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SIMULTANEITY, MULTI-PLEXITY, EXTRA-LEGAL:

Emerging Ideas in Times of Global Crisis*

Carolyn Nordstrom

1. A recent publication of mine (Prelude: An Accountability, *Social Analysis* 52/2, 2008) predicated that in 50 years the Academy will collapse, due in part to archaic and unrealistic theoretical orientations. I want to stress that I am speaking of the western Academy in the broadest epistemic sense, not of specific disciplines nor actual individuals today. The article concludes that the Academy will be recreated at the end of the 21st century. This re-creation will take place slowly, painfully, and with deep reflexivity – and, as I wrote: the foundations will be forged on the concept that "Theory is theoretician, is." Theory is ontology. Not "theory as" or "theory about," but "theory is" in the sense of being produced in interactions, ontologically, never standing abstracted from ontological production. To be created in interaction is to be imbued with the sense of being. These new epistemological traditions were forged "with the idea that not only people but also the theories they 'live' can be considered reflexive," and as such are "imbued with the same complex of interactions cognitive, existential, phenomenological, emotive – that define theoreticians, that is humankind, and their productions in the larger world" (*ibid*. p. 9).

I'll begin with Alain Badiou's quote: "Reality is." Through the years of fieldwork, I realised that at some level people understand their world(s) and their lives – indeed reality – as multiplex. These understandings are not easily theorised, however. I choose the word multiplex because this captures something fundamental about the ways in which reality is conceived, and the ways in which researchers can convey this. The term captures an elegance of complexity.

Plexus is classically defined as a braided network. In its more dynamic meaning, it is an entanglement of associations, an intricate coherence. It's plural, plexuses, are multiple braided networks, or entanglements of entangled groups, networks, associations, and affiliations. The word comes from Latin: to plait. It roots as well as encompasses the term "to ply," as in: I ply my trade as an artisan with the ships plying their trade across the seas. The term is imbued with a sense of movement. The idea of plexus – braided networks – not only in, but as movement is central in the context I am speaking of today. In the larger scope, I am developing this term in an anthropological sense of intricate associations of people, of thought and action.

I became interested in these concepts while working on political violence, in warzones, and on the extra-legal. It became evident to me that there are plexuses we see and plexuses we don't see. When I say 'see', I am referring to social-level knowledge: to knowledge, or what Stanley Cohen calls acknowledgement, that circulates on a public level; that exists as part of a recognised generalised epistemology in societies, similarly to what Michael Taussig calls 'public knowledge' – that which we can say, versus 'private knowledge' – that which we may know but cannot say. I'm interested

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in the relationship between the two, for as Stanley Cohen points out in wondering why so many people fail to recognise impending massacres when evidence is widely visible, public denial can translate into private denial, even when people's lives are threatened. Why do we see some things and why don't we see others? Let me begin by exploring things we don't see, and offer some examples.

In the United States 3000 children are beaten to death every year, and few people are aware of these figures. I ask students in my classes if they know the basic facts on violence in the USA that affect their lives and communities, such as the one above. I have not yet encountered a student who has heard this figure, though formal government reports have been published on it. Likewise, one out of four of my undergraduate female students is sexually assaulted in some way during her four years at university, and few are aware of these figures. "Crime and violence in the USA" is a common headline in popular media, and the reports commonly focus on street crime. The epidemiology of babies battered within the home is far less addressed, and when it is, isolated cases from marginal groups (impoverished, minority populations, addicts) are often spotlighted.

Larger societal patterns are not merely 'forgotten' in these stories, they are 'made-invisible.' And this invisibility is constructed for a reason. Those of us who research violence, from gender and identity violations on the personal level to abuses at the political level, know the difficulties of not only finding, but reporting, accurate data on these issues. While the invisibility at the formal public level can be staggering, there is even less information about why certain realities are rendered invisible.

In terms of extra-legality, literally trillions of dollars move round the world extra-legally every year. Millions of people are involved in these activities. This represents massive economic and political block of power about which we know very, very little. I have been fascinated by the impact the extra-legal has on world events, and why it is we know relatively little about this compared to our knowledge of formal legal activities. Of course, answers have to do with power, privilege, and profit.

The plexuses of social thought and action we "don't-see" are invisible, – not because they are peripheral, nor because they are scaled and occupy different scale dimensions, nor because they are 'outside' what is important or present, but because we, and by 'we' I mean generalised social groups, have been taught to limit our public awareness of what we perceive "is."

In fact, these social realities are central to social, political, and economic processes of the world, and I will get back to this when I talk about simultaneity. They are part of our daily lives. They are not "outside" in any way: we interact in these worlds while we are taught by general social orientation not to see them, to limit what we perceive "is" – in sense of "reality is" as Alain Badiou writes.

At this juncture, my interest is with exploring plexuses as configurations of social, political, economic, and identity realities at a broad level. As a dynamic way of understanding the multiplexities of the world we live in as fluid constantly changing processes and interactions. There are many equally excellent ways to assess the roiling complexities we encounter in the field and in theory; theoretical and methodological diversity enriches disciplines. This discussion today is one of many equally useful examples of ways to think, and research, multiplex "anthro-scapes."

A chance encounter I had in Sweden a year ago helps to introduce this approach. After giving a talk in Uppsala, some colleagues asked me to join them at a dinner party celebrating a recent Ph.D.

Someone mentioned I should ask Erik Ottoson, who was sitting near me, to tell me about his recent talk, saying it was one of the more innovative talks people had heard recently. "Resonates with your work," they noted. So I heard Ottoson's paper in a restaurant amid festive drink and food. It's probably the best way to get a paper: it's very vibrant.

Eric is Swedish. He had gone to the UK, and his work focused on a moment, and a "drift", in London. For those of you who have an interest in the theoretical perspective Ottoson develops, let me situate you in the larger perspective he was exploring before telling you about his paper. He was drawing upon the situationists (and to the related psycho-geographers).

Remember the society of the "spectacle" that first gained popularity in the mid-1900s on – widely recognised in the work of Guy Debord, and in theoretical explorations of, for example, "architecture encoding violence" and the deeper meanings of urban space, flow, and life. Originally Guy Debord was interested in looking at architecture and the ways in which it configures conceptual social space, relationships of violence and nonviolence, and emergent social identities. This is based more broadly on the idea that geography has a physiological component layered with what might be termed a sense of city-psychologies – patterns of real-use and the meanings behind these – that are often hidden in the junctures of public/private and priviledged/marginalised relations.

One of the approaches that Guy Debord and the situationists developed was the concept of *dérive*. It is generally translated as drift, and it is a theoretical and methodological means of uncovering the often hidden or obscured realities defining a city and its people. The technique is to drop all one's preconceptions and simply begin to move in a city without a set plan, goal, or direction. The theory is that this will not produce meaningless random chance, but will illuminate the relationships of the public and the invisible, social truths from social fictions, that characterise urban spaces. This works, they argue, because cities have contours and currents, they have exits and entrances that are important in everyday life but blocked from public awareness – tangible patterns that are part of the city's psycho-geography. By dropping one's preconceptions and giving oneself over to following (literally being pulled along) the contours and currents, a person will be able to uncover the more dynamic reality of urban life. Situationist's interests tend to focus on such processes as power, marginalisation, resistance, and the art and politics of 'being' within a larger phenomenology of the city.

So Eric Ottoson finds himself in London, and buys a hamburger. He goes to throw away the hamburger-wrapper, and looks for a waste bin. Any of you who have been in London will know these can be hard to find. In his struggle to throw away this piece of paper, Eric begins to focus on waste-bins. He begins a *dérive*, a "drift," through the city of London in a search for waste-bins. Ottoson builds on classical situationist theory by enacting a drift, but adds a thematic focus, choosing to follow a specific item (original situationists supported drifts that were intentionally unintentional, without a guiding focus). Though Ottoson doesn't know this at the start, his drift ultimately becomes a way of defining a powerful history of the city – moving from trash can to trash can. Obviously he could have gone in any direction, and had to choose one – so a *dérive* is not a claim to any ultimate or all-encompassing reality about trash cans, or London and Londoneers, or their history and present. He is uncovering a meaningful and yet subtle psycho-geography. As he walks, he begins to realise where waste-bins are and where they are not, and he begins to talk to people about what he sees. What emerges is a complex realisation of The Troubles among Ireland, England, and the UK: the use of bombs in innocuous everyday items like waste bins – and how these

shape people's concept of space and place, of threat and safety, of politics and community, and how this configures their sense of who they belong with and against, and the identities emerging from this. By following a drift of trash cans he uncovers this complex history of politics and violence, of the associations that people forge, and of how history merges into the present.

As Eric was explaining his paper to me, I saw something new – something neither in his paper nor in situationist theory, something that as of yet I don't really have the words for it. I use the term plexus for now, but a better term may surface in the future.

There is something I want to explore using Ottoson's example as a springboard, but yet something different than the situationists who are focusing on single drifts, bounded urban locations, and set relationships of geography, architecture, city-flow and people. The ideas that occurred to me while listening to Eric helped me understand the difficulties I experience in trying to do justice in explaining what I've seen in warzones or the extra-legal – to the large, endlessly multifaceted, dynamic realities we find ourselves in.

In classical scholarship, we have a tendency to approach any given social question in terms of certain set categorical foci: identity, power, placement, position; by gender, ethnicity, social class, institutional affiliation, religion, ideology, legality, and so on. Instead, I saw the possibility of exploring and theorising complex social realities and human identities along the numerous interlinked arenas any given individual engages in. Arenas that can be conceptualised as the sum of thought and action derived from a dérive, a coherent set of drift linkages and their attendant meanings across societies and among people. For example, imagine after charting waste-bins and illuminating the complex interrelated narratives of The Troubles in London, a researcher returns to the first waste-bin, or to a set location, or to a specific person – and launches other *dérives* based on different criteria: Children in red coats, money flows, ice-cream trucks, a fifty pence coin, statues of saints, drug sales, tech centres, illegal street markets, *ad infinitum*.

In each of these *dérives* 'multiplex' patterns – entangled networks – of thought and action become visible. As with Eric Ottoson's talk, we gain a sense of social universe around a single drift, and by extension around every drift; in his case it was waste bins, political violence and identity. If Ottoson had instead started out following children in red coats he would have uncovered another set of associations and images, likewise with one-pound notes, ice-cream trucks, or a gun. Each one of these would create an arena of interaction that ultimately has an impact on shaping the way people create and experience their social worlds and their own sense of self. In one important sense, both social worlds and individual identities are the sum total composites of all the intersections of people's "braided networks," – or, speaking metaphorically, of all the associations illuminated by drifts as theorised by Ottoson and situationists.

This is a dynamic understanding: the intricate associations one might participate in around any given theme is constantly changing, as are the composite of themes any given person engages in at any given time. These easily number in the hundreds: anthropologist, movie-goer, cell-phone user, vegetarian, person who buys from street markets, dog-owner, investor, person-in-black-coat, cyclist, Spanish-speaker, hoop earring wearer ... and each of these arenas encodes multiplex social and personal knowledge that shapes actions. To show how a seemingly innocuous example 'entangles' into deeper associations, hoop earrings in western and cosmopolitan settings stereotypically convey identity markers that range from assumptions about a more creative and carefree nature to less conservative political and social inclinations.

Not all (or even most) multiplex meanings are evident. Extend this example to people in red coats. In some sense red means something to people. I'm not certain what meaning it has to different people, nor do I think they are certain, but it does mean something. There is some sense of haptic association deeper than the mere color. Something that propels a person to buy a red coat and not a brown one, or vice versa; something that influences a red-coat-wearer to 'feel' a certain way, however subliminal, when meeting another person wearing a red coat, and not when meeting a person in a brow coat. These haptic associations hold across human endeavor, including trafficking.

In a more powerful example, Sydney Mintz shows how following a theme – the commodity of sugar – along a research path that resonates with *dérive* on a global scale can explain the thick inter-linkages of development, inequality, power and its abuses, modernist economics, and the way ideologies are crafted and employed to sustain all the above. Dynamism, the flux of constant change, is thus definitive of social worlds and personal identities.

I can use the word plexus here to try to capture the complex of interrelated associations illuminated by any single dérive, any thematic drift-study such as Ottoson's, but I am not quite satisfied with the word. I am looking for a descriptive term that can conveys the deep anthropology, the inner and outer worlds, that a coherent thematic drift revels.

This way of thinking about multiplexity – multiple plexuses – give it a depth and vibrancy that for me better approximates the emergent world as we live it. My interest in this grew from finding that using a conceptual framework similar to *dérive* with a thematic focus addresses the kinds of multifaceted social realities we encounter in the field and "life-lived" in a more satisfying way than do classical categories of society/culture/person alone. There are hundreds of terms scholars use to refer to the "collectivities of people and practices" that anthropology in particular and the Academy in general study, but we tend to maintain the centuries-old analytical categories of gender and age, class and ethnicity, religion and nationality, association and shared practice. These are critical research foci, and always will be – the key is not to replace them, but to add to our explanatory abilities. Any categorisation, however important it's contributions, will only represent a part of the full compendium of such phenomena as identity and power, or the transformational character of the social universes we find ourselves in today.

For example, we can focus on one individual, take the colleague A.G. sitting next to me here, and map all the plexuses, all the interactions, that define his life at this moment: people who wear corduroy coats; are anthropologists; volunteer with local charities, head academic institutes, eat traditional Austrian noodles, invest in mutual funds, vacation in Michigan, attend specific political rallies, share music with their daughters, and so on. You find, as with everybody, literally hundreds of such 'existents' – and, returning to an earlier theme, I suspect that a number of them tap into what I refer to as publically invisible realities – into what we are not supposed to see. For example, following A.G.'s financial investments might show that his bank is using his money to make unsecured loans, or comingling it with laundered money that brings in added revenues, but will ultimately undermine the health of the bank; or that eating traditional Austrian noodles has been correlated with certain health outcomes, but this research has been buried by pharmaceutical companies in the interests of profits; or that while people traveling to Michigan undergo strict security searches, illegal cargo passes through less-secured searches and is loaded onto the same plane – perhaps illegal pharmaceuticals treating carbohydrate-related ailments yielding unrecorded profits for drug companies that are professionally laundered through international banks.

This discussion of multiplexity comes with two parts. The second concerns the haptic, from the Greek word *haptikós* – to perceive.

Juliana Bruno in architecture has developed an approach to the haptic I find well grounded and innovative. The work I present here is equally indebted to earlier authors like Walter Benjamin who honed theoretical orientations to haptic knowledge through the lens of cinema, Lacan within psychoanalysis, and more recently Gille Deleuze in the context of art and philosophy.

Authors from Bruno to Deleuze and Walter Benjamin develop the deeper implications of *haptikós* – perceiving – and the Greek etymological meaning of "being able to come into contact with." Thus, for these authors the individual phenomenology of perception is imbued with a sense of relationship and interaction, of touch and emotion. Perception 'feels.'

Everybody in Academia today knows the epistemological traditions embracing the optic, the gaze, and the seemingly infinite number of approaches conjoining seeing/ knowing, observation/ objectivity, vision/ insight, sight/ power/ reality across Academia, the professions, and popular thought. Considering the number of studies that deal with optics compared to those using aural or olfactory approaches to collecting data and to theorising knowledge, it becomes obvious that academics commonly privilege seeing as the most advanced form of knowing. The same holds true in widespread society: consider for example western law, where testimonies based on sight are 'seen' to be more objective and reliable and therefore "more true" than those based on other senses – "I saw this man at the crime scene' versus 'I smelled this man at the crime scene.'

For Bruno, then, "knowing" – perception – is relational, and includes sensations, movement, emotion, and affectivity; and for this reason she suggests moving beyond a fixation on optics to haptics.

To me (as to Walter Benjamin), it is meaningless to replace the optic with the haptic: they are ultimately indivisible, and thus equally important. One lacks definition, and indeed existence, without the other. My aim here is to enhance awareness of the haptic in our scholarship in general, and in terms of plexuses and multiplex understandings in particular. I am most interested in Bruno's use of haptic as relationships of perception made meaningful in the way we touch and are touched by our world(s) on all levels. For her, this links the intimate and interior terrain of one's self with the world outside in a way that is profoundly emergent.

2. I want to talk a bit about a topic – trafficking – I have not done that much work on as a way to move beyond abstract discussion and look at multiplex and haptic orientations in hand's-on research. In my research on the extra-legal, I have become fascinated with things like food, pharmaceuticals, technology, and resources: the everyday stuff everyone uses in life, and the stuff that is made 'invisible' in overall discussions of the extra-legal – while things like illegal narcotics, arms, and blood diamonds take the headlines.

Consider: you can make as much if not more money smuggling pharmaceuticals as you can anything else, including illegal narcotics. Virtually everyone in the world gets sick and needs pharmaceuticals at some time in their life. Very few of them will choose to take illegal narcotics. Which of the two commodities do you think will ultimately prove more lucrative? We, and that is to say the general public, are encouraged to "see" one – illegal narcotics, and not the other – smuggled pharmaceuticals. When I say we 'see' one thing and not another, I am referring to generalised social knowledge circulating in societies. For example, of all the references to 'illegal

drugs' in the media, in literature, in scholarly analysis, in policy, in professional reports from police and NGOs, what percentage deal with illegal narcotics (marijuana, cocaine, heroin, street and club mixes, etc.), and what percentage deal with smuggled pharmaceuticals? The vast majority of the focus is clearly on the former, so much so that very little information is available on the latter, even though medicines have a much larger and more critical impact on general society. In addition to creating visibilities and invisibilities, public information on drugs – like all extra-legal commodities – generally carries a strong emotional charge. Though more people can be harmed by illegal and adulterated pharmaceuticals, and have far less control over avoiding them (compared to the much smaller population buying illegal narcotics for pleasure and not to save life) – illegal narcotics elicit the greatest opprobrium, and policy and policing monies.

'We,' as generalised society, are encouraged to have phobias about certain things, like drug dealers, in certain ways. And not about others, like drug dealers. These in/visibilites extend throughout society, politics, and dominion: for example, we 'see' terrorism – in terms of extra-national individuals setting explosives to kill random innocent people; but not terrorism as nationals beating 3,000 children to death every year in the USA, or as serial rapists preying on random innocent people.

By way of illustration: I bet there isn't a person in the room who can tell me anything about the global numbers of extra-legal pharmaceuticals and smuggling: What are the estimates of the size of the illegal pharmaceuticals market? How much money does this generate? Where do they originate, what are the trafficking routes, and who are the target populations? What percentage of these are adulterated, and how? Who is involved? How are the profits laundered? What policies and police actions are in place to arrest this flow? Who has been busted? What is the impact of this on general society, on families, on health? I bet everybody in the room can tell me something in a heartbeat about illegal narcotic sales.

In terms of sheer scholarship, and in terms of protecting society, these differences are nothing short of astounding. For at the bottom line, it is no harder to study and disseminate information on the pharmaceuticals. Except for the fact that the widespread invisibilities – the lack of data, texts, research tools, resources, investigative bodies, policies, police personnel, etc – impede this research.

One answer is to do ethnography – get out in the field and track this. And one effective way is to follow the 'multi-plexuses' – the meaningful thematic *dérives* linking people, practices, products, knowledge, ideology, and belief that define the roiling flux of extra-legal pharmaceuticals in the world. Central in this is following these associations of reflection and practice not merely as something "observed" – but as haptic relationships: Perception that touches, and is touched by, the world within and around us. It is only in this way that the reality, and not the myth, of a phenomenon emerges.

3. I began this discussion of linking haptic theory to field research by saying I was going to give an example I have not worked with much – trafficking. I'm choosing this topic for two reasons. First, I was asked by a colleague here, if I might speak to issues of women, injustice, and violence today. Second, it provides a chance to show how this approach can be useful before a person knows much about a research topic as well as after one has gained a familiarity. People generally have some idea about organ trafficking, people trafficking, baby trafficking: the term trafficking implies actions taken against people's will, and is therefore differentiated from smuggling.

Few inroads have yet been made to solving the problems of trafficking today, even though more people are suffer slavery every year in the 21st century than in the entire slaving era of the of the middle ages and early industrialisation.

One of the problems is that the frameworks available to understand trafficking aren't as dynamic as people's lives. The people who traffic are always changing, the players move in and out of these activities. They encompass many different roles (procurers, transporters, financiers, accountants and money launderers, pimps, enforcers, logistics, etc), and seldom confine themselves to bounded communities, specific criminal organisations, or locales. Traffickers rarely associate primarily along identity groupings (e.g. religion, ethnicity, etc). These identity associations may well be important in other aspects of their lives, but trafficking is a global business based in complex cross-border and cross-cultural networking – conjoining social groupings and bridging divisions is the key to success. To take Ottoson's example: if a Catholic or Protestant sees a waste bin in UK, they might well find this meaningful. But if the same person moves into a trafficking network, those considerations will disappear: Catholic or Protestant, waste bins or bombs give way to entirely different considerations.

What people most focus on depends on context. And this is in continual flux and redefinition. This is one of the core problems in analysis: our epistemic universe tends to be static. Our theoretical foundations are rather like the countries and national boundaries pictured on a globe: fixed in geography and ideology; never overlapping; reproduced without iteration. Trafficking rings are not static associations, frozen in time and place – they undergo continuous reformation: people move away from previous rings, they forge new ones, they reconnect with old ones in new ways.

In one very fundamental way trafficking rings, like all human associations, are absolutely alive. I say alive here as – regardless of how much we are use to speaking of institutions and epistemes as abstracted from ontology – in truth, trafficking is no more and no less than individual people in action. This extends throughout the plexuses of associations: the people who are trafficked are always changing - where they come from, who they are, where they are taken, who is buying them, and for what purposes. And so on, through people in red coats, money flows, political associations, anthropologists.

Change is the constant. Look at actual relationships: take the aforementioned colleague A.G. sitting next to me. You can map this relationship, explain its meanings, delve into its consequences. And in doing this, the relationship is rendered static, immobilised in an historical moment. It is singular. But in the meantime, A.G. can go over and check e-mails, reassess his notions of power, smuggle food to starving war orphans, change offices, become a soccer coach, eat Austrian noodles … but the only relationship mapped was A.G. – Carolyn sitting here today in this talk. This particular situation becomes caught in a freeze frame, and that frame becomes definitive, the only one people 'see' – the only publically visible and theoretically available information, – an analytical moment, suspended.

This 'suspended analytical moment ' is common to research and policy: To tame the complexity of the people, the world, we encounter, conventional public wisdom encourages us to look for set associations; to explain these as if they are enduring and not continuously emergent; to map the relationships; and to seek solutions to problems in these descriptions and maps. In the case of trafficking, routes are mapped, criminal groups and their hierarchies of power identified, procurement practices investigated. This yields the idea that these maps, these actors and their

relationships, hold across space and time. This freeze-frame perspective lends to the approach that "if we arrest this particular person (king-pin, trafficking logistician, etc.) we have a solution"; "if we can block this route we can reduce trafficking;" "if we just get the victims out of the hands of the traffickers they can return to their normal lives." Of course, these approaches have not proved successful. Arrest one person and the network of people involved simply continues in its process of continuous reformation; block one route and the flow of people simply diverts across countless other routes; pull a victim out of the hands of her or his abusers and their history does not disappear like a freeze frame released into a new narrative.

Concepts of multiplexity (multiple braided networks, dynamically entangled associations) and plexuses (themselves multiple intertwining networks of people in thought and action) encourage broadening research sensibilities to include haptic perceptions. The intricate and complex patterns of associations – both conceptual and physical – that define people's lives and identities become more clearly, more coherent, even as they gain complexity. The way these ideas and interactions affect others, and then others still, lends depth of meaning and movement to people's connectivities. Actual patterns of change become visible. An abstracted view (view as optic) is enlivened into ontological understanding. There is touch to theory, it has sense. Meaningful solutions emerge from here.

If we want to understand something like trafficking, one approach is to begin in the same way that Eric Ottesen looked at waste bins: start with one. A researcher can start at a place or with a person – whether it's a perpetrator or a friend of a victim, a STD or a police investigator, a trafficked child or a border crossing, a place where trafficked people are forced to work or the ways traffickers launder money. If one follows the linkages will he or she uncover them all? Never. Will Eric Ottoson ever see every trashcan? No. Will we ever understand the reality of trafficking in its entirety? Impossible. Will Eric fully uncover the ultimate truth of The Troubles? Can any research? No. Will we get a treatment for cancer because researchers have seen and treated every single person with cancer? No. But a pattern emerges.

If we hone theories capable of rendering these patterns dynamic, we are a step further in solving the dilemmas inherent in static epistemological frameworks. If we privilege the optical dimensions of our investigations, and thereby lose haptic perceptions – we lose the significance of why people are doing what they do. We lose the ways in which the realities of experience and the phantasms of belief touch people, ripple across space, reconfigure time, and give depth to theory.

An undergraduate student of mine just turned in an interesting paper, and I found it a creative example of what I am talking about here. This student was not an anthropologist, had not taken a class with me before, and had never heard me talk about the ideas I've been discussing today. She wanted to do an independent study with me about trafficking as she had volunteered the summer before with an NGO concerned with trafficking, and was considering working with them in India upon graduating. Halfway through the semester I discovered her research could hold its own with just about any of the professional studies of trafficking – yet (like most studies) was classical in orientation. She talked about patterns of trafficking and flows of people and ideas, about the more subtle cultures that develop and diverge among police and policy, NGOs, and scholarship in seeking solutions – but there was a distance to it. There was a static "freeze-frame" quality to her work – something mapped on a globe and explained in a text. The optical dimension was well developed, but it lacked haptic vibrancy. I told her that because she was going into the field to work

with people profoundly touched by these realities, I wanted her to gain a sense, to know at least a little, what trafficking lives like, feels like, and not just what it looks like. Honor the people you will be working with by letting their realities touch you in some way. I told her she could get on the internet, use videos, read people's stories. I didn't care how she did it, but I wanted her to 'know' – to perceive in the Greek meaning of *haptikós* – this world in some sense, not just look at it. She scratched her head and left. Granted, it was a hard assignment: in Academia we don't have the means to teach people how to feel things. She never talked to me about how to do this assignment, she just handed me her final thesis at the end of the semester. In reading it, I found out that after our conversation she had gone back to where she was living and begun a deep conversation with a woman she knew and who had been raped by a family member when she was young. The woman was now dealing with the trauma and trying to figure out how to interact with her family. My student helped her through these traumas daily until the semester's end: talking, arranging health care, advocating, defending, caring.

And through the long hours of talking and watching how the larger world reacted to the plight of her friend, my student began looking at the relationships between power and pain, at what constitutes a sense of self, at the things 'we' in general society will look at, or acknowledge, and what won't we look at, and where the responsibility rests in all of this for us. She then took the same sets of observations and applied them to trafficking. She discovered many parallels, many overlays – in terms of individual trauma, social impact, power relations, and questions of responsibility and justice. Her insights help break new and important ground: I suspect in 15 years someone will write a paper showing – with an obviousness no one will question – that the high rates of sexual violation college students suffer in the USA (one out of four undergraduates) share haptic correlates with trafficking in terms of public notions (and with plexuses) of privilege, inequality and economics; of power, trauma and social control.

There are certain sets of haptic associations we don't necessarily have recognised names for; the plexuses that make up our multiplex lives extend well beyond those constituted around age categories, gender associations, belief systems, political parties, national and ethnic designations, work affiliations, impassioned pursuits. People move in myriad variously entwined associations, and pick up a haptic depth of sense and feeling from all, however complicated and at times impossibly contradictory these may be. Hundreds, potentially thousands, of multiplex associations move people in meaningful and definitive ways. They feel the import and impact of some more than others, but all will feel them in extremely complicated and dynamic ways. We 'are' – in the sense that people recognise themselves as self – the compendium of the multiplex realities, the multi-plexuses of haptic engagement, in the constant flux of living.

Let me return for a moment to Alain Badiou: traditional thought in the classical academy since the enlightenment generally accepts that all phenomena, however multiplex, can be followed to its causal or original or instigating point. This point is always singular. This logic teaches that there is some-(one)thing, some-(single)place, some-(unique)dynamic, some-(paramount)reason that ultimately explains whatever it is we are investigating. Find the cause and the solution becomes apparent: if we can find the reason why people buy a trafficked woman, or if we can create a deterrent that trumps this reason, we will be able to stop it.

Our scholarship unfolds in a western epistemological universe that is strongly grounded in the belief that singularity is foundational to all complexity: the universe began with the big bang,

pathogens cause disease, the 2008 economic crash was caused by unsecured loan and investment practices, society is a collection of single individuals, thought produces knowledge.

Badiou takes exception with this, saying that underneath multiplicity is ... multiplicity; the foundation of complexity is complexity. There is no eternal, foundational "one" from whence the world in its complexity arises – ground zero is always sets of relationships, complexes of associations. I think Badiou is right: as I noted earlier, at the core of multiplexity are plexuses. At the core of plexuses are plexus. At the core, plexus is plural: by definition, plexus is multiplex. We live in a world of multi-plexuses – no single point, no one strand of the braid or link of associations, is causal, foundational, original, core. This leads me to the last point.

4. One of the things that have frustrated me is that this 'episteme' of singularity produced the 'facts' that "two things cannot exist in one place at the same time," and "contradictions cannot co-exist simultaneously." My frustration stems from encountering contradictory things existing in one place and time in my field research, and then finding conventional academic wisdom deems this impossible. According to this conventional wisdom, research that finds what is defined as impossible is by definition impossible: the research and not the theoretical assumption is questioned.

Multiplexity circumvents the fetish of singularity. Simultaneity becomes possible. Contradictions can coexist without merging into a dialectic (itself a compromise with singularity). In the research for the book I am writing, I began this foray into simultaneity through the concept of the void – for it provides an excellent test case into the question of two impossible contradictions existing together in the same place and time without any ultimate singularity unifying them. Debates have raged for several thousand years over the existence and nature of the void and its relation to being. Jean Paul Sartre was one of the few people who said "you can not separate being and nothingness," they exist simultaneously without one encompassing the other. Nothingness exists within being, but does not originate in being – nothing comes precisely from nothing. They exist simultaneously, together configuring the possibilities of existence while neither configures the other. By most western logics, it seems perfectly impossible that "something" (being) and "nothing" (non-being) can occur simultaneously in the same ontological moment, not merely as a theoretical point, but as a (non)existential reality. I take Sartre's side in arguing that this is not only possible, it is necessary in 'being' human, in Badiou's meaning of "reality is."

The example of being and void is a fairly stark one to demonstrate the way in which I conceive of simultaneity, even among seemingly impossible contradictions. Let me turn now to talk about simultaneity in the more fluid multifaceted situations of daily life. What I want to develop here is a notion that the plexuses implied in multiplex – the many, many reticulating social networks constituting our internal and external worlds – also operate in simultaneity.

For example, you all are probably familiar with Alfred Schütz's work on multiple realities. A classic example of his is walking into a movie theatre and becoming swept up into the movie, then walking outside the theatre afterwards and experiencing the shift from movie-reality to daily-life-outside-the-theatre reality. Schütz opened the theoretical door some 80 years ago for understanding multiple realities in a dynamic way. However, he saw these different realities as taking place linearly: one gives way to another as circumstances change.

I would like to take this work a step further and say that multiplex realities are far more integrated and co-existent. As Badiou says: there is no single causal factor or point of origin from which we

live our lives. No explanatory singularities. No one-to-one context/reality relationships. Underneath multiplexity is multiplexity.

People operate in extremely complex interrelationships of associations, and while many are very important for our lives, some we never articulate. There is a curious irony here: for example in considering extra-legality, street cops, smugglers, and most everybody working the underground knows the realities of the extra-legal world far more accurately than the policy experts who shape public knowledge and security practice on this. The former understand the intricate networks of fluid connections both theoretically and experientially – as haptic, multiplex, and often simultaneous.

Research along these lines can have a deeper validity: as I mentioned briefly, two months before the September 2008 global economic meltdown I published an article predicting the crises. In exploring the multiplex haptic associations of the extra-legal and their relationships with the legal this was the clear outcome. I'm appalled by the statement "oh it is not possible to fully understand and thus accurately predict economic booms and busts, it is guesswork at best – our analytical frameworks will never be sophisticated enough to be able to do this."

In fact, our analytical frameworks are sophisticated enough. But the overwhelming weight of epistemological convention and traditional public wisdom works to open certain doors and close others in pursuing these topics across research and publishing – in directing our research gaze along certain pathways and creating blind spots along others, in defining what we see and do not see.

I want to point out that when you are looking at something like the extra-legal, and let's take trafficking again, you are not just considering the associations to other traffickers and their victims. A vast range of people, commodities, and services are moving along these trafficking plexuses, and these are moving worldwide. Traffickers may run anything from drugs and arms to computers and counterfeit designer goods; they may ferry mechanics for their vehicles and lawyers to protect them; they launder and invest money; they work with legitimate businesses, buy real estate, and support sports teams. People, whether traffickers or saints, integrate multiplex associations far more than most of the traditional theories suggest.

These classical theories accepting that societies are in some ways fundamentally opaque and can never be accurately understood, are further compromised by old bordered static notions of the state, sovereignty, power, and the extra-legal. Continuing to follow the example of trafficking, consider Eastern Europe.

Few countries experiencing war or political and economic transitions have sufficient tax bases to cover all their perceived needs. Most struggle with insufficient infrastructure, weak currencies, poverty, arrested development, and poor integration into global economies. To deal with this, most exploit some aspects of the extra-legal to gain the monies, resources, and services they need.

Sovereignty requires cash and resources. Money-makers vary from country to country, depending on the resources each has. The Democratic Republic of Congo has natural wealth – from oil and diamonds to timber and fish. Colombia and the golden triangle have drugs, the Caymen Islands has offshore money, Eastern Europe (lacking the above) has girls and women. Countries may formally decry extra-legal practices. Trafficking women and girls may well be illegal. But it's lucrative. A tacit understanding exists that monies made extra-legally as well as legally move into a country's economy, financial institutions, and infrastructural development. The more cash the more development potential, the greater the leader's power base. A massive industry surrounds

trafficking: every person trafficked requires a cast of hundreds. Trafficking avoids detection by using cross-border tactics. Procurers and "employment agencies" find people; transport industries move them; border agents process them; managers feed, clothe, and tend them; people rent and sell real estate, commodities, protection; bankers and accountants manage and launder profits; lawyers provide legal counsel. Customers buy.

In other words, trafficking requires the average workforce within a national economy. These activities can bring in hundreds of millions of dollars yearly for a single country. Consider the fact that forced labour (including sex exploitation) brings in 31 billion a year, according to International Labour Organisation estimates. One hundred and six countries (out of 185 worldwide) have GDPs below this figure.

Sovereignty can be built, in part, on trafficking. These power equations are not about morals, but about global political and financial relationships. When you follow trafficking with a haptic sensibility, you can see not only the dynamics of trafficking itself, but as well how money, people, and resource flows are transformed into political, economical power.

To conclude, then, let me return to the notion that the Academy is collapsing in the 21st century. What if the broad epistemic traditions grounding (and bounding) the Academy in its most general sense are dangerously outdated? So outdated that while it is possible to foresee economic crises, the means are not used; that while it is possible to better ameliorate political violence, injustice, and grinding poverty, it is not done; that while celebrating creativity, power and its pathologies can trump academic freedom.

The solutions begin with challenging our most institutionalised, and sometimes our most cherished, definitions about society, self, power, knowing, research, theory, reality. I am not suggesting that the answers reside in such concepts as multiplexity, *haptikós*, and simultaneity, but that these approaches are examples of many that will likely begin to define 21st century epistemologies better able to speak to emergent realities, to explore what "reality is," to be relevant.