SO321: ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR

Seminar Leader: Agata Lisiak  
Course Times: Tuesdays 9-10.30 am, Thursdays 1:30-3 pm  
Room: tbc  
Email: a.lisiak@berlin.bard.edu  
Office hours: Tuesdays 10.30-12; Thursdays 10.30-12

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.

Requirements

Attendance
Your preparation, attendance, and participation are crucial. Please complete the required readings, be on time for each class, and contribute energetically and meaningfully to the discussions. A class participation mark will be awarded on the basis of your engagement in class discussions. Missing more than two classes will affect your participation grade for this class. Please consult the [Student Handbook](#) for BCB’s policy on absences. This mark makes up 30% of the final grade.

Readings
A course reader is required for this class, as are the following books:
- Marshall Berman, *Modernism in the Streets*
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*
When preparing for class and working on your assignments, please check out the Reserve Shelf in the library. You will find some great books there! Also, I recommend getting your own copies of Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing*, and Nikolai Gogol’s “Nevsky Prospekt”.

**Assignments**

Students are required to complete three assignments for this class:
- a 10-minute in-class presentation on a Faustian project
- a mid-term visual essay on an urban walk
- two one-page in-class written responses to assigned readings
- a 2000-word final paper on the experience of modernity in popular culture and art

We will discuss the requirements for each of these assignments in detail in class. Please make sure to get in touch with me whenever you have any questions about the assignments.

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. If I agree to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade higher than a C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

---

**Grade Breakdown and Deadlines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 1 (presentation)</td>
<td>10% // 26 September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 2 (midterm visual essay)</td>
<td>20% // 26 October 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 3 and 4 (in-class reading responses)</td>
<td>5% each // n.d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment 5 (final paper)</td>
<td>30% // 20 December 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Schedule**

**Week 1**

September 5

September 7
Doreen Massey, *For Space*, Chapter 6
Enrique Dussel, Eurocentrism and Modernity

---

**Week 2**

September 12 – no class (professor away at a conference); class makeup on **October 13**

September 14
Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 1

**FILM SCREENING** // September 14, 7 pm, Lecture Hall
*The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, dir. Chad Freidrichs (2012)

---

**Week 3**

September 19
Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, Chapter 2

September 21
Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning*, Chapters 9-10
**Week 4**

September 26
PRESENTATIONS: Building a modern world: a Faustian project

September 28
Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

**Week 5**

October 3 – no class, public holiday

October 5

**Week 6**

October 10

October 12 – no class, Liberal Arts Education discussion

** October 13 – Gorki Theater, 7.30 pm

**Week 7**

October 17
Garnette Cadogan, *Walking While Black*

October 19
Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting*
Valeria Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, excerpts

**Week 8**

October 24
A visual essay workshop
VISUAL ESSAYS DUE OCTOBER 26, 11 am

October 26
Marshall Berman, *Take It to the Streets (MITS)*

**Fall Break**
*please read Gogol’s Nevsky Prospekt over the break; I will send everyone a digital copy of the short story so you can read it while you travel*

**Week 9**

November 7
Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid*, Chapter 4

November 9
Nikolai Gogol, *Nevsky Prospekt*

**Film Screening** // November 9, 7 pm, Lecture Hall
*I Don’t Want To Sleep Alone*, dir. Tsai Ming-liang

**Week 10**

November 14
Alexandra Kollontai, *New Woman*
Sheila Rowbotham, Introduction to Alexandra Kollontai’s work
Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing (Willie)*

November 16
AbdouMaliq Simone, The Missing People

**Week 11**
November 21

WATCH AT HOME: *Style Wars*, dir. Tony Silver (1983)

November 23
Marshall Berman, *New York Calling* (*MITS*)
Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, Chapter 4

**Week 12**
November 28
Teresa P. R. Caldeira, *From Modernism to Neoliberalism in Sao Paulo*

November 30
Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind*, Chapters 1 and 2
Yvonne Doderer, LGBTQs in the City, Queering Urban Space

**Week 13**
December 5
Jeff Chang, *We Gon’ Be Alright* (*Vanilla Cities*)

December 7
Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Chapter 2

**Week 14**
December 12
Ananya Roy, *The 21st-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory*

December 14
Marshall Berman, *Sings in the Street* (*MITS*)