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Violence and Open Spaces

The Subversion of Boundaries and the Transformation of the Western Genre

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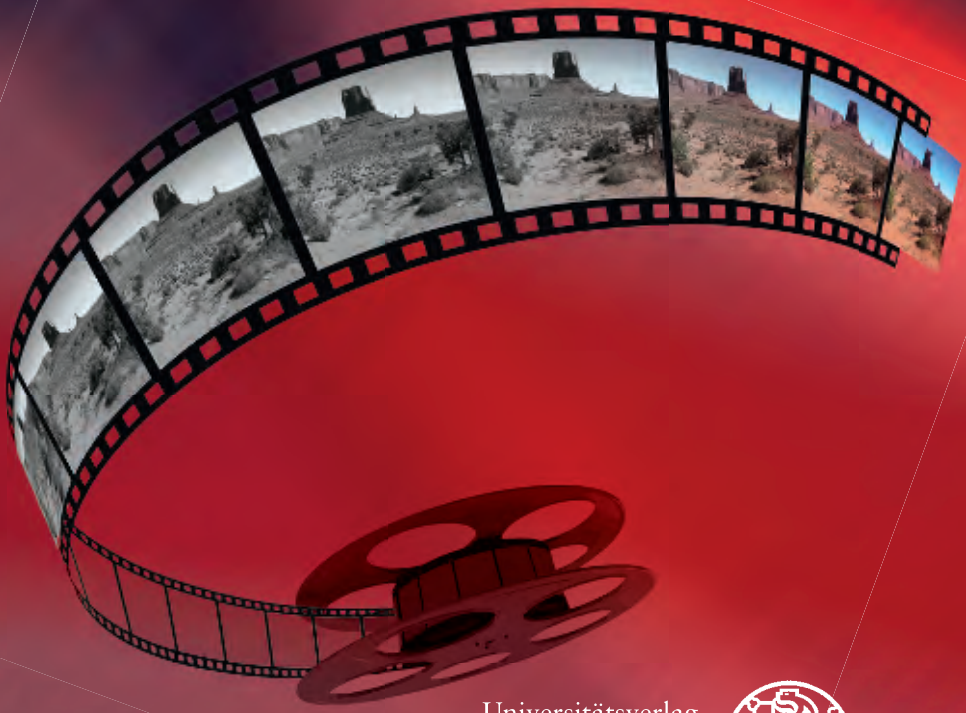

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Violence and Open Spaces: The Subversion of Boundaries and the Transformation of the Western Genre

The West has played a central role in imagining the American nation ever since Frederick Jackson Turner formulated his theory on the significance of the frontier in the formation of a national character. For Turner it was the fact that, unlike European borders, the frontier demarcated "the hither edge of free land," and thus presented the threshold to a space, presumed empty and wide-open, that beckoned to be conquered. At the frontier, the European would be stripped of the garments of "civilization" and emerge from the process a new man [sic!]. As Richard Slotkin points out, this process of "regeneration through violence" became a staple of American national narratives, whether in literature or in the one genre that more than any other celebrated the idea that it was the land that shaped America: the Western.

'Space' is therefore a crucial category in the understanding of the Western. The genre thrives on the juxtaposition between a dangerous and often seductive open space and the slow expansion of homesteads, both a spatial constellation and a process in which—at least in most of the classic Westerns—the latter tends to be associated with civilization and the former with savagery. Not only is this savagery understood to characterize the Native American societies whose lands were being conquered and settled in the process of the westward movement; savagery more generally denotes a state of unregulated violence. The openness of space appears to adequately represent its unruliness, its lack of organization, and the probability of being subjected to random violence. In *The Civilizing Process* (1939), sociologist Norbert Elias explains that for

pacified spaces to exist, a stable monopoly of violence is required that rests with the state. Many Westerns depict this slow process in which representatives of society and the state (the sheriff, the army, and the settlers) wrestle with 'decivilizing' forces (Indians and outlaws) that threaten the emerging social order. Yet some of the best Westerns call this opposition into question and visually translate their subversion as the crossing and sometimes even temporary dissolution of boundaries (between wilderness and civilization, but also between the urban and the rural, the inner and the outer) such as in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) or *The Searchers* (1956). Ultimately, however, such subversions depend on the continued existence of borders, boundaries, and frontiers.

In recent years, with the production of films that explicitly use the conventions of the Western as well as films that only indirectly refer to this tradition, these borders, boundaries, and frontiers—including their gendered connotations—have increasingly been assailed to the point at which they seem to have become fluid. Both revisionist and more recently the post-Western display important continuities regarding the close enmeshment of space and violence, but they more importantly play on these continuities in order to highlight crucial breaks. While the classic Western at times did critically investigate the arbitrariness of boundaries between savagery and civilization as well as the identification of nature with savagery and settlement with civilization, in these more recent narratives, violence has infiltrated the domestic space (the farm, the family, etc.) and has collapsed the opposition between nature and civilization, as in David Milch's HBO series *Deadwood* (2004-2006) or Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone* (2010). The transition between urban, rural, and natural space is increasingly in flux and the intermediary position of both the rural small town and of suburbia is vanishing rapidly, as becomes apparent in Vince Gilligan's TV-series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) and its use of the Southwestern desert. As crucial as the construction of space(s) is for the ideological agenda of classic Westerns, as important are its visual and narrative reconstructions in the revisionist and the post-Western. They provide not only the setting for the violence of territorial reorganization, but they are the *reason* for ongoing violence—both unregulated and state-monopolized—in the first place. The different spaces that constitute the Western genre and the ways in which they are created, defended, or destroyed by violence are

at the heart of the genre's constitution of community—last but not least the 'imagined community' of the nation (Anderson).[1]

The following pages provide an overview of the ways in which it is possible to interrogate the relationship between violence, space, and nation-building in the Western based on the work of Norbert Elias and contemporary relational sociologists, such as Loïc Wacquant. The first part of this introduction will take a look at the significance of the classical Western hero as mediator between the forces of wilderness and civilization. By drawing on Elias' work on *The Germans*, it suggests that the promise of regeneration as staged by the classical Western entails the prolongation of the civilizing process and thus contains the postponement of the emergence of democratic institutions. The second part considers contemporary, "post-Western" interpretations of violence and space, arguing that whereas the classical Western told of the progression of the civilizing process, though in "spurts and counter-spurts" (Elias), the post-Western tells of its regression in the face of the neo-liberalist dismantling of the State.

Civilizing and Decivilizing Processes Staged in the Spaces of the Classic Western

The classic Western is characterized by the tension of open and enclosed spaces as well as by the lone hero's exposure to the vastness of both tempting and dangerous spaces. It is here that the violent encounters with the forces of nature (including in this representational economy Native Americans) take place. The chase—most prominently of whites

[1] Important to consider in this context is the transnationalization of the genre, its transposition to non-American settings as for instance in John Hillcoat's *The Proposition* (2005; Australia) or Andreas Prochaska's *Das finstere Tal* (2014; Austria). As Emma Hamilton has argued, such films—often based on specific national film traditions of related genres, "draw on Hollywood conventions of a 'Western film' and reflect the broader movement in post-2000 American films to re-envision the West as a broad discursive space" (134). For the sake of contextual coherence in its investigation of shifting relations of space and violence, however, this volume considers only American productions and settings.

by Indians, but also of the outnumbered 'good guy' by the villains or of the outlaws by avengers of law and/or justice—is certainly one of the standard elements of the classic Western. While these encounters highlight the intimate connection between open space and violence in the genre, it is another type of violent encounter that provides the framework for the Western's negotiation of community, law, and violence in and through space: the showdown. Carried out openly in the streets of town and often under the watchful eyes of the townspeople, it pits the Western hero, a man of honor, against a ruthless villain. What is at stake is the peace and prosperity of the frontier community, yet while the shoot-out is traditionally staged on the main street—and therefore in what can be considered the frontier town's *agora*—it also takes place on the boundary between legal and extra-legal violence. As Richard Slotkin famously maintains, in the myth of the West violence figures as a necessary element in a process of transition from feudal, autocratic structures to the rule of law in a democracy. Slotkin's metaphor of 'regeneration through violence' imagines the nation as a kind of organic entity whose insufficient strength is built up by the antidote of brutal force. With the implication that violence restores vitality, the Western genre presents this violence as beneficial to national maturity and re-defines it as indispensable, if not legitimate.

In an analogy similar to that of Slotkin's organic entity, Elias once stated that, "It would, I think, be a rather nice task to write the 'biography' of a state-society [...]. For just as in the development of an individual person the experiences of earlier times continue to have an effect in the present, so, too, do earlier experiences in the development of a nation" (*Germans* 178). What Elias had in mind and what he set out to do in his study of the German state-society since the late nineteenth century was not another historical account of political events, but rather a sociological analysis of the development of a nation, its intra-state structures and institutions, especially institutions that are connected to the state's claim to a monopoly of physical force. Not surprisingly, he focuses on the duel as an institution which results, as he puts it, in "a socially regulated fostering of violence" (19).

Originally reserved to European aristocrats, dueling was a ritual that allowed a man to defend his impaired honor physically rather than taking recourse to the courts. Apart from its social function as a (often facially visible) mark of membership in the good society and thus a sign of

distinction, the significance of the duel for the nation state lies in the violation of the state monopoly of physical violence. As Elias proposed in his model of the civilizing process, the formation of a state monopoly of force, i.e. "the concentration of arms and armed troops under one authority"—in conjunction with the collection of taxes that allowed for enforcing the monopoly through the police and the military—"makes the use of violence more or less calculable;" the monopoly thereby fosters a pacification of public spaces, which "forces unarmed people [...] to restrain their own violence through foresight or reflection; in other words it imposes on people a greater or lesser degree of self-control" (*Civilizing Process* 373).

However, the civilization of which Elias speaks, "is never completed and always endangered" (*Germans* 173); and the civilizing process rather than developing linearly, "moves along in a long sequence of spurts and counter-spurts" (*Civilizing Process* 382). Thus any constellation in which a considerable number of citizens lays claim to participate in the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of violence necessarily has consequences for the inner stability of a nation. On the sociogenetic level, a weakening of the state monopoly of violence means that the nation state descends again into a less civilized stage (in the descriptive sense Elias used the term in his concept of the civilizing process), and as a consequence, public space relapses into violence. On the psychogenetic level, the national habitus displays less moderation and self-restraint, especially with regard to aggression and the exertion of violence.

While Elias never wrote a comparable 'biography' of the United States, he has pointed out that, in the United States, the state monopoly of violence was less firmly centralized than in most European nations, because "a white male majority spread throughout the country, participated without clearly distinct organisation in whatever emerged, in the course of time, as the state monopoly of physical power" ("Maycomb Model" 222). As a consequence, rather than leaving it to the representatives of the state to maintain law and order, white American men have frequently shown a propensity to take the law into their own hands. One of the stages in the American state-building process, in which this occurred rather frequently, was during the decades of westward expansion, a period when the state monopoly of violence did not yet extend into these less densely populated territories of the West. In this respect, the

American frontier constituted a social space reminiscent of so-called warrior societies, where in Elias' words, "violence is an unavoidable and everyday event, and where individuals' chains of dependence are relatively short, because they largely subsist directly from the produce of their own land" (*Civilizing Process* 370). In a threatening environment, "a strong and continuous moderation of drives and affects is neither necessary, possible nor useful" (ibid.).

Since the period of westward expansion that is usually portrayed in the classic Western lasted only a few decades, it is indeed arguable and has been a topic of debate among historians to what extent the frontier experience shaped the American national character, or in Eliasian terms, whether such a relatively brief counter-spurt could have produced a change in the habitus of a people (Mennell 198-203). Yet, figurational sociologists agree that there are "group decivilizing processes which may occur in the context of a longer-term process of civilization" (Fletcher 85). In the case of the American frontier, the counter-spurt took place in a territory that in contrast to the rest of the country showed certain preconditions of a decivilizing process. The weakening of the state monopoly of violence and the parallel shortening of the chains of interdependence are most likely accompanied by the following part-processes: "a rise in the levels of fear, insecurity, danger and incalculability; the re-emergence of violence into the public sphere; growing inequality or heightening of tensions in the balance of power between constituent groups [...]; a freer expression of aggressiveness and an increase in cruelty; an increase in impulsiveness […]" (Fletcher 84). To what extent the historical West displayed these processes is a matter of debate. But there is no doubt that the frontier as it is represented in the Western exhibits all these characteristics and projects one of "the experiences of earlier times [that] continue to have an effect in the present" (Elias, *Germans* 178).

Moreover, Elias insists on the importance of visual representation in transmitting historical experiences. The past, he claims, has an influence on the present "not only because of the inertia of traditions [...], but also because an image of past phases of one's own society, distorted and deformed though it may be, continues to live on in the consciousness of subsequent generations, serving involuntarily as a mirror in which one can see oneself" (*Germans* 53). It is in the symbolic imagery of the Western genre that the historical phase of westward expansion lives on

in the American collective memory. Of course, as has often been stated, the mirror the classic Western holds up to the nation is distorted: it shows a glorified picture of the dubious process of dispossessing Native Americans by taking the allegedly free land of the western territories. However, such historical misrepresentations are not surprising, for, after all, the '"virtue' of a national self-image is grounded in its own interpretation of the past" (Fletcher 67). Looking at the classic Western and its continuous transformations through an Eliasian lens, i.e. regarding it as a representation of a crucial episode in the American civilizing process, may reveal then significant aspects of the American self-image or we-ideal.

The genre of the classic Hollywood Western famously works with the binary of civilization versus wilderness embodied by the juxtaposition of two diametrically opposed types of space. Enclosed human settlements such as small towns, farmsteads, or coach stations are scattered in wide landscapes such as extensive prairies or deserts, often dominated by intimidating rock formations. The natural environment is inimical to human beings and isolated human dwellings with their confined interior spaces are shown as constantly exposed to multiple threats. Even within frontier towns, public space is far from being pacified; physical violence intrudes frequently, as disputes are settled with guns in the main street or in the saloon. Whether gangs are fighting each other or a group of lawbreakers terrorizes the population, in the end it is the Western hero who restores order and peace by outgunning the villains. If the hero is the town's marshal, as for example in *High Noon* (1952), he simultaneously reinstates the law and—at least temporarily—re-establishes the state monopoly of violence—while at the same time, his *de jure* position is not clear, for he takes up the fight against the villains *after* he has laid down his insignia of office, reclaiming them only when he realizes that no-one else is willing to do so. But more often than not, the hero of the classic Western (especially the Western films directed by John Ford) is an outsider or an outlaw himself. Yet at the same time he usually acts on behalf of the community, even if his motive may be private revenge for a murder of family members, as is the case in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939).

The major part-processes that according to Fletcher are indicative of a counter-spurt of decivilization appear in *Stagecoach*. As the plot highlights, to travel between two frontier towns across Indian territory

clearly involves "a rise in the levels of fear, insecurity, danger and incalculability," and "the re-emergence of violence into the public sphere" becomes most obvious in the town of Lordsburg that is dominated by the Plummer brothers and stages the final showdown. In contrast to the blunt physical violence exerted in Lordsburg, Tonto displays the effects of a "growing inequality or heightening of tensions in the balance of power between constituent groups." The emerging conflict between the group of established citizens—represented by the Ladies of the Law and Order League—and members of a group that the established define as outsiders is also fought in public, not with fire-arms but by means of symbolic violence, such as angry demeanor, denigrating language and defaming gestures. While the outgunned combatants in Lordsburg lose their lives, the outcasts of Tonto die a social death by being expelled from the community. Both battles show "a freer expression of aggressiveness and an increase in cruelty; an increase in impulsiveness" (Fletcher 84). Nevertheless the two confrontations differ in function and assessment. While the ladies' bellicosity is ridiculed and has a negative impact on two likable characters, the lethal violence of the hero against the villains is justified and awarded. Moreover, the infringement of the state monopoly of violence is accepted, if not applauded. *Stagecoach* can therefore be said to deal with two kinds of violence: with attacks from without and conflicts within; with physical violence and symbolic violence. The stagecoach as epitome of a closed space becomes the focus point for both kinds of violence. The class struggles at work in the relatively more civilized community of Tonto are continued within while physical violence intrudes from without.

Temporarily conjoined in the extremely confined space of the coach, agents of the 'good society' are confronted with—in their eyes—disreputable representatives of frontier existence. In the course of the movie, however, the ranking is revised as the established prove to be either corrupt and selfish (a banker), cowardly and inhumane (Hatfield, son of a famous southern judge, ex-officer of the Confederate army turned gambler), or at least conceited and arrogant (Mrs. Mallory, daughter of a former Confederate general and wife of a cavalry officer, who can hardly bring herself to acknowledge Dallas' generous help as a midwife). While the established insist on manners and etiquette as a way of reinforcing social distance, the frontier characters repeatedly show charity, altruism, and courage. The stagecoach is therefore an interior

and yet public space, in which social hierarchies are contested by means of symbolic violence. During the Indian raid, it also becomes a space into which physical violence intrudes, with consequences for the social order as the established fail and the moral hierarchy that *Stagecoach* juxtaposes with the social hierarchy is confirmed. For instance, Hatfield (John Carradine) at first successfully contributes to the defense of the group by shooting several Indians, but then focuses on preserving the southern lady's honor, and he is only prevented from killing her by being killed himself. Furthermore, it is not Mrs. Mallory (Louise Platt), but Dallas (Claire Trevor) who with her own body shields the newborn baby. In addition, Doc is shown as an undaunted shooter, having regained (self-)respect by once more successfully fulfilling his role as a medical doctor by assisting Mrs. Mallory in giving birth. Only Ringo's (John Wayne) role is ambivalent. On the one hand, he is the bold hero who in a breath-taking manoeuver regains control over the horses after the driver had been shot. On the other hand, he deliberately saves his last three bullets for the Plummer brothers thereby endangering the group (that is only saved by the Western *deus ex machina*: the cavalry). However, the hero's ambivalence is the very crux of the matter.

Reading this constellation with Elias' theory instantly reveals the problem inherent in the formula of regeneration through violence. The Western confers to the hero the function of a mediator, who as a representative of the unrestrained forces of wilderness is permitted or rather expected (by the community as well as by the movie audience) to use extralegal violence in order to restore order and peace in a frontier settlement that is terrorized by villains that the representatives of law are incapable or unwilling to fight. In terms of the outcome of the dramatic conflict, the message of the Western suggests that civilization only prevails because of the brave, necessarily violent intervention of the heroic individual. In contrast, Elias' model suggests that the frontier community is not threatened by common criminals but by conditions favoring a decivilizing counter-spurt. This perspective reveals the victory of the civilizing forces suggested by the movie as an illusion, as they may only triumph on the basis of an unlawful act of violence that by definition undermines the very foundation of the civilizing process since it destabilizes the state monopoly of violence. The price of temporarily restoring peace by extralegal violence is high; it means the prolongation of the decivilizing process. The fact that the violation of the state monopoly of

violence occurs on the main street of town with the approval of the onlooking community and sometimes even with the tacit assent of the representatives of the law, is proof of the very weakness of the state monopoly of violence. In contrast, the duel in nineteenth-century Europe was clearly considered a breach of the state monopoly of violence punishable by law and consequently it took place secretly. Moreover, the upper-class individuals involved in a duel fought exclusively for their personal honor. In the Western, the individual who takes the law in his own hands also has a personal motive, usually revenge, but in the course of action it is transformed into an act of valor by a common man on behalf of the community, and as such it goes unpunished. It is only by implication, namely in the outsider position of the hero, who will never become a fully integrated member of the community, that the illegality of the hero's violence is acknowledged. What then from the point of view of the Eliasian sociogenetic concept of the civilizing process is a "counter-spurt" that leads to the de-pacification of public space, and what in terms of the correlating psychogenetic aspect can be understood as a lapse into a less balanced personality that confronted with violence in turn has to rely on more violent, aggressive behavior, in the Western is projected as a favorable, if not necessary development in the course of creating a better and stronger nation.

Robert Pippin, who in his thought-provoking study on the classic Western interprets the genre from the perspective of political philosophy, points out that "the question of legitimacy, essentially the legitimacy of the state's claim to a monopoly on the use of legitimate coercive force," though "certainly an important issue […] also represents quite a narrowing of focus when compared with the range of issues addressed by Plato or Machiavelli, or Hobbes or Rousseau or Hegel" (12). According to Pippin, what these philosophers contribute to the "question about the best organization of ruling and ruled, about how we might best live in common," is political psychology, namely, "the question of what sort of soul is best suited for what sort of regime, and what sort of soul is likely to be produced by what sort of regime" (12-13). While this broader issue about the American democratic soul undoubtedly is a core concern of the Western, its emphasis may blur the boundaries between the ideological message of the Western—regeneration through violence—and the critical analysis of the myth. An Eliasian perspective on the Western, albeit necessarily incomplete, enables us to

clearly make this distinction and thus to reveal the major function of the genre, the fabrication of a we-ideal that turns a precarious phase in American nation-building into a victory.

Spatial Re/Constructions and the Transformation of the Western Genre

Any inquiry into the condition of the Western is an inquiry into the transformation that its essential tropes and conventions have undergone. Among these, spatial tropes figure prominently: the ranch, the saloon, and Monument Valley, as well as the traditional binaries of city and country, house and wilderness, or North and South. Space, to emphasize the central insight of the so-called spatial turn, is not merely a setting but constitutive for the way in which cultural meanings are negotiated in the film. Therefore, the shifting representations of space and spatial tropes and the way in which they are constituted as well as questioned by violence attest to space as dynamic, its boundaries in constant flux. Most scholars of the contemporary Western—or the post-Western—agree that established boundaries have become destabilized on several levels in Western films, even though they also point out that this shift must be seen as the development of inherent possibilities rather than as a rupture. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay argues in her contribution in this volume that not only have some of these spaces—namely the farm or ranch and the frontier town—traditionally served to "represent intermediate spaces between the open land farther West and the urban-industrial society to the East" (33), but also that already in the classic Western the 'iconography of space' provides ample opportunity for contradictory readings. At the same time, Krista Comer has observed a shift of types of spaces that dominate the Western, with the absence of the urban being as constitutive for the Western in the 1940s and 1950s as the presence of the urban is for Westerns of the post-Civil Rights era (see Krista Comer, "New West, Urban and Suburban Spaces, Postwest").

In the course of this transformation, the periphery has increasingly moved to the center: Rethinking the presence and role of Native Americans, African Americans, Chicana/os, and Asian Americans in the historical West has changed the way in which the genre tells stories of empire and nation-building. For obvious reasons, much attention—both by filmmakers and by critics—has been paid to the depiction of Native

Americans in the Western and to the shift it has undergone from their portrayal as "savage opponent[s] to […] being portrayed as wronged victim or generous host" (Washburn ix). A prominent and successful example for this shift is Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves* (1990), a movie celebrated for its positive portrayal of Native Americans (or more specifically the Lakota; their enemies, the Pawnees, continue to be depicted along well-established lines of the brutal savage). At the same time, Costner's film—with its grandiose depiction of open landscape and its presentation of the classic Western's narrative of the violent western expansion as a movement of progress and civilization—has also been criticized for its romanticization and its perpetuation of the image of 'Indians' as a 'vanishing race' and thus while breaking with some, reenforcing other established stereotypes. A more recent production, Kelly Reichardt's *Meek's Cutoff* (2010), addresses these stereotypes somewhat differently: While from the beginning of the film, the threat of an Indian attack looms large over the small group of settlers, they are not attacked; Reichard cleverly plays with viewers' expectation and with Hollywood conventions of suspense only to disappoint it. Instead of having to heroically fight off the expected savage enemy, the men capture one lone Native American man, unarmed, and—after deciding against killing him—try to enlist him as a scout to find water. But the endeavor is a difficult one, for the film does not stop at debunking the classic Hollywood stereotype of the bloodthirsty Indian: it also deconstructs the image of romanticized reciprocity *à la* Costner. While *Dances with Wolves* builds upon a notion of growing familiarity between the protagonists by way of learning each other's language, communication between the settlers and the Native American man—both verbal and non-verbal—continuously fails in *Meek's Cutoff*, foreclosing any notion of red-white reconciliation and leaving us with an uneasy coexistence at best. Besides films such as Reichardt's, the 1990s and in particular the 2000s saw an increasing output by Native American directors who took up the Western genre to critically reexamine not only the history of encounter and territorial dispossession, but also viewing expectations and representational dynamics. Chris Eyre's *Skins* (2002), for instance, like his earlier *Smoke Signals* (1998), is set in the present, but nevertheless deploys and appropriates Western motifs, such as breaking the law to right wrongs. Films like *Skins* thus "reimagine the power of Indigenous view-

ers to interpret Western genre images," including the notion of revenge as part of a larger project of justice (Hearne 40).[2]

Regarding the fundamental re-evaluations of ethnic relations and the role of non-white protagonists, this volume focuses on yet another emergent field of study, that is, the depiction of African-Americans in the Western. Examples addressing African Americans as agents in the West include Sidney Poitier's *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and Mel Brooks' Western satire *Blazing Saddles* (1974) and more recently Clint Eastwood's *The Unforgiven* (1992) and Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012); while up to the period of the civil rights movement, "blacks were seen unfit as heroes in the West," erased from the classic Western landscape visually and musically (Miriam Strube in this volume; 108), these and other movies offer a form of "racial revisionism" that both challenges and reproduces the conventions of the Western genre (Strube 131). *Django Unchained* is a particularly pertinent example of a movie that not only blurs spatial boundaries (between the iconic West and the 'Old South'), but that also allows for disparate readings of the way it deploys redemptive violence. While for Iris-Aya Laemmerhirt Django and Broomhilda, "as the sole survivors of the story, can be understood as the new American Adam (and Eve)" (162), Laura Bieger states that the film's "playful conjunction of frontier and plantation, Italo Western and exploitation movie creates a black hero who avenges a personal matter while leaving the systemic horrors of injustice untouched" (148).

But revisions of the Western and its generic relation of space and violence do not solely concern questions of ethnicity and race, but also gender. While in the classic Western, the (masculine) open spaces of the frontier are frequently juxtaposed to (feminine) enclosure and domesti-

[2] A number of critics have explored the representation of Native Americans in the Western genre, including critical revisions in neo-Westerns (e.g. Peter C. Rollin's *Hollywood's Indians: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film,*1998; or Elizabeth Bird's *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, 1996). More recent studies such Joanne Hearne's study *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* (2012) or Kerstin Knopf's *Decolonizing the Lens of Power: Indigenous Films in North America* (2008) have looked comprehensively at Native American film production.

city, recent productions such as Joel and Ethan Coen's remake *True Grit* (2010, discussed by Wibke Schniedermann in this volume), Kelly Reichardt's *Meek's Cutoff* (also 2010), or Tommy Lee Jones' *The Homesman* (2014) explicitly investigate and deconstruct gender roles and gender representations, even if they tend to nevertheless point at "the power of a patriarchic capitalism that does not provide many options for rebellious women" (Schniedermann 63). And last but not least, the end of the Cold War has left the United States in the midst of a movement towards globalization that, as Krista Comer argues, no longer allows for a national identity built on regionalism. As a result of this turn, established borders and boundaries have become flexible, transparent, and open for redefinition. That this is by no means a clear-cut development becomes particularly tangible in post-9/11 Westerns with the war in Iraq as a turning point from "pre-war hawkishness to post-war disillusionment," as Martin Holtz argues in his contribution in this volume (94). In other words, the genre's transformations become most visible in the way in which they are translated spatially, and in how these spatial translations relate to violence.

What, then, does the term "post-Western" contribute to a study of Westerns as ongoing cultural work? While the revisionist Western seeks to retell the iconic stories of the West from previously marginalized perspectives, thus revealing the process of civilization as always already embedded in a process of reversal to savagery or even the savagery inherent in the process of 'civilization,' the post-Western, as it is understood here, not only critically revisits the familiar territory of the West(ern), but also reflects upon the possibility and limits of its own disengagement with the Western as a representational and ideological system. Drawing on Stuart Hall's discussion of the term "postcolonialism," Neil Campbell argues that, "[t]he 'post' never just means the 'past' as in the term 'post-western,' but rather 'a process of disengagement' from the system it is in tension with, in the full knowledge that it is 'probably inescapable' from that system as well [Hall 1996: 246]" ("Post-Western Cinema" 415). Just as the term post-Western in the context of genre therefore emphasizes the fact that contemporary Westerns do not abandon but continually revisit the tradition, so does it serve as a starting point for a critical reflection of approaches to the genre. Among the studies that have broached new topics and directions we find Susan Kollin's collection *Postwestern Cultures: Culture, Theory, Space*