

**Transcript Ep.56: Urbanization: A Contested Concept**

**[David Harvey, on video]** *Between 1900 and 1999, the United States consumed 4, 500 million tons of cement. That's in one century. Between 2011 and 2013, China consumed 6, 500 million tons of cement. That is in three years, the Chinese consumed 50 percent more cement than the United States had consumed in the whole of the preceding century.*

**[Nicolas Goez]** That was David Harvey, a renowned Marxist geographer. And the fact he's talking about is more than striking. Just let it sit for a second. In only three years, China poured more cement than the United States did in the entire past century. Where has all that cement gone to? And how much cement has been actually spread all over the world in the past three years? My name is Nicolas Goez, and I'm going to be your host in today's episode.

**[Intro]** *This is the urban political. The podcast on urban theory, research, and activism.*

**[Nicolas Goez]** I began this story with cement because it's something we often associate with cities, concrete jungles. And since cities are getting bigger and bigger, you can already guess what's the deal with all that cement. So, we're going to talk about something even more massive than China's construction aspirations. Because it's not only cement that has been spread around the globe. Energy consumption is on the rise. Extraction of raw materials is reaching unprecedented peak levels. And millions, if not billions of people, are moving and commuting to urban centres every day, let alone the count of the other millions already living in cities, demanding that same energy and raw materials to sustain their urban life.

This might be a symptom of, what some have called at the turn of the century, the urban age. Very prominent in this discourse appear organizations and institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the OECD, the European Union, and the like. And since then, a ridiculous number of books, papers, and articles start with a prognose that almost sounds like a sentence: "The world is urbanizing at a disruptive pace" or by this or that year "most people around the world would be living in cities". And derived from these kinds of statements, researchers, politicians, and journalists point to the serious consequences of such an urbanizing world. Food shortages, social crisis, environmental catastrophes. Well, at the same time, they anticipate solutions within the same cities causing trouble in the first place. But there's some fuzz around this so-called urban age. How do they actually define and measure urbanization? After all, what's a city in Germany or Sweden might be a village in China. In this episode, we're going to talk about all this, diving into a quite controversial and productive concept coined as planetary urbanization.

This concept has been around for a while. It was proposed by Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid at the beginning of the past decade, and it has been a contested topic in urban studies ever since. It has reopened fundamental and pressing discussions, and reframed questions like: what is a city, how do we understand urbanization and city making? What is the role of capitalism within today's urbanism, and what do the hinterlands have to do with all this? At this point, you might be thinking it's too much for a podcast episode. And it is. Today we'll be only seeing the tip of the iceberg, but with the expertise of Johanna Hoerning and Hillary Angelo, our guests in today's episode, we will try to disentangle some bits of this concept and the debates behind.



So let me introduce you to Johanna Hoerning. She is professor of sociology at the HafenCity University in Hamburg and has been researching social movements and their spatial dynamics from a postcolonial perspective for two decades. Johanna, thanks for being here with us.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** Thank you for having me here.

**[Nicolas Goetz]** Our second guest is Hillary Angelo. She is professor of sociology at the University of California Santa Cruz and her research focuses on understandings of the environment and the relationship to large scale spatial and social transformations. Hillary, welcome to The Urban Political.

**[Hillary Angelo]** Thank you. It's good to be here.

**[Nicolas Goetz]** I'm super thrilled to start this podcast with you. And my first question would be, what is urbanization? What is included in that word? And what isn't? So, who wants to go first?

**[Hillary Angelo]** Johanna, do you want to go first?

**[Johanna Hoerning]** Okay, I can make a start. We can just move back and forth probably. Because it is, of course, a very, it can be a very small concept. It can be something we can instant in a very banal way, which is actually what all the talk about urban age and so forth has been pointing towards. That we are just moving towards a world in which more people live in settlements that we can call urban cities and towns alike.

And as such, it's just a relational process of changing and moving, transforming towards a world in which people live more in cities and towns. But as such, it is actually not very useful to urban research or to social sciences at the larger scale. And I think as a process, of course it is a process, that's something that we have to understand in the first place. As a process, it links to very different things. So, it links to a question, how social relations are being transformed into being urban relations. What that is, is something that it's a whole entire debate in itself. And how social relations that can be framed as non-urban are being overcome. So, this concept relates again back to different other discourses that link to other notions and concepts, such as the urban in itself, the non-urban, which can be understood as rural or just non-urban in a more broader sense.

I think what we have to understand is, of course, that urbanization as a process can mean a transformation of, let's say, settlements and interactions, but it is also a process of, I think, Lefebvre framed it as "The becoming of the urban", and as such, it is a process that's never ended, and never ending because it's always a becoming of the urban. And I think we can probably in the discussion, go into further detail what that can mean, but it is certainly something that we have to understand as an ongoing process.



**[Nicolas Goez]** Thank you very much, I think that sounds super interesting. Especially because of the complexity you're mentioning here in this concept. I think, we have a lot of work in front of us. What do you think? What do you say, Hillary?

**[Hillary Angelo]** I think that was a great start, Johanna, and you started with the most difficult question, of course, Nicolas. I guess some things that I would add to what's already been said, which I basically very much agree with. You mentioned planetary urbanization as coming from Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid. And one thing I would say is that their intellectual inspiration was, of course, from Lefebvre whom Johanna just mentioned. Who in his book *The Urban Revolution*, talks about this kind of incipient planetary urbanization. And what he's really referring to there is the kind of urban problematic or urban processes overtaking industrialization as the kind of dominant form of transformation on the planet. And since you also started with a quote from Harvey, I feel compelled to say that I think in this kind of Marxist geography, critical political economy tradition, people are usually talking about the spatialization of capital. The redevelopment, the uneven development, investment and disinvestment in the built environment and all these really complex ways, which we can of course talk about within cities as spatial containers and also far beyond them in all the ways you're both gesturing towards.

And then the final thing I'd say, which Johanna already hit on, which I think is really important and is close to my own heart as a fellow sociologist, is the kind of cultural and social aspects of these transformations and what the implications of these geographic and political economic changes are on people and ways of life and sensibilities. And how these transform in parallel. So, I guess that's what I'd add there.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Thanks Hillary, I think that's super interesting, and I see both of you have developed a basic understanding of urbanization and already shown some of the pathways of this debate. But before we get more into the content, I want to ask you why and how did you end up writing about urbanization? I mean why in first place. You can really answer this question in a very simple way. It can be personal.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** The question is probably how far back do you want me to go in my biography?

**[Nicolas Goez]** I think it's very often a development of ideas, I guess. But I mean, you choose when you want to start.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** I think what I first engaged with, and I didn't really think of myself as an urban theorist at the time or as a researcher doing urban studies, but I engaged with urban social movements and the housing question in Brazil. So that was my starting point. And I did it mainly in São Paulo. And I actually, over the course of doing that research and engaging with political questions in the urban context, I got more and more, let's say, confronted. I was confronted with the idea of these cities being mega cities and being a very specific and distinct form of urbanization, radical urbanization, widespread agglomerations.

And so, from the start, I was already engaged engaging with these very specific forms of urbanization. And I think what has been very important to me over the course of the years has been to understand these as specific forms. And in order to understand them engage in a broader perspective on different processes and transformations that are linked or that we can understand as urbanization. And in the course of that, I have been more and more intrigued by the idea of linking that back to what we in urban research always claim as to be non-urban or rural. And I think that has been actually the most important point to me and engaging also with the planetary organization debate. To understand different forms and differentiations in the urbanization processes. And I think that is something that I share absolutely and have in common, as a point of interest, with the authors engaging in the planetary organization debate.

**[Nicolas Goez]** I think it's super interesting, this perspective from Brazil. You've mentioned before, Hillary, that one of the inspirations for Christian Schmid and Neil Brenner was Lefebvre, but actually also Roberto Monte-Mór from Brazil. And I guess that plays also a role in this kind of different context where literature has developed, like in the case of Roberto It's more this concept of extended urbanization, which maybe you as experts can talk about later a little bit, if you feel like, but I think I also want to pose the question to you, Hillary, how did you end up writing about urbanization?

**[Hillary Angelo]** We should definitely go back to the questions of extended urbanization and the kind of urban rural questions for sure. Like Johanna, I could go way back in my own personal biography, but maybe I'll just say, I worked for the parks department. After I graduated from college, I started my career in city government in New York, before I got my PhD. That work was urban in orientation in the sense that it was focused on a large city and social and political and ecological relations in that city. Mostly I worked with community groups that were trying to be involved in their parks. And so, we were trying to offer support for these groups and help them learn to work with city government and advocate for resources and all that kind of stuff. And I became very interested in the kind of political and emotional and affective power of these urban green spaces. And I got kind of obsessed with the question of why do people love their parks so much? Why are all these people confronting really serious social, economic, political challenges, choosing to go out and pick up trash and parks on weekends. And why do city council members love it so much?

A lot of my work has gone on to be about that question, but I think it was also about, I mean, I was interested in trying to ask more sociological than spatial or political economic questions about urbanization. So, trying to revisit some of these questions about urbanism as a way of life or the urbanization of consciousness, people like Wirth and Harvey have posed, and to think about what does that mean. And what does it mean when we adopt this processual orientation towards urbanization and are not thinking about just people who are living in cities. I guess that was kind of the genesis of it. Sometimes I say that I just continue to use the term partly for convenience, because I think, it's maybe worth talking about today, there is a sort of level of pragmatism and professional buckets that we all put ourselves in. So, if you identify as an urban sociologist you're stuck with the term. We could talk about that as well.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Yeah, totally. But I think I'd like to define some contours still a little bit. Because this episode is not only aimed at an audience that has some knowledge on urban studies and the literature, but we're also trying to digest a little bit this whole debate and make it accessible for other groups. And I think one of the most important questions for that is why is it important to research urbanization

in the first place? And another question that's linked to that is why has this become such a visible topic in the past 30 years? I think that's also related to the whole urban age debate, I don't know, it would be super interesting if you could just delve a little bit into that.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** I mean, I would say that it never ceased to be an important issue. And I think that just for a while in the global north, let's say, it was not a politically very visible question linked to processes of urbanization. And so, the case in point that it is more visible now and vividly debated, I think probably links back to political and economic developments in the cities that we see. As I started my research on urbanization in Brazil, I think, it never ceased to be an important issue and in certain parts of the world, it has been just for the last decades, and not just the last three decades. It has been one of the central issues in societal struggles, in research and in trying to understand societal developments at large.

**[Hillary Angelo]** I really like the point that Johanna just made about how it's sort of always been important. I mean, there's a long tradition of urban research and it's definitely continuing to change and evolve. So maybe it hasn't become more important. I do think, as you were saying as you introduced this podcast, there's been an interest from the global north or maybe 10 years ago now in that kind of growth of so-called mega cities in the global south. And so, those cities had morphological characteristics that were surprising urban scholars who'd been looking at industrial cities, sort of classic 19th century industrial cities, like London, New York and so on.

And so, I think that that prompted a lot of this urban age discourse and that then prompted urban theorists to, I think, to sort of say how do we really understand these phenomena and is the best way to understand this as some kind of urban age tipping point. I will just say as the American here, I think the other thing that was going on in the United States anyway, is that urban sociology was very much caught and still is very much caught in this kind of Chicago school paradigm, which is mostly using the city as a laboratory and looking at these social groups and their relationships in cities.

So, a lot of what the Chicago school sociologists did were things called neighbourhood studies. Where they'd look at x group of immigrants or x group of problematic urban residents. So that could be the Polish immigrants, or it could be the gay men living in Manhattan or whoever that group was. I'm just trying to understand them. And so, I think, again, in the North American context this planetary urbanization intervention can be understood as an effort to shift focus away from this very myopic view and view focused on apparently strange morphologies of new cities and towards the broader processes of transformation.

**[Nicolas Goez]** I think that's a great bridge to my next question. You're directly relating the concept of planetary urbanization to this whole discussion of why is it important to research urbanization in the first place? Could you maybe explain to the audience, in a nutshell, what planetary urbanization is?

**[Hillary Angelo]** Johanna, maybe I should go first this time. I think it's harder to go first, so you can respond to me. So, I'll just say, since I was already sort of starting to talk about it. I think, and I'm borrowing this partly from my friend and colleague David Wachsmuth, who says this frequently as well. I think planetary urbanization, as it is understood, so mostly people are talking about Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid's work, wrongly or rightly, which we can also get into. But that intervention is best

understood in the context of urban studies in North America. So, this mainstream Chicago school approach and as a sort of rebuttal to that and a corrective, and also to the urban age people. So, saying, we've been all very fixated on neighbourhoods in cities or the growth of cities per se. In fact, it would be very useful for this discipline that calls itself urban studies or urban sociology to refocus on the entire transformation of global urban geographies. What's involved in the growth of these cities. What's involved in the transformation of these neighbourhoods, as you were talking about. What concrete from where is being used to construct them? What infrastructure of sanitation, water, communication, finance, and so on is being constructed, that's underpinning and making these forms of urban life possible. And trying to ask the discipline to take that into account. And I realized I didn't respond to your question about nature, but we can get into that too. I think that's an aspect of it as well.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Totally. Because if we're talking about the raw materials that are getting extracted to sustain urban life, for example, then we are also relating directly to extractivist practices, for example. And I think that's related to environmental issues.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** I completely agree. And I mean, it's probably interesting that you've invited 2 sociologists to talk about it. What I think is really and also, I find really intriguing about the debate on planetary organization is exactly the point, and just adding to what Hillary just said, de centring our research on urbanization from the city, because we always assume that we know what the city is. And the city is the product at the end of urbanization processes, and we seem to imply that we know what the city is, and they're just intrinsically linked those processes.

But the planetary urbanization debate has really challenged us to think about these dynamics differently and to move our focus away from the city as a product that we know, and that we can define as an entity. And I think, looking more into networks and connections between different places that link and that form the backbone of processes of urbanization has been one of the most intriguing things of the whole debate to me. And although it is very difficult to really say, very simply put, what planetary urbanization is about. It is, of course, about a process of different processes of centralization. And I think this has been very good in order to understand that urbanization is a process of centralization of interactions, of goods, of capital of infrastructures and in a way also of common goods. And the way that people use and appropriate those common goods. I think all those aspects that are part of the processes of urbanization, that we look into with planetary urbanization, that we need to understand in a more global, in a more differentiated way. I think those are aspects that I really find intriguing about the whole debate.

**[Hillary Angelo]** I think that makes a lot of sense. One thing I'd add, or I would underscore is that I think in terms of the planetary urbanization intervention in particular, it's trying to draw attention to both the centralization and extension. Like Brenner and Schmid's edited volume "Implosions / Explosions". To think about the cities themselves as a moment of centralization that are reliant upon and bound up with this sort of extension. You mentioned extended urbanization before [unintelligible], extended landscapes of extraction.

I would underscore something you also just said, which is this sort of shift in orientation from site to process. So, away from thinking about cities as sites or neighbourhoods and cities as sites to this process itself.

**[Nicolas Goez]** I think that's a super interesting aspect of the entire debate because I think it gives us a conceptual tool to think of social spatial processes or social spatial phenomena beyond these places and focusing on these processes. You also mentioned something about the debates that are revolving around the whole idea of planetary urbanization. My next question is related to that debate because it's been a quite heated debate and since the beginning of the planetary urbanization thesis this concept has been causing a lot of discussions.

And for example, there was this entire special issue in the journal "Environment and Planning D" that gathered different positions, raising sharp critiques to the concept of planetary urbanization. And there was also a super harsh article by Richard Walker in the city journal. I'd even say it was unprofessional, maybe. Because of the dismissive character and disqualifying tone. But why is all that? What are they fighting over, or what were they fighting over? Because I think the debate has changed a lot since it began. Hillary, you and Kian Goh summed up all these critiques and structured them a bit. Could you give us some thoughts on these critiques?

**[Hillary Angelo]** It is very contentious, there have been many debates. So, I published this article with my colleague and friend Kian Goh, where basically we argue that many of the critiques are positing difference against abstraction in a certain sense, basically one of the kernels of the criticisms, not all of the criticisms, is that this is a very large scale, abstract, top-down account of global transformation that occludes difference in various places. That it occludes differences in different cities, different types of cities, different sorts of politics that you might find within cities. And that that big categorical distinction of difference against abstraction or this universalizing theory versus local concrete variability is a core. We talk about in the article, like kind of different registers of that critique. So, some are empirical where people point out concrete differences in different places and contrapose those to this idea of a universal abstraction. One is epistemological. So, a lot of these critiques are coming from feminist scholars. And it's a positional and political argument where they say that a theory like planetary urbanization is a kind of God trick, in Donna Haraway's words. It supposes a kind of objectivity that none of us can have. We can't really have a planetary theory.

And that there's a third theoretical register of critique that deals really more with the conceptual boundaries of the concept. Like, how does urbanization relate to other large-scale processes? Or how do we think about transformations of everyday life in relation to this very large-scale thing. So that's how I have worked, have laboured to understand, some of these critiques, but Johanna, I would love to hear your thoughts on that too.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Before Johanna responds to that, I think maybe it would be nice to have the three aspects in a nutshell, you mentioned epistemological, like from an epistemological position. The second was?

**[Hillary Angelo]** Empirical. And the third is theoretical. So, these are all in the paper, there's a little table in the paper, actually.

**[Nicolas Goez]** All the literature is going to be in the description of the episode. Johanna, if you want to respond to that? I also have a juicy question for you.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** I think I can absolutely relate to what you just said, Hillary. And I myself, I've also tried to engage with the planetary urbanization debate, going through those dimensions. So, I do think empirically, there will always be a way of understanding, and this is necessary. We do have to look into empirical variations, but this is not at a theoretical level. So, we do have a difference between empirical insights, theoretical abstractions and epistemologically understanding the ways that we deal with our research in methodological and epistemological ways.

And this also points to the fact that the debate has been so inspiring, actually. Because I think it is absolutely important to engage with urban studies and urban research from all those angles and to link them back together. So, I think this has made it very clear again that we have to engage in a more thorough way. And also in a more, I'm not saying planetary, but a more global way. In order to understand how do we get to formulate theories, and based on what empirical insights? I think this has just been really inspiring to many of us. And I think that is also one of the reasons why the debate has been so heated. And actually, I think heated debate is something that we need, and it's at the heart of academic discourse. I don't think it's a bad thing, it's actually a very good thing.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Yeah, I would also definitely say that's a very good thing.

**[Hillary Angelo]** That's right. And the other thing I said before that I think in its American iterations, this is in part a response to the dominance of Chicago school sociology. But there's also, of course, as Johanna was just referencing, there's been a lot of questions about how we globalize urban research. People like Jennifer Robinson and Ananya Roy and others have been working on that. And so, I think there's also a way that you can see planetary urbanization as fitting into those sets of methodological and theoretical questions, which have been very rich in our field for a number of years.

**[Nicolas Goez]** You were mentioning before the tension, let's say, between differentiation and abstraction and Johanna, in your article, reassessing urbanization, you mention some interesting aspects around this tension. And I'm a little bit nerdy, I put a quote, let me read it. *"Theoretically, the thesis of planetary urbanization calls for differentiating a plurality of the urban, but at the same time, the planetary claim posits a universality that comprises not only cities everywhere, but any place anywhere. The demand for theoretical differentiation, as well as the provocation, in terms of universality, both invite examination."*

I think you have a very important point there, because it's a tricky tension between that differentiation and that abstraction. Is the concept maybe trying to encompass more than what it should? I know that this is not an easy question to answer, but could you maybe talk a little bit more about this idea? Or this tension. I don't know if tension would be the correct word.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** I'll just follow you with the tension. I think this tension is something that is at the heart of any conceptual theorizing that we do, and that is that is one of the things that we do in research. I think this is actually something that we always have to engage with. There is a tension between the abstract concept, and it points towards a potential universality. I think it lies at the heart



of any abstract concept. But at the same time, the debate and the whole idea of planetary urbanization has been about differentiation.

And so, I think this is a, it is a productive tension. It is a productive tension in the way that it points towards the need and also the challenge how to understand those different aspects and dynamics of urbanization. I think I wrote something about invites for more investigation or whatever I wrote. The point of where you can really start, you can really rethink and engage and go back and forth between differentiations and conceptual theorizing. And I think that is absolutely required. But what I also think is that planetary urbanization has had the tendency, or the contributions to the debate have had the tendency to overestimate the universal processes of urbanization. And I think that what is that need is actually that we try not to overlook those differentiations as also potentials for theorizing. So, I think while there is the grand theory of planetary urbanization that includes or tends to include those empirical and process on dynamic variations or differentiations, I think we ought to look into the theorizing or theoretical potential of those differentiations in their own right. And that is something where post-colonial theory and post-colonial authors and contributions to the debate have also pointed towards. They've said it's not about empirical variation in the sense that, yes things look always different wherever you go, but it's about historical differentiation and also global perspectives on different processes and dynamics of urbanization and the ways that the urban relates to other and maybe non-urban phenomena.

**[Hillary Angelo]** I think it's interesting how much everybody tends to agree with each other when we actually get in a room and start talking. That's one thing I would say. And the debates, as you've said, have been really heated. And there's been caricaturing of positions in ways that are probably not so helpful. One point of distinction I would make is just to say that I don't think calling a process global implies that it's universal. Or to say that something is global or planetary doesn't mean it touches down in the same way everywhere. So, colonialism, for example. Which we can understand as global, doesn't mean that all colonial or post-colonial or settler colonial sites look the same. So, I think that that's one.

And I think that anyone who kind of uses this framework would probably say something like that, if asked. The other thing I would say is, absolutely I certainly don't feel that having some kind of overarching rubric of planetary urbanization as a way of directing our attention or shaping the kinds of research questions we might ask or thinking about places that might be connected to each other in ways we wouldn't obviously see or think about. That that certainly doesn't exhaust the possibilities for theory making or any sorts of questions that anyone could ask of anything in the world. I completely agree with Johanna about that. The other, I guess I would just say, I want to add this and, Nico, I can't remember if you have a question about it, so you can just tell me to table this for a minute if we're going to get to it later.

I also think there's a kind of question about the shape of our field and the gender politics and the geographic politics of our field that have really shaped us to be. And who is advancing this theory or who is the most visible proponent of this theory? And these are scholars from North America and Western Europe. They're very well known, they're very senior, they're white and they're male. And so many of the critiques, from feminist scholars in particular, have, I think there's been a layer of frustration of both the kind of audacity of positing a theory of this scale and geographic scale and level of abstraction and the kind of composition of our field that accepts that kind of theory making from certain kind of people, but maybe would be less willing to accept it or take it up in the same way from others.

And so, I think it's really important to talk about that. I mean, the paper I wrote with Kian was trying to disentangle these threads a little bit. That set of issues is very important to me as a female scholar and as a scholar in general. And so, I think that's another big part of why it's been so fraught.

**[Nicolas Goez]** And I think in that sense this issue is not only an issue of the urban studies, I think it's basically science in general and academia in general, how it's working. Because we still are under certain structures that privilege some people. I mean nothing against the valuable debates, but well, we are talking about Christian and Neil Brenner in this debate. Partly because they coined the concept, but we just mentioned briefly Roberto Monte-Mór. So instead of maybe delving more into that. So, I think that's some food for thought that's definitely worth taking on.

**[Hillary Angelo]** And I would just say, and then I'll stop oversharing, but I think there's really interesting work being done that uses this concept by many junior scholars, many international scholars, many women. And it troubles me that that work doesn't get taken off. And it often doesn't get read by critics. Often the critiques are just engagements with Neil and Christian and you know, they're people I love and respect and whose work I love and respect, but I think it would be a richer dialogue if more of that work was being read seriously. And I'm happy to name some names later.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Yeah, please. And also, for the literature list that we're going to add to the description, that would be great. Now we had just, well, it's superficial, I mentioned it at the beginning. This is going to be just the tip of the iceberg. And we talked a little bit of the contours of the concept of planetary urbanization and urbanization in more general terms. And we have talked about the core of the debate, I'd say. Now I would like to bridge a little bit to an outlook. Especially that we've talked about these political issues that are so present in today's academic production. So, in this third section of the discussion, and as we are also approaching the end of the episode, I want to ask a question that isn't actually mine but from Martin Arboleda.

He asked a question to Neil Brenner in his edited book, well, Neil Brenner's edited book "Critique of Urbanization: Selected Essays", and I think it's a very important question and a very interesting question for us. Please let me read it. *"An emerging body of scholarship that draws on actor network theory has also challenged the stable and bounded way in which the urban is traditionally conceived. And these scholars propose to radically de-centre the object of urban studies by recasting the city as the relational product of social material networks that connect myriad spaces and actors, most of which can be thousands of kilometres away from the sites being investigated. And although this relational turn in urban studies resonates in some ways with the notion of extended urbanization and, well, planetary urbanization, it also breaks with some of the methods planetary urbanization builds upon, such as geopolitical economy, with its emphasis on the totalizing, world transforming dynamics of capital. Do you see any potential avenues for these two approaches to mutually reinforce each other in the future, or is the gap between the two becoming increasingly entrenched?"*

I think this is important. I'm adding a new concept, actor network theory is not necessarily at stake here in this discussion, but from a certain perspective, I do think that it's part of this differentiation aspect that we're talking about. And I would also like to extend the question or the character of this question that Martin Arboleda asked Neil Brenner to the discussion we were having before, regarding post-colonial and feminist perspectives. I mean, can we build bridges between these different positions

or are these positions becoming also too entrenched? I mean, I'm trying to look to a horizon in which we could meet.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** Just one idea or one thought that I had while you were reading the quote is that I do think that the relationality between the social and the material is not something that is new to urban research. I think it is mostly new to social research or social theory.

But not to urban research. I think that is something that urban studies have always engaged with. And it was at the heart of trying to understand this relation between social relations and the materiality and the spaces within the urban. So, I do think that probably, I wouldn't attach or link this relational perspective necessarily only to ANT (Actor-Network Theory). I would say that what ANT and that is probably something that links then again also to feminist theory, that it has actually, what it pushes us to understand more is actually the bodily or corporeal materiality of those relations. And I think that is something interesting, and that is also very genuine to feminist research. And I think it pushes and it kind of re-links different notions and phenomena that urban studies might have always looked at, but maybe not in that systematic way. So, I think the link is actually that relationality because it's there in all those approaches. And I think that is probably what holds them or binds them together and why it is possible actually to combine perspectives from those approaches in approaching urban phenomena.

**[Hillary Angelo]** I think that was such an important point that you just made. It's one that I think a lot about, but I don't often hear people say it out loud, myself included. The idea that urban studies has been attuned to the material world in ways that sociology certainly hasn't for quite some time. And I think that's something I really love and appreciate about our field. I think there's probably different ways to answer this question. And the quote that you read from Martin Arboleda suggests, I think rightly, that there are some fundamental disagreements between the actor network theory or assemblage theorists and the more economic geographers. Disagreements about the power of capital and that sort of capitalist totality and the extent to which it shapes relations in a given context.

I was looking, since we've just been talking about Neil Brenner today, there was another fight between Colin McFarlane and Brenner, Madden, and Wachsmuth about this, and Brenner, Madden, and Wachsmuth and their response to McFarlane, basically arguing for the incompatibility of these as theoretical perspectives sort of said that there's lots of great empirical and methodological ways that you could think about linking them, methodologically. We can trace material relations and networks and so on, but that maybe that sort of theoretical disagreement about capital and totality is incommensurable in a certain way. The way that I like to think about it, I sort of gestured at this earlier, is that planetary urbanization as a kind of framework offers some good ways of asking questions and offers other things too, but at least some good ways of asking questions. The theory as advanced by its most visible proponents isn't doing everything that it could. So, in this piece with Kian, we both talk about our own work and how we think we're working on things that, planetary urbanization, maybe we would assume it might not help us think about phenomena at the level of everyday life or how these practices persist across different places and times. Thinking about repertoires of social action, things that feminist scholars and assemblage theorists and others often look at. And so, we try to talk a little bit about how those same kinds of activities, the same sorts of empirical research objects might look a little bit different having this kind of theoretical framework to work with. I want to believe they're compatible and I think they probably are up to a certain point, but maybe it depends on what you're studying as well. Maybe it's kind of an empirical.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Also, the questions you're asking, I think that's also an important thing. I mean, we kind of just simply take theories and use them without any context. I think the methods we're using are also quite important for the choice of what kind of theories are we going to use or concepts we're going to use. In that case, I also think that they are most, I mean, connection between the ideas could be most fruitful when they are adapted as well.

**[Hillary Angelo]** One thing that, I think, Johanna also sort of gestured or one of you mentioned earlier. I mean, obviously theory making is a process of abstraction there. It's abstraction involved in the production of the theory itself, but these are iterative or dialectical or whatever you'd prefer to call it. So, there's obviously like all of these researchers have empirical research objects, are looking at concrete phenomena in the world and our choice of methods and choice of objects has much to do with the tools, the theoretical tools we choose to understand them.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Yeah, totally. All right, so as I said, we're approaching the very end of the episode and now you got the chance to say some final words, Johanna, maybe we start with you, would you like to make a last statement somehow or last point?

**[Johanna Hoerning]** I think I'll go back to what I mentioned right at the beginning when you asked me why I'm engaging with urbanization. I think, and this has become more and more important to me, I think what I do see as a necessity today is to link not only different places and different processes in urban theory, but also to link perspectives and to also cross disciplinary boundaries and also different sub disciplines. So, obviously, the one thing that we haven't been talking about now is rural studies. And in my point of view, I think this is one of the most important things that I feel that we need to do is to engage much more in a dialogue between urban and rural theory in order to understand those processes because I think that we have, as urban theorists and as urban researchers, we have much to learn from rural researchers and vice versa. Also, because it has not only been said to be a binary that shapes the world. But also, it's a disciplinary and sub disciplinary binary. And I think that is something that we really ought to overcome and work much more in cooperation and learn much more from one another.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Totally. And I think that really links to the entire idea of planetary urbanization at some point. And it's also a good start to build some bridges, also between different perspectives, which might seem opposite in the first place, because if we are linking the rural with the urban, well, that's a start to overcome this dichotomy that has been contested anyways. Hillary, how about you? Do you have any last statement, or would you like to add something to that?

**[Hillary Angelo]** Yeah, I was going to say something not totally dissimilar. I think, as a provocation, planetary urbanization has been really useful. And I'm excited to see where the field goes. And I think a lot of the really interesting recent work has been asking questions of the sort that Johanna was pointing out, either disciplinary boundaries or questions of relationships between fields and spaces that are kind of challenged by this perspective but haven't actually been dealt with in the research. Since you asked us, I did pull some names of articles that I like and often reference. Like Buckley and Strauss, who talk about Lefebvre and everyday life and how does that relate to the kinds of

transformations of capital and natural resources and materials that have been emphasized. Tariq Jazeel, who has a really great piece on the relationship between planetary urbanization and other global processes like patriarchy, colonialism. I have a grad student who works on the military. So, I think urbanization in interaction with other large-scale processes is going to be really important and challenges questions of periodization, challenges ideas of political autonomy, challenges geography. Like what places we think are important to be researching. Swarnabh Ghosh and Ayan Meer have just written a really interesting piece about urban and agrarian questions. Rodrigo Castriota and João Tonucci, who are also Brazilians, have been writing really great stuff. I think there's all this really wonderful work that's moving in those directions. And I hope to see more of it. And I hope to see that work cited by critics as well, because it's just so important that people are reading beyond the headlines.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Thank you very much, Hillary. You sort of answered the last, the very last question of the podcast with that already. All the literature is going to be in the description. Just to mention it again for those who may be tuning in a little bit later. Johanna maybe before closing the round, do you have any literature recommendations for those in the audience who want to keep researching and studying this topic? It can be a book or an article. I mean, it doesn't have to be an extensive list like Hillary did, but a jewel you would like to share.

**[Johanna Hoerning]** I'm going to be a little bit more generic about it, but I think linked to that, and I think this is intriguing, the research that is showing and being published now. And I'm just going to go a little bit more back in time, because I also think that it's not for us to engage with these questions, does not only mean to engage with the research that is surging now and being published now, but also going back a little bit and looking into authors that we might have not read before. And so, obviously coming from Brazilian research too, I would think that we have to engage much more, and also translate authors much more so that they can be really read by a broad audience. Authors such as Milton Santos. Everyone knows about Milton Santos, but there's just been a very limited amount of his text has been translated, for example. And so, I would try to argue more for these translations, but also less fear of engaging with texts in different languages, because I think sometimes it can be very helpful to read those texts in other languages than English, because we do have different concepts in different languages, and we can use them in different ways. And they can help us understanding the processes and the differentiations between those.

So, I think that is something I would like to point out. And then, of course, more generic from what I just said, engaging with authors from rural studies. I think you mentioned Halfacree already or Michael Words, engaging with the question of the rural, and they also engage with Lefebvre, for example, in a very broad way. There are so many links between our research areas and fields. I think we just ought to put them into practice, into academic practice.

**[Nicolas Goez]** Johanna, thank you very much. Hillary, thank you very much as well. This was a fantastic talk. Thanks for being here. This was The Urban Political.

**[Outro]** *Thanks to you for listening. For more information visit our website [urbanpolitical.podigee.io](http://urbanpolitical.podigee.io) Please subscribe and follow us on Twitter.*