Rethinking eco-feminism in the context of critical systems thinking

Anne Stephens

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Critical Systems Thinking (CST) is a branch of systems thinking that theorises and aligns methodological practice to the idea of emergence, based on contingency, interrelatedness and boundary critique. CST engages with questions of difference, inclusion and exclusion. Feminists, having had a long association with questions of difference and identity, and a certain tension generated by post-structuralist considerations of meaning-making, can use systemic practices to embrace the dynamic and shifting nature of knowledge production with a an eco-feminist curiosity. Such as curiosity is an experimental and playful approach to systemic practices with implications for the theorization and methodological design of interdisciplinary sociological and environmental politics research. We need effective ways to work with communities of people in intra-disciplinary ways to engage with the range of socio-environmental phenomena that are reshaping the way we live. A ecofeminist curiosity bought to bear with systemic intervention practices recognise the complex, interlinked and co-contingent relationships between humans and other-thanhumans - a journey that has no clear way forward and is emergent in character. To act in this way is a political act – one we must take to move beyond instrumentalist neo-liberalism.

Extractive industries in 'post-resource conflicts': Lessons from the Pacific

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40 per cent of intrastate conflicts globally are linked to natural resources. Given the correlation between natural resources, conflict and its recurrence, there is an urgent need to find more peaceful avenues for the extraction of natural resources. This urgency is particularly salient for the Pacific region due to a number of large-scale extractive projects either currently in operation, or under negotiation, in conflict and postconflict environments. Significant examples include the re-opening (and subsequent closure) of the Gold Ridge mine in the Solomon Islands; ExxonMobil's Liquefied Natural Gas Project in Papua New Guinea as well as debates on the potential resumption of large scale mining on Bougainville. A striking feature of these cases is that they comprise new or re-opened extractive projects in areas where natural resources have been directly related to prior conflict and community tension. The entry or re-entry of extractive companies may contribute simultaneously to renewed conflict and to peace building. This paper explores recommendations in the academic and policy literature on how extractive companies can negotiate this two-edged dynamic and considers their relevance to examples from the Pacific.

TITLE: The force of habit: Changing domestic water cultures in Australian cities

Author/s: Jo Lindsay and Sian Supski

Affiliation/s: School of Social Sciences, Monash University

This paper examines the diverse domestic water cultures and consumption habits after drought in three Australian cities – Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane. Each location has distinct environmental, geological, social and cultural attributes. All three cities have experienced drought, to varying degrees, over the past 15 years and each city has responded differently. Drawing on focus group data a rich picture of diverse water cultures emerges. Melbourne participants described a sense of water crisis during the drought that has since abated, yet they remain water conscious. Brisbane participants experienced unprecedented water shortages during the drought but have recently experienced substantial floods. They report a mixed response in their daily habits. Perth's drying climate has been addressed by technological solutions including the construction

of two desalination plants and reliance on ground water and aquifer recharge which has seemingly mitigated any palpable sense of crisis and enabled heavy water use habits. We explore how participants in different cities engage with their water use habits and why some habits have been more amenable to change than others.

Negotiating and re-negotiating climate change in Australia: A case for neoliberal environmental hegemony

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York University, Canada & Curtin University, Australia

Abstract
Continuous and alarming scientific research tells us that 2014 was the hottest year ever recorded (Cole and McCarthy, 2015) and that four of the planet's nine ecological boundaries have been crossed (Steffen et al., 2015). These dramatic shifts have led some to argue that the world has entered a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, where humans are transforming the environment on a global scale through, for example, climate change. To limit or reverse these planetary ecological shifts, Wright et al. (2013) argue that we need to reimagine the socio-economic and political structures of contemporary society. However, this does not appear to be happening; indeed, the dominant response from business, policymakers and organised labour within the Australian context is deeply embedded in the existing, and as we argue hegemonic, political economic framework of neoliberalism. Tracing the history of climate change policy responses from Hawke to Abbott, we highlight how Australian climate policy has been maintained within a narrow spectrum of economic rationalism. Rather than reimagining the socio-political economic structures of capitalism, Australian climate change policy over the last quarter of a century presents a form of neoliberal hegemony.

Flying High: Academic Air Travel, Internationalisation and Sustainability

Andrew Glover
Yolande Strengers
Tania Lewis
RMIT University

This paper discusses the 'absent presence' of hypermobility in contemporary Australian academia, both as lived experience and as a normative institutional orientation. Academic mobility is closely tied to one's ability to cultivate and maintain 'network capital' (Larson, Axhausen & Urry, 2006). Such forms of extended social capital are seen as promoting one's ability to access the most prized elements of the academic career - international collaborations, high-impact journal publications, and research grants. This paper draws on recent research conducted on Australian academics' expectations to travel by air, and the viability of alternative modes of collaborating and meeting. We find that the imperative to mobility is not just linked to personal academic preference, but is embedded in imperatives toward internationalisation in the policies of the Australian research and tertiary education sector. However, the 'presence' of - and expectations around - mobility within academic discourses is contrasted by a relative 'absence' of recognition of its social and environmental implications. Many Australian university sustainability policies, for instance, fail to acknowledge air travel as a notable source of their carbon footprint. Drawing on a survey conducted with Australian academics, and an analysis of university sustainability and broader institutional policies, we discuss the problematic contradiction that academic air travel poses.

TITLE:
Growing Change: The relationship between Urban Agriculture participation and the presence and development of Ecological Habitus

Author/s: *James Ribeiro-Duthie* MSD, MEnvMan

Affiliation/s: School of Social Science, University of Queensland

Start text of Abstract Here (*no more than 200 words with no figures or tables*):
A number of the current social and ecological challenges such as climate change, urban growth and food insecurity are complex and interrelated in nature. There have been calls from across disciplines for a holistic and interrelated approach to - and understanding of – these phenomena. Also recognized, however is that current understandings of how to promote the development of this 'ecological' understanding are limited. One group of activities that has been suggested as having potential to enable a shift towards an ecological understanding is urban agriculture. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice and the concept of habitus, embodiment of such a holistic approach to - and understanding of phenomena would indicate the presence of an 'ecological habitus'. The presentation explores outcomes of UA engagement and the relationship between urban agriculture practice and the presence and development of ecological habitus. The research involved a series of interviews with urban agriculture participants in conjunction with participant elicited photography in the Brisbane and Hobart. Initial findings suggest that engagement in urban agriculture may result in increased social and cultural capital, greater awareness of and attachment to place and the potential embodiment of ecologically relevant dispositions, and practices that are perceptible as changes to the lifestyles and material conditions of the participants.

TITLE: **The subordination of food security to biodiversity preservation in coastal marine systems in the Indo-Pacific**

Author/s: Simon Foale

Affiliation/s: James Cook University

Start text of Abstract Here (*no more than 200 words with no figures or tables*):
The western environmentalist ideology of the conservation biology community has in the past two or so decades influenced tropical coastal fishery management discourse and research in ways that divert scientific attention away from a fundamentally agricultural aspect of fishery production – the availability of nutrients. In much recent scientific literature, concerns about fishery-based 'food security' have been *retrofitted*, using a win-win argument, to an *a priori* western preservationist agenda which is based on the 'cumulative intrinsic value' of the large numbers of coral and other species that comprise Indo-Pacific coral reef ecosystems – a system of valuation that means little to most Indo-Pacific subsistence and artisanal fishers. An unacknowledged problem with this idea is that corals, which prefer to live in clear, *nutrient-poor* waters, transmit comparatively little of their primary production to fishery production. Estuaries, lagoons and upwelling areas by contrast can be very productive. I argue that the subordination of one moral framework - fishery production and food security - to another which is based on the western-scientific intrinsic and aesthetic values of coral reefs, misleads both scientific and policy discourse, and I illustrate with a case study from Solomon Islands, and an overview of fishery production in the Indo-Pacific region.

Title: Pop-up food vendors as spatially mobile practices and their implications for sustainability

Bhavna Middha

Centre For Urban Research, RMIT University, Melbourne

This paper conceptualizes pop-up food vendors as a retail practice defined in terms of its temporality, spatially mobile infrastructure, distinct business model and special competencies. From 'filling' empty spaces and livening up barren side streets to presenting new and creative business models, pop-up food outlets have become increasingly commonplace in urban food environments and represent today's new age of social media, globalization, spatial mobility and fast paced emerging innovations.

Eating is increasingly considered a socio-spatial practice, thus pop-up food outlets are an essential part of spatial design and planning. Food related land uses have long been associated with sustainable urbanism not only in terms of spatial planning and design but also in terms of intensive energy and resource consumption along the industrialised food chain. Drawing on an ethnography of RMIT University's city campus as a site of food provisioning and consumption, this paper investigates how food retail practices of pop up vendors performed in different spaces can generate different impacts on food-scapes. This will be explored through the notion that all mobilities entail highly embedded and immobile infrastructures, therefore the way in which these seemingly non-permanent infrastructures interact with the existing infrastructures can have different implications for sustainability.

TITLE: Climate change action - beyond the neoliberal orientation: a research proposal.

Author/s: Julie C. Parison

Affiliation/s:
Discipline of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University, Townsville.

Abstract (*192 words*):
Background: Climate change is the most significant public health challenge humans have ever

confronted. Governments are slow to respond. Research and discourse focuses on attitudes or

nonresponsiveness of individuals and socially influential stakeholders.   Responsiveness of

individual human actors who have taken preventive action is under researched. A research study to

explore this is proposed. This presentation will seek audience feedback on the most suitable

sampling frame for this project.

Question & aims: This study will investigate why and how individuals have acted to remake their

lifeworld in response to global warming and climate change. Focusing beyond neoliberal solutions

is proposed. Deeper case description will explore the social context, attributes, actions and

motivations of individuals who have successfully adopted an ecological lifestyle.   A further aim is

the theoretical understanding of transformational human action which supports the creation of

healthier societies.

Methodology: Archer's reflexivity theory and Bourdieu's concepts "habitus", "capital" and "field"

will frame a qualitative case study research design.   Methods proposed include theoretical and

snowball sampling, participant observation and in-depth interviewing, and qualitative thematic

analysis.

Expected Outcomes: A theoretical understanding of individual climate change action and the sociological forces framing those success stories.

Meat mimicry: the neoliberal challenge to meat consumption

Jane Daly
PhD Candidate, Beyond Behaviour Change Research Program, Centre for Urban Research, School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University

Fake or faux, meat substitutes are a curious food. Increasingly positioned as a food governance strategy, the meat substitute has captured the imaginations of environmental researchers, food scientists and entrepreneurs as a way to moderate meat consumption. Alongside findings from research into the everyday food practices of 21 meat-reducing households, I interrogate how proponents of this approach suppose the strategy to 'work' (Warde 2005, Shove 2012, Meah and Watson 2011). Positioned within a neoliberal consumer society model of change, I show how the meat substitute maintains the dietary status quo in three ways. First, by transporting and recirculating standards and definitions of what makes a proper meal, what is seen as an acceptable, proper food to take to a barbeque or serve to guests. Second, by sustaining the co-evolution of food practices with their linked material arrangements: the technologies and infrastructures such as freezers, BBQs and systems of provision via energy intensive cold chains, the same material arrangements that current meat-centric meals depend upon. And third, by sustaining collaborations between food and gender practices: just as the meat substitute attempts to mimic every aspect of meat, so too does it aim to be taken up in performances of masculinity.

TITLE: Climate activism and the neoliberal turn: whatever it takes?

Author/s: Vanessa Bowden

Affiliation/s: University of Newcastle

With the dramatic disintegration of climate mitigation policy in Australia, environment groups have implemented a number of creative strategies for targeting greenhouse intensive industry. Nationally, the prominent anti-mining group Lock the Gate works with landholders to resist the encroachment of mining, gaining support from such unlikely personalities as Alan Jones, while the group 350.org are leading a fossil fuel divestment campaign. In the Hunter region of New South Wales, the Hunter Community Environment Centre has campaigned on the health impacts of the coal transportation chain in an attempt to mobilise residents to prevent the approval of further coal loaders. While such strategies might be seen as an example of what Beck (1997) calls subpolitics, with groups working in unlikely alliances to prevent one of the major causes of climate change, they are also a decidedly neoliberal approach to social change. This paper suggests that these strategies, while yielding some success, have limited applications in terms of dealing with the broader issue of climate change, privileging concerns for self-interest at the expense of the need for engaging the general public or pushing for ambitious leadership to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate Change: The Revival of Economic Rationalism on Australian Climate Change Public Policy

Student Julie O'Callaghan[1]

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Becoming Environmental: How environmental educators fashion environmental citizens

Jo-Anne Ferreira
Griffith School of Environment, Griffith University, Brisbane.

In this paper I problematize understandings of environmental citizenship in environmental education. Through examining common programs and practices, I argue that environmental education can be understood not as a means to "re-connect" our true selves with the natural world but rather as a governmental mechanism for fashioning new beings into existence – beings who are so "environmental" that they have very specific concerns, interests and capacities that allow them to _become_ informed and active environmental citizens. Reading environmental education practices as technologies of citizenship deployed to fashion new personas challenges contemporary understandings of the role of such practices, and challenges notions of environmental citizenship as a form of liberation. While such a reading could easily be understood as a critique of the work of environmental educators, the more meaningful question this paper asks is whether such efforts to constitute and regulate individuals is indeed problematic, if we believe bodies such as the IPCC and the world's top scientists who argue that climate change is real, human induced, and will have major negative impacts on all life on Earth.

TITLE: Media leaders are dead. Long live Leadership.
Author/s: _Isabel McIntosh_
Affiliation/s: University of Tasmania
Start text of Abstract Here (no more than 200 words with no figures or tables):

The digital sphere brings together "fragmented, individualized populations" that challenge traditional notions of collective identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 751). Instead new encounters take place bringing together actors from multiple spheres to voice common concerns around singular issues that are simultaneously place-based and networked across places.

In the campaign (2011-2015) against coal seam gas campaign in NSW a multi-voice and diverse line up of experts, farmers, local residents and women have emerged as spokespeople, each connected to local networks and identity groups such as the Knitting Nannas or farmers of the Liverpool plains. Rather than leadership defined by media promoting the charisma of a prominent individual (e.g. Gitlin, 1980; Lester,

2010) media coverage of the campaign has involved hundreds of spokespeople. How has this decentralised leadership enabled the campaign to build a far broader engagement than Australia's traditional environmental NGO-led campaigns?

I analyse media coverage of the Fullerton Cove blockade in 2012 and the 2014 Pilliga protest camp to show the diversity of spokespeople used as sources in media coverage. I examine the relationship to social power and how it has contributed to resilience, sustainability and diversity in the campaign. I investigate how the connective is replacing the collective as the organising form in environmental networks of protest.

Antipodean exception? Theorising the failure of neoliberal climate policy in Australia

Ms Rebecca Pearse[1]
[1]University of Sydney

Conflict over climate policy has contributed to major legitimation crises for successive Australian governments since the 2000s. And the present moment is an interregnum, where the hegemony of carbon pricing has been challenged, but the Coalition's 'Direct Action Plan' is also hotly contested. This paper asks, what does the failure of climate policy in Australia tell us about neoliberalism? I argue that the Australia case troubles existing Northern social theories of the rise (and fall) of neoliberal climate policy. Dominant explanations of neoliberalisation in climate policy are Eurocentric, focused on the persuasive powers of economists in the global North from the 1970-1990s, and they read too much into the neoliberal promise of low carbon accumulation. Northern theories of neoliberal climate policy do not sufficiently theorise the redistributive impacts and state developmental agendas 'market solutions' serve. Nor do they account for the substantive and political failures of carbon trading *and* alternative policies championed by conservatives. I argue that the failure of neoliberal climate policy in Australia reflects the impossibility of reconciling genuine decarbonisation with the postcolonial state's extractive development strategy. More generally, this Australian case illustrates that neoliberalisation goes hand in hand with developmentalism.

TITLE: Was Foucault an Environmentalist? Governance, Journalistic Discourse and the Great Barrier Reef.

Author/s: Dr Maxine Newlands

Affiliation/s: James Cook University

With so many voices speaking about the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) – UNESCO, scientists, conservationists, industries, Australia's Federal and State government and their institutions, individuals and more, how can they all be heard?, who is setting the rules? And whose reef is it anyway?

Foucault's concepts (1976 & 2008) provide a useful theoretical position from which to analyse the many GBR voices. Although Foucault's work lacks any specific reference to environmentalism, he understood the need to study "environmentalism in terms not of epistemological options" but instead the "necessary conditions for the emergence of an ecological/environmental movement in itself" (Darier, 1999, p. 4). By identifying the conditions in which voices emerge, reveals a governance/discourse, power/knowledge nexus that shows the strongest voices are not necessarily those setting the rules about the GBR.

Drawing on archival and qualitative research, this paper will explore a) the drivers of communication and media coverage in the environmental governance of the reef; and b) the main discourse at play that shape our knowledge of the GBR.