The experience of living in a city is one vital thread that connects us with our ancient, medieval, and early modern ancestors, and that continues to provide a unifying element in millions of our contemporaries’ disparate lives across the globe. During your studies at NYU, urban life will be a constant environment and stimulus, whether you find yourself in New York, Florence, Accra, or Shanghai.

*Visible and Invisible Cities* aims to supply conceptual frameworks and historical contexts for this experience. The course centers on the ways in which human communities have been theorized and imagined within the Western tradition from classical antiquity through to the Renaissance. The particular intellectual focuses of the course are the city, conceived since Aristotle as the proper habitat of humankind, and the relationship between the family or household and the state. The primary texts encompass utopian writings and works of political theory, but also texts describing and analyzing real-world communities. In addition to literary and philosophical texts, we also look at visual and cartographic representations of cities and urban space.

*Visible and Invisible Cities* combines features of two different types of Texts and Ideas courses, one that follows through a particular idea, or related set of ideas, through history, and another that explores the relationship between two periods of cultural history (in this case the ancient world and late-medieval and Renaissance Europe). The course aims to expand your knowledge of intellectual history and literature, and to help you gain a sense of how traditions of thought evolve over time. It will also help you to refine your skills in analyzing and engaging critically with complex texts, ranging from the canonical (Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Dante, Boccaccio,
Machiavelli, More, Shakespeare), to texts long marginalized from the canon and only now becoming visible (Christine de Pizan, Moderata Fonte).

Some of the questions the course will consider are:

- What answers have past ages evolved to the question of what the perfect human community would be like?
- What factors have been determined as critical to the construction (and destruction) of communities?
- In what ways have the relationships between the individual, the family, and the community or state been conceived?
- What role has the notion of the city played in political thought?
- In what ways has urban space been conceived and represented through visual media?
- In what ways have factors such as gender, class, race, and religion inflected the conceptualization and use of urban space?
- How has the notion of the city played out in imaginative literature—as ideal, as dystopia, and as locus for human experience and agency?

INSTRUCTORS’ CONTACT DETAILS

Virginia Cox (virginia.cox@nyu.edu). Casa Italiana, Room 305
Office hour: Wed 1-3

Joe Perna (jtp255@nyu.edu)

Melissa Swain (melissa.swain@nyu.edu)

REQUIREMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

General requirements
• Attendance and participation are required at all lectures and all recitation meetings. Students are expected to have read each of the works on the reading list, be prepared to contribute to discussions during the lectures and participate actively during the recitations.

• You must notify your preceptor by email if you will not be able to attend a class because of a religious holiday or an illness or emergency. A failing grade may be assigned to any student with a combined total of three unjustified absences from lectures and/or recitations.

• Assignments must be printed out and handed in at the beginning of each recitation. Electronic copies sent by email will not be accepted. You must contact your preceptor if you are unable to hand in a paper on time. No late work will be accepted without prior clearance.

• Use of electronic devices, other than e-readers (Kindle, etc), is not permitted in class.

• Do be sure to contact one of the instructors (contact details above) if there are factors internal or external to the course that you feel are affecting your performance. Don’t leave any problems until the end of the course and then tell us when they’re too late to remedy! We are keen to ensure that all students get the most out of the course and perform to the best of their potential.

Assessment

*15% Attendance at lecture and section and participation in section.

*20% Recitation exercises. Written exercises will be spot papers (1-2 pages long), to be assigned on weekly readings at intervals through the course (due before the relevant section). Students will also be asked to initiate the discussion of the weekly readings once in the semester through a five-minute oral presentation.

*15% Mid-term exam. Identification, short answer, and short essay.

*20% Final paper. This is a longer writing assignment (6-8 pages) comparatively analyzing any two of the primary texts read for the course. A draft will be required two weeks before the final assessment is due, and all students will meet individually with their recitation instructor for feedback and comment. Writing sessions will be scheduled during recitation hours in preparation for this assignment.

*15% Creative project. This is a writing/video assignment (4-6 pages/3-5 minutes) reflecting on any aspect of contemporary urban life, using theoretical or comparative material deriving from the course.

* 15%. Final exam. Identification, short answer, and short essay.

Exam dates
Mid-term exam: October 22
Final exam: December 16

Deadlines for written work
Creative project due: October 30
Draft of final paper due: November 20
Final paper due: December 16

BOOKS FOR PURCHASE

The following books are required for purchase for this course. Copies are available from the NYU Bookstore. Please ensure that you get these particular editions of texts; do not rely on texts available on the internet. It is required that you bring your copies of the texts set for a given week along to the classes that week (lectures and sections).

COURSE OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Weeks 1-2. Frames

Sept 3. Thinking the city

Sept 8. Perspectives on the city: *InvisibleCities*
Italo Calvino, *InvisibleCities*, 5-55 [chapters 1-3]

Sept 10. Perspectives on the city: The city and the senses
Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City”, 91-97
*The City and the Senses*, 1-9

PART 1: THE ANCIENT CITY

Week 3. Tragedy and the polis

Sept 15
Aeschylus, *Oresteia: Agammemnon*

Sept 17
Aeschylus, *Oresteia: Eumenides [The Furies]*

Week 4. The city theorized

Sept 22
Plato, *Republic* [extracts]

Sept 24
Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, chs. 1-7, 12-13; Book 2, chs 1-5, 9, ch. 12 (just the initial section on Athens, pp. 80-81); Book 7, esp. chs. 1-4, 7, 13-15

Week 4. The city imagined

Sept 29
Virgil, *Aeneid* Bks 1, 2 and 4

Oct 1
Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bks 5-6; Bk 8, lines 306-69

PART 2: THE MEDIEVAL CITY
Week 5. The city moralized

Oct 6
Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Good and Bad Government*

Oct 8
Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 3, lines 1-21; Canto 4; Canto 8, lines 66-93; Canto 10, lines 1-93; Canto 28

Week 6. The city imagined 2

Oct 13 No class

Oct 15
Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Introduction to Day 1; Day 3, story 1; Day 2, stories 4-5

Week 7. The city imagined 2 (cont.)

Oct 20
Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Day 4, story 1; Day 10, story 10; Christine de Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, extracts [see website for details]

Oct 22
Mid-term examination

PART 3: THE RENAISSANCE CITY

Week 8. Family values: the household and the court

Oct 27
Leon Battista Alberti, *The Book of the Family*, Books 1 and 3 [extracts]

Oct 29
Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book 1, chs 2-28 (pp. 10-35); Book 2, chs 5-12 (pp. 69-76); Book 3, chs. 2-21 (pp. 148-63)

Week 9. The city described

Nov 3
Leonardo Bruni, *Panegyric of the City of Florence*, Part I (pp. 135-49) [supplementary] Robert C. Davis, “The Geography of Gender in the Renaissance”

Nov 5
Jacopo de’ Barbari, *Map of Venice*
Leonardo da Vinci, *Map of Imola*
Virginia Cox, “Mapping the World: Geography and Cartography”

Week 10. The comic city

Nov 10
Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 15-18

Nov 12

Week 11. Utopias

Nov 17
Thomas More, *Utopia*, Bk 1

Nov 19
More, *Utopia*, Bk. 2

Week 12. The city and memory

Nov 24
Petrarch, letters to Giovanni Colonna on the ruins of Rome
Poggio Bracciolini, extracts from *On the Inconstancy of Fortune*
Joachim du Bellay, *The Antiquities of Rome*, sonnets 1-3; 5; 10; 12-16; 18; 24-27; 29; 31-32

Nov 26
No class

Week 13. Utopias 2

Dec 1 Michel de Montaigne, “On Cannibals”


Week 14. The breaking of bonds

Dec 8 Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Acts 1-3


Week 15. Conclusion
Dec 15 *Caesar Must Die* (Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 2012)

A bibliography for the course will be provided on the NYU Classes site

ILLUSTRATIONS

?Fra Carnevale, Ideal City, 1480-84, Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery
Piero della Francesca, Ideal City, c. 1470. Urbino: Galleria Nazionale delle Marche
Antonio Filarete, Design for the City of Sforzinda, from *Libro architettonico*, c. 1464