**SO321: ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR**

Taught by Agata Lisiak ([a.lisiak@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:a.lisiak@berlin.bard.edu)) at Bard College Berlin, Fall 2019

**Course Description**

This class is dedicated to a careful reading of Marshall Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* – a highly influential, if not uncontroversial 1982 book on the experience of modernity. With this book, Berman aimed for nothing less than grasping ‘a world where everything is pregnant with its contrary’ and we will attempt to do the same. We will read and discuss the authors Berman engages with (Goethe, Marx and Engels, Gogol, Baudelaire), as well as many others whose voices remain absent from his analysis, but need to be heard in the context of reflections on modernity. This class makes no attempt to erect a monument for Berman – as he once said (speaking of Marx), ‘a thinker needs beatification like a hole in the head!’ – but, rather, offers a critical engagement with his writings on modernity. We will therefore discuss Berman’s western-centric study alongside texts that offer postcolonial, feminist, and queer approaches to modernity. Aside from Berlin, Paris, New York, and Saint Petersburg, presented as the modern metropolises in *All That Is Solid*, we will also discuss experiences of modernity in Mexico City, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Durban, and Sao Paulo, among other cities. Drawing from fiction, film, ethnographic studies, essays, theory, and hip hop, we will reflect on how modern individuals assert their dignity in the city, even if it is exclusionary and oppressive. As Berman observes: ‘the streets, our streets, are where modernism belongs’ – we will explore these streets not only through fiction, film, and theory, but also off-campus walks.

**Readings and assignments**

Week 1

September 2

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Preface + Introduction**

September 4

* Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. London: Sage, 2005. Excerpts.
* Dussel, Enrique. Eurocentrism and Modernity. *boundary 2* 20.3 (1993): 65-76.

Week 2

September 9

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 1**

Assignment 1: Drawing on Berman’s chapter and today’s discussion, prepare a 5 minute presentation on a Faustian or pseudo-Faustian project of your choice. Email the power point file to me latest by midnight **21 September** and be ready to present it in class on 23 September.

September 11

* Le Corbusier. *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning*. New York: Dover, 1987 [1929]. Excerpts.
* Mattern, Shannon. A City Is Not a Computer. *Places Journal* 2017: <https://placesjournal.org/article/a-city-is-not-a-computer/> (\*\*\*READ ONLINE\*\*\*)

Week 3

September 16

FILM SCREENING (in class)

*The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, dir. Chad Freidrichs (2012)

September 18

OFF-CAMPUS INDIVIDUAL WORK

Assignment 2: Identify and walk through one of Berlin’s housing estates and document the visit (take notes and pictures); write a 1000-word report from the field engaging with *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* and at least one of the texts we have discussed so far; include at least one image of the housing estate and email the assignment to me by midnight **October 4**.

Week 4

September 23

IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS: Building a modern world: a Faustian project.

OFF-CAMPUS WALKING ASSIGNMENT 1 (prompt to be announced in class)

September 25

* Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (including Berman’s Introduction)

OFF-CAMPUS WALKING ASSIGNMENT 2 (prompt to be announced in class)

Week 5

September 30

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 2**
* Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

October 2

* Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Verso, 2018 [1972]. Excerpts.
* Bhambra, Gurminder K. Whither Europe? *Interventions* 18.2 (2016): 187-202.

Week 6

October 7 –Guest lecture by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Savvy Contemporary

* Hall, Stuart. The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power. 1992.

October 9

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 3**
* Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of the Modern Life*. Trans. P.E. Charvet. Penguin Books, 2010 [1863]. Sections III & XII.

Homework for October 16: Do all the readings assigned for the October 16th class (Debord etc.), think about our past walks, consider *All That Is Solid* and at least one other text we have discussed so far, and write a script for a walk you would like to take in Berlin. Email the script to me by **11 am, October 14**.

Week 7

October 14

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 3 – continued**
* Harvey, David. The Condition of Women. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
* Bebel, August. Prostitution a Necessary Social Institution of Bourgeois Society. *Woman and Socialism*. Jubilee 50th Edition. New York: Socialist Literature, 1910.

OFF-CAMPUS WALKING ASSIGNMENT 3: Take a walk according to your own or your partner’s walking script (make some changes to it, if you wish). Document the walk visually (photos, drawings, collages, maps, etc.) Is there a story you would like to tell? Is there a specific mood you would like to convey? Write a few paragraphs reflecting on the walk/images through the lens of at least two of the readings we have discussed in class. Email the walking script and the draft of the visual essay to Agata by midnight, October 20. We will be workshopping the essays in class in preparation for your midterms.

October 16

* Debord, Guy. Theory of the Derive. 1958.
* Situationists International. Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation. 1958.
* Lisiak, Agata, Reece Cox, Flavia M. Tienes, Sophia Zbinovsky Braddel. [“A City Coming Into Being”: Walking in Berlin with Franz Hessel and Marshall Berman](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13604813.2018.1555960). *CITY: Critical analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*. 2019.

Week 8

October 21

**A visual essay workshop**

Assignment 3: Visual essay due midnight October 24.

October 23

* Cadogan, Garnette. Walking While Black. *Freeman’s: The Best New Writing on Arrival*. New York: Grove Press, 2015.
* Solnit, Rebecca. City of Women: The Power of Names. *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas*. Eds. R. Solnit and J. Jelly-Schapiro. Oakland: University of California Press, 85–90.
* Elkin, Lauren. *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London*. New York: Vintage, 2017. Excerpts.

**FALL BREAK**

Week 9

November 4

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 4**
* Nikolai Gogol, Nevsky Prospekt.

November 6

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 4** – continued
* Kollontai, Alexandra. “New Woman” from The New Morality and the Working Class. 1919.

Week 10

November 11

* Gyasi, Yaa. *Homegoing*. New York: Vintage, 2017. Willie.
* Hartman, Saidyia. The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 117.3 (2018): 465-490.

November 13

* Quijano, Aníbal. Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality. *Cultural Studies* 21.2-3 (2007): 168-178.
* Lugones, Maria. Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System. *Hypatia* 22.1 (2007): 186-209.

Week 11

November 18

* **Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 5 (parts 1 and 2)**

November 20

* Zukin, Sharon. Consuming Authenticity. *Cultural Studies* 22.5 (2008): 724-748.
* Schulman, Sarah. *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. 23-52.

Week 12

November 25

* Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Chapter 2.

November 27

* **Marshall Berman, New York Calling. 2007.**
* Chang, Jeff. *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: Picador, 2005.

Week 13

December 3

* Robinson, Jennifer. *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. London: Routledge, 2006. 65-92.
* Caldeira, Teresa P. R. Peripheral urbanization: Autoconstruction, transversal logics, and politics in cities of the global south. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35.1 (2017): 3–20.

December 4

* Mattern, Shannon. Maintenance and Care. *Places Journal* (2018).   <https://placesjournal.org/article/maintenance-and-care/> (\*\*\*READ ONLINE\*\*\*)

Week 14

December 10

* **Marshall Berman**, **The Romance of Public Space. 2013.**
* Butler, Judith. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. Excerpts.

December 12

Concluding assignments and discussion.

Assignment 4: Final essay due midnight 17 December 2019.