

Die Geschäftsführung

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Ergänzungen zu den Lehrveranstaltungen des Englischen Seminars im WS 2022/23

B.A.-Seminar, Aufbaumodul Cultural Studies GB (050 659)

Utopian and Dystopian Imagery in Contemporary Culture, 4 CP

2 st. mo 12-14

Christinidis

Dystopian imagery is ubiquitous. Recently, fictional and non-fictional narratives of ecological catastrophe and the end of civilization have been the most prominent instances of dystopianism, but fears sparked by other issues, such as social conservatism and patriarchal gender relations or technological developments including genetic engineering, have found expression in dystopian narratives. By comparison, there is a relative dearth of utopian visions of a future in which the crises of the present have been successfully overcome. Yet both utopian and dystopian narratives emerge from the same dissatisfaction with reality as it is in the here and now, and both hold up a mirror to the present, though the mirror of dystopia may be black(er) and more pessimistic. Both pose urgent questions about the ethical implications of the way we live now as well as the kind of society we would like to live in, and both can serve as important sources of insight and inspiration.

In this seminar, we will take as our first points of departure Ursula K. Le Guin's 1973 short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and the 2010 episode of the British television series *Doctor Who*, "The Beast Below", which shares some central themes with Le Guin's narrative, to reflect on the relationship between utopia and dystopia. Throughout the rest of

the semester, we will be looking at both utopian and dystopian narratives and imagery across a variety of media, including film, television series, video games, fiction, and poetry. We will discuss not only the hopes and fears that manifest themselves in these texts, but also the ways in which society, history, and the potential for social transformation for better or for worse are conceptualised. By what means are particular phenomena or developments framed as hopeful or frightening? Who or what is claimed to be in a position to affect the situation? What is the role of the medium chosen, of genre, and of other formal elements in achieving these effects?

As dystopian imagery tends to at least partly focus on the horrible things human beings may do to one another, including rape and violence, there is a high risk of experiencing some discomfort in this seminar – indeed, discomfort is the affect dystopian imagery is designed to provoke, and it is therefore normal under the circumstances. If, however, you have been affected by PTSD and are likely to experience effects that go beyond discomfort, such as flashbacks or retraumatisation, as a result of common triggers, please make sure you consider carefully to what extent your mental health allows you to actively participate in a seminar dedicated to these issues.

Most of the material will be provided via Moodle or Sciebo at the beginning of the semester, but please buy (and read) a copy of David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas*. If you haven't already registered for a Sciebo account, it would be useful if you could do so ahead of time.

Assessment/requirements: *Übung*: regular reading/watching of assigned material, active participation and expert group; *Seminar*: regular reading/watching of assigned material, active participation, expert group and seminar paper (*Wissenschaftliche Hausarbeit*).

Die Anmeldung zur Veranstaltung erfolgt direkt per Mail bei Frau Dr. georgia.christinidis@rub.de.