

<b>Veranstalter</b>	<b>Prof. Dr. Jan D. Kucharzewski</b>
<b>Thema</b>	<b>Once More Into the Fray: Transitions, Transgressions, and Liminality in American Culture [AA-MA3]</b>
<b>Art der Veranstaltung</b>	<b>Seminar III</b>
<b>Veranstaltungsnummer</b>	<b>53-572</b>
<b>Zeit</b>	<b>2st, Do. 10-12 Uhr</b>
<b>Raum</b>	<b>Ü35 - 01016</b>
<b>Beginn</b>	<b>05.04.2018</b>
<b>Sprechstunde während der Vorlesungszeit:</b>	<b>Nach Vereinbarung</b>

In one of the most self-consciously iconographic endings of 1990s Hollywood cinema, the two protagonists of Ridley Scott's eponymous *Thelma and Louise* (1991) remain suspended in transition. After having eluded various institutional and individual representatives of a patriarchal system that has suppressed and dominated them for most of their lives, the two women commit their last act of resistance by deliberately driving their car over the edge of the Grand Canyon. As the vehicle sails into the chasm, the image freezes and then fades into the credit sequence, never showing the inevitably fatal crash. While persecution and jail await on one side of the frame and certain death on the other, Thelma and Louise perpetually hover in a realm betwixt and between. True freedom, so the movie seems to suggest, can only exist in a moment of liminality.

Initially coined by the anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1967), liminality refers to a precarious phase of unsettledness in rites of initiation meant to symbolically integrate a subject into a dominant social/cultural system. This temporary suspension of established standards and norms in a teleological process towards normativization will be identified in this seminar as a constituting element in the cultural history of the United States.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's claim that "the coming only is sacred" attests to the ubiquitous presence of 'liminal thinking' in American culture. As a paradigmatically American philosophy, Emersonian transcendentalism also exemplifies how the tension between autonomous selfhood and communal obligation is a formative yet unresolved aspect of the American experience. The opposing forces of self-reliant individualism on the one hand and the ideal of "one Nation under God, indivisible" expressed in the "Pledge of Allegiance" on the other, require almost permanent adjustment. Through thematic close readings of literary and audiovisual texts since the nineteenth century, we will therefore examine how American myths of nationhood and hegemony are invested in notions of liminality, in-betweenness, and transition.

### **Course Requirements**

Besides the "doh!"-requirements of attendance and participation as well as of actually reading and preparing the texts, students will be asked to produce guided reading responses (ca. 300 words) for each session which will be collected or read out in class. There will not be oral presentations in this course. The course will be completed with a term paper.