



ICS SEMINAR SERIES 2024

From Extended Mind to Distributed Intelligence

25 July 2024 | 11:30am - 1:00pm
Room: EB.G.02 Parramatta South Campus

Abstract

Distributed intelligence is an emerging field of research designed to explore the ways in which intelligence is not reducible to psychology in the narrow sense, but distributed throughout the world of material objects and social relations, including technologically mediated networks and ecologies of social interaction. The concept initially took shape during a two-day symposium held at the University of Western Sydney in November 2023 under the title 'Exo-Mnemonics: Memory, Media, Machines'. The purpose of that symposium was to reflect on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the philosophers Andy Clark and David Chalmers's path-breaking 1998 paper 'The Extended Mind', which argued that mind extends into the external world, and includes external phenomena that assist in acts of memory and cognition. Participants were also invited to consider both the larger genealogies or histories of the extended mind thesis, and the manner in which emerging technologies such as machine learning, big data, and artificial intelligence compel us to rethink Clark and Chalmers's approach. The consensus that developed during the symposium was that the notion of the extended mind was limited in at least three ways: 1) it remained essentially Cartesian, in that it assumed that mind exists prior to and independent of its extensions; 2) it took for granted a liberal individualist framework, without exploring its more radical political implications; and 3) it did not pay sufficient attention to the specificity of the ways that mind can be extended, and the sense in which different kinds of extensions reflexively reinvent the mind in different ways. Whence the suggestion that we move from the paradigm of extended mind to that of distributed intelligence. This paper will introduce the concept of distributed intelligence and offer two examples of how it can be employed as a research paradigm.

Biography

Charles Barbour is an Associate Professor in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts and a school-based member of the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University. His research falls into two broad fields: Marx and Marxism, and especially the intellectual history of the young Marx and his contemporaries; contemporary social and political theory, with a particular emphasis on questions of secrecy and deception. Along with dozens of journal articles and book chapters, he is the author of two monographs: 'The Marx-Machine: Politics, Polemics, Ideology' and 'Derrida's Secret: Perjury, Testimony, Oath'. He also writes for 'The Conversation' on questions of technology and society. He is currently developing a large collaborative and interdisciplinary project on Archives, Technology, and Secrecy.

Presenter: Charles Barbour
Discussant: Chris Fleming
Chair: Zoe Horn

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