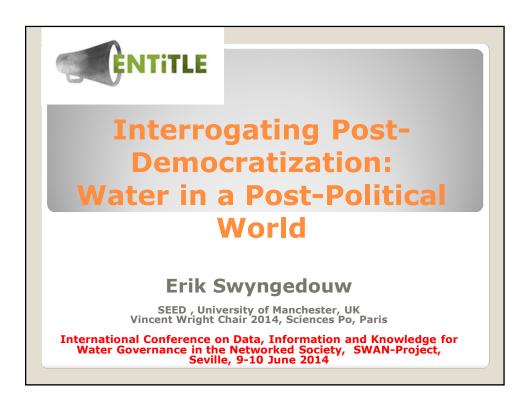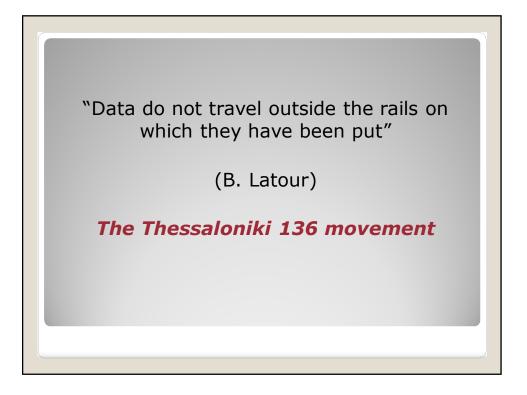## Rumsfeld's wisdom for us

There are things we know we know.
There are things we know we don't know.
There are things we don't know we don't know.

And the disavowed truth

There are things we don't know we know

ENTiTLE

Interrogating Post-Democratization: Water in a Post-Political World

Erik Swyngedouw

**SEED , University of Manchester, UK
Vincent Wright Chair 2014, Sciences Po, Paris**

International Conference on Data, Information and Knowledge for Water Governance in the Networked Society, SWAN-Project, Seville, 9-10 June 2014

"Data do not travel outside the rails on which they have been put"

(B. Latour)

The Thessaloniki 136 movement

Two Vignettes

Foregrounded and Censored DATA

The Rosarito case (100 MGD of desalted water a day)

- Desalination project on Mexican side of Mexico-US border (Possible Water for San Diego WA/LA/Arizona)
- Presented as a multiple techno-managerial 'fix': water shortage, Colorado river conflict, climate change, differential environmental impact of MegaProjects, Disputed Ownership Rights

- Consolidated Water (Cayman Islands) purchased the land at US$ 20 million. Land financing and the impossibility of information (neoliberalization as the privatization of increasingly socialized information under the banner of market confidentiality)

- Apparently Depoliticized Waters (presented as socio-ecological and techno-natural adaptation to multiple crises) to make sure nothing really changes
- The properly political dimension is disavowed/displaced: expression of a post-democratic or post-political process
- The Water conundrum as Trojan horse of de-politicization

Expert Knowledge and De-Politicization

The U.N. Fourth World Water Resources Development Report (3-annual report)

1. Bible of Water Resources (cfr IPCC reports)
2. Summarizing state of the art
3. "The situtation is serious but not dramatic"
4. Disavowal of political antagomism/agonism through filtered expert-data
    1. Political Water struggles (dams, irrigation, urban supply, privatization, access, dispossession)
    2. Water Justice/Right to Water/Democratizing Water Governance (in contrast to stakeholder participation)
    3. 'Drivers' as external to the dynamics of the hydro-social cycle

5. Data/Information as the 'point de capiton'/quilting point
6. The latter is the terrain of the expert/researcher/stakeholder - no discussion of the political-economic constitution of data

De-politicizing Water: Post-Democratic Governance

Techno-Managerial Governance around consensually agreed concerns

Public concerns viewed and approached as techno-managerial problems articulated through expert knowledges within institutional frameworks of (participatory) governance animated by heterogeneous interests and positions under the overall and uncontestable aegis of neoliberal market imperatives

Limiting the terrain of the political to the domain of governance
Politics as bio-political governance
The disavowal of 'the politics of the extraordiary' or 'the political'

Post-Politicization as a process of consensualising techno-managerial form of governance ….

- **Cultivation of a permanent state of emergency (environment/security/economy/migration)**
- **The economization of politics**
- **The de-politicization of the economic**
- **Sustained by expert management**
- **Populist – electoral apathy/Opinion Poll Data as barometer**
- **Autocratic forms of glocal 'governance-beyond-the-state'**
- **The 'tyranny of participation' by 'unauthorized' actors**
- **Techno-managerial dispositifs – institutionalized social management**
- **Biopolitical governance of the population**
- **Dispute versus dissensus (everything rendered contentious as a modality of de-politicization except 'Democracy' itself)**
- ➔ **Fukuyama's truth**

... But intensifying outbursts of staging dissent/antagonistic violence

(the return of the repressed/disavowed/foreclosed)

◦ The fragmenting forces of consensus politics

◦ **violent/dissensual eruptions (racaille/people)**
◦ **Environmental Movements: Climate Justice – Justicia Hidrica – Righ to Water – Resistance against dispossession**
◦ **The return of the passion for the Political 'Real' under the banner of equality**
◦ **The 'Seeds of Distopia' as Global Risk Number 1 (Davos WEF Risk Report, 2012)**

Comments on De- and Re-Politicization: what is (de-)politicization?

1. De-politicization: politicized repression, foreclosure or disavowal of 'the political'
        a) archi-politics (undivided community)
        b) meta-politics (organic whole)
        c) para-politics (displacement onto non-political)
        d) ultra-politics (friend-enemy)
        e) post-politics

2. Post-politicization: de-politicization through expert-based techno-managerial governance within a given frame that cannot be contested: science and 'scientific' expertise at the service of de-politicization

3. De-Politicization as a decidedly politicized – but disavowed - gesture.

Post-Political Politicization

"We have to change radically in order to make sure that nothing really changes"

What is 'The Political' and 'Politicization' (… or the Elephant in the Room)

1. Post-Foundational Political Thought: Politics (as the act of governing) versus 'the political'

2. The 'Political' as the name for an absence/a void – the non-existence of foundational social ordering or …. The recognition of radical heterogeneity/the split of/in the people.

3. The 'political' as immanent practice that disrupts the order of being under the banner of equality – the political immanence, rupture, transformative.

4. Politicization as the process that renders this radical heterogeneity 'perceptible', 'performative' and/or 'democratic'

Modalities of 'Politicization'

a) Politicization as rendering visible/public the contentious natures of things and processes: Latour's 'Parliament of things' as the process through which socio-ecological relations and assemblages are made perceptible, public and, therefore, rendered contentious/contested/contestable within governance arrangements.

➔ Process of rendering CONTENTIOUS what is presented as consensual. This permits, in turn, the negotiation of recognized differences provided a Habermasian free space of communication is produced (liberal notion of politicization).

---

b) Politicization as the performative staging of equality: rupturing of 'the distribution of the sensible' by 'the part of no part' (Rancière) through an act that performatively stages 'equality' and addresses a 'wrong' in 'the distribution of the sensible'

➔ Performative ACT that stages equality and meets/confronts the in-egalitarian ordering of the givens: the production of a new common sense. Politicization as rupture/disruption/interruption: Water Justice and Right to Water struggles and conflicts.

➔ "The people are those who, refusing to be the population, disrupt the system" (Foucault, 1981)
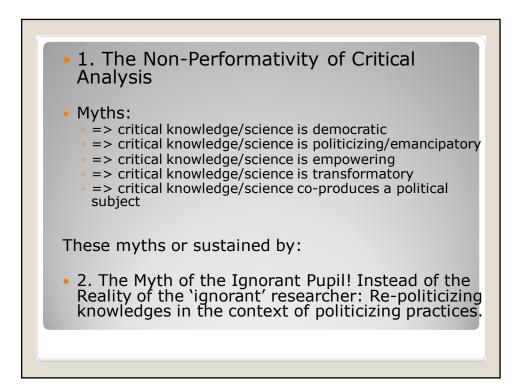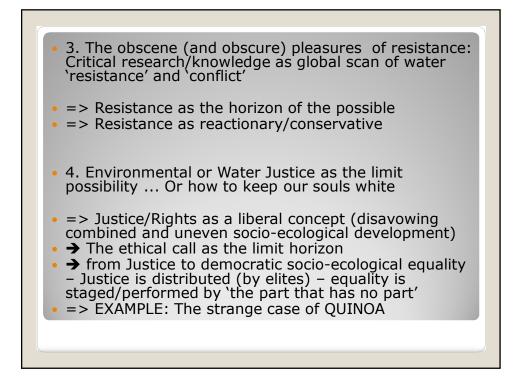
c) Politicization as 'fidelity' to 'the egalitaran hypothesis' (A. Badiou/S. Žižek/J.Dean): the interrupting procedure through which the egalitarian hypothesis (ega-libertarian management of the commons by the common) is called into being, and through which new socio-ecological assemblages are called into being.

➜ Sustained militant acting that revolves around maintaining 'fidelity' to an inaugural 'event' (the immanence of the political) that foreshadows the realization of the egalitarian hypothesis

➜ The 'Democratic' at work: equal say in the process of managing the commons.

The Democratic Political

- the empty place of power

- the presumption of equality

- égaliberté as contingent foundation

- affirmation of society's absent ground

- the democratic against democracy (the political versus politics)

Back to Water

- 1. The Non-Performativity of Critical Analysis

- Myths:
  ◦ => critical knowledge/science is democratic
  ◦ => critical knowledge/science is politicizing/emancipatory
  ◦ => critical knowledge/science is empowering
  ◦ => critical knowledge/science is transformatory
  ◦ => critical knowledge/science co-produces a political subject

These myths or sustained by:

- 2. The Myth of the Ignorant Pupil! Instead of the Reality of the 'ignorant' researcher: Re-politicizing knowledges in the context of politicizing practices.

- 3. The obscene (and obscure) pleasures of resistance: Critical research/knowledge as global scan of water 'resistance' and 'conflict'

- => Resistance as the horizon of the possible
- => Resistance as reactionary/conservative

- 4. Environmental or Water Justice as the limit possibility ... Or how to keep our souls white

- => Justice/Rights as a liberal concept (disavowing combined and uneven socio-ecological development)
- ➔ The ethical call as the limit horizon
- ➔ from Justice to democratic socio-ecological equality – Justice is distributed (by elites) – equality is staged/performed by 'the part that has no part'
- => EXAMPLE: The strange case of QUINOA

---

5. Move from the elite ideological position (UN4WWR)

"The Water Situation is Serious but not Dramatic"

To a democratic-egalitarian position:

"The Situation is Dramatic but not Serious":

By Way of Conclusion: the Political Water Conundrum

- 2008: The end of neoliberal wet dream: Welcome to Zombie neo-neoliberalism!
  - From Lehman Brothers to Lazy Greeks as manufacturers of World Crises: The financialization of everything and accumulation by dispossession.
  - Water privatization/private investment in water had already slowed down massively
  - Water and other socio-environmental inequalities and injustices have disappeared from international agendas
- 2008/2009: US$ 1.5 trillion bailout
- 2010/2011: Another several hundred billion Euro of tax money in EU alone (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland) (will be > 1 trillion €)
- 1.5 Billion people without safe sanitation: The 4th WWDR (financing needs/private sector participation/financial crisis).
- 70% expected to be raised by private sector (World Bank)
- UN: US$ 100 a year to provide safe water
- 25 years of free and fully covered water supply

- The 'Piketty' conundrum: The elite's worst nightmare, the challenges of ega-libertarian democratization, and the immanent return of the political

The Situation is Dramatic but not Serious