

## ENG 720 Textual Studies II, Fall, 2007

### Global Cities, Global Slums

Call #: 8715, Wed 4:15-7:05, LC 13

Bret Benjamin (bret@albany.edu)  
Mon 4:15-7:05, ED 022

Office: Humanities 340 (442-4054)  
Office Hours: W 3-4, and by appt.  
<http://www.albany.edu/faculty/bret/720/>

Radical urbanization, the swift demise of a rural peasantry across the entire planet and the corresponding rise of mega-cities, amounts to, in the words of historian Eric Hobsbawm, “the most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of [the Twentieth] century.” Mike Davis reports in *Planet of Slums* that 3.2 billion people currently live in cities (more, for the first time in human history, than in the countryside), with double that number likely by 2050. Roughly one third of those current city dwellers—approximately 1 billion people—live in slums, shantytowns, *favelas*, *chawls*, and the like, where population growth has outpaced urbanization growth since 1970.

The multi-cultural, networked, cosmopolitan city often plays the hero in globalization tales; the global slum, with its all too familiar images of lack and immiseration, stands as its Other. Postcolonial literary studies has tended to focus on the nation/narration conjuncture, the ways in which literary production constitutes and is constituted by the nation state and national consciousness. Rather than (or, in addition to) the nation, this seminar will examine contemporary literatures and theories of globalization and globality through the time and space of urbanity—the figures of global city and global slum. Reading a mix of theory, history, and novels we will approach global urbanity from a number of critical vantage points, among which will include the following: the global city/slum’s transformed role within theorizations of neo-liberalism, flexible accumulation and post-Fordist modes of production; the global city/slum as a space or scale of collective belonging that might trouble or extend theories of the nation, cosmopolitics, or the multitude; the cityscape as the site of global cultural “flows” and contact; the city/slum and radical alter-globalization social movements (a new proletariat?); and/or the global city/slum and planetary ecology. Novels will likely include Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*, Chris Abani’s *Graceland*, Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, and Paulo Lin’s *City of God*. Critical work will include texts Mike Davis, David Harvey, Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castels, James Ferguson, Aihwa Ong, Rem Koolhaas, Randy Martin, among others.

#### Required Texts

Chris Abani, *Graceland*

Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*

Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*

David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*

Rem Koolhaas, *Mutations*

Paulo Lins, *City of God*

Randy Martin *Empire of Indifference*

Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*

Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance*

Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*

### **Recommended Texts**

Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*  
David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*

\*\*all texts available at Mary Jane's Books, 215 Western Ave.

Additional Readings, as needed, may be added periodically to the course E-Reserves page.

### **Course Requirements**

#### *Response Papers*

For each week's readings, you will be responsible for posting a short (500-750 word) response to the course website via E-Res.

#### *Working Groups*

One of the hallmarks of the "Birmingham School" of British Cultural Studies was a commitment to collective scholarship that analyzed from multiple perspectives the "circuits" or "webs" of cultural significations evident in single, apparently simple or innocuous, artifact or practice. With that model loosely in mind—a model that re-emerges in the hybrid text *Mutations*, which we'll be reading—this class will divide into one or more "working groups," with each collectively orchestrating an investigation around a shared topic. This represents something of a departure from most graduate seminars where the individual term paper is the standard model of evaluation. The specific details of the working groups will be negotiated in class—the structure that the working groups will take as well as the topics they choose to examine will need to be hashed out collaboratively. I am expecting, however, that each student will write an individual research paper as well as contributing to a collaborative group introduction that frames the project's methodological practices as well as the broader intellectual and political stakes of its research agenda. Each working group will present their work publicly, either at a departmental conference or in a conference-like setting, the details of which will be determined by the class.

## Schedule of Readings

- 8/29 Introductions
- 9/5 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (1-120)  
David Harvey *Spaces of Global Capitalism* "Space as a Key Word" (pp. 119-148)  
*Mutations* (pp. 1-41, Photographic Dossier 194-267)
- 9/12 No Class
- 9/19 Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination" (1-19)  
(E-Res)  
David Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, Part 2 (121-197) (E-Res)  
Saskia Sassen, *Global Cities* "Overview," CH5, "Epilogue" (3-15, 90-126, 345-363) (E-Res)  
Manuel Castels, *The Rise of the Network Society* "Space of Flows" (376-428) (E-Res)
- 9/26 David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* "Neoliberalism" and "Notes" (9-116)  
Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (121-206)  
Robert Neuwirth, "Rio de Janeiro" (pp. 25-65) (E-Res)
- 10/3 Paulo Lins, *City of God*
- 10/10 Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*  
*Mutations* (Pearl River Delta pp. 280-338)
- 10/17 Randy Martin, *Empire of Indifference*
- 10/24 Chris Abani, *Graceland*  
Robert Neuwirth, "Nairobi" (pp. 67-99) (E-Res)  
James Ferguson, "Globalizing Africa" (pp. 25-49) (E-Res)
- 10/31 Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*
- 11/7 Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, Part 1 (1-249)
- 11/14 Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* Part 2-3 (250-542)  
"Housing for the Urban Poor" (booklet)
- 11/21 No Class
- 11/28 Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance*
- 12/5 Wrap-up
- 12/12 Presentations (exam day)