

Urban Narratives

Fall 2025

Course: BTP2NA_T_25

Time and place: Tue 14:00-15:40, Room 56, Main Building

Instructor: Dr. Éva Pataki (pataki.eva@arts.unideb.hu)

Office hour: Tue and Fri 9:00 -10:00, Rm 118, Main Building

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Course Description

The aim of the course is to familiarize students with the social, lived, and affective dimensions of urban life in 20th-century American fiction and film. Through a selection of novels, short stories, and films, students will engage with representations of the American city as spaces of community and exclusion, as lieu de mémoire and emotional geographies. We will explore how the urban environments of New York, Chicago, Washington, and Miami shape human experience – especially for marginalized communities – and how writers and filmmakers reflect and reimagine urban space. Drawing on critical theory on space, affect, and postcolonialism, the course examines cities not as neutral settings but as contested territories of memory, power, movement, and identity, as well as protagonists in their own right. By the end of the course, students will develop tools for analyzing urban narratives across genres and media, and producing original, theoretically grounded arguments. Through classroom discussion, oral presentation, and written assignments, the course will also facilitate students to hone their analytical and academic writing skills.

General course requirements

Students will be expected to keep up with the reading and watching assignments and to be equipped with questions and comments for class discussion. The classes should be conducted in an atmosphere in which the instructor and the students can share and discuss their insights. Students should note that the linguistic quality of their performance will have a major impact on their final grade.

Requirements for a grade

1. Class participation (15%)

Active participation in class discussion is essential and will have a mighty influence on one's final grade. You should by no means be afraid to come up with ideas and open them up for class discussion. Since, however, one seminar session may be too short for us to discuss each and every point that you might

want to raise, you should also be able to relate to the points raised by your fellow students and/or the instructor. Please be prepared for *occasional comprehension tests* on the assigned readings/films, the results of which will also be included in your grade for class participation.

2. Presentation and discussion (20%)

The discussion leader should prepare a 10-minute PPT presentation based on a short excerpt (7-15 lines) selected from the assigned work of fiction or film (plus 1-2 movie stills, in case of the latter). The presentation should include critical questions, analysis with close reading, and the discussion leader's own interpretation, supported with a theoretical background. The presentation will be followed by leading a group discussion of further questions about or extracts from the text, provided by the instructor. The other group discussion leaders will be selected at random. The discussion leader should be prepared to respond to on-site questions related to their analysis, and bring a PPT or an adequate number of copies of the excerpt to class so that the members of the group can share a copy amongst themselves. Grading criteria: Critical questions and analysis (5%), Argumentation and theoretical background (5%), Responding to on-site questions (5%), Discussion and academic style (5%).

3. End-term test (40%)

The course will conclude with an end-term test intended to measure the students' comprehension and mastery of the material covered throughout the semester.

4. Take-home essay (25%)

An *argumentative essay* (1800-2200 words, Times New Roman, font size 12, 1.5 line-spacing, conforming to the requirements of the MLA style) on one or more literary/cinematic texts chosen by the student from the field and period covered by the course and accompanied by a research documentation (mind-mapping on a narrow topic, research questions, hypothesis, notes on/quotes from primary sources as well as secondary sources used for theoretical support, a detailed outline of the essay, reference to any AI generated material used). Grading criteria: Academic content (analysis and interpretation, plausibility of thesis = 10%), Argumentation (logic of argumentation, theoretical background = 5%), Academic language and style (structure, coherence, references, citation, bibliography = 5%), Research documentation (= 5%).

Deadline: December 2

NOTE ON PLAGIARISM: ALL forms of plagiarism will automatically result in failure for the course. Please note that in the case of AI-generated texts used in submitted written work (essays and PPTs), the student is responsible for any errors in the text, for the correctness of the content and conclusions, and for the veracity of the text. The submitted text can only be accepted as an independent work of the student if the substantive part of the text is truly and clearly the result of independent work. In their submissions, students must document the purpose and use of AI tools in their work (name of the software,

way of use, prompts) in the Works Cited/Reference list. Should the suspicion of unauthorized use of AI-based aids arise, the instructor reserves the right to verify the student's knowledge of the course material as well as the student's authorship of an assignment or paper in a manner chosen by the instructor. Any violation of the University's regulations on academic conduct constitutes an ethical offense according to the provisions of the Study and Examination Regulations.

Attendance policy:

In accordance with university regulations, **missing more than three sessions**, including those that are due to illness, **will result in a failing grade.**

Grading:

Your final grades will be calculated on the basis of the percentage figure that the results of the requirements add up to. Failure is 60% or below.

91-100=5

81-90=4

71-80=3

61-70=2

0-60=1

Schedule of classes

Week 1

Orientation and Introduction

Week 2

No class

Week 3

Theories and Concepts: Edward W. Soja, "Discovering Thirdspace" (1996) and Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" (1980)

Week 4

Joh Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), excerpts

Week 5

Colson Whitehead, *The Colossus of New York* (2007)

Week 6

Manhattan (dir. Woody Allen, 1979) and *25th Hour* (dir. Spike Lee, 2002)

Week 7

Consultation week – NO CLASS

Week 8

James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (1957) and Edward P. Jones, "The Girl Who Raised Pigeons" (1992)

Week 9

Stuart Dybek, *The Coast of Chicago* (1990), excerpts; Junot Díaz, "Negocios" (1996); and Bharati Mukherjee, "A Wife's Story" (1988)

Week 10

Teju Cole, *Open City* (2011)

Week 11

W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet" (1920) and Shirley Jackson, "The Tooth" (1949)

Week 12

Do the Right Thing (dir. Spike Lee, 1989)

Week 13

Revision and closing

Week 14

End-term test

Readings

Compulsory literature: (see detailed course programme)

Recommended literature:

Anderson, Ben. "Affective Atmospheres." *Emotion, Space and Society*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2009, pp. 77–81.

Hakutani, Yoshinobu and Robert Butler, editors. *The City in African American Literature*. Associated University Press, 1995.

Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford University Press, 2003.

Keenan, Norris. "Urban Fiction." *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Fiction 1980 – 2020*, edited by Lesley Larkin, Patrick O'Donnell, and Stephen J. Burn, Wiley, 2022, pp. 1340–47.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Wiley-Blackwell, 1974.

Massey, Doreen. *Space, Place, and Gender*. University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Zukin, Sharon. *The Cultures of Cities*. Blackwell, 1995.

Pomerance, Murray, editor. *City That Never Sleeps: New York and the Filmic Imagination*. Rutgers, New York, 2007.

Tambling, Jeremy, editor. *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*. Springer, 2022.

Westphal, Bertrand. *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Translated by Robert T. Tally Jr., Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

All readings are available in printed form in the institute library and/or in digital form on the e-learning site of the course.