

ENG 695

Transnational Film Genres: Westerns and Melodramas

Fall 2018

**Thursdays 4-7:50 pm
106 Friendly**

Contact Information

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Office Hours: 1-3 pm (T) or by appointment

Course Description

Genres are constantly changing, whether it is to adapt, understand –or challenge– new social and political environments. Genre films have been important cultural texts that continually mediate complicated relations of power; such as the power relations that are in the shape of epic battles represented in “Westerns” that tend to portray Native Americans as hostile “savages” that stand in the way of Anglo-Saxon “civilization”. Genre films also present specific takes on issues that affect our everyday life, such as family, professional, racial, class, and sexual differences in “Melodrama.” With all of this in mind, what can we gain by thinking of genre not just in terms of conventions and expectations, but in relation to national context and transnational influences?

Though perceived as the most “American” film genre, if we follow the paths of the “Western” genre starting in the US, it would lead us to Japan, to Italy, to India, to Mexico, and to East Germany. The recent trend of “remaking” Asian melodramas, gangster films and horror movies in Hollywood obviously reverses the presumed flow of influence from Hollywood to other national and regional cinemas. This course examines the transnational dissemination of genre films across nations and explores the ways in which genre conventions are constituted, redefined and transformed within these processes of global exchange. Thinking transnationally expands our sense of film genres beyond the national border, and following genres across borders allows patterns to emerge between varied film aesthetics, industries and social contexts that increase our understanding of the role of film in an increased globalized era.

In this course, we will primarily consider westerns and then melodramas that have traditionally been coded as a “female” genre (to the “male” western). In addition to exploring the formal and industrial elements of cinema across nations, the analysis of westerns and melodramas will lead us to interrogate cinematic and cultural

constructions of violence, family, gender, sexuality, and territory across seemingly opposed genres.

Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

I. Attendance/Participation (25%):

Prompt and regular attendance both in lecture and screening and active participation in the discussion for the full class period is of extreme importance. You are expected to attend each class meeting on time and actively participate in the weekly discussions. Arrangements for anticipated absence due to official schedule conflicts (such as athletic events, academic events) should be made with me in advance of the class to be missed. If you can't attend class due to illness or an emergency, you must provide appropriate written documents such as a doctor's note, etc. Any unexcused absence will affect your course grade negatively. It is your responsibility to arrive to class punctually; habitual or chronic lateness to class will adversely affect your final course grade as well. More than ONE unexcused absence will result in lowering your final grade by one-thirds of a letter. An attendance sheet will be distributed each day in class; it is your responsibility to make sure you have signed in when present.

***Notes on Screenings:**

1) In-class screenings are essential, integral part of the course and not to be missed. And you're expected to sit through the entire screening. If you must miss a screening, be sure to discuss it with me in advance and provide document to be excused.

2) "See also" films: You will in your own time screen the "see also" films. You should watch these films for their assigned week, as we will discuss them together with films screened in class in the following week. The films are reserved in the library.

II. In-class Presentation & Journal (25%)

Each class participant will give a presentation (about 20 minutes) on a film screened in class. Your presentation should discuss the film and its relationship to the themes and readings of the class. It should also prompt class discussion on the issues at hand. You will also turn in a short journal of your presentation (4 pages, approximately 1500 words), which will highlight the issues that your presentation will bring up, incorporating responses from your colleagues. You need to submit your journal a week after your presentation.

III. Reading Reflections (weeks 3-7, 15 %)

This assignment will require you to write up a short reading response to readings. Each week, pick ONE essay from the list of readings and write a brief reflection (2 pages max). These reflections should include your personal reflections or reactions to the articles. You need to post your reading reflections on Canvas by Tuesday (midnight).

IV. Annotated Bibliography (35 %, Due: December 8):

This assignment requires you to choose a research subject that you would like to do some reading on and generate a bibliography on your subject. Your annotated bibliography needs to include citations of sources with a brief description and evaluation information ("annotation") for each source. We will go over specifics in greater detail later in the term. Your bibliography is due June 15.

***NOTE:** Failure to complete any assignment by the end of the course will result in a failing grade ("F").

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- 1) identify key issues, critical questions, and methodological frameworks in film genre studies
- 2) interrogate film genres in relation to such film-theoretical questions as national and transnational cinemas, film historiography, stardom and fandom, media co-productions, etc.
- 3) demonstrate in-depth knowledge about the compound relationship of genre films to issues in identity politics
- 4) analyze formal, cultural, and industrial elements of film texts.

Academic Integrity

I will expect the highest level of integrity from the students in this class. All students are subject to the regulations stipulated in the UO Student Conduct Code. Particularly, plagiarism, the use of the same paper for more than one class, cut-and-paste of writings by others without proper citations, or the submission of a paper authored by someone other than you will result in a failing grade and a report to the Office.

Accessible Education

If you have any diagnosed learning or other disabilities, please let me know early in the term so that I can work towards accommodating the classroom and assignments to your needs. And please bring a notification letter issued by Accessible Education Center to me. For more information, please visit <http://aec.uoregon.edu//>.

Required Texts

Readings will be provided each week.

Recommended Texts

- Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1999)
- Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genre* (Wiley, 2008)
- Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1981)
- Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 1975)
- Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*
- Christine Gledhill, ed, *Home is Where the Heart Is* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987)

- Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, eds, *Melodrama Unbound* (New York: Columbia University, 2018)

Recommended Film-streaming venues:

- 1) Kanopy (www.kanopystreaming.com): free access with an UO ID
- 2) Filmstruck (www.filmstruck.com): Criterion and Time Warner Classic collections

Course Schedule

Please complete the reading listed under each week before coming to class the following week.

PART I WESTERNS

Week 1

Introduction

Screening: *The Searchers* (1956)

Readings:

Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (Chapters 1 & 2 and "The Western", pp.31-34)

Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society* (Chapter 3)

Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Toward a Critical Transnationalism in film studies"

Week 2

Defining & Redefining the Classical Hollywood Westerns

Screening: *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)

The Wild Bunch (1969)

Readings:

Altman, Chapter 4

Will Wright, Chapters 5, 6 and 7

Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915* (Chapter 11)

Andre Bazin, "The Evolution of the Western"

Week 3

Regeneration– "Samurai" Westerns & "Curry" Westerns

Screening: *Seven Samurai* (1954) or *Yojimbo* (1961)

Readings:

Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* (Chapters 1-3)

David Desser, "Toward a Structural Analysis of the Postwar Samurai Film"

Stephen Teo, *Eastern Westerns* (Introduction and Chapter 3)

Madhuja Mukherjee, "The Singing Cowboys: Sholay and the Significance of (Indian) Curry Westerns within Post-colonial Narratives"

See also: *Sholay* (1975)

Week 4

Demythification: "Spaghetti" Western & "Red Indian" Westerns

Screening: *My Name is Nobody* (1973)

Readings:

Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genre* (Chapters 4 and 5)

Dimitris Eleftheriotis, "Spaghetti Western, Genre Criticism and National Cinema: Re-defining the Frame of Reference"

Gerd Gemünden, "Between Karl May and Karl Marx: The DEFA *Indianerfilm* (1965-1983)"

Chung and Diffrient, *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema* (Introduction and Chapter 4)

See Also: *The Sons of Great Bear* (1966)

Week 5

Border-Crossing: Genre-mixing & Transmedia

Screening: *Cowboy Bebop* (1998-99, selected episodes)

Reading:

Altman, Chapters 6 and 8

Janet Staiger, "Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History"

U.J. Bjork, "'Have Gun, Will Travel': Swedish television and American westerns, 1959-1969"

See also: *Let the Bullets Fly* (2012)

Westworld (1973) and *Westworld* (2016-, HBO series)

PART II MELODRAMAS

Week 6

Melos/drama

Screening: *Written on the Wind* (1956)

Readings:

Christine Gledhill, *The Melodramatic Field*

Thomas Elssasser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama"

Laura Mulvey, "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama"

Hilary A. Hallett, "Melodrama and the Making of Hollywood"

See also: *Far from Heaven* (2002)

Week 7

Melodrama, Self and Nation

Screening: *Lucia* (1968)

Reading:

Mercer & Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (Chapter 2)

Ana Lopez, "The Melodrama in Latin America: Films, Telenovelas and the Currency of a Popular Form"

John King, "Cuban Revolutionary Cinema" (*Magical Reels*)

Kathleen McHughes and Nancy Abelmann, "South Korean Film Melodrama: State, Nation, Women, and the Transnational Familiar" from *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama*

See also: *Peppermint Candy* (1999)

Week 8

Melodrama-Woman's Genre?: Melodrama and Identity Politics

Screening: *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974)

Readings:

Mercer & Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (Chapter 3)

Nadine Schwakopf, "Beyond the Woman's Film: Reflecting Difference in the Fassbinder Melodrama"

Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (Chapter 4)

Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess"

See also: *The Crying Game* (1992)

Week 9

No Class- Thanksgiving Break

See also: *Tokyo Story* (1953)

Week 10

Genre, Nostalgia and Reflexivity

Screening: *In the Mood for Love* (2000)

Readings:

Catherine Russell, "Insides and outsides: Cross-cultural criticism and Japanese film melodrama"

Pam Cook, "Rethinking Nostalgia: *In the Mood for Love* and *Far From Heaven*"

Tania Modleski, "The Search for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas"

Final Paper due: Noon, December 8