

PYRAMIDE PRÉSENTE



the New West

un film de Kate Beecroft

AU CINÉMA
LE 6 MAI

ETATS-UNIS | 1H37 | DCP | 5.1 | 2.00 | COULEUR

DOSSIER PÉDAGOGIQUE
pour les professeurs d'anglais



Kate Beecroft

BACKGROUND & TRAINING

- Born and raised in Los Angeles
- Trained at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London
- Originally saw acting as her only path to storytelling: "When you're a cute little girl, people tell you, 'You like storytelling? You should be an actress'"
- Transitioned to directing after drama school, driven by a desire to create roles for underrepresented faces and stories

ARTISTIC IDENTITY & VISION

- Drawn to marginalised communities, women's stories, and non-professional actors
- Directorial philosophy: *"The next Meryl Streep could be at a bus stop in Idaho. Go find it."*

The Film

HOW THE FILM CAME TO BE

On a road trip through the Badlands with her cinematographer Austin Shelton — looking for material for a short film or music video — Kate Beecroft received a tip from a local woman's daughter: "Get off at this exit, east of the town of Wall, and there's a woman named Tabatha waiting for you." She turned off the highway, found a ranch full of teenagers on horseback, and spent the next five years making her debut feature.

THE STORY

The New West is a docufiction set on a broken-down ranch in the Badlands of South Dakota, east of the town of Wall, hence its original title.

After the sudden death of her husband, Tabatha — a tattooed, rebellious horse trainer — wrestles with financial insecurity and unresolved grief on her remote South Dakota ranch. She has taken in a group of wayward teenagers from broken homes, alongside her own daughter Porshia, a promising rodeo rider. When a mysterious Fort Worth rancher named Roy arrives with a tempting offer to buy or partner on the land, Tabatha must decide whether to compromise her fierce independence — or find a way to rescue herself and her chosen family on her own terms.

The film was shot in just 24 days on the Zigma Ranch. Kate Beecroft spent several years recording authentic conversations that she translated into a script that her non-professional actors learnt to ease filming.



Highlights for your class

GRIEF AND RESILIENCE

Mourning without resolution

The film's emotional core is Tabatha's inability to fully grieve her husband John while life relentlessly demands her attention. Beecroft refuses the arc of 'getting over it' — as one review puts it, the film shows 'there's no getting over, only moving through.' Tabatha's grief is embodied in her relationship with Porshia, who blames her mother for John's death. The campfire scene — where Tabatha finally tells the full story — is the film's cathartic climax: trauma turned into art.

MATRIARCHY AND FEMALE POWER

Women who rescue themselves

The New West is fundamentally about women holding things together in a world that offers them little support. Tabatha leads a de facto matriarchy: a chosen family of girls and teens who find structure through shared labour with horses. Roy's offer represents the temptation of male rescue. Tabatha's mother Tracey makes it plain — 'the one who's in the best position to rescue Tabatha is herself.' The Western genre's trappings are deliberately used to place women at the centre of a form that has historically erased them.

CHOSEN FAMILY AND BELONGING

The ranch as sanctuary

The ranch functions as a refuge for teenagers from broken homes. Beecroft creates a community portrait where belonging is forged through shared work, horses, and loyalty rather than blood ties. The threat of losing the ranch is therefore not merely financial — it is an existential threat to an entire community of people who exist nowhere else.

LAND, IDENTITY & INDEPENDENCE

What is worth preserving?

The question of whether to sell the land drives the plot, but its deeper meaning is about identity: for Tabatha, the ranch is not real estate — it is who she is. RogerEbert.com observed that the naturalness, freedom, and intimacy that oozes from East of Wall makes the ranch something that we as viewers see as worth preserving.' The tension between financial survival and the preservation of a way of life echoes larger debates about land, community, and the disappearing rural West.

Highlights for your class

THE AMERICAN WEST — MYTH AND REALITY

Reinventing the Western

Variety's Peter Debruge noted that 'so much of the American cowboy mythos has been codified, if not invented wholesale, by Hollywood. *The New West* places punk, tattooed, female, and mixed-race bodies at the centre of the Western landscape — reclaiming a genre that has systematically excluded them. Kate Beecroft is not romanticising the West: the ranch is run-down, finances are desperate, and the community is marginalised even within the town of Wall. The film is both a love letter to and a quiet deconstruction of the frontier myth.

The place of women in the Myth

The film debunks the American myth according to which cowboys and ranch owners should be white males, as shown in most Hollywood Western movies. The film shows the reality of South Dakota, where women still have to fight harder than men to sell horses in a male-dominated community in which women face discrimination and domestic violence. The camp fire scene is a must-be-studied scene.

The place of native Americans in the Myth

Poshia's strong relationship to nature is reminiscent of that of native Americans. Kate Beecroft's cast is 90% native American, though, as in real life, the characters do not claim belonging to the native American community for fear of being discriminated against. The ranch looks like a reservation, where wayward teenagers are to be tamed like the horses they spiritually merge with.

Highlights for your class

DOCUFICTION AND REPRESENTATION *Unseen communities on screen*

Kate Beecroft's choice to use real people playing themselves carries a political dimension: the Zimiga family had never been seen on screen. As a local woman's daughter told Kate Beecroft: 'as a woman in this community, she's never seen, and it was the first time she felt seen.' The docufiction format raises questions about authenticity and the ethics of filmmaking.

MAN AND NATURE *How human beings connect to nature*

Take a close look at how Tabatha, who "knows everything about horses", finds it harder to connect with her own daughter and soothe her than with horses. Also pay attention to Porshia's mystical relationship with the Badlands, and her Native-American-like connection to the land.



Awards & Recognition



JANUARY 2025, PARK CITY, UTAH
world premiere; standing ovation



Reviews to discuss in class

*“Earnestly dedicated to the women depicted on screen, **THE NEW WEST** displays the grit and grind of living life as it comes in the Badlands while never muddying its subjects.”*

ROTTEN TOMATOES | CRITICAL CONSENSUS

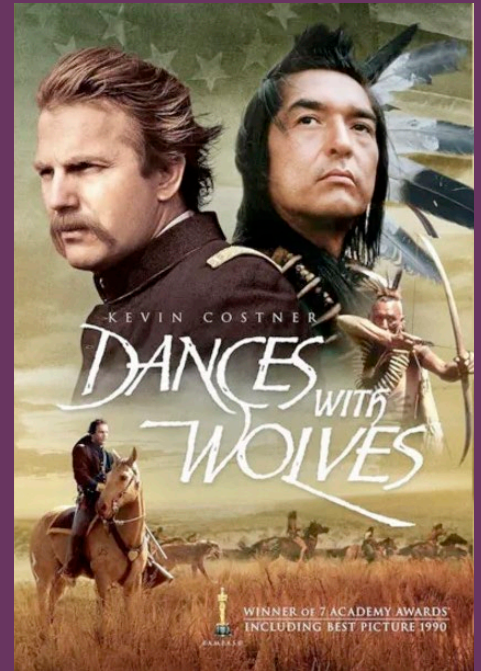
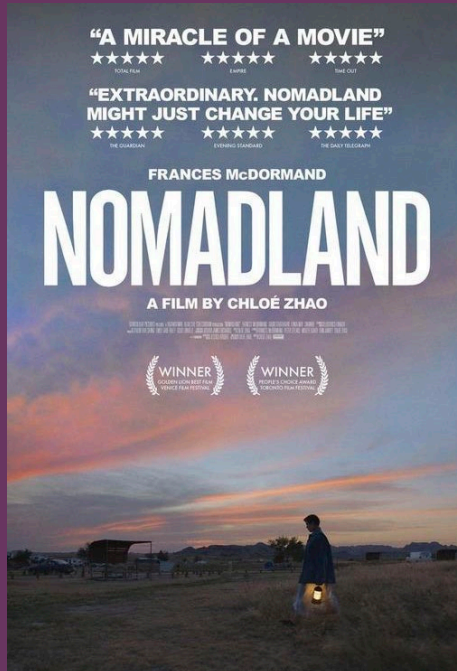
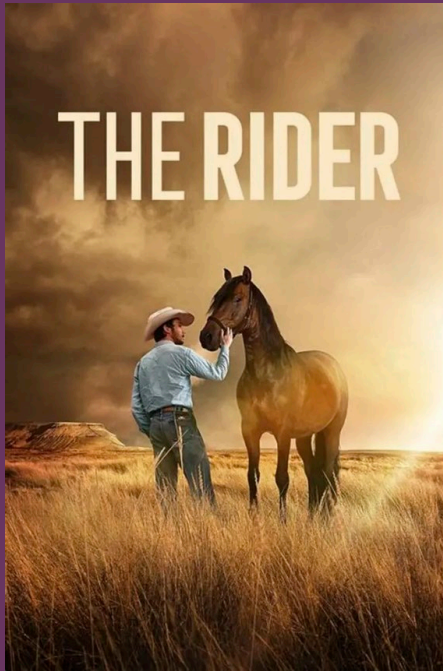
*“**THE NEW WEST** pits grief against growth and puts on display the fact that there’s no ‘getting over,’ only moving through. With almost a full cast of first-time actors operating like pros, the docufiction element is wholly immersive. The lines between reality and fiction blur so effectively that all we viewers can manage is simply to feel.”*

PEYTON ROBINSON | ROGEREBERT.COM

*“Beecroft has captured that bittersweet, specific feeling of place — she effectively conveys that it’s not about the where, but the who. Tabatha Zimiga is an extraordinary person, and **THE NEW WEST** is smart to position her as such.”*

DAN MECCA | THE FILM STAGE

Connected Movies



Ranch and Rodeo culture

THE COWBOY CODE

A distinctive ethos emerged within ranch culture, often described as the "cowboy code": a set of unwritten values centring on self-reliance, stoic endurance, loyalty to the outfit (the ranch and its crew), honesty, and a particular form of taciturn masculinity. This code was partly functional — the isolation, physical danger, and interdependence of ranch work required reliability and composure — and partly mythological, amplified by dime novels, Wild West shows, and cinema.

The code also encoded racial hierarchy: the heroic cowboy of popular mythology was white, while Black, Mexican, and Native American cowboys — fully present in historical reality — were marginalised or rendered invisible. The Nat Love memoir (1907), one of the few first-person accounts by a Black cowboy, stands as a direct counter-text to this erasure.



Ranch and Rodeo culture

RODEOS

Rodeo functions as far more than sport: it is a ritual performance of national mythology. The arena becomes a stage on which the values of the frontier — courage, skill, rugged individualism, man's mastery over nature — are re-enacted for contemporary audiences. The opening ceremonies of major rodeos — the Grand Entry, the flag parade, the national anthem, the military colour guard — explicitly connect rodeo to patriotism and military virtue.

This ideological dimension became particularly pronounced during the Cold War, when rodeo was promoted as an expression of quintessentially American freedom and individualism in contrast to Soviet collectivism. The Reagan presidency (1981–89) cemented the association between rodeo, ranching, and a particular conservative vision of American identity — one that has persisted in country music, Republican political aesthetics, and rural cultural identity.

Rodeo also has a significant Indigenous dimension that the dominant narrative obscures: many of the foundational skills come from Native horsemanship traditions, and an important circuit of all-Indian rodeos — operating under the Indian National Finals Rodeo (INFR) — has run parallel to the PRCA circuit since 1976, maintaining the sport's Indigenous roots.



The myth of the Conquest of the West

MYTH VS. HISTORICAL REALITY

The Myth

"Empty wilderness" — the West was virgin, unpopulated land awaiting settlement.

Heroic individual pioneers tamed the land through hard work, bravery, and self-reliance.

Native Americans were "savages" resisting the advance of civilisation.

The conquest was peaceful, or at least a fair fight between equals.

The cowboy was a white Anglo-Saxon hero embodying American values.

The West as a land of freedom and equal opportunity for all.

The Historical Reality

Hundreds of Indigenous nations with complex political, economic, and agricultural systems inhabited the continent. Population estimates for pre-contact North America range from 5 to 18 million.

Expansion was driven by corporate interests (railroads, land speculators), federal military power, and government policy. Individual settlers were instruments of a state-sponsored project.

Indigenous resistance was a legitimate response to invasion and dispossession. Many nations had sophisticated governance, diplomacy, and legal traditions.

Massacres, broken treaties (~370 signed, virtually all violated), biological warfare, forced starvation, and cultural genocide were systematic and state-sanctioned.

Approximately 1 in 4 cowboys was Black (many freed slaves); Mexican vaqueros invented the craft; Native Americans also worked as cowboys. The white cowboy is largely a 20th-century cinematic invention.

Women had few legal rights; Chinese immigrants faced legal exclusion (1882); Black settlers faced violence and segregation; Mexican landowners were systematically dispossessed after 1848.

The myth of the Conquest of the West

KEY CONCEPT: TERRA NULLIUS

The legal fiction of terra nullius (“nobody’s land”) allowed European and American powers to claim sovereignty over inhabited lands by arguing that Indigenous peoples did not “use” the land in a legally recognisable way. This doctrine underpinned US land policy throughout the 19th century and has since been challenged in international law.



Vocabulary

CORE CONCEPTS — IDEOLOGY

Manifest Destiny | *Destinée manifeste* | The belief that US expansion to the Pacific was divinely ordained and historically inevitable.

the frontier | *la frontière (de l'Ouest)* | Turner's sense: the moving boundary between settled and "unsettled" land; as much a cultural space as a geographical one.

westward expansion | *l'expansion vers l'Ouest* | The process of US territorial growth from the Atlantic to the Pacific throughout the 18th–19th centuries.

settler colonialism | *colonialisme de peuplement* | A form of colonialism in which settlers permanently occupy and replace Indigenous populations.

nation-building | *construction nationale* | The process of creating a shared national identity, often through myth, culture, and collective memory.

founding myth | *mythe fondateur* | A narrative that legitimises and gives meaning to a nation's origins.

social Darwinism | *darwinisme social* | The (pseudo-scientific) application of "survival of the fittest" to human societies, used to justify racial hierarchy and conquest.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND DISPOSSESSION

Indigenous / Native American | *autochtone / Amérindien(ne)* | Preferred contemporary terms; "Indian" is considered outdated or offensive in most contexts.

dispossession | *dépossession / spoliation* | The act of stripping peoples of their lands, rights, or property.

forced relocation | *déplacement forcé* | The compelled removal of a population from their homeland, as in the Trail of Tears.

ethnic cleansing | *nettoyage ethnique* | The expulsion or destruction of an ethnic group from a territory by force.

cultural genocide | *génocide culture* | The destruction of a group's language, religion, and cultural practices, e.g. through boarding schools.

reservation | *réserve indienne* | Designated territory to which Native peoples were confined after dispossession of their original lands.

assimilation policy | *politique d'assimilation* | Government policy aimed at integrating — and erasing — Indigenous culture through boarding schools, language bans, etc.

Vocabulary

THE MYTHOLOGICAL APPARATUS

the pioneer | *le pionnier / la pionnière* | A settler who moves into “new” territory; romanticised as a heroic builder of civilisation.

the wilderness | *la nature sauvage* | In the myth: untamed, dangerous, empty; to be conquered and civilised. In reality, managed Indigenous land.

lawman / outlaw | *shérif / hors-la-loi* | Twin archetypes of Western morality — order vs. chaos, civilisation vs. savagery.

the noble savage | *le bon sauvage* | Rousseauian archetype: the romanticised Indigenous person, pure and unspoiled but ultimately inferior and doomed. A paternalistic myth.

the “vanishing Indian” | *l'Indien “voué à disparaître”* | The racist trope that Indigenous peoples were destined to die out — used to naturalise their destruction.

dime novel | *roman de gare / roman à deux sous* | Cheap mass-market fiction of the late 19th century; primary vehicle for early Western mythology.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CRITIQUE

revisionist history | *histoire révisionniste* | The critical re-examination and correction of established historical narratives. New Western History is revisionist in this positive, scholarly sense.

counter-narrative | *contre-récit* | A narrative that challenges or subverts a dominant or official account.

decolonisation | *décolonisation* | The process — political, cultural, and epistemic — of dismantling colonial structures and restoring Indigenous rights and voices.

postcolonial theory | *théorie postcoloniale* | Academic framework (Said, Spivak, Bhabha) for analysing the legacies of colonialism in culture, knowledge, and power.

erasure | *effacement / occultation* | The removal or suppression of a group's history, presence, or identity from the dominant narrative.

whitewashing | *édulcoration de l'histoire* | Presenting a sanitised, racially skewed version of history that minimises white violence and complicity.

collective memory | *mémoire collective* | The shared pool of knowledge about a group's past; subject to political construction and contestation.

reckoning | *prise de conscience / règlement de comptes* | A moment of confronting and accounting for past injustices.

land rights | *land claims / droits fonciers / revendications territoriales* | Legal and political demands by Indigenous peoples for recognition of their sovereignty over ancestral lands.



Crew

Screenplay and direction

Produced by

A production

In association with

Editing

Music

Music supervisor

Sound

Costumes

Casting

French distribution

Kate Beecroft

Lila Yacoub, Kate Beecroft, Melanie Ramsayer, Shannon Moss

Station Road, Stetson's Kingdom

Picture Movers, Stadium, Working Barn Productions,

Low Road Image Austin Shelton

Jennifer Vecchiarello

Lukas Frank, Daniel Meyer O'Keefe

Simon Astall, Sadie Matthew

Sergio Diaz

Christina Blackaller

Wittney Horton

Pyramide

Cast

Porshia Zimiga

Tabatha Zimiga

Roy Waters

Tracey

Jesse

Ryder

Clay

Leanna

Brynn

Skylar

PORSHIA ZIMIGA

TABATHA ZIMIGA

SCOOT McNAIRY

JENNIFER EHLE

JESSE THORSON

CHANCEY RYDER WITT

CLAY PATENEAUDE

LEANNA SHUMPERT

BRYNN DARLING

WYATT MANSFIELD

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