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RELICS OF THE UNSEEN PRESENCE? EVOCATIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN HERITAGE AND WESTERN-HERO ROAD POEMS IN BRUCE BAILLIE'S *MASS FOR THE DAKOTA SIOUX* AND *QUIXOTE*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss the ways in which Bruce Baillie's *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* (1964) and *Quixote* (1965) evoke Native American Indian heritage and western-hero road poems by challenging the concept of the American landscape and incorporating conventions traditionally associated with cinéma pur, cinéma vérité, and the city symphony. Both pictures, seen as largely ambiguous and ironic travelogue forms, expose their audiences to "the sheer beauty of the phenomenal world" (Sitney 2002: 182) and nurture nostalgic feelings for the lost indigenous civilizations, while simultaneously reinforcing the image of an American conquistador, hence creating a strong sense of dialectical tension. Moreover, albeit differing in a specific use of imagery and editing, the films rely on dense, collage-like and often superimposed images, which clearly contribute to the complexity of mood conveyed on screen and emphasize the striking conceptual contrast between white American and Indian culture. Taking such an assumption, I argue that although frequently referred to as epic road poems obliquely critical of the U.S. westward expansion and manifest destiny, the analyzed works' use of plot reduction, observational and documentary style as well as kinaesthetic visual modes and rhythmic editing derive primarily from the cinéma pur's camerawork, the cinéma vérité's superstructure, and the city symphony's spatial arrangement of urban environments. Such multifaceted inspirations do not only diversify *Mass*' and *Quixote*'s non-narrative aesthetics, but also help document an intriguing psychogeography of the 1960s American landscapes, thus making a valuable contribution to the history of experimental filmmaking dealing with Native American Indian heritage.

Keywords: American avant-garde and experimental film; Bruce Baillie; *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*; *Quixote*; Native American Indians.

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In the history of post-war avant-garde cinema, Bruce Baillie is renowned not only for co-founding the San Francisco Cinematheque (1961-present) and Canyon Cinema (circa 1961-present), but also for producing one of the most remarkable experimental works, which "leave the others [...] far behind in their artistry and professionalism" (Polt 1965: 50). According to the filmmaker himself, he "has committed his whole life to creating a more peaceful world through his art" and some of his projects are considered treasures of the national cinema, e.g., the widely acclaimed *Castro Street* (1966) or *Quick Billy* (1971) (Baillie 2010). "Unsurpassed for their lyrical sensuality, expressive honesty and formal inventiveness" ("How avant-garde filmmakers achieve the impossible: Interview with Bruce Baillie" 2015), his philosophical and mythopoeic meditations on mid-century Americana, while influenced by the 1950s and 1960s Beat spirit (Sterritt 1998: 210) or realist and visionary style of filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage or Maya Deren, "turn from the uneasy inwardness of Brakhage's work to a problematic study of the heroic" (Sitney 2002: 180). In other words, somewhat contrary to the structural film conventions, which emerged in the 1960s, the artist's tantalizing lyrical form seems to be highly engaging with the self, hence articulating the essence of consciousness: "[Baillie's] lyrical and keenly observational 16mm films evade genre categories and explore narrative in non-traditional forms, fusing the mystical and the mundane, the cosmic and the personal, mythology and autobiography" ("Bruce Baillie: Still, life" 2016). Baillie's focus on spiritual enlightenment, also common for then contemporary masters of visionary cinema, including James Whitney, Jordan Belson, Tom Chomont or the aforementioned Stan Brakhage, has persistently served "as a way of visualizing the colors of the soul on its journey toward spiritual regeneration" (MacDonald 1992: 110).

Born in 1931 in Aberdeen, South Dakota, Baillie has always shown an avid interest in theatre and art, and after having briefly served in the Korean War and having been awarded a degree in art at the University of Minnesota, he turned to filmmaking, which he studied in the London School of Film Technique and practiced as part of the San Francisco avant-garde film movement (Renan 1967: 118–119, Baillie in MacDonald 1992: 111). Though actively engaged in reforming the avant-garde film scene in the San Francisco area, the artist soon circumscribed his cultural activity and withdrew from the spotlight mostly due to his pacifist personality and continuous struggle with hepatitis since 1967. In one of his rare interviews conducted by Richard Corliss (1971: 31), Baillie commented on his role as a filmmaker: "I always felt that I brought as much truth out of the environment as I could (...). I want everybody really lost, and I want us all to be at home there. I have to say finally what I am interested in, like Socrates: peace ... rest ... nothing." His first pictures, including *On Sundays* (1961), *Mr. Hayashi* (1961), *The Gymnasts* (1961), *Friend Fleeing* (1961), *Have You*

Thought of Talking to the Director? (1962), *Everyman* (1962), *A Hurrah for Soldiers* (1963), or *To Parsifal* (1963), were predominantly short, meditative and often localized pieces, which dexterously captured Baillie's own mental states as well as portrayed the clash between cultures in contemporary American society:

> What forms the films of Bruce Baillie is his compassion and concern for how people (and how nature) can exist in today's environment. What provides the effectiveness of his films is Baillie's ability to combine disparate images, simple people and super weapons, harvests and circuses, whistling highways and quiet sunrises, to make strong visual statements. (Sheldon 1967: 112)

Similarly, *Mass for the Dakota Sioux* and *Quixote* can be classified as Baillie's early and, to a large extent complimentary, 16 mm pictures, often referred to as "the most sublime and visually soaring works of American experimental cinema" as well as "visionary road movies and plangent hymns to the dream of America that never came true" ("Songs to a fallen world – three films by Bruce Baillie" 2016). However, contrary to some of the artist's earliest works, which merely "blend formal properties of traditional documentary (...) with strong impulses toward spontaneity (...)", the two films are often regarded as more substantial, ambitious, and stylistically varied projects due to their incorporation of dreamlike and mystical kineticism, urban poeticism, or idyllic physicality (Sterritt 1998: 210–211). Both absorptive and politically engaged in the critique of U.S. culture, they accentuate the ills of contemporary society, including consumerism, racism, oppression, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights Movement. Particularly *Mass*, where the layering of imagery becomes perhaps the most complex and memorable, suggests that the experience of reality "is not simply a set of surfaces available to perception and intelligence, but a composite of surface and of spirit that flows beneath the surface and behind our perception of it" (MacDonald 1992: 109).

Mass, frequently described as one of Baillie's most ambitious and personal projects, is also considered, somewhat surprisingly, as one of the least successful. Conceived as a response to John F. Kennedy's assassination, this poetic, haunting, contemplative, and visually polyphonous mourning to the Sioux makes extensive use of found and filmed footage, clouding of the image with a diffusion filter, multiple exposures, and superimpositions. Akin to the artist's other works, his black and white portrayal of contemporary non-religious and non-cultural city life, accompanied by artificial urban sounds, should be seen in terms of oblique symbolism. As implied by Callenbach (1964: 30–31), *Mass* offers a "subtle, indirect commentary on modern life", where Baillie "combines a lyric gift with rather mordant social comment" by juxtaposing "images of great tranquility with a harsh, even despairing point of view or, in other words". Somewhat indistinct flashes of imagery, presenting mainly washes of superimposed industrial landscapes, including prefabricated houses, suburbia, bridges, factories, markets, TV screens,

advertisements, traffic, or parades, tend to serve as a visual metaphor and epic statement on the modern Dakota Sioux in 1960s America (Wyman 2012). A playful contradiction between the Mass' traditional celebration of life and a deeply pessimistic exposure of the theme of death, the film is devoted to "the religious people who were destroyed by the civilization which evolved the Mass" (Sitney 2002: 182). According to Baillie himself, it constitutes "a Christian form dedicated to a pagan people, the Sioux. But the Indians are really a religious people because they are devoted to the earth. This attachment to the soil means a lot to me" (Baillie in Polt 1965: 50). The titular mass, though apparently serving as the picture's structure divided into some distinctive sections of the Catholic liturgy, including Introit, Kyrie, Epistle, Gloria, Communion, and Offertory, does not provide any explicit visual or verbal references to the religious service except for the use of a Gregorian chant from the Trappist Abbey. What follows is Baillie's brief guide to *Mass*' structure published in Canyon Cinema Cooperative Catalogue 3:

> INTROIT: A long, lightly exposed section composed in the camera.
> KYRIE: A motorcyclist crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge accompanied by the sound of the Gregorian Chant. The EPISTLE is in several sections. In this central part, the film becomes gradually more outrageous, the material being either television or the movies, photographed directly from the screen. The sounds of the "mass" rise and fall throughout the epistle.
> GLORIA: The sound of a siren and a short sequence with a '33 Cadillac proceeding over the Bay Bridge and disappearing into a tunnel.
> The final section of the COMMUNION begins with the OFFERTORY in a procession of lights and figures in the second chant.
> The anonymous figure from the introduction is discovered again, dead on the pavement. The touring car arrives, with the celebrants; the body is consecrated and taken away past an indifferent, isolated people accompanied by the final chant.
> (Baillie in Canyon Cinema Cooperative Catalogue 3 1972: 19)

A highly symbolic opening scene presents a night shot of applause for an anonymous and lonely human figure groveling and dying on the street, whose fate is apparently ignored by all the passers-by. Below Polt provides a concise description of the film's narrative content:

> Next comes a scene of people gathered. Suddenly they applaud. Then a long section of overexposed, sometimes double- and triple-exposed shots of city scenes, trains, cars, people on the street. After this we see a motorcyclist, shot from the rear, crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge. There follow shorts of a banana dock where Baillie occasionally works. Then long passages that could be classified as Pop Art – of television programs, mostly commercials and a televised military parade. Again the motorcyclist, now seen from the side, and sequences shot from the film THE MAN WITH X-RAY EYES – Ray Milland driving a big black sedan. The ending once more shows the motorcyclist, this time shot from the front, and then the sedan coming to take away the solitary man from the opening passage.
> (Polt 1965: 52)

The sole imagery suggestive of the tragic narrative of Native American Indians in contemporary U.S. society is expressed in the work's brief introduction, which states: "'No chance for me to live, Mother, you might as well mourn.' Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Sioux Chief" (Baillie 1964), as well as a few insert shots of selected anonymous representatives of the Dakota Sioux. Therefore, what seems to be relics of the tribe's presence, depicted in "a series of images of contemporary America interwoven with the ritual spiriting away of a dead Indian" ("Mass for the Dakota Sioux" 2017), might be interpreted as a painful symbol of what has become of Native American heritage. In particular, it becomes conceptualized in what Pinar (2015: 24) calls a fragmented, meta-textual, and reflexive nature of Bailie's films, which combine diverse stylistic, thematic, and referential modes in an attempt to "expose the constructed nature of the films and denaturalize the reconstruction process of cultural representation whose fictive elements, authoritative voice and spectacular exploitations could otherwise go unnoticed". While both *Mass* and *Quixote* have an allegorical structure common for many filmmakers involved in experimental ethnography, the former uses the themes of technology, alienation, and death to allegorically deal with the representation of the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 in which one hundred and fifty Lakota Sioux were killed by the U.S. Seventh Calvary at a camp near Wounded Knee Creek. Pinar (2015: 69) hypothesizes that although the incident is implied merely on an allegorical level, Baillie's editing, such as overexposure, a collage of found footage or filters, and the presence of the mobile protagonist, "suggests less a simple dichotomy of nature and culture than a much more complicated engagement with the minority movements". Namely, the filmmaker deliberately draws on a paradoxical structure to expose the dichotomy between life and death on the one hand and, on the other, to use the analogy of Mass and resurrection to anticipate the emergence and development of the American Indian Movement,[1] officially founded in 1968, and other minority civil right movements of the late 1960s:

> Baillie suggests a hope for the political mobilization of the Native Americans, the signs of which were already emerging in the context of the production of the film. In 1973, members of the American Indian Movement occupied Wounded Knee, South Dakota to reconstruct their history through references to the past; this is a strategy that parallels how, in Mass for the Dakota Sioux, Baillie reads his own context through an allegorization of the fragments of history.
>
> (Pinar 2015: 75–76)

[1] For more information on the American Indian Movement and the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 refer to Deloria, Jr. & Lytle (1983), Weyler (1984), Smith & Warrior (1996), or Segal (2000).

The accompanying layering of an over-exposed, obscure, and often distorted footage of the U.S. national flag, TV beauty queens, or almost indistinguishable urban landscapes does not only reinforce the complexity of the imagery and viewing experience, but also emphasizes the significance of a largely imperceptible spiritual dimension of the surrounding reality, here represented by some brief close-ups of the indigenous peoples' faces. As put by MacDonald (1992: 109–110), "Baillie's dexterity in capturing the sensuous of the world (...) is an emblem of the degree to which he sees the perceivable world as invigorated by spirit. (...) His refusal to betray his cine-spiritual quest, despite the resistance that surrounded him, became a demonstration of the spiritual integrity of his work". This effect is also achieved by Baillie's challenging of the camera's privileged gaze, which enhances both a fragmented nature of the protagonist's/spectator's perspective and an absence of the film's subject matter, that is, the history and trauma of the Wounded Knee massacre, thus connecting the horrors of the Dakota Sioux's past to the future of the American Indian Movement (Pinar 2015: 76–77).

Unsurprisingly, *Quixote* appears to be equally engaging with socio-political and cultural issues regarding Native American Indians. Critically acclaimed as well as praised as "one of Baillie's most important films" ("Films by Bruce Baillie, experimental filmmaker, at Museum of Modern Art" 1972: 1) and "the greatest American film you've never seen" (Stephens 2011), the work constitutes "an entirely unique atlas of the country's spiritual currents" (*Bruce Baillie Anthology, 1962–1971* 2016). Reminiscent of the road trip across the western United States, it presents the region's settlement as an "imperialist conquest and is linked to the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s and the Vietnam War" (Peterson 1994: 32). Undeniably, the picture reflects the mood of the troubled Civil Rights decade in its idealized depiction of American Indians embattled with the problems of sovereignty and development. As suggested by James (1989: 160–161), *Quixote* utilizes "recurrent image clusters in which the remnants of the pre-colonial past – its geography, its fauna, and especially the richness of its aboriginal cultures – coalesce, fragments of an Indian summer shored against the ruin of the modern metropolis". James (1989: 161–162) pinpoints that Baillie's somewhat utopian representation of technologically underdeveloped and underprivileged Indians and Asians, which becomes particularly apparent in the symbolism of the final scene, stands for "a prelapsarian ideal, [which] fall[s] to industrialism (...) and war" and aims to allegorize a set of countercultural values opposing those traditionally associated with U.S. imperialism, capitalism, industrialism, and racial tensions. Pinar (2015: 78) rightly concludes that "Baillie offers an ethnographic study of a minority group or community in each documentary section: a farmer/smuggler in New Mexico, Mexican crop-pickers and loaders, a high school basketball game, a circus, a Native America reservation, and Selma demonstrations, respectively".

However, the fact that the filmmaker provides his audience with extreme close-ups, solarized long shots, or some fragmentary audio-visual details that barely help disclose certain timeframes and locations, including road signs, Mexican tunes, extracts from Barry Goldwater's campaign speech, or footage of Vietnam protests, prevents the viewer from assuming an informed position. Interestingly, the fourth collage sequence, which features a Native American reservation filmed in the observational documentary mode, seems to be the most telling. It consists of long shots of two old Native Americans talking and smoking in a diner, an antelope and a bison, some old photographs, a newspaper ad that reads: "an Indian outbreak is a dreadful thing – outbreaks and crimes are never possible among people who use Kirk's American family soap", a science book page comparing Native American and European brains, an anthropology book on the inferiority of Native American Indians, and, finally, a close-up and near-abstract shot of an American Indian child who smiles and then begins playing and sledding in the snow with his peers. Pinar (2015: 87) claims that akin to *Mass*, the idea behind *Quixote* boils down to the mobilization of civil rights politics conceptualized in Baillie's animation, which occurs at the beginning of the section and consists of red and blue filtered images of trucks and machines moving in a construction site. Pinar (2015: 87, 89) suggests that while this self-reflective binary opposition between nature and civilization "establishes seemingly unlikely connections between the rhythms of the reservation and the machinery", thus celebrating the indigenous cultures and giving voice to minority movements that challenge the power relations, the stasis in *Quixote*'s final shot "alludes to a momentary immobility of intense pleasure that becomes open-ended".

Meanwhile, the deep ecology and new age oriented undertones are enhanced by the appearance of the bearded figure, featured in the opening scene and resembling Walt Whitman, whose "influence is palpable in Bruce Baillie's kaleidoscopic convocation of midcentury America" (*Bruce Baillie Anthology, 1962–1971* 2016). *Quixote*, shot between 1964 and 1965 on a cross-country journey "across the land and soul of a divided land with the same melancholic wanderlust that infused Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Robert Frank's *The Americans*" (*Bruce Baillie Anthology, 1962-1971* 2016), pictures the 1960s American landscapes in a free-flowing, jazz-like, and uninhibited manner. Sterritt (1998: 210) asserts that both *Mass* and *Quixote* tend to contain subtle references to Kerouac's fiction, particularly observable in the films' "romanticized regard for the American past" through their reliance on the concept of the hero as well as the motif of Catholic spirituality and traveling through physical and psychic landscapes. Likewise, drawing on Kerouac's sensibility and spontaneity, *Quixote* exposes its audiences to mountain ranges, deserts and highways, automobiles, farmlands and Indian reservations, wild horses and tycoons, skyscrapers, antiwar and Civil Rights movement demonstrations as well as insert images of the Vietnam War,

pedestrians, high school basketball players, circus acrobats, advertisements and newspaper clippings, comic books, all accompanied by both diegetic and non-diegetic sounds generated by classical, electronic, jazz, and rock compositions. Akin to *Mass*, the film's focus is primarily on the land, whose depiction is deliberately distorted by the use of preternatural optical effects, flash frames, anamorphic lenses, and swooning hand-held camera movements. In this context, some explicit references to the indigenous heritage are scarce, including brief shots of "young Indian girls supplanted by industrial machinery gouging the earth" (James 1989: 160), Native American Indian ritualistic dances and close-ups of selected individuals, featured to "show how in the conquest of our environment in the New World, Americans have isolated themselves from nature and from one another" (Baillie in MacDonald 1992: 126).[2] The absence of a protagonist is substituted with collectivities represented here by Cervantes' character, Quixote, that accentuates both the heroic theme prevalent in Baillie's work and tension between ecology-oriented heroism and the destructiveness of technology. In his interview with Richard Whitehall (1969: 19), Baillie comments on *Quixote* as one of his most profound western-hero forms, which complements the structural and ideological principles of *Mass* with an even more ironic and ambiguous imagery:

> Quixote was my last western-hero form. I summarized a lot of things. I pretty much emphasized the picture of an American as a conquistador. A conquering man. For example, up in Montana there's a bridge being put up, driving straight through the mountains, and it was half made when I got there. They're chopping their way right through. And, to me, that was the best explanation of what western man was up to.
> (Baillie in Whitehall 1969: 19)

It goes without saying that both works take more or less the distinctive form of a travelogue,[3] which involves journeying across physical as well as mental or liminoid landscapes and "subtly blends glimpses of the heroic personae with despairing reflections on violence and ecological disaster" (Sitney 2002: 181). However, the actual travelling, along with the use of non-standard imagery, mise-en-scène, and editing, is also devoid of a single protagonist who becomes replaced with "collectivities, mythically linked in each case with a legendary hero

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2 In none of his interviews to date, Baillie mentions any specific religious and cultural beliefs and practices of the Dakota Sioux and other Native American Indian tribes that he explicitly referred to in *Mass for the Dakota Sioux*'s and *Quixote*'s visual and narrative content.

3 The term 'travelogue' is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "an (illustrated) lecture about places and experiences encountered in the course of travel; hence a film, broadcast, book, etc. about travel; a travel documentary". Gunning (1997: 14), Peterson (2004: 197), and Ruoff (2006: 2) note that since the end of the 19th century, travel films' most notable formal elements have been the focus on place as their primary subject as well as the use of travelling shots, which tend to foster "the view aesthetic".

– Don Quixote and Christ" (Williams 1999: 534). Drawing on travel ride films' conventions (Rabinovitz 2006), such as cinematic realism, panning camera movement, or "mobilized virtual gaze" (Friedberg 1993: 2),[4] Baillie "views the American landscape and culture as a wasteland founded on the destruction of a native culture" (Peterson 1994: 32), hence challenging the former concept by incorporating a number of avant-garde modes of representation. However, certain shots, particularly those deriving from the road movie (e.g., the motorcyclist riding across a bridge, views captured from the road) may be indicative, somewhat ironically, of standard cinematic conventions influenced by a distinctively American tradition of depicting sublime, picturesque, and luminist qualities of grand and largely uncivilized natural scenery, which goes back to the 19th century Hudson River School movement.[5] Baillie's pictures, however, tend to challenge the sublime and luminist concept of the American landscape by means of form and content; whereas the former is achieved by drawing on selected European avant-garde traditions, the latter is built with Baillie's own innovative use of narrative revolving around the tentative protagonist. For instance, some major influences coming from the French cinéma pur, usually applied to experimental cinematic works produced during the 1920s European avant-garde movement, include opposing any form of distinct narrative expression and advocating an employment of unique visual and rhythmic editing techniques, such as time lapse, slow motion, dynamic cutting, trick and moving camera shots, etc. (see, e.g., Aitken 2001: 80, Beaver 2006: 39–40). Akin to other experimental works representative of pure cinema, including those by Man Ray, Stan Brakhage, Bruce Conner, Maya Deren, Ron Fricke, Godfrey Reggio, Walter Ruttmann, Ralph Steiner, Dziga Vertov, Slavko Vorkapich, etc., both *Mass* and *Quixote* seem to project rhythm, dynamism, and motion, thus stirring a strong visual interest in their audiences while transcending and ridiculing the plot, characters or settings.

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4 The "mobilized virtual gaze", defined as "a received perception mediated through representation" (Friedberg 1993: 2) and based on a paradoxical combination of the movement of viewing with the immobility of the spectator, seems to have largely affected contemporary audiences' perception of time and space and led to the emergence of panoramic viewing, which implies a fast, scanning, deep, yet simultaneously static, restricted, and superficial gaze as the screen clearly frames the field of vision (Schivelbusch 1986: 189).

5 While the aforementioned concepts, also inseparably connected with the school's strands of pastoral elegaic and scientific exoticism, were first proposed in 18th century European aesthetics and further discussed by Burke, Kant, Schopenhauer, or Gilpin, they are also related to Turner's Frontier Thesis, which successfully advanced the myth that pioneering the American West has played a substantial role in shaping the national character, as well as Manifest Destiny, which stressed the U.S. primacy in exploring and expanding across North American territories (see, e.g., Carmer 1972: 19–24, Nash 1982: 67–71, Allen 1992: 27, Driscoll 1997: 8–20).

Naturally, the act of questioning some conventional notions of space and time through a skillful montage or use of nonstandard camera movement and angles, superimpositions, optical effects, soundtrack, or visual composition is also common for cinéma vérité's superstructure and the city symphony's spatial arrangement of urban environments. However, the focus of the former, also considered a form of observational cinema if devoid of a narrator's voice-over, is on minimizing the presence of the camera, whose key role is to record reality as objectively as possible in an attempt to reveal or rediscover a cinematic truth and highlight often neglected subjects (see, e.g., Rosenthal 1978: 7, Bruzzi 2000: 67). In line with the genre's principles, Baillie was free to make his own artistic choices, which involved the use of stylized and frequently provocative set-ups enhanced by the "mood" music and therefore implied a clear ideological message rather than presented an avant-doc construction of reality. Moreover, although the films' visual and narrative content cannot be seen as an uninterrupted and unmanipulated representation of the events on screen, it seems to draw on cinéma vérité's technology and filming methods, primarily the use of synchronous sounds and hand-held cameras. In this way, the director tends to strip away some traditional cinematic conventions to eliminate numerous technical, procedural, and structural barriers between the audience and filmed subject and thus leaves much room for individual interpretation (Mamber 1974: 1–4). Somewhat paradoxically, Baillie exposes his viewers to a number of uncontrolled or "real" situations and edits footage in order to re-create the surrounding reality in a largely spontaneous way so that the imagery seems distorted, yet simultaneously unbiased. He appears then to rely on the two key approaches to non-fiction filmmaking, namely direct cinema and cinéma vérité, the latter of which borrows from Dziga Vertov's *kinopravda* as well as observational, participatory, and provocational modes of sync-sound shooting (Nichols 2001: 34, MacDonald 2014: 9). Similarly to Vertov's works, particularly *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), both *Mass* and *Quixote* capture the actual objects as they are unaware of the presence of the camera and offer a more experiential form of documentary by means of multi-layered images, fast and slow motion, tracking shots, jump cuts, Dutch angles, freeze frames, extreme close-ups, or animated inserts. Unsurprisingly then, the works' self-reflexivity, rhythm, use of quick-cut editing, and emphasis on form over content render them as largely influenced by the Soviet montage, specifically Vertov's concept of *kino-oki* (*cine-eyes*), later adopted by Brakhage, which rejected "staged" cinema and proclaimed the primacy of the camera lens over the human eye, thus conveying a highly personal and poetic vision of the surrounding reality (Dawson 2003).

Furthermore, the films' non-narrative form and lack of dialogue, successfully compensated by an almost hypnotizing juxtaposition of images and music, may be considered a partial revitalization of the city symphony. Although both pictures do not adhere to the genre's structure, which suggests the passage of a

day, they still incorporate certain elements of the city symphony's spatial arrangement of urban environments through their reliance on kinaesthetic visual modes, rhythmic editing, hyperkinetic camera choreography, speeded up sequences, or time lapse photography (see, e.g., Beattie 2006: 1, Verrone 2012: 127). As MacDonald (2001: 152–153) rightly points out, many of the 1920s city symphonies "can be seen as representing not only a particular modern metropolis but also at least one filmmaker's vision of the nation this metropolis itself epitomizes; and the distinctions among these films reconfirm or polemicize national distinctions between the peoples they document". Additionally, they tend to follow some of the visual conventions employed in Baillie's *Castro Street* (1966), including the layering of superimposed images and thick haze or the doubling of black-and-white and color, hence simultaneously celebrating and condemning industrial landscapes, which remain an ongoing source of meditation on the relationship between nature and civilization. What follows is Camper's comment on *Quixote*'s use of dense collage of contrastive images:

> In *Quixote* wild horses and a basketball game are part of a cross-country trip that ends with an antiwar demonstration in Manhattan. Baillie says he's depicting our culture as one of conquest, but his film's greatness lies not in its social analysis. Rather it's in the way his superimposed and intercut images float almost weightlessly in space, creating a hypnotic sense of displacement that lets us see beyond aggression.
>
> (Camper 2005)

Similarly, *Mass*' shots of a troubled city life, whereas creating a strong sense of dialectical tension, provide dazzling and almost poetic glimpses of the 1960s American urban environment in order to capture its spirit. Also *Quixote*, in its attempt to chronicle "a tumultuous period in American history from the road", relies on the city symphony's spectacle and internal rhythm, particularly "a dual sense of anonymity and intimacy" as well as repetition, fragmentation, and displacement (McCabe 2009: 61), which highlights the prevalent themes of war, commercialism, and racism rather than observes or contemplates the filmed subject. Mourão (2015) posits that Baillie's camerawork clearly engages with the representation of the Other and social classes by reencountering and moving toward the unprivileged and unfavored subjects, including Native American Indians, Afro-Americans, Asians, children, or beggars, while neglecting the white middle class. While the former are usually shot at length and in close-up, the latter are filmed critically and dispassionately either at a distance and within a group or as "an image appropriated from pages of a magazine, a TV program or advertisements": "[Baillie's] camera is clearly more at ease next to them than to the modern white man: he walks side by side with them, he approaches and listens to them – even if the meaning of what is said escapes him, like with the conversation of the two elderly Indians in *Quixote*" (Mourão 2015).

These and related conventions do not only help conceptualize Baillie's concern with social issues burdening the U.S. nation, but they also challenge the concept of the American landscape by means of which Baillie "subtly blends glimpses of the heroic personae with despairing reflections on violence and ecological disaster" (Sitney 2002: 181). While placed at the center of both films, the representation of natural and urban landscape is built upon the heroic personae, particularly the figure of an anonymous motorcyclist and Quixote embodying the collective protagonist. Sitney interprets *Mass*' motorcyclist as a tentative vehicle of the heroic:

> Contrasted to the images of waste and violence, a motorcyclist appears in the traffic and Baillie follows him, shooting from a moving car for a long time. He is the tentative vehicle of the heroic in this film. But when he too disappears in the welter of superimposition, we do not expect his return. Instead the movement shifts to the grill of a 1933 Cadillac as it cruises the highway. As the second part of the film circles back on itself, the Cadillac turns out to be the ambulance/hearse which brings doctors to the man on the street and which carries away his dead body. Then when it reenters the highway, Baillie again shifts the emphasis to the motorcyclist, whose second disappearance concludes the film.
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> (Sitney 2002: 182)

Sitney (2002: 182) further argues that the two shots of Black Elk's words and the U.S. flag are particularly indicative of Baillie's ironic and pessimistic view of the American landscape:

> Two images demonstrate the ironic pessimism with which Baillie views the American landscape at the center of the film. Over the sprawl of identical prefabricated houses he prints the words of Black Elk: "Behold, a good nation walking in a sacred manner in a good land!" Then he pans to an American flag waving on a tall pole in the distance. By changing the focus without cutting from the shot, he brings to view a previously unseen barbed wire fence between the camera and the flag.
>
> (Sitney 2002: 182)

Interestingly, *Quixote*, which somewhat proves that "forays into a fallen world as a cine-knight-errant have (...) involved challenges doomed to failure" (MacDonald 2017), envisions the American landscape in a similar manner. The picture is frequently referred to as a visual journal, a road trip or "the diary of a film-maker in search of a hero who can be his mediator without irony" (Sitney 2002: 183), where the director is given part of a Quixotic traveler and observer. Sitney (2002: 183) notes that Baillie himself "becomes the hero of his own film as he descends through a nostalgia for the lost Indian civilizations (manifested in the intercutting of contemporary chiefs with turn-of-the century photographs of the tribes) to a vision of New York streets meshed with a collage of old films and footage of the war in Vietnam". Similarly, MacDonald (1992: 110) sees the artist-

protagonist figure as strongly opposing the majority of mainstream, fast-paced, and commercial cinema productions: "For Baillie, the very idea of making his films is so out of synch with the mainstream history of film and the commoditized world it reflects and reconfirms that it renders him an anomaly, an outcast, a 'pure fool' like Parsifal and Don Quixote". Also, as is evident in the film, the examined representation is simultaneously affected by sublime and luminist qualities as well as avant-garde conventions, which successfully combine purity and the romanticism of natural landscapes with consumption and the wastefulness of industrial ones. Unsurprisingly, *Mass* makes use of similar representational modes, which implicitly challenge the concept of the American landscape through exposing dualism between nature and culture, the former being embodied by the Sioux's spirituality and lost connection with the U.S. pre-industrial land. Akin to Baillie's other works, *Mass*' and *Quixote*'s focus on disunity becomes manifested on the level of sound-image relation, shot-to-shot superimposition, tonal composition, and directionality of movement (Fischer 1976: 21), which contribute to the depiction of natural landscapes as "the physical manifestation of the divine spirit" (MacDonald 2001: 196), particularly evocative when shot from a moving vehicle, hence given in an explicit travel ride film's form.

It is often argued that, while "musically melting image and sound into lustrous, sensual poems", both *Mass* and *Quixote* offer "a whisperingly intimate yet sweepingly epic meditation on the myths, the violence and the ghosts haunting the American soul" (*Songs to a fallen world – three films by Bruce Baillie* 2016). The use of complex, lyrical, and associative register not only helps picture an epic journey through the nation's quest for ecological balance and social justice, but it also gives voice to the artist himself whose portrait emerges from a densely textured and manipulated imagery. The works' coalescence of the figurative and the abstract as well as their evocation of cinéma pur, cinéma vérité, and the city symphony, prove indispensable for creating poetic documentaries renowned for their formal inventiveness and expressiveness. As suggested by Dargis (2016), "using effects like tinting, negative printing, matting and, most strikingly, superimpositions – mesmerizingly, the different layers often move in opposite directions", allows Baillie to rediscover and reinterpret the relationship between nature and humanity, Native American Indian and white American culture, as well as reality and consciousness through the art of cinema. The central representation of the American landscape constructed by means of the heroic personae and selected travel (ride) films' conventions seems to direct the viewers' attention to "the moral as well as physical landscape of the U.S.", whose depiction pays homage to the "forgotten men – Indians, blacks, an old boxer, migrant workers" seen as "the heroes of an impersonal, standardized, technological society" (*Films by Bruce Baillie, experimental filmmaker, at the Museum of Modern Art* 1972: 1).

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