In Search of Neonaturalism; or, Lost in Translation:
Tracing an Elusive Meme in American Literary Criticism and Contemporary U.S. Film

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This PDF version of a PowerPoint presentation serves as a companion website for my essay “Neonaturalism in Contemporary U.S. Film,” which appeared in *Studies in American Naturalism* 15.1 (2020): 18-48. The PDF contains filmographic and visual materials which could not be included in the published article. Some of these materials formed the basis of an invited plenary lecture, delivered at the symposium “American Literary Naturalism and Its Descendants,” hosted by the University of Iceland in Reykjavík, on November 15, 2019.

[Please hide Tools Pane for best quality. When following links to film clips, click on the Play button (it takes about 15 seconds for the video to start).]
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Part One

1. Introduction

It is hard not to notice the resonance of naturalist aesthetics in TV series and movies such as David Simon’s *The Wire* (2002–08), the Coen brothers’ *No Country for Old Men* (2007), Noah Hawley’s *Fargo* (2014–), or Alejandro G. Iñárritu’s *The Revenant* (2015), or in novels such as Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America* (2004), Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House* (2012), or Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* (2016). The felt presence of new forms of naturalism in contemporary film and literature, however, stands in stark contrast to the scarcity of systematic research on this phenomenon.

Rather than discussing possible reasons for such a resurgence of naturalism or answering the question of what that means for the periodization of this tradition in historiography, which would require a much larger project, this essay sets itself the more modest objective of detecting and categorizing substantial configurations of neonaturalism in recent U.S. film in order to establish a sufficient basis for pointing to a recognizable trend and thus encourage new scholarship. After a brief look at prior research and two striking motifs, as well as preliminary remarks on the selection and organization of primary materials, I will examine a corpus of one hundred and seventy highly rated U.S.-produced releases (1996–2019), grouped via fourteen macro- and microclusters, and relate representative examples to current perspectives in literature studies and film criticism, culminating in an analysis of filmic neonaturalism at its most radical. The epilogue calls for scholar-detectives willing to identify artistic strategies placed at several removes from classical literary naturalism and argues for self-conscious attempts at retranslation.
Part One
2. Research Situation
2.1. General Studies on U.S. Naturalism in the 21st Century

Under the search terms “neo-naturalism” / “neonaturalism,” the International MLA Bibliography spits out a mere 5 / 7 entries respectively, only one of which refers to more recent U.S.-American literature (see Adrian Schober’s 2014 article on young adult fiction). Interestingly, these entries include a repartee between two German scholars (an Americanist and a Germanist) hotly debating the sense and nonsense of empiricist literature-and-science approaches (e.g., cognitive poetics [based on the cognitive sciences, esp. neuroscience], bio-poetics [based on research in biology], or literary Darwinism [based on evolutionary theory, especially evolutionary psychology]; see Eibl 2007 and Kelleter 2007; for an intermediate position, see Sielke 2018).

It requires an evaluation of the wider corpus of scholarship on literary realism and naturalism to identify at least some sources analyzing neonaturalist elements in 21st-century texts or film, including investigations of individual authors, works, genres, and traditions (e.g., Raskin 2011 [on Into the Wild]; Dudley, guest ed., 2012 [on African American culture]; Link, guest ed., 2013 [on science fiction]; Buehrer 2014 [on Russell Banks, Denis Johnson, and Harry Crews]; Clarke 2014 [on Cormac McCarthy]; or Bieger 2017 [on The Wire]).

* New impulses are to be expected from a doctoral dissertation with the working title “The Resurgence of American Literary Naturalism in the Neoliberal 21st Century.” In this study currently being written at University College Cork, Sarah McCreedy will look at works by Colson Whitehead, Daniel Woodrell, Cormac McCarthy, ZZ Packer, Lionel Shriver, T. C. Boyle, and Emily Fridlund.
Part One
2. Research Situation
2.2. General Studies Tracing U.S. Naturalism into the Late 20th Century

Perhaps even more striking than literary critics’ “ignoring the continuing presence of naturalism” (Clarke 52) is that the research situation turns out to be only slightly better with respect to the second half of the twentieth century, with the following six studies proving to be the most relevant: Donald Pizer, “Contemporary American Literary Naturalism” (1985)*; Paul Civello, American Literary Naturalism and Its Twentieth-Century Transformations: Frank Norris, Ernest Hemingway, Don DeLillo (1994); James R. Giles, Violence in the Contemporary American Novel: An End to Innocence (2000)**; Donald Pizer, “Is American Literary Naturalism Dead?” (2002); Richard Lehan, Realism and Naturalism: The Novel in an Age of Transition (2005); and James R. Giles, The Spaces of Violence (2006).

* Pizer’s 1985 article is preceded by Don Graham’s “Naturalism in American Fiction” (1982), a research report mentioning, rather than analyzing, naturalistic novels such as Joyce Carol Oates’s Them (1969), James Lee Burke’s To the Bright and Shining Sun (1970), and Norman Mailer’s Executioner’s Song (1979). Emphasizing the fact that “the world of the naturalistic novel . . . is always the world out there” (2) and that a “passionate commitment to facticity and actuality . . . may be [its] most abiding contribution . . . to American fiction” (13), Graham claims that “naturalism . . . has persisted as a vital force” (3) in post-1940s U.S. literature and that “to abandon utterly this mode is to risk losing the world” (13).

** I am grateful to Gary Totten and the contributors to SAN’s special issue on Naturalism’s Histories (5.1 [2010]) for pointing me to James R. Giles’s 2000 and 2006 monographs. Giles’s The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America: Encounters with the Fat Man (1995) has not been included because the most recent text discussed is Oates’s Them (1969). Philip Gerber’s “Whither Naturalism?” draws a broad picture (citing authors such as Joyce Carol Oates, E. Annie Proulx, Robert Stone, or William Styron) but limits itself to a closer analysis of Tom Wolfe’s The Bonfire of the Vanities (1987).
Part One
2. Research Situation
2.3. Studies on Naturalism in Contemporary American Film

The state of research is deplorable, too, in regard to new forms of naturalism in late 20th- and early 21st-century U.S. visual culture, notwithstanding the fact that Donald Pizer, as early as 1982, had reminded his readers of “the transfer of some of the interests and techniques of literary naturalism to such forms as the film (for example, The Deer Hunter). . .” (see Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism 152; cf. also Pizer, “Contemporary” [1985/93] 431; 186).

Except for occasional references to naturalistic strains in selected films, however, there has been no attempt at systematic analysis (see Lehan on Cimino’s The Deer Hunter [1978] as well as Scorsese’s Mean Streets [1973] and Raging Bull [1980]*; Den Tandt on Scott’s Blade Runner [1982] and the Wachowskis’ The Matrix [1999]**; and Clarke on “the films of the Coen Brothers, Quentin Tarantino, . . . some of Woody Allen’s. . . . and Christopher Nolan’s . . . Memento [2000]”***). This project is hopefully a first step in that direction.

In short: A broader exploration of American neonaturalism has yet to be published.

Part Two
Neonaturalism in Contemporary U.S.-Produced Film (1996-2019):
From Inconspicuous Motifs to Thematic and Generic Key Clusters

1. Inconspicuous and Conspicuous Motifs

Film Clip 1 [The Wire, Seas. 1 (HBO, 2002), Epis. 3: “The Buys,” 00:13:35-16:12]
https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=b734eaff-4f3f-4462-8f41-ac320170c419
1.1. An Inconspicuous Motif and Its Resonances: The Example of Chess

In the crime drama TV series *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-08), drug boss Avon Barksdale’s nephew D’Angelo (“Dee”) uses chess as a metaphor to explain the unwritten rules, internal hierarchies, and inevitable constraints of the drug trafficking game (Season 1, Episode 3). The realism (and naturalism) of the series has spawned almost 400 academic publications, including two articles in the journal *Studies in American Naturalism*. 
At a closer look, this inconspicuous film sequence can be related to central texts in classical naturalist theory, modern linguistics, and contemporary philosophy:

Frank Norris, “The Puppets and the Puppy” (1897)

- *The Queen’s Bishop*--- . . . There is no Boy, except that which exists in your own imaginations. . . . There is, perhaps, a certain Force that moves us from time to time. . . . this Force, is not omnipotent. It can move us only along certain lines. I still retain my individuality---still have my own will. . . . I am a free agent---that’s what is so terrible. . . . After I have been Thrown-away, I shall gradually rot and decay. . . . You can know nothing of the vast, grand scheme of the Room. . . . We cannot understand these things, but there must be reason in them. . . . (Sobby, the Fox-terrier puppy, pushes open the door. . . . the Queen’s Bishop . . . tumbles down the register. . . . muttering, vaguely, something about the “vast, resistless forces of nature.”) (Frank Norris of “The Wave” 175-80)


- [First irony:] . . . a figure who confuses his putative “own will” with the predetermined diagonal way in which a bishop must be moved, according to the laws of the chessboard. . . . [Second irony:] . . . the bishop’s assumption that [these] laws, which allow him and others to predict future “moves” or developments in the game, always and uniformly apply. (McElrath [1993] 53)

- . . . Norris’ own focus is on a particular kind of confusion: how idealists delude themselves when seeking for a benign order amid “the throes of a vast and terrible drama.” (McElrath 58)

- . . . characters in naturalist works . . . become genuinely human only after they have been shown to be nothing but puppets. (Darvay [2015] 44)
• But of all comparisons that might be imagined, the most fruitful is the one that might be drawn between the functioning of language and a game of chess. In both instances we are confronted with a system of values and their observable modifications. . . . First, a state of the set of chessmen corresponds closely to a state of language. The respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms. In the second place, the system is always momentary; it varies from one position to the next. It is also true that values depend above all else on an unchangeable convention, the set of rules that exists before a game begins and persists after each move. (88)

• In a game of chess any particular position has the unique characteristic of being freed from all antecedent positions; . . . one who has followed the entire match has no advantage over the curious party who comes up at a critical moment to inspect the state of the game; to describe this arrangement, it is perfectly useless to recall what had just happened ten seconds previously. All this is equally applicable to language and sharpens the radical distinction between diachrony and synchrony. (89)

• Can [a lost piece] be replaced by an equivalent piece? Certainly. Not only another knight but even a figure shorn of any resemblance to a knight can be declared identical provided the same value is attributed to it. (110)
It is important to distinguish at least two kinds of rules. . . . For example, the rule “Drive on the right-hand side of the road” regulates driving in the United States, but driving can exist independently of his rule. Some rules, however, do not just regulate, but they also create the possibility of the very behavior that they regulate. So the rules of chess, for example, do not just regulate pushing pieces around on a board, but acting in accordance with a sufficient number of the rules is a logically necessary condition for playing chess, because chess does not exist apart from the rules. Characteristically, regulative rules have the form “Do X,” constitutive rules have the form “X counts as Y in context C.” ([Chapter 1: “The Purpose of This Book”] 10)

Searle had first used the chess analogy in *Speech Acts* (1969) to illustrate that language is a system of constitutive rules (see 34-35).

A seminal parallel between such models and naturalist literary theory is Searle’s concept of “biological naturalism”: “Mental phenomena are caused by neurophysiological processes in the brain. . . . I call it ‘biological naturalism.’ . . . . The ‘mystery’ of consciousness today is in roughly the same shape that the mystery of life was before the development of molecular biology. . . . It seems mysterious because we do not know how the system of neurophysiology/consciousness works, and an adequate knowledge . . . would remove the mystery.” (*The Rediscovery of the Mind* 1; 101-02)
What connects these texts, in addition to their recourse to chess imagery, is their common focus on the complexity of systems and their interacting components. This systems-oriented approach ties in with (neo)naturalism’s synchronic critique of capitalism and the political, economic, and social mechanisms that ensure its survival.
The sequence from *The Wire* can also be related to well-known and lesser-known works in 19th-, 20th-, and 21st-century American literature and film:

**The Chess Motif in 19th- and 20th-Century American Literature**


- Its most extensive use, however, is to be found in the oeuvre of Vladimir Nabokov (*Pale Fire*, 1962; *The Defense* [Zaščita Lužina, 1930], 1964; *Speak, Memory*, 1966).


- Luzhin, preparing an attack for which it was first necessary to explore a maze of variations . . . began a long meditation. . . . he had seen something unbearably awesome, the full horror of the abysmal depths of chess. He glanced at the chessboard and his brain wilted from hitherto unprecedented weariness. But the chessmen were pitiless, they held and absorbed him. There was horror in this, but in this also was the sole harmony, for what else exists in the world besides chess? Fog, the unknown, non-being. . . . ([1990 Vintage ed.] 139)

- Poets do not go mad; but chess players do. . . . I am not . . . in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination. (*Chesterton, Orthodoxy* 35; qtd. in Janscó 70)
Since a disproportionate number of the players dominating the history of chess were Jews (including the world champions Steinitz, Lasker, Botvinnik, Tal, Fischer, and Kasparov), it is hardly surprising that the two chess-related novels in my corpus of 21st-century fiction should be works by Jewish American writers:
In both novels, chess metamorphoses from a concrete object of fascination to a metaphorical arena of disillusionment and defeat:

**Michael Chabon, The Yiddish Policemen’s Union (2007)**
- In this transnational alternative history, in which the Jews found temporary exile in the wastes of southern Alaska (based on a real, 1939 proposal by the U.S. Department of the Interior tragically rejected by the Alaskans [Trousdale 103n]), a chess puzzle borrowed from Nabokov’s autobiography *Speak, Memory* serves as a crucial clue enabling hard-boiled detective Meyer Landsman and his half-Jewish, half-Tlingit cousin Berko Shemets to solve the murder of the chief rabbi’s drug-addicted (and probably gay) son, Mendel Shpilman.
- Shpilman (whose name evokes the Austrian-Jewish master player Rudolf Spielmann) collapses under the high expectations he has raised as a chess prodigy and potential messiah (Tzadik Ha-Dor).

**Jonathan Lethem, Dissident Gardens (2013)**
- In Lethem’s ninth novel, a saga about leftist revolutionaries spanning three generations, 13-year-old Cicero Lookins, the gay, fat son of a black police officer who once had an affair with the Jewish matriarch Rose Zimmer, is defeated by cliché-Ashkenazi chess hustler “Cousin Lenny” in such a crushing manner that he decides never to play chess again:
  - “. . . he [Cicero] believed in chess, a secret garden of rational absolutes. . . . [Lenny:] ‘So why did nobody mention the black Fischer was a man-mountain?’ . . . . ‘You’re going to lose this game. You like coins, kid? . . . . Because this, frankly, is going nowhere for you.’ . . . . *Nowhere in chess*. . . . To Lenny’s verdict, Cicero now added a vow: . . . he’d never touch chessmen again.” (Lethem 57-63)
In contemporary anglophone film, chess emerges either as a means to bring some light into the lives of socially and racially disadvantaged youth in slum settings or as a catalyst in the characters’ trajectory from genius to madness and self-dissolution:
In *The Luzhin Defence* (2000), *The Dark Horse* (2014), and *Pawn Sacrifice* (2014), the protagonists’ obsession with chess and dysfunctional families trigger mental instability, echoing the fate of famous chess masters such as Steinitz, Morphy, Pillsbury, Rubinstein, Nimzowitsch, or Alekhine. *The Dark Horse*, based on the life of the Maori chess genius Genesis Potini, is unique in that it not only combines the motifs of social work and madness but also stages chess in terms of indigenous spirituality and identity-building. In *Pawn Sacrifice*, the fictionalized Bobby Fischer crumbles under the combined pressures of a game allegedly “shackling the mind and brain” (Einstein qtd. in Shenk xvi) and the Cold War as an oppressive political force field.
1.2. A Conspicuous Motif: Weather Conditions as a Pervasive Metaphor

In keeping with Frank Norris’s understanding of naturalism as a form of romanticism (e.g., in “Zola as a Romantic Writer” [1896] or “A Plea for Romantic Fiction” [1901]), in contemporary film the weather and its consequences frequently serve as mirrors of human limitation, crisis, and suffering.
1.2.1. Snow and Ice

1.2.1.1. Indifferent Nature as Embodiment of the Human Condition

(The Revenant [Regency, 2015; dir. Alejandro G. Iñarritu], Main Menu)
1.2.1. Snow and Ice

1.2.1.2. Hostile Nature as Human Projection

(The Revenant [Regency, 2015; dir. Alejandro G. Iñarritu], 02:23:00)
1.2.1. Snow and Ice

1.2.1.3. Snowy Wastes as a Theater of Human Insignificance

(Fargo [FX, 2014 (TV Series); created by Noah Hawley], Seas. 1, Epis. 10: “Morton’s Fork,” 00:56:20)
1.2.1. Snow and Ice

1.2.1.4. Ice as a Symbol of Emotional Coldness

(The Ice Storm [Good Machine, 1997; dir. Ang Lee], 01:44:23)
1.2.1. Snow and Ice

1.2.1.5. Limited Vision/Perspective/Ability

*(Inside Llewyn Davis [StudioCanal, 2013; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen], 01:12:40)*
1.2.1. Snow and Ice

1.2.1.6. Frozen Lives: The Struggle against Stasis and Heredity

(Affliction [Lions Gate Films, 1997; dir. Paul Schrader], 01:37:25)
1.2.1. Snow and Ice

1.2.1.7. Frosty Nature as a Means of Foreshadowing Death

(The Ice Storm [Good Machine, 1997; dir. Ang Lee], 01:35:06)
1.2.2. Thunderstorms as an Index of Insanity or Emotional Turmoil

*(Take Shelter [Sony Pictures, 2011; dir. Jeff Nichols], 00:01:27)*
1.2.3. Pouring Rain as Metaphorical Representation of Despair

(American Beauty [DreamWorks Pictures, 1999; dir. Sam Mendes], 01:37:26)
1.2.4. Natural Disasters as a Sign of Cosmic Arbitrariness

*The water does not care about my plan.*

*(Queen of Katwe [Walt Disney Pictures, 2016; dir. Mira Nair], 01:35:00)*
1.2.5. Endemic Social Problems as a Force of Nature

*Come on, man. You’re talking about drugs.*

*That’s a force of nature, that’s sweeping leaves on a windy day, whoever the hell you are.*

*(The Wire [HBO, 2002-08; created by David Simon], Seas. 3, Epis. 2: “All Due Respect,” 00:53:14-20)*
Part Two
Neonaturalism in Contemporary U.S.-Produced Film (1996-2019): From Inconspicuous Motifs to Thematic and Generic Key Clusters

2. Macro- and Microclusters

Preliminary Remarks: Categorizing the selected corpus in terms of macro- and microclusters is a heuristic construction designed to foreground themes, motifs, and genres particularly conducive to neonaturalist moments in contemporary film. “Macrocluster” is used to describe a fairly large group of films connected by an overarching theme. “Microcluster” stands for a smaller group of films connected by a common motif or genre. These categories overlap insofar as films can contain elements pointing towards several of the above-mentioned clusters. Criteria for selection include recognizable (neo)naturalistic components and artistic quality (as documented by prestigious film prizes or high ratings on platforms such as Rotten Tomatoes). In the subsequent collection of representative examples, visualized in the form of screen captures and film clips, I will focus on literary aspects (plot/story, characters, point of view, setting, theme, mood, symbols/imagery, genre), rather than dramatic features (acting, costumes, make-up) or cinematic devices (camera angles, sound and vision, lighting, framing, editing), of the films selected. The table and filmography lists on the next fifteen slides provide an overview of all macro- and microclusters examined:
# 2. Macro- and Microclusters

## 2.1. Overview

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2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.2. Macroclusters

2.2.1. Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities

- *Rocketman* (2019; dir. Dexter Fletcher)
- *Boy Erased* (2018; dir. Joel Edgerton)
- *Green Book* (2018; dir. Peter Farrelly)
- *Call Me by Your Name* (2017; dir. Luca Guadagnino)
- *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017–19 [TV Series, three seasons]; created by Bruce Miller)
- *Carol* (2015; dir. Todd Haynes)
- *Boyhood* (2014; dir. Richard Linklater)
- *Fargo* (2014– [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
- *Gone Girl* (2014; dir. David Fincher)
- *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
- *American Horror Story*, Seas. 2: Asylum (2012–13; created by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk)
- *The Tree of Life* (2011; dir. Terrence Malick)
- *A Serious Man* (2009; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
- *Breaking Bad* (2008–13 [TV Series]; created by Vince Gilligan)

- *No Country for Old Men* (2007; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
- *Brokeback Mountain* (2005; dir. Ang Lee)
- *Capote* (2005; dir. Bennett Miller)
- *Monster* (2003; dir. Patty Jenkins)
- *Mystic River* (2003; dir. Clint Eastwood)
- *Far from Heaven* (2002; dir. Todd Haynes)
- *The Wire* (2002–08 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
- *Six Feet Under* (2001-05 [TV Series]; created by Alan Ball)
- *American Beauty* (1999; dir. Sam Mendes)
- *The Sopranos* (1999-2007 [TV Series; created by David Chase)
- *Fargo* (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.2. Macroclusters

2.2.2. Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

- *Hillbilly Elegy* (2020; dir. Ron Howard [in production])
- *Sharp Objects* (2018 [TV Series]; created by Marti Noxon)
- *Mudbound* (2017; dir. Dee Rees)
- *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017; dir. Martin McDonagh)
- *True Detective* (2014–19 [TV Series]; created by Nic Pizzolatto)
- *Mud* (2012; dir. Jeff Nichols)
- *The Help* (2011; dir. Tate Taylor)
- *Bloodworth* (2010; dir. Shane Dax Taylor)
- *Winter’s Bone* (2010; dir. Debra Granik)
- *That Evening Sun* (2009; dir. Scott Teems)
- *Shotgun Stories* (2007; dir. Jeff Nichols)
- *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006 [Documentary Film]; dir. Spike Lee)
- *Cavedweller* (2004; dir. Lisa Cholodenko)
- *Big Fish* (2003; dir. Tim Burton)

- *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* (2003 [Documentary Film]; dir. Andrew Douglas)
- *Monster’s Ball* (2001; dir. Marc Forster)
- *American Hollow* (1999 [Documentary Film]; dir. Rory Kennedy)
- *Bastard out of Carolina* (1996; dir. Anjelica Huston)
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.2. Macroclusters

2.2.3. Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

- **Native Son** (2019; dir. Rashid Johnson)
- **BlacKkKlansman** (2018; dir. Spike Lee)
- **Green Book** (2018; dir. Peter Farrelly)
- **If Beale Street Could Talk** (2018; dir. Barry Jenkins)
- **Widows** (2018; dir. Steve McQueen)
- **Get Out** (2017; dir. Jordan Peele)
- **Hostiles** (2017; dir. Scott Cooper)
- **Suburbicon** (2017; dir. George Clooney)
- **Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri** (2017; dir. Martin McDonagh)
- **American Crime Story, Season 1: The People v. O. J. Simpson** (2016 [TV Series]; developed by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski)
- **Fences** (2016; dir. Denzel Washington)
- **Hidden Figures** (2016; dir. Theodore Melfi)
- **Indignation** (2016; dir. James Schamus)
- **Underground** (2016–17 [TV Series]; created by Misha Green and Joe Pokaski)
- **The Revenant** (2015; dir. Alejandro G. Iñárritu)
- **Selma** (2014; dir. Ava DuVernay)
- **The Butler** (2013; dir. Lee Daniels)
- **Fruitvale Station** (2013; dir. Ryan Coogler)
- **12 Years a Slave** (2013; Steve McQueen)
- **Django Unchained** (2012; dir. Quentin Tarantino)
- **The Help** (2011; dir. Tate Taylor)
- **Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee** (2007 [TV Film]; dir. Yves Simoneau)
- **Broken Trail** (2006 [TV Miniseries]; dir. Walter Hill)
- **Everything Is Illuminated** (2005; dir. Liev Schreiber)
- **Crash** (2004; dir. Paul Haggis)
- **Ray** (2004; dir. Taylor Hackford)
- **The Human Stain** (2003; dir. Robert Benton)
- **Far from Heaven** (2002; dir. Todd Haynes)
- **25th Hour** (2002; dir. Spike Lee)
- **The Wire** (2002–08 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
- **Monster’s Ball** (2001; dir. Marc Forster)
- **The Corner** (2000 [TV Series]; dir. Charles S. Dutton)
- **O Brother, Where Art Thou?** (2000; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer and co-screenplay) Coen])
- **American History X** (1998; dir. Tony Kaye)
- **Smoke Signals** (1998; dir. Chris Eyre)
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.3. Microclusters

2.3.0. Adaptations of Naturalist Fiction

- *Native Son* (2019; dir. Rashid Johnson) [based on Richard Wright’s 1940 novel]
- *In Dubious Battle* (2016; dir. James Franco) [based on John Steinbeck’s 1936 novel]
- *The Road* (2009; dir. John Hillcoat) [based on Cormac McCarthy’s 2006 novel]
- *Revolutionary Road* (2008; dir. Sam Mendes) [based on Richard Yates’s 1961 novel (for Yates as a “neo-naturalist,” see Lee Siegel [2001])]
- *Affliction* (1997; dir. Paul Schrader) [based on Russell Banks’s 1989 novel (see McEneaney’s chapter “Naturalism as Postmodern Parable: *Affliction*” [2010])]

Nota bene: Adaptations of literary works considered part of the canon of American (neo)naturalism will not be discussed in detail because they are naturalistic by default.
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters

2.3.1. The Frontier & the Neo-Western

- *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018 [Netflix]; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
- *Leave No Trace* (2018; dir. Debra Granik)
- *Hostiles* (2017; dir. Scott Cooper)
- *Fargo* (2014– [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
- *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
- *Django Unchained* (2012; dir. Quentin Tarantino)
- *Justified* (2010-15 [TV Series]; developed by Graham Yost)
- *True Grit* (2010; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
- *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (2007 [TV Film]; dir. Yves Simoneau)
- *Into the Wild* (2007; dir. Sean Penn)
- *No Country for Old Men* (2007; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
- *Broken Trail* (2006 [TV Miniseries]; dir. Walter Hill)
- *Brokeback Mountain* (2005; dir. Ang Lee)
- *Open Range* (2003; dir. Kevin Costner)
- *Insomnia* (2002; dir. Christopher Nolan)
- *Fargo* (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters
2.3.2. Dysfunctional Families / Milieu Studies / Isolatoes

- Native Son (2019; dir. Rashid Johnson)
- Leave No Trace (2018; dir. Debra Granik)
- The Mule (2018; dir. Clint Eastwood)
- The Deuce (2017-; created by David Simon and George Pelecanos)
- I, Tonya (2017; dir. Craig Gillespie)
- Lucky (2017; dir. John Carroll Lynch)
- Mr. Mercedes (2017– [TV Series]; developed by David E. Kelley)
- American Pastoral (2016; dir. Ewan McGregor)
- Indignation (2016; dir. James Schamus)
- Moonlight (2016; dir. Barry Jenkins)
- Queen of Katwe (2016; dir. Mira Nair)
- The Immigrant (2013; dir. James Gray)
- Joe (2013; dir. David Gordon Green)
- Shameless (2011 [TV Series]; developed by John Wells)
- Wendy and Lucy (2008; dir. Kelly Reichardt)
- The Wrestler (2008; dir. Darren Aronofsky)
- The Departed (2006; dir. Martin Scorsese)
- The Machinist (2004; dir. Brad Anderson)
- The Human Stain (2003; dir. Robert Benton)
- Monster (2003; dir. Patty Jenkins)
- Mystic River (2003; dir. Clint Eastwood)
- 25th Hour (2002; dir. Spike Lee)
- The Wire (2002–08 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
- The Corner (2000 [TV Series]; dir. Charles S. Dutton)
- Requiem for a Dream (2000; dir. Darren Aronofsky)
- American History X (1998; dir. Tony Kaye)
- Affliction (1997; dir. Paul Schrader)
- The Ice Storm (1997; dir. Ang Lee)
- Trees Lounge (1996; dir. Steve Buscemi)
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.3. Microclusters

2.3.3. Cosmic Naturalism / Accident, Coincidence, Chance

- *Native Son* (2019; dir. Rashid Johnson [screenplay: Suzan-Lori Parks])
- *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017; dir. Martin McDonagh)
- *Manchester by the Sea* (2016; dir. Kenneth Lonergan)
- *Fargo* (2014– [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
- *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
- *Crash* (2004; dir. Paul Haggis)
- *[Mulholland Drive* (2001; dir. David Lynch)]
- *American Beauty* (1999; dir. Sam Mendes)
- *Fargo* (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters
2.3.4. Post-Apocalypse / Ecodrama / Dystopia

- *Leave No Trace* (2018; dir. Debra Granik)
- *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017–19 [TV Series, three seasons]; created by Bruce Miller)
- *True Detective*, Season 1 (2014 [TV Series]; dir. Cary Joji Fukunaga; created by Nic Pizzolatto)
- *The 100* (2014–19 [TV Series, six seasons]; developed by Jason Rothenberg)
- *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2011; dir. Stephen Daldry)
- *Take Shelter* (2011; dir. Jeff Nichols)
- *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011; dir. Lynne Ramsay)
- *Treme* (2010-13 [TV Series]; created by David Simon and Eric Overmyer)
- *Children of Men* (2006; dir. Alfonso Cuarón)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters
2.3.5. Science Fiction / Neurofiction / Social Media

- Searching (2018; dir. Aneesh Chaganty)
- Get Out (2017; dir. Jordan Peele)
- Arrival (2016; dir. Denis Villeneuve)
- Westworld (2016– [TV Series]; created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy)
- The Martian (2015; dir. Ridley Scott)
- Ex Machina (2014; dir. Alex Garland)
- Unfriended (2014; dir. Leo Gabriadze)
- Gravity (2013; dir. Alfonso Cuarón)
- Her (2013; dir. Spike Jonze)
- Under the Dome (2013-15 [TV Series]; developed by Brian K. Vaughan)
- Source Code (2011; dir. Duncan Jones)
- Inception (2010; dir. Christopher Nolan)
- The Social Network (2010; dir. David Fincher)
- Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004; dir. Michel Gondry)
- Minority Report (2002; dir. Steven Spielberg)
- Memento (2000; dir. Christopher Nolan)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters
2.3.6. Finance Fiction / Financial Crisis

- *The Big Short* (2015; dir. Adam McKay)
- *Margin Call* (2011; dir. J. C. Chandor)
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.3. Microclusters

2.3.7. Child/Sexual Abuse / Trauma

- *Spotlight* (2015; dir. Tom McCarthy)
- *True Detective*, Season 1 (2014 [TV Series]; dir. Cary Joji Fukunaga; created by Nic Pizzolatto)
- *Precious* (2009; dir. Lee Daniels)
- *Doubt* (2008; dir. John Patrick Shanley)
- *Mystic River* (2003; dir. Clint Eastwood)
- *Bastard out of Carolina* (1996; dir. Anjelica Huston)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters
2.3.8. Musical Biography

- *Rocketman* (2019; dir. Dexter Fletcher)
- *Green Book* (2018; dir. Peter Farrelly)
- *A Star Is Born* (2018; dir. Bradley Cooper)
- *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
- *8 Mile* (2002; dir. Curtis Hanson)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters

2.3.9. Black Humor Crime / Thriller/Horror-Dramedy

- *Us* (2019; dir. Jordan Peele)
- *BlacKkKlansman* (2018; dir. Spike Lee)
- *Suburbicon* (2017; dir. George Clooney)
- *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017; dir. Martin McDonagh)
- *Fargo* (2014– [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
- *True Detective*, Season 1 (2014 [TV Series]; dir. Cary Joji Fukunaga; created by Nic Pizzolatto)
- *Breaking Bad* (2008–13 [TV Series]; created by Vince Gilligan)
- *Six Feet Under* (2001-05 [TV Series]; created by Alan Ball)
- *Fargo* (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.3. Microclusters
2.3.10. Translation & Documentation

- Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (2007 [TV Film]; dir. Yves Simoneau)
- The Wire, Season 4 (2006 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
- Everything Is Illuminated (2005; dir. Liev Schreiber)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.1. Macrocluster: Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities

A first striking result of analyzing the productions assigned to this thematic cluster is the unproportionally high percentage of movies and TV series concerned with alternative sexualities (almost half, marked pink). Even higher is the percentage of films featuring male protagonists who can either be characterized, as Brett Martin notes, as “difficult men” (marked orange) or who otherwise suffer from a sense of thwarted masculinity (marked red; see next two slides). In his history of high-quality, multi-episode serialized drama, Martin describes this new type of protagonist as “unhappy, morally compromised, complicated” (4)—“a humanized red state” in “a bitterly divided country” following the 2000 presidential elections, when “coastal, liberal, educated, ‘blue state’” Americans “were left groping to come to terms with the Beast lurking in their own body politic” (87). As Martin observes, “This was the ascendant Right being presented to the disempowered Left—as if to reassure it that those in charge were still recognizably human” (87).
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.2. Macroclusters
2.2.1. Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities

• *Rocketman* (2019; dir. Dexter Fletcher)
• *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018; dir. Bryan Singer)
• *Boy Erased* (2018; dir. Joel Edgerton)
• *Can You Ever Forgive Me?* (2018; dir. Marielle Heller)
• *Green Book* (2018; dir. Peter Farrelly)
• *Call Me by Your Name* (2017; dir. Luca Guadagnino)
• *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017–19 [TV Series, three seasons]; created by Bruce Miller)
• *Moonlight* (2016; dir. Barry Jenkins)
• *Carol* (2015; dir. Todd Haynes)
• *Wild* (2014; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
• *Boyhood* (2014; dir. Richard Linklater)
• *Fargo* (2014– [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
• *Gone Girl* (2014; dir. David Fincher)
• *The Wrestler* (2008; dir. Darren Aronofsky)
• *Mad Men* (2007-15 [TV Series]; creat. by Matthew Weiner)
• *No Country for Old Men* (2007; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
• *There Will Be Blood* (2007; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
• *Brokeback Mountain* (2005; dir. Ang Lee)
• *Capote* (2005; dir. Bennett Miller)
• *A History of Violence* (2005; dir. David Cronenberg)
• *The Aviator* (2004; dir. Martin Scorsese)
• *Monster* (2003; dir. Patty Jenkins)
• *Mystic River* (2003; dir. Clint Eastwood)
• *Far from Heaven* (2002; dir. Todd Haynes)
• *The Wire* (2002–08 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
• *The Man Who Wasn’t There* (2001; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer and co-screenplay)] Coen)
• *Six Feet Under* (2001-05 [TV Series]; created by Alan Ball)
• *American Psycho* (2000; dir. Mary Harron)
• *American Beauty* (1999; dir. Sam Mendes)
• *Fight Club* (1999; dir. David Fincher)
• *Magnolia* (1999, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
• *The Sopranos* (1999-2007 [TV Series; created by David Chase)
• *Fargo* (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.2. Macroclusters

2.2.1. Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities

- Rocketman (2019; dir. Dexter Fletcher)
- Bohemian Rhapsody (2018; dir. Bryan Singer)
- Boy Erased (2018; dir. Joel Edgerton)
- Green Book (2018; dir. Peter Farrelly)
- Call Me by Your Name (2017; dir. Luca Guadagnino)
- The Handmaid's Tale (2017–19 [TV Series, three seasons]; created by Bruce Miller)
- Moonlight (2016; dir. Barry Jenkins)
- Carol (2015; dir. Todd Haynes)
- Wild (2014; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
- Boyhood (2014; dir. Richard Linklater)
- Fargo (2014– [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
- Gone Girl (2014; dir. David Fincher)
- Dallas Buyers Club (2013; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
- American Horror Story, Seas. 2: Asylum (2012–13; created by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk)
- The Master (2012; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
- A Serious Man (2009; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
- Breaking Bad (2008–13 [TV Series]; created by Vince Gilligan)
- The Wrestler (2008; dir. Darren Aronofsky)
- Mad Men (2007-15 [TV Series]; creat. by Matthew Weiner)
- No Country for Old Men (2007; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
- There Will Be Blood (2007; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
- Brokeback Mountain (2005; dir. Ang Lee)
- Capote (2005; dir. Bennett Miller)
- A History of Violence (2005; dir. David Cronenberg)
- The Aviator (2004; dir. Martin Scorsese)
- Monster (2003; dir. Patty Jenkins)
- Mystic River (2003; dir. Clint Eastwood)
- Far from Heaven (2002; dir. Todd Haynes)
- The Wire (2002–08 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
- The Man Who Wasn’t There (2001; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer and co-screenplay)] Coen)
- Six Feet Under (2001-05 [TV Series]; created by Alan Ball)
- American Psycho (2000; dir. Mary Harron)
- American Beauty (1999; dir. Sam Mendes)
- Fight Club (1999; dir. David Fincher)
- The Sopranos (1999-2007 [TV Series; created by David Chase)
- Fargo (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.1. Macrocluster: Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities

A motif particularly relevant with regard to the neonaturalistic representation of „difficult“ masculinities and alternative sexualities is what Richard Slotkin in the title of his 1973 anatomy of Amerian frontier mythology has famously called „regeneration through violence.” In the examples selected, the motif is used in two variants: In the serious variant, violence is either exerted against the racial, sexual, or in-group Other or a presumably emasculated Self. In Tony Kaye’s American History X (1998), for instance, neo-Nazi leader Derek Vinyard (Edward Norton) shoots a petty black thief and curb stomps another for racist reasons, triumphantly posing as an Aryan hero before being arrested, the sign in the background ironically highlighting Derek’s ideological blindness and radicalization. Compare also Chiron (in this scene, Ashton Sanders) being beaten up by homophobic peers in Barry Jenkins’s Moonlight (2016 [01:01:29]); Tony (James Gandolfini) strangling a ‘rat’ in season 1, episode 5, “College” (1999 [00:48:30]), of David Chase’s The Sopranos (1999–2007); and the unnamed narrator’s (Edward Norton) almost beating to death a fellow club member in David Fincher’s Fight Club (1999 [01:32:54]) (see screenshots on the following two slides).
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.1. Macrocluster: Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities

Serious Variant: *American History X* (New Line Cinema, 1998 [00:53:06]; see Macrocluster 2.4.3.) and *Moonlight* (A24, 2016 [01:01:29]):

![Image 1](image1.png)

![Image 2](image2.png)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.1. Macrocluster: Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities

Serious Variant: *The Sopranos*, Season 1, Episode 5, “College” (HBO, 1999 [00:48:30]), and *Fight Club* (20th Century Fox, 1999 [01:32:54]):
In the ironic variant, the accidental exertion of violence literally transforms a socially and sexually underperforming individual into a potent body and personality. At the end of the first episode of Vince Gilligan’s neo-western crime drama TV series *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013), ‘Walt’ White’s (Bryan Cranston) eventual display of virility is subversively undercut by his wife’s surprise at Walt’s unexpected performance, Skyler’s (Anna Gunn) verbal response questioning both Walt’s physical identity and sudden hypermasculinity (see next slide).
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.1. Macrocluster: Masculinity / Alternative Sexualities

Ironic Variant: *Breaking Bad*, Season 1, Episode 1, “Pilot” (Sony Pictures, 2008 [00:14:27, 00:50:10 & 00:55:21]):

Is he asleep?

Oh, Walt, is that you?
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

As in the macrocluster on “Masculinities / Alternative Sexualities,” neonaturalist moments in the “Blue-Collar South” cluster—ranging from earlier productions such as *Sling Blade* (1996), *Bastard out of Carolina* (1996), and *American Hollow* (1999) to recent releases such as *Mudbound* (2017), *Sharp Objects* (2018), and *Hillbilly Elegy* (2020 [in progress])—come in different variants or modes: the realistic-naturalistic (1), the Gothic (2), and the metafictional-ironic (3).
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

The realistic-naturalistic mode runs the gamut of the deterministic forces shaping the lives of poor whites in the rural South—from economic and social precariousness (*Winter’s Bone* [2010] 00:07:42), ecological deterioration, and a legacy of racism, to alcoholism (*Joe* [2013] 00:28:28) and a frequently uncanny sort of religiosity (*Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* [2003] 00:48:46; see next slide) to outright occultism (*True Detective*, Season 1, Episode 5, “The Secret of All Life” [2014] 00:45:13; also see next slide):
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

[Speaking In Tongues]

Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus (Searching Films, 2003 [00:48:46])

True Detective, Seas. 1, Epis. 5: "The Secret of All Life" (HBO, 2014 [00:45:13])
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

The Southern Gothic mode is ever-present in these movies, be it in the form of haunted landscapes (as in Debra Granik’s *Winter’s Bone* [Anon. Content, 2010], set in the rural Ozarks of Missouri [00:19:06]), extreme violence (see *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* [20th Century Fox, 2017, 00:08:02], where one of the billboards informs us that the protagonist’s daughter was “raped while dying”), or grotesque characters, moving beyond cliché through an in-group perspective (see Andrew Douglas’s documentary *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* [Searching Films, 2003], featuring “Grit Lit” writer Harry Crews, who reminisces that “in our world everybody was maimed and mutilated . . .” [00:14:27]).
The metafictional-ironic mode employs black humor, hyperbole, and intertextuality in order to play with the aforementioned themes and devices, parodying not only representations of the South and related cultural stereotypes but also the Southern Gothic predilection for naturalistic motifs. Examples are Eli Craig’s Canadian-American horror comedy film *Tucker & Dale vs. Evil* (2010)—with allusions to the homosexual rape scene in John Boorman’s Southern Gothic thriller *Deliverance* (1972) (“We are in hillbilly country now, boys. Squeal like a pig!” [*Tucker & Dale* 00:01:00]); to Gaear Grimsrud’s (Peter Stormare) feeding Carl Showalter’s (Steve Buscemi) body into a woodchipper at the end of the Coens’ 1996 *Fargo* (*Tucker & Dale* 00:28:08); as well as to racist thinking about the dangers of miscegenation and racial purity (*Tucker & Dale* 01:16:08 [“You’re half hillbilly”]; see next slide)—and the Coen brothers’ *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000)—which revives the motif of the fraudulent bible salesman, e.g. in Flannery O’Connor’s 1955 short story “Good Country People” (see *O Brother* 00:48:54 [“vast amounts of money to be made in the service of God”]), and evokes the ending of Herman Melville’s 1851 novel *Moby-Dick* to deflate classic naturalism’s reliance on scientific thinking (see *O Brother* 01:36:00–25 [“There’s a perfectly scientific explanation for what just happened”]; see slide after next).
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

We are in hillbilly country now, boys. Squeal like a pig!

(Coughs, splutters) I don't think I have the stomach for this, Tuck.

It's true, Chad. You're half hillbilly.
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

...where I'll tell you of the vast amounts of money to be made in the service of God.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? (Working Title Films, 2000 [00:48:54])

There's a perfectly scientific explanation for what just happened.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? (Working Title Films, 2000 [01:36:00-25])

Out with the old spiritual mumbo-jumbo, the superstitions and backward ways.
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

A less overt allusion to Boorman’s notorious iconography of “white trash” in his adaptation of James Dickey’s 1970 novel is to be found at the end of Winter’s Bone (2010 [01:31:59]; see next slide). When Ree Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence) is sitting on the steps of their little house with her younger siblings, her six-year-old sister Ashlee’s attempt at playing the banjo overwrites the “genetically deficient” “banjo kid” (played by Billy Redden, who also appeared in Tim Burton’s 2003 fantasy dramedy Big Fish) in the opening sequence of Deliverance (1972 [00:06:24, 00:06:11]). The scene also reframes Dorothea Lange’s 1936 F.S.A. photo Migrant Mother (see two slides after next).
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

(Winter’s Bone [Anonymous Content, 2010; dir. Debra Granik], 01:31:59)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.2. Macroclusters
2.2.2. Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.2. Macroclusters
2.2.2. Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

Considering the general characteristics of Southern fiction, and especially the Southern Gothic tradition, with its focus on rural poverty, religious fanaticism, grotesque protagonists, inexplicable violence, and the curses of the past, the abundance of neonaturalist moments in this cluster is no longer that surprising. All the more so since some of the films and documentaries (e.g., *Cavedweller* [2004], *Joe* [2013], or *Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus* [2003]) are based on novels by, or were produced in collaboration with, Southern authors (Dorothy Allison, Larry Brown, and Harry Crews) who have already been classified as neonaturalist writers (see Guinn [2000] and Buehrer [2014]), or who deserve to be reread as such (e.g., the recently rediscovered William Gay, whose 2002 short story “I Hate to See That Evening Sun Go Down” and 2000 novel *Provinces of Night* inspired the movies *That Evening Sun* [2009] and *Bloodworth* [2010]). In the introduction to *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South* (2000), Matthew Jackson Guinn traces the resurgence of naturalism in contemporary Southern literature to the respective authors’ social background:
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

Not since the days of Wright and Erskine Caldwell has naturalism been so prominent in southern fiction: the novels of Allison, Brown, and Crews depict a culture nearly as replete with deterministic poverty and social indifference as it was in the 1930s. Writing from the almost unprecedented perspective of southern poor whites speaking for themselves, these authors expose the dark underside of an ostensibly genteel culture. These new naturalists all hail from backgrounds of poverty. . . . What becomes clear in reading them is that people of their class had no participation in the movement called southern modernism. . . . Allison, Brown, and Crews demonstrate that . . . free will is a product of class status beyond their own, that to espouse an autonomous existence is to ignore the quality of southern life at its lower socioeconomic levels. (Guinn xiii)
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

Martin McDonagh’s Academy Award- and Golden Globe-winning *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017)—a dark comedy crime drama about a mother who tries to pressure the police department of a fictional racist small town into solving the brutal murder and rape of her teenage daughter, Angela—is a brilliant combination of all modes identified as standing out in filmic portrayals of the blue-collar South. Firmly embedded in the Southern Gothic tradition via intertextual allusions on all levels of the film’s structure (e.g., by the director’s having the character Red Welby read Flannery O’Connor’s 1955 collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories* [00:03:27] or by having his androgynous protagonist collaborate with a midget, echoing Carson McCullers’s 1951 novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* [01:33:03]; see next slide), *Three Billboards* deconstructs dominant gender categories and ironizes southern racism and the restrictions of small-town life while avoiding caricature by effectively humanizing the protagonists in the course of the narrative.
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

*Three Billboards* (20th Century Fox, 2017 [00:03:27])

I know I'm a dwarf who sells used cars.

*Three Billboards* (20th Century Fox, 2017 [01:33:03])
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

In addition to its ironic critique of racism and homophobia (climaxing in the police chief’s statement, “If you got rid of every cop with vaguely racist leanings, you’d have three cops left, and all of them are gonna hate the fags” [00:27:51–57]; see next slide), as well as established religion (“And when a person is culpable to altar-boy-fucking” [00:21:24]), this open-ended film gem contains impressive moments of cosmic naturalism (e.g., when Mildred Hayes [Frances McDormand] is mimicking her daughter’s angry “I hope I get raped on the way!” after having refused to let her use the family car, shortly before Angela’s actual rape-murder [“Yeah, well, I hope you get raped on the way too!” (00:33:48)]) and black humor (so when Chief Willoughby [Woody Harrelson] apologizes for the inconvenience of his death in a letter written before his suicide to reform racist cop Jason Dixon [Sam Rockwell]: “I’m dead now. Sorry about that” [Three Billboards 01:16:16]; see slide after next).
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

"If you got rid of every cop with vaguely racist leanings, you'd have three cops left, and all of them are gonna hate the fags."
2.4.2. Macrocluster: Revisionist Takes on Blue-Collar Southern Life

*Three Billboards* (20th Century Fox, 2017 [00:21:24])

And when a person is culpable to altar-boy-fucking,

*Three Billboards* (20th Century Fox, 2017 [00:33:48])

Yeah, well, I hope you get raped on the way too!

*Three Billboards* (20th Century Fox, 2017 [01:16:16])

I'm dead now. Sorry about that.
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

Long neglected in scholarship and teaching, the contribution of ethnic and especially African American writers to literary naturalism has recently received more attention (see Dudley 2004, 2011, and 2012, as well as Schmidt 2019). In “The Subversion of Racial Science in Charles W. Chesnutt’s ‘The Doll’ and Stephen Crane’s ‘The Monster’” (2018), in which she illustrates that, in his 1912 story, Chesnutt “borrows the [biological] theories’ racially deterministic language not only to show its effect on whites’ perception of African Americans but also to demonstrate how African Americans can transcend that perception through reason” (59), Kelly Masterson tackles the nexus between racializing (pseudo-)scientific discourses and the suppression of black agency:

For African American naturalist writers . . . it is often not heredity itself, but rather the use of racialized hereditarian science to justify discrimination and oppression that acts as a deterministic force. They push back against heredity . . . , refusing to reduce their characters to purely racialized biological drives and revealing that it is the agency of other humans who wield these hereditarian theories of race that circumscribes their agency. (Masterson 48)
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

Interestingly, filmmakers’ engagement with the disastrous consequences of racial science and biological essentialism is strongest in ironic portrayals of historical and contemporary white racism (e.g., *Django Unchained* [2012], *Get Out* [2017], or *BlacKkKlansman* [2018]). In serious period drama films, in contrast, whether concerned with slavery, the civil rights movement, or racial violence today (e.g., *12 Years a Slave* [2013], *Selma* [2014], or *Fruitvale Station* [2013]), the protagonists are routinely confronted with deterministic forces beyond their control (e.g., institutionalized segregation). A trend that can be seen in all productions centering on interethnic conflict and race relations is the directors’ increasing preference for a global and transnational perspective (e.g., *Crash* [2004], *Babel* [2006; see Microcluster 2.3.3.], or *The Revenant* [2015]).
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

Quentin Tarantino’s *Django Unchained* (Columbia Pictures, 2012), although criticized, like Farrelly’s *Green Book* (2018), for its reliance on the ‘white savior’ trope, not only contains the most hilarious exposure of KKK stupidity in film history (00:40:40), but it also efficiently deconstructs the racist determinism behind the 19th-century vogue for phrenology (01:53:51-58:18; see also next slide)—a pseudoscience championed by American writers such as Edgar Allan Poe or John Neal (cf. Poskett; Carr; Holmes):
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

In the skull of the African here...

...the area associated with submissiveness...

...is larger than any human or any other subhuman species on planet Earth.

Then we can examine the three dimples inside Broomhilda's skull!
Jordan Peele’s social thriller *Get Out* (Universal Pictures, 2017 [00:57:27; 01:21:26-31; 01:33:41-34:10]), which, according to Kelli Weston, “may well be the most penetrating cinematic depiction of slavery, from the nature of the institution to its far-reaching psychic consequences” (38), ironically stages the white appropriation of the black body in terms of cannibalism (in the movie, the brains of aging whites are transplanted into lobotomized young African Americans). In the words of bell hooks, “The overriding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (qtd. in Weston 39; cf. also 2.4.12.):
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

*Get Out (Universal Pictures, 2017 [01:21:26-31]*)

*People want a change.*
*Some people wanna be stronger.*

*Faster, cooler.*

*Black is in fashion.*

*Get Out (Universal Pictures, 2017 [01:33:41-34:10]*)

*Help. Help.*
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

Inspired by D. W. Griffith’s racist silent film classic *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), as was Tarantino’s *Django Unchained* (2012), Spike Lee’s *BlacKkKlansman* (Focus Features, 2018) deserves mention for its use of intertextuality and the documentary mode (although it is much too unsubtle, foreseeable, and didactic to be so highly rated). Naturalism-related interest is added to this adaptation of Ron Stallworth’s 2014 memoir by the movie’s references to Fred Gildersleeve’s notorious photos and picture postcards of the 1916 lynching and slow burning alive of Jesse Washington in Waco, Texas (01:35:57), already fictionalized in Colson Whitehead’s novel *The Underground Railroad* (2016); to the fascist-isolationist origins of Trump’s campaign slogan “America First” (01:40:53), known by everyone who read Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America* (2004); and to the anything but surprising fact that “Trump is a racist,” as Lee put it in a 2018 interview with *The Times*, visualized by incorporating footage of the president’s KKK-supported reaction to the August 12, 2017 neo-Nazi terrorist attack in Charlottesville, VA (02:02:28-03:45; see next slide):
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

DONALD TRUMP:
Not all of those people were neo-Nazis, believe me.

You also had people that were very fine people.

This is the first step toward taking America back.

HEATHER HEYER
May 29th, 1985 – August 12th, 2017
Rest In Power
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations

Despite their undeniable weaknesses, including the fact that they reinforce rather than refute racial stereotypes and patriarchal structures (see, e.g., “Symposium” [2007] and Silvey [2013]), the Academy Award- and Golden Globe-winning ensemble or network films *Crash* (2004; dir. Paul Haggis) and *Babel* (2006; dir. Alejandro G. Iñarritu) insist that we have to “crash into each other” (*Crash*, 00:02:38) in order to make contact with the global Other. In Iñarritu’s *The Revenant* (2015), events are placed in a grim, transatlantic context of Euro-American expansionism, Native genocide, “the beginning of deregulated capitalism” (Iñarritu; qtd. in Lawrenson 25), and “unchecked ecological plunder” (Lawrenson 26), the protagonist being recast as a transnational figure by coupling him with a Pawnee wife and half-Pawnee son, who are both killed by white Americans. In all of these movies, the lack of intra- and intercultural respect and communication precipitates the unfolding of violent tragedy.
2.4.3. Macrocluster: Interethnic Conflict / Race Relations
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.4. Microcluster: The Frontier & the Neo-Western

In *Quest West* (2014), Richard Lehan points out that “[t]he Western went through many . . . incarnations, but the most significant was its transformation by literary naturalism. . . . The individual in combat with a force is analogous to the individual on the frontier in combat with the environment, and thus literary naturalism was a perfect literary mode to accommodate narratives of the frontier—and to pick up where the Western left off” (Ch. 11, sect. ii, n. pag.). A distinguishing trait of all recent movies and TV series on the subject is that they are revisionist, whether set on the historical or the present frontier. In films with a historical setting, in addition to genre parodies (e.g., *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* [2018]), there is a clear tendency to overwrite traditional scripts by foregrounding interracial and multicultural encounters (e.g., *Broken Trail* [2006] or *Django Unchained* [2012]), by criticizing capitalism (e.g., *Open Range* [2003]), or by focusing on Native American losses in the wake of U.S. expansionism (e.g., *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* [2007], *The Revenant* [2015, 00:01:13; see next slide], or *Hostiles* [2017]). In films set in the present, the frontier either functions as a backdrop for sexual or spiritual self-realization (e.g., *Brokeback Mountain* [2005] or *Into the Wild* [2007]), or, as in *No Country for Old Men* (2007; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen), as a relentlessly indifferent stage for “predators and prey” (Peebles 168 [*No Country* 00:11:15; see next slide, bottom left]), a nightmarish space where “salvation and damnation” are “dol[ed] out . . . with the flip of a coin” (Link, “McCarthy” 159), with the figure of Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) embodying the arbitrariness of fate (for the Coens’ use of the game of chance metaphor, see *No Country* 00:23:09 [next slide, on the right]):
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.4. Microcluster: The Frontier & the Neo-Western

No Country for Old Men (Paramount Vantage, 2007 [00:23:09])

The Revenant (Regency, 2015 [00:09:13])

-No Country for Old Men (Paramount Vantage, 2007 [00:11:15])

-Sir?
-The most you ever lost on a coin toss.
In “Cosmic Irony and the Literature of Frustration,” a section of his 2013 article “McCarthy and Literary Naturalism,” Eric Carl Link — taking his cue from Donald Pizer’s diagnosis that the “naturalistic occasion is still that of a closed social and moral world and of a figure seeking some way out” (“Contemporary American Literary Naturalism” [1993] 185) — argues that “the cosmic irony which defines the human condition is layered with the frustration arising from the epistemological crisis of the individual who seeks but does not find” (157). Unsuccessful struggle and frustration characterize the experience of most of this cluster’s isolatoes—from unloved husbands (see screenshot [01:44:54] from The Ice Storm [1997] on the next slide), sons crushed by their families (e.g., in Affliction [1997] or Indignation [2016]), or parents losing their children to political radicalism (e.g., in American History X [1998] or American Pastoral [2016]) to traumatized ex-soldiers (e.g., in Leave No Trace [2018]) and alcoholics battling existential loneliness (e.g., in Trees Lounge [1996] or Joe [2013]). Surprisingly, however, there are also those who eventually find solace and meaning, if at times unconvincingly, including Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey), the adult Chiron Harris (Trevante Rhodes [“Black”]), and the title character (Harry Dean Stanton [“Lucky”]) at the end of True Detective (2014 [Season 1, Episode 8 (“Form and Void”), 00:50:08-51:47]), Moonlight (2016 [01:44:35]; see next slide), and Lucky (2017 [01:20:16]; see next slide), respectively:
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.5. Microcluster: Dysfunctional Families / Milieu Studies / Isolatoes

*The Ice Storm (Good Machine, 1997 [01:44:54])*

*Moonlight (A24, 2016 [01:44:35])*

*Lucky (Magnolia Pictures, 2017 [01:20:16])*
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.6. Microcluster: Cosmic Naturalism / Accident, Coincidence, Chance

In *Realism and Naturalism: The Novel in an Age of Transition* (2005), Richard Lehan makes a heuristic distinction between three “fields of force”: the “biological,” “cosmic,” and “social/political” models. In his chapter on “The Cosmic Model,” in which he traces a “sense of cosmic play” (151) in the works of Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, and Thomas Hardy, Lehan claims that the cosmic, including cosmic irony (“[c]hance, accident, coincidence” [168]), “is another aspect of the determinism that informs naturalistic literature” (167). Inspired by Robert Altman’s paradigm-changing ensemble classic *Short Cuts* (1993), and, like *Magnolia* (1999) and *Babel* (2006), presented in multiple, interconnected storylines, Paul Haggis’s Academy Award-winning *Crash* (2004) can be seen as a filmic embodiment of Lehan’s exemplification of cosmic naturalism. Fittingly, the film opens and closes with a car accident involving Americans of different ethnicities who insult each other (00:03:31 & 01:43:52; see next slide). In one of several cases of strange coincidence, racist white LAPD officer John Ryan (Matt Dillon) saves the life of an African American woman (00:58:18; see next slide), after having sexually molested her during a racially motivated traffic control earlier. Cosmic chance comes into play when Persian shop owner Farhad (Shaun Toub) believes to have shot the little daughter of a Latino locksmith, before finding out that the bullets in his revolver were only blanks (01:18:50; see next slide):
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.6. Microcluster: Cosmic Naturalism / Accident, Coincidence, Chance
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.7. Microcluster: Post-Apocalypse / Ecodrama / Dystopia

The productions gathered in this cluster remind us that neonaturalism, like classic naturalism, is highly political and inherently responsive to current developments. The real or imagined disasters that propel these dystopian and/or post-apocalyptic narratives, however, are less contributive to their uncanny relevance than the political and sociopsychological climates from which they emerged. Margaret Atwood’s 1985 *The Handmaid’s Tale* was written and published in the Reagan Era, which saw the ascendancy of Christian fundamentalism, the “Moral Majority,” and free-range capitalism. The novel’s 2017-2019 Hulu-MGM adaptation had its genesis when an upsurge of ultra-conservatism resulted in the unexpected election of Donald J. Trump.* It is no coincidence, then, that some of the most gripping neonaturalist moments in the TV series involve the silencing and biblically sanctioned sexual objectification of women, with mock-executions of gagged and bound female bodies serving as one element in the regime’s politics of permanent fear (Season 2 [2018], Episode 1 [“June”], 00:10:02; see next slide, left), institutionalized homophobia and ecological deterioration (Season 2, Episode 2 [“Unwomen”], 00:06:05; see next slide, right), as well as the curtailing of academic freedom (Season 2, Episode 2, 00:11:13; see next slide, bottom):

* Tellingly, a recent "Forum" on the Hulu production of *The Handmaid’s Tale* in *Communication, Culture & Critique* appeared in a special issue (11.1 [2018]) on *Media and the Extreme Right*. 
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.7. Microcluster: Post-Apocalypse / Ecodrama / Dystopia

*The Handmaid's Tale*, S2, Epis. 1: "June" (Hulu, 2018 [00:10:02])

*The Handmaid's Tale*, S2, E2: "Unwomen" (Hulu, 2018 [00:06:05])

*The Handmaid's Tale*, S2, E3: "Unwomen" (Hulu, 2018 [00:11:43])

that you're not maintaining a healthy learning environment.
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.8. Microcluster: Science Fiction / Neurofiction / Social Media

The mutual influence of literary and filmic science fiction is a prime example for the undervalued potential of transmedial analysis (see, e.g., the intertextual links between Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* [1968], Scott’s *Blade Runner* [1982], Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), cyberpunk, the Wachowskis’ *The Matrix* [1999], and Spielberg’s *Minority Report* [2002; based on Dick’s 1956 short story of the same name]). There are also numerous parallels between science fiction and literary naturalism, although scholarship on this connection, as Eric Carl Link has pointed out in his introduction to a special SAN issue on the subject (8.1 [2013]), is “simply non-existent” (3): “Both . . . are literary modes that emerged from . . . the scientific spirit of the age. They both explore the relationship between humans and their environment, the perverse, brutish, and grotesque in human nature. . . . And, most importantly, they both highlight a profound cosmic irony in which human claims of evolutionary superiority are relentlessly challenged . . .” (3). Notable neonaturalist moments in the films of this cluster relate to biological, neurological, and cosmological determinism (as in the notion of predetermination in the “precrime” concept [*Minority Report* (2002) 00:22:43; see next slide, left] or the eradicability and contagiousness of ideas [*Inception* (2010) 00:02:55; see next slide, center]), the manipulability of human memory and perception (e.g., *The Matrix* [1999], *Memento* [2000], *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* [2004], and *Inception* [2010]), the inherent deficiency and irresponsibility of mankind (e.g., machines as a “cure” for human imperfection [*The Matrix* (1999) 01:32:43; see next slide, right] or brain transplantation in *Get Out* [2017]), and the uncontrollability of data circulation in the social media (e.g. in the “screenlife” masterpiece *Searching* [2018]):
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.8. Microcluster: Science Fiction / Neurofiction / Social Media

![Scene from Minority Report](image1)
![Scene from Inception](image2)
![Scene from The Matrix](image3)

You're talking about predetermination, which happens all the time.

Once an idea has taken hold of the brain, it's almost impossible to eradicate.

Human beings are a disease.
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.9. Microcluster: Finance Fiction / Financial Crisis

The difference between the classical turn-of-the-20th-century business novel (e.g., Howells, Norris, or Dreiser) and post-2008 finance fiction is that “the scale now seems vaster” (Gajarawala, “The Fictions of Finance” [2015]; qtd. in Shonkwiler, The Financial Imaginary [2017] 123). In view of the increasing abstractness of the world of finance and “intractability of the global financial network,” fiction appears to fulfill a translational function: “As the epistemological divide between finance and everyday life yawns ever wider, . . . [n]ew genres have emerged to do the work of translation between that thing called financialization and the daily grind of the global economy, or, if not, to at least ironize our ability to do so” (Gajarawala n. pag.). While contemporary financial films still resort to Darwinistic animal imagery in the tradition of the immemorial squid and lobster scene in Dreiser’s The Financier (1912), if mostly in the satirical-hyperbolic mode employed in Martin Scorsese’s The Wolf of Wall Street (2013 [see 01:30:02 on the next slide, left]), their main focus is on the irreality (see The Wolf, 00:10:51, next slide, right) and uncontrollability (see Margin Call [2011]) of unpredictable financial market forces:
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.9. Microcluster: Finance Fiction / Financial Crisis

*The Wolf of Wall Street* (Red Granite Pictures, 2013 [01:30:02])

*The Wolf of Wall Street* (Red Granite Pictures, 2013 [00:10:51])
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.10. Microcluster: Child/Sexual Abuse / Trauma

The release of the movies and TV series assigned to this cluster is clearly a response to the increased disclosure of child abuse cases in the last two decades, most of them related either to well-organized rings of pedophiles or to sexually abusive dignitaries of the Catholic church. The neonaturalist devices that I found in the six titles selected (Bastard out of Carolina [1996], Mystic River [2003], Doubt [2008], Precious [2009], True Detective, Season 1 [2014], Spotlight [2015]) vary according to the perspectives from which the events are presented. From the vantage of those investigating such cases, as for example in True Detective or Spotlight, “[i]t takes an outsider” (Spotlight 00:55:01; see next slide, left), like the Texan sociopath Rust Cohle or the Jewish editor of the Boston Globe’s investigative journalism unit, Marty Baron, to clear up long-hushed-up crimes in close-knit communities (in keeping with the theme of marginality prevalent in classic naturalism). Those traumatized by, or accused of, sexual abuse, as in Mystic River, Doubt, or Precious, struggle with questions of “what if;” or cosmic naturalism (Mystic River 00:36:04; see next slide, center), and try to encode their experiences in therapeutic narratives, often based on animal imagery (Mystic River 00:54:39; see next slide, right):
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.10. Microcluster: Child/Sexual Abuse / Trauma

Because it takes an outsider, like me.

*Spotlight* (Open Road Films, 2015 [00:55:01])

What if you or I had gotten into that car instead of Dave Boyle?

*Mystic River* (Village Roadshow Pictures, 2003 [00:36:04])

The boy who escaped from wolves.

*Mystic River* (Village Roadshow Pictures, 2003 [00:54:39])
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.11. Microcluster: Musical Biography

As in naturalistic milieu studies, six (out of seven) movies in this cluster are concerned with alcoholism and substance abuse (the other five include *8 Mile* [2002], *Ray* [2004], *Green Book* [2018], *Bohemian Rhapsody* [2018], and *Rocketman* [2019]). Additionally, *A Star Is Born* (2018; dir. Bradley Cooper) features an X-shaped plot reminiscent of Hurstwood and the title character in Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900). The descent of Jackson “Jack” Maine (Bradley Cooper), a country musician struggling with addiction, tinnitus, and depression, and the ascent of Ally (Lady Gaga), a talented but unknown waitress and singer-songwriter discovered and married by Jack, converge when Maine, completely intoxicated, wets himself and collapses on stage at the very moment Ally receives her first Grammy (01:36:51; see next slide, left), and culminate with Jack’s suicide when Ally has emerged as a global superstar (01:58:14; see next slide, right):
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.11. Microcluster: Musical Biography
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.12. Microcluster: Black Humor Crime / Thriller/Horror-Dramedy

The movies and TV series of this microcluster (ranging from the Coen brothers’ *Fargo* [1996] to Jordan Peele’s *Us* [2019]) use ironic intertextuality, including references to Jack Londonesque naturalism, French existentialism, and classics of the horror genre, to parody and deconstruct traditional configurations of evil and inevitability. In the first season of the TV series *Fargo* (2014; created by Noah Hawley), for instance, the widow of murdered mobster Sam Hess describes her married life in Bemidji, Minnesota, as “stuck in the Yukon with . . . two mongoloid sons” (episode 3 [“A Muddy Road”], 00:17:59 [see to the right]). By the end of episode 10 (“Morton’s Fork”), the season’s Mephisto-like social Darwinist Lorne Malvo (Billy Bob Thornton), fittingly metaphorized as a wolf (00:49:23–50:26; see next slide, top), has succeeded in turning two ‘civilized’ men (Lester Nygaard [Martin Freeman] and Gus Grimly [Colin Hanks]) into animals. In episode 10 (“Palindrome”) of season 2 (2015), in a typical moment of “postirony” (Lukas Hoffmann), Camus’s notion of life’s absurdity (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, 1942) is debunked as foolish theoreticism by cancer-stricken Betsy Solverson (Cristin Milioti), the split screen device highlighting abstract philosophy’s irrelevance for a married couple’s concrete struggle with suffering and mortality (00:27:06; see next slide, bottom left). In Peele’s *Get Out* (2017), allusions to classical horror films, such as *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Omen*, *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein* (especially the motif of the “mad scientist” [01:22:50; see next slide, bottom right]), serve to visualize the experience of race as a surreal nightmare:
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.12. Microcluster: Black Humor Crime / Thriller/Horror-Dramedy
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.13. Microcluster: Translation & Documentation

In tune with its increasing importance in contemporary U.S. visual culture (more recent movies including *Lost in Translation* [2003], *The Interpreter* [2005], *Babel* [2006], and *Arrival* [2016]) —if, perhaps, as inconspicuous as the motif of chess—, translation figures prominently in four films of the analyzed corpus. Particularly noteworthy is the twist this motif gives to the naturalist tradition of documentation. Depending on whether it occurs in historical or contemporary settings, translation fulfills two different functions: In 19th-century frontier settings, linguistic and cultural translation emerges as a tool of ethnocide and expropriation. Examples of this variant are, first, an interpreted dialogue between Arikara chief Elk Dog and French Canadian fur trader Toussaint in Mexican director Alejandro G. Iñarritu’s grimly naturalistic revenge epic *The Revenant* (2015), occasioned by mutual obligations allegedly ensuing from an earlier agreement and the kidnapping and raping of the chief’s daughter, Powaqa, by French hunters (see Film Clip 2, next slide)—and, second, Charles Eastman’s (Hakadah/Ohiye S’a [Adam Beach]) ultimate refusal to contribute to the Dawes Act-related, Census-based “renaming project” in Yves Simoneau’s historical drama *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (2007 [see Film Clip 3, slide after next]).

* Mostly connected to discourses of “untranslatability,” the phrase “lost in translation” was employed so widely (e.g., in Robert Frost’s much-quoted dictum that “poetry is what gets lost in translation,” James Merrill’s eponymous 1976 poem, Eva Hoffman’s 1989 immigrant memoir, or Sofia Coppola’s 2003 movie [cf. Delabastita n. pag.; Moraru 175]) that it has become a figure of speech. It also echoes the “translational turn” in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Bachmann-Medick n. pag.), particularly pronounced in the fields of comparative literature (see Apter 2006) and postcolonial studies (see Appiah 1993, 2001, 2006).
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.13. Microcluster: Translation & Documentation

➤ Film Clip 2 [The Revenant (Regency, 2015), 00:33:34-35:06]

https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=63271b21-a09f-4cb6-a91f-ac350130b699
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.13. Microcluster: Translation & Documentation

→ Film Clip 3 [Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (HBO, 2007), 02:01:00-02:43]

https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=13d94d68-13c3-4ddf-95f9-ac3501328dfa
2. Macro- and Microclusters
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.13. Microcluster: Translation & Documentation

In 21st-century settings, intra- and interlingual translation serves as a means of deconstructive humor. In the third episode ("Home Rooms") of the fourth season (2006) of David Simon’s highly successful crime drama TV series *The Wire* (2002–08), for example, the Baltimore Police Department’s former Western District Commander, Howard “Bunny” Colvin (Robert Wisdom), is introduced to his tasks as field researcher for the University of Maryland. In a dialogue that can be read as an ironic nod to the nexus between 1930s American naturalism (especially James Farrell and Richard Wright) and the Chicago School of Urban Sociology (see, e.g., Cappetti [1985]), the academese of sociology professor David Parenti (Dan DeLuca) is so incomprehensible that “The Deacon” (played by ex-drug trafficking boss Melvin Williams) is needed as an intralingual interpreter to bridge the gulf between theory and practice (see Film Clip 4, next slide).
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples
2.4.13. Microcluster: Translation & Documentation

→ Film Clip 4 [The Wire, Seas. 4 (HBO, 2006), Epis. 3: “Home Rooms,” 00:44:35-46:18]
https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=8f04e90a-fb66-4c69-ae33-ac350134598a
2. Macro- and Microclusters

2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.13. Microcluster: Translation & Documentation

In Liev Schreiber’s *Everything Is Illuminated* (2005), a movie adaptation of Jonathan Safran Foer’s tragicomic 2002 novel, the young American Jew Jonathan (Elijah Wood), his Ukrainian impromptu translator and interpreter Alex Perchov (Eugene Hütz), the latter’s anti-Semitic grandfather (Boris Leskin), and a deranged dog named Sammy Davis, Jr., Jr. go in search of a woman named Augustine, who in 1942 supposedly saved Jonathan’s grandfather from the Nazis in the liquidated shtetl of Trachimbrod. In keeping with the fact that, in the case of what Marianne Hirsch has called “postmemory,”* the unspeakable inevitably has to be reimagined, or retranslated (see Hirsch 1992/93, 1997, 2012; Doise 95; and Strümper-Krobb 252), this adaptation, although very different from the novel in terms of structure and narrative technique, contains a hilarious interpreting scene. In this scene, involving the exoticized heritage tourist’s vegetarianism, Jonathan’s (and naturalism’s) obsession with empirical research and historical documentation is deconstructed from a transnational angle (climaxing in Jonathan’s joining in the Ukrainians’ irrepressible laughter at his quasi-reflexive bagging of a local potato; see Film Clip 5).

* “[T]he passing down of traumatic memories to generations who came after the traumatic event that produced them” (Doise 95).
2.4. Neonaturalist Moments in Film: Representative Examples

2.4.13. Microcluster: Translation & Documentation

Film Clip 5 [Everything Is Illuminated (Warner Bros., 2005), 00:27:32-30:53]

https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=90b05a4f-c870-44d8-8f18-ac350137de15
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion: 
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

The most extensive use of neonaturalist thinking in the examined corpus, surprisingly, is to be found in the first season (2014; dir. Cary Joji Fukunaga) of the popular HBO crime anthology series *True Detective* (2014-19; created by Nic Pizzolatto), one of the highest-rated U.S. TV shows of all time.* Set in the “Cancer Alley,” an 85-mile stretch between Baton Rouge and New Orleans along the Mississippi River of post-Hurricane Andrew and Katrina petro-industrial southern Louisiana, the season’s storyline embroils us in a 17-year-long homicide investigation during which two conflicted anti-heroes, the Louisiana State Police CID detectives Martin (“Marty”) Hart (Woody Harrelson) and Rustin (“Rust”) Cohle (Matthew McConaughey), hunt down a serial killer whose ritualistic sex-murders are connected to a broader conspiracy of perverse authority figures, including Louisiana politicians and clergymen, involved in the pseudo-satanic sacrificial rape, torture, and killing of abducted women and children.

* Top-rated U.S. TV series in the Internet Movie Database (IMDb [average rating, as of 3/2016]) include *Breaking Bad* and *Game of Thrones* (9,5), *The Wire* (9,4), *The Sopranos* (9,2), *True Detective* (9,1), *House of Cards* (9,0), as well as *Mad Men* and *Justified* (8,7) (see Arenhövel et al., “Wissenssümpfe spoilern [Spoilering Knowledge Swamps]” 3).
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion: Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

The season in question, for which critics have suggested genre assignations as various as hard-boiled and neo-noir crime fiction, Southern Gothic, “toxic screen”-ecodrama (Kelly), or “metaphysical detective fiction” (Sheehan and Alice), contains so many literary and philosophical references that it triggered book-length studies (e.g., Milazzo [2019]; Graham and Sparrow [2018]; Stoddart and Samuel [2018]) and inspired a “broadcast literature audience” (Sheehan and Alice 28-30) to post comprehensive, if still far from exhaustive, reading lists (see Ho, “Listopia”). *True Detective*’s first season not only abounds in (neo)naturalist moments but also points to some of the basic differences between naturalism and neonaturalism.
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

Film Clip 6 [True Detective, Seas. 1 (HBO, 2014), Epis. 1: “The Long Bright Dark,” 00:13:40-16:40]
https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=3ffeaa40-5ded-444e-9952-ac35013bd196

A prime example is a particularly somber sequence in the show’s first episode, “The Long Bright Dark” (see Film Clip 6). Here, Rust Cohle’s calling our world “A giant gutter in outer space” reverberates with a famous passage in Stephen Crane’s story “The Blue Hotel” (1896): “One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamour of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb” (Nagel and Quirk 342). It also, and more directly, refers to the radical deflation of human self-importance in the cosmic, Schopenhauer-influenced nihilism of the early Friedrich Nietzsche: “In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge” (On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense [Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne], 1873; Kaufmann 42; cf. Brock 46).

When Cohle speaks of “a tragic misstep in evolution” and suggests that “the honorable thing for our species to do” is to “stop reproducing, walk hand in hand into extinction,” he does more than evoke evolutionary theory à la Darwin or Spencer, which is a staple of classical naturalism. Instead, he paraphrases proponents of “antinatalism,” from Arthur Schopenhauer (The World as Will and Representation, 1818) and Emil M. Cioran (The Trouble with Being Born, 1973) to “weird fiction” writer Thomas Ligotti (The Conspiracy against the Human Race, 2011), who argue against procreation because it results in unnecessary suffering to humans, animals, and the environment (cf. also the “Voluntary Human Extinction Movement” and the works of David Benatar).
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

A giant gutter in outer space.

I think human consciousness is a tragic misstep in evolution.

*True Detective*, Seasons 1, Epis: 1: "The Long Bright Dark" (HBO, 2014 [00:13:57])
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

These nihilistic-naturalistic diatribes are all the more effective because they take place while driving through a toxic waste land, a bayou version of Fitzgerald’s “valley of ashes,” with Cohle “voic[ing] the visual and sensory experience of what is transparent in the program’s visual depictions of the landscape” (Kelly 49). The atmospheric foundation for *True Detective’s* “dark ecology” (Timothy Morton) is laid in Antibody and Elastic’s Emmy-awarded main title sequence (2014, © HBO, see bottom right), which incorporates photographs by Richard Misrach, such as *Sugar Cane and Refinery, Mississippi River Corridor, Louisiana, 1998* (see top right), as printed in Misrach and Orff’s ecocritical 2012 volume *Petrochemical America* (see next slide, to the right; cf. Lirette; Byrnes 91-92).
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

*True Detective, Seas. 1, Epis. 1: "The Long Bright Dark" (HBO, 2014 [00:16:59])*
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

Film Clip 7 [True Detective, Seas. 1 (HBO, 2014), Epis. 3: “The Locked Room,” 00:03:21-06:56]

https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=dcc0bc4e-34b4-435a-81e1-ac35013f6650

The tent revival scene in the first season’s third episode (“The Locked Room,” see Film Clip 7) echoes the critique of organized religion to be found in classical naturalist writers like Crane or Dreiser (for the complexity of the matter, see, e.g., Steven Frye, “Naturalism and Religion”). It is also in tune with True Detective’s agenda of exposing the military-industrial-clerical-political complex (embodied by the Tuttle family), for which human lives and bodies are expandable. With his brutal analysis of evangelical Christians and ostentatious reliance on an uncompromising scientific approach (see next slide, left), Rust, in the words of Eike Brock, turns into “a paragon of anti-religious nihilistic arrogance” (“Nietzsche in Carcosa” 40 [my translation]), while simultaneously being confronted with the existential loneliness ensuing from the “death of God,” as Marty’s amazingly astute comment subversively implies (see next slide, right).
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

Certain linguistic anthropologists think that religion is a language virus

When you get to talking like this, you sound panicked.

*True Detective, S1, E3: "The Locked Room" (HBO, 2014 [00:06:26])

*True Detective, S1, E3: "The Locked Room" (HBO, 2014 [00:05:27])
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

The radical nature of *True Detective*’s innovative employment of the naturalistic mode comes to the fore in two sequences featuring the unauthorized arrest and spontaneous execution of meth cooker, child rapist, and Nietzsche-fetishist Reginald Ledoux (watch the following film clips).*

**Film Clips 8 and 9** [*True Detective*, Seas. 1 (HBO, 2014), Epis. 5: “The Secret Fate of All Life,” 00:10:50-11:24 & 00:14:44-16:08]

[https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=95224093-e82a-49db-9463-ac3501426663](https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=95224093-e82a-49db-9463-ac3501426663)

[https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=55b2d04b-b0ca-4d4a-bb54-ac3501439f82](https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=55b2d04b-b0ca-4d4a-bb54-ac3501439f82)

Please focus your attention on the interplay between visual action and voiceover.

* Ledoux’s citings of “black stars” and “Time is a flat circle” are references to Robert W. Chambers’s “weird” horror story collection *The King in Yellow* (1895), from which Pizzolatto borrowed the idea of “Carcosa,” and to Nietzsche’s doctrine of “eternal recurrence,” as described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* ([Also sprach Zarathustra] 1883). A look at Nietzsche helps explain both Cohle’s horror of the eternal return of evil and strangely optimistic near death experience-induced “healing” at the end of *True Detective*’s first season (see “The Convalescent” section [Part III] in *Zarathustra* and Brock 55).
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion:
Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

Blew apart this tree between us.

COHLE: While I was hunkered down behind this old decrepit boat.
3. In Lieu of a Conclusion: Contemporary Filmic Neonaturalism at Its Most Radical

Here, the two time frames that make for the show’s structural complexity—a murder investigation in the 1990s and its overt review and covert continuation in the 2010s—and the necessity for covering up what really happened are used to introduce the element of narrative unreliability, visualized by the discrepancy between action on the screen (representing events in the 1990s) and voiceover (Marty and Rust’s reporting on these events in the 2010s).

The cinematographic mise-en-scène of unreliable narration (compare screen captures on the previous slide) illustrates that neonaturalism—rather than simply recycle naturalistic themes, motifs, and concepts—quotes, undercuts, and subverts them. The prominence of this device, like the prevalence of intertextuality, (black) humor, and (post) irony in the films of my corpus, exemplifies a major difference between naturalism and neonaturalism—namely that the latter has been filtered through the lens of postmodernism, even if it rejects some of its more experimental features and formal mannerisms.
Epilogue

Neonaturalism is alive in contemporary U.S. film, going beyond mere pastiche by the power of its social critique and consistency of its philosophical outlook. From the perspective of evolutionary theory à la Richard Dawkins, then, naturalism has manifested itself as a “good meme,” or, in the words of Andrew Chesterman: “ideas that turn out to be good ideas survive. . . . By analogy with biology, these are known as mutualist memes, being of mutual benefit to themselves and their carriers” (6).

Like genes (or their more radical viral equivalent), however, memes mutate, and are transformed by new ideological, artistic, and technological environments, so that it takes scholars willing to engage in detective or translation work in order to identify neonaturalist strategies placed at several removes from classical literary naturalism. The openness and decoding ability required for such an undertaking are aptly described in Christophe Den Tandt’s “Cyberpunk as Naturalist Science Fiction” (2013):

. . . realism and naturalism gain considerable transgeneric breadth once we accept that no impassable barrier separates mass-culture narratives from serious socially oriented mimesis. Culture studies scholars have shown that the popular narratives of crime fiction, SF, or even the Hollywood western serve as carrier waves for a realist or didactic payload: the realist/naturalist components of popular texts are encoded within the broader lattice of patently non-realistic action stories. . . . (96–97; emphasis mine)
That there are limits to retranslation was incisively formulated in a different context by Doro Wiese in *The Powers of the False* (2014). In a subchapter tellingly titled “Turning Readers into Translators,” concerned with the aporias of postmemory in Foer’s *Everything Is Illuminated*, she writes: “But when trying to find the past, one also has to accept that its fragments have undergone . . . a ‘sea-change’ and that it remains impossible to know their original shape” (95).

To be aware of our limits as professional critics may be just the motivation we need to reach for new heights in understanding challenging material, as proclaimed by the editors of a recent *PMLA* special issue on “Cultures of Reading”: “But what remains untranslatable is also what can lift the spirit, or what just propels us with due diligence to read more and even, perhaps, to read better” (Ender and Lynch 16).

To end this presentation on a humorous note, I will finally treat you to a hilarious, one-and-a-half-minute clip from a translation-related blockbuster:

⇒ Film Clip 10 [*Lost in Translation* (Focus Features, 2003), 00:09:38-11:12].

[https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=6c86e618-6451-4b00-939e-ac350145341c](https://video.uni-mainz.de/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=6c86e618-6451-4b00-939e-ac350145341c)

Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Meurer, Ulrich, in collaboration with Maria Oikonomou, eds. *Übersetzung und Film: Das Kino als Translationsmedium* [Translation and Film: The Cinema as a Medium of Translation]. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012.


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Works Cited


Filmography: Contemporaray (Neonaturalist) Films and TV Series / Chronological List:

- *Bastard out of Carolina* (1996; dir. Anjelica Huston)
- *Fargo* (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
- *Trees Lounge* (1996; dir. Steve Buscemi)
- *Affliction* (1997; dir. Paul Schrader)
- *The Ice Storm* (1997; dir. Ang Lee)
- *Smoke Signals* (1998; dir. Chris Eyre)
- *American Beauty* (1999; dir. Sam Mendes)
- *[American Hollow (1999 [Documentary Film]; dir. Rory Kennedy)]*
- *The Matrix* (1999; dir. Lana and Lilly Wachowski)
- *The Sopranos* (1999–2007; created by David Chase)
- *Frightly* (2001; dir. Bill Paxton)
- *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer and co-screenplay)] Coen)
- *Monster's Ball* (2001; dir. Marc Forster)
- *Mulholland Drive* (2001; dir. David Lynch)
- *Six Feet Under* (2001-05 [TV Series]; created by Alan Ball)
- *8 Mile* (2002; dir. Curtis Hanson)
- *Far from Heaven* (2002; dir. Todd Haynes)
- *Insomnia* (2002; dir. Christopher Nolan)
- *25th Hour* (2002; dir. Spike Lee)
- *The Wire* (2002–08 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
- *Big Fish* (2003; dir. Tim Burton)
- *Monster* (2003; dir. Patty Jenkins)
- *Mystic River* (2003; dir. Clint Eastwood)
- *Open Range* (2003; dir. Kevin Costner)
- *[Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus (2003 [Documentary Film]; dir. Andrew Douglas)]*
- *Cavedweller* (2004; dir. Lisa Cholodenko)
- *Crash* (2004; dir. Paul Haggis)
- *[Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004 [Documentary]; dir. Michael Moore)]*
Brokeback Mountain (2005; dir. Ang Lee)
Capote (2005; dir. Bennett Miller)
Everything Is Illuminated (2005; dir. Liev Schreiber)
Good Night, and Good Luck (2005; dir. George Clooney)
A History of Violence (2005; dir. David Cronenberg)
Knights of the South Bronx (2005 [TV Film]; dir. Allen Hughes)
Munich (2005; dir. Steven Spielberg)
Broken Trail (2006 [TV Miniseries]; dir. Walter Hill)
Children of Men (2006; dir. Reed Morano et al.)
The Departed (2006; dir. Martin Scorsese)
[When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts (2006 [Documentary Film]; dir. Spike Lee)]
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (2007 [TV Film]; dir. Yves Simoneau)
Into the Wild (2007; dir. Sean Penn)
Mad Men (2007–15 [TV Series]; created by Matthew Weiner)
No Country for Old Men (2007; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
Shotgun Stories (2007; dir. Jeff Nichols)
There Will Be Blood (2007; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
Breaking Bad (2008–13 [TV Series]; created by Vince Gilligan)
Burn After Reading (2008; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
Doubt (2008; dir. John Patrick Shanley)
The Hurt Locker (2008; dir. Kathryn Bigelow)
Revolutionary Road (2008; dir. Sam Mendes)
Wendy and Lucy (2008; dir. Kelly Reichardt)
The Wrestler (2008; dir. Darren Aronofsky)
Precious (2009; dir. Lee Daniels)
The Road (2009; dir. John Hillcoat)
A Serious Man (2009; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
That Evening Sun (2009; dir. Scott Teems)
[The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia (2009 [Documentary Film]; dir. Julien Nitzberg)]
Bloodworth (2010; dir. Shane Dax Taylor)
Inception (2010; dir. Christopher Nolan)
Justified (2010–15 [TV Series]; developed by Graham Yost)
The Social Network (2010; dir. David Fincher)
Treme (2010–13 [TV Series]; created by David Simon and Eric Overmyer)
True Grit (2010; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
Tucker & Dale vs. Evil (2010; dir. Eli Craig)
Winter’s Bone (2010; dir. Debra Granik)
[Bobby Fischer Against the World (2011 [Documentary Film]; dir. Liz Garbus)]
Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close (2011; dir. Stephen Daldry)
The Help (2011; dir. Tate Taylor)
Margin Call (2011; dir. J. C. Chandor)
Shameless (2011– [TV Series]; developed by John Wells [originally created for British TV by Paul Abbott])
Source Code (2011; dir. Duncan Jones)
Take Shelter (2011; dir. Jeff Nichols)
The Tree of Life (2011; dir. Terrence Malick)
We Need to Talk About Kevin (2011; dir. Lynne Ramsay)
American Horror Story, Seas. 2: Asylum (2012–13; created by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk)
Beasts of the Southern Wild (2012; dir. Benh Zeitlin)
Django Unchained (2012; dir. Quentin Tarantino)
The Master (2012; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
Moonrise Kingdom (2012; dir. Wes Anderson)
Mud (2012; dir. Jeff Nichols)
The Butler (2013; dir. Lee Daniels)
Dallas Buyers Club (2013; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
Fruitvale Station (2013; dir. Ryan Coogler)
Gravity (2013; dir. Alfonso Cuarón)
Her (2013; dir. Spike Jonze)
The Immigrant (2013; dir. James Gray)
Inside Llewyn Davis (2013; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
Joe (2013; dir. David Gordon Green)
Life of a King (2013; dir. Jake Goldberger)
Orange is the New Black (2013— [Netflix TV Series]; created by Jenji Kohan)
12 Years a Slave (2013; Steve McQueen)
Under the Dome (2013—15 [TV Series]; developed by Brian K. Vaughan)
[Urban Rez (2013 [Documentary Television Program]; dir. Larry Pourier)]
The Wolf of Wall Street (2013; dir. Martin Scorsese)
Boyhood (2014; dir. Richard Linklater)
The Dark Horse (2014/16; dir. James Napier Robertson)
Ex Machina (2014; dir. Alex Garland)
Fargo (2014— [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
Gone Girl (2014; dir. David Fincher)
Inherent Vice (2014; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
Pawn Sacrifice (2014; dir. Edward Zwick)
Selma (2014; dir. Ava DuVernay)
True Detective (2014—19 [TV Series (anthology crime drama), three seasons]; created by Nic Pizzolatto)
Unfriended (2014; dir. Leo Gabriadze)
Wild (2014; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
The Big Short (2015; dir. Adam McKay)
Carol (2015; dir. Todd Haynes)
The Martian (2015; dir. Ridley Scott)
The Revenant (2015; dir. Alejandro G. Iñarritu)
Spotlight (2015; dir. Tom McCarthy)
American Crime Story (2016— [TV Series, three seasons]; developed by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski)
American Pastoral (2016; dir. Ewan McGregor)
Arrival (2016; dir. Denis Villeneuve)
11/22/63 (2016 [TV Mini Series]; developed by Bridget Carpenter)
Fences (2016; dir. Denzel Washington)
Hidden Figures (2016; dir. Theodore Melfi)
Indignation (2016; dir. James Schamus)
In Dubious Battle (2016; dir. James Franco)
Manchester by the Sea (2016; dir. Kenneth Lonergan)
Moonlight (2016; dir. Barry Jenkins)
Queen of Katwe (2016; dir. Mira Nair)
Underground (2016—17 [TV Series, two seasons]; created by Misha Green and Joe Pokaski)
Westworld (2016— [TV Series]; created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy)
Call Me by Your Name (2017; dir. Luca Guadagnino)
The Deuce (2017— [TV Series, three seasons]; created by David Simon and George Pelecanos)
Get Out (2017; dir. Jordan Peele)
The Handmaid’s Tale (2017–19 [TV Series, three seasons]; created by Bruce Miller)
Hostiles (2017; dir. Scott Cooper)
I, Tonya (2017; dir. Craig Gillespie)
Lucky (2017; dir. John Carroll Lynch)
Mr. Mercedes (2017– [TV Series, Season One]; developed by David E. Kelley)
Suburbicon (2017; dir. George Clooney)
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017; dir. Martin McDonagh)
[66]
The Ballad of Buster Scruggs (2018 [Western Anthology, Netflix]; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
BlacKkKlansman (2018; dir. Spike Lee)
Bohemian Rhapsody (2018; dir. Bryan Singer)
Boy Erased (2018; dir. Joel Edgerton)
[Fahrenheit 11/9 (2018 [Documentary]; dir. Michael Moore)]
Green Book (2018; dir. Peter Farrelly)
If Beale Street Could Talk (2018; dir. Barry Jenkins)
Leave No Trace (2018; dir. Debra Granik)
The Mule (2018; dir. Clint Eastwood)
Searching (2018; dir. Aneesh Chaganty)
Sharp Objects (2018 [TV Series]; created by Marti Noxon)
The Sisters Brothers (2018; dir. Jacques Audiard)
A Star Is Born (2018; dir. Bradley Cooper)
Widows (2018; dir. Steve McQueen)
Native Son (2019; dir. Rashid Johnson [screenplay: Suzan-Lori Parks])
Rocketman (2019; dir. Dexter Fletcher)
Hillbilly Elegy (2020; dir. Ron Howard [in production])
[162 films (170 [including 8 documentaries])]
Filmography: Contemporay (Neonaturalist) Films and TV Series / Alphabetical List:

*Affliction* (1997; dir. Paul Schrader)
*American Beauty* (1999; dir. Sam Mendes)
*American Crime Story* (2016– [TV Series, three seasons]; developed by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski)
*American History X* (1998; dir. Tony Kaye)
[American Hollow* (1999 [Documentary Film]; dir. Rory Kennedy)]
*American Horror Story, Seas. 2: Asylum* (2012–13; created by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk)
*American Pastoral* (2016; dir. Ewan McGregor)
*American Psycho* (2000; dir. Mary Harron)
*Arrival* (2016; dir. Denis Villeneuve)
*The Aviator* (2004; dir. Martin Scorsese)
*The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018 [Western Anthology, Netflix]; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
*Bastard out of Carolina* (1996; dir. Angelica Huston)
*Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012; dir. Benh Zeitlin)
*Big Fish* (2003; dir. Tim Burton)
*The Big Short* (2015; dir. Adam McKay)
*BlackkKlansman* (2018; dir. Spike Lee)
*Bloodworth* (2010; dir. Shane Dax Taylor)
[Bobby Fischer Against the World* (2011 [Documentary Film]; dir. Liz Garbus)]
*Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018; dir. Bryan Singer)
*Boy Erased* (2018; dir. Joel Edgerton)
*Boyhood* (2014; dir. Richard Linklater)
*Breaking Bad* (2008–13 [TV Series]; created by Vince Gilligan)
*Brokeback Mountain* (2005; dir. Ang Lee)
*Broken Trail* (2006 [TV Miniseries]; dir. Walter Hill)
*Burn After Reading* (2008; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (2007 [TV Film]; dir. Yves Simoneau)
*The Butler* (2013; dir. Lee Daniels)
*Call Me by Your Name* (2017; dir. Luca Guadagnino)
*Can You Ever Forgive Me?* (2018; dir. Marielle Heller)
*Capote* (2005; dir. Bennett Miller)
*Carol* (2015; dir. Todd Haynes)
*Cavedweller* (2004; dir. Lisa Cholodenko)
*Children of Men* (2006; dir. Reed Morano et al.)
*Crash* (2004; dir. Paul Haggis)
*Dallas Buyers Club* (2013; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
*The Dark Horse* (2014/16; dir. James Napier Robertson)
*The Departed* (2006; dir. Martin Scorsese)
*The Deuce* (2017– [TV Series, three seasons]; created by David Simon and George Pelecanos)
*Django Unchained* (2012; dir. Quentin Tarantino)
*Doubt* (2008; dir. John Patrick Shanley)
*8 Mile* (2002; dir. Curtis Hanson)
*11/22/63* (2016 [TV Miniseries]; developed by Bridget Carpenter)
Everything Is Illuminated (2005; dir. Liev Schreiber)
Ex Machina (2014; dir. Alex Garland)
Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close (2011; dir. Stephen Daldry)
[Fahrenheit 9/11 [2004 [Documentary]; dir. Michael Moore]]
[Fahrenheit 11/9 [2018 [Documentary]; dir. Michael Moore]]
Far from Heaven (2002; dir. Todd Haynes)
Fargo (1996; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer & co-screenwriter)] Coen)
Fargo (2014– [TV Series]; created by Noah Hawley)
Fences (2016; dir. Denzel Washington)
Fight Club (1999; dir. David Fincher)
Fruitvale Station (2013; dir. Ryan Coogler)
Get Out (2017; dir. Jordan Peele)
Gone Girl (2014; dir. David Fincher)
Good Night, and Good Luck (2005; dir. George Clooney)
Gravity (2013; dir. Alfonso Cuarón)
Green Book (2018; dir. Peter Farrelly)
The Handmaid’s Tale (2017–19 [TV Series, three seasons]; created by Bruce Miller)
The Help (2011; dir. Tate Taylor)
Her (2013; dir. Spike Jonze)
Hidden Figures (2016; dir. Theodore Melfi)
Hillbilly Elegy (2020; dir. Ron Howard [in production])
A History of Violence (2005; dir. David Cronenberg)
Hostiles (2017; dir. Scott Cooper)
The Human Stain (2003; dir. Robert Benton)
The Hurt Locker (2008; dir. Kathryn Bigelow)
The Ice Storm (1997; dir. Ang Lee)
If Beale Street Could Talk (2018; dir. Barry Jenkins)
The Immigrant (2013; dir. James Gray)
Inception (2010; dir. Christopher Nolan)
In Dubious Battle (2016; dir. James Franco)
Indignation (2016; dir. James Schamus)
Inherent Vice (2014; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
Inside Llewyn Davis (2013; dir. Ethan and Joel Coen)
Insomnia (2002; dir. Christopher Nolan)
Into the Wild (2007; dir. Sean Penn)
I, Tonya (2017; dir. Craig Gillespie)
Joe (2013; dir. David Gordon Green)
Justified (2010–15 [TV Series]; developed by Graham Yost)
Knights of the South Bronx (2005 [TV drama]; dir. Allen Hughes)
Leave No Trace (2018; dir. Debra Granik)
Life of a King (2013; dir. Jake Goldberger)
Lucky (2017; dir. John Carroll Lynch)
The Lurkin Defence (2000; dir. Marleen Gorris)
The Machinist (2004; dir. Brad Anderson)
Mad Men (2007–15 [TV Series]; created by Matthew Weiner)
Magnolia (1999, dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
The Man Who Wasn’t There (2001; dir. Joel [and Ethan (producer and co-screenplay)] Coen)
Manchester by the Sea (2016; dir. Kenneth Lonergan)
Margin Call (2011; dir. J. C. Chandor)
The Martian (2015; dir. Ridley Scott)
The Master (2012; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
The Matrix (1999; dir. Lana and Lilly Wachowski)
Memento (2000; dir. Christopher Nolan)
Million Dollar Baby (2004; dir. Clint Eastwood)
Minority Report (2002; dir. Steven Spielberg)
Monster (2003; dir. Patty Jenkins)
Monster’s Ball (2001; dir. Marc Forster)
Moonlight (2016; dir. Barry Jenkins)
Moonrise Kingdom (2012; dir. Wes Anderson)
Mr. Mercedes (2017— [TV Series, Season One]; developed by David E. Kelley)
Mud (2012; dir. Jeff Nichols)
The Mule (2018; dir. Clint Eastwood)
Mulholland Drive (2001; dir. David Lynch)
Munich (2005; dir. Steven Spielberg)
Mystic River (2003; dir. Clint Eastwood)
Native Son (2019; dir. Rashid Johnson [screenplay: Suzan-Lori Parks])
No Country for Old Men (2007; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
Open Range (2003; dir. Kevin Costner)
Orange Is the New Black (2013— [Netflix TV Series]; created by Jenji Kohan)
Pawn Sacrifice (2014; dir. Edward Zwick)
Precious (2009; dir. Lee Daniels)
Queen of Katwe (2016; dir. Mira Nair)
Ray (2004; dir. Taylor Hackford)
Requiem for a Dream (2000; dir. Darren Aronofsky)
The Revenant (2015; dir. Alejandro G. Iñárritu)
Revolutionary Road (2008; dir. Sam Mendes)
The Road (2009; dir. John Hillcoat)
Rocketman (2019; dir. Dexter Fletcher)
Searching (2018; dir. Aneesh Chaganty)
[Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus (2003 [Documentary Film]; dir. Andrew Douglas)]
Selma (2014; dir. Ava DuVernay)
A Serious Man (2009; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
Shameless (2011— [TV Series]; developed by John Wells [originally created for British TV by Paul Abbott])
Sharp Objects (2018 [TV Series]; created by Marti Noxon)
Shotgun Stories (2007; dir. Jeff Nichols)
The Sisters Brothers (2018; dir. Jacques Audiard)
Six Feet Under (2001-05 [TV Series]; created by Alan Ball)
Sling Blade (1996; dir. Billy Bob Thornton)
Smoke Signals (1998; dir. Chris Eyre)
The Social Network (2010; dir. David Fincher)
The Sopranos (1999–2007; created by David Chase)
Source Code (2011; dir. Duncan Jones)
Spotlight (2015; dir. Tom McCarthy)
A Star Is Born (2018; dir. Bradley Cooper)
Suburbicon (2017; dir. George Clooney)
Take Shelter (2011; dir. Jeff Nichols)
That Evening Sun (2009; dir. Scott Teems)
There Will Be Blood (2007; dir. Paul Thomas Anderson)
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri (2017; dir. Martin McDonagh)
The Tree of Life (2011; dir. Terrence Malick)
Trees Lounge (1996; dir. Steve Buscemi)
Treme (2010–13 [TV Series]; created by David Simon and Eric Overmyer)
True Detective (2014– [TV Series (anthology crime drama), three seasons]; created by Nic Pizzolatto)
True Grit (2010; dir. Joel and Ethan Coen)
Tucker & Dale vs. Evil (2010; dir. Eli Craig)
12 Years a Slave (2013; Steve McQueen)
25th Hour (2002; dir. Spike Lee)
Underground (2016–17 [TV Series, two seasons]; created by Misha Green and Joe Pokaski)
Under the Dome (2013–15 [TV Series]; developed by Brian K. Vaughan)
Unfriended (2014; dir. Leo Gabriadze)

[Urban Rez (2013 [Documentary Television Program]; dir. Larry Pourier)]
We Need to Talk About Kevin (2011; dir. Lynne Ramsay)
Wendy and Lucy (2008; dir. Kelly Reichardt)
Westworld (2016– [TV Series]; created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy)
[When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts (2006 [Documentary Film]; dir. Spike Lee)]
Widows (2018; dir. Steve McQueen)
Wild (2014; dir. Jean-Marc Vallée)
[The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia (2009 [Documentary Film]; dir. Julien Nitzberg)]
Winter’s Bone (2010; dir. Debra Granik)
The Wire (2002–08 [TV Series]; created by David Simon)
The Wolf of Wall Street (2013; dir. Martin Scorsese)
The Wrestler (2008; dir. Darren Aronofsky)
[162 films (170 [including 8 documentaries])]}