

Geography 516
Urban Geography: Frontiers of Urban Theory & Research



D. Asher Ghertner

Tuesdays 1:40-4:40, LCH-B120

Instructor: Asher Ghertner

Office: B-238, Lucy Stone Hall

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4-6pm or by appointment

Email: a.ghertner@rutgers.edu

Course Introduction

This is an advanced graduate seminar that sets out to examine frontiers of urban theory and research. We use Henri Lefebvre's foundational writings on urban revolution as our jumping off point, and proceed weekly with an examination of diverse approaches to the study of power, difference and inequality in the contemporary city. Each week begins with a foundational assumption or concept related to urban space, before exploring how ethnographic and critical geographical research can push the boundaries of that assumption/concept and reveal emergent political possibilities and ways of rethinking the city. The course takes a global approach, interrogating the limitations of Northern, metropolitan theory and the often unacknowledged contributions of studies from and on the global South. In treating 'the urban' in the broadest of terms, the aim of the course is for students to come away with a critical 'toolkit' for understanding intersections of space, power, and difference, and some of the methodological openings and risks of current research in the human sciences.

Requirements

This course will be run as a reading-intensive seminar. Each week we will systematically discuss the argument, method and implications of the texts; present our ideas and questions to each other; and generally learn from the diverse backgrounds and perspectives we all bring. Accordingly, it is imperative that everyone comes fully prepared to participate.

Each student will be expected to undertake the following:

(i) To prepare a short one page **critical commentary** on each week's readings and to post this on the Sakai forum for that week by the Monday evening (no later than 8 pm) prior to the Tuesday class.

(ii) To **lead/chair class discussion**, which involves a short (5-10 minute) presentation of the key theoretical and conceptual issues in the readings pertaining to that week. I will circulate a sign-up sheet during week 1 for you to choose the week(s) you'd like to present. This will often be done in groups of two, and you will likely have the opportunity to present more than once in the semester.

Course paper

The main assignment for this course is a ~20 page paper that deploys concepts from the course to an issue, debate, theme, or phenomenon of your choosing. The purpose of the term essay is to demonstrate that you can leverage theoretical insights from the seminar to make an intellectually rigorous argument around an empirical or philosophical problem of your choosing.

Assessment

Students will be assessed according to the following scheme:

Critical commentaries & presentations	35%
Classroom participation	20%
Course Paper	45%
Total	100%

Readings

Required course texts:

- Harvey, David. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso.
- Holston, James. 2008. *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press.
- Goldstein, Daniel. 2004. *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia*. Duke University Press.
- Weizman, Eyal. 2007. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso.
- Hsing You-Tien. 2010. *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China*. Oxford University Press.

All additional readings will be posted on the course website on Sakai or placed on reserve in the Alexander Library.

Seminar Outline

Week 1 (September 3rd) – Introduction

Background readings:

- Amin, Ash. 2013. "The Urban Condition: A Challenge to Social Science," *Public Culture* 25(2).
- Sassen, Saskia. 2010. "The City: Its Return as a Lens for Social Theory," *City, Culture and Society*, 1: 3-11.

Week 2 (September 10th) - Urban revolution

We begin this week with Henri Lefebvre's seminal theorization of the urban revolution and the various ways it has been interpreted and critiqued. Key here is the role of land/real estate as what Lefebvre calls the "secondary circuit" of capital, or what David Harvey discusses in terms of the spatial fix. We will also raise questions related to more popular political and policy dimensions of the term.

Readings:

- Smith, Neil. 2003. Forward. In Lefebvre, H., *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. vii-xxiii.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2003. "From the City to Urban Strategy," from *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp.1-22.
- Lefebvre, Henri. "Industrialization and Urbanization" and "Theses on the City, the Urban and Planning," In *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 65-86 & 177-184.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. Chapter 1, *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Merrifield, Andy. 2002. "Henri Lefebvre: The Urban Revolution," from *Metromarxism*. London: Routledge, pp. 71-92.
- Harvey, David. 2001. "Globalization and the 'spatial fix'," *Geographische Revue* 3(2), 23-30.

Week 3 (September 17th) The right to the city

This week we consider the contemporary applicability of the “right to the city” for understanding urban social movements. Henri Lefebvre, for whom “the right to the city is like a cry and a demand... for a transformed and renewed right to urban life,” is our point of departure, but we also examine how other urban theorists have taken up and modified his ideas, including David Harvey’s most recent book on urban protest. We will also aim to compare “the right to the city,” theorized largely in terms of urban processes in the global North, with a wider range of resistance strategies from societies with different state, legal, and property regimes.

Readings:

Lefebvre, Henri. 1996. ‘The right to the city,’ from *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 147-160.

Harvey, David. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso.

Bayat, Asef. 2000. “From ‘dangerous classes’ to ‘quiet rebels’: Politics of the urban subaltern in the global south,” *International Sociology* 15(3).

Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. “Populations and political society,” from *The Politics of the Governed*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 53-80.

(optional) Benjamin, Solomon. 2008. “Occupancy urbanism: Radicalizing politics and economy beyond policy and programs,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32(3): 719-729.

Week 4 (September 24th) - State space

This week’s lecture begins with Lefebvre’s abstract reflections on the spatial organization of the state and follows with a series of cuts into how the state space has been studied. This work shows how understanding the state not as an undifferentiated entity, but rather an arena of struggle with its own spatial organization, territorial extent, and scalar hierarchy allows for a reconceptualization of modes of political claims-making and spaces of citizenship. When we look beyond the North Atlantic (and sometimes inside it), we see that clear state-society boundaries are difficult to uphold.

Readings:

Lefebvre, Henri. 2003. “Space and the state,” in Brenner, N., Jessop, B., Jones, M. & Macleod, G. (Eds.) *State/Space: A Reader*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.

Brenner, Neil. 2004. “The state spatial process under capitalism: A framework for analysis,” in *New State Spaces*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 69-113.

Ghertner, D. Asher. 2011. “Gentrifying the state, gentrifying participation: Elite governance programs in Delhi,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(3): 504-532.

Ferguson, James, & Gupta, Akhil. 2002. “Spatializing states: toward an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality,” *American Ethnologist* 29(4), 981-1002.

Anjaria, Jonathon. 2011. “Ordinary states: Everyday corruption and the politics of space in Mumbai,” *American Ethnologist*, 38(1), 58-72.

Allen, John & Cochrane, Allen. 2010. “Assemblages of State Power: Topological Shifts in the Organization of Government and Politics,” *Antipode*, 42(5), 1071-1089.

(optional) Swyngedouw, Eric, Moulaert, F. & Rodriguez, A. 2002. “Neoliberal urbanization in Europe: Large-scale urban development projects and the New Urban Policy,” *Antipode*, 34, 542-577.

Week 5 (October 1st) – Urban citizenship

This week moves from the spatiality of the state to the practices of citizenship. Whereas citizenship has been studied historically as a form of political belonging linked to nation-states, recent scholarship has pushed the term, suggesting that citizenship in the 21st century is increasingly organized through metropolitan forms of struggle that, through everyday practices, empower, parody, or subvert state agendas. This urban citizenship, Holston and Das suggest, must be understood as a contested set of vulnerabilities and privileges that are assembled and performed, not given and received.

Readings:

Holston, James. 2008. *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press.

Das, Veena. 2011. "State, citizenship, and the urban poor," *Citizenship Studies* 15: 319-333.

AlSayyad, Nezar & Roy, Ananya. 2006. "Medieval Modernity: On Citizenship and Urbanism in a Global Era," *Space and Polity* 10(1): 1-20.

Week 6 (October 8th) – Infrastructural politics

This week we consider infrastructure as a technology of city building and as a key arena of urban political mobilization. How have changing models of urban service delivery, such as water privatization, shaped political struggle and neighborhood identity? How does the study of infrastructure as a socio-political system contribute to a richer understanding of how urban residents interact with, access, and know the state? What might it mean to examine the materiality of urban politics, or to treat sewers, pipes, wires, and bridges as vibrant political objects?

Readings:

Kaika, Maria and Erik Swyngedouw. 2000. "Fetishising the modern city: The phantasmagoria of urban technological networks." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24: 122-148.

Graham, Stephen and Simon Marvin. 2001. "The Collapse of the Integrated Ideal" and "Social Landscapes of Splintering Urbanism," in *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities, and the Urban Condition*. Routledge, pp. 90-136 & 219-303.

Kooy, M. and Karen Bakker. 2008. "Technologies of government: Constituting subjectivities, spaces, and infrastructures in colonial and contemporary Jakarta," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32: 375-391.

Anand, Nikhil. 2010. "Ignoring power: Knowing leakage in Mumbai's water supply," In Anjaria, J. and C. McFarlane (eds) *Urban Navigations: Politics, Space and the City in South Asia*. New Delhi: Routledge, pp. 191-212.

Latour, Bruno. 1992. "Where are the missing masses? The sociology of a few mundane artifacts," In W.E. Bijker and J. Law (eds) *Shaping Technology/Building Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 225-258.

Week 7 (October 15th) – Waste

This week considers the dialectics of waste and value, belonging and unbelonging, beauty and filth in the contemporary city. How are wasted materials and bodies managed in the dense circulations and metabolic circuits of the urban life-world? How does the study of the city from its sewers, slums and landfills change what we understand the production of the urban to mean?

Readings:

- Venn, Couze. 2006. 'Rubbish, the Remnant, Etcetera,' *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2-3): 44-46.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2005. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. London: Polity Press (selections).
- Wright, Melissa. 1999. "The Dialectics of Still Life: Murder, Women, and Disposability," *Public Culture* 11: 453-474.
- Ferguson, James. 1999. "Global Disconnect: Abjection and the Aftermath of Modernism", from *Expectations of Modernity: Myth and the Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 234-254.
- Beall, Jo. 2006. "Dealing With Dirt and the Disorder of Development: Managing Rubbish in Urban Pakistan," *Oxford Development Studies* 34(1): 81-97.
- Gidwani, Vinay. 2013. "Value struggles: Waste work and urban ecology in Delhi," In A. Rademacher and S. Sivaramakrishnan (eds) *Ecologies of Urbanism: Metropolitan Civility and Sustainability*. Hong Kong University Press, pp. 169-200.
- McFarlane, Colin. 2008. "Governing the contaminated city: Infrastructure and sanitation in colonial and postcolonial Bombay," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32(2): 415-435.

Week 8 (October 22nd) – Margins and marginality

Urban marginality was a hotly contested term in the 1970s, when Perlman famously challenged the concept with her claim that marginality was a myth. In the wake of structural adjustment programs and the neoliberal doctrine that followed, the ascendance of structural unemployment throughout the world has led marginality to return as a key sociological term (see Davis and Wacquant). How do so-called surplus or redundant populations make their presence felt in settings that no longer even pretend to have the capacity, or the will, to include them? In the absence of the promise of economic inclusion, how do the poor retain what Appadurai calls the "capacity to aspire," and with what political stakes? How do they assemble the means to overcome precarity in resource- and infrastructure-scarce environments?

Readings:

- Perlman, Janice. 1975. "Rio's Favelas and the Myth of Marginality," *Politics & Society*, 5(2): 131-160.
- Davis, Mike. 2006. "A Surplus Humanity?" in *Planet of Slums*. London: Verso, pp. 174-198.
- (skim) Wacquant, Loic. 2010. "The Rise of Advanced Marginality," from *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*. London: Polity Press, pp. 229-256.
- Auyero, Javier. 1999. "This is a lot like the Bronx, isn't it? Lived experiences of marginality in an Argentine slum," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 23(1), 45-69.
- Perlman, Janice. 2004. "Marginality: From Myth to Reality in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro," In Roy, A. and N. AlSayyad (eds) *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia*. Washington: Lexington Books, pp. 105-146.
- Appadurai, Arjun (2013). "The Capacity to Aspire," From *The Future as Cultural Fact*. London: Verso, pp. 179-198.
- Simone, Abdoumalig. 2004. "People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16(3): 407-439.
- Butler, Judith and Athena Athanasiou. 2013. "The logic of dispossession," in *Dispossession: the Performative in the Political*, London: Polity, pp. 10-31.

Week 9 (October 29th) – No Class

(Asher away for talk at the University of Chicago, but optional Thursday afternoon session to workshop paper ideas and text)

Week 10 (November 5th) – Violence at the margins

Urban peripheries and frontiers have long been studied as sites of lawlessness and violence. Such violence at the margins of the law and city have been understood historically to be indications of marginal(ized) communities' search for autonomy vis-à-vis the state. This week we read a contrasting argument: Goldstein's seminal arguments about violence as a performance of political belonging and a claim to the city.

Goldstein, Daniel. 2004. *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia*. Duke University Press.

Butler, Judith and Athena Athanasiou. 2013. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. London: Polity, (selections).

Week 11 (November 12th)– Disciplinary power

This week considers the uses of architecture and planning as technologies of discipline. To what extent can Foucault's diagram of the panopticon be extended into contemporary forms of city making, and what are the gaps in disciplinary power that allow for political openings and novel forms of dissent?

Readings:

Foucault, Michel. 1975. "Panopticism" from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage, pp. 195-230.

Weizman, Eyal. 2007. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso.

Allen, Lori. 2008. "Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 23(3): 453-487.

Week 12 (November 19th) – Governing the city

This week examines political technologies used to know, organize and manage urban territories and populations: maps, surveys, censuses, plans and the like. How do states and other authorities direct interventions into densely populated, constantly changing urban environments, without relying on the ever-present oversight and disciplinary gaze we considered last week? How do they simplify dynamic ground realities into plans, and how do they use plans, maps and other calculative instruments to direct the population towards what Foucault called "convenient ends"?

Readings:

Foucault, Michel. 2007. Lectures 1 and 4 of *Security, Territory, Population*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Joyce, Patrick. 2003. "Maps, numbers and the city: Knowing the governed," From *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*. London: Verso, pp. 20-61.

Osborne, Thomas & Nikolas Rose. 1999. "Governing the city: Notes on the spatialisation of virtue," *Environment and Planning D* 17: 737-760.

Appadurai, Arjun. 2002. "Deep democracy: Urban governmentality and the horizon of politics," *Public Culture*, 14(1), 21-47.

Ghertner, D. Asher 2010. "Calculating without numbers: Aesthetic governmentality in Delhi's slums," *Economy and Society*, 39(2), 185-217.

Week 13 (Nov 26th) – Planetary urbanization or urban revolution?

We turn this week to the urban revolution underway in China through Hsing's *The Great Urban Transformation*. In particular, we consider how informal property markets emerge and operate in the interstices of China's centralized party apparatus and its rapidly expanding property market. We also contrast the grounded dynamics traced by Hsing with recent triumphant speculations on "planetary urbanization."

Hsing You-Tien. 2010. *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China* Oxford University Press.

Shin, Hyun Bang. 2011. "Vertical accumulation and accelerated urbanism: the East Asian experience" in Mathew Gandy (Ed) *Urban Constellations*. Jovis, pp. 48-53.

Brenner, Neil and Schmid, Christian. 2011. "Planetary Urbanization," in Mathew Gandy (Ed) *Urban Constellations*. Jovis, pp. 10-13.

Week 14 (December 3rd) – TBA

Course participants to choose monographs for the final two course meetings

Possible books to consider:

Simone, Abdoumalig. 2009. *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads*. London: Routledge.

Chattopadhyay, Swati. 2012. *Unlearning the City: Infrastructure in a New Optical Field*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Soja, Ed. 2010. *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Boo, Katherine. 2012. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*. New York: Random House.

Bourgeois, Phillipe and Schonberg, Jeff. 2009. *Righteous Dopefiend*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 15 (December 10th) - Wrap-up session

----- Paper due December 13th -----