Engaged Research

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Engaged research is committed to making a positive difference in the world. It is engaged ethically and reciprocally with others. If our aim is to carry out innovative interdisciplinary research into continuities and transformations in culture and society in a way that contributes to understanding and shaping contemporary local and global life, then doing this well is difficult. Good engaged research involves being reflexively engaged *both* in the practical world of activities and things, and in the analytical world exploring the conditions and limits of knowledge practices. In these terms, just as we seek to relate to the practices of other people, we also seek to hone the craft and ethics of our own scholarly practices.

Engagement has its core meaning in the Old French word, *gage*, signifying 'a pledge'. It is a commitment witnessed by others to fulfill the terms of an agreed relationship. In these terms, engaged research is a public pledge. It recognises that we 'have to take seriously the material conditions of our own professional and intellectual practice'.[2] In the original meaning the 'possibility of making a pledge rested on and strengthened the social relations surrounding the … major participants, and the witnesses, as in other manifestations of gift economies.'[3] Our version of engaged research extends this sensibility at a time when reciprocity in research relations is under pressure.

en·gaged
adj.

employed, occupied, or busy; committed, as to a cause; pledged to marry, betrothed; involved in conflict or battle; being in gear; meshed; partly embedded in, built into, or attached to another part.

These notes represent a condensed summary of our approach in the Institute for Culture and Society. It is a collective representation, but this does not mean that all researchers in the Institute take the same view on everything or use the same methods. What we are attempting to do here is explore possible common ground.

In summary, engaged research is an orientation to others, including those with whom we are researching and those who are involved in the area in which we are researching.

This means that such a research sensibility carries all the weight of overlapping networks and groups of human relations. It also carries the weight of engagement with beings and entities beyond the human, including ecologies and objects in the world. If, as we are so often reminded, we are now living in the period of the Anthropocene when humans began to change the nature of nature, then these relationships matter a great deal. This is one of the many quandaries associated with engaged research: engagement is multiple and demanding. This essay will elaborate these quandaries later, but first turns to investigating the basic principles of engaged research. If engagement is a pledge, then we need to be clear about to what we are pledging ourselves.

SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGED RESEARCH

Principle 1. Engaged research is developed through relations of reciprocity (relationality).

Principle 2. Engaged research is long-term and future-oriented, even as it begins with the present and takes seriously the constitutive importance of the past (temporality).

Principle 3. Engaged research is conducted in relation to lived places, recognising that places are stretched across various extensions of spatiality from the local to the global (spatiality).

Principle 4. Engaged research works critically to understand the human condition, but it does so by working across the intersection of the social and the natural (intersectionality).

Principle 5. Engaged research seeks to work through difference rather than dissolve that difference (ontology).

Principle 6. Engaged research recognises that knowledge and enquiry is bound up with power and practice (epistemology).

Principle 7. Engaged research is sensitive to the issue that methodological decisions have ethical and practical consequences, both for understanding and practicing in the world (methodology).

In keeping with understanding of principles as orientations for practice rather than inflexible injunctions, the principles that we work with are no more than guidelines. Meeting the terms of these principles does not mean that every project in an engaged research portfolio is characterised by all of the principles listed below. It means rather that the researchers who are working with such an orientation attend to these principles as a broad sensibility of research, and that each of their projects is treated as part of a larger whole.

Principle 1. Engaged research is developed through relations of reciprocity (relationality).

Reciprocity is a difficult concept. It cannot be reduced to the process of exacting *quid pro quo* through mutual self-interest. And it means more than equal giving and taking. In our terms, reciprocity is defined broadly as exchange relations of negotiated mutuality. Reciprocal relations are best conducted over the long term (see Principle 2. Temporality). Just as importantly, this kind of exchange needs to be conducted at different levels of relationality, from embodied reciprocity organised between persons who know each other, to more abstract forms of reciprocity carried by institutional arrangements and codifying media such as legal contracts and memorandum. Depending on the circumstances, and how these relations are understood, all these levels of reciprocity can work well together to support good, complex, and ongoing sets of engaged relationships.

The importance of the principle of reciprocity is therefore not just as liberal consideration of balance. Rather it is interwoven into a tapestry of considerations founded in relation to an

1 This is a collaborative piece of writing. It draws heavily on the critical input of Ien Ang, Philippa Collin, Louise Crabtree, Brett Neilson, Amanda Third and Jessica K Weir. The named author in this case was only the person who collated the various discussions and took final responsibility for the text. It is a draft only and will in time be developed as a jointly authored work.

2 Ang, I 2006, 'From cultural studies to cultural research: engaged scholarship in the twenty-first century', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, p. 186.

3 Arvanitakis, J & Hodge, B 2012, 'Forms of engagement and the heterogeneous citizen: towards a reflexive model for youth workshops', *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, vol. 5, pp. 56–75, cited from p. 59.

ethics of care. Here an ethics of care is an ontologically deeper form of ethics than an ethics of rights. Care requires consideration of the very different needs of others. Ideally it requires negotiation over such social themes as identity in relation to difference (see Principle 5. Ontology); autonomy in relation to authority; and inclusion in relation to exclusion. Grouping these couplets together under the nomination *ethics of care* is perhaps too restrictive, but it gets closer to providing a general description than any other we can think of among the possible terms in current use.

Sometimes institutionalised exchange relations conducted by universities, nation-states, corporations, and aid agencies use notions of reciprocity to mediate their relations to others as if it is an accounting exercise where an ethics of care is reduced to contractual fairness. This tends to limit the layered possibilities of reciprocity to Memorandum of Understandings s, university-to-university agreements, national tax redistribution regimes, regional balance-of-trade agreements and global aid programs. There is nothing wrong with these kinds of abstract reciprocity as such. However, we do need to keep in mind the concern that abstract reciprocity by itself can be instrumental, self-serving and oriented to the extension of institutional power.

Aspects of reciprocity include the following:

- Working in deep partnership, including with local communities, while maintaining an intellectual autonomy and a practice of negotiated 'distance', which means that giving back is not romantically conceived of as the work of an 'insider';[4]
- Having a commitment to making a positive contribution to public social life, which requires making public the outcomes of research while not simply instrumentalising that role;
- Acknowledging the intellectual deep debts that we have to other writers, while always clarifying critical differences and divergences;[5]

Principle 2. Engaged research is long-term and future-oriented, even as it begins with the present and takes seriously the constitutive importance of the past (temporality).

Based on a critical interest in the human condition, engaged research begins with the time in which we live. This temporal orientation might be called 'developing a history of the future'. It is not futurism. It not interested in single lines of prediction or fancy prognoses about the exact shape of the coming period. Mapping a history of the future is done with great care, including through being sensitive to different ontologies of time. This involves qualifying the dominant cultural sense in the Global North today on 'modern time' associated with contingency, risk and progress, or 'postmodern time' associated with relativising temporal relations.

Engaged research tends to be done across extended periods of time. By comparison with rapid assessment techniques, consultancy reviews or standalone project studies, engaged research seeks to work collaboratively across extended periods of time, drawing comparisons, and seeking to understand change *and* continuity. While such rapid projects can be useful, as much as is possible individual projects are connected to ongoing research engagements. While engaged research does not necessarily have the capacity to meet the full demands of ethnographic immersion, place-based projects doing engaged research do seek to go back to the same places again and again (see Principle 3), talking to people, experiencing the ecologies of that place, and gathering data from many sources.

Principle 3. Engaged research is conducted in relation to lived places, recognising that places are stretched across various extensions of spatiality from the local to the global (spatiality).

Places are locations imbued with layers of meaning and practice. Rather than treating places as geographically discrete spaces or singular sites, *engaged research* understands places as being stretched across various extensions of spatiality. It recognises the entanglement of global and local processes without suggesting that local particularities can all be subsumed under the heading of global patterns.

Secondly, places are understood as crossed by different levels of material abstraction from embodied relations to mediated relations.[6] This means, for example, that we are interested in mediated communities, networks and regimes of association formed through such processes as social media. At the same time we never forget that these communities and networks, however abstracted, are formed of people who live in embodied places. In methodological terms (see Principle 4) this means balancing the abstraction of digital methods with the embodied meaning of face-to-face engagement.

Principle 4. Engaged research works critically to understand the human condition, but it does so by working across the intersection of the social and the natural (intersectionality).

Social life is embedded in and dependent upon natural life. Ecologies needs to be understood as imbued with both nature and culture.[7] While we eschew any suggestion of a positive 'post-human' future, we are critical of human*ism* to the extent that it tends to centre research and engagement on human relations to the exclusion or relegation of other lives and processes. Something new is clearly happening, vaguely signalled by the concept of 'the Anthropocene'. That is, we are the first human civilisation with the technological and social capacity to override prior senses of planetary boundaries and limits. This engenders responsibilities to others, including non-human others. In short, we need to be attentive to questions of the Anthropocene and its consequences for this planet.

Principle 5. Engaged research seeks to work through difference rather than dissolve that difference (ontology).

Difference is an integral part of a changing world. At the boundaries of difference reside both tensions and creative possibilities. Because *engaged research* entails both working with others and researching across boundaries, tensions constantly arises. Such

4 This makes engaged research different from action or participatory research.

5 See, for example, Noble, G & Watkins, M 2003, 'So, how did Bourdieu learn to play tennis? habitus, consciousness and habituation' *Cultural Studies,* vol. 17, no. 3&4, pp. 520–539.

6 James, P 2006, *Globalism, nationalism, tribalism: bringing theory back in*, Sage Publications, London.

7 Weir, JK 2008, 'Connectivity', *Australian Humanities Review*, 45, pp. 153-164.

tensions, however, offer new possibilities (see the definition of reconciliation below). 'The point is not to resolve these differences (although this may be a positive by-product) but to hold them in tension and allow them to directly inform the research process in ways that resist the sedimentation of orthodoxies.'[8] Hence, by contrast with action research or participatory research that describe research as immersion, engaged research recognises the fact that as researchers we can never be simple 'insiders' to any process that we are researching, even our own. Engaged research lifts researchers out of such assumed complicity even as they seek to be *intimate outsiders*.

Principle 6. Engaged research recognises that knowledge and enquiry is bound up with power and practice (epistemology).

Knowledge is fundamental to the human condition and there are different ways of knowing things. Analytic enquiry is just one form amongst many. It has no essential authority over other forms of enquiry, but in today's world it has become extraordinarily powerful, particularly through two associated forms of application: technoscience and data analysis. These knowledge-based activities are fundamentally remaking our world. Engaged research is also founded on a similar base of analytic enquiry and applied outcomes, but it frames this practice very differently. It is interpretative rather than empiricist. It is reflexively critical rather than instrumental. Rather than posing 'solutions', it seeks to open up possibilities for alternative lines of practice and knowledge.

All knowledge has profound consequences for how we live in relation to others and to nature. As researchers it is thus incumbent upon us to be actively and reflexively aware of the consequences of our knowledge practices. We need to think through the way in which we work. This means treating questions of research method, principles and ethics as more than just things to be enunciated for the purpose of applying for grants.

Engaged research is theoretically sensitive without extolling theory-laden deconstructive criticism. It is empirically sensitive without being empiricist. Both data collection and interpretative theoretical work are important. This means working with existing evidence collection processes while recognising the ways in which any form of evidence collection tends to reflect the assumptions that frame that collection. This entails drawing on primary empirical data while maintaining an interpretative and analytical sensibility. This makes engaged research very different from positivism.[9] One key example is the current emphasis on big data. The opening up of such sets of evidence offers new and exciting opportunities for deep research. However, with digital data it is crucial to get beyond the algorithmic architectures that produce the data sets in the first place.[10] This is to recognise both the importance of mediation in social relations and the fact that data sets are, in the final instance, no more than patterned representations of what people do. Seeking knowledge is not just a matter of collecting data or information.

Principle 7. Engaged research is sensitive to the issue that methodological decisions have ethical and practical consequences both for understanding and practicing in the world (methodology).

There are many aspects to this principle about the relation between theory and practice.

Engaged research treats culture as integral to social life. Instead of defining culture in terms of a primary interest in popular culture or literary culture, or accepting the mainstream definition of culture as the arts, *engaged research* treats culture as a basic domain of social life, always in relation to ecology, economics and politics. In these terms, engaged research understands culture 'not through some general mechanism of cultural construction but through a distinctive ontological politics of culture'.[11] (See the definition of 'culture' below.)

Engaged research critically integrates different methods and methodological approaches. Critical pluralism in bringing together different methodological insights does not just mean taking different methods from here and there, and roughly stitching them together. Engaged research does the hard work of bringing different methodologies into a negotiated alignment with each other in keeping with the principles of its overall approach. It interrogates the underlying theoretical assumptions of different methodologies and methods. And it lifts the strengths of chosen methods (while being aware of their weaknesses) into an integrated platform of tools and techniques for positive knowledge engagement.

Engaged research is interdisciplinary. That is, it takes seriously the strengths of various disciplines while attempting to work creatively within and across them. In a secondary sense, it is also transdisciplinary in that it treats disciplinary boundaries as contingent, however it eschews the usual transdisciplinary tendency towards trying to annul disciplinary boundaries. Engaged research involves an intensive encounter of disciplines rather than a flat merging of them. The disciplines in which we work centrally are cultural studies, sociology, human geography, communications studies and global studies. Some of these are more thoroughly developed as disciplines than others. Each has different zones of focus. At their best, what they have in common is an openness to interrogate and work across their own boundaries.

Engaged research moves back and forth between theoretical conceptualisation and empirical exploration, discovery and verification.[12] This aspect of the methodology principle cuts against those who think that they can 'enter' the world and derive their theoretical categories from what they collect in a pre-theoretical way. Researchers can neither leave ivory towers to 'enter' the world nor can they ever be pre-theoretical. Of course, researchers can be naively theoretical, but even the claim that theory is secondary to data is a theoretical-ideological claim. Researchers are already in the world framed by ideas, ideologies and imaginaries. Concepts, including the very concepts of 'ideas', 'ideologies' and 'imaginaries'—as

8 Third, A (forthcoming), 'Media and communications research at the intersections of scholarship, policy and practice: a case for engaged research', *Media International Australia*.

9 This makes engaged research very different from positivism.

10 Kanngieser, A, Neilson, B & Rossiter, N 2014, 'What is a research platform? mapping methods, mobilities and subjectivities', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 302-318.

11 Bennett, T 2013, *Making culture, changing society*, Routledge, London, p. 2.

12 This makes engaged research very different from grounded research.

well as categories such as 'gender', 'class', 'ethnicity', and 'the unconscious'—are already theoretically charged terms, continuously moving between scholarly and common-sense uses. The category of 'the conscious', for example, something we all assume now we have, came to us via theoretical debates in the nineteenth and early twentieth century over the complexity of being human. Engaged research therefore entails reflexivity about this double hermeneutic.

QUANDARIES OF ENGAGED RESEARCH

For all of the work that we have done to clarify the principles associated with positive engaged research, it is important to be clear about the difficulty of maintaining such an approach.

As implied a couple of times in the above discussion, the first quandary of engaged research is that while researchers ideally should enunciate clear principles to guide what they doing, these principles can be no more than an orientation. This means that rather than a fixed set of prescriptions the principles of engaged research (including those listed above) will always remain provisional. They need to be revisited and discussed. They should remain contested and up for discussion. Recognising this tension is part of turning what could be a dogmatic failing into a possible strength.

A second quandary, at least for our version of engaged research, is that its principles are in tension with themselves. Setting up the conditions for doing positive engaged research is Janus-faced. It entails, for example, both reaching out to others in a very practical public way and withdrawing from the world into discussions about foundational theory and method. Being out in the field talking to people is important as is dialogue with colleagues, but so too is sitting at a desk alone, reading, writing or just thinking. Good engaged research entails both the close-to-the-ground work of developing detailed social maps of different ways of living, and it also extends to expansive high-flown exploration of epistemological questions. By building a platform of principles and methods for analysing and articulating the ways in which concrete issues can be understood, our approach to research attempts to respond to these tensions positively.

A third quandary concerns the nature of the relationship with those whom research relations are developed. Relations with others, no less research relations, are multiple and changing. Engagement is not just a matter of working out one's primary partner, or, in ethnographic terms, deciding upon one's key informant(s) and then gathering data. In any research engagement there are overlapping networks and groups of human relations, and they are often in tension with each other. Engaged research, as mentioned before, also carries the weight of engagement with beings and entities beyond the human, including ecologies and objects in the world.

A fourth quandary emerges from the issue that the term 'engagement' denotes what seems to be a virtuous activity. 'Engagement' is most often an open active term. However, 'engagement' is also a 'problematic term not the least because no one knows exactly what it means, but also because the term has rather romantic connotations, occupying a terrain of meaning located anywhere in between participatory democracy, local populism and social realism.'[13] As with any approach engaged research can be done well or badly.

In attempting to get beyond romantic notions of engagement, our version of engaged research brings together questions of theory, methodology, principle, and ethics as part of a broad *platform* for research practice. Developing a research platform of some kind has always basic to doing good research. However, in our case we want the terms of this platform to be explicit in connecting principles and method (see Brett Neilson's essay in this volume).[14] An explicit engaged-research platform can, for example, provide a bridge for crossing the methodological chasm that separates the current emphasis on digital research—including through analysing abstracted sets of big data—and ethnographic and hermeneutic research that emphasises the emotional lived experience of people. At the same time, research platforms are not simple either. In this regard, for example, the algorithms commonly associated with digital research platforms are particularly tricky things (see the appendix on definitions below). While they mediate (and appear to *translate*) these tensions with automatic precision, automaticity is the last thing that we are seeking with engaged research. The principles of engaged research (as set out above) are thus intended as a way of responding to a series of basic tensions in contemporary academic work without becoming too comfortable.

A fifth quandary is that at the very time when engaged research appears to be going comfortably, that is often because difficulties are being submerged. Conducting an extended empirical survey, on the one hand, or analysing the strengths and weaknesses of a particular theoretical text or lineage, on the other, are actually much simpler than the stresses of good engaged research. Because social life is complex, layered and changing, engaged research involves engagement with others in long-term exploration of the intersections of various conjunctural and contingent events, processes, and conditions of existence—cultural, economic, political and ecological—as well as an engagement with the theories that have attempted in the past to understand these events, processes and conditions. In this sense, engaged research is more than a method seeking to understand complex social assemblages, structures conjunctures, changes and continuities. It is both this *and* the process of negotiating the relationships associated with such research.

APPENDIX 1. KEY CONCEPTS OF ENGAGED RESEARCH

In the foregoing discussion a number of concepts were used that, though being highly contested terms, tend to get slipped into arguments as self-evident. This appendix is an attempt to make explicit how we were using a number of key concepts. This way of treating concepts becomes part of our research platform

13 Ang, I, Lally, E, Anderson, K, Mar, P & Kelly, M 2011, 'What is the art of engagement?' in E Lally, I Ang & K Anderson, *The art of engagement: culture, collaboration, innovation,* University of Western Australia Publishing, Crawley, p. 2.

14 Also see Kanngieser, A, Neilson, B & Rossiter, N 2014, 'What is a research platform? mapping methods, mobilities and subjectivities', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 302–318.

Algorithms

Algorithms arrange infrastructural power. Algorithms play a vital role in calculating the material properties and organisational capacities of infrastructure. Algorithms build computational systems of governance that hold a variable relation between the mathematical execution of code and external environments defined through arrangements of data. Algorithms instruct things to do things to things. Algorithms create patterns. Condensing code and sociality, algorithms generate movement through data processing, scraping and forecasting. Algorithms drive financial markets, operate transport and communications infrastructure, connect global supply chains and allocate resources. Algorithms evaluate labour productivity and capital gains in real-time. Algorithms displace experts and transform worlds.[15]

Community

Community is defined very broadly as a group or network of persons who are connected (objectively) to each other by relatively durable social relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties, and who mutually define that relationship (subjectively) as important to their social identity and social practice. Communities take many forms and can variably co-exist over different spatial extensions.

Culture

The cultural is defined as a social domain that emphasises the practices, discourses, and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held-in-common. In other words, culture is 'how and why we do things around here'. The 'how' is how we practice materially, the 'why' emphasises the meanings, the 'we' refers to the specificity of a life held-in-common, and 'around here' specifies the spatial, and also by implication the temporal particularity of culture.

Data

Data is a particular form of codification of information. It only becomes knowledge when it is interpreted.

Development

Development is social change—with all its intended or unintended outcomes, good and bad—that brings about a significant and patterned shift in the technologies, techniques, infrastructure, and/or associated life-forms of a place or people. This definition does not assure that all development is good, or even that 'good development' is necessarily sustainable.

Ecology

The ecological is defined as a social domain that emphasises the practices, discourses, and material expressions that occur across the intersection between the social and the natural realms. It concerns humans, animals and other beings, as well as objects in the world. The 'natural realm' (a broader consideration than the ecological) includes a spectrum of environmental conditions from the relatively untransformed to the profoundly modified. The distinction between the social realm and the natural realm, with the natural as a context for human action, is common in traditional (cosmological) and modern (scientific) understandings, but we are adding a further dimension. Our definition recognises this usage but lays across both terms the important dimension of human engagement with and within nature, ranging from the built-environment to so-called 'wilderness' areas. This means that the ecological domain focuses on questions of social-natural interconnection, including human impact on, and place within, the environment from the unintended consequences of living on the planet to issues of the built-environment. The ecological is thus not treated as a background context but a place of being.

Economics

The economic is a social domain that emphasises the practices, discourses, and material expressions associated with the production, use, and management of resources. Here the concept of 'resources' is used in the broadest sense of that word, including in settings where resources were/are not instrumentalised or reduced to a means to other ends, including accruing exchange value.

Globalisation

Globalisation is a process of extension and intensification of social relations across world-space, where the nature of world-space is understood in terms of the temporal frame or social imaginary in which that space is lived— ecologically, economically, politically and culturally.

Ideas

Ideas are thoughts, opinions, beliefs and concepts. They can be held individually, but they tend to swirl around communicating segments of meaning.

Ideologies

Ideologies are patterns of ideas. They are patterned clusters of normatively imbued ideas and concepts, including particular representations of power relations. They are conceptual maps that help people navigate the complexity of their social universe. They carry claims to social truth as for example, expressed in the main ideologies of the national imaginary: liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, and fascism.

Imaginaries

Imaginaries are patterned convocations of the social whole. These deep-seated modes of understanding provide largely pre-reflexive parameters within which people imagine their social existence—expressed, for example, in conceptions of 'the global', 'the national', 'the moral order of our time'. They are the convocations that express our inter-relation to each other.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is matter that moves matter (Larkin). At once mundane and monumental, infrastructure enables capital's expansion. Infrastructure is more than groundwork. Infrastructure cuts across corridors, fibres and code with imperial force. Yet infrastructure is vulnerable. Striking against infrastructure requires not just sabotage but constitutive acts of organisation. Infrastructure permeates technical and algorithmic divisions to become both concrete and soft. Infrastructure is not boring. Infrastructure aestheticises rationality.[16]

15 Quoted from http://logisticalworlds.org/concepts last accessed 22 December 2014.

16 Quoted from http://logisticalworlds.org/concepts last accessed 22 December 2014.

Nature

Nature is the ground of all being. Nature is prior to humans, and nature is beyond humans, but nature also includes humans. The concept of 'ecology' (see above) thus describes this last dimension of nature.

Ontology

Ontologies are patterned ways of *being* in the world. They are lived and experienced as the grounding or existential conditions of the social. For example, modern ontologies of linear time, territorial space, and individualised embodiment frame the way in which we walk about the modern city. It is only within a modern sense of time that the ideologies of progress or economic growth can make sense. Even if prior ontologies affect how we see things like sacred spaces and events they tend to be reconstituted in terms of such dominant understandings.

Platform

In contemporary use a 'platform' is an object, system, or process that is built upon to some practical effect. A platform provides a basis for a practice of some kind. In political terms a platform is the name given to a declaration of principles. In the computing world its most common definition is as an operating system. The acceleration of social networking services has reconfigured the notion of the platform as a catalyst for Internet-user participation and clustered organisation. This reconfiguring has added the critical dimension of the platform as medium and process. In our case we are concerned with making explicit the processes and tools that we use for knowledge formation in the act of research.

Politics

The political is defined as a social domain that emphasises practices and meanings associated with basic issues of social power as they pertain to the organisation, authorisation, legitimation and regulation of a social life held-in-common. The parameters of this area thus extend beyond the conventional sense of politics to include social relations in general. They cross the public/private divide; itself in formal terms a modern construct. The key related concept here is a 'social life held-in-common'. While it is true that not everything that is done in the private or public realm is political just because it may have consequences for issues of the organisation, authorisation, legitimation and regulation of a social life held-in-common, many issues of politics bear directly on the sustainability of a city.

Reconciliation

Positive reconciliation is ongoing and always in process. It is not an ultimate state. It is neither a formula for prescriptively 'fixing' or 'curing' conflict, nor a model to be mechanically applied in order to produce peace. Such an approach thus hints at a parallel approach to the classical discussion of the distinction between positive and negative liberty. Positive reconciliation is defined here not as the final resolution of difference nor as a process of forgiving and forgetting—this can be called negative reconciliation—but rather as a never-concluding, often uncomfortable process of remaking or bringing together (from the Latin, reconcilare) of persons, practices and meanings in ongoing 'places of meeting' (from the Latin, concilium). The definition, relevant to both personal and political reconciliation, is thus careful not to presume that differences will be resolved, dissolved or settled once and for all time, nor to presume an ultimate truth or transparency about the source of the conflict.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is defined broadly as exchange relations of negotiated mutuality.

Sustainability

Sustainability is the capacity to endure. *Positive* sustainability as distinct from just enduring can be defined as practices and meanings of human engagement that make for life-worlds that project the ongoing probability of natural and social flourishing, vibrancy, resilience, and adaptation.

Threshold

A threshold is a place of passage supporting the transformation between the radically different and the familiar. A threshold both defines and sustains the uniting difference between two domains: between the familiar everyday experience and where the purely sensible and obvious are transcended. A threshold establishes an in-between region, a meeting place of different domains of rational thinking, while remaining rational.

Urbanisation

An urban area can be defined as a human settlement characterised—economically, politically and culturally—by a significant infrastructural base; a high density of population, whether it be as denizens, working people, or transitory visitors; and what is perceived to be a large proportion of constructed surface area relative to the rest of the region. Therefore urbanisation is either the spatial increase of urban settlement or an increase in the number of people living in urban areas.


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