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

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Fall 2013; Tuesday, 6:00 – 9:00 PM  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 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 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:** Siou Ghost Dance (Thomas Edison, 1894)
The Battle at Elderfield Guch (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


**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)


**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:**  


**Texts Recommended:**  

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

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Week 05:  

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

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

**Texts Recommended:**  

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

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Week 06:  
**Captivity Narratives: Violence and its Aftermath**

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

**Texts Required:**  


**Texts Recommended:**  

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

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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:**  

**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 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)

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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:** Lonely are the Brave (David Miller, 1962) Dalton Trumbo & Edward Abbey

Heaven’s Gate (Michael Cimino, 1980)

Pale Rider (Clint Eastwood, 1986)

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Week 10:

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

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


**Texts Recommended:** Django Kill – If you Live, Shoot! (Giulio Questi, 1967)

Django the Bastard (Sergio Garrone, 1969)

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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”)


**Films Recommended:** 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:**  

**Texts Recommended:**  

**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:**  

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