

M.A. Seminar
Fascination for Fascism in America
FS 2018, Thur. 16.15-18.00
Prof. Elisabeth Bronfen

The election of Donald Trump as President of the U.S.A. has made a critical engagement with populism and its support of totalitarian political thought once more timely. How do novelists use the genre of alternative history to think about what it would mean for American democracy if fascism were to come to America? What is the appeal of the fascist leader? How does Emerson's notion of self-reliance re-emerge in radical right-wing individualism? How do films reflect on the interface between populism, popular culture and totalitarianism? How does the American cultural imagination conceive of fascism from the left?

- (01./ 22.2.): Introduction: Susan Sontag (1975) "Fascinating Fascism"*
Shirley Jackson (1948) "The Lottery"*
- (02./ 1.3.): Sinclair Lewis (1935) *It Can't Happen Here*
- (03./ 8.3.): Frank Capra (1941) MEET JOHN DOE
Gregory La Cava (1933) GABRIEL OVER THE WHITE HOUSE
- (04./ 15.3.): William Dieterle (1941) THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER
- (05./ 22.3.): Orson Welles (1941) CITIZEN KANE
- (06./ 12.4.): Nathanael West (1934) *A Cool Million*
- (07./ 19.4.): Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841) "Self-Reliance"
King Vidor (1949) THE FOUNTAINHEAD
- (08./ 26.4.): Philip K. Dick (1962) *The Man in the High Castle*
- (09./ 3.5.): Philip Roth (2004) *The Plot Against America*
- (10./ 17.5.): Tim Burton (1989) BATMAN
- (11./ 24.5.): HOMELAND Season 6 (2017)
- (12./ 31.5.): Hermione Lee, *Biography. A Very Short Introduction* (excerpts, "The Biographical Channel", "Telling the Story")*.
Guest Lecture by Hermione Lee **Thursday 31 May, 6-8pm.**
Attendance is compulsory!
Please note the time is different from our regular class, venue t.b.a.!

Books to read as preparation:

George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi. *America. A Narrative History* (New York: Norton 1999), chapters 27-30 offer an excellent overview of fascist movements in America and Europe in the period between the two wars, as well as the American resistance against totalitarianism. Since we will have no oral reports to cover this material, these chapters are **obligatory reading**.

Timothy Snyder. *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York 2017). This very short book will give you a sense of why an engagement with America's fascination for fascism is so relevant for the current political situation. While emboldening and insightful, this is **optional reading**.

Kurt Andersen. *Fantasyland. How America Went Haywire. A 500-year History* (New York 2017). A cultural overview of how political culture got to where it is today, very informative although not much analysis of the appeal of 'fake news' for the American cultural imaginary. This, also, is **optional reading**.

Requirements for the class:

All students must prepare a one-page preliminary discussion for each class session. These are to be posted on Olat (course forum) by Wednesday, 9 am of the respective week. This can entail a thesis, a series of questions, comments or associations. This will count towards your class participation. Writing this preliminary discussion is, thus, compulsory for each session. **Neglecting to hand in 10 thesis papers will result in a fail.**

Students taking the class for **9 KP** must also write an essay, to be handed in by October 1, 2018. As with any written assignment, it is wise to use the class discussions to test your ideas for your essay. Please discuss an outline of your essay either with Elisabeth Bronfen, or with one of her assistants, Morgane Ghilardi (morgane.ghilardi@es.uzh.ch) and Hannah Schoch (hannah.schoch@es.uzh.ch).