

**The Dangers and Delights of the (Modern European) City**  
*Society for the Humanities Seminar 418 (Undergraduate Course)*

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"Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears." — Italo Calvino

**DESCRIPTION**

This course explores the dreams and nightmares of the modern European city in the great era of urbanization, from the 1820s to the 1930s. What were the dangers of the city? What fears did it awaken in city dwellers, government officials, writers and artists? What was seen as its promise? What new pleasures did it allow? We will begin by surveying urban developments across this period, together with theoretical perspectives on urban life. From here, the course will move forward in rough chronology, drawing examples from Paris, Manchester, London, Berlin, and other cities real and imaginary. Readings (about a book a week) are drawn from recent secondary work in the cultural history of the city and various primary sources (literature, film, art, sociology, journalism and more). Throughout the course, we will take up various aspects of the city and the urban experience: the mental life of the metropolis, the social geography of the city, the industrial city, crime and the underworld, contagion and social hygiene, urban planning, prostitutes and public women, urban entertainments. The course will proceed as a seminar, with discussions and student presentations. Students will prepare a substantial research paper and present their findings at the end of the term.

**REQUIRED BOOKS**

There will be a Course Reader at KC Copy Center, 118 Dryden Road. The following books should be available at the Campus Book Store:

- Honoré de Balzac, *Père Goriot* (Norton Critical Edition, 1997; orig. 1835).
- T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Rev. ed., Princeton University Press, 1999)
- Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Modern Library, 1998; orig. 1907).
- Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin, 1900* (Harvard University Press, 1996).
- Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1999).
- Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City. Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930* (Reaktion Books, 1998; orig. 1991).
- Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (University of California Press, 1998).

## **ON RESERVE**

All of the required books (except the novels of Balzac and Conrad) are on reserve. In addition, the following books (which will prove useful to many of you on your research papers) are on two day reserve at Uris Library.

- H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (1973), 2 vols.  
A large collection of short essays on all aspects of the Victorian city in Britain, one part social history, the other part a cultural history of representations of the city.
- Peter Geoffrey Hall, *Cities in Civilization* (1998).  
A very broad-ranging tome (from ancient Rome to modern Tokyo!) examining various cities in periods of cultural splendor.
- Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940* (1985).  
Broad-ranging as well, but emphasizing London, Manchester, Paris, Berlin, New York. Examines perceptions of the city, of the dangers and the promises of urban life.
- Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna* (1986).  
Beautifully illustrated and well written. Olsen surveys urban developments in these three cities in the nineteenth century. Emphasis is on the city as work of art, rather than as site of social pathologies.
- Anthony Sutcliffe, ed., *Metropolis, 1890-1940* (1984).  
London, Paris, Berlin, and more, in this later era of urbanization. Useful essays survey portrayals of the city in architecture, art, literature, and cinema.

## **REQUIREMENTS—PRESENTATIONS, RESEARCH PAPER, PARTICIPATION**

Each student will take part in two presentations on the assigned readings (prepared and presented with another student). Talks should last about twenty minutes (between the two presenters). You may address some particular aspect of the day's reading, fill us in on important background information, offer some comparisons to other readings. In any case, you should pose some important questions about the reading, and help to start and sustain the discussion.

The writing assignment for the course is a single research paper, on a topic worked out in consultation with me. Any city, any theme, any source is fair game, but I must approve your topic. I intend this to be a serious and substantial research paper that engages both primary and secondary sources, but I may be open to alternative projects. You will present your tentative findings to the class (another presentation) in the last week of the course. The paper is due one week after our last meeting. Length is not the best indicator of seriousness and substance, but I would suggest about 20 pages.

As the course meets only once a week, regular attendance, preparedness and participation are absolutely essential. I trust you to do all the reading and do it well. Be forewarned, there is a lot of reading. You won't be able to finish the week's assignment in an evening. I will tell you when you can skim.

## **GRADES**

Roughly 50% of your grade will be based on your participation (which includes the first two presentations you give during the semester). The other 50% will be based on your final paper (and the final presentation).

## **SCHEDULE of TOPICS, READINGS, VIEWINGS, and DUE DATES**

[R] = Reader, [C] = in-class, [H] = handout

*Note: We will schedule two film screenings outside of class, as well as an additional evening meeting at the end of the term for student presentations.*

### **1. Jan 24 - Introduction: The Urban Experience**

[C] Charles Baudelaire, "To a Woman Passing By" (1860)

[C] Emile Zola, short selection from Paris (1898)

[C] George Grosz, "Metropolis" (1911-17)

[C] Giorgio de Chirico, "The Enigma of a Day" (1914)

[C] Gustave Caillebotte, "Paris, A Rainy Day" (1877)

[C] Charles Marville, "Rue Glatigny, Paris" (1865)

### **2. Jan 31 - The Promise and the Dangers of the City: A Wide View**

[H] Carl Schorske, "The Idea of the City in European Thought," in *The Historian and the City* (1963), pp. 95-114.

[H] Andrew Lees, *Cities Imagined* (1985), pp. ix-xi, 1-90.

[H] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Modern Life" (1902-3), in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (1950), pp. 409-424.

[C] Leni Riefenstahl, dir., "Triumph of the Will" (Germany, 1934; selections, about 20 mins)

### **3. Feb 7 - Social Spaces of the Old (New) Paris**

Honoré de Balzac, *Pere Goriot* (orig. 1835).

#### 4. Feb 14 - **The Industrial City and the Working Class**

[R] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (orig. 1844), "The Great Towns," pp. 57-107.

[R] Steven Marcus, Engels, *Manchester and the Working Class* (1985), pp. 3-66, 131-248.

[R] Caroline Arscott and Griselda Pollock, "The Partial View: The Visual Representation of the Early Nineteenth-Century Industrial City," in Janet Wolff and J. Seed, eds., *The Culture of Capital* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 191-233 and pls. 7-38.

#### 5. Feb 21 - **Wandering in the Street**

Charles Baudelaire

[R] *Les Fleurs du mal* (1861), selections

[R] *Paris Spleen* (1869), selections

[R] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (written 1939) in *The Arcades Project* (1999), pp. 14-26 and selected images.

T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (1984), Introduction and Ch. 1, "The View from Notre Dame," pp. 3-78, pl. 1-5.

#### 6. Feb 28 - **Paris in the Art of Manet. The Street, The Suburb, The Prostitute, Urban Entertainments**

T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, remainder.

[C] Manet, Caillebotte, Monet, Degas, and others

#### 7. Mar 7 - **Early Mass Culture in Paris**

Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (1998).

#### 8. Mar 14 - **Newspaper Culture in Berlin**

Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin, 1900* (1996).

*SPRING BREAK*

9. Mar 28 - **Anarchists and Secret Agents in London**

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (orig. 1907).

10. Apr 4 - **Crime and its Detection**

[R] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (orig. 1841)  
in *Thirty-Two Stories*, pp. 130-158.

[R] Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Case of Identity" (1891),  
in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1909), pp. 52-71.

[R] H. Ashton-Wolfe, *Warped in the Making* (1928), pp. vii-x, 3-84, 111-140.

[R] Edmond Bayle, "The Scientific Detective"  
in Alfred Morain, *The Underworld of Paris* (1931), pp. 13-25.

11. Apr 11 - **Nightlife in Paris, Berlin, London: A Broad View**

Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City. Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930* (1998; orig. 1991).  
Selections TBA.

12. Apr 18 - **The Eiffel Tower and the City of Dreams**

René Clair, dir., "Paris qui dort" (1923). Screening (before class) to be arranged.

Blaise Cendrars, from *Modernities and Other Writings* (1992)

[R] "The ABC's of Cinema" (1919)

[R] "The End of the World filmed by the Angel of Notre Dame" (1916-1919)

[R] "The Eiffel Tower" (1924)

[R] Roland Barthes, "The Eiffel Tower" (1964)

[C] Giorgio De Chirico, cityscapes

[C] Robert Delaunay, selections from La Ville and La Tour Eiffel series

[C] Eugène Atget

13. Apr 25 - **Wandering in the Street, Again**

Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1999). Selections TBA.

14. May 2 - **Crime and the Underworld**

Fritz Lang, dir., *M* (1931). Screening (before class) to be arranged.

[R] Beth Irwin Lewis, "Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis," in Charles Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr, eds., *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis* (1990), pp. 111-140.

[R] Gabriele Tergit, "Fritz Lang's *M*: Filmed Sadism" (orig. 1931) in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (1994), pp. 632-633.

[C] George Grosz

[C] Otto Dix

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