Political Economy has experienced its cultural and performative/practice turns. These turns have been prompted in part by a growing sensitivity to the local or to diversity as part of scholarly and public reaction to the claimed homogenization wrought by capitalist globalization and in part by postcolonial critiques of various Marxist and neo-Marxist accounts of capitalism as Eurocentric. This emphasis on culture/economy as performative has called forth scholarship on capitalism that is more locally specific, historically situated, and often ethnographically rich. Though this scholarship might be seen to replace earlier understandings of capitalism as big structures and large processes, I prefer to see the two strains or strands of scholarly work as complementary and as usefully read in juxtaposition. In general, the course works against the bifurcation of economy and culture, constitutive not only of conventional economics, but also much of political economy and cultural studies.

More specifically, the course begins with David Harvey’s Marxist or Marxian account of capitalism as a structured but contradictory whole and neo- or post-Marxist work on capitalism as a world system with globalization as its latest stage. Though helpful in many respects, and I too will fall into speaking of capitalism as if it is a totality and unity at times, work organized around the logic of capitalism or the idea of a capitalist world-system has been challenged as Eurocentric and insufficiently attentive to the diversity of capitalisms or social formations attached to or subsumed under or articulated with capitalism as a global system. We will examine the sociological vocabularies of embeddedness and performance as avenues to capture the cultural elements of capitalism and the postcolonial ideas of multiple histories, translation, and uneven and combined development as possible resources for understanding the diverse impacts and practice of capitalism across space and time. Work by Gidwani, Mitchell, Tsing and Chu give us important exemplars of the possibilities of capturing capitalism in its necessarily localized universality. The seminar will look at one theme in greater detail: the structure of global production/supply chains and logistics. Here, as before, we will move between scholarship that looks at the logic of broad structures and processes and work that hones in on the more embedded and spatially localized performance of supply chains.

The course supports the development of a sensibility that is attentive to and appreciative of both the big structures analytic and the diversity of situated local and regional experience and the agility to move between the two.
Course requirements:

a. Prepare for class. The “primary readings” will be the principal basis of class discussion. You may want to dig deeper into the list if that literature draws you in or if you are responsible as the day’s key commentator. The additional readings at the end of the syllabus serve as reference points beyond the course. Leave them for later or other work. Participation in classroom discussion figures in 20% of your final grade. Participation grade includes:

b. Submit questions (a minimum of two) for class discussion each week. Circulate them by 9 am each Tuesday via email. In addition to the four questions, provide the pedagogical rationale for the questions, individually or as a set. Explain where these questions might lead us.

c. Class essay and presentation. Each week one student will prepare a 5-8 minute discussion of the readings—turning on some key themes or questions. The daily commentator’s role will involve launching each class period, as a way of focusing and intensifying our discussions. It may help to draw on additional readings from the secondary list—or not. By the next class period, the commentator will turn in an essay of 4-5 pages will be due. Together=20% of final grade. Presentations will be scheduled during the initial class period.

d. Produce an annotated review of the literature for a class period different than the one for which you take responsibility in part c or for some imagined class period that doesn’t exist on my syllabus. There are numerous limits to and gaps in my syllabus. Take this as an opportunity to fill in some lacuna in the course. You are welcome to choose an area that supports your own work. These will be shared with the rest of the class, so make them useful to a wider audience. That means your annotations need to connect the texts you review to wider themes. 20% of the grade

e. Final paper (approximately 20 pages). 40% of the grade.

Milestones:

- **M February 7:** Send me a few paragraphs stating your aspirations and intentions for this research project, such as topic, approach or genre, how it supports your graduate work.
- **Su March 23:** an initial fragment of the paper (5-7 pages) and a discussion of where this fits into this fragment fits into the overall project.
- **April 18:** Final paper due

Note: All the materials for class should be available via the library reserve system. You may want to purchase some of the books for yourself.
Class schedule:

Week 1 (Jan 10): Introductions

I. Capitalism as Big Structures and Large Processes

Week 2 (Jan 17): The Contradictory Logic of Capitalism

David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (Oxford, 2014), Introduction, Part 1 (chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7), Part 2, Conclusion


Additional Readings:


Week 3 (Jan 24): Capitalism as World-System/Globalization


Additional Readings:


**II. Transitional Ideas**

*Week 4 (Jan 31): Embodiment and Economy as Performative*


Additional Readings:

Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Social and Economic Origins of our Times*


*Week 5 (Feb 7): Postcolonial Critique*

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University), chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 47-96)


Additional readings:

Jacqueline Best and Matt Patterson, eds., *Cultural Political Economy* (Routledge, 2010)

III. Exemplars

Week 6 (Feb 14): The Local Constitution of Capitalism

Vinay Gidwani, *Capital Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India* (University of Minnesota),

Week 7 (Su Feb 19-Su Feb 26): Break

Week 8 (Feb 28): Enacting Modernity


Week 9 (Mar 7): The Enactment of the Universal as the Local


Week 10 (Mar 14): An Ethnography of Flows


Global Supply Chains/Logistics

Week 11 (Mar 21): Power and Global Production


**Week 12 (Mar 28): Disarticulations and Heterogeneities**


**Week 13 (Apr 4): Queering Logistics**

Deborah Cowen, The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade (University of Minnesota, 2012), Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5