

Conference Abstracts

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Disorderly information in the network: The politics of Finding and Valuing Information

Information and knowledge are the lifeblood of the decision-making making. Every day we look for information to help us make decisions. Be it at the individual, organizational or global level, our judgments are made based on what we know, and can find out about, the situation at hand. But what happens when we encounter information that doesn't fit with our expectations or understandings? What happens if information comes to light that refutes our assumptions? When is such information considered valid, legitimate, factual, or evidence? When do we decide to 'go out on a limb' with information that doesn't quite fit with our expectations? What and how does knowledge get pushed to the margins? Categorised in the 'too hard' basket?

Our responses to such questions are tied up with what we know about the world and what we want to know about the world.

This paper explores such behaviours by drawing on Shutz's phenomenological explanations about our 'horizons of understanding' and Wallerstein's systemic view of core/periphery in an examination of the relationship between information use and risk taking in strategic decision making.

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Another Crisis! Australian Muslim Men and Agency.

Muslim men in Australia and internationally have been subjected to many trials by media and politics since the disastrous event on September 11, 2001. Yet for this group and in deed Muslims in general, it seems that one has to cope with crisis after crisis (e.g. Gang Rapes, the Cronulla Riot, Bali and London bombings and the wisdom of Mufti's and Pope's etc). Muslim men are of particular interest as they are

often seen to be the instigators of evil doing and malicious harm on the national and world stage. How is the issue of repeated crisis, and dealing with the dread of more, in uncertain and volatile times, impacting on the lives of men and their sense of hope, their fears, and their ability to effect change. How in particular do recently arrived Muslim men, who are of refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds, cope with multiple layers of distress and trauma that started in their search for safer ground, and continues on, now that they are Australian citizens. How is agency operationalised amongst Australian Muslim men? What of resilience? What are their strategies for coping and transforming their current predicament?

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Becoming Multitude: Pier to Pier Resistance in Hong Kong

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Australia's 'Boat People' Sagas: Crisis, Distance and Responsibility

This paper takes the current culture of crisis that pervades both media and government as a point of departure for thinking through the relationship of the present as a state of emergency to the past and the future. As other commentators have noted, the perpetual present marked by the moment of crisis and the distancing of the past it makes possible, is productive of a political culture in which culpability can never be attributed, thus also absolving those living in the present moment of any responsibility towards future outcomes of current actions. Drawing from Elspeth Probyn and Roslyn Diprose on temporal and social distance in both opening up and negating possibilities for ethical action, the paper seeks to work through the conceptualization of crisis, distance and responsibility. The attitudes and actions of past and present Australian governments and the subsequent climate of public debate on the topic is drawn upon to contextualize and examine the way in which the moment of crisis in the present is productive of a temporal distance that further enables and reinforces the social

distance assumed to be at play between asylum seekers and the general electorate. Some of the questions to be asked and negotiated are how the current climate of national emergency surrounding asylum seekers engenders this distance from the past and permits an evasion of responsibility for the future.

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(Dis)organised Mechanisms for Local Resilience.

A critical interpretation of dominant schools within the study of social movements and organisations can provide a basis for investigating complexity thinking as a means for understanding the (dis)organisation of local organising (Chesters & Welsh, 2006; Chia, 1999; Cilliers, 1998; Macquire et al, 2006; Urry, 2002). Complexity thinking situates the local in dynamic interaction with those national and global movements seeking solutions for sustainability. Through this lens I examine three empirical cases: the ‘Sydney Social Forum’ (the Sydney formation of the ‘World Social Forum’), the ‘Green Corridor Coalition’ (a Newcastle based group that developed a proactive conservation strategy and challenged the government’s regional development strategy) and Sydney-based community ‘Climate Action Groups’.

This exploratory study considers what processes or mechanisms may enable spontaneous emergence through loosely coordinated networks devoid of centralized control. Rather than assuming these cases form part of a unitary social movement or that they are ‘organised’ entities, this paper considers how emergent (dis)organising occurs as a constant process of (re)eco-organisation (Morin, 2007). Common themes indicated by participants between the cases, include their communication processes, how meetings generated campaign objectives and collective action (through consensus processes, dispersed leadership and emergent planning), how this was facilitated through loosely connected informal networks, and at times disrupted by ‘micro-politics’ (negotiation of diverse interests through both conflict and collaboration). These mechanisms are considered through a complexity theory framework to demonstrate how such theories work in practice at the local level.

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Asylum-seekers in crisis?

Increasing movements of people, goods and capital are key features of contemporary globalisation. Nation states are increasingly formally engaged with each other through international agreements and protocols in ways that blur traditional borders and boundaries. Asylum-seeker populations are an example of the kinds of contemporary people movements traversing the global; these movements are monitored and regulated by international conventions such as the UNHCR Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951).

This paper considers some of the ways in which local nations are responding to increasing global asylum-seeker movements and, thus, highlights some local and global intersections in relation to this issue, focussing on the example of Australia's response to recent asylum-seeker arrivals.

This descriptive research contends that asylum-seeker movements do not necessarily indicate a crisis within contemporary times but rather, reflect a longer-term pattern of human movement across the globe in times of local crises. However, this is not to suggest that increasing numbers of asylum-seekers in quest of safe havens is unproblematic. The Australian example is used to explore local and global challenges.

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Critical incidents, theory and analysis: strategies for coping with the ambiguous products of chaos

This paper will develop a method and strategy for analysing crisis as it occurs as a normal state of play, as a way of connecting familiar language and experience with the otherwise often recondite concepts and values of theories of chaos and complexity. Critical incidents are unexpected events whose effects unfold exponentially to produce large-scale, surprising consequences. In broad terms they have the form of a Lorenz Butterfly Effect. Through this resemblance they connect with some other common terms from chaos and complexity theory, such as far-from-equilibrium dynamics and fractals, but what is important for my purposes is the fact that they do not rely on these theories to demand attention. On the contrary, faced with a critical incident, managers and other inhabitants of systems know directly that the system they had relied on to behave predictably has shifted out of that mode. Critical Incidents are the carriers and popular proof of the omnipresence of chaos, even if most of the effort to explain them is designed to explain them away.

In this approach, critical incidents are key points of entry into diagnosis of the surrounding conditions. By definition, the initial conditions of a critical incident, what will make them critical, are not analysable in advance. Yet once the sequence has unfolded, the beginning and the end will have a significant relationship, available to analysis. The relationship will be fractal, an operation acting on a structure which

could not be detected until the operation was continued for some time, manifested in the structures of the larger event, themselves unknowable without the fractal analysis that tracks them back to the originary moment (whose status as origin is always provisional). The fractal consists of a unique and unstable relationship between order and non-order, never a pure form of order or disorder.

Some analyses of actual critical incidents will provide the basis for the paradoxical judgement, developed from Zadeh's Principle of Incompatibility, that whenever a system has gone beyond a certain threshold of complexity, attempts to impose crisp concepts and linear logic will produce greater incoherence, less relevance to the aims and purposes of managers of the system. As a consequence, the anatomy of a critical incident will always reveal, among other qualities, the complicating, dysfunctional presence of the will to order.

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Materialising Environmental Justice: Activist Memory-Work with Things that Matter

Recent work in nature-cultures has sought to enrich the affective pathways of being and embodiment by paying close attention to the entanglements between things, publics and natures. The purpose of this work has been to engage with an enlarged field of environmental and geographical politics that include the performative agency of nonhuman subjects and objects, which can then be traced through of a range of cultural, political, scientific and legal registers. This has opened up a lively debate over how things come to matter and how different social collectives engage with them. This paper explores how struggles for environmental justice sustain dangerous memories and social alternatives by working with things that matter. Drawing on a case study of grassroots activism around high-level nuclear waste disposal at Yucca Mountain in Nevada, this presentation will explore the objects, scenarios and collective memories that make up the counter-topographies of place-making and environmental justice. Examples will include a variety of strategic repertoires enacted by anti-nuclear waste activists such as toxic tourism, indigenous writing, people's nuclear waste policy, legal challenges, and environmental direct action.

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The weight of the event: the collapse of the Global Justice Movement in Australia after 9/11

The terror attacks in the US on 9/11 had a pronounced effect on Western society, including in Australia. For activists organising in the Global Justice Movement locally the attacks came a year to the day after the s11 blockade of Crown Casino with its successful disruption of the World Economic Forum. In the period following the attacks, and the subsequent wars launched on Afghanistan and Iraq, how did the movement in Australia respond and change?

This paper will examine the impact of 9/11 on the movement for ‘another’ globalisation, and argue that it moved into decline because of a number of internal and external factors. It is helpful to delineate the external factors as material and ideological to understand the weight of the event on the movement. Meanwhile the factors arising inside the movement can be most usefully seen as weaknesses around organisation and political questions that intersected with the external factors, creating a crisis that led to the movement's degeneration.

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Networks and the Ongoing Crises of the Information Society

Conventionally networks are thought of as reflecting order or as generating spontaneous order, but what if networks express disorder, help produce disorder, or exaggerate disorder and spread it faster the more efficient they are? What if network ordering produces networked disordering? The software basis of network information capitalism not only fails recurrently or seems inadequate but even when working, frequently produces an experience of disorder for its users. This is demonstrated by continuing high rates of software installation failure or disruption, despite some 50 years experience. This paper investigates the disorder experienced in networks, these

perceptions of failure, confusion and chaos, through interviews and through online postings about experiences in the world of financial capital, argues that networks and software models emphasise the informational crisis of hierarchy within the corporation, and that this leads to magical thinking and ultimately collapse.

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An Aversion to 'Climate Crisis'

The most powerful interests in debates about responding to climate change are those of corporations. Responses which are invested in short-term profitability rather than the viability of the planets ecology raises the question as to whether capitalism as a social system is able to deal with the significant structural challenge of climate crisis. The notion of 'sustainability' is often utilised to represent a corporate version of climate change, and this prevents alternative ways of attending to, and being able to think seriously about the climate crisis. In particular it excludes the most vulnerable and marginalised, those who will suffer the most from climate change. Gramsci's theory of crisis can be a meaningful way to challenge the dominant hegemony, due to his understanding of the dynamic reciprocity between the organic and conjunctural aspects of a crisis. The impending (if not current) climate crisis has to be taken as an opportunity to challenge the dominant hegemonies that seek to frame climate change in their own terms.

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The Relevance of Marx for Understanding the Global Financial and Economic Crisis

The unexpected onset of the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 - the largest financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s - has sparked renewed interest in the work of Karl Marx and his critique of political economy. Despite writing in the nineteenth century, Marx's book sales have soared in a number of countries, and new university courses are appearing on his work in the wake of the contemporary crisis. This paper looks at some of the ways in which Marx's work remains relevant to understanding financial and economic crises. In particular, it will note the importance of his work on the falling rate of profit in capitalist societies, the deep class and other economic inequalities generated by capitalism, the role of finance and 'fictitious capital', the impact of class power on the state, and the importance of class conscious and collective action for economic and political change.

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Apocalypse Now: traumascapes in the sphere of public imagination.

We live in an environment where security – national, homeland, personal – must be configured in response to what Liotta (2005) calls “creeping vulnerabilities” as well as specific “threats”. And as Michael Barkun notes it is also an environment in which “war” and “disaster” are conflated with very real policy consequences:

there are no longer clear distinctions between war and peace, war and crime, war and disaster. Rather myriad forms of 'low intensity' conflict inhabit a transnational zone of ambiguous events (Barkun 2002:31)

This “transnational zone of ambiguous events” is not just apparent in the news and the rhetoric of politicians. I will argue that a contemporary version of the apocalypse myth is deployed in response to this situation through what I term “nomadic

mediascapes” which cluster fact and fiction, popular culture and hard news in the contemporary sphere of public imagination. Phenomena as diverse as the “traumascapes” (Tumarkin 2005) of popular crime shows and the apocalyptic scenarios of prophecy novels all contribute to this ongoing sense of low intensity conflict and creeping vulnerabilities.

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Burma: cross-border civil society, chaos, crisis and the struggle for democracy

Burma, a country with eight major ethnic groups and dozens of smaller ethnic groups, has been under military dictatorship since 1962 and racked by civil war for more than sixty years since its independence from the British colonial rule in 1948. Civil society inside Burma remains tightly controlled in their ability to work independently and competently. I have categorised six types of civil society in the context of Burma and have closely examined the nature of cross-border civil society, a type of civil society that emerges amid political crisis and economic chaos. Cross-border civil society refers to Burmese civil society organisations largely based on Thai-Burma borders and in Thailand. This type of civil society has been shown to operate independently and vibrantly. The uniqueness of cross-border civil society is in its ability to contribute to democratic change in Burma.

Cross-border civil society as emerging through political crisis and economic chaos also entails a new form of democracy and promotes informal (adult) education and builds up citizenship and grassroots participation. My field research illustrates that cross-border civil society, in less than a decade, has been transformed from a function of emergency response to capacity building measures that enhances citizens’ ability to participate and make changes. In fact, cross-border civil society is a form of social movement that strongly favors democratic reform and has helped defines a new form of democracy- power from below.

My paper will explore the crucial role of cross- border civil society and its informal educational work that promotes active citizen participation, and I will also look at the

challenges and the impact that the work of cross-border civil society has on the democracy movement in general and other types of civil society inside the country.

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From Crisis to Resilience: Integrated Emergency Management (IEM) for 'All' or 'Any' Hazards

This talk will highlight the emphasis of all-hazards approaches to crisis on organisational resilience and suggest that by moving beyond piece-meal policy rhetoric and blurry definitions of risk, hazard and threat it is possible to create a system of integrated emergency management (IEM) that allows a more meaningful resilience to crisis to emerge.

IEM harnesses organisationally embedded capabilities, developing an understanding of the goals to be achieved by pulling together a collaborative multi-agency system for dealing with all stages of the disaster cycle. In order to meaningfully embed organisational resilience into the practice of all those concerned the paper will draw on the lessons learned in ESRC sponsored research into the UK Civil Contingencies Programme. Particularly this paper draws on the implementation of civil contingencies and terrorist legislation in the UK to highlight:

- The need for extensive and early consultation in order to assess existing capabilities across diverse organisations
- The need to activate efficient command and control structures at local, regional and national scales of government
- The activation or creation of efficient multi-stakeholder networks
- The important role of Risk assessment and Risk registers
- The implementation of themes of activity within a strategic programme of capabilities along a prescribed time-line
- The coordination of a statutory commitment to multi-stakeholder preparation, testing and implementation of plans
- The coordination and enhancement of communicative pathways between public and private agencies

The paper will summarise the policy, practice and process of implementation linked to the broader UK Resilience and Civil Contingencies agenda, and conclude by suggesting potential benefits of adopting this approach in an Australian context.

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The Sound of Technology Failing

In the mid to late 90s a term came into being to describe the rupturing of the slick digital facade of recent sound and art technologies. Sound artist and theorist Kim Cascone and others coined 'post-digital' to describe the failure of digital technology and its resulting detritus as compositional material. Cascone wrote that failure reminds us that 'our control of technology is an illusion, and revealing digital tools to be only as perfect, precise, and efficient as the humans who build them' (Cascone 2000, 13). Application of extended technique, technological accidents and the adaptation of preexisting machines have always been drivers of artistic invention.

Why then is it only recently (with the advent of the digital) that 'failure' has entered the lexicon to describe an age old practice, previously considered to be value-additive? How does the post-digital's use of 'failure' expose endemic crises within age-old creative processes?

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Social liberalism', the crisis and the Left

The ascendancy of neoliberalism across the Anglosphere was accompanied by a dramatic shift towards market-centric policies by centre-left parties. The space opened to their left for the rise of more radical formations was often associated with a critique of social democracy's degeneration into "social liberalism", seen as an irreversible abandonment of redistributive social justice and state intervention. Yet in Australia

the Rudd Labor Government, considered a prime example of social liberalism, has responded to the global economic crisis with a massive program of state intervention and strident ideological attacks on neoliberalism. Despite the magnitude of the crisis, the Left has been unable to produce an alternative politics, instead either uncritically accepting Rudd's agenda or arguing that nothing has really changed. This paper argues that in accepting the terms of the debate set by the concept of social liberalism, the Left has created a political impasse that can only be overcome with clarity on the nature of both social democracy and the neoliberal project.

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The Clash of Spontaneous Orders: From Economy of Nature to the Financialisation of Ecosystem Services

The transformation since the 1970s of international economy by financial deregulation, and the transformation of finance by the rapid evolution of derivatives, now meets the "convergence of the capital markets and the environment" (Fusaro and Yuen 2004). It has been noted that neoclassical equilibrium analysis failed to predict the unsustainability of debt-financed growth, and that those economists who predicted the 2007/2008 crisis all used flow-of-funds accounting models (Bezemer 2009). However even these analytical models do nothing to shed light on the underlying biophysical stocks and flows of economic activity, and the fact that current crisis is finally predicated upon unpayable 'ecological debts'.

Market-based climate reform, while proceeding at a glacial pace, nevertheless amounts to a partial 'financialisation' of the carbon cycle and its attendant crises. Using the same logic at work in global carbon trading, proposals have been made such that the loss of abundance, biodiversity and ecosystem function that comprises the Sixth Mass Extinction (Gould, Wilson) can be plugged into the distributed computation of markets, with market 'mechanisms' to allow trading in 'biodiversity and ecosystem services' (Chichilinsky, 2009).

Such proposals for the evolution of forms of 'natural capital', the palliative commodification of extinction, and the securitization of ecological debts are unique in that they institutionalise an indistinction between ecology and neoliberal economics. Drawing on the history of conceptual exchange between ecology and economics, the paper identifies several implicit 'bioeconomic' theories within the neoliberal consensus, the convergence of which underwrites hopes to securitise 'sustainable growth' through the interpolation and alignment of 'financial evolution' and 'ecosystems services'.

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Who's Crisis are we talking about: Managing Tourism on the Kokoda Track PNG? -

The Kokoda Track appears to move from one crisis to the next with various stakeholders contesting its ownership, its safety and its use. This paper aims to provide an examination of the Kokoda Track as it has developed as a long term trekking opportunity since 2001. It seeks to provide a look at the development of the track as a tourism phenomenon while also drawing attention to the various factors associated with track usage and visitor experience in trekking. In the literature the main factors found to influence the track experience were congestion, interaction between trail user groups and environmental degradation. This paper will provide personal reflections from the author and his experiences of working with the communities, governments and NGO's over the last 8 years in preparing a number of strategies for the Kokoda and its future.