



Plenary Abstracts

Plenary 1: Unquiet spirits, rebels past and a disordered soul

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Dance of the *desordeiros*:

Capoeira, art and the fashioning of an epic self.

The Afro-Brazilian dance and martial art, capoeira, was once associated with urban gangs called *capoeiras* and *desordeiros* or “disorderlies”. They were individuals – mostly men – who thrived on the margins of Brazilian urban society, including the docks, precincts dedicated to nightlife and trafficking contraband, and in *carnaval*, when celebration took over city streets. Alternately turned to as political enforcers and turned upon and persecuted as a target of moral panic (especially after Brazil became a republic), the gangs bequeathed to contemporary Brazil both a rich performance tradition and a complex oral record of their way of life, which we now also know through police records.

This presentation explores accounts of disorderly lives, especially a type of heroic self fashioning in which capoeira practitioners engaged in the late twentieth century, in which past moments of mayhem, trickery, and violence were especially important. Even though the art is now legal and openly practiced, even endorsed by state representatives, many practitioners seek to maintain the sense that they are practicing ‘disorder,’ even though the stakes have been significantly lowered. Through a phenomenology of heroic self constitution, especially drawing on song texts and practitioners’ autobiographies from the ‘old guard’ of venerated masters, this presentation seeks to explore a distinctive way of inhabiting an urban environment, at once chaotic and richly evocative, characteristic especially of capoeira practitioners whose careers in the art straddled the divide between quasi-illegality and growing respectability. Ironically, legalisation and an orderly present allow, even encourage, extravagant celebration of a disorderly past.

Associate Prof. Kalpana Ram

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Fertile Disorder.

My recent book *Fertile Disorder: Spirit Possession and its provocation of the modern* (2013) builds around the premise that it is generative to examine states of disorder as being able to tell us something more fundamental to human existence. The insight is not new. For Freud, it was the hysterical bodily states, the slips of the tongue, which gave us access to the workings of a human unconscious. For Marx it was the conflict of classes which gave the enquirer their access to the underlying workings of economic exploitation. What is distinctive about my argument is that by following the orientations both of anthropology and of phenomenology, we can understand phenomena such as spirits and ghosts, not as 'symptoms' to be deciphered by a science either natural or social, but as telling us something about ourselves that science, as well as various forms of modern politics (liberal, socialist, feminist), have typically obscured.

In south India as in many parts of the world, unquiet spirits are not simply symptoms but actual materialisations of injustice that refuse to be banished or buried. And the injustices they alert us to are not simply those that have been already picked out for us by modern progressive politics. Some of these injustices are the 'bad deaths' anthropologists will be familiar with – deaths that are violent and premature. But in their interaction with the living, spirits and ghosts also bring to the foreground complaints regarding other forms of incompleteness such as the loss of the nurture and care that people expect in primary relationships. These too, generate a pervasive sense not only of loss, but of injustice.

Insofar as anyone who has suffered such a loss can, I think, recognise this sense of injustice as characteristic rather than idiosyncratic, we are not dealing with a psychological state purely internal to the subject. Nor are we dealing with something objective in the sense of a natural phenomenon that is purely external to subjects. Indeed, when we 'recognise' this way of living loss as injustice, we are also moved beyond a description of culturally specific ontologies. I suggest that instead, we are potentially alerted to a recognition of a level of sociality that is absolutely primordial to our existence.

The proposal for this workshop asks us to consider whether anthropology should switch to considering disorder as 'the enduring reality', with order only a 'temporary and often frail and illusory' state. The proposal is in keeping with the spirit of a good deal of the recent anthropological literature that focuses precisely on large scale disorder: civil war, Partition, state violence. When combined with an equally prominent emphasis on large scale movements of refugees, migrants, globalisation, there is a tendency precisely to treat disorder as the deeper ontologically primary human condition. My argument leads in a different direction. The sense of injustice that lingers long after experiencing a radical sundering of intimate relations with others, as well as with places (which contain both human and non-human presences), suggests that while change and movement are certainly integral to

human existence, too rapid and widespread a scale of change are more characteristically experienced not as a reversion to a deeper level of what we can comprehend because it is ontologically primary, but rather as unfair and beyond the level of human coping.

Professor Glenn Petersen

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Micronesian Ethnography from a Disordered Soul?

I chose to begin work in Micronesia, where I've been doing ethnographic research for more than four decades, because it was an American colony; by struggling against American colonialism there, I believed I could atone for having fought in America's colonial war in Vietnam. In this paper I intend to portray my work in Micronesia as a different facet of colonialism, in that I have used my studies of Micronesian lives in an attempt to heal my own wounds.

I find a fundamental quality of disorder in my work and challenge its underlying motives, throwing the results into question. To what extent are the patterns and processes I discern in Micronesian societies primarily external representations of my own wounded psyche? I assume all ethnographic reporting includes significant elements of projection, but here I am contemplating something more complex and distressing. It is one thing to question the accuracy of one's observations and conclusions; it is another to imagine that the essential fiber of all one's work is suspect.

I address four themes. First, I question use of the term "disorder" in the context of PTSD; that is, that certain reactions that are described as disorders may in fact be natural responses to experiences one has undergone. Second, there is far more disorder than I have recognized in the currents of life in the societies I study. Third, my sense of betrayal and rage at my own government and society leads me to idealize the government and society of Micronesian communities. Finally, I have never lost sight of a lesson I learned as a young man from N. Kazantzakis' immortal character, Alexis Zorba: "You've got everything except one thing—madness. A man needs a little madness, or else he never dares cut the rope and be free.

Plenary 2: Manners, mess and moral dis/order

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MANNERS in everyday politics

As social beings persistently battling against moral disorder, we also experience normative social order as oppressive — although, I argue, we rely on its foundations for social comfort. Here I will explore the order/disorder binary in relation to manners, a term I am using for the vast array of impulsive, pre-rational, judgements made in any social setting — the interaction rituals of everyday life (Goffmann 1967), that express historically produced ‘subjective norms of affect’ (Norbert Elias 1978 [1939]). The grounding of social life in normative patterns of shame, embarrassment, disgust, and other visceral responses can be clearly observed on Australia’s ‘cultural borderlands’ (Morris 2013). I will explore the conflicted consequences of these in relation to sex, child-rearing and personal property.

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The story of the distinguished lady professor’s dinner-table fart: Prelude to an inquiry into the limits of table manners

Burping at a dinner table is one thing, farting is quite another. Burping is considered good table manners in China and India but not in Japan or Europe, although it was acceptable in France and Spain in the 19th century. Farting is everywhere considered bad form but it excites polar opposite emotions: side-splitting laughter at one extreme, suicidal shame at the other. Physiologically speaking the burp, the fart and the queef are similar in that they all involve the eructation of intestinal gases through an orifice. Why is the oxygen and nitrogen that eructs through the mouth valued highly relatively to that, which eructs via the anus and vagina? Lévi-Strauss finds the origin of table manners in the contrasting approaches to burping in Native America and Europe but he does not mention farting let alone queefing. Nor does Mary Douglas or Sahlins. Sahlins notes that the apes cannot tell the difference between holy water and distilled water. But dogs, unlike us, cannot only tell the difference between a fart and a queef they can also identify the human culprit. Culprits, for their part, invariably blame the dog. Farting and queefing pose a problem for the theory of culture that has not even been posed let alone answered. Given that people everywhere fart away between 476 to 1491ml of gas every 24 hours it is worth considering the impact that ‘dirt’ of this kind has on people’s conceptions of order/ disorder and equality/inequality? Why is that farts among equals creates

laughter while farts among unequals causes shame? The queef, for its part, is secret women's business. How can a man ever hope to understand an eructation of this kind?

Dr. Jonathan Marshall

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Trolling and the Information Mess

Trolling is embedded within the disorders of the 'information mess' generated by the 'information society' and its use of information technology. In this society, people use information for gaining a strategic effect or for commodification, restricted and wealth production rather than for communication. Furthermore and the volume of information requires ordering by social filtering, which occurs through social groups clustered around particular sources or modes of interpretation. Information mess extends features found in 'normal communication'.

Communication needs resolution. Online, one of the main means of understanding a person's message is by people framing them as a member of a group, which has strong connections or disconnections with groups the interpreter identifies with. In an environment in which people feel political disempowerment, can find data to support almost any position, and feel that most information is propaganda, abuse becomes not only a way to mark group membership, but to attack those who are held responsible for the disempowerment. Obliteration becomes the norm.

Online existence is unstable, and requires acknowledgement with the best way of gaining a response to insult someone, or make an emotionally upsetting statement. In a many-to-many communication framework this will produce insults back, which then proceed as positive reinforcement, and helps the conflict spread.

This paper proceeds to analyse the politics of the information mess, by looking at trolling as part of a wider sphere of activity, in particular the cultivated panic about trolling in the Australian media in the months of August to October 2012, and the relationship of this panic to the way political and media discourse was also conducted. While some media organisations carried out a war against trolls, they also legitimised and demonstrated the inevitability of trolling in political and social discourse, by the way they framed the questions, the ways that evidence was presented, and the ways the media engaged in its own abusive support for particular political ideals. Trolls were to be exterminated.