

Climate Justice

Cam Walker

AGAINST
THE CURRENT

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Cam Walker

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The developed world must lead the charge in combating climate change.

As climate change bears down on us, the public debate about this most pressing question has perhaps never been so confusing and muddled. At the national level we have had the grinding debate over the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), and the very public civil war within the Coalition about whether climate change is even caused by human action. We have the mad suggestion that Victoria could develop its own export industry for our dirty brown coal, and vigorous argument about whether so-called clean coal technology will ever actually be viable. And there is, of course, huge debate about the climate change negotiations about to be held in Copenhagen.

The overall goal for the COP15 United Nations Climate Change Conference is to establish an ambitious global climate agreement for the period from 2012, when the first commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol expires. Key leaders, like Barack Obama and Kevin Rudd, have been warning the global community for months not to expect much from these talks. They believe an agreement on how to set reduction targets is still too hard, although the gathered leaders can at least move forward on developing a framework.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change grew from the Earth Summit held in Rio

in 1992. Awareness that climate change was posing a serious threat to humanity and our ecosystems led to commitment to develop a global response—in 1997 the Kyoto Protocol became the implementing mechanism for taking action. This was a historic moment because the Protocol accepted the rich world had caused most of the world's environmental problems and hence expected the rich would go first in accepting binding greenhouse gas emissions. Shameful lobbying by the Howard government resulted in Australia getting permission to actually increase its emissions, despite the glaring reality of our carbon debt to the rest of the planet, especially the developing world where per capita emissions are so low.

Industry lobbyists will be at Copenhagen in their thousands, and will find common cause with countries that rely on fossil fuels, and the laggard nations not prepared to step up to the challenge of global warming. As the Australian national debate shows, leaders in the debate run the risk of being bullied back into line, so there is little incentive for any political party to announce deep and unilateral emissions reductions targets before the meeting. Australia's paltry 5 per cent 'unconditional' reductions target is indicative of the lack of leadership we are seeing from developed nations generally.

After the most recent preparatory talks in Barcelona, it was clear that a significant number of developed nations were not only being cautious in their commitments, they were

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effectively undermining the chances of getting to agreement on developing a binding global agreement. In its assessment of these talks, Friends of the Earth International said:

We have seen rich countries continually seeking to ditch emissions targets under the Kyoto Protocol. They are tearing down an existing, legally binding international framework, which has taken years of negotiation to establish, in an attempt to wriggle out of their responsibility to cut their emissions first and fastest.

The several preparatory meetings held during 2009 only became more frustrating as momentum was continually checked, and an increasingly bitter divide between rich and poor countries emerged. After the last two meetings, negotiations were deadlocked. Some environment NGOs have seen the deadlock as potentially 'catastrophic'. The Alliance of Small Island Nations has been increasingly vocal on the need for deep emissions reductions, while a growing number of African nations have challenged the slow pace of negotiations, but there simply has not been sufficient momentum to push the

world's leaders to the point of accepting the inevitable: deep cuts in greenhouse pollution now while enshrining the right of all nations to fair, sustainable development.

So, should we 'adjust our sets' and just expect less from the Copenhagen meeting? Even some environmental groups have suggested as much. Or do we accept what climate science is telling us: that to have any hope of avoiding dangerous climate change, we must reduce emissions now? Globally, our ecological footprint exceeds the Earth's capacity to regenerate by about 30 per cent. If present trends continue, by the mid-2030s we will require the equivalent of two planets to meet our needs. The fact remains that global warming is a global issue and therefore requires a co-ordinated global response, and this must take the form of a new global agreement. This agreement should recognise that rich countries have done the most damage to our climate and that they should take action first. In addition, it should:

- commit wealthy industrialised countries (listed in Annex I of the Protocol) to at least 40 per cent cuts in emissions domestically by 2020, by using green energy, sustainable transport and farming, and by cutting energy demand
- refuse to sanction reductions through the buying of carbon credits from developing countries or buying forest in developing countries to 'offset' ongoing emissions in the industrialised world
- require rich countries to provide additional monies for developing countries to grow in clean, green ways and to cope with the floods, droughts and famines caused by climate change
- ensure that such monies are distributed fairly and transparently.

The wealthy industrialised world should take responsibility for repaying the full measure of its climate debt. Doing so is not merely right—it also provides the basis of an effective climate solution. A fair

and effective climate solution requires, at a minimum, that developed countries repay their adaptation debt to the developing countries, providing finance and technology to ensure full compensation for losses already suffered and the means to avoid or minimise future impacts. World Bank figures suggest the absolute minimum figure allowing for fair adaptation is US\$50 billion a year. This could be allocated according to a nation's historical emissions and ability to pay.

Australia is already being hit by climate change. Bushfires, floods and droughts are going to get worse unless we take strong global action. Our Pacific neighbours? already threatened by sea level rise? have been joined by over fifty countries in setting a benchmark for how much carbon pollution can be in the atmosphere. Australia should join them at Copenhagen and set a global target well below 350 ppm; our present target of 450 ppm would devastate the planet if adopted globally. Australia can show it is serious about climate change by declaring a national moratorium on coal power and coal mining and implementing a just transition for workers in the coal industry.

A wealthy minority of the world's countries and corporations are the principal cause of climate change; its adverse effects fall first and foremost on the poor majority. This basic and undeniable truth forms the foundation of the global climate justice movement. Climate change threatens the balance of life on Earth and with it human communities everywhere, so addressing climate change requires urgent action by all people, rich and poor, in all countries, developed and developing. But to be both just and effective the response must be fair. Developing countries and communities are unlikely to ignore the historical responsibility of the developed world for the causes and consequences of climate change.

Friends of the Earth campaigners will be writing throughout the Copenhagen meeting. Go to <www.foei.org/en/blog/>. ←

National School Curriculum

Rob Durbridge

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The politics of curriculum in Gillard's 'Education Revolution'

The introduction of a national curriculum for schools was a goal of the Howard government that was adopted by the ALP and is strongly promoted by the media and employers. In the name of this logical goal, right-wing educational interests push for an instrumentalist curriculum and competitive national testing. It is seen by them as a corrective to leftist content and methods and a vehicle for further school privatisation. Federal

Education Minister Julia Gillard gets media praise for pushing on with the national curriculum and cites it as an early gain in the 'Education Revolution'. The reform is being implemented by a new national body, Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA), under the leadership of education consultants and entrepreneurs Barry McGaw and Tony McKay. The new body is responsible for the K-12 curriculum, national assessment, data collection and reporting on all schools.

The ACARA Board is largely composed of state and private education employers. Specific panels in learning

areas include classroom teachers, but the exclusion from the board of any representatives of 250,000 public and private teacher unionists is deliberate. News Ltd outlets in particular advocate the removal of union influence from education policy. ACARA's proposals for the national senior secondary curriculum have caused concern due to a failure to engage the profession, a lack of funds for teachers' professional development and an unrealistic implementation schedule. A particular early failure to recognise the need to engage Indigenous



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educators in ACARA was highlighted by an open letter from Indigenous academics and teachers. Education ministers have since agreed to establish an Indigenous Education Action Plan, but its terms have been seen as narrow and remedial in focus.

Part of ACARA's role is to oversee the development of national testing, accountability and reporting—the 'transparency agenda'. It is the intersection of this role with the curriculum proper which causes most concern. The former Curriculum Corporation, owned by state and federal governments, did not have such a role. The emphasis on competitive measurement reflects the influence of US programs such as 'No Child Left Behind' and the punitive approach to poor-performing schools by Joel Klein in New York. Echoes of the Blair government's policies of testing, inspection and closure abound.

The superficial appeal of this approach is apparent, and the right-wing media's influence is clear. But it is hard to understand why US policies are to be applied to Australian schools, which generally perform well by international standards, particularly given the low level of funds allocated to public schools by OECD standards. In the internationally recognised PISA and TIMSS literacy and maths/science tests, Australia performs well above the United States and the United Kingdom.

Australian unions are being warned by colleagues in the United Kingdom and the United States not to go down the road of competitive testing as a focus for education policy. The danger of this approach is that only things which can be measured are valued—the econometric mantra. It is easy to compare test scores from the NAPLAN tests of all year three, five, seven and nine kids in May each year. It is easy to then create league tables, despite the fact that NAPLAN was never designed for that purpose. Gillard's unveiling of the My School website feeds fears of precisely that development. Teachers in the United Kingdom in particular warn of the damage these policies do to teaching and learning.

All Australian media outlets regard any restriction on the media's 'right' to publish comparative school test information as unacceptable—without legislative protection, league tables will be next. When asked by a Canberra principal how the growth of creativity, personal well-being or spiritual development would be measured, Gillard's reply was illuminating. 'If we could absolutely measure everything then I would say that we should, but there are some things that are beyond measurement. Whether a person is a good person or not a good person ends up being a matter of opinion, not a matter of statistical measurement.'



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The federal and Victorian governments have even gone so far as to link student test scores with teacher performance pay in a pilot scheme devised by Boston Consulting and funded under a so-called 'National Partnership Agreement' (NPA) under the auspices of COAG. Terry Moran, head of the Prime Minister's Department and previously of the Victorian Premier's Department, has previously engaged Boston Consulting, a firm that promotes the integration of public and private schooling in Australia.

NPAs are the vehicle for a range of federal government-initiated reforms that involve the agreement of states and territories before teachers, parents or unions are consulted. This is a bureaucratic, not an educational, process with none of the involvement that previous Labor governments demonstrated with public bodies of respected experts, such as the Schools Commission. An unprecedented degree of bureaucratic centralism is being driven by Canberra taking strategic control of educational programs from fund-starved state and territory governments.

In October Gillard attended a Washington conference to 'Hear foreign experts and the world's most innovative practitioners share cutting-edge catalysts for dramatically improving student learning,' where she joined a panel—hosted by George's brother and former Florida Governor Jeb Bush—entitled 'Allies in the International Education Arms Race'. The rest of the panel included British Professor James Tooley, an expert on private education and 'the role of the state in education, and on private education, privatisation and public-private partnerships in developing countries and transition economies,' and Peje Emilson, a key figure in establishing voucher funding of for-profit schools and CEO of a €45 million per year corporation operating twenty-two private schools in Sweden. We can hope this line-up is not a portent for the forthcoming review of Australian schools' funding post-2013, which has always been the biggest education policy question facing the Rudd government.

For the audit culture behind Gillard's 'Education Revolution' see Cooper's Last in this issue. ←

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Parallel Importations

John Hinkson
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The decision to retain parallel importation rules in the publishing industry is likely to be a Trojan horse.

It would be hard to find a more emotional response from the Right to the decision by the Rudd government to maintain the import rules that have given some protection to the publishing and printing industry in Australia. Michael Stutchbury, economics editor at *The Australian*, led the reaction. Under the heading 'Decision Betrays a Lack of Spine', he accuses the Rudd government of not caring for

consumers who will have to pay more for books, not giving 'a fig' about the tax on underprivileged kids, throwing out the education revolution, and not caring for 'social inclusion'. As these are all social agendas that Stutchbury and *The Australian* are not known for championing in their own right, we might need to dig a little deeper to understand the source of the concern.

It is not too hard to find the answer. It is a concern about maintenance of the competition agenda first put in place by Hawke and Keating, an agenda that opened the door to the market orientation of the last thirty years. And it is the market that will achieve the social revolution if it is given the chance. Stutchbury and *The Australian* are no fans of Labor and they are worried about what the Rudd response to the GFC means for the commitment of Canberra to global markets.

That global markets (supported by the internet) may be distorting our way of life is hardly a preoccupation of *The Australian* and the issue barely been touched on by the political debate over the book import laws. Yet the possible change to the laws does bring to the fore important questions: to what degree should the economy and culture of the nation be made-over by global markets in the pursuit of global imports and exports and a global way

of life? Rather than being a matter of how books will be priced, the issues around parallel importation laws potentially raise far more basic questions of how we are to live over the coming decades.

While there are, no doubt, shades of difference between what *The Australian* would champion in this area and what the Rudd government is pursuing, these shades don't amount to much. What all parties share—the Productivity Commission, *The Australian*, many commentators, the government and even many industry defenders of the parallel importation policy—is a complete lack of questioning of a global market enhanced by the high-tech force of 'new' media and the internet. When the government says, in the defence of its decision, that it is concerned about the pressure of online sales on the publishing industry this is really a round-about way of saying, 'Don't worry about changing the rules in the short term, the market and the internet will do the job for us soon enough'. In other words, give things a year or two and it will be a *fait accompli*. There may be shades of policy difference between the various parties but all of them are working within an overall view of support for the global market to work things out.

This attitude of *fait accompli* towards the market—it will ultimately win—is not all that obvious given Rudd's public criticism of neo-liberalism and so-called 'extreme capitalism', leading some to think of him as standing outside a commitment to global markets. It provides him with a point of ideological differentiation and legitimisation, and the decision to retain parallel importation laws seems to reinforce this view. But it is not a legitimisation he deserves. Rudd assumes the continuation of the neo-liberal market in its predominant aspect, even the 'efficient market thesis', wishing to shape it only minimally to prevent the kind of disruption the GFC has represented. If this does not seem to be a very major difference, all the more reason to make a lot of noise about it so Labor is legitimised in the eyes of a public demoralised by the direction their lives have taken under twenty years of 'market rules' ideology. In reality, the 'special deal' for the publishing and printing industry is no more than a temporary fix holding back the inevitable of what Paul Keating

used to call the 'level playing field' represented by the transformed market.

There are not many voices inclined to challenge this material force. It is 'reality', 'common sense', 'development', 'the only way to go'. Any other suggestions are regarded as unhinged. In this absolutely dominant view, the best the publishing industry and Australian authors can hope for is a special deal that, predictably, is always under threat. This is a timid defence of our cultural institutions, one with little future while it restricts its arguments to sectional interests, ignoring the problem of cultural production as an aspect of the larger, historic crisis that marks our time.

Those who advocate the global market and the efficient market thesis think of the market as a simple, unchanged institution. But today's market is an aspect of a more general institutional change arising out of the conjunction of capitalism with those revolutionary practices of the academic institutions—the technosciences. The computer and the silicon chip: these are two of a range of technologies with social outcomes that not only set in place a revolution in the structure of the market but also a unique way of life. It is one increasingly composed of social relations that work at a distance, ideal for global interchange but destructive of social



Parallel
Importations

John Hinkson

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institutions grounded in local face-to-face relations and structured by relations across the generations. If the internet allows us to make endless connections with others, these are typically fast moving and lacking the warmth, empathy and depth of association that is historically signified by family, community and knowing others in place and over time.

This emerging revolution in the way we live, produce and distribute is inseparable from the global market. It has affected our relationships and feeling for others. And crucially from the standpoint of our relation to the world of nature, it has enhanced the principle of expansion, put in place by historical capitalism, of resource, land and water use, and of population and economic growth. Not only has it exhausted the availability of natural resources but also the viability of the planet taken for granted by Homo sapiens for 10,000 years.

The weak defence of the publishing and printing industries has no future while these expansive forms of social development are taken for granted, as Labor well knows. It was not all that long ago that the community came out in support of the Maritime Union of Australia and 'won' the battle against dismantling long-established conditions on the wharfs only to see this 'victory' dissolve as technology decimated the workforce. Any real defence needs to be put as part of a larger perspective, where the full implications of a combination of new global technologies and capitalism are assessed.

Opposition to the material force of the global market is beginning to emerge, grounded in a view of the material consequences of a way of life now visibly unsustainable. Such opposition needs to include a substantial defence of the social circumstances of writers and intellectuals, publishers and printers, as an aspect of constructing a way forward for Australia and the Australian people. For a generation our intellectual culture has been overly slanted towards global economy and culture. Can it broaden its perspectives in the defence of a social world of reading, writing and publishing based in the renewal of local and regional cultures? ←



Norway's
Sámi Parliament

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Norway's

Sámi Parliament

Jane Robbins

A model for Indigenous representation?

On September 14th two elections were held in Norway. One was for the national government and the other was for the Sámediggi, or Sámi Parliament, the representative body for Norway's Indigenous minority, the Sámi. In due course the King of Norway, Harald V, will open the next session of the Storting or Parliament. Shortly after, wearing the same regalia and with much the same pomp and circumstance, he will open the Sámediggi in its impressive building in the town of Karasjok (Kárásjohka) in the Arctic Circle and the heart of Sámi territory. The symbolism of this parallel ceremony is just one of many ways in which the Norwegians acknowledge the

importance of the status of the Sámi representative body within the political system.

The Sámediggi has been in existence since 1989 and since that time its responsibilities have increased considerably. Today it administers a budget of over \$50 million (NOK 250 million), which is roughly half the amount spent on Sámi programs by the Norwegian government. While its original powers were modest, they have gradually expanded. The Sámediggi manages the Sámi Development Fund, which allocates funding to Sámi organisations; it has responsibility for language and cultural heritage preservation, protection of heritage sites and for the development of teaching aids to support education. In 2000 a NOK 70 million fund was established by the government as compensation for former assimilation policies; the Sámediggi allocates grants for cultural and linguistic activities from the interest generated. In 2005 the Finnmark Act acknowledged the traditional rights of the Sámi to land and water in Finnmark County in the north of Norway.

There are many parallels between the role and function of

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the Sámediggi and the former Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). However, the positive approach of the Norwegian government to a popularly elected Indigenous representative body is in contrast to the experience in Australia, where ATSIC was frequently at loggerheads with government, especially in the last few years of its existence. The Howard government's verdict that ATSIC was a failure has become popular wisdom. Interestingly, the lack of a separation of powers (that is, ATSIC's ability both to make policy and approve expenditure) is now commonly believed to be at the heart of its shortcomings. It was also widely seen as unaccountable both to government and to its Indigenous constituents. These assumptions have been perpetuated by the current Labor government, which made it clear that its endorsement of the current process to establish a new Australian

Indigenous representative body was conditional on it not being 'another ATSIC'. This has been understood to mean that the new body should not be popularly elected nor should it have any direct control over expenditure. It is interesting in this context to consider why the Norwegians appear to be happy with their arrangements which embrace these roles and indeed wish to endorse the independent status of their Indigenous representative body.

The Sámi and Australia's Indigenous peoples share a common legal difficulty in achieving recognition of their political claims within the modern nation. Historically, neither were offered treaties by the colonising powers that assumed their territories. In the case of the Sámi (or Lapps as they have been called), this occupation took place over many centuries as people from the south and east moved into Sámi territory in the northern regions of

Fennoscandia. The consolidation of contemporary national borders left Sámi territory divided between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. No one is sure how many Sámi there are, but it is estimated that there are between 50,000 and 70,000, with the majority—probably around 40,000—in Norway. They are commonly known as nomadic reindeer herders of the arctic north, but in fact Sámi communities historically pursued a variety of lifestyles including fishing and hunting and trapping as well as reindeer husbandry. As in Australia, Norwegian Sámi suffered from discriminatory government policy in the first part of the 20th century—education was only provided in Norwegian language and many children were placed in boarding schools in an active attempt to 'Norwegianise' their culture. The government supported settlers to move onto Sámi lands, especially in the north, where this policy had defence implications. As non-

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Norwegians, Sámi also experienced restrictions in purchasing land.

Sámi relations with the Norwegian began to change immediately after World War II. Retreating German troops applied a 'scorched earth policy' in northern Finnmark and Troms regions, with dire consequences for the Sámi. In a short period of time three quarters of the Sámi population in Norway lost their homes, boats and other material possessions. Government aid and reconstruction followed and this, for many Sámi families, was the first positive interaction with the Norwegian state. The extension of welfare benefits and other social services to Sámi communities also occurred during this period, although this was not accompanied by any recognition of cultural rights. Interestingly, the most important turning point in Sámi/Norwegian relations occurred in the 1980s as the result of a dam project. The Alta-Kautokeino dam was approved by the Norwegian parliament in 1978 to provide hydro-electricity. The proposed site would flood important reindeer grazing areas and harm traditional salmon fisheries. As in Australia's Franklin Dam case, Indigenous activists joined with environmentalists to protest against the dam, resulting in some of the most dramatic civil unrest ever witnessed in Norway. In 1981, 600 police in riot gear forcibly removed protesters who had chained themselves together. In the capital, in scenes reminiscent of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Sámi erected a traditional lavvu, or tent, in front of the Storting and began a series of hunger strikes. Such scenes are rarely seen in the peaceable Norwegian society. The case went to the Supreme Court, which over-ruled objections, but an important step had been taken—the Sámi had become politically visible, perhaps for the first time, and the Norwegian national conscience had been pricked. As a result several official committees were established to consider Sámi cultural and legal rights and these led to the Sámi Act of 1987, the recognition of Sámi in the Norwegian Constitution and the establishment of the Sámediggi in 1989.

An interesting contrast to Australian experience of Indigenous representation is the involvement of political parties in Norwegian Sámi elections. This practice has been encouraged by the fact that the Executive Council and President are chosen, Westminster style,

on the basis of majority support. Party 'lists' form the basis of political campaigns, together with loose groupings of individuals. Mainstream parties such as the Labour Party have a Sámi counterpart while others are based on Sámi organisations such as the Norwegian Sámi Association (NSR) and regional Reindeer Herders' Associations. The NSR has been the dominant party in the Sámediggi, governing with either a majority in its own right, or in association with minor parties. Two years after the 2005 election its coalition with minor parties broke down allowing the Labour Party, led by Egil Olli, to form a governing alliance with minor parties for the first time. Registration for voting is voluntary and is open to anyone who identifies as a Sámi and either speaks the Sámi language or has a parent, grandparent or great-grand-parent who spoke

Sámi. In the 2005 election, voter turnout was 73 per cent and women won a majority of seats.

In the recent election the campaigns of two previously unrepresented parties attracted considerable interest. The Progress Party (FrP) is a major right-wing force in the Norwegian Parliament and has been outspoken in its opposition to the Sámi Parliament, labelling it discriminatory and undemocratic and portraying Sámediggi funding activities as racially based 'privileges'. The FrP campaign for the Sámi elections was highly publicised and controversial, with speculation that it reflected the views of conservative Sámi who are uncomfortable with the language of rights and separatism. At the other extreme was another newcomer, Årja, a party which promotes Sámi self-determination with a focus on

the Sámi settler communities in inner Finnmark. Årja campaigned for hunting rights and liberalisation of the use of snowmobiles and quad bikes—a hot environmental issue in the north. The September elections saw both of these parties win 3 seats each at the expense of the major parties. Negotiations resulted in a majority coalition of Labour, Arja and 3 single-seat parties forming a government, with Egil Olli of the Sámi Labour Party continuing his presidency and Årja's tertiary educated young female leader, Laila Susanne Vars, becoming the vice-president. Under this Coalition it is predicted that opportunities for economic or resource development in Sámi regions will be considered more favourably than in past regimes, which prioritised reindeer herders' interests. The reduced support for the major parties in favour of the smaller parties has

been seen as voter protest against the lack of differentiation between Labour and NSR platforms and dissatisfaction with past policy decisions.

The dynamic of party politics in the Sámediggi offers an interesting contrast to the experience of ATSIC. The ATSIC commissioners were chosen through a process in which began with voters electing local representatives for Regional Councils. The Regional Councils were then grouped into zones for the purpose of electing a commissioner to the national board, rather than an executive being chosen on the basis of majority support by elected representatives. This was done to create a strong model of regionalism, but such a system also emphasised geographical equality of representation at national level, as opposed to the development of 'issues' based platforms, and produced a national board of commissioners who shared no intrinsic strategic outlook. It is not surprising that ATSIC election campaigns were conducted almost exclusively on a personal leadership basis rather than on policy issues. It might be hard to accept that ATSIC could have benefited from the development of parties as there is a common perception that it was already 'too political'. While we know from mainstream politics how frustrating parties can be, they do at least offer a rudimentary tool for communication between the voters and their representatives and provide a basis for a policy debate to emerge. Sámi voters have used their election opportunity to send a message to their representatives in the Sámediggi that a change is required.

It is interesting to speculate why the Norwegian government has encouraged the expansion of the responsibilities and the independence of the Sámi Parliament. This is probably because it has come to interpret Sámi rights within the framework of international treaty obligations, as a matter of human rights. Unlike Australia it has signed ILO Convention No 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, as

well as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. However, article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights has perhaps been the most influential determinant of Norwegian Sámi policy, a document to which Australia is also a signatory. Article 27 states:

In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or use their own language.

It also contains protections against discrimination for these groups. Norway has embraced these articles and is developing a genuine partnership with the Sámi in the governance of cultural and heritage matters. It is now beginning to expand its partnership with the Sami to economic and resource management. While there has been some evidence of dissent within Norwegian society regarding these developments, in comparison to the native title debate in Australia there seems to be relatively little controversy. Norway has also embedded recognition of the Sámi in its Constitution. It will be interesting to observe whether the current Australian debate on the adoption of a Human Rights Act will encourage the development of similar perspective on Indigenous rights in this country. ←

On the Fluctuating Value of Lives

Aurélien Mondon
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Why are some conflicts more visible than others, some deaths more significant?

Recent events have taken me back to almost a year ago. Time flies, suffering and indifference remains. What I found confirmed through these events and their reception in Australia is that we need to acknowledge equality ever more urgently.

Within two weeks last year, over 750 Palestinians lost their lives in what became known as the war on Gaza. Thousands more were wounded. While some were admittedly soldiers from Hamas, many, if not most, were civilians. A third were children. On 6 January 2009, *The Australian* reported that in an online poll on their website 53 per cent believed the invasion to be justified. Even if *The Australian's* readers do not adequately represent the Australian population as a whole, this led me to wonder why so many people, in a country which has in fact no direct link to the conflict, could decide to support such an invasion. What argument could justify the death of hundreds and the further starvation and impoverishment of thousands? Can the deaths of a few Israeli justify such a massacre? It is a strange reminiscence of colonial times, when the slaughter of many more colonised was adequate punishment for the murder of a coloniser.

This is of course not to say that Israeli civilian deaths should not be deplored or condemned, and should be forgotten or forgiven because they do not compare in number to Palestinian deaths. However, I found the fact of these deaths hardly sufficient to support an invasion which was bloodier than any rocket launched from Gaza ever was, and quite possibly could ever be.

Acknowledging the equal value of Palestinian and Israeli lives could therefore be a start. What kind of equality? The most basic

form: both are human beings and are as such equal. For this point to hold, equality has to be understood as an axiom. That is, it cannot be understood as a goal but as a starting point, as a state that requires enactment through prescriptions. The Palestinians and the Israelis are obviously not, in practice, equal in terms of justice, food and liberty, just as Palestinians are individually different from one another. However, as mentioned earlier, they are all human beings and this makes them, I believe, undeniably equal. From this point, it becomes impossible to justify unfair or discriminatory conduct. Still, it is the denial of this axiom of equality, which can be witnessed on an everyday basis in the news, that I believe is one of the most important impediments to radical change.

During the war on Gaza, on Christmas day 271 people were killed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Only a few lines appeared in the French news. A week later, a short article in *The Age* mentioned the killing of 500 villagers in a single day. Needless to say this did not make the front page. On the other hand, the Palestinian crisis was, over several days, front page material for most newspapers across the world.

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has killed more than 5.4 million people in ten years, but maybe because it does not seem to be about to end, we can probably wait before

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Why were the
American lives lost during
the 9/11 attacks so
important, while over ten
years in the Congo the
same number of people
have died every two days
with a response of
complete indifference?
Why is the Palestinian
conflict so much more
mediatised than the
Congolese, the Sudanese,
the Haitian?

taking interest in it. During last's year's Christmas festivities, Australia's cricket team not doing so well and the Palestinian conflict were enough to satisfy our right to freedom of information. Far be it for me to judge from a self-righteous perspective—I admit I knew very little about the DRC conflict before the publication of an article on Rue89.com highlighting the disparity of treatment between the deaths of people depending on their nationality, skin colour, background or whatever is, or could be, used to differentiate and alienate them.

Many questions (re)surfaced after reading this article. Why do we care more about some lives than others? Why were the American lives lost during the 9/11 attacks so important, while over ten years in the Congo the

same number of people have died every two days with a response of complete indifference? Why is the Palestinian conflict so much more mediatised than the Congolese, the Sudanese, the Haitian? Have we all finally given up the idea that all human beings should be allowed to live a decent life, or even just live? Does the number of conflicts happening around the world force us to make a choice between those we should care about and those we have to leave aside? Is this decision linked to a wish to ignore the effects of colonisation, past and present, on some parts of the globe?

Things have not changed in the last nine months, and recent events have brought me back to this topic. On 3 October, the earthquake and

REFLECTION

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On the Fluctuating Value of Lives

Aurélien Mondon

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tsunami in Sumatra made the front page of *The Age*, and probably most newspapers in the country. To my surprise (I may be naive) I could not find the number of victims on this page, while the number of Australians missing was written three times. If I remember well, the total number of victims did not appear before page seven. 1300 perished. Some might say it is normal to care more for one's neighbour or for one's family. Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the extreme-right Front National party in France, said so himself. Still, I could understand, if not condone, such a sentiment that leads someone to want to know how many people from one's homeland might have died in such a catastrophe. What shocks me is the disdain with which the alien victims are treated. Is it because they are poor? From a different culture? Overseas? This probably links back to the irrational creation that is nationalism. Why should one consider oneself more closely related to the sportsman who earns millions and lives on the other side of the country (or overseas) than to their foreign neighbour with whom they share their daily life? Of this, I'm not sure.

Still, it gets worse. The day after the *Age* 'incident', it happened that an information session was organised by the Congolese community. This event reminded me that on average more than a thousand people die each and every day in the Congo because of war, and that except on some very rare occasions these people do not even make it to page seven of our newspapers. On that day, most of what I had learned since last January was confirmed by witnesses of the bloodiest war since World War II. Why is this war taking place? For the same reason the Congo has been exploited and millions of its people killed since the 19th century: its vast natural resources. First it was rubber, exploited by the Belgians and King Leopold II, and resulting in the deaths of around 10 million people. The King made an immense fortune—recently, one

of his palaces on the French Riviera was sold for a record US\$895 million. After the independence of the 1960s, neo-colonialist forces were not yet ready to let the Congo go its own way and benefit from its own resources (coltan, diamonds, gold). After the CIA 'got rid of' Lumumba, the only elected leader of the Congo, who had pledged to overcome the Congo's ethnic divisions, Mobutu, whom many Congolese dissidents call the 'puppet', was put in place to keep business going as usual. Exploitation continued, and Mobutu's wealth soon grew to over US\$5 billion. In 1996, Mobutu was overthrown and from then on, the First and Second Congo Wars raged, between the Congolese themselves, but also involving seven neighbouring countries who were keeping their eye on the Congo's resources. Over 5 million people died within a decade and 1.8 million were displaced; many women were raped and mutilated; thousands of children were enrolled in militias, often after having been forced to kill their own parents; thousands more children were enslaved to work in mines.

Nowadays, coltan has replaced rubber and diamonds. The DRC holds around 80 per cent of the world's reserves in its soil. I assume that many, until recently myself included, do not even know what coltan is and yet could not live without it. Coltan is a crucial mineral in the construction of many electronic objects, from mobile phones to computers and game consoles. It was for coltan that Rwanda and other neighbouring countries invaded the Congo, under the false pretence of looking for those guilty of genocide. As a UN report uncovered, they headed straight towards the mines. At the same time, facilitating the invasion, the price of coltan (illegal to mine in the Congo) soared because of the necessity to build more and more PlayStations. Australian companies, such as Talison Minerals and Sons of Gwalia, have played an important part in this bloody trade. In 2001, Australia produced around 80 per cent of the coltan illegally mined in the DRC and bought from the Rwandese.

All this has been tolerated because of our denial of equality in the face of the all-powerful laws of the market. All these deaths because we have decided to

accept that life can be given a fluctuating value that can be weighed against other goods. The deaths of millions of black people seems, therefore, if not tolerable, at least acceptable, in the face of the incredible benefits we can draw from it. In the end, it comes down to this: How much blood is my PlayStation worth?

There is an optimistic point here. There is a solution and it is in our own hands. Only equality as a starting point can be this solution, not only for particular conflicts such as those taking place in the Middle East or in the Congo, but for most of the inhuman treatment a huge proportion of the people living

on this planet are subjected to every day (lack of drinking water, food shortages, death from curable diseases). What is happening in the Congo or in Gaza is not just one special and out of the ordinary thing—it is what is happening in many other places in the world every day. Acknowledging this equality is the first step towards taking our own responsibilities away from those who judge us incapable, and who have made us responsible for cruelty most would never have tolerated.

It is with Jacques Rancière's words that I conclude:
It is true that we do not know that humans are equal. We are saying that they might be.

This is our opinion, and we are trying, with those who believe as we do, to verify it. But we know that this might be exactly what makes a society of humans possible.

What is to be done? Relying solely on our governments and NGOs, or finally emancipating ourselves and accepting our responsibilities? As Rancière noted, 'the government does not owe the people its education for the simple reason that one does not owe the people what it can acquire on its own'. In fact, education is like liberty: one does not receive it, one acquires it. ←



debate **Big Polluters and Small Steps**

Gill Freeman
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Arena Magazine nos 100 and 101 have carried an interesting discussion on what we are to do in the face of the unfolding environmental catastrophe. Nonie Sharp has interpreted *The Transition Handbook* (Rob Hudson, 2008) as representing by no means 'naive, small steps', whereas in her reply Chris James claims that this book lets 'the big polluters off the hook'.

The messages from our political leaders are contradictory. Some sectors of government say we must maintain growth irrespective of the environmental consequences. There is the suggestion from the Victorian state government, for example, that an export market be developed for our brown coal. However, others in government urge individuals and households to adopt a conserving and energy-efficient way of life. They are exhorted to take action, mostly in the form of small and fairly palatable steps. The main climate change message of late, through the use of the black balloon ads, suggests that individuals and households should consider the efficiency of electrical appliances and adopt more conservative uses of these appliances.

There is no challenge to the 'big polluters' in either of these messages. At one stage, at the federal government level there were some larger steps being taken, albeit tentatively. The immensely popular solar-panels subsidy meant more and more PV systems were being installed in households. Recently, however, the per-household rebate has been withdrawn, and as a result the growth in this form of household-based energy production has stalled. The

subsidies available for solar panel installations in remote Aboriginal stations and agricultural enterprises have also been abandoned. So these larger steps, which seemed to confront the big polluters through promotion of locally produced clean energy, are no longer being taken. The main thrust of calls the public receives from government to act on climate change are directed towards personal and/or household behaviour.

The Transition Town movement, on the other hand, is about a community deliberately setting about a long-term and rigorous examination of its use of fossil-fuel based energy and how it can plan for the end of cheap oil. A secondary consideration is how the community deals with climate change. We have 'enjoyed' the benefits of the long period when oil was cheap and its use was escalating, and established patterns of life assume that this will continue. The Transition Town community sets about challenging this assumption and planning an 'energy descent pathway'.

This is by no means an easy task as there are many forces arrayed against these conversations ever being seriously undertaken. There are sceptics who can throw the community processes off course. There are those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. To engage with neighbours in the community in this conversation is to challenge everyone to take the very large step of reconsidering every aspect of our reliance on cheap oil. In their own way these communities are confronting the big

polluters, and not letting them off the hook, as Chris James suggests in issue 101. Rob Hopkins points out that this involves local energy and water self sufficiency, personal and community mobility, appropriate housing, access to food, new forms of recreation and leisure, new forms of exchange, how health is maintained and how the community deals with emergencies. The changes envisaged allow the possibility of progress towards self reliance and resilience in the face of future shocks.

As Nonie Sharp says, 'transitioning sprang from a realisation that the problem is vast and that, morally speaking, doing nothing is not an option'. These conversations are gearing up across Australia in the country as well as in cities, and are a manifestation of the frustration felt by people who feel that government is not treating the big issues with the urgency required. Will transition towns change the world? Who knows? They do have some hope of changing the local community. A participant in the Foster-based Corner Inlet transition town initiative says in her blog: 'Transition towns, sustainability, good environmental practices, minimising footprints, being fit, healthy and connected to others, saving money, consuming less—to me it's all the same thing pretty much when viewed from a practical, hands-on position.

I know that this Transition thing has re-kindled my energy in these directions'. ←



debate **Transition and the Revitalised Middle Class**

Chris James
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In *Arena Magazine* no. 102, Ted Trainer, author of the *Conserver Society Alternatives for Sustainability*, enters the debate on the Transition Towns movement with the question 'Transitioning to Where?' He notes the potential of the Transition Towns movement but believes there is a good chance the 'present movement will come to nothing of lasting significance'. He acknowledges that the way of life we now have is 'unjust and unsustainable' but claims we cannot overcome the 'overshoot' in material consumption simply by using technical advances. Many Transition Towns ideas are based on technical advances,

for example solar power. Running alongside these advances is the other important notion, localisation and/or small communities. Notably in this respect, Trainer advocates the same kind of smallness put forward by Transition Towns. It may be that small is inevitable but if so, we need to be very clear about the implications of this move.

Trainer quite rightly suggests there needs to be a just global economy. We must level the fields between the

DEBATE

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Big Polluters and Small Steps

Gil Freeman

Gil Freeman and his partner Meredith are engaged in farming on a small South Gippsland mixed farm. Gil is a member of the Energy Innovation Co-operative, based in West Gippsland.

‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’. This is no simple matter. We need to take care that we don’t just bundle up the poor and put them in some remote local with no communication and no services, as was the case with single mothers and ministry housing estates some years ago, and has been the case with a number of minority groups. This kind of separatism is an easy option and is already built into the Transition Towns model but it doesn’t mean it cannot be changed. A question here underwrites the willingness of Australians to be truly inclusive and to clearly identify what demarcates diversity and inclusiveness from cultural relativism.

The Transition Towns’ answer to the consumption problem is if we withdraw from the current economy en masse it will simply fail. Easier said than done. Emotionally and habitually most Western people enjoy some aspects of the current consumerism. Moreover, it is not that the *thinking* sectors of society have not tried to

withdraw from the market forces, or a least some areas of it. Various international companies have had their products boycotted for morally unjust and unethical reasons. However, most long term acts in this respect fizzle out and within a year or so it is business as usual. In contrast, many socialist based alternatives quickly take on the capitalist formula when people find themselves undervalued and unrewarded. A solid history of this lies in the commune movement.

The idea that we can build a new society around energy and the coming scarcity of it is an interesting concept but are people truly willing to forego their luxuries? More to the point, will the world really run out of energy? Or is it more an issue of what type of energy are we talking about? At what cost? And who suffers to make sure the elites do not go without? In terms of community-based Transition Towns movements the answer to these questions lies in the contexts. Transition Towns tend to take on the

culture in which they find their existence. Start a Transition Towns group in an area that is notoriously racist and the conversation will soon swing to how we stop all the boat people entering Australia. Or, to quote a different example, ‘We don’t want all these people coming from the city and lobbying on our farms’. Indeed, Transition Towns are, for the most part, culturally bound and can be a means of sustaining localised forms of cultural relativism. In which case is ‘energy’ the real topic of the debate?

The Transition Towns energy decent plan is based upon decentralisation. Transition Towns answer to most aspects of non-sustainability is localisation, believing it will make for a more sustainable and just world. It might be more sustainable but sustainable for whom? And what is actually being sustained? Autarky? Isolationism? Neo-feudalism? A new green economy? The re-invention of capitalism? In much of rural Australia we have not moved far from these regimes

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Transition and the Revitalised Middle Class

Chris James

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anyway. Rural people hate any kind of outside authority; they like to make up their own rules even if they do oppress fifty percent of the population—women. I make this point because if, as a society, we are ever going to address the pitfalls of patriarchy, it is never going to happen in small communities because of the necessity that women do all the domestic work; and, just by chance, Transition Towns (in rural communities) are visibly gender differentiated. In addition, small communities are fraught with people in self-appointed positions of power. This was challenged at a recent Transition Towns meeting when a senior shire employee was heard to say, ‘There has to be a gatekeeper’. Is this a projection of how small communities are to be envisaged? Are we looking at communities as prisons without walls, with gatekeepers and possibly, metaphorically speaking, gun towers?

Trainer suggests that Transition Towns is focused on energy and he argues that renewable energy cannot sustain society. Also there is no indication that the world’s governments are seriously committed to going down the path of renewable energy. The carbon lobby is too strong, governments are too weak and too wrapped up in self-interest. Moreover, the ‘ordinary’ people are kept too busy trying to earn a living and surviving the rising costs and market failures to think too far outside the proverbial square. Environment concerns are really for those who have time for them. It has often been said that the environment movement is made up of the (leisured) middle class. Now the middle class is in decline. I would contend then that Transition Towns is not really about environment sustainability as much as

it is about sustaining the middle class, whose roots have been severely shaken by the crises in capitalism. This is not new territory. The class war is simply dressed in a new guise—aestheticism. Because ‘small’ produces this kind of aestheticism it can only be viewed from a distance. This makes it easy to hide the abuses (the detail). We understand this in art but have not fully comprehended the fluidity, or discursiveness, of this kind of postmodern politics. Instead we have called its discourses ‘depoliticised’.

Trainer suggests we build aspects of a new system—‘basically an Anarchist vision’—within the old system; *be in and against the state*, in other words. This is the very reformist idea that failed to shift middle class supremacy in previous decades because all the gains are too easily turned around. It brings us back to the real purpose of the Transition Towns movement—bourgeois community resilience. We need to ask: is ‘resilience’, a pathway to real social change or is it a bulwark against it? Is Transition Towns a means of letting the middle classes off the social justice hook? Further, is it a means of allowing middle class dependent governments to abrogate their responsibilities to citizens in favour of a civil society where anything goes as long as it is good for business? If this is so then Transition Towns has not shifted from mainstream neo-liberalism. ←



David Long

As I have recently seen *Arena* concerns itself with cultural issues—how we are living today, under consumerism—I would like to make a few points from my own experience. Rather than intellectualise, I prefer to assert from striking observations and intuitions. Many things I see hit me like a ton of bricks, living in a big consumer city like Melbourne much of the last twenty years. My background probably enhanced this: thirty years of yoga practice; a few years living in Asia; times of rural living in Australia, often with idealistic, somewhat self-sufficient people; a few months in communist Eastern Europe in the seventies; and, in Australia, always living *decades* behind the times, with few gadgets, few distractions and entertainments, and often with no TV.

But would not anyone who has lived in an Australian city for twenty or thirty years notice huge changes in how we live? It's been twenty years since the Berlin Wall came down and the collapse of communism. In that time, much of the Left has lost its focus—the negative focus on 'the enemy' and the positive focus on 'the vision'. This enemy has morphed from capitalism into (hyper-)consumerism. Consumerism, as we see it operating, involves the minds, desires and fears; it involves invasion and inundating sacred space—the hearts and minds of people. It involves dumbing down and distracting with entertainment and novelty and spectacle, and transforming passers-by into resources to be impacted with a promotional message.

The intensity and density of consumerist advertising is of course very different from the control techniques I saw in Eastern Europe, where communism was presented as a *fait accompli*. The visual

and aural brainwashing I get in Melbourne is approximately *fifty* times any sloganeering I saw in Eastern Europe. I know I am free but I spend a huge amount of time and energy filtering and cancelling unwanted peripheral messages. This is not what I call 'quality of life'. As consumerism grinds on, we see daily how it goes against human nature and our lovelier and sweeter side.

But what of a positive vision? We can't just be anti. What are we for? Until we embrace the joys of simplicity, quietness, the sanctity of people's headspaces, we will remain suckers for all-action, vibrant cosmopolitanism, exciting, all spruiking, all-music and all-dancing public areas. We need to give the people back their mindspace; we need to promote 'Sane Spaces' as necessary and beautiful public places; we need to and reduce the amount of advertising by two-thirds.

The Left needs to embrace spirituality fully, as showing the way to the fulfillment that materialism cannot give and as a personal discipline to counter the saturation of consumerism. If Marx and Engels were living in Melbourne now, they would not be writing about the exploitation of the workers, they

would be writing psychology—how our minds have been seduced and stuffed with rubbish; how our hearts have been hardened in many ways; how nervous, jumpy and contracted we have become. How many enjoy a state of contentment, spaciousness and benign feelings all round, which, as far as I can see, is actually the purpose of life?

An interesting exercise is to draw a line in the sand by picking any year before 1970, or even between 1970 and 1985 (when consumerism began to kick in). Compare it to now in respect to how people were. Were they nice to be around? Were they kind? Were they honest? Were they fun? Were they trusting? Were they open or closed? Were they grounded in the unrealistic and fantasising? Were they humble or egoistic? Were they content or wanting? Work from

your own memories or experiences from that years, not from theory. In developing countries and some others, the important issues may be exploitation and justice, but in Australia I think the issue is how to un-wreck our psychology.

However, in every country, planetary survival is before everything else. Do we, in Australia, have the time and scope to adopt a gradual approach, of forty years or twenty years, of weaning ourselves away from consumerism and towards simplicity and sustainability? Sure, a gradual approach might protect some jobs and some living standards on the way there, but what are we, the people, like now as material to work on and what would we be like at the end of it?

We can have any number of gabfests, but they won't change

much or motivate the consumption-afflicted to simplify. Appalling upheaval and dislocation would, of course. But before doomsday happens, sampler experiences of simplicity peace and serenity need to be available to show people what they are missing. Yoga and mindfulness education/meditation should be taught in schools. There should be ad-free zones, background music-free zones, designated quiet spots marked on maps like public toilets! The 'Life. Be in it' campaign went on for years and was probably successful. But now we have 'hyper-life'. We now badly need a four-year or more 'Peace. Be in it' campaign. Answers will come from silence and beauty more than from gabfest and commissions. ←

Arena Magazine Appeal?



The Dirt

Jake Lynch

Seattle's jaded generations find hope in the new city farms

I love how Australians call a campfire a 'bush telly'. It just makes so much sense: the magnetism of the thing, the endless variety you can see in a frame that from a distance appears unchanging. The way it draws people to it is almost spiritual, beyond any considerations of warmth or light, and perhaps clasps the end of that thread in us that leads back to a more ancient man, when the fire was about survival.

It seems that vegie gardens are like that too. A young bloke who lives in our apartment block here in Seattle put together a little patch around the side of our building a few months ago. That was

telly', the magnetism of the thing, the endless variety that you can see in a frame that from a distance appears unchanging. And, like the fire, perhaps the patch clasps the end of that thread in us that leads back to a more ancient man, when the garden was about survival.

As my first American winter gave way to my first spring and I started to explore my new neighbourhood, I saw vegie patches sprouting up all over the place. In backyards but also on the strip in front of houses, in planter boxes on concrete pathways; the local middle school even built a garden out front where people were free to take whatever produce grew there. The proliferation of patches reminded me of some of the poorer cities in Asia I had visited, where people there grew food for their own survival. But here in the Seattle suburb of Queen Anne, there is plenty of disposable income to spend on organic produce at one of the many stores nearby where it is available. It was standing around with Brandon one Sunday afternoon, watering the patch and pondering the cornucopia, that I started thinking. What is motivating people to get down into the dirt for the sake of a few fresh lettuces? Why the sudden urge to grow? So I asked Brandon. For him it wasn't an economic necessity, but a way of connecting with a way of life that to him felt more meaningful.

As it turns out that desire to connect to a life that felt more meaningful is a common one these days. For someone who grew up in an Australia of relative prosperity and social stability, America of 2009 seems to be a place on the precipice. Since 9/11, many of the people here feel besieged. The current financial situation and the state of many of the big cities has not helped placate the American people, plenty of whom are dissatisfied with their immediate environments.

March; by July, where before there was just soil and seeds, there grew leaves and vines and products of the earth. People would come out to dump their rubbish, have a look at what Brandon was doing, and pretty soon there would be four or five neighbours, who had never given each other the time of day previously, standing around having a chinwag, 'kicking the tyre' as they say, making note of the changes and talking about the seasons. I would stand out there with them, thinking about the 'bush

Since the departure of former President Bush much political and cultural agony has subsided, but there are new troubles to replace the old. People are questioning the corporations that in many ways usurp actual democratic governance. Crime is up, obesity is up, unemployment is up. The gap between the rich and the poor is greater now than at any time before, exacerbated by a social services system that groups the United States more with the developing nations than with the world's leaders. To say the natives are restless is true, but it doesn't fully express the social and economic dissatisfaction that is rumbling, through America's cities especially.

Against this backdrop, Community Gardens programs are currently the hot topic in urban planning and social services. They are hailed by its champions as not only a way to preserve and enhance green space in the city, but also as a resource of human capital; a way to facilitate the interaction of people with their communities, while at the same time fostering an interest in outdoor recreation and healthy eating. Community Gardens programs are seeing a huge increase in people wanting to get involved, and waiting lists for plots are hundreds long. The Seattle City Council's P Patch program, administered by the Department of Neighbourhoods, provides organic community garden space for residents of seventy neighbourhoods. Though Seattle doesn't have the urban slum crises of many other cities in the United States, 12 per cent of its residents live below the poverty line. Fifty-five per cent of P Patch gardeners are low income, and between April and October 36 per cent of gardeners get more than half of their produce needs from their P Patch.

The act of growing your own food in the backyard vegie garden or the suburban plot has always been something of a social statement, and today this is true more than ever. As a response to the obesity epidemic, corporate influence over the industrial food economy, carbon emissions, social discontent, unemployment, and even the breakdown of the family structure, more and more people are picking up trowels and shovels, and finding satisfying answers in the soil of urban gardens. ←

Dauntless Reveries

Ian Bedford

Reflecting on reveries of imperial power, 'life is normal' and escape from suffering through violence.

1.
'Bin Laden has only made things worse.' It was November 2007. I was in Pakistan. The speaker and his circle of friends were all old acquaintances. They were not *madrasa* students, Taliban, or sympathisers in any way with the goals and premises of fundamentalist Islam. Their feeling against America was not an abstract and uninformed detestation of 'the Great Satan' but resembled the animus of the Irish against the English; of the Tibetans and Uyghur against the Chinese; or (more intimately) of Palestinians against the Israelis, whose relentless expansion of settlements on the West Bank of Jordan, in defiance of UN resolutions, was, to them, a trespass sanctioned by the Americans. In the Pakistan context, they were all democrats. Why, then, that 'only'? How could they lament, as peaceable persons fired with sentiments of justice, that bin Laden had 'only' made matters worse? Had they ever believed that the destruction of the Twin Towers, or any such large-scale, murderous action, might conceivably have made the world a better place?

2.
'We are not alone in dreaming at night,' wrote W. G. Sebald in *Austerlitz* (2001), soon before his untimely death. 'The smaller mammals such as mice and moles also live in a world that exists only in their minds when they are asleep ... and who knows ... perhaps moths [the topic of his discourse at this point in his story] dream as well, perhaps a lettuce in the garden dreams as it looks up at the moon by night.'

There is reason to suppose that diverse creatures, while inactive, may in a way imagine themselves still to be active; or perhaps, while active, they imagine themselves to be at rest. The life of images, of that which is present to the mind or to what doubles for the mind,

does not cease with sleep or revive on waking. Yet to call this persistence 'dreaming' is another matter.

Of course this persistence is not the only enigmatic thing about the being of an animal. As one who at times encounters funnel-web spiders, I always wonder—at the very moment of the encounter—what they are 'doing there'; that is, why they have come, since no place seems to me to be the right place for them. 'If it's a male, he's looking for a mate', I'm told. I suppose I know what this means. Magnified by my fear and distaste, the funnel-web is to me so alien a creature that I am unable to supply any really convincing analogy for what is to be one. It would be impertinent to wonder if such a creature 'dreams'. Its function is to populate dreams.

With moths and moles, beneficent creatures, something goes on, but it seems 'dreaming' is not the word. To dream entails a contrast with waking life. Not even the human infant, an evolving person, 'dreams'. In Colin McGinn's terms (*Mindsight*, 2004), he or she cannot yet distinguish 'image' from 'percept'. Until she matures, and the capacity for this distinction swims into her grasp, the baby will be unaware that some of her sensory contents 'can be manipulated at will'; that she can wish, and in fact often wishes, for what appears—that she makes things appear.

The baby does not know she wishes, while with moths and moles the word 'wish' seems not premature but wholly inappropriate. In both these cases, the human and the non-human, however, we may say of the sentient being that it is lapped without knowing it by the stuff of an experiential world from which it does not emerge but which furnishes it with an image of its activity, incommunicable to other beings. This sense of its life accompanies it awake or asleep. But it cannot appear or matter to this creature that it is dreaming.

In the sociohistorical vision of Giambattista Vico (1688–1744), aspects of this condition are identified for human communities. Vico's 'first men'—his own heuristic invention, beings who have become men through their discovery of language and of such human institutions as marriage and burial—are themselves wholly enclosed within a world which seems self-evident to them, which fills them with wonder and from which they are unable to emerge because they are locked within their immediate experience of the world. They have no distancing concepts. Their concepts as these evolve will be 'imaginative', not 'intelligible'. Vico says of his first men—a category which in his day subsumed women—that the fables that shaped their understanding belonged to 'myth': a Greek word which in Latin became *mutus*, 'mute', since the first language, asserts Vico, was not a spoken language.

There will be no space to enquire here why Vico thought the first language was mute. The assumption is not as unpromising as it sounds. Vico, and Rousseau after him, were among the first to recognise that language is a

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conceptual structure, which does not need sound. He did not mean that no vocal sounds at all accompanied this first language, but that they did not signify. A time came when sounds began to signify. Yet for Vico the emergence of human 'voices', *le voci*—sounds that signify—did not yet mark the transformation of language into something conformable to our present notion of human language. For us, language works 'by convention'. Words and their meanings are appointed. The first men, however, assigned words to objects by a process that owed little or nothing to social convention. This process for them was natural, as natural as fear, as breathing. It was also mistaken. Their use of language misled men about the nature of the world.

Such 'mistakes' are still made—it is the burden of what I will argue—so we will look at one of them in Vico. Men's first notion of God, of the divine, was of a being of surpassing power who resembled themselves in that he was all body; emotion, for him, was paramount, and was extremely volatile. He expressed his awe-inspiring intentions in thunder and lightning. Men obeyed these intentions, which they took for words. So they entered—as men—into the sphere of language and of the ideas language first conveyed: 'imaginative universals'. They obeyed what they took to be God's intentions, uttered in words. These words they imagined they discovered, as the utterance of God. In fact—and this is one of the subtleties of Vico's theory—they invented them, for thunder and lightning are not really words.

Such was the creation of men 'wholly different from that of God'. It rested, from the beginning, on misunderstanding (*fraintendimento*), on mistake-making. Vico's was a teleological perspective and he would maintain that men came in time to correct some of their mistakes, guided as they were by God's providence. When a commentator on Vico wants to make him appear like Marx, for example, he or she stresses this aspect of 'providence'; the

workings of which do indeed sustain some very Marx-like passages, penned over a century before Marx. But should one turn to the Bible for the reported actions of the Judaeo-Christian God, who was Vico's, one finds a being who does not in fact strike one as very wise or 'providential'; or as much of a guide. The wholly anthropomorphic being in the prophetic scriptures explored by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit (*Idolatry*, 1992) conceived of his people Israel as a whore and of himself as a betrayed husband, ranted and raved, and specialised in dire threats and the cosiest of reconciliations. We do not seem far at all from the passionate, thundering God imagined by the first men. To Vico, however (who for methodological reasons excepted the Jews, but not the Christians, from the ambit of his theory), his God was wise and God's providence secure. If we today are capable of reason, it is thanks to God's providence, to the staging of a gradual process, and not at all to the spontaneous acumen of these first men.

Yet their 'imaginative universals' are with us still. They were not altogether banished by the evolution of a spoken language. Though there is some doubt about Vico's own attitude to the succession of 'stages' in his evolutionary typology (he often contradicted himself) it would appear that for him elements of the first 'stage' (of language, and also of logic, institutions and understanding in general) survived through the entire process (Gianfranco Cantelli, *Mente Corpo Linguaggio*, Firenze 1986). Before leaving it, I will take a last look at the circumstances of consciousness and communication among these hypothetical first men. Because of their bodily nature and enormous physical strength, to be taken, so Vico surmised, with the want of abstractions in their language and their inability to reflect on themselves objectively, from without, their creative power, their power to move themselves and persuade others, and so to found institutions and to harness the potentialities of human action, was extraordinary, and has never been exceeded. Contemporary man, by contrast, rich as he is in concepts, refined in taste, able to discriminate between modes of reality and courses of moral action, does not invent, is not creative in the sense in which these first men and their early successors were creative.

Vico was himself a product of the Enlightenment: hence his 'New Science'. But he was not filled with the enthusiastic optimism of the Enlightenment. Reason, to him, was a real but slight power. Men of his own day were no longer so comprehensively 'mistaken' as men once were: they could now hope to understand themselves and the natural world, up to a point, but it

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was not at all clear that they had replaced or outworn the ascendancy in their own hearts of their 'imaginative universals'. Man, creative man, problem-proposing man and problem-solving man, continues to think in 'imaginative universals', loves rhetoric, is buffeted by his emotions, and sentenced to the body. He is never very far from nature, though he imagines himself to be.

3.

We return to the question of dreaming, of what it is to dream. Most people know, usually without reflection, what it is to wake, or to have wakened, from a dream. This is commonsense. But, like those quiet reaches of water, sometimes marked by a dark coloration, or tacit ruffling of the surface, from which—locals say—no diver ever emerges, there are spaces, figments of the body and mind which resemble dreams, or are called by that name. From these, it may be hard to wake. Spaces of this kind include the so-called 'reveries' of fame, love or conquest,* which may be prolonged forever without ruinous consequences to the dreamer, if so he be called. Such is the reverie of American power, the worldwide American way of life. American power is, of course, a reality. It is also a dream. Distant peoples may be captivated, or bruised, by that dream. It would be an enormous calamity for the Americans in particular if they were ever to waken from it but there seems no immediate likelihood of that happening. It is not that kind of dream. It is the reverie of an imperial people.

A more precarious example is the dream or reverie of 'life as normal', entertained to the full in the certain and immediate prospect of global warming. Having noted this—once—I avert my mind, like most people. I know global warming is real, is catastrophic, and is largely manmade: but I avert my mind. I avert my mind, not, as I should, from the reverie of life as normal, which hastens to re-envelop and sustain me, but from my brief glimpse of an indecency, the real state of affairs. I don't think I have ever quite visualised this imminent calamity across its full range, even when reading a scientific research article on the topic. Rather, it is always some finite aspect, reflecting my habitual train of thoughts, that perturbs me—the loss of Bangladesh, for example, or the fate of the rivers of Asia from the Mekong to the Indus should China, enlarged with Tibet, intensify its raid on world resources by damming or diverting the headwaters. I grieve over small particulars—as even these are, in the immense and stupefying balance of things. I do not know what to do, and retreat to my rapture of a liberal and humane future for the human race. There ought to be a passage in Vico which would anatomise this rapture and wilful blindness, to be placed along with his anatomy of the 'conceit of nations' and 'conceit of scholars' (*boria de' dotti*).

In a statement broadcast on al-Jazeera (Oct 29, 2004) bin Laden—I think for the first time—claimed full responsibility for the Twin Tower attacks. 'We decided to destroy towers in America so that they may taste what we have tasted.' Whether or not he believed his own words, bin Laden, or his persona, spoke directly to the elation, the immense yearning for outcome which the destruction of 9/11 had generated the world over among sympathisers of diverse kinds. Few of these sympathisers were activists, fewer still were committed to routines of violence, and not all of them were confined to the Muslim world. But for every witness of the television images of that grandiose event who, confounded by the slaughter, saw only terror and disproportion, there were others—quite differently placed in the world—who noted no disproportion, glimpsed nothing novel or unprecedented in an act of terror, but found themselves caught up in a dream which was familiar to many of them, but had never been urged on them with such sublime force: a dream, not of terror, but of retributive justice.

'Bin Laden has only made things worse.' My friends in Pakistan spoke as they did because they had shared in this dream, and were now awakening from

it. Why did they awaken from it? The question must be put because, as with other such dreams—the reverie of imperial power; the all-but-universal reverie, the most seductive and dangerous of the lot, of 'life as normal'—there are so many who do not awaken, and this is not merely a reflection of the benightedness of 'some people'. It may be, as Vico's thought suggests, invincibly human, and not merely a reminiscence of our 'first' condition, to persist in such dreams.

Those who awakened from the dream in this case—I am referring to one case, and to only a few people—did so, I think, because their faith was imperfect and they had never quite consented to dream in the first place. Retributive justice, after all, is a tall order, and in very short supply—as against mere retribution, without the justice. These friends in Pakistan had themselves participated, without high expectations, in a brief political struggle, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy in 1982, which sought to force parliamentary elections on the military dictator, General Zia ul-Haq, who was buttressed in power by the Americans. They lost, as they expected to lose. Their scepticism had hardened—though one can be a sceptic and still fight.

They were thrilled, all the same, by 9/11. It is hard to pass judgment on their elation. The simpler the emotion, the more it excludes: perhaps compassion, at the loss of so many innocent lives. But who is to say their emotion was simple? They beheld bodies in free fall. There was, at least, no fear of sense deprivation in front of the TV sets, as endured by American audiences throughout the coverage of the first Gulf War, when the charts and diagrams and discourses on military hardware persuaded many that the death-dealing was in some way imaginary and that smart bombs spared lives. There were no images then of the rubble in Baghdad, or of the rain of bombs from aircraft on a retreating army.

We are still searching for a word, other than 'dream', to refer to the condition of those (ourselves not excluded—for how can we be sure we, or our kind, or our age, are not confronted by some all too visible reality to which we are blind?) who are prevented from 'awakening' in time to perceive what should be self-evident in the world around them. Those in this condition, like McGinn's baby, are unable to distinguish their wishes from reality, or to qualify percepts with concepts. But the human baby, to his or her advantage, is genetically equipped to evolve away from this condition early in her lifetime. Vico's first men, too, evolve, but the measure here far exceeds one lifetime. 'Providence' aside, there is no guarantee of the outcome; and there may not be time.

In a world whose penetration by media, controlled at the source, has done little to relieve enormous inequalities of power, access and insight into causes but has only intensified them, despised, displaced and forgotten populations all over the world, those who brood on their plight, and those who would exploit their plight, have come to share in a reverie brimming with aspiration and vital force, leading nowhere. They have rallied to the idea of a reassertion of their worth and presence in the world through violent resistance to overwhelming power. Bin Laden's deed has provided a symbol. There may be more symbols—symbol after symbol. This misunderstanding—which may be compared with the peasant jacqueries of medieval Europe, or the fulfilment of the protocols of the Resurrection (*qiyamat*) in the castle of Alamut in Persia by a sect of the Ismai'lis in the Muslim 7th century—has destructive potential, yet is steeped in pathos. It has fateful wrongness, and breaks the heart because the injustices it perceives are only too real.

‘We decided to destroy towers in America so that they may taste what we have tasted.’ Yet, leaving aside the impudence of that second ‘we’—for bin Laden, born to riches, perhaps came up with this identification only as an afterthought—there was, and can have been, no question of the Americans ‘tasting what we have tasted’. The palate of the lion requires fresh meat. When Bush marvelled, soon after 9/11, that an act of terror could have been committed on such a peace-loving people as the Americans, who had not done anyone any harm, his wonderment—perhaps not his wonderment, but that of the nation for whom he spoke—was genuine, and filled, too, with a poignancy all its own. It would be useless to rehearse the long litany of American violations of national and popular sovereignty the world over—beginning, perhaps, since one has to begin somewhere, with the overthrow of the elected leader Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, and not excepting the various panicky attacks on Afghan wedding parties, or the shooting down of a passenger airliner in Iranian air space in July 1988—in revenge for a misdeed of the Iraqis. The one-sided body counts—so many American or Israeli dead, taken to far outweigh the much greater number of Vietnamese, or Guatemalan, or Palestinian dead—are the kind of statistics which, outside the Anglo-American world, fan the perception of a recklessly brutal power, quite incapable of acknowledging the effects of its actions. This image is not, of course, the whole truth, but it is a part of the truth. American self-perception is so relentlessly magnified by the most seductive and technologically proficient of the world’s media that, for those who attend to no other source, it may be that hostile perceptions of American actions will always come as a surprise. When bin Laden fantasises about Americans being brought to taste what has been tasted by the wretched of the earth, he has launched a preposterous myth, quite without reality on this scale in even the most regulated and urbane civil society. In a Jane Austen novel, Emma

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Woodhouse will at last see the error of her ways. This happens, often for the better, in interpersonal relations, on their modest scale, but not in international relations, and least of all when the wrongs are enormous. Imperial Rome finds nothing to weep about in the ruins of Carthage.

Bin Laden has indeed made things worse. The reverie of unleashing one’s puny force, through violence, on overwhelming power, can lead only, through self-deception and all the byways of despair and demoralisation, to a redoubled suffering on the part of the victimised, a suffering in which the heaven-blessed adversary does not participate in the least. This reverie, it should be recalled, is by no means the same as the strategy, or resource, of continued resistance, of the reassertion of non-compliance, as by some Buddhist monks in Burma. *That* is realism: to understand that a prized value may not triumph in the world, but to cleave to it, to continue to urge it because nothing else is worth having. It may be hard to translate this outlook into a political program but it is often done—all the time, in fact, by those survivors of persecution who are privileged to fight for, and retain their humanity. Trade unions and other collectives cherish a history of hard-won objectives that are not readily to be lost. Primo Levi has written (in far from triumphal terms) of such a victory at Auschwitz.

The fear is that people, all of us, not perhaps in our intimate dealings, where there may be the time and the goodwill to recover from error, but wherever we are grouped into giant entities—such as the nation—which are not wholly of our own making, but appear to be, are by that very means enrolled in vast, dreamlike undertakings from which we are powerless to ‘awake’. I have referred, in the spirit of Vico, to three of these mythic undertakings: the reverie of imperial power, the reverie of ‘life as normal’ and the reverie of the escape from suffering through the employment of reciprocal violence. There are others. The one I, personally, find the hardest to combat and identify is the second. I am not sure what use there would be in prolonging the catalogue of such sedative structures of delusion. The point, rather, is to awaken from them.

* Here we have all three, in one tremendous proposition:
 To seeke new worlds, for golde, for prayse, for glory,
 To try desire, to try love severed farr,
 When I was gonn shee sent her memory,
 More stronge than were ten thousand shippes of war.

Sir Walter Raleigh, *The eleventh and last booke of the Ocean to Scinthia*, 1592.

Re-evolution of Social Democracy

Tom Nairn

Comments on Guy Rundle’s *Crikey* series on the Left

The most welcome aspect of Guy Rundle’s three part series on the Left, recently published in *Crikey*, was its historical range and perspective. Rundle sees the question of present-day strategy for the Left as determined and inherited from a darkling plain upon which a fundamental war was fought out across decades, to end with results bitter for all concerned. The armies involved were not modestly ignorant but all too knowing, over-confident and given to drunken swaggering. Today we find them clutching their heads and groaning in assorted ditches. The mutual exhaustion of the contending parties has brought the greatest hangover of modern times.

Rundle’s thoughts were occasioned by *The Australian*’s series entitled ‘What’s Left?’, most likely intended, he suggests, to make everyone look to a renascent Right for new signposts. But over there, as he explains, we find that neo-conservatism has ended up as just another post-night-out sufferer—indeed, stuck in a peculiarly deep self-dug millennial ditch, amid the wreckage of neo-liberal lunacy and disappointment. So far, the Great Financial Crisis has led mainly to calls for digging deeper in the proverbial sense, while some indefinable regulation

is conjured up to avoid future cave-ins. Yet, such return to business as usual has become insupportable to the great majority, even for *The Australian* readers. The latter’s columnar zombies seem to have lost their appeal. Hence the anxiety for some alternative, for a presentable centre-left, a novel totem-pole of regroupment and organisation. As Rundle puts it, the ‘green left’ looks like the current best bet, but regrettably too negative: ‘less consumption, less waste, less destruction’—a more determined regulation of capitalism, rather than a replacement. Marxists may still be glimpsed on street corners, their message now suspiciously ossified into ‘something from the 3rd century church fathers’. Amid the ruins of the great 20th century cathedrals, they too have had to resort to origins, shouting into the winds of consumption and privatisation.

Some may indict Rundle for exaggeration or pessimism. But there may be a case for thinking his deconstruction, though in the right direction, hasn’t gone far enough. The vast 20th century temples of socialism rested themselves on dubious foundations. Leninism was not betrayed by Stalin and social

democrats. It was from the start a form of compensatory or catching up development: in effect, a short cut to industrialisation, employing rhetoric and promissory notes to render the strains of the forced march more bearable. Such mobilisation needed an ‘-ism’ (social or communist), which in turn counted on symbolic exaggeration of the system-foe, capitalism. Rundle takes the argument back to post-World War II and its left-wing aftershocks; it should perhaps be taken back to 1848 and the world of *The Communist Manifesto*:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations,

with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify ...

This truth of Rundle’s day was published 160 years ago—not so long in the appropriate macro-developmental timeframe. It only feels longer because the trajectory of bourgeois advance has been so broken up by conflict and warfare, the latter concluding only twenty years ago with the end of the Cold War. Since then, the advance has resumed in a form unimaginable by Marx, Engels or Lenin: the communist vanguard of the globe’s biggest nation deliberately building up capitalist development as the only possible mode of industrialisation—not another new economic policy, but the

only one available. On the one-time Left as on the all-time Right, ‘all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind’.

Forced New Evolution?

In that real condition, Rundle observes, ‘There is no left’. And with the GFC, counter-Leninism has followed Leninism through history’s exit door into the irretrievable. However, nobody can yet stand an ‘-ism’-less world—the permanent sobriety of life after ideology, plus recovery in 21st century ditches and recovery wards. Not so long ago, intellectuals could at least switch orchestras, from blowing in the pipe band to booming in capitalism’s brass band, or vice-versa. Today the latter is futile



cacophony and the former seems to have no wind left. There's no music in the air; we are all forced to dream up new sounds and melodies.

No Left left? 'So why is this man smiling?' Rundle continues. Because the era of second-rate short cuts may be finished, though democracy is not:

What does make radical change possible, sudden and likely ... is that processes of self-management are immanent, there beneath the surface, within hypermodernity, in a way they haven't been previously ... That's a result of better education, intellectual labour—but also of the fact that we all spend so much time thinking about how systems work ...

With all their inherent problems, he insists, 'these debates will emerge again, there is no choice but to have them'. At which point, it's worth indicating one oddity in Rundle's contribution: after smiling to the reader, he remarks that the required shifts of outlook are 'harder to see from Australia than just about everywhere else'. Really? I doubt if many attentive readers from other stranded boat-crews will agree. These are Australian reflections from out front, not the outback. That is, from a society (as I noted in *The Age*, the same day as I read Rundle) ranking 'Second in the world for quality of life' in the latest UN Human Development Report for 2009. It's also a country conscious of good fortune and possibility, illustrated in a recent *Economist* table (11 October 2009) as more confident than most of its luck—no. 1 in fact, just ahead of Canada, Finland and Austria.

Rundle's reticence here recalls something else, about one of the systems that wound up in 1989. The 1848 *Manifesto* went on from its dizzying vision of global bourgeois triumph to make a great mistake we still live with. The authors thought that the -ism of capital would soon efface old-fashioned nationality politics, frontiers, patriotism and so on.

The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of

the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

The famous words are often quoted today as a direct anticipation of globalisation. However, we also know that the 'national ground' became a lot more important after 1848, not less. Nor did it concern only annoyed reactionaries. From their respective standpoints as Rhinelander and Jew, the authors hugely underestimated the factor of national identity. Refusal or qualification of the 'cosmopolitan character of production' was mounted, in a process of grossly uneven development that led to imperialism and warfare, rather than the ascendancy of their chosen vehicle of response, class. We must be wary of analogous mistakes today.

'Intercourse in every direction' makes choice in any particular direction more positive and important, not less. 'Universal inter-dependence of nations' renders the independent trajectory of this or

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that nation more meaningful—more distinguishable from what would otherwise be uncomfortably like all-the-sameism, the more homogeneous common fate preached from innumerable pulpits ever since 1989. As Mark Pluciennik has observed, 'social evolution' is also 'a shorthand for other concepts' that encompasses as a proxy for 'existing hierarchies', including 'race' and mounting (or falling) great-power domination (*Social Evolution*, 2005).

Rundle is both decided and amusing on Australia's distinctive route. 'The single greatest failed movement in Australian political history is classical liberalism', he states, because the 'paradoxical fact' in recent times has been Labor victory: the defeat of John Howard's missionary resurrection of liberalism between 1996 and 2007. Not only have Labor's core principles survived, the 2007

election results suggest they have been somehow 'cemented into the culture', and reaffirmed via Kevin Rudd's victory. Neo-liberalism arrived too late in Australia, and could not resist a crassly ideological style—making up for lost ground and time by public relations loudness, a practically 'revolutionary' fervour. However, this style proved self-defeating in quite a short time. It led to correspondingly loud collapse and discontent, and the movement that carried Rudd into office (and generated the current debate).

Rundle is scathing about the limitations of Rudd's Labor victory, and its 'stunningly unambitious political programme'. Yet his own position suggests there must be more to it than such failings. In the concluding part 3 of 'The Left', he says one should be 'wary of expounding abstract alternatives' unrelated to real movements, and then turns immediately to Latin America: where 'there is an enormous amount going on', and not only in the case of Hugo Chavez's Venezuela. 'New modes of distribution, co-operative production, intersection between intellectual life and and everyday existence are being developed.'

However, it is worth stepping back a little here, and remembering another diagnosis: that of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. Anderson underlines there the importance of Latin America in formulating what one might call the 'classical theory' of nation-statehood and nationalism—what was to become the principal cohesive force of 19th and early 20th century development. Among the newer states of a sub-continent, newer forces and trends were enabled, in a revealing way that showed meanings previously obscured in European overlaps and contests. Perhaps an even deeper causation is involved here: both when and where arising tendencies reach fruition can be of crucial importance. Accident partly determines all actual trajectories—the course of societies as well as their

prediction made by Jean-François Revel: 'By and large ... the nationalist imperative of the congruence of political unit and of culture will continue to apply [even though] the sharpness of nationalist conflict may be expected to diminish'. Hence under globalising circumstances 'late industrial society ... can be expected to be one in which nationalism persists, but in a muted, less virulent form'.

Muted but (by implication) still positive, and potentially effective. So we may not have to make Rundle's choice between an over-abstract greenery and the 3rd century church fathers. Democracy on the real terrain of later industrial society should be sufficient—more prominent and assertive, certainly, but also more possible within the context of cyber-culture, enhanced accessibility and Gellner's

'universal high culture'. The pluralism of the latter will be nourished, rather than flouted or denied, a higher stage of particularism and ancient diversity, not an impossible (and dangerous) ironing-out or reduction of species inheritance. Most science-fiction depiction of earth invaders has shown them as all the same: lizards oppressively at one, whether as destroyers or redeemers. But all this really expresses is the limits of sci-fi and its inability to break with the customs of Homo sapiens' imperialism and colonisation.

Historical Re-selection?

The same point could be made another way: globalisation is unlikely to be the title of some mass conversion or convulsion—a quasi-religious mutation of humanity into a novel and homogeneous condition. It will

source in ethno-linguistic diversity. From such variety the general or universal is born—'species-being', in Feuerbach's original sense. Logic alone tells us there can't be a universal without particulars; however, less obviously, the latter never cease determining the former, in the process of history.

It's true that once constituted, the general then itself becomes a cause, and is awarded undue prominence by intellectuals and politicians. The 'cosmopolitan character of production' (and everything else) becomes itself a trend influencing the determinate (for example, Australian) realities on which it is founded. 'A vague depressive sense of nothingness becomes the psychological common cold of hypermodernity', Rundle says, an atomised society of 'ungrounded people 'where identity gets nowhere in a 'world of shadows'. The 1848 prophets were misguided enough to conjecture that the answer to the sense of nothingness might be the advancing cohesiveness of class. Proletarian union and common cause should cure atomisation and disintegration: development along healthier, more human lines—social and communal principles embodied (in the first instance) by vanguards of mobilising souls alerted to the immanent higher ground.

However, such mobilisation was taken over from below by pressures of ethnos and language, the pre-existent varieties of societal formation. In the concluding part of his *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Ernest Gellner surely supplied a more realistic assessment of future trends. The nationalism that had unavoidably informed actual industrialisation was most unlikely to simply evaporate in its subsequent later stages. He followed the

more probably be, in Gellner's phrase, 'somewhere in the middle', altered yet entirely recognisable, and devoted to maintaining or even somewhat accentuating the inherent variety—the 'wild cultures' that end up in the 'garden' of a more global modernity. Rundle concludes that *The Australian's* ambition for a reaffirmed neo-liberalism is vain: 'Whatever the case, it's clear that some of us are going to have to be more vocal and explicit about possible futures'. All the more so since (as he doesn't need to add) the Australian neo-liberal Coalition parties have collapsed into utter confusion since losing power in 2007. His reflections here point to something else special to Australia: the republican dilemma.

In Australia the sense of uncertain nothingness and

atomisation seems in truth less pronounced, as Australians have a rallying point denied most comparable countries, in the shape of the republican movement and principle—the decision to make a break from having the UK monarch as the nominal head of state. It's true a referendum in 1999 decided to keep Queen Elizabeth II in place, although this refusal was customarily put down to the absence of any popular vote for the proposed president. He or she was supposed to be selected and voted for in the federal parliament alone; that is, via the British two-party system also inherited, and consecrated by the 2001 federation of ex-colonial states. The republican spirit may be strong in Australia, as Rundle's argument makes clear, but confidence in the Canberra system and cadres of government is not. Too many voters must have felt the new institution would be merely an extension, even a reinforcement, of the old. The republican spirit called for a new start but the proposed reality looked like being sucked down into tradition, a symbol rather than a substantial shift in outlook.

However, a symbol can manifest real shifts, and following the GFC we surely have a little more insight into what may be involved. What Leninism and counter-Leninism had in common was a gross over-emphasis upon the economic factors of general development. Post-1848 historical materialism put it up front, as a truth occluded by ancient superstition and proprietorial interest; a century later, the post-60s capitalist renaissance glorified it as anti-socialism, the victorious ideology of 1989. The fall of both contending parties suggests the fallibility of economic ideologies as such. Old-time religions have of course smartly occupied the void; but are these the only conceivable settlers in this 21st century land?

Rundle suggests the contrary. In part 3 of the 'The Left' he says that 'a post-capitalist system reverses

the current relationship between culture/society and market/economy so that the former determines the latter and not, as currently happens, economy dictating to society and culture ... Protestant capitalism cannot be re-established after consumer capitalism ... An economic-cultural crisis is in the works'. Is this forecast so very different from that made by Kevin Rudd in his celebrated 'Social Democracy' essay in *The Monthly*? The latter suggested that the GFC left us with social democracy as the sole plausible contender in the globalisation stakes. But surely Rundle's line of argument takes us further: the only plausible form anything like social democracy can take under the emerging circumstances is that of a republic.

'Democratic nationalism' isn't sufficient: votes are too easily contrived and, in effect, falsified to order. From Turkey to Indonesia,

military statehood has shown the way. The essence of democracy is not just voting—all too arrangeable by management, notably by the armed and be-medalled. No, it's more like 'Get the scoundrels out!'; that is, guaranteed means of extrusion, bred into the societal equivalent of bones and sinews. Command-democracy can learn to ape electoral republican government, but not this republican spirit. It is, surely, the latter alone that will in the longer run make globalisation supportable. The republics of ancient and early modern times arose in opposition to dictatorships and divine-right monarchy. Present-day republicanism is arising via a degree of opposition to great-power-dominated globalisation—not refusal of globality 'as such', but recognition that the 'as such' can all too easily be made a stage show. What it then really entails is great-power dominance in a new garb. However, like Gellner's nationalism,

From Turkey to Indonesia, military statehood has shown the way. The essence of democracy is not just voting—all too arrangeable by management, notably by the armed and be-medalled. No, it's more like 'Get the scoundrels out!'; that is, guaranteed means of extrusion, bred into the societal equivalent of bones and sinews.

republicanism will also persist in a muted yet still essential form. It can remain the guarantee of tolerable wider homogeneity, by impeding the de facto dominance of commercial-industrial imperiums and their accomplices. Globally conditioned societal evolution will be the same and different.

Kevin Rudd's insistence on the G20 as a key international grouping has been both important and effective here. His accompanying plea for stronger Australian presence within the body has also been in tune with deeper trends. And this in turn is, surely, the reason why Australian republicanism is in no way anachronistic. In the 19th century Latin American countries helped formulate a nation-state condition in opposition to European (and later North American) hegemony. In the 21st, a formula will be needed to qualify and alter the spread of North Atlantic (and later Chinese or

Indian) hegemony. The democratic-republican spirit and status will continue to be a vital ingredient of that opposition. The re-evolution of societies in a more globalised condition will increasingly embody that moral spirit and vision. Like South America, Australasian societies benefit from lighter burdens and accretions, customs less indurate and persistent.

‘An economic-cultural crisis is in the works’, muses Rundle in his part 3. And it ought to bring with it emancipation from ‘commodification’ and trust in market forces—‘a positive insistence that some things need to be outside of the market for there to be a culture, for the market to sit within the polis, and not vice versa’. What this means is a much bigger turning point and initiative than most arguments about the refurbishment of left-wing movements and ideas have thus far contemplated. ‘Will that future be anything like the communism envisaged in the early Marx, or Lenin’s utopian *State and Revolution*? Emphatically not.’ I agree—but doesn’t this imply the border being crossed is historical rather than a matter of regroupment, salvation, re-training courses and detection of new messages between the lines of classical texts? It may be something more like the transition from traditions of foraging and hunting to the neolithic or, later, from the feudal to the urban, or from the early-modern to conurbation-defined, standard-issue modernity—a crossing that’s at the same time an inevitably unknown cross-roads, towards new territory where everything, including Left and Right, will have to seek and establish new definitions. Evolution itself has to find new parameters in the circumstances of growing globalisation. Standard-issue nationalism was from 1789 to 1989 principally determined by warfare—not only actual wars but the underlying climate of conflict-preparation, compulsive community and a cohesion at once over-supportive and repressive—diversities inherited rather than elective, and conserved for all time

coming in the name of sacred genesis and societal rights. Future-issue nationality requires a different -ism, transcendence rather than oblivion.

Certain grounds for such transcendence had already been laid down. Perhaps the most striking example is Nancy Fraser’s reflections on the evolution of second-wave feminism and its relationship to the era of neo-liberal folly and downfall. In the *New Left Review* no. 56 (Mar/Apr 2009), she argued that the affinity between feminism and neo-liberalism lay ‘in the critique of traditional authority’, a levelling provoked by narrowly economic motives, but with much deeper and longer-lasting societal effects. The latter carry us forward into the terrain provisionally sketched out by Mary Midgley’s *Beast and Man: the Roots of*

Human Nature (1979), and further defined by the later *Evolution as a Religion* (1985), with its appropriate sub-title ‘Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears’.

The day I finished reading Rundle’s comments, *The Age* published an article by Gail Collins of *The New York Times* headed: ‘Sorry, folks, it appears the end of the world is here again’ (Tuesday 17 November), where she points out how 2009 is easily surpassing the alarms of millennium year 2000. In a very recent address to the Australian Social Sciences Academy, John Dryzek argued in less dramatic style that this is the moment for what he defined as ‘deliberative democracy’, a conclusion close to Rundle’s concluding suggestion that ‘some of us are going to have to be more vocal and explicit about possible futures’. The point of such deliberation isn’t

winning votes and short-range policies—more like changing basic assumptions and outlooks. We need not just some public intellectuals but also public sociology and other disciplines, the matrix of future arguments and decisions. Or, as Professor Dryzek amusingly put it, the point is more like shifting onwards the standing attitudes of public, including international, hypocrisy, the taken-for-granted presuppositions of what simply has and had not to be said, in order to have any hope of impact. The Cold War epoch had its own range of tongues in cheek, and globalisation is now evolving a successor bundle: by what they fail to say will they be known and go down in (redesigned) history, thus constituting the public opinion, even the world opinion, of an age still in formation. ←

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FEATURES



On Peter Sutton's
Pietism

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(Brill and
Haymarket).



On Peter Sutton's

Pietism

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The meaning of pietism and sacramentalism in Sutton's critique of reconciliation

Is theology the answer to the intractable problems of Indigenous and non-Indigenous reconciliation? Peter Sutton seems to think so, especially in his troubling and arresting work *The Politics of Suffering*. Or rather, one type of theological approach is the cause of the failure of reconciliation: sacramentalism. The other, pietism, offers a solution. What are religious, or rather theological, terms doing in the midst of a work by a fairly traditional anthropologist on the politics of reconciliation? Sutton introduces them only the last chapter, but they actually frame the discussion of the whole book. Yet he is tantalisingly succinct in describing these two positions:

There are two basic ways of framing a resolution of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I will call them the 'sacramental' and the 'pietistic'. In religious talk, sacramental paths to spiritual grace require a

collective and ceremonial act. Pietistic ones are those of the individual in quiet communion with the divine.

Pietists stress a one-to-one relationship with the deity, unmediated by priestcraft or the collective witnessing of a symbolic sacrifice. Pietism is in some ways much more at home in an age of individualism than in ages of greater corporatism and communalism.

The sacramental-sacrificial approach represents the reverse. It also goes back deep into Old World prehistory, to a time when animals and humans, not symbols, were sacrificed in human rituals.

That is about it, except for a few passing comments that do not add to this basic description. For Sutton, 'sacramental' is really a code for government-sponsored public programs paid for out of tax dollars, endless reports and posturing by politicians, all of which have failed dismally. In the second quotation above he has deviously added 'sacrificial', which is another category altogether and largely left alone. By contrast, 'pietism' acts as a catchword for private and personal ways of working in the world, outside the programs that seem to have failed. Why choose the terms

sacramental and pietistic when collective and individual would have done perfectly well? Are they merely camouflage for criticisms of social democratic approaches and a championing of liberalism? Why do his criticisms of collective, government-sponsored projects sound like commentary by Miranda Devine or Andrew Bolt? Is not the ideology of the individual one of the worse aspects of colonialism itself? And what is the role of theology in debates over reconciliation?

In what follows I will try to answer these questions, although in the end I argue that Sutton has confused matters. What really is at issue is at best obscured by these terms: agency. Sacramentalism acts as a cover for one-directional agency, coming from the non-Indigenous and directed towards Indigenous people. By contrast, pietism conceals a pattern of mutual agency, consultation and joint decision-making. Yet Sutton has unwittingly raised another issue: the implicitly theological nature of many of the key ideas used in debates over reconciliation. Before I get to those matters, a few words on sacramentalism and pietism are in order.

Sacramentalism

First, the evil term: sacramentalism, which is a deeply Roman Catholic term. As one might expect in

theology, fine distinctions bedevil any simple overview. But some patience is needed, since Sutton uses the term loosely, so much so that he badly misrepresents theology and confuses his own analysis (and his readers). Sutton claims that sacramentalism is collective and ceremonial, sacrificial and pre-historic.

He is mostly mistaken, for the word actually has two senses, neither of which suits his purpose. First, the word may refer to a 'sacrament', such as baptism or communion. The problem is that—strange as it may sound—the church has nothing to do with the effectiveness of a sacrament. Technically, a sacrament works through the act itself (*ex opera operato*). God transfers grace through the act and does not rely on any person, institution, state of mind or whatever. The act is sufficient; it is an objective act on God's part. It is a little like the story of the Danish physicist, Niels Bohr, and the horseshoe. Bohr lay ill out on his farm; a friend called and noticed the horseshoe above the door to his room. 'I thought you didn't believe horseshoes made you well', said the friend. Bohr replied, 'I'm told it works even if you don't believe in it'. Clearly Sutton does not mean this sense of sacramentalism, since that would mean the objective, disinterested act of, say, adequate healthcare, an apology or a treaty, would be enough. Out of the four ways Sutton describes sacramentalism—ceremonial, collective, sacrificial and pre-historical. Is the sacrament ceremonial? Yes. Is it collective, sacrificial and pre-historic? No.

Perhaps Sutton means the ‘sacramentals’ (to be distinguished from the ‘sacrament’). These are acts that convey God’s grace only through the intercession of the church (*ex opere operantis ecclesiae*). What kind of acts? Grace at meals, a blessing, a ring at marriage, a simply act of kindness and so on. There is no definitive list, for a sacramental is the process through which human activities are made holy, mediated by the church. Now we have a collective dimension, since a sacramental relies on the church. But it is not necessarily ceremonial (it may be, but is not necessarily so), sacrificial or pre-historic.

So the theological terms don’t actually fit Sutton’s definition of ‘sacramentalism’. Or rather, they have a partial fit, depending upon what element one chooses. What is really going on with Sutton’s use of the term? I would suggest that sacramentalism for Sutton is quite bad camouflage for social-democratic, hand-wringing, lefty approaches to Indigenous and non-Indigenous reconciliation. But then he includes in this collective mix state-sponsored programs, reports and legislation. All of which comes under the umbrella of a theological term that is less than useful.

Two final observations: Sutton plays into an old Protestant polemic with his use of sacramentalism, for the word is usually connected with Roman Catholic theology. A strange move this, since it harks back to the major issue of religious conflict in Australia back in the 1950s and earlier, namely the Protestant–Roman Catholic divide. Riots, debates, political allegiances, mutual suspicions, bans on marrying across the divide—these were part of the social and

religious scenery at the time. It is hardly useful to resort to those differences once again.

Further, a pernicious subtext also appears with Sutton’s description of sacramentalism as sacrificial and pre-historic. He hints that it is pre-Christian, but there is a dangerous slippage to an image of Indigenous life before Europeans arrived. Does he want to suggest that before the arrival of Christianity and its theological terms, Indigenous people too were prehistoric, given to animal and human sacrifice? On the surface, of course not, but beneath the text the hint is there.

Pietism

The favoured term is pietism, which Sutton describes as a one-to-one relation with God, one undertaken by an individual in quiet communion, more suited to an age of individualism (our own?). No mediators here, no priests or church or state, just individuals doing the best they can. For Sutton this is the way forward for reconciliation, although he does need to replace God with another human being. All that is needed is a ‘personal moral adjustment’ (p. 203) to interpersonal and collaborative reconciliation between two persons. Sutton uses the examples of individual acts of private reconciliation, in which people get on in their day-to-day lives, and in which the non-Indigenous person becomes a vocal critic of racist state policies: Lancelot Threlkeld and Biraban in the 1820s–1840s, Ursula McConnel and Billy Mammus in the 1920–1930s, and Lloyd Warner and Mahkarolla in the 1920s.

Is pietism up to task? At one level it is. Pietism has a distinct history with complex threads, but it is clearly a very Germanic, Protestant (especially Lutheran) and relatively recent development dating from the late 17th century. Its central concern was a life of deep religious commitment, rooted in inner

experience and manifested in outward acts or the ‘practice of piety’.

So far, so good, at least for Sutton’s purposes. The catch is that pietism was ultimately a collective movement with strong political overtones. It sought to revive the church from within rather than break away from it. Indeed, the main stream of pietism was warmly welcomed by pastors and theologians in the German Lutheran Church in the 18th and 19th centuries and quickly became seen as a way to renew religious life. It soon spread to other parts of the world whether Lutheran Protestantism was strong, especially Scandinavia, Greenland and North America.

For Sutton’s argument pietism is useful in some senses but not in others. Inner experience, the place of God in one’s heart, lives lived in quiet faithfulness, and the impetus for individual philanthropic activity—all these elements work quite well for Sutton’s purposes. But he ignores the other elements of pietism, such as the collective and institutional nature of mainstream pietism, its desire for reform within the institution and its tendency towards conservatism.

Why choose the terms sacramental and pietistic when collective and individual would have done perfectly well? Are they merely camouflage for criticisms of social democratic approaches and a championing of liberalism? And what is the role of theology in debates over reconciliation?

Once again, I suggest that Sutton's dip into theology is less useful than he might think. Pietism doesn't simply mean individual relations, for it is also a deeply collective theological practice. In this respect, the word becomes in Sutton's hands a cover for the sort of liberalism championed by Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, or their lesser followers in Australia like Andrew Bolt or Miranda Devine. Individual enterprise is the key, not collective approaches (which become totalitarian) or state intervention (the evil of 'big government').

Agency and Theology

Sutton's use of the opposition between sacramentalism and pietism is in the end a caricature. By picking certain features and making them definitions of the whole, he has distorted both traditions, using them as poor camouflage for state-sponsored and individual solutions. However, I suggest that what lies behind Sutton's argument is really the issue of agency. With sacramentalism he seems to mean agency from one quarter and moving in one direction: from non-Indigenous governments to Indigenous people. The former decides what is appropriate, depending more on the vagaries of electoral cycles, ideological positions, the power of lobby groups, and individual political careers. And then it acts, assuming it can fix all the problems with the latest program—the NT Intervention is the obvious recent example of this one-sided approach.

However, by pietism Sutton is pointing towards mutual agency, one that involves two or more people (I would add groups) who realise their own needs, shortcomings and limits, but above all the need to come to an understanding of one another and the need to act on that understanding. It takes little imagination to determine which approach is more desirable. The catch is that Sutton seems to think that this process is primarily an individual one, an argument that is

ideological (in the bad sense) and hardly progressive.

My final question picks up another issue: the theological tenor of the reconciliation debate as a whole. Of course, a good of discussion has taken place on these matters within the progressive wings of the Christian churches, where debates and resolutions concerning reconciliation have been cast in explicitly theological senses. However Sutton, as a leading anthropologist, has done what the churches have not been able to do, since they so often remain closed circles: somewhat unwittingly, he has brought out and made public the underlying theological nature of the debate by invoking explicitly theological terms, even if he misses the mark in the specific terms he has chosen. In short, I would suggest that much of the terminology and mindset of reconciliation uses what may be called secularised theological ideas. Emptied of their theological content and refilled with political and social content, they still trail many theological assumptions behind them. For example, reconciliation itself is one such term (between God and human beings), as is the idea of guilt (collective or individual—an issue in the Howard years), and even covenant or treaty.

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Sutton's dip into theology is less useful than he might think. Pietism doesn't simply mean individual relations, for it is also a deeply collective theological practice. In this respect, the word becomes in Sutton's hands a cover for the sort of liberalism championed by Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman.

However, before we rush in to claim theological ideas for resolving the relations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, we need to investigate those terms carefully, especially since Christian theology came with European invasion, embodied in the person of Samuel Marsden who filled the role in the early colony of both clergyman and judge. The problem is that all of these key terms assume an unequal relationship, God on the one side and human beings on the other. Guilt is what one feels towards God for having disobeyed and sinned; reconciliation is for human beings alone, since we need to be reconciled to God; a covenant is made between unequal partners, one more powerful and the other less so. This imbalance often carries through to the secular uses of such terms.

So I would suggest that in the current debates we would do well to investigate the implicit theological assumptions of the key terms. Who is the more powerful one in the process of negotiating a treaty? Who is the guilty party? The NT Intervention shifts the guilt squarely onto Indigenous people, who then need to be 'punished' for their 'sins'. But then those who oppose the intervention argue for the guilt of the colonisers, who then need to make amends. And is it possible to produce a process of reconciliation that either recognises the thereby seeks to negate the imbalance of power, or is it possible to come up with a reconciliation that removes such imbalance? ←

Reconstituting 'The Social'

Mark Furlong

Is the vocabulary of health colonising how 'the social' is understood?

In the Australian university context, social work education has traditionally been based in social science faculties or, less frequently, arts faculties. Over the last decade or so, an increasing number of these programs have been relocated to faculties of health and/or medicine. For example, the social work programs of Victoria's Deakin, La Trobe, Melbourne and Monash universities are now embedded within very large, health-centred aggregations.

Such a relocation can be expected to have consequences. For example, within this auspice it is apparently natural to frame the compulsory field *practicum* each student must complete a 'clinical placement', a description that contradicts the expectation that the parameters of social work extend far beyond the health sector. This is not an

abstract concern, as key moments in social work practice—such as community development and the agitation for more responsive public policy, or active client advocacy and collective social action—cannot be totalised within the configuration that structures current health care provision.

That is, in the received model of health care the expert professional—the clinician—uses the objective knowledge and technical competencies of their specialist discipline to act upon an inanimate site—the immobile, ignorant patient (the 'case'). This design is based on a private, rather than a public, model of modernist professional practice, and its claim to practitioner legitimacy (that it is scientific, evidence-based, and so on) is at least at some tension with, if not antagonistic to, the basis of a politicised conception of social service action.

Yet, the above overly simplifies the current situation, as practices in the health field are not always synonymous with

this received design. Indeed, a case for a progressive re-constitution of the narrow boundaries in which health care has been envisaged is gaining momentum. Perhaps best illustrated in Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's flag-flying *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (2009), a social model of health and well-being that is establishing a profile, not just with left-leaning academics but also with governments. This work puts forward a diverging paradigm to the received, expert-centred template for health care.

Using an analysis of comparative international data as a conceptual axis, Wilkinson and Pickett's findings undermine the expectation that greater health expenditure leads to better overall health outcomes. For example they point to the fact that health outcomes in Cuba and United States (life expectancy, infant mortality) are about the same, yet the United States spends in the order of ten times what Cuba spends. Even

more interestingly, these authors do not confine their focus to the traditional indicators of health status, concerned with morbidity and death. Rather, they investigate an astonishingly broad suite of what they refer to as 'health and social problems'—homicides, imprisonment rates, literacy levels, mental health problems, obesity, teenage pregnancy and so forth—and argue that their prevalence correlates very closely to the steepness of the 'social gradient' in any given society.

In their analysis, the greater the gradient (the top four being the United States, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Australia), the greater the rate of problems. The lesser the gradient (Japan, the Scandinavian countries), the less these problems are present. Not only does the rate of health and social problems not correlate with a nation's health expenditure, Wilkinson and Pickett argue, within the bracket of the twenty most affluent countries it has little or nothing to do with differences in the average income between these nations.

This work is provocative at several levels, not least of which is that it aligns with deepening concerns about health expenditure across the Western world. This alignment can be seen in the attention government is giving to, and to an extent the funding now being directed into programs concerned with, health promotion, social inclusion and the management of chronic disease. It seems 'the social', that wondrously bountiful community we'd all like to believe is there for all of us, is being viewed with a gimlet eye.

In the following, I want to examine these developments and to examine the possible relationships that might exist between three propositions: that 'the social is at risk of being removed from social work'; that the institutions of, and a discourse centred upon, 'health' is taking dominion over how the social is envisaged and practised; and that traditional conceptual and practice formations that have rationalised the

organisation of health care have become unstable. I will argue that ‘the social’, especially at the interpersonal level, is being re-constituted in an instrumental manner, while at the same time being de-natured, possibly demolished, in terms of its older, more reciprocal understandings.

The Positive Valence of Health

Unlike services offered in welfare, disability or income security settings, health services tend to evoke positive community meanings. Health services, like the terms ‘health’ and ‘well-being’ themselves, accrue approbation, as long as they are deemed to be functioning at least moderately well. This is in stark contrast to services with negative associations, such as those that are said to foster dependence, or those that create alarm: think of child protection services which, by the devil’s only definition, can never get it right.

That health services have a positive perception is due to a mix of factors. Not least of these is the wonder ordinary citizens experience at the opera of science and regression that is evoked: on the one hand, we are mystified by and are in awe of the precinct—life and death—in which the high priests of this sector officiate. On the other, we are mystified by and are in awe of the high-tech that is so shamelessly shown off.

The latter is aided by a strategic identification of health services with health science. Particularly using the badge ‘evidence-based practice’ as a phalanx, a claim for certainty, muscularity and status has been advanced by and accepted by the public on behalf of the well credentialed. And

as the weight of this colonisation settles into an apparently timeless dominion, something of the pattern language associated with the powerful has leached into ordinary speech and adjacent fields of human service and community practice: randomised, double blind trials have become the gold standard for all research (despite their inapplicability in many areas); the language of clinical intervention—the image of interactionless, determinate practice where a neutral expert fires magic bullets into inanimate sites—has become the norm.

This trend is observable in everyday ways. For example, it is now commonplace for a broad range of practitioners to be in the business of ‘delivering’ what are termed therapeutic and clinical services across a range of community-based and residential settings. This is in contrast to a decade ago when the description of a service as therapeutic or clinical was almost always associated with specialist, apparently more exotic service providers, and tended to be dismissed as precious and irrelevant by those who ‘did the real work’.

So, a tight alignment between the language of medicine and the prospects for effectiveness has taken root beyond its historical location in dedicated health settings. This alignment is now well leveraged into the policies and priorities of health and community settings. But there is an even broader crossover taking place: the positive valence of the language of health, particularly in its broader guise of ‘health and well-being’, is being dispersed into the still larger sphere of public policy and administration

Health is colonising other government sectors under the flag that ‘health is, and ought to be, a whole-of government approach’. Of course, there are socio-technical, discursive and ‘politically economic’ dimensions to this colonisation, especially the latter as whatever is said to support health and well-being is thought to have positive budgetary implications. But from where did this interest in health and well-being spring?

generally. In South Australia, government policies are being ‘audited’ to ensure they meet the ‘health and well-being’ test. And, whether it is literal or apocryphal, it has been said that current federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon has operationalised the same criteria as key performance indicators for her departmental staff and for those with which her department does business.

The current Commonwealth Green Paper suggests the federal government is considering taking greater, if not overall, responsibility for the funding of primary health. To state governments this indicates that health is where the money is. In response, for example, the Victorian government has proactively split its Department of Human Services into two (the departments of Health and Human Services), with the funding advantages this split was designed for to gather to the fore. Further, health is colonising other government sectors under the flag that ‘health is, and ought to be, a whole-of government approach’. Of course, there are socio-technical, discursive and ‘politically economic’ dimensions to this colonisation, especially the latter as

whatever is said to support health and well-being is thought to have positive budgetary implications. But from where did this interest in health and well-being spring, and to what extent is this interest halal—or is it some kind of corrupt co-option?

The Social Determinants of Health

When we talk of ‘health’ there is a complex, interconnecting set of contexts invoked. Mindful that health is where the money is, as it is where the action is from a policy perspective, it is important to be clear that there is a diverse set of fronts on which the health motif is being iterated. Firstly, there is the domain of health in colloquial speech (‘Are you well?’) and everyday experience. Personally, ‘health’/ ‘well-being’ exists as an attribute, as illness exists as a travail (‘I’ve gone down with a bug’/ ‘He is suffering from an illness’).

Institutionally, there are distinct categories of health service. At one pole there is ‘health promotion’, a preventive enterprise that seeks to modify behaviours, for example, public education about the dangers of smoking and, at the

other, those familiar ‘primary health’ providers, particularly general practitioners (although another meaning concerns basic, as opposed to professional, health services). There is also the suite of high-tech ‘tertiary/specialist health’ services and, more recently, also a developing set of programs for ‘chronic illness and its management’. Finally, there is aged care, a troublesome service network ambiguously located within, and yet also extending beyond, the health sector. It is anticipated by government and policy makers that it is in these latter three sub-fields that financial liability will lie. As this century unfolds it is expected that health expenditures will continue to increase, far and away beyond CPI increases, a trajectory considered financially unsustainable.

Given this context, it is not surprising that the emerging data on the ‘social determinants of health’ have attracted a ready audience amongst politicians and senior administrators. (Left-leaning and communitarian researchers have had a longer term interest.) This data has many provocative facets, not least the finding that social variables, such as a person being a member of an at-risk group (for example, one subject to racism), or the quality of a person’s interpersonal connections, powerfully mediates the incidence and severity of a range of health and mental health problems.

‘Social factors’, it should be noted, is a notoriously unstable and highly contested notion. Depending on one’s definition, it includes an extensive number of dimensions: from structural categories, such as class, gender and employment, to more traditional public health concerns, such as sanitation and diet. What is particularly innovative in recent formulations is an active regard for ‘the locally social’, such as the presence and quality of personal relationships. Reputable research centres like as the *Harvard Centre for Public Health* are now reporting that a person with significant relational support is less likely to be ill, not by a few percentage points but by a factor or two or more times those who do not have such levels of affection and support. Conversely, a hostile local social setting amplifies risk. No longer able to be summarily dismissed as leftie-hippie bias, the importance of ‘the locally social’—of having and giving affection, of being respected for making a contribution to one’s significant others—has recently received epidemiological, and to some extent, empirical validation.

Social epidemiologists are reporting that the prevalence of a broad range of serious health problems—diabetes, strokes, heart attacks, even cancer—conforms to this idea. Further, as epidemiologists report, if a person happens to become ill, a positive interpersonal network

will ameliorate the severity of the condition. This finding has been replicated in many studies and its fullest, most socially ambitious expression is set out in Wilkinson and Pickett’s *The Spirit Level*. (Additional texts developing this broad argument include Ryff and Singer’s *Emotion, Social Relationships and Health* and Cacioppo and Patrick’s *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*. The latter reports that ‘loneliness [is] on the list of risk factors for ill-health and early death right alongside smoking, obesity and lack of exercise’.)

This recent research testifying to the importance of social factors in physical health complements material available since the mid 1980s on mental health. A number of high-profile reports have supported the case for decades that a social model of health is highly salient to understanding prevalence and recovery issues. (Warner’s *Recovery from Schizophrenia: Psychiatry and Political Economy* and Brown and Harris’ *The Social Origins of Depression* particularly come to mind.) Recent research around anxiety and depression, for example, has only deepened this interest. Of course there continue to be vociferous, high-profile advocates for a strictly bio-chemical, illness-based conception of mental health. These professional and public bodies have a strong grip on public attention and agitate for a

radically clinical approach, for example, *Beyond Blue’s* approach to depression.

For those who believe that there are important social determinants to health it has become clear that illness and recovery, vulnerability and resilience cannot be well understood, nor attempts to respond appropriately conceptualised, without acknowledging the importance of the immediate, as well as larger, social context. Such acknowledgement will necessarily, at least to a degree, de-centre the traditional, clinical approach to health care: the received image of the expert acting upon the supine patient is being or will need to be significantly re-modelled. Making this more difficult is the fact there is no stable conceptual vocabulary for articulating the social context at the macro or micro level, or for theorising the connection between these levels. For example, there is no common language across the disciplines for denoting ‘the socially relational’: terms like network, families,



In the specific

educational site where social work finds itself, is it possible that being embedded within a health/medical setting will, over time, significantly shape the way social work is allowed to perform, which, in turn, will tend to shape how it understands itself?



supportive relationships, social attachment, bridging capital, even the ‘locally social’, can be found to denote the dimension of person-to-person interaction.

Mindful that these conceptual uncertainties will persist, from a government policy perspective, if there is empirical evidence that social determinants have an impact on health, then they are a potential site for intervention. That is, if the set of factors implicated can be identified, it might be positively manipulated to reduce the incidence, and perhaps the severity, of ill-health, which will in turn have a positive budgetary outcome. This interest in the importance of the ‘social determinants of health’ is logically animated by concern for the cost of ‘carrying’ those with chronic conditions, allied with cost concerns deriving from an ageing population. It is also possible that the reliance on expensive, high-tech medicine might be lowered, a development that also potentially de-centres the hegemony of the interests vested in the traditional clinical model of care. With costs, at this point, at the centre of policy concerns, the ‘social determinants of health’ are likely to be realised within an instrumental agenda (as will the idea of ‘preventative health’).

Re-formulating ‘the Social’ in Health Promotion

In the social model of health it is conventional to understand a person’s ‘family and friends’ as a resource — an asset there to buttress the prospects for the individual. As we have seen, supportive relationships have been reported to ward off physical and psycho-social threats to health and well-being,

and, if one does happen to contract a bug or disease or suffer a mental health problem, supportive relationships will help you recover quickly or not succumb as deeply. Just as Tom Hodgkinson recently argued that Facebook understands a person’s friends and personal networks as assets—connections that can be opportunistically taken advantage of when the ‘user’ wishes—in health promotion discourse personal relationships are also an asset: a kind of prophylactic medicine.

This thinking is evident in health promotion’s public declarations: advertisements pasted in men’s lavatories exhort the reader to check whether a friend might be depressed and if so set about supporting them; posters in rural settings tell you ‘Times are tough. If you haven’t heard from your mates for a while, give them a call. Keep talking’. In the ‘Together we do better’ campaign, advertisements in newspapers describe a group of young men sitting around yarning as ‘master therapists’.

Yet, supportive relationships cannot simply be delivered, cannot simply be called up as a unilateral demand: they cannot be, as the language of the health promotion authorities sets out, ‘accessed’. One may ‘access’ a parking space or have a right to a ticket to the football, but does this same kind of logic apply in the realm of relationships? Should we even try to make it apply?

Unlike commodities or legal rights, supportive relationships have a particular character and can only be, in a powerful sense, learned and earned rather than guaranteed or stipulated. As

important as the public messages coming out of health promotion are, the idea that positive relationships are a ‘personal resource’, a kind of opaque ‘goods and service’, instrumentalises, and even to a degree commodifies, the interpersonal. In the first instance, this can be understood as naive: to propose that supportive relationships could ever be impersonally delivered is as useful as distributing menu cards in a famine (to re-purpose one of Freud’s delightful lines). Such an understanding of relationships could also be seen as counter-productive in that it seeks to repudiate the premise that relationships are, and ought to be, in the main, reciprocal and non-linear, accountable and mysterious.

More worryingly, where it is said that positive personal relationships concern a person’s prospects for maintaining the integrity of their individual autonomy, this view of the interpersonal actively perverts understanding of the most local of social contexts towards a description of distinctly post-human relationships. Put another way, if it is never ethical to treat the other as a means (Kant’s categorical imperative), following the same logic it can never be ethical to instrumentalise the intimately personal.

This criticism cues a number of important questions. If it is not appropriate to instrumentalise relationships, how might the ‘locally social’—the realm of the interpersonal—be understood? If it

is not right to be interested in positive personal relationships because they will save the state money, what is the proper ‘business’ of the intimately relational? And, from the full cluster of social determinants of health and well-being, what is the particular contribution of the distinct sub-realms of ‘the social’, particularly the dimension that includes interactions with ‘strangers’, or the more traditional network of ‘family and friends’?

The Interpersonal Social

‘The social’, as noted earlier, is a complex, indivisible matrix. Mindful then that seeking to construct an inclusive, conceptually coherent description is something of a quixotic project, it is possible to initiate a limited engagement with ‘the social’ from a modest starting point: *humans are inherently social beings and interpersonal contact is an irreducible expression of this sociality*. That is, a project to articulate ‘the locally social’ can begin from the idea that this arena is first and foremost, but is not restricted to, local ensembles of

interpersonal relationships. Within these ensembles are conducted:

- intimate/affectionate reciprocities
- formal and informal interpellations
- highly charged symbolic ceremonies
- everyday lived experiences of materiality.

It is within such local exchanges that the sources of personhood that forge and re-cast selfhood and well-being, or personal dis-ease, go about their everyday business. That is, it is within these exchanges that ‘what I say I am’ is checked by, complemented or juxtaposed to the descriptions of what those who are most proximal or important to me ‘tell me I am’. It is this sense of ‘the locally social’, this place where formalities and informalities jostle and interpenetrate, where calibrations around key social appraisals—judgements around respect, status, level of contribution, degree of inclusion, reputation and so on—tend to support or agitate private evaluations concerned with self-appraisal.

Within all social ensembles emergent characteristics are

generated, patterns that then tend to persist over extended periods. These characteristics can be glimpsed in the protocols that an outside observer can, to a degree, note: the specifics of etiquette and manners; the repetitive patterns found in interpersonal sequences that take place in all established social groupings, like the non-random ordering of speakers; the allocation of respective roles and responsibilities embedded in every ongoing relationships. Over time, such empirical detail tends to determine the prospects for the relational: how interactions are experienced, understood, imagined and conducted.

For current purposes, my interest is in the spectrum of social exchanges that take place between people in dyads and small groups where these interactions may be familiar or incidental. Historically, they have tended to have an embodied character—a 'presence' that is immediate—while more recently they have tended to become mediated by information technologies. Inclusive then, of a changing mix of relational types, what might be said of the day-to-day encounters we have with strangers, intimates and associates, the suite of contacts and relationships that take place across the wide spectrum of our affinities?

Mindful exchanges embedded in a common history and recurrent

patterns of interaction are the more obviously significant; in a material sense, each meeting, even if fleeting, impersonal or barely noticed, can be considered a variation on the category 'relationship'. In established connections with others, in these spontaneous, evanescent relationships important transactions can occur, implicit performances concerned with identity and reality construction. With (at least) a million years training in being sensitive to the nuances of group dynamics we can be affected by a moment in a crowd, a gesture when you are standing in a queue, an instant when you unexpectedly catch the eye of or are meaningfully ignored by the driver in the lane next to you when your cars are gridlocked together at an 'intimate' distance.

This theatre may be reciprocal in its enactment of status and concern—it may be 'civil'—or it may be asymmetrical, iniquitously distributing socio-personal costs and rewards. It may maintain the participant's identity and self-esteem, or it might endanger, even disturb, these categories. In their cumulative effects, or their potential to have a particular, albeit occasional psychodramatic power, under certain conditions chance encounters have traction, heft, which is now understood to have important effects. The effects of these impersonal, yet personal, transactions might be harder to

Despite the instructions given to us in the modernist, neo-liberal narrative, humans are not discrete agents that exist inside their skins. The new health promotion narrative goes some way towards acknowledging, and potentially valorising, this social being-ness.

register, harder to fathom and make sense of, than those that those that occur, for example, between a priest and a parishioner or a grandmother and a grandchild. Yet, as Wilkinson and Pickett so powerfully argue, being 'dissed' by those who don't know you in the street, an act of dehumanising disregard that is cued by the perception you are unsightly or a loser, can trigger shame and ostracism. Such experiences can lead to a lower self-appraisal, higher cortical levels, diminished immune function—a whole progression spiralling downwards that, over time, involves serious negative health consequences.

Micro-transactions and, even more so, their importance are difficult to track. And, exactly because the locally social is opaque, it is timely to ask: what is going on with how we are getting on? What is happening in shops and in cars, at sporting and artistic venues, on public transport and in homes, schools and workplaces? In the small domains of interpersonal practice, in the ongoing

groups and passing ensembles within which we all participate, do we know what is passing between us?

We have been acculturated to think in terms of the binary of 'self' and 'society'. Living within this binary tends to have the evanescent realm of the relational pass by unnoticed. Geoff Sharp (in 'To market, to market', *Arena Magazine* no. 100) has one view of what is happening to the locally social: that the process of market thinking has undermined, if not colonised, the informal mores that have long been associated with 'direct presence': those codes of conduct traditionally found in families, friendships and communities. Another view is Anthony Giddens' opposite idea: that 'pure', equitable relationships have never been more possible.

How is sociality being experienced, understood and performed now? Is it in good shape, flexible yet resilient, as some would have us think?



Perhaps it is entirely fungible, a vestige or trace that can take any number of forms without losing its essential qualities. Or is it currently being stressed and pressured, being bent, thinned and made fractious in new and dangerous ways, as Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck argue? Is it being de-natured, or just going on getting on with its timeless purposes? These are large questions that an open lens offered by a radical interest in the social determinants of health and well-being could capture.

In an examination of each example of local, small-scaled sociality it is necessary to pursue the ideal of what Clifford Geertz called 'thick description'. That is, what is of interest are the phenomenological and behavioural details of what is being transacted: what exactly can be said of the manners that are characteristic of the encounter; what is their empirical configuration, dynamic and trajectory? Even more immanent, what are the respective roles and responsibilities that have been allocated between the participants, the (more often than not) implicit 'dance parts' that structure actions and meanings enacted in these encounters?

Further, are these allocations equitable, contested or assumed, and do the espoused ethics and accountabilities that are declared by the participants align with what actually takes place? As Gilbert Ryle observed of the difficulty distinguishing a purposive wink from involuntary tic, there is an intense interpretative complexity involved in making social judgements. When it comes to examining the locally social, this condition means an aspiration to

'thick description' is a requirement, even if this aim can only be approximated. Participation in the above dyads and small groups, as well as in the chance happenings of locally civil sociality (whether the mode of address is proximal or mediated) can never be simply a 'functional', let alone an instrumental, matter. Rather, a spectrum of interactions, the many and varied examples of participation that take place, are the condition within which humanness is realised and health and well-being supported or eroded, honoured or poisoned.

While it is acknowledged that the meanings transacted in such local exchanges are likely to, but will not necessarily, derive their particular attributions from the specifications than have been authorised in relevant, larger socio-structural formations—ideology, religion, law and so on—this is not to say the local is totally suborned by the socio-structural. That is, as the locally social is being considered, a decision can be made to privilege immediate personal relationships mindful of the significance of top-down moments of influence.

Such a division is, at best, of course, a kind of 'regulatory fiction' (to re-purpose a phrase from psychoanalysis): representatives of 'relevant, larger socio-structural formations', such as locally based clerics, pass across the local/socio-structural divide. Although it is to reify a rupture between the 'larger' and 'smaller' realms, it is a welcome development that the locally social is being given a profile within the emerging interest in 'social determinants of health'. This interest in

dyads and ensembles, spontaneous and formal groupings, has the potential to be a countervailing moment to an abiding concern for individual subjectivity, identity and selfhood and the allied interest in individual consciousness, autonomy, self-determination, rights and so forth that so early characterises the discourse of a culture where individualisation has taken root.

'The Social' and the Value of Relationships

In Bernard Wolf's dystopian classic *Limbo* (1952), the narrator says: 'The human skin is an artificial boundary: the world wonders into it, and the self wanders out of it. Traffic is two way and constant'. Despite the instructions given to us in the modernist, neo-liberal narrative, humans are not discrete agents that exist inside their skins. The new health promotion narrative goes some way towards acknowledging, and potentially valorising, this social being-ness. On the other hand, like Facebook, and the cultural logic of the market more generally, in the hands of policy makers focused on cost and social management, 'social determinants of health' tend towards an instrumental understanding of relationships.

In the first instance, the contrast of a 'social determinants of health' model to the traditional clinical response to illness is a progressive moment. This is seen in the movement in health policy and practice towards health promotion and the importance of social inclusion. All this, of course, is

music to the ears of social workers: 'That's all good gear. That's what we've been on about for ages!' In this context, acceding to or complying with social work's relocation within a health faculty presents as a positive, even if ambiguous, prospect.

Compared to the institutional status and positive discursive valence of health, it is clear that the 'welfare' badge is a goner. Yet, in the specific educational site where social work finds itself, is it possible that being embedded within a health/medical setting will, over time, significantly shape the way social work is allowed to perform, which, in turn, will tend to shape how it understands itself? Faculties of health science have institutional interests, strategic directions, expectations of professional privilege and so on, that are not consonant with an emancipatory or contesting vision.

Schools of social work, like everyone from the university to the federal Cabinet, currently wants to ride on the health express, to go where the action is—and that is in the health sector and/or to use the health metaphor. Yet, this is to ride

the tiger's back or, if you prefer, to shake hands with a gorilla, as there is likely to be an unstable relationship between advantages and disadvantages, between the progressive and the regressive, in the kinds of alliance politics that will be involved. Everyone wants to get on the high table of policy, to revel in the positive status that health currently enjoys. Yet, you can't engage in parallel play if you are in bed with a gorilla.

At broader level, it is certain 'the social' is currently being bent, even re-constituted, by forces endemic to late capitalism and that it is within this context that the 'social determinants of health' model will take shape. Here the struggle will be to resist the invitation to re-cast understandings of 'the social' to align it with a purpose that is both task-focused and naive. Rather than commodifying personal relationships as a useful a resource in the job of realising a healthy, autonomous citizenship, a contesting version locates interdependence and fairness, personal accountability and social inclusion, as orientations to be valued in their own right. ←

Is, Ought, Ends?

Matthew Sharpe

The life of academics in the new university

Is Let me begin answering the question ‘What is a university for?’ by collapsing one distinction that this question means to open, between what is and what ought to be. The universities of today have several functions:

- individual self-development of students
- the inculcation of socially useful skills in students
- the pursuit of pure research, of knowledge for its own sake
- the conduct of applied, commercial and military research
- the education of ruling commercial, political, and cultural elites
- and critical reflection upon society.

There was perhaps never a time, at least in the post-war modern period of expanded higher education, when Australian universities did not fulfil all of these six functions. Yet this continuity belies significant changes. The Australian university sector has undergone massive changes in the two decades since 1988.

We can give an impressionistic or (as philosophers would say) a phenomenological sense of this by change conveying ourselves into the shoes of a student commencing higher education in Australia. This student will be in larger

classes. These classes will be taught by teachers with larger teaching loads than those of her predecessors even a decade ago. Staff members on fixed term or sessional contracts will take the tutorials or give the lectures. More of her contemporaries will be full fee-paying students. Some will probably be international full fee-paying students. There will be less class time than for previous generations of students, since semesters (or trimesters) are shorter. More of the content will be ‘delivered’ on-line. This, positively, allows her more freedom in study patterns. Negatively, it provides another disincentive for going to campus, and becoming involved with the social, group and political activities the place hosts. Her teacher may or may not be suffering from fatigue because of increased workloads, and a growing sense of alienation from workplace and management. This

teacher will more than likely belong to a school, cluster, institute or silo fitted with an acronym and less than five years old, with its own, short- to medium-term budget constraints, rather than to a disciplinary department. Certainly, the teacher will be confronted, as part of her job, with demands to produce minimum research quotas as well as to teach, and ideally to attract grant or private income to the university. Our student, meanwhile, will be accumulating a HECS debt of thousands of dollars to be paid off when she attains lasting employment. She will be more likely than her predecessors to have to divide her social and study time with casual or part-time work, usually in the retail or hospitality sector.

These changes can also be stated in the language of Australian public policy—namely statistically:

- Whereas between 1975 and 1985 student:staff ratios in Australian universities were under 12:1, by 1996 this figure had changed to 16:1. In 2006, this had increased to 20.5.
- Whereas in 1987, there were under 400 thousand tertiary students in Australia, by 1998, there was some 672 thousand; by 2006, 957 thousand.
- While in 1987 the average number of

students per institution was under 5 and 1/2 thousand, by 1998 this average was just under 17000.

- Whereas in 1987 there were 17248 registered international fee paying students, this figure had quadrupled to over 72 thousand in 1998; in the same time period, the numbers of graduate students had grown at a comparable rate from under 28,000 to nearly 88,000.

These statistics need to be balanced against how, between 1987 and 1998,

- the proportion of funds from the government dropped from 85 per cent to 55 per cent, a trend which the Bradley reforms aim to somewhat redress
- the proportion of funds from fees and charges jumped from 2 per cent to 15 per cent
- the number of vice chancellors and deputy vice chancellors in the twelve ‘sandstone’, ‘redbrick’ and ‘gumtree’ universities grew from nineteen to fifty-one.

These changes have been rapid, if generally incremental. They have taken place at different paces and in different ways. They have largely failed to meet any systematic union, academic or student opposition. However, they reflect clear, very marked changes in government policy, and a larger, reflexively chosen re-conception of the place of the university in relation to state, economy and society. They also reflect a marked homogenisation in

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university governance, as a formalistic managerialism ('agency theory', 'transaction cost theory', 'public choice theory') has trumped Indigenous, traditional or local forms of self-government and has imported the same language everywhere: accountability, performance plans, stakeholders, consumers, clients, deliverables, outcomes, targets, moving forward, networks, clusters and so on.

The change in Australian university policy is in turn part of a much larger revolution, the systematic dismantling of social democracy according to neo-liberal or economic rationalist ideas. The key idea is that the public sector, far from playing a benevolent role in nation-building, inefficiently allocates hard-earned tax-payers' dollars to rent-seeking bureaucrats and other idle, tax-funded 'elites'. These elites cynically hide behind noble-sounding appeals to the common good in order to cultivate their own more or less base self-interest, just like everybody else. In particular, the changes in the tertiary sector date from the second microeconomic phase of neo-liberal reform under the Hawke-Keating government, post-1985. In Australia, there are two escapable markers in the remarkable neo-liberal changing of University policy so far.

Firstly, there were the 1987-88 Dawkins reforms, under the aegis of the new Commonwealth (super-)Department of Employment, Education and Training, and with advice from the so-called Purple Circle of select university advisors. These reforms created sixteen new

universities by upgrading TAFEs to university status, and merging colleges of advanced education (CAEs) with existing universities. The Dawkins reforms were advertised in terms of the need for Australia to become the 'clever country', with something for both 'econocrats' and 'bleeding hearts', in then treasurer Paul Keating's phrase. Youth unemployment was combated by massively increasing enrolment in tertiary education, including in graduate places. The language and reality of 'user-pays' was introduced into tertiary sector policy, alongside HECS, the deferred 'user-pays charge'. Students were to become consumers or clients, a source of funding or EFTSLs. Fee-paying international students were to be courted as a new market, with tertiary education transcending nation-building and boundaries, to become for the first time a leading economic export (now Australia's third largest). Finally, new forms of managerial practice from the private sector were to be introduced, to 'get more for less' (Keating again), all this being now more closely monitored by the Commonwealth.

Secondly, in 1996, the newly elected conservative Howard government commissioned the West report 'Learning for Life'. While not all of its recommendations were accepted—for example, that students should have education vouchers to take to universities of their choice, which is revisited under Bradley—the West report became the basis for the next wave of tertiary education reform. This wave of reforms was implemented from 1998. Direct government grants were cut and full fee-paying, including international student intakes, was thereby further 'grown' or necessitated. The central principle was that, in order to generate microeconomic efficiencies, universities should have to compete for scarce government resources in quasi-markets, for example, the annual Australian Research Council grants, or the present ERA device for measuring and comparing research outputs between individuals, disciplines, schools and universities as a way of efficiently allocating public monies. Rather than relying primarily on governmental oversight, as the Dawkins Labor reforms had done, the Coalition preferred the 'steering at a

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university policy is part of a much larger revolution, the systematic dismantling of social democracy according to neo-liberal or economic rationalist ideas. The public sector, far from playing a benevolent role in nation-building, inefficiently allocates hard-earned tax-payers' dollars to rent-seeking bureaucrats and other idle, tax-funded 'elites'.

distance' approach. This involved cutting direct funding and making universities compete with one another for increasingly scarce financial support. The new external, economic environment accordingly 'incentivated' (to use the jargon) remarkable growth in advertising budgets, even as teaching staff was cut, and staff productivity (raised student:teacher ratios) continued to grow. The Howard/West reforms also further incentivated the proliferation of new soft budget research and other administrative clusters, institutes or groups, within universities to compete for sources of funding. In order to generate managerial efficiencies, there has been widespread devolution of budget and decision-making powers away from collegial, discipline-based forums and academic boards to schools and higher-level management across the sector. Increasingly, managerial staff do not come from an academic background, and often have little understanding or sympathy for the work of teaching or pure research. Finally, new budgetary efficiencies have been found by increasingly relying on fixed term and casualised staff to teach courses, freeing research time for tenured academics to attract research funding through publications, grants, and cultivating 'knowledge transfer', which means research capable of attracting commercial funding.

Ought

The rapidity of these changes, coupled with the outgrowth of managerial language that has accompanied it, has shocked and disillusioned academics. It has been the clash of two worlds, or rather the complete whitewash of the older ways of organising and experiencing academic work. Academics have gone from being, as teachers, a large part of the *raison d'être* of the university and, as colleagues, privy to the decision-making processes affecting their ways and priorities of working, to finding themselves increasingly excluded from decision-making and its supporting rationales. Teaching has been consciously and systematically devalued before the rent-seeking work of research and 'grantsmanship' increasingly necessary to keep budgets in the black. What from the perspective of higher-level management appears as an efficiency, like the greater 'productivity' of teachers forced to teach and to assess larger student workloads, is experienced by teachers as a source of declining time, increasing burn-out, and a despairing sense that they can no longer educate students as they had even two decades ago—especially now they are being forced to put their publications where their mouths were, on top of increased teaching loads. Then in many universities there have been continuing rounds of redundancies, sweetened always by the invariable claim that they can be 'voluntary'.

It is small wonder that, around the turn of the millennium, probably the most pessimistic, and empirically overblown, theoretical narratives imaginable have achieved wide currency in parts of the academy (I am thinking in passing of Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben's recently fashionable claim that the concentration camp is the 'nomos'—principle and space—of the new world order, and that all of us are now as effectively powerless as camp inmates or *museImann*). Such a nightmarish ambit claim answers, if

as 'an impediment to effective management', and that only 19 per cent of those interviewed supported collegial governance. One consequence of the post-Dawkins reforms, and the pressure that universities have been put under by funding cuts, external performance targets, and competition in the newly created quasi-markets, is that the gap between management and academic staff is greater than ever before. The 'organisational economics' of the new managerialism that has come with microeconomic reform into the academy aims at creating organisational structures where decision-making prerogatives are centralised and the burdens and risks of implementing decisions are devolved to middle managers and service providers (teachers). The executive must answer to government and to the economic bottom line in a competitive and uncertain environment. The performance settings and budgetary bottom lines the middle managers (typically deans and heads) face for their part leave them little room for manoeuvre. They also divide the time and loyalties of deans and school heads, as they make the type of consultative and collegial forms of decision-making of yesteryear increasingly unfeasible. The teachers are at the bottom

of the chain, accountable for meeting budgetary and teaching targets which are often delivered down to them with all the fatality (and obscurity of language) of the most ancient oracles.

To state two timeless pragmatic political data: deliberation and democratic governance—in this at least like scholarship itself—take time. They therefore push against the imperative for efficiency, directed towards whatever end. Second, many changes can only be achieved efficiently if those affected by them are not privy to their discussion and rationale, not to mention being too busy with larger burdens and responsibilities of their own. If rapid change alone is the desired goal, the loyalty of people affected is desirable but their indifference, alienation and confusion is sufficient to minimise resistance. Efficient managers of many different political stripes have known this.

So if we are to critically address the questions 'What are universities for?' it is also worth stressing that the managerial (even the executive) staff who have implemented and forced these changes have not been wholly sovereign in their decision-making capacity. Each of them, we can also assume, has acted with the level of good will and sense of contributing to a perceived greater good that is a necessary condition for motivating anyone at all. Each also, even the vice chancellors and deputy vice chancellors, has acted in circumstances not wholly, or even largely, of their own choice or creation, however they may have

little else, to the lived sense of alienation and disempowerment of many contemporary academics, particularly in the humanities, whose life-world has truly been shattered and whose opinions have been rendered irrelevant in their own workplaces. I still recall the words of a person, widely admired in her intellectual field, who had worked at Melbourne for over two decades and successfully supervised dozens of research students to completion, who hardly hesitated to retire when the voluntary redundancies were offered, saying that she no longer felt she understood the place, who ran it and why, or felt she should owe it anything more than contempt.

But the despair of academics, for all its legitimacy, is also an uncanny mirror to the spontaneous, pseudo-Nietzschean or Anne-Randian rhetoric of managerial staff. These invariably point to the inscrutable *ressentiment* of academics, and the ageless or Thatcherite mantra of TINA ('there is no alternative') to justify the reshaping of the university as an 'enterprise' or 'corporation'. In their 1997 study, Meek and Wood found that 42 per cent of Australian senior tertiary executives saw academic collegiality

warmed to the role out of pride, ideology, will to power, guilt or any other motive.

Put simply, management is not the enemy. Academic staffs' demonising of management may be as understandable as management's inability to understand academics' desire to preserve the practices, privileges and prerogatives of their generations-old status group. But it is also politically unhelpful. And it misses the wider question of why the reforms to which we are all subject were initiated. Management is not tasked to answer the question of what universities are for, in principle if no longer in fact. Their task is to manage. They aim to manage efficiently, and for this reason they manage now more prescriptively than they have ever done in this sector before. But efficiency is a relative value, no matter how hard we try to fetishise it. The question is: efficiency for what? Or if we want more for less, more of what?

If the ends or goals we are efficiently pursuing are not good or appropriate ends, or are ends which are imposed upon us beyond our control and comprehension, then we will have become the well-meaning but efficient servants of many mistakes, broken institutions and a diminished national culture. To merely cite the need for someone to take responsibility does not exclude that what we take responsibility for should be capable of critical scrutiny. History has known many bad leaders, and false paths paved with good intentions and efficient expedition. It gives me no joy to report that, as a teacher at a 'competing institution', that the very place I teach

at has become the butt elsewhere of jokes, pity and plans to poach disappointed students.

What is, alas, does not mean what ought to be.

Ends

Whatever each of our self-perceptions—and I stress again that I don't think that most people who have been implementing the new managerialism in universities have bad or anti-cultural intentions—the questions the new university raises respond directly to the predominant language of public policy, and the external motives for reforming the tertiary sector here and around the developed nations. That this is so is a case of what critical theorist Jurgen Habermas calls the colonisation of the lifeworld (people's lived experience and self-perceptions) by heteronomous systems-imperatives: the demands of a reified media-steered system or, if you like, a 'spontaneous order' (the economy) which, having attained a certain size, takes on a life and quasi-natural regularities of its own. Beneath that, I would add, the changes in the Australian tertiary sector are the outcome of the political struggle and ascendancy of the new Right following the 1970s economic crises.

Whatever our own senses of what we do, managers or academics need only consult the opinion pages of any Murdoch paper most days of the week, let alone the papers regularly submitted to government by the leagues of interconnected new Right think tanks in this country, to see that the universities are seen by influential parts of our governing elites as hotbeds of elitist, anti-social opinion, and as consistently inefficient or irrelevant forms of rent-seeking.

As for the claim that no one could seriously believe that education does not involve shaping young characters, and not just making them job-ready, let me (to be less parochial or confrontational) cite the British Minister (yes) for 'Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education', Minister Rammell,

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who greeted declining enrolments in pure humanities subjects in the United Kingdom in 2005 with the approving remark that this was no problem: evidently 'students are choosing subjects they think will be vocationally beneficial'.

Evidently enough. But surely no one can believe that the aim of the whole exercise is to subordinate entire Universities to the imperatives of the new post-Fordist capitalism, wherein (for one thing) increased investment in R&D is required for firms to compete internationally, but wherein these firms cannot individually be tasked to privately fund such research, given the costs involved and the difficulty of internalising benefits such as preventing competitors from benefiting from said R&D?

Here again, to be politic, let me cite the Gordon Brown Treasury in the United Kingdom, whose rhetoric of a 'knowledge economy' and (yes) 'knowledge transfer' is however not foreign to the colonies. What is required, the UK Treasury explained in a 2004 policy statement, is 'greater responsiveness of the research base of the economy', 'better integration of the research base with the evolving needs of the economy' or even 'better progress in harnessing knowledge to wealth creation'. This is because, according to

Callinacos 'if we were to turn our backs on the global economy we would also have to leave behind the huge creative power of the knowledge economy' which 'reaches deep into our lives and implicates all of us as consumers and workers'. 'The Economic Benefits of Increased Participation in Education and Training', which is the Access Economics Report cited as the highest authority by the 2008 Bradley Review, does not even wonder about such an economistic agenda.

But surely then the new higher education still aims at shaping young Australians' culture and values, and therefore contributing to Australian nation-building? To answer, let us cite 'Australian higher education in the era of mass customisation'. This was a background paper underlying the 1998 West Review. Yet, like the Access Report, it was written not by academics, students, managers or even VCs, but by 'Global Alliance Limited'. GAL is a Tokyo-based investment bank which aimed to bring the good news of its 'context-free' managerial science to bear on the Australian universities. The goal of Australian tertiary reform should be to produce 'winners in the international [education] marketplace'. These new universities should be economically rather than educationally directed, and the government should 'open the floodgates to new domestic and international interests' to vamp up competition to produce efficiencies. As Considine and Marginson observe, although it had a significant real-world impact on the Howard regimes' 1998 reforms,

'Global Alliance' says little about the long-term policy objectives of nation-building and the creation of equitable opportunities via education, or the effects on teaching quality or the striving for research excellence, or nothing about the fate of different academic disciplines in its imagined new world.

This telling oversight does not detract from the claim that there was never a golden age, and that we should cease pining for it. Education until the 1970s was a marker and instrument of privilege. The collegial, status-group based forms of university self-government bred vices as well as virtues: complacency, narcissism, arrogance, sometimes obscurantism. But then we should, I think, balance such considerations by asking whether there are not some human goods that can only be produced from leisure, and which do not immediately meet mass market demand, like art, philosophy, theology, literature—things people widely agree are among those that make life most worth living.

In the largest possible frame, the debate about what universities are for is the debate about what a society should be for, beyond its own material reproduction, and in what its flourishing should consist. It also touches on the ancient question, at least as old for us as Socrates, of what knowledge and wisdom is for, given that the search for the truth must reserve the right to question what society presents as being 'the only alternative.

In a slightly sharpened lens, the ends of the university become problematic in a

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new way in liberal modern societies like our own. This is because political liberalism is founded on the view that we cannot publicly reason or rationally decide about final ends—since that should properly be people's private business, with the pun not wholly unintended. But neo-liberalism was—and let's be frank, will continue to be for some time, in the absence of any competing philosophy and unified social movement—the most radically sceptical form of liberalism yet, one which assumes self-interest and the need to audit, survey or submit everyone to market pressures to insure that we are not all so many rent-seeking free-riders.

To reason about universities and what they are for is to re-raise some very necessary but very difficult questions about how we conceive our society, the moment we reject the postmodern and neo-liberal idea that no such thing exists. What should we do with the social surplus? Should we continue collectively deferring this question by reinvesting it to generate further growth, wagged by the global economy which the leading policy statements of the day agree has the ancient face of fate, until it seems that our geophysical and natural environment can no longer sustain us? Or is there a place for non-economic, non-utilitarian ends to orient our hopes and public policy? ←

Indigenous Sovereignty in the Northwest Passage

Peter Jull

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Nunavut and federal marine protection for Canada's far north-east

Like north-eastern Australia's Torres Strait, Canada's far north-east features a legendary and luring waterway, the Northwest Passage. Until recent years it has been mischievous to consider it a real passage, and it has drawn unknown numbers of ships and navigators to their doom since the Dark Ages. But now, with climate change, the eastern entry of Lancaster Sound faces a new era.

Wikipedia tells us the region is uninhabited, but it is precisely the regional population of Inuit in High Arctic villages north, south and west of the Sound, acting both directly and through politically effective, policy sophisticated and research-loaded political associations, who have fought for its protection. The richness of the Sound's biology and its pivotal role in the well-being of Canada's entire Eastern Arctic, together with hopes or whispers of rich oil, gas and mineral resources, have ensured that the region has held the attention of non-Inuit interests, officials and outsiders of many stripes.

The Canadian Encyclopedia tells us:

As a result of the interaction of currents, the sound is rich in nutrients and supports a biologically varied community of birds, mammals and fish. At Bylot Island, which lies at its eastern end, it provides breeding grounds for some 3 million seabirds alone. The area has provided sustenance for Inuit cultures for thousands of years: ringed seals, walrus and polar bears, and narwhals, belugas, killer and bowhead whales. Arctic fox is trapped in almost every inlet, and arctic char is taken at the mouths of rivers.

Now the dramatic climate changes, which even faraway Australia hears about daily—affecting Arctic sea ice, Greenland glaciers, as well as polar bear and walrus needs and numbers—have spawned an explosion of interest and activity relating to Arctic shipping, whether through the High Arctic islands

land and sea claims settlement provides many powers and guarantees so that against all comers they can 'care for country', to use the Australian phrase. These Inuit-specific rights are written into the Canadian Constitution.

This is helpful because the current, very conservative, Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, is given to northern visions, extending to often quoting the trite and clumsy words of the national anthem about 'the true North strong and free'. As national Inuit leader Mary Simon pointed out during Harper's latest northern trip, after half a dozen visits he is finding that the Arctic is about people, not merely space for military manoeuvres. Indeed, the Harper view often seems peculiarly anachronistic, typical of the early post-war period when the North was a fuzzy vision of a future to be dominated by the revving of large and loud machines, ripping up rocks and tundra.

The Inuit and sub-Arctic peoples resisted this approach and its underlying socio-economic assumptions, and over time persuaded Canadians and their governments that a tapestry of

(Lancaster Sound and the Northwest Passage) or even across the open Arctic Ocean near the North Pole. The Northeast Passage, around Norway and across the top of Russia to the Far East, is also in play, as the Russians have much more experience in Arctic shipping.

The Canadian federal and Nunavut governments, and the Eastern Nunavut Inuit birth-right corporation for claims and resource management, are ready to sign an agreement for a national marine conservation area. One advantage to governments is the continuous use of sea-ice by Inuit for travel, camping and hunting, dating from the time before Europeans 'discovered' Canada. This Inuit reality is important for Canada's protection of Arctic waters in an era when more than occasional shipping is looming. Long-time research and legal experts who have worked with Inuit are particularly excited by and optimistic about this new format for practical co-operation in the most sensitive of environments.

In the 1970s and 1980s the Inuit embarrassed Southern experts with the depth of Greenland and Nunavut hunters' knowledge of marine life and its likely response to shipping, ice-breaking, offshore drilling and the like. While this is true of most of Canada, it is particularly so of the Arctic that the Indigenous people taught other Canadians first to understand, then to value, and finally to manage and conserve intelligently the natural gift which is North America.

Some Northwest Passage issues are already well accepted. Canadians need no reminding by international NGOs or the United Nations that the cultures, communities, livelihoods and regional resources of indigenous Inuit must be maintained. Inuit fought that battle from the end of the 1960s and in 1999 inaugurated their own Nunavut Territory in which most of the Northwest Passage is situated. The accompanying

cultures and languages already were in good shape, vision-wise, if only they would turn off the bulldozers and listen to them. Eventually they did. Greenland also cares about shipping in the Passage past its coastal towns and hamlets with their marine livelihoods. A full-blown Inuit country, it is self-governing in most ways, already respected and especially able in international marine and environment matters.

This reminds us of the Torres Strait and remote Australia today. Since the Intervention we have been especially busy telling Indigenous people what is wrong with them—largely in social, health, educational and employment terms—implying we know the answers. These are not always founded in cultural autonomy and continuity, which are minimum requirements. If we join our governments' might and main with Indigenous knowledge and aspirations, we could do better than simply setting off another cycle of alienation. ←

Everlasting Children

Peter Jull
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A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and J. K. Rowling

'Children in these families, at the end of the nineteenth century, were different from children before or after.' So writes A. S. Byatt in *The Children's Book*, her long 2009 novel spanning the years that saw the 19th century turn, and the Great War begin and end. The children she writes about come from a particular section of the British upper middle class, the Fabians and their friends. 'Neither dolls nor miniature adults; these children joined their parents at meals, had their characters considered in the light of new social and psychological ideas, and inhabited their own 'separate, largely independent, lives as children'. This happy breed roamed free in fields and woodlands, rode ponies and bicycles and developed lasting friendships. And sometimes they had adventures. If all

this sounds familiar, it's because it is: it is the stuff of much of children's fiction, fantastic as well as realist, from the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th.

What a world, that had such creatures in it. Well, it is perhaps comforting to know that similar children can be found in the fiction of J. K. Rowling, whose characters exist in a world very like that conjured by the imaginations of earlier writers. Harry and his friends may ride broomsticks instead of ponies, and open locked doors with a swish of a wand rather than struggling with a key cut from an impression made in a bar of soap, but both Rowling's children and their forerunners encounter similar, settled and comfortably confirming hierarchical worlds even if enemies are sometimes included. And whatever their sex or age, enemies represent what is bad, while the children, existing in a neatly dichotomous moral world of good and evil, dark and light, oppose them.

In 2003, six years before her own novel about children was published, Byatt wrote about Rowling's books for children. The distinction between 'for' children and 'about' children is an important one, and is at the heart of what Byatt has to say, both in her discussion of Rowling, and in her own recent novel. Rowling writes for children, yet adults are among her ardent admirers. About this fact Byatt has two things to say. Reading books written for children is a pleasant diversion, a reversion to 'the reading child' that gives comfort to the adult, particularly those who haven't, in adulthood, managed to recapture the level of enchantment they once found in reading. The second is that the adult who reads Rowling's work with the same enthusiasm as the child is one who 'hasn't

known, and doesn't care about' mystery. Such adults are inhabitants of 'urban jungles, not of the real wild'.

Her article produced an avalanche of rebuttal, creating headlines which claimed that she had called adult readers of Rowling 'childish'; a misreading which only goes to show the childishness of some of those responding to it. But more importantly, the dismissal of her claims about Rowling's books meant that her central point, which is that Rowling's imaginary world fails to provide significance, didn't get the analysis it deserved. The recent publication of Byatt's novel, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, makes what Byatt had to say about Rowling all the more interesting.

The Children's Book opens in the South Kensington museum, that 'schoolroom for everyone', as its first director, Henry Cole, put it. Two boys look down at a gallery containing porcelain and see a third boy drawing. He is copying the design on one of the masterpieces of the collection, an extraordinary candlestick. The year is 1895; the Prince Consort, as Byatt reminds her reader, died in 1861, and the museum is already in the process of the changes that will lead to its renaming as the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899. The boys meet, and discover that Philip, the boy drawing, is living rough in the basement of the museum, having come there from Burslem in the Staffordshire Potteries. He wants to be a potter, but knows that he must leave the industrial processes of the Potteries behind if he is to become an artist in clay and glazes. Olive Wellwood, a writer for children, is at the museum. One of the boys who found Philip is her beloved son Tom. Philip is borne away to Kent and apprenticed to a difficult, but brilliant, potter whose work is avidly collected by the South Kensington Museum.

The book's many narratives intertwave several families' stories, and cross class lines. Olive Wellwood is also a child of the Potteries. As a young adult she and

her sister, Violet Grimwith, ran away; Violet, unmarried, still lives in Olive's household. Olive met her husband, a Fabian, in London, and was transported by him to Kent, and into the middle class. In Kent writers and artists, freethinkers and specialists in early education surround her: Olive's Kent is a maelstrom of late Victorian ingenuity and striving. Her writing helps support the large household she shares with her husband, five children and her sister. In fact two of the five children are Violet's, fathered by Olive's husband, and raised as Olive's own. This truth is not revealed until very late in the book, when some of the stories 'for' the children, and 'about' the children, begin to make their effects felt. Aside from her commercial work, Olive writes a manuscript book for each of her own children, providing them an imagined alternative life, a possible world. These stories extend and elaborate as the children grow, creating a perpetual fantasy for them and of them. For all the children they are consequent, but for the best beloved, Tom, fatal.

Stories told to children, and books written for them (mostly by adults) are serious business. Like any other cultural form children's books play a role in the production of the subject. In them childhood and its other, adulthood, are given discursive form. Discourses, as Foucault taught us, are material; they produce effect. Childhood is set about with discourses shaping what it can, must and should be, and children's books, wonderful as they are, are as much part of the shaping of childhood as are ideas about psychology, education, sociality and so on. Children's books are product of adults who are representing a childhood which is not theirs, nor yet that of the children for whom they write; children's books are 'for' children, not 'by' them. Neither child nor adult fully enters the space between, as Jacqueline Rose reminded her readers in *The Case of Peter Pan*, more than thirty years ago. That is the space of becoming, of what is not yet. And that is a space that, in Olive Wellwood's writing for her children, is as dangerous as any adventure writer would care to imagine.

Rowling's work, it is to be hoped, has not had fatal consequences for any of its readers. But such extremes are, fortunately, not essential, and the fact that readers long survive reading them does not mean that the Harry Potter books fail to play their part in the fertile space between the adult's writing and the child's reception. It is because Byatt knows that books written for children are important cultural forms, bearing their own constitutive apparatus, that she is concerned about the failure of significance in them.

Take magic, an essential feature in Rowling's work. It is controlled, with clearly defined boundaries: for example, under-age wizards must not undertake magic when they are in the ordinary world of Muggles. The magic they can do is equally controlled: the children are at Hogwarts to learn to bring their remarkable gifts into a disciplined form. Where, in this, is Herne the Hunter in the night sky, on whose heels run the unstoppable and everlasting Wild Hunt? Where are the spells that cannot be broken, and which will turn a human woman into a mermaid perpetual? And where is the werewolf who was never a man, but who, like the Pangolin, lives between the earth and the sky, and will always do so, belonging fully to neither? Compared to these figures, and all the others who

crowd fairy and folktale, saga and song, Voldemort, the evil genius of Rowling's world, is an envious and malicious boy who, grown up, uses his gifts to get at Harry Potter and anyone who tries to help him. Motivated by childhood jealousy of Harry's father, which is deadly enough, his malice, even when it is parsed as evil, can only be thought of as a world event from the perspective of an infant ego. The magic that results is equally infantile: a series of nasty little tricks about nothing much, nothing significant. It must be admitted that several members of Rowling's cast die, but only because they got caught up in the melee, when actually nothing much was at stake. Harry was, after all, under a permanent spell of protection, called mother-love. All the same, malice is, of course, bad enough, but it is nothing compared to the undying and unmotivated malevolence of the Wild Hunt. And that, according to Byatt, is real magic: unstoppable, inexplicable, and a potent source of necessary wonder.

The period in which Byatt's novel is set was also that in which the cult of the child reached its height. The slow development of the ideal of childhood, achieved in the decades of which she writes, transformed the family in many ways, not least turning it from an economic unit in

which the child was a productive member to one in which the child became totally dependent. At the same time the child was cast into the terrible paradox of the wholly innocent yet dangerously latent sexual subject. The era about which she writes is also that in which J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* appeared, a play and later a book about a boy who would never grow up. Everlasting children like Peter played a significant role in children's literature until the first few decades of the 20th century, when denial of adulthood finally became impossible. Byatt's character Olive, innocent of this inevitability, writes a play in which she and her collaborator hope to copy Barrie's success. She bases it on the story she wrote for her son Tom. The play, called *Tom Underground*, the title she gave to his own story, horrifies Tom and literally finishes him.

That, Byatt makes clear, is how powerful children's books can be. They are places in which the child can imagine him or herself, can try

on what it is to be like this, like that, and respond to the novel's ideas about good and evil, dark and light. It would be as well, she argues, both in her novel, and in her article about J. K. Rowling, if books for children didn't substitute wild magic and wonder for mere technological wizardry, as Rowling does, even though she gives it archaic form. If we are to have mystery, let it not be the kind that lies in wondering how a trick was done; let it be as serious as the child reader deserves; let it have significance.

Although Byatt's topic is children and their books, her target is the adult who reads children's books and, by extension, those who write them and write about them. Veering uncomfortably close towards elitism in her article about Rowling, she overplays her hand, encouraging an easy dismissal of what she has to say. The fact is that books written for children are very good calibrators of cultural change, and Rowling's are no exception. All too apt for their inevitable franchising, they are also exciting page-turners, recyclers of motifs and structures from many precedent forms—and no worse for that. Whether their popularity should be understood as another breaking down (or coming together) of adult and child taste, about which Neil Postman wrote despairingly in *The Disappearance of Childhood* in 1982; and whether that is a precursor to a new kind of childhood, a new kind of literacy, or to a decay of cultural forms that is to be resisted at all cost, is a question worthy of thought. Indications such as Byatt's are abroad, and it is wise to take note of them. In the meantime, it should be remembered with gratitude that the much-maligned Enid Blyton encouraged many non-readers to read; so too does J. K. Rowling. And that is not to damn with faint praise. ←

A Description of the Storm Glass and Guide to its Use in Forecasting Weather

Lisa Gorton
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IV.

The ambition of a miniaturist,

which fashions Mantegna's *Triumphs* in pin-scale diorama—

trophies and armour, where

Caesar's chariot by key-wound mechanism succeeds itself

upon the scene—is

framed in this, where crystals

by the wreckage upon wreckage which is making, remake weather

as a succession of rooms,

and by such recessive logic prove what is unassailable

in curios, useless things.

It makes an icon of patience,

not as ships in bottles—rigged tricks of possibility—

but that experience be forfeit

to this illuminated scene, making and unmaking its alike uninhabitable palaces—

The Storm Glass, sometimes called a Camphor Glass, is an outdated instrument that foretells weather. A sealed glass containing chemicals, dissolved in alcohol and water, the crystalline forms in it vary with electric changes in the air.



A Description of the Storm Class and Guide to its Use in Forecasting Weather

Lisa Gorton

Lisa Gorton's poetry collection, *Press Release*, was shortlisted for the Melbourne Prize Best Writing Award and won the Victorian Premier's Prize for poetry. She is also the author of a novel for children, *Cloudland*.

REVIEW



A Dangerous Nationalism

Cuy Rundle

Cuy Rundle is a consulting editor for *Arena Magazine*.



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book A Dangerous Nationalism

review by Cuy Rundle

Tim Soutphommasane, *Reclaiming Patriotism* (Cambridge University Press, 2009)

'They're still wearing Australian flags', a friend remarked in horror at the Big Day Out, the one-day music festival started around a decade ago as something to do around the time of that most hollow of hallowed days, January 26. The pleasantly formless day of music and youth was being turned into an explicit expression of Australianness. For those who value such days as simply expressions of joyful human being, not pressed into service, the display of a national flag seemed to be the ultimate negation. Everyone was condemning the aggressive manner in which a few Anglo kids were parading around asserting white Australianness. But the very display of flags at all struck my friend as a betrayal of the day's spirit.

For Tim Soutphommasane, this latter reaction is as wrong as the rejection of white Anglo Australianness is correct. The total rejection of patriotism as a value by a loose group of writers, activists and commentators lumped together as 'progressives' is both a political and philosophical error. In the Howard era, such people identified patriotism with the worst aspects of Australian Anglo-Celtic chauvinism and rejected it utterly. Infected with a

'citizenship knowledge' test as a pre-requisite to the right to vote, an explicit spruiking of 'ecstatic myths' such as Gallipoli, and a ban on dual citizenship, among others. If an abstract 'liberal patriotism' is not engineered, the reservoir of national feeling will flow into Cronulla-style riots, or into 'mush'—sentiment for 'the taste of VB, barbeques, going to the beach or following the cricket'. Liberal patriotism must be engineered without allowing the sneaking-back in of Anglo-Celtic nationalism, the means by which said mush becomes weaponised.

There is some truth to the charge that Australian activists sometimes single out Australia as having a uniquely maligned history, an over-reaction to the self-congratulatory kitsch of the past decade, and a false analysis of what is just one settler-capitalist society amongst a number. Soutphommasane's analysis of the actual politics of the Howard period strikes me as

quite wrong; there's insufficient space to go into detail here, and I've given an account of it in *Crikey*. More pertinent for *Arena* readers is a description of the author's misconstruction of patriotism, nationalism and their creation, through the interaction of the intellectually trained and the mainstream.

Though most of the book is dedicated to enumerating a series of techniques by which liberal patriotism can be engineered, Soutphommasane rejects, or simply is not aware of, theories that nationalism and patriotism arise from the cultural activities of intellectuals, often those in exile, projected back onto multi-layered and more complexly affiliated communities. The work of Hobsbawm and Trevor-Roper on the invention of tradition, Benedict Anderson on imaginary communities, and many others in these pages, including Paul James, has laid bare the process by which nationalism is

cosmopolitanism developed since the 1960s, progressives have entirely cut themselves off from local loyalties, and have fallen into alienation and despair.

Patriotism is something they should develop not because it is a good idea in itself, but to rejoin the national conversation,

to be politically active, to be successive advocates for change and reform, you have to engage the minds of other citizens ... to deny patriotism is a sure path to political impotence ... In the face of rapid and far-reaching economic change ... the nation remains the last remaining source of stability and security.

Though Soutphommasane occasionally gestures to an absolute value to patriotism—'it is no different to other forms of loyalty or love, and a necessary condition of collective self-improvement'—the understanding of it is overwhelmingly instrumental. A sense of patriotism is what holds a multicultural society together, and the global pressures towards dispersion must be countered by a 'liberal patriotism' manufactured by state and cultural apparatuses—explicit talk of 'Australian values', a cultural literacy curriculum, an explicit yoking of infrastructure development to the task of building a 'stronger nation', a compulsory

overwhelmingly a production of intellectuals using the raw material of local traditions, and transformed through the intellectuals' distinctive practice of producing abstractions and essences.

Seemingly unaware of this, Soutphommasane gives a naive version of Australian nationalism and the bush myth as arising from, well, the bush. But of course it didn't. The country was more urban than rural by 1910, and the bush myth was constructed by the drunks, obsessives, and dissolute intellectuals of the Melbourne and Sydney literary world. The bush myth offered a rapidly suburbanising country an idealised form of values of simplicity and hardihood lost almost before they had begun. 'Mateship' was the precursor of the pointless sacrifice at Gallipoli, one way by which active questioning of it could be deferred. Soutphommasane's account of how we, as

progressives, should treat this material is quite telling:

There is, admittedly, an element of myth in Anzac, as there is in all traditions, not least national ones. We suspend our judgement in submitting ourselves to the legend. We substitute for literal truth a more ecstatic truth; literal accuracy gives way to something more visceral, more emotional and ultimately more moral ... sacrifice does not just earn a nation's stripes; it also demands that we pay our gratitude by giving the benefit of the doubt.

For those familiar with the history of myth presented as truth in the service of unity, the above passage should be troubling, to say the least. And everything is wrong with Soutphommasane's account of how we should relate to our homeland. The 'ecstatic myth' routine is combined with an uncritical endorsement of German kulturkampf nationalism from Fichte onwards, and an envoi quote from Herder—but Soutphommasane also chooses as valuable exactly what is most deadened in national attachment, and rejects its living expressions.

Thus the concrete expressions of national life—the taste of a local beer, the shared interest in a seasonal sport—are rejected as 'mush', while great attention is given to arid experiments in building a patriotism based on celebrations of Australia's alleged role as the world's first universally franchised democratic nation (a role that would have come as news to the Aborigines, or 'fauna'). This is curious. Like many progressive patriots, Soutphommasane quotes Orwell on the nefariousness of the Left, yet does not take Orwell's point that a genuine love of country is expressed through concrete experiences, girls walking in clogs over the cobbles, warm bitter, *The Guardian* and so forth. In the Australian context, he seems simply unaware of many of the progressive left traditions that did attempt to ground a universalist politics in local expression. 'There was a decline in progressive nationalism from the 1960s on', he argues. In fact, the 1960s and 1970s saw its greatest efflorescence when the localist themes of the radical Left—the revival of the bush ballads, connection with Indigenous Australia, the self-publishing of local serious novels—fed a general wave of radical and critical nationalism, from the new theatre and local music to the Australian independence movement, a genuine republican movement, in contrast to the top-down ARM of the 1990s.

The Australian Independence Movement could sometimes be silly in its attempts to elevate bush culture (The Bushwhackers,

the Kalkadoon bookshop etc), but their sense of place was at least concrete, and created a democratic political-cultural programme which yielded results. By contrast, Soutphommasane's attempt to fill out a notion of liberal patriotism as expressed above all through policy quickly leads him into absurdity. Irresolvably contentious issues such as a Bill of Rights, or an apology and treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are given a 'patriotic' swoosh even though opponents of such measures could, with equal consistency, call them unpatriotic. In one absurd moment, Soutphommasane asks how the issue of climate change can be drawn into a patriotic narrative. When the fate of the atmosphere cannot be recognised as the first unquestionably global humanist challenge in history, then the motif of patriotism has become both fetish and symptom of something else.

Soutphommasane is a young writer, eager to make a policy mark. That has led him to create an unreflexive book which simply reprises the invention and projection of nationalism in the Renaissance—an aspiring dreamer amid the dreaming spires of Oxford, inventing an ideal Australia. That happens, but why has the book been welcomed by many on the Left, especially those from one-time internationalist traditions? The question is all the more pertinent given that Soutphommasane's formula appears to be quite wrong. The book appears to have been conceived in the worst days of Howardism, before more universalist and progressive strands did reappear in Australian politics, even if in a kitschified form. In the United Kingdom, Gordon Brown's experiments in 'Britishness' have been an abject failure. Contemporary societies are more complex than these simple formulas can reduce them to, beloved of academics not bound by the strictures they set others.

One strives to find something positive in this book. But there is something hard to like in it. None of the real expressions of countrylove and social solidarity—from surf lifesaving to the CFA, from the David Hicks campaign to, yes, the taste of a VB, make much of a positive appearance. It has more than a mild feel of a revenge against situatedness, a scheme to replace the inchoate and various manifestations of countrylove and a sense of place, with a series of abstract schema in which no-one feels at home save the intellectual. ←

book **A Distributist Way**

review by Johann Rossouw

Race Mathews, *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society: Alternatives to the Market and the State* (The Distributist Review Press, Irving, 2009)

In the twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall it seems increasingly as if that event didn't so much represent the victory of liberal democracy and capitalism over autocratic communism, as the beginning of the end of the epoch of which both these systems are variants, namely secular materialism. Since 1989, the unraveling of secular materialism has since been embodied by two other significant historical events, namely the terror attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, and the on-going global financial crisis (GFC) brought on by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September. If the terror attacks led to profound doubt about the global saving grace of secular

materialism's political arm—liberal democracy—the GFC did the same for secular materialism's economic arm, market capitalism. Secular materialism's crisis of political faith famously and ironically led to a change in missionary strategy, particularly in the United States: less emphasis on the 'soft power' of culture and commerce and more on the 'hard power' of war and unilateralism.

So far it would seem that the crisis

of economic faith is causing a similar ironic reaction, perhaps more evangelical than missionary: an emotional closing of ranks by the faithful around the dogma of salvation through economic growth. Just how irrational this faith has become, and just how deeply it is held, is shown by how the precondition of any type of economy—the ecology—is still sacrificed on the altar of economic growth, and by the anxious appropriation of anything resembling ‘restored economic growth’.

It’s no wonder that so many Western countries suffer from political apathy, cynicism about the political and economic elites and a growing fear for the future. As long as secular materialism continues to be the theological mainstream these illnesses are bound to worsen, for the people know all too well that things can’t be business as usual, while the apparent lack of alternatives weigh heavily on them.

Finding a way out of the current impasse requires new ways of thinking and doing, many of them acts of rediscovery and reconstruction. One such act is the updated edition of Race Mathews’

timely book *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society: Alternatives to the Market and the State*. As was hinted above, secular materialism is itself a theology. Thinking beyond the confines of the theology in which one was raised does require boldness and an ecumenical spirit. Mathews displays this in the introduction when he makes it clear that while his ‘concerns are secular’, a lot can be learned from social Catholic thought, particularly as it has manifested since the last quarter of the 19th century in distributism, to which this book is dedicated.

What is distributism?

Distributism favours a ‘society of owners’ where property belongs to the many rather than the few, and correspondingly opposes the concentration of property in the hands either of the rich, as under capitalism, or of the state, as advocated by some socialists. In particular, *ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange must be widespread* (my emphasis).

In order to understand why distributism is an

alternative to both a market- or a state-based approach, it is useful to bear in mind some of the philosophical differences between these approaches and distributism. Where the state and the market often, if not usually, aim for a direct relationship with the individual, distributism sees the individual’s relationship to the economy and politics as mediated by the community and its institutions. Where the state and the market, especially since abandoning its pretensions to the elevation of citizens and consumers since World War II, these days see the economy and the good life as one and the same, distributism sees the economy as but one of the means to the good life and the good life is more than economical.

thought and practice, this was done with an eye on the industrial future and not the agrarian past.

Mathews spends six of the eleven chapters on an historical overview of the founding decades of distributism in Britain, roughly between the last quarter of the 19th century and the 1930’s. These were of course years of massive social tension and great ideological energy in industrialised Britain. In more or less chronological order the founding figures and events in the development of British distributist thought were: a growing consciousness of the massive skewing of the ownership of production and property in an industrialising Europe and a concomitant mass poverty; the publication of the great papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, following on the work of the great British Catholic cardinals Newman and Manning; and the rise to prominence of the three well-known British distributist thinkers, Hillaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton and his younger brother, Cecil.

Mathews shows how all three, after an initial dalliance with socialism, sooner or later became disillusioned with its centralist and materialist tendencies. Of course, they were also all Catholics, and therefore schooled in a body of thought focusing on social justice, community agency and the promise of a better social order. To his credit Mathews also pays a lot of attention—perhaps too much—to the fervent debates the distributists had with the leading socialists of the day, including figures such as George Bernard Shaw and Beatrice and Sidney Webb. The utility of this focus is that it allows the reader to understand how vital the exchanges between the socialists and the distributists were for the latter’s development of their views—and that the contemporary reader disillusioned with socialism does not have to re-invent the wheel when exploring or applying distributism.

Mathews goes to great lengths to analyse the reasons why distributism never really was practically adopted by ordinary citizens, including the abhorrent anti-Semitism of which Belloc and the Chestertons were guilty until thankfully reversing their position in the 1930s. Another reason is also the old academic problem: great at talk, less at action. In chapters six and seven Mathews tells the happy but ultimately doomed adoption of distributism in Nova Scotia, Canada’s

In assessing the promise of real and lasting social change through the adoption of distributism it is important to have a good historical overview of its origins and achievements so far. This historical overview cannot be developed without reference to its other two great secular materialist contenders, namely socialism and (market) capitalism. For a start, all three of these approaches developed in reaction to, and perhaps even as an extension of, the Industrial Revolution between 1800 and 1850 in Britain. It is important to bear this in mind when assessing distributism, for although its founders did draw on medieval

Antigonish movement, led by the Catholic priests 'Jimmy' Tompkins and Moses Coady. Their insight was to combine economic action and adult education, beginning with a poor fishing community. Tompkins and Coady understood all too well that real change depends on popular participation, on-going education and new or reformed institutions. Finding a number of co-operatives, evening study groups and credit unions—that is, ownership of production and capital—was their answer. It worked well until the movement failed to ensure on-going popular participation and the vitality of its founding ideals.

Which brings Mathews to the greatest distributist story so far, that of the Basque Jesuit priest José Maria Arizmendiarieta (1915–1976), and the Mondragon co-operative in the Basque region of Spain. By 2008 Mondragon's sales stood at around \$US20 billion; it employed more than 103,000 people and it was Spain's seventh biggest industrial group. Arizmendiarieta had fought on the side of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, nearly died in prison and was driven by a strong commitment to the Basque people and social justice. Like his Antigonish predecessors he combined on-going education, co-operative production and co-operative ownership of capital, but he had the foresight with his co-founders to develop an evolutionary structure for Mondragon, ensuring its longevity and growth.

Mathews comprehensively explain the functions and structure of Mondragon, but they are usefully summed up in the collective's ten basic principles: open admission, democratic organisation, sovereignty of labour, the instrumental and subordinate character of capital, participatory management, payment solidarity, interco-operation, social transformation, universality and education. Mondragon's success has been helped, as Mathews points out, by the historical experience and identity of the Basques, but that shouldn't distract one from its major achievement as embodying the best of modernity without succumbing to its pathologies. Possibly the main reason for Mondragon's success is that it took the community rather than the state as its point of departure, which has ensured that the market is an extension of the community, rather than the inverse.

Race Mathews' *Jobs of Our Own* is required reading for all those yearning for the popular politics of the 1960's, as well as for all those dreaming about a popular politics of the future—and real change.

Jobs of Our Own is available through Amazon.com or directly from the publishers, The Distributist Press, at <distributistreview.com/press/>. ←

film **Hollywood and the Holocaust**

review by *Kate Harper*

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Inglorious Basterds (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2009)

With the anticipation of a new Quentin Tarantino film comes the fervent expectation that this one will be wackier, bloodier and more self-referential—that is to say, more *Tarantino*—than the last. In fact, Tarantino and his works are revered by his most loyal of fans with the sort of wide-eyed frothing at the mouth usually reserved for evangelical preachers or cult leaders promising various salvations. For these most ardent of followers, he has become a kind of postmodern-antichrist-Christ and, whether you like his films or not, it is easy to see why. His works encapsulate a sort of violent intertextuality and hyper-awareness of filmic contexts that derives from the director's own obsessive cinephilia: they demonstrate how a postmodern aesthetic can work, what it sounds like and how it can affect our bodies.

Tarantino's latest film, *Inglorious Basterds*, begins with a tongue-in-cheek reference to the film as a twisted fairytale of sorts. The first inter-titles read: 'Chapter 1. Once upon a time ... In Nazi occupied France', as if this might be a story told to children to, surely, give them nightmares. From this initial allusion to the fairytale, Tarantino sets up a 'what if?' narrative, an imagined history of World War II. In this imagined history he gives the Jews a brutal and effective agency they never had. The 'basterds' in the film are a group of Jewish American soldiers, led by Lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt), who not only kill their enemy with an efficiency that has Hitler and his SS cronies quaking, but also take trophies from their kill, namely Nazi scalps.

It is this element of the film—Jews as murderers—that has divided critical responses: what are the implications of turning real-life victims into characters as methodically

violent as the real-life perpetrators? By re-writing history does Tarantino insensitively trivialise a horrific episode in the not-so-distant past? Or does his status as a daring Auteur give him licence to do whatever he wants, especially since in the postmodern context history and its subsequent representations are all 'up for grabs' anyway?

These are important questions to consider. What is especially interesting, however, is that Tarantino's irreverent film points to the reverential way the film industry has consistently capitalised on the atrocities of the Holocaust, so much so that it would be fair to define the Holocaust film as a distinct sub-genre of the war film proper. The cinematic portrayal of terrible atrocities is surely necessary for cultural awareness and healing; however, it would be naive to assume that the only reason Hollywood has so consistently backed and rewarded productions that deal with World War II is for of the educative function of such stories. As Kate Winslet, playing herself in an episode of BBC's *The Extras*, satirically acknowledges, 'do a film about the Holocaust and you're guaranteed an Oscar'. Undeniably, this is an exceptionally popular genre that makes studios and production companies lots of money. (In retrospect, Winslet's comments seem hilariously portentous as, in a case of life imitating art, she had been nominated for Oscars on four previous occasions and finally won earlier this year for her role in the Holocaust film *The Reader*.)

Tarantino employed some of the designers and locations that have been previously used with such Oscar-winning success in the making of the most lucrative and 'serious' Holocaust films of recent years. Notably, he enlisted

Anna B. Sheppard, who was the costume designer for *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist* and the HBO mini-series *Band of Brothers*, to help with the wardrobe of *Basterds*. In addition, four of the major interior locations for the film were constructed at Studio Babelsberg in Berlin, which has been the setting for *The Pianist*, *Die Fälscher* and *The Reader*. And what distinguishes these films, aside from obvious thematic concerns, is that they have enough Oscars between them to fill a rather grand poolroom. By using some of the most renowned people and places from recent Holocaust films to construct the *mise en scene*, Tarantino gives his film a sense of historical realism—perhaps the genre's most recognisable formal feature—so as to fracture it time and time again. In fact, the film elicits a sense of the uncanny: the *mise en scene* is predominantly grounded in realism, yet the way in which this world unfurls is unreal and defamiliarising.

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With Hollywood's earnest profiting from the Holocaust in mind, Tarantino's *Basterds* appears to both play on and work against established notions of how a film that deals with this subject typically organises its narrative and style. Its obvious fictionalising of history aside,

the film's narrative is split into five chapters, reflecting an appreciation for the episode structure of novels and theatre, and each unfolds, as Tarantino notes, with 'a vaguely different look, and a different feel, and the tone is different in all of them. The opening feels like a spaghetti western, but with WWII iconography'. The first and second chapters are especially imbued with elements of the western in terms of sound and action. In particular, as we witness the basterds' first Nazi kill and scalping, the soundscape becomes Morricone-esque, whilst the staging of a key moment is drawn out like a Sergio Leone shoot-out, so that the tension becomes almost unbearable. *Basterds'* episodic narrative structure and the differing shade of each chapter—pulsating with intertextuality and allusion—is in stark contrast to the way in which Holocaust films are usually treated; where few formal devices exist that might take us outside of the historical world that is being created for us.

Despite occurring in what realistically appears to be 1940s France or Germany, *Basterds* disrupts the realism it establishes because stylistic and narrative elements constantly announce: *this as a film, a*

Tarantino film. The opening scene demonstrates how this works specifically in terms of the use of sound. The scene begins on the French countryside as farmer Perrier LaPadite chops wood while his daughter hangs out the washing, before Colonel Hans Landa, the Jew Hunter (Christoph Waltz), arrives at the doorstep to question LaPadite about the whereabouts of neighbouring Jewish families. As soon as we see the Nazi cars in the distance the sound shifts from the quiet natural noises of the landscape and characters to an eruption of off-screen strings and orchestral melodrama. So sensational is the use of sound here that it conjures up the way off-screen music is too often used in Holocaust films to affect us in highly sentimental ways (think *Schindler's List*). Its use here in *Basterds* is stripped of sentimentality, as the intensity of the score actually wakes us out of the narrative to laugh at how obviously we are being manipulated. This highly self-conscious use of sound disrupts the realism of the film's world, for it seems to (loudly and hilariously) refer to the entire gamut of war films' deliberate and manipulative use of sound for sentimentality.

Basterds' rampant play with genre—moving from western to

melodrama in a matter of seconds—and postmodern approach to story and sound resists the reverential Hollywood style of making a Holocaust film right through to the ending itself. The film's last chapter brings together three closely interwoven storylines in a black comedy of errors that offers us a Tarantino-style happy ending. Since we are, of course, rooting for an imagined Jewish victory, *Basterds* provides the most satisfying ending we can hope for: the Axis of Nazi Evil—Hitler, Goebbels and Göring—are all burned to death in a cinema while watching the fictional Nazi propaganda film *Nation's Pride*. This *mise en abîme* was shot by Eli Roth, who plays one of the basterds. As Roth said, Tarantino, 'got the Jewish director to make the Nazi propaganda'. Even more cerebrally testing is that what Tarantino has actually done is had the Jewish director to make a Nazi propaganda film that results in killing all the Nazis and ending the war: the Jews win. That is to say it is the Nazis' love of cinema that effectively allows for the end of the war. This notion of the power of cinema to effect great change is perhaps the most self-consciously romantic theme that runs through *Basterds*: it is the Nazi's love of cinema—and, in particular,

their adoration for the propagandistic effects of cinema—that alters history in favour of the Jews.

Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* rewrites history in a frenzy of postmodern genre-bending and self-referentiality that has the very idea of film's influential possibilities at its thematic core. In doing so *Basterds* is unique as a Holocaust film. The way in which this entirely fictional narrative unfolds through a hyper-aware use of style conjures up the very real way that the Holocaust has been largely depicted by Hollywood: through a highly deliberate use of realism that elicits enormous profits. In a stroke of irony that seems to further confirm Winslet's comments in *The Extras*, Christoph Waltz is expected to be nominated at next year's Oscars for his portrayal of the Jew Hunter. Playing a Nazi who is as quirkily charming and childlike as he is ruthlessly efficient and self-serving, his nomination?and probable win?seems to prove that, in Hollywood, even a completely fictional film that parodies the Holocaust style of filmmaking cannot escape the earnest eyes of the Academy. The irony of this, I'm sure, will not be lost on the director or the film's cast: parody Hollywood well enough and it misses the joke completely. ←

Cooper's Last

Antisocial Education

Simon Cooper

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Gillard's 'Education Revolution': transparently antisocial

If Bob Hawke regrets the 'no child living in poverty' remark, Paul Keating the 'recession we had to have', Kevin Rudd may eventually bemoan the *Monthly* essay where he staunchly declared the limits of neo-liberalism. It becomes harder each day to spot the distance between the Rudd government and the neo-liberal project. From stimulus packages to emissions trading schemes, the market is posited as the only possible mechanism for solving problems. Yet, neo-liberalism is more than simply an economic arrangement; it is a cultural form that reshapes everything we do in terms of the market. If the government funds public institutions but reconstitutes their internal culture along market lines then this is in essence neo-liberalism. Nowhere is this clearer in the government's approach to education, once the rallying point for Labor. Here the Rudd government's commitment to the audit culture—the process of gathering data, setting performance targets, benchmarking and public reporting—reveals its complicity with the neo-liberal project.

The much touted 'Education Revolution' is in actuality a

'revolution in transparency' as Julia Gillard remarked. Influenced by UK policy as well as by controversial figures such as Joel Klein in New York, her 'hardline' approach to education funding involves the gathering and disclosure of information about individual school performance. This information will be posted on a new My School website so parents can make choices about where to send children to school. Here one cannot help but think of Grocery Watch, the other stumbling website initiative of the government. Just as Grocery Watch left untouched the structural imbalances between producers, markets and consumers, Gillard has had little to say on the discrepancies between the funding of government and non-government schools. Indeed her department is committed to an extra 32 per cent (\$26.2 billion) to private schools in the next four years. So in one sense, like Grocery Watch, My School will do little to alter funding arrangements. However, it may substantially alter the culture of schools, realigning them towards a market model.

Schoolteachers, parents and principals have expressed concern with the 'transparency' component of Gillard's education policy. Recently 150 school principals

confronted the Education Minister in Canberra, arguing that the data would not accurately reflect the activities of individual schools and would lead to unfair comparisons between schools ('naming and shaming') once the media got hold of the website's data. Gillard's faith in the auditing process allows her to deflect such criticism. For her, transparency equates to the extension of democracy—parents have the right to know and to choose. Emphasising accountability makes a nice sound bite. Before embracing the 'common sense' of auditing, however, two things should be noted. Firstly, it is extremely difficult to make complex institutions such as schools 'transparent'. Secondly, the process of transparency transforms the culture of organisations, making them over so that they make sense in terms of market models, but not as public institutions.

The critics of auditing measures are many and their examples too numerous to document here. Worth noting, however, is a recent policy briefing published by the Economic and Social Research Council in the United Kingdom. The report reviewed the use of performance indicators in the United Kingdom over the past decade. It found

there was no guarantee that public service quality improved as a result of auditing procedures, and that outcomes from such procedures were unpredictable, often distorting the behaviour of public service providers. The report also found that data generated through auditing procedures was unreliable and did not lead to the capacity for meaningful choice between services. Ironically, the report also found that the United Kingdom was ranked lowest of all European countries on the trust its citizens had in government statistics. These effects—inaccuracy, distortion and distrust—were also combined with the massive cost of the auditing process. For example, the annual cost of running Ofsted (the system used to measure schools) was equivalent to that of almost 5000 teachers. Back in Australia, respected education statistician Margaret Wu argues that the data being relied upon by Gillard to measure school performance contains too large a margin for error to be meaningful. The data, used to link student performance and school performance, is according to Wu 'at best a conjecture'.

Beyond these documented problems lie

deeper concerns about auditing. In the last two decades auditing has moved from being a mere tool of accounting to a comprehensive form of legitimisation, especially in relation to schools, universities, hospitals and other public institutions. The aim of auditing is to end wasteful practices and restore public confidence in institutions and services. By embracing auditing practices, however, governments are adopting market models for efficiency that enact cultural shifts as much as they target 'waste'.

Critics of the audit culture note how auditing colonises the workplace, transforming it so as to make it 'auditable'. As individuals measure themselves against external indicators, they often suppress the impulses that led them to their vocation. Teachers may narrow their classroom practice so as to improve scores, de-emphasising learning processes outside that of the 'test'. Responding to the pressure of benchmarking, many schools in the United Kingdom began to only focus on the top 40–50 per cent of pupils, marginalising the rest, even



Antisocial
Education

Simon Cooper

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discouraging students from sitting exams where they might receive a low grade. Ultimately the audit process transforms what it claims to measure. In assuming only what can be measured is of significance, the way in which public institutions are understood can be distorted.

Julia Gillard comes from a long line of politicians claiming that auditing processes make education more accountable, thus restoring public confidence. However, all too often the auditing process fosters the very mistrust it is meant to restore. The older informal mechanisms of communication and trust that operated in school communities and local regions are hollowed out when a school's performance is reduced to a set of comparative data. Reframed as individual consumers, there is less scope for parental voices to be meaningfully heard. Significantly, one of Joel Klein's first measures was to eliminate school boards and reduce parental involvement in school operations. Who needs messy community relations when you have a website that tells you all you need to know?

The embrace of audit models for measuring schools reconstitutes them along market principles, effectively privatising them from within. Hardly a revelation, then, that the government is soft on private school funding. Nor perhaps is it a shock that Gillard agrees that Rupert Murdoch 'is making a hell of a lot of sense' in suggesting corporate sponsorship for public schools. The Education Minister has stated that she 'would like to see all major corporations enter into a relationship with schools'. Because the auditing model frames performance in

terms of market models, the hesitation one might have expected a Labor politician to have with respect to Murdoch and corporate sponsorship disappears. The whole idea of what education is, or should be, is very narrowly cast. Does anyone really believe that the complex process of schooling—a social and cultural process as much as a pedagogical one—can be measured through testing results and tracking student and teacher 'performance'?

Basing an education revolution around 'transparency' has failed elsewhere. It has proven costly and unreliable, generating mistrust in data rather than confidence in auditing measures. Beyond this lies the complicity between transparency measures and neo-liberalism—ushering in market models of 'efficiency' and competitiveness that change institutional behaviour. Aimed at the parent as consumer, policies like the My School website are profoundly antisocial, undermining the relationship between schools and their communities. Elsewhere such policies have led to school closures rather than improvement, as parents remove their children from what is now arbitrarily revealed as a 'lesser school' creating a chain reaction that makes the school unsustainable. No coincidence, then, that Gillard has emphasised that class sizes will not be measured in assessing school performance. Will we follow the NY model set up Joel Klein—fewer schools, bigger classes, and a drop in teacher morale as they are forced to stick to standardised lesson plans and drop creative approaches—all to improve scores? ←



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