

ON THE ROAD

REBELLION AND SELF-DISCOVERY IN U.S. ROAD MOVIES

Time: Friday, 4:00-5:30 · **Course number:** 512.325

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan Brandt · **Office hours:** Thur, 4-6 (Moodle) · **Email:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at

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Rooms: <https://unimeet.uni-graz.at/b/bra-2fg-oih-ktk> (UniMeet)

Description: To think of America means to think of mobility and especially of traveling. “Travel and the construction of American identity,” the *Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* notes, “are intimately linked. This connection undergirds commonplace descriptions of America as a nation of immigrants and a restless populace on the move.” This seminar offers an overview of the *mobility discourse* in the U.S., focusing on the most notorious genre associated with traveling and self-discovery – the road movie. A key motif in the films of this genre is that of the ‘open road,’ which symbolizes both the country’s penchant for non-conformist behavior (the biker as a ‘rebel’) and its obsession with opportunities of self-fashioning (in terms of economic prospects and personal accomplishment). The self-induced (and highly gendered) image of Americans as ‘kings of the road’ is reflected in the rich canon of U.S. road films. Serving as popular expressions of dominant cultural sensitivities, road movies commonly feature characters who leave their homes and alter their perspectives in the process of traveling through the country. Going on the road enables the protagonists to distance themselves from established norms and break free from the restrictions of U.S. society.

Teaching and Learning Method: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by ‘experts’ who organize the session by means of questions, games, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block. The experts will upload their questions for the discussion forum 6 days in advance!

Materials: All print texts will be made available on **Moodle**.

Aims: The course will familiarize participants with the aesthetics and the socio-historical functions of the ‘road movie’ genre as well as with the basics of film theory and analysis.

Assessment: **A.)** regular attendance (*no more than 2 absences!*) and active in-class participation, as well as *nine* (!) substantial entries in the discussion forum (1/3); **B.)** presentation as part of an expert session plus 3-page handout and online questions (1/3); **C.)** research proposal (2 pages) and final paper (12-15 pages, 4,000-5,000 words) (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the course.

Deadline for Final Papers: (including declaration of honesty): Monday, July 19, 2021. You need to upload a digital version of your paper on Moodle and hand in a printed version. There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Please indicate when handing in your final paper if you would like detailed feedback!

Important: This class is part of the **Certificate “American Film and Television Studies”** (Module 1.1 - American Film and Television Studies – Analysis and Theory).

GUIDELINES AND UNIMEET ETIQUETTE

Set your screen name

Make sure to set your screen name to the name you want to be addressed by, typically your first and last name, so that your instructor and your fellow students can refer to you by your proper name in discussions. If you want to, you can also add your preferred pronouns (he/she/they) in parenthesis, so others know how to refer to you.

Use your webcam

All of us constantly communicate via facial expressions. Being able to communicate with one another is an important aspect of your online learning experience. In order to have a functioning and communicative seminar atmosphere, participants will thus be expected to have their webcams on.

Mute your microphone (when not in use)

Switch your microphone to mute whenever you aren't talking – especially if you are in a noisy environment or if you are working in a particularly large group.

Presenting your Project

As a presenter, you will gain full rights to moderate the session and share your screen. On UniMeet, you can share video clips externally (e.g., via YouTube).

Indicate questions in the chatroom (as a participant)

Indicate questions in the chat forum. The course instructor and/or the presenter can then ask you to step in and formulate your question with your audio on.

ASSESSMENT:

A.) Regular attendance (no more than 2 absences!) and active participation (1/3);

B.) Expert Session (incl. uploading of material onto Moodle course site) (1/3);

C.) 2-page research proposal plus 12-15-page final paper (including title page, table of contents, and bibliography). Please use templates on Moodle! (1/3).

Note: You need to pass each section to pass the whole course.

A.) REGULAR ATTENDANCE, CLASS PARTICIPATION, AND MOODLE DISCUSSION FORUM

Regular attendance and **active participation** in class sessions are crucial to the success of the course. *Absences* must be explained in writing, preferably prior to class. No more than two absences are allowed. You are expected to be present in our digital meetings, not only having read the assigned material, but also prepared to fully engage with the material, ask questions, offer perceptive interpretations, and even argue for your way of reading the text at hand. Note: There might be **pop quizzes** (i.e., unannounced online tests at the beginning of a session) to check whether you have read the materials.

You need to **post at least nine substantial entries** in the **Moodle discussion forum**. Make sure you are well informed *before* answering the three discussion questions: Read the required text. Conduct some **additional online research** according to your own research interests. When making an entry, refer to useful materials you found on the internet (clips, articles, etc.). Ideally, you would also **respond to other entries** already uploaded by other students.

B.) EXPERT SESSION

As an expert, you will prepare **three short questions** for the discussion forum (to be uploaded 6 days in advance), potentially together with links to **clips** or **images**. Show your discussion questions to me 1 week before your session (or send them to me via email)!

In class, you can start with some **essential information** on the topic (look at the keywords on the syllabus first), then pose questions to trigger a **lively discussion**. Choose **examples** related to the topic of the session that you can discuss in class (for example, in group work; use the format of the 'breakout rooms'). Be **interactive**. Show images and clips, launch a game, pick up questions. Do not stick to your schedule *too much*!

Revise your presentation carefully after the session and **upload it** together with a **handout** (3 pages) on Moodle within a week after the session!

C.) RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND FINAL PAPER

A **research proposal** (2 pages) is due around mid-term. Look for the exact dates in the course agenda below. The form for the research proposal is available on Moodle.

The **final paper** (max. 15 pages, including title page, table of contents, and bibliography, 4,000 –5,000 words) should be typed (Times New Roman, 12pt, 1.5-spaced, using one side of the sheet only, pages numbered). The paper should show your name, your student email address, the course title, the instructor's name, the date of submission, and the number of words. Primary and secondary sources need to be cited according to the Uni Graz guidelines for style and format.

The **deadline** for submission of the final paper is **Monday, July 19, 2021**. Keep in mind: A good paper is a finished paper. There is **no extension** of this deadline.

SYLLABUS

12 March	Introduction: Rebellion and Self-Discovery in U.S. American Road Movies Additional text (optional): Stephen Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, Introduction to <i>The Road Movie Book</i> (1997).
19 March	Film Theory and Analysis – An Overview Main text (reading required): Amy Villarejo, "The Language of Film" (2013). Additional text (optional): Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos, <i>Introduction to Film Analysis</i> (2012). Keywords: Camera Movement; Color; Framing; Lighting; Mise en scène; Montage; Sound.
26 March	Road Comedies – Tragicomedy and Slapstick Main example (viewing required): <i>It Happened One Night</i> (dir. Frank Capra, 1934). Watch online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek0l03Rkp7s Companion films (optional): <i>Blues Brothers</i> (dir. John Landis, 1980); <i>Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas</i> (dir. Terry Gilliam, 1998); <i>Little Miss Sunshine</i> (dir. Jonathan Dayton & Valerie Faris, 2006); <i>Due Date</i> (dir. T. Phillips, 2010); <i>Hangover 3</i> (dir. T. Phillips, 2013). Keywords: Odd couple; Poverty; Pre-Code Era; Romance; Screwball; Sexuality; Transformation.
16 April	Social Critiques Main example (viewing required): <i>Sullivan's Travels</i> (dir. Preston Sturges, 1941). Watch online: Pt 1: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2nz3ac ; Pt 2: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2nzanb Companion films (optional): <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> (dir. John Ford, 1940). Keywords: Community; Hollywood; Income Equality; Irony; Laughter; Road as Alternative Space; Satire; Self-Knowledge; Social Critique.
23 April	Film Noir Main example (viewing required): <i>Detour</i> (dir. Edgar Ulmer, 1945). Watch online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tap67KjPu8 Companion films (optional): <i>They Live By Night</i> (dir. Nicholas Ray, 1948); <i>The Hitch-Hiker</i> (dir. Ida Lupino, 1953). Keywords: Agency; <i>Femme Fatale</i> ; Fallen Hero; Gangster Film; Guilt/Innocence; Nightmare; Raw Noir.
30 April	Rebel Road Films Main example (viewing required): <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i> (dir. Arthur Penn, 1967). Companion films (optional): <i>Badlands</i> (dir. Terence Malick, 1973); <i>True Romance</i> (dir. Tony

Scott, 1993); *Kalifornia* (dir. Dominc Sena, 1993).
Keywords: Crime; Family; Justice; Killer Couples; Outcasts; Society & Class; Violence.

7 May

Independent Study Unit- Research Proposal

No class! Create a 2-page research proposal for your final paper.

21 May

Buddy and Outlaw Movies

Main example (viewing required):

Easy Rider (dir. Dennis Hopper, 1969).

Companion films (optional):

Trains, Planes, and Automobiles (dir. John Hughes, 1987);

Midnight Run (dir. M. Brest, 1988); *Rain Man* (dir. Barry

Levinson, 1988); *O Brother Where Art Thou* (dir. Coen

Brothers, 2000); *On the Road* (dir. W. Salles, 2012).

Keywords: Buddy Movie; Drugs; Enlightenment; Freedom;

Hippie Culture; Masculinity; Racism; Sex.

28 May

Action and Adventure Movies

Main example (viewing required):

Duel (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1971).

Watch online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUuGRyC-MJM>

Companion films (optional):

Vanishing Point (dir. Richard C. Sarafian, 1971); *Getaway* (dir. Sam Peckinpah, 1972); *The Hitchhiker* (dir. Robert

Harmon, 1987); *Joy Ride* (dir. John Dahl, 2001); *The Fast and the Furious* (dir. Rob Cohen, 2001).

Keywords: Action; Adventure; Horror; Man vs. Machine; Paranoia; Suspense; Technology; Thriller; Velocity.

4 June

Queer Road Movies as Heterotopias

Main example (viewing required):

Thelma & Louise (dir. Ridley Scott, 1990).

Companion films (optional):

My Own Private Idaho (dir. G. Van Sant, 1991); *To Wong Foo* (dir. B. Kidron, 1995).

Keywords: Crossover; Empowerment; Feminism; Friendship; Heterotopia; Queer.

11 June

Postmodern Road Films

Main example (viewing required):

Natural Born Killers (dir. Oliver Stone, 1994).

Companion films (optional):

Broken Flowers (dir. J. Jarmusch, 2005); *Everything Is Illuminated* (dir. L. Schreiber,

2005); *Nebraska* (dir. A. Payne, 2013); *Inside Llewyn Davis* (dir. Coen Bros., 2013).

Keywords: 'Future' Motif; History; Holocaust; Humor; Illumination; Independent;

Memory; Psychology; Quest; Trauma.

18 June

Postapocalyptic Dystopias

Main example (viewing required):

The Road (dir. John Hillcoat, 2009).

Watch online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmzDzsvxv_Y

Companion films (optional):

The Book of Eli (dir. Albert Hughes, 2010); *Mad Max: Fury Road* (dir. George Miller, 2015).

Keywords: Apocalypse; Death & Destruction; Doubt; Dystopia; Memory Road Symbolism; Violence.

25 June

Animated Cartoons

Main example (viewing required):

Finding Dory (prod. Disney-Pixar, 2016).

Companion films (optional):

A Goofy Movie (prod. Walt Disney, 1995); *Up* (prod. Disney-Pixar, 2009); *Moana* (prod. Disney, 2016).

Keywords: Amnesia; Animals; Animation; Anthropomorphism; Cartoons; Quest; Route 66.

2 July

Biographical Road Dramas

Main example (viewing required):

Green Book (dir. Peter Farrelly, 2018).

Companion films (optional):

Smoke Signals (dir. C. Eyre, 1998); *The Straight Story* (dir. David Lynch, 1999);

Into the Wild (dir. Sean Penn, 2007).

Keywords: Biography; Friendship; Life Writing; Love; Race/Whiteness; Sexuality.

DUE DATE
RESEARCH PROPOSAL

FINAL PAPER
DUE DATE: July 19, 2020