

The Familiar and the Strange:

Understanding the relationship between
science, technology, and community
protest

Professor Fiona Haines, Criminology, University of Melbourne

Mr Martin Bortz, PhD Candidate, University of Melbourne

Dr Sara Bice

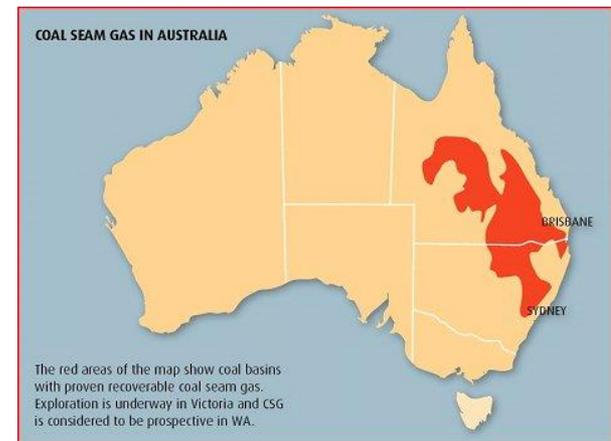
Introduction

- ▶ Understanding Familiar and the Strange and its relationship to
 - ▶ Environmental impact
- ▶ Translated through:
 - ▶ socio-cultural norms
- ▶ And political influence



The Coal Seam Gas Controversy

- ▶ Technology is politically controversial
 - ▶ proven technology vs danger of 'fracking'
- ▶ Environmentally ambiguous
 - ▶ Either providing transition fuel
 - ▶ wrecking groundwater



Our Focus

- ▶ How can the dichotomy of familiar/strange help understand the relationship between environmental ambiguity, expertise and social conflict in the context of CSG?
- ▶ (What are the implications of this for ensuring environmentally and socially just outcomes in an environmentally constrained world?)
 - ▶ Disclaimer: This is a fraught area, with significant conflict and trauma – experienced by many. This is a sense making paper – with no grand claims!



Understanding environmental threat of the technology

- ▶ To groundwater, to health/air pollution, fugitive emissions/climate
- ▶ As posing an actuarial risk
 - ▶ Risk understood as potential of damage inflicted by a toxic vector to an affected body (water source/human body) Haines, 2011
 - ▶ Captured by risk assessment undertaken by expert (in this case scientist/engineer)
 - ▶ That may be more or less accurate



The familiar and the strange

- ▶ The technology can be understood as matter out of place
 - ▶ Something that does not conform to our normal schemes of classification (Douglas, 1966)
 - ▶ Dirt, weeds, litter – or a gasplant in a field of cows or sheep
- ▶ Tied to socio-cultural norms
 - ▶ Technology a threat to ‘our community’ ‘our way of life’
 - ▶ Managed relationally/ through norms of place/familiarity/belonging
- ▶ Through metaphor and analogy, the technology may become matter *in place* (Logue, Clegg and Gray, 2016)
 - ▶ Analogies render something knowable
 - ▶ They ground new practices and narratives for achieving ‘naturalness’



And to the political

- ▶ Analogies need to be tied to networks of (political) power:
 - ▶ “While analogies are often a key art of early claims to legitimacy they are not sufficient to sustain it: for this to occur there have to be rituals and power relations that reproduce legitimacy” Logue et al p.1603
- ▶ Political legitimacy (risk) framed around demands of capital accumulation and legitimation (Haines, 2011).



Lenses used:

- ▶ Language
- ▶ Metaphor/analogy
- ▶ Expertise
- ▶ History

Making the strange familiar: Language

- ▶ **Words out of place**
 - ▶ “(The Head of Drilling saying) in a community meeting ‘we’re going to decimate the well’ and it’s okay.” And I’m like, “Wow. We’re really using these words. Okay.” ... They felt if they were really up front with the information and used all the proper drilling terms and used all the stuff then it would be okay.” 21:3
- ▶ **Putting information back “in context” – in place**
 - ▶ “we actually had them on iPads and could take people through the talk and show them different things so that they could see, working on that familiarisation process” 21:7
- ▶ **Take the community with you so they feel part of the conversation**
 - ▶ But still requires trust in expertise



(your words) cannot be trusted

- ▶ “The problem is not your words – it is your action”
- ▶ Reclaiming language
 - ▶ Darling Downs vs Surat Basin
- ▶ Fracking:
 - ▶ For industry (frac'ing, fraccing) a specific technical process
 - ▶ Controllable, safe, explainable
 - ▶ Used in a minority of drilling operations
 - ▶ For community activists the whole industry
 - ▶ Poisoning water
 - ▶ Fracturing landscapes
 - ▶ Fracturing communities



Making the strange familiar: use of analogy (BTEX)



▶ **Water resulting from drilling was found to contain BTEX**

▶ Natural – or not?

▶ “It was a detection, it wasn’t a spill” 22:4

▶ And action, not disclosing seen as betrayal

▶ **You’d literally have more BTEX in your petroleum jelly-based lipstick** that you would be using.They tossed around for a really long time internally about whether to report this or not 22:5

▶ “... by not disclosing this discovery of BTEX even though it was quite small in quantity, gosh, set us back, like years in terms of trust” 21:8



▶ **Communication by way of analogy – to familiarise.**

▶ “... you listen to Alan Jones (shock jock) screaming at his rudest. He was (interviewing) the Premier and he said “They used 760 chemicals!” We used nine. When we did the public forum we had a couple of hundred people, our community relations girl (sic) **went down to the supermarket and she bought eight products that had the eight of the nine chemicals.** The only one she didn’t get was something which was in hair dye” 15:9

▶ **But the familiar can be dangerous**

▶ “People don’t understand how bad petrol is” 15:9

▶ Unleaded petrol contains Benzene – known carcinogen (the B in BTEX)

Expert

An expert is someone with extensive knowledge in a particular area. Experts are called upon for their expertise in professional or academic fields.

Expertise

- ▶ Who can determine whether CSG is “Matter out of place”?
- ▶ The expert is trusted
 - ▶ “...we had hydro-geologists come along, we had someone come along and talk about, I think, caesium at one stage, which is a radioactive compound used in drilling. And within about ten minutes, he completely put to bed what had been a front-page story. Everyone went, “oh, alright, that’s what it is.” 20:4
- ▶ Or not:
 - ▶ “And the (company engineer) said, “But, oh yeah but it’s only ten centimetres diameter (under your house) don’t worry about it.” ... the community was going, “Holy shit I didn’t know this was going on. I’m now really confronted by it. I don’t trust you. I don’t know what you’re doing. You’ve been doing this for years and you haven’t been telling me about it.” And the guys like “Of course, why would we tell you about it? It’s nothing for you to worry about. Trust us. We’re the good guys.” 21:3 What do you mean you don’t trust us? Why would you even think that we would do anything to hurt you?” 21:4



Regaining trust in expertise

- ▶ Site visits
- ▶ Releasing information
 - ▶ “.... we got very strong support for that because people sat down all of sudden and said," Gee this is really good information that we've never been able to have before, never been able to watch these—basically in real-time, never been able to watch these companies operate. ... what we've doing is trying to do is actually provide factual information that can't be challenged. Give it to the community. Let them know that we're not bull shitting , we're not trying to hoodwink them. That this is just genuine information for their interest and to try to help them understand what is going on.” 11:10
- ▶ Acting civilly
 - ▶ In contracts
- ▶ Employing locals as engagement people – and them being tested
 - ▶ “They wanted to know the nitty gritty, they wanted to know the micron size of the steel that you were using in your outer casing, for goodness' sake. You had to know.” 15:2



And partly failing

- ▶ Heavy toll...

- ▶ “You are a disgrace to your community!”



TRUST

- ▶ Iron fist in velvet glove

- ▶ “So, when it gets to a sticking point and the company actually wants some hard stuff done, they end up having to employ someone that (appears) the nicest person you’ve ever met - but someone who’s a total bully.” 5:7

- ▶ Losing control of expertise

- ▶ “There’s a lot of PhD’s in this community...”
- ▶ “The nationals and the industry said, well, “the extreme greenies are just leading you down the path, you know, and they’re taking you for a ride” ... and so that triggered citizen research because people felt their noses out of joint being told A: they were dumb and B: they were being used as pawns by us. So that actually triggered people to research” 6:7



History: Coal vs CSG



- ▶ Coal the incumbent, historically rooted, familiar, politically supported
 - ▶ But more dangerous
- ▶ “The gas industry were babes in the wood” 5:7
- ▶ Coal industry were able to be more aggressive
 - ▶ And less regulated
 - ▶ “(When I was in coal) we used to vent it or burn it. ... but to see Santos 100 metres away doing exactly what we were doing (coring operation) and the shit that they had to go through was pretty phenomenal” 15:1



Protest against CSG

- ▶ **(Initially) assisted Coal**
 - ▶ “They were just happy for us to take the fall for everything and get their own shit through” 15:12
- ▶ **Coal greater level of political support**
 - ▶ Extensions to mines, environmental permissions pushed through as protest was going on
- ▶ **Cumulative backlash?**
 - ▶ CSG a bridge too far



Bringing it back together

- ▶ How can the dichotomy of familiar/strange help understand the relationship between expertise, environmental ambiguity and social conflict in the context of CSG?
 - ▶ Gas proponents needed to make the technology familiar, no longer able to say “trust us we are the experts” nor with political connections to push through.
- ▶ Changed language from signalling expertise to finding words – and analogies – that could communicate, engender familiarity
 - ▶ Language to ameliorate the asymmetry of trust
 - ▶ Analogy to draw on socio-cultural norms – transfer trust
- ▶ But language, communication and analogies are socio-culturally anchored.
 - ▶ Communication *itself* was seen as the problem by community protesters
 - ▶ the familiar can be (actuarially) dangerous (petrol)
- ▶ Trying to ‘buy’ trust (employ locals) socio-culturally is fraught
 - ▶ Can help, but emotionally draining and can exacerbate local conflict
- ▶ Did indeed result in ‘fracturing’ place



Conclusion

- ▶ **History: coal vs gas**
 - ▶ Coal's relationship to government direct
 - ▶ Accumulation – and legitimation secure
 - ▶ History, political connections and support meant coal could be both familiar and dangerous – an option not open to CSG
- ▶ **CSG experienced (and needed for socio-cultural reasons) greater regulation more reliant on becoming familiar, accepted and trusted locally level.**
- ▶ **CSG's relationship to government mediated by regulation**
 - ▶ Regulation signalled to the community that government cared, and CSG's acceptance of regulation and efforts at compliance signalled to the community they could be trusted.

