

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

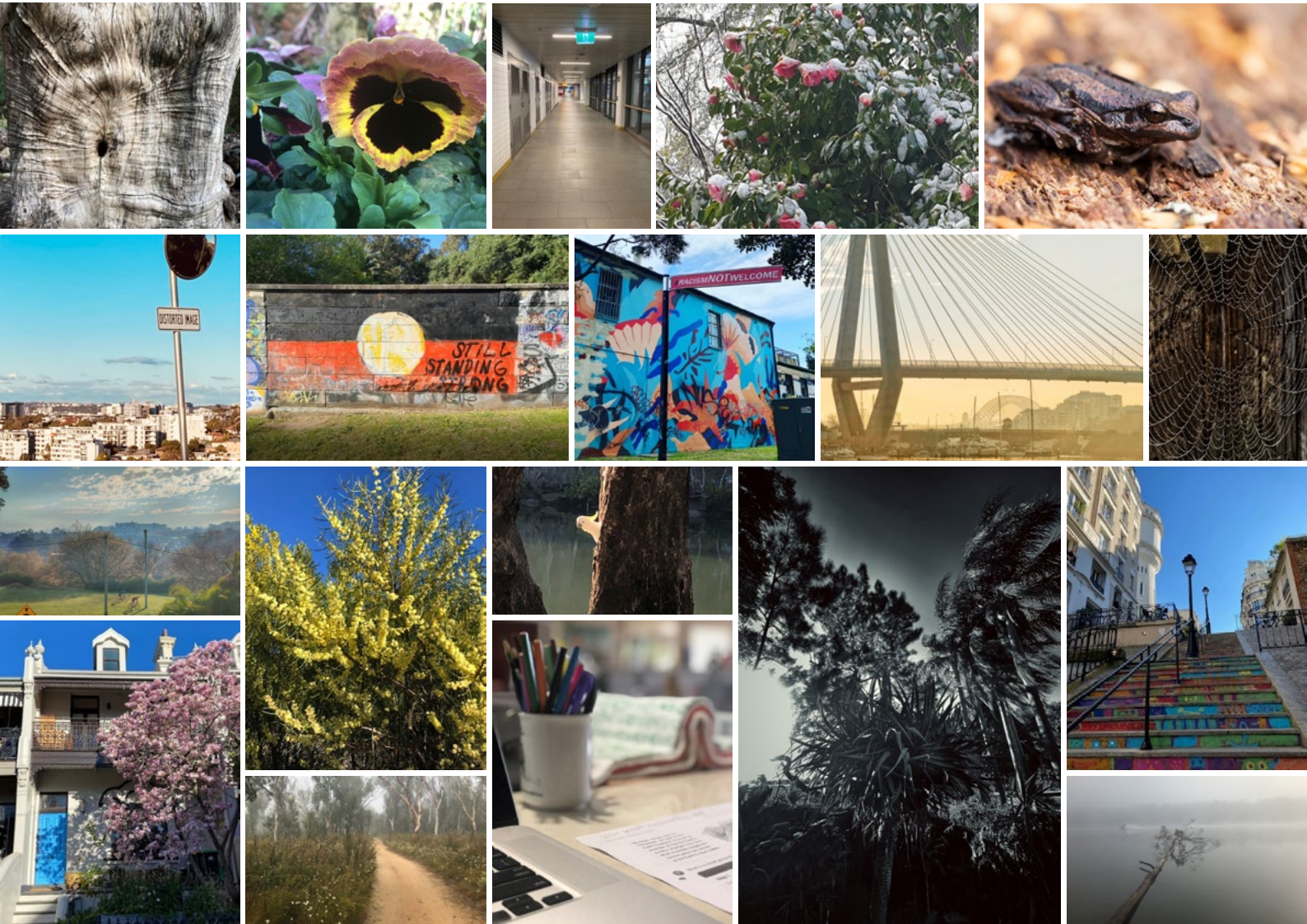


Institute for Culture
and Society

2020-21

Institute for Culture and Society

ANNUAL REVIEW



Compiled and edited by: Sally Byrnes, Heather Horst, Liam Magee

Contributors: Sally Byrnes, Alexandra Coleman, Philippa Collin, Edgar Gómez Cruz, Justin Gaudry, Ben Hanckel, Stephen Healy, Zoe Horn, Heather Horst, Liam Magee, Tadgh McMahon (SSI), Tom Riley (batyr) Ned Rossiter, Juan Francisco Salazar, Malini Sur

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Cover image: Provided by ICS staff during 2021 lockdown, compiled and edited by Katelyn Paech.



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Wolli Creek and the Cooks River at
dawn by Juan Francisco Salazar

INTRODUCTION FROM THE ICS DIRECTOR

2021 marks the second year of the global pandemic and the accompanying disruptions to what we once knew as patterns of research and scholarship. Many metaphors describe the experience and emotions of enduring the extended pandemic in 2021: metaphors of a marathon (not a sprint); of a fight or war fought by masks and vaccinations; or of a roller coaster ride full of ups and downs. In the spirit of our new partnership with the Biennale of Sydney we can equally imagine the year through the metaphor of water: flowing like a river, complete with all its tributaries, rapids, waterfalls, dams and undertows.

The year started with a steady stream of activity, beginning with our planning day in February and subsequent seminar series carried out through online and hybrid formats. As we moved into the spring, the pace picked up speed and we were able to gather in person, following COVID-safe protocols, for a series of events on campus and some local fieldwork in Sydney, Melbourne and across the state. One of the highlights involved the graduation celebration of eight PhD students, their families and supervisors over afternoon tea, curated thoughtfully by HDR Coordinator Tulika Dubey and HDR Director Associate Professor Denis Byrne. In addition, the Culture/Power Symposium honouring the work of Emeritus Professor Tony Bennett (and friends) was a landmark event by any measure. Honouring all the work he has engaged with and inspired at the ICS, the event featured ICS colleagues including Professor Greg Noble, Distinguished Professor Ien Ang, Dr. Ben Dibley and Dr. Michelle Kelly, and we also welcomed zoom and interstate visits from Professor Meaghan Morris, Emeritus Professor Graeme Turner, Dr. Kylie Message and so many others. It also involved



Professor Heather Horst

a classic farewell from our favourite poet Emeritus Professor David Rowe.

By the end of June, this continued flow of events was again arrested, with ICS members living in greater Sydney and Melbourne

entering lockdown once more. As the Delta variant spread throughout the country, the New South Wales government introduced curfews and lockdowns that were more strictly enforced by police in the Western Sydney region. Residents of the region were

also on the frontlines of the national border closures - the topic of our migration and border closure [event](#), led by Associate Professor Anna Cristina Pertierra, Associate Professor Shanthi Roberston and Dr. Sukhmani Khorana. With one of the strictest border closures around the world, members of our community who were not Australian citizens or Permanent Residents were unable to leave the country to attend funerals and care for families overseas, for fear of being unable to return. In addition, and as Professor Ned Rossiter, Associate Professor Liam Magee and I discuss in our *Pandemic Futures* piece in this Review, working from home and undertaking homeschool also became a seemingly endless new reality. For many staff lockdowns also meant missing the births, holidays and other meaningful activities between the months of July and November, until restrictions on movement finally eased and vaccination numbers across the state increased.

When physical connection was no longer possible for ICS members, we took advantage of technology to do our own collective care work. Deputy Director Professor Katherine Gibson initiated a call for 'lockdown' snaps where ICS academic and professional staff share pictures of mundane life in lockdown. ICS members will recognise many of these photos throughout the pages of the ICS Annual Review. In addition, with eight of our international HDR students stranded overseas in India, Indonesia, China, the Philippines and Canada, and with local candidates stuck at home, Katherine and Associate Professor Denis Byrne, led weekly 'Wednesday Writing Lockdown' sessions over zoom. Framed as a two-hour 'shut up and write' session, our HDR candidates worked on thesis chapters and shared the joys and struggles of writing. Finally, our Engagement Directors Associate Professor Liam Magee and Dr. Malini Sur recruited our resident DJ, Professor Juan Francisco Salazar to host a radio show, *ICS Radio: Cultural Tonic*, which ran on Monday evenings from 4:30pm between August and November. Broadcasted in our high tech zoom home studios (with all of the audio quality such a setup might entail) with the support of Elise Blight, ICS Radio invited Institute staff to share five songs and stories about their lives. As DJ Salazar's assistant I got to personally enjoy the privilege of getting to know more about many of our staff. Our [ICS Radio Playlist](#) serves as a souvenir of this very particular moment in ICS history.

Amidst all of this disruption, our work continued. On the research grant front, we were delighted that Distinguished Professor Ien Ang, Professor Deborah Stevenson, Dr. Malini Sur and Dr. Zelmari Cantillon were awarded an ARC Linkage in partnership with the Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences for the grant 'The Collaborative Museum: Embedding Cultural Infrastructure in the City'. In addition, Associate Professor Liam

Magee and colleagues at the MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development, in partnership with the Australian Music Centre and Earshift Music, were awarded an ARC Linkage for the project 'To map and enhance Australian musical improvisation as a creative industry'. We also developed two new projects with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. The first, 'Building the evidence base on the impacts of mobile financial services for women and men in farming households in Laos and Cambodia', is a five-year grant that involves Institute Associate Dr. Erin Taylor, Professor Heather Horst, Professor Katherine Gibson, Dr. Isaac Lyne and colleagues in Adelaide, Cambodia and Laos over the next five years. The second project 'Strengthening agricultural resilience in Western Province: Mapping place-based strengths and assets' is led by Professor Katherine Gibson with support from ICS alumnus Dr. Pryor Placino. We also had an impressive number of industry supported grants such as 'Digital inclusion for Online Learning' (Professor Amanda Third, Associate Professor Associate Professor Liam Magee, Professor Karen Soldatic, Lilly Moody and PhD Candidate Linda Marsden with funding by NBN Co.) as well as funding from the Blacktown City Council for the 'Child-friendly Communities Living Lab' project with a Young & Resilient Research Centre team (Professor Amanda Third, Dr. Girish Lala, Associate Professor Philippa Collin and Georgina Theakstone). It is wonderful to be able to continue our research with so much engagement from partners across different sectors.

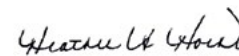
During what was an irregular ebb and flow to our academic routines, ICS members nevertheless managed to accomplish extraordinary things. Professor Katherine Gibson joined Global Professorial Fellow Jamie Peck as a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. Professor Deborah Stevenson was recognised as Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia. In addition, Dr. Waldo Fabian, Associate Professor Emma Power, Associate Professor Neil Perry, Professor Denis Byrne, Professor Alana Lentin and Professor Karen Soldatic were recognized in the December promotions round. A series of amazing scholars joined us in 2021 for grant appointments, including Dr. Michelle Fitts, Dr. Bronwyn Bate, Dr. Tsvetelina Hristova, Dr. Christopher Lean, Dr. Isaac Lyne, Dr. Emma Mitchell and Dr. Adam Sargent. We also were joined by a talented team of staff on long-term projects including Maia Giordano, Dr. Abhi Kashyap, Dr. Girish Lala, Dr. Wei Lui, Dr. Jasbeer Mamalipurath, Betty Nguyen, Dr. Kim Spurway and Georgina Theakstone. This is all alongside the award of nine newly minted PhDs including Dr. Ilia Antenucci, Dr. Alex Coleman, Dr. Matt Dalziel, Dr. Tsvetelina Hristova, Dr. Jasbeer Musthafa Mamalipurath, Dr. Mauricio Novoa Munoz, Dr. Pryor Placino, Dr. Sajal Roy and Dr. Ozgur Sahin. Other students were approved to graduate or

submitted their PhDs - amazing achievements at any point in time, but particularly in the midst of a pandemic.

The series of essays, reports and visualisations in the 2021 Annual Review highlights different landing points on this year's peristaltic journey of research at the Institute. It begins with a profile of two of our recently completed HDR students, providing a sense of their experience coming through the Institute. We then turn to an interview with one of our esteemed alumni working outside of academia in an area of cultural infrastructures. Our interview with Institute Fellows Dr. Stephen Healy and Dr. Malini Sur chronicles the different experiences of researchers transitioning over the rocky creek beds of early to mid-careers. Alongside a discussion of the impact of the pandemic on the tenor of our research across our new research programs, we also highlight a few of our partnerships and the revamped Engagement Platforms which set the stage for new research initiatives regionally and nationally.

Whilst I write this, we are at the beginning of loosening restrictions on movement across Australia, and we are starting to hear about the spread of the Omicron variant locally and globally. Rather than conquering or overcoming COVID-19, we continue to be cautiously optimistic, committed to working collaboratively and collectively within the Institute, across WSU and alongside our research partners, while we learn to navigate the new contours delineated by the pandemic.

Heather A. Horst
Director





2021 HIGHLIGHTS



**31 Institute-based
members**
**31 School-based
members**



**\$3,003,385
income**



**150
publications**



13 books



11 reports

**All figures are unaudited figures up to 1st November 2021*

STARTING THE HDR JOURNEY WITH THE ICS



Photo by deanmarston432

Much like moving to another country or buying a house, embarking on a HDR journey is a significant life decision. While it seems like a long and winding road, different paths could lead you to your destination. We spoke to our PhD candidate Zoe Horn and Justin Gaudry who recently submitted for his MRes. They shared their journey and research projects, and revealed what brought them to ICS.

Originally from Canada, Zoe is a researcher at heart, and she is no stranger to academia. She holds a MSc in International Relations, after which she received a Bachelor of Architecture. Previously, Zoe worked as a researcher for a Harvard-based research network called Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO). At WIEGO, she researched political economy, but her interest in architecture came about while observing the works of the architects and urban planners she was working with.

Unlike Zoe, Justin wasn't working in research prior to his arrival at ICS. He graduated from university with a major in philosophy and worked in various administration and auditing roles in the public service for 25 years. 'Even

though it was a long break, I never lost my passion for the field and kept engaged in regular reading' he says. After considering a postgraduate degree on and off over the years, he decided to come to ICS to do his MRes part-time. After getting a taste of higher degree research, he subsequently decided to leave work and study full-time to pursue his real passion.

Justin recently submitted his research project on Panpsychism and Social Theory. He recalls experiencing trepidation initially due to not having strong familiarity with social theory, which became an essential part of his research. However, the MRes program's intensive coursework alongside seminars and workshops offered by ICS helped him develop

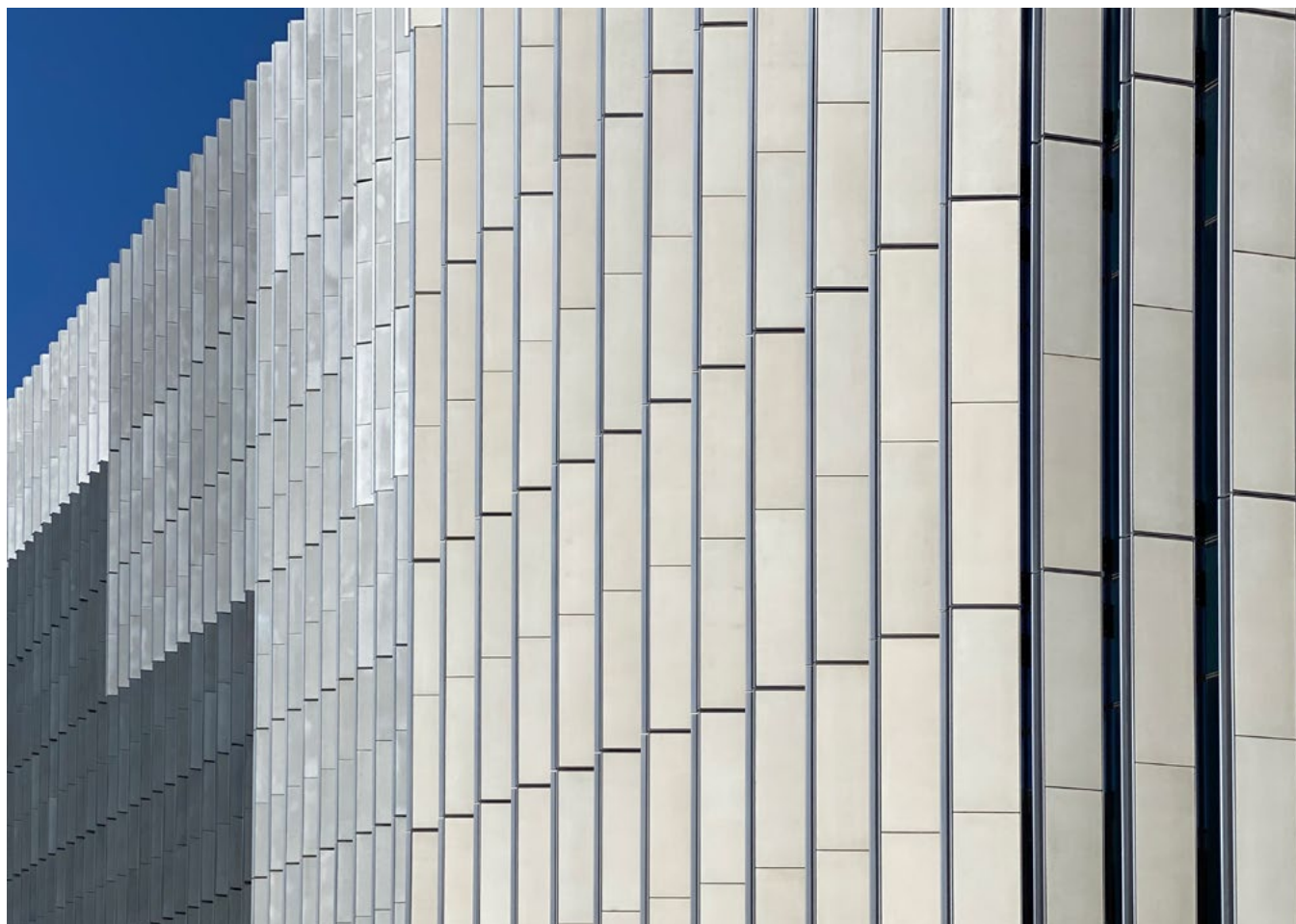


Photo by Edgar Gómez Cruz

a sound knowledge of theory relevant to his research and build on his research skills. Justin says that the coursework modules and Institute's interdisciplinary approach to teaching and research attracted him to ICS. 'I didn't want to be locked into a specific discipline/faculty to do my masters in because my research interest was cross-disciplinary. ICS has people from all kinds of fields with different approaches, but there is also coherence.'

Zoe arrived at ICS five months ago, after completing her Master of Architecture at UTS. Her research looks at the formats and architectures of automation and she is interested in how machine learning shapes culture and geopolitics. Her research proposal was accepted as part of a broader ICS project titled 'The Geopolitics of Automation', funded by the Australian Research Council. She describes her research project as a 'strange disciplinary marriage with a logical thread,' which looks at architecture, automation, and political economy. 'Since arriving at ICS, these ideas have evolved as I've engaged with people on the project who come from different backgrounds and have different interests. I think that's a reflection of a healthy and productive research environment,' Zoe reveals.

'The wonderful thing about ICS is that even though I've come in through this ARC project, my supervisors understood the importance

of a PhD finding work and research they are interested in rather than being guided explicitly by the terms of the larger project. As a result, I have been given a lot of space to develop my interests, so I still have some independence,' she explains.

Justin's MRes project addressed the issue of how different social theorists interpret the relation between the human, the non-human, mind, and matter in the context of environmental problems. He looked at the issue through three specific theories: vital materialism, historical materialism, and panpsychism.

Justin had been interested in the topic for over a decade and had done a lot of background reading before enrolling in the course. Consequently, he started MRes with a myriad of ideas for his research paper. He is grateful that his supervisor Stephen Healy channelled him in the right direction by helping him to narrow down his research topic while still giving Justin the chance to pursue the ideas he was passionate about. He describes his experience as 'having a lot of guidance but not an overbearing one.'

As many other HDR students did over the last year and a half, Zoe found starting research during the pandemic to be a very limiting experience. 'When you are bumping into people in the halls, you often have these chance encounters with other researchers that

might change the course of your research. That obviously hasn't been the case for students during lockdown,' Zoe says and adds: 'But every time I speak with my supervisors, I come away with a totally new understanding of what I am doing.'

Initially, Justin felt like he wasn't a 'typical ICS student' because his work was theory-based and didn't require any fieldwork. Now, he counts himself lucky because the pandemic hasn't impacted the trajectory of Justin's research. 'I had my computer, books, and access to the library, and I was able to tune into the seminars from home,' Justin says.

Looking ahead, Justin is considering applying for a PhD to dive deeper into some of the ideas from his Master's research, and Zoe is looking forward to starting her fieldwork.

MAPPING ALUMNUS PATHWAYS BEYOND THE ICS

What is it like to pursue a career outside academia once you finish your PhD? How do you build on the research skills gained during your degree? What do you have to do to cross the bridge from academia to industry?

For answers, we interviewed our HDR graduate, Dr. Alex Coleman, about her life after the PhD and the challenges and benefits of transitioning into full-time work.

Alex completed her PhD in 2020 at the Institute for Culture and Society and currently works as a full-time researcher for City Strategy, Penrith City Council's newly formed team which develops policy and strategy. She describes Penrith as an area going through a rapid transformation fuelled by the construction of the airport, aerotropolis and Sydney Metro, which keeps her team very busy.

'There is an airport being built in the area. Besides that, we plan city-shaping strategies to enhance residents' quality of life, including planning for better housing, roads and more green spaces. So, there is always something to do,' she says.

As someone who has lived in Penrith most of her life, Alex knows the Penrith District and its residents well. At 23, she kickstarted her postgraduate journey by going straight into a PhD at the ICS after graduating from Western Sydney University. Her PhD research examined the experiences of working-class university students and graduates from the area, with a specific focus on Cranebrook.

While Alex is passionate about research and teaching, she says that the precarious nature of employment in academia was one of the main reasons for her eventual move into her Council role. 'One of the first conference presentations I attended in my PhD was by an academic who talked about the lack of job opportunities for PhD students in academia,' she says.

After submitting her thesis, Alex had a number of roles in academia, including a fellowship at the Whitlam Institute. As the E.G. Whitlam Research Fellow for 2020 she

was supported to publish her thesis as a monograph with Bloomsbury, write an article for *The Conversation*, and author an essay on Whitlam and higher education which was then picked up by ABC Radio Sydney. She also worked casually as a Research Fellow at Deakin University and as a Sessional Academic Tutor at Western Sydney University.

At the end of 2020, Alex was no longer interested in juggling casual contracts and was looking for a change. Alex took an open-minded approach to the job search. She admits she did not have a particularly strong focus on a singular field but was open to opportunities which could come up anywhere. In her job search, the location, job security and being able to use her skillset were the major factors. Her life is based in Penrith and, in the wake of 2020's lockdowns, she had no desire to move for a role, which can sometimes be a requirement for academic positions. So, when she came across the job opportunity on the Council's social media page, she saw the possibility of achieving the life she wanted outside academia.

'My workplace is just down the road and even though the role is full-time, I work for less hours and can have the weekends off. So I have a much better work-life balance,' she says.

Alex describes transitioning into her new role as being an 'eye-opening experience'.

'I found myself working alongside town planners, engineers, economists, transport experts and heritage officers whom I had never worked with before. Of course, I have lots of colleagues who think very differently, so yeah it has been really interesting and challenging but enjoyable too,' she says.

She has been upskilling in the workplace and learning from colleagues who have different skill sets. The town planners, for example, have taught her about zoning and how to develop tree canopy targets. She adds that while her role did not require a PhD, many of the skills she was trained for at the ICS were transferable into her new role. 'It's very different but there are some research skills I can use. I have been interviewing local business owners from Penrith's employment lands, such as manufacturers and construction workers, to understand what it is like to do business in Penrith,' she adds. 'I have been



Dr. Alex Coleman (right) and Dr. Ozgur Sahin (left) on their graduation day 2021

able to develop interview schedules, chat with business owners about their experiences, thematically analyse the research material, and write an engagement report that draws on scholarship produced by the ICS, such as Katherine Gibson's "Beyond Business As Usual" report.'

On reflection, Alex wishes she had done a few things differently during her PhD candidature. She regrets not prioritising income and mental health: 'Finishing a PhD in three years is rare and, like most students, my scholarship eventually ran out and paying rent and putting food on the table became a stressful juggling act.' She wishes she had completed the final stages of her PhD part-time so that she had a better quality of life for those final years.

Right now, Alex is enjoying the new chapter of work at the Council, and learning new skills from her colleagues. The positivity and open-mindedness she maintained throughout her job search are evident in her attitude towards the future. Alex says that an eventual return to academia is not off the table. She still loves teaching, and muses that she might eventually return to university teaching or pursue that love through other channels. She is looking forward to publishing her thesis in book form, which is expected to come out in 2022.

This piece was written by Deniz Agraz following an interview with Alex Coleman in November 2021.

MOVING FROM ECR TO MCR: AN INTERVIEW WITH MALINI SUR AND STEPHEN HEALY

ICS ANNUAL REVIEW INTERVIEW WITH DR. STEPHEN HEALY AND DR. MALINI SUR

Earlier this year two of our Institute Fellows, Dr. Stephen Healy and Dr. Malini Sur, sat down with Director Heather Horst to discuss their journey within the Institute over the past six years. Stephen is currently the co-convenor of the Urban Futures Research Program and Malini is the Deputy Director of Engagement at ICS.

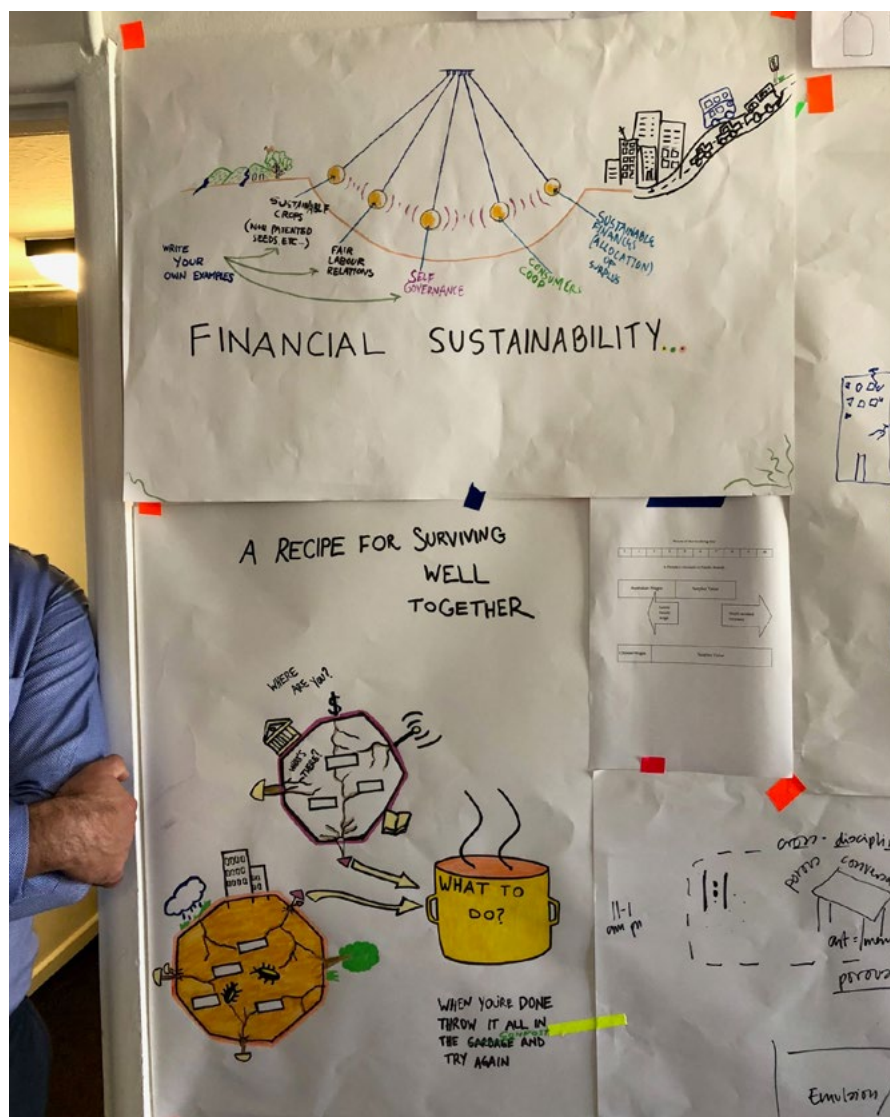
HH: When did you join the Institute and how has your research changed over the years?

SH: I came to ICS in the second half of 2014 from a position at Worcester State University (USA). I had been collaborating with colleagues Katherine Gibson and Jenny Cameron, a process which intensified following the death of our friend (and my mentor) Julie Graham in 2010 during the publication of *Take Back the Economy*.

My arrival coincided with the consolidation and proliferation of diverse economies as a recognised disciplinary subfield within and beyond geography. The community economies research network has grown to 300 members over this period of time, and the Community Economies Institute incorporated in 2020 as a registered non-profit that can shape the agenda. I've been privileged to be a part of this process in several capacities.

This work has recently evolved through my current research on Innovative Waste Economies, an ARC Discovery Project with Gay Hawkins, Ruth Lane and Abby Mellick Lopes, where the basic idea is to look at existing innovative waste economies in Australia as already offering creative responses to the provocations posed by waste materials: plastics, organics and textiles.

One of the challenges for thinking differently in this sector is the extent to which these spaces have been colonised by the frenzied



Redrawn Surviving well and Investment from the Redrawing the Economy Project

proliferation of the circular economy. While there is much to be admired about the CE, it is also a policy discourse that can stifle imagination and seems to continuously revert to a reinscription of business as usual. One example is the NSW government 'circular' catch phrase "waste-as-opportunity", which still imagines waste as a kind of capital to profit from.

MS: I arrived at the Institute in 2016 following an unexpected email from Shanthy Robertson

who mentioned a faculty position that combined interdisciplinary research in globalisation along with a teaching focus on anthropology. Sitting at the National University of Singapore where I had a research fellowship, this seemed like a dream job.

ICS became my intellectual anchor in a country that I had not even visited, and where I had no academic roots. Over the past five years, the books that my colleagues have written and the seminars which are the nerve

centres of our intellectual life have immensely shaped my thinking and writing.

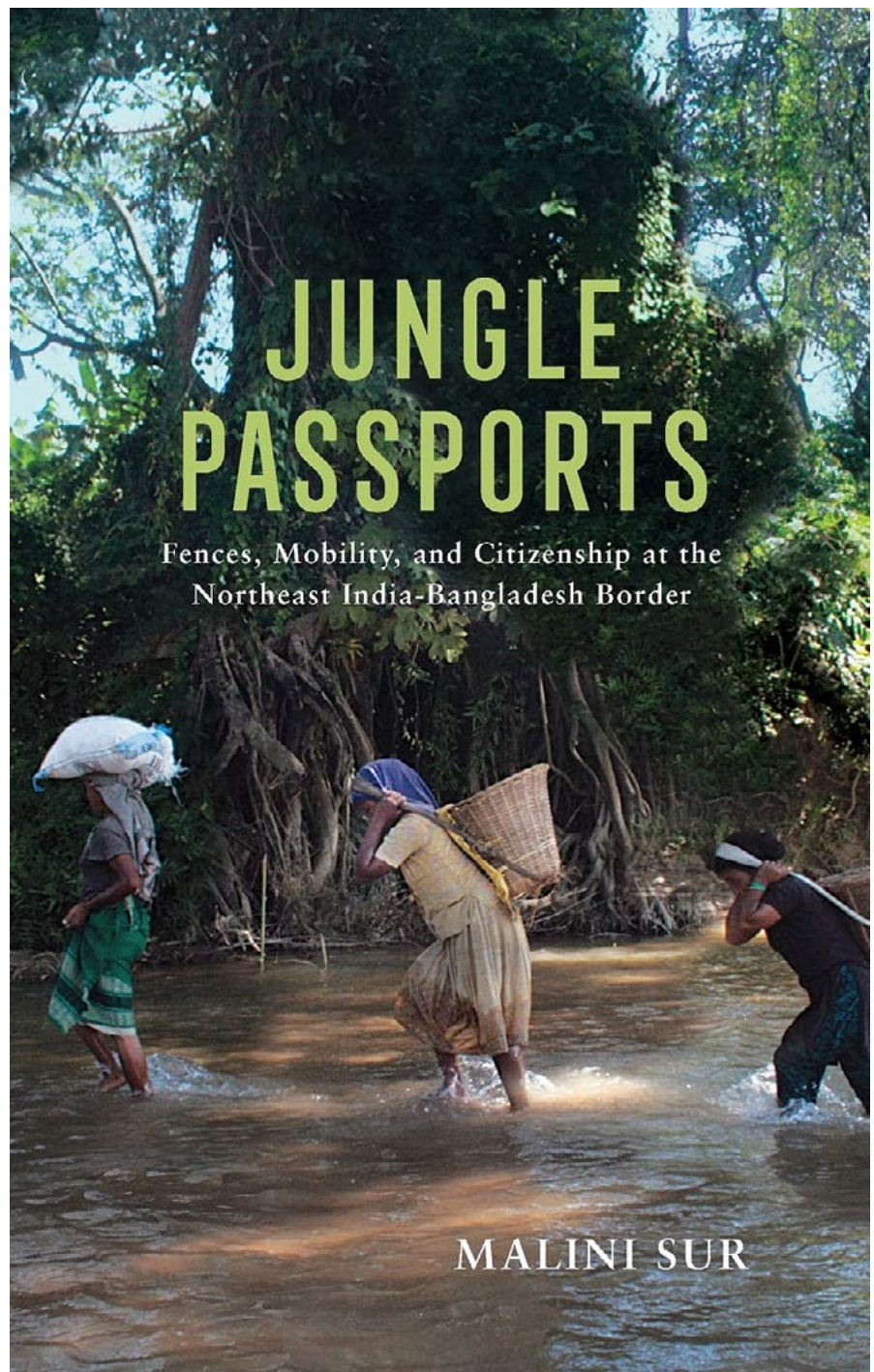
The academic milieu at ICS has provided me with even more strong foundations to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions in social theory. For instance, my recently published monograph *Jungle Passports* recasts established notions of citizenship and mobility along violent borders. I situate life-force as an analytic entry point to think about borderlands where the division of sovereignties and distinct regimes of mobility push undocumented people to undertake perilous journeys.

This year, I have had my first success at collaborative research, part of an ARC Linkage grant led by Professor Ien Ang, along with Professor Deborah Stevenson and Dr. Zelmari Cantillon. For me, this project defines what the Institute is. Taking cultural research as praxis, this project is of immense national and regional importance. It seeks to establish collaborative practices via museums that would contribute directly to the social, urban, cultural and economic fabric of their localities, reshape placemaking and notions of community. I am very excited about this project given my interests in the environment, migration and filmmaking.

HH: You have both taken on leadership roles in the Institute over the past few years. Can you describe how you are working to shape the future of the Institute and our research?

SH: I've been involved with both the Cities and Economies and Urban Futures Research Program which I co-convene with Dr. Emma Power. One continuity between the two incarnations of the group is that collegiality, humour, and light-heartedness are key ingredients for generating ideas and collaborations that can turn into research projects. That strategy has worked well for supporting projects that have turned into ongoing initiatives and projects. Cities and Economies has been a "big tent" with many different agendas, projects, and theoretical frameworks.

Having said that, the transition to Urban Futures implies a shared focus. The future-orientation, the question of what urban form looks like in a world shaped by challenges – climate change, plastic pollution, pandemic, food security – are some of the many pressing issues facing Sydney and communities around the world. One thing that Emma and I share in common is an interest in the role that care plays in constituting city life. Care becomes a way of orienting inquiry around almost every facet of urban life – from infrastructure and the built environment, to everyday social/convivial life. Care is certainly present in the sociality that sustains commons (cool or otherwise) but it suggests an orientation towards thinking more broadly about what makes urban futures possible.



Cover of *Jungle Passports* by Malini Sur

MS: Leading engagement is crucial given the Institute's historical focus on engaged research. This includes the journal *Issues*, but also involves contributions to a regional, national and global set of concerns about the role of research in the university and society. Working closely with Liam Magee and the dynamic Sally Byrnes, Senior Business Development Officer, I focus specifically on international relationships.

Engagement makes the cutting-edge social and cultural research that we do meaningful

to the communities whose life-worlds we explore regionally and globally, and relevant to the wider public to which we are ultimately accountable. Engaged research and outreach is a key mission that is implemented through well-structured thresholds, and make ICS generative as a critical space for not only knowledge production but also public accountability to the debates about pressing issues that affect us all.

REFLECTIONS ON PARTNERING WITH THE ICS

As part of its commitment to engaged research, ICS partners with organisations across industry, government and community sectors.

batyr and Settlement Services International are two key partners who have been working

with us to understand and address challenges faced by young people, refugees and asylum seekers. Here they tell us what they have been doing with the ICS, and why collaborating with research institutes is so critical to their work.

SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (SSI)

Could you tell us a bit about your organisation: what is its mission? What about your own role and area? And could you tell us about the role of research in your organisation: how important is research, and what purpose does it serve?

The SSI Group is a community organisation and social business that supports newcomers and other Australians to achieve their full potential. We work with people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people with disability, and youth and children, to build capacity and enable them to overcome inequality. I lead the research and policy function which works to highlight inequality through research and partnerships and embed evidence in our work to shape policy and inform programs

You have been working with ICS researchers over the past two years on refugee experiences of settlement. What has this experience been like? What contribution has ICS made to your work on these issues? Have you worked with the university sector before, and if so, has working with ICS changed your views?

SSI works with researchers in a range of partnerships. Our partnership with ICS has been on developing and conducting the Foundations for Belonging research.

The research explores refugees' social connections, their access to rights and fulfilment of responsibilities to deepen understanding of the social and civic dimensions of integration. The first phase of the research was conducted in 2019. The second in 2020 focused on refugee women and digital inclusion and the third phase currently underway (to be released in early 2022) focusses on family separation among refugees due to COVID-19. ICS have been critical to the evolution of this research series through providing valuable input and adding rigour to research at all stages from design through to publication and dissemination.

Looking to the future: how do you see your engagement with the university sector, and with institutes like ICS, evolving? As we begin to imagine a post-COVID future, over the next decade what do you think are the key challenges your clients and customers will be facing? What are ways universities can help address these challenges?

SSI will continue to engage with the university sector in the future as one of our partners to advance the links between research, policy and practice.

Thank you to Tadgh McMahon for providing these reflections



Foundations for Belonging 2021 cover

REFLECTIONS ON PARTNERING WITH THE ICS

BATYR

Could you tell us a bit about your organisation: what is its mission? What about your own role and area? And could you tell us about the role of research in your organisation: how important is research, and what purpose does it serve?

batyr is a preventative mental health organisation created and driven by young people for young people. We are trying to create a world that is free from stigma; where young people don't experience preventable mental ill-health and when they are having a rough time, they get the right support early. All our programs are delivered by young people and always have lived-experience storytelling at the centre. We have a network of inspiring young people who get up in front of their peers every week to share their stories to try to educate and shift attitudes.

My role is focused on evaluating our programs, but also it's about creating platforms for the young people we work with to create larger scale change. Evaluation is something we strive to get better and better at to ensure our impact. We also never want to be complacent, and it helps inform our programs, so they evolve to meet new challenges. We're also increasingly getting involved in translational research. We want to understand what it's like for young people dealing with mental health challenges and most importantly turn that knowledge into something that can affect change in their lives.

You have been working with ICS researchers over the past year on youth and mental health. What has this experience been like? What contribution has ICS made to your work on these issues? Have you worked with the university sector before, and if so, has working with ICS changed your views?

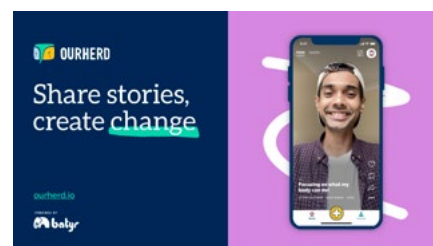
There is an amazing alignment between the values and approach of batyr and ICS. And that stems from our commitment to positive outcomes for young people. For me, nothing summed up why we should be working together more than when in a meeting about the evaluation of our new storytelling app, *OurHerd*, Assoc Prof Phillippa Collin said that data collection should not happen at the expense of young people's engagement on the app and getting benefit from it. Broadly,

there seems to be a culture at ICS and Young and Resilient Research Centre that not only is about supporting young people but positioning them as experts and respecting their incredible skills and knowledge by genuinely involving them in research.

The *OurHerd* evaluation project with the Young and Resilient Research Centre has been valuable to us as we move from MVP to market. The project has given us a clearer picture of the impact of the app. At batyr we don't always like to follow the straight and narrow path, which melds well with the team at ICS who bring critical and creative thinking to evaluative practices and have recommended really exciting and innovative approaches to our ongoing impact evaluation. This year it's been the blossoming of a wonderful partnership. There's an excitement from both teams as we've recognised a flexibility and a keenness to do innovative stuff, and so it's been less about what might we do next but how do we whittle down the list? And excitingly we've just kick started our next project together looking at how young people support each other through mental ill health.

Looking to the future: how do you see your engagement with the university sector, and with institutes like ICS, evolving? As we begin to imagine a post-COVID future, over the next decade what do you think are the key challenges your clients and customers will be facing? What are ways universities can help address these challenges?

We have recently launched two new teams at batyr focusing on Data and Insights and Global Impact. So we are increasingly getting into the research game. And in part that means building relationships with academic partners like ICS, but it also means increasing our internal research capacity. The *OurHerd* app for example is designed as a research pipeline, collecting and coding qualitative data on young people's experiences using AI and machine learning. We without a doubt need the expertise of talented researchers like Assoc Prof Collin and Dr Benjamin Hanckel at the Young and Resilient Research Centre to do that work. At the moment, we rely on academic researchers for detailed knowledge of methodological approaches, trends in the



academic literature and support in making sure our evaluations are robust and when necessary, independent. And as we advance in our own research capabilities, working with innovative researchers that are doing cutting edge translational work outside of just the university bubble like the researchers at ICS will have the most value.

For young people the world continues to throw challenges at them. It puts my own challenges through the pandemic into perspective when I consider how hard so many young people have had it. Social isolation, educational disruption, and economic insecurity fell hardest on so many of them. And their mental health has suffered. We think our focus on empowering young people and their communities, and elevating their voices in research and important decision making is part of the solution. And universities can be part of that. But we need to keep our ears open and truly listen.

Thank you to Tom Riley from batyr for providing these reflections

INTRODUCING THE NEW ICS ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS

In 2021, we are pleased to introduce the launch of Engagement Platforms. A re-naming and reorganising of what had been termed 'strategic initiatives', the four Engagement Platforms focus on enduring commitments to work with communities, industry and government on key research issues.

Two of the platforms – Community Economies and Circles of Sustainability – are well-established and over the last seven years have developed close connections with Australian and international groups. SISTER-Hub and Media Literacy are emerging Engagement Platforms, building on long-standing associations with Western Sydney city councils and Australian media organisations.

COMMUNITY ECONOMIES

Led by Professor Katherine Gibson and Dr Stephen Healy, *Community Economies* links the ICS to an established network of scholars and practitioners who have worked on alternative economic programs and research since the 1990s. It connects ICS with important communities and case studies in Cambodia, India, the Philippines, the Pacific Islands, the Americas, Europe and regional Australia.

For more about *Community Economies*, please visit: <https://www.communityeconomies.org>.

CIRCLES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Initiated by Professor Paul James and Dr Liam Magee through the United Nations Global Compact Cities Programme over a decade ago, *Circles of Sustainability* develops and

applies methods of assessment for social sustainability that encompass cultural and political alongside ecological and economic dimensions. It works closely with the Urban Sustainability Exchange, an online platform for sharing urban sustainability best practice.

For more about *Circles of Sustainability*, please visit: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics/research/impact/circles_of_sustainability.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSITIONS ENGAGED RESEARCH HUB (SISTER-HUB)

Associate Professor Louise Crabtree-Hayes, Professor Juan Salazar and Dr Neil Perry bring together regional New South Wales university engagements into a unique program that seeks to reimagine and enable post-industrial life with local communities and councils. This involves a range of research and engagement activities underway through Maldhan Ngurr Ngurra – the Lithgow Transformation Hub – and a similar suite focused on planetary health in the Blue Mountains. Activities in both locations involve partners across government, industry, community, creative, and educational sectors, and include the film *Nature Calls the Shots* (37 min) on permaculture pioneer Robyn Francis which was also produced under the Sister Hub banner.

For more about *SISTER-Hub*, please visit: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics/research/engagement_platforms/sister-hub.

MEDIA LITERACY AND DIGITAL PARTICIPATION

Led by Associate Professor Tanya Notley, this engagement platform emerges from a series of projects which have focused on investigating and advancing the ability of all citizens to use media to participate fully in society. Implemented in partnership with the Australian Media Literacy Alliance, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the

Museum of Australian Democracy and media scholars from around Australia, initiatives in *Media Literacy and Digital Participation* aim to tackle challenges that are entangled with digital media, information infrastructures and business models, including misinformation, digital exclusion, media bias and political polarisation.

For more about *Media Literacy and Digital Participation*, please visit: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics/research/engagement_platforms/media_literacy.

Working alongside the five Research Programs, each Platform will offer avenues for engagement with partners for Institute staff and students. They support the University's Sustainable Development Goals in direct and practical ways: building capacities for income and employment; moving to renewable energy sources; combating misinformation; and championing sustainable urban change.

Though far from the only channels through which ICS works with partners, the Platforms supply a concentrated means for collaborating on contract research, grants and scholarships. Led by experienced researchers, they also offer opportunities to develop skills for HDRs and ECRs to engage with community and industry. Through the Engagement Committee and each of the platform leaders, we welcome opportunities to develop these streams of engaged research with you further in 2022.

Associate Professor Liam Magee is Director of Engagement at the Institute for Culture and Society and co-lead of the Living Lab Research Program at the Young & Resilient Research Centre.

LOOKING TO RESEARCH FUTURES

Living with the Pandemic: Reflections on Research Futures

NED ROSSITER, LIAM MAGEE AND HEATHER HORST

Over the past two years the global pandemic dramatically reoriented research at the Institute for Culture and Society. At one level, there is nothing exceptional here: it would be hard if not impossible to point to any organisation unaffected by the force of a novel Coronavirus unleashed on the world. Nonetheless, the social, cultural, environmental, technological and economic challenges that have emerged in the wake of the pandemic have become central to the kinds of questions we address and the research we collectively conduct.

From the use of the Service NSW App and COVID-Safe check ins with QR codes to the display of electronic vaccination certificates, the fabric of life continued to change. These automated processes of managing populations often intersect with finance capital. The everyday use of Apple Pay, Google Pay and other services encourages us to bypass physical money. Transitions to new economic habits are the subject of recent work by Ben Hanckel and colleagues, who have documented how young people are reconsidering risk in today's **digitised financial markets**. The prevalence of surveillance media, now thoroughly embedded within routines of daily life as technologies of inspection, meanwhile also serve to regulate and organise geographical borders, temporal coordinates and cultural distinctions, as critical new books by **Malini Sur**, **Shanthi Robertson**, **Fiona Cameron** and **Denis Byrne** variously illustrate.

Tony Bennett, Gay Hawkins, Greg Noble and colleagues (2021) also **demonstrate** the ways a plurality of habits now condition how urban Australia is experienced, organised and governed in distinct ways. Signs requiring 'social' (or, more technically and empirically correct, 'physical distancing'),

the performance of hygiene associated with hand sanitiser and ritualistic cleaning of surfaces became commonplace, as did the normalisation of wearing masks. **Sukhmani Khorana** connects these COVID-related worries to older white Australian discourses expressing fears of class and racial contamination, and argues instead that both international and intra-urban habits of transport present possibilities for an alternative 'mobility justice'. Manfred Steger and Paul James also considered the implications of what they term '**the great unsettling**' for everyday forms of global capitalism, and **Ian Ang** reflects upon the importance of maintaining a commitment to cosmopolitanism in the wake of divisions intensified by the pandemic across local and global scales.

The political occlusion of mobility intensified a collective desire for the pleasures of traversing space beyond the claustrophobic confines of domestic settings. Lockdown, restrictions on movement within 5km and 10km zones, and working from home over the past two years also changed our relationship to public spaces and cultural institutions that constitute our cities. Visiting galleries, libraries and museums gave way to new sites of culture and exhibition: parks, walking paths, open spaces and other outdoor settings where, in the latter phases of lockdown, people gathered for picnics and forms of socialising outside of the home. During the earlier stages of COVID-19 in 2020, **work** by Deborah Stevenson and colleagues had already highlighted the complex urban overlays of formal with informal cultural infrastructures in the City of Parramatta; a point no less significant in more remote parts of the Asia-Pacific region, as research by Zelmari Cantillon on the historical Hotel Paradise in **Norfolk Island** and Heather Horst on fashion in **Fiji** underscores.

Closures and immobility also had other consequences. The reduction in cars, trucks and buses clogging up roads in the morning and evening commutes and the dramatic decrease in airline travel to and from Australia changed the quality of our air and the clarity of our water for the better. But these small wins might only be temporary as life returns to 'the new normal', reminding us in visceral and sensory ways that climate change will continue to have devastating and catastrophic

effects. Three examples showcase how ICS research supplies critical insights at the crossroads of environmental and social science: Declan Kuch's work on **carbon accounting**; Juan Salazar's collaboration with the Sydney Biennale for an online conference, playlist and book on **water**; and the **@RISK podcast series** convened by Josh Wodak and Jessica Weir, featuring climate experts from around the world.

In a fundamental sense, we are also reminded of the uneven effects of the pandemic at every level. International students living in Australia during the pandemic have been unable to see friends and families at home. Eight of our students from overseas were not able to return to Sydney to resume their studies, and students living locally and internationally were isolated in conditions that have, amid the risks and tragedies of the pandemic, frustrated their studies and careers. Border closures between states within Australia kept many people apart and, as Linda Marsden highlighted in her keynote at The Joan, intensified the **role of technology** in maintaining social relations. As Calli Prince's **work on mothers and mothering during the pandemic** makes clear, a new triple shift emerged, with parents (and most often mothers) playing the role of teacher, employee and mother/father almost simultaneously. Localised 'bubbles' of people who lived within 5km or 10km of each other created newfound bonds, and appreciation of the local amenities often helped to counter the boredom and mundane dimensions of our lives. The intensification of intimate surroundings brought renewed focus on alternative **housing** and **community** arrangements – topics covered this year in research by Louise Crabtree-Hayes, Neil Perry, Katherine Gibson and Stephen Healy.

Finally, we acknowledge the amazing efforts of our current and recent higher degree candidates, who continue despite improbable odds to contribute to institutional life and the culture of research in many ways. We reference here a far-from-exhaustive list of highlights: Vanicka Arora's discussion of **heritage in Bhaktapur, Nepal**; Jasbeer Musthafa Mamalipurath's analysis of **papal online discourse**; Skye Tasker's work with Philippa Collin on **youth leadership**; Luke Munn's research on **data centres and the**



Mushrooms by Edgar Gómez Cruz

politics of optimised efficiency; Tsvetelina Hristova's collaboration with Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter on the unlikely affinities between **transcontinental railways and block chains**; and a compelling ICS seminar panel featuring Anisha Madden and Bhavya Chitranshi alongside Katherine Gibson on the **politics of food security and distribution**.

A lot is at stake, much more than we can possibly register in this short commentary. As we've often heard and felt throughout

the pandemic, it can seem as though social research is out of step with the speed and scale of global transformation. Yet the questions that our research address – the geopolitical and social effects of automation, the contested role of culture, the state of the environment, and the operations of borders that cut across cities and social distinctions as well as nation states – present themselves more insistently than ever. As we collectively build the Institute as a cultural, social, political and intellectual endeavour,

we draw encouragement from the continued support of Western Sydney University, our communities and our partners. Together we seek to understand and to act upon a very different world in the making.

2020 Highlights

33

School-based
members

30

Institute-based
members



40

PhD Students

11

MRes Students



42

PhDs Completed
in last 5 years



262

Research
Publications

Research Income

\$2,335,163

*indicative result



82 Active Grants worth
\$14.9mil

21 New Research Grants
awarded worth \$4.8mil

6 New ARC Grants
awarded worth \$1.9m



29

Books
Published



In the media

390 Media engagements

27 Conversation articles

452,652 Views of Conversation articles

Contact information

(02) 9685 9600

ics@westernsydney.edu.au

Western Sydney University

Locked Bag 1797

Penrith NSW 2751 Australia



WESTERNSYDNEY.EDU.AU