PhD Course in Urban Geography/Urban Studies/Cultural Studies:

“Riots, Uprisings, and Revolts in the Contemporary City”

Fall, 2018, 7.5 ECTS

Course Organizers:
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Course Rationale and Description:
As has been well noted in the scholarly literature and popular discourse, we now live in an urban age. As Lefebvre argued fifty years ago, the industrial revolution seems to have been supplanted by an urban revolution. Yet this is equally an age of urban unrest – of riot, rebellion, uprising, and insurrection – as the social democratic, socialist, and neoliberal orders that marked the early stages of the urban revolution have sequentially broken down, and as a new social order has yet to solidify. Understanding the role riots, uprisings, and revolts in the production of urban space, urban disorder, and the nature of emerging new urban orders, is thus of utmost importance.

Geographers, urbanists, and scholars of culture have contributed to a vibrant and growing literature on urban unrest, which, through its specific focus on the spatiality of urban riot, revolt, and uprising, can be distinguished from (even as it builds upon) earlier scholarship on social movements and urban disorder that emerged out of the upheavals of the 1960s. By the time the course is held, the three course organizers will have each published substantial books (two of them edited/collective efforts, one sole-authored) that examine and expand theories urban unrest and their role in shaping cities. These three books (listed below) will form the foundation of the course, supplemented by other key works in the burgeoning literature.

A crucial part of the course, beyond understanding the social and spatial theories of urban rage and unrest, is understanding the role cultural practices play in moments of upheaval. First, times of unrest are often enormously productive, not just of new political formations and order, but of new forms of artistic expression. Second, such artistic expression in turn often shapes revolt itself as participants take on new ways of knowing and being (or adapt older ones, like the carnivalesque). Third, riots and revolts are transformative of material spaces and political orders, but at the same time must be represented; artists and other cultural producers thus themselves become key actors in shaping the discourses of rebellion and reaction. A significant goal of the course, therefore, will be to examine the interrelationship of urban unrest, spatial transformation, and cultural production from an interdisciplinary perspective, bringing into dialogue human geography, urban studies, cultural
studies, and social theory. To accomplish this goal, a portion of the course will take the form of participation in a one-and-a-half-day mini-conference entitled, “Culture in Revolt.” The mini-conference will (subject to confirmation) include a screening of the documentary, Riots Reframed and a discussion with the filmmaker Fahim Alam, followed by a keynote presentation by social movements and Right to the City scholar Margit Mayer – as well as a discussion between the two. The mini-conference itself will involve not only researchers, but also artists/cultural producers and activists involved in understanding and shaping this insurrectionary moment.

Besides the mini-conference, the course will consist primarily of seminars, with emphasis placed on student participation. Examination will occur by a final paper of approximately 5000 words. Students wishing to submit an alternative form of cultural intervention may discuss their ideas for doing so with the course organizers. Participating students will be expected to present their central arguments as well as an overview/outline of their final paper/project during one of the course blocks set aside for student presentation.

Since the course organizers are committed to integrating research with learning/teaching, students will be invited to apply separately to also make a presentation in the mini-conference if they so desire.

List of Potential Instructors (subject to change):
Fahim Alam, Filmmaker, London
Mustafa Dikeç, Malmö University
Anders Lund Hansen, Lund University
Miguel Martinez Lopéz, Uppsala University
Margit Mayer, Free University of Berlin
Don Mitchell, Uppsala University
Dominika Polanska, Uppsala University
Ove Sernhede, University of Gothenburg
Catharina Thörn, University of Gothenburg
Håkan Thörn, University of Gothenburg

With the exception of the course organizers and Alam & Mayer, lecturers will be drafted from the host universities.

TO APPLY:
Send an email to Don Mitchell (Don.Mitchell@kultgeog.uu.se) expressing your interest in the course and confirming your availability for each module. Include an explanation of how the course might influence or be valuable to your scholarly interests. Seats in the course are limited so we cannot guarantee everyone admission. Applications will be accepted up until 1 September, 2018, and the organizers will inform all applicants whether or not they are admitted to the course shortly after the deadline.

(The preliminary schedule – subject to change – begins on the next page)
Module 1: 13-14 September, 2018, Uppsala University

Theme: Riots, Rebellions, Uprisings, and Revolution in the Making of Cities

Thursday, 13 September:
9:30-12:00 Seminar 1
13:00-15:30 Seminar 2
16:00-17:30 Student Presentations (1)
19:00 - Group Dinner (self-funded)

Friday, 14 September:
9:30-12:00 Seminar 3
13:15-14:30 Public Lecture
15:00-16:30 Student Presentations (2)

Module 2: 10-12 October, 2018, University of Gothenburg

Theme: Urban Uprising: Culture in Revolt

NB: This portion of the course will be composed of three related parts: (1) a public screening and discussion of an important documentary on the London Riots of 2011, (2) a one-day public mini-conference, and (3) a one-day “closed” series of seminars and discussions (PhD students will be required to participate in all three sections).

Wednesday, 10 October:
18:00-20:00. Documentary Screening and Discussion with the Filmmaker: Riots Reframed: a film by Fahim Alam (subject to confirmation).

Thursday, 11 October:
9:30-17:00 Course/Conference: Culture in Revolt
A mini-conference, organized as part of the course, exploring the role of culture in urban uprisings – and in representing them, including a keynote by Margit Mayer (proposed). Besides lectures/discussions by some of the potential instructors listed above, participants will include activists from organizations such as Megaphone (Stockholm) or The Panthers (Gothenburg).
19:00- Course/Conference Dinner (partially self-funded)

Friday, 12 October:
9:30-12:00 Seminar 4
13-14:30 A conversation between Fahim Alam and Margit Mayer
15:00-16:30 Student Presentations (3)

(Continued Next Page)
Module 3: 16-17 November, 2018, Malmö University

Theme: Urban Rage and the Exclusionary Politics of the City

Thursday, 16 November
9:30-12:00 Seminar 5
13:00-15:30 Seminar 6
16:00-17:30 Student Presentations (4)
19:00- Course Dinner (self-funded)

Friday, 17 November
9:30-12:00 Seminar 7
13:00-14:30 Student Presentations (5)
15:00-16:30 Public Lecture
16:30-17:00 Last Words/Wrap Up

Seminar papers (4000 words) – or alternative cultural intervention – due: 14 December, 2018

Topics and Literature

The specific topics of each seminar will depend on the final roster of instructors. Likely topics include some combination of: The urban revolution/urban question; new theories of urban unrest; urban unrest and the production of city-space; rioting as urban politics; riots as urban “events”; disorder and the re-imposition of order in urban space; representing rebellion; the democratization of media and the publicization of unrest; the occupation of urban space as political strategy; social movements and urban unrest; the art of rebellion; social media and the new spatiality of revolt.

Foundational Texts for the Course


Key Texts on the Urban Revolution:


Lefebvre, H. (2003 [1970]) The Urban Revolution (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press)


Texts on Urban Unrest:

Extensive and timely bibliographies of the literature urban unrest may be found in the three “Foundational Texts” and so are not repeated here. A few key recent works include:


Hall, Stuart, Crithcer, Chas, Jefferson, Tony, Clarke, John, and Roberts, Brian. (2013 [1978]) Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order (New York; Palgrave Macmillan).

