

THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS?



NEW YORK AS REALITY AND CULTURAL ARTIFACT

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt (Brückenprofessor)
Room and time: Fri, 12-14, Room 4
Course type: Arbeitsgemeinschaft
First session: October 12, 2012

“There is no question there is an unseen world; the question is, how far is it from midtown, and how late is it open?”

Woody Allen

Course description: “New York is a different country,” the entrepreneur Henry Ford once quipped, “Everybody thinks differently, acts differently.” Ford’s remark, which describes New York City as an isolated space, distinct from ‘the rest of America,’ is revealing in the light of the recent ‘Spatial Turn’ with its focus on the cultural significance of urban spaces and the meaning of location and belonging as identity markers. Throughout its history, New York City has not only been characterized as an ‘independent space’ in its own right, but also as the epitome of the ‘American Dream.’ It is part of this ambiguous rhetoric that New York symbolizes both ‘Americanness’ (being the first U.S. capital) and globalization (“The World’s Business Capital”). Perhaps more than any other city, NYC lends itself to contradictory projections that portray it either as a democratic ‘melting pot’ or as a misanthropic Moloch. The course will investigate a wide range of images and fictions based in the city of New York, from the early days of the U.S. republic to the heyday of immigration and finally the terror of 9/11. We will examine a number of influential texts about the ‘Big Apple,’ including short fiction (e.g., Stephen Crane’s *Maggie* from 1893), longer prose (Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* from 1925), poetry (Hart Crane’s “To Brooklyn Bridge” from 1930), comedies (*Annie Hall* from 1977), film melodrama (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* from 2011), and television shows (*Sex and the City*, 1998-2004). Our discussions will be grounded in scholarly works associated with urban studies and spatial theory (T. Bender, M. de Certeau, H. Lefèbvre, S. Sassen, E. Soja, E. Wheeler).

Methods: Presentations by students in the form of expert sessions (based on PowerPoint and handouts, focusing on *five discussion questions* and two or three relevant passages/sequences from movies or literary texts to be selected by the experts and discussed in class); forum discussions on Moodle. All course texts are available on Moodle: <https://moodle.univie.ac.at/>.

Aims: The course investigates the aesthetics and function of one of the greatest symbols of America itself: New York. Looking at NYC as both a site of lived experience (immigration, terrorism, etc.) and as a cultural artifact (epitomizing America’s highest dreams and darkest fears), we will try to grasp the fascination and enduring vision associated with the city.

Form of control: Regular attendance; active in-class participation; presentation as part of an expert session with 4-page handout to be distributed in class; reading assignments; occasional quizzes; at least 8 elaborate entries in the discussion forum.

Syllabus

Oct. 12 Introduction: New York – The Quintessential American City?

Basic texts (optional):

Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, “The American City” (2006).

Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, Introduction to *Gotham: A History of New York City* (1999).

Edward Margolies, Introduction to *New York and the Literary Imagination* (2008).

Richard A. Blake, “Cinema City: All around the Town” (2005).

Oct. 19 Sizzling New York – Vibrancy and the Melting Pot

Main texts (required):

Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” and “Mannahatta” (poems) (1855-1892).

Additional materials (for experts):

Hart Crane, “To Brooklyn Bridge” (poem) (1925)

Richard Lehan, “The Urban Vortex” (1998).

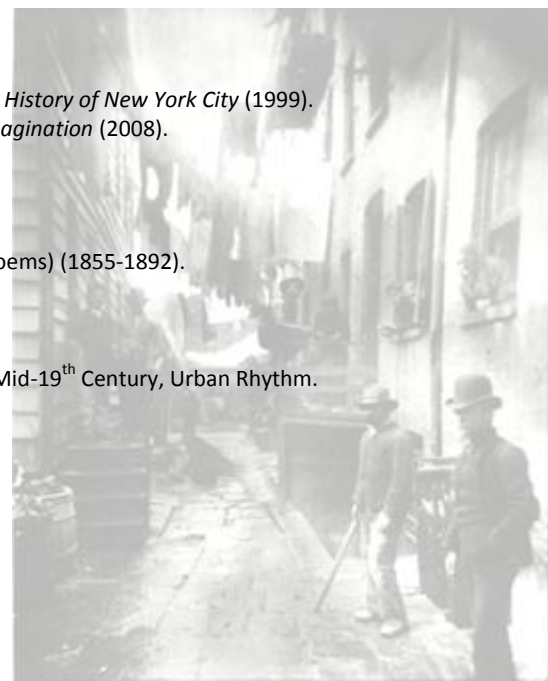
Keywords: Broadway, Brooklyn Bridge, Immigration, Manhattan, Mid-19th Century, Urban Rhythm.

Oct. 26 No class! (Austrian National Holiday)

Relax and enjoy!

Nov. 2 No class! (All Saints’ Day)

Relax and enjoy!



- Nov. 9** **Gotham City – New York and Its Dark Side: Poverty, Crime, and Death**
 Main text (required):
 Stephen Crane, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Jacob Riis, excerpts from *How the Other Half Lives* (1890).
 Keywords: Batman, Crime, Darwinism, Film Noir, Gotham, Poverty, Sick City, Slums, Tenements.
- Nov. 16** **Extra-Screening**
 Manhattan (dir. Woody Allen, 1979).
- Nov. 23** **The Roaring Twenties – Enthusiasm and Disillusionment**
 Main text (required):
 John Dos Passos, excerpts from *Manhattan Transfer* (1925).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 John Carlos Rowe, "Interpellation, Urbanization, Globalization in *Manhattan Transfer*" (2006).
 Keywords: Disillusionment, Globalization, Immigration, Lost Generation, Metropolis, Success Myth.
- Nov. 30** **The Harlem Renaissance – Double Consciousness and Urban Black Identity**
 Main text (required):
 Rudolph Fisher, "The City of Refuge" (1925).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Alain Locke, "The New Negro" (1925).
 Keywords: Double Consciousness, Ethnicity, Harlem Renaissance, Jazz Age, New Negro, Passing, Urban Frontier.
- Dec. 7** **The Comical City – Jewish Culture, Diaspora, Humor**
 Main text (required):
 Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Cafeteria" (1968).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Woody Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977) & *Manhattan* (1979).
 Keywords: Brooklyn, Diaspora, Humor, Jewish Community, LA as NY's Counterpart, Art Spiegelman.
- Dec. 14** **Postmodern New York – Reading and Misreading the "Big Apple"**
 Main text (required):
 Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985), read selectively.
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Jean Baudrillard, "New York" (1986).
 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" (1984).
 Keywords: Anti-Architecture, Detective Fiction, *flâneur*, Labyrinth, Legibility, Madness, Postmodernism, Textuality.
- Dec. 21** **No class! (Christmas Holiday)**
 Relax and enjoy!
- Jan. 11** **The Romantic City – Searching for "Mr. Big"**
 Main texts (required):
 Selected clips from *Sex and the City* (1998-2004).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Episodes "Sex and the City" (1998), "I Heart NY" (2002) and "Anchors Away" (2002).
 Joanna di Mattia, "Mr. Big, Mr. Perfect and the Romantic Quest" (2004).
 Susan Zieger, "Sex and the Citizen in *Sex and the City's* New York" (2004).
 Keywords: 'Big', *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Business, Citizenship, Consumption, *Email for You*, Fashion, Romanticism.
- Jan. 18** **Queer Metropolis – Eroticism and Urban Subcultures**
 Main text (required):
 Trailer and clip from the movie *Shortbus*.
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Shortbus (dir. John C. Mitchell, 2006).
 Nick Davis, "A View from the Shortbus" (2008).
 Keywords: Bohemians, Diversity, Greenwich Village, Statue of Liberty, Subculture.
- Jan. 25** **Apocalyptic New York – Fear, Terrorism, and Scenarios of Doom**
 Main text (required):
 Jonathan Safran Foer, excerpts from *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005).
 Additional materials (for experts):
 Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2011).
 E. Ann Kaplan, "Reflections on Trauma and the Twin Towers" (2002).
 Keywords: Apocalypse, Cosmopolis, Global City, Ground Zero, Postmetropolis, Terrorism, Trauma, 9/11.