

Geography 620 Urban Theory: The Urban Revolution



clashing built form near Bandra-Kurla, Mumbai; source: unequalscenes

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Tuesdays 1:40-4:40, LCH-B120

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Course Introduction

This is an advanced graduate seminar that sets out to examine proliferating forms and experiences of urban revolution. Urban revolution means many different things. For Henri Lefebvre, frequently cited as the progenitor of the term in urban studies, it refers to the emergence of “complete urbanization” as a virtual potentiality, or a form of spatial production in which the entire world is affected by the urban condition. But what is the urban? Something more than cities, to be sure. David Harvey, building on Lefebvre, frames it as fixed investments in the secondary circuit of capital—the built environment and its various infrastructures—and he develops a spatial Marxism exploring urban revolution, in this first sense, as a tendency of crisis-prone late industrial capitalism to create deepening patterns of creative destruction in which land and its material accoutrements are governed by exchange value—a capitalist landscape that itself becomes the terrain of crisis. What we get is an “urban fabric” that “doesn’t narrowly define the built environment of cities, but all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the countryside” (Lefebvre 2003 [1970], 3-4).

But this just a small part of urban revolution, one that has perhaps unnecessarily dominated urban theory. Lefebvre further meant by urban revolution the emergence of a more alienated human sociality, an “urbanized society,” akin to the earlier Frankfurt School critique of capitalist modernity and the associated “shocks” of commodity culture. Urban revolution in this sense signals the jostle of the crowd, the “colonization” of consciousness by commodity form, an alienated everyday life, a social milieu increasingly given to us (here, take!) rather than made by us—in other words, a revolution in the structure of experience.

Lefebvre’s discussion of the state-directed, capitalist production of abstract, urbanized space was closely tied to his notes on the right to the city, a collective right (to the city as oeuvre) that he argued was greatly threatened by the urban condition he witnessed in mid-twentieth century western Europe. Lefebvre is but one node in a global milieu of experiments in urban revolution, though, and *his* right to the city—while highly generative in activist, policy, and academic circuits globally—is hence but one notion of urban citizenship to be considered. Lefebvre took inspiration, albeit with some trepidation, from the Paris student revolts of 1968, positing that occupations of the urban were spatial claims to centrality—a “cry and a demand,” as he put it, for democratic participation and a call to halt everyday life’s colonization by exchange value. If we track other geographies of urban revolution from the global insurrection that was ’68—be they in Calcutta, Mexico City, or Beijing—then different global-local articulations become visible, each with different figurations of the politics of the possible. What we find in these lived urban revolutions, as with others that preceded and followed them, is different attempts, at differing scales, to—as Walter Benjamin put it in his framing of all moments of revolution—reach for the emergency brake on the train of historical progress.

Well, the train of historical progress is marching on, and so many have been reaching for the emergency brake, including at the moment of this course’s launch in Hong Kong (around democracy), Srinagar (militarism), São Paulo (Amazon), Queensland (right to protest), Manchester (extinction), to name but a few. This is not a topics course, but I would like to use it as an occasion for seminar participants to work to develop a conceptual “toolkit” for interrogating what urban revolution in any of its geographical, political, ecological, technological, or sociological senses means in concrete geographical settings. Thus, in addition to structured readings exploring different senses and experiences of urban revolution, you will be asked to develop a writing project on “revolution” over the course of the semester. We will be talking about this in the early weeks of the semester, but it generally means selecting one space-time of urban revolution, framing the problem at hand, and developing a conjunctural analysis to explain the conditions of its emergence. One of the defining treatments of revolution in almost all senses we’ll consider in the course is a confluence of forces whose reverberating effects endure, have a legacy, well beyond the events that took place. Kristen Ross, writing about the Paris Commune, calls this the communal imaginary; Benjamin called it exploding the continuum of history. In whatever framing, these events in their actual “working existence” constitute a form of praxis, a working theory expressing other ways of being, doing, or sensing that cannot be wiped away or forgotten, even when the events themselves may have failed on their own terms. We will spend time in seminar discussing “your” revolution, bringing different revolutionary sites into conversation, and debating the analytical and political stakes of the framings of revolution we choose.

Halfway through the semester, during week 8 (October 22), you will need to prepare an approximately five-page precis outlining what revolution means in the space-time you are

exploring; the key agents, structures, and processes driving the revolution there; and some of the theoretical questions you'd like to explore before the semester's end. After this "mid-semester revolution," we will turn to single monographs exploring different senses of urban revolution (explicitly or implicitly) to pull out methodological questions about concrete historical-geographical research and the ethical and political imperatives of fieldwork.

Requirements

This course will be run as a reading-intensive seminar. Each week we will systematically discuss the argument, method, and implications of the texts; present our ideas and questions to each other; and generally learn from the diverse backgrounds and perspectives we all bring. Accordingly, it is imperative that everyone comes fully prepared to participate.

Each student will be expected to undertake the following:

(i) To prepare a short, ~one-page **critical commentary** on each week's readings and to post this on the Sakai forum for that week by the Monday evening (no later than 7 pm) prior to the Tuesday seminar meeting. These commentaries can engage with your own "revolution" project, but should always narrow in a problem raised by the key text(s). Beginning with a key quote, explaining its argument, locating it in the larger argument of the author, and problematizing that claim either by juxtaposing it against other arguments you've read or with the author's own propositions is one model for the critical commentary. Basic summaries of argument or explications of what "is interesting" to you are not *critical* in this sense.

(ii) To **lead/chair class discussion**, which involves a short (~10 minute) presentation of the key theoretical and conceptual issues in the readings pertaining to that week. This does not mean a summary of the authors' main arguments or an expansive literature review. Rather, it means laying out key empirical, theoretical, or methodological contributions of the week's readings, and posing a set of questions to open up and structure conversation. What shared themes, methods, critiques, or concepts emerge from the readings; or what might we learn by asking questions posed in one text of an accompanying text? I will circulate a sign-up sheet during week 1 for you to choose the week(s) you'd like to present.

Course project

Each seminar participant will write critically over the course of the semester about a contemporary or historical expression of urban revolution, in any sense. You should begin background readings early on in the semester to narrow in on a particular problem by week 3. We will take time in week 4 to discuss your framing problem and imagined approach to the project. By week 8, you'll need to prepare a ~five-page precis discussing the analytical problem you're exploring, while also providing a historical-geographical introduction to the setting. As far as the final product, the standard approach would be a longer format academic paper, but I am open to other formats, from a webpage or photo collage to an annotated bibliography/literature review or short essay that might be submitted to an open-access website such as openDemocracy, Society & Space, Public Books, Kafila.org (for those working on South Asia), etc. Joint writing projects are also welcome.

Assessment

Students will be assessed according to the following scheme:

Critical commentaries & presentations	35%
Classroom participation	20%
Course Project	45%
Total	100%

Readings

Required course texts:

- Bou Akar, Hiba. 2018. *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Peripheries*. Stanford University Press.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. UC Press.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2019. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. W. W. Norton & Co.
- Rolnik, Raquel. 2019. *Urban Warfare: Housing Under the Empire of Finance*. Verso.
- Ross, Kristen. 2015. *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*. Verso.
- Soprzanetti, Claudio. 2018. *Owners of the Map: Motorcycle Taxi Drivers, Mobility, and Politics in Bangkok*. UC Press.

Additional books from which we will be reading extensively, digital selections of which will be posted on Sakai, include:

- Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. Columbia University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2003 [1970]. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

All additional readings will be posted on the course website on Sakai or placed on reserve at the Carr Library on Livingston Campus.

Seminar Outline

Week 1 (September 3rd) – Introduction

Background reading:

Short selections from Italo Calvino's (1973) *Invisible Cities*, including: Cities and Desires 5, Cities and Eyes 5, Cities and the Sky 3.

Week 2 (September 10th) - Urban revolution

We begin this week with three interventions into spatial revolution. First, we engage Henri Lefebvre's seminal theorization of the urban revolution, a foundational framing of the secondary circuit of capital and the predicament of urbanized society. We also consider Foucault's framing of heterotopia, a condition we might say can either be prompted by or precipitate urban revolution. Finally, we read Walter Benjamin's classic notes on Baudelaire as a means of moving to the interior of urban subjectivity, or considering revolution as an emphatic experience. These three framings of space—as geographical, as discursive, as interiority—help situate our empirical investigations going forward.

Readings:

- Smith, Neil. 2003. Forward. In Lefebvre, H., *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. vii-xxiii.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2003. "From the City to Urban Strategy," from *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp.1-22.
- Lefebvre, Henri. "The right to the city," "Industrialization and Urbanization," and "Theses on the City, the Urban and Planning," In *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 65-86, 147-160 & 177-184.
- Harvey, David. 2001. "Globalization and the 'spatial fix,'" *Geographische Revue* 3(2), 23-30.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2006 [1939]. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Schocken Books, pp. 171-210.
- Foucault, Michel. 1986. "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 15(1): 22-27.

Week 3 (September 17th) The right to the city

How do experiments in collective living and collective occupation relate to broader claims to the city? This week, we examine that ur-moment of urban commoning that shaped Lefebvre's and so many thinkers' notions of the right to the city: the Paris Commune. The Paris Commune was a laboratory of political invention, important simply and above all for, as Marx reminds us, its own "working existence." This week, we explore the intellectual antecedents and political afterlives of the Commune as well as its contemporary impact on writing about and practices of the right to the city, from Occupy to Black Lives Matter.

Readings:

- Harvey, David. 1978. "The Urban Process Under Capitalism: A Framework for Analysis" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2(1-3): 101-131.
- Harvey, David. 2006. *The Right to the City*. *New Left Review*.
- Ross, Kristen. 2015. *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*. Verso.

Additional readings:

- Mitchell, Don & Joaquin Villanueva. 2010. "The Right to the City," In *Encyclopedia of Urban Studies*. London: SAGE, pp. 668-672.

Week 4 (September 24th) – Surplus capital, surplus populations

If last week's key text prompted a critical interrogation of the economic-geographic tradition (especially David Harvey) for engaging the right to the city, this week we return to how that tradition can be recovered as part of a structural and radical critique of the geographical production of racial difference. Examining Gilmore's now-classic *Golden Gulag* offers a way of

reading the critique of capitalist surplus as a critique of racial banishment, or surplus disposal and capital switching as always also a problem of producing “surplus” populations and driving dehumanization.

Readings:

- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. UC Press.
- Kushner, Rachel. 2019. “Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change your Mind.” *The New York Times Magazine*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html>.

Additional Readings:

- McKittrick, Katherine. 2011. “On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place.” *Social and Cultural Geography*, 12:8: 947-963.
- Hawthorne, Camilla. 2019. “Black Matters are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-First Century.” *Geography Compass*: 1-13.
- Bledsoe, Adam and Willie Wright. 2019. “The Anti-Blackness of Capital.” *Environment and Planning D* 37(1): 8-26.

Week 5 (October 1st) – Urban Rage

From Zuccotti Park (NY) to Gezi Park (Istanbul), Tahrir Square (Cairo) to Ratchadamnoen Nok (Bangkok), and Soweto (Johannesburg) to Clichy-sous-Bois (Paris), concentrated expressions of urban outrage against authoritarianism, racial/ethnic exclusion, class inequality, and spatial homogenization are growing in contemporary expression. This week dives into a selection of ethnographic, or otherwise deeply lived, accounts of urban protest, grasping the spatial conditions of possibility for these movements’ making and unmaking.

Readings:

- Sopranzetti, Claudio. 2018. Selections from *Owners of the Map: Motorcycle Taxi Drivers, Mobility, and Politics in Bangkok*. UC Press, pp. 17-62, 196-255.
- Maharawal, Manissa, 2017. “Black Lives Matter, Gentrification, and the Security State in the San Francisco Bay Area,” *Anthropological Theory* 17(3): 338-364.
- Dikeç, Mustafa. 2017. “Rage in the Urban Age” and “Young Turks find Peace in Revolt,” in *Urban Rage: The Revolt of the Excluded*, Yale University Press, pp. 1-11, 175-213.
- Von Schnitzler, Antina. 2016. “After the Rent Boycotts: Infrastructure and the Politics of Payment,” in *Democracy’s Infrastructure: Techno-Politics and Protest after Apartheid*. Princeton University Press, pp. 65-104.

Additional Readings:

- Hannah Appel. 2014. “Occupy Wall Street and the Economic Imagination.” *Cultural Anthropology* 29 (4): 602-625.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahatta. 2016. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Week 6 (October 8th) – Governing the City

This week examines political technologies used to know, organize and manage urban territories and populations: maps, surveys, censuses, plans, and the like. How do states and other authorities direct interventions into densely populated, constantly changing urban environments without relying on ever-present oversight and the disciplinary gaze of police? How do they simplify dynamic ground realities into plans, and how do they use plans, maps and other calculative instruments to direct the population towards what Foucault called “convenient ends”?

Readings:

- Foucault, Michel. 2007. Lectures 1, 2 & 4 of *Security, Territory, Population*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Joyce, Patrick. 2003. “Maps, numbers and the city: Knowing the governed,” From *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City*. London: Verso, pp. 20-61.
- Osborne, Thomas. 1999. “Security and vitality: Drains, liberalism and power,” in Foucault and Political Reason, edited by Barry, Rose, and Osborne, Routledge, pp. 99-122.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. “Principles True in Every Country,” In *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. UC Press, pp. 54-79.
- Scott, James C. 1998. “The High-Modernist City,” In *Seeing Like a State*. Yale University Press, pp. 103-146.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkianm, Nadera. 2016. The Occupation of the Senses: The Prosthetic and the Aesthetic of State Terror. *British Journal of Criminology* 57(6): 1279- 1300.
- Ghertner, D. Asher 2010. “Calculating without numbers: Aesthetic governmentality in Delhi’s slums,” *Economy and Society*, 39(2), 185-217.

Additional readings:

- Appadurai, Arjun. 2002. “Deep democracy: Urban governmentality and the horizon of politics.” *Public Culture* 14(1): 21-47.
- Dean, Mitchel. 2002. “Liberal government and authoritarianism.” *Economy and Society*, 31(1): 37-61.
- Legg, Stephen. 2006. “Governmentality, congestion and calculation in colonial Delhi.” *Social & Cultural Geography*. 7(5): 709-729.
- Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 7 (October 15th) – Occupancy Urbanism

Models of urban politics often rest on collectivist or evental accounts of revolt, occupation, protest, or public performance. When we look at the ways in which the urban majority in the South—those denied the formal requirements of spatial belonging and livelihood—occupy space, however, we often find a different set of more accretive, non-deliberative, or otherwise experimental modes of claims making. From insurgent citizenship, to the quiet encroachment of the ordinary, to the politics of the governed, to autoconstruction, this week’s readings consider experiments in what Solly Benjamin calls occupancy urbanism as a grounds for the less noticed revolution in informal livelihoods in “much of the world.”

Readings:

- Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. “Populations and Political Society” and “The politics of the governed,” from *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. Columbia University Press, pp. 27-90.

- Holston, James. 2009. "Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries." *City & Society* 21: 245-267.
- Bayat, Asef. 2000. From 'dangerous classes' to 'quiet rebels': Politics of the urban subaltern in the global south. *International Sociology*, 15(3).
- Das, Veena. 2011. "State, citizenship, and the urban poor," *Citizenship Studies* 15: 319-333.
- Caldeira, Teresa. 2016. "Peripheral urbanization: autoconstruction, transversal logics, and politics in cities of the global South." *Environment and Planning D* 35: 3-20.
- Bhan, Gautam. 2019. "Notes on southern urban practice." *Environment and Urbanization*, doi: 10.1177/ 956247818815792.
- Ghertner, D. Asher. 2015. "Why gentrification theory fails in 'much of the world'," *City* 19: 552-563.
- Chiodelli, Francisco. 2019. "The Dark Side of Urban Informality in the Global North: Housing Illegality and Organized Crime in Northern Italy." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 43(3).

Additional readings:

- Roy, Ananya. 2004. "The Gentleman's City: Urban Informality in the Calcutta of New Communism." In N. AlSayyad & A. Roy (Eds.), *Urban Informality* (pp. 147-170). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Roy, Ananya. 2004. "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association*.
- Benjamin, Solomon 2008. "Occupancy urbanism: Radicalizing politics and economy beyond policy and programs." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(3), 719-729.

Week 8 (October 22nd) – Mid-Semester Revolution

Seminar participants will share ~5 page experiments in documenting their "revolutionary" inquiry thus far.

Week 9 (October 29th) – Intimate Revolution

This week turns to the radical aspirations and insurgent desires of African-American women as they lived in open rebellion against the Victorian mores of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. In wrestling with the question of what a free life is, many young black women created forms of intimacy and kinship outside the bounds of the law. Looking at frequently neglected spaces of solidarity in New York and Philadelphia, Hartman's social history of this intimate revolution offers a stark glimpse into the possibilities of private life in the context of deep public exclusion and stigmatization.

Readings:

- Hartman, Saidiya. 2019. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. W. W. Norton & Co.
- Simone, Abdoumalig. 2004. "People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16(3): 407-439.

Week 10 (November 5th) – Frontier Revolution

This week turns to the revolution of war in Beirut, considering how space is unmade through, but also made in anticipation of, war. The mode of spatial production that Hiba Bou Akar calls “war in times of peace” is fought not with tanks and rifles but with the mundane tools of municipal planners: zoning regulations, infrastructure projects, land and apartment sales, housing laws. Like the preceding civil war, this war is fought for territory by religious-political organizations. When planning is no longer about improvement, but about the anticipation of future violence, in New Orleans, Athens, or Bangalore as much as Beirut, the logic of future war can be seen as a global planning practice.

Readings:

Bou Akar, Hiba. 2018. *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Peripheries*. Stanford University Press.

Week 11 (November 12th) – Monstrous Revolution

Guest seminar with Ben Gerlofs, Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Latin American Studies, Princeton, based on his research on Mexico City's various revolutions

Readings:

Gerlofs, Ben. 2018. “*Asi No* (Not Like This): Resisting Postpolitics on Mexico City's Avenida Chapultepec.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42(6).

Other readings TBA

Week 12 (November 19th) – Financial Revolution

This week turns to the financial revolution by which land is increasingly rendered a financial asset, a fungible resource to be traded and exchanged. Drawing on the economization techniques by which real estate markets are made and performed, including the insights from Actor–Network theory, we consider how private risk is socialized and social life is privatized under conditions of late liberalism.

Readings:

Çalışkan, Koray, and Michel Callon. 2009. “Economization, Part 1: Shifting Attention from the Economy Towards Processes of Economization.” *Economy and Society* 38 (3): 369–398.

Searle, Llerena. 2018. “The contradictions of mediation: intermediaries and the financialization of urban production.” *Economy & Society* 47.4, 524–46.

Rolnik, Raquel. 2019. *Urban Warfare: Housing Under the Empire of Finance*. New York: Verso.

Additional readings:

Christophers, Brett. 2016. “Geographies of Finance III: Regulation and ‘After-Crisis’ Future.” *Progress in Human Geography* 40(1): 138–148.

Fields, Desiree. 2018. “Unwilling Subjects of Financialization.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41(4).

Teresa, Benjamin. 2016. “Managing fictitious capital: The legal geography of investment and political struggle in rental housing in New York City.” *Environment and Planning A*, 48(3): 465–484.

Week 13 (Nov 26th) – Thanksgiving Break

Week 14 (December 3rd) – Agrarian Revolution

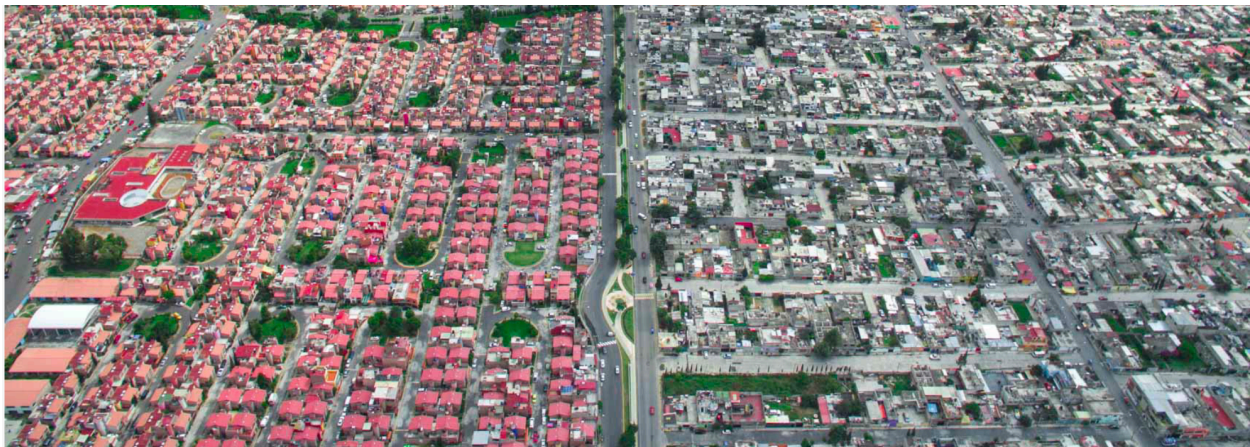
This week considers spatial revolution without urban baggage. If we center not the decline of industry, but the endurance/future of agriculture and resource-based livelihoods, how does the proliferation of various forms of land grabbing, land financialization, and urbanizing ground rent take shape on the terrain of past and present trajectories of agrarian change?

Readings:

- Levien, Michael. 2013. "Regimes of Dispossession: From Steel Towns to Special Economic Zones." *Development and Change* 44 (2):381-407.
- Balakrishnan, Sai. 2019. "Recombinant Urbanization: Agrarian-urban Landed Property and Uneven Development in India." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 43(4): 617-632.
- Watts, Michael J. 2018. "Frontiers: Authority, Precarity, and Insurgency at the Edge of the State." *World Development* 101: 477-488.
- Cowan Tom. 2018. "Urban villages, agrarian transformation and rentier capitalism in Gurgaon, India." *Antipode* 50.5, 1244-1266.
- Jacobs, R. 2018. "An urban proletariat with peasant characteristics: land occupations and livestock raising in South Africa." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45(5-6): 884-903.
- Selections from *Land Fictions: The Commodification of Land in City and Country*, edited by D. A. Ghertner and R. W. Lake (forthcoming).

Week 15 (December 10th) - Wrap-up session

----- Final course project submission due December 16th -----



unequalscenes from Mexico City