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)


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:

**19 October**
America, a Living Nightmare – Postmodernism and the Critique of Grand Narratives
- Main text (required):
- Additional text (optional):

**26 October**
Yippie Pop – Postmodern Art and Consumer Culture
- Key example (required):
- Additional texts (optional):

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1 All main texts for this course are available at Moodle: [https://moodle.uni-siegen.de](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):

09 November  Revising Tradition – Fragmentation and the Questioning of ‘Official Histories’
Main text (required):
Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., preface and Chapter 1 from Breakdast of Champions (1973).
Additional text (optional):

16 November  Posthuman Individuals – Robotic Identity and the Limits of Humanity
Main example (required):
Additional text: (optional)

23 November  The Cyborg and the Transformation of the Self
Main example (required):
Additional texts (optional):

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):
Additional texts (optional):
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):

21 December  Cyberpunk and Technoculture
Main example (required):
The Matrix (Andy & Larry Wachowski, 1999).
Additional texts (optional):

11 January  Postmodern Literature and the Reconstruction of Time
Main text (required):
Toni Morrison, excerpts from Paradise (1997).
Additional texts (optional):

18 January  Blending High and Low Culture – Postmodernism and the Comic
Main example (required):
Additional text (optional):

25 January  A World Upside Down – Literature after 9/11
Main text (required):
Don DeLillo, excerpts from Falling Man (2007).
Additional text (optional):

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):