USP 689 - Advanced Urban Politics & Sociology

**Critical Urban Theory**

CRN: 15399

Prof. Nathan McClintock, Toulan School of Urban Studies & Planning

Fall 2017

Thursdays 9 – 11:40 am  
311 URBN

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.

In this course, we’ll reflect on how various social theories – including those of Marx, Polanyi, Bourdieu, Foucault, and the more recent work of feminist, critical race, and Indigenous scholars – can inform our understanding of cities as social and material spaces produced and reshaped by flows of capital, as well as the way that such processes are mediated by the state and social class, through hegemonic conceptions of, race, and gender, land and property. Running through much of this work are reflections on social change, how it arises, and how it can be mobilized.

We’ll begin with some foundational building blocks of Marxian political economy, drawing on Marx and Harvey, to think about how capital manifests spatially through urbanization. We’ll move on to scholars who have pushed beyond these structural understandings by rethinking political economic categories such as markets [Polanyi], power [Foucault], and class [Bourdieu]. We’ll then draw on work that demonstrates how capitalism works through social constructions [and their lived and material manifestations] of gender [McDowell, Fedeni, and others], race [Oni & Winant, Robinson, McKittrick, Woods and others], and property [Blomley, Coulthard, Hern]. Throughout the course, we’ll complement our readings of these theoretical frameworks with new and recent empirical scholarship, primarily from geography, urban studies, sociology, and planning, but also from anthropology and ethnic studies.

By providing a foundation in the political economy of capitalist urbanization and an introduction to a number of critical theorists and their principal contributions, the course serves as a point of embarkation into the world of critical urbanism. Some of the theoretical lenses we discuss may prove particularly relevant to thesis or dissertation research addressing relationships between urban processes, (in)equity, and action. Course content is primarily of interest to urban studies, planning, geography, sociology, and anthropology graduate students, but may also be of interest to doctoral students in social work, education, and health seeking to understand the urban contexts in which they work.
Course Texts

Plan to read about 150 pages of dense academic prose per week. Given how reading-intensive the course is, 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 and book chapters, available as PDFs or links posted on D2L. We will also be reading the following books in their [near] entirety, so you’ll need to purchase them both:


As we will read significant sections [two or more chapters] from the following books, you might also be interested in picking up a copy, but they're not required:


And now 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 [e.g., post-war housing policy in Saskatoon or informal water provisioning in Paramaribo], 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 (what I call the “theory drop”), 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 highlight, star, underline, annotate key passages, whatever, but do so sparingly, so you can go back and quickly pick 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 classroom etiquette*

- Please be on time so we can start right at 9am.
- Please inform me ahead of time, if possible. If you are unable to come to class for any reason. Barring extenuating circumstances, you must submit a reading response for any day you miss.
USP 689 – Critical Urban Theory – Fall 2017

• Turn off cell-phones. Use of laptops is welcome for note taking, but please respect the rest of us by refraining from checking Facebook, email, or any other distraction. To fight temptation, turn off your Wi-Fi if you have to!
• 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

Reading Responses [40%]

Beginning Week 2, you are responsible for writing a reading response (RR) or précis each week. These should be about 400 to 500 words [ie, one single-spaced page]. Your response should not simply summarize the key argument from the reading; rather, it should synthesize the key insights you take from the ensemble of readings. You should conclude with some thoughtful provocative questions that the readings raise for you. Please use 1” margins, 12pt Times New Roman font, and single-spacing! Please upload your RR to D2L before class each week. I will grade these with a grade of 96, 88, and 80 [my numeric equivalent to a v+, v, or v-, respectively]. You get one freebie, ie, you can skip submitting a RR one week, but you must turn in a response for any week you are absent, barring extenuating circumstances.

Participation [20%]

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 and if you’re a talker, be conscientious not to dominate the discussion.

To help move the discussion forward, come to class each week prepared to discuss the questions that you raised in your RR. You should post at least one of these questions to the week’s Discussion Questions forum on D2L by Wednesday night. You must also thoughtfully respond to at least one question that one of your classmate’s has raised.

Everyone will be required to give a 10 to 15-minute presentation on the readings at least once. You should be prepared to walk us through the key concepts/arguments/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. Look over the discussion questions posted to D2L by your peers as you organize your questions and discussion topics. Please prepare an outline/diagram/visual aid to steward us through this process. This can be a one-page handout, or you can use the blackboard.

Final Paper [40%]

In addition to your weekly reading responses, you are required to write a short final paper [2,500 to 3,000 words]. This should be a well-structured essay that applies some of the theory we’ve covered in the course to your research area of interest. I highly recommend that you make an appointment with me at some point over the course of the term to discuss your final paper topic. Please use 1” margins and single-spaced 12-pt Times New Roman font. Upload to your D2L Dropbox by 12 noon on Th 12/7. Please submit as a Word document (not PDF or .odt) so I can insert comments.
**Grading and Academic Integrity**

My general rubric for graduate-level assignments is as follows:

- **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 as to obscure 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.

**Office hours**: Th 1 – 3 pm [or by appointment] in 350E URBN. It’s best to contact me ahead of time to sign up for a slot, as these tend to fill quickly. My email is n.mcclintock@pdx.edu. Please include “USP 689” in the subject heading if you email me for any issue related to this course.

**Academic accommodations**: If you are a student with a documented disability and are registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC), please contact me immediately to facilitate arranging academic accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through the DRC should contact the DRC immediately at 503-725-4150.

**Other campus resources**

PSU's [Student Code of Conduct](http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault/) makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are strictly prohibited and offenses are subject to the full realm of sanctions. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources on PSU’s Enrollment Management & Student Affairs: Sexual Prevention & Response website at http://www.pdx.edu/sexual-assault.

The PSU Food Pantry offers supplemental food items to currently enrolled PSU students. The pantry is located in SMSU 325. For more information, you can email foodhelp@pdx.edu. For more information on food, housing, financial, utility, and childcare assistance for students, visit [http://www.pdx.edu/studentaffairs/CISFS](http://www.pdx.edu/studentaffairs/CISFS).

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. Visit [http://www.pdx.edu/dmss/](http://www.pdx.edu/dmss/) for info.

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. See [http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/](http://www.pdx.edu/tutoring/) for more info.

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: [http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/](http://www.writingcenter.pdx.edu/). Their website also contains resource pages that suggest ideas and strategies for completing writing projects.
Course Outline & Readings

**Week 1: Introduction**

**Week 2: Capital**
  - Introduction [1-14]
  - Ch.1: Commodities and Exchange: “Chapter 1: The Commodity” [15-47]
  - Ch.3: From Capital to Labor-Power [85-92, 98-105]
  - Ch.1.1. The Two Factors of the Commodity [125-131 or [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S1](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S1)]
  - Ch. 7. The Labor Process and the Process of Producing Surplus Value [283-306 or [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch07.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch07.htm)]
  - Ch. 2: The Urban Process under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis [59-89]
- Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1
- Harvey, *A Companion to Marx’s Capital*
  - Ch. 11: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation [289-313]

**Week 3: Markets**
  - Introduction by Fred Block [excerpt: xxii – xxxviii]
  - Ch. 1: The Hundred Years Peace [3-5]
  - Ch. 2: Conservative Twenties, Revolutionary Thirties [31-32]
  - Ch. 3: “Habitation versus Improvement” [35-44]**
  - Ch. 4: Societies and Economic Systems [45-58]**
  - Ch. 5: Evolution of the Market Pattern [59-70]**
  - Ch. 6: The Self Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money [71-80]**
  - Ch. 11: Man, Nature, and Productive Organization [136-140]**
  - Ch. 12: Birth of the Liberal Creed [141-157]**
  - Ch. 13: Birth of the Liberal Creed [Cont’d]: Class Interest and Social Change [158-170]**
  - Ch. 14: Market and Man [171-173, 183-186]
  - Ch. 15: Market and Nature [187-192]
  - Ch. 21: Freedom in a Complex Society [256, 265-267]


**Week 4: Power**

  o Introduction [1-9]
  o Ch. 1: Foucault’s theory of power [13-26]
  o Ch. 2: Disciplinary power [27-39]
  o Ch. 3: Biopower [41-54]

  o Ch. 2: 14 January 1975 [23-40]


**Week 5: Class**

  o Introduction [1-6]
  o Part II: Field Theory [41-81]
  o Ch. 5: Social class [87-99]
  o Ch. 6: Capital [101-117]

  o Ch. 1: Social Space and Symbolic Space [1-13]


**Week 6: Gender**

  o Ch. 1. Introduction: Place and Gender [1-33]

  o Introduction [11-17]
  o The Accumulation of Labour and the Degradation of Women [68-75, 92-100]
  o Introduction: New Frontier’s in Life’s Work [1-18]

**Week 7: Race I**

  o Introduction [1-16]
  o Ch. 4: A Theory of Racial Formation [105-136]
  o Ch.1: Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development [9-28]

**Week 7: Race II**


**Week 9: Land, Property, [Un]Settling I**

  o Ch. 1: Welcome to the Hotel California [1-29]
  o Ch. 4: Land and the Postcolonial City [105-138]
  o Introduction: Subjects of Empire [1-24]
  o Ch. 2: For the Land [51-78]
  o Conclusion: Lessons from Idle No More [151-179]

**Week 10: Land, Property, [Un]Settling II**

## Schedule and Key Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key Theorist(s)</th>
<th>Some Key Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9/28</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Brenner Derickson</td>
<td>Critical urban theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10/5</td>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>Marx Harvey</td>
<td>Commodities, use vs. exchange value, value / labor theory of value, production, general formula of capital (M-C-M'), abstract labor, socially necessary labor time, surplus value, labor power, class, industrial reserve army, division of labor, accumulation, crisis, devaluation, fixed capital, circuits of capital, circuit-switching, uneven development, primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/12</td>
<td>Markets</td>
<td>Polanyi</td>
<td>Embeddedness, double movement, fictitious commodities</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>11/16</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Foucault</td>
<td>Force relations, power as exercised, power from below, force vs. resistance, sovereign power, disciplinary power / governmentality, surveillance, biopower, administering life</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>10/19</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Bourdieu</td>
<td>Species of capital [economic, cultural, social, symbolic], distinction, field, habitus, doxa</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>10/26</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>McDowell Federici Meehan &amp; Strauss ...</td>
<td>Precarious work, precarious life, social reproduction [production/reproduction], bodies/embodied practices/bodily performance, materiality, feminization of reproductive labour, flexibilization of labor</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Omi &amp; Winant Robinson McKittrick ...</td>
<td>Racial formation, racialization, racial project, forms of racism [individual, cultural, institutional, structural], racial despotism, racial democracy, racial hegemony, whiteness, white privilege, racial capitalism, racial mode of social regulation + neoliberal regime of accumulation, colorblindness, race-class, plantation logic, plantation futures</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>11/9</td>
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<td>Woods</td>
<td>blues epistemology, Bourbonism, regional blocs</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11/23</td>
<td>Land, Property, (Un)Settling</td>
<td>Coulthard, Blomley</td>
<td>property, ownership model, unsettlement, mapping/remapping Settler colonialism, recognition, dispossession, grounded normativity, transformative vs. affirmative redistribution, decolonization, terra nullius/urbs nullius</td>
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<td>11/30</td>
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Exam Week: No Meeting - FINAL PAPER due to D2L Dropbox by 12 noon on Thursday