

Critical Review of Modernity in Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*

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Introduction

Marshall Berman was a Marxist humanist writer and an American philosopher. A professor of science at City College of New York and a professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York as well. The book *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* about modernism was written by him. Marshall Berman examines the clash of classes, histories, and cultures and ponders our prospects for coming to terms with the relationship between a liberating social and philosophical idealism and a complex, bureaucratic materialism.

Summary

Berman encounters the central vagueness of modernism in his book "All Solids That Melts into Air." In order to understand the world, men and women became objects of modernization so that they could cultivate it and make it their Home. The author establishes an open-ended conversation with the reader so that he or she can make his or her own understanding of modernization, as explained in the book in three different stages. These different stages of modernity start with the first phase, which is from the 16th to 18th century. These were centuries when humans were trying to adopt modern life. The second stage of modernization began during the [French Revolution](#) and in the Gurella war period (the 1790s). In the latter half, 19th-century society became preoccupied with a nostalgic desire to gain knowledge about non-modern civilizations.

Encouraged by thinkers like Nietzsche, Rousseau, Goethe, Baudelaire, and Kierkegaard, the first three parts of the book identify the implications of the workings of these modernist thinkers. First part of the book deals with the expression of Goethe's Faust modernist quest, while the second phase of the book poses a question about Marx's communist manifesto's relationship with bourgeois economies and with modernist culture can be accounted for. After this, Berman explains the work of Baudelaire in terms of art that humans who are influential and powerful in economic and political aspects are most likely to artistically creative. However last two sections of the book discuss the elements of modernism in terms of age, race gender in different locations. Meanwhile, Berman examined how important is it to explore modernization by looking at the cosmopolitan and imperial city of St. Petersburg. In the last section of the book, Berman explained how New York represented modern life imagined and ruined and how a modern man built his capacity.

Critical Perspective

The end of the 18th century was promising to humanity. New planets were discovered [Uranus, Saturn], music had been created by Mozart, the world's furthest parts were conquered by great countries, the Rights of Man was approved after the French Revolution, etc. Times were saturated with scientific progress, marking events and inventions. Suddenly the world became smaller, much more accessible. Previously deadly illnesses were now curable, and countries previously feared were ruled. All was a promising great start. Until "Faust" was seduced by "Mephistopheles". He sold his soul. To spread himself endlessly. (Marx & Engels, 1848)

I think it is remarkably clever to use someone else's text, to open it up, decode it, and have untangled, clear human evolution within those disturbing times, though through one person's life, but living as most of people did. It is sad, but then it is not the first time humanity was forced, accidentally or intentionally, to develop, to evolve, to grow. "Goethe sees the modernization of the material world as a sublime spiritual achievement." But then again, Faust, as a symbol of humanity, was previously saved by the church from his death. It does sound incredibly similar to the Dark Ages. Therefore, now, will humanity be saved by modernisation? By progress and development? Maybe it will, but somehow causing all material development, all structural changes in the world, though as hard as ripping band aides, is human.

It is man's desire to control, to overpower, to be able to prove his superiority against nature. Accidentally, it gave in by letting man discover planets and cures. As man is the cause of the development of modernization – developer, his spiritual and moral battles do not cease to exist. They might have been silenced for a while, but "four ladies" Need, Care, Want, and Guilt occasionally let themselves be noticed. This is a paradox in itself, as a moving and motivating development force sometimes slows the process by doubting itself. It is, therefore, self-destructive and obsolete. Environments, institutions and all other people and things that are most dominant now may become obsolete in the next era. Even the moving forces like developers. This is greatly illustrated by M.Berman by choosing appropriate historical events, facts, and people. Sooner or later, regime, [political system](#), or economic politics will be destroyed. That is probably the greatest tragedy of [human development](#). And development, in general, as it will at a certain point, will become obsolete and will halt.

The ending and beginning of the book involve the area of South Bronx, the area where Berman was born, raised, and transformed in the 1980s. Robert Moses was the guy who wanted to transform the area where Berman was raised; Moses wanted to build an Expressway without having legal documents. The interaction between Moses and Berman transformed Berman completely. The results were unimaginable as Robert, along with other constructors, damaged the government property in such a way that even holes were not left by the blocks demolished, but arson attacks made a huge impact on them, and they left. According to Mosses, this was the act of modernism, in the act of modernity itself. (Berman, M., 1988)

The modern urbanism represented by Berman has every single possible reason to demolish Moses. Rather he did something more than nice. “Ordeal” is most commonly written in the first phase. He explained how the reactions and behaviors of a person change as he experiences new things in society. The person who demolished the area where Berman grew up is the same person who made some amazing buildings, themes, and amusement parks in New York. This made some confusion in the mind of the author about how the same person can be different in different situations. He concluded that as we move on towards to modernization more, we lose the ability to differentiate between positive and negative.

To describe modernity in a more effective way, Berman used the figure of Faust, who wanted to sell his soul in return for development and modernization. Throughout the book, Berman recommends Faust to read dialectally, as a story about the need to have improvised technology and modernization. The figure shows how important modernization is for Faust that he is willing too exchange his soul to have this in his life. The scenario above stated that modernization did come with negativity as well. Let’s recall that Robert Moses’ behavior and how modernization changed his priorities and encouraged him to do that is not legally right.

Pastoral modernism is one of the initial visions to be explored, which is discussed in the earlier work of Baudelaire. In most of his earlier works, he praised Burgeois. There are no traces found in terms of dullness in this work but the realization of the idea in terms of political, artistic, and industrial future. The main motive of the work was the desire for human progress effectively with the help of art. Above stated pastoral modernization claims that teher is a positive relationship between spiritual modernization and materialism. This claims that those people who aer dynamic and highly intelligent in political and economic life are most open to artistic and intellectual creativities. While finding out the power and dominance of beauty, Baudelaire was not able to see the changing dynamics of society. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)

We don’t know how to use modernism was one of the beliefs of Berman in the 20th century even though, as he hastens to affirm, in the history of the world, the 20th century might be one of the most creative eras and that “we have missed or broken the connection between our culture and our lives.” Regarding this matter, at least, it is averred that they ordered these things much better in the 19th century when the relation of aesthetic modernism to social modernization is claimed to have been more creative, more dynamic, more dialectical, and more wonderful in every way. This, above all, is the reason why we should now be setting our sights backward—on Baudelaire’s Paris and Dostoevsky’s St. Petersburg. There, apparently, the connection between “our culture” and “our lives” would have had much more to offer us than the dismal present. This mural would be depicted, more or less (one gathers), in the manner of the old “Ballad for Americans,” a cast of thousands representing successive waves of immigration, radical sects, and prosperous Bronx alumni who have made their mark in American life. Never for a moment does Berman suspect that his “modernist dream,” which seems to have been compounded of 1930’s-style post-office murals, Soviet-style Socialist Realism, and perhaps a bit of Southern California kitsch, represents everything that the modernist imaginative has long ago repudiated.

Conclusion

After a critical analysis of the book, it is clear that although Berman has painted a colorful picture of Marxism and modernity, it still lacks in terms of missing elements like class and gender. The book is clarifying for those who have difficulty understanding post-modern society. In order to create a positive and structured outlook, Berman has consistently constructed ambient and dark visions of reality so that he could regain modernity and optimism, which is why it has been seen that sometimes he often contradicts the purpose of the book to provide a greater understanding of modernity. The Book does not clearly clarify every facet of modernity, provided the literature is not enough.

References

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