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westerns

films

through

history

edited by  
janet walker

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A student in a film history course I conducted traveled to the UCLA Film and Television Archives to view a print of the early sound western *In Old Arizona*; listening carefully to the now scratchy soundtrack, the student was stunned to hear a familiar musical theme, a tune his grandfather had whistled for as long as he could remember. I would like to thank that former student, now turned film editor, Aram Nigoghossian, for his perceptions about how the past returns in westerns. Also I would like to thank the students of "The Western: 'Cowboys' and 'Indians,'" for joining the expedition into territory that was for some familiar but for others unfamiliar, either because movie westerns at the end of the century are fewer and farther between or because I insisted that one could love westerns and still approach them from a feminist and antiracist perspective. I am afraid I might forget one of you if I try to name you, but our conversations and your papers remain in my memory; thank you all for what you taught me. By name I would like to thank the film studies graduates who served as readers for the course and contributed their lively opinions and their judicious comments: Jamie Gluck, Lisa Brende, and, once again, Cynthia McCreery.

Finally, thanks are due to Steve Nelson, who brought *Signs and Meaning* and *Horizons West* to our marriage, and who is always willing to rent another western when nothing else appeals; and to Ariel Nelson, who encouraged my tendency to see westerns historically as well as mythologically, saying "you're right, Mom, if they were just myths they'd have gods and imaginary creatures and all that." Thank you both for constancy and joy.

## introduction

### westerns through history

janet walker

The insight that "the western is history" is everywhere and nowhere. In "The Evolution of the Western" (1955), André Bazin declared that "the western is rooted in the history of the American nation."<sup>1</sup> Jim Kitses was even bolder in 1969, and it is from him that I borrow the untamed metaphor of my first sentence,<sup>2</sup> but I could just as well have borrowed it from one of Richard Slotkin's chapter headings in *Gunfighter Nation* (1992), "The Western is American History."<sup>3</sup> Absent from these latter two examples is Bazin's notion of the western's organic rootedness. The western does not "spring from," nor "grow out of" history. No sense of boundaries nor of separate entities is couched. The western *is* history.

### three paths in a conceptual topography

Discussions of the western, from any perspective, generally begin with the acknowledgment that it is a historical genre by virtue of its constituent films being set in the past, and in particular, overwhelmingly, between the end of the Civil War and the "closing of the frontier" in 1890.<sup>4</sup> And

sources that develop discussions of the western *as historical* tend to pursue its historicity down one of several paths. First, it is often emphasized that the industrial production of motion picture westerns dates back far enough to have a history that dovetailed with that of frontier settlement. In other words, early westerns may be seen to have a discernible documentary quality, a certain authenticity springing from their ability to use still extant western settings and to employ genuine westerners as actors, directors, writers, and consultants. Richard Schickel and Thomas Schatz refer to this sense of actuality in their descriptions of early westerns. Schickel writes:

In those pre-metropolitan days [Los Angeles] was, moreover, in spirit a real western town, the last railhead on the Santa Fe line. Ranching was still one of California's major industries, and Los Angeles was always full of genuine cowboys who had driven their herds to market there or had simply come to town to spend their pay. Raoul Walsh, a director who had been a cowhand in his youth, would recall that one of his first movie jobs was rounding up stray cowboys after the saloons closed, helping them on their horses and, before dawn, leading them across the hills to Western locations in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>5</sup>

In Schatz's terms:

As cultural and historical documents, the earlier silent Westerns differ from the later Westerns. In fact these earlier films have a unique and somewhat paradoxical position: Although they were made on the virtual threshold of the Modern Age, they also came at a time when westward expansion was winding down [but was still going on]. . . . (In fact, *The Great Train Robbery* related events that had occurred only a few years previously and as such was something of a turn-of-the-century gangster film.) But eventually, the cumulative effects of Western storytelling in the face of contemporary civilization's steady encroachment served to subordinate the genre's *historical function* to its mythical one.<sup>6</sup>

A second path in the "western *is history*" topography leads out from the perception that the western is not historical by virtue of the period in which it is set (because, as everyone knows, westerns have a tendency to be inauthentic with regard to period and person), but by virtue of the period in which a given film was produced. *The Searchers* is, as Brian Henderson and Peter Lehman have argued, as much about America in 1956 as it is about Texas in 1868: "The conventions of the western allowed [director John] Ford to displace present-day racial tensions into the past and onto another race."<sup>7</sup> Or, recall Robert Sklar's contribution to the anthology *American History/American Film* in which he discusses the Howard Hawks western *Red River*. The film, Sklar wrote, "is not only about capitalism; its form and its destiny were also *the products of*

capitalism, specifically of the changing economic structure of the Hollywood film industry in the postwar years."<sup>8</sup> Stanley Corkin follows suit in his article on postwar westerns (*Red River* and *My Darling Clementine*) and the Cold War, published in what is, as I write this, the most recent issue of *Cinema Journal*.<sup>9</sup> Probably the most complex treatment of this avowedly redoubled western historicity is that of Richard Slotkin. The full title of the aforementioned chapter is "The Western is History, 1939–1941," for there Slotkin makes the case that westerns of those years are very much engaged with contemporaneous sociopolitical currents, presented with reference to a mythic past wherein the more current dilemmas are seen to originate. Films of the turn of the decade were a response to "a widely felt need for a renewal of that sense of progressive and patriotic optimism."<sup>10</sup>

Third, there has been intense interest in the veracity of a given western's rendering of historical personages and events (in the "biopic" and the "event pic") and also of western settings (in the fictional film set against a western backdrop). In fact, such comparative studies of films and their historical contexts make up what is likely the most prolific and still growing area of comment and publication on the film western.<sup>11</sup> But this is not to say that all writers employ the same theoretical framework, be it implicit or explicit, for conceptualizing the film/reality relationship. A great many authors are satisfied merely to disabuse the public of film-induced misimpressions that what they see on the screen corresponds directly to what really happened. For example, Buck Rainey's half-page introduction to his 1998 publication of *Western Gunslingers in Fact and on Film* indicates that "[t]here are still many folks who honestly believe that Jesse James was a modern day Robin Hood, that Wyatt Earp was a staunch upholder of law and order and that Wild Bill Hickok was the greatest gunslinger the West produced. Generally speaking, they base these beliefs on what they have learned from film and novels. . . . This book allows the reader to compare film characters with their real life counterparts."<sup>12</sup>

Yet, other authors are concerned with both the ideological ramifications of the departures from fact *and* the ideological ramifications of the will to accuracy itself as shared by scholars and quality filmmakers alike. For example, Ward Churchill's provocative review of *Black Robe* (1991) shows the disingenuousness of the production's drastic measures in the name of accuracy (paying \$37,000 to transport cedar bark for use in building Huron huts; fashioning digging implements out of moose shoulder bones) by contrasting it with other ways in which the film's historiography is grievously biased. The film depicts the Iroquois people in 1634 New France (now Quebec), enjoying acts of cruelty that extend to the remorseless execution of an Algonquin child, even though anthropological evidence suggests that in reality Iroquois clan mothers controlled village life and would likely have adopted and raised a child held captive.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in Churchill's view, the film's pretensions to

historical authenticity are highly selective and, as such, part of the film's strongly racist import. Of course, I vastly prefer the theoretical sophistication of Churchill's orientation to the naïveté of Rainey's approach, but it's likely that Rainey's work is the more representative of western film criticism and modes of reception at large.

My cartographic metaphor serves to delineate the routes of western film historiography, but it must be qualified to allow that the historian can be, and often is, in two places at once. Slotkin, for example, while emphasizing the currency of films for audiences of the early 1940s (the second path), reflects as well on their relationship to the real subjects they represent (the third path), including Dodge City, Kansas, the Civil War, George Armstrong Custer, and Jesse James. All told, the insight that the western is history would seem to pervade and perhaps even to dominate the critical literature on the western.

But I would like to suggest something to the contrary. A close examination of the major writings on the western genre reveals a marked *disinclination* to give substantive attention to the western as historical. Genre approaches to the western deliberately eschew the suggestion that westerns are genuinely historical, concentrating instead on narrative and structure: "The fact is," writes Schatz, "that Hollywood's version of the Old West has as little to do with agriculture—although it has much to do with rural values—as it does with history."<sup>14</sup> This ahistoricity is often attributed to the changing nature of the films themselves. As exemplified by Schatz's passage, the genre's historical function is seen as having become subordinated to its mythical one. According to this line of reasoning, if it was appropriate for George N. Fenin and William K. Everson in *The Western* (1962) and Kevin Brownlow in his long section in *The War the West and the Wilderness* (1978) to give prominent attention to the western as historical, that is because they wrote about silent westerns. Later westerns did not share the genre's coequality with events in western history.

Observe in addition the clear statement that it is present-day America as much as, if not more than, America's past that is the subject of the mature western. As Schatz notes, "efforts to document the historical West on film steadily gave way to the impulse to exploit the past as a means of examining the values and attitudes of contemporary America."<sup>15</sup> Here the Old West is viewed as apt subject matter that supports the wider sociological function of the western.

Perhaps Kitses's statement that "the western is history" is not metaphoric but rather metonymic; that is to say that from a certain perspective, the historical dimensions of the western (its milieu and mores) seem to represent the whole. From another perspective, however, one of greater distance, this dimension recedes from view, as Kitses claims that "Ford is not the western; nor is the western history. For if we stand back from the western, we are less aware of historical (or representational) elements than of form and *archetype*."<sup>16</sup> In genre criticism, the historical

setting and themes that are so conspicuous initially as to suggest that they are the western's most salient feature are not as important, finally, as the operations of genre and authorship that require attention to "form and archetype."

Although informed by historical consciousness (Schatz went on to write the well-known studio history *The Genius of the System*<sup>17</sup>), Kitses's book and Schatz's substantial chapter on the western epitomize—and indeed help to constitute—the genre approach to the western. They do not purport in the final analysis to be historical studies, but rather formal analyses of the narrative and iconographic patterns of genre film. It is, however, that very slide—from taking seriously the historical function of the western to seeing that function as antiquated in the genre (and in genre criticism), usurped by formal and ideological issues—that I wish to point to as being characteristic of literature on the western.

What is most surprising is that avowedly historical approaches share with the genre-based approach this disinclination to investigate the historical aspects of the genre. Even the best historical scholarship on film evinces a tendency to separate the historiographic impetus of the western film, perceived as being merely felicitous or "nominal,"<sup>18</sup> from its contemporaneous context of production, perceived as being significant—but not necessarily historical. *The BFI Companion to the Western*, an intelligent, invaluable guide (and a historical one at that, with its longest section devoted to "A Cultural and Historical Dictionary" of actual western people, events, places, and themes), begins with a disclaimer about the genre's historicity: "The Western's narrative structure and motifs are seen to derive less from any real world than from the economic and artistic imperatives of Hollywood, each film finding its plausibility and terms of reference in the audience's previous experience of the genre."<sup>19</sup> In the thought that the western's intrinsic material "derive[s] less from any real world" and more from "the economic and artistic imperative of Hollywood," the historical specificity of the generic material, be it relevant to past or present contexts, is lost; for such imperatives must govern the representational patterns of American cinema as a whole.

Even Richard Slotkin's magisterial trilogy on myths of the American frontier evinces a tendency (and granted, as with *The BFI Companion to the Western*, it is one tendency among others, but a significant one I believe) to receive the western-as-myth as being set apart from history. That is, the film western (as with other cultural forms) is *not historical in and of itself*; it *draws on* historical material. But while history is argumentative and discursive, westerns give *narrative form* to ideological beliefs and values. As Slotkin writes, "myths are stories drawn from [but not discursive renditions of] a society's history."<sup>20</sup> This is a division emphasized by the cover blurb for Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation*, which identifies the book as a work of "literary and history scholarship [emphasis mine]," thus dividing the two.

*The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western*, by historian Michael Coyne, makes a similar distinction between western films and historiographic function. As a historian, Coyne is critical of the “mythic approach” (represented by John Cawelti’s *The Six-Gun Mystique*), “the auteurist approach” (which saw the analysis of films by directors including Howard Hawks, Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Raoul Walsh, and others), and “the structuralist approach” (as represented by Will Wright’s *Sixguns and Society*, and, again, by Cawelti) for what Coyne regards as their insufficient attention to the historical context of western film production. The “political/allegorical approach” as represented by Philip French in *Westerns*, John Lenihan in *Showdown*, and once again by Wright, seems more to Coyne’s liking and he locates his own “in-depth appraisal of the crucial relationship between era and artifact” within it.<sup>21</sup> However, in setting out what he sees as the four main approaches that have been adopted with regard to the film western, the text/context distinction between westerns and history is preserved. Westerns may “interact with history,” Coyne affirms, but the western, as the “ideologically seductive” and “quintessentially American” melodrama, *is not history*.

The third path down which the thought that the western is history is pursued—that of prolific accuracy/inaccuracy deliberations—is similarly subject to mudslides. If film studio publicity departments touted the authenticity of their output (which they did), and if the films themselves would begin quite often with a statement to the effect that “what you are about to see is a true story” (which they did), then film scholarship would define itself in and through the task of illuminating the dramatic license taken by western films. For example, the format of *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* is to include with each chapter a page layout organized around the headings “History” and “Hollywood.” In the “History” section we are given the facts of the matter: a capsule summary of Custer’s career for *They Died with Their Boots On*; a photograph of the real Fort Apache for the Fort’s filmic namesake; and so on with Wyatt Earp, Davy Crockett, and the other subjects of the westerns included in the book. The “Hollywood” section provides mainly film production history: how many Academy Award nominations *The Alamo* received, Darryl Zanuck’s editorial interference in *My Darling Clementine*. In this way the nonhistorical nature of westerns is emphasized. Westerns get their facts wrong and they encompass a large imaginative component, therefore, they are not historical. . .but rather, again, mythological.

There is, however, an advantage to be gained from scholarship that has well established the dramatic license that westerns inevitably take and disabused readers of the western film’s historical conceit. Now, largely because of these developments and the dangers to which they’ve alerted us, it is possible to study the relationship to the real that absolutely does inform the Hollywood western. “The considerable extent to which the

Western frequently . . . asserts its basis in history hasn’t been adequately considered,” writes Corey Creekmur in his contribution to this volume. His chapter, along with this volume as a whole, is an attempt to begin to rectify that lack. Yes, westerns take dramatic license; but it is also true that westerns take *historical license*.

I indicated above that one tendency in Slotkin’s work is to separate the mythological function of the narrative western from the discursive or argumentative function of history writing. In fact, Slotkin’s conceptual framework is larger and more suggestive, and I think that ultimately the troubling separation of myth and history in his book resolves itself into a useful, if inexplicit, distinction between the two rather than creating an absolute opposition. The trajectory traced in *Gunfighter Nation* is chronological, concentrating on the changes that myths and genres undergo over time as they are affected by “historical contingency.”<sup>22</sup> The book is a cultural history; and the western genre, therefore, in literature and film is a mythological “activity and process” through which people formulate, grapple with, and revise the “problems that arise in the course of historical experience,”<sup>23</sup> with historical experience taken to be fundamental to the content and patterns of cultural products including films. There is a historiographic element to mythological discourse. And the reverse may be true as well for Slotkin. There may be a mythographic component to history writing. “A culture has its heritage of ‘lore,’” writes Slotkin, which is “preserved for use by lore-masters, storytellers, *or historians*.”<sup>24</sup>

#### dramatic license/historical license

We need to take seriously the profound and multifaceted historical and historiographic functions of the film western; they are the subject of this volume. Historical interpretation is a feature of the film western as well as of western history, and western history, like the western film, is constituted through narrative and ideological patterns. This is not to suggest that the West and the western be conflated. Moreover, I do believe in the utility of the distinction between nonfictional and fictional modes of representation; but when history is conceived to take various narrative forms (as does the western) and the western is conceived to take various argumentative modes (as does written history), one needs to look carefully to untangle and highlight the different reading protocols adopted in the two forms of representation. The rejection of the western’s historicity on the basis of its dramatic license is specious; and falsity is not a grounds for dismissal, since fictions are not simply false nor nonfictions simply true.

In studying the historical nature of westerns it is useful to make reference to contemporary film-studies literature on the historical film. Both George Custen’s industrial analysis of Hollywood biopics and Robert Burgoyne’s study of the historical film of the 1980s and 1990s

take seriously the historical function of the films they analyze,<sup>25</sup> and neither author falls prey to the historical mystification of the films under study. Custen refers to biopics' "obvious distortions ranging from the minor to the outright camp," and Burgoyne to such films' "somewhat glancing relationship to the historical record."<sup>26</sup> Nor does either author neglect the contributions the films make to the evolving national imaginary in the present. Indeed, for Custen the very definition of the biopic "shifts anew with each generation" so that "[t]racing a code for the biopic is an exercise in reconstructing a shifting public notion of fame,"<sup>27</sup> and Burgoyne's book is thoroughly involved with how the films in and implied by his corpus reconstruct American mythologies of nation for the contemporary audience. Yet while they confront head on the very issues that have led many scholars of the western away from the western *as* history, these authors continue to assert the centrality of the historical dimension of the films they study. As Burgoyne eloquently asserts, "What I try to stress . . . is the way *the cinematic rewriting of history* currently unfolding articulates a *counternarrative* of nation."<sup>28</sup>

Custen and Burgoyne both allow—indeed insist—that history and narrative are capable of interpenetration and that there is such a thing as historical narrative. Directly influenced by the work of Hayden White, both film historians emphasize the validity of the insight at the basis of his work (which insight White attributes to Paul Valéry, Martin Heidegger, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Michel Foucault): namely, that history is always reconstructive and generally fictive. Of course White's work is part of a larger analytical tradition that includes the work of E. H. Carr, J. H. Hexter, Paul Veyne, Peter Novick, Dominick LaCapra, and Michel de Certeau, and that is attuned to "the rhetoric of history," to "the tropes, arguments, and other devices of language used to write history and to persuade audiences."<sup>29</sup> White's particular contribution has been to study "the 'artistic' elements of a 'realistic' historiography,"<sup>30</sup> or the historical permutations of the premise that "the historical monograph is no less 'shaped' or constructed than the historical film or historical novel."<sup>31</sup> And from the opposite vantage point he assumes (and elaborates when necessary) that realist narrative can have a historical component. "There is no reason," White writes in the context of a discussion of historical novels and films, specifically *The Return of Martin Guerre*, "why a filmed representation of historical events should not be as analytical and realistic as any written account."<sup>32</sup> The salient distinction for White is not between history and narrative, nor even between fiction and nonfiction, but rather between "historiography"—written history—and "historiophoty"—"the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse."<sup>33</sup>

This rhetoric-of-history approach, and Hayden White's corresponding ideas about history and narrative, are quite well known in film studies and in film historiography,<sup>34</sup> but are incorporated only sporadically into studies of the western.<sup>35</sup> That must change, I submit, if we are to

understand—and because it is crucial to understand—the historical vicissitudes of the film western. To reverse the terms and concentrate on studies of historical films that incorporate westerns, George Custen's study does include some western titles and Robert Burgoyne's book contains a chapter on *Thunderheart*, but neither book is designed to handle westerns as a group (see Corey Creekmur's chapter for more discussion of this point with regard to Custen's book). In fact, I would suggest that it's precisely because the films are regarded in these studies mainly as historical films and only secondarily as generic westerns that their hospitability to historiographic practice is recognized.

The restraint in genre criticism against recognizing the historical aspects of the western has an ancillary effect: the deflection of attention away from nonwhite characters and their real-world counterparts. Although Native Americans are major characters in about one-fifth of all westerns, minor characters in many more, and the enemy of record in still others, the dominant story form involves the mythic cowboy hero and the mythic function of the community as an oasis of civilization in the wilderness. In westerns, as we have learned, the cowboy is the breakaway rider of Manifest Destiny; he is not part of the settlement pack, but clears the way for western expansion and for the pioneers to whom, as the films have it, we owe "our" heritage.

Genre criticism has actually taken cognizance of the biases of the western, acknowledging the concomitant (non)representation of Native American worldviews. However, genre criticism has been better at recognizing such biases, of which it is critical, than at initiating any critical practice that can supercede them. "The Anglo-Saxon focus may indeed have been central to the ideological power of the Western and its nostalgic appeal," wrote Douglas Pye in his introduction to *The Book of Westerns*, coedited with Ian Cameron.<sup>36</sup> Or, as Edward Buscombe explains, "The Western as a genre has traditionally celebrated the myth of taming the frontier 'wilderness.' As such it has been able to see the Indian only as the unknown 'other,' part of those forces which threaten the onward march of Euro-American civilization and technological progress . . . [C]onsequently, the portrayal of Native Americans could scarcely but be unsympathetic, Eurocentric and degrading."<sup>37</sup> As Pye sees it, "Women and Indians are key terms in the generic equation, as it were, but with their representation largely constrained by their roles in a symbolic drama dominated by the fantasies of White men."<sup>38</sup> If we stay within the story realm given by the western text it is difficult indeed (but not impossible, as I've tried to show in my own contribution to this volume) to discern, against the grain of the text, a "symbolic drama" at least informed by the fantasies of Indians. This is why genre study, as a text-dependent form of analysis, gives so little play to Indians whose stories are "lost," as Tag Gallagher has written.<sup>39</sup>

Genre criticism wants to have it both ways when it comes to myth and history in the western: westerns are said to be mythic with respect

to the portrayal of Indians. John Ford's Indian characters are "mythic apparitions" and "icons of savage violent beauty dread," in Gallagher's words;<sup>40</sup> therefore, since *everybody knows* that those are not "real Indians" up there on the screen, nobody should be offended by their negative portrayal. But then shouldn't the same thing hold when it comes to the white characters? If Indians qua Indians can't be represented in a mythic system, how can whites qua whites be represented? To accept Gallagher's terms for the moment, I would say that the stories of settlers are also lost—in an inflated narrative of defensive self-satisfaction. Genre criticism, however, tends to renege on protestations that westerns are mythic in the assumption that white stories, unlike Indian stories, *can* be told in westerns. Genre criticism has a tendency to recapitulate the bias it pretends only to reveal. It allows historical interpretation presented in narrative form to parade as mere myth.

If we accept that westerns do have a historical function, one could assert that Indian stories were never really lost. The films are as much *about* Indians (even where the latter are represented by their non-appearance as a structuring absence) as they are *about* settlers. It's just that the stories are told from the colonists' perspective—from the perspective of celebration rather than boundless grief at the "taming of the frontier 'wilderness.'" My point is that history and myth are related and textual. If this weren't so, then the western corpus could include a narrative turn in which Europeans are repulsed, pushed back across the sea, or in which they decide to withdraw once they see how their diseases are killing Native Americans. But these possibilities seem ludicrous because *that's not the way it actually happened*. The western is a profoundly historical genre.

As such, the western is a genre that repays a historical approach to its analysis. And when we go outside the text for our points of reference in reading westerns, alternatives begin to present themselves. Yes, it's true that white perspectives also dominate historical accounts of the frontier era, but the plentiful existing primary documents and the appearance of more and more counterhistories in the subfield known as New Western History provide the cultural historian of the western with new bases for analysis.<sup>41</sup> Some such counterhistories have begun to press the argument that somewhere between nine million and twenty million Native Americans were living in North America at the time of Columbus's landing here.<sup>42</sup> Ward Churchill states unequivocally that the American holocaust "was and remains unparalleled, both in terms of its magnitude and the degree to which its goals were met, and in terms of the extent to which its ferocity was sustained over time by not one but several participating agencies."<sup>43</sup> Knowledge of this history can aid film analysis in identifying the nature of "lost stories," in finding what is there residually, and in comprehending a new form of western being made in the late 1980s and '90s, a form that includes stories of Native American heritage such as *Powwow Highway* (Jonathan Wacks, 1989), *Thunderheart* (Michael

Apted, 1992), *Smoke Signals* (Chris Eyre, 1998), and *Backroads* (Shirley Cheechoo, 2000). These films feature contemporary Native-American protagonists, but they are still very much about the past: about how tribal values may or may not figure in the lives of present-day Native Americans; and about the consequences in the present of a history of conquest, genocide, and survival.

The chapters in this book are deeply concerned with this counter-historical function of the western. It is no coincidence that all of the authors represented in the book have elected to contribute writing on films and issues that prioritize perspectives outside the white-dominated mainstream. For example, a significant section of Alexandra Keller's chapter considers a film (*Posse*) by a black director (Mario Van Peebles) portraying black characters, and Peter Bloom has written about the Algerian redubbing of a French "camembert" western. The chapter by Melinda Szaloky, "A Tale N/nobody Can Tell: The Return of a Repressed Western History in Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man*," and chapters by Claudia Gorbman and myself, discuss Indians as nobodies and somebodies. Tomás Sandoval's chapter investigates the counterhistorical possibilities in *Lone Star*—a film about everybody: blacks, whites, Indians, and Mexicans.

That histories as well as westerns must absolutely be received in their fully rhetorical dimensionality as constructed texts struck me recently when I attended the exhibit on Buffalo Bill's Wild West at the Gene Autry Museum in Los Angeles. I had just read Kevin Brownlow's account of William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's involvement in events preceding and following the massacre at Wounded Knee in December of 1890, including the execution of Sitting Bull one week prior to the massacre:

The general commanding the troops was Nelson Appleton Miles, a veteran of the Civil War, who had defeated the Kiowas, the Comanches, and the Cheyennes. . . . As the government had been alarmed by the Ghost Dancers, so the Sioux took fright at the troops. They evacuated the reservation and fled to the Bad Lands, where they were joined by a thousand more tribesmen. Sitting Bull had returned from exile in Canada, and General Miles decided to isolate him in case he tried to seize command of the Sioux. Miles asked Cody, on the staff of the governor of Nebraska and recently returned from a highly successful tour of Europe with the Wild West, to talk to his former trouper [Sitting Bull had appeared with Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1885]. Cody agreed, but he could not resist an all-night drinking session with cavalry officers. Next day President Benjamin Harrison, alerted by the local Indian agent, canceled Cody's mission. The agent sent a detachment of Indian police; Sitting Bull refused to submit and was killed. His white horse, given him by Cody, was trained to kneel at the sound of gunfire. As the Indian police shot Sitting Bull, the horse knelt—a source of wonder in Indian oral history.<sup>44</sup>



Here the tragic ironies are multiplied. The defensive actions of the Sioux were misunderstood. Cody just missed an opportunity to intervene. Sitting Bull was shot by fellow Sioux. Sitting Bull's horse mistook reality for stage play.

Imagine my surprise at the museum exhibit's very different treatment of these events. To give its visitors some historical background, the printed commentary mounted on the museum's walls describes the death of Sitting Bull and the Wounded Knee massacre. But then, as we move from that panel to the next, we read that "Buffalo Bill's Wild West had been touring Europe at that time and had set up its winter quarters. It was not certain that the Indians, who had returned to the USA, would be permitted to rejoin the show, so Cody and his business partner Nate Salisbury decided to incorporate a new element into their performance, one 'that would embody the whole subject of horsemanship.'" This is rather confusing. Where were the winter quarters set up? Were they in Europe or America? When did the Indians return? Was it before or after the massacre at Wounded Knee? The main elision, however, is that of the presence of Cody in the military camp at the time of Sitting Bull's death. The passage suggests, without stating it, that he was nowhere around, perhaps even as far away as Europe. Yet the exhibit also includes a painted poster that depicts General Miles and William Cody at Pine Ridge in January of 1891 and bears the label "Viewing Hostile Indian Camp."

My guess is that the exhibit's curators sought to downplay Cody's indirect involvement in Sitting Bull's death in case such a reference might cast a pall over the commemorative aspects of the exhibit or undermine the illusion of Cody's powers—powers that justify him as the subject of an exhibit in the first place—by suggesting that Cody couldn't save his "former trouper."

The point is that written history, be it found in books or on the walls of museums, is not necessarily less selective or interpretive than the history presented in film westerns. For another example, consider the statistics provided here with regard to the genocide of Native Americans. Informed readers of the aforementioned passage may have been skeptical about the figures quoted, perhaps finding them inflated. The Smithsonian Institution had asserted until recently that not more than one million people lived north of Mexico prior to the arrival of Columbus. Lately, however, they have upped their estimate to two million, indicating that the earlier estimate was in error. But in a long impeccably researched chapter with more than six hundred footnotes, Ward Churchill surveys military, government, newspaper, scholarly, and epidemiological documents and literatures to show that work based on archival records indicates a preinvasion population that scholars have begun to approximate at fifteen million.<sup>45</sup> Obviously, the death of 90 percent of two million people is harrowing enough. But to say that nearly fifteen million died, and to argue as Churchill does that they were *exterminated* (since we accept that Jews who died in concentration camps

of disease were exterminated as surely as their compatriots who died in gas chambers), is to place a very different interpretation on the history of hemispheric holocaust.

History, then, may be said to take dramatic license just as films take historical license. There are valuable insights to be gained in studying the two in concert, as is the goal of this volume concisely put.

### westerns and histories

The relationship between westerns and histories has various facets that are intrinsic to the subject matter and capable of serving as heuristic categories. We can study westerns in their variety and as they have developed through(out) history and film history from the silent era to the present. Or we can regard westerns as histories on film, interpreting past events alongside written histories from which they may draw. We can even see some westerns as fulfilling a historiographic function by evincing a self-consciousness about the history writing process at the same time that they share in it. Through the lens of history, we come to realize that westerns incorporate, elide, embellish, mythologize, allegorize, erase, duplicate, and rethink past events that are themselves—as history—fragmented, fuzzy, and striated with fantasy constructions. The relation between the western and the history of the West must be more complex than an "is."

To complicate matters, these categories for engaging in the study of westerns are not discrete. This is largely because westerns themselves fall into different subcategories with varying relationships to the past-as-thematic-material, and varying formulations of the fictive material that bears the historical along. Some, but not all, westerns are biopics or event pics, which means that some but not all are what film scholars generally mean by historical films.<sup>46</sup> These particular westerns lend themselves to analysis as histories because their relationship to the real past is avowed and detailed in their treatment of historical personages and events and not just landscape and historical sweep. And in fact there have been several articles (fewer in number than we may have thought) that have measured individual biopics and biopic cycles against historical record while keeping in mind the aesthetic specificity of historiophoty and not falling into simplistic comparisons between film and "reality."<sup>47</sup> Other westerns are "merely" set in the past making no reference to actual historical events and personages. These have not generally been discussed as historical films. And yet, as Creekmur indicates in chapter 6 of this volume, "While most film genres, including the most fantastic, often make some claims upon historical reality, the Western appears unique in its regular, perhaps even inherent, reference to a geographically and historically delimited time and space."

How can we begin to account for the subcategories of the western genre's characteristic "reference to a historically delineated time and

space?" In "Traces of the Past: From Historicity to Film," Philip Rosen used the nineteenth-century debate in architecture between restorationists and preservationists to begin a taxonomy of historical filmmaking practice.<sup>48</sup> Whereas the restorationist's urge (epitomized by Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc) is to return a historical building to its original style even if it means razing subsequent, even centuries-old additions that are viewed as inauthentic, the preservationist (represented by William Morris or John Ruskin) is "willing to subordinate organic order to the disordering work of time."<sup>49</sup> Applied to film—like architecture a medium where there is "an iconicized trace—a mechanical presentation of sights and sounds from the past"—the restorationist/preservationist dialectic is echoed most simply in the documentary/fiction dyad. Whereas documentaries are concerned with providing a real relation to the past, fiction films are later versions, products of their own time as well as of past time. Extrapolating from Rosen's argument to the western, one achieves the ability to distinguish between more or less highly interpretive, embellished, stylized, or add-on histories of the west on film.

I see westerns arrayed along a continuum, at the right end of which are found the mainly fictional westerns and at the left end of which are found the mainly "biopictional." Wholly fictional films (but I doubt such an animal exists; all films, including science-fiction films, refer to the relationships of an inhabited world and so make reference to our own) would be off the scale to the right; wholly documentary films (or at least our imagined conception of them, since I'm *sure* such a thing does not exist) would be off the scale to the left. *The Searchers* would crowd the right end of the continuum; Ethan Edwards and his quest are made up, but Texas 1868 and the Civil War, from which Edwards is supposed to have just returned, are real. *The Life of Buffalo Bill* (Thomas Edison, 1912) would crowd the left end; William Frederick Cody plays himself in part of the film, and the exploits he recalls are based on historical occurrence, but sheer imagination and the fictional trappings of reenactment also play a significant role just as they did in Buffalo Bill's traveling Wild West exhibition. In this volume, the chapters by Corey Creekmur and Joy Kassin contain explicit discussions of these matters and they, along with the chapter by William Simon and Louise Spence, grapple with the historically interpretive features of Buffalo Bill vehicles as a case study of the historical function of the western biopic.

In the middle of the continuum we find films such as *Thunderheart* and *Powwow Highway* that are fictional in the main but also figure past historical incident as resurgent material with which the films' characters must deal. In *Thunderheart* a modern-day FBI agent (played by Val Kilmer) has several visions including a vision of himself "running with the elders" at Wounded Knee. In *Powwow Highway* the main character (played by Gary Farmer) has a vision of Cheyenne Indians led by Dull Knife escaping from Fort Robinson. Moreover, instead of being contemporary to the time they were made, both films are actually set in

the 1970s. Thus, they are also at pains to reference real events and cultural practices of that decade. Matters are more complicated still: *Powwow Highway* and *Thunderheart* hark back to even earlier 1970s events, with both films making reference to the Vietnam War; *Thunderheart* also brings in the 1975 firefight at the Pine Ridge Reservation and the 1973 occupation of the Wounded Knee monument.

The continuum, however, could use a third dimension, for all stretches of the line support the potential for a film, however balanced between fictive and historical elements, to function also as a "historiographic metafiction." Coined by Linda Hutcheon in her book *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, this phrase is adopted by William Simon and Louise Spence (in chapter 4, here) to describe how Robert Altman's *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* "self-consciously suggest[s] the discursive nature of all reference"—including, I would emphasize, historical reference. One might say the same about Altman's other anti-western *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*. Although the film is fiction, it nonetheless points up gritty realities that were a feature of actual life on the frontier and it highlights, by contrast, the prettification engaged in by classical westerns. Self-consciousness about historical representation characterizes many westerns because—no matter how attuned a twentieth-century film is to the ideologies of the nineteenth century—the time lapse creates the potential for metahistorical reflection. In analyzing an individual Altman film as historiographically metafictional, Simon and Spence thus offer an analysis with wider applicability to the genre as a whole.

What, then, are we to make of this melange of history, fiction, and historiographic metafiction that characterizes the western genre while figuring in individual films and film groupings in seemingly endless combination? Although boundaries between heuristic categories are blurred, I submit that there are distinct affinities among types of westerns and types of perspectives on the western. It is these affinities that govern the section divisions of this book.

In chapter 1, "Generic Subversion as Counterhistory: Mario Van Peebles's *Posse*," Alexandra Keller proposes that 1990s postmodern westerns are unique in that they "show a marked preoccupation not only with their own generic value as westerns, but also with the discourse of history itself, and their relation to it." Left to my own devices I would hang onto the possibility that a rogue postmodern western could be found in any decade and I suspect that Simon and Spence would disagree with Keller's claim that *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* (1976) falls short of "full-blown postmodernism." But these are fascinating questions and Keller has met the challenge of explaining, finally, what our intuitions have told us: that the "90s postmodern western" is a coherent category whose coherence relies on the way its constituent films are skeptical of official history and "foreground the difference between history and the past." She argues that if the

western “has always been a revisionist genre it has not, until relatively recently, wanted to announce itself as such.” Her essay specifies such distinctions in wonderful detail and with reference to a number of key films including *Walker* and *Dances with Wolves*. It then brings these ideas to bear on a close analysis of *Posse*. Part 1 of this volume was therefore established to follow Keller’s lead (and her chapter leads off), and it features three essays on the postmodern 1990s western as the self-consciously historiographic western par excellence.

In her essay, “A Tale N/nobody Can Tell: The Return of a Repressed Western History in Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man*,” Melinda Szaloky poses the question of whether revisionist westerns can “remember differently” the frontier history they have been “forced to forget” as we have become more enlightened about racial inequities and national statism. Can the “scattered remnants of the frontier myth” reappear as history, or are they merely countermyth? This is the same litmus test of the postmodern western posed by Keller, and, by those standards, Szaloky’s close reading of *Dead Man* would indicate that it is indeed a postmodern text. Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau and of Sigmund Freud, Szaloky suggests that history writing necessarily involves a process of selection *and erasure*, and that traumatic events that have been erased/repressed from mainstream histories do have the potential to return in revisionist westerns. This they do in *Dead Man*, she argues, particularly through the character of N/nobody, whose captivity by whites and abduction overseas reverses the captivity narrative trope of the western, and whose points of view and dreams upon his return are manifestations of the “return of the white man’s repressed other.” The representations of death and violence in the western, and their frequent poeticization, Szaloky argues, are exposed in *Dead Man* as being linked to the “Westerner’s quest for origins” and identity. *Dead Man* renders these dilemmas differently by posing them in relation to “Nobody’s desire to return the white man to the land of his fathers.” The perspectives of the other, Szaloky argues, suppressed in life and repressed in films and histories, return in the postmodern strategies of *Dead Man*.

In chapter 3, Tomás Sandoval refers to ideas in Hayden White’s famous essay “The Burden of History” to bring out *Lone Star*’s initiative with regard to the weight of historical occurrence.<sup>50</sup> Not only does the film suggest alternate remembrances of things past (revisionism foregrounded), it also suggests that past occurrences may be taken up—or not—in the present and future of human endeavor. The film, in his reading of it, suggests that historical subjects need not also be *subjugated* to past events: “blood only means what you let it,” quotes Sandoval. And he demonstrates how this “belief in human agency” is particularly crucial for those groups whose blood was let in a past that included inequality, slavery, and conquest in the face of democracy.

I have indicated above that “Cowboy Wonderland, History and Myth: ‘It Ain’t All That Different than Real Life,’” by William Simon and

Louise Spence provides a detailed analysis of a single film, Altman’s *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull’s History Lesson*, as a self-conscious work of historiography. On this basis the essay fits in well with the three essays in part 1, and I could have placed it there and let you as readers figure out whether the film’s revisionist characteristics are different than or the same as those of the more recent 1990s films. But the essay also belongs with the two other chapters on Buffalo Bill westerns, and, in the absence of a graphic (hypertextual?) means to place the essay in two places at once, I have elected to include it as the first essay in part 2.

Each of the three chapters in this section uses Buffalo Bill—the historical personage *and* fictionalized persona—to investigate issues of biography, authenticity, representation, and history. “No single character summarizes the transformation of the historical reality of the American frontier into commercial entertainment as fully as William F. ‘Buffalo Bill’ Cody,” writes Corey Creekmur. It was Cody who “made familiar throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe” the “most memorable scenes and incidents [that] had been part of the popular imagination for a quarter-century,” writes Joy Kasson. He did it by being not only a scout in the “Indian Wars” but a showman as well. One is almost sympathetic to the hyperbole of the Buffalo Bill exhibit at the Gene Autry Museum, which tags Cody the “most famous person living” at the time. With its 600 men, 500 horses, 11-acre mobile showground, and 23,000 yards of tent canvas, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West company needed 52 train cars to travel. And travel they did, on the European tour of 1895, for example, to 131 sites in 190 days, covering 9,000 miles. The German Army was ordered to study the operation.

The chapters in this section approach the Buffalo Bill phenomenon from various angles. Simon and Spence are interested in Altman’s film critique of Buffalo Bill mythology, and they discuss the use of Paul Newman in the title role and the film’s numerous inventive metafictional devices. But the teeth of that critique—the pointed result of the film’s ample allusions to the mechanic of storytelling—chew on *Sitting Bull’s History Lesson*, the film’s subtitled indication that “the story of the American West is less a tale of civilization, progress, heroic action and triumph than oppression, displacement, exclusion, and defeat.” It is no coincidence, Simon and Spence point out, that the Altman film is set “between 1885 (when Sitting Bull joined Buffalo Bill’s Wild West) and 1890 (when Sitting Bull was killed at Standing Rock).” The chapter ends with an intriguing discussion of the film’s inclusion of the Wild West’s inclusion of two rather different Last Stand scenes. The first shows Custer being vanquished, but in the second sequence Newman plays Buffalo Bill playing Custer, who vanquishes Sitting Bull played by Will Sampson playing William Halsey playing Sitting Bull. The first sequence is a “comic travesty,” write Simon and Spence, the second a “postmodern parody.”

While Altman confined himself to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, Kasson informs us that Cody directed much more. He was the subject of

numerous films, as Kasson and Creekmur both point out, and in addition was the driving force behind an ambitious undertaking discussed by Kasson: the filming of the Indian Wars, including the Battle of Wounded Knee by involving the actual participants.

As an American studies scholar, Joy Kasson fleshes out her characterization of Cody and his endeavors through an astute reading of diverse documents from archives including the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, and the Library of Congress. Here the reminiscences of Cody's business partner Nate Salsbury are analyzed in light of the grand claims of the Wild West's program notes and other promotional materials. Apparently Salsbury himself saw the contradictions in the Buffalo Bill persona that Altman, and Simon and Spence, develop. According to Kasson's research findings, Salsbury wrote, "There were two of him to me. One the true Cody as he has always been from his birth, and the other was a commercial proposition that I discovered when I [!] invented the Wild West."

*Indian War Pictures* overreached Cody's masterful use of artifice, for with that project he "diminished the element of fictionality and heightened the claims to authenticity." There were difficulties, however, and the film ended up disrupting "the delicate balance between role-playing and memory" that he had been able to maintain with the Wild West. A contributing factor must have been the disturbing subject matter itself. Cody had never before staged the massacre at Wounded Knee, during which 146 Indians including women and children were killed by the Seventh Cavalry, and the attempt to do so failed to draw in an audience. The death of Sitting Bull also figured into *Indian War Pictures*, Kasson explains.

Moving in this section from an essay focused on one film to an essay focused on Cody productions we arrive at chapter 6, "Buffalo Bill (Himself)," by Corey Creekmur. He, like Kasson, is interested in Edison's *The Life of Buffalo Bill* as a film within which "reality and artifice" do battle: as I mentioned above, Cody plays himself in the framing story. But where Kasson moves on from *The Life of Buffalo Bill* to analyze Cody's subsequent attempt with *Indian War Pictures* to make what contemporary critics might call "docudrama" or documentary reenactment, Creekmur's essay moves from *The Life of Buffalo Bill*, with its elements of "actuality," to *Buffalo Bill* (William Wellman, 1944) as a standard biopic.

In keeping with the other contributions in this section, Creekmur's goal is to examine these individual films not only to understand their particular combination of dramatization and reportage, but as part of a larger project: to investigate "a consistent blurring between the western and the biopic that hasn't been directly investigated."

Part 3 of the volume is given over to new essays on the history of the western. This is not to say that other essays in the volume do not pertain to film history. Kasson's and Creekmur's essays might be categorized as

being a mix of social and aesthetic film history with further reflections on how the two necessarily entwine in western film history. And even the four essays on single films set their analyses within the historical context of the genre's propensity to become more and more self-conscious. The three chapters in this third part of the volume, however, examine successive westerns in the context of diverse research materials ranging from minstrel song sheets (Kathryn Kalinak) to field recordings of American Indian tribal music (Claudia Gorbman) to journalism in the colonies of French North Africa (Peter Bloom).

Listening to the car radio a few days ago, I heard an interview with composer-guitarist Bill Frisell talking about new developments in his musical interests. He had always been most interested in the newest, coolest thing, he said. But now he's older, more secure, and more willing to explore musical forms that he would have rejected previously as unhip. What was the particular musical form in question? American popular song. That's what he now finds crucial to his development as an American musician. Those of us who have grown up in the United States can hum and probably muster lyric fragments of "Oh! Susanna," "Camptown Races," "Dixie," and others. These songs represent our heritage. They were sung in mining camps, on western trails, and in film westerns, by soldiers, explorers, and cowboys. They are authentic western music, or so we thought. Kathryn Kalinak's chapter "How the West Was Sung" teaches us that there's much more to know (surprises perhaps) about the history of such songs, and about their plentiful incorporation into film westerns, both silent and sound. Their use in western film narrative, Kalinak argues, redoubles the film work to affirm American community through the exclusion of African Americans, Native Americans, and the problems of racism. And yet, since the songs themselves cannot always sustain the totalizing white supremacy of their overt meanings, and certain songs are explicitly about the tragedies of slavery, their adoption by films can sometimes bring up racial issues, including antiracist perspectives.

Focused on composer Stephen Foster but ranging far wider, Kalinak's essay is the definitive word on the music of the frontier as used in western films, from James Cruz's silent *The Covered Wagon* to John Ford's Civil War westerns, *The Horse Soldiers* and *Sergeant Rutledge*. It also suggests how knowing the "archaeology," as she puts it, of these songs expands the corpus of films we must study to understand the western. Until now, who realized the importance of the 1939 Vitaphone short *Royal Rodeo*, or heard the strain of abolitionism in *The Telegraph Trail*? Through their songs, these films figure the "racial turmoil" that has "always been at the center of American identity."

Where one film music scholar, Kathryn Kalinak, explores the racial content of frontier songs, another, Claudia Gorbman, discusses the role of the film score in "determining the spectator's reception of the other." "How," Gorbman asks, "does music inflect the nature and degree of the

Indian's otherness?" Technical, but made accessible to film scholars with much less musical knowledge than Gorbman, the essay "Drums Along the L.A. River: Scoring the Indian," begins by identifying "musical clichés" such as "tom-tom" drumming that have cued the presentation of Indians on screen. She confirms our suspicion that these musical stereotypes "bear little relation to authentic Indian music," but their history, as described, is fascinating. Moreover, art composers of the turn of the century did appropriate Indian music, known from ethnographers' transcriptions and field recordings, and their use of it raises issues of accessibility and translation that are of particular relevance to the musical scene today where "commercial interests pick and choose among the world's musicians and musical traditions in the insatiable search for new sounds to add to the global pop mix."

This is the framework for Gorbman's analysis of "Indian music" as it has developed over time from classical westerns (including *Stagecoach*, scored by Richard Hageman, John Liepold, W. Franke Harling, and Leo Shuken), to postwar liberal westerns (*Broken Arrow*, scored by Hugo Friedhofer), to 1970s westerns (*A Man Called Horse*, with its "faux ethnographic" score by Leonard Rosenman), to recent offerings (*Dances with Wolves*, scored by John Barry). The essay enlightens us as to the communication of "unheard" meanings.<sup>51</sup> For example, Gorbman's analysis of Friedhofer's score for *Broken Arrow* reveals how the liberalism of the film's story is undercut in various ways by the score in spite of—but yet in some respect *because* of—the film's use of diegetic Indian music in the form of the "actual music and dance of the Mountain Spirit from the girls' puberty ceremony of the White Mountain Apache." Apache chanting is also used in Ry Cooder's score for *Geronimo: An American Legend*, but this time to rather different effect—one that seems to link the promise of earlier appropriations to an American counterhistory of loss.

In chapter 9, Peter Bloom takes us not only "Beyond the Western Frontier," to quote the essay's main title, but beyond national boundaries as well. Recent years have seen a proliferation of new work by established scholars on political economies and cultures under globalization. And the importance of new media technologies to these configurations is not lost on these scholars, among them Néstor Canclini, Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, Saskia Sasson, and Zillah Eisenstein.<sup>52</sup> But these very important accounts of the processes of globalization risk becoming, in a word, *global*. It's extremely difficult to paint a picture as meaningful close-up as it is from afar.

Peter Bloom's essay does just that, however. His study of "an evolving process of reception and reappropriation of the Western film genre in France and the French colonies," is much needed, pioneering work that rewards the desire for more detail. Bloom begins with an industrial analysis of the international reach and popularity of the American western in the interwar period. He follows this trajectory to France and then to Algeria, Morocco, and French Indochina, where "junk prints"

were shown in film caravans as well as first- and second-run movie theaters. Then, turning to contemporaneous sources, including French journalism in the colonies, he suggests how the adventures of "Bronco Billy" Anderson, William S. Hart, Tom Mix, Art Acord, and the other western stars might have been received at a distance from the context that gave birth to them. This entails an understanding of the Algerian political context and a close description of the films' themes, both of which Bloom provides. The western, with its "good badman" hero, was subject, Bloom shows, to local translation, and even allegorization, by its avid spectators.

This was the context for the development of a form of spectatorship involving parody and cultural translation. And it was the context for the Algerian redubbing (*Dynamite "Moh,"* 1966) of a French "camembert" western (*Dynamite Jack*, 1961) that was itself a parody of the American westerns with which the European and African screens had been flooded. "*Dynamite 'Moh,'*" writes Bloom, suggests that "the subversion of dominant meanings is an ongoing, dynamic process, nearly simultaneous with the reception of the speech act itself"—and it is profoundly historical.

Cathy Caruth, whom I quote in the volume's concluding chapter, has written that "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event."<sup>53</sup> Alone in part 4, my own essay makes the claim that, even when they do not explicitly reference outside events—or perhaps *because* they do not—some westerns allude to the violent history of American settlement through narrative retrospection and stylistic antirealism. Such westerns—and there is a surprisingly large number of them—are *internally* historical. Evoking the past through flashbacks, ellipses, and indeterminate signifiers—images that hold characters and audiences captive—these "traumatic westerns" mark an obsessive return to troubling memories that refuse to dis-/resolve. The form of the films themselves is traumatized, as are the worthy spectators inscribed by their texts.

The essay studies two patterns that lend themselves to traumatic representation: the narrative of captivity and the narrative of familial succession. *The Seachers* provides the main example of the first, while *Pursued*, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *Lone Star*, exemplify the second pattern. These films are part of a prominent subgroup of westerns "in which past events of catastrophic nature are represented so as to challenge both the realist representational strategies of a genre that often trades on historical authenticity and the ideological precepts of the myth of Manifest Destiny."

With only a few exceptions, the essays presented here were written expressly for this volume. They all share the aim to consider the "western through history." In a footnote in his introduction to *The Western Reader*, Jim Kitses reports that he was "critiqued [after the publication of *Horizons West* in 1969] for arguing that 'first of all the Western is America History.'"<sup>54</sup> Writing in 1998 he declares, "I remain unrepentant."<sup>55</sup> I applaud that statement, and in fact would like to see it freed of its status as an apologia. Likewise, in their introduction to *Back in the Saddle*

Again, Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson state that “the collection ends where it began, with history. . . . History . . . is at the heart of the genre.”<sup>56</sup> The present volume begins, ends, and is shot through with historical considerations that have formed the western genre and its reception, for it is the western’s status as a historical phenomenon, a body of films multifariously bound up with the incarnate fortunes of North America and the United States, that seems to me its most salient and enduring aspect.

#### notes

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1. André Bazin, “Evolution of the Western” (1955), reprinted in *The Western Reader*, ed. Jim Kitses and Gregg Rickman (New York: Limelight Editions, 1998), 49. Originally published in English in *What Is Cinema?* vol. 2, trans. and ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967).
2. Jim Kitses, *Horizons West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 8.
3. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), chapter 9, “The Western Is American History, 1939–1941,” 278.
4. Sources generally cite as the epitaph for the “old frontier” Frederick Jackson Turner’s address, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” delivered at a meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, July 12, 1893, during the World’s Columbian Exposition. It is reprinted in *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1986).
5. Richard Schickel, foreword to *The BFI Companion to the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe (London: The British Film Institute, 1988/New York, Da Capo Press paperback edition), 10.
6. Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* (New York: Random House, 1981), 46; emphasis and bracketed text added.
7. Peter Lehman, “Texas 1968/American 1956: *The Searchers*,” in *Close Viewings: An Anthology of New Film Criticism*, ed. Peter Lehman (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990), 411. See also “*The Searchers*: An American Dilemma,” in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. 2, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 429–49.
8. Robert Sklar, “Empire to the West: *Red River*” in *American History/American Film: Interpreting the Hollywood Image*, ed. John E. O’Connor and Martin A. Jackson (New York: Ungar, 1987), 170; emphasis added.
9. Stanley Corkin, “Cowboys and Free Markets: Post–World War II Westerns and the U.S. Hegemony,” *Cinema Journal* 39, no. 3 (2000): 66–91.
10. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 279.
11. For some key examples see Ted Mico, John Miller-Monzon, and David Rubel, eds., and Mark C. Carnes, gen’l. ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995); a significant number of the book’s chapters are on various westerns (see chapters by James Axtell, Richard White, Anthony F. C. Wallace, Marshall De Bruhl, Sean Wilentz, Alvin M. Josephy Jr., and John Mack Faragher), which attests to the importance of the western to considerations of films in the historical context.) See also Jon Tuska, *The Filming of the West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), especially “Frontier Legends,” parts 1 and 2; Jon Tuska, *The American West in Film: Critical Approaches to the Western* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985),

especially part 3, “Frontier Legends”; and Buck Rainey, *The Western Gunslingers in Fact and on Film: Hollywood’s Famous Lawmen and Outlaws* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998).

12. Rainey, *Gunslingers*, 1.
13. Ward Churchill, “And They Did It Like Dogs in the Dirt,” *Z Magazine*, December 1992, 20–24.
14. Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, 47.
15. *Ibid.*, 46; emphasis added.
16. Kitses, *Horizons*, 13, emphasis in the original.
17. Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).
18. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 311.
19. Buscombe, *The BFI Companion*, 13.
20. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5.
21. Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 13.
22. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 8.
23. *Ibid.*, 6.
24. *Ibid.*, 7.
25. George F. Custen, *BiolPics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
26. Custen, *BiolPics*, 5; Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, 1.
27. Custen, *BiolPics*, 7.
28. Burgoyne, *Film Nation*, 11; emphasis added.
29. Allan Megill and Donald N. McCloskey, “The Rhetoric of History,” in *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs*, ed. John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 221. See also E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961), J. H. Hexter, “The Rhetoric of History,” in *Doing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), and Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
30. White, *Metahistory*, p. 3, n. 2.
31. Hayden White, “Historiography and Historiophoty,” *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1195–96.
32. *Ibid.*, 1196.
33. *Ibid.*, 1193.
34. For a notable example see Vivian Sobchack, ed., *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* AFI Film Readers Series (New York: Routledge, 1996).
35. Roberta E. Pearson, in “Custer’s Still the Hero: Textual Stability and Transformation,” *Journal of Film and Video* 47, nos. 1–3 (1995): 82–97, does cite and incorporate the ideas of Hayden White.
36. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye, eds., *The Book of Westerns* (New York: Continuum, 1996).
37. Buscombe, *The BFI Companion*, 156.

38. Douglas Pye, "Introduction: Criticism and the Western," in Cameron and Pye, eds., *The Book of Westerns*, 12.
39. Tag Gallagher, "Angels Gambol Where They Will: John Ford's Indians," *Film Comment*, September/October 1993, 70.
40. Ibid.
41. Works of New Western History include Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence, Kan.: The University of Kansas Press, 1991), and Forrest G. Robinson, ed., *The New Western History: The Territory Ahead*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).
42. See Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), especially the chapter entitled "'Nits Make Lice': The Extermination of North American Indians, 1607-1996"; and Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), especially 210-12.
43. Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 4.
44. Kevin Brownlow, *The War the West and the Wilderness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 227.
45. Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 129-37.
46. Robert Burgoyne's *Film Nation* is of further interest in this regard because his study of the "historical film" encompasses some films that employ a historical personage as a main character and some films that employ a fictional character as the protagonist.
47. For valuable historical work on the western see, for example, Steve Neale, "'The Story of Custer in Everything But Name?' Colonel Thursday and *Fort Apache*," *Journal of Film and Video* 47, nos. 1-3 (1995): 26-32; and Roberta E. Pearson, "Twelve Custers, or, Video History," in *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 197-213.
48. Phil Rosen, "Traces of the Past: From Historicity to Film," in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 67-89.
49. Ibid., 73.
50. Hayden White, "The Burden of History" (1966), in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
51. Gorbman's analysis in this essay builds on ideas developed in her book *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: British Film Institute, 1987).
52. Néstor Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), Saskia Sasson, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: The New Press, 1998), Zillah Eisenstein, *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
53. Cathy Caruth, introduction to her edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4-5.
54. Jim Kitses, "Introduction: Post-modernism and The Western," in *The Western Reader*, 30, n. 4.
55. Ibid.
56. Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson, eds., introduction to *Back in the Saddle Again*, 6.

historical

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part one