

UGRD3001: Learning Portfolio

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WEEK 1

Introductory talk by Lawrence Cram

Key aspects of this talk were:

- The genesis of this course in an essay regarding the question of what purpose universities serve, or should serve, in our society, and whether they achieve what they set out to achieve effectively.
- The question of whether there can be more effective links between the perspectives of natural science and the humanities?
- 'Problem solving'
 - is this part of the problem?
 - reactive
 - assumes context
 - results come too late
 - 'futility of learning'
 - 'unknown unknowns'

Financial Crises – What have we learnt from past crises?

Renee Fry – College of Business and Economics

Renee gave a brief insight into the ways in which an economic perspective attempts to gain insight into previous financial crises in order to predict future ones. The lecture highlighted the difficulty in achieving this goal due to the almost endless array of factors that need to be incorporated into any model for it to be valid. These include the range of participants in any given crisis, and the range of human behavioural tendencies that impact on their economic activity.

Lecture Questions

1. To what extent do cultural/philosophical perspectives on lifestyle/consumption/the world around us have a relationship with national debt? This would have to exclude any debt gained by countries as the recipients of so-called 'development' efforts. This is something that, as not easily quantified, may not be approached by economists.
2. Does a 'mainstream' economic perspective on events include such things as:
 - the global geo-political power dynamic
 - the historical basis for the current situation
 - is a crisis not also a necessary rebalancing of a distorted system?

WEEK 2

Tutorial 1 Preparation

Deposit Guarantees tutorial questions:

Describe why policy makers might opt for a deposit guarantee.

- fear of a run on deposits.
- perceived need to instil confidence in the system in order to stimulate economic activity.
- political need to be seen to be doing something.
- herd mentality of governments.

Describe the motivation for the introduction of the deposit guarantee in Australia.

- pretty much the same as above.
- possibility of political pressure from the 'big 4' banks?
- sense that it is the profitability of the banks that is a key aspect of Aus capacity to reduce impact of global events.
- Labour government eager to pre-empt any querying of their 'economic management' capabilities.

In designing a deposit guarantee, what features for inclusion would you debate with your co-policy makers?

- What funds are to be covered by any guarantee?
- To what extent are any 'distortions of the system' a real or significant factor?
- the time frame of any proposed guarantee.
- upper/lower limits of any guarantee.
- who's interests is any guarantee really serving – are there any significant losers as a result of implementation?

Describe what you think the economic implications for a deposit guarantee may be.

- increase in consumer sentiment/confidence in banking system in face of collapses overseas.
- reduction in irrational flow on of irrational 'crisis behaviour'.
- little long-term damage to financial (or any) system.

Describe what impact these changes may have on the global economy.

- very little? Does the fate of Australia have significant influence on the broader global economy? I imagine that our resources could still be purchased whatever the domestic economic circumstances.

- other countries already have guarantees, so broader dynamic not impacted on by our joining them.

Tutorial Reading 2

This reading explores the links between 'explicit deposit insurance' (a guarantee), and the stability of the banking system. The authors concluded that there is one, and that a guarantee undermines said stability. Key to their argument was that a guarantee introduced 'moral hazard' due to a bank's capacity to attract deposits no longer being based on the level of risk in their asset portfolio, thus encouraging banks to try riskier strategies in the quest for higher yield, leaving themselves more vulnerable.

When reading this piece I was struck by the following points:

- the way in which the authors consistently brushed over the huge range of individual circumstances of the countries included in their study
- the number of characteristics of countries that were unable to be measured or incorporated in the data.
- the particular instance of using GDP/capita (referred to as 'development') as a proxy for the quality of regulation and legal environment in a country, despite the obvious weakness in this as a general premise.

Weekly Reflections

It has struck me that an economic perspective is a useful way to begin a course such as this, due to it being a successful (?) attempt to understand and systemise complexity. It could be seen as a cross-disciplinary exercise in that it is the result of a linking of mathematical principles to the cultural/social processes of the humanities.

Economics could be said to be overly reductionist or essentialist, as evidenced when one imagines theoretically recreating a society out of its economic representation. The result would have few of the social or moral features we hold dear when we consider the society in which we live. Do we lose these things as models of capitalism (or any other economic model) come to pervade a society? It is easy to see drivers for the reactive growth in a neo-Marxist perspective in sections of the humanities, although the same 'reductionist' critique could be aimed in its direction.

The constraints of the economic paradigm (as with any paradigm) are also clear. The 'causes' of the latest 'global financial crisis' in economic terms are, on further examination, clearly 'effects' themselves (results of social dynamics, political decisions etc).

It seems that in order to see things as clearly as possible we must continually question the contextual limits of the perspectives or information given to us.

Lecture 2: Helpful and Unhelpful Thinking About Complexity and Uncertainty.

Steve Cork – EcoInsights

An introduction to the way in which problems are categorised in terms of their difficulty to solve, the range of ways that these problems are viewed, strategies being employed to deal with the most difficult of these, and constraints on our capacity to deal with these problems effectively.

Key points for me were:

- the issues around one's capacity to clearly identify a problem:
 - mode of thinking/analysis
 - awareness of assumptions
- role of imagination in visualising possible future scenarios
- inverse relationship between efficiency and resilience

Lecture questions.

Can the divergent goals of 'efficiency' and 'resilience' be reconciled in our economic system?

My response to this lecture was driven largely by the way in which this notion of dealing with 'complex problems' was leading people to engage with the edges of the most 'complex' of them all – **exactly what is the nature of 'my' existence in relation to the broader system within which 'I' am sited and how should 'I' most effectively engage with that broader system?** Am I acting independently? Am I simply the system itself in action? As with many contexts, the 'personal agency' versus 'system' debate seems to end at a point of conundrum. What seems to me to be of relevance is the possibility that the characteristics of a Western scientific/philosophical framework could be a limiting factor in any real resolution of this. It could well be the limitations of the 'framing' that is the essence of the conundrum. Through many years of meandering around at the more philosophical end of Buddhist/Taoist thought, I have a sense that there are aspects of, for example, their notions of 'dichotomy' and 'duality' as not being representative of the fundamental nature of things that may allow us to see the problems we face in a different light, and possibly provide a path forward.

WEEK 3

Tutorial 2 Preparation

Readings

Wicked Problems

- issues surrounding the differences between technical and social decision making.
- 'wicked problems' as:
 - symptoms of other problems
 - 'solutions' leading to unforeseen circumstances
 - links to social pluralism, institutional complexity and scientific uncertainty
 - no 'root cause'

- complex – difficult to acquire accurate knowledge of the problem
- issues with traditional public management:
 - not conducive to dealing with wicked problems
 - hierarchical
 - ‘managerialism’
 - ‘contractualism’
- How to approach complexity?
 - outcomes focus/systems thinking
 - ‘web’ of inputs, processes and outputs
 - ‘mapping’ of problem
 - collaboration/coordination
 - mobilising adaptive work (eg. leadership skills)

Hidden Flaws

Behavioural Economics as having insights into why competent business people engage in flawed strategy:

1. Overconfidence.
2. Mental accounting (treating money differently depending on source/purpose).
3. The ‘status quo’ bias (keeping things as they are).
4. Anchoring (having one’s parameters of thought set by an initial premise).
5. Sunk-cost effect (inability to let go of flawed ventures).
6. Herding instinct.
7. Misestimating future hedonic states (exaggerated sense of the way in which changes will positively or negatively impact on one’s well-being).
8. False consensus (information bias, selective recall, biased evaluation, groupthink).

Tutorial 2 Recap / Weekly Reflections

In this tutorial we attempted to rate problems in order of ‘wickedness’, and then tried to develop strategies for dealing with the problem of violence against Indian students in Australia. This wasn’t necessarily our most ‘wicked’ problem, but I think it possibly seemed one that we would have a greater chance of grappling with in the limited context of our tutorial! What became clear in the course of the tutorial however was that very little is clear when faced with a wicked problem. Our group, possibly due to my involvement, became lost in the contextualising of the problem, which can become a futile engagement with ever-larger paradigms, moving away from any direct engagement with particular incidents of violence. **Is this a fundamental conundrum? Does the need to make sense of a problem through siting it within a broader context, and the need also to arbitrarily limit the boundaries of that context in order to have a material engagement with the issue that is of concern, mean that our responses are rarely able to really engage with aspects of the scenario that in any way approach something near a root cause? Is the view of wicked problems as not having root causes in part based on our inability/unwillingness to engage with the ontology that even our perspectives of the issue are**

limited by?

The main thing to come out of this week for me is the way in which the very nature of 'wicked problems' hinders engagement due to their reluctance to be defined clearly. As was put at the end of the tutorial, the issue of violence against Indian students could, from one perspective, be regarded as not very wicked at all, if it is simply viewed as an example of the need to reduce the incidence of late-night muggings. Any 'wickedness' is more based on the resulting debate about its greater significance as a reflection of the nature of Australian society.

Lecture 3: Collapse of Empires.

Part 1: Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Paul Burton

This talk was constructed around an overview of the perspectives that have been held over time as to the reasons for the 'collapse' of the Roman Empire. There were several key concepts touched upon:

- Is it appropriate to even call it a 'collapse'?
- How is it possible to find 'a reason' when a list of 210 can be compiled?
- To what extent does **historiography** colour the reasons that historians of a given era attribute to the collapse? Is there any 'objective history'?
- Is it possible to reconcile a **system view** with a **unit view** of causation?
- Are the right questions to be asking: Why did it last so long? Why did the West survive?

Part 2: The Kennedy Thesis: Explaining System Change Joan Beaumont

This talk considered the thesis put forward by Paul Kennedy in his book 'The Rise and Fall of Great Powers' to explain the fundamental factors in an empire's rise and fall, using examples taken from the 1500s to the present. Key aspects of his thesis are as follows:

- Global power is a relative concept, reflective of the dynamic of a broader system.
- Relative strength never remains constant.
- There are direct links between economic strength and global power.
- The use of economic resources in war-time is a key factor in a rise to power, but ironically overly focussing on military prowess at the expense of economic endeavour ('imperial overstretch') is seen as a cause of decline of empires.

The following critiques have been made:

- Is the uniqueness of situations ignored in this thesis?
- Is the present being superimposed on the past (presentism)?
- It is overly focussed on certain notions of power (navalist?).
- What is the role of ideologies, personal agency, sense of national mission etc?

Part 3: The Collapse of the Dominant Narratives of Collapse in International Relations

Jim George

This talk engaged with the ongoing tension at the heart of International Relations theory between the positivist systems of 'power politics realism' and 'liberal internationalism/neo-liberalism', and the theories that question the inherent ontological limitations of the positivist and related empiricist modes that frame both these systems.

Realist perspectives:

- Machiavellian principles: only the strongest will survive, importance of military prowess, meeting of aggression with aggression, need of a strong leader.
- The central role of the nation-state in global organisation.

Liberal perspectives:

- An antidote to power politics thinking.
- A narrative of rationality
 - Development/progress as an antidote to the collapse of the state.
 - Uses a western/democratic/capitalist template.
 - Universalising- the world as a single system/world-view as peace.

Jim dealt with the scope and necessity that now exists to examine these approaches more critically, in order to engage with the current multiple layers existing in the international sphere. He highlighted the way in which the characteristics of Australia's engagement with the surrounding region have been influenced by a questioning of some central premises of the above approaches.

Lecture Questions

The discussion following this lecture was wonderfully interesting and animated. I engaged with the idea of the validity of 'empire' in some way changing, and America therefore not aspiring to be, or presenting itself as an empire as traditionally imagined. I suppose my thinking tends to see the notion of empire as an example of a representation of the 'systemic' nature of global dynamics, and as such, whether overt or not, the current dominance of US interest globally justifies it being viewed as such. This is not to suggest a 'Kennedy-ist' representation of cause and effect, but simply an acknowledgement of relevance of a broader systemic context.

Reflections

I am currently doing a Political Science unit on 'Development and Change', and a Sociology unit on 'Identity, Difference and Ethnicity'. It is proving fascinating to be approaching key complex issues such as globalisation, ethnic tension and global wealth distribution in all of my subjects, though seeing this done from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. In a sense it is allowing me to engage in a practical application of some of the topics we have already dealt with in this course, in that I am seeing the value in drawing on a variety of perspectives, while at the same time seeing the way in which each of these perspectives must be sited within its contextual

framework, and its associated assumptions and world-view. I am already clearly seeing the merits of a course such as this. When I described it to someone they commented that it sounded like a 'thinktank', and I guess it is. Everything else I am studying is making more sense in light of the mode of thinking that we are engaging within UGDR3001.

WEEK 4

Tutorial 3 Preparation

Stimulus Questions

1. Empire collapse as loss of:
 - a. global status
 - b. geographic area
 - c. cultural influence
 - d. economic power
2. Why did Roman Empire fall?
 - a. Responses to Imperialist behaviour requiring time to gestate/manifest?
 - b. Global status due in part to a lack of concerted resistance?
 - c. 'Rotten at the core'- inward-looking rather than outward?
3. Underlying cause for collapse of empires?
 - a. The inherent instability of global situations?
 - b. The corruption of power?
4. Lessons to be learnt?
 - a. the fact that empires do not represent equilibrium – they reflect a brief snapshot of a dynamic set of circumstances.
 - b. The things that bring an empire into being aren't the things that will effectively maintain it.
5. I'm not sure that I see there as having been other paths for events at any time to have followed, and as such am wary of attributing value to the perspectives we have now as being more appropriate than those they were able to have at the time.

Tutorial 3 Readings

The readings regarding 'empire' for this week had some clear points of correlation. The overarching idea was the crucial role that perspective plays when viewing a complex human scenario, and the myriad of ways in which this perspective may be caused to differ. These included the view from within or from outside a scenario; from various historical points; from religious perspective; or from within current orthodoxy. In history this is the domain of 'historiography'.

The Kennedy thesis for empire rise and fall was an interesting attempt to create a system-based

framework as a tool to both explain the flow of global power throughout modern history, and allow us to observe these flows as they are occurring. When the ideas touched upon in the paragraph above are taken into account however, it is easy to see the space for the critique of Kennedy's ideas that was also in the readings.

My most enjoyable reading for a long time has been Smith's 'Positivism and Beyond'. In short, in the context of International Relations theory, he engages with the notion that understanding epistemological/ontological/methodological parameters or limitations is a key aspect of an effective engagement with something that is as inherently complex as IR. Specifically, an implicit acceptance/reliance on an 'empiricist' epistemology and 'positivist' methodology limits the capacity to see the validity and usefulness of theoretical perspectives that are not arising out of empiricism.

Tutorial 3 Recap / Reflections

This was a very exciting tutorial, led by X and Y, based largely on the challenge of linking contested theoretical premises to practice.

We first spent time attempting to understand the Kennedy thesis, and discussed the way in which some underlying principles of the dominant IR theories are being challenged. We discussed the materialistic and deterministic nature of Kennedy's thesis, enjoying the idea of the momentum of rise to empire leading to decline also.

The second part of the tutorial saw us in groups, attempting to solve a problem appropriate to our relative disciplines. The problems were taken from Demandt's list of 210 causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, and we chose 'gluttony' – as a symbol of decadence or excess. Using a whiteboard we ultimately concluded that the only way to counter this characteristic of a society would be a metaphysical or paradigm change, whereby the aspiration to have 'more' relative to 'others' was replaced by a profound sense that excess was inappropriate, and society was founded on more egalitarian principles (the pitfalls to this are, however, obvious – how to avoid gulags?!). **Does this highlight the pitfalls any model/aspiration relating to an ideal? Should any model of society that doesn't factor in the flawed and unpredictable 'humanness' of its participants be treated with caution, due to the fundamental inability that there may be to predict how these 'unquantifiables' will impact on outcomes?**

Lecture 4: Pacific Islands

This lecture dealt with the Pacific region from an interesting standpoint, as the theme throughout was largely the complex nature of **identity** and **perspective**, both at an individual level, and at community, national, state, and regional levels. The Pacific is a useful lens through which to view the subtle ways that this can manifest. Members of the multitude of island populations at this point in time have a huge range of seemingly conflicting identities with which they must engage at any given moment. These may have arisen out of historical processes, arbitrary regional groupings, and an interaction with surrounding 'Western' cultures, to name but a few options.

PARTS OF LECTURE

1. Katerina Teaiwa: This section dealt with the power of perceptions – both perceptions of others, and self-perceptions – in the formation of ‘Pacific’ identity. Through a highlighting of the enormous range of historical, political and social perspectives/paradigms that impact upon people of the Pacific, she highlighted the difficulty anyone faces when navigating this.
2. Peter Larmour gave a political science reading of the nature of ‘the state’, and the reasons why ‘all states look the same’. The state was seen as an agent of simplification, a process of homogenising, which will have, within a region of such cultural diversity as the Pacific, myriad underlying platforms. The reading of a society’s ‘success’ or ‘failure’ using a state-based set of criteria was called into question.
3. Scott MacWilliam talked of the dangers of ‘reductionism’ and its impact on ‘the questions we ask, and how we answer them’. In keeping with recurring themes of this course, he highlighted the need to consider ‘where’ we are viewing anything from, and the way in which this is influencing the way in which we are seeing, or even ‘what’ we are seeing (epistemology/ontology).

Questions of Lecture

Given the validity when viewed from their particular (disciplinary) point of reference, should theoretical perspectives/perspectives of scale/reductions simply be viewed as ‘tools on a tool belt’, to be pulled out depending where something is being viewed from? What implications (if any) does this have on any possibility of a reconciliation of this variety of perspectives?

Again, the need to reduce/categorise/generalise in some way, in order to engage with the world around us is at issue here. How do we avoid there being weakness somewhere in the definitions that are made, in that they are made to serve a particular purpose at the expense of others? **I guess the essence of this course is not necessarily to gain the capacity to answer these kinds of questions, but aiming to have the awareness to ask them.**

WEEK 5

Tutorial 4 Preparation

The readings for this tutorial focussed on two issues relevant to Pacific islanders. The first dealt with the fluidity and intangible nature of identity, and the way in which an assumed identity can impact in a real sense in the way decisions are made, and the potentiality of circumstances realised. The Pacific Islands in recent years is an example of a region largely at the mercy of negative characterisations imposed upon it, and, in the eyes of the author, must actively avoid engaging with.

The second reading dealt with the ideas of culture and sustainability as fashionable ‘catchphrases’ in development circles. With regards to the Pacific, aspects of culture have been characterised by experts as inhibiting the pace of development. The crux of the argument is that islanders have the responsibility to make any programme of development as culturally appropriate as possible so if they don’t take steps to ‘know thyself’, they will not succeed in this objective.

Tutorial 4 Recap / Reflections

The main activities of this tutorial were activities looking at the way in which identity is effected by various things, and impacts on behaviour, and the way in which the links between identity and a broader power dynamic place clear limitations on action.

We firstly did an exercise designed to test our responses to 'corruption', and then see to what extent this was impacted on by our 'cultural' identity. **It was clear from comparisons with results of the same activity conducted in PNG that our perspectives are largely governed by an imposed moral framework, and will vary accordingly.** We had a relatively high regard for the implicit regulatory structures of our society, and a relatively low tendency to perceive behaviour as corrupt.

Secondly we assumed the identities of regional actors at varying levels of the political/economic power dynamic, and attempted to gain insight into the variety of, and reasons for different perspectives on a given issue, for example a Free Trade Agreement. **This highlighted the idea that a judgement of 'good' or 'bad' will reflect the perspective of the judge more than any inherent quality of what is being judged.**

LEARNING PORTFOLIO PART II

Lecture 5: Closing the Gap

This lecture dealt largely with the varying perspectives on modes of engagement with the issue of 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Particular issues covered were the current Northern Territory intervention, and the role of personal agency (specifically the 'Caring for Country' programme), and its cultivation/support (or not).

PARTS OF LECTURE

1. Jon Altman: John has very crisp perspectives on the issue of intervention. He sees the process as being driven by the 'logic of the settler/coloniser' to destroy indigenous societies, invasion as an ongoing process, and the correlation between destruction and assimilation. He sees the NT intervention as racist at its core, and a symbol of a return to 'neo-paternalism', or 'new mainstreaming', involving a demeaning of 'self-determination' as a concept. He admits to some short term benefits arising from the intervention, but sees these as in no way validating the exercise.
2. Sean Kerins: Sean outlined the level of indigenous ownership of land across Australia (20%), and discussed the issues faced by those indigenous people entrusted with the management of these vast areas. He discussed the benefits of indigenous management (empowerment, cost-effectiveness), and the complexity present in the accessing of available funding, based on the range of sources this comes from, each with differing characteristics. The 'Caring for Country' program was shown to be of value on a range of levels, including the maintenance of threatened indigenous knowledge/practice, and possibly the only realistic way to manage serious environmental threats such as weeds and feral pests.
3. Francesca Merlan: Francesca discussed a review she had written on two recently-written books that support the NT intervention. They are 'Up from the Mission' by Noel Pearson,

and 'The Politics of Suffering' by linguist/anthropologist Peter Sutton. She described Pearson's perspectives as being interestingly sympathetic to the ideals of the missionaries of his youth, and including a deconstruction of the implications of his mixed-race ancestry. Sutton's book was described as painting a picture of the social collapse of indigenous communities. Both concluded that something along the lines of the intervention was necessary in order to counter the damage that had been done by well-intentioned 'left-liberal' policies begun in the early 1970s.

Question of Lecture

To John: To what extent do you see there being a capacity for your standpoint on the NT intervention to be engaged with by proponents of the 'mainstream' political view? To what extent do you (or they) see a potential for a reconciliation of perspectives?

This question stems from my sense of the issues of indigenous Australians as a type that can be viewed through the lens of some of the ideas I am currently playing with within my sociology course on identity. The perspectives of the majority group in a society are to a certain extent governed by the requirements of the broader national group dynamic in terms of identity formation through highlighting/not accepting differences, and as such, those perspectives may only be critically engaged with when viewed from a vantage point outside this dynamic (if that's possible!). Does the political/advisory process have a self-reflective aspect of this nature? Can the validity of majority/minority decisions/perspectives be enhanced by referencing them within that broader theoretical context, or would that be seen as too threatening by both parties (or anyone with a firm position on an issue)?

WEEK 6

Tutorial 5 Preparation

Readings

Beyond Closing the Gap, John Altman

This paper argues that an approach centred around reducing inequality between indigenous and other Australians is a continuation of old policy approaches, and undervalues diversity and difference. Altman considers the complexity inherent to these sometimes-incompatible goals. He sees 'Closing the Gap' as misrepresenting a continuation of old policies as a new approach, and as being indicative of the dominant neo-liberal approaches to individual advancement.

Deaths in Custody: Mr Ward

This man died in 2008 after being transported in the back of a paddy wagon for four hours in extreme heat with no food or water. It was a stunning example of the level of mistreatment an indigenous person may receive in custody, and was judged by the coroner in June 2009 as having breached Australia's human rights obligations.

GetUp! NT intervention fact sheet.

This document details the way in which the NT intervention has used the issues raised in the 'Little Children are Sacred' report to embark on a wide ranging program that is disempowering for

communities, rushed, and hugely wasteful of funds.

Green Left- Howard takes total control of Aboriginal destiny

An article describing the NT intervention as being a draconian version of ideas in recent writings by Noel Pearson. It lists a wide range of critical positions re the policy, the government's motives and Pearson himself.

'Hook Line and Sinker'.

This paper outlines the implications of Aboriginal fishing practice not being acknowledged in NSW Fisheries legislation. Aboriginals are thus being effectively penalised for taking part in a non-commercial cultural practice. This is anomalous with other state's legislation acknowledging Aboriginal fishing rights, and with other legislation relating to land-based Aboriginal hunting.

Stimulus Activities:

1. An 'Australian Aborigine' is an image that non-indigenous people have created in order to represent indigenous Australians in a manner which matches their own desired sense of self. It is a fluid representation, but never severely threatens the validity of 'Australianness' as an Anglo construct.
2. The main challenges facing indigenous Australians today are: maintaining a cohesive narrative to their collective identities in the face of cultural discontinuity; the inability of mainstream support systems to provide basic needs; an acceptance among the broader Australian population that the indigenous situation is largely of Aboriginal peoples own doing.
3. Tony' story resonates with me as a clear indication of the mix of inevitability and chance that guides our path through life, and the extent of the 'identity crisis' that comes with a dislocation from one's origins.

Tutorial 5 Recap

This tutorial was framed by depictions of Aboriginal lifestyles and White Australian perspectives and practices as contained in the movie 'Rabbit-Proof Fence'. This was a very sensitive portrayal of the way in which well-intentioned behaviour may be fundamentally misguided and have consequences that are ultimately negative. We used the case studies of people from the 'Bringing them Home Report' to discuss the impacts that taking children from their parents and placing them within another cultural paradigm has had. Media representations of aboriginal issues were then discussed. The article I read highlighted the range of confused messages that are out there regarding the taking of children. On the one hand it is seen as a violation, but on the other a necessity.

Reflections

The topics this week highlight the practical difficulties in formulating and implementing social policies when there is a majority-minority power dynamic at play. There is really no obvious way to resolve the opposing perspectives on this issue. At the heart of the Australian identity is the inherent validity of our place here, in this 'lucky country'. The tension created by a sense of our presence as being in some way the cause of Aboriginal conditions, and the need to address this without compromising our sense of our own validity is a largely-unacknowledged dark cloud over

the Australian psyche. Could it have been any other way? Is there any reason why a moral sense of the need to redress things now seen as past wrongs can't be engaged with without it necessitating a negative relationship with the past? Without it being a threatening notion to significant portions of the population?

Lecture 6: Environmental Policy Issues, Steve Dovers

This hugely interesting lecture gave an overview of the changes in the way environmental issues are being framed and engaged with towards ways that engage with their inherent complexity. Steve gave us an insight into the difficulties and unforeseen outcomes of this process through a rapid-fire treatment of the notion of 'sustainability' as a complex concept, using water management, approaches to the issue of climate change, the range of 'policy instruments' available to achieve a desired goal, local impacts and aspects of climate change, and the significance of paddock trees as case studies to highlight the range of ways in which complexity presents.

It was a race through a huge number of examples and aspects of the issue of sustainability and complexity at the level of practical policy outcomes. One of its key points was that complexity exists at so many levels of an issue such as the environment, because it is so many things to so many different stakeholders (while being many stakeholders itself), and is engaged with in so many different ways by any one stakeholder, that the impacts of policy concerning any one stakeholder or one action are multiple and hugely unpredictable.

Questions of Lecture / Reflection

Is a cause of complexity in relation to environmental issues an inability to question aspects of our behaviour that form part of Western ontology, such as a Christian-based relationship with nature and capitalist notions of 'growth as necessary'?

It seems to me unlikely that the direction we are heading in environmentally can be significantly altered by a tweaking at the edges of the Western cultural and economic mission. **As such, I question whether an engagement with the complexity of environmental issues within a Western intellectual paradigm might not be missing the point entirely.** A more viable solution may entail an entirely separate paradigm arising in parallel with, and in competition with the currently dominant global capitalist system. Although how this might occur is anyone's guess! Maybe it's occurring now! The bottom line is that the lifestyles we lead only ever had structural validity when a very small proportion of the world's population lived them. How the current scenario will be resolved is anyone's guess.

WEEK 7

Tutorial 6 Preparation

Reading

Uncertainty, Complexity and the Environment, Steve Dovers

This article describes sustainability policy as:

1. guiding a pattern of economic and human development that protects opportunities for future generations to use natural resources and enjoy a healthy environment while allowing for human development goals, especially for the world's poor to be met in the near term.
2. requiring a recognition of major social and policy goals including the importance of biodiversity and the treatment of environment and development in an integrated rather than a separate way.

Case Study: Shark population of southern Australia at unprecedented levels following a quota fishing system introduced in 2002.

1. **What was complex?** Capacity to measure changes accurately; number of stakeholders; capacity to understand all factors involved.
2. **Political context? Why difficult to enact? Who involved?** quota not too hard to introduce based on small number of people affected; People involved: politicians; scientists; Australian Fisheries Management Authority; monitors; fishermen.
3. **Awareness of the issue** grew in the late 1980s, but not until 2000 was a quota introduced.
4. **The policy appears successful**, as more sharks are being recorded, but this is combined with fishermen getting record catches, so how does that work? Surely they would be catching less than prior to the quota?
5. **This issue was handled well because** it was a clear case of supply and demand, and there was an obvious need to act. There was a relatively easy solution, and there were not big economic costs. BUT, what does success signify? A return to past practices?

Tutorial 6 Recap

X's tut contained an initial exercise based around the case studies of environmental issues that had been handled well, and then a debate concerning the issue of introducing nuclear power plants into Australia. The first section seemed to suggest that, logically, the chances of success of a problem were largely based on the capacity to have all stakeholders seeing eye to eye and all standing to benefit or lose relatively equally. The capacity to arrive at a point of consensus is also probably largely based on the issue itself, rather than the social skills of the negotiators. As we see with issues such as the Middle East and a carbon trading system, when some people stand to lose significantly, negotiation may go on forever.

The second section highlighted this, as our debating teams each had reasonable grounds for feeling that their position was tenable, and could back it up with figures and logical argument. There really are as many arguments for nuclear power as there are against it, so it depends largely on the mood of the people as to whether it is accepted or not.

Reflections

The issue of the environment has such *profound* implications. I have always struggled with the juxtaposition of the Western romantic relationship with environmental beauty and our rapacious need to use what we term 'resources' (they're somehow different to the beautiful bits you know). I can link this back to our relationship with indigenous Australians as a case where conceptual limitations due to conditioning or dominant discourses are the limiting factor, only allowing certain questions to be asked. This course began because of a querying of the parameters of university education as a way to wisdom, and it seems to me that this is one of the conundrums that we are being exposed to repeatedly in this course. **I find it hard to differentiate between capitalist behaviour, Christianity and our exalted position at the top of the food chain. We have intellectually validated the use of whatever we are capable of using, and we are now nearing a logical endpoint of this.** Our ontology has come to reflect and validate our behaviours, and would seem to have to change drastically for humanity to gain any real control over its future. Ross Gittins recently described us as being 'caught in a glut of our own making', as creatures whose pre-intellectual survival instincts still dominate our behaviours, in circumstances where they are entirely not warranted. Maybe the key aspects of our ontology are things that we cannot engage with intellectually anyway, as it would take an extended period of evolutionary forces to have an impact on them?

Lecture 7: The Mathematics of Complexity: Chaos Theory

Michael Barnsley gave a fascinating talk on recent discoveries of ways of representing and understanding the workings of chaotic systems. He discussed feedback loops as models used to observe complex systems where there were two key aspects that were considered to be of supreme importance, for example global temps and CO2 levels, or inflation and interest rates. In these simple models outputs have a deterministic relationship with inputs. As these models were developed they were seen to have a logarithmic function, whereby there was a point at which efficiency or growth or whatever change is being measured will begin to decline. What was then discovered was that if the driver of change was increased in magnitude, for example the food given to rabbits on an island, there was a point at which the results appeared to become random or chaotic. This discovery led to the analysis of such systems and the realisation that through a representation pictorially of the behaviour over a longer time frame it was possible to describe the aggregate behaviour more accurately than it was possible to predict behaviour at particular instances.

From this, models of feedback systems with multiple feedback functions that were chosen randomly (more realistic) were shown to end up producing predictable, determined outcomes after large numbers of iterations, that were infinitely magnifiable – fractal geometry. Different initial rules = different fractal outcomes, but predictable. FASCINATING!

Questions of Lecture

I wasn't at the lecture, but I would probably have asked something about the social applications that Michael mentioned. I have always had an idea that systems must logically replicate as scale changes, and it seems therefore logical that you can, as Michael mentioned, equate an individual with 'the body politic'. In my sociology course on collective identity that thought has crossed my mind too – is a group essentially an individual in its behaviour and patterns? If not that, then how

about the idea that when a group comes together, the biological rules that frame an individual's parameters, despite them being applied randomly, are what are driving the group's identity and over time, with many iterations of social interaction you end up with a predictable outcome of structure in all but very few cases. And you can't predict which cases will be the failures. And the structure of society has a fractal element to it, with all members eventually having an ontology that defines their interaction with others on whatever scale, in whatever setting. HA!

WEEK 8

Tutorial 7 Preparation

Feedback loops: work when inputs lead deterministically to outputs, and we don't need to know how the change from inputs to outputs occurs, but we can isolate one important variable and monitor its relationship to the observed changes. They therefore have two factors, and a mode of change that does not need to be understood.

Example: input/ output – change in body weight, control factor – amount of food

Chaos mathematics – complex or complicated? It seems to me that chaos maths is a means of showing that complex scenarios can, over time, manifest in complicated, but predictable forms. Is it a transcendence of the initial complexity? An acknowledgement that there is little point in attempting to deal with highly complex scenarios on a moment by moment basis? See above for reference to human problems.

Complexity Now? Just depends how you look at it. In order to deal with complexity there is always something done to allow an engagement. Whether that's using multiple perspectives, longer time frames, hindsight...they all have more appropriate settings and limitations.

Tutorial 7 Recap

The boys did a good job. Tried to squeeze too much in, but that's easily done. It was interesting trying to get our heads around something like chaos theory after such a brief introduction. We all (most of us anyway) were running around a whole new playing field on this one. The idea of there being points at which previously deterministic systems would suddenly begin to act completely randomly, and then that out of the randomness would emerge deterministic patterns again over time is quite a profound notion.

Reflections

This topic is the most boundary-pushing that we have had yet, and maybe that we will have in this course. It boggles the mind to think that perceived order could be simply a veneer present within a fairly narrow range of variables, and underlying these is chaos. Or that it's all just chaos really, and the order we see is the fractal pattern resulting from many random iterations. How this relates to engaging with complexity in a problem solving manner I'm not sure. The fractal idea probably has benefit as a representation of replication in certain social structures but I don't know enough to say this confidently. One thing this course is asking of us is to be prepared to have any fixed ideas on reality challenged which is a very worthwhile thing.

Lecture 8: Engineering, Collapse in Network Systems

Part 1: Networks, Complexity & Cascading Collapse, David Hill

David described how network models are useful as an aid to understanding the nature/structure of complex systems such as the global economy, IT systems or biological systems. Networks consist of nodes connected by links. Hubs are nodes that have a large number of links. The characteristics of the pattern of linkages play a huge part in the functioning of the system as a whole, particularly in relation to the inclination or resistance of the system to collapse. A system with significant hubs is seen as 'robust but fragile', in that a random attack is unlikely to result in collapse, but a targeted attack on one of the hubs will potentially shut down the entire system.

'Scale-free' networks are those whose structure is independent of their size, and are characteristically 'small-distance' or 'small-world' networks, with the linking of nodes not reliant on proximity. They are considered as having high 'connectivity', due to this direct linking of physically distant points. Hand in hand with this goes the fragility mentioned above, as the influence of an important node (a hub) extends broadly.

He then went on to discuss the notion of 'synchronisation' as a natural tendency, with examples of metronomes set at different speeds synchronising, and pedestrians walking across a wobbling bridge exacerbating the wobbles by synchronising with them. Relating this to networks, small-world systems are seen as synchronising well based on their more remote connections.

Collapse in these systems can come through loss of required synchronisation, and may cascade outwards from hubs. Real world examples are computer viruses, the spread of diseases, cancer inside humans, financial crises. Arresting these collapses brings issues such as notions of isolation versus freedom, and the idea of something being 'too big to fail'.

Part 2: Engineering, Shayne Flint

Shayne gave an overview of the role engineering has played in turning ideas into a technological reality. He highlighted the extent to which the results of engineering are intertwined with most aspects of our modern lives, whether we realise it or not.

Engineering traditionally uses a 'separation of concerns' model. Key techniques utilised in this approach are specialisation, decomposition, abstraction, and life-cycle phases. Each of these has specific strengths, but also weaknesses, highlighted by the impacts on the natural system resulting from a lack of capacity to fully understand the implications of implementing a certain strategy or process.

Modern engineering has seen the need to work within a multi-disciplinary framework, in order to engage with broader implications more effectively. This has highlighted some limits of the separation of concerns model in that it doesn't directly address the fundamental premise of complexity- What exactly is the problem we are solving? New perspectives on engineering may characterise it as a continuous process of education and change.

Questions of Lecture / Reflections

Is the issue the goals we have, rather than the way engineers go about achieving them?

Have we crossed some kind of significant threshold that has caused this questioning of the validity of engineering?

Does the perceived need for an increased speed of engineering development incorporate an inherent compromise in our capacity to fully appreciate the implications of any new technology? Is the perceived need for more speed linked more to changing norms (increased paranoia?) than any real changes to the world around us?

Discussions of engineering and technology always bring me back to an engagement with their cultural and philosophical premises. The pervasive Western mentality has always seemed to me to not be that far from George W's "American way of life is non-negotiable!" statement. Inherent to this is the relationship we have with technology as our interface with the world around us. Far from living lives based around our undeniable capacities to find a harmonious position in the natural system, we live lives based on this being an untenable aspiration. My above questions all reflect this to some degree. As on many occasions in this course it is all about perspective though. Mine is as an oft-disgruntled observer of this technological age, with a semi-romantic notion of a world where people acted in a fashion other than their natural tendencies, and more of them thought like I did!

WEEK 9

Tutorial 8: my facilitation...

Well. That didn't go all that particularly well now did it. For whatever reason, I was unable to resist attempting to do 3-4 times the amount of activities that should have been done in my allotted time, which set the framework for an unsatisfying experience. Based on the number of other demands on my headspace at present (breaking my ankle didn't help) I really struggled to engage effectively with the basis of this week's tutorial. Unfortunately I didn't find the ideas Shane gave us to be as intellectually exciting as some of the other panels we have had, although this doesn't excuse me from such a poor showing. My powerpoint not working obviously exacerbated things, but it wasn't the main issue really. Had X and I the time to really work together, the better choice would possibly have been to engage with networks solely. As well as that the nature of the assessment has left me feeling that I have let her down considerably, and I feel very bad about that.

My point of engagement with this week's topic came through the report on *Geo-engineering the Climate* by the Royal Society. It seemed an appropriate vehicle for an exploration of some of the methods of engaging with complexity outlined by Steve Cork earlier in the semester. In particular, I liked the idea of running through the initial stages of a 'scenario planning' session, given the level of uncertainty surrounding the impacts of any geo-engineering 'solution'. Even the acceptance of geo-engineering as a plausible option was of concern, in relation to its impact on the progression of other broad-based mitigation strategies in the near term.

Geo-engineering the Climate outlines the options currently being tabled in order to deal directly

with the effects of climate change. Broadly speaking, there are seen as being two possible modes in which to approach this. The first is to deal with the issue of CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere, and thus reduce the effect of this on climate. The second approach is to deal with temperature change directly, by reducing the impact of the sun on the planet. The report highlights the relative effectiveness of a variety of methods in each category, rating them in terms of cost, effectiveness and risk. The general theme of this rating is that there seems to be a positive correlation between effectiveness, cost and risk in most cases. The other feature of this report is its highlighting of the way in which the parameters of global governance make the implementation of many of the proposed options very difficult indeed. It is possibly just the impetus we need for those shadowy figures already ruling the world to reveal themselves and allow the 'New World Order' to finally manifest! (jokes)

Reflections

Any reflection this week must, for me, focus on the need to recognise the way in which a problem (for example facilitating a tutorial) can gain in complexity based simply on the capacity of the observer to engage with it when required. In my case it was a confluence of external business and personal factors impeding my ability to see the ramifications of decisions made regarding the tutorial format. In the case of something such as climate change, it is the issues of local political instability, potential economic repercussions, other more pressing environmental issues, lack of understanding, representations of the global power dynamic to name but a few. An issue that is inherently not particularly complex can have its complexity multiplied through its embeddedness in other issues at a particular moment. **Solutions may come not through a re-framing of an issue, but through a change in the capacity to see an issue for what it is.**

Lecture 9: Pandemics, and Complexity in pharmaceutical markets

Part 1: Flu Pandemics, Kamalini Lokuge

This was a very interesting lecture that covered the local and global responses to the recent H1N1 flu pandemic. The existing pandemic plan was shown to be inappropriate, particularly the notion of 'containment', which was proven impossible with a virus as contagious as H1N1. A new phase called 'Protect' was initiated to replace this stage, involving limiting the impacts of the disease on the general population. Anti-virals formed a major part of this approach, but are not considered to have played a significant role in shaping the pattern of the disease in Australia.

Kamalini then looked at the ways in which pandemics can be managed in developing countries. She ran through options such as the WHO pandemic plan, non-pharmaceutical interventions, medical care, vaccines and anti-viral medicines. The conclusion from this section was that the availability of anti-virals would make a significant difference to the impact of the disease in developing countries. The irony of current circumstances was then clear. Rich countries had large stockpiles of and access to antiviral medicines, though these played little part in the impact of the disease. Developing countries on the other hand have little access to anti-virals, and they are one of the more effective strategies in that context.

Part 2: Global pharmaceutical markets and the TRIPS agreement, Peter Drahos

This section dealt with the way in which the TRIPS agreement (an international system of guaranteeing property rights and patents) has set the framework for the domination of large pharmaceutical companies, and the associated capacity of developing countries to access sufficient stocks of necessary medicines. In addition to this, bilateral agreements and patent structures such as the Patent Cooperation Treaty allow large corporations to easily have their ownership of molecules or processes recognised in the majority of potential global markets.

Key themes of this lecture were the raised cost of medicines as a result of TRIPS, and the inconsistency that then exists between the profit motive and public health objectives. Important drivers having led to the current scenario were seen as 'reason versus emotion', the role of the media, and a re-framing of the issue.

Questions of Lecture

How is it that the idea of local containment of a disease as contagious as influenza was considered possible by Australia and the WHO?

It seems amazing that an integral part of the pandemic management schedule could be so quickly seen to be of so little efficacy. I don't quite understand how this can be the case given the number of highly paid people involved in formulating these plans, and the experiences that we have had with flu pandemics in the past. My amazement was increased by a '7.30 Report' story a couple of days prior to the lecture discussing the findings that the masks issued during the pandemic had little to no effect on reducing the wearer's chance of infection!

I was also interested to find out a little more about the reasons behind nations such as India and China signing up to TRIPS, due to the way in which it would hand ownership of all sorts of knowledge over to powerful Western interests. It really is a momentous decision in terms of its relation to US corporate dominance in the years following.

WEEK 10

Tutorial 9 Preparation

1. The Great Flu game: I found over 4-5 games that if poorer regions had their healthcare capacities raised prior to any outbreak, were given stockpiles of anti-viral medicines, and there was an early involvement of all research capacity, a significant reduction in fatalities was possible. My best score was 5,000,000+ infections and 6500 fatalities.
2. *Pandemics, anti-viral stockpiles and bio-security in Australia: what about the generic option?* This article outlines the role of anti-viral drugs as an important first line defence during a pandemic, and the issues surrounding the production of generic versions. The GSK and Roche patents are seen as a major impediment to being 'pandemic ready'. The capacity of patent laws to be over-ridden by governments is discussed, involving an on-going analysis of 'tax-payers' rights versus patent holders' rights'.
3. Indian Flu hypothetical response exercise:
 - a. WHO-
 - i. critique notion of containment

- ii. boost healthcare, basic hygiene
- iii. increase anti-viral production!! Override any US EU concerns
- b. a developed country
 - i. order anti-virals
 - ii. channel funds to specific medical response areas
 - iii. reassure public
 - iv. investigate generic options
 - v. initiate a travel alert, screen incoming passengers
 - vi. assist India
- c. a developing country
 - i. engage in black market pharmaceutical trade
 - ii. pressure pharmaceutical companies to reduce prices
 - iii. form a bloc with regional neighbours
- d. an Australian business
 - i. assess vulnerability
 - ii. plan for economic repercussions
 - iii. don't allow staff to travel

Tutorial Recap

This was a really great tutorial. X and Y limited their plans to two significant exercises, giving plenty of time for each to reach its conclusion. We first planned a policy response by the Indian government to the hypothetical Indian flu. This proved useful in highlighting some aspects of the policy-formulation process that will prove useful in our assessment task. Lawrence stressed the need to frame a problem simply and clearly, and that the emphasis should not be so much about the response, but more about *how we turn the response on*. The focus should be on the people and structures in place to deal with complexity, rather than the complexity itself.

The second part of the tutorial was a negotiation between a government and a pharmaceutical company regarding accessing a greatly increased amount of anti-viral medication. It highlighted the power that large companies have in these circumstances, and the compromises that governments must make in order to achieve their goals. The range of outcomes that different groups arrived at gave clear indication of the way in which a complex issue may have no one clear solution, rather a range of solutions that are more or less efficient but equally valid.

Reflections

This week's topic was one where the human repercussions of actions are ever present. Lives will be saved or lost in the here and now based on the capacity to negotiate appropriate solutions or compromises. **The pandemic scenario shows the way in which a key feature of complexity may be parallel, even mutually exclusive frames of reference. The difficulties in finding mutually acceptable solutions may rest on the finding of links between insurmountable-appearing differences of perspective.** The separation existing between global capitalism and altruism is often at the heart of this. It is in these circumstances where the role of an over-arching

non-partisan mediator or arbitrator (such as the UN) may become crucial. Just how this can be enacted effectively on a global level is in itself undoubtedly a wicked problem.

Lecture 10: Complexity and Law

Part 1: Nanotechnology: Thomas Faunce

This was a very interesting presentation. Thomas used as a case study the possible introduction of nanotechnology to assist developing countries by lowering construction costs, and improving sanitation. He highlighted ways in which this could be seen as a 'wicked' problem, particularly owing to the significant risks that this technology can potentially pose to personal and environmental health. This case study was used to introduce ways in which the law can be seen as a manifestation of societies' attempts to systemise and formalise the complex interactions that people or peoples have with each other, and with the environment around them. As such, it is a discipline well-versed in navigating the treacherous waters of competing interests and perspectives, and has developed effective (and not-so-effective) strategies for arriving at the most acceptable outcome when taking these into account (the question is always going to be "Acceptable for whom?" however). It is also a system geared towards dealing with change, both in terms of being capable of adapting to deal with new circumstances, and also providing a set of parameters within which change can 'legitimately' occur.

Thomas raced through a huge amount of complex material, so there was much that could have been elaborated on further. Key to our interests were his pointers to 'resolving complexity':

- detect logical fallacies
- gain information intuitively as well as rationally
- see the problem and your role dispassionately and unselfishly
- think laterally (try linking your problem to a random object in order to contextualise it)
- be comfortable exploring unusual ideas
- MEDITATE/CONTEMPLATE

Part 2: Complexity in Refugee Law: Matthew Zagor

Matthew gave a presentation focussing on the legal status of refugees in the international legal system. A conceptual driver of his talk was the relatively new notion of a 'climate refugee', and the way in which this impacted on the established legal definitions of a refugee in international law. International law was described as being traditionally based around the notion of the 'nation-state', and associated notion of sovereignty. Refugee law, in its articulating of the 'rights' of refugees, is a challenge to these notions in that these rights, in certain prescribed circumstances, transcend those of a sovereign nation-state.

It was highlighted how the basis of current refugee law, the Refugee Convention of 1951, arose out of a 'confluence of interests' and has features reflecting the types of refugee scenarios being experienced at the time in post-WWII Europe. The convention thus has real limitations, and a very narrow interpretation of 'refugee'. Importantly, in the case of climate refugees, there is currently not the same level of confluence of interests regarding these people. In many countries

there has been a moving away from key aspects of the Convention or a manipulation of grey areas in order to avoid meeting refugee obligations.

Questions of the Lecture / Reflections

I didn't have any questions at the time, but I am intrigued by the broader implications of the idea that a legal system is a society's ultimate representation of a combination of both their moral judgement of and practical engagement with specific events, behaviours or objects. The capacity to distil relevant elements out of a scenario (be they moral, ethical or pragmatic), and the requirement of a simple, understandable solution (not always, granted) are two of the key hurdles to effective engagement with complexity that we have repeatedly come across throughout this course. Maybe the skills given by legal training could be more broadly taught and applied?

Thomas is most definitely a man after my own heart, in his obvious sense that a fundamental premise of engaging with 'complexity' is initially engaging with oneself, in order to have the capacity to see *anything* clearly. His emphasis on meditation and not having conditioned limitations on how far one's ideas can roam show clearly the extent that he, as I have, has realised that some (if not all) of the means of grappling with complexity were understood a long, long time ago.

WEEK 11

Tutorial 10 Preparation

Findelli article.

This reading was concerned with the notion of 'technoethics', or the moral dimension of our relationship with and utilisation of technology. It examines the way in which our relationship with man-made objects sit somewhere between the poles of utilitarian and symbolic, and this can be mapped in a fashion that shows this spectrum along with the significance, type of engagement required in design and production, and limits of realisation of objects. This model is seen to have scale-free properties.

The article then goes on to look at the way an object or artefact is sited within the broader environment, which is represented as four 'worlds' within a systems theory methodology.

There are many tricky concepts dealt with in this article, but the following are some interesting ideas:

- a solution may use an artefact to 'solve' a problem, or a change on behaviour to 'dissolve' a problem.
- a technological solution is a type of 'attitude' to a problem, a matter of ethics, not technology alone.
- design as being framed by a 'global ethical attitude'

Unfortunately I missed this tutorial.

ered earlier? And on and on we go....

WEEK 12

Individual Presentations: Reflections

When preparing for this presentation, I essentially started with my topic, the notion of 'development' in a global context as being prefaced by an engagement with an awareness of the inherent socio-economic / geo-political power dynamic of the globe, and the inequalities or 'disparities' associated with this. I then started talking (to myself) to see what came out. I was pretty happy with the results of that process, so noted a few things down and pretty much left it at that. I think this reflects where I see the value of this course to be for me. It is not something that sits, or will sit, in the foreground of my future relationship with my disciplines or areas of supposed expertise, but it will be an important addition to the *context* or *ontology* within which all that more clearly defined stuff is sited. I wrote a sociology essay recently where I referenced the idea of the context of the state as defining the limitations of what is conceived as possible in a social organisational sense, and it also links to Faunce's idea of consciously breaking down conceptual barriers to free thinking. This course has expanded our boundaries of thought undoubtedly, and has also made clearer some of the boundaries we will inevitably bump into at some stage.

Some of the bright young things in our tutorial did a great job of constructing talks with a far more organised interaction with the specific things we have engaged with over the course. This I think reflects their futures as productive and useful members of society, and mine as continuing to comment from the margins!

Lecture 12:

Preparation

'Enhancing Research Collaborations: Three key management challenges'. Gabriele Bammer.

This article dealt with aspects of the collaborative environment required for working on complex issues. Key points are:

- the harnessing of differences that are potential causes of conflict through a structured process of integration.
- setting of boundaries to the problem: What differences of perspective are of greatest relevance to the reaching of an outcome? Boundaries must be a compromise between what researchers may want to achieve, and what is 'defensible' in terms of presentation to funding bodies and availability of researchers.
- navigating issues of gaining legitimate project authorisation and maintenance of research independence.

The Nature of Uncertainty: Bammer and Smithson

This chapter was largely concerned with the way in which 'uncertainty' is referenced from different disciplinary and functional perspectives. It was shown that uncertainty may be the

centre of attention and analysis, something to be glossed over or even hidden, or something that there isn't the time to engage with. There is discussion of the debate surrounding the extent to which uncertainty is able to be overcome, and the way in which many fields of study are acknowledging fundamental, ineradicable areas of uncertainty.

The chapter then unpacks the idea of uncertainty, highlighting particular types, and proposes a 'taxonomy' in order to get a clearer sense of these types and how they relate to particular contexts and each other.

Panel

Unravelling Unknowns: Michael Smithson

Michael talked of the various ways in which our relationship with unknowns is constructed in an intellectual and social setting. He highlighted the fact that there are unknowns inherent to all intellectual endeavours, although this is not always acknowledged, and that unknowns also have a positive context. He has created a detailed 'typography' of unknowns, beginning with the general notion of 'ignorance' and breaking this down based on an initial split into 'error' and 'irrelevance'. Finally he discussed a range of responses to unknowns, which were: denial; banishment; reduction; acceptance; and relinquishment.

Integration and Implementation Sciences: Gabriele Bammer

Gabriele described an approach to dealing with complex questions that aims to systemise a cross-disciplinary appropriate methodology. She ran through the 'five question framework' that is used in this process, and then we focussed specifically on the question of "What are the best approaches to the problem and arena of implementation?" This concerned the task of working towards framing the problem effectively, a values-based analysis of the problem and its stakeholders, and a focus on the differences of approach and opinion that the problem-solving group bring to the table.

The applicability of this approach to problems such as those we had been charged with investigating was very clear.

Reflections

I think that I was a little 'unravelling complexified out' by the time of this lecture. It was a little hard to engage with yet another approach or perspective on complexity, when I was feeling primed to get into our group project. As I have said earlier, I am most comfortable when my relationship with the ideas we have dealt with in this course are implicit, and am not so comfortable with imposed or 'systemised' approaches. A question was raised following Gabriele's talk as to whether this structured approach has weaknesses by virtue of its structure, and I wonder about that also. The question then of course is where does that leave you?

WEEK 14

Group Presentation to PM and head of PM&C

Our tutorial was given the question: 'What are the political implications of international movements of people for Australia? Issues to consider include economic, environmental and political refugees.'

We spent a lot of time grappling with the breadth of the question, and struggled for a while to work out a way to frame it that would translate into a cohesive presentation with all sub-groups contributing relatively equally. Part of this difficulty was our instinctive decision to break this down in a process-driven, stage based fashion, rather than in a parallel, theme-based way. This could have been due either to it being the best way to approach this particular type of question, or because our tut had a couple of fairly dominant characters in it, giving a centralised nature to the decision-making process, and a hierarchical division of labour. The 'leaders' quite naturally ended up being the drivers of our policy direction, with other groups framing their presentations around this. This isn't a negative reflection on our group dynamic, rather an observation of how a certain social composition influences the dynamic that follows. The group division we undertook meant that we were required to interact as a whole group quite considerably throughout preparing our presentation as there had to be a linear cohesiveness to the entire thing. This made it hard to proceed at times, due to the need to wait for another group to finalise an aspect of their presentation that you were in turn relying on. It also however really added to the sense of whole-group solidarity and commitment.

Anyway, there were various ways in which this exercise highlighted aspects our new-found engagement with notions of complexity. The initial difficulty in framing our approach was a clear example of the way in which a wicked problem refuses to be framed easily. Just what is the problem? Unforeseen consequences of any action were another key aspect of deliberations. Political ramifications seem extraordinarily difficult to predict or pre-empt. The social aspect of decision-making and multiple valid perspectives was also tricky. There were periods when no-one was happy with where we were heading.

The presentations highlighted the range of ways in which a task of this nature could be approached. In the context of a parliamentary brief, there was a lot that couldn't be fully appreciated until one had observed some, and done one. It brought to mind a tip I learnt while studying to be a teacher which was the KISS rule: Keep It Simple, Stupid! There is little point conducting a presentation of great detail if after the first point the listener is lost. The best briefs on the day seemed those where there was time to speak at a reasonable pace, and there were not too many points made. Our group laboured a little on this level on the basis of attempting to deal with our question in quite a broad fashion. The task then could seem to be to work out how to cram as much as possible into 800 words and 5 minutes, which in terms of a brief, could defeat the purpose. All in all it was a very rewarding exercise.

OUTSIDE SEMINAR: Obesity and Complexity

This seminar was given by Stanley Ulijaszek from the 'Unit for Biocultural Variation and Obesity', School of Anthropology, Oxford University.

This seminar was part of the Toyota Lecture Series (?). It was a very brief outline of the scale of the obesity problem in Western societies, and the way in which there have been recent attempts in Britain to integrate the various relatively discrete ways in which this issue was being addressed. The simple view, of obesity being able to be solved simply by understanding the body's energy and digestive systems, has been shown to be of little use. The essence of this lecture was very

relevant to our course, in that this integrated approach required complete acknowledgement and engagement with the complexity of obesity as an issue. Many of the features of a complex issue that we have discussed were evident, and the approaches required were also familiar. Obesity was seen as a multi-faceted issue, as much socio-political as it is medical. The various disciplinary options used to engage with obesity have resulted in a range of models explaining its manifestation, but little overlap between them. The crux of this lecture was an outline of a 'meta-model' designed to integrate all or most of these.

This range of models highlights the initial issue when faced with complexity: What exactly is the problem? Example models given were:

- obesity/thrifty genotypes ('obesity genes?')
- nutrition transition (a changing model of society, western influences)
- developmental programming (birth scenario affecting propensity to be obese)
- obesogenic environment
- food behaviour (addictive opportunities inherent in food consumption)

The list of causes one could write for obesity again highlights the complexity of the issue, á la 'The Decline of the Roman Empire'.

The model resulting from attempts at integration was a very complicated network model. It only reduced the complexity of obesity to a certain extent, as the linkages had to be weighted, and there were no consistent descriptors throughout. Ulijaszek described it as more of a 'thinking map'. It does serve to guide the policy response process, in providing a visual representation of the extent to which a response will impact on the broader range of influencing factors, and it also shows the extent to which the pre-existing models consider all factors, or overlap. Policy responses are shown by this map to have an inter-disciplinary requirement, which has immediate implications regarding the disjointed structure of current government agencies dealing with obesity.

Ulijaszek described the use of the 'scenario planning' method as a tool to gain a sense of outcomes within certain sets of policy parameters. If one took a position at either end of the spectrums from 'individual responsibility first' to 'social responsibility first', and from 'a response based on reacting and mitigating' to 'a response based on anticipating and preparing', there would be four scenarios produced. The conclusions of this were that the response most likely to be effective would involve a wider social responsibility as defined by communities, with the implications of future changes driving long term preparedness and adaptive changes in behaviour. Practical application of this is another matter altogether, it would seem.

The limitations of this 'map of obesity' were briefly detailed. They included its incapacity to deal with the body as 'subject' as opposed to 'object' and not showing the ways in which various 'obesogenic factors' are linked.

Ulijaszek finished by highlighting several features of the 'wickedness' of obesity. There were too many ways of thinking about the problem for it to be easily tackled. Based on the complexity of cultural systems influencing the manifestation of obesity, it will occur in locally-specific ways,

requiring models and policy approaches to also be locally-specific. The changing of one thing will have little chance of influencing the greater momentum of obesity in a society (this point could be countered by the notion we have encountered in our course of networks being 'fragile' if a key 'hub' is targeted- choose the right target and have great impact?). Finally, any intervention needs to be proactive and anticipatory.

This seminar was an example of clear application of many of the ideas and approaches we have encountered in 'Unravelling Complexity'. Obesity is an issue at once simple and complex, with many perspectives on it able to be taken. It highlighted the way in which our course is a reflection of broader trends evident in the way issues are being engaged with in our society. This reminds me of Lawrence musing at the end of one of our tutorials whether the move to treat issues as complex is helping or hindering our efforts to productively engage with them. It could easily be the latter. Most of what we uncover when analysing an issue to a deeper and deeper extent could be said to be already implicitly present in a considered or instinctive initial understanding of it. Our decisions are usually clear, if we care to see them, before any analysis is embarked upon. In a lighter comparative vein, it reminds me of women walking into my shop, picking up something, then spending half an hour trying to choose what to buy until almost invariably buying the first thing they looked at!