

Transcultural Spaces

Challenges of Urbanity, Ecology, and the Environment in the New Millennium

**John F. Kennedy-Institute for North American Studies
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, October 30 – November 1, 2008**

Modern cities represent transcultural spaces in which the confrontations of urbanity, ecology, and the environment emerge most visibly. Tensions between the creative and destructive aspects of global cities reverberate throughout the humanities. *Transcultural Spaces* is an interdisciplinary symposium which will seek to explore the effects of the »ecological turn« on academic debates regarding urbanity and digitalization. The conference is meant to offer a platform for discussions on the intricate interrelationship of urbanity and ecology in American culture, including (re)negotiations of city and nature in art, literature, film, music, architecture, and the digital media. We will investigate both the appearances of »city« and »nature« as opposites in corporate cultural hegemony as well as the modes of amalgamation and hybridization by which city and nature are constituted as complementary figures. Our main focus aims at the question what kind of contributions literary and cinematic fiction, the visual arts, and other discourses in the U.S. have made to participate in a dialogue concerning environmental and technological issues. How are we, as scholars of American studies, to deal with the challenges of the on-going environmental crisis which is, by all means, also a crisis of technological progress? What solutions can the humanities provide to become, in Christopher Newfield's words, a »locus of solving practical problems in the world«?

Keynote speakers will include Alan Trachtenberg (Yale University) and Lawrence Buell (Harvard University).

International scholars are encouraged to submit papers on any of the following topics:

- hybrid spaces (nature and city as spaces of friction and exchange between religious, ethnic, and cultural minorities and »mainstream culture«)
- protest culture and natural resources (especially environmental consciousness and ecocriticism; signs, symbols, and sounds of protest movements)
- democratic landscapes (romantic and counter-hegemonic landscapes)
- imaginary Americas (changing visions of a multicultural and multiethnic America linked to the concepts of nature and city)
- promises of virtual urban futures (possibilities of conflation of nature and city space in new digital media, hyper-realist images, computer animated films, virtual worlds on the Internet such as »Second Life«)

Presentations are meant to be brief, intense, and controversial. They are intended as a starting point for discussion, not as a settled issue. Handouts and audio-visual aids are welcome.

Brief abstracts (200 words) for a 20-minute paper, including a short biographical statement (with institutional affiliation, postal address, e-mail address), should be sent to either Stefan Brandt (sbrandt@zedat.fu-berlin.de) or Frank Mehring (fmehring@zedat.fu-berlin.de) by April 23, 2008. Proposals may also be considered for panels (of four papers). 200-word rationale should include panel title, a description of the panel theme, name of the panel chair, and 200-word abstracts of each paper (with contact details for each presenter).

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