

Krista Comer (kcomer@rice.edu)
office hours: Th 1-2pm

Herring Hall 317, x3207

English 594: Studies in Contemporary Literature and Culture
Topic for Spring 2007
Matters of Space: the Global/Local American West

We are said, in the contemporary period, to be living in “spatial times.” Matters of space—its current global reorganization and inscription with newer as well as more familiar principles of power—figure largely in literatures about globalization, postmodernity, and postcoloniality. Spatial keywords such as “borderlands,” “glocal,” “deterritorialized publics,” and “regionalization” have come to the fore of humanities and social science discourse as responses to questions about the nature of global change, the compression of space through time acceleration, the new forms of alliance and displacement occasioned by neoliberal economic regimes and the advent of cyber-technologies. As a topical course about contemporary theory, literature and culture, we survey defining thinkers, writers and events, as well as moments and keywords, associated with the recent spatial turn in critical theory.

Our spatial case in point is that social/political/cultural geography known as the American West. We ask about the kinds of knowledges produced by way of specific real time places like Indian Country, the Tex/Mex and Cali/Mex borderlands, or Los Angeles—knowledges about late capitalism, new social movements and new diasporic communities, representation and the built environment, racial and gender formation, and the embodied experience of everyday life. Along the way we emphasize the local/global nexus so fundamental to the spatial dialectic of globalization. A range of productions of the western local bear on discussions, for as the local becomes ever more globalized, so too does the global depend upon the production of locality. How do we understand this kind of local-that-is-global, its relation to new communities and forms of agency? We evaluate a series of instances in the production of the “glocal,” asking: how do culture producers conceptualize locality or place? What knowledges about places are being produced and for whom, and with what kinds of social and political effects?

Required Texts: (all on reserve)

Course Packet available in English Dept, readings denoted by (*)

Books:

Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1986)
Didion, *Run River* (1963); *Play It As It Lays* (1970)
Lefebvre, *Production of Space*
A. B. Guthrie, *The Way West* (1950)
Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)
American Quarterly, *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures* (2006)

Film:

The Searchers (1956)
Endless Summer (1966)
Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka 'ehukai
The Business of Fancy Dancing ('02)
Smoke Signals (1998)

Assignments: Students have the option of multiple short and then a longer paper, or a seminar paper at course end. Consult individually with me early by the fourth week to devise your own program of study. In terms of presentations, each of us will do several oral presentations, of theoretical materials and film or literary texts. Each of us also will have formulated questions for the presenters and for our seminar.

Introduction/Contexts

- January 11 Local/Global Beginnings: Field Work #1 on Visual Ideologies
- Class Visit to MFAH, “The Modern West: American Landscapes 1890-1950”
- Also, panel at MFAH, “Off the Wall: Graffiti, Art or Not?” Presented in conjunction with MFAH’s exhibit “Helio Oiticica: The Body of Color”
- Selections from *The Modern West: American Landscapes 1890-1950* (should have received these already in your boxes). This text on reserve.
- January 18 Samplings: Old and New School Regionalisms
Representation/Public History & Built Environment /Indigeneity/Area Studies
- Stegner, “History, Myth and the Western Writer” from *The Sound of Mountain Water* (1969) + “Coming of Age,” from *Where the Bluebird Sings*. . . (1992)*
- Comer, Chap 1, from *Landscapes of the New West**
- Foote, “What Difference Does Regional Writing Make?” 3-16*
- Richard Slotkin, Visual Narrative and American Myth from Thomas Cole to John Ford, *American Victorians and Virgin Nature* (T. J. Jackson Lears, 1999)*
- Ella Shohat/Robert Stam, “From Eurocentrism to Polycentrism” and “The Imperial Imaginary,” *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media**
- Arjun Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination” from *Globalization**

Los Angeles: Where It all Comes Together

- January 25 Lefebvre and After
- Chapters 1, 2, 6, Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974)
- David Harvey’s “Afterword” in *Production of Space*
- Soja, “The Extraordinary Voyages of Henri Lefebvre,” *Third Space*
- Rose, Chapters 2, 3, 7 *Feminism and Geography**
- February 1 Where Marx Meets L.A.– L.A. and “Paradigmatic Postmodernity”
Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Logic of Late Capitalism”*

Soja, Chaps 1, 8, 9 from *Postmodern Geographies**
Mike Davis, "Sunshine or Noir?" from *City of Quartz**

February 8 Didion, *Play It as It Lays*
Didion, *Run River*
Comer, Chap II *Landscapes of the New West**

Feb 10: SATURDAY FIELD WORK #2: City Tour, hosted by muralist Josef Sifuentes:
Chicano/a Public Art

9am-12pm Meet on loop in front of Lovett Hall

Suggested: Dolores Hayden, Preface + Chap 1, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History**

February 15 Critical Localisms
Arif Dirlik, "The Global in the Local" from Wilson, Dissanayake, *Global/Local**
Wilson, "Goodbye Paradise: Global/Localism in the American Pacific" from *Global/Local**
Doreen Massey, "Living in Spatial Times?" from *for space*
Intro + Hise, Willard from, *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures: A Special Issue of American Quarterly* (Sánchez & Villa, editors)
Clips from Bruce Brown's *Endless Summer 1: The Search for the Perfect Wave* (1966)
"Heart of the Sea: Kapolioka 'ehukai," Film portrait of Hawaiian legend Rell Sunn"

Indian Country

February 16 Friday 5pm. Screening of *The Business of Fancy Dancing*, dinner at Baker House following, then screening of *Smoke Signals*. Films drawn from short fiction and literary celebrity of Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene).

February 22 Leslie Silko (Laguna Pueblo), *Ceremony* (1977)

Vine Deloria, "Indians Today, the Real and Unreal," *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969)* OR
Zeese Papanikolas, Chaps 1 + 2 *Trickster in the Land of Dreams**

February 23 Friday 7pm Screening at Baker House of *The Searchers* (1956)

March 1 A.B. Guthrie, *The Way West* (1950)

March 3 Field Work #2: Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Details TBA.

- March 8 Midterm Recess
- March 15 Mignolo, "Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity"* *ALH* 2006
 Gerald Vizenor (Chippewa), Selected Readings TBA from *Postindian Conversations* and/or *Manifest Manners* (handouts to be provided)
 Susan Bernardin, "The Authenticity Game: 'Getting Real' in Contemporary American Indian Literature" from *True West**

Borderlands/Border Thinking

- March 22 Saldívar-Hull, "Mestiza Consciousness and Politics" from *Feminism on the Border**
 Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Frontera* (selections TBA)
 Soja's Chap 4, from *Third Space*
 Mignolo, Intro + "Border Thinking" from *Local Histories/Global Designs*
- March 29 Selections, *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures: Special Issue of American Quarterly* Sánchez, Villa, editors
 Lisa Lowe, Chapters 1 and 7 from *Immigrant Acts**
 Ramon Saldívar, "History and Remembrance as Social Aesthetics," from *The Borderlands of Culture**
 José David Saldívar, "Tracking Borders, "Remapping American Cultural Studies," + "Frontejas to El Vez," in *Border Matters**
- April 5 Spring Recess
- April 12 Miyoshi, "A Borderless World?" From *Global/Local**
 Caren Kaplan, "Postmodern Geographies: Feminist Politics of Location" from *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement**
- April 19 Massey, "A Relational Politics of the Spatial," from *for space**
 Mignolo, "An Other Tongue, An Other Thinking, An Other Logic," from *Local Histories/Global Designs*