

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY
WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

CONTAGION DESIGN:
LABOUR, ^{22.OCT} ECONOMY, ^{29.OCT}
HABITS, ^{04.NOV} DATA ^{12.NOV}

MARK ANDREJEVIC, RITAJYOTI BANDYOPADHYAY, TONY
BENNETT, FRANCK COCHOY, BEN DIBLEY, TEPPU ESKELINEN,
KATHERINE GIBSON, ORIT HALPERN, GAY HAWKINS, STEPHEN
HEALY, DECLAN KUCH, ROLIEN HOYNG, JOYCE LIU, ANNE
MCNEVIN, BRETT NEILSON, PETER NORTH, NED ROSSITER

22.OCT-12.NOV 2020

How is contagion designed? How do labour, migration, habits and data configure contagion? Across a program of four weeks of discussion and debate, this international symposium explores the current conjuncture through these vectors to address issues of rising unemployment, restricted movement, increasing governance of populations through data systems and the compulsory redesign of habits. Design logics underscore both biological contagion and political technologies. Contagion is redesigning how labour and migration are differentially governed, experienced and indeed produced. Habits generate modes of exposure and protection from contagion and become a resource for managing biological and social life. Data turns contagion into models that make a virus actionable and calculable. But can the logic of pre-emption and prediction ever accommodate and control the contingencies of a virus? The aim of this event is to explore these issues and their implications for cultural, social, political research and technological conditions. If contagion never abandons the scene of the present, if it persists as a constitutive force in the production of social life, how might we redesign the viral as the friend we love to hate?

The Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University wishes to acknowledge and pay respect to the Darug and Gadigal custodians and other traditional owners of this country, past, present and future. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

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WEEK 1: MIGRATION AND LABOUR 22.OCT 11:30AM-1PM

How does renationalisation in pandemic times partition labour and migration in ways that contest the national as a triumphant project resilient to a virus that demonstrates its power to destroy economy and life, work and society? Rather than affirming some mythic sense of the nation as a homogenized political space, renationalisation instead deepens already existing divisions and borders amplified by structural and technical logics of urban space and platform economies. How do the spatialities wrought by the current pandemic, coupled with the persistent continuum of global heating, transform patterns of migration, work and border politics? Further, can contagion be understood as a structuring force over and above attempts by government authorities to organize economy and society using policy instruments? This panel addresses these questions by exploring the connections between migration, labour, contagion and biopolitical techniques for designing worlds.

001 RITAJYOTI BANDYOPADHYAY, 'Economic Informality and Democracy in India at the Time of Covid-19'

This paper attempts to present our initial understanding of the implications of Covid-19 for Indian economy. It offers a brief map of the terrain of informal economy and its linkages with contemporary capitalist development, migration, democratic politics and state welfare in India with an intention to demonstrate the urgency for further, detailed studies on the changing dynamics of the informal economy in the postcolonial context. In this talk, an attempt is made to understand the on-going crisis as internal to contemporary capitalist development. It further explains why Covid-19 needs to be understood in the context of supply chain capitalism. We make use of the current disruption in the global order as a living archive of changing capitalist and regime sensibilities. An analysis of this extraordinary conjuncture in the history of capital unravels layered entanglements of democracy, migration and economic informality that would otherwise have remained 'secret' in public memory. Disruptions are occasions when these secrets enter the realm of public discourse.

002 JOYCE LIU, 'What Comes After the Lockdown? A New Wave of Nationalisation and the Local Divide'

The highly contagious but invisible virus during the rapid spread of COVID-19 triggered people's fear and aggressive defense mechanisms and activated local societies' enmity lines. This talk will take a few examples in Southeast Asian countries and discuss the new wave of nationalization and xeno-racism that comes with the lockdown. I take it as a symptomatic recurrence that tells us more about the postcolonial nation-state's social, economic, and political design.

003 ANNE MCNEVIN, 'Temporal Contagion as an Antidote to Renationalization'

Figured in terms of disease and infection, the onset of contagion in the form of a pandemic has deepened the impulse to cocoon safe inside spaces from an unsafe outside world. The time of contagion is figured as a crisis time of sudden outbreak requiring emergency response. These spatial and temporal frames for contagion precipitated a defensive mobilization of national borders, almost as a reflex action, and revealed the relative absence of alternative space-time registers through which to respond to contagion in ways that did not simply reinforce

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the givenness of geopolitical boundaries and exceptional power. In this paper, I ask whether contagion as metaphor might inspire other kinds of world-making practices, especially when approached from a temporal perspective. I draw on mid-twentieth century anti-colonial proposals for confederations that linked, rather than severed, colony and metropole in spatial and temporal terms, insisting on the interconnection of colonial pasts and decolonizing futures.

In those cases, what might be called temporal contagion was figured as the enabling condition of progressive change. Reflecting on this case, I grapple with the under-examined generative potential of contagion as metaphor.

Chair: KATHERINE GIBSON
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WEEK 2:

CONTAGIOUS MUTUALITIES

29.OCT 4–5:30PM

The 'Covid-pause' has created a new context for calling business as usual into question. In this interregnum of an assumed world, contagious mutuality has gone viral – mutual aid practices large and small are being practiced and shared, the role of care-workers in holding everything together is brought to the fore and how to align thinking about post-covid economic recoveries with a longer term response to climate change has become a central question. This session explores what other economies might emerge if we let go of practices and institutions that inhibit 'recovery' for all, human and nonhuman. Scholars and activists investigating new models of production, new forms of mutuality, new roles for the public sector and new economic responses to the COVID/climate emergency discuss how to rethink and redesign vulnerable economies in ways that anticipate and align with climate readiness.

001 STEPHEN HEALY and DECLAN KUCH, 'Contagious Mutuality: Spreading Postcapitalist Possibilities'

COVID-19 has laid bare everything that is currently broken, illustrating how deepening economic inequality and ecological precarity translate into differential vulnerability. Early on in the pandemic Latour observed that COVID had accomplished the seemingly impossible: suspending most of the global economy. Arundhati Roy saw this same moment as a portal through which we might pass into a different future. In this paper we review efforts by the Community Economies Research Network (CERN) to think carefully about how a more-than-capitalist post-COVID future might be brought into being, how responses to COVID might anticipate what is required for a sustained response to climate change. Our starting point is the many forms of mutual aid that have 'spontaneously' emerged in

response to this disaster. In dialogue with our panellists, we discuss how these practices might provide the format for different economic futures, including the role that local and state governments might play in developing new modes of shared measurement, valuation and production.

002 PETER NORTH, 'Design Contagion and Contagious Mutuality: A view from the Brexit plague ship of fools.'

There are decades where nothing happens and months when decades happen. The shock of the contagious spread of COVID-19 around the world did indeed mark a pause where the world was stopped for a time. It seemed there was a hunger for new ideas, and mutual aid mushroomed as communities came together, unbidden and unorganised, to help each other out. With a case study of Liverpool, UK, this paper works analytically at the municipal

level to examine what mutualities are contagious, travel and land, and how this happens as the COVID pandemic mutates and changes over time and space. Who develops new ideas, and how do they travel? Who 'speaks', who is listened to, and who is the 'we' that is listening and acting and deciding what practices and institutions that inhibit 'recovery' for all, human and nonhuman should be let go?

003 TEPPU ESKELINEN, 'Redefining Community in Nordic Countries After the Pandemic'

In the Nordic context the pandemic is a major disruption to governing 'norm and order', opening an opportunity for rethinking 'how the

world functions'. The ongoing pandemic has both generated new concepts of economy and community while creating momentum for major policy change. We have so far seen a major reorientation of the state/market balance alongside a reconfiguration of everyday social organisation, but little relation between these levels. I will analyse these developments and discuss how they could lead to a rethinking of the economy beyond the empowerment of the state sector.

Chair: TONY BENNETT
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WEEK 3:

HABITS OF CONTAGION

04.NOV 4–5:30PM

French sociologist Gabriel Tarde was fascinated with the 'suggestive realm', with the power of contagion and imitation in shaping social life. For Tarde, being open to suggestion was not an indicator of animality or primitiveness, it was evidence of an almost pre-conscious or affective sense of being connected to others. This mode of connection is not based on emotional identification it is more like contagious communication, or a 'group mind'. This panel explores how biological and social forms of contagion interact. How do suggestion and affective atmospheres shaped by fear of contact, crowds and contamination prompt new habits, and how is the governance of populations managed through the prohibition or reform of old habits? What role does suggestibility play in infrastructure redesign focused on the logistics of prevention and safety?

001 FRANCK COCHOY, 'On the Art of Burying One's Head in a Band: How the Sanitary Mask Encounters the Habits of Laypersons and Experts'

When mask wearing was advised by government and experts as a new habit in France, philosophers and sociologists condemned this directive. Masks represented further biopolitical control of the body or, following Goffman, they erased identity and face-to-face expressiveness. However, what these scholars failed to see was that for many people wearing masks was not about modifying social relationships but reshaping their possible interactions with the virus. While intellectual

buried their heads in their theories, people astutely protected their breath behind an appropriate band of fabric. Based on analysis of over 1000 testimonies gathered during lockdown, this paper explores the tensions between layperson and academic approaches to masks. After considering masks as a possible threat to social encounters, many people quickly saw them as the best way to pursue their interactions. They also learned that what disappears, like the smile, can be seen elsewhere, for instance, at the corner of their eyes. So, the current Foucauldian and Goffmanian reading of masks gets it wrong and the mask emerges as a potent device for materialising a new habit.

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002 BEN DIBLEY, 'Demophobia and the Infrastructures of Infection'

No doubt one of the casualties of Covid-19 is the crowd. Historically a figure central to urban modernity, in the pandemic the buzz and shove of the crowd has been replaced by stillness. Cities are empty, eerie and listless. Both infecting and affecting, the virus has dispersed the crowd as it is prohibited by authorities and avoided by individuals. This paper explores what these responses to epidemiological risk generate. It asks, how are they 'nurseries for the new habits of tomorrow'? (Tarde)

003 GAY HAWKINS, 'Social Distance: Security, Suggestion, Insecurity'

'Social Distancing' has become a powerful objective of the governance of urban space and movement during Covid-19. But what does it mean and how is it achieved? This paper explores how various infrastructures of social distance create new relations between people and things in order to make security calculable. Many of these infrastructures involve new regulations and explicit constraints on how space can be occupied. Other techniques of social distance are more suggestive and imitative. In these cases, distance is a kind of choreography, a spontaneous dance with strangers that reconfigures habits of movement and everyday orders of interaction. The differences in these modes of establishing social distance - regulation and suggestion - highlight the complexities of governing habits and their force in composing shifting ontologies of urban space. They also point to insecurity, to the role of atmospheres of contagion in disrupting urban habits and provoking new ones.

Chair: NED ROSSITER
Click [HERE](#) to register

WEEK 4:

DATA CONTAGION
12.NOV 11AM-12:30PM

Computational systems generate data with a viral propensity. Multiplied across platforms, data mutates in recombinatory ways. The mixing of data unsettles order and systems of control. Digital networks provide tools able to measure the spread of contagion across economy, culture and society. But they are less able to register outside forces of politics and history that precondition the speed of distribution and scale of infection. This panel considers the propensity of data to build relations and produce worlds, amplified and accelerated within and across data regimes. What are the protocols of contagion specific to data? How do externalities shape the design of data relations? What is the relation between data and contingency? Can data be asymptomatic?

001 MARK ANDREJEVIC, 'Biometrics "at-a-distance": Touchlessness and the Securitization of Circulation'

Biometrics companies have responded to the Covid-19 Pandemic, unsurprisingly, as an opportunity to capitalise on the promise of 'touchless' interaction and transaction as a means of securing circulation. When 'touch points' at sites like mass transit and cash registers are viewed with a newfound suspicion

as vectors of contagion, the proposed solution is touchless identification and verification enabled by facial recognition and other visual forms of biometric identification (such as gait analysis). These technologies are being coupled with other forms of biometric sensing at-a-distance including surface body temperature monitors and oxygen saturation detectors to track symptoms and enforce quarantine and social distancing. Such responses reconfigure the relationship between the plague logic of stasis/quarantine and endemic strategies according to which circulation is still permitted.

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The 'new normal' envisioned by biometrics at-a-distance takes the form of what might be described as granular or modulatory biopower, in which the population can be disaggregated without defaulting to disciplinary forms of control. The imperative is a return to circulation secured by the ability to filter and divert the population based on individual-level monitoring and recognition.

002 ROLIEN HOYNG, 'Datafication and Contingency in Circular Economies'

Across the formal and informal circular economies of electronics, data materialities and waste materialities affect one another. In the formal circular economy, data supposedly secures waste matter according to ontologies of proprietary objects. In contrast, informal circularity often operates through the absence of data, which allows for the contingency of uncontrolled affections of waste matter. However, data-centric technological apparatuses of formal industries that instigate decentralized and automated decision-making trigger contagions of data and contingency emerging from the operations of data materialities. Meanwhile, though informality seems to be conditioned on contingency, data practices that are key to speeding up informal circulation reproduce formal ontologies. What are the politics and ethics of these ambivalences of the formal and informal circular economies of electronics? What can these examples show us about ecological politics in times of datafication?

003 ORIT HALPERN, 'Resilient Natures: Algorithmic Finance, Radical Events and Ecological Models'

Today, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the term 'new normal' circulates ad nauseum throughout news outlets and social networks. This new normal is largely defined by a naturalization of precarity for some, the dramatic elevation of profit for others, and a demand for increased computation and automation to secure territory, population, and resources. Endless curves and data visualizations show us these 'truths'. It is hard to gaze upon these curves and not be reminded of a history of actuarial practices involving populations. It is also surprising how tenacious the ideology of the normal is, and how reluctant we are to cease using it.

The idea of the normal curve was an invention of 19th century human sciences underpinning contemporary understandings of economies, populations and 'race'. Our adherence to the language of the normal is, therefore, also about nature. But what form of nature is this? My intent is to briefly historically situate this 'new' nature by tracing a history of the merged engagements between economics, artificial intelligence, and population management in ecology between the 1950's-1970's. I will examine the concepts of resilience, adaptation and evolution within these fields to trace a genealogy of our contemporary 'new normal' that assumes ubiquitous computing and speculative financial practices are the routes to environmental and population security.

BIOGRAPHIES

MARK ANDREJEVIC is Professor in the School of Media, Film and Journalism at Monash University. He researches and writes about digital media, surveillance and popular culture. He is the author, most recently, of *Automated Media* (2019) and is working on a book project called *The Fate of Interactivity*.

RITAJYOTI BANDYOPADHYAY teaches History at IISER Mohali, India. His earlier and ongoing research projects explore themes in informality, infrastructure technologies and governmentality studies in late-colonial and postcolonial India. He is particularly invested in studying the materiality of mass politics as India transitioned from imperial sovereignty to popular sovereignty.

TONY BENNETT is Research Professor in Social and Cultural Theory at the Institute for Culture and Society and Honorary Professor in the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University. He is a

Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and of the UK Academy of the Social Sciences.

FRANCK COCHOY is Professor of Sociology at Jean Jaurès University, Toulouse, a researcher at the LISST-CNRS, and a senior fellow of the Institut Universitaire de France. He works in the field of economic sociology, with a focus on market devices. He has conducted several projects on the role of marketing, packaging, self-service and trade presses. His most recent articles in English have appeared in *Social Studies of Science, Environment and Planning A, Socio-Economic Review*.

BEN DIBLEY is a researcher at the Institute of Culture and Society. His interests include a focus on notions of the crowd and their relations to understandings of habit, which he has been exploring as part of the ARC Discovery Project 'Assembling and Governing Habits'.

TEPPO ESKELINEN is Senior Lecturer in international development at the university of Jyväskylä, Finland. He has published extensively on economic alternatives, democratising the economy and social utopias and is a member of CERN.

KATHERINE GIBSON is Professor in Human Geography at the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. With Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy, she co-authored *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming Communities* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

ORIT HALPERN is an Associate Professor in Sociology and Anthropology and the co-director of the Speculative Life Research Cluster (www.speculativelife.com) at Concordia University in Montréal. Her research engages histories of design, urbanism, cybernetics and the human and environmental sciences. She is most recently the author of *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason since 1945*.

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Her forthcoming book *The Smartness Mandate* interrogates ubiquitous computing, catastrophe and speculative design.

GAY HAWKINS is a Professor of Social and Cultural Theory at the Institute for Culture and Society., Western Sydney University. She researches in the areas of environmental humanities, political materials, markets and STS.

STEPHEN HEALY is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society at WSU, and member of the Community Economies Institute. His research focuses on the role of collective enterprise, commons, the social and solidarity economy in processes of social transformation.

ROLIEN HOYNG is Assistant Professor at the School of Journalism and Communication of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her work addresses digital infrastructures situated in particular contexts of practice, and in specific the digital materialities of urban politics in cities such as Hong Kong and Istanbul as well as the datafication of waste and ecological politics. She is the editor of a forthcoming special issue entitled *Via Asia: Digital infrastructure, world-making and liminality* (International Journal of Communication) as well as of

a book (with GPL Chong) entitled *Communication innovation and its infrastructures: A critique of the new in a multipolar world* (Michigan State University Press).

DECLAN KUCH is a Vice Chancellor's Research Fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society at WSU, Visiting Research Fellow at UNSW and member of the Community Economies Research Network (CERN). He is currently researching the social dimensions of energy technologies and nanoscience and technology.

JOYCE C.H. LIU is Chair Professor of the Institute of Social Research and Cultural Studies, National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan. She is currently the Director of the International Center for Cultural Studies of the University System of Taiwan, a cross-universities research network connecting four distinguished research-oriented universities in Taiwan, and the International Graduate Program in Inter-Asia Cultural Studies supported by these four universities. Her research projects cover biopolitics, border politics, critical citizenship studies, epistemic decoloniality and artistic intervention.

ANNE MCNEVIN is Associate Professor of Politics at The New School, New York City. Her research interests include the transformation of citizenship and sovereignty, the regulation of borders and migration, and spatial and temporal dimensions of world politics.

BRETT NEILSON is Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. His most recent book (with Sandro Mezzadra) is *The Politics of Operations: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2019).

PETER NORTH is a Professor of Alternative Economies at the University of Liverpool with particular interests in social and solidarity-based economies and a member of CERN.

NED ROSSITER is Professor of Communication in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts and Director of Research at the Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University.

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