

Reading the Contemporary

Module Convenor: Dr Caroline Edwards

Lecturers: Dr Caroline Edwards, Dr Joe Brooker, Professor Carol Watts, Dr Antonio Venezia

Module Code: EN095S7

Module Level: MA (core module)

Time: Mondays 6-9pm, Autumn Term 2014-15

All sessions involve a lecture (6-7.20) followed by a seminar (7.40-9) with the exception of Week 11, during which the first session (6-7.20) will be taught as a closing lecture and the second session (7.40-9) will consist of a student-led workshop on Researching the Contemporary.

Course description:

This course introduces students to a range of contemporary literary, cinematic, visual and theoretical works published since 2000, tracing some of the major developments in contemporary literatures at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Taking in poetry, film, memoir, journalism, the novel, the graphic novel, science fiction and digital culture, this course explores the meanings and characteristics of the 'contemporary' via a focus on categories like hybridity, performance, trauma, memory and the uncanny – terms that have been major preoccupations of cultural production in the last two decades.

The course is broadly split into two sections, the first of which explores 'the aesthetics of disintegration' arguably symptomatic of developments like postcolonialism and globalization; the second explores the idea that the aesthetics of the contemporary moment might also, and simultaneously, be stalked by a number of 'returns': of, among others, the religious, the national, the historical, the 'real'. In this way the course moves beyond debates about postmodernism by reading the postmodern as one among a number of conditions that shape the contemporary world.

Aims and objectives:

- To provide a comprehensive grounding in some of the key trends and texts in the field of contemporary literature and culture, with a special focus on the post-2000 period.
- To engage students in debates about the conceptualization of the contemporary, and to equip them with the appropriate vocabulary and critical paradigms.
- To identify and engage with the key features and characteristics of new forms of writing that have emerged as a result of new technologies.

- To develop a multidisciplinary approach to the study of contemporary literature and culture.

Coursework and assessment:

Assessed essay: this course is examined by a 5,000 word essay due the first day of the spring term. Please see the handout posted on Moodle for a list of essay questions and submission instructions.

Texts that you will need to purchase:

Cloverfield (2008) (DVD) **
Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty* (2004)
Hari Kunzru, *Transmission* (2005)
Nalo Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads* (2003)
Tom Raworth, *Collected Poems* (2003)
Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007)
Jon McGregor, *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002)
Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009)

** this text is a film and is available in the library, although as with any core text, it's not guaranteed that it will be available when you want to watch it.

Please note: all core reading material that is *not* listed above – these will usually be short texts, i.e. essays, poems, short stories etc. – will be made available either electronically via Moodle (Birkbeck's virtual learning environment) or via a handout given out in advance of the relevant class.

All recommended secondary reading is available via the e-journal databases (Project Muse and JSTOR), in Birkbeck Library or Senate House Library; you will also be able to find copies of all texts in the British Library.

Introductory reading on contemporary literature and cultural theory:

Siân Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard (eds), *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013)
Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (London: Verso, 2012)
Pamela Bickley, *Contemporary Fiction: The Novel since 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
Peter Boxall, *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
Ian Brinton, *Contemporary Poetry: Poets and Poetry since 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
Judith Butler, *Prearious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004)

- Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh (eds), *Literature and Globalization: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2010)
- Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Postmodern Humanism in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Reconciling the Void* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006)
- Robert Eagleston, *Contemporary Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Justin Edwards and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet (eds), *The Gothic in Contemporary Literature and Popular Culture: Pop Goth* (New York: Routledge, 2012)
- Amir Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013)
- Brian Finney, *English Fiction Since 1984: Narrating a Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006)
- Sebastian Groess, *The Making of London: London in Contemporary Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)
- Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin, *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto, Soundings:*
<http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/manifesto.html>
- Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (eds), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 2006)
- Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (eds), *Literature After 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2010)
- Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008)
- Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks (eds), *Literature and the Contemporary* (London: Longman, 1999)
- Rod Mengham (ed.), *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English since 1970* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999)
- Jago Morrison, *Contemporary Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2001)
- Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013)
- Steve Padley, *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)
- Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)
- David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2010)
- Philip Tew and David James (eds), *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition* (Madison, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009)
- Rebecca L. Walkowitz (ed.), "Immigrant Fictions," *Contemporary Literature* (special issue), Vol. 47, No. 4 (2006)
- Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010)
- _____, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002)

Week 1 | Induction

This session will welcome you to the MA Contemporary Literature and Culture. We will talk through the structure of the programme, as well as look ahead to this particular module. Finally, we will consider the historical,

disciplinary and theoretical parameters within which contemporary literature is researched today, and explore the opportunities, as well as the challenges, presented by literary and cultural texts in the 21st century – which pose pressing questions of our own age. Students are invited to a social gathering after this class.

INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALIZING THE CONTEMPORARY

Week 2 | When was the Contemporary? (CE)

This session introduces the module by opening a debate about the nature of the contemporary: is it primarily a conceptual or a periodizing term? What is the contemporary “now”? Calibrating a number of distinct, yet related, modes of being in time, or experiencing time, the concept of contemporaneity also suggests an anachronistic articulation of being with other times. We will consider the variety of methodologies available for exploring these temporal paradoxes: among them, philosophies of time in the continental tradition, sociological approaches to technological development and the crisis of instantaneity, the role of digital media in everyday life, and a comparative historical consideration of recent global events or “hinge” points in historical time, such as 2001, 2008 and 2011.

Essential viewing/ reading:

Cloverfield (2008) (Dir. Matt Reeves)

Giorgio Agamben, ‘What is the Contemporary?’ in *What is an Apparatus? And other Essays* (2009)

Don Slater and George Ritzer, ‘Interview with Ulrich Beck,’ *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1.2 (2001): 261-277 [available online: http://www.sagepub.com/mcdonaldizationstudy5/articles/Weber%20and%20Other%20Supporting%20Theories_Articles%20PDFs/Slater.pdf]

Dominic Head, ‘The Post-Consensus Renaissance?’ in *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 1-22

Martin Haliwell, ‘Contemporary American Culture’ in *American Thought and Culture in the 21st Century*, ed. Martin Haliwell and Catherine Morley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 211-226

Background reading:

David Ciccoricco, *Reading Network Fiction* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007)

Steven Connor, ‘The Impossibility of the Present, or, from Contemporary to Contemporal’ in *Literature and the Contemporary*, ed. Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks (London: Longman, 1999)

Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

David James, *Modernist Futures: Innovation and Inheritance in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012)

- Fiona McCullough, 'Introduction' in *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction: Imagined Identities* (London: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 1-20
- Karen Newman, Jay Clayton and Marianne Hirsch, "Re-Reading the Present" in Karen Newman, Jay Clayton and Marianne Hirsch (eds), *Time and the Literary* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-10
- Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- Janet, Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds. *Political Emotions: New Agendas in Communication* (London: Routledge, 2010)
- Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009)
- Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., "Documenting the Horror" in *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 57-80
- Slavoj Žižek, 'Passions of the Real, Passions of Semblance' in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002)

Week 3 | Retro Action (JB)

The contemporary seems to be about the new. But contemporary cultural production also involves revisiting the past. How does the aesthetic reconstruction of the past contribute to the cultural-temporal mosaic of the contemporary? Are we attracted to the glamour of the past, nostalgic for its certainties, or keen to use it to interrogate the present? How is the past manipulated and remade by the lenses and styles of our contemporary moment?

Essential reading:

Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty* (2004), on the 1980s.

The lecture will also refer to the TV series *Mad Men* (2007-present), on the 1960s.

Other reference points:

- 1980s neo-1950s movies: *Back To The Future*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, *Absolute Beginners*
- post-2000 neo-1980s movies: *Donnie Darko*, *13 Going on 30*, *This Is England*
- Neo-1980s novels: David Peace, *GB84* (2004) makes a strong comparison to Hollinghurst; see also Tim Lott, *Rumours of a Hurricane* (2001) and David Mitchell, *Black Swan Green* (2006).
- Retro TV: *Life on Mars* and *Ashes To Ashes*

Background Reading

Andy Beckett, *When The Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber, 2009)

Joseph Brooker, *Literature of the 1980s: After the Watershed* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), Conclusion

--- 'Neo Lines: Alan Hollinghurst and the Apogee of the Eighties', *Literary Criterion*, XL: 3&4 (2005): 104-116

- 'Orgreave Revisited: GB84 and the Return to the 1980s', *Radical Philosophy*, Vol. 133 (September / October 2005), pp. 39-51
- Andrew Eastham, 'Inoperative ironies: Jamesian aestheticism and postmodern culture in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*', *Textual Practice*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (2006): 509-527
- Elizabeth E. Guffey, *Retro* (London: Reaktion, 2006)
- Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995)
- *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)
- Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1991), chapter 9 on 'nostalgia for the present'
- Nicky Marsh, *Money, Speculation and Finance in Contemporary British Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2007)
- Andy McSmith, *No Such Thing as Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Constable, 2010). Simon Reynolds, *Retromania* (London: Faber, 2011)
- Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005)
- Peter York and Charles Jennings, *Peter York's Eighties* (London: BBC Books, 1995)

PART ONE: THE AESTHETICS OF DISINTEGRATION

Week 4 | Networks Beyond the Nation (CE)

This class will explore the changing composition of class, subjectivity and politics in a post- or transnational context. The impact of diasporic migrations, fluctuations of labour and employment, technologies of communication, strategies of protest, and new forms of collective and creative belonging in the twenty-first-century require a reconsideration of the way in which we imagine, and understand, our contemporary moment. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri are the pre-eminent philosophers of this new composition of class and its political articulations. We will be reading extracts from their influential text *Multitude* (the follow-up to *Empire*) alongside Hari Kunzru's 2005 novel *Transmission*, which offers a striking example of the role of deterritorialised chains of causality and the impact of technology on the lives of its protagonists.

Essential reading:

Hari Kunzru, *Transmission* (2005)

Selections from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (2005)
[scanned copies of relevant sections will be made available via Moodle]

Berthold Schoene, 'Global Noise: Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Hari Kunzru' and 'Coda: The Cosmopolitan Imagination' in *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 127-153

Background reading:

- Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)
- Homi Bhabha, 'The World and the Home', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992): 141-153 (JSTOR)
- Atilio Borón, *Empire and Imperialism: A Critical Reading of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri* (New York: ZedBooks, 2005)
- Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur, eds, *Theorizing Diaspora* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003)
- Peter Childs and James Green, *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels: Zadie Smith, Nadeem Aslam, Hari Kunzru and David Mitchell* (London: Continuum, 2013)
- Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Penguin, 2000)
- _____, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993)
- David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)
- 'Hari Kunzru in Conversation.' *Wasafiri: The Transnational Journal of International Writing* 45 (July 2005): 11–14
- Pierre Lamarche, Max Rosenkrantz, David Sherman (eds), *Reading Negri: Marxism in the Age of Empire* (Chicago: Carus, 2011)
- Philip Leonard, *Literature After Globalization: Textuality, Technology and the Nation-State* (London: Continuum, 2013)
- Pei-Chen Liao, *'Post'-9/11 South Asian Diasporic Fiction: Uncanny Terror* (London: Palgrave, 2013)
- Fiona McCulloch, *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction: Imagined Identities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)
- Franco Moretti, "Network Theory, Plot Analysis" in *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 211-240
- Paul Andrew Passavant, *The Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri* (New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Frauke Reitemeier (ed.), *Strangers, Migrants, Exiles: Negotiating Identity in Literature* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2012)
- Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrew Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004)

Week 5 | Evaporating Genres (CE)

This session extends our discussion of nationalism and post- or transnational imaginaries, exploring the way in which genre has been used in twenty-first century postcolonial fiction. Born in Jamaica and raised in Toronto, Nalo Hopkinson is an award-winning writer whose work complicates any easy generic categorisation, moving between speculative fiction, magical realism, historical fiction, fantasy, slave narrative, and science fiction. Moreover, her editorial work on anthologies of Black and Afro-Caribbean SF have been prominent in opening up the field to a wider set of new voices writing in the diaspora. We will consider the way in which her acclaimed 2003 novel *The Salt Roads* experiments with narrative structure, voice and temporal

organisation to offer its readers a set of overlapping female perspectives that move fluidly across boundaries of historical time, interpolating race, class and sexual orientation. The novel blends creolized vernacular narrative, otherworldly deities, West Indian theology and the historical form of the slave narrative into a fluently episodic structure that challenges our received understandings of both gender and genre. Interestingly, *The Salt Roads* is also considered to be a work of “literary fiction,” and the lecture will contextualise those provocative debates in contemporary publishing and literary criticism which address increasingly hybridised (or “evaporating”) generic boundaries; as well as challenging the privileging of “literary” over speculative fictions in recent years.

Essential reading:

Nalo Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads* (2003)

Margaret Atwood, “Dire Cartographies: The Roads to Utopia” in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (New York: Virago, 2012), pp. 66-98

Milena Marinkova, “Revolutionizing Pleasure in Writing: Subversive Desire and Micropolitical Affects in Nalo Hopkinson’s *The Salt Roads*” in *Postcolonial Literatures and Deleuze: Colonial Pasts, Differential Futures*, ed. Lorna Burns, Birgit M. Kaiser (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 181-198

Background reading:

Neal Baker, “Syncretism: A Federalist Approach to Canadian Science Fiction,” *Extrapolation*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2001): 218-231

Bould, Mark (ed), “Africa SF” [special issue], *Paradoxa*, Vol. 25 (2014)

Lorna Burns, “Postcolonial Literature as Health: Robert Antoni and Nalo Hopkinson” in *Contemporary Caribbean Literature and Deleuze: Literature between Postcolonialism and Post-Continental Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 148-188

Diane Glave, “An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson,” *Callaloo*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2003): 146-159

Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)

Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal (eds), *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2010)

Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (eds), *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)

Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan (eds), *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press)

Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008)

Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001)

- Nancy Johnson, " 'Happy that it's here': An interview with Nalo Hopkinson" in *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*, ed. Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 200-215
- Isiah Lavender, "Introduction: Mapping the Blackground" in *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 1-20
- Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Alondra Nelson, "Making the Impossible Possible: An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson," *Social Text*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2002): 97-113
- Judie Newman, *Utopia and Terror in Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2013)
- Ralph Pordzik, *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001)
- Eric D. Smith, *Globalization, Utopia and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)
- Sheree R. Thomas, *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (Grand Central Publishing, 2000)
- Gary K. Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2011)
- Gary K. Wolfe and Jonathan Strahan, "Somehow Déclassé: An Interview With Nalo Hopkinson" in "Africa SF," ed. Mark Bould, *Paradoxa*, Vol. 25 (2014): pp. 310-324

Week 6 | Reading Week – NO CLASS

Week 7 | Poetry and Speed (CW)

This week explores the vectors and velocities of contemporary poetics and what Tom Raworth calls the 'requisite speed'. In what ways is poetry intimately and generatively engaged with the conditions of the present time, and how can we begin to think the concept of contemporaneity in its light. Poet Carol Watts addresses speed and the present in Raworth's writing and performance.

Essential reading:

Tom Raworth, 'Ace' and 'The Vein', in *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003)

Hear Raworth reading Ace online at Pennsound

<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Raworth.html> or buy the Rockdrill cd at <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Ace-1966-1979-Rockdrill-Tom-Raworth/dp/1905001037>

Background reading:

Louis Armand, ed., *Contemporary Poetics* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2007)

Manuel Castells, 'The Space of Flows', *The Rise of the Network Society*

(Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)

Nate Dorward, ed. *Removed for Further Study: The Poetry of Tom Raworth*, The Gig 13/14 (June 2003)

Peter Larkin, 'Innovation Contra Acceleration',
<http://www.dgcdlynx.plus.com/lynx/lynx46.html>

Keston Sutherland, 'Four Theses on Speed', *Quid* 2004

John Wilkinson, 'Tripping the Light Fantastic: Tom Raworth's Ace', *The Lyric Touch: Essays on the Poetry of Excess* (Cambridge: Salt, 2007)

PART TWO: THE AESTHETICS OF RETURN

Week 8 | The Aesthetic of Bookishness in the Digital Age (CE)

This session will explore the way in which a growing corpus of twenty-first-century novels are responding to their digital contexts. Today, the printed novel competes with a wide range of entertainment and art forms – most notably, cinematic releases, the long-form series of “quality” TV shows, computer games franchises, fan fiction and online commentary and journalism, as well as graphic novels and literary collaborations and installations. Digital media thus present a fresh challenge to the traditional literary novel in its printed codex form. We will consider the way in which novels such as Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007), in company with Mark Z. Danielewski's earlier cult novel *House of Leaves* (2000), and Jonathan Safran Foer's recent *Tree of Codes* (2010), are drawing on a historical tradition of avant-garde literary experimentation to blur the boundaries between printed book, art object, and digitally-engaged hypertext. The lecture will offer some background context in the interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks required to read such hypertextual fictions – whose organisation of text demand complex forms of attention on the part of the reader. The way in which such texts are received, read, and engaged with in online forums and fan sites suggests an interesting congruence of the possibilities afforded by new digital forms of communication with a tradition of aesthetic experimentation that long predates the internet.

Essential Reading:

Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007)

N. Katherine Hayles, "Material Entanglements: Steven Hall's *Raw Shark Texts* as Slipstream Novel," *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2011) [copies will be made available via Moodle]

Jessica Pressman, "The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First-Century Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2013) [available online:

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mqr;c=mqr;c=mqrarchive;idno=act2080.0048.402;view=text;rgn=main;xc=1;g=mqrq>]

Background Reading:

- Bill Brown, "Materiality" in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, Ed. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 49-63
- J. Yellowlees Douglas, *The End of Books--or Books Without End?: Reading Interactive Narratives* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001)
- Alison Gibbons, *Multimodality, Cognition, and Experimental Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2011)
- Alison Gibbons, "Multimodal Literature and Experimentation" in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 420-434
- Matthew K. Gold (ed.), *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)
- N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008)
- N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)
- N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002)
- Jennifer Hodgson, "Such a Thing as Avant-Garde Has Ceased to Exist: The Hidden Legacies of the British Experimental Novel" in *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now*, ed. Siân Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 15-33
- Jerome McGann, *Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)
- Adelaide Morris and Thomas Swiss, *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: THE MIT Press, 2006)
- Loss Pequeno Glazier, *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-poetries* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2001)
- Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000)
- Mark Tremayne, ed., *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future of Media* (London: Routledge, 2007)

Week 9 | Post-secularism after 9/11 (CE)

This week explores what is starting to be defined as a 'post-secular' literary sensibility, alongside critical material. Developed in theological discourses which combine biblical exegesis with continental political philosophy, this emerging critical paradigm has more recently been used to open up questions of narrative ambiguity in twenty-first-century British and American fictions. An emerging caucus of fictions are offering religiously inflected disruptions of secular constructions of reality, articulating what might be called a 'weak' religiosity, whose motifs encourage us to re-evaluate Enlightenment tenets of

secular rationality via ontological openings or ambiguously posited ruptures to the smooth functioning of literary realism. Jon McGregor's first novel, *If Nobody Speaks*, will be our starting point for considering how we read two seemingly incompatible discourses – secularism and theology – and what role literary fiction has to play in deconstructing any easy distinctions between these two vocabularies in the post-9/11 period.

Essential reading:

Jon McGregor, *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002)

Hent de Vries, 'Introduction: Before, Around and Beyond the Theologico-Political' in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (2006) [scanned copies of relevant sections will be made available via Moodle]

John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (2007) [scanned copies of relevant sections will be made available via Moodle]

Background reading:

On literature after 9/11:

Veronique Bragard, ed., *Portraying 9/11: Essays on Representations in Comics, Literature, Film and Theatre* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 2011)

Susan Buck-Morss, *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left* (London: Verso, 2003)

Steven Chermak, Frankie Y. Bailey and Michelle Brown, eds, *Media Representations of September 11* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 2003)

Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)

David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, eds, *Literature After 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2010)

Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Derek Rubin and Jaap Verheul, *American Multiculturalism After 9/11* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009)

Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009)

Social Text special issue '911 – a Public Emergency', 72 (2002) (Project Muse)

MFS Modern Fiction Studies special issue – 'Fiction After 9/11', 57.3 (2011) (Project Muse)

On religion in the contemporary period:

Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003)

- Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: The Resurgence of Religion in World Politics* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999)
- Phillip Blond, ed, *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998)
- Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic After 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2010)
- Judith Butler, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and Cornel West, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)
- Caroline Edwards, 'An Interview with Jon McGregor,' *Contemporary Literature* 51.2 (2010): 217-245 (Project Muse)
- Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002)
- Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010)
- Griffith, Marie and Melani McAllister, eds., *American Quarterly* Special Issue: 'Religion and Politics in the Contemporary United States', 59.3 (2007) (Project Muse)
- Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever* (Cambridge, Mass.: De Capo Press, 2007)
- George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)
- Andrew Tate, *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (London: Continuum, 2010)
- Fiona Tolan et. al., *Literature, Migration and the "War on Terror"* (New York: Routledge, 2011)
- Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009)

Week 10 | The Return of Nation (AV)

This session explores the enduring power of the national narrative in a globalized world that has supposedly transcended the nation-state as a meaningful unit. Via a graphic text that incorporates historiography, autobiography and journalism, the class will trace the process of recovering evidence of collective trauma – evidence that has become 'footnotes' in a neglected history that bears witness to the stakes in the Israeli / Palestinian national narratives. We will consider the formal analysis of the graphic novel, and the comparative reading practices that this raises for our understanding of contemporary literature and culture and, specifically, how we conceive of 'the novel.' Sacco's investigative journalism draws attention to the complex process of navigating oral testimonies and the subjective biases inherent within historical representation. Finally, the interweaving of subjective experience and historical construction reminds us of the temporal overlappings that punctuate our understanding of contemporaneity and of historicity.

Essential reading:

Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009)

Background reading:

On Israel/Palestine:

Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955-57* 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1995) (see especially chapter 6)

Ramzy Baroud, *My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* (London: Pluto, 2010)

Gerald Butt, *Life at the Crossroads: a History of Gaza*, 2nd ed. (Cyprus: Rimal, 2009)

Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008)

Joe Sacco, *Palestine* (London: Cape, 2003)

On trauma:

Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008)

On the nation:

Stephen Berger, Linas Eriksonas, and Andrew Mycock, eds., *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts* (New York: Berghahn, 2008)

Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007)

Ernst Renan, 'What is a Nation?' (1882) [available online: http://www.cooper.edu/humanities/core/hss3/e_renan.html]

On Sacco and comics:

Hillary Chute, 'History and Graphic Representation in Maus,' *Twentieth-Century Literature* 52.2 (2006): 199-230 (JSTOR)

Groensteen, Thierry, *The System of Comics* (Jackson, MA: University Press of Mississippi, 2007)

Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson, MA: University Press of Mississippi, 2005)

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: the Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993)

Robert Peterson, *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2011)

Roger Sabin, *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels* (London: Phaidon, 1996)

Rebecca Scherr, 'Shaking Hand's with Other People's Pain: Joe Sacco's Palestine,' *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 46.1 (2013): 19-36 (Project Muse)

Modern Fiction Studies 52.4 (2006): 'Graphic Narrative' (special issue), edited by Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven (Project Muse)

Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,' *Critical Inquiry: On 'Narrative,'* 7.1 (1980): 5-27

Sacco on Sacco:

Joe Sacco, "Presentation from the 2002 UF Comics Conference," *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* 1.1 (2003) [available at: http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v1_1/sacco/](Transcript of Sacco's presentation at the 2002 University of Florida's Conference on Comics and Graphic Novels)

Joe Sacco, "Joe Sacco: Return to Palestine" - Sacco interviewed by Roger Sabin at the London ICA (29 September 2009) [available at: <http://www.eyemagazine.com/blog/post/notes-on-saccos-footnotes-in-gaza>] (Transcript of the interview with Dr. Roger Sabin on the publication of *Footnotes in Gaza*)

CONCLUSION

Week 11 | Modernist Inheritances and the Paradoxes of the Present (CE)

This concluding session will open with a lecture, which turns to the elusive moment of the 'present' and the inescapability of historical forms of perception and expression within twenty-first-century writing. Writers like Tom McCarthy, Maggie Gee, and Will Self have all recently expressed their identification with modernist aesthetic practices, which raises intriguing questions concerning the notoriously 'incomplete' project of modernist innovation and 'making it new.' Meanwhile, the so-called contemporary 'late modernists' – among them, Michael Ondaatje, J. M. Coetzee, Toni Morrison, Milan Kundera, Ian McEwan and Philip Roth – present us with challenging questions pertaining to the apparent re-emergence of modernist aesthetic experimentation. What does it mean to approach a particular cultural moment such as modernism, from the perspective of its contemporary replenished moment? How elastic are our periodizing boundaries for literary and cultural analysis? And does this resurgence of interest in the modern signal the final death knoll of postmodern theory and practice in the twenty-first century? We will consider the way in which such inheritances are straining to look towards a reconfigured literary landscape that breaks with the dominant mode of contemporary realism (or the genre of 'littic' as it is increasingly being referred to) and asserts a dissatisfaction with narrative closure.

No set reading for this session.

The lecture will be followed by a short session on essay writing skills, in preparation for the assessed essay (due after the Christmas break).

7.40-9pm: Student-led workshop: Researching the contemporary

The seminar will consist of group presentations, as part of a student-led workshop on researching the contemporary. This is designed to help support students' planning for the assessed essay for this module. Groups will be asked to reflect upon their preparatory discussions concerning the following aspects of the essay: selection of relevant case studies; refinement of thesis statement; argument structure; conceptual and theoretical frameworks; academic sources and relevant secondary reading.