



Production still from  
*Vanishing Point*, 1971. Photo  
by Walter F. Jasiewicz.  
Courtesy of Tom Jasiewicz.  
All images reproduced in  
Robert M. Rubin, *Vanishing  
Point Forever* (RideWithBob  
and Film Desk Books, 2024).



Robert M. Rubin

by Robert Polito

Robert M. Rubin is an essayist, collector, and curator whose writing and exhibitions steadily surprise. His new book, *Vanishing Point Forever*, circles the 1971 film *Vanishing Point*, directed by Richard C. Sarafian from a devastating script by the novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante. The film features Barry Newman as Kowalski (no first name), an elusive and mercurial car-delivery driver racing against time—and swarms of desperate police—in a white 1970 Dodge Challenger on the road from Denver to San Francisco at the close of the 1960s.

At the book's center is a facsimile of Cabrera Infante's shooting script, beguiling and gorgeous. Surrounding it is almost everything a viewer of *Vanishing Point* might wish to know for cinematic and historical background and future reverberations across the arts: location shots, film stills, posters from around the world, palimpsestic excerpts from Cabrera Infante's initial drafts, the novelist's own early film criticism (under the pseudonym G. Caín), and his ambitions for the unrealized film *The Jam*. Along with sharp disquisitions by J. Hoberman,

Alberto Moravia, Rita Guibert, and Rubin himself on Cabrera Infante's fiction, the automobile, Westerns and road movies, neo-noir, and New Hollywood, *Vanishing Point Forever* is at once scholarly and idiosyncratic, a vital, vivid history and a vernacular, collaged memoir.

Of striking consequence is what Rubin calls the "long tail" of *Vanishing Point*—the afterlife of the movie in films by Quentin Tarantino, writing by Irvine Welsh and Randy Kennedy, art by Richard Prince, songs by Guns N' Roses, Primal Scream, and Audioslave, and even global politics, by way of an astonishing essay "How He Found America" by journalist Rick Lyman. As Kowalski drives across the desert, he encounters totems of American counterculture, but *Vanishing Point* is less a celebration of the 1960s than an autopsy. By turns realist and phantasmagoric, the film anticipates contemporary media and surveillance cultures and the apocalyptic narratives of the fraught third decade of the twenty-first century.

**ROBERT POLITO:** We rarely get to see actual screenplays outside of the institutional constraints of a library or archive, and when we otherwise read a screenplay, a publisher has usually reset the original in a new typeface. So, there's an eerie and mesmerizing quality in experiencing Guillermo Cabrera Infante's script for *Vanishing Point* as it emerged from his typewriter in your book. His early drafts are palimpsests—sometimes he taped his revisions over the preliminary version in paper of a different color—intimating a different *Vanishing Point* altogether. But the entire shooting script for the film that you've reproduced is also so mysterious and alluring that it seems to come from another world. Is that beauty, that uncanniness, part of the appeal of collecting screenplays?

**ROBERT M. RUBIN:** Yes, these screenplays are fascinating book-like fragments and artifacts, but they are also ephemeral process material, transitional in purpose. Screenplays are texts that want to be moving images.

Someone concerned with literary posterity like Cabrera Infante might save all the interim drafts of his screenplay, but for producers and studios, screenplays are just industrial blueprints, and everything but the final shooting script is scrap paper. For me, they have a largely untapped archival value.

Reading the screenplay after watching a movie is a different experience than reading the novel upon which a film you've seen is based. This is especially true if what you're reading is *not* the final shooting script, or in the case of *Vanishing Point*, the final shooting script is not really final. You're reading another version of a movie you've already seen. Sometimes you're even reading multiple versions of the same movie in the same document, such as when the filmmakers are still figuring out how to end the movie after production has begun. Reading a screenplay is more striking than just reading an early draft of a novel or a poem because of the distance between words and images, the way words

modify images that have become familiar. The collaborative and somewhat random nature of moviemaking can make the gap between page and screen wider still. I have a ton of draft scripts that have a revelatory impact when you read them in light of what made it onto the screen.

With respect to *Vanishing Point*, the overall effect of reading the script is very different from watching the movie, even though what's in the movie is mostly faithful to Cabrera Infante's script. A lot of his writing fell away during the filming for budgetary reasons. It's the difference between an ambitious magical realist novel by a master of Latin American literature and the bottom half of a drive-in double bill, except that each carries elements of the other within it. There *were* some significant departures from the original, however. For example, the hitchhiker

opposite: Guillermo Cabrera Infante in London, 1970. Photo by Michael Thompson. Courtesy of Miriam Gómez.





left: Cabrera Infante in Havana, 1958. Photo by Ernesto Fernandez Noguerras. Courtesy of Miriam Gómez.

Cabrera Infante wrote is a seven-foot-tall Black woman with a shaved head—that hardly describes Charlotte Rampling!—but the dialogue is fairly faithful to the script. So, on the page, after watching the film, you’re reading dialogue coming out of the mouth of this otherworldly figure but thinking about Charlotte.

As material objects, too, screenplays are fun to unpack. You have scripts with “rainbow revisions”—different color pages to delineate various revision dates—and of course the holographic notations of the writer, director, whomever. Many of my scripts are, as we say, “bloody with ink.” I own Orson Welles’s personal script for *Touch of Evil*, which is a brilliant mess. Sometimes you get a script from an actor with only his lines marked up or filled with motivational notes, or from an art director with notes only about scenery. One person’s witness marks of the making of the film. A tiny window. I have two of John Wayne’s scripts: one for *The Searchers*, one for *Rio Bravo*. They have little or no writing in them, except for doodles, but the Duke had a habit of folding over each page as it was shot. So both scripts, inside their wrappers, are entirely folded in half. Weird . . .

RP: Is there a focus to your collection?

RMR: At this point I have a bit more than two thousand screenplays and just

under a thousand groups of stills (set and continuity photos, which contain a lot more visual information than just screengrabs—that’s a whole other subject). There are three basic categories, which correspond to stages of my own cultural development: Westerns, a staple of my childhood; film noir, which I discovered in late adolescence from reading Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and James M. Cain, whom Cabrera Infante cites as an influence in his BOMB interview with Oscar Hijuelos; and New Hollywood, which was happening during my college film society years. They happen also to be three of the most interesting chapters in American film history.

On top of that, I have concentrations of scripts by certain directors like Welles and Alfred Hitchcock, plus scripts by important writers like William Faulkner, especially unproduced or uncredited ones. Faulkner scholarship has evolved from denigrating his Hollywood output as hackwork he wrote drunk to seriously studying how he developed themes for his novels in movie work that never made it anywhere near the screen, let alone with his name on it. I’m thinking in particular of his uncredited work on *Drums Along the Mohawk*. Upstate New York is not Yoknapatawpha County, but in an early draft for this John Ford movie there’s some great Faulknerian stuff about our expropriation of the land

from Native Americans that is more fully developed in his later fiction. But it clearly started with his engagement with the raw material of the novel on which the movie is based. Any script by someone who is a recognized writer of fiction interests me, whether it ever got made or not.

RP: Where did all this start for you? Were movies always part of your DNA?

RMR: I watched a lot of television growing up in New Jersey in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s. *Million Dollar Movie* ran the same film multiple times every day for a week, and some films got tattooed on my brain that way at an early age. In college, I was a director of my school’s film society and binge-watched 16 mm prints on the wall of my room before they screened for students. I wanted to transfer to the film school at the University of California, Los Angeles, back when film school was still a fairly embryonic thing, but in my parents’ eyes this would have been a serious downgrade from the Ivy League college I was attending and the law school track they thought I was on. My father’s exact words were: “Take the needle out of your arm, son. You’re staying put.” He said the same thing previously when I told him I wanted to hitchhike around America on my gap year. I ended up going to school in France instead, to a program that reimbursed students for tickets to French movies. At sixteen I saw almost every movie that came out in France between September 1969 and June 1970, starting with Jean-Pierre Melville’s masterpiece *Army of Shadows*. Talk about starting at the top.

RP: What are some of your favorite films?

RMR: I’ll take my point of departure from Cabrera Infante’s own list of favorite “predilections” at the end of his remarkable 1970 interview with Rita Guibert in *Seven Voices*, which also includes interviews with Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Jorge Luis Borges,

Julio Cortázar, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Gabriel García Márquez. Cabrera Infante's was conducted just after he wrote *Vanishing Point* but before it was released. He was exiled in London but riding high on the critical acclaim of *Three Trapped Tigers*, a Guggenheim grant, and a Hollywood movie in the can.

In the Guibert interview, he mentions moments in cinema that have resonated with me as well: Henry Fonda coming out of the barber and sitting on the porch in *My Darling Clementine*, Buster Keaton's "artful dodges," the "stark sexuality" of Angie Dickinson in *The Killers*. There's a set photo of her with Howard Hawks from *Rio Bravo*, the perfect late-classical Western, where she's essentially in her undergarments—very *troublant*, as the French say. John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* is another favorite we share: Cabrera Infante cites Marilyn Monroe and Sterling Hayden, and I'd add Sam Jaffe and the sweater girl dance at the end.

While we're on Hayden, Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* gives noir the same sort of absurdist twist that Cabrera Infante gives the road movie. I'd be curious to know what Cabrera Infante thought of Altman's adaptation of one of his favorite books. In my own personal canon, Leo McCarey's *Ruggles of Red Gap* stands out. The scene where Charles Laughton recites



above: Six-sheet poster for the UK release of *Vanishing Point*.

below: *Fotobusta* for the Italian release of *Vanishing Point* (*Punto Zero*), featuring Charlotte Rampling and Gilda Texter.

the Gettysburg Address gives me a lump in the throat. And of course, the greatest of noir Westerns, *The Gunfighter*. I wrote an essay about that movie as the basis for Bob Dylan and Sam Shepard's song "Brownsville Girl" for your book project *Bob Dylan: Mixing Up the Medicine*. *The Wild Bunch* probably had the greatest impact on me of any Western I've ever seen. For New Hollywood, it's harder to say. Even the great ones are flawed in some way, but I love minor masterpieces like Ulu Grosbard's *Straight Time*.

RP: Here I'm starting to see movies, literature, and music converge for you in exciting ways. Is there an ultimate purpose to your accumulations?

RMR: I'm building a collection of archives that is possibly unique, bringing together material across broadly thematic lines that has never been together. And I'm a total completist about it. I try to load up on as many different drafts of the same project

pages 114–115: Pages from Cabrera Infante's revision of the *Vanishing Point* screenplay from the first draft (June 1969) to the second draft (January 1970). Courtesy of the Guillermo Cabrera Infante Papers, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.



INT. GALAXIE ~~DAY~~

The man, his foot on the accelerator.

EXT. INTERSECTION DAY

Not far from the barriers <sup>the</sup> mammoth bulldozer ~~crane~~ is being shifted from the ditch onto the main road. ~~The CAMERA PANS~~ <sup>the</sup> AROUND ~~to reveal an enormous Army-transport~~ helicopter <sup>is</sup> poised in the fields, its rotors ~~are~~ still ~~and~~ people crowd around it.

EXT. GALAXIE ~~DAY~~

The car, moving fast towards the intersection.

EXT INTERSECTION DAY

Several police cars pull up at the barriers, then approach the spot where the bulldozer is awkwardly being set on the road. Through its spars we see men in overalls directing the positioning of the machine. There is ~~stalking~~ <sup>stalking</sup> ~~maneuver~~ <sup>maneuver</sup> in the ~~air~~ <sup>air</sup>.

FULL SHOT --BULLDOZER--Crosswise, its derrick spans all lanes.

INT ~~ENCLOSURE~~ CAR DAY

The driver keeps on travelling towards the intersection, apparently unaware of the hold-up ahead.

CLOSE UP--DRIVER-- From a shirt pocket he fishes out a small envelope. Deftly he opens it. Pills. He takes some.

EXT INTERSECTION DAY

As the steam-roller arrives, the patrolmen in charge let it pass into the space between the barriers and the bulldozer.

FULL SHOT--SPEED COP

With an impatient gesture, underlined by the roar of his machines, the escort speeds up and leaves the roller behind to join other cops gathering near the bulldozer, which is still being maneuvered. Police motor-cycles and patrol cars are ~~parked in the enclosure.~~ parked in the enclosure.

CLOSE UP --DRIVER--He notices something in the sky.

~~BLONDE~~  
 (already nostalgic)  
 When do I get to see you again?

Pointedly, KOWALSKI does not answer.

~~BLONDE (Cont)~~  
 Come and see me sometime in Vegas.  
 I work at the -

~~But~~ KOWALSKI is already on the highway, his car roaring away.  
 The CAMERA HOLDS on the BLONDE. She looks for a moment at  
 the vanishing Galaxie, then trots along to her car. She looks as lonely  
 as hell.

EXT. HIGHWAY DAY

The Galaxie speeding on, trying to beat the rising sun.

~~TIME SPACE CONTINUUM - MONTAGE (SPECIAL EFFECTS)~~

~~The car is suspended between earth and sky, as if riding on a sunbeam.  
 It passes a big sign seemingly hanging from a cloud.~~

~~WELCOME TO UTAH!  
 THE MORMON STATE~~

~~Another isolated sign appears moving towards CAMERA in the opposite  
 direction.~~

~~YOU ARE NOW LEAVING  
 THE STATE OF COLORADO  
 - WE LOOK FORWARD TO  
 SEEING YOU AGAIN.~~

~~(Of course, the Galaxie is going "through the looking-glass". In "real  
 life" you cannot possibly enter Utah before leaving the state of Colorado.  
 But the intention is to indicate that KOWALSKI is crossing the threshold  
 of space and going beyond the time barrier through the invisible door of  
 memory.)~~

~~A final "suspended" sign appears, slowly:~~

~~"COME WEST, YOUNG MAN"~~

~~CUT TO~~

EXT. HIGHWAY DAY

Suddenly, from behind an innocuous billboard - "Drink ~~PANTALONE~~

**FRESCA!**



as I can. Even versions of successful movies that the producers rejected. Sometimes it takes years, even decades, for a project to get made, and its twists and turns on the way to the screen can be more interesting than the end result. For example, I have many different versions of *On the Road* spanning almost three decades: Barry Gifford, Francis Ford Coppola and Michael Herr, Roman Coppola, Russell Banks, they all had a crack at it. I even have some notes on an unproduced Jack Kerouac movie from Robert Benton, plus correspondence by all of the above with Beat writer Carolyn Cassady about “getting it right.” The book’s circuitous path to the screen and the literary roadkill it engendered along the way are more interesting to consider than the *On the Road* movie that finally got made. Reverential screen adaptations of literary landmarks are generally the worst. But *On the Road* and the counterculture it spawned informed New Hollywood in all kinds of subtle and indirect ways, which can be gleaned from this particular paper trail. It’s worth noting that Cabrera Infante dedicated the screenplay of *Vanishing Point* to Dean Moriarty! From *On the Road* to, literally, the end of the road. There’s generations of fascinating scholarship lying in wait in this stuff.

RP: Agreed! To that end, I love the incidental magic of some phrases in Cabrera Infante’s script. Early on, he describes the “whiteness” of Kowalski’s 1970 Dodge Challenger as “something definitely, fatally Melvillean.” A later succession of fleeting “VIEWPOINTS” is virtually transcribed as verse: “The unreachable horizon ahead / A vast expanse of sand to the right / A greater sandy vastness to the left.” These wouldn’t have been filmed, since they’re not part of the dialogue, and we never could have known about them if you hadn’t reproduced the screenplay.

RMR: I’ll bet this is the only screenplay out there that uses the word *sastrugi*.

RP: I suspect you’re right. I’m struck that all three of your script-collecting areas impinge on *Vanishing Point*. As you write in the book, the film is very much of its moment but looks back to

earlier films, notably classic Westerns, such as *The Searchers*, and noir road films, along the lines of *You Only Live Once*, *They Live by Night*, and *Gun Crazy*. Your book elaborately and deftly surrounds *Vanishing Point* with these and many other cinematic and historical contexts yet positions the film as perhaps epitomizing the look, motifs, and spirit of New Hollywood.

RMR: Cabrera Infante was a huge Raymond Chandler acolyte. The quote I use in the book from *The Long Goodbye*—“There is no trap so deadly as the trap you set for yourself”—is like noir scripture and essentially sums up what Kowalski does to himself. If not yet epitomizing New Hollywood, the film certainly points the way. Cabrera Infante steeped the story in multiple genre traditions while at the same time, with an assist from cinematographer John A. Alonzo, pushed cinema into New Hollywood narrative and visual territory.

RP: You include some of Cabrera Infante’s film criticism—or rather, that of the pseudonymous G. Cain—particularly the stunning essay “My Friend, Marlon Brando.” Influenced by your book, I’ve been reading a compendium of G. Cain’s film writing, *A Twentieth Century Job*—nice pun in that title—that Faber and Faber compiled back in 1992. What do you think of his film criticism?

RMR: He’s actually quite a classicist. Remember the last quote in my book: “We have killed the gods of film ... without knowing how to fill their place”? He’s talking about Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, and Edward G. Robinson. He hates Jean-Luc Godard, although this may have to do with his feeling that the release of *Weekend* contributed to the implosion of his film *The Jam*. But his film writing is wonderful. How he describes *L’Avventura* is priceless: “the memorable moment in which the cinema says to the novel: move over, sister, I can tell a story, too.”

RP: The tonalities of *Vanishing Point*, too, are so distinctive. In certain ways the film proceeds as a faux documentary, with all these references to specific places and times—“Denver, Colorado, Friday 10:30 PM.” Yet, in

other ways it unfurls as a fantastic dream: those brief flashbacks that blur present, past, and, at a couple of points, future, as Kowalski’s life appears indistinguishable from his memories and projections; the telepathy that seems to circulate between Kowalski and Super Soul, the blind radio DJ; and Charlotte Rampling’s hitchhiker/death visitation scene.

RMR: The flashbacks are actually much more complex and coherent in the screenplay, and the lines between fantasy and reality even more fluid, like in Cabrera Infante’s novels. He complained about what got lost along the way: “I wrote a movie about a man with troubles in a car but [the director, Richard C. Sarafian] made a different kind of movie about a man with a car in trouble.” It’s true that some of the flashbacks have been truncated to the point of obscurity. Or as Raymond D. Souza put it in his biography of Cabrera Infante, Kowalski is made into “a rebel without a cause.” But that’s not really fair. The ambiguities around what he’s doing are what makes the movie so haunting, whether they are intentional or not. The entire movie, not just the Kowalski character, is kind of a cipher in this regard, one that invites multiple projected meanings.

RP: Still, that Kowalski character, played by Barry Newman, is so fascinating, so elusive. He’s decent, even, the sweet way he always circles back to check on the fate of the drivers he forces off the road. At best, he’s indifferent to most other people, a loner. His flashbacks form a chain of haikus chronicling his life from childhood through the death of his girlfriend—he’s been an honored war veteran, a stock car racer, a cop—without presuming to explain him. Super Soul dubs Kowalski the “last American Hero for whom speed means freedom of the soul.” But the script also invokes Kowalski as “a trapped animal.” His own version is, “I’m not running, I’m just going.” When he said that in the movie, I thought immediately of Gertrude Stein and her essay on her book *The Making of Americans*:

I am always trying to tell this thing that a space of time is a natural

Stills from Richard C. Sarafian's *Vanishing Point*, 1971. © 1971 20th Century Studios, Inc. All rights reserved.



thing for an American to always have inside them as something in which they are continually moving. Think of anything, of cowboys, of movies, of detective stories, of anybody who goes anywhere or stays at home and is an American and you will realize that it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is always filled with moving ...

That's Kowalski, too, and *Vanishing Point*.

RMR: She nailed it.

RP: Yet whatever of America's past or the 1960s that the film celebrates it also immediately mourns. *Vanishing Point*, as you suggest in the book, is a sort of elegy for the counterculture of the 1960s. In the span of ninety-eight minutes, it's as if we move from *On the Road to Crash*, from Jack Kerouac to J. G. Ballard and David Cronenberg.

RMR: It's a bleak portrait of America. The city looks terribly uninviting. It's full of dark postindustrial streets and sex- and drug-addled hippie bikers in strip mall parking lots. Everyone in the heartland is marginal or sketchy. As one of the critics wrote, we never meet anyone resembling the "salt of the earth" that Wyatt and Billy come across in *Easy Rider*. The desert landscape is otherworldly, its human population hollowed out.

RP: But *Vanishing Point* is in other aspects also way ahead of its time. I'm thinking of all these sly references to the media and surveillance culture along the way, long before *The Conversation*.

RMR: Super Soul's radio broadcast of Kowalski's race calls on Guy Debord's idea of the spectacle. At the risk of stating the painfully obvious, it's hard to consider the O. J. Simpson police chase without thinking of *Vanishing Point*. A great example of life imitating art. Alberto Moravia's review picks up on the unusual, sacrificial nature of Kowalski's journey. But Cabrera Infante's prescience probably has a lot to do with his own experiences being simultaneously on the lam from

Castro and the CIA! When you read the Guibert interviews, you realize he is the only one of the writers in the book disillusioned by leftist politics. Bear in mind, it's very early, 1971, and many of us were still riding on the fumes of '68. He really wails on Che Guevara in particular. He calls him a "dubious figure ... the avatar of the myth of the warrior, self-created. Or the readymade guerrilla."

Notably, Cabrera Infante is the only one of the seven interviewees (most of whom lived abroad) who couldn't go home if he wanted to. He never minced words about Cuba. I'm surprised Castro's goons didn't take him out on the streets of London one day.

By the way, I love the fact that the state police force that finally closes in on Kowalski is all women. Cabrera Infante had a thing for imposing, if not predatory, females: the hitchhiker in *Vanishing Point*, the praying-mantis-like Jane Birkin character in *Wonderwall*, and the three-hundred-pound La Estrella in *Three Trapped Tigers*. I hope you noticed Cindy Williams of *Laverne & Shirley* and *American Graffiti* fame among the police officers.

RP: I missed that.

In that same Guibert interview, Cabrera Infante says, "I'm anti-utopian: I believe that Arcadia, Paradise, or whatever that horizon is called, lies behind us, always in the remote past and never in the future." For all his verbal playfulness, all his allusive jokes, that's the grim vision of his novels, *Three Trapped Tigers* and *Infante's Inferno*, and the rueful spirit of *Vanishing Point*, too.

RMR: Yes, even the golden age of cinema is past for him.

RP: Another major astonishment in your book is the complex ways the film engages music. Cabrera Infante's novels are immersed in jazz, and in a remarkable foreword to his script, he refers to "the express purpose of illustrating the possibilities of a musical commentary running parallel to the picture." He notes, "This counterpoint of words and musics and images may have been done before many times in musical or in comedies but never in dramatic films." Radio and Super

Soul are crucial to this commentary and counterpoint, but the bold musical approach ventures far beyond what Kowalski is hearing over his car radio.

RMR: Reading the foreword you realize just how ambitious Cabrera Infante was. We take this use of music in film for granted today, but it was radical then, predating *Mean Streets* and *American Graffiti*. Of course, if you look at the musical samples that didn't make it into *Vanishing Point*, you can see how a movie that was always a day late and a dollar short did not have the means to license songs by the Beatles. I thought of making a playlist of all the songs that are in the screenplay but not in the movie, but then I realized that wasn't the point. Cabrera Infante only wanted us to hear snippets in specific, momentary contexts—he actually uses the word "samples" *avant la lettre*, as we used to say in grad school—rather than in a soundtrack. The actual soundtrack of the movie seems slapped together, but in a way that's good. It left the door open for Guns N' Roses, Primal Scream, and Audioslave to make their own. It adds to the film's long tail.

RP: That "long tail," the afterlife of *Vanishing Point* in films, music, books, and visual art, is one of the most intriguing aspects of your book.

RMR: Part of that long tail comes from the messiness, the open-endedness, and the sometimes haphazard nature of the final product. The nameless biker hippie chick mainstreamed what had hitherto been a cultish sexual fetish. The energy crisis of the early '70s turned the muscle car into an object of male desire, and with a normcore everyman like Barry Newman at the wheel, instead of a Steve McQueen type, viewers could identify more directly with Kowalski. It made room for Zoë Bell in Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* to step into a "Kowalski car" rather than McQueen's Bullitt. I could go on.

RP: There are so many possible "auteurs" behind *Vanishing Point*. But after reading your book—the collaborative essence of film duly acknowledged—it really seems to be Cabrera Infante's, no?

RMR: The soul of the film is Cabrera Infante's, the look is Alonzo's, and the execution under duress is Sarafian's. But *Vanishing Point* is a perfect example of great art arising, almost in spite of itself, out of conflict and constraints. That's a lot of what the book is about.

RP: As you were creating the book, did you have any models in mind? Over the past few years there have been lots of books committed to a single film, but I can't think of any with your resourcefulness and scope, your plunge into process, circumstances, and resonances. Were there studies or catalogs that you saw as embodying analogous aims?

RMR: I have a bunch of future single-film volumes in mind. Each is meant to send the reader down multiple rabbit holes, with the reproduced screenplay itself as the point of departure. I wouldn't go so far as to say it's a new genre, but it is definitely something that doesn't have a direct precedent in film book publishing, though it is close in spirit to *Zona: A Book About a Film About a Journey to a Room*, Geoff Dyer's book about Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Very personal and associative like Dyer's, but enriched with archival and visual process material.

RP: How did you start to organize such a diversity of materials across multiple media and histories?

RMR: It helps that I'm a gearhead, because a lot of the long tail of the movie happens in the vintage muscle car world. I grew up car crazy and in another life was a serious collector of old racing cars. I was already familiar with Agnieszka Kurant's 2013 film *Cutaways*, featuring it in my 2015–16 exhibition *Walkers: Hollywood Afterlives in Art and Artifact* at the Museum of the Moving Image. Same for Richard Prince and Quentin Tarantino. I'm pretty up to date on their respective oeuvres. You'll notice that apart from my own contributions and J. Hoberman's great foreword, all the writing in the book was already out there, waiting to be found. It took a bit of legwork to source the 1956 *Carteles* piece connecting Cabrera Infante

and Marlon Brando and the Moravia review. There are some films I might have discussed more fully: Vincent Gallo's *The Brown Bunny*; Yoji Yamada's *The Yellow Handkerchief*, which Miriam Gómez, Cabrera Infante's wife, suggested I watch; and the *John Wick* movies, which have a Super Soul-type character. But those are all just influenced by or lightly reference (or rip off) *Vanishing Point*. I'm more interested in wholesale, outright appropriation, as practiced by the likes of Richard Prince, Tarantino, and Kurant.

RP: Not surprisingly, Prince's images and writing shadow your scrutiny of *Vanishing Point*. In fact, the first time I "met" you, though I didn't take that in until years later, was back in 2011 when my wife and I visited *American Prayer*, the exhibition at the Bibliothèque nationale de France that you curated on Prince's own book and manuscript collecting. What was his role here?

RMR: Richard mentioned *Vanishing Point* and *The Honeymoon Killers* to me in a conversation about his favorite movies. I had no idea about either. As I write in the essay "Not Running Just Going," I thought Cabrera Infante was an erudite cigar aficionado, and his book *Holy Smoke* was all I knew of his work up until then.

Aside from pulling my coat to the existence of the movie, Richard has opened my mind to what I call the world of cultural simulacra. They can be "better than the real thing," like the Marlboro Man, or copies of something for which an original no longer exists (or never did)—it's a term with a lot of conceptual wiggle room. At the same time, he has the collector's granular frames of reference regarding originality and authenticity. So, he wants the *best* association copy of *On the Road*, the one inscribed by Kerouac to Neal Cassady. Robert McNamara's copy of the Warren Commission report inscribed to him by Earl Warren and dated the day *before* the official publication date. The canceled Doubleday edition of J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, all but a few of which got pulped on personal orders from Nelson Doubleday. He knows those codes cold, and at the same time, all that stuff is the raw material of his artistic

practice. Collecting it *and* recycling it. He really helped me loosen up and make more freely associative connections between things.

RP: I know from teaching and my own work that reading often leads to writing. Are collecting and curating generative in that way for you?

RMR: Collecting and curating certainly makes you a self-generating reader. It's a way to devise your own "analog algorithms," if that's not an oxymoron, instead of relying on Amazon to stick you in a comfortable silo. In a digital world, it's hard to meander pleasurably through the cultural landscape. I'm trying to stay one step ahead of the internet.

RP: Maybe this is the inevitable "Why now?" question. I first saw *Vanishing Point* decades ago, back when I was a student in Boston. I viewed it then as a dirge for 1960s counterculture, but also, along with those other New Hollywood films, as a knife blade into the heart of the old film studios. The conclusion of something, yes, but possibly a departure, too, a fresh start.

I watched *Vanishing Point* a few times while reading your book and kept thinking, Well, here we are again. Both for the movie world and for the wider world: the occasional bits of life in small indie films, against the decadence of the franchises; along with our sense of the end of American democracy, even the end of human life on earth. How do you look at *Vanishing Point* now, some fifty-plus years later?

RMR: We're at a similar inflection point in the culture industry right now. Much as Hollywood was upside-down with films like *Dr. Dolittle* when *Easy Rider* shifted the paradigm, today we see the franchise model running out of steam and the golden age of television in the rearview mirror, compounded by artificial intelligence, the writers and actors guild strikes, and Covid. But it's anybody's guess what films will have the same kind of cult status and long tail fifty years from now as *Vanishing Point* does today. I'm just sweeping up behind the big parade.