University of Fort Hare

Together in Excellence

*Inaugural Address by
Professor Gary Minkley*

Social Acts and Projections of Change

Programme

Programme Director: Professor de Wet Gideon

15h30 – 15h35
Academic Procession

15h35 – 15h40
Opening Prayer: Professor Reckson Thakhathi

15h40 - 15h45
Welcoming: Vice Chancellor,
                                       Dr Mvuyo Tom

15h45- 15h50
Introduction of Inaugural Professor: Deputy Vice Chancellor
                                       Academic Affairs, Prof Larry Obi

15h50– 16h35
Key note address: Professor Gary Minkley

16h35 -16h40
Induction of Inaugural Professor: Vice Chancellor,
                                       Dr Mvuyo Tom

16h40 – 16h45
Handover of gift   Vice Chancellor,
                                       Dr Mvuyo Tom

16h45 – 16h50
Message from the Dean   Professor de Wet Gideon

16h50 - 16h55
Vote of thanks: Registrar Professor Michael Somniso

16h55– 17h00:
Closure of event: Vice Chancellor,
                                       Dr Mvuyo Tom

Singing of the National Anthem

University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

Lecture title

Social Acts and Projections of Change

Professor Gary Minkley

Profile

Professor Minkley completed a PhD at the University of Cape Town in 1994. His thesis was entitled Border Dialogues: Race, Class and Space in the Industrialisation of East London'. He subsequently worked at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the History Department between 1984 and 2003, where he was both Chairperson and Professor.

In 2004 he was appointed jointly as a Senior Researcher in the newly established Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research (FHISER) on the East London campus of Fort Hare and in the History Department. At beginning of 2007, at the point he was to take up the position of Professor of History on the East London campus, he was asked to apply for the position of the Postgraduate Director post at GMRDC, which was related to the illness of the then Dean, Andy Gilbert. He was appointed Director of Postgraduate Studies from January 2007 - 31 August 2009. Thereafter he was appointed to the NRF/DST SARChI Research Chair in Social Change, located in the GMRDC, starting in September 2009 and which is on-going.

He has published extensively with four books (including in print), three edited journal collections, as well as more than 30 nated articles. His research interests are in South African History and the Dynamics of Social Change and in Public and Visual History, Public Memory and Public Space. In relation to the research areas of Social Change this entails attempting to explore the ways that 'the social' itself no longer conjures a common set of assumptions about society, culture, representation, or the methods by which we write and produce history. Rather it is a category and construct that needs to be explored, engaged and researched. This project seeks to engage these categories and constructs of the Social and Social Change, drawing on innovative archives and methodologies of the performative and social acts around people's everyday lives and constitutions the social, and trace and explore its multiple and often contradictory and ambiguous meanings and trajectories in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, and more widely.

These concerns are located within a number of inter-related projects and themes, and entail close collaborative work with local and international partners and include focus areas on 'Social Acts', on 'Seeing the Sound of Social Change', on 'Re-thinking the Rural', on the 'Politics of the Humanities and Social Change', on 'Developing the Common and community engagement.

This research is directly related to concerns with social change in the pre- and post-1994 period and has relevance not only to concerns with understanding local and global transitions in social life related to those of knowledge economies, but also to significant changes and new ways of being in the world. As such, the relevance of the current research relates to exploring new ways in which both the impersonal processes that construct the subject and the shared experiences of subjects in constituting and re-assembling the social world are re-examined and pasts and presents re-articulated and re-assembled.

Social Acts and Projections of Change

Abstract
This lecture considers the question of the social from within the workings of the SARChI Chair in Social Change. Rather than accepting 'the social' as something that is given, it proposes that we problematize and 're: work' the social as being a hybrid domain, as being spatially diverse and as being enacted. An argument for 'social acts', which are related to, but not the same as actors and actions is proposed as a means to read and understand the social and projections of social change in new ways. While social acts produce actors and need actors to be actualised, social acts themselves produce ruptures in the given, entail a remaining in the scene and they always involve others and the Other in altering projections of the social, of 'other socials', and of projections of change. In practice too, the enactment of the social and the material as integrally associative decentre the object, bringing it into view as one that is also socially enacted, requiring continuing effort, choreography, staging, repetition, but also rupture. To enact, then, is to realize a rupture in the given-ness of the social and to necessarily attend to the unexpected, unpredictable and unknown of the social and its equally enacted and re: worked projections of change.

"With every reference or claim to identify a law-abiding abstraction that explains what-can-be-seen by reference to what cannot, we reinscribe the social imaginary that positions the human capacity to imagine order at the foundation of society itself" (Mary Poovey, 1995)

"How did we pass from a usage of 'the social' understood as the problem of poverty, the problem of others, to its current definition in terms of a general solidarity and the production of a life-style; what enabled it to be made into a showcase of development, whose defence comes before all else, something to be offered to the world at whatever cost?" (Jacques Donzelot, 1979)

I am currently the holder of the SARChI Chair in Social Change at the University. This is a joint NRF/DST funded research chair, which I have held since September 2009. Prior to that I was the Director of Postgraduate Studies at the University. My academic background is in History, and I worked at UWC from 1984-2003. My primary research area was in the Eastern Cape, and in East London in particular. In my PhD thesis I examined the intersecting racial, class and gender dynamics related to the industrialisation of East London in the twentieth century. In that initial research, which is on-going in many ways, I was concerned to understand how a relatively marginal urban space enacted and assembled forms of power and knowledge that produced particular forms of subjectivities. In particular, I was concerned with how the apartheid racial subject was constituted in workplaces, bureaucracies, administrations, unions, and councils; in how alternative subjectivities were made and unmade and with how these were not simply, regularly or even necessarily routinely reducible to material or class interests (which framed the dominant social history approach at the time).

My purpose here is not to rehearse those arguments. The brief outline serves more to make another observation. In trying to think through these questions, both the discipline and the subject of history were opened to critique. Together with colleagues at UWC we developed an alternative approach to doing history. In what we termed an 'engaged public history' we sought to bring into question the assumed hierarchies of historical knowledge. Instead of

presenting history as the domain of professional historians whose work is made available for popularization, our argument is that there are a range of historical genres and producers of history, who cohere and compete with each other in the making of history in a variety of different ways. Our role, as historians, is both to understand these different ways of making history, how they intersect with each other, and to intervene in a manner that does not necessarily give precedence to academic knowledge but allows for the constant questioning and opening up of historical authority. We call these 'knowledge transactions', a concept we constantly evoke in our work.   We became interested in identifying a public history that would take us beyond popularization as a means to expose our own limits and those of the discipline. The question we were consistently worrying at was what Foucault's 'founding subject' of history meant in conditions of postcoloniality. Was it possible to think about a history that was not about the 'discourse of the continuous', a restoration of the subject into a 'reconstituted unity' of a 'totalized' time?[1] Could the sites of public histories, and public scholarship, enable us to gain some ground instead of holding our ground?[2]

It is through the generation of histories by institutions that assert a distinction between past and present that publics are addressed. 'The public' does not exist as already given and constituted audiences to be surveyed and serviced. Publics rather exist *by virtue of being addressed*'. This is not to say that publics are not real. Indeed, as Warner (2002) points out the very idea of a public is based entirely on the presumption of its reality and it is this 'circularity' between 'address' and 'the real' that are the essence of 'the phenomenon': 'A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the discourse that gives it existence'.[3] (Karp, 1992) Thus when one speaks about changing relations between museums and communities, for instance, one is in effect referring to 'how an audience, a passive entity, becomes the community, an active agent. … A community can be one form of … a 'public', a 'commonality' for which someone presumes to speak … This is the only way in which a public can become an actor. The political contests over who has the right to speak for whom are the inevitable result of the emergence of new communities that make claims on museums. This is how publics are created.'[4] These contests over the constitution and reconstitution of communities and the ownership of histories are 'critical social locations where knowledge and perceptions [of the public sphere] are shaped, debated, imposed, challenged and disseminated'.[5]

The concepts of "community" and "publics" evoked here and articulated in this earlier work are the links to the original proposal that set out the guiding argument for the Chair in Social Change. Its starting point was broad and was directed by the Chair process, where the brief of the Chair had been determined by a prior application of which I had not been part. In essence it stated: "understanding how social relations are constituted and change in society remains a complex and relevant topic where there has been a tendency amongst social scientists in Africa to focus on more quantitative approaches to the study of social and economic phenomena, or to become embroiled in textual and discourse analysis, which is often far removed from the realities of everyday lives."

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 13-14.
[2] This is a play on the title of the fourth collection of essays brought out by the University of the Witwatersrand's History Workshop in 1989. See Philip L. Bonner et al (ed), *Holding their Ground.*
[3] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 67.
[4] See Ivan Karp, 'Introduction: Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture', in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine (eds), *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 12-14.
[5] Center for the Study of Public Scholarship, 'Institutions of Public Culture fellowships, 2005-6', poster/brochure (Cape Town and Atlanta: Steering Committee, Institutions of Public Culture, 2005).

This determined the primary focus: the Chair would concentrate on **everyday lives** – and on
(a) the understanding and analysis of changing social (and power) relations at the local level
(b) the ways these relationships were and are constituted and transformed through lived experiences, and
(c) how they intersect with larger social processes and

This meant that the Chair developed a focus on the 'social dynamics within and between communities, groups, genders and generations in a way that would enhance our ability to address broader issues and debates on social transformation (such as those around identity, poverty, gender, globalisation and the impact of neo-liberalisation)'.

Relatedly, the focus of the Research Chair was also framed by the *Social Sciences and Humanities Area* (under the Science and Technology for Social Impact Sub-Program of the DST) and thus by the *Human and Social Dynamics Grand Challenge* of the DST. These grand challenges relate to the understanding that 'human and social dynamics are at the core of nearly every challenge facing South Africa – from climate change to creating a competitive and innovative workforce'. The DST (and the NRF and the NRF Chair) therefore states that the fifth 'grand challenge' in science and technology (in order to develop a national system of innovation in line with the Ten Year Innovation Plan) to drive transformation towards a knowledge-based economy is to 'increase our ability to anticipate the complex consequences of change; to better understand the dynamics of human and social behaviour at all levels; to better understand the cognitive and social structures that create and define change; and to help people and organisations better manage profound or rapid change'. The basic long-term programme is to 'increase basic understanding of human behaviour', and this will need to be achieved by 'teams of cross-disciplinary experts'. This is so for the DST, because 'technologies cannot be developed without giving thought to how they will affect and be received by human beings'.

In particular three aspects were identified as significant:
(i)   how to better understand the dynamics of human and social behaviour and of cognitive and social structures that create and define change. Here, an emphasis was placed on 'better', read in the sense of identifying the limits of existing explanations of social change and seeking alternative approaches
(ii)   the necessity to engage with the questions of the relations between technologies (the material) and the human (the social) and to explore new approaches to these object-subject relations
(iii)   to engage in cross-disciplinary research where the issues of cross-disciplinary knowledge of locating, understanding and explaining social change would be related to these Grand Challenges in an interrogative, questioning and critical way.

As such, though, the research orientation and focus of the Chair also needed to address a further critical dimension: that everyday practices, the 'ways of operating', or doing things in the world and the everyday meanings and understandings of social change can no longer appear as 'merely the obscure background of social activity'.[6] While much critical scholarship over the last decades has vigorously engaged in this, and in the discussion of the relationships between structure and agency (from the Marxist Thompson (1978) - Althusser (1970) debates in History, through to ideas of hegemony and common sense (from Gramsci, 1971), structuration (Giddens, 1984), habitus (Bourdieu, 1980)) and beyond, (as in post-

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[6] See M de Certeau and H Lefebvre, in particular

structuralist debates around power and action; or in actor network theory, via Latour (2005) and others, for example), the approach adopted here was to seek innovative new paths through these debates and approaches in order to address social change itself, as a concept whose meaning cannot be assumed. I will return to a more careful consideration of this concept of the 'social' – below.

Thus, exploring social change entailed exploring social contexts (and hence the importance of enactments of 'community' and of 'engagement') where social institutions and associations are being transformed all over the continent (with new spaces of economy and work, reconfigured political systems for enacting citizenship, recomposed genders, decomposed generational associations, altering forms of 'the family' and so on). Here complex re-makings of older social relations are taking place around changing internal and external dynamics, alongside creative new forms of social life, new forms of mobility and of belonging and changing assemblages of 'the social'. These can be seen in changing urban and rural social relations, equally altering forms of wealth and status, and new forms of global connection and difference. Localities, communities and their 'structures of feeling'[7] (Williams, 1977) around social change are therefore undergoing change that is multi-dimensional, uneven, newly differentiated, and that ranges from intensifications of levels of conflict and crises, to behaviours and opportunities that are innovative, adaptive and unique.

As such, while threading a path through these complex relationships and debates between structure and agency, the project focuses on the practice of everyday life and social change, and thus on the differentiated and often largely invisible modalities of social agency – the 'ways of operating' and doing things 'in the ordinary' in the midst of profound processes of social change. The aim is to understand and explore how various collectives and groups of ordinary people 'navigate the insecurities, opportunities, stresses and choices which confront them', and to identify the structural conditions which shape and are shaped/re-shaped by these processes. These 'dense encounters' will enable us to understand the present as much in its national regional and continental and global context, as in its particular pasts.

As suggested above, this research focus also meant a focus on developing new methodologies around qualitative and action or practice, research, and on fieldwork-based research, but which continues to be based on participation, and on historical and social related archival, documentary and oral research. Clearly this approach relies on developing the skills, sensitivity and sophistication for 'thick description', and for developing oral interviewing techniques and methods that rely on generating dialogic and 'conversational narratives' and that prioritize individual people's own experiences, understandings and meanings. Too often, research work in communities has relied on survey and formal questionnaire methods that are inappropriate for understanding 'the social' and rather serve to define and construct the very social they seek to explain.[8] I will return to this below.

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[7] See Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, 1977

[8] This is how the Social Sciences create the social – and is very similar to the stakes that history as a discipline had in holding onto the ground it had established for itself in the hierarchies of historical knowledge. Here too there is a 'circularity' similar to the one that Warner points to in the idea of a public.

Beyond this, however, the focus of this research which emphasizes everyday practices, also meant that we needed to develop research methodologies that draw on an understanding of four things:

- A distinction between tactics and strategies, following de Certeau (1984), where the processes of investigating tactics involves being able to investigate everyday practices and 'ways of operating' in terms of habitus, drawing on the procedures of everyday creativity and on the formal structures of practice.
- The development of methodologies to engage (1) practice as a kind of performance, (2) 'repertoires of embodied practices' as a system of knowing and transmitting knowledge, and (3) scenarios as meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviours, and potential outcomes.
- To draw on aspects of actor network theory (or method) in order to explore 'the social' in ways that can resonate with the concerns related to 'knowledge economies' and to concerns with science, technology and innovation. In this respect, recent engagements with social theory and methodologies around 'assembling the social' was engaged and critically explored. This entailed a 'social theory of the visible', tracking, detailing, elaborating and exploring the visible and specific intertwinings of the human and nonhuman and analysing the networks and complex entanglements of people and things in the intersecting networks and specific settings of social change.
- Finally, methodologically, we focussed on 'mobilities' as a means to explore 'the diverse mobilities of peoples, objects, images, information and wastes: and of the complex interdependencies between, and social consequences of, these diverse mobilities' [citation?] for understanding new forms of social change. This approach then, also resonated with the concerns of globalisation, and with the ways that this 'joining the world economy' or 'becoming global' run in highly selective and spatially encapsulated forms of global connection combined with widespread disconnection and exclusion, and how these relate to differing processes of social continuity and change.

From the vantage point of these methodological approaches to investigating social agency through tactics, practices and performances, mobilities, networks and assemblages, three components related to the research focus are intensified:

- the location of these investigations of networks at the ordinary and everyday rather than 'from above'. This enables new ways to investigate questions of scale and social change as well
- the emphasis on the ways that local communities and groups (associated and assembled) are always practiced and located in various kinds of extended connections and translations, from the local to the global
- and that the non-human (diseases, viruses, cattle, policy documents, social grants, etc.), and the repertoires, tactics and performances of embodied agencies and their implications for understanding social change are factored into explanations and understandings of agency in potentially new and different ways

As such, through the social, more nuanced ways for understanding the relations among people, knowledge and things – and of how power and organisation must be produced, stabilised and made to cohere through relations among collectives of people and things –can be more effectively focussed on.

I want, following Qadri Ismail (2005), to continue to abide by these arguments, these directions, these possibilities, but also critically reflect on them after a four-year period of research. As such, I want, in the remainder of this lecture, to focus on four areas that I think have developed both new insights, and new ways of engaging the social and social change. Hopefully, in the process, the title of the lecture: Social Acts and Projections of Change will become apparent.

The four areas I want to discuss can be summarily entitled:
  (1) What is 'the social'?
  (2) What are social acts?
  (3) What is the techno-social? Or, are objects social acts?
  (4) Re: working the social and projections of change

I'm after brevity, so let me write in note and somewhat more lecture determined form.

1. What is the social? The Strange Aquarium

Most studies on the social as it comes to bear on the post-apartheid (and studies of social cohesion, community, or national identity can be included here) take the social as an ideal which must either be vigorously defended or triumphantly declared. Examples abound, not least around the current election. I will not rehearse them again here.

But recent debates around the social have highlighted how the social is not natural, is not an objective infrastructure that underwrites culture or economy, is practically never a gradual, continuously changing process that establishes threshold conditions for cultural and political events, nor a relatively autonomous domain composing modern life, even if it appears as such. (Poovey (1995), Donzelot (1979), Deleuze (1979), Joyce (2002), Sewell (2005), Mbembe (1999, 2001, 2008)).

Rather it is framed in and through 'language', assembled in multiple contingencies, is complexly spatialised and is problematically and routinely associated with the desires and spaces of the urban. It is equally apparent that the history of power and of the political is 'intrinsic' to an adequate understanding of the social and associated projections of change. It is therefore no longer possible to read the social as – ideally – collective, rational, secular and sovereign, or to [itself] read it in and through modernity's discourses of order and of seemingly natural and progressive enhancements of change. Rather, 'the social' is a product of western modernity; a constituted, defined and demarcated 'domain' arising out of the discourses of medicine and the body (Foucault (1982, 2003), Donzelot (1979))– that "place where power has historically assumed its most monstrous and most liberating incarnations" (O'Connor, 2000). Poovey (1995) has dramatically demonstrated how the modernist abstraction of the social body was itself generated in the early Victorian state in response to cultural and political anxieties about anatomy and contagion, poverty and disease.

There are, in turn, three aspects arising out of these arguments that I want to briefly consider.

(a) The first is the ways that 'the social' is a historically constituted category, a genealogical figure and one that Deleuze (1979) describes as a 'hybrid domain' that requires explanation and analysis.

Mary Poovey (1995) reminds us that it is possible to use the social as a noun phrase that designates an objectified abstraction because of a historical process – variously constituted by professionalization, the creation of disciplines and the hardening of lines between them, the concept of scientific objectivity – that has made such abstractions seem as real as material entities. This seeming 'view-from-nowhere' organised from a non-participating objectifying observer perspective makes it possible to think about social structures, relationships and processes as entities, as relatively autonomous and as sufficiently systematic to warrant scientific descriptions which are systematic as well.

And yet, at the same time, it is taken for granted, to be real/concrete, assumed to 'be there' and to operate as the natural ordering of modern life. This needs to be both brought into question – this taken-for-grantedness itself analysed and its 'hybrid domain' explored and read in critical ways. Here is one particularly compelling example of what I mean, drawn from the work of Jacques Donzelot (1979) and from Gilles Deleuze's *Introduction*. Essentially Donzelot argues that by studying the relationships between technologies of power and strategies, observing the interplay between these levels of materiality, looking for a guiding thread for understanding the place gradually taken by the social within the strategic configurations that succeeded one another from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present, 'the social' can be drawn and traced.

Donzelot first:

> For 'the social' is not society understood as the set of material and moral conditions that characterize a form of consolidation. It would appear to be rather the set of means which allow social life to escape material pressures and politico-moral uncertainties; the entire range of methods which make the members of a society relatively safe from the effects of economic fluctuations by providing a certain security which give their existence possibilities of relations that are flexible enough, and internal stakes that are convincing enough, to avert the dislocation that divergences of interests and beliefs would entail. And perhaps the most surprising thing is the status that "the social" has thus won in our heads, as something we take for granted. A strange aquarium that has become, in a very brief period of time, the reality principle of our societies, the raison d'etre of development, the proof that it has engendered, notwithstanding wars and pollution, a greater humanization. Thus it is the yardstick by which political discourses will measure or oppose one another, but also the basis on which they will try to start afresh when its realization has effaced the charm of old promises.

And here is Deleuze (1979) on Donzelot:

> The question is not at all whether there is a mystification of the social, nor what ideology it expresses. Donzelot asks how the social takes form, reacting on other sectors, inducing new relationships between the public and the private; the judicial, the administrative, and the customary; wealth and poverty; the city and the country; medicine, the school, and the family; and so on. We are shown how it cuts across and reshapes previously existing or independent divisions, providing a new field for the forces already present. … As the social is a hybrid domain, particularly in regard to relations between the public and the private spheres, Donzelot's method consists in isolating pure little lines of mutation which, acting successively or simultaneously, go to form a contour or surface, a characteristic feature of the new domain. The social is located at the intersection of all these little lines. … Next it was necessary to show how, at each intersection of these causes, mechanisms are assembled to function in such and such a manner, slipping into the interstices of bigger or older apparatuses, which then undergo a mutation as a result. It is here that Donzelot's method is

akin to that of engraving, for he delineates a new scene set within a given frame. Finally, it was necessary to determine the consequences these lines of mutation and new interworkings were to have on the field of forces, the alliances, the hostilities, the resistances, and above all the collective processes [les devenirs collectifs] that change the value of a term or the meaning of a statement.[9]

(b) The second is how particular understandings of the social are constituted out of disciplinary (and instrumental) forms of knowledge and become 'the social'.

(I realise this statement is not a given, but rather itself constitutes a reading, an argument and a position and one that I want us to re-engage and re-consider)

My argument is well illustrated by Law and Urry (2004). They argue that social inquiry and its methods are productive: they (help to) make social realities and social worlds. They do not simply describe the world as it is, but also enact it. For them, if social investigation makes worlds, then it can, in some measure, think about the worlds it wants to help to make. It gets involved in 'ontological politics'. However, they go on to show that the social constructed by the social sciences in terms of its methods – and its politics – are still stuck in, and tend to reproduce, nineteenth-century, nation-state-based and western modernity politics: the modern, rational, secular individual subject as the natural and ideal subject of, and within the social. This social imaginary, following Taylor (2004) rests on secular abstraction, an ideal of collective order and a normative image of human nature.

And in this, the social sciences are relational or interactive. They participate in, reflect upon, and enact the social in a wide range of locations including the state just as publics are enacted or called into being '*by virtue of being addressed*', see above where Warner (2002) points out that "the very idea of a public is based entirely on the presumption of its reality and it is this 'circularity' between 'address' and 'the real' that are the essence of 'the phenomenon'". Compared with sociologists, and even more so cultural studies, economists have often been more effective. Unemployment, production, productivity, terms of trade, balance of trade, GDP – such economic dimensions of the social are integral to state discourse and action. But, if economic categories are performative, then so too are many quantitative and qualitative 'sociological' categories: poverty, multiple livelihoods, public and private, the public sphere, individual and group, order and disorder, custom and tradition and so on. And the boundary between 'the social' and 'the economic' is fuzzy, since to construct the economic is also to construct the social – and (often enough) vice versa.

(c) **And thirdly, the social doesn't exist as a single spatial type. Thought of as located within topologies of space, this allows a sense of articulating other spaces and 'other socials.'**

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[9] But the milieu on which these lines act, investing and transforming it, still needs to be defined. This milieu is the family-not that the family is itself incapable of being a motive force of evolution, but when this is the case, of necessity it is by virtue of a coupling with other vectors, just as the other vectors enter into relations of coupling or intersection in order to act on the family. So Donzelot has not written another book on the crisis of the family: the crisis is simply the negative effect of the emergence of these little lines; or rather, the rise of the social and the crisis of the family are the twofold-political effect of these same elementary causes. Whence the title, The Policing of Families, which expresses above all this whole correlation, escaping the double danger of a sociological analysis that is too global and a moral analysis that is too summary.

The argument/proposition I am making here is that 'the social' performs several kinds of space in which different operations take place, and that this entails what I am calling the articulation also of 'other socials'.

What are some of the spaces that the social performs? One formulation will have to suffice here. In it, one social space is that of regions, in which "objects are clustered together and boundaries drawn around each cluster. Another is the network in which distance is a function of the relations between the elements and difference a matter of relational variety." (Mol and Law, 1994) These are the two topologies with which social theory is familiar. The first is old and secure, while the second, being newer, as Mol and Law (1994) note, is still proud of its abilities to cross boundaries. However, as they argue, there are other kinds of space too. "Sometimes neither boundaries nor relations mark the difference between one place and another. Instead, sometimes boundaries come and go, allow leakage or disappear altogether, while relations transform themselves without fracture. … Entities may be similar and dissimilar at different locations, or in the same location and may transform themselves without creating difference. Sometimes then, social space behaves like a fluid." It enacts a more heterogenous social; other socials.

2. What are social acts?

As suggested above, the formulation of the idea of Social Acts as an innovative theoretical focus of the work of the Chair, seeks to initiate, and thereafter to sustain, expand and further develop the wide-ranging research impulses around 'the social' and social change of the past four years of the Chair's work in new ways.

I (and we) seek to locate the dynamics of social change around this broad conceptualisation of 'acts' and beyond the systematic implementation of routine research methodologies around archive, fieldwork and interviews however innovative those new methodologies around qualitative and action or practice, research, and on fieldwork-based research have been, see above. As such, we draw on approaches that engage with repertoires, with the performative, with assemblages of the social, and with critical discursive and material object approaches to sound and the visual - all of which have emerged as consolidating the core research work of the Chair and out of the collaboration between the SARChI in Social Change at the University of Fort Hare, the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change (ICGC) and the Department of History at the University of Minnesota, and the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape .

In summary form, the argument is that, in locating 'the social' as a problem, rather than as a given, we are concerned to critically examine the ways in which the social itself no longer conjures a common set of assumptions about society, culture, representation, or the methods by which we write and produce a history, or an understanding. Rather, 'the social', and for that matter 'other socials' are constituted, and as importantly, *enacted* categories, with various itineraries, agencies, actions and actors, modes of performativity, and effects of subjectivation that need to be explored, engaged, and researched.

Following Arendt's (1958) conceptualization of 'social acts' as both "governing and beginning", the new research proposes that to socially (en)act is to realize a rupture in the given-ness of the social and to necessarily attend to the unexpected, unpredictable and unknown of the social. It thus argues that social acts may be read against habitus, practice, discipline and routine as the ordering qualities of how humans form and conduct the social. Rather, social

acts set actualizations in motion, but also a being that acts - within shifting forms of responsibility and answerability to changing affiliations, solidarities or hostilities - to 'begin itself' as subject. Social acts, then, articulate social agents both as object and as subject of history.

As Isin (2008) has argued, if we survey the state of social and political thought today, there are a number of concepts that are dominant but the concept of the 'act' is not one of them. He argues that we (scholars) are concerned about 'practices', 'conduct', 'discipline', 'rule', 'governance' and 'action', to describe what agents do and how they behave, but not 'acts'.

For Isin this state of affairs often values "routine over rupture, order over disorder, and habit over deviation. When the second concepts in these pairs come into focus they are often considered as 'distortion' of the first concepts. It appears that to describe, explain or account for those routines by which humans order their social and political relations is more important than their ruptures or breaks. The predominant focus has become the way in which people conduct themselves and routinize certain habits in their bodies, develop certain behaviours, and follow certain rules. It seems that social sciences in general and social and political thought are oriented towards understanding orders and practices and their conditions of possibility." (Isin, 2008)

Isin shows how these concepts are oriented towards how subjects constitute themselves through relatively enduring modes of conduct. He argues that "admittedly, certain issues and controversies emerge from this focus: for example, the problem of the relationship between structure and agency, the problem of the agent, the problem of the universal and the singular, the problem of the individual and society, and problem of continuity versus discontinuity. What is the relationship between structures of action and the patterns of action? How do people conduct themselves? What do disciplines accomplish? Do disciplines produce bodies? If so, how? If it is through routines, how do those routines become practices? How are subjects enabled to act upon the actions of other subjects? Do subjects follow rules? Does following a rule involve routinized habits or is it a rational process? How does governing the actions of others work as conduct of conduct?"

These examples are not exhaustive but fairly representative. I am suggesting then, closely following Isin (2008) Schatzki (2002, 2003) and others, that social and political thought has been dealing with a cluster of problems that we can define as problems of orders and practices: and how they have become objects of social thought (2002, 2003). It is fair to say that it is this dominant focus on orders (and, thinking dialectically, disorders which form the grounds of the emergence of another order) and practices that undergirds modern social and political thought.[10] To insist on investigating acts is to call into question this dominant cluster of problems itself.

This is particularly ironic – and additionally so for my work as the Chair, given its focus on social change - because modern social and political thought was born in the age of

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[10] Following Isin (2008), when we consider other major concepts of social and political thought in the twentieth century such as discipline (Foucault 1975), practice (Bourdieu 1980), society (Giddens 1984), identity (Rajchman 1995), citizenship (Turner 1986), government (Dean 1999), state (Tilly 1992), nation (Anderson 1983), sovereignty (Hinsley 1986), globalization (Hirst and Thompson 1999) and cosmopolitanism (Held 1995) it is almost as if social and political thought is exclusively focused on given orders. Or, rather, it is the givenness of orders that becomes an object of investigation. Accounts are provided of orders either found, diagnosed or anticipated. It seems almost as if social and political thought is fascinated by how an order holds and aims to give an account of it.

revolutions and its main concern can be said to have focused on giving an account of change, even revolutionary change. Marx (1848) and Freud (1964) perhaps represent the beginning and end, respectively, of that concern.

What does an act mean? And what does it mean to consider an 'act' alongside rupture, disorder, and deviation rather than only/simply alongside the dominant preoccupation in social and political thought with routine, order, and habit in the conceptualizations of the social?

Strangely, while both as verb and noun 'act' is one of the most provocative and affective words in the English language, it is also not easily neutralized by being absorbed into or flattened as 'action'. As Ware (1973, p. 403) illustrates, via Isin, at least in the English language, replacement of 'act' by 'action' either is impossible or changes the meaning of everyday phrases. We have expressions such as acts of courage, acts of generosity, acts of terror as well as court actions, social actions, affirmative actions but these will not work by exchanging 'act' with 'action' and vice versa.[11]

Isin (2008) argues then that "[a]n act is neither a practice nor a conduct nor an action, and yet it implies or perhaps makes all those possible. When theorizing acts we are dealing with three types of entities … : acts, actions and actors. When I use the term 'theorizing acts' I have in mind an approach that focuses on an assemblage of acts, actions and actors in a historically and geographically concrete situation, creating a scene or state of affairs. Yet, if investigating acts is impossible without focusing on acts themselves that exist independently

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[11] Isin (2008) elaborates this effectively: "A brief digression into the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) illustrates this. As a verb, to act primarily assembles meanings such as 'to put in motion', 'move to action, 'impel, actuate, influence and animate', 'to bring into action, bring about, produce, perform, or make', or 'to carry out a project, command or purpose'. To act implies simultaneously being directed and oriented towards something. But it also implies to perform an action either as genuine (a play) or counterfeit (simulation). To act embodies actions that can produce both genuine and counterfeit effects. Moreover, it can be coupled with phrases to assemble meanings such as to 'act out', which means to represent unconscious impulses, desires, instincts and drives. Being directed or oriented towards does not only or necessarily involve consciousness but also the unconscious. To 'act up' can imply conducting oneself disgracefully or anti-socially. To act can also mean to act or enact a character, or to impersonate or assume a character by mimicking or mocking. To act may also mean 'to perform on the stage of existence' or 'to do things in the widest sense' or 'to conduct oneself' or to serve or stand in for something or somebody. To act on or upon implies regulating conduct according to certain norms or imperatives. Finally, to act, when used in conjunction with things, can mean to produce effects, fulfil functions or exert influence. As a verb, then, what is remarkably missing from the English usage is to begin, create or disrupt. It is defined by rather neutral verbs such as make, move and animate, but there is no sense in which an act actualizes.

As a noun, an act is equally non-interchangeable with action. Most significantly, an act stands for a deed or a performance but not for a thing done. In the same vein, it also stands for any operation of the mind such as desiring and willing. An act can be opposed to intention or possibility and can mean actuality of a condition, state or quality. An act can refer to the process of doing, action or operation ('act of God') as well as a moment of the process ('in the act'). Equally significantly, an act refers to anything transacted by a political body such as a council or deliberative assembly. It is therefore – as adecree passed by a legislative, judicial or other body – the most fundamental declarative political and legal instrument. By extension, it also refers to the instrument itself as a record of this transaction and declaration. As such, its genealogy shares the same origins as the Acts of the Apostles. Finally, and equally interestingly, an act refers to parts or divisions of a drama in which a definite segment of the whole action is performed. By extension, it also evokes communion, collaboration, affiliation and fraternization by 'getting into the act'. Obviously, both as verb and noun, the word 'act' implies and evokes an impressive range of conduct and outcomes that are related to but irreducible to action.

of actors, it is also important to recognize that acts cannot be actualized without actions." In this Isin follows Reinach (1983): "It was he who argued that acts should be distinguished from action and that they should be accorded ontological existence that is prior to both actors and actions. He interpreted the essence of an act as an expression of the need to be heard. He investigated various acts such as willing, promising, commanding, requesting and contemplating, and concluded that for an act to be a social act it must enact (via linguistic or non-linguistic means) a need felt by one party to be heard by another (p. 19). As he put it, '[t]he turning to another subject and the need of being heard is absolutely essential for every social act' (p. 20)." Put differently, the material, physical, spatial and discursive/linguistic of language - is the nature of the act, its "transcendent qualities", its virtuality located in the simultaneous suspension of action (the wait/need for an actor to turn it into action) and its presumed necessity.

As Isin (2008) proposes, if there is one conclusion that one can draw it is that acts are a class of phenomena that indicate transcendent qualities of an action, whereas an action indicates a deed, a performance, something that is done. He says "[t]o begin theorizing acts there does not need to be an action at all. We can investigate, for example, 'acts of forgiveness' and consider under what conditions certain actors [and actions] may come into being by becoming implicated in acts that we can identify as 'acts of forgiveness'. Thus, it can be said that acts have a virtual existence that may be actualized under certain conditions. They are actualized, that is, made actual, by action and by actors or, at minimum, two actors. He draws on Derrida and states "[w]e can argue, as Derrida does (2001), that for an act of forgiveness to be an act of forgiveness it needs to be unconditional, and that there can be no conditional act of forgiveness. To be able to develop this argument we don't need to make reference to actions that actualize an act of forgiveness. By contrast, investigating actions would always involve the assemblage of action, actors and acts in a concrete scene. An act, then, should not be reduced to a deed or an action."

The essence of an act, following Isin then, as distinct from conduct, practice, behaviour, action and habit, is that **an act is a rupture in the given**. He says further "[t]his is very close to what Ware (1973) had in mind when he considered that acts must be accomplishments."

Again, significantly drawing on Isin (2008), Arendt, like Lacan, defines the act as a fundamental human capacity. He says: "Arendt often argues that being political means the capacity to act (Arendt 1969, p. 179). But if to act is no mere behaviour, what is its essence? She ascribes particular importance to the ancient Greek conception of act, which means both governing and beginning (Arendt 1958, p. 177). To act means to set something in motion, to begin not just something new but oneself as the being that acts to begin itself (p. 177). Since we are beings endowed with the capacity to act (or, as Sartre would say, since 'to be is to act'), and because to act is to realize a rupture in the given, 'to act' always means to enact the unexpected, unpredictable and the unknown (Sartre 1957, p. 613). As Arendt puts it rather evocatively, '[T]he human heart is the only thing in the world that will take upon itself the burden that the divine gift of action, of being a beginning and therefore being able to make a beginning, has placed upon us' (Arendt 2005, p. 322)." (isin 2008)

To act, then, is neither arriving at a scene nor fleeing from it, but actually engaging in its creation. With that creative act the actor also creates herself/himself as the agent responsible for the scene created. To maintain a distinction between acts and action and acts and habitus requires isolating acts as those entities that create a scene by involving actors who remain at the scene. Acts are ruptures or beginnings but not impulsive, fleeting

reactions to a scene. By theorizing acts, or attempting to constitute acts as an object of analysis, we must focus not only on rupture and repetition (rather than primarily order), but also on a rupture that enables the actor (that the act creates) to remain at the scene rather than fleeing it.

If an act is understood in play with habitus, practice, conduct, discipline and routine as ordered and ordering qualities of how humans conduct themselves, we can then perhaps understand why the question of acts would remain minor and fragmented within social and political thought and the social sciences. But also why it becomes a central category to examine and explain change.

In summary: (1) Acts and action are distinct and separate (but related) classes of phenomena. While acts have a virtual existence, action is always actual. (2) Acts rupture or break the given orders, practices and habitus. Creative ruptures and breaks take different forms that are irreducible. They can, for example, take forms of resistance or subservience. What actualizes an act is not determinable in advance. (3) Acts produce actors and actors do not produce acts; actors actualize acts and themselves through action. (4) Actualization of acts provokes both responsibility and answerability. Acts always concern others and the Other. The tension between responsibility and answerability produces acts as ruptures in the given. (5) Answerability and responsibility are distinct and separate (but related) classes of phenomena. While responsibility invokes the given, immediate and calculable, answerability orients acts towards the Other. (6) Ethics and the ethical, politics and the political are distinct and irreducible (but related) aspects of acts that one must investigate separately while keeping them together.

Let me try and illustrate this a little more. As Isin (2008) notes, "through orientations (intentions, motives, purposes), strategies (reasons, manoeuvres, programmes) and technologies (tactics, techniques, methods) as forms of being social, beings enact solidaristic, agonistic and alienating modes of being with each other." He argues these forms and modes constitute ways of being social in the sense that being implicated in them is not necessarily calculable and rational but may also be unintentional or affective. It is in these ways that we become social: that is to say, we enact ourselves. For this reason, it is impossible to investigate 'the social' – without investigating the specific constellation of orientations, strategies and technologies that are available for enacting solidaristic, agonistic or alienating modes of being with each other.

So, for example, we can think of Solidaristic acts as generous, magnanimous, beneficent, hospitable, accommodating, understanding, loving; Agonistic acts as competitive, resistant, combative, adverse; Alienating acts as vengeful, revengeful, malevolent, malicious, hostile, hateful.

The question of acts emerges from this analysis precisely because it raises the question as to what accounts for subjects refusing, resisting or subverting the orientations, strategies and technologies in which they find themselves implicated, and the solidaristic, agonistic and alienating relationships in which they are caught. While we are implicated or caught in these forms and modes, they guide but do not determine our enactments, or the enactment of the self in relation to others and to the orientations, strategies and technologies in which they find themselves implicated, and the solidaristic, agonistic and alienating relationships in which they are caught. It is important to investigate these forms and modes of being social, and acts enable us to investigate the transformation of these ways forms and modes: how

do subjects become actors by finding ways into or out of them? If we always find our ways into forms and modes of being social, we also find ways out of them.

3. The Techno-social: the Material and the Social/Are Objects Social Acts?

An opening via John Law and Annemarie Mol (1995). They ask: "What is materiality? What is sociality?" They point out: "Perhaps these are two different questions. Perhaps materiality is a matter of solid matter. And sociality has to do with interactive practices. Perhaps, then, the social departs from matter. Perhaps it "departs" from it in two different senses: it both rests upon it; and it goes beyond it. To say this would be to hold on to materialism. And to idealism. Together. It would be to hold on to a traffic between the two. An interchange. Perhaps. But perhaps not."

They continue: "Perhaps materiality and sociality produce themselves together. Perhaps association is not just a matter for social beings, but also one to do with materials. Perhaps, then, when we look at the social, we are also looking at the production of materiality. And when we look at materials, we are witnessing the production of the social. That, at any rate, is a possibility." (Law and Mol, 1995) Chris Otter (2008) has recently called an approach along these lines the 'techno-social'.

Law and Mol (1995) productively explore three theory-metaphors for sociality-materiality. The first is semiotic. "Our semiotics suggests that sociology and materiology go together; and that materials are relational effects. It also suggests that social stability is linked to material distinction. Humans deal in both social and technical relations; they produce (and simultaneously shape) scientific knowledge, economies, industrial structures, and technologies. They are, as the jargon puts it, heterogeneous engineers or engineer-sociologists."

The second is that of strategy. Strategy, they argue, is also a matter of material distinction: recursive and reflexive material distinction. "Strategy then, both performs distinction and derives from it. But instead of helping us to understand social stability, strategy is about social change [and about enactment]; about material inflation and the social shifts with which it is linked. The dividing line between people and machines is negotiable. Sometimes it is difficult to draw a line at all. So that what we see is heterogeneous." (Law and Mol, 1995) Think of that heterogeneity. As they outline people have dental fillings, spectacles, drugs, heart pacemakers, condoms, alarm clocks, dresses, telephones, shopping bags, money, books, identity cards, bus passes and ball-point pens. And machines have drivers, pilots, users, service-people, designers, victims, onlookers, lookouts, cleaners, bricoleurs, adapters, admirers and abusers.

The third theory-metaphor they offer is that of the patchwork. They argue it "depends on a sensitivity to difference, here and now. Or rather, it depends on a sensitivity to the possibility that social and material relations don't add up. Or hang together as a whole. Semioticially, or strategically. Which means that they are like a patchwork." (Law and Mol 1995) They conclude stating that all entities are local. And that what we thought were stabilities are … unstable. What we thought had direction … shakes and quivers.

As Mol (2002) has relatedly argued, in a variety of sites in the nineties the idea that objects might not just gradually acquire an identity that they then hold on to has been pushed aside, or complemented, by this new idea. That maintaining the identity of objects requires a

continuing effort. That over time they may change. As she says "If I claim that this is in the literature, why then not relate to Charis Cussins here? She makes the objects dance, and her title alone is telling enough for what I try to convey: that there is an ongoing 'ontological choreography' (Cussins 1996)." And if that object is 'the social' it's maintenance requires continuing effort, enactment, choreography, staging …

Put differently, following Mol (2002), this may be thought of as one of the products, symptoms, or elements of the process of **decentering the object** (as John Law calls it in Law (2002)). She argues this does not simply grant objects a contested and accidental history (that they acquired a while ago, with the notion of, and the stories about their construction) but gives them a complex present, too, a present in which their identities are fragile and may differ between sites. It does so by deploying and describing the various performances — or enactments — of the objects' identities on stage. Thus, "the remarkable shift has been made: the dividing line between human subjects and natural objects has been breached — but not in a way such that physics can take over the world, or that genetics is allowed to explain us all. This is a move that is the other way around: like (human) subjects, (natural) objects are framed as parts of events that occur and plays that are staged. If an object is real this is because it is part of a practice. It is a reality enacted." (Mol, 2002)

In practice, objects are socially enacted: they too are social acts.

4. Re: working the social and projections of change

A final argument. The research work of the Chair – its orientation – entails an attempt to move beyond an approach to (and the associated explanations that essentially understand and assume) social change as a necessarily progressive, rational and collective that emerges out of gradual, continuously changing processes that establish objective threshold conditions for economic and political order and as a normative measure of evolving human nature.

And projections of change are further delineated through mobilising this term **re: working**, derived from John Mowitt. This adds a further dimension to engaging projections of change in these ways. Mowitt argues that re: working "implicates the labor of our reflection about [the social and social change] in the effort to recast its purpose." This requires us to think about the very terms with which we approach the 'question' of the social and social change, asks what work the concept of 'social change' does, and the work that it has done, what might be useful about it, and how the labour of our reflection on the social may be implicated "in the effort to recast its purpose," or may in fact return us to the "political resonance of the term ('re: working')" but also to that of the term "social change," used now, re-invoked now (because it clearly has been figured before) as projections in the contexts of the postcolonial, postapartheid, neoliberal, globalized moment.

Rather, through the imaginative use of the idea of 'social acts' and related to a range of both systematic conventional research methodologies placed alongside those of enacting the social in performance, in contingent assemblages and in relation to the visual, to sound and to everyday practices and repertoires amongst others, the social and social change emerge as problems, rather than as givens: **they emerge as projections**. This has major implications for considering, explaining and understanding social change.

Drawing on the work of Achille Mbembe, David Scott, Tim Mitchell, John Mowitt (for example), it has become necessary to consider the social and social change as being both uncertain but also compositional and experimental and made within shifting oppositions

(between the material world and its representations, for example).[12] Social change is projected then – or more systematically enacted - in social practices. Following their leads, we focus in on the changing worlds of labour, of work, of living, of moving, of knowing, of materialities, interiorities and of 'being human' and their projections of change. Key spaces and sites of investigation include these everyday institutional and more contingent places, but also seek to look at the **in-between** and the ruptures as a means to generate new ways of reading shifting social horizons of the social and social change.

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[12] This would also include Paul Landau's groundbreaking study of the 'birth of the political' and the social (and political) practices surrounding its composition and re-composition and Isabel Hofmeyr's (and colleagues) equally significant work on reading the transnational and of the relationships between materialities, texts, knowledges and the constitutions of the social across time and space.

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