

# SPACE ODDITIES

## URBANITY, AMERICAN IDENTITY, AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

**Lecturer:** Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt  
**Contact:** stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at  
**Room and Time:** Room SR 34 D2, Attemsgasse 25, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor · Fri., 11:45-13:15  
**Course number:** SE 512.312

**First session:** October 10, 2014



**Course description:** When we think of American cities, we have a complex (and often contradictory) set of images in mind, possibly encompassing postcard motifs of the One World Trade Center and palm trees on Sunset Boulevard, L.A. In its various shapes and discourses, the American city functions as both a parameter and an expression of the complexities of U.S. social practice. The seminar is interested in tracking these recent changes in the development of American cities. “The city as we imagine it, the **soft city** of illusion, myth, aspiration, and nightmare,” Jonathan Raban points out, “is as real, maybe more real than the **hard city** one can locate on maps, statistics, monographs on urban sociology, demography and architecture.” We will examine “real-and-imagined places” (E. Soja) such as Las Vegas and Los Angeles as well as more historically grounded metropolises such as New York City and Chicago. Special attention will be paid to two forms of American spatiality: **a.) lived urban spaces** (immigration; cultural exchange; urban subcultures; etc.) and **b.) imaginary and mediated spaces** (literature and films about American cities; fake cities and simulacra such as Disneyland; etc.).

**Methods:** This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by ‘experts’ who organize the session by means of questions, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short handout.

**Assessment:** Regular attendance; active in-class participation; presentation as part of an expert session with a 2-page handout to be distributed in class; at least 8 original entries in the discussion forum; and a final paper of ca. 10-12 pages.

This seminar is linked to the International Conference “Space Oddities: Urbanity, American Identity, and Cultural Exchange” that takes place at University of Graz from November 21 to November 23. Important: You will be asked to write ½-page summaries of two (!) keynote lectures/conference panels.

**Note:** The final paper has to be handed in on January 30, 2015 in class. There is no extension of this deadline!

### Syllabus

#### **Oct. 10 Introduction: American Cities – Urbanity and Civilization**

Basic texts (recommended):

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

Edward Soja, “Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis” (1997)

#### **Oct. 17 Urbanity as Somatic Experience – Walking through New York City**

Main texts (required):

Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City” (1984)

Additional text (for experts):

Allen J. Scott, “Metropolis” (1988) & Jay McInerney, “It’s Six A.M. Do You Know Where You Are?” (2001)

Keywords: Lower East Side, Modernity, Skyscrapers, Urban Practices, Voyeurism, Walking Rhetorics

~~- EXTRA SCREENING OF CRASH / EXACT DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED-~~

#### **Oct. 24 City of Quartz – Excavating the Future in Los Angeles**

Main example (required):

*Crash* (2004, dir. Paul Haggis)

Additional text (for experts):

Mike Davis, “City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles” (1990/2006)

Keywords: Chinatown, Criminality, Downtown, Exopolis, Fortress City, Metropolarities, Race Riots, Urban Frontier

#### **Oct. 31 Queer Cities – The Emergence of LGBT Subcultures in New York and San Francisco**

Main text (required):

Armistead Maupin, from *Michael Tolliver Lives* (2007)

Additional materials (for experts):

George Chauncey, “Building Gay Neighborhood Enclaves” (1994) & *Tales of the City* (TV miniseries)

Keywords: Bohemia, The Castro, Drag Queens, Harlem, Jazz Age, Nightlife, Postmodernity, Stonewall, The Village

#### **Nov. 7 Cosmopolis – Power, Consumption, and Gentrification in Contemporary America**

Main text (required):

Sharon Zukin, “Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World” (1991)



Additional texts (for experts):

Mike Featherstone, "Cosmopolis" (2002) & Edward Soja, "Postmetropolis" (1997)

Keywords: *Chaosmos*, *Cosmopolis* (film), Cosmopolitanism, Consumption, Gentrification, Liminality, Postmetropolis

- EXTRA SCREENING OF *HANGOVER* / EXACT DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED-

Nov. 14

### The Symbolic City – Las Vegas as Hallucinatory Image

Main example (required):

*Hangover* (2009, dir. Todd Phillips)

Additional materials (for experts):

R. Venturi, excerpts from *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) & *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998, dir. Terry Gilliam)

Keywords: Casinos, Clichés, Iconography, Imitation, *Leaving Las Vegas* (film), Ornament, Pastiche, Symbolism

Nov. 21-23

### Opening Conference "Space Oddities" (see program)

Keep in mind you need to write ½-page summaries of two (!) keynote lectures/panels to be handed in on Nov. 28.

Nov. 28

### The Simulated City – Television, Hyperreality and Fake Urbanity

Main text (required):

R. Kates, "New Urbanism Meets Cinematic Fantasyland – *The Truman Show*" (2000)

Additional materials (for experts):

J. Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" (1981) & *The Truman Show* (1998, dir. Peter Weir)

Keywords: Artificiality, Disneyland, Fake Cities, Hyperreality, Media, New Urbanism, SimCity, Simulacra, Utopia

Dec. 5

### Independent Study Unit

Write a 2-page proposal for your final paper to be turned in on Dec. 12.

Dec. 12

### The Immigrant City – Border Crossing, Hybridity, and Transculturality

Main example (required):

Junot Diaz, "Negocios" (1996)

Additional text (for experts):

Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality" (1999)

Keywords: Boundary Crossing, Diaspora, El Barrio, Hybridity, Immigration, Melting Pot, Multiculturalism, Transculturality

- EXTRA SCREENING OF *BLADE RUNNER* / EXACT DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED-

Dec. 19

### Cities on the Edge of Time – Urbanity and Science Fiction

Main example (required):

*Blade Runner* (1982, dir. Ridley Scott)

Additional text (for experts):

Vivian Sobchack, "Cities on the Edge of Time: The Urban Science Fiction Film" (1988)

William Gibson, ch. 1 ("Chiba City Blues") from *Neuromancer* (1984)

Keywords: Architecture, Bauhaus, Dystopia, *Matrix* (film trilogy), *Metropolis* (movie), Neo-Noir, *Sin City* (film)

Jan. 9

### Post-9/11 Cities – Loss, Trauma, and Crisis

Main text (required):

Excerpts from Don De Lillo's *Falling Man* (2007)

Additional materials (for experts):

D.J. Barron and G.E. Frug, "After 9/11: Cities" (2002)

Keywords: 9/11, Boundaries, Frontier Cities, 'Lonely Crowd', Safety, Suburbia, Terrorism, Trauma

Jan. 16

### The Open City – The Globalized City as Space Oddity

Main example (required):

Teju Cole, excerpt from *Open City* (2011)

Additional materials (for experts):

Saskia Sassen, "The Global City" (2009) & Richard Sennett, "The Public Realm" (2008)

Keywords: Global City, Globalization, Mega-City, 'Openness/Closure', Open City, Palimpsest, Transnationalism

- EXTRA SCREENING OF *CITY OF GOD* / EXACT DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED-

Jan. 23

### Underworld - The Brazilian Moloch as a Specter in American Visual Culture

Main text (required):

*City of God* (2002, dir. Fernando Meirelles, USA/BRA)

Additional materials (for experts):

Bianca Freire-Medeiros, "'I went to the City of God': Gringos, Guns and the Touristic Favela" (2011)

Keywords: 'Brazil in the U.S. Imagery', Cinema, Favela, Gangs, Inter-American, Poverty, Tourism

Jan. 30

### The 'Right to the City' – Reappropriating Urban Space in Contemporary America

Main text (required):

David Harvey, from *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (2013)

Additional materials (for experts):

Mark Purcell, "Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant" (2002)

Judy Lubin, "The 'Occupy' Movement: Emerging Protest Forms and Contested Urban Spaces" (2012)

Keywords: Economy, Financial Crisis, Heterotopia, 'Occupy Movement', 'Right to the City'