

**ENGLISH 740-01: STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY AND
POSTMODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE (3.0 CR.)**

Time, Space, and Community in Postmodern Narrative

Instructor: Assistant Professor Christian Moraru
Fall 2003

McIver 139A, M 6:30-9:20 PM
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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: This is a graduate seminar that focuses, broadly speaking, on one of the “conditions” of “postmodernity,” to quote David Harvey: “time-space compression”. Arguably, postmodernism represents space and time in specific ways, and we will deal with this specificity by analyzing some core fictions and theoretical texts. We will also notice, this representation obtains through an intertextual dialogue with previous, modern and modernist fashions of understanding space, time, and related categories such as home, domesticity, country, nation, empire, community, connectivity, migration, travel, history, and so on. Required texts include novels by Don DeLillo, John Updike, Karen Tei Yamashita, Richard Powers, Jonathan Franzen, and Leslie Marmon Silko; criticism and theory by Stephen Toulmin, David Hollinger, Danilo Zolo, Christopher Butler, Fredric Jameson, Edward Soja, and David Harvey, among others.

While we will stress primary fictional narratives, the course also aims at familiarizing the students with recent theory and criticism. Further, in this class, students learn and apply the research methodology needed for the professional study of literature and the critical ideas and theories shaping literary discourse. The emphasis will be laid on identifying the dynamic and features of core concepts and models of current critical and cultural analysis including modernism, postmodernism, identity, community, globalism, and cosmopolitanism. We will place these notions in their appropriate contexts; we will study their origins in modern theory as well as their forms in cultural history. Classroom work and individual projects--to be presented orally or in writing--are geared toward this goal. See the Professional Development note below for more specific objectives graduate students (Ph.D.'s, M.A.'s, M.Ed.'s, and M.F.A.'s) will reach in this class.

METHODOLOGY AND CLASS FORMAT: Running for almost three hours, this class will

resemble a seminar, combining lecture, extensive discussion, student presentations, and some group work. Usually,

our meetings will open with a lecture by the instructor providing historical and cultural background and placing the scheduled readings in the appropriate context. Following this introduction, students give 15-20-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of those readings. Then, we discuss collectively the materials for the day. I will set aside time to prepare and evaluate writing projects, exams, and other assignments.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES: Graduate students are encouraged to use this course to put their work in the larger, more demanding and competitive perspective of professionalism and academic performance. The class is geared toward graduate reading and writing carrying potential for publication and presentation outside UNCG. While fulfilling the course's requirements is your main goal, I urge you to take these requirements as an opportunity to think about yourselves as part of the academic community, with its standards, language, methods, tools, and venues.

Here are a few questions for us: where do I stand as a scholar, teacher, critic, and writer, and which are my goals? What is, or will be, my audience? In what kind of scholarly conversation do I wish to intervene based on what I learn in this class? What steps do I have to take to do that? What are the available resources? Which are the outlets for my work? What do I have to do, for instance, to turn my seminar presentation/paper into a conference paper/journal article/dissertation chapter/writing sample? (more details in class and individually).

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Writing Assignments and Exams. Two options:

a) a midterm paper (10 pp. including endnotes and Works Cited) and a final paper (25 pp. plus endnotes and Works Cited, recommended for advanced graduates;

b) a midterm and final paper (10 pp. each), plus a take-home final exam.

For the final paper only, you are responsible for submitting (to the instructor and ahead of time), for duplicating and circulating among class members a 1-p., single-spaced proposal, which will be presented and discussed in class toward the end of the semester. We will meet individually to discuss your proposal before its presentation. I urge you to consult with me on the topic of your first paper.

Note: All assignments are due in class on the day indicated in the syllabus.

2. Individual Presentations. Students sign up for their final project and oral presentations right away so that we can spread out the presentations over the course of the semester. Each student will give a brief, 15-20-min. talk on the scheduled readings. The presentations need not be written.

Guidelines: Presentations cover a relevant aspect or material for the day. I do not expect you to fully analyze or explain the assignments or even one of these assignments. But I do ask you to a) briefly outline the argument or content of the readings you intent to talk about; b) identify one major element or theoretical problem in these works, which should help us open up our conversation; c) finally, you must introduce us to one critical article on your subject (identify and present its thesis, outline its argument and research, and judge it overall). Feel free to consult with me before you pick your presentation topic.

3. “The Question for the Day.” Each student will write up, before the class, one question on the scheduled readings. You need not have the answer to the question; nor does the question have to be fully formulated--you may, occasionally, phrase it more as a problem than a full-blown query. I request that you e-mail your question to me by 2:00 PM each Monday.

4. Attendance and Participation. Both are expected and will factor into the final grade (see below under course policies).

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my regular office hours or make an appointment to discuss your specific interests, goals, or any aspect of this class. I urge you to make a first appointment early on in the semester. I will schedule these meetings immediately. I will also hold a second round of conferences before the semester ends, to discuss your 1-p. proposals and your progress in this class.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. Late Papers: No late papers--and any other kind of work for that matter--accepted. However, if you foresee any deadline-related problems, please come to see me ahead of time. We shall work together to find a solution.

2. Absences: You are allowed no more than 2 (two) absences during the semester for illnesses (which you must document afterwards), religious holidays, or emergencies preventing you from attending. No undocumented absences allowed. Should they occur, they will affect your final grade. I will subtract 5% from the latter for any undocumented absence. Since we meet once a week, attendance is particularly critical to the success of our work in this class. If you are the victim of an emergency, please stay in touch with me by e-mail or phone.

GRADING: As a general rule, no incompletes (but come to see me if you anticipate any problems). The quality of your work will be reflected in the final grade as follows:

1. Papers and/or exams: 85%
2. Oral participation: 15%

Note: I would like to discuss these percentages and all requirements in general on the first meeting.

REQUIRED TEXTS

I. Fiction:

DeLillo, Don. Cosmopolis. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. ISBN: 0743244249

Franzen, Jonathan. Strong Motion. 1992. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. Pbk. ISBN 031242051X

Powers, Richard. Plowing the Dark. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. pbk. ISBN: 0312280122

Silko, Leslie Marmon. Almanac of the Dead. New York: Penguin, 1992. pbk. ISBN: 0140173196

Updike, John. Brazil. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996. ISBN 0449911632

Yamashita, Karen Tei. Through the Arc of the Rain Forest. Minneapolis: Coffee House P, 1990. Pbk. ISBN 091827382X

II. Criticism and Theory:

1. Core Texts:

Zolo, Danilo. Cosmopolis: Prospects for World Government. Trans. David McKie. London: Blackwell, 1998. ISBN: 0745613012

Toulmin, Stephen. Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity. U of Chicago P, 1992. pbk. ISBN: 0226808386

Butler, Christopher. Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction. New York, Oxford: 2002. ISBN: 0-19-280239-9

Hollinger, David A. Postethnic America. Beyond Multiculturalism. New York: Basic Books/HarperCollins 1995. Pbk. ISBN 0465059929. 2000 ed.

Malpas, Simon, ed. Postmodern Debates. New York: Palgrave, 2001. ISBN: 0-333-76536-2

2. On Reserve (Jackson Library--marked "R" in the syllabus)

Augé, Marc. Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity. London. New York: Verso, 1995.

Harvey, David. The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change. Cambridge, UK: Blackwell, 1990 (pbk.). ISBN 0631162941

Jameson, Fredric, and Masao Miyoshi, eds. The Cultures of Globalization. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1998.

Soja, Edward W. Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Theory. London. New York: Verso, 1989.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Week 1

Mon Aug. 18 Introduction to the course: goals, requirements, policies. Presentation of the topic and weekly syllabus, followed by discussion.

Note: Start reading DeLillo's novel and try to finish it by next week.

Week 2

Mon Aug. 25 Modernism, postmodernism, cosmopolis

Assignments: DeLillo, Cosmopolis, Part One, 1-107

Toulmin, Cosmopolis 139-201 (but try to skim through earlier chapters)

Zolo, Cosmopolis 9-18

Week 3

Mon Sep. 1 Labor Day Holiday. **No class**
Start reading Franzen's novel.

Week 4

Mon Sep. 8 Postmodernism as cultural space

Assignments: DeLillo, Cosmopolis, Part Two, 111-209

Harvey 201-307 (R; Optional-"O")

Soja, Postmodern Geographies 76-93

Week 5

Mon Sep. 15 Postmodernism and capital risks: from DeLillo to Franzen (I)
Assignments: Franzen, Strong Motion 1-225
Chr. Butler, Postmodernism

Week 6

Mon Sep. 22 Postmodernism and capital risks: from DeLillo to Franzen (II)
Assignments: Strong Motion 229-351 77 R;
Jameson, The Cultures of Globalization xi-xvii; 54-
Augé 75-120 R;O

Week 7

Mon Sep. 29 Postmodernism and capital risks: from DeLillo to Franzen (III)
Assignments: Strong Motion 355-508

Week 8

Mon Oct. 6 Postmodernism, reality, and representation in network society (I)
Assignments: Powers, Plowing the Dark 1-145
Baudrillard, Derrida, Lyotard, and Rorty essays, Malpas
53-62; 63-78; 93-100

Week 9

Mon Oct. 13 Fall break. **No class**
Finish reading Powers by next time.

Week 10

Mon Oct. 20 Postmodernism, reality, and representation in network society (II)
Assignments: Plowing the Dark 146-415
Midterm student evaluations
Midterm papers and exams due (in class)

Week 11

Mon Oct. 27 Postmodernism, race, and ethnicity (I)
Assignments: Updike, Brazil 1-162
Hollinger, Postethnic America 79-163

Week 12

Mon Nov. 3 No class: I will be out of town at a conference
Compete reading assignments for Nov. 10

Week 13

Mon Nov. 10 Postmodernism and magic realist space (I)
Assignments: Brazil 162-260; Judith Butler, "Gender
Trouble," Malpas 110-116 (O), Yamashita, Through the Arc 1-102; Zolo,
Cosmopolis 139-182

Week 14

Mon Nov. 17 Postmodernism and magic realist space(II)
Assignments: Through the Arc 105-212
Final project presentations (I)

Week 15

Mon Nov. 24 Postmodernism and Native American visions of a new cosmopolis (I)
Assignments: Silko, Almanac 1-219
Final project presentations (II)
Discussing the final exam

Week 16

Mon Dec. 1 Postmodernism and Native American visions of a new cosmopolis (II) new
Assignments: Almanac 220-431
Final project presentations (III)
Final exam assigned

Week 17

Mon Dec. 8 Postmodernism and Native American visions of the cosmopolis (III) new
Assignments: Almanac 432-763
Final project presentations (IV)
Last day of classes
Overview
Final evaluations
Final papers and exams due (in class)