

Lost in the Funhouse?

Postmodern American Literature and Culture

Lecturer: Priv.-Doz. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Gastprofessor

Room and time: AR/AR-B 2201, Tuesday, 14-16

Course type and number: Proseminar (1032300031)

Modules: Bachelor LCMS/KM M 4.1: Gattungspoetik / Gattungsgeschichte; LA GYM M 2.1: Gattungspoetik und Gattungsgeschichte; LA GHR M 1.2: Gattungspoetik und Gattungsgeschichte; LA BK M 1.2: Gattungspoetik und Gattungsgeschichte.

First session: October 12, 2010

Course description: This class is designed as an introductory course to postmodern U.S. American literature and culture. You will be familiarized with the key concepts associated with postmodernism and postmodernity ('grand narratives,' 'simulacrum,' 'simulation,' 'palimpsest,' 'pastiche,' 'cyborg,' etc.) and read crucial theoretical as well as fictional texts. The seminar will begin with close readings of early postmodern texts such as Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and John Barth's short story "Lost in the Funhouse" (1968) and then move on to Kurt Vonnegut's cryptic fiction of the 1970s. Chief emphasis will be placed on the heyday of literary postmodernism in the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s, with discussions of the writings by Paul Auster (*Moon Palace*, 1989), Toni Morrison (*Paradise*, 1997), and Don DeLillo (*Falling Man*, 2007). We will also discuss some films, including Michael Crichton's *Westworld* (1973), Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1995), Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999), and Frank Miller's *Sin City* (2005), as well as TV shows like *The Simpsons* (1989 – present). One of our main goals will be to examine the boundary lines between modernism and postmodernism on the one hand and postmodernism on the other in order to find out how both discourses affect us today.

Grading:

2 CP: active participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout with a summary of the main additional text in one (!) sentence & at least eight entries in the discussion forum *before the session*;

5 CP: competent & lively participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout with a summary of the main additional text in one (!) sentence & at least ten entries in the discussion forum *before the session* & a 3-page summary of one important feature of postmodernism (to be made accessible to the class);

7 CP: competent & lively participation in class discussions, expert session plus handout with a summary of the main additional text in one (!) sentence & at least ten entries in the discussion forum *before the session* & short paper on a seminar-related topic with a close reading of ca. 10 pages.

Note: Poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your final grade!

Deadline for Final Papers: Friday, March 31 (Thursday), 2011. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus

12 October Introduction: Are We Having Fun Yet? American Postmodernism and Its (Dis-)Contents

Basic texts:

Jean-François Lyotard, from *The Postmodern Condition* (1979).¹

Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (1987).

Paula Geyh, F.G. Leebron, and A. Levy, "Introduction to Postmodern American Fiction" (1998).

Jeremy Hawthorn, "Modernism and Postmodernism" (2000).

19 October America, a Living Nightmare – Postmodernism and the Critique of Grand Narratives

Main text (required):

Thomas Pynchon, excerpts from *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966).

Additional text (optional):

Paula Geyh et al, "Breaking the Frame" (1998) (short intro).

26 October Yippie Pop – Postmodern Art and Consumer Culture

Key example (required):

Andy Warhol eating a Hamburger (1982), watch on: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaf6zF-FJBk&feature=fvw>

Additional texts (optional):

David Joselit, "Yippie Pop: Abbie Hoffman, Andy Warhol, and Sixties Media Politics" (2002).

Todd Gitlin, "The Postmodern Predicament" (1989).

¹ All main texts for this course are available at Moodle: <https://moodle.uni-siegen.de>. All these texts are also available in the form of a course reader (for those who like to have everything printed out already). Copy write, Weidenauer Str. 248 (behind the police station), phone: 0271-45416.

- 02 November Disruption, Non-Linearity, and Other Literary Challenges**
 Main text (required):
 John Barth, "Lost in the Funhouse" (1968).
 Additional text (optional):
 Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holstein, "Grounding the Postmodern Self" (1994).
- 09 November Revising Tradition – Fragmentation and the Questioning of ‘Official Histories’**
 Main text (required):
 Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., preface and Chapter 1 from *Breakfast of Champions* (1973).
 Additional text (optional):
 Kerwin Lee Klein, "In Search of Narrative Mastery: Postmodernism and the People without History" (1995).
- 16 November Posthuman Individuals – Robotic Identity and the Limits of Humanity**
 Main example (required):
Westworld (dir. Michael Crichton, 1973).
 Additional text: (optional)
 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1983).
- 23 November The Cyborg and the Transformation of the Self**
 Main example (required):
The Stepford Wives (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1975).
 Additional texts (optional):
 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991).
 LeiLani Nishime, "The Mulatto Cyborg" (2005).
- 30 November Self-Referentiality, Intertextuality, and the Quest for Identity**
 Main text (required):
 Paul Auster, excerpts from *Moon Palace* (1989).
 Additional text (optional):
 Interview with Paul Auster on *Moon Palace* (by Larry McCaffery & Sinda Gregory) (1992).
- 07 December Revisiting History, Dealing with Trauma**
 Main text (required):
 Art Spiegelman, from *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1986 & 1991).
 Additional texts (optional):
 Paula Geyh et al, "Revisiting History" (1998) (short intro).
 Michael Rothberg, "'We Were Talking Jewish': Art Spiegelman’s ‘Maus’ as ‘Holocaust’ Production" (1994).
- 14 December Commercialism and Death – Hyperreality and its Excesses**
 Main example (required):
Natural Born Killers (dir. Oliver Stone, 1994).
 Additional text (optional):
 Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulation" (1981).
- 21 December Cyberpunk and Technoculture**
 Main example (required):
The Matrix (Andy & Larry Wachowski, 1999).
 Additional texts (optional):
 Paula Geyh et al, "Technoculture" (1998) (short intro).
 Michelle Chilcoat, "Brain Sex, Cyberpunk Cinema, Feminism, and the Dis/Location of Heterosexuality" (2004).
- 11 January Postmodern Literature and the Reconstruction of Time**
 Main text (required):
 Toni Morrison, excerpts from *Paradise* (1997).
 Additional texts (optional):
 John Young, "Toni Morrison, Oprah Winfrey, and Postmodern Popular Audiences" (2002).
 Marni Gauthier, "The Other Side of ‘Paradise’: Toni Morrison’s (Un)Making of Mythic History" (2002).
- 18 January Blending High and Low Culture – Postmodernism and the Comic**
 Main example (required):
Sin City (dir. Frank Miller & Robert Rodriguez, 2005).
 Additional text (optional):
 Paula Geyh et al, "Popular Culture and High Culture Collide" (1998) (short intro).
- 25 January A World Upside Down – Literature after 9/11**
 Main text (required):
 Don DeLillo, excerpts from *Falling Man* (2007).
 Additional text (optional):
 Jonathan Safran Foer, excerpts from *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005).
- 01 February Still Lost in the Funhouse – Popular Television and the Heritage of Postmodernism**
 Main example (required):
 Episode from *The Simpsons* (1989 - today) (to be announced).
 Additional text (optional):
 Paul A. Cantor, "The Simpsons: Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family" (1999).