Political Fictions:
Film and the Novel in the Global 21st Century
Spring 2016 – Thursdays 9am-11am – P/T/003

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Office Hours: To be confirmed
Screenings: Tuesday 11am-2pm, BS/005

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, globalisation, 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, nonsite, Dissent, Jacobin 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 11am on Tuesday in the BS/005 should 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 Wednesday, 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 need 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**  
The Neoliberal Self and the Ethical Apocalypse  
(14 Jan)  
*Nightcrawler* (Dan Gilroy, 2014)  

Required:  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Introduction  
Benjamin Kunkel, “Dystopia and the End of Politics,” *Dissent*  
Jane Elliott, “Suffering Agency: Imagining Neoliberal Personhood,” *Social Text*  
Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, Chapters 1-3  

Suggested:  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapters 1 & 2  
Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, Chapters 1 & 2  
Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*, Chapter 3  
Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History,” *National Interest*  
Stuart Hall et al, “Framing Statement,” *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto*  
*Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Benh Zeitlin, 2012)  

**Week 3**  
Globalisation and “World Literature”  
(21 Jan)  
Roberto Bolano, *2666* (2004), Parts I, II, III  
*Even the Rain* (Icíar Bollaín, 2010)  

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*  
Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review*  
Herman Herlinghaus, “Placebo Intellectuals in 2666,” *The Global South*  
Carlos Alonso, “The Novel without Literature,” *Novel*  
*City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, 2002)  

**Week 4**  
Framing Gender and Materialist Realisms  
(28 Jan)  
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”  
A O Scott, “New Wave on the Black Sea,” *New York Times*  

Suggested:  
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 4  
Eugenio di Stefano & Emilio Sauri, “Latin Americanist Criticism Today,” *nonsite*  
**Week 5**  
**Totalitarianism and the Problem of Evil**  
(4 Feb)  
Roberto Bolano, *2666* (2004), Part V  
*The White Ribbon* (Michael Haneke, 2009)  

**Required:**  
Hannah Arendt, “Total Domination,” from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*  
Sharae Deckard, “Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and 2666,” *MLQ*  

**Suggested:**  
Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” *Under the Sign of Saturn*  
Hannah Arendt, from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*  
*Pan’s Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006)

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**Week 6**  
**Reading Week**  

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**Week 7**  
**Allegory and Ideology**  
(18 Feb)  
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  
Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”  

**Suggested:**  
Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid*, Chapters 1 & 2  
*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2010)

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**Week 8**  
**Art Under Censorship**  
(25 Feb)  
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*  
Sarah Brouillette, “Literature is Liberalism,” *Jacobin*  
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

The Subaltern, History, and the Politics of Difficulty
(3 Mar)
Zoe Wicomb, *David’s Story* (2000)
*White Material* (Claire Denis, 2009)

Required:
Bruce Robbins, “Subaltern-Speak,” *n+i* (and responses by Chibber, Robbins)

Suggested:
Dorothy Driver, “Afterword” to *David’s Story*
Timothy Morton, “Subaltern Stakes,” *New Left Review*
Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*

Week 10

Commerce, Culture and Contemporary Criticism
(10 Mar)
*No* (Pablo Larrain, 2012)

Required:
Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry as Mass Deception”
Imre Szeman, “The Limits of Culture,” *Rethinking the Frankfurt School*
Rachel Greenwald Smith, “Six Propositions on Compromise Aesthetics,” *the account*

Suggested:
S. McCann & M. Szalay, “Do You Believe in Magic?” *Yale Journal of Criticism*
Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, Introduction
Sebastian Budgen, Review of *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, *New Left Review*
Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*, Introduction
N. Brown, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption under Capital”
David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 7
*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) (*many copies in library*)