


Postcards from the edge: transitioning from blue sky to coal face....

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“This conference focuses on the scientific and policy-relevant knowledge of social-ecological dynamics needed to enable a shift towards the sustainable stewardship of social-ecological systems in the Anthropocene.”

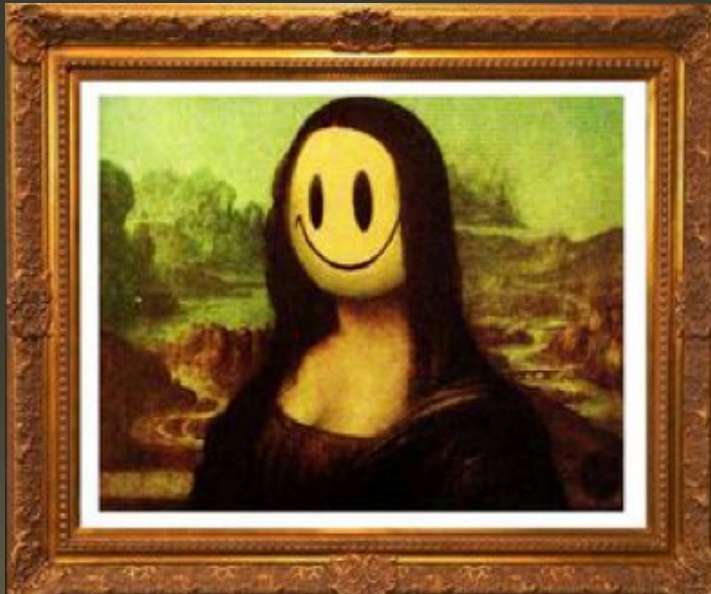
“Focus on challenges and opportunities in operationalizing sustainable development in practice...”



Using my understanding of science-in-practice to...

"Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."

Transgressive “prankster
performance art” – leads a “red
nose rebellion” right up to the
doors of tradition



Banksus militus vandalus

BANKSY




Driving a more transgressive understanding of socio-ecological systems and resilience...

There are many 'sciences' and ways of doing science.....



This brand of science is happening 'off the books on the streets'... often the only way to know it and access it is through personal narratives.....

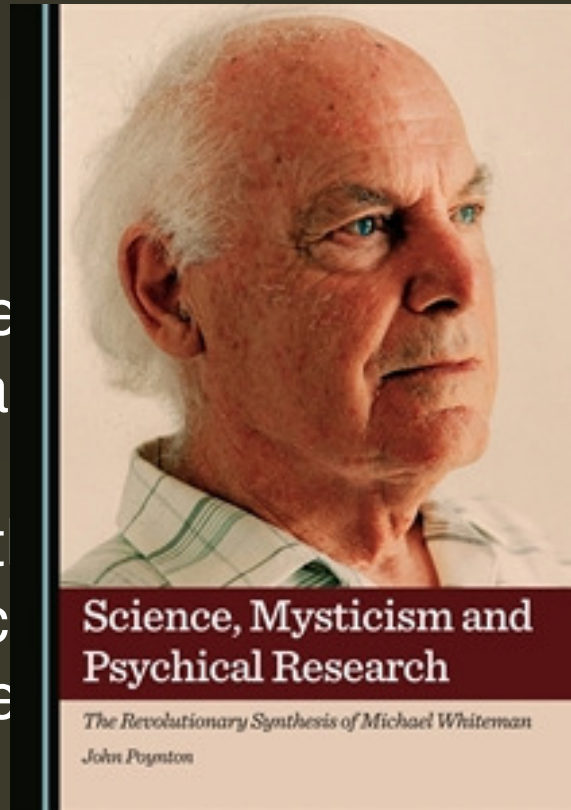
Share some perspectives as a 'street scientist'



No one ever asked us to reflect on who we might be doing this science for or how we thought we should communicate with the people who would use our science.....the scientist (male) going to 'do science to the world' (whether it liked it or not!).....

Reflecting back...

Intellectually liberal
saw value in making
believe that any
worse than another
where science could
done...not scare
ecology.



someone who
ge....didn't
was better or
partisan about
w it could be
n question of

Mentors are important – eclectic
mix of classical biogeography,
philosophy, mysticism, classical
music, psychical research.....


Practical:

- People were central to doing science – science was important for decision making
- The importance of being a risk-taker and finding other risk-takers to work with (policy makers who see science as critical to policy development and implementation)
- Building trust is critical in sustaining the subversive activities of the risk-takers
- Being available and delivering answers on timelines that make sense to the consumers of science (often out of synch with research timelines)
- Talk science in a way that can be understood – de-jargonise!

Conceptual:

- Had to read the architecture library – challenging stereotypes
- Had to learn the language of Town Planners - re-jardonise!

Wandered down the hill (physically and mentally) into the city.....

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- Is something this cross-sectoral really good science?
 - Strong anti-urban bias in ecology - cities are not important to ecology
 - Anti-ecology bias in the urban sector – ecology is not important to cities. Difficult to break down silos
 - Very few of the ‘ecology lighthouses’ thought it could be done – only members of the eclectic scientific fringe offered help

Ultimately realised that the different priorities of science-in-academia and the science-in–the-real world would force a choice....there was nowhere where it was possible to meet the needs of both.

There is a price to pay...

Leaving the Ivory Tower for City Hall meant developing a new understanding of the world:

- Political ecology rather than ecology is important
- Perception is as powerful (if not more powerful) than fact
- It isn't what you know it is who you know
- Policy world is often suspicious of science
- There are no silver bullet solutions – need to keep decision-making options open
- You need to be prepared to do two jobs
- It's a battlefield out there!

Because you are neither fish nor fowl – both sides remain cautious as they are not certain of which agenda you may be advancing.


Decided doing science in the policy space was going to be more effective than trying to do policy in the science space.....



Some advantages to being a change agent with no allegiance to either side – less restricted by normative constraints - easier to offer proof-of-concept that change is possible.



Outcome: Scientist-in-practice - a hybrid personality at the boundary of many worlds that makes everyone uncomfortable

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- Create a niche department focused on biodiversity, climate change adaptation and resilience
 - Create a new discourse around skills e.g. support PhD studies through assisted education
 - Create jobs that allow people to be involved in research in the government environment
 - Create and fund biodiversity and climate change adaptation focused research partnerships with UKZN
 - Use science to access additional resources for the city
 - Highlight that local government should not be scared of experimenting and failing

Used science not to change the system –
but to change what was done in the system

- Science is not politically neutral and is not universally trusted (is often seen as a 'political bad')
- Need to hold firm against political pressure – have to be brave and wily (it is ugly out there!)
- Fight the same battles many times – play the long game
- Good ideas have a political shelf life – have to refresh the motivations for action
- Work under the radar in the grey institutional spaces
- Build champions (risk-takers) not just wait for them to appear
- Document own experience and actively carry information back into the research universe to ensure better triangulation between theory and praxis
- Recognise the spectrum from research scientist to scientist-in-practice i.e. transdisciplinary spectrum rather than transdisciplinary individuals – and train for this
- Need an 'ecology of revolutions' with smart alliances between the risk takers – a multiplicity of change agents
- That it is still tough to be a woman....

Postcards from the edge....

In every socio-ecological universe has a lighthouse at the centre that is the source of the light (aka traditional knowledge) – this could be an individual or group of people – while at the edge are the street-wise players (Red Nose Revolutionaries) who benefit from the central illumination (knowledge), but remain more inquisitive about what lurks in the dark and ignored spaces.

In due course some RNR will become the lighthouse at the center of their own knowledge universe – so it is important that we remember to create a supportive environment so those at the edge can emerge, learn and thrive.

That is the only way the Shift will happen.....

My Narrative.....



Thank you!

