Ecojustice and Activism Learning Circles

- 7th June 2017
- 4 – 5.30pm (EST)

Dr. Peta White, Dr. Marilyn Palmer, and Dr. Sandra Wooltorton will be offering a conversation and exploration of Ecojustice and Activism.
Scope of Conversation

With deep commitment to ecojustice and activist practices we explore where we are positioned and why...

we also consider where to from here... and how we might get there!

The challenge is to hold the tension

*How do the social, economic and ecological sit together as we build our sustainable futures?* We don’t really know what the key elements of a post-fossil-fuel-capitalist society will be, although we are starting to get some ideas as people all over the world theorise and implement their version of the future.

Some visionaries help us see a way forward and this conversation is to help us envision laying down our path in our walking.

Our abstract...

Learning how to be socioecological in practice while taking up the role of ‘academic’ can be problematic in the neo-liberal university. This presentation demonstrates how three academics are attempting to hold the tensions of academic positions and practice with socio-eco-justice in their hearts.

This work is supportive of finding a new ways of being successful academics, working towards an inclusive, generative future. This leads to their vital question of how to construct workplace cultures, collaborations, and networks that create a slow shift towards embedded justice.

Their answer entails a process of listening for the discourses, to find ways to be a better colleague, to learn and share environmental action, and to build optimism and hope.

In an earlier paper, the authors described their emerging collaborative ethnographic methodology for building resilience and transformative possibilities towards sustainable ways of being academic. In this paper they describe place-responsive actions that enrich their collaboration and enable their learning stance to drive change in their own lives and respective university workplaces.
Three in a tree/nest/circle (metaphor?)

- Our collaborative autoethnographic space is maintained using Zoom online conferencing technology as we hold fortnightly Nurturing Conversations about our lives and our work.
- We are held together across a physical triangular space from Yawuru buru (Broome) to Warundjeri land (Burwood) to Noongar boodjar (Bunbury).

What we do:

- We have learnt that emotion and relationships are at the heart of resistance to neo-liberalism; the Achilles' Heel and the Trojan Horse all in one.
- We nurture and love one another from afar, listen to our troubles, reflect, plan, and write.
- We support each other to DO things (Hopkins, 2013) which:
  - sustain our scathing critique of neo-liberalism and hyper-capitalism because it deserves no less
  - use the resources the neoliberal university provides (time, an income packet, an office, support staff, ready access to the world's libraries)
  - sustain our research, teaching, writing and community practice as activist scholars (Sachs, 2003; Flood, Martin, & Dreher; 2013; Pulido, 2008)
Slow and Tiny Acts of Resistance (STARs)
produced by Women Writing Away, Tauhara, Winter 2015

➤ 1. Talk about and support slow strategies.
➤ 2. Count what others don’t
➤ 3. Organise
➤ 4. Take care (of ourselves and others)
➤ *. Contest negative discussions with/about colleagues
➤ 5. Write fewer emails
➤ 6. Turn off email
➤ 7. Make time to think
➤ 8. Make time to write (differently)
➤ 9. Say no, say yes
➤ 10. Slow down our teaching

Some permaculture principles help us stay on track

Fair share, Care for planet, Care for people

➤ Use small and slow solutions
➤ Design from patterns to details
➤ Integrate rather than segregate
➤ Use and value diversity
➤ Use edges and value the margins
➤ Creatively use and respond to changes

Social, Economic, Environmental
Others’ writing remind us...

_Fuck Neoliberalism_ By Simon Springer, Department of Geography, University of Victoria

_Fuck Neoliberalism._ That’s my blunt message. I could probably end my discussion at this point and it wouldn’t really matter. My position is clear and you likely already get the gist of what I want to say. I have nothing positive to add to the discussion about neoliberalism, and to be perfectly honest, I’m quite sick of having to think about it. I’ve simply had enough. For a time I had considered calling this paper “Forget Neoliberalism” instead, as in some ways that’s exactly what I wanted to do. I’ve been writing on the subject for many years (Springer 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015; Springer et al. 2016) and I came to a point where I just didn’t want to commit any more energy to this endeavor for fear that continuing to work around this idea was functioning to perpetuate its hold. On further reflection I also recognize that as a political maneuver it is potentially quite dangerous to simply stick our heads in the sand and collectively ignore a phenomenon that has had such devastating and debilitating effects on our shared world. There is an ongoing power to neoliberalism that is difficult to deny and I’m not convinced that a strategy of ignorance is actually the right approach (Springer 2016a). So my exact thoughts were, ‘well fuck it then’, and while a quieter and gentler name for this paper could tone down the potential offence that might come with the title I’ve chosen, I subsequently reconsidered. Why should we be more worried about using profanity than we are about the actual vile discourse of neoliberalism itself? I decided that I wanted to transgress, to upset, and to offend, precisely because we ought to be offended by neoliberalism, it is entirely upsetting, and therefore we should ultimately be seeking to transgress it. Wouldn’t softening the title be making yet another concession to the power of neoliberalism? I initially worried what such a title might mean in terms of my reputation. Would it hinder future promotion or job offers should I want to maintain my mobility as an academic, either upwardly or to a new location? This felt like conceding personal defeat to neoliberal disciplining. Fuck that.


How do we view our practice... differently!

► _SW:_ I feel safe - like Peta and Marilyn are ‘sistas’ - colleagues as friends. We can discuss personal matters professionally, and professional matters personally, and it’s great to really explore discourse and language in depth. Like ... love, friendship and RESEARCH! (What are those things?)

► _PW:_ I feel the comfort and strength of our group constantly, but especially when I need it the most. I practice being nurtured and nurturing others and I take that practice outside this bubble.

► _MP:_ I feel the healthiest and happiest and most productive I have in a long time and I think it is because of this bubble (and another one I share with eco-social workers)
Our plan

► We feel we are creatively using and responding to change, even though it is frightening and we feel vulnerable.

► We see a way forward through pre-figurative politics (Springer, 2016) which simply means to start as we mean to go on; become the transformation we want to see (Pelling, 2011); focus on the journey not the outcome; the process is the product; we lay down the path in our walking, etc.

► For us now that means locating and supporting other bubbles to work together and build the future we want to see. We can do this when we:

► Observe and interact
► Integrate rather than segregate

We use collaborative, autoethnographic fictionalised stories...

► How do we hold ourselves accountable, around our empathy, in the tensions, and not be perfect!
The beauty of the story...

- Use of humour
- Checking out of ideas
- Be curious not judgmental
- Avoid overt enculturation
- Enjoy the support of the bubble

- An extension of the story – we all have stories

We also use acts of activism...

- Today is an act of activism
- Reaching out through our networks (such as AAEE) and connecting with colleagues to share and hold the tensions together.
- We want to raise some questions and generate some thoughts about our future...

The challenge is to hold the tension

We can NOT proceed with practices tied to unlimited growth and yet when limits are expressed, we often find eco[in]justice promulgated as inevitable. Those who say ‘it is too late’ and ‘there is nothing we can about it’ are for the most part privileged and confident that they and their families will be spared the worst of what Meadows et al. have referred to as ecological overshoot and collapse.

The challenge is to hold the tensions between ecological care and socio-economic justice, while we find our way towards a sustainable future where we extraction is balanced by replacement and dumping is balanced by absorption.
Locating ourselves as academic ecojustice activists in various pleases/spaces

- Neo-liberal institutions obsessed with consumption & growth
- A2E2 Relationships
  - Family
  - Community
  - Professions/Disciplines
- Learning circles
- Classrooms
- Writers 3

Practices which maintain business as usual

- Neoliberalism
- Limits to growth
  - Younger culture
- EcoHJustice
  - Unsustainability
- INActivism
The questions we might ask??

What is your activism?

Do you use the word activism? What does it mean to you?

Do you think of yourself as an activist?

What activism could you do?
What activism do you do regularly?

What are the things that trouble you about the world? What do you think of as ecojustice? eco-IN-justices?

What are the things that are troubling you in the environment?

Where is the ecojustice in your workplace/home/community? Where is it needed?

How do you think about the limits of growth (earth is a finite system)?

What are you doing about it?
Scope of Conversation

This presentation will start from the ideas presented so well by Donella Meadows – Limits to Growth


Donella Meadows – Limits to Growth

• http://donellameadows.org/systems-thinking-resources/
Annie Leonard – Story of Stuff

- The Story of Stuff [http://storyofstuff.org/] and
- Story of Solutions [http://storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-solutions/].

Charles Eisenstein

- [http://charleseisenstein.net/]
Science Week – 12-20 August 2017

• With Science Week coming up in the near future we have a focus on “Future Earth”
• Future Earth’s 2025 vision addresses eight key challenges to global sustainability:
  • Deliver water, energy, and food for all
  • Decarbonise socio-economic systems to stabilise the climate
  • Safeguard the terrestrial, freshwater and marine natural assets underpinning human well-being
  • Build healthy, resilient and productive cities
  • Promote sustainable rural futures
  • Improve human health
  • Encourage sustainable consumption and production patterns
  • Increase social resilience to future threats.

https://www.scienceweek.net.au/schools/
Resilience and optimism for transition to an older culture (Hartmann, 2004)

**Older Cultures**
- Political Independence
- Egalitarian Structure
- Getting their resources from renewable local sources
- Having a unique sense of their own identity
- Respecting the identity of other tribes

**Younger Cultures**
- Political Dominance
- Established hierarchy: clear authority structures
- Acquiring resources through trade and conquest
- Absorbing other cultures into their own identity
- Genocidal warfare against others
References:


Thank you for contributing to this conversation