GEOPGRAPHY 200B

INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIC THOUGHT

Michael J. Watts

“Ideas brilliant. But he needs to work a little harder on the facts.”
- Report card from Ernest Gellner’s Geography Teacher, St. Albans’s County School for Boys.

“I’m not a donkey, I don’t have a field’
- Max Weber

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This seminar provides an introduction to contemporary geographic thought building upon the foundation laid last semester in 200A. I want to organize the course a little differently than 200A and it will have as a consequence a related but somewhat different set of (rather ambitious) purposes.

1. Contemporary human geography theory located on the wider backdrop of what one might call “geographic traditions”. I am starting from the assumption that all of you have some but probably a limited background in Geography as such: that is to say the history of the discipline, its various genealogies, its relation to empire and the state, and the various strands of human geographical theory especially since 1945. Now this could and should be the focus of a year-long seminar in itself (and why we don’t offer such a class is an interesting political question in itself) but there is no way I can do that in 200B. But nevertheless I do wish to go some way toward introducing the discipline with the operating assumption that (i) for those of you entertaining a life in the academy then the chances are you’ll end up in a Geography department and may well be expected to if not teach a class on human geography and its relations to “the earth” then at the very least be familiar with the road map of its development, and (ii) you will be a product of Berkeley Geography which has a storied history (the “Berkeley School”) and again you need to know something about Berkeley Geography in relation to the discipline and even the social sciences, something of its major intellectual figures (Carl Sauer, Clarence Glacken, Paul Wheatley, Allan Pred) and to appreciate what is distinctive about the sort of work we conduct here (I believe it is) – i.e. what the “new” Berkeley School might be – and to gain an appreciation of the sorts of work (dissertations, monographs) produced from the Department say over the last couple of decades.
2. *Thinking Geographically*: here I am going to devote seven weeks to a set of readings – typically built around a core monograph and supplementary readings – which hopefully reflect your own interests and potentially your doctoral interests. This means obviously that in empirical terms the topics we will cover are exceptionally diverse, and are something of a gamble in the sense that I (and perhaps you) only have a tentative and general sense of what you might end of doing for your dissertation. That said, the idea is to select a raft of broad issues which I hope will speak so some of your intellectual concerns. The monographs will not necessarily be authored by geographers but our challenge will be to think geographically about the issues they raise and what a geographic perspective might bring. Again my goal here is to simultaneously engage with contemporary human geography while at the same time placing your interests on a larger social scientific landscape. Every week will consist of a core monograph and a posse of other complementary articles and chapters. Each week I’d like one or two people to make a short presentation to get the discussion going (and each week everyone will post a short one-pager on the readings).

3. *An occasion to develop a first draft of your research prospectus, and correlative to reflect upon research design and how we “use theory” and its relations to method, forms of data and so on.* This part of the course will necessarily be truncated too but I do want to spend some time thinking about what goes into a research proposal – what makes a good and bad proposals, how they should be structured – and to get you thinking early about your dissertation (wherever you may be in the formulation of it). I really want to dig into this process and your ‘paper’ for this class will be a first attempt at pulling together such a research program or part of a program. The research proposal identifies what you will do: namely, circumscribe and articulate a problem or issue that is theoretically framed to generated both questions and claims (‘hypotheses’, arguments) that in turn demands particular (appropriate) sorts of evidence and the means (‘methodologies’) by which such relevant information (data) is to be obtained (collected, generated etc.). This is of course one of the hardest things you’ll do in your academic life, and there is absolutely no road map (and often no systematic preparation in the academy) to do it. So we’ll try. We will read some foundational work on research design (Bob Alford), on the research process (Kristin Luker), the funding landscape (I’ll use my knowledge here of chairing the Board of Governors of the Social Science Research Council for a decade), and then we shall examine actual proposals all designed to help you prepare your own. I shall also have some of my doctoral students come to class to talk about their experiences along this (sometimes rocky) road. *The prospectus will represent the written requirement for the seminar.* Let me say that I appreciate for most people in your position the very idea that you can produced a fully-fledged proposal at the end of your first year is quite unrealistic. That is not my expectation. Rather my own view is that for many reasons – including the very practical one of normative time – one cannot start too early thinking about your project, the sorts of foundational training (courses, skills, independent readings, committee members) you will need to pull off your project and making your first efforts at identifying a problem, a question, a claim. It may be that what
you submit will primarily focus on the broad issues you think you wish to explore, or is an opportunity to read around a topic. Proposals have many moving parts and relatedly involve typically false starts, dead ends, and constant refinement and honing. So you might as well begin as soon as you can. There are some useful materials I have worked up over the years on my website at: http://iis.berkeley.edu/node/304

4. What is entailed in crafting, designing and writing a dissertation? This will involve taking a look at a book produced as a dissertation and subsequently converted into a monograph (you will notice that virtually every week I have inserted in the readings a “Berkeley School Book” or a “Berkeley School Dissertation”: I do not expect you to read it (though you may if you have time or interest) but I would expect that you delve into it in some way: the art of browsing and ‘skimming’ a book is a very important. All of this is to acquire a sense of the approach and the sorts of work produced here. All of these monographs – and this is why I want to use the monograph as the unit of our collective consumption – are the sorts of projects that you will be taking on: in scope, scale, breadth and depth. How they are put together, designed, methodologically framed and so on, are the issues we need to grapple with. So while I want to help you give you a road map I also want to help you think through how a book (or a dissertation) is constituted in its various ‘moments’ of design, execution and so on: its biography and life cycle, its architecture and component parts (fieldwork, method, argument, theory etc), and how we assess a book (how we read it and make judgments about it). And these judgments typically have to start with what the author intended to do, the sorts of arguments tabled, the use of evidence and the like. We need to read carefully, and learn how to read critically. My idea, in short, is to convey an idea of what is entailed in a dissertation project and to this extent complements the work we do on research proposals and research design. There are various sources around and about (none very good) which address these issues: http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-guide-to-thesis-writing-that-is-a-guide-to-life
http://pwr.la.psu.edu/resources/graduate-writing-center/handouts-1/WritingProposals.pdf/


5. To provide an opportunity in the latter third of the semester to focus on a set of readings – identified by you which speak directly to your proposed dissertation projects. I am going to have a month (toward the end of the semester, in April) in which we do not meet collectively but rather we meet one-on-one, and during this month I want to devote exclusively to you working and reading on your dissertation topic. This has several advantages. First, it gives you some time to really devote to the prospectus and to provide an opportunity to pull something together that we can seriously discuss at the end of the semester (our last session – an extended class – will be devoted to us workshopping each of your proposals). Second, I would like you to think therefore about what you want to do in the month you devote to the
proposal: specifically this might be an occasion to read some empirical or background materials on your case. **To this extent I’d like each of you to prepare a short list of materials that you intend to cover during that month and which we might discuss.** I recommend you get something to me that outlines what you want to do right before the mid-term break in late March. The form and character of these readings will reflect your personal interests and where you are in your project: they could be empirical but may also entail immersing yourself further in the core conceptual and theoretical literature surrounding your case study. I will look for some sort of statement of how you want to spend this time and what you want to read: clearly in some cases your project far exceed my knowledge and expertise but I can work with you in assembling a sort reading course for this month and we will meet one on one if not every week then at the very least when it makes sense to discuss the progress of your proposal. If you want to spend that month writing the proposal rather than more reading that is of course fine too. It is worth bearing in mind that I’d like everyone to engage with some aspect of a research proposal as their requirement for the class, and indeed we shall have the last session devoted to reading and workshopping all of your proposals.

6. **The final thing we shall explore in the seminar is what we might call ‘professionalization’.** This again is far more than we can do this semester but I do want to take the opportunity to talk about the process of getting a PHD (which naturally includes how you put your program of work together, how you constitute and prepare your fields, your analytical paper, how to work with your faculty/committee, making use of non-Geography resources on campus including identifying your external committee member(s)). A key part of this is of course assembling and identifying your “fields” for your comprehensive exams. The internal PHD requirements raise larger questions of course concerning the tools of our profession: namely, lecturing, identifying your pedagogy/style, going through job interviews, explaining your research, interacting with colleagues, writing articles (very tricky!), reviewing manuscripts, addressing all of those issues surround the dull discipline of the labor market (job interviews, preparing a resume, writing a job letter) including the challenges to ‘your first job’, and giving papers at conferences and workshops. Again in my experience is that it is something often not talked about or ‘taught’ and like proposal writing is absolutely key to being an academic geographer. I’ll bring into class at various points some of our PHD students who are finishing up to reflect upon their experiences.

I have structured the class as follows. We’ll open with some reading on Geography as a field of knowledge, and on Berkeley Geography in particular. Then I’ll turn to some important readings about doing research, research design as a craft, and what is entailed in developing and refining a research question, and design a program of data collection and research around it. We’ll then move into our “theory” part of the course and to identifying a number of topics and themes which (I hope) speak directly to the interests of the group. The next section will be the occasion for you to explore your own research interests and, as I’ve said, over this period we shall meet one-on-one not as a group. We’ll end up with a session on what I am calling “professionalization” (tho we shall, I
hope have occasion to talk about these issues throughout the semester). Our final session will be a workshop in which we collectively workshop your proposals.

Requirements: This class will be run as a reading-intensive research seminar. Accordingly, it is critical that everyone come well-prepared for discussions. Each student will be expected to undertake the following:

(i) To prepare a short one page critical commentary on the week's core readings and to circulate this electronically by the Tuesday evening (absolutely no later than 5 pm) prior to the Thursday day class.

(ii) To kick off class discussion (which involves a short (10-15 minute) presentation of the key theoretical and conceptual issues.

(iii) A written research to be handed in at the end of the semester. I am proposing that we devote a session on May 12th to discuss proposals (ideally we should give each proposal about 45 minutes) with the expectation that the final versions are handed in no later than Monday May 17th at 5pm.

Class Structure: I would like to run the seminar in the following way. The first period will be a discussion of the key readings/monograph for the week. This discussion will led off by a student every week; it will involve an outline of the key readings/monograph and posing a key set of questions or provocations. At some point (there is no point in stopping the discussion at a specific time) we will take a coffee break. For the second period (an hour) I shall give/lead a mini-lecture/discussion including talking about the key “Berkeley monograph/dissertation” assigned to each week. The function of this is to place our discussion and the core readings on a larger landscape of literatures, ideas, and theorizing about resources. But the major function will be to situate our discussions and for us to provide something of a roadmap for related debates and literature, and to begin to investigate how the core ideas from the week speak to geographic concerns and to the building of contemporary geographic theory and research programs.

Key texts for the Class:
I shall try and put most materials on bCourses or share them electronically with you during the first class. For monographs (most are in paper) we’ll need to arrange for scanning for those of you who do not wish to purchase the books (though all are in principle available in the libraries).

Obviously articles from journals you can directly access yourself through ejournals in the library collection.

Here are the core monographs. I have indicated with an * those books which I have in pdf form. Perhaps some of you can sleuth copies of some of the other books. If not we scan unless you want to purchase (many are available on line in used form).


Kristin Luker, *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Harvard University Press, 2008,


Steve Early, *Big Oil, Big Money, and the Remaking of an American City*, Boston, Beacon Books, 2017


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(*) Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, Berlin: Richter Verlag, 1995


**Written requirement:**
The submission of a research proposal to be handed in no later than May 17th 2017.
There is a website that I developed on the IIS website devoted to the preparation of a proposal at:
http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/DissPropWorkshop/

and at:
http://geography.berkeley.edu/people/person_detail.php?person=21

*The Art of Writing a Proposal* prepared by the Social Science Research Council which is the best short discussion of how to structure a research proposal.
http://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/7A9CB4F4-815F-DE11-BD80-001CC477EC70/

At various points during the semester I shall discuss actual proposals and how to develop a compelling research question. I shall distribute my book chapter entitled “In search of the Holy Grail’ on dissertation research at the beginning of the semester (it is available on my website).

**Learning to Write**

Much can be said about academic writing and all of us typically get pissed off when, every year it seems, the *New York Times* publishes (again) a snotty article on the deplorable state of academic pen-personship (usually quoting gobs of Judith Butler or, in one famous case a few years back our own Allan Pred). I loathe the idea that as social scientists we should not deploy our own language, some of which can be necessarily technical and difficult. But I also believe that much social science does not exactly make for a pleasurable reading experience and writing is often marked by extraordinary sloppiness and ambiguity. Make precise claims seems to me to stand at the heart of what we do, irrespective of theory, political orientation, method etc. I’d recommend the following as most definitely worth looking at:


Steven Pinker, 2014 *The Sense of Style*. Viking.

The bottom line is that we commit ourselves to a life of writing. At the very least it’s worth thinking about and for all of us to scrutinize our prose.

**BACKGROUND GEOGRAPHY TEXTS AND READERS OF INTEREST**

The following is a list of some books that you might find worth consulting as background or source books for our discussions of geography and geographic theory. I realize many of you may not have much of a background in the discipline (though equally for some of you these books may be old hat), but these are useful reference texts.

Blackwell.

Bartley, Brendan, Phil Hubbard, and Rob Kitchin. 2004 Thinking geographically.
Bloomsbury Publishing.


Harvey, D., 1969, Explanation in Geography. Edward Arnold.


I would also recommend browsing Progress in Human Geography’s reviews/overviews of new research in particular geographical sub-fields (political ecology, economic geography, post colonialism, gender etc.) appearing in each issue. Key journals such as Society and Space, Transactions of the Institute of British Geography, Journal of Historical Geography, Urban Geography, Dialogues in Human Geography, Cultural Geographies, Antipode, and Gender, Place and Culture are worth keeping abreast of.
Stuart Elden, Professor of Geography at the University of Warwick has an excellent blog (Progressivegeographies) exploring the links between Geography and political/social theory….and just about everything else: http://progressivegeographies.com/
Another useful website is: http://www.theory-talks.org/2010/05/theory-talk-38.html
I’D LIKE TO OFFER A FEW “PRINCIPLES FOR SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS”

The following guidelines are intended to facilitate seminar discussions. We are a small group and this will mean that we all have to contribute and participate to make discussions work. There will not necessarily be presentations but conversations require that we all speak up, air our views, and help us (all) figure things out and move our projects and interests forward. These comments may seem over the top, but I have found them useful (even in small group settings such as ours). Some of them may sound obvious, but from past experience it is still important to make them explicit.

1. READINGS. At least for the first part of each seminar session the discussions should revolve around the weeks readings rather than simply the topic. There is a strong tendency in seminars, to turn every seminar into a general “bull session” in which participation need not be informed by the reading material in the course. The injunction to discuss the readings does not mean, of course, that other material is excluded from the discussion, but it does mean that the issues raised and problems analyzed should focus on around the actual texts assigned for the week.

2. LISTEN. In a good seminar, interventions by different participants are linked one to another. A given point is followed up and the discussion therefore has some continuity. In many seminar discussions, however, each intervention is unconnected to what has been said before. Participants are more concerned with figuring out what brilliant comment they can make rather than listening to each other and reflecting on what is actually being said. In general, therefore, participants should add to what has just been said rather than launch a new train of thought, unless a particular line of discussion has reached some sort of closure.

3. TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS. Not every seminar intervention has to be an earthshattering comment or brilliant insight. One of the reasons why some students feel intimidated in seminars is that it seems that the stakes are so high, that the only legitimate comment is one that reveals complete mastery of the material. There are several general rules about comments that should facilitate broader participation:
   a. No intervention should be regarded as “naive” or “stupid” as long as it reflects an attempt at seriously engaging the material. It is often the case that what seems at first glance to be a simple or superficial question turns out to be among the most intractable.
   b. It is as appropriate to ask for clarification of readings or previous comments as it is to make a substantive point on the subject matter.
   c. If the pace of the seminar discussion seems too fast to get a word in edgewise it is legitimate to ask for a brief pause to slow things down. It is fine for there actually to be moments of silence in a discussion!

4. BREVITY. Everyone has been in seminars in which someone consistently gives long, overblown speeches. Sometimes these speeches may make some substantively interesting
points, but frequently they meander without focus or direction. It is important to keep interventions short and to the point. One can always add elaborations if they are needed. This is not an absolute prohibition on long statements, but it does suggest that longer statements are generally too long.

5. **EQUITY.** While acknowledging that different personalities and different prior exposures to the material will necessarily lead to different levels of active participation in the seminar discussion, it should be our collective self-conscious goal to have as equitable participation as possible. This means that the chair of the discussion has the right to curtail the speeches by people who have dominated the discussion, if this seems necessary.

6. **SPONTANEITY vs. ORDER.** One of the traps of trying to have guidelines, rules, etc. in a discussion is that it can squelch the spontaneous flow of debate and interchange in a seminar. Sustained debate, sharpening of differences, etc., is desirable and it is important that the chair not prevent such debate from developing.

7. **ARGUMENTS, COMPETITIVENESS, CONSENSUS.** A perennial problem in seminars revolves around styles of discussion. I think that it is important in seminar discussions to try to sharpen differences, to understand where the real disagreements lie, and to accomplish this is it generally necessary that participants “argue” with each other, in the sense of voicing disagreements and not always seeking consensus. On the other hand, there is no reason why argument, even heated argument, need by marked by aggressiveness or contentiousness.
SEMINAR OUTLINE
PART I

Week 1 January 18th  Introductions and Organization

This is the first session and we’ll spend a large part of the class getting organized, discussing the class organization and so on. But I’d like to devote some time to thinking about geographical knowledge (in general) and specifically your own engagement with the discipline. To this extent I will circulate pdfs of a number of pieces which if you can try and take a look at before we meet would help kick off the discussion.

Andrew Barry, Geography and Other disciplines, unpublished manuscript, University College London, 2013.


Week 2 January 25th The ‘Berkeley School’ of Geography

Press, 49-69. Read the letter he wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation after being approached to give his ideas on their nascent Green Revolution.


Allan Pred, Unspeakable Spaces, racisms past and present on exhibit in Stockholm, or the unaddressable addressed, *City and Society*, XXXI, 2001.


**Secondary Reading.**

Michael Williams *To Pass on a Good Earth*. 2014 University of Virginia Press, two chapters.


**Example of recent Dissertation:**


**PART II**

**Week 3  February 1st**

**Research Design and the Craft of Research**


Michael Watts, In search of the Holy Grail, in E. Perecman (ed.), *A handbook for social science field research*, Sage, 2006. This is also available on the website below.

Please explore the website: http://iis.berkeley.edu/funding-opportunities/graduate


Research proposals: please read Research Proposal # 1.

**Other Readings:**


Ellen Perecman and Sara Curran (eds)., *A Handbook for Social Science Field Research*. Sage, 2006 (a useful collection with contributions on various aspects of doing research: archives, surveys, interviews, and so on).
Examples of recent Dissertations:


PART III

Week 4 February 8th  The Migrant-Refugee-The Displaced-the Dispossessed


Michael Levien, Regimes of Dispossession, Politics and Society 41, 2013, 351-94


I have also added a file called MOBILITIES. This, for those of you with an interest, have a series of pieces on the current refugee crisis and on geographic approaches to mobility. It might be of interest.

Secondary Reading

Thomas Nail, The Figure of the Migrant. Stanford University Press, 2015.

Seth Holmes, Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies. University of California Press. 2013


**Week 5  February 15th  Capital and Community**


**Secondary Readings**


**Week 6  February 22nd  Land and Maritime Questions**

Journal of Agrarian Change, Special Issue: the Political Economy and Ecology of Capture Fisheries, July 2012 (selected articles on Bcourses).

Liam Campling and Elizabeth Havice, The politics of property in industrial fisheries, Yale University, Agrarian Studies, 2013/Food First.


Teo Ballve, Everyday state formation, Society and Space, 30, 2012, 603-622

Secondary Reading:


Phil McMichael, Landgrabbing as security mercantilism. Globalizations 2013, 10/1, 47-64.


Week 7  March 1st  Militarization-Security-Space


Jake Kosek, Ecologies of Empire, Cultural Anthropology, 25/4, 650-678.


Andrew Lakoff, Preparing for the next emergency, Public Culture, 19/2 2007, 243-273.

Joseph Masco:

http://the-archipelago.net/2014/08/07/joseph-masco-militarization-of-territorial-planning-in-cold-war-usa/

**Other Reading**


See Derek Gregory’s blog on war, peace and security with many downloads of his new work.
http://geographicalimaginations.com/


**Berkeley School Book:**


**Week 8  March 8th  Infrastructure of Forgotten Spaces**


In addition I’d suggest we try and organize our session around a viewing of his (and Noel Burch’s) 2 hour (I know) documentary: *The Forgotten Space*.


De Boeck, F. 210, *Infrastructure: Commentary from Filip De Boeck. Curated Collections, Cultural Anthropology Online*, November 26,


**Other Reading**

Allan Sekula has written extensively about photography and representation and you might wish to look at: *Against the Grain*, University of Nova Scotia Press, Halifax 1984.


**Week 9 March 15th Disastrous Environments**


Kate Brown, *Dispatches form Dystopia*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016, Chapter 6, Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place.

Laurent Berlant, Slow Death in *Cruel Optimism*, University of Chicago Press, 2011.


**Secondary Readings:**


**Week 10 March 22nd Mapping History: Geography, Law, Sovereignty**


**Secondary Readings**


SPRING BREAK NO CLASS ON MARCH 29th

PART IV
Week 11  April 5th Individualised Research and one on one meeting
Week 12  April 12th Individualised Research and one on one meetings
Week 13  April 19th Individualised Research and one on one meetings
Week 14  April 26th Individualised Research and one on one meetings

PART V
Week 15  May 5th Professionalization: Constituting Fields, Oral Exams, Constituting and Working with Dissertation Committees, Funding,.....
Mark Edmundsen, Why Teach: In defense of Real Education. Bloomsbury, 2013, selected chapters.

Examples of Fields and Fields Statements and examples of proposal, course syllabi, and manuscripts for review are posted on Bcourses. Discussions of constituting committees, labor market, and other issues.

For writing:

http://progressivegeographies.com/2015/01/03/how-to-get-published-in-an-academic-journal-top-tips-from-editors/

http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Academics-Writing-Stinks/148989/


May 12th  Workshop: Proposal Presentations