

# POSTMODERN AMERICAN CULTURE: THE 1970S AND 1980S

## Syllabus

HS 32 111 Tue, 10--12 Uhr, John F. Kennedy-Institute, Room 201, Summer term 2004

Dozent: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt, [sbrandt@zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:sbrandt@zedat.fu-berlin.de)

**Course description:** In mainstream academic discourse, the American 1970s and 1980s are usually regarded as a period of uncontrolled change and reassessment, of effervescence, fun, and profit, but also of new challenges and controversies that irrevocably changed the fabric of social and cultural life. Perhaps most important of all, the era is seen as marked by the advent and expansion of postmodernism. The course will introduce students to postmodern cultural theories while examining and comparing works from various areas of American culture, including literature, film, television, architecture, and music. Special focus will be placed on the following phenomena: the Watergate affair, glam-rock, ethnic and gay subcultures, hyperreality, cultural difference, the disappearance of the boundaries between "high" and "low" culture. The seminar will be held in English.

**Credit requirements:** Regular attendance, active [!] participation in class, an oral presentation, and a term paper (15-20 pages).

- 13. April 2004:**            Introduction
- 20. April 2004:**            Definitions I  
Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1993)  
David Harvey, "Postmodernism" (from *The Condition of Postmodernity*) (1990)
- 27. April 2004:**            Definitions II  
Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (1982)  
Gerald Graff, "The Myth of the Postmodern Breakthrough" (1995)
- 4. May 2004:**                Postmodernist Fiction  
Theo D'haen, "Postmodernism in American Fiction and Art" (1986)  
Paul Auster, "City of Glass" (from *The New York Trilogy*) (1985)  
Brian Jarvis, "Reflections on the 'City of Glass'" (from *Postmodern Cartographies*) (1998)
- 5. May 2004:**                Extra Screening: Todd Haynes, VELVET GOLDMINE (1998) (Wednesday, 12-14, R 340)
- 11. May 2004:**              Postmodern Consumer Culture  
Benjamin R. Barber, "Die Entstehung von McWorld" (from: *Coca Cola und Heiliger Krieg*) (1996)  
Mike Featherstone, "Theories of Consumer Culture" (from: *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*) (1991)  
Anne-Lise François, "These Boots Were Made for Walkin': Fashion as Compulsive Artifice" (from: *The Seventies: The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture*) (2000)

- 18. May 2004:**            **Television and Music Videos**  
 E. Ann Kaplan, "MTV and the avant-garde: the emergence of a postmodern anti-aesthetic?" (from: *Rocking Around the Clock*) (1987)  
 John Fiske, "Moments of television: Neither the text nor the audience" (1989)  
 Lawrence Grossberg, "MTV: Swinging on the (Postmodern) Star" (1989)
- 19. May 2004:**            **Extra Screening: David Lynch, BLUE VELVET (1986)** (Wednesday, 12-14, R 340)
- 25. May 2004:**            **Postmodern Cinema**  
 Jerry A. Varsava, "Blue Velvet and the Revisioning of the Middle-American Idyll" (1995)
- 01. June 2004:**           **Postmodern Architecture**  
 David Harvey, "Postmodernism in the city: architecture and urban design" (1990)  
 Charles Jencks, "The Emergent Rules" (from: *Postmodernism: A Reader*) (1993)
- 08. June 2004:**           **Postmodern Art**  
 John T. Paoletti, "Art" (from: *The Postmodern Moment*) (1985)  
 Brandon Taylor, "Stolen Forms: 1976-90" (from: *Avant-Garde and After*) (1995)
- 15. June 2004:**           **Hyperreality**  
 Brian Jarvis, "Everything Solid Melts into Signs: Jean Baudrillard" (1998)  
 Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" (from: *Art after Modernism*) (1984)  
 Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulation" (1981)
- 22. June 2004:**           **Cultural Difference**  
 Steven Connor, "Postmodernism and Cultural Politics" (from *Postmodernist Culture*) (1989)  
 Gyan Prakash, "Postcolonial criticism and Indian historiography" (from: *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*) (1995)
- 29. June 2004:**           **Politics of Postmodernism**  
 Richard Rorty, "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism" (from: *Postmodernism: A Reader*) (1993)  
 Chantal Mouffe, "Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?" (from: *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*) (1988)  
 Hans Bertens, "Out of Left Field: The Politics of Postmodernism" (1996)
- 06. July 2004:**           **Identity and Postmodernism**  
 Linda Nicholson, "Identity Politics and Political Economy" (from: *The Moral Turn of Postmodernism*) (1996)  
 David Kaufmann, "Yuppie Postmodernism" (from: *Critical Essays on American Postmodernism*) (1995)
- 13. July 2004:**           **Final discussion: What Comes after Postmodernism?**  
 Robert Rebein, "After Postmodernism" (from: *American Fiction after Postmodernism*) (2001)