

The humanistic modernism of Marshall Berman.

Fernando Fernández-Llebrez.

University of Granada (Tenured Professor of the University of Granada at the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology. PhD in Political Science and Administration from the University of Granada).
Departament of Political Science and Administration. Faculty of Political Science and Sociology.
University of Granada. C/Rector López Argüeta, s/n, Granada, 18100.

ABSTRACT:

This article has two objectives. On the one hand, to analyze *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* in depth in order to provide an overall summary of Berman's work, as well as his life, without which all that surrounds it is difficult to understand. On the other hand, it offers a modest tribute and acknowledgement of the aforementioned book but also at the same time of Berman's thinking and his unrelenting labour as a political theorist committed to a freer and fairer world. This route take us to the main thesis, in which Berman's modernism is defined as a *humanist modernism* that infuses and characterizes the whole of his work.

Keywords: Marshall Berman, Modernism, Intellectual history, Political thought, Political Theory, Humanism.

Date of Submission: 08-06-2021

Date of Acceptance: 21-06-2021

The humanistic modernism of Marshall Berman.

On 11 September 2013, in his birth city of New York, Marshall Berman died from a heart attack while he breakfasted in one of his favourite restaurants, the *Metro Diner* on 100th street, Broadway. The date (and place) in which that sad dénouement occurred is evocative of various moments. For any sensitive person it is undoubtedly a painful day because of its association with the human tragedy of 2001. Furthermore, forty years before, on that same day, the dictator Augusto Pinochet took power from Salvador Allende in a coup, which led to one of the most inhuman and tyrannical regimes of the late twentieth century. In a further coincidence, Berman gave an interview to *Radar* in 2007 at that same restaurant, in which he offered his reflections and opinions about 11S. And now, at least for political scientists, urbanists and other specialists, it is necessary to add this loss to that date. As Charles Baudelaire said in *The Voyage*: "Ah, how vast is the world in the light of a lamp! In memory's eyes how small the world is!"

35 years ago Berman published in English the stunning book *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, one of the literary jewels of political theory, and 29 years ago it was translated into Spanish. It is a work that marks a before and after in the study of modernism, and that has been republished many times and in various languages. Now, from the other side of the Atlantic, political theory pauses for a moment to reflect on that.

Berman was one of the most lucid theorists that political science produced in the final third of the XX century and start of the current. His intellectual, academic and personal work has been recognized, above all in the United States and Latin America, as that of a theorist who left an indelible mark on modernist thought. The obituaries provide ample testament to that.

This article has two objectives. On the one hand, to analyze *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* in depth in order to provide an overall summary of Berman's work, as well as his life, without which all that surrounds it is difficult to understand. Even so, many questions will remain unresolved as the profundity, breadth and complexity of this work would provide more than enough for an entire monography.

On the other hand, it offers a modest tribute and acknowledgement of the aforementioned book but also at the same time of Berman's thinking and his unrelenting labour as a political theorist committed to a freer and fairer world.

All That is Solid Melts into Air and the experience of modernity.

In the "Introduction" of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Berman leaves clear where he is going to take us. His start succinctly summarizes what modernity signifies for him:

"There is a mode of vital experience -experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils- that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience "modernity"."

That is, modernity is not going to be analyzed as an abstract, foreign and distant philosophical theory, but rather as an experience that affects people of flesh and blood. And what characterizes this experience?:

“To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world -and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity or disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air””.

With that as a point of departure it is not surprising that Berman employed metaphors such as a whirlwind or whirlpool to refer to this experience, due to their capacity to stir up prior certainties. The sources that feed this experience are multiple and varied, from the great scientific discoveries to urban growth, as well as industrialization and social and political protest movements. In the XX century, the social processes that bring: “this maelstrom into being, and keep it in a state of perpetual becoming, have come to be called “modernization”. These world-historical processes have nourished an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own. Over the past century, these visions and values have come to be loosely grouped together under the name of “modernism””.

Here we already have the three central concepts of Berman’s political thought (modernity, modernization, and modernism) that form the backbone of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, and that also comprise the whole of his work. However a response is needed to the nature of the relationship between these categories. In this sense, his theoretical political perspective can be summarized as “a study in the dialectics of modernization and modernism”.

Berman frequently employed the word ‘dialectic’, which surely was the product of his Marxist inheritance. However it is not possible to detect the idea of the “definitive solution” in his works, which this Marxist perspective usually denotes; more accurately, the opposite. His path is broad and open, and in fact he explicitly states that “no mode of modernism can ever be definitive”. It probably would have facilitated a better comprehension – and critical dimension – of his oeuvre had he not (ab)used the word ‘dialectic’. However it is also true to say that the word can be interpreted in his work as a tension or conflict between situations, moments, ideas and/or experiences that are paradoxical and inseparable among themselves, but do not require the formulation of any synthesis, or rejection of democratic rhetoric.

His idea of ‘modernism’ is one of many possibilities. It is more inclusive than that which is usually offered by academic texts: it signifies a broader and more open way of “understanding culture; which is very different from the curatorial approach that breaks human activity up into fragments and locks the fragments into separate cases, labeled by time, place, language, genre and academic discipline”. Berman’s perspective allows us to develop inter-relations among all types of artistic, intellectual and political activities, creating “the conditions for dialogue among the past, the present and the future [...] solidarities between great artists and ordinary people”. In doing this he broadened the vision that we have of our own experience, showing us that our lives are richer than that we had imagined, and identifying culture as a “a source of nourishment for ongoing life, rather than a cult of the dead”.

In order to develop this perspective Berman does not balk from mixing different theoretical and literary sources. It is common, therefore, for him to inter-relate works and authors from universal literature (like Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Baudelaire, among others) with writers who are characteristic of the social sciences (such as Karl Marx or Walter Benjamin, for example), as well as drawing on the genres of music, theatre, cinema, novels and comics. And beyond all these sources, Berman is also in close touch with signs that emanate from the street -where his students come from-, of ordinary people, and of urban art. It is a perspective that allows him to offer an unorthodox view full of sensitivity, in which what is important is to properly understand and explain the social and political reality that we actually live. In order to achieve this, he uses language that is comprehensible and accessible to all, and one that is profoundly distant from academic elitism.

At the same time, Berman’s modernism does not overlook one of his work’s crucial aspects, namely the relationship between personal experiences and his theoretical political reflections. Rather, Berman does it in an open and frank way. The interaction between his life and what it produces is a constant in his literature. If we want to delve further into his thought it is worth going deeper into these personal aspects, which will enlighten us about his ethical and political concerns, as well as providing insight into his profound narrative.

The young Berman and the Bronx.

Berman was born in 1940 in the neighbourhood of Tremont, in the Bronx of New York; an experience that influenced him throughout his life. He was the son of a Jewish family of textile traders. As he himself relates, his father -Murray Berman- from very young “was thrown into “the business world” –that’s what he and my mother called it- pushing a truck in the garment center to help support his parents and nine kids in one room”. This is a place that is referred to by his father as “the rack”, and upon which he built his working life. In 1948 Murray Berman and a friend founded a fashion industry magazine, which two years later went bankrupt due to Berman’s partner fleeing with the money, leaving the whole Berman family on the ropes. This led to his father’s first heart attack that left him at death’s door. Eventually the family managed to pull through and get back on their feet, although five years later, in 1955, his father had another heart attack that killed him. Berman analyzed this loss, not only for its human and personal impact, but also for its features of disloyalty, trickery and shame; all characteristic of the contradictions of modernity.

After completing secondary school in the Bronx, Berman won a scholarship to study at the University of Columbia, graduating in 1961. His time at the University was marked by two events. Beyond all that university life signifies, there he met two professors who were key to his personal and political development. At Columbia he received classes from Meyer Schapiro about the history of art -with an interdisciplinary focus and tremendous originality for the times-, which impacted him and made him look at culture, art and freedom in an open and complex way, intermingled with the society in which it develops. This was probably the first time that Berman thoroughly studied and got to formally learn about modernist culture. This was not difficult for him as Columbia University specialized in that field.

Schapiro, however, was not just “any modernist.” He was a Jewish immigrant, a brilliant intellectual and close to the communist party in his youth – a point that he shared with Lionel Trilling, also a professor at Columbia. And, furthermore, “through much of the 1930s and 1940s a militant left-wing socialist, later a liberal social democrat, a founding editor of *Dissent*”.

Berman saw certain similarities between Schapiro’s work and that of the young Marx, above all regarding the relevance of *individuality* for modern life. According to Berman, “Schapiro wants to make it clear not only that the modern subjects are alive, but that he’s *there*, at the core of the work of art”, embracing the *humanist tradition* that seeks to create a society in which the free development of each individual is the basis for the free development of all. And he does it seeking to inhale the fullness of life and with a critical vision inspired in the greatest thinkers, who make his works “full of problematic features”.

In this way, Schapiro argues for a society that is open and receptive to new perspectives that, by incorporating excluded groups, contains “a parable of pluralism, a way for people (and peoples) to see each others’ ways of seeing, so they can cooperate collectively, constitute a public, and strive together for a fuller future”. This way of understanding art and culture is a perspective that came to impregnate the whole of Berman’s thought throughout his life, and define his political and humanistic view.

If Schapiro is an important author to comprehend the cultural understanding of the young Berman, it is Jacob Taubes who played a key role in his discovery of Karl Marx. According to Berman, in 1959 he met with Taubes in his Butler Library office, at Columbia. After a conversation about the inappropriateness of revenge and their mutual agreement on the need for radical change, Taubes suggested that he read Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, saying that this book was written by Marx “when he was still a kid, before he became Karl Marx”. As Berman later recognized, this book initiated his Marxist journey. His story is moving: “I opened it at random, here, there, somewhere else –and suddenly I was in a sweat, melting, shedding clothes and tears, flashing hot and cold”. For Berman, the *Manuscripts* was a book full of paradoxes for whoever read it, because it could simultaneously destroy their lives and bring them happiness.

Berman’s reading of Marx is charged with a unique characteristic. It was neither inequality nor materialism that impacted him, but rather the “feeling for the individual” that he found in Marx’s work. That was the human value that captured Berman, and one that could be translated as *Bildung*, or ideas like subjectivity, self-development and growth. This identified Marx with that *richness of being human* that forms a part of the humanist imagination, as “with the Enlightenment and with the great revolutions that formed its climax when he asserts the universal right of man to be “freely active”, to “affirm himself”, to enjoy “spontaneous activity”, to pursue “the free development of his physical and mental energy”.

From this perspective, Berman places Marx in the same line of authors as Dostoyevsky, Charles Dickens, James Joyce and Frank Kafka, and would read him from that moment on as part of the modernist and humanist culture of the XIX century. Although, for Berman, Marx’s uniqueness lay in him demonstrating, at the same time, how the organization of capitalism makes that option difficult or impossible. This conflict and tension is, for Berman, Marx’s great contribution to XIX century thought; a conflict that, years later, will take the form of the debate between modernism vs modernization, which is so characteristic of Berman’s work.

For that reason it is not strange that from an early age Berman rejected communism in its ‘real version’ (that which authentically exists). After watching on television, with his mother, how the tanks killed children in

Budapest he understood that he was not, nor could ever be, a communist. And from that moment he clung on to a formula he called “Marxist humanism”. It is probable that Berman’s determination to continue using the word “Marxist” was related to that personal moment when his moral and political identity was taking shape, because in reality his Marxism was and is barely related with Marxism as a doctrine, in any of its variants. As his friend Michael Walzer accurately details in the obituary he wrote: “Marshall was not a Marxist Marxist, but one of his own kind”; Berman “was a lovely human being”.

In 1962 Berman moved to Oxford for his postgraduate studies where he met Isaiah Berlin who supervised his thesis on *Freedom and Individuality in the Thought of Karl Marx*, showing once again that his “Marxism” had little or nothing to do with that of the times. In fact, one of the central questions to explore in the intellectual and political work of Berman is to reflect on his profound humanist and democratic dimension. But for the purposes of this work it is sufficient to highlight the intrinsic relationship between his modernist and humanist conceptions, configuring what was described by Berman himself as “modernist humanism”, locating himself on the pathway opened up by Dickens, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Baudelaire, Marx and Joyce. However in order to properly understand this, it is necessary to continue with our story and track the evolution and development of his thought.

In 1967 Berman returned to the United States and began his relationship with the City College of CUNY (The City University of New York), in which, for nearly four decades, he gave political science and urbanism classes, and began his “collaboration with the magazine *Dissent*, a bulwark of political and cultural anti-conformism in America [...] and on whose editorial board Berman formed a part for many years”.

Berman’s classes in CUNY –which he prepared and delivered with extreme care- was his work, but it also formed a part of his social and political commitment. CUNY is not any university, as it is made up of students from lower social classes and has a high presence of ethnic minorities. In fact for years he gave classes in Harlem, although he also gave them in the centre of the city. That contact with human reality was important for Berman because from that he was able to extract fundamental lessons, understand signs from the street and develop his modernism, something that the Marxist-Marxist Perry Anderson –obsessed by the revolution- was, and is, incapable of even being able to sniff at.

It is worth pausing at this point to highlight the *subterranean* and habitual presence of specific Jewish thinking that exists in all these influences and that will also shape Berman’s work, more so, if it is possible, over the passage of time.

The beginnings of modernism and the politics of authenticity.

When analyzing Berman’s modernism three phases can be distinguished in the history of modernity. The first, which approximately spans from the start of the XVI century to the end of the XVII century, is when people start to experience modern life and “they hardly know what has hit them. They grope, desperately but half blindly, for an adequate vocabulary; they have little or no sense of a modern public or community within which their trials and hopes can be shared”. The second is the moment of its peak, which corresponds to the XIX century. And the third phase, of the XX century, represents a decline of the aforementioned perspective.

Berman focuses on the first phase in his first book. In 1968, at the same time as he protested against the Vietnam war –even being arrested -, he obtained his doctorate from Harvard with a thesis that he published two years later under the title *The Politics of Authenticity. Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*. This book is a journey through the ideas of the individual and freedom via the works of Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and whose political ideal Berman called “authenticity”.

His perspective on Montesquieu is original and gains force in the *Persian Letters*, by analyzing how the *politics of authenticity* emerges when the old world of the harem is contrasted with the new metropolis (represented by Paris). The *politics of authenticity* that Berman finds in Montesquieu opens a specific and new form of freedom for the modern world that affects both the personal and political dimension and is integral to a radical egalitarianism in which all individuals have the possibility of realizing their aims.

In Berman’s words, the *Persian Letters* propose a society in which the freedom of every person “is respected, and where personal diversity and individuality are constantly out in the open” and in which a form of individuality is promoted that preserves its independence of the roles that the individual sees themselves as obliged to fulfil.

His analysis of Rousseau is more contradictory. Of Rousseau he writes in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* reminding us that he was “the first to use the word *modernisme* in the ways in which the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will use it; and he is the source of some of our most vital modern traditions, from nostalgic reverie to psychoanalytic self-scrutiny to participatory democracy”. But his modernism contained more than simply one face illuminating a contradictory discourse; and one that it is important not to forget. Rousseau is viewed as an author capable of producing modernist dreams anchored in the *politics of authenticity*, although simultaneously, he was the greatest representative of a modernism contrary to this ideal, which Berman described as the “politics of inauthenticity” due to its capacity to destroy those same dreams; a destructive policy

in which the most absolute authority penetrates into the interior of the human being in such a way that we govern ourselves against ourselves and our own freedom.

If it is true to say that *The Politics of Authenticity* has its own personality as a book, it must also be seen as the precursor to *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, given that its journey through part of the XVIII century shows us the beginnings of a modernist culture characterized by the relationship between modernism and a specific Enlightenment thought.

In any case, in the 1970s Berman also worked with other magazines where he wrote articles that served as material for *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, although others were collected together at the end of the 90s in his book *Adventures in Marxism*.

With this journey we arrive at the story of XIX century modernism, something that Berman would explore in an outstanding way with *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*.

The heights of modernism and its humanist source.

The intellectual diagram that Berman drew of the XIX century and start of the XX century up to the start of the second world war is protagonized by Goethe, Marx, Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky and, on a different level, Robert Moses. Each of the aforementioned authors might merit an article in their own right, so here we can only highlight some of their most characteristic features with the aim of providing an overall view.

Goethe's *Faust* is read as the foundational work of modernism: "what this Faust wants for himself is a dynamic process that will include every mode of human experience, joy and misery alike, and that will assimilate them all into his self's unending growth; even the self's destruction will be an integral part of its development". It is the "desire for development" that gives strength and unity to this *Faust*; a development that ends by demanding a heavy human cost that becomes clear at the end of the novel.

Berman analyzes the three parts of Goethe's *Faust* as if they are three metamorphoses. The first is the "dreamer" that, strongly influenced by liberal romanticism, is read "as the bearer of a dynamic culture within a stagnant society, he is torn between inner and outer life", which needs to establish, through the idea of human self-development, a "connection between the solidity and warmth of life with people –everyday life lived within the matrix of a concrete community- and the intellectual and cultural revolution that has taken place in his head". The problem is that it is not easy to carry out this task because "the road to heaven is paved with bad intentions", such that yearning to explore "the sources of all creativity; now he finds himself face to face with the power of destruction instead".

The second metamorphosis is of the "lover", in which the tragedy of his beloved Margarita occupies a prominent place. For Berman this part of *Faust* expresses the limitations that the Gothic world puts on human freedom; a Gothic world that Margarita wants to leave and that will cost her her life. Berman summarizes it well when he stresses that "once, perhaps, the Gothic vision might have offered mankind an ideal of life and activity, of heroic striving toward heaven; now, however, as Goethe presents it at the end of the eighteenth century, all it has to offer is dead weight pressing down on its subjects, crushing their bodies and strangling their souls".

The third metamorphosis arrives following this crisis, that of the "developer", to whom Berman gives evident importance. In some memorable pages Berman shows how Faust –at the sound of some bells that remind him of his childhood- orders Mephistopheles to "get rid of" two elderly people (Philemon and Baucis) who live on the site upon which he wishes to build a "great work", which means the death of both elderly people. Faust is unable to accept the bad caused, however, and blames Mephistopheles for what has occurred. Berman finishes this chapter by drawing a clear distinction between the developer and the limits and problems of modernization –which affects capitalism, but not only, and generates a Faustian and pseudo-Faustian period.

Faust's developer has fought stubbornly to create a world without want, need or guilt, but his world generates shadows that he can not and does not want to see or hear, so he expells the foul wind from his mind, as before he threw out the devil: "He destroyed those old people and their little world –his own childhood world- so that his scope of vision and activity could be infinite, in the end, the infinite "Mother Night", whose power he refused to face, is all he sees". His problem is that he cannot now look at them in the face and live with them: he has to destroy them. This is the tragedy of Faust's developer.

Next Berman studies two modernist authors that better highlight such contradictions: Marx and Baudelaire.

Locating Marx among the great modernists in history, Berman undertakes a reading of the *Manifesto* (and other works such as *Grundrisse* and *Capital*) that is profoundly alive and paradoxically closer to a novel than a sociological essay. Following this route, Berman pauses in the significance of the 'bourgeoisie' for Marx: first in demonstrating the best that human activity can give; being capable of freeing "the human capacity and drive for development: for permanent change, for perpetual upheaval and renewal in every mode of personal and social life". The problem for Marx is that those forces would be exhausted by searching for them in another place –the working class- to continue and modify the aforementioned labour, given that the injustices that the modernizing process has left behind are insufferable.

The relevance of Berman's perspective is that he sees Marx as a critic of 'modernization' in support of 'another modernization', where the defence of the modernist project is its cultural motor. And in doing this he critically contradicts the anti-modernist and post-modernist reading that the Marxist left made in the 70s and 80s, including the *New left* – in which Berman participated at its inception- which he sees as "increasingly crazy". He is a critic of the development of the left that he has lived, and which he summarizes very well when he calls it "the Used Left".

Baudelaire, a contemporary of Marx, also lucidly analyzes the paradox between modernism and modernization. If one main actor had to be chosen from the story of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, in our modest opinion, it is Baudelaire, who characterizes the "modernism of the street", which Berman continued speaking of throughout his life and that represents his most completed proposal. This reading of Baudelaire was highly influenced by the vision of Walter Benjamin in his book *Libro de los pasajes*, which gives it an inescapable social and political charge. As such, the presence of Baudelaire in the thought of Berman is highly significant.

Berman dedicates the first pages of his reflections on Baudelaire to his pastoral and counter-pastoral modernism, but it is not there that he focuses his attention, but rather in the reading of two key poems in *Paris Spleen*: "The eyes of the poor" and "Loss of a halo". Both poems seek to delve deep into Paris, analyzing life in the metropolis -with its boulevards like the background of a painting characterized by "modern traffic"- and showing us the dynamism and the paradoxes of urban public space without which the modernist project is inviable. The first poem serves to show "how the contradictions that animate the modern city street resonate in the inner life of the man on the street"; and the second, from the Macadam sludge, informs us how the necessary loss of the halo represents a moment of political de-sacralization and of creative capacity that opens up for us characteristically modernist "new modes of freedom". Sources of freedom that drink from the street and live in its confusion, with all their paradoxes and ambivalences.

From that point Berman takes us by the hand to St Petersburg to go deeper into what he calls the *modernism of underdevelopment*. Here again Berman's writing is incredibly vivid and contains a sense of a futility that makes that city a point of reference for a modernism that is hypothetically different and distinct to those previously studied.

As Berman rightly points out, St Petersburg's traditions "are distinctively modern, growing out of the city's existence as a symbol of modernity in the midst of a backward society", with his key symbol being the *Crystal Palace*. But the traditions of this city "are modern in an unbalanced bizarre way, springing from the imbalance and unreality of the Petrine scheme of modernization itself" between the end of the XVII century and start of the XVIII century, which does not have 'a good end'.

Berman describes this modernizing process as "modernization from above" and, in response to it, he contrasts modernism with "modernization from below", which will engender and feed itself throughout the XIX century and start of the XX century, with St Petersburg being one of its emblems. This "modernization from below" has two main 'moments'. The first was carried out by the *Decemberists* in the popular uprisings that took place in the city in 1825, and that were the impulse behind Alexander Pushkin's modernist poem *The Bronze Horseman* in 1833. The second moment takes place from 1861 on, in the heat of the emergence of a new generation of citizens, and will have in Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864) its most significant modernist expression; with this work chosen by Berman to be the main focus of his reflection. And in the middle of all this process there will be a street, how could there not be, that will serve as a nexus between both moments: Nevski Prospekt, the main artery of the city and with clear similarities to the boulevards of Paris.

But the journey through the "mysteries of St. Petersburg, through its clash and interplay of experiments in modernization from above and below" does not only provide Berman with clues to explain what happened in this city, but also to raise key questions about some of the features of the political and spiritual life of cities like Brasilia, New Delhi and Mexico City, as well as to also highlight that "the Petersburg influenza infuses the air of New York, of Milan, of Stockholm, of Tokyo, of Tel Aviv, and it blows on and on".

Returning to the Bronx and the modernism of the XX century.

With these new airs Berman arrives at the last stop on his journey by docking in New York, which is seen as an absolute symbol for XX century modernity; although it is one in which the "selva" makes itself comfortable and its protagonist this time is not some man of letters but rather an urbanist like Moses. Here, in addition to the vibrant and brilliant tone of the previous chapters, we must add some biographical details that give personal and political dramaticism to his reflection. Recalling memories from his childhood in the Bronx, Berman contrasts the daily life of the streets -simple, but solid- with the Bronx of the 60s, characterized by burnt out buildings, piles of rubbish, and drug abuse.

What had occurred in between? In urbanistic terms the construction of an urban motorway through the centre of the Bronx had de-structured it. And in politico-cultural terms the whirlwind of 'development devastation' that Moses finished representing. Moses, like Faust, started by creating great new schemes –paths

through parks, the current design of Central Park,...- which could have him interpreted as a “true creator of new material and social possibilities”. But in his development and evolution Moses was both a mere executor of directives and a destructor, and flattened everything behind him to the point where he seemed to enjoy the devastation. Berman’s pages that evoke this destruction are enormously profound and sensitive and show that when he writes he puts on the table a part of his life, with its hopes and pains, so that we can share and dialogue with him.

From all this decadence Berman draws a theoretical lesson: “the evolution of Moses and his works in the 1950s underscores another important fact about the postwar evolution of culture and society: the radical splitting-off of modernism from modernization”. This is a rupture that leads Berman to highlight a clear difference between the modernism of the XIX and start of the XX centuries and the modernism that began to be forged from the 1960s onwards.

During the 60s, and afterwards, Berman differentiates three modernisms: the marginal, the negative and the affirmative, -represented in this same order by Roland Barthes, Harold Rosenberg and Robert Venturi-, which are going to be the precursors of post-modernist culture. These three modernisms do not communicate with each other, nor with society. They are simplified and unilateral versions of the previous modernism -with one thing in common: ‘their amusement in the fragmentation of life’- and do not contribute a significant story for the life of flesh and blood people as the modernism that preceded it did; with all its paradoxes and ambivalences. This is the unifying thread that has broken and that has left current modernisms rotten as political, social and cultural projects. Fragments remain that we can go and visit in each one of the ‘artistic corners’; although the richness of life in these shared public spaces has been lost. It could be said that all these modernisms, whether actively or passively, accepted Le Corbusier’s war cry: “We must kill the street”.

Berman believes, however, that it is possible to repair modernism. Not to construct *any* modernism, but rather one that is humanist, like that which has been talked about throughout this article, and which emanates from his work. This must be given, with all its contradictions and conflicts- socially critical meaning “as part of the psychic fullness”, profoundly human; a *humanist modernism* that accurately summarizes the key political theory from which Berman speaks and from the interpretation of his work. His aim is to recover the work of Jane Jacobs in favour of a modernism anchored in the “openness and democratic feeling of the street”; or the creativity of urban artists like Claes Oldenburg and his view of the street as a metaphoric mural; or that of Octavio Paz; or other social groups, artists and musicians who speak and act without forgetting the daily life of ordinary people. And: “the process of modernization, even as it exploits and torments us, brings our energies and imaginations to life, drives us to grasp and confront the world that modernization makes, and to strive to make it our own”. For that reason modernist culture will continue developing new perspectives and expressions of life, given that “the same economics and social drives that endlessly transform the world around us, both for good and for evil, also transform the inner lives of the men and women who fill this world and make it go”. Life on the street may be reduced, but it will never completely disappear. There will always be space to reconstruct a *modernist humanism* capable of aspiring to a freer and more just society. Although the hows and whys, and the difficulty of its implementation, is a complex issue that needs to be addressed in future works.

In sum, the publication of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* did not only bring happiness, but was also accompanied by no small amount of sadness. A short while after finishing the book Berman suffered an irreparable loss: his five year old son Marc, “was taken from” him. As Berman said, citing Ivan Karamazov, the death of a child makes a person want to return their ticket to the universe. “But he does not give it back. He keeps on fighting and loving; he keeps on keeping on”. And, despite his deteriorating health –in which he suffered a stroke in the 1980s that left him with negative consequences for the rest of his life, such as seizures and sleep apnea-, that is what he did. Berman picked himself up and climbed back on board the flight.

Following *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* he published a collection of articles (see below) under the title *Adventures in Marxism*, and he continued his long collaboration with *Dissent* with some of his most successful texts. And in 2006 he wrote his book *On the Town*, with which he again showed his capacity to write *great stories* full of cheer and hope for people. As he wrote in *On the Town*: “I’m Still Here”.

On the Town represents a great tribute to his city. It is a journey through Time Square studying its changes in the public (and private) spaces that shape it (from Broadway up to 42nd street). The fact that the public square appears again is not by chance. Berman had already written about it in previous works, although in this case it has to be said that it is more than just a functional square (as it is a main square); what it really is is a street intersection.. But the modernism of *On the Town* is sufficiently rich to address separately, as it would require much more time and space; in the same way as many of the questions that we have noted and left pending throughout this article. For its human value, for a *humanist modernism* –filled with profound ethical convictions- and because Berman was one of the great political theorists at the end of the XX century, there is sufficient reason to better know his thought and go deeper into it with the same rigour and passion that characterized his whole life and work. This article represents only a small contribution to that. The task requires many more articles to come and enlarge that “broad and open way” that his work left in the air.

In conclusion, we shall conform ourselves by recalling the words of Walzer in reference to the last lecture that Berman gave in CUNY's Great Hall, and which reflects his profound human value:

"The Hall was packed with people of all ages who admired Marshall and who loved him. He climbed the steps to the podium like an old man, but he spoke of this city with the ardor of a young man. When he finished, we all stood, everyone stood, and applauded. And I thought, this is the way it should be".

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1]. Albores, Jesus, "Marshall Berman, el filósofo que llevo a Marx al Bronx", *El Pais* (11/10/2013).
- [2]. Anderson, Perry, "Modernity and revolution" in *New Left Review* 114, March-April (1984).
- [3]. Baudelaire, Charles, "El Viaje", in *Las flores del mal*, RBA editores (Barcelona, 1992).
- [4]. Benjamin, Walter, *Libro de los pasajes*, Akal (Madrid, 2005).
- [5]. Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, Simon and Schuster (New York, 1982).
- [6]. Berman, Marshall, "The signs in the street. A Response to Perry Anderson", in *New Left Review* 114, March-April (1984).
- [7]. Berman, Marshall, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, Penguin Books (London, 1988).
- [8]. Berman, Marshall, *Todo lo solido se desvanece en el aire. La experiencia de la modernidad*, Siglo XXI (Madrid, 1988).
- [9]. Berman, Marshall, *Adventures in Marxism*, Verso (London, New York, 1999).
- [10]. Berman, Marshall, "Brindis por la modernidad", in Nicolas Casullo, *El debate modernidad-posmodernidad*, Retórica ediciones (Buenos Aires, 2004).
- [11]. Berman, Marshall, *la diaria*, "Entrevista a Marshall Berman: Marx y el modernismo" (26/12/2008).
- [12]. Berman, Marshall, *The Politics of Authenticity. Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*, Verso (London, 2009).
- [13]. Berman, Marshall, *On the Town*, Verso (London, New York, 2009).
- [14]. Berman, Marshall, "De ruinas y horizontes. Una conversación con Marshall Berman", in Jorge
- [15]. Brenna and Francisco Carballo, *De ruinas y horizontes: la modernidad y sus paradojas (Homenaje a Marshall Berman)*, Universidad Autónoma de México (Mexico, 2014).
- [16]. CUNY, Webpage, <http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/we-remember/2013/09/16/marshall-berman-professor-dies-at-72/> (accessed December 2, 2017)
- [17]. Díaz, Jose Javier, "Los tiempos de la modernidad. A proposito de Marshall Berman", *Historiografías*, 11, Enero-Junio (2016).
- [18]. Levinson, Mark, "Remembering Marshall Berman", *Dissent*, (in <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/remembering-marshall-berman>, 17/09/2013) (accessed 15, 2017).
- [19]. Merrifield, Andy, "Marshall Berman, 1840-2013", *Radical Philosophy*, 183 January/February (United Kingdom, 2014).
- [20]. Radar (Sunday supplement of *Diario Página/12*), "Entrevista a Marshall Berman: Nueva York, el 11-S y el mundo en el que vivimos" (in <http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/we-remember/2013/09/16/marshall-berman-professor-dies-at-72/>, 22/07/2007) (accessed September 15, 2017).
- [21]. Roiz, Javier, *La recuperacion del buen juicio*, editorial Foro Interno (Madrid, 2003).
- [22]. Roiz, Javier, *A Vigilant Society. Jewish Thought and the State in Medieval Spain*, Suny Press (New York, 2013).
- [23]. Walzer, Michael, "Remembering Marshall Berman", *Dissent*, (in <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/remembering-marshall-berman>, 17/09/2013) (accessed November 5, 2017).
- [24]. Walzer, Michael, "Reading the Signs in the Streets with Marshall Berman", *Dissent*, 12, April (2017).