



## **The One-Dimensional Empire: The Leveling-Down of Reality**

**Study Group with Lawrence Stallings and Scott Stelle, d.a.i. Tübingen**

**Fri., October 27, 2006, 6.45 pm at the d.a.i.**

This quarter we will study how America's championing of democracy, human rights and free market capitalism is leveling down reality. Now that the public has been persuaded that the mechanisms of democracy and the free market are one and the same, a culture of profit and greed is corrupting the system. Likewise, the new ideology of human rights has come to be interpreted as the rights of individuals, which exist independently of any hierarchy or community in which one might be situated; rights are universal, not communal or national. Today, nothing higher stands between the individual's right to immediate gratification and the widest forces of global capitalism, which are everywhere undermining the last vestiges of authority and standards of judgment. The contemporary "epoch of equalization" is forcing hitherto, more or less, self-contained social groupings to merge with one another.

We wish to bring a political-edge to cultural studies by critically examining the geographical division of labor in a context of developing and developed nations, which coincides with the simplification of life into a binary logic of production and consumption. The dramatic shift from production to consumption among developed nations is establishing new markets and legitimizing multiculturalism, whose suspicion of hierarchy simultaneously promotes a culture of consumption. Instead of analyzing popular culture we turn to business culture, where the imperial spirit is truly revealed.

If all past empires had a sacred dimension, then what are the prospects of an American empire whose dominant ethos is purely worldly? The old gospel of saving and postponed gratification has been turned on its head by advertising and easy credit, or what Herbert Marcuse called "repressive desublimation," i.e. shop till you drop. Some pecuniary standards of American culture may have changed, but the self-righteous and punitive legacy of America's religio-political values remain intact. How does the joyless fundamentalist rejection of postmodern values throughout the world challenge America's muscular democratization and total market integration project?

New members to this study group are always welcome!

Further dates: November 24, December 22

Admission free