Capitalism and Modernity: Institutions, Power, Agency
Don Kalb
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology
AY 2016/17
MA and PHD level
4 credits, 8 ECTS credits

A critical approach to modernity starts with blurring the conventional liberal ‘trias’ of state, market and civil society, foundational notions of differentiation upon which the modern disciplines of economics, political science and sociology are built. These notions have been seen as basic recipes for modern rule and Western power, among others because they take the jumbo relational processes of capitalism and empire, and therewith of combined and uneven development and ongoing ‘primitive accumulation’, from view. Critical anthropological practice is aimed at complicating these modern notions of liberal order, in particular the relational dynamics of power and counter-power. They call for searching the interstices between apparently distinct institutions, and for situating actual economic, political and civic practices in real human communities in time and space in the context of unfolding combined and uneven development.

This four-credit course is an advanced conversation around aspects of a broadly conceived anthropological political economy, based in short but serious digressions into ‘the transition debate’, World Systems Theory, Postcolonial critique and the critique of postcoloniality, as well as the Anthropology of Global Systems, contemporary urban Marxism, and Polanyi. The course aims at an understanding of modernity from an anthropological perspective that rejects the separation of symbolic systems on the one hand and material structures and practices on the other, and envisions situated social practice within identifiable power fields that are constituted within the ‘critical junctions’ between relevant scales from the local to the global within uneven and combined capitalist development.

The course consists of a mix of lectures and seminars prepared by students each week. Students will do research for and write a research paper of max. 3000 words (strictly) in which they will gear the analytic strategy elaborated in the class to their own research themes.

Learning outcomes:

1) Developing an anthropological sensitivity for the conditions of modernity, including a capacity for what anthropologists call interstitial analysis (what is generally framed as interdisciplinary analysis) within a context of combined and uneven development.

2) Learning to diagnose scalar interactions in the production of situated social practice and process as studied by ethnographic methods.

3) Employing 1 + 2 in the anthropological analysis of current transformations.

Requirements:
Class 50% (presence in class and active participation in assignments is mandatory, also for auditing students). Paper 50%.
Week 1: 23/9
Introduction

Week 2: 30/9
Modernity: power and scale versus the differentiation paradigms.


Week 3: 7/10
The Modern World-System and its social analysis


Week 4: 14/10
The West and the Rest: Visions of the Capitalist Transformation


Week 5: 21/10
Modernity and postcolonialism

Frederick Cooper, “Modernity”, in Frederick Cooper Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History, Berkeley, UCP, 2005, pp. 113-149


Week 6: 28/10
The Anthropology of Global Systems: Jonathan Friedman on cycles of hegemony, modernity as identity space, and tribalism

Kaysa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman, Historical Transformations, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008:

chapter 2: Crises in Theory and Transformations of the World Economy, pp. 43-56
chapter 7: Transnationalization, Sociopolitical Disorder, and Ethnification as Expressions of Declining Global Hegemony, pp. 203-225


Chapter 7: The Implosion of Modernity: A New Tribalism, pp. 239-262
Chapter 9: Indigenous Struggles and the Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, pp. 295-313


Week 7: 4/11
Karl Polanyi and the Great Transformation

Literature TBA

Week 8: 11/11
David Harvey’s capitalist modernity

Literature TBA

Paper Outline due: max 300 words. Topic/theme/question/hypothesis

Week 9: 18/11
No class!! Teacher absent. Time to work on research paper, plus reading for the group project for next 2 weeks.

Week 10: 25/11
The populist moment: Class Transformations and the New Right

This week there will be a group project. We all read Kalb’s texts on class and the new Right. One group will read and present “The Politics of the Right”, another “Transforming Classes” (see below).


Week 11: 2/12
“Transforming Classes”. Leo Panitch and Greg Alb eds. Socialist Register 2015

Week 11: 2/12
Teacher absent. Working on research paper. Draft versions of the paper can be submitted on this date and will be discussed with the teacher early next week. They can then be finalized for class presentation in week 12.

Week 12: 9/12
Students present their individual projects. They give a max. ten-minute presentation of what they are writing about and why that is interesting in the light of questions about modernity. Every presenter will be commented upon by an allocated discussant who has read the paper before.