lapses' and gaps in this 'official' story involve him in the uncovering of multiple and contested memories that relate to the whole community and its complex, layered history.

Sayles visualises this entangled, layered 'after-life' of history, legend and memory through techniques such as intertextuality, superimposition, montage, seamless transitional editing, a hybridised soundtrack commenting on the film's narrative, reiterative, liminal spaces within the film (drive-in, café, school, river, roadside stall, borderlands), as well as the complex web of characters and relationships that enhance the central themes of the film – secret histories, new identities and hybrid communal relations. For example, in demonstrating the relationships of the past 'whose pulse can still be felt in the present', Sayles edits without 'a cut or a dissolve' because they 'say this is a border, and the things on opposite sides of the border are meant to be different in some way, and I wanted to erase that border and show that these people are still reacting to things in the past'.²² Thus, as Hollis tells Sam in the present his version of Buddy's 'stand-off' with Wade, the camera focuses on a bowl of tortillas on the table becoming a bowl in the past as the camera re-focuses upon Buddy. The sequence ends with Buddy asking for a 'cerveza', and as the camera moves back into the present, Hollis uses the very same words. In 'erasing' the border between past and present cinematically, Sayles shows that history and memory are alive in the present, informing and shaping the

choices people make, so that it feels 'almost not like a memory – you don't hear the harp playing. It's *here*'.²³ 'It was [said Sayles] a way of suggesting that kind of shared past that's still in the town, even though it's not written history.'²⁴ Thus every relationship in the film is steeped in the entanglements of history and memory with much of the drama based on how these diverse people deal with its 'weight' – 'do I want to carry this? Is [the history] good, or is it possible to say "I'm going to start from scratch? Do I still live my life in reaction to – for or against – my father?"'²⁵

Similarly, *Lone Star* deliberately echoes other texts and genres, from classic westerns, border movies, film noir, murder mysteries, to Mexican-American writing, such as Americo Paredes' *With His Pistol in His Hand*.²⁶ Sayles has said that the film 'is more film noir than a Western, where the story turns back on the detective . . . But I hope it's more like Raymond Chandler, where the trip is the point, and not "Who Shot the Sheriff?"'²⁷ The film investigates and unravels a 'legend', Buddy Deeds, a reference to John Ford's reflective *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and yet pays homage to Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* with the border as a space of complex exchange and porosity, where corruption and the law are entwined like the very histories of the people who live there. *Lone Star* also refers ironically to the events of the Alamo as a mythic historic marker of border relations, especially John Wayne's *The Alamo*, with its insistent myth of white sacrificial victory over the duplicitous and cowardly Mexicans, encouraging its audience to both 'remember' and 'forget' its importance. In contrast, *With His Pistol in His Hand* examined the 'corrido' of Gregorio Cortez, a Mexican border hero, to reveal 'his story, the fact and the legend of it', demonstrating how myths emerged on both sides of the borderline, 'partaking of influences from both cultures' and with 'cultural conflict [seen as] many-layered'.²⁸ The multi-layered border culture is reflected in and illuminated by the depth of reference that Sayles builds into the genre memory that its audience draw upon to comprehend its rich, complex and unfinished history. Like the action that opens the film, once we begin to dig into the past of the border country or the text itself, what is unearthed is layered and interconnected rather than an epic, grand narrative about heroic events and last stands.

Such layerings create a 'complex movie where the effect is more cumulative than linear', since Sayles is not providing a direct route

through to a single conclusion, but offering instead his Chandler-like 'trip' in which the audience engages with a host of interconnected, complementary and simultaneous elements.²⁹ There is no simple borderline to divide past and present, truth or legend, history or memory since these ambiguous elements are woven together; 'You know', says Sayles, 'history has the word *story* in it.'³⁰ In uncovering and gathering these stories throughout the film, the audience is displaced beyond the borders of conventional historical frameworks with preferred and approved versions, encouraging choice and the possibility of alternative notions of what constitutes history and identity. This unsettling of history is represented in the film by Sayles' disorientating visual techniques, like the seamless editing already discussed, and in his use of acute camera angles, low shots, expressionist close-ups, superimposition and dissolves that draw us critically into the many layers of Frontera's stories.

In a key scene Sam is represented undergoing a layered memory-journey, a microcosm of the broader 'trip' represented in the film, as he sifts through the records, notes and dates of his father's 'history', as if the detective is becoming the historian delving into the interconnected archives of the border, emphasised by the lines that he draws between different elements of the past. The layered, superimposed dissolves swirl around from all angles integrating Sam's face with the maps, written, official records and his own scribbled jottings, binding his 'personal', inner memory with that of the border itself as the blues soundtrack links it all still further to both Wade and to Otis (connected through 'R and B' in the film). As the sequence returns to Sam's actual office, the words of the Mexican janitor echo across all we have just seen, 'Time marches on', reminding us that too much dwelling in the past can only stifle the future.

The weight of this past is, however, guarded by the older, white, male generation, of Hollis the Mayor and Fenton, a local businessman, who resent change and display a racist dislike of the erosion of their dominance on the border: 'They call everything else in the country after Martin Luther King and we can't have one measly courthouse [named after Buddy] . . . it's bad enough that all the street names are in Spanish.' When Sam reminds them that 'they were here first', he replies, 'Well then let's call it after Big Chief Shit-in-the-Bucket . . . He had the Mexes beat by centuries.' This exchange reveals the complex history of the cultural landscape that Sayles is keen to explore in the film:

A lot of what this movie is about is history and what we do with it. Do we use it to hit each other? Is it something that drags us down? Is it something that makes us feel good? You can have six different people look at the Alamo and they have six different stories about what actually happened and what its significance was. The same goes for your personal history. At what point do you say about your parents that was them, this is me and I take responsibility for myself from this day on. That's also what this movie is about.³¹

For *Lone Star* is about 'the burden of history' shown through the interrelated narratives of Sam, Pilar and Delmore, 'and about whether you can make the choice to not carry it, and whether that's a good thing or not'.³² This is dramatised when a school meeting discusses how history should be taught, bringing into sharp focus issues of memory and cultural tension. 'You're tearing down the heritage, tearing down the memory of those people who fought and died for this country', one Anglo parent says, whilst a Mexican replies, 'We fought and died for this land too. We fought the US army, the Texas Rangers.' 'Yeah, and you lost buddy . . . Winners get the bragging rights, that's how it goes.' Pilar, the history teacher, is accused of breaking away from the official 'textbook'; 'the way she's teaching it she's got everything switched around . . . her version is not . . . what we set as the standard'. As Mexican voices call for 'historical perspective', someone shouts 'you call it history, I call it propaganda and they might have their own story of the Alamo on the other side but we're not on the other side'.

Pilar's defence of her teaching is central to the position of the film itself and recalls a particular response to the 'culture wars' of the 1990s: 'I've only been trying to get across part of the complexity of our situation down here, cultures coming together in both negative and positive ways.' This, however, can only be accepted in a limited manner by the meeting: 'If you're talking of food and music . . . I have no problem with that, but when you start changing who did what to who . . .'. For this is a community where such 'complexity' is seen by many as a rejection of an essential identity based upon rooted, fundamental, national myths about Manifest Destiny and, therefore, about the loss of local power and status. Pilar's revisionism of public and personal 'his-story' highlights how gender 'borders' are also critiqued in this film and indicative of the wider social changes taking place throughout these communities as old, established, patriarchal regimes begin to fragment. Pilar is a 'pillar' of the

community like her mother, Mercedes, a successful, independent business woman despite having entered the US illegally, later seen aiding border-crossers to make a new start in America. And yet for much of the film Mercedes denies her past, as she has severed her connections to Mexican history and blocked out all her memories of the crossing and of the loss of her young husband Eladio at the hands of Wade. But as ever in the film, memory returns, provoked by contact with the actual present, for as Mercedes chooses whether or not to help a new generation of wetbacks, it triggers her memory of crossing and draws her to a point of reconciliation with that past. Although she has no desire to go 'home' to Mexico with her daughter and grandson, who has a 'Tejano roots thing', Mercedes will ultimately choose to help Enrique and his fiancée cross to the US, showing the 'mercy' her name suggests.

Similarly, Sam investigates the history of his father, a local hero whose life has taken on an almost religious, mythic significance, underlined by Hollis's comments that 'Your father was my salvation' and Fenton's line 'Your mother was a saint'. Elsewhere, Sam is told 'Sheriff Deeds is dead, you're just sheriff junior', to which he replies, 'That's the story of my life'. It is against this powerful hagiography that Sam's interrogation of the past revises both his father's and his own life-story whilst revealing the community's underlying relationships. Self-consciously echoing *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, we are told how Buddy was a 'goddamned legend' with 'the finest sense of justice of any man I ever knew', but rather than 'print' that legend, *Lone Star* investigates it, unravelling the relations that constitute the secret history of the Deeds family and the border family/community. The surname suggests 'an act, something done, an exploit' and the 'written evidence of a legal transaction', whilst echoing the proverb 'the deeds of the father are visited on the son'.³³ Sam's investigation into the 'deeds' of his family history begins with Hollis's memory developing into a deeper examination of interviews, written documents, archives, family records and forensic evidence, as he pieces together his alternative history. In this, Sayles dramatises a version of what Lipsitz calls 'counter-memory':

[A] way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality . . . counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward . . . [it] looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives. But unlike myths that

seek to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past . . . [It] embodies aspects of myth and aspects of history, but it retains an enduring suspicion of both categories.³⁴

In 'countering' the history and memory of his father, Sam acts against the monolithic 'totality' of his legend, uncovering the 'the local, the immediate and the personal' and all the 'hidden histories' clinging to that reputation and replayed throughout the film by the likes of Hollis, Fenton and Otis. Sam's paternal investigation reveals the connections across the community just as Sayles' film interweaves the various stories that echo and relate to each other both directly and indirectly. He has said, 'the best metaphor for history is fathers and sons. Inheriting your cultural history, your hatreds and alliances . . . is what you're supposed to get from your father in a patriarchal society.'³⁵ Of course, in *Lone Star* many parent/child relationships reassess 'history', but the film is drawn to fathers as the source of patriarchal authority and control, symbolic of the genealogical order of the border country and embodied in the 'dead fathers' of Buddy Deeds and Charlie Wade. In a flashback establishing Wade's brutality over the young Otis, he says: 'You learn to know your place *son*, this isn't Houston', reminds him that he 'sent his father to the Farm once' and finally, when pointing his gun at Otis says, 'Come to Papa'. Power, authority, the control of history itself, lay in the hands of real and symbolic fathers, as this scene reminds us, drawing obvious parallels with the master/slave relations invoked by Wade over Otis. Later in the film Sam's ex-wife, Bunny, is represented as a sedated, neurotic woman still ruled by the 'master/father' and unable to break free of his patriarchal control. 'I've only got my little girl now, she's my life-line', she mutters, voicing her father's words, adding, while supposedly commenting on a weight-lifter on the television, '[i]magine all that weight pressing down, it'd be hard to breathe, hard to swallow'. The weight of the past, the dead weight of the father in the lives of Sam and Bunny, the film suggests, may or may not be overcome to allow change to take place.

Otis Payne, the African-American bar-owner, brutalised by the 'master/father' Wade, in turn rejects his own young son Delmore, who returns as the new colonel at the local Army base. Delmore's life is conditioned by his surrogate Army 'family' with clear rules and lines to follow, revealed after a shooting at 'Big O's', when he

makes an 'official visit' to question his father. In contrast to Delmore's 'spit and polish' officialdom, Otis interjects memories that present an alternative history of Frontera's blacks, since 'over the years this is the one place that's always been there . . . There's Holiness Church or Big O's'. To which Delmore replies, 'And people make a choice?' and Otis answers, 'Most of them choose *both*. You see it's not like there's a borderline between the good people and the bad people – you're not on either one side or the other.' This pragmatic version of social practice shows how people attempt to live with contingency and the 'fuzzy logic' of border cultures, 'choosing both' as a way of living with the multiple and hybrid whilst refusing the arbitrary historical lines of 'demarcation' that divide people and keep them apart. Memories and unrecorded histories cut through and coexist with the official lines and disciplined authority of history represented by Delmore's military bearing, and as with Sam's delving into Buddy's life, a 'counter-memory' is formed that 'embodies aspects of myth and aspects of history' whilst retaining 'an enduring suspicion of both categories'.³⁶ Delmore leaves, saying 'You'll get official notification when I make my decision', asserting his power over his father and simultaneously authorising a particularly regimented and systematised view of history 'by the book', and yet the scene has also presented something countering this, offering the audience a more complex rendition of cultural relations.

Delmore's son, Chet, inherits these tensions, caught between a disciplinarian father and a 'legendary' grandfather whose image he knows only from the label for his barbeque sauce. Disinterested by Pilar's history lesson, as it seems removed from and irrelevant to his own experience, Chet like Sam, must uncover the history of and division within his own family and see its complex relationships to everyday life. When Chet visits Otis's Black Seminole Indian museum, a hybrid mix of escaped slaves and Native Americans whose 'border' identities reveal notions of origin or essence inadequate, he asks about one John Horse/Juan Caballo, 'is he a black man or an Indian?' 'He's *both*', answers Otis, echoing the earlier scene with Delmore, since, 'Blood only means what you let it'. In his own way, Otis asserts choice, self-determination and rejects the mastery of history to define our lives as he had earlier resisted Wade's assumed power and authority. If the obsession with 'blood', origins and 'history' is so reductionist it cripples the ability to live together and build decent communities, then what has been lost is a balance

that acknowledges, values and uses the past without being imprisoned and conditioned by it at the expense of new relationships and alliances. Chet comments, 'My Father says that from the day you're born, you start from scratch, no breaks and no excuses', which is another extreme position that the film argues against, for it suggests that the past has no significance and has to be screened out. The film's view is rather that the past has to be known, lived and worked through – like the legend of Buddy Deeds – before people can choose to move on.

However, there are borders everywhere that divide people arbitrarily and deny them the opportunities to develop identities and relations, epitomised by men like Wade and Buddy, agents of official history, who in different ways kept the lines clearly drawn. From a Mexican perspective, when Sam crosses the border, he's told, 'a bird flying South, you think he sees this line? You think half way across that line they're thinking different? Why should a man?' Whereas an Anglo bar tender longs for the clarity of segregation:

we are in a state of crisis, the lines of demarcation are getting fuzzier and to run a successful civilization, you have got to have your lines of demarcation between right and wrong, between this-un and that-un, your Daddy understood that . . . people don't want their salt and sugar in the same jar . . . you're the last white sheriff this town's gonna see . . . this is it right here Sam, this bar is the last stand.

In the bar our attention is drawn to the Army couple, one black, one white, as an example of the changing racial borders of the town and the nation, not in the terms outlined by the bar tender, but rather as a sign of possibility. Ironically, Buddy helped to make the lines of demarcation fuzzier because of his relationship with Mercedes and the birth of Pilar, even though he claimed otherwise in his public life. His hypocrisy reveals the countering layers that the film uncovers and which De Certeau, echoing Deleuze, defined as the nature of history and place:

The kind of difference that defines every place is not on the order of a juxtaposition but rather takes the form of imbricated strata . . . The revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites, and spatial practices . . . This place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. In reality, in its depth it is ubiquitous. A piling up of heterogeneous places.³⁷

Sam's subsequent relationship with Pilar means that the fuzzy lines of the border run right through their lives to the point that their incest becomes a metaphor for the hybrid mixing taking place throughout the region. Just as the multi-layered soundtrack shifts seamlessly between Tejano music, to mariachi, rock and roll, R and B, country and western and back again as a measure of the cultural mix of the border, so the film explores the implications of a world with no boundaries in which there is an 'imbricated' 'piling up' into a sophisticated cultural 'collage'. In the scene that reconciles Sam and Pilar at her mother's empty café, they dance to Freddy Fender's 'Desde que conosco', the English version of which, 'Since I met you baby', was playing when Delmore met his father earlier in the film, triggering the shift towards reconciliation in the film's central relationships. In a conversation after they have made love in Sam's apartment, Pilar comments that 'There's nothing on the walls. No pictures', to which he replies, 'There's nothing I want to look back on.' It is as if the past has had no dynamic relationship with the present; 'Like your story's over', says Pilar, borrowing words from her son Amado earlier about her own life. At this shared recognition of emptiness and reconciled to their new love, Pilar adds 'It [his story] isn't [over] . . . not by a long shot', for as the film asserts, one cannot be imprisoned by the past, but instead one must comprehend and use it in order to move on – to continue the 'story' of your life.

Following this scene of reconciliation between the past, present and future, Sayles instigates other related compacts; between Otis and Delmore, when the latter sees the 'shrine' to him at Big O's home; between Mercedes and her past when she helps Enrique's fiancée to safety in the US; and between Chet and Delmore when the latter softens to both his son and his father, accepting that the 'Army isn't for everyone' and they might have a barbecue to reconcile the family. The central reconciliation is, of course, Sam and Buddy's as he goes to Hollis and gives his 'version', concluding with 'Buddy Deeds was a murderer', and then hears the truth from Otis. The creation of the 'legend' is explained, and as Otis says, 'As time went on, people liked the story we told better than anything the truth might have been.' It is now up to Sam to act, to make a choice as to whether or not Wade's murder by Hollis should be revealed, but he opts for silence, to bury the truth and allow the legend to remain: 'It's just one of your unsolved mysteries', he says. The knowledge of the past and the delving into communal and personal memory has

brought Sam and others to these moments of reconciliation not as an act of closure, but as the possibility of beginning, for new relationships commencing out of this joining of past and present.

Sam and Pilar's reconciled love provides a productive revision of the oldest taboo of miscegenation across races and suggests a new hybrid American identity, a mixing of bloods, not in war, violence and 'disagreement', but in hope and renewed possibility as an ironic, revisionist, Edenic couple heading a symbolic new 'family'. The final scene of the film is played out in an abandoned drive-in cinema, with Pilar and Sam looking up at the blank screen as she asks 'when does the movie begin?' It is a key site of memory in the film, being their place of love and denial – it is here that Buddy found them and broke up their relationship – and also a reminder of communal collective experience of the movies where different peoples came together to enjoy film. Earlier in a flashback sequence, the drive-in, ironically called 'Vaquero', reminding us of the Mexican roots of the 'American' cowboy, is playing *Black Mama, White Mama*, a film about a black and a white prisoner hand-cuffed and escaping from jail, chosen by Sayles because 'it's about people of different races being chained together whether they want it or not'.³⁸ Here, Buddy, denying such hybrid relations, splits up Pilar and Sam, reinforcing the cultural and racial borders that both the place and the movie being watched challenge to some extent. Of course, Sayles' 'movie' itself is a complex revision of the old myths projected endlessly onto this screen in the past, and Pilar, who finds out about their incest in this scene, calls for a clean break, a new beginning: 'We'll start from scratch' [linking her back to Chet earlier] . . . All that other stuff, all that history, to Hell with it right? Forget the Alamo'. Looking up at the blank screen ravaged by time passing, Sayles creates 'the sense that they are going to go forward, something could be projected on that thing. But they're not the fourteen-year-old kids that they were. They've had some damage. Things have fallen away. They're different people'.³⁹ This 'difference' comes with the knowledge that will let them escape Frontera in the same way that a movie traditionally offers its audience an 'escape' from the everyday through the imaginative 'free space' of the cinema encouraging 'ways of asking and answering questions' that 'reposition us for the future by reshaping our memories of the past'.⁴⁰ Pilar and Sam look up to the screen ready to 'project' their new vision upon it, ready to take over the role of the movie as the 'escape' from the everyday borders and

restrictions of their lives and in the creative imagining of alternative identities. As the film *Lone Star* ends, Sayles suggests that the latent possibility inherent in the experience of movies can be carried forward into life itself – that is, into the imaginative reconstruction of identity, community and nation.

As Sayles has said, ‘American culture is not monolingual or mono-racial. It’s always been a mix’, and in this moment of decision Sam and Pilar ‘choose to cross that border of moral opinion’ and assert this new ‘family’.⁴¹ Their incipient migratory movement and willingness to break the ‘rule’ and social taboo are signs of a wider recognition of the necessity for that very dialogical, hybrid mix that Sayles sees as fundamentally American. As if to directly respond to the kind of one-dimensional notions of identity and nation associated with conservative historians and theorists, Sayles allows Sam and Pilar a ‘second life’ as an anti-essentialist identity forged from movements and migrations rather than formed by a single and rooted attachment to one place.⁴² The territorialism and essentialism that the film works against is further challenged as their ‘new beginning’ begins with a ‘line of flight’, a Deleuzian ‘deterritorialisation’ in which their identities are re-formed as acts of hybrid ‘becoming’.⁴³

In Sayles’ new history, knowing about the past is vital as a way forward rather than as something to dwell upon or be imprisoned by, existing as part of a multifaceted spatial appreciation of living in the West with its many stories and many peoples. The film challenges a world of borderlines and the oppressive weight of ‘dead’ fathers, and proposes a more productive, imbricated way of living where the past and present interconnect within hybrid communities and ‘enables other positions to emerge . . . displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority . . . [that give rise to] to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation’.⁴⁴ In these postcolonial borderlands, Sayles creates a sense of optimistic newness, of Sam and Pilar as hybrids on ‘the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between space*’, about to begin a life somewhere in the New West by displacing the old histories and prejudices and commencing ‘something different, something new’.⁴⁵

Stephen Cook writes that ‘Frontera is not unlike a forest whose roots have overlapped and grafted. One may not tear out any tree without damaging the others’, and indeed one might go further to argue that Sayles’ layered histories suggest that ‘roots’ in the final

analysis are unsubtle tools to define the complex subtleties of border identities seeing in the 'overlapped and grafted' rather more of the 'rhizomatic' as defined by Deleuze and Guattari as 'a set of relations not separable from each other'.⁴⁶ Indeed, Chicana Gloria Anzaldua's optimism for the future is based on a similar belief that 'There will be a hybridity of equal parts instead of a graft and a major tree'.⁴⁷ For her, identity

is an arrangement or series of clusters, a kind of stacking or layering of selves, horizontal and vertical layers, the geography of selves made up of different communities you inhabit . . . Where these spaces overlap is nepantla, the Borderlands. Identity is process-in-the-making . . . you shift, cross the border from one to the other.⁴⁸

Anzaldua's 'nepantla' is an 'in-between' space that facilitates transformation since within it, as in *Lone Star*, traditionally assumed and fixed borders break down, compelling us to find new ways of defining ourselves and our communities. The forbidden or taboo (like the incest motif and the hidden histories in the film) ruptures the smooth surfaces of the everyday, forming an 'interface' so 'in the cracks between worlds and realities . . . changes in consciousness can occur. In this shifting space of transitions, we morph, adapt to new cultural realities'.⁴⁹ Through the retrieval of memory and the reconstruction of Frontera's multiple histories, Sayles' film reaches points of knowledge and reconciliation from which choices can be made about living with the past rather than in its shadow and about identity as a process rather than a fixed and rooted essence, for ultimately '[w]e can and must visit the past, but we do not have to live there, no, not anymore'.⁵⁰

Notes

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2* (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), p. 25.
- 2 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 256–7.
- 3 Diane Carson (ed.), *John Sayles Interviews* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1999), p. 203; and Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and Memory Crisis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 31.
- 4 Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 352.
- 5 George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 24–5.
- 6 Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, p. 27.

- 7 William Truettner (ed.), *The West America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1991), p. 40.
- 8 Mary Helen Washington, "Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies If You Put African American Studies at the Center?": Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 29 October 1997', *American Quarterly*, 50: 1, (March 1998), p. 16.
- 9 Janice Radway, "What's in a Name?" Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998', *American Quarterly*, 51: 1 (1999), 6.
- 10 Carson (ed.), *John Sayles Interviews*, p. 210.
- 11 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 6–7.
- 12 Annette Kolodny, 'Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes Towards a New History of the American Frontiers', *American Literature*, 64: 1, March 1992, 9.
- 13 Kolodny, 'Letting Go', pp. 9–10.
- 14 J. D. Saldivar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), p. 11.
- 15 Saldivar, *Border Matters*, p. 13.
- 16 Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 5.
- 17 Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, p. 6.
- 18 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), p. x.
- 19 Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 79.
- 20 De Certeau, *Writing of History*, pp. 85, 4.
- 21 Tod Lippy, 'Writing and Directing *Lone Star*', www.scenariomag.com/interviews/sayles.html
- 22 Carson (ed.), *John Sayles Interviews*, p. 204.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Lippy, 'Writing and Directing *Lone Star*', p. 4.
- 25 Carson (ed.), *John Sayles Interviews*, p. 204.
- 26 Americo Paredes, *With His Pistol in his Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).
- 27 R. Pride, 'John Sayles', in *Hollywood Scriptwriter*, www.hollywoodscriptwriter.com/saylesuncut.html, p. 3.
- 28 Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, p. 247, and quoted in Saldivar, *Border Matters*, p. 41.
- 29 Lippy, p. 13.
- 30 Gavin Smith (ed.), *Sayles On Sayles* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 217.
- 31 John Sayles, 'Interview at Cannes', www.filmscouts.com/films/lon-sta.asp

- 32 Lippy, 'Writing and Directing *Lone Star*', p. 3.
- 33 Smith (ed.), *Sayles On Sayles*, p. 226.
- 34 Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, p. 213.
- 35 Carson (ed.), *John Sayles Interviews*, p. 214.
- 36 Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, p. 213.
- 37 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 201.
- 38 Smith (ed.), *Sayles on Sayles*, p. 228.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, pp. 164–5.
- 41 Carson (ed.), *Interviews*, p. 213, p. 216.
- 42 Smith (ed.), *Sayles on Sayles*, p. 225.
- 43 See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: The Athlone Press, 1992).
- 44 Homi Bhabha, 'The Third Space', in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p. 211.
- 45 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 39.
- 46 Stephen Cook, 'The New West in John Sayles' *Lone Star*: Texas as a Mirror of California', Unpublished Paper at Western American Literature Association Conference, Sacramento, 1999, 1–17, p. 16. G. Deleuze and C. Parnet, *Dialogues* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. vii. See also Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
- 47 Gloria Anzaldua, *Interviews/Entrevistas* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 278.
- 48 Anzaldua, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, pp. 238–9.
- 49 Anzaldua, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, p. 280.
- 50 Cook, 'The New West', p. 17.