

# SO321: ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR

Seminar Leader: Agata Lisiak  
Course Times: Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3.30 pm  
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Office hours: Monday 10.45-12; Wednesday 12.30-1:30

## 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 urgently 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, decolonial, feminist, and queer approaches to modernity. Aside from Paris, New York, and Saint Petersburg, presented as the modern metropolises in *All That Is Solid*, we will also discuss the experiences of modernity in Kingston, Lusaka, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Sao Paulo, among other cities. Drawing on fiction, film, ethnographies, essays, theory, and hip hop, we will reflect on how modern individuals assert their dignity in the city, even when it is exclusionary and oppressive. As Berman observes: ‘the streets, our streets, are where modernism belongs’ – we will explore these streets not only through the assigned readings, but also through many 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 meaningfully to the discussions. A class participation mark will be awarded on the basis of your preparation for and engagement in class discussions, as well as your homework and walking assignments (see below). There may also be a pop quiz or two and the grade will add to your participation grade. Please consult the [Student Handbook](#) for BCB's policy on absences and bear in mind that tardiness and missing more than two classes will affect your participation grade. 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, [All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity](#)
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, [The Communist Manifesto](#) (with Berman's introduction)

I also recommend getting your own copies of Franz Hessel's *Walking in Berlin* (trans. Amanda DeMarco), Yaa Gyasi's excellent novel *Homegoing*, and a collection of Nikolai Gogol's short stories (e.g., *Diary of a Madman*, *The Government Inspector and Selected Stories*, trans. Ronald Wilks, Penguin Books, or *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Vintage Classics).

### Assignments

Students are required to complete the following assignments for this class:

- a 5-minute **presentation** on a Faustian or pseudo-Faustian project
- a 1000-word **report** based on a visit to one of Berlin's housing estates
- a mid-term **visual essay** based on a scripted city walk
- a 2500-word **final paper** on the experience of modernity

We will discuss the requirements as well as the grading criteria for each of these assignments in class. Please make sure to get in touch with me whenever you have any questions. In addition to the graded assignments, this course includes **several walking assignments** that will count as homework and will add up to your participation grade.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

As specified in the *Student Handbook*, "Bard College Berlin students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of integrity and intellectual engagement in their academic work. Attendance and thorough preparation for class, as well as commitment to the pursuit of excellence in written work, are fundamental requirements of Bard College Berlin's programs." Acts of academic misconduct (plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, cheating) will be reported and result in a disciplinary process (see the *Student Handbook* for details). 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 we 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**

Class participation (includes homework): 30%  
Assignment 1 (presentation): 10% // 22 September 2019  
Assignment 2 (housing estate report): 10% // 4 October 2019  
Assignment 3 (midterm visual essay): 20% // 24 October 2019  
Assignment 4 (final paper): 30% // 17 December 2017

### **Schedule\***

#### 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 **22 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.

September 25

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

Week 5

September 30

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

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

October 2

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

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

Week 6

October 7

- **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.

October 9

- **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 50<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Socialist Literature, 1910.

Homework for October 14: Do all the readings assigned for next 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

- 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. *CITY: Critical analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*. 2019.

OFF-CAMPUS WALKING ASSIGNMENT 3 (prompt to be announced in class)

October 16

- 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.

Visual essay draft due October 20.

Week 8

October 21

**A visual essay workshop**

Assignment 3: Visual essay due midnight October 24.

October 23

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

### 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, Anibal. *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.

<u>Assignment 4</u> : Final essay due midnight 17 December 2019.
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\* Please note that the schedule is subject to change. All the changes will be communicated via email.