

GPHY 893 – Radical Circulations: Geographies of Waste and Recycling

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Contact Time	1.5 hrs. tutorial per week; 1.5 hrs. weekly in-class lecture; weekly office hours	
Format	Lectures, discussions, and debates based on key texts, case studies and videos	
Class Assessment	Class Participation - 10% Weekly Reflection - 15% Oral Presentation - 15% Book Chapter Review - 25% Annotated Bibliography - 35%	

COURSE OVERVIEW

Capitalists have long understood that any economy could be organized around the satisfaction of infinite human desires/wants (See Cornberg, 2005). The acquisitive aspect of human nature that begets desires/wants also calls into existence a never-ending economic process that is detached from reality i.e., resources are in fact, limited. When desire is translated into demand, it leads to production, marketing and distribution and consumption. To satisfy these infinite desires/wants, a wide range of living and non-living entities (natural resources) are ‘wasted’ through the commodity production process. This simultaneously creates the conditions for the owners of the means of production to accrue and accumulate surplus capita. To this end, virgin forests and woodlands, animals, mountains, rivers, oceans and seas, non-renewable resources exemplify the natural side of disposability, while obsolete products e.g., VHS, portable cameras, Kodak film, VCRs, and single-use plastics, represent the artificial side (See Cornberg, 2005). Human beings, particularly racialized peoples, as labour and as consumers are also rendered disposable, within the neoliberal capitalist economy (See Giroux, 2014, Babbitt, 2015). Given the above, this course takes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding waste, its creation, and its centrality to the expansion of global capital accumulation, paying particular attention to the social, political, and economic processes that render certain material objects/commodities, spaces/places, and populations as waste in contemporary economics. The course will also engage with current debates about recycling/urban mining (within informal waste networks) as a solution to the global waste problem, and anxieties around critical minerals scarcity. The course draws on scholarly works in political ecology, critical resource geographies, commodity chain analysis, environmental and social justice, the circular economy, black ecologies, and critical race.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Explain key theoretical approaches and concepts within waste studies
2. Explain the the economics of waste recycling and recovery.
3. Articulate the pros and cons as well as factors influencing the policy shift towards a circular economy
4. Explain complex concepts in written and verbal formats
5. Develop critical reading skills, participate, and learn from class discussions and assigned readings

SELECTED COURSE TOPICS

Waste, (Informal) Recycling, Commodity Chain, Circular Economy, Green Capitalism, Informal Waste Economies, Racial Capitalism; Electronic Waste, Used Textiles, Fast Fashion; Toxic Dumping, Labour

COURSE READINGS

The required readings for this course will come from journal articles, book chapters, blog/forum post, newspaper articles, government reports and documentaries.