



(Left: Cover art for *The Castle* by Erwin Fabian, right: illustration based on Kafka's novel by Bill Bragg)

What is the relationship between the city and consciousness in the modernist novel? Our course borrows its title from German sociologist Georg Simmel's 1903 essay, where he describes "the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions" that make up the daily experience of urban life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. How did this accelerating, fragmented experience make its way to the foreground of novelistic representation, altering narrative style through the formal experiments authors pursued in order to translate phenomenological experience? In modernist writings, the city and the new technological experiences it offers its inhabitants takes center stage; characters and their subjectivities cannot be separated from their apprehension of the spaces that surround them. Innovation in communications, transportation and architecture annihilated the tyranny of distance and transformed the scale of human habitations, and these changes left their mark on literary worlds, where characters find themselves more and more unable to orient themselves in spaces grown unfamiliar.

Throughout our course we will consider the stakes of representing place in all its modern disorientation and think through how some of the key artistic and intellectual movements of the first half of the twentieth century (existentialism, the Harlem Renaissance, the new novel) can better be understood by consideration of the cities in which they emerged.

Key texts will include works by Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, John Dos Passos, Nella Larsen, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Georges Perec.