The Gentrification of the Political

University of Kent, Canterbury
Tuesday 7th June 2016
Boardroom, Darwin College

9:00-9:30 Welcome, Registration, Coffee & Tea

9:30-11:00 Keynote Address
Cynthia Weber (University of Sussex)

11:00-11:30 Coffee & Tea Break

11:30-13:00 Panel I: Gentrification and the Urban Landscape
Stan Erraught - *Popping up all the Time and all over the Place*
Phil Hubbard - *The Gentrification of the High Street and the Gentrification of the Mind*
Gimin Lee - *In-Between Conservation and Development in the Gentrification Process: Understanding Place Identity of Broadway Market in London*

13:00-14:00 Lunch Break

14:00-15:30 Panel II: The Politics of Gentrification
Thomas Decreus - *Chantal Mouffe and the Political: A Two-Edged Sword*
Harmonie Toros - *Taming War: The Politics of Teaching Experiential Knowledge of War in the Classroom*
Michael Reiger - *Gentrification and Utopia*

15:30-16:00 Coffee & Tea Break

16:00-17:30 Panel III: Critical Interventions in Gentrified Neighbourhoods

Maria Larissa Santos - *The Violent Production of a Violent City: Gentrification in Ciudad Juárez*

Paul Rekret - *Free Time*

17:30-18:30 Wrap up Session
Abstracts

**Chantal Mouffe and The Political: A Two-Edged Sword**

The political is a crucial concept in the oeuvre of Chantal Mouffe. In a general, ontological sense, the political refers to the condition of antagonism which characterises every social relation. Starting from this idea, Mouffe argues for agonistic pluralism and a more radical politics. Remarkably however, in Flanders this idea of agonistic politics has been picked up by right wing populists and publicists, in order to legitimise their political demands. In doing so, they explicitly refer to the work of Chantal Mouffe. In this sense the concept of the political is somehow 'gentrified'. I will try to show how this gentrification of Mouffe's concept of the political cannot be considered accidental. In fact, it leads us back to a theoretical ambiguity in Mouffe's thinking about politics and the political.

**Thomas Decreus** studied and worked at the University of Leuven and is doctor in political philosophy, specialising in (post-)Marxism and democracy theory. He currently works as a journalist for the independent media-platform DeWereldMorgen.be. He is also (co-)author of Dit is morgen (2016) and Een paradijs waait uit de storm. Over markt, democratie en verzet (2013).

**Popping up all the Time and all over the Place**

In September 2013, an organisation called Upstart took over a ‘vacant’ space at Dominick St. in Dublin’s city centre and created a ‘pop-up’ city park. For a month the park, decorated with imported plants and shrubs and furnished with ‘upcycled’ materials - pallets, tyres and so on – was host to range of activities; music, theatre and other types of performances, lectures, children’s activities and a host of other events. Coverage in local and national media was positive and Dublin City Council, who lent the site to Upstart basked somewhat in the glow of being part of what was perceived as a radical new way of ‘re-imagining’ urban space. Nevertheless, amid all this positivity, there was also some quite trenchant criticism. As Bresnihan and Byrne (2013) point out, Upstart has stated that it will convert a space which would ‘otherwise be vacant’ into a public park. But every space in the city has its own history, and the Granby Park site particularly so. The site was earmarked for a PPP (Public Private Partnership) initiative by DCC and contracts were in place with a commercial developer to
build a complex of mixed – private and social – housing and commercial property on the site and across the road, where blocks of local authority owned apartments still stand. The collapse of the Irish economy from 2008 put a stop to this, along with other similar schemes in Dublin, and has contributed to the continuing and growing housing crisis in the city. Therefore, to describe the site as ‘otherwise vacant’ sounds very like a deliberate erasure of recent history.

Much of the discussion around the project centred around notions of ‘community’ but, while it would be simplistic to recast the relationship between those who worked on the site and those who live in the area solely in class terms, it is possible to view it through a lens informed by the study of gentrification. As in many other old cities, inner Dublin has seen a partial return over the past two decades by middle-class home owners, often fitting, however loosely, the ‘creative class’ description. To some eyes, therefore, the Granby Park initiative looked suspiciously like an exercise in micro-colonialism by incomers, imposing their notions of urbanism on an inner city working class community.

In this paper, using Granby Park as an example, I investigate how the particular temporal and spatial aesthetic of the ‘pop-up’ is constructed, and how it plays out on the imagined empty space and within the often carefully curated history of our cities. I argue that no urban space is ever empty, however bare; that complex and contested patterns of settlement and displacement are written on every such space, and that the ‘pop-up’ can serve powerful ideological ends by the very act of its staging.

**Stan Erraught** returned to academia in the ‘90s after a long and unsuccessful career as a musician and received an MA and then a PhD in philosophy from Essex and UCD respectively. His research interests include critical theory (Adorno in particular), Kant and political theory, the aesthetics of popular music and the sociology of music, and popular music and the city. He is currently Principal Lecturer in Music Management at Buckinghamshire New University.

**The Gentrification of the High Street and the Gentrification of the Mind**

Writing in 2008, Loïc Wacquant argued that the literature on gentrification was becoming increasingly redundant because of its fixation with the lifestyles of the middle class gentrifier rather than any serous attention being given to the working class and the displaced. As he put it, ‘any rigorous study of gentrification should hold together the trajectories of the lower-class old timers and of the higher-class newcomers battling over the fate of the revamped district, since this class nexus forms the very heart of the phenomena’. Others have noted this tendency but precious few subsequently have paid much attention to the lives of the displaced, or offered a working class perspective on gentrification. The question is why? In this paper I
explore this question, drawing on Sarah Schulman’s (2012) *Gentrification of the Mind: witness to a lost imagination* to reflect on the absence of critical voices in debates concerning the gentrification of British shopping streets. Offering some brief empirical observations on the ongoing transformation of Margate’s High Street, described in much of the media as signaling the town’s ‘rebirth’, I argue that forms of symbolic violence repeatedly position working class retail spaces as in need of regeneration, encouraging forms of embourgeoisement that do not correspond to the material circumstances of those most reliant on those spaces. This said, I note an almost complete lack of critical voices highlighting the deleterious effects of the town’s incipient retail gentrification. In arguing this, I mirror Wacquant’s summation that there has been a complete ‘ideological eviction’ of critical perspectives around gentrification and a ‘class blindness’ which mirrors the objectification of the working class over recent decades.

**Phil Hubbard** is Professor in Urban Studies in the University of Kent’s School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, and Director (Sub Dean) for Research in the Faculty of Social Sciences. He is particularly interested in the city as a site of social conflict. His work draws on theories of the city developed in urban sociology and urban geography, and also engages with debates in criminology and socio-legal studies given his particular interests in urban “disorder” and struggles for space between different social groups.

**In-between Conservation and Development in the Gentrification Process: Understanding Place Identity of Broadway Market in London**

When evaluating a city, it can be ideal to make a good relationship between its architecture, people and its intrinsic identity in urban areas mingled with various lives together. However, enormous economic power in neoliberal societies have changed this relationship. Urban areas have been redesigned in today’s iconic images by exploiting both architectural and sociocultural resources, whilst the quality of life in cities has become more polarised between rich and poor. Regarding this, gentrification – a trend in neoliberal cities has spread to particularly the downgraded old neighbourhoods for the purpose of rebranding and revitalising these areas.

In the case of deprived old neighbourhoods designated as conservation areas, the authentic remains of the edifices tend to be better conserved as well as managed and the infrastructure is improved for intensifying image-based commodification in the gentrification process. Butler (1997) noted that seeking heritage values in urban areas can be a smokescreen for financial motives to sell a sense of history. Meanwhile, sociocultural and community values are often neglected, which eventually changes the relationship between the built environment
and old neighbours who have shaped the place identity connected with their memories and experiences.

Broadway Market in London – one of the traditional marketplaces in Hackney located in tEast London used to function as a trading and social hub for everyday people with its intrinsic characteristics. However, the popularity of Broadway Market decreased and plenty of shops became empty after WWII. Urban regeneration schemes and designated conservation areas in the late 20th century have led to improving physical quality and conserving the tangible heritage as well as the leisured-experience market in the gentrification process. Nevertheless, the relationship between this marketplace and its main users has changed and its authentic character has been compromised. Therefore, this paper will explore the changes of this old neighbourhood and evaluate its place identity today by studying Broadway Market case through architectural and sociocultural analysis.

Gimin Lee is a First Year PhD Candidate in the School of Architecture at the University of Kent, studying the relationship between heritage conservation and gentrification as cross-disciplinary research between Architecture and Urban Sociology. Of particular interest is the meaning of the authenticity of place in accordance with tangible and intangible forms for historic continuity in gentrified areas. She received an MA Conservation and Regeneration at the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield in 2014. Her masters thesis is about the extent to which the traditional marketplace should be valued as a sustainable place in town revitalisation.

Free Time

Rap music is a sound who’s emergence is inseparable from post-industrial urban geography. Its site of authenticity is an abandoned inner-city, and increasingly from around 1990 its leit-motif an individualised vision of supernumerary existence. Its imagery was specific to the 1990s: a ghetto abandoned by the state, an experience of the city as a space populated by gangs, criminals, addicts; a space of threat, danger, and social dysfunction to be avoided. So-called ‘gangsta’ or reality rap might have, through its tales of criminal virtuosity, acted as an implicit critique of unjust social structures as is often asserted. But from the perspective of the dominant culture, it confirmed the pathological nature of urban poverty.

Sequestered and restricted to the carceral space of the ghetto, as an abstraction “Black noise” in the form of rap could enjoy circulation in a global market, could re-orient the ghetto’s style, aesthetic, and vernacular into a voyeuristic fantasy for consumption in White suburbs permitting those outside the inner-city to consume its outlaw status without contact with those subjects who, with little to no access to paid employment, had their existence effectively made illegal. But the counterpart to an experience of the city as a space of danger and ruin is
of it as a space of protected and privatised escapism as a space, in other words, of consumption. For while the post-Fordist state has treated the ghetto as a dumping ground for an increasingly supernumerary population, its withdrawal from supplying social support has implied its growing role as a supplier of business services.

This historical shift is particularly relevant to the history of hip-hop insofar as an increasingly revanchist state-led urban regeneration project, pioneered in New York city beginning in the mid-1990s entailed re-zoning and pacification policies in areas previously abandoned, that had incubated hip-hop. Harlem, parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn gave way to yuppy loft conversions, a ‘foodie’ vomitorium, streets erupting with art galleries and boutiques the setting for a now universal art of photographic self-portraiture. So too rap music reflected this changing relationship with its concrete playground.

In this paper I look to changing tropes of authenticity in rap music as a means of tracing a changing experience of urban space in recent decades. As a form of popular music who’s site is often at the vanguard of urban degeneration and regeneration and whose theme is often labour in informal economies, it inhabits a privileged position in registering changing affective relations to our lived environment. Drawing on the work of geographers Neil Smith and Saskia Sassen among others and Theodor Adorno’s insights into the relationship between music, labour, and time, I argue that popular music reflected, if not prefigured, the pacification of the inner-boroughs of New York in the mid-2000s and the outsourcing of the imagery of what Loic Wacquant calls the ‘hyper-ghetto’ to Sun Belt cities.

Paul Rekret is Associate Professor of Politics at Richmond University. He is author of Down With Childhood (Repeater) and host of Beholder Halfway, a weekly radio essay, on Resonance Extra.

Gentrification and Utopia

The process of gentrification is not simply tied to urban development, but is a matter of identity. Through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity, valuable insight can be gained about the process of gentrification, and the extension of that process into other areas. This manifests as changes in a variety of social institutions that draw on or adopt a certain narrative. The narrative of communities affects the interpretation of traditions, history, and customs in accordance with that narrative, producing a unique identity for that community. Gentrification has its origin in narrative. The desire to reinterpret the historical context of institutions leads to the development of a utopian narrative that seeks to legitimize the identity of a community and bring about changes in social configuration. Gentrification occurs when groups whose identity is not reconcilable with the initial narrative distort it to include and reflect
their own identity. This distorts the initial project of revitalization by a community with a unique identity into an ideology which maintains the social configuration that was being re-interpreted. In order to combat gentrification of various social institutions, it is incumbent upon us to embrace a plurality of narratives, rather than attempting to reduce our own and our community's to a singular homogenous narrative.

Michael Regier is a first year master's student in philosophy at the University of Windsor, UK. He holds bachelor degrees in philosophy (2014) and education (2015) from the same institution. His current research interests include narratology, literary criticism, and aesthetics. He is currently working on a thesis on Plato's conception of poets and poetry.

Taming War: The Politics of Teaching Experiential Knowledge of War in the Classroom

How do we teach and learn the human experience of war? How far removed in time and space is this experience from a classroom in a British university? This paper starts with an investigation into the presence/absence of war experience in the Global North, the effects of narratives distancing war, and the consequences of challenging these narratives. It draws on the teaching and learning experience of a lecturer in the third-year undergraduate module PO656 Humans at War at the University of Kent (UK) that introduces students to the concept of experiential knowledge, the ontological, epistemological, and methodological difficulties of accessing “experience,” and asks students to engage with and analyze a testimony of war. The module is thus based on the premise that war is elsewhere and “we” need to make an effort to access this “over there.” Students over the years have increasingly challenged this premise, responding to the “where is war and how can we access it?” question with: “We are war.” This response directly challenges an established narrative in International Relations – whether in the realist or critical approaches – that the Global North has been essentially an experience of peace since World War II. This paper argues that this narrative obscures the fundamental role of war experience in ordinary lives of ordinary citizens in the Global North and the role of wars past and wars exported in maintaining ordinary lives as they are, and aims to reinforce the construction of the “peaceful,” “civilized” Westerner and the “violent,” “barbaric” other. The paper could thus be a story of radicalism in the academy - an example of a space where students can engage in what bell hooks describes as "talking back." Any module on war, however, may inevitably result in a taming of political violence - its pain and destruction but also its radical potential. Indeed, the ontological gap between war experience and war knowledge (Brighton, 2011) requires a sense-making exercise carried out collectively by lecturer and students alike when war experience is brought into the classroom (or
into academic journals). Such a sense-making move makes war unchaotic and linear, while chaos and non-linearity are seen as essential components of the experience of war and violence more generally (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995). The aim of this paper is thus to examine whether any study of war - however experimental and experiential - can avoid such taming.

**Harmonie Toros** is Senior Lecturer in International Conflict Analysis at the University of Kent, UK. She has been researching the potential for negotiations and dialogue with non-state armed groups for 10 years (Terrorism, Talking and Transformation: A Critical Approach, Routledge, 2012) and more recently has been investigating methodological and epistemological challenges involved in researching and writing on the human experience of war and political violence. She is an editor of the journal Critical Studies on Terrorism and, in stark contrast, a member of Global Research Network of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate of the UN Security Council.