

USP 689 Advanced Urban Politics and Sociology – Fall 2022

Urban Center 311 | Thursdays 9am – 11:40am

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Office hours by appointment



COURSE INTRODUCTION

What is “critical” theory and how is it relevant to the study of the city? How can it help us understand the geographies of urbanization and social change? Urbanist Neil Brenner writes that critical urban theory “insists that another, more democratic, socially just and sustainable form of urbanization is possible” and “involves the critique of ideology and the critique of power, inequality, injustice and exploitation, at once within and among cities.” The approaches we use to do so, however, are widely debated. This reading-intensive, discussion-centered graduate seminar will expose students to a variety of critical social theories relevant to the study of cities and the social process that shape them.

This seminar will introduce foundational concepts, thinkers, and trajectories in critical theory. As a class, we will aim to understand what critical theory *is*, what it’s critical *of*, and how best to utilize it in your own scholarly engagement with urban studies. The goal of the course is a deeper examination of a wide variety of critical theories, and as such we will oftentimes abstract out from patently urban or geographical concerns with the intention of applying our theoretical encounters in urban contexts. We will begin by surveying topics such as capitalism, psychoanalysis, and power before turning our attention to race, settler- and de-colonization, gender, sexuality, and affect. None of these topics exist in a vacuum, and as such, each week/theme attempts to loop in several intersecting topics so as to reflect the complex reality of the world(s) we are embedded in.

Generally speaking, critical theory is a broad field of thinking meant to deconstruct and challenge the (unjust) status quo, especially attentive to the position(s) of the marginalized, colonized, and oppressed. As I see it, critical theory is oppositional to white supremacy, capitalism, and cis heteropatriarchy; its critiques concern the structural, the psychoanalytic, and the embodied; and it is as concerned with building new worlds as it is with challenging current organizations of society. But it is also unsettled; much of what we call critical theory is still being worked out. With that in mind, many of the course’s themes and readings are intended to raise as many questions as they answer. This course, then, aims to open a window into some of these contested threads with the hope that students might venture deeper down the rabbit hole(s)

that suit their scholarly aspirations. At the end of the course, students should be equipped with a strong foundation in the key theoretical and conceptual vocabularies necessary to do so.

COURSE TEXTS

Plan to read about 75-100 pages of dense academic prose per week. Given the reading-intensive nature of the course, you should read *strategically* (see below). In general, it will be helpful to read these in the order listed on the syllabus. We will mostly be reading journal articles, book chapters, and a handful of videos and podcasts, all of which will be available as PDFs or links posted on Canvas. There is no need to buy any books or subscriptions.

An important note on reading: For this class – and throughout your academic careers! – it’s really important to *read strategically*. Remember that *not all text is created equal*. Some passages are worth skimming, while others you will want to read more than once. So unless you’re trying to learn about the particular empirical content area of the paper, don’t waste your time taking notes on the empirics. Instead, your goal should be to identify the authors’ key claims, the arc of their argument, and how they develop and support it. Most authors flag these things throughout, because they want their argument to be clear and concise and to remind the reader where they’ve been and where they’re going with the paper. And most articles follow a relatively formulaic organization, so you’ll quickly learn where to find the lit review, the gaps in the lit / justification for the study, the theoretical framework, the methods, the empirics, and finally the analysis of empirics using the theoretical framework. Remember that while the empirics themselves may not be useful for your own work, understanding *how* an author uses a particular theoretical framework to interpret their empirics – and/or conversely uses these empirics to make a broader theoretical claim – may be incredibly useful to you. This is what you’re looking for – take notes on these things! And be sure to read actively: highlight, star, underline, annotate key passages, whatever, but make sure you do so in a way that helps you can quickly find out the most important bits.

In addition to identifying the central arguments/claims/hypotheses and how they support them, you should also focus on how the author is situating their work. What are the scholarly debates they’re engaging in? What gaps in the literature are they trying to fill? Whose work are they building on? Disagreeing with? It’s also important to think about the research design and methodology. What are the key theoretical constructs or frameworks they’re employing? What kind of data are they using to support their claims and how did they collect it? What are the strengths and weaknesses of their argument and/or methodology?

EXPECTATIONS

General etiquette:

- Please be on time
- Please let me know ahead of time if you will not be in class
- Make sure you are tuned into class discussions and have distractions tuned out to the best of your ability
- Finally, given the various perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing in the room, please be patient and respectful with one another if you disagree. This class may push you into unfamiliar intellectual territory... I want your brain to hurt, but that’s it!

At the graduate level, my job as a professor isn't to lecture, but rather, to structure the course, to ask questions, and to keep us on track. Our goals each week are to critically engage with the readings, to situate them conceptually in relation to the other readings, and to think about their theoretical and methodological implications for your own research. In order for this to work, it's essential that you come to class having read all assigned readings and prepared to discuss them thoughtfully and critically. It will be obvious if you come unprepared.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Class Participation (40%)

Everyone will be required to lead class once during the course of the term. You should begin with a 10-15 minute presentation that identifies and describes the key concepts, arguments, and theories from the week's readings. You should also be prepared to get our discussion started (and keep it going, if necessary!) with a few questions/topics/themes of import. Be sure to look over the discussion questions posted to D2L by your peers as you organize your questions and discussion topics. We will choose presentation weeks in class week 1; no presentations on weeks 2 or 10.

For those not presenting, please remember this is a discussion-driven seminar. You are responsible for reading the assigned materials before class and coming ready to discuss. Everyone must join in the discussion. Remember to "share air", i.e., if you're shy, push yourself to talk; if you're a talker, be conscientious not to dominate the discussion.

Weekly Discussion (30%)

Everyone except the week's presenter will be required to post a response to the week's readings **by noon each Wednesday** (be early if possible – that will give the weeks' presenter extra time to prepare). These responses should be posted to Canvas and include any questions, comments, and/or critiques that the readings raised. Importantly, the discussion folders will not be available beyond the due date – I am quite strict about this!

As a note – in your discussion responses, it would be very helpful to think about the patently urban implications of the theories we will be studying: what might these theoretical positions contribute to a better understanding of the city? This is especially true in weeks where we don't have many (if any) urban-specific theories.

"Theory Drop" Assignment (30%)

This short final paper (~3000-3500 words) should be a well-structured essay that functions like the "theory drop" section for a publishable paper or thesis/dissertation chapter. A "theory drop" (not an official moniker, I'm borrowing this term from Prof. McClintock) is the part of a paper that describes its theoretical underpinnings to the reader and justifies its use for a specific case; it usually occupies some area of a paper's literature review (after the intro, before the empirics).

Your paper should do the following: competently define relevant theoretical concepts; weave those concepts together such that they don't read as disparate pieces (i.e. don't just *list* them, *link* them); describe how you are building on these concepts (i.e. discuss what they miss or where you

see the need for further theoretical development); and briefly apply the concepts to the topic of your interest (i.e. how will you use them).

Remember that we are working with theory in this class, so theory should be central to the paper's content. On other words, I'm not looking for papers that are focused on empirics or methodology; these concerns should serve as examples in your papers. Instead, I'm looking for papers that grapple with the theories we've encountered. Again, think of this assignment as the theoretical underpinning of your eventual thesis or dissertation – use it as an opportunity to really unpack the theories that you are drawn to.

GRADING AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I will be using the following rubric for grading:

- A+ or A: Demonstrates original thought and synthesis of ideas, sophisticated, cogent analysis, and is clearly written or presented. Excellent work.
- A- or B+: Presents above average analysis with appropriate evidence to support the ideas and is clearly written or presented. Good work.
- B: Shows a basic level of understanding, with analysis limited to the most obvious arguments. Writing is competent. Adequate work.
- B- or below: Misunderstands or misrepresents the material or is so poorly written/presented that it obscures the analysis. Inadequate work.

You are graduate students and adults, so I don't need to elaborate on plagiarism and related issues of academic integrity as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct. I take this seriously, as I expect you to. Please see me if you have any questions about proper citation practices.

COURSE CONSIDERATIONS

This is an in-person class. In the era of Covid, however, it's always a possibility that we may need to shift online (to Zoom through Canvas). *If* that happens, please be aware of the following:

Our use of such technology is governed by FERPA, the [Acceptable Use Policy](#) and PSU's [Student Code of Conduct](#). A record of all meetings and recordings is kept and stored by PSU, in accordance with the Acceptable Use Policy and FERPA. Your instructor will not share recordings of your class activities outside of course participants, which include your fellow students, TAs/GAs/Mentors, and any guest faculty or community-based learning partners that we may engage with. **You may not share recordings outside of this course.** Doing so may result in disciplinary action.

STUDENT RESOURCES

Access and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities. PSU values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. My goal is to create a learning environment that is equitable, useable, inclusive, and welcoming. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify me. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability

Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. Call 503-725-4150 or email drc@pdx.edu. The DRC website is <https://www.pdx.edu/drc>. If you already have accommodations, please contact me to make sure that I have received a faculty notification letter and discuss your accommodations.

Title IX. Portland State is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based harassment and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or sexual harassment, know that help and support are available. Information about PSU's support services on campus, including confidential services and reporting options, can be found on PSU's Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website at: <http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/get-help> or you may call a confidential IPV Advocate at 503-725-5672 or schedule Online at <https://psuwrc.youcanbook.me>. You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to:

- PSU's Title IX Coordinator: Julie Caron by calling 503-725-4410, via email at titleixcoordinator@pdx.edu or in person at Richard and Maureen Neuberger Center (RMNC), 1600 SW 4th Ave, Suite 830
- Deputy Title IX Coordinator: Yesenia Gutierrez by calling 503-725-4413, via email at yesenia.gutierrez.gdi@pdx.edu or in person at RMNC
- Deputy Title IX Coordinator: Dana Walton-Macaulay by calling 503-725-5651, via email at dana26@pdx.edu or in person at Smith Memorial Union, Suite, 1825 SW Broadway, Suite 433 D2L.

Please be aware that all PSU faculty members and instructors are required to report information of an incident that may constitute prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell me about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or student code of conduct, I have to share the information with my supervisor, the University's Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. However, the Title IX Coordinators will keep the information confidential and refer you to a confidential advocate. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module Creating a Safe Campus in your D2L.

Other resources you should know about:

For information on assistance with food, housing, financial, utility, and childcare, please visit: <https://www.pdx.edu/dos/student-resources>

The Office of Diversity & Multicultural Student Services (Smith Memorial Union 425) provides structured, academic support service, advising, referrals, and advocacy for first-generation college students, low- income and others facing special challenges. <http://www.pdx.edu/dmss/>

The Learning Center (Millar Library 245) mission is to foster the learning process by empowering PSU students to accomplish their academic and personal goals. In addition to helping with current coursework, academic support services can assist in developing effective learning strategies. <http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/>

The Writing Center (Cramer 188) will help you with all varieties of projects, including class assignments, resumes, application essays, presentations, and creative writing. It aims to help writers at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to the final draft. You can schedule an appointment online and their website also suggests ideas and strategies for completing writing assignments. <http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/>

COURSE SCHEDULE (Meetings every Thursday @ 9am)

****Note – make sure to check page numbers!**

<p>Week 1 9/29</p>	<p>Intro to Critical Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LeGuin, The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas • Foucault & Deleuze, Intellectuals & Power • Žižek, They Live <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVwKjGbz60k • Woods, Life After Death
<p>Week 2 10/6</p>	<p>Marx and Political Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvey, Companion to Capital Vol 1; pgs. 9-47 & pgs. 85-92 • Marx, Ch. 26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch26.htm • Estranged Labor: Karl Marx on Alienation (Podcast) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://revolutionarylefradio.libsyn.com/alienation • Hackworth, W.E.B. DuBois and the Urban Political Economy Tradition in Geography
<p>Week 3 10/13</p>	<p>Racial Capitalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections from Black Marxism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foreword, xi-xiii ○ Preface, xxvii-xxxii ○ Intro, 1-5 • Melamed, Racial Capitalism • There Are No Utopias with Robin D.G. Kelley (Podcast) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://www.npr.org/2022/02/20/1082030426/there-are-no-utopias • Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI • Dantzer, The Urban Process Under Racial Capitalism
<p>Week 4 10/20</p>	<p>Psychoanalysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lapsley, Psychoanalytic Criticism • Hook, What Is “Enjoyment as a Political Factor”? • Fanon, The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized (from <i>Black Skin White Masks</i>) • Frank, Gentrification and Neighborhood Melancholy • Recommended: Why Theory? Desire and Drive (Podcast) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://soundcloud.com/whytheory/desire-drive

Week 5 10/27	(Bio/Necro) Power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foucault, <i>The History of Sexuality</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Method, pgs. 92-102 ○ Right of Death & Power Over Life, pgs. 135-145 • Foucault, <i>Security, Territory, Population</i>, pgs. 1-23 • Mbembe, <i>Necropolitics</i>, pgs. 11-40
Week 6 11/3	Settler Colonialism & Decolonization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolf, <i>Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native</i> • Fanon, <i>Wretched of the Earth: On Violence</i> pgs. 1-62 • Tuck & Yang, <i>Decolonization is not a Metaphor</i>
Week 7 11/10	The Plantation & Its Wake <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hartman, <i>Scenes of Subjection</i>, Ch 1: Innocent Amusements, pgs. 17-48 • McKittrick, <i>Plantation Futures</i> • Gilmore, <i>Golden Gulag: What Is to Be Done?</i> pgs 241-248 • Chua, <i>Abolition is a Constant Struggle</i> • Recommended: Always Already Podcast Interview with Frank Wilderson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://alwaysalreadypodcast.wordpress.com/2020/05/11/wilderson-interview/ • Optional: Hartman & Wilderson, <i>The Position of the Unthought</i>
Week 8 11/17	Feminist Theory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federici, <i>Caliban and the Witch: Introduction</i>, pgs. 11-19 • Federici, <i>Wages Against Housework</i> • Lorde, <i>The Master's Tools Will Not Dismantle the Master's House</i> • The Combahee River Collective Statement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/ • Ahmed, <i>Bringing Feminist Theory Home</i> (from <i>Living a Feminist Life</i>) • Optional: DeBeauvoir, <i>Introduction</i>, pgs. xix-xxxvi (from <i>The Second Sex</i>)
Week 9	NO CLASS
Week 12/1	Queer & Affect Theory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butler, <i>Gender Trouble</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Women” as the Subjects of Feminism, pgs. 1-8 ○ From Interiority to Gender Performances, pgs. 183-193 • Berlant & Warner, <i>Sex in Public</i> • Deleuze, <i>Practical Philosophy</i>, Ch. 2, pgs. 17-29 • Cvetkovich, <i>Depression, A Public Feeling: Introduction</i>, pgs. 1-10 • Berlant, <i>Cruel Optimism</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Affect in the Present, pgs. 1-11 ○ After the Good Life, An Impasse, pgs. 191-200

****Finals Week – let’s meet to discuss our term projects (time TBA)***