

Postmodern Literature and Culture

8:109 Fall 2007

TTH 9:30-10:45 104 EPB

Prof. Porter (jeff-porter@uiowa.edu)

Office: 305A EPB Phone: 5-0468

Hours: T 11-12:30 TH 2:30-4

Description

Whatever its point of departure—the assassination of JFK in 1963, the Manson massacre in 1969, or the opening of Disney World in 1971—the postmodern era points to a fundamental shift in our relationship to technology, mass media, and consumer culture. Perhaps no one has a more intimate feel for this shift than Americans born since 1984 who have grown up with cell phones, iPods, instant messaging, and the ubiquity of the media. What kind of world is that? This course will take a close look at the representation and critique of postmodern culture in contemporary American and European fiction and theory, focusing on such topics as the postmodern subject, mediation, history as terror, the hyperreal, and experimental fiction. Throughout the semester, students will trace the efforts of contemporary writers to define postmodernity and to understand its dilemmas. Our reading of contemporary fiction and theory will be supplemented by—time permitting—selected film screenings (*Memento*, *Run Lola Run*, *Jarhead*, *Fight Club*, and *Donnie Darko*).

Texts

Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*

Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Jean Baudrillard, *America*

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*

Art Spiegelman, *Maus I+II*

Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light*

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

(The above books are available at Prairie Lights book store)

Assignments & Grading

This may seem obvious, but it's absolutely essential that you keep up with the reading.

Come to each class prepared to listen, ask questions, and interpret and speculate on the readings in class. Participation and occasional in-class short exercises (25%)

One analytical paper based on the readings (6-8 pages) (30%)

Three one-page short responses (SR) (15% each)

Attendance. You have two free absences during the semester. Any further absences will lower your final grade, unless you contact me promptly with a good excuse and do a make-up assignment (I reserve the right not to offer you the chance to make up your absence, if your excuse isn't valid). Two lates will equal an absence.

Stay tuned for fuller details about required assignments and tests.

Schedule

Week 1

8/28 Introduction to the syllabus, assignments, and the texts

8/230 **What is Postmodernism?**

Week 2

Gender and Genre: A Postmodern Anti-Fairytale

9/4 Carter, *The Magic Toyshop* (chapters 1-6)

9/6 Carter, *The Magic Toyshop* (chapters 7-9)

Week 3

9/11 Screening and discussion: *Donnie Darko* (2001)

The Postmodern Family and the Predicament of the Subject

9/13 DeLillo, *White Noise* (Part I: Waves and Radiation)

Short Response #1

Week 4

9/18 DeLillo, *White Noise* (Part II: The Airborne Toxic Event)

9/20 DeLillo, *White Noise* (Part III: Dylarama)

Week 5

Travels in Hyperreality

9/25 Baudrillard, *America* (chapters 1-3)

9/27 Baudrillard, *America* (chapters 4-6)

Week 6

10/2 Screening and discussion: *Memento* (2000)

Indeterminacy and the Postmodern Reader

10/4 Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (chapters 1-3)

Short Response #2

Week 7

10/9 Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (chapters 4-6)

10/11 Discussion

Week 8

10/16 Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* (chapters 1-4)

10/18 Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* (chapters 5-7)

Week 9

10/23 Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* (chapters 8-12)

History, Terror, and Representation

10/25 Spiegelman, *Maus I* (chapters 1-3)
Short Response #3

Week 10

10/30 Spiegelman, *Maus I* (chapters 4-6)

11/1 Spiegelman, *Maus II* (selections)

Week 11

11/6 Discussion

Technology, Speed, and War

11/8 Screening and discussion: *Jarhead* (2005)
Paper Assigned

Week 12

11/13 Virilio, *Desert Storm*

11/15 Discussion

Week 13

11/20 HOLIDAY

11/22 HOLIDAY

Week 14

11/27 Screening and discussion: *Run Lola Run* (1998)

11/29 Discussion

Paper Due

Week 15

Postmodern Horror

12/4 Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

12/6 Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

Week 16

12/11 Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

12/13 Wrap Up

Important Policies of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Academic Fraud

Plagiarism and any other activities that result in a student presenting work that is not his or her own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is reported to the departmental DEO and then to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Services in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students have the right to make suggestions or complaints and should first visit with the instructor, then with the course supervisor if appropriate, and next with the departmental DEO. All complaints must be made within six months of the incident.

www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml#5

Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations first must register with Student Disability Services and then meet with a SDS counselor who determines eligibility for services. A student approved for accommodations should meet privately with the course instructor to arrange particular accommodations. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Visit www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/ for definitions, assistance, and the full policy.

Administrative Home of the Course

The administrative home of this course is the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, which governs academic matters relating to the course such as the add / drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, issues concerning academic fraud or academic probation, and how credits are applied for various CLAS requirements. Please keep in mind that different colleges might have different policies. If you have questions about these or other CLAS policies, visit your academic advisor or 120 Schaeffer Hall and speak with the staff. The CLAS Academic Handbook is another useful source of information on CLAS academic policy: www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/index.shtml