This course explores the emergent concerns of the American fiction of the 2000s. As we consider what might be distinctive about recent novels, we will also examine the ways in which they negotiate the past and re-evaluate longer standing discourses. We will think about how this writing is clearly tied to its American contexts – social, political, intellectual – while not simply reflective of these, or easily categorised as only a ‘national’ literature. We will become familiar with some of the key critical discussions in the field of US literary studies in particular, but our concerns will overlap with those involved in the study of the contemporary more broadly. What aesthetic strategies are available for dealing with recent history? How are the events of the 2000s negotiated in literary writing? Is it useful to think about this period in terms of ‘posts’? What are the dominant moods and themes of this writing, and what visions of community and identity do these works present? How do these fictions relate to contemporaneous critical projects? We will be paying careful attention to questions of form and style, period designations, and genre. There is a significant amount of primary reading for this course, so it will be helpful to focus on this in the first instance. Reading lists of further critical and theoretical material are provided below. These lists are not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive, and students are encouraged to pursue other directions relevant to the course. It will be useful to think about your other reading in both American literature and contemporary literature when approaching these texts.

*Please note: for each individual seminar, critical material relevant to the topic will be circulated in advance, which members of the class will present to the group.


**Thinking through genre:** Art Spiegelman *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), Cormac McCarthy *The Road* (2006)

**Writing the postsecular:** Marilynne Robinson *Gilead* (2004), Mojha Kahf *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006)

**Speculative history in the ‘post-race’ era:** George Saunders *Lincoln in the Bardo* (2017), Colson Whitehead *The Underground Railroad* (2016)

**Fictions of (in)attention:** Tao Lin *Taipei* (2013), Ben Lerner *10.04* (2014)

Examples of texts that may be useful for considering current theoretical/historical/sociological discussions in the field:

Sara Ahmad The Promise of Happiness (Duke UP, 2010), Queer Phenomenology (Duke UP, 2006)
Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski eds. Critique and Postcritique (Duke UP, 2017)
Talal Asad Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Stanford UP, 2003)
Jean Baudrillard trans. Chris Turner The Spirit of Terrorism (Verso, 2013 ed)
Lauren Berlant Cruel Optimism (Duke UP, 2011)
Bill Brown Other Things (Chicago UP, 2015)
Jonathan Crary 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep (Verso, 2013)
Colin Dayan The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons (Princeton UP 2011)
Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life (Verso, 2014)
David Harvey A Brief History of Neoliberalism (OUP, 2007 ed)
Brian Massumi The Politics of Affect (Polity, 2015)
George Packer The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013)
Robert Putnam and David Campbell American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us (Simon and Schuster, 2010)

Relevant journals and forums:

Criticism/secondary reading:
Anthology which may provide a helpful general reference for thinking across periods: American Literature in the World An Anthology from Anne Bradstreet to Octavia Butler eds. Wai Chee Dimock et al (Columbia UP, 2017)
James Annesley Fictions of Globalization: Consumption, the Market and the Contemporary American Novel (Continuum, 2006)
Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus “Surface Reading: An Introduction”, Special Issue The Way We Read Now Representations 108:1, Fall 2009
David Brauner Contemporary American Fiction (Edinburgh UP, 2010)
Gerry Canavan and Priscilla Wald eds. American Literature Special Issue Speculative Fictions, 83.2, 2011
Cathy Caruth and Jonathan Culler eds. PMLA Special Issue Literary Criticism for the 21st Century, 125.4, October 2010
David Cowart Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America (Cornell UP, 2006)
Peter Coviello and Jared Hickman eds. American Literature Special Issue After the Postsecular, 86.4, 2014
David Glimp and Russ Castronovo, eds. ELN Special Issue After Critique, 51.2, Fall/Winter 2013
Richard Gray After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11 (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)
Andrew Hoberek, ed. Twentieth-Century Literature Special Issue After Postmodernism: Form and History in Contemporary Fiction, 53.3, 2007
Alex Houen ed. States of War since 9/11: Terrorism, Sovereignty and the War on Terror (Routledge, 2014)
Heather Houser Ecosickness in Contemporary US Fiction: Environment and Affect (Columbia UP, 2014)
Jason Gladstone et al, eds. Postmodern/Postwar – and After (Iowa UP, 2016)
Daniel Grausam On Endings: American Postmodern Fiction and the Cold War (U of Virginia P, 2011)
Fredric Jameson Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Verso, 1991 ed)
Brian Jarvis et al, eds. The Contemporary American Novel in Context (Continuum 2011)
Lee Konstantinou Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction (Harvard UP, 2016)
Jeffrey Lawrence Anxieties of Experience: The Literatures of the Americas from Whitman to Bolaño (Oxford UP, 2018)
Yoon Sun Lee Modern Minority: Asian American Literature and Everyday Life (OUP, 2013)
Theodore Martin Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism, and the Problem of the Present (Columbia UP, 2017)
Mark McGurl The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing (Harvard UP, 2009)
Robert McLaughlin “Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World” *sympleke* 12.1-2, 2004

*Modern Fiction Studies* Special Issue Fiction after 9/11, 57.3, Fall 2011

Ankhi Mukherjee *What is a Classic?: Postcolonial Rewriting and the Invention of the Canon* (Stanford UP, 2013)

Jeffrey Nealon *Post-Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism* (Stanford UP, 2012)

Alondra Nelson ed. *Social Text* Special Issue Afrofuturism, 2.71, Summer 2002


Aimee Pozorski *Falling after 9/11: Crisis in American Art and Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2014)

Judith Ryan *The Novel After Theory* (Columbia UP, 2011)


Rebecca Walkowitz *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (Columbia UP, 2015)


Lee Zimmerman ed. *Twentieth Century Literature* Special Issue Postmodernism, Then, 57:3-4, 2011