The theme of this seminar is an exploration of a series of currents in (and around) geographical political economy, going somewhat deeper and wider than is normally possible in a survey course. World-system, regulation, state, and socioeconomic theories will each be the focus of a two-week consideration. This will provide an opportunity to cover some of the territory between influential (earlier) treatments and more recent adaptations and critiques. Consideration of these four broad themes—each of which has its own (spatial) genealogy as well as its own take on spatiality—will be punctuated by interludes on uneven development, relationality, and conjunctural analysis. We will do some surveying of critical economic geography along the way, but just as importantly will seek to locate this eclectic and evolving project in the context of parallel and overlapping currents in political economy and socioeconomics.

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We will maintain a quite intensive reading and work schedule during the term, with the tradeoff of a somewhat shorter final term paper. Each student is required to (a) complete the assigned readings, drafting a 1-2pp reaction paper [summarizing the takeaway conclusions; talking and discussion points for the group] each week for submission (no later than 2pm Wednesday) to the Dropbox folder; (b) serve as a session convenor, reviewing and thematizing the reaction papers, co-chairing in-class discussions; (c) write a 3pp “profile” paper on a key figure in the field, presenting this in written and oral form to the class; (d) write a term paper on a topic of their choosing, related to the principal themes of the seminar, for submission one week after the final class.
Together, we will seek to create a positive, respectful, and open environment around our discussions in class (and in our encounters with the readings). There are going to be differences of opinion and perspective, not just across the readings but almost certainly within our own group. All students should feel comfortable in sharing their perspectives, even (and perhaps especially) if they sense that theirs might be a minority point of view. It is important for all of us to listen as well as talk when it comes to our discussions in class, which should not be confused with a race towards definitive conclusions or some imagined “consensus.” We can all learn from different ways of seeing problems and indeed the world.

PDFs will be made available of all the required readings. Dipping into the further readings is recommended. Most of these are easily accessible.

Profile paper: Each student will write a profile of a key figure in the field: Michel Aglietta, John Allen, Giovanni Arrighi, Jennifer Bair, Fred Block, Robert Boyer, Neil Brenner, Michael Burawoy, James Ferguson, Nancy Fraser, JK Gibson-Graham, Akhil Gupta, Gillian Hart, Stuart Hall, Bob Jessop, Greta Krippner, Alain Lipietz, Doreen Massey, Ralph Miliband, Timothy Mitchell, Karl Polanyi, Nicos Poulantzas, Immanuel Wallerstein, or a relevant author of their choosing. The profiles need not follow a fixed template, but should incorporate (i) a discussion of the full arc of the author’s research program and published contributions, (ii) an effort to situate this work socially, geographically, and historically, and (iii) a critical assessment of the author’s most significant contributions, be these theoretical, methodological, political or otherwise. The profiles should not exceed three pages supplemented by a brief bibliography of not more one page. They will be shared with other members of the class.

Term paper: topics for term papers are to be developed by students, relating to the principal themes and issues examined in the seminar. A one-page outline should be submitted for approval no later than November 19. Term papers should not exceed 18pp of 1.5 line-spaced text (with the bibliography being additional to this). Term papers are due one week after the final class. (Late papers will receive limited feedback beyond the grade.)

Assessment: overall class participation and weekly reaction papers 25%; profile paper 25%; term paper 50%.

September 5 Orientations

This will be an introductory session in which the character, origins, and evolution of geographical political economy will be discussed, in relation to the subdiscipline of economic geography in both an intellectual and a sociological sense. The modus operandi for the class and work assignments will also be discussed.

Required readings:


Further readings:


September 12 World-system theories I

In this session, we will consider some of the foundational contributions to world-systems analysis, and some of the precursors to dependency theories, which have come primarily from historical sociology but which would acquire a wide reach and indeed impact following their early articulations in the 1970s.

Required readings:


Further readings:


September 19  World-system theories II

After having surveyed some of the foundational arguments in world-system and dependency theories, this week we will delve into some of the debates around their application, adaptation, reception, and reformulation—considering the later life of these approaches. After being out of fashion for a while, much of this work is getting a new hearing (and reading).

We will be joined by Brett Christophers in the second part of the class, an opportunity to reflect on these and other takes on the phenomenon of financialization, its spatialities, geographies, and uneven development.

Required readings:


Conversation with Brett Christophers:


Further readings:

October 3  Interlude I: Uneven & combined development

Since we have no class on September 26, there are more readings than usual this week. We examine the foundational concept of uneven (and combined) development, axiomatic for most geographers and yet often take for granted. Uneven development was actively problematized in the field of radical geography during the 1970s and 1980s, when it was a subject of explicit theoretical and empirical interrogation, but receded to the background for two decades after that. Uneven development appears to have “returned,” as a matter of explicit concern, in the past decade, where some of the more influential contributions have come from outside the discipline of geography, including international political economy, development studies, and political sociology.

Required readings:


Further readings:


October 10  Regulation theories I

Regulation theories (especially their Parisian variants) exerted a considerable influence on radical political economy and economic geography, beginning in the late 1980s. They offer a particular perspective on the macro economy (notably at the nation-state scale), “integral” in scope and extending to the state, culture, politics, and more. This week we focus on some of these earlier contributions and their travels into geography.

Required readings:


Further readings:

October 17  Regulation theories II

We continue with the regulationist theme, looking into some of the more recent iterations of this style of inquiry. Some would say that regulation theory lost its way around the turn of the century, but in recent years there has been a notable return at least to its problematics (concerned with the social regulation of long-run patterns of development, their hegemonic forms, the effects of different forms of crisis, etcetera) if not necessarily its methods.

Required readings:


Further readings:


October 24  Interlude II: Relationality

In this second “interlude” we focus on the theme of relationality, which has been fundamental to geographical political economy in many of its forms. Doreen Massey’s characteristic styles of theorizing, explanation, and exposition are a crucial touchstone here, and her reflections on Spatial divisions of labour, a decade after its original publication deserve especially close attention.

Required readings:


Allen JR and Cochrane A (2007) Beyond the territorial fix: regional assemblages, politics and power. Regional Studies 41(9): 1161-1175


Further readings:


October 31  State theories I

State theories have a reputation, some of it thoroughly deserved, for being excessively abstract and quite detached from the messy realities of statecraft and “state effects” in practice. We dip into this literature in this first week by way of a brief survey of some of the foundational contributions to contemporary state theory, beginning with the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, before moving on to some of the later discussions, including work that has sought to “spatialize” state theory.
Required readings:


Further readings:


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**November 5**

**State theories II**

In this second week on the state, we follow some of the vectors of more recent work, including in geography, sociology, and anthropology. This has raised all kinds of questions about dominant understandings of the state and state power, delving into questions of territorialization, spatiality, geography, and scalar structure.

Required readings:


**Further readings:**


**November 12 Interlude III: Conjunctures**

Conjunctural analysis was a defining feature of Gramsci’s approach, reflecting the later Marx among other influences. Via Raymond Williams and (especially) Stuart Hall, the provenance and practices of conjunctural analysis were expanded and elaborated, although they have never been codified in an explicit way. In this session, we will explore the issue of theorizing capitalism “conjuncturally,” seeking to recover the methodology along the way.

**Required readings:**

Howell C (2003) Varieties of capitalism: and then there was one? *Comparative Politics* 36(1): 103-124


November 19  Socioeconomics I

As one of the pathways into theorizing socio-economically, we will trace some of the influences of Karl Polanyi in and around geography. Polanyi’s “substantivist” approach to the analysis of economic worlds, lives, and modes of coordination has never been an “exclusive” mode of inquiry, and as such is often placed in conversation with complementary or parallel approaches, including Marxism, feminism, political ecology, and economic sociology. There is more than one kind of “socioeconomics,” however, as we will see.

Required readings:


Further readings:


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**November 26 Socioeconomics II**

Pursuing some of the through lines of neoPolanyian thought, this final session will consider complementarities and contradictions between this family of approaches and those associated with feminism, Marxism, and economic sociology.

**Required readings:**


**Further readings:**


