

M.A. Seminar
***Mad Men* and the American Cultural Imaginary**

Thurs. 16.15-18.00
Prof. Elisabeth Bronfen

Mathew Weiner's T.V. series *Mad Men* – thus the wager subtending this seminar – should not only be read as a cinematic re-imagination, treating this historical period as a seminal transition for American culture and politics. Rather, it is equally pertinent to ask what a fictionalized return to this earlier period says about contemporary American culture. Given both the literary quality of this series, as well as its detailed commitment to intercultural references it is equally valid to treat it as one of the great American DVD-novels of the 21st century and ask how seriality has come to be deployed in this new mode of visual narration. Given that a detailed viewing will be required to do justice to the narrative, visual, intercultural and ideological complexities of this series, we will focus on the first three seasons as well as season 7, whose final episodes will be released while the seminar is taking place. Essential for an introduction to 1950s/60s culture is David Halberstam, *The Fifties*.

(1./ 19.2) Introduction

(2./ 26.2) Gendering the office in Hollywood films

Season One

(3./ 5.3) Mapping characters and spaces

(4./ 12.3) Marriage, home and the state of the union

(5./ 19.3) The Pitches and the American project

Season Two

(6./ 26.3) Shifts in character constellations and spatial topologies

(Saturday 28.3) PROJECT DAY

(7./ 16.4) Hauntings of the past

Season Three

(8./ 23.4) Shifts in character constellations and spatial topologies

(9./ 30.4) Business and its discontents

The Final Season

(10./ 7.5) Final character constellations

(11./ 21.5) Landing on the moon

(12./ 28.5) What I have learned: Closing shots, closing episodes, narrative closures

Requirements for the class:

- All students must choose a ‘favorite’ scene to be presented briefly at the beginning of one class session (time codes should be posted on Olat (course forum) by Tuesday so everyone can watch the scene before coming to class).
- Because, owing to holidays, we will miss several class sessions, there will be a **project day on Saturday, March 28, 2015**. Students are asked to give short presentations on a cultural artifact of their choice. Please e-mail your theme and a brief outline (1/2 page) of the presentation to Hannah Schoch (hannah.schoch@es.uzh.ch) by March 5. Please contact Hannah Schoch by week 2 if you will not be able to attend. A detailed program will be made available closer to the date.
- So as to keep a collective ‘log book’ of class discussions, all students must compile written minutes (*Sitzungsprotokoll*) for one of the class sessions (to be uploaded to Olat).
- Finally, students taking the class for 9 KP must write an essay. It is wise to use the class discussions to test your ideas for this piece of written work.

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR THE PROJECT DAY

Feminism, gender discontent, troubling the suburban home:

- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*
- Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road*
- Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*, “Lady Lazarus”
- Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*
- Romna Jaffe, *The Best of Everything* (book and film)
- Masters and Johnson, *Masters of Sex* and the sexual revolution of the 1960s

American individualism and social/political challenges

- Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, and conservative moral imagination and the feminist movement of the 1960s
- Frank O’Hara and minimalist art (Rothko)
- John Cheever
- the legacy of transcendentalism: Thoreau, Emerson and the civil rights movement.
- afro-american rights, gay rights
- cold war, the Republican Party, Nixon vs. Kennedy
- Arthur Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*
- counter-culture and the Vietnam War

1960s public sphere:

- innovation of advertising, William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man*
- *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (book and film)
- Warhol and advertisement, consumer goods, Pop Art
- single, working women and/in Hollywood
- Marilyn Monroe vs. Jacky Kennedy
- David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*
- Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide To Pseudo-Events in America*

Visual and popular culture:

- The films Don Draper watches
- Billy Wilder’s *The Apartment*
- Hitchcock’s visual style
- Bob Dylan, *Inside Llewyn Davis* and the politics of folk-rock music
- French and Italian cinematic innovations
- Frank Sinatra

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- Stoddart, Scott F. (ed). *Analyzing Mad Men. Critical Essays on the Television Series*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2011.
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