Researching cities: beyond universalism and particularity
A collaborative UCLA/UBC seminar

Instructors:
Helga Leitner (UCLA): 1144 Bunche Hall, UCLA hleitner@geog.ucla.edu (Office hours: Th 3:00-5:00pm)

Jamie Peck (UBC): room 134, Department of Geography, UBC jamie.peck@ubc.ca (Office hours: T 1.30-2.30, Th 1.30-3.00)

Eric Sheppard (UCLA): 1170 Bunche Hall, UCLA esheppard@geog.ucla.edu (Office hours: Th 2:00-5:00pm)

Time/space: Tuesdays 3:00-5:50pm,
Room 223, Geography, UBC
Room 270, Powell Library, UCLA

This is an exciting time in urban studies. In this experiment in collaboration, bringing students and faculty from two campuses/cities/countries into a ten-week space of mutual critical exchange, teaching and learning, we seek to move from current high profile debates about urban theory towards methodological questions of empirical research practice. There is a plethora of research methods utilized in critical urban studies, the vast majority of which are qualitative (for exceptions, see: Deborah and Rodrick Wallace (1998) A plague on your houses: How New York was burned down and national public health crumbled. Verso; Peter J. Taylor (2004) World city network: a global urban analysis. Routledge). Qualitative approaches include urban ethnography, interview-based studies, and archival work, but much more besides. While methodological choices are not sutured to ontological and epistemological positions—indeed there is more room for maneuver here than stereotypes about quantitative and qualitative work make room for—particular theoretical approaches have come to be packaged with certain methodological predispositions. In this seminar we seek to unsettle such packages, while carefully attending to how theory and method intersect: How theoretical debates open up methodological possibilities even as methodological practices raise questions about theory.

With this in mind, we divide the seminar into two blocks. We will spend five weeks examining the relation between theory, method and practice, devoting the remaining three weeks to the detailed interrogation of how these intersect in three high profile urban monographs. (The latter will set the stage for student writing projects and for the workshop that will be the culmination of the seminar.) Each week of the seminar will be devoted to in-class discussion of required readings in a videoconferencing format, with all participants having prepared by reading these in advance and posting questions for discussion prior to class.

The heat and light generated by urban theory over the past decade has been matched by a strange absence of attention to questions of method in urban studies (a dearth that has also characterized economic geography: Tickell A, Sheppard E, Peck J, Barnes, T. (eds). (2007) Politics and Practice in Economic Geography. London: Sage). With this in mind, it is our intention to use
this seminar as a basis for a methodological intervention into the field. Student work will be oriented toward realizing such an intervention. (i) From a primer of keywords for significant conceptual-methodological topics in urban studies, individual students will pick one, provide a written report to the class, and present it verbally. (ii) Working in pairs, students will select one monograph (or, with justification, two) from a list developed during the seminar, and write a 5,000 word essay about urban research methodology as enacted in this monograph. If these essays are strong enough, we will seek to publish them together in the form of an edited volume.

A further requirement of ALL participants is attendance at a two-day closing workshop we have organized at the University of California White Mountain Research Center’s Owens Valley Field Station, near Bishop, CA. Financing for accommodation and meals has been secured. This will take place April 2-4 (on the tail end of the AAG meeting in San Francisco, but note we must all leave San Francisco early on Saturday morning). The workshop will provide the vital opportunity for the two groups to spend time together, and to cement collaborations, but it will also play a crucial role in the collective project that we have in mind. This will be a moment to workshop those methodology essays, to sharpen the central arguments, and to draw lessons from across the monographs in question. It will also be the time to make decisions about possible publication.

There will be a Moodle site for the class, moderated from UCLA. Readings will be uploaded here, and we will use it for communication among seminar participants (e.g., posting weekly discussion questions, see below): https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/16W-GEOG250-1. UCLA students in Geog 231 and 250 are automatically enrolled; those from UBC will receive invitations to join.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Key tasks (addition to discussion of readings)</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| January 5 | Introductions and arrangements                             | • Housekeeping arrangements  
• Video conferencing protocols  
• Discuss and augment keyword list (Appendix A)  
• Discuss and augment monograph list (Appendix B) |
| January 12| City and planet: problematizing the global                  | • Further discussion of keywords and monographs  
• Choice of three case study texts for February 23-March 8  
• Prepare to rank preferences |
| January 19| City and governance: neoliberal urbanism and its others     | • Discussion of methodological essay proposals                                                         |
| January 26| City and city: the comparative gesture                      | • Keyword presentations                                                                                     |
| February 2 | City and street: dwelling and travelling                    | • Keyword presentations                                                                                     |
| February 9 | City and the more-than-human world: urban assemblages       | • Keyword presentations                                                                                     |
| February 16| RESEARCH WEEK (UBC Spring Break)                           |                                                                                                             |
| February 23| Case Study 1: TBA                                           | • Keyword presentations                                                                                     |
| March 1   | Case Study 2: TBA                                           | • Keyword presentations                                                                                     |
| March 8   | Case Study 3: TBA                                           | • Keyword presentations                                                                                     |
| March 18  |                                                             | • Methodological essays due                                                                               |
| April 2-4 | Workshop at White Mountain Research Center Retreat, Bishop CA| • Workshopping of methodological essays and keywords                                                      |
Week 1: January 5
Introductions and arrangements

Required preparatory reading: Please read before the first class meeting


Week 2: January 12
City and planet: problematizing the global

Required readings
Further reading
http://www.urbantheorylab.net/publications/

Week 3: January 19
City and governance: neoliberal urbanism and its others

Discussion of methodological essay proposals

Required readings

Further reading
Week 4: January 26
City and city: the comparative gesture

Keyword presentations

Required readings

Further reading

Week 5: February 2
City and street: dwelling and travelling

Keyword presentations

Required readings


**Further reading**


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**Week 7: February 9**

**City and the more-than-human world: urban assemblages**

**Keyword presentations**

**Required readings**


**Further reading**


Farias, I and T Bender, Eds. (2012). *Urban Assemblages: How actor-network theory changes urban...

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**Week 6: February 9**  
RESEARCH WEEK (UBC Spring Break)

**Week 8: February 23**  
**Case Study 1:** first of three selected monographs identified by the class  
*

*Keyword presentations*

**Week 9: March 1**  
**Case Study 2:** second of three selected monographs identified by the class

*Keyword presentations*

**Week 10: March 8**  
**Case Study 3:** third of three selected monographs identified by the class

*Keyword presentations*

**Stoppage time:** White Mountain Research Center Retreat, Bishop CA (April 2-4)

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**ORGANIZATION OF THE SEMINAR, STUDENT WORK AND EVALUATION**

1. **Weekly discussion**  
Students are expected to have read the required material prior to each meeting, and will be responsible for formulating questions as a basis for in-class discussion and analysis of these materials. *All students are expected to participate fully in the discussion each week.* The first
hour will be spent off-line, with the UCLA and UBC groups preparing for the video-conferencing that will occupy the remainder of the seminar.

Each seminar participant will formulate **two questions for discussion each week** based on the week’s readings. Questions may include questions of clarification (issues that were hard to understand and for which some explanation would be important), but should also raise issues for debate. Stimulating issues for debate would be those that arise from a comparative analysis of the week’s readings (rather than a reaction to one of the readings, for example); those that present the issue in a way which does not suggest a simple or one-sided answer; and those that allow differences of opinion to be introduced. **Questions should be submitted to the shared Moodle site by no later than 8 pm on the Monday prior to class.**

The UBC and UCLA groups will draw on these questions to prepare at least two discussion themes for the week.

**2. Keyword primers**
Each student will write one keyword primer, of no more than 1,000 words. For each keyword, primers will be written by two different individuals. Think of these as free-standing short papers written for an advanced undergraduate audience. They should be written in the “dictionary” style (beginning with a clear definition and moving towards a broader and more critical assessment of how this keyword emerged in the urban literature and how it has been interrogated methodologically citing the best known examples/illustrations, key texts, protagonists, etc.), including a short bibliography (no more than 6 items).

A working list of keywords can be found at Appendix A. **Please come to the first class with suggestions for how this list might be prioritized and extended.**

Each pair working on the same keyword will discuss their respective drafts, decide on a format and prepare a ten-minute presentation to the seminar. Presentations will start in week four. Your primers must be shared with all participants via the Moodle site, 24 hours prior to your presentation. After the presentation, we ask you to combine your thinking into a single 1,500 word “entry,” that will be considered for possible publication in a keywords appendix of an edited book on methodology in urban studies. It follows that the text must be **entirely original,** and keep the methodological theme in mind. Feel free to check out other dictionaries, encyclopedia, etc., but avoid derivative discussions. **Make sure to follow the referencing style at Appendix C.**

**3. Methodological essays**
The main writing task is completion of methodological essays reflecting on substantial monographs in urban studies, drawing from a list to be finalized in the first two weeks of the class (monographs written since 2000, with an orientation towards “global” urban studies). We envision these being written jointly by student pairs, as drafts for possible publication in the edited book on methodology in urban studies. These should be approximately 5,000 words
The essays should constitute a methodological critique, constructive deconstruction and positive-but-critical assessment of a significant book or books. Again, please follow the referencing style scrupulously (Appendix C).

Each student will also be tasked with undertaking a peer review of one of the other methodological essays.

A working list of books is at Appendix B. Please come along to the first class with suggestions for how this list might be prioritized and extended.

Each student pair should prepare a brief (1 page) proposal for their essay for discussion and feedback by week 3. The final essay is due by March 18. Following peer review, these essays will be actively workshopped at the White Mountain Research Center Retreat (April 2-4).

If you do not wish to participate in this project, you should provide a proposal by week 3 for an individual seminar paper that you would prefer to write.

4. White Mountain Research Center Retreat (April 2-4)
We will gather at this UC research center, in Bishop, CA, in the afternoon of Saturday April 2, staying until noon on April 4. Accommodation and food will be provided. This will be devoted to finally meeting one another face to face, reflecting on the seminar, and (most importantly) workshopping the methodological essays and keyword primers in order to refine these for publication. Each pair would present their essay in turn for feedback and discussion. Peer reviewers will serve as discussants. If all goes well, these essays will provide the basis for an edited book with a focus on methodological issues in urban studies. For the edited collection to work effectively, the whole set of monographs that are reviewed will need to capture the range of work in the field, principal approaches and notable innovations, and (where appropriate) recurring problems, challenges, and blindspots.

GRADING

Your grade will depend on: the quality of your discussion questions and your contributions to general discussion throughout the quarter (30% of grade); the keyword primer and presentation (15%); and the methodology essay (40%); and participation at the Retreat (15%).
Appendix A: Working list of keywords

Inspired by the classic style of Raymond Williams’ Keywords, the purpose of these “backgrounders” is to provide—in aggregate—an introductory guide to the definition, use, and application of key terms, concepts, and formulations in contemporary urban studies.

Please come to week one with suggestions of terms that you think should be added to this working list, and which keywords should be prioritized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agglomeration</th>
<th>Informality</th>
<th>Subaltern urbanism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austerity urbanism</td>
<td>LA School</td>
<td>Suburbanization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago School</td>
<td>Neoliberal urbanism</td>
<td>Urban assemblage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-produced urbanism</td>
<td>Ordinary cities</td>
<td>Urban encounters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative cities</td>
<td>Planetary urbanism</td>
<td>Urban growth machine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dispossession</td>
<td>Postcolonial cities</td>
<td>Urban regime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gating</td>
<td>Postpolitical cities</td>
<td>Urban social movements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gentrification</td>
<td>Relational comparison</td>
<td>Urban mobilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global cities</td>
<td>Right to the city</td>
<td>Urban materialities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Working list of urban monographs

Monographs appropriate for our purposes in the class should demonstrate real heft, and they should represent good examples of their particular “genre” (e.g. Chicago-style ethnographies; urban political economy; archival-based ...). Furthermore, they should be constructed and written in a fashion that is “available” for methodological interrogation and deconstruction. (Part of the process of critique and review will be to “reverse engineer” the author’s methodology: how did s/he assemble the material and arguments for the book; what data collection and analysis strategies were used; what issues of positionality and perspective arise; how reflexive is the text, etc.?) Ideally, the chosen books will display methodological creativity, real depth, and repay the attention that they will be paid. Cumulatively, they should allow us to say something significant about methodological norms, innovations, and challenges in the field of urban studies.

Our goal is that we jointly “own” the final lineup of monographs that we decide upon. This should not just be an aggregation of personal favorites, but a list that speaks to the range, reach, and potential of urban studies. Crucially, there are both methodological and geographical aspects to this question. Our final list cannot be “representative,” but it should display the breadth as well as depth of the field.

Please come to week one with suggestions of books that you think should be added to this working list. We will also have a conversation in week 1 about how to prioritize the revised list.

Abu-Lughod JL (2007) Race, space, and riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles
Adams, Vincanne (2013) Markets of sorrow, labors of faith
Amin, Ash and Thrift, Nigel (2002) Cities: reimagining the urban
Blomley, Nick (2003) Unsettling the city
Bourgois, Philippe (2002) In search of respect: selling crack in El Barrio
Bourgois, Philippe and Schonberg, Jeff (2009) Righteous dopefiend
Caldera, Theresa (2001) City of walls
Dikeç, Mustafa (2007) Badlands of the Republic
Fainstein, Susan (2011) The just city
Friedman, Andrew (2013) Covert capital: US empire in the suburbs of Northern Virginia
Gandy, Matthew (2002) Concrete and clay: reworking nature in New York City
Gandy, Matthew (2014) The fabric of space: water, modernity and the urban imagination
Gotham, Kevin Fox and Greenberg, Miriam (2014) Crisis cities
Gowan T (2010) Hobos, hustlers and backsliders: homeless in San Francisco
Graham, Stephen (2011) Cities under siege: the new military urbanism
Haila, Anne (2016) Urban land rent: Singapore as a property state
Harvey, David (2012) Rebel cities
Hirt, Sonia A (2012) Iron curtains: gates, suburbs and privatization of space in the post-socialist city
Hoffman, Lisa (2010) Patriotic professionalism in urban China
Holston, James (2008) Insurgent citizenship
Ismail, Salwa (2006) Political Life in Cairo’s New Quarters: encountering the everyday state
Iveson, Kurt (2007) Publics and the city
Kaika, Maria (2005) City of flows: modernity, nature, and the city
Kanna, Ahmed (2011) Dubai: the city as corporation
Kern, Leslie (2010) Sex and the revitalized city
Low, Setha (2003) Behind the gates
Masseys, Doreen (2007) World City
McGuirk, Justin (2014) Radical cities: across Latin America in search of a new architecture
Mitchell, Katharyne (2004) Crossing the neoliberal line
Murray, Martin J (2011) City of extremes: the spatial politics of Johannesburg
Murray, Martin (2008) Taming the disorderly city: the spatial landscape of Johannesburg after Apartheid
Perlman, Janice (2010) Favela: four decades of living on the edge in Rio de Janeiro
Ross, Andrew (2011) Bird on fire: lessons from the world’s least sustainable city
Sáf, Lúcia (2007) Life in the metropolis: Mexico City and São Paulo
Samara, Tony Roshan (2011) Cape Town after Apartheid
Simone, AbdouMaliq (2010) City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: movements at the crossroads
Simone, AbdouMaliq (2014) Jakarta, drawing the city near
Söderström, Ola (2014) Cities in relations: trajectories of urban development in Hanoi and Ouagadougou
Storper, Michael (2013) Keys to the city
Zipp S (2010) Manhattan projects: the rise and fall of urban renewal in Cold War New York
Appendix C: Our shared citation style

Please follow this citation style (meticulously!) for keyword primers and methodological essays.

In text citation style:

... civil-society groups but also from the leadership of the government’s own social-policy ministry (Teichman 2008, 2009). Exaggerated faith was placed in the kind of economistic technoscience favored by the World Bank, for whom Levy had worked as a professional economist-cum-policy analyst, an organization later credited for “generously provid[ing] technical advice” during the design, piloting, and startup phases of the program (Levy 2006: 114).

Bibliographic style:


