

Contemporary American Literature

Contemporary: " *contemporarius*, from *con-* 'together with' + *tempus*, *tempor-* 'time'."

Text: " *text-* 'woven', from the verb *texere* " (*OED*)

This course will consider a selection of American aesthetic expressions as they are "woven" in and into our own time. The works on the reading list speak from different locations, with different agendas, and in different genres, but come together in the being of and in this time, *now*. While there is nothing that immediately or obviously may seem to connect the works, the practice of reading itself is one that invariably looks for systems, for similarities; as creatures of habit we construct and interpret our impressions and our meaning-making on former templates. It may be that Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* seems a far cry from Frantzen's *Corrections*; Beyoncé's lyrics and video and Bechdel's comic little in common with any of the other works in this company, and yet, are we able to see common threads, shared themes? Are there (perhaps unexpected) aesthetic similarities, thematic threads? To assist the understanding of and response to contemporary American literature we lean on a selection of thematically oriented secondary texts as well as more general theoretical material.

Students in the course are expected to participate actively, which among other will mean preparing minimum one thesis statement in the course of the semester for the seminar to think about and respond to (details in class).

The evaluation is a one week take-home exam + an oral exam where you will be tested in the course readings.

PRIMARY TEXTS (if not otherwise marked, all available at Akademika)

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*

Jonathan Frantzen, *The Corrections*

Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Daniel Orozco, "Orientation", from *Orientation and Other Stories* (**Literature Kiosk**)

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home. A Family Tragicomic*

Jordan Peele, *Get Out* (film)

Paul Beatty, *The Sellout*

Beyoncé, "Formation" (lyrics, official music video, Super Bowl 2016 performance, all online)

SECONDARY TEXTS:

Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary?" *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, Stanford, Stanford University Press,

<http://folk.uib.no/hlils/TBLR-TOTALT-221015/TBLR-Contemp-Paris2015-27.12.15/Agamben%20Contemporary.pdf>

Derek Attridge, "Creation and the Other," *The Singularity of Literature*, Routledge, 2004 (**Literature Kiosk**)

William Freedman, "The Literary Motif," (**Literature Kiosk**)

Jean-Luc Nancy, "Art Today," *Journal of Visual Culture*, 9 (1), 2010

<https://paralelotrac.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/03-nancy-art-today.pdf>

Peter Osborne, "The Fiction of the Contemporary," *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso Books, 2013, (Literature Kiosk)

Toni Morrison, "Playing in the Dark," Rivkin and Ryan, *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2017. **(Literature Kiosk)**

Douglas Wolk, "What Comics Are and What They Aren't," "Pictures, Words, and the Space Between Them," Alison Bechdel: Reframing Memory," from Wolk, *Reading Comics and What They Mean*, Cambridge, Da Capo Press, 2007. **(Literature Kiosk)**