



Interpreting the City: Cultural Constructions and their Material Effects

This core module invites students to engage with the city as an imaginary and discursive entity as well as a place where things happen, and to approach the imagining of the city through different aesthetic as they have evolved over time. Learning from and analysing texts, painting and sculpture, as well as photography and film, students will be invited to pay particular attention to synthetic, totalizing or projective invocations of Paris and London, asking: what lies behind the gesture of trying to define the “essence” of a city? And how do assumptions about this “essence” then surface in different forms of cultural and urban production? Through different approaches to these questions students will be invited to explore the fact that a city is constructed in culture as well as in bricks and mortar, and that these two processes are inseparable.

Module aims

- students will acquire a foundation for the understanding of the history of the city as a focus for cultural representation, broadly speaking from the Renaissance to modern times;
- they will engage in close analysis of cultural artefacts and texts and explore how these representations inform their understanding of the historical evolution of the city;
- they will develop a knowledge of advanced scholarship in the history of art and literature relating to the cities of Paris and London to a level appropriate for an MA;
- they will understand how to relate primary and secondary material to inform their understanding of the history and representation of the modern city and particularly Paris and London;
- they will acquire the critical skills to pursue optional modules and to develop their work towards a dissertation topic.

Module structure

Teaching will take place in 11 two-hour sessions and will involve close analysis of specific works, as well as preparation by site or museum visits. Students will be expected to carry out preparatory work in advance of the seminar discussion. Set readings will be communicated in advance and each session will involve discussion, textual analysis and student presentations. Assessment will be based on two written assignments.