

Elvin K. Wylly

Statement of Professional Experience, Research, and Teaching

I am an urban geographer working across a distinctive array of specializations in social theory, public policy, and critical spatial analysis. My career draws inspiration from urban geography's Quantitative Revolution, as well as our field's subsequent generations of critical methodological, epistemological, and political revolutions. Most of my empirical work focuses on U.S. urban dynamics of housing, capital markets, fair housing and fair lending, gender and racial inequality, and gentrification. My research has been sponsored by, *inter alia*, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Ford Foundation, the Fannie Mae Foundation, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, and Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. My work seems to be reasonably well recognized when evaluated on the ubiquitous metrics of contemporary knowledge production (a Google H-index of 27, 22 for the past five years) even as recent experience in teaching, research, and service has convinced me that such pseudo-positivist cognitive quantification is dehumanizing the intergenerational heritage and meanings of human geography, and indeed all of human scholarship.

I currently serve as Chair of the Urban Studies Coordinating Committee at the University of British Columbia. I served as Co-Editor and Editor-in-Chief of *Urban Geography* from 2007 to 2015.

Research

The metropolis is manifestation and crucible for evolving socio-spatial constitutions of inequality. Distinctively American constructions of class, gender, and race/ethnicity have major implications not only for U.S. urbanism, but also for transnational political economy. My research analyzes public policy and capital market processes in the reproduction of these inequalities, with a special emphasis on urban housing markets.

The most widely known part of my research approaches housing as an entry point for tracing the spatial restructuring of regulation, law, and industry practices of housing finance from the late 1960s through the Global Financial Crisis and its aftermath. The deeply-entrenched inequalities of localized circuits of class-monopoly rent -- the "old" exploitations of inner-city slum landlords -- were reconstructed into transnationalized network infrastructures of financialized innovation. The fair housing demands of the Civil Rights movement were hijacked as financialization hastened the destruction of those parts of the American welfare state explicitly focused on the social equity use values of urban housing. The result was a new spatiality of legalized racist deception generating class-monopoly rents amongst multi-scalar networks of intermediaries in predatory structured finance -- from local subprime mortgage brokers to national lenders, transnational conglomerates, and Wall Street investment houses. Racialized *exclusion from* capital was recast into lucrative new markets for stratified, racialized *inclusion into* circuits of predatory capital -- allowing agents and institutions to earn racialized exploitative profits while denying all discriminatory intent.

My work documents three historical-policy junctures of this transformation. **First**, I led the analysis of front-line details of lenders' "new markets" response to the first Clinton

Administration's enforcement of the long-neglected fair housing/lending statutes of the 1960s. I advanced from junior partner to leader on studies sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Fannie Mae Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, while spearheading independent critiques of these policies -- scrutinizing the role of housing finance in accelerating gentrification and the destruction of public housing, the spatial evolution of housing disinvestment and suburban decline, and the persistence of old-fashioned exclusionary racist lending practices alongside "new markets" lending. **Second**, I have documented how home and housing are undermined by neoliberal deregulatory financialization, as part of a broader effort to synthesize critical political economy with the econometric techniques required to engage policy audiences captured by reactionary neoclassical/neoliberal coalitions. This work has been sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, and has also been integrated with advocacy and litigation (e.g., New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, American Civil Liberties Union). Central to this research is the analysis of how local contingencies of ethnoracial, class, and built-environment geographies interact with America's complex federalist spaces of law, consumer protection, and banking restructuring; part of this work has also been integrated into my role in a SSHRC major collaborative project on the spatial dimensions of 'global suburbanism.' **Third**, I have analyzed how predatory finance exploited the "discriminatory trinity" of American constructions of race, gender, and age -- an intersectionality well understood by generations of feminist geographers but repeatedly ignored by an insistently patriarchal culture of finance and law. This work yielded a pre-crisis guest-edited special issue of *Housing Policy Debate* -- "Market Failures and Predatory Lending" -- and studies of the legal implications of race/ethnicity/gender non-disclosure in federal fair lending datasets. My work was invited for testimony to a Federal Reserve advisory panel, and my analysis of gender/age/race in the National Mortgage Data Repository was chosen for inclusion in *Context & Consequences*, a twenty-year retrospective by legal scholars at Georgetown Law to evaluate what has (and has not) changed since Anita Hill's testimony in the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings. My current research in this area examines the permanent-crisis dynamics of neighborhood foreclosure and vulture-investor competition, the financialized austerity innovations that are undermining community development policy, and the accelerated re-scaling of rent gaps, disinvestment, and gentrification in transnational urbanism.

In recent years, I have charted new genealogical paths in the history, present condition, and possible futures of geographical thought. Ever since the 1960s, successive waves of critical epistemology and political mobilization for social justice have been defined in explicitly post-positivist terms. Unfortunately, mainstream historiographies have distorted our collective memories of positivism -- with catastrophic consequences for *today's* politics of knowledge production. I've published several elements of a comprehensive manifesto for a 'strategic positivism' that seeks to realign epistemology, methodology, and politics in order to reconcile scientific integrity with political emancipation -- challenging the deceptive, conservative poststructuralist hijacking of the truly radical, revolutionary spirit of the original, long-forgotten positivist project before the ontological and embodied violences of the Great War, the Second World War, and America's Cold-War co-optations of western science.

Several ongoing research projects document the contemporary acceleration of revolutionary transformations of geographical thought and practice. First, in "Automated Post(Positivism)," I analyze the hybrid political technologies through which Silicon Valley is now coding

transnational neoliberalism into the architecture of ubiquitous consumerism and planetary accumulation in what is widely celebrated as “cognitive capitalism.” The result is a bizarre and dangerous fusion of universalizing ontologies of Big Data observation sustained by the illusory empowerment of infinite individuality in the digitized situated knowledges and standpoint epistemologies of globalizing social networking. Second, in “The New Quantitative Revolution,” “The New Social Physics,” and “Where is an Author?,” I diagnose the realignment between the past and present in the simultaneous arrival of planetary urbanization and the informational practices that Castells portrays as “networks of neural networks from human brains stimulated by signals from a communication environment through communication networks.” My theorization connects today’s communications geographies with Comte’s post-theistic conceptualization of intergenerational scientific knowledge as the “Great Being” of humanity, Marx’s “Fragment on Machines” that understands accumulated knowledge codified in production technologies as the “general intellect,” and Foucault’s genealogy of the political and categorical roles of the “author function” in scientific and literary discourses. A recombinant digital vivisection of individual authors’ relations with collective human discourses lends a strange performative reality to these elements of Comte, Marx, and Foucault, while replacing *human* readers, editors, and writers with search-engine epistemologies in the role that Foucault called “founders of discursivity.” Third, in “Turner’s Noösphere,” I extend and refine Neil Smith’s last major work on gentrification -- his 2011 “Evolution of Gentrification” chapter -- in light of the latest innovation frontiers of intensifying global competition meritocracies amongst tomorrow’s capitalists. NYU President John Sexton’s ambitious and controversial Global Network University that connects a world urban system of “idea capitals” is explicitly premised on the concept of the noösphere, a “God-like” planetary consciousness theorized by the evolutionary paleontologist and ordained Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Neil’s “Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy” is coalescing with an astonishingly fast technological reincarnation of social Darwinist theory and practice -- from the explicit “Darwinization” of neuromarketing to the algorithmically optimized social engineering of behavioral economics, to Matthew Ridley’s hijacking of evolutionary theory to justify neoliberal doctrine. Put simply, revanchist urbanism is *evolving* through open and explicit political economies of education and human capital, into a harsh new kind of Chicago-School human ecology at the planetary scale -- redrawing Frederick Jackson Turner’s evolutionary frontier between “savagery and civilization.”

Teaching and Advising

Teaching is the creation of the conditions of possibility for new kinds of thought. Such possibilities can be realized through a variety of alternative pedagogical philosophies or ‘content delivery’ technologies, but the fundamental issue remains: “teach” is a transitive verb, while “learn” remains intransitive. Genuine learning can only take place in an environment with the right blend of commitment, rigor, creativity, freedom, guidance, and trust -- enabling both ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ to co-produce knowledge that will be transformative for both. The optimal conditions for learning and teaching change each year, with each class, in a dynamic assemblage of the evolving worlds and processes we ask our students to learn, the collegial and competitive interactions amongst each group of students, and the priorities and opportunity costs of the collective intergenerational choices codified as formal curricula. Our excellent students here at UBC have transformed me several times over, and in turn my pedagogical philosophy is

an effort to find, capitalize, and refine students' distinctive skills within geography's evolving blends of old and new methods and science/arts and humanities influences.

My graduate and undergraduate teaching emphasizes interdisciplinary urban studies as well as urban geography. Specific course offerings range from surveys of urban geography and urban studies to more specialized analyses of housing and neighborhood change, gentrification, housing policy, predatory mortgage lending, urban tourism, locational competitions to host the Olympics and other hallmark events, racialized violence in urban policing, and the reincarnation of nineteenth-century philosophies of 'social physics' in contemporary Silicon Valley innovation. Some of these courses incorporate multivariate quantitative analysis and laboratory work. In graduate advising, I'm supervisor or co-supervisor for current and recent doctoral students studying the legal transformation of informal, secondary suites in Vancouver's housing market, the conversion of churches to luxury condominiums in Toronto, the global-city networks of mining firms in South Africa, the generational contrasts in young adults' balancing of housing and labor market competition in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, the granting of posthumous citizenship to Filipino soldiers killed in active-duty service to the U.S. military, the racialized history of urban redevelopment in Halifax, the nexus of performative accounting and neoliberal bond-market discipline of urban governance in Jackson, MS, and the neoliberal financialization of U.S. community development through the rapidly-growing "Social Return on Investment" (SROI) industry.

My teaching practice is energized by the collaborative barn-raising of the small, interdisciplinary seminar, the conversational mode of knowledge production in the one-on-one office-hours meeting, and the joyous electricity of a crowded lecture hall. Half of my annual teaching is devoted to the mid- to large-size lecture mode -- a third-year class of about 70, a second-year course of about 170 -- and it is simultaneously a joy and an unforgiving, disciplined competition with Facebook, texting, and Twitter. Our multitasking students are competitive -- "bionic hamsters" in the words of one educational theorist -- and quite brilliant: the challenge is that this brilliance is diffused and fragmented across university curricula that privilege eclectic consumer choice, and shattered by the accelerated technological transformation of the human attention span in the increasingly automated neoliberal noösphere of today's socially-networked cognitive capitalism. My pedagogical passion is trying to build common ground among a disciplinary and methodologically diverse group of students, while respecting the very different investments made by students who are navigating a radically dynamic plurality of paths through a large, diffuse academy. When I teach one of the elementary concepts of urban systems -- the rank-size rule specifying the log-linear relation between city population and position in the urban hierarchy -- I'm typically interrupted with three very different kinds of questions. One: what about primacy and non-linear breaks in the hierarchy, and what about the matter of spatial autocorrelation? *Yes, let's explore those dynamics ...* Two: isn't this a neo-colonial, Eurocentric, God's-eye positivist view of the urban world? *Yes, let's explore the politics of how these theories have been applied ...* Three: What's a logarithm? *Yes, let's refresh our memory on that one ...* (The methodological and political questions have become even more interesting lately, as I have integrated more of Trevor Barnes's historiography of Christaller's work with the Nazis.)

I build common ground across these kinds of questions with a narrative, genealogical approach that weaves the radical plurality of our field's methodologies into the substantive and political

goals of geographical knowledge production. My teaching also places special emphasis on the craft of writing and re-writing, with provisions for multiple deadlines, comments, and “revise/resubmit” opportunities. Thus one of the more tangible metrics of my teaching effectiveness include the roles for graduate as well as undergraduate students I’ve brought in as full coauthors for publications in *Housing Policy Debate*, the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, the *Geographical Bulletin*, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, *Geografiska Annaler B*, and *American Quarterly*. Another involves the way teaching, research, and service have coalesced in our current inquiries into the cloud-computing surveillance infrastructures of education and knowledge production -- from the cognitive predator drone technologies of plagiarism detection services like Turnitin.com to the new author function policing mechanisms of the Open Researcher and Contributor Identifier (ORCID) system. If you have not yet been asked for your ORCID, you will be, very soon. This is yet another Quantitative Revolution, with a new set of teachable moments and opportunities to reconfigure the relations amongst human sciences and human politics. And so we can draw inspiration from all of the students -- undergraduates, postgraduates, tenured-professorial -- whose scholarship in *Urban Geography* across thirty-five years have been sampled and anonymized into the Foucauldian author function “ORCID Unauthenticated” in an editorial in the journal’s current issue. The students -- *human* geographers building a neoLuddite alternative to the algorithmic narcissism of automated ‘review management systems’ and automated quantification of scholarly ‘impact’ in a rapidly-growing citational-industrial complex -- title the editorial “Please Do Not Cite This Article,” and they end their analysis with this:

“And so I whisper to you, as a human author to a human reader, through the cognitive-capitalist cacophony of ORCIDs and DOIs and H indexes and impact factors and search robots, and I beg of you: please do not cite this article. Instead, read it, think about it, and give it to students, colleagues, or any impact-obsessed administrators who still remember how to read anything other than benchmarks and league tables. Then cite Berry’s (2000) forgotten “Citations as Measures of Worth,” to see how high we can drive those metrics together in a tactic of experimental persuasion (my plea to you) rather than self-serving “collusive behavior.” And then cite Neil Smith’s (2010) “Academic free fall,” as well as Gibson-Graham’s (1993) “How to smash capitalism while working at home in your spare time.” We’ll create some unexpected correlations for the search robots to chew on, while reminding ourselves that communities of non-commodified readers and authors can still decide what citations are measuring, and what our shared ideas are worth.”