Community, individuality and complexity: how superficiality, self-interest and cultural superiority contribute to the development of contemporary urban communities.

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University 2010
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

In recent years there have been a number of social commentaries describing the fractured state of traditional social relations, such as community. Typically, these texts show how, based on the growth of globalisation and individualism, community relationships have eroded, leaving individuals without the support and cultural foundations necessary to develop a stable self image or consistent social environment.

This thesis will illustrate that, while these perspectives on the changing nature of society may be correct, they do not necessarily translate to the demise of community. Instead, what is occurring is a bias towards specific types of social activity, where only traditional modes of sociality are considered capable of generating communities.

Focusing on the concept of gemeinschaft, the thesis examines how romantic and simplified notions of what community should entail have generated a body of knowledge that has become blind to the many forms of community existing outside of this ideal.

By way of support, two ethnographies of contemporary communities (both creative urban groups) are presented to show how community is far from the permanent, singular, supportive and caring environment that is generally assumed.
Instead it is shown to be fractured, plural, often uncaring and highly individualised.

From here, the thesis illustrates how many of the factors that are traditionally outside of community discourse, namely superficiality, arrogance and imagined superiority, contribute towards the generation of community norms. These norms are shown to be highly individualised and plural but also cohesive, with individuals using the social identifiers of art and creativity to construct similarly and difference between themselves and others.

The thesis concludes by showing how community is constantly adapting to the changing norms of the social environment, as such, for social scientists to suggest community is dying, simply because its form is changing or that it is not adhering to traditional interpretations of it, is erroneous.
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