Displacements: A Journey from St. Petersburg to Los Angeles

Comparative Literature Seminar Room
Isabel Bader Theatre (Victoria Campus)
93 Charles Street West, 3d floor
Tuesday 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Instructor: Thomas Lahusen
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The course examines the notion of “displacement,” signifying processes of change in and among places of dwelling, flight, production, and exchange through works of fiction, film, literary/cultural theory, and history. Recent theoretical works on place, space, cultural geography, literary and cinematographic archaeology will be examined through novels, films, and scholarly monographs. Starting with the reading of Marshall Berman’s chapter
“Petersburg: The Modernism of Underdevelopment” in his *All That’s Is Solid Melts Into Air* (1982), our journey moves to a series of texts displaying urban and rural spaces in Russia, China, Europe, and North America. Following Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg* (1913-14), we will explore the spaces of some utopian/dystopian landscapes of post-revolutionary Russia; the Paris of Benjamin’s Arcades project; the post-socialist space of a Romanian village; and end in the polycentric and fragmented urban space of Los Angeles. Further course material includes the following films: Chen Kaige’s 1984 *Yellow Earth* and Jia Zhangke’s *24 City* (2008). The former is a post-Mao cinematic reflection on the foundational space of Chinese socialism, the latter presents its recent “modernization.” The film *Outskirts (Okraina)*, by the late Petr Lutsik (1998) is a violent and dystopian meditation on post-Soviet “decollectivization,” whereas Joel Schumacher’s *Falling Down* (1993) showcases a case of post-modern homelessness in present-day Los Angeles through the violent rampage of a man at the end of his rope.

The course is designed for students of comparative literature, history, film studies, and cultural geography.

**Course organization and requirements**

**Meetings** take place every week. The readings for all sessions are required. **Presentations:** one or several students are responsible for facilitating the discussion along with the instructor. The presenters prepare discussion questions on the readings, to be sent by e-mail to the entire class at least 2 days before the discussion. Presenters are responsible for the assigned reading. They can use additional materials, listed under “further reading” in the course outline. In the week of the presentation, they should be the experts on the assigned readings and should be among the most active participants. A one-person presentation should last about 10 min.

The **grade** will be calculated as follows:

1. Active class participation (25%). Mere physical presence during the seminar will earn you no more than 50 percent of this grade.

2. One seminar presentation/moderation (25%)

3. One final 20-30 page (double-spaced) research paper. (50%).

The topic for the **final paper** is to be chosen in consultation with the instructor. It should specifically relate to the notions of place and space, and other theoretical concepts used in the course. An outline with a bibliography will have to be submitted no later than week 8 of the course. Each outline and bibliography must be approved by the instructor before the student continues with the project.
Papers must follow the Chicago Manual of Style format (Humanities style). For a quick guide, see: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

The papers must be submitted in hard copy to my office (319N Munk Centre). Do NOT submit your paper to Comparative Literature or the desk of the History Department. An electronic version of the papers must also be submitted to: thomas.lahuksen@utoronto.ca

Penalty for lateness: 2% per day

Reading assignments

A. Books on order at the UofT Bookstore

Marshall Berman, All That’s Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity (Verso, 2010).
Tim Cresswell, Place: A Short Introduction (Blackwell, 2004).
Katherine Verdery, The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania (Cornell UP, 2003)
Mike Davis, City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles (Verso, 2010).

A number of books will be on short-term loan but access cannot be guaranteed.

B. A number of book chapters and articles: see course outline.

Course Outline

Session 1 (11 September) ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

Session 2 (18 September) THE MODERNISM OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Session 3 (25 September) PLACE, SPACE & TIME

Session 4 (2 October)  
THE SHADOW CITY: PETERSBURG  


For those who read Russian: http://www.save-spb.ru/

Session 5 (9 October)  
SPACES OF HIGH-MODERNISM  


Session 6 (16 October)  
HETEROTOPIA  

Session 7 (23 October)  
PLACES OF HISTORY  
Films: *Yellow Earth* [Huang tudi] (Chen Kaige, 1984); *24 City* [Ershisi cheng ji] (Jia Zhangke, 2008).

Screenings of these films have to be organized prior to class by the students at the Audiovisual Media Commons at Robarts Library. Copies of these films will be made available for this screening only and cannot be checked out.

Reading:  
Rey Chow, "Silent is the Ancient Plain: Music, Filmmaking, and the Conception of Reform in China's New Cinema," *Discourse* 12.2 (1990): 82-90. Also in: Rey

**Session 8 (30 October) DIALECTICS OF SEEING**


Due date of the final paper outline & bibliography

**Session 9 (6 November) POSTSOCIALIST SPACE**


Film: *Outskirts (Okraina)*, Petr Lutsik, 1998.
For a short introduction to the film, see: http://www.rusfilm.pitt.edu/1999/border.html

The screening of this film has to be organized prior to class by the students at the Audiovisual Media Commons at Robarts Library. A copy of the film will be made available for this screening only and cannot be checked out.

**12 – 13 November: FALL BREAK**

**Session 10 (20 November) (POST)MODERN SPACE**


**Session 11 (27 November) CONCLUSIONS**

Film: *Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993). To be watched individually.
Online: http://www.alluc.org/movies/watch-falling-down-1993-online/121759.html
Session 12 (4 December) PRESENTATION OF FINAL PAPER PROJECTS

Due date for research paper: 4 December
Formal requests for late submissions have to be presented earlier in the semester. Only VALID REASONS will be accepted.