Spring 2014  
ENGL 074.001: Contemporary American Literature & Film
Room: FBH 244  
MW 2-3:30

Prof. Jean-Christophe Cloutier  
Office: FBH 316  
Office hours: Mon. 3:35-5pm, Thurs. 1-3pm  
cloutier@english.upenn.edu

Course Description:  
The last half-century has seen our means of communication increase at incredible speed—ostensibly creating a “global community” through social media and the World Wide Web. At the same time, much of contemporary fiction bears witness to growing alienation and the ultimate failure to “connect.” Mirroring the current proliferation of media platforms, this course will incorporate novels, films, graphic narrative, poetry, songs, and short stories to survey the breadth of contemporary American fiction in its global contexts. By focusing on texts that dramatize a desire for community, connectivity, recognition, and meaningful encounters, we will explore the relationship between post-45 American fiction and the world we (try to) live in. Texts will include works by Ellison, Kerouac, Roemer, Highsmith, O’Brien, Coppola, Scorsese, Ellis, DeLillo, Egan, and Ware. Assignments will consist of discussion posts, two short paper exercises, and a comprehensive exam.

Fulfills requirements:  
Sector 2: Language, Literature and Culture  
Sector 6: 20th Century Literature

Required Texts at Penn Book Center

Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952)  
Jack Kerouac, On the Road (1957)  
Patricia Highsmith, The Tremor of Forgery (1969)  
Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons, Watchmen (1986-87)  
Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried (1990)  
Bret Easton Ellis, American Psycho (1991)  
Don DeLillo, Cosmopolis (2003)  
Jennifer Egan, A Visit from the Goon Squad (2010)  
Chris Ware, Building Stories (2012)

Required Films (on Course Reserve)  
Michael Roemer, Nothing But a Man (1964)  
Mike Nichols, The Graduate (1967)  
John Schlesinger, Midnight Cowboy (1969)

1 Note: a more detailed version of the syllabus (complete with links to PDFs, clips, etc.) can be found on Canvas for your convenience.
Martin Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (1976)
Miranda July, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005)

**Assignments:**
**Papers:**
1) Close Reading assignment: choose a smaller section (passage or chapter) from Ellison or Kerouac and analyze its language and imagery closely, constructing an argument about its significance to the chapter or novel as a whole. 
(4-5 pages) 25% of grade
**DUE:** February 19

2) Comparative/Thematic Essay: choose a text from two of our sub-thematic clusters and write a closely argued comparative essay, OR concentrate on one text and write an analytical essay on a particular theme in deeper focus. (For the first option, one text one must be a text other than Ellison or Kerouac; for the second paper option, you must consult me if you’d like to write on Ellison or Kerouac a second time). 
(5-7 pages) 30%
**DUE:** April 16

**Exam:**
3) Comprehensive final exam, in-class. It will consist of three distinct sections (Identification of passages or characters, analysis/interpretation of passages, and a multiple choice essay question)
30%
**DATE AND TIME:** 05.05.2014, FBH 401, 9am-11am

**Participation and Discussion Posts:** 15%
Attendance is mandatory, of course; lectures and discussions are where we all learn the most. Although lecture-sized, this class will strive to create an atmosphere in which we become a community of cultural and literary investigators.

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**
(subject to change)

**The Quest for Individuality in Postwar America**

**Week 1**
Wednesday, January 15\textsuperscript{th} (Day treated as a Monday)
Introduction; syllabus; requirements

**Week 2**
Monday, January 20\textsuperscript{th} (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)
No Class

Wednesday, January 22\textsuperscript{nd}
CLASS CANCELED DUE TO SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS

Week 3
Monday, January 27th
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)—Chapters 1-13
[Song: Louis Armstrong, “(What did I do to be so) Black and Blue”]

Wednesday, January 29th
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)—Chapters 14-20

**Postwar: Looking for a New America**
Week 4
February 3
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)—Chapter 21 to 25, Epilogue

February 5
Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (1955)*
Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957) [Part 1]

Week 5
February 10
Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957) [Part 2 & 3]
New York Times Book Reviews of *On the Road*, September 5 and 8, 1957 [on Canvas]

February 12
Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957) [Part 4, wrap-up]
Material from other Beats:
    William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* [excerpts]; “Words of advice for young people”
    Gregory Corso, “Marriage”

**Love Hurts**
Week 6
February 17
Michael Roemer, *Nothing But a Man* (1964)

February 19
Mike Nichols, *The Graduate* (1967)

**First Paper Due**

Week 7
February 24
[required stories: “The Things They Carried”; “How to Tell a War Story”; “The Lives of the Dead”]

February 26

**Unlikely Pairings at Home and Abroad**

Week 8
March 3

March 5
Patricia Highsmith, *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969) (cont’d) [Chapter 15-end]

Week 9
**SPRING BREAK!**

March 10
Spring Break, No class

March 12
Spring Break, No class

**Urban Isolation and World Peace**

Week 10
March 17
Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (1986-87), Chs. 1-6
[selections from Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* for the uninitiated].

March 19
Moore & Gibbons, *Watchmen* (1986-87), Chs 7-12

Week 11
March 24
Martin Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (1976)

**Murder & High Finance**

March 26

Week 12
March 31
April 2

**Virtual Patterns and Surveillance**

Week 13

April 7

April 9
Philip K. Dick, “The Minority Report” (1956) [PDF]

**Intersecting Lives, Cruel World**

Week 14

April 14

April 16

**Second Paper Due**
* Note: No need to write a Discussion post this week

Week 15

April 21
Chris Ware, *Building Stories* (2012)

April 23
Chris Ware, *Building Stories* (2012)

Week 16

April 28
Miranda July, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005)

April 30
Exam Review Session

**FINAL EXAM: May 5th, 2014. 9am-11am [Room: FBH 401]**