Political Fictions:
Film and the Novel in the Global 21st Century
Autumn 2014 – (mostly) Fridays 11am-1pm – BS/008

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Office Hours: Monday 11-12; Tuesday 1-2
Screenings: Tuesday 2-4, D/L/037

Module Description

What makes narrative art political? When we interpret the politics of a written or visual text, how do we weigh the claims of artistic intention, aesthetic tradition, global and local contexts of production and reception, and the various forms of unconscious at work? In this module, we will approach these questions with respect to 21st-century novels and films that derive from and depict situations all over the globe, from the US and Latin America to Africa, Asia and Europe. Through these texts we will engage with the most prevalent political constellations and ideologies of our time, including neoliberalism, globalization, communism, fascism, and liberal democracy. We will explore issues of gender, ecology, economics, affect, censorship, and decolonisation. Secondary readings will include academic criticism, both classic and contemporary, alongside essays on politics and aesthetics from publications including the New York, Los Angeles and London Review of Books, China File, Dissent and n+1. One subtheme of the module will therefore be its engagement with the thriving contemporary literary culture in print and online, and students will be encouraged to view their own critical writing in relationship to this realm, as well as the more strictly academic one.

Module Requirements

The main grade for the module is awarded for a 4,500-word essay, submitted in week 2 of the Spring term.

Other compulsory requirements for those taking this module are as follows:

First, weekly film screenings at 2pm on Tuesday in the D/L/037 must be attended by all students. I will organise most of the screenings, but may ask a student to take responsibility in some weeks.

Second, by 2pm on Thursday, the day before class, each student will send an email about the week’s material to political.fictions@gmail.com. This email should contain 2 points of interest about the novel under discussion, 2 points of interest about the film, and 1-2 points of interest about the critical reading. Points of interest should not be very long: two or three sentences each will suffice. These points will be used to shape the seminar discussion, so be prepared to expand verbally on points you have raised in your email.

Third, compulsory critical readings for each seminar will be available on the VLE site, and should always be brought to class, either via printing or via a tablet device.
Week 2  
*Family Values and the Neoliberal Apocalypse*  
(Oct 10)  
*Take Shelter* (Jeff Nichols, 2011)  

**Required:**  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Introduction  
Benjamin Kunkel, “Dystopia and the End of Politics,” *Dissent*  
Rachel Greenwald Smith, “The Liberal and the Neoliberal Novel: *The Road*,” excerpt  
Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, Chapters 1-3  

**Suggested:**  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapters 1 & 2  
Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy” *Theory & Event*  
Stuart Hall et al, “Framing Statement,” *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto*  
Jeffrey J. Williams, “The Plutocratic Imagination,” *Dissent*  
Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History,” *National Interest*  
*Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Benh Zeitlin, 2012)  

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Week 3  
*Style, Storytelling and “World Literature”*  
(Oct 17)  
Roberto Bolano, *2666* (2004), Parts I, II, III  
*City of God* (Fernando Meirelles, 2002)  

**Required:**  
The Editors, “World Lite,” *n+1*  
Lucia Nagib, “Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema”  

**Suggested:**  
Pankaj Mishra, “The Case Against the Global Novel,” *Financial Times*  
Pankaj Mishra, “Where’s the Rage?” (interview), *Guernica*  
Suketu Mehta, “In the Violent Favelas of Brazil,” *NYRB*  
Roberto Schwarz, “Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination,” *New Left Review*  
Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review*  
Carlos Alonso, “The Novel without Literature,” *Novel*  
*Gomorrah* (Matteo Garrone, 2008)  

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Week 4  
*Gender and Materialist Realisms*  
(Oct 23)  
Roberto Bolano, *2666* (2004), Part IV  
*4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* (Cristian Mungiu, 2007)  

**Required:**  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, “Mexico”  
Sharae Deckard, “Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and 2666,” *MLQ*  
A O Scott, “New Wave on the Black Sea,” *New York Times*  

**Suggested:**  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 4  
Graham Huggan, “Death, Neoliberalism, and the Postcolonial in 2666,” *MFS*  
Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*  
*Elena* (Andrei Zvigrantsev, 2012)
### Week 5
**Totalitarianism and the Problem of Evil**

(Oct 31) Roberto Bolano, *2666* (2004), Part V  
*Hannah Arendt* (Margarethe von Trotta, 2012)

**Required:**  
Hannah Arendt, “Total Domination,” from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*  
Hannah Arendt, from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

**Suggested:**  
Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” *Under the Sign of Saturn*  
*The White Ribbon* (Michael Haneke, 2009)

### Week 6
**Reading Week**

### Week 7
**Engaging Ideology**

(Nov 14) Mo Yan, *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* (2006), Books I-II  
*Bamako* (Abderrahmane Sissako, 2006)

**Required:**  
Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, Chapter 1 and Epilogue  

**Suggested:**  
Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”  
Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid*, Chapters 1 & 2  
*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2010)

### Week 8
**Art Under Censorship**

(Nov 21) Mo Yan, *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* (2006), Books III-V  
*This is Not a Film* (Jafar Panahi, 2011)

**Required:**  
Perry Link, “Does This Writer Deserve the Prize?” *NYRB*  
Anna Sun, “The Diseased Language of Mo Yan,” *Kenyon Review*  
Charles Laughlin, “What Mo Yan’s Detractors Get Wrong,” *China File*  
Perry Link, “Politics and the Chinese Language,” *China File*  
Pankaj Mishra, “Why Salman Rushdie should pause before condemning,” *Guardian*  
Godfrey Cheshire, “Iran’s Cinematic Spring,” *Dissent*

**Suggested:**  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 5  
*Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2007)
Week 9  Subalternity, Gender and History  
(Nov 27)  
Zoe Wicomb, *David’s Story* (2000)  
*Almayer’s Folly* (Chantal Akerman, 2011)  
*White Material* (Claire Denis, 2009)  

Required:  
Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa” *Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*  
Bruce Robbins, “Subaltern-Speak,” *n+1*  

Suggested:  
Dorothy Driver, “Afterword” to *David’s Story*  
Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*  
Joseph Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895)  

Week 10  Commerce, Politics and Popular Culture  
(Dec 5)  
*No* (Pablo Larrain, 2012)  

Required:  
Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, excerpt  
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, Introduction  

Suggested:  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 7  
Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, Chapter 2  
*The LEGO Movie* (Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, 2014)  

Required Texts  
- Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (Picador, 2006)  

Recommended Texts  
- David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, 2005)  