The City in American Literature and Culture

Syllabus

PS 32 110, Tue, 14-16, John F. Kennedy-Institute, Room 203, Summer term 2004

Dozent: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, slbrandt@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Course description: It is a curious quality of cities that they are both physical and imaginary places. Cities loom over their inhabitants with the monumental force of their physical presence. Yet, at the same time, they are by nature artificial. “The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, and nightmare,” Jonathan Raban says, “is as real, maybe more real than the hard city one can locate on maps, statistics, monographs on urban sociology, demography and architecture” (1984). The course will discuss, among others, the following questions and aspects: 1.) What is the “real” city? Is it the “hard” city of material fact or the “soft” city of imagination? 2.) The differences between American and European cities; 3.) The rapid growth and development of American cities and the role of industrialization and immigration in that growth; 4.) The city as a storehouse of images; 5.) The nature of urban desire; 6.) The decline of American cities; and 7.) The postmodern metropolis. The seminar will be held in English.

Occasional film screenings: Tue, 16-18, Room 319

Credit requirements: Regular attendance, active participation in class, an oral presentation, a mid-term paper and a final paper (à 3-5 pages). There will also be a few quizzes meant as an encouragement to keep track with the assigned reading.

Required reading: A course reader is available in the copy-shop at Königin-Luise-Str.


20. April 2004: What Is a City?
Texts:

27. April 2004: Cities of the Future
Lecture:
Vivian Sobchack (University of California, Los Angeles):
“Cities at the Edge of Time: The Urban Science Fiction Film”
- discussion -
Text:

Texts:

Extra Screening: BLADE RUNNER (Ridley Scott 1982) (Tue, 16-18, Room 319)

Text:
18. May 2004: Why Aren't Our Cities Like That?
Texts:
Jean-Paul Sartre, "American Cities" (from: The City) (1971)

25. May 2004: Industrialization and Urban Growth
Texts:

— Mid-term paper —
Late papers will be graded down!

01. June 2004: How the Other Half Lives
Texts:
America & Lewis Hine: Photographs 1904-1940 (1977)

08. June 2004: Urban Frontiers
Texts:
Ralph Ellison, "Prologue", from: Invisible Man [1952]

Extra Screening: DARK CITY (Alex Proyas 1997) (Tue, 16-18, Room 319)

15. June 2004: Cities of Illusion
Texts:
Nicholas Christopher, "Night and the City" (from: Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City) (1997)
Christine Bolt, "The American City: Nightmare, Dream, or Irreducible Paradox?" (from: The American City) (1997)

22. June 2004: The Beat City
Texts:
Jack Kerouac, from: The Town and the City (1950)
Allen Ginsberg, "Howl" and "Footnote to Howl" (1956)
William Carlos Williams, "Perpetuum Mobile: The City" (1971)

Extra Screening: ANNE HALL (Woody Allen, 1977) (Tue, 16-18, Room 319)

29. June 2004: Modern Urbanity
Text: Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" (1993)

Extra Screening: Sex and the City: "I Love NY" & "Anchors Away" (HBO 2001 & 2002) (Tue, 16-18, Room 319)

06. July 2004: Postmodern Lifestyles
Text: Mike Featherstone, "City Cultures and Postmodern Lifestyles" (from: Consumer Culture and Postmodernism) (1991)

Text:

— Final Paper —
Late Papers will be graded down!