

# DR. STRANGELOVE'S AMERICA

## LITERATURE AND THE VISUAL ARTS IN THE ATOMIC AGE

**Lecturer:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, Guest Professor

**Room and time:** WS-A 001, Thursdays 14-16

**Course type:** Lecture series (Vorlesung)

**Modules:** Bachelor LKM M 3.1 Literatur- und kulturgeschichtlicher Überblick / Lehramt Gym 1.2 Literatur- und kulturgeschichtlicher Überblick / Master Internationale Kulturhistorische Studien EM 7 (1914 - Gegenwart)

**First session:** April 7, 2011

**Course description:** The lecture series will deal with the literature and culture of the American 1940s and 50s. How were literary and cinematic texts influenced by the 'age of anxiety' that began after the end of World War II? Did America really learn to "stop worrying and love the bomb," as Stanley Kubrick's 1964 movie, *Dr. Strangelove*, suggests? How were the various discourses of the time – e.g., the cult of spontaneity and Beat culture – joined in a public attempt to cope with the challenges of the Cold War? The course will deal with developments in literature, cinema and the arts as well as with shifts in the political and social fabric of American society. Texts to be scrutinized in the lecture will include Saul Bellow's picaresque novel *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), Billy Wilder's satirical film comedy *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro" (1957) as well as the gloomy paintings by Edward Hopper and Jackson Pollock's abstract expressionist works. Emphasis will be placed on the composition, function, and aesthetics of works which were crafted under the auspices of the Atomic Age. How can the culture of the early postmodern era be classified? Which effect did the era have upon later periods such as the Hippie era of the 1960s and the neo-conservatism of the 1980s?

### Grading:

2 CP: regular attendance, participation in discussions, at least seven entries in the discussion forum, final exam of 45 min.

5 CP: regular attendance, participation in discussions, at least nine entries in the discussion forum, final exam of 90 mins.

6 or 7 CP: regular attendance, participation in discussions, at least seven entries in the discussion forum, final exam of 90 mins. (1/2), and final paper (10-12 pages) (1/2).

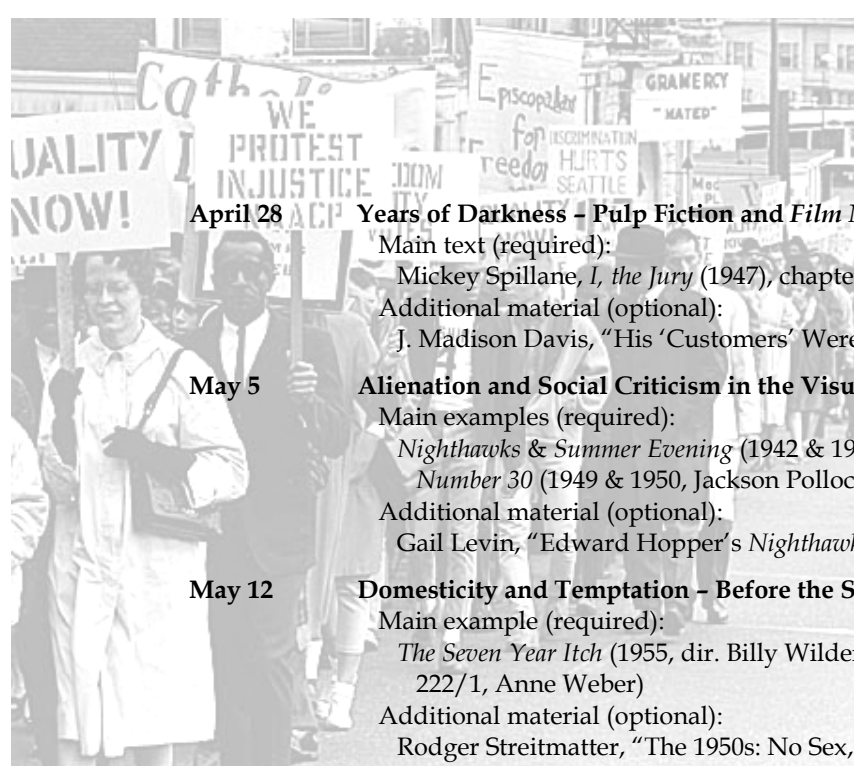
**Deadline for Final Papers:** Friday, August 31 (Wednesday), 2011. Note: There is no extension of this deadline! Please throw papers into my box (2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the AR-H building) or send them in postal form. Do not send papers via email!

### Syllabus

- April 7**      **Introduction: Age of Anxiety, Age of Rebellion**  
Basic texts (recommended):  
Dana Polan, "Introduction" to *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (1986), 1-20.<sup>1</sup>  
Douglas Brode, "The Lure of the Fifties" (1992), 7-19.
- April 14**     **Atomic Fear and the Big Bug Movies of the 1950s**  
Main example (required):  
*Them!* (1954, dir. Gordon Douglas). Check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222)  
Additional materials (additional):  
William M. Tsutsui, "Understanding the Big Bug Movies of the 1950s" (2007), 237-253.
- April 21**     **Easter Holiday (Gründonnerstag)**  
*Relax and enjoy!*

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<sup>1</sup> 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.



**April 28**      **Years of Darkness – Pulp Fiction and Film Noir**

Main text (required):

Mickey Spillane, *I, the Jury* (1947), chapters 1, 2, and 13.

Additional material (optional):

J. Madison Davis, "His 'Customers' Were the Jury: Mickey Spillane, 1918-2006" (2007), 6-8.

**May 5**            **Alienation and Social Criticism in the Visual Arts**

Main examples (required):

*Nighthawks* & *Summer Evening* (1942 & 1947, Edward Hopper); *Number 10, 1949* & *Autumn Rhythm, Number 30* (1949 & 1950, Jackson Pollock). Look carefully at these pictures online!

Additional material (optional):

Gail Levin, "Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, Surrealism, and the War" (1996), 180-195.

**May 12**         **Domesticity and Temptation – Before the Sexual Revolution**

Main example (required):

*The Seven Year Itch* (1955, dir. Billy Wilder). Check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber)

Additional material (optional):

Rodger Streitmatter, "The 1950s: No Sex, Please, We're American" (2004), xiii-xix.

**May 19**         **New Hopes – The Return of the 'American Quest' Narrative**

Main text (required):

Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), chapters 1, 14, 24 & parts of final chapter.

Additional material (optional):

Philip O. Gericke, "The Adventures of Augie March and Its Picaresque Antecedents" (1990), 77-83.

**May 26**         **Naming Names – Anti-Communism and the Reinstatement of Religious Values**

Main example (required):

*I Married a Communist* aka *The Woman on Pier 13* (1949, dir. Robert Stevenson). Check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber)

Additional material (optional):

Daniel J. Leab, "How Red Was My Valley: Hollywood, the Cold War Film, and *I Married a Communist*," *Journal of Contemporary History* (1986), 59-88.

**June 2**           **Ascension Holiday (Christi Himmelfahrt)**

*Relax and enjoy!*

**June 9**           **The Civil Rights Movement and the 'Race Question'**

Main text (required):

James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son" (1955), 127-145.

Additional material (optional):

Jerry H. Bryant, "Wright, Ellison, Baldwin – Exorcising the Demon," *Phylon* (1976), 174-188.

**June 16**         **Us vs. Them – Alien Invasion Narratives of the 1950s**

Main example (required):

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, dir. Don Siegel). Watch online in eight parts or check out overnight at the Sekretariat (room AR-K 222/1, Anne Weber).

Theoretical text (required):

David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950), 3-31.

Additional material (optional):

Katrina Mann, "'You're Next!': Postwar Hegemony Besieged in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*," *Cinema Journal* (2004), 49-68.

**June 23**         **Feast of Corpus Christi (Fronleichnam)**

*Relax and enjoy!*

**June 30**         **The Cult of Unthink – The Beats and the Revival of the Body**

Main example (required):

Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," *Dissent* (1957), 1-15.

Additional material (optional):

Andrea Levine, "The (Jewish) White Negro: Norman Mailer's Racial Bodies," *MELUS* (2003), 59-81.

**July 7**            **Final Exam**

**July 14**         **Wrap-Up Session**

