

Research and Activism in the Urban Context

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Course Description

This class involves an expansive field in the intersection between activism and ethnographic research in the urban context. Urban ethnography is often engaged with various forms of activism, for instance, regarding the issue of gentrification or the privatization of public spaces. This engagement frequently raises theoretical, practical, political, and ethical questions regarding the subjectivities and practicalities of the knowledge production and dissemination processes. In this class, we will examine cases and discussions revealing the unsettling relation between knowledge and power as well as scholarship and politics in the broader sense by questioning different forms of activism and ethnography in different fields, primarily in the urban context. Who is an activist? What kind of perspective does an activist bring to social-scientific research? In turn, what could be the effect of the ethnographer on political activism and the lives of activists? Our inquiry aims to illustrate the city as a contested space by pursuing the possible relations between activists and ethnographers. The reading list includes academic, literary, and journalistic pieces ranging from classic sociological theory to recent works on solidarity, citizenship, and social movements.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2022: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Assessment

The course assessment consists of basically attendance, participation, and engagement in the discussions and activities. See also “Grade Breakdown.”

Assignments

During the semester, everyone will write a semi-academic essay on a case related to the topics we would discuss in the class. The essay's draft version and preliminary bibliography will serve as a midterm exam (up to 3000 words, 17 October 2022), and the final version will be the final-term exam (up to 5000 words, 22 December 2022). This way, students can examine the topics discussed in this course with their observations and experiences, probably in the cities they live(d). Of course, students can change their cases to examine if they need. However, it should be before it's too late. The last 30 mins of the Thursday classes will serve as an open floor to discuss the progress in the essays together. We will also do some discussions in the class with the role-playing method. In the second week, students will decide whether to act as an activist or an ethnographer in these debates throughout the semester. Students can swap their sides later, but in such a case, they would need to present their reasons to their classmates. Students' participation in lectures and their contribution to discussions would also guide the evaluation process of their papers.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Seminar grade: 30% (Attendance, engagement participation in the discussions, seminar preparation)

Midterm (Draft essay and preliminary bibliography): 30%

Final essay: 40%

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction, review of the syllabus...

Tuesday: Introduction, review of the syllabus and main concepts

Thursday: Scenes from our cities and main conflicts in the urban context

Week 2: What is a city?

Tuesday: Simmel, Georg. "The metropolis and mental life." In *The urban sociology reader*, pp. 37-45. Routledge, 2012.

Thursday: Spengler, Oswald. "The soul of the city." *Classic essays on the culture of cities* (1969): 61-88.

For curious minds: Vance, Eugene. "Signs of the city: Medieval poetry as detour." *New Literary History* 4, no. 3 (1973): 557-574.

Week 3: Citizenship in the global cities

Tuesday: Purcell, Mark. "Citizenship and the right to the global city: reimagining the capitalist world order." *International journal of urban and regional research* 27, no. 3 (2003): 564-590.

Thursday: Christensen, Pia. "Place, space and knowledge." *Children in the City, Home Neighborhood and Community* (2003): 13-28.

For curious minds: Excerpt from Ward, Colin, and Ann Golzen. *The child in the city*. London: Architectural Press, 1978.

Week 4: Rivalries, struggles, negotiations and settlements?

Tuesday: Kennedy, Hugh (2010) 'The City and the Nomad.' In: *The New Cambridge History of Islam Volume 4: Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 290-305.

Thursday: Sutterlüty, Ferdinand, and Sighard Neckel. "Bashing the migrant climbers: Interethnic classification struggles in German city neighborhoods." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no. 4 (2006): 798-815.

For curious minds: *The City and The City*, China Mieville, Macmillan, 2009 (novel)

Week 5: Citizens and activists

Tuesday: Alsayyad, Nezar, and Ananya Roy. "Medieval modernity: On citizenship and urbanism in a global era." *Space & Polity* 10, no. 1 (2006): 1-20.

Thursday: Nielsen, Morten. "Mimesis of the state: From natural disaster to urban citizenship on the outskirts of Maputo, Mozambique." *Social Analysis* 54, no. 3 (2010): 153-173.

For curious minds: Kubicek, Paul. "The earthquake, civil society, and political change in Turkey: assessment and comparison with Eastern Europe." *Political Studies* 50, no. 4 (2002): 761-778.

Week 6: Cities are in crisis

Tuesday: Hall, Stuart, and Doreen Massey. "Interpreting the crisis." *Soundings* 44, no. 44 (2010): 57-71.

Thursday: Gillespie, John, and Quang Hung Nguyen. "Between authoritarian governance and urban citizenship: Tree-felling protests in Hanoi." *Urban Studies* 56, no. 5 (2019): 977-991.

For curious minds: Weaver, Timothy. "Urban crisis: The genealogy of a concept." *Urban Studies* 54, no. 9 (2017): 2039-2055.

Week 7: Right to the City

Tuesday: Harvey, David. "The right to the city." *The city reader* 6, no. 1 (2008): 23-40.

Thursday: Fernandes, Edésio. "Constructing the Right to the City in Brazil." *Social & legal studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 201-219.

For curious minds: Milan, Chiara, and Stefania Milan. "Fighting gentrification from the boxing ring: how community gyms reclaim the right to the city." *Social Movement Studies* 20, no. 6 (2021): 722-739.

Week 8: Urban researcher: An informant or an ally?

Tuesday: Oldfield, Sophie. "Between activism and the academy: The urban as political terrain." *Urban Studies* 52, no. 11 (2015): 2072-2086.

Thursday: Chari, Sharad, and Henrike Donner. "Ethnographies of activism: A critical introduction." *Cultural Dynamics* 22, no. 2 (2010): 75-85.

For curious minds: Briggs, Daniel. "Commodifying Intimacy in 'Hard times': A Hardcore Ethnography of a Luxury Brothel." *Journal of Extreme Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (2018): 66-88.

Week 9: Allies, friends, or foes: Ethnographer and activist

Tuesday: Lamphere, Louise. "The Transformation of Ethnography: From Malinowski's Tent to the Practice of Collaborative/Activist Anthropology." *Human Organization* 77, no. 1 (2018): 64-76.

Thursday: Goode, Judith. "How urban ethnography counters myths about the poor." *Urban life: Readings in the anthropology of the city* (2002): 279-95.

For curious minds: Price, D. H. "The destruction of conscience in the National Academy of Sciences. An interview with Marshall Sahlins." *CounterPunch.org* 26 (2013).

Week 10: Political modes of knowledge production: Ethnographers, journalists, activists

Tuesday: Collins, Patricia Hill. "Truth-telling and intellectual activism." *Contexts* 12, no. 1 (2013): 36-41.

Thursday: Harcup, Tony. "Alternative journalism as active citizenship." *Journalism* 12, no. 1 (2011): 15-31.

For curious minds: Carpentier, Nico, and Bart Cammaerts. "Hegemony, democracy, agonism and journalism: An interview with Chantal Mouffe." *Journalism studies* 7, no. 6 (2006): 964-975.

Week 11: The audience problem

Tuesday: Briskman, Linda. "Courageous ethnographers or agents of the state: Challenges for social work." *Critical and Radical Social Work* 1, no. 1 (2013): 51-66.

Thursday: Fassin, Didier. "The public afterlife of ethnography." *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 4 (2015): 592-609.

For curious minds: Driscoll, Jesse, and Caroline Schuster. "Spies like us." *Ethnography* 19, no. 3 (2018): 411-430.

Week 12: Identities and agencies: The paper will remain!

Tuesday: Fine, Michelle, and Lois Weis. "Writing the "wrongs" of fieldwork: Confronting our own research/writing dilemmas in urban ethnographies." *Qualitative inquiry* 2, no. 3 (1996): 251-274.

Thursday: Neale, Jonathan. "Why Radical Academics Often Find it Hard to Write, and What to Do about It", <https://annebonnypirate.org/2015/04/29/why-radical-academics-often-find-it-hard-to-write-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

For curious minds: Neale, Jonathan. "Ranting and silence: The contradictions of writing for activists and academics." *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology* (2008): 217-255. (long version of the above article)

Week 13: Ethics in urban ethnography

Tuesday: Urla, Jacqueline, and Justin Helepololei. "The ethnography of resistance then and now: On thickness and activist engagement in the twenty-first century." *History and Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2014): 431-451.

Thursday: Arcilla, C. "Ethics and personal politics in the engaged ethnography of urban subalternity." *AghamTao Journal of Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (2019): 57-87.

For curious minds: Wacquant, Loïc. "Scrutinizing the street: Poverty, morality, and the pitfalls of urban ethnography." *American journal of sociology* 107, no. 6 (2002): 1468-1532.

Week 14: Portraits and legacies

Tuesday: Jane Jacobs vs Robert Moses: Urban Fight of the Century,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUeuQT6t7kg&ab_channel=VinceGraham

Thursday: Urbanists/activists of Gezi Park, Cennetin Düşüşü (The Fall of Heaven),

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMkPIrjp7X0&t=35s&ab_channel=Tristana

For curious minds: David Harvey and David Graeber, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRACS7JFXFg&t=899s&ab_channel=PlaceCulturePolitics

Week 15: Review of the semester

Note: The articles/pieces listed as "for curious minds" are optional... Most of the reading material is online and free. If you cannot access any of them, please let me know.