Interrogating the 'Normal' in PNS

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'Normal' What?

- The 'N' in PNS was inspired by Kuhnian 'normal' science with PNS formulated to provide suitably 'extended' facts

- Post-normal challenges, however, necessitate post-normal responses whose veracity lies as much with their societal implications as with any technical inputs into them

- The 'normal' of concern then shifts from that of facts to that of society (and thus from Kuhn to Foucault!)

Foucauldian PNS!

- Foucault was concerned to show how contemporary life was shaped by power constituted not only by governmental politics but also by the role in this of other significant cultural formations, such as science

- Foucault described how government has become a technical exercise involving coercive techniques to ensure compliance with governmental imperatives.

- It's important to note the resonance between these ideas and the critique of 'normal science' and technocracy underpinning the original PNS analysis.

- This can be taken to imply a turn to 'post-normal politics'

'Post-normal politics'

- Originally described as equating to a:

  ...polity in which..political power acts as mediator for a complex web of decision making bodies...analogous to extended peer communities...such that matters of technological innovation, scientific research, the environmental impacts of infrastructure development and also lifestyle and other singular personal and community level issues become..the province of..societal debate and consideration focused upon the construction of broad-based public knowledge (Healy, 1999: 666-667).

- This focus upon knowledge construction, however, is only one aspect of the societal implications of any proposed solution to post-normal problems

- These societal implications are integral to the 'forms of life' that any proposed solution to post-normal problems may give rise

'Forms of life'

- 'Forms of life' embrace the interdependencies between culture, the specificities of everyday life and the technoscientific achievements that result from facts (and are, for example, related to the latter as the car is to 'automobility').

- Because 'forms of life' embrace the way knowledge informs and constitutes how we live, it is well suited to societal oversight and evaluation

- The 'complex web of decision making bodies' comprising 'post-normal politics' would thus work best if focused upon interrogating the 'forms of life' arising from proposed solutions to post-normal problems

EG: *Addressing Climate Change*

- While conventionally configured as a technical problem resolvable by technical means (i.e. facilitating a technological shift by economic means) climate change will only be resolved if, and when, enduring and widely accepted low emissions 'forms of life' are instituted

- Much of the emissions intensity, and content & character, of current 'forms of life' was determined by technical imperatives (e.g. the emergence of domestic appliances in the early 20th C)

- Adequately low emissions future 'forms of life' will thus require attention to matters such as what we do in our bathrooms and kitchens, and what we do these things with (in addition to matters of technology, how to make an ETS work etc, etc)

- A job for 'post-normal politics' perhaps?