

The Western: Cartographies of Ideology, Representation, and Landscape

Faculty of Architecture cross-listed w/ the Department of English, Film, & Theatre as well as with the Department of Native Studies, Faculty of Arts

Ralph Stern, Dean and Professor, Faculty of Architecture

ralph.stern@umanitoba.ca

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Room 224, Education Building

Office Hours: By Arrangement

ARCG 7070 CRN 16057

FILM 3250 CRN 15849

EVDS 3710 CRN 13977

NATV 3000 CRN 15949

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The “western” as myth, ideology, genre, marketing, or international export has been central, for better or worse, in framing cinematic understandings of landscape, settlement, community, and individuality within the larger tropes of “civilization versus nature”. Largely disregarded today, westerns have a trajectory as long and complex as that of cinema itself. This history includes early twentieth-century westerns with ethnographic and documentary value, the “B” westerns of the Hollywood prewar era, to the “adult westerns of the postwar era, and the “revisionist” western of the Vietnam and post-Vietnam eras. To this already diverse history must be added the important “boom” of the Italo-westerns, which included more than four hundred films produced in the 1960s and 1970s, often as Italian-German-Spanish co-productions, as well as the “socialist” westerns produced in East Germany. Even today the western retains an allure, whether as hybrids in films such as *Sukiyaki Western Django*, *Cowboys and Aliens*, the quotation rich *Rango*, or in more traditional productions such as the Canadian *The English-man’s Boy* and *The Way of the West*.

Westerns have, on the one hand, unabashedly promoted schematic clichés of masculinity, violence, racism, cultural hegemony, and American exceptionalism. On the other hand, they have explored complex issues of individual and national identity formation, economic and social struggle, processes and impacts of technological advance, structures of rural and urban development, the role of law as well as issues of justice and collective guilt. Narrative structure across this spectrum is often complemented by a rich and complex visual field encompassing images that have impacted contemporary understandings of landscape, environment, settlement, and even fashion.

This course will explore the complex history of the western. A series of films will be selected that provide an exemplary introduction to the topic, together with weekly required and suggested readings. Grades will be based on class participation, weekly writings, and on a final paper.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This is an interdisciplinary course. Within this central framework, objectives are threefold: 1) to give students an introductory overview of the development and history of the “western” as a film genre; 2) to situate the historical trajectory of the 19th-century “west” (as represented in the western) in its “true” historical context; 3) to situate the “western” in its respective 20th-century contexts. All these will intersect the “art of seeing”; understanding visual media as a form of knowledge production set in a discursive visual, literary, and technological field. The interdisciplinary nature of the course is intended to facilitate discussion across these three course objectives.

Week 01:

From Real to Reel: The end of the Frontier and the beginning of Cinema

Film (Introduction): *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1966)
Texts Required: Simon, Scott *The Invention of the Western Film. A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 3-54.
Texts Recommended: Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*, 1902
Films Recommended: *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)
The Virginian (Cecil B DeMille, 1914)
The Squaw Man (Cecil B DeMille, 1914)

Week 02:

The Silent Western: Pulps, Dime Novels, Nickelodeons and the Tourist

Films: *Sioux Ghost Dance* (Thomas Edison, 1894)
The Battle at Elderfield Gulch (D.W. Griffith, 1913) 29 minutes
Last of the Line (C. Gardner Sullivan, 1914) 26 minutes / Museum of Modern Art
The Tourists (Mack Sennett, 1912) 6 minutes / Museum of Modern Art
Lady Killer (Roy del Ruth, 1933) 5 minute excerpt
The Indian Detour (Fred Harvey Company, 1926) 16 minutes / Library of Congress
Texts Required: White, Richard »When Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill Cody Both Played Chicago in 1893« in: Etulain, Richard (ed.), *Does the Frontier Experience make America Exceptional?* (New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 1999): 45-57.
Texts Recommended: Buscombe, Edward »Painting the Legend: Fredric Remington and the Western« in: *CJ*, 23:4, (1984): 12-27.
Bold, Christine »The Voice of the Fiction Factory in Dime and Pulp Westerns« in: *Journal of American Studies*, 17:1, (1983): 29-46.
Films Recommended: *The Toll Gate* (Lambert Hilliyer, 1920)
The Iron Horse (John Ford, 1924)

Week 03:

The Western Comes of Age: On Location in Monument Valley

Film: *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939)
Texts Required: Carmichael, Deborah »The Living Presence of Monument Valley in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939)« in: *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns. Ecocriticism in an American Film Genre*, Deborah Carmichael (ed.), (Salt Lake City UT: University of Utah Press, 2006): 212-28.
Telotte, J.P. »"A Little Bit Savage": *Stagecoach* and Racial Representation« in: *John Ford's Stagecoach*, Barry Kieth Grant (ed.), Cambridge University Press, (2003): 113-31.
Texts Recommended: Hyde, Anne »Cultural Filters: The Significance of Perception in the History of the American West« in: *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 24:3, (1993): 351-74.
Leutrat, JL & S. L.-Guigues »John Ford and Monument Valley« in: Buscombe, Edward (ed.) *Back in the Saddle Again. New Essays on the Western*, (London: British Film Institute, 1998): ????.
Films Recommended: Cavalry Trilogy (John Ford: *Fort Apache*, 1948; *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, 1949; *Rio Grande*, 1950)
Red River (Howard Hawks, 1948)

Week 04:

The Dark West: Noirs in National Parks

Film: *Yellow Sky* (William Wellman, 1948)

Texts Required: [Tompkins, Jane](#) *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 69-80. (Chapter “Landscape”)

Spence, Mark David *Dispossessing the Wilderness. Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 41-70. (Chapters 3 & 4; “Before the Wilderness: Native Peoples and Yellowstone” & “First Wilderness: America’s Wonderland and Indian Removal from Yellowstone National Park)

Texts Recommended: [Shaffer, Marguerite](#) *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

Films Recommended: *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946)
Ramrod (André de Toth, 1947)

Week 05:

The Law, Vigilantes, and Pacifists: Collective Guilt and the Hollywood Witch Hunt

Film: *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952)

Texts Required: [Drummond, Phillip](#) *High Noon*, (London: British Film Institute, 2003).

Texts Recommended: [Corkin, Stanley](#) »Cowboys and Free Markets: Post-World War II Veterans and U.S. Hegemony« in: *Cinema Journal*, 39:3, (2000): 66-91.

[Graham, Don](#) »The Women of “High Noon”: A Revisionist View« in: *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 34:4, (1980): 243-51.

Films Recommended: *The Ox-Bow Incident* (William A. Wellman, 1943)

Week 06:

Captivity Narratives: Violence and its Aftermath

Film: *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)

Texts Required: [Frankel, Glenn](#) *The Searchers: The Making of an American Legend*. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2013): 11-45. (Chapters 1 & 2; “The Girl (Parker’s Fort, 1836)” & “The Captives (Comancheria, 1836)”

[Gwynne, S. C.](#) *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History*, (New York: Scribner, 2010): 1-11; 207-34. (Chapters 1, 14 & 15; “A New Kind of War”, “Uncivil Wars”, & “Peace and Other Horrors”)

Texts Recommended: [Smith, Anthony Burke](#) »The Nationalization of the Catholic Imagination: The Westerns of John Ford« in: *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 17:2, (1999): 51-66.

Films Recommended: *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970) — revisionist western
The Outlaw Josey Wales (Clint Eastwood, 1976) — revisionist western

Week 07:

Going Global: Italo-Westerns and the German Connection, or, Yojimbo in Andalucia; the Zapata Western

Film: *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1968)

Texts Required: [Frayling, Christopher](#) *Sergio Leone: Something to do with Death*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 247-301. (Chapter “Once Upon a Time in the West”)

Texts Recommended: [Fawell, John](#) *The Art of Sergio Leone’s Once Upon a Time in the West: A Critical Appreciation*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005).

[Koepnik, Lutz](#) »Unsettling America: German Westerns and Modernity« in: *Modernism/Modernity*, 2:3, (1995): 1-22.

Films Recommended: *Django* (Sergio Corbucci, 1966)
The Great Silence (Sergio Corbucci, 1968)

Week 08:

Manifest Destinations and Revolution: Cowboy Empires, Vietnam, and other Misadventures

Film: *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969)

Texts Required: Slotkin, Richard *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998): 591-613. (Section “The Demoralization of the Western: Sam Peckinpah’s *The Wild Bunch*, 1967”).
Sharrett, Christopher »Peckinpah the Radical: The Politics of *The Wild Bunch*« in: *The Wild Bunch*, Stephen Prince (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 79-104.

Texts Recommended: Mitchell, Lee *Clark Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). (Chapter “Violence Begets”)

Films Recommended: *Vera Cruz* (Robert Aldrich, 1954)
Duck, You Sucker (Sergio Leone, 1971)

Week 09:

Modernity on the Range: Industrial Capital Stakes a Claim

Film: *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (Robert Altman, 1971)

Texts Required: Self, Robert *Robert Altman's McCabe & Mrs. Miller: Reframing the American West*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007): 46-91. (Chapter “Revisionist Western”)

Texts Recommended:

Films Recommended: *Lonely are the Brave* (David Miller, 1962) Dalton Trumbo & Edward Abbey
Heaven's Gate (Michael Cimino, 1980)
Pale Rider (Clint Eastwood, 1986)

Week 10:

Post-Modernity, Genre-Bending, and the Supernatural Western

Film: *High Plains Drifter* (Clint Eastwood, 1971)

Texts Required: Vidler, Anthony »The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime« in: *Assemblage*, 3, (1987): 6-29.
Erisman, Fred »Clint Eastwood’s Western Films and the Evolving Mythic Hero« in: *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 6:2, (2000): 129-43.

Texts Recommended:

Films Recommended: *Django Kill – If you Live, Shoot!* (Giulio Questi, 1967)
Django the Bastard (Sergio Garrone, 1969)

Week 11:

Other Hauntings and Voices of the Other: Wounded Knee, A.I.M, and Nixon’s Feds

Film: *Thunderheart* (Michael Apted, 1992)

Texts Required: Ostler, Jeffrey *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004): 243-63; 313-37. (Chapters 11 & 14; “When the Earth Shakes do not be Afraid”: The Ghost Dance as an Anticolonial Movement” & “If He Fights, Destroy Him”: The Road to Wounded Knee”)
Smith, P. & R. Warrior *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, (New York: New Press, 1996): 127-48; 194-217. (Chapters 7 & 10; “The American Indian Movement” & “The Independent Oglala Nation”)

Texts Recommended:

Films Recommended: *Smith, Sherry* *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
Soldier Blue (Ralph Nelson, 1970)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (Milos Forman, 1975)
Powwow Highway (Jonathan Wacks, 1989)

Week 12:

Masculinity Unwound: Gals, Gays, and Change-Artists in the Cowboy Empire

Film: *The Quick and the Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1995)

Texts Required: Dowell, Pat »The Mythology of the Western: Hollywood Perspectives on Race and Gender in the Nineties« in: *Cineaste*, 21:1/2, (1995): 6-10.

Texts Recommended: Floyd, Kevin »Closing the (Heterosexual) Frontier: "Midnight Cowboy as National Allegory« in: *Science & Society*, 65:1, (2001): 99-130.

Films Recommended: *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969)
Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005)
Rango (Gore Verbinski, 2011)

Week 13:

Borderlands and La Frontera: NAFTA, Narcotics, and Banditos in the (hybridized) New West

Film: *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996)

Texts Required: Bronfen, Elisabeth *Home in Hollywood: The Imaginary Geography of Cinema*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): ???? (Chapter: "Hybrid Home: *Lone Star*")
Limon, Jose »Tex-Sex-Mex: American Identities, Lone Stars, and the Politics of Racialized Sexuality« in: *American Literary History*, 9:3, (1997): 596-616.

Films Recommended: *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005)
No Country for Old Men (Coen Brothers, 2007)