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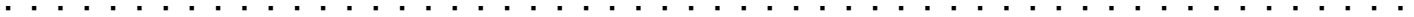


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Cartoonist?

Contradictory Conservatism

Christopher Scanlon

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Contradictory
Conservatism

Christopher Scanlon

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Tony Abbott is like one of those Pynchonesque postmodernists who eschews formal narrative conventions in favour of a series of seemingly random episodes

Narrative, it's said, is everything in electoral politics. You need to give the punters a story that makes sense of their lives and connects them to some bigger picture. If that's so, then Tony Abbott is like one of those experimental, Pynchonesque postmodernists who eschews formal narrative conventions in favour of a series of seemingly random episodes that may or may not be related. That, at any rate, is the lesson from the first months of Abbott's leadership.

The first sign that Abbott had rejected narrative conventions was his announcement in early March of generous maternity leave entitlements to be funded by a 1.7 per cent levy on Australia's 3200 largest businesses. In a valiant attempt to give this a fig leaf of plausibility, Abbott claimed his Saul/Paul conversion came after talking with his daughters. A week and a bit later Abbott was at it again, going on Melbourne's gay and lesbian community radio station JOY FM to tell listeners that an Abbott Liberal government would consider civil unions for same sex couples. He told listeners, 'I'm in favour of stable, enduring relationships. I'm in favour of people keeping their commitments to people. I would be very sympathetic to some institutional arrangement which encouraged that across the board, rather than in just what might be described as the more common or traditional contexts.'

Both performances have been tailor-made to humanise Abbott in response to the image of the creepy religious bully that the media portrays, and also to broaden the Liberals' electoral appeal to swinging voters. Abbott's problem, though, is that in reaching out to this broader constituency he risks alienating his conservative core. The maternity leave reform, for example, is bold, but coming from Abbott it looks like a cynical attempt to overcome the perception in Voterland that Tony has a problem with women. The suspicion is that the proposal will be shelved quicker than you can say 'a return to

traditional family values' as soon as the Liberals are safely ensconced in power. Abbott's personal views on gays and lesbians are probably more complex than the crude caricature he and others present in the media, but the JOY FM episode invites similar suspicions.

The larger question in all this is why is Abbott having such a tough time piecing together a coherent narrative. Part of the answer lies in the fact that a good chunk of the story the Liberals told under John Howard has been pilfered by Rudd. This isn't to reduce Rudd to Howard lite. Rather, it's to suggest that the Rudd government has retained some of the key elements of the Howard conservative narrative, such as internet censorship and the retention and expansion of punitive welfare policies in the Northern Territory, with punitive policies against refugees also emerging in recent weeks.

Perhaps the larger problem facing conservatives is that the narrative they have relied on for decades—which combined social conservatism with letting the market rip—has been exhausted.

Perhaps the larger problem facing conservatives is that the narrative they have relied on for decades—which combined social conservatism with letting the market rip—has been exhausted. In a nutshell, this narrative promised greater economic freedom while strengthening traditional social and normative structures. Put simply, the story told by conservatives for decades was that the free market would enable everyone who worked hard to get rich, yet the familiar world of hearth and home would remain unchanged.

Things didn't quite turn out that way of course. The idea that you could unleash market forces while assuming that social and cultural structures, such as the traditional family and gender roles, would remain substantially unchanged was thoroughly contradictory.

For a time, the full force of that contradiction could be managed, or at least displaced. Howard was a master at the game, using fears about the country





"..I'm not sure what he's doing, probably trying to appeal to some sector of the community he's just mortally offended..."

being overrun by hordes of refugees to displace people's concerns about the lack of economic and social security in everyday life. The game only came unstuck when the economic reforms began to hit home in the form of WorkChoices. When market forces began to intrude so nakedly into family life, with leave and holiday entitlements up for grabs, the old narrative devices ceased to work.

Perhaps Abbott's gambits on maternity leave and formally recognising same-sex relationships are in some sense an acknowledgement of this contradiction. The trouble is Abbott's conservative instincts undermine his attempts to reach out to new constituencies. Not long after announcing his maternity leave scheme, Abbott made clear his continued allegiance to the economic policies of Howard and Costello: 'For nine years I was a minister in the Howard government and thoroughly absorbed its economic ethos. These were a reflection of my values, as well as those of John Howard and Peter Costello'. To make perfectly clear where he stood, Abbott followed with the principle that 'Government spending and taxes should always be lower and government itself should always be smaller, under the Coalition than under Labor'. How this squares with a northern European-style maternity leave scheme funded by a levy on big business is anyone's guess.

If it's any consolation to Abbott, he isn't the only conservative to find himself struggling to put together a convincing story. In the United States and United Kingdom, the combined effects of the financial crisis, public outrage about obscene executive salaries, and turmoil in the property market has destroyed whatever faith remained in the neo-liberal narrative of the free market first, with morals tacked on. That said, there are some conservatives who have cottoned on to the fact that conservatives need a new story. Phillip Blond, for example, director of UK think tank ResPublica, advocates 'Red Toryism'. On the face of it, Red Toryism looks a lot like the Third Way, associated with Tony Blair during his first two terms in office. All of the big themes that New Labour talked about, but did little to realise in practice, are there: communitarianism, the devolution of power to local authorities and civic activism. But there is a difference. Blond does something that Blair and New Labour could never bring themselves to do: reject neo-liberalism.

Writing in the February 2009 issue of *Prospect*, Blond argues for re-localising banks via the post office, setting up local trusts to invest in local communities, enabling the poor to buy assets, and breaking up big business. In Bond's words, implementing such policies would 'build a new economic and capital base that decentralises power and extends wealth and also makes a final break with the logic of monopoly and debt-financed capitalism'. In many respects, Blond's is a revised version of an older, organic form of conservatism, harking back to a time when conservatives not only believed in conserving things, but also believed in a little thing called 'society'.

Whether UK Conservative leader David Cameron will heed Blond's advice is another question. While Cameron has flirted with Blond's ideas, presenting himself and his party as new-style conservatism intent on softening the Thatcherite era, the Tories' recent slide in the polls has prompted Cameron to steer back towards Thatcherite economics. Of course questions also remain as to whether Red Toryism is viable or desirable. Blond's reflexive anti-modernism and tendency to blame liberals on both the Left and Right for all of society's ills suggest it might be more nostalgia trip than a workable alternative. But Red Toryism does at least offer conservatives a believable narrative for redrawing a consistent political philosophy in the wake of the financial collapse of 2008. In that regard UK conservatives are streets ahead of Australia's conservatives, who tend to move in packs—and rather dull-witted ones at that. Even Malcolm Turnbull's efforts to drag the Liberals into the climate change debate by supporting a market-led solution to the global climate problem was too much of a challenge for Australia's Tories.

It seems likely that until Abbott (or whoever replaces him) comes up with a new conservative narrative, the Liberals will go on bouncing back and forth within the contradiction they fuelled at the heart of neo-liberalism. **A**

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Contradictory
Conservatism

Christopher Scanlon

The Wire

as Social Science Fiction

Lindsay Fitzclarence

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The Wire as Social
Science Fiction

Lindsay Fitzclarence

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A conference on the TV show *The Wire* explores its place as a reflection on, and challenge to, post-industrial city life

The Wire is crime drama set in the US city of Baltimore. A Home Box Office (HBO) production, it is currently on Australian television, but ran for five seasons in the United States between 2002 and 2008. Despite being a 'slow burner' for the first three seasons, it eventually gained widespread recognition and is now acclaimed by some as one of the most important pieces of television in the last two decades.

One possibility for the growth in interest was the timing of the show's release. In the United States screening culminated at the same time as the reality of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) was taking hold. With the US financial system buckling under the weight of multiple internal tensions there was heightened motivation for seeking explanations for the collapse and its effect on different social groups. Stated differently, the GFC provided a warrant for better narratives about the nature and contradictions of our world's increasingly abstract global connections. *The Wire* is an extended dramatisation of some of these issues.

During an interview, David Simon, *The Wire*'s creator, talked about his aspirations that 'the show would ... be about untethered capitalism run amok, about how power and money actually route themselves in a postmodern American city, and, ultimately, about why we as an urban people are no longer able to solve our problems or heal our wounds'. *The Wire* was designed as a probing critical social analysis pitched at different yet related levels.

Informed by two major ethnographic studies, *The Wire*'s overall narrative arc is the vehicle for a commentary about how global change has taken hold in six social institutions: drug gangs, maritime unions, the police force, the city political system, the school system and the print media. The creators have woven together a commentary taking in political intrigue and deception, personal motivations, beliefs and temptations, and a tension between the exercise of power from above and resistance from below.

The dynamic and contradictory nature of this selection of institutions and social forces is located in a Baltimore depicted as a post-industrial city. Here is a space subject to unstoppable change and embodied in struggles created by myriad competing interests.

Given the focus of the show and the sudden burst of viewer enthusiasm, it is of little surprise that the academic community has also shown an interest. In late 2009, a small gathering of scholars from different locations and diverse academic disciplines met in Leeds at a conference titled *The Wire as Social Science Fiction?* An explanation of this title was offered by the conference convener, Roger Burrows. He observed a general crisis in sociology and, taking his lead from US author and sociologist C. Wright Mills, argued for new ways to refresh 'the sociological imagination'. Burrows asked, 'What happens when the methods of social science become standardised, normalised and commodified? What other tools are needed to stimulate the sociological imagination?' These two questions provided the general frame for the presentations and discussion.

In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills offered guidelines for useful sociological practice, which provide a way of assessing the strengths of *The Wire* as social science fiction. In summary, they involve a focus on the interplay between history and biography, consideration of society as a whole where society is located in longer term history, and the nature of men and women who prevail in society at the time. Two other considerations guide method: descriptions that move back and forth between private concerns and larger public interests, and observations drawn from extended analysis.

There are obvious strengths in the source material for *The Wire*'s sixty episodes. Firstly, the writers have a wealth of first-hand experience in the institutions they dramatise. David Simons worked as a journalist with *The Baltimore Sun*, while co-creator Ed Burns was a police officer in the Baltimore Police Department and then a public school teacher. Additionally, they had each taken part in extended studies of two of the locations that formed the very core of the series' storylines. Simons spent a year working within the Baltimore Police Department, which resulted

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in a book titled *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*. Simons and Burns spent a year living with the occupants of Baltimore's drug market, and subsequently co-wrote the book *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-city Neighbourhood*, which was made into the HBO mini series *The Corner*. Collectively these accounts and representations provided the material, format and socio-cultural context for *The Wire*.

The dominant back-story running through the series is the Baltimore drug trade. This complex storyline involves two competing organisations—drug gangs on one side, the police department on the other—with neither of these 'bureaucratic' structures portrayed as uniform, stable and free of conflict, jealousy or betrayal. Peter Moskos, a former Baltimore police officer attending the conference, provided useful insight about how these tensions play out in real life. He observed that Baltimore's murder rate ranks high in national averages: each year in his work district alone approximately 1 in 160 men in the 15–34 age bracket is murdered (detailed in his book *Cop In The Hood*). He noted that these figures are largely a symptom of the drug trade and the struggles over territory and profits. In other words, the figures mainly represent those inside the drug trade, and in particular at the lower end of the power structures—namely young males, many of whom are still of school age. This is reflected in *The Wire's* focus on inter-gang struggles and the involvement of very young recruits.

Within the larger narrative structure, the series dramatises the complex interplay between global crime, the increasing use of sophisticated technologies and the latent contradictions in the multilayered nature of the post-industrial economy. In Series 2 the focus moves to the Baltimore waterfront. As with so many maritime thoroughfares, this one is experiencing dramatic ongoing change. The mechanised handling of shipping containers has produced numerous flow-on effects, particularly in the world of the stevedores. Trying to stem the tide of job losses for his members, union boss Frank Sobotka involves his team in an elaborate scheme to process and pass on containers containing smuggled goods. One of these containers is used to smuggle in women from the Second World, destined for life as interned sex workers in US cities. When this transaction goes wrong, and the women are found dead in a container, the Baltimore police department and city authorities become involved. In the subsequent disintegration of 'normal' work and life, Sobotka, who has tirelessly worked to maintain the viability of his union, is murdered. Viewers are thus offered poignant insights into the complexities and contradictions associated with one aspect of change in a post-industrial city.

Alongside the widespread praise for *The Wire* there has also been criticism, evident in the wide scope of presentations at the conference. For example, questions were asked about the ethics of 'disclosure', the nature of the 'real', and the contradictions brought into play when the pleasures and seductions of viewing are mixed up with the tragedies, injustices and violence of real life settings. These are questions that, perhaps more clearly here than in many televisual constructions, call out for real cultural and political solutions.

But it is exactly on this note that I will conclude. With a return to the rhetorical question *The Wire as Social Science Fiction?*, I am reminded of a comment from another time and place. Friedrich Engels once mused that he had learned more from Balzac than from all the professional historians, economists and statisticians put together. Today there is much to be learned from *The Wire*. **a**

Connell Turns South

Kevin Murray

The wheel spins once more for the Global South

There was a raffle wheel at the entrance to the exhibition *Turn the Soil*. Rather than numbers, the nails around the rim were adorned with flags. Each flag represented an alternative colonisation of Australia. Instead of the Union Jack in the left hand corner, there were rising suns, stars and stripes and the Indigenous black, red and yellow. The idea was to reflect on the contingent nature of Australia's history. But it didn't turn out so. At the exhibition opening, a peculiar scene developed around this wheel. Like gamblers, the group were cheering for their favourites to be selected. By far the largest roar was for the tricolour—if only Australia had been colonised by France!

For Australian culture workers, France is a dream-like

world where intellectuals are lauded above sports stars. During the 'linguistic turn' of the 1980s, many of us spent months reading the latest Derrida, perfecting our Foucauldian moves and rehearsing Lacanian concepts. Not everyone was as enthusiastic. Robert Hughes once quipped that Australian art had gained as much from French theory as French theory had from Australian art. Yes, the kind of reactionary statement you'd expect from a puffed-up ex-pat. But the asymmetry is unnerving, nonetheless. Was reading French theory a sign of philosophical sophistication or just an intellectual form of karaoke?

Raewyn Connell's inaugural talk at the Southern Perspectives series raised the uneasy possibility that this kind of intellectual love affair with metropolitan centres is an elaborate act of *mauvaise foi*. It was a challenging beginning to a new series exploring what's happening in this part of the world. Southern Perspectives emerged from initiatives such as the

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South Project, which attempt to explore the kinds of conversation that might be possible with those across the latitude. There are no longer excuses like apartheid or military dictatorships to dismiss southern cousins as beyond the pale. But how does a relatively north-centric country like Australia engage with 'developing' neighbours without playing the role of Deputy Sheriff?

The increasingly common use of 'south' to demarcate the other side of the global divide has interesting complications for Australia. There are two very different souths. There is the geographical south, involving those countries like Australia who inhabit the 'lower' world—including Latin America, Africa, South Asia and the Pacific. And there is the political Global South, a loose gathering of nations (excluding Australia) in opposition to the industrialised 'first world'.

A number of south–south academic networks have emerged in recent years to share common histories and discuss common challenges. So where does Australia fit in this?

By accident of geography, Australia has strayed into a grouping where it doesn't seem to belong. Although geographically inaccurate, the political use of South avoids the implication of alternatives such as 'developing' that a nation's future will be measured by how much it catches up to the already developed world. Building on this, the concept of 'south–south' offers an axis of reciprocal engagement. In the colonial 'hub and spokes' model, non-Western countries needed to connect to the colonial centres in order to engage with each other. But increasingly trade and politics is bypassing these centres, such as the BRIC (Brazil–India–China) alliance. Complementing these trade blocks now are south–south intellectual dialogues. A number of south–south academic networks have emerged in recent years to share common histories and discuss common challenges, such as the rise of China as a new hegemon. So where does Australia fit in this?

Australia's intellectual engagement with the South has been partly through postcolonial theory. This has involved rich dialogue between the centre and periphery about the impact of colonisation, not only in economics but also in cultural identity. But postcolonial theory has largely retained the basic intellectual networks that located action in familiar metropolitan centres. They might be subaltern identities, but they had chairs in ivy-league universities. Now this action is shifting to places that are off our radar. Nor are the new discussions entirely predicated on the colonial legacy, but witness new power structures, such as China's investments in Africa. While *cultural* relativism is largely accepted, there is new questioning of universalism in fields of knowledge, such as law, medicine and science.

More than any other recent publication, it was Raewyn

Connell's *Southern Theory* which posed questions for an Australian context. Hers is an interesting voice to take up this call. Connell's intellectual career has straddled a number of inexorable divides in Australian culture. She previously tackled class (*Class Structure in Australian History*, 1980) and gender (*Masculinities*, 2005). She is now applying her Manichean perspective to global politics. In *Southern Theory* she advocates 'to reshape the circuits through which social-scientific knowledge moves'. This entails departing from the north-centric position of Australian social sciences to solidarity with the other half in what has become known as the Global South.

Ironically, the book has received great attention in the Global North, where it has been the subject of many panel discussions and conference keynotes. Reviews have been largely glowing. A British education journal claimed that '*Southern Theory* is a key text for the period in which we are living'. However, in Australia it has been relatively overlooked, with no reviews in mainstream press.

Connell launched the series at the Institute of Postcolonial Studies, which has done more than most other Australian organisations to extend dialogue beyond the transatlantic world. Connell began with reference to the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji. His concept of 'extraversion' describes the way academic disciplines are established in the colonised world as 'data mines' for the North. In identifying local 'extraversion', Connell spoke about the role of classical languages in the foundation of Australian universities. The 'smokey pub in Oxford' became the fantasy scene of an intellectual centre, to be replicated where possible in the periphery. As disciplines like sociology emerged, the mission was to extend metropolitan theory into the colonies: thus the number of book titles such as *Class Stratification* in Australia.

Having set this scene, Connell then laid out what she saw as the two horns of the dilemma. One was escaping to the metropole, following the leads of Christina Stead, Gordon Child, Percy Grainger and in our time Germaine Greer. The second was to embrace the periphery, particularly in the growing fields of Indigenous studies.

Much of this resonated with earlier debates about republicanism in Australia. But Connell added a contemporary twist. The growing audit culture in Australian universities allots 'brownie points' for high ranking journals, which are inevitably located in the North, thus decreasing

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Connell Turns South

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Information about
Southern
Perspectives is
available at
<www.southernperspectives.net>.



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diversity of context. What to do? Connell advocates de-centring intellectual authority, nurturing new perspectives in fields such as gender and youth, more use of translation, and greater participation of audience in intellectual media. That night's audience was eager to consider how difficult this would be. How could we renounce our emotional attachment to Northern symbols of knowledge? And how might poor Southern countries like East Timor find the resources to play the academic game?

Beyond the acknowledgment of its challenges, Connell's ideas have been the subject of intense debate about their internal merits. It's certainly not a finished project.

Some have questioned whether there can be anything like a consistent theory coming from disparate marginal voices. But that's like witnessing a traffic accident and criticising lack of organised response.

Building 'southern theory' is going to be fraught. There are hazards to avoid—already invented wheels to be used and resentments to be overcome. But others have begun this thinking too. As well as Paulin Hountondji's African philosophy, there is Enrique Dussel's 'philosophy of liberation', Boaventura de Sousa Santos' 'southern epistemology' and Unaisi Nabobo-Baba's 'Fijian Vanua Framework for Research'. It's time to spin the wheel again. **a**

No Break From 'All That'?

Geoff Sharp

Robert Manne and David McKnight's plan to reform social democracy misses fundamental questions about the sources of the climate crisis

Goodbye to All That? The new collection of essays edited by Robert Manne and David McKnight and published by Black Inc. is marked by a strange paradox. The whole text is presented within the looming prospect of what both editors refer to as catastrophic climate change. Neither editor doubts that this is an unprecedented challenge to the future of humankind. Yet neither has anything at all to say as to how self-destructive ways of living, which in the past have led to the destruction of particular cultures, now return as a general threat to the whole of humanity.

In the last section of the book, entitled 'Climate Change: The Urgent Challenge', essays by Ian Lowe and Guy Pearse do begin to address growth, limits to growth or the particular modes of consumption and production of energy resources that lead to atmospheric and climate degradation. Yet even there, the particular sources of today's unprecedented reconstitution of production together with its vast expansion of globalising processes are not directly related to climate change. The way of living that produces climate change is still taken to be another variant of the capitalist process. The possibility that this way of living may only be one aspect of a far more deep-seated transformation is not entertained.

Is the absence of a sufficiently developed theoretical framework that can begin to address the actual sources of the new found

conjunction of the more abstracted technosciences with capital a source of this failure?

Is the challenge this presents to what we take to be the foundations of our being the actual source of the denial and passivity of our response to the prospect of environmental disaster?

The actual response to changing circumstances among the remaining contributors to this volume is a slewing away from any line of enquiry which considers more basic issues. Instead they offer a focus on the global financial crisis and the way in which the discrediting of 'market fundamentalism' and the excessive greed and individualism integral with the neo-liberal ideology opens the way for a return to a social democratic polity. Even given that redirection to the active regulation of capital, there is an astonishing absence of any explicit discussion of just how more favourable conditions for tackling climate change might prevail within a social democratic order. Perhaps one should assume that Manne, McKnight, Rudd or Quiggin simply take this for granted. As if in backhanded confirmation of his own ethical assumptions, Robert Manne deplores 'the destructive role played by neo-liberalism in inhibiting an effective response to climate change'.

While the new post-capitalist conjunction—of capitalism with the technosciences—may be seen as radically deepening a climate crisis, there is

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little reason to believe that a simple renewal of social democratic concern for the common good can provide an effective answer. This is by no means to dismiss the genuine significance of that concern. Rather it is to suggest that a social democratic polity is not, by itself, a likely source of the necessary level of resolve.

One main reason for that conclusion is that the history of the ethical resolve to democratically regulate capitalism ‘from within’ is one of failure. As a system it both out-produced and made its own limited ideological contribution to the self-destruction of the revolutionary socialist alternative. Social democracy, at least in its beginnings, was the parliamentary path to much the same concern for the common good as revolutionaries pursued: that of ending capitalism. Following the Great Depression of the 1930s, social democracy retained its name but changed its objective. The Keynesian answer to the capitalist cycle of growth and collapse was not to reject capitalism but to regulate it. Finally, the neo-liberal period of unprecedented growth produced the certitude that no further crisis could eventuate—open-ended growth and the prescriptions of supply-side economics were held to provide a final solution. Nevertheless the crash occurred and any effective answer must surely move beyond ‘more of the same’: a return to social democracy.

A democratic answer now may be slow in the making, but first and foremost it must generate a practical response that begins to move beyond the far too limited response of regulating capital.

That practical engagement depends first of all upon renewed movement among those same intellectually related groupings who have been drawn into a conjunction with capital.

Would anyone deny that their engagement and support has been a necessary condition for the surge of productivity and the individualist enchantments that have defined the recent period of neo-liberal ascendancy?

The practical movement to which I am referring is grounded in a relatively basic, as if spontaneously given, form of social interchange. It expresses a sensibility which begins to become more explicit in many contexts: in politics most readily seen in the Green movement. It is practical first of all in the sense that seemingly spontaneous acts are often experienced as if they do not have conscious intent. They appear to be grounded in a taken-for-granted sense of the relative permanence of our being in its relation to the natural world. That sense of permanence can readily feed into a rejection of changes that undermine our basic sense of being. It can begin to prompt an alternative to the mainstream impetus to half-blindly enter a process of transformation that introduces a break in the continuity of the human condition.

Given their intellectually related formation, the challenge to continuity presented by the technosciences can more readily ground a

reflective awareness among those who more actively enter the practice of reconstitution: those same intellectually related groupings which, for the present, are in thrall to capitalist ‘growth’. Among them some begin to articulate a response that recognises that the significance of growth, of progress as well, if pursued blindly in the name of individualised freedom, begins to pass beyond the limits of what most people still take to be the relative permanence of the human condition. Set now within the conjunction of a capitalism and a relation to reality which breaks with these still prevailing assumptions of relative permanence, a reconstitutive practice can work towards a different order of being.

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The way of living that produces climate change is still taken to be another variant of the capitalist process.

That particular sense of the natural order of being has been ‘contained’, as it were, even for millennia. Throughout the history of class societies the more abstracted powers of the intellectually related practices have elaborated interpretations of ultimate meanings which often legitimated domination by those whose privileges depend upon the labour of others.

Interpretation has been the primary activity of intellectuals; that is, until the intellectually related practices also began to play a major role in the reconstruction of labour as such. First, that is, in its rationalised mechanisation under industrial capitalism and then in the actuality of the transformational break mediated by the reconstitutive practices of the technosciences.

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There is no space in this short comment to cover ground already traversed in earlier articles in *Arena Magazine* concerning the distinctive form of life of the intellectually related grouping. However, it is of some interest to note that, in some implicit register, the project of social democratic renewal may itself be displaying hints of a break from the limitations of its own commitment to capitalist continuity.

In their introduction to this volume, editors Manne and McKnight join Rudd and several other contributors in their over-endorsement of the role of ideas, of political ideologies

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No Break from ‘All That’?

Geoff Sharp

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especially, in the formation of social realities. The reconstitutive transformation we are facing now cuts deeper than 'ideas' alone can encompass. At least at the level of apprehension, Rudd himself suggests a certain discomfort with the strictures of the continuity which his own ideology imposes. Listen to the portentous ring of his opening passage as reprinted here, following its first publication in the recently declared social democratic organ *The Monthly*.

From time to time in human history there occur events of truly seismic significance, events that mark a turning point between one epoch and the next, when one orthodoxy is overthrown and another takes its place.

This is the language of discontinuity, not that of regulating yet one more convulsion within capitalism, or even one more reversion to well-intentioned attempts to reform or regulate it in the name of the common good.

There is an astonishing absence of any explicit discussion of just how more favourable conditions for tackling climate change might prevail within a social democratic order.

So, by way of an endnote, are we actually saying *Goodbye to All That?* The history of this title hardly encourages optimism.


Only a few among the present generation would recognise that these words previously served as the title chosen by the English poet Robert Graves as he worked towards personal regeneration following the immersion of his own generation in the slaughterhouse of World War I. At least in an historical sense it was a distinctly temporary departure. It was no more than an *au revoir* to All That. Maynard Keynes recognised that the Treaty of Versailles, which marked the end of the war, also sowed the seeds for the renewal of conflict in the conflagration which commenced in 1939.

That war ended in 1945 at Hiroshima in an event which, as mediated by intellectual practices, reconstituted war making. It replaced the mechanised conflict of armed men by deploying the product of a physics laboratory. Was it also of truly seismic significance—a 'turning point between one epoch and the next'; of far more general significance than even this particular event

of nuclear war could encompass? Was it a portent of a shift towards the possibility of a reconstituted reality? That is, a reality in which nuclear power is only conceivable as integral with that more abstracted mode of engagement typifying the intellectually practices.

The front cover of *Goodbye to All That?* symbolises the great financial crash of neo-liberal capitalism by depicting a jet aircraft standing on its nose while displaying only the slightest denting. It certainly looks as if it could fly again!

At least in the immediate sense nothing said about the limitations of this collection of essays should deflect recognition of the reality that no sudden break from post-capitalism is possible. The post-capitalist process has now so worked its way through every institution that even the institutions of intellectual formation have lost much of their once quasi-independent status. Drawn into the role of direct support to the powers, their instrumentally rational expression in the technosciences becomes the main source of a post-human trajectory. Within that trajectory climate change may be seen again as only one among its potential consequences for the human condition.

If 'some rough beast now slouches towards Bethlehem' its present course can be redirected. In a major degree that prospect depends on an enhanced understanding among the intellectually related groupings. Their distinctive and more abstracted mode of engagement with reality co-exists with their openness to that same spontaneous sense of erosion of their own basic humanity that affects their peers. For them, most radically, it also allows a critical reflection upon the present dominant trajectory. That power of reflection above all requires them to form a new and far more active constituency within a 'social democracy' which helps to draw its now shortsighted forerunner into the practice of actually constituting a more viable way of living. In their distinctiveness they must stand up more vigorously than ever before; in the name of an enlarged sense of the common good, they must break the bonds of dedicated service to the existing powers. 

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COMMENT

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No Break from 'All That'?

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The Transition Decade

Cam Walker

Cam Walker is the campaigns coordinator for Friends of the Earth in Melbourne.

comment

Transition Decade

Cam Walker

On 1 February 2010, well over a thousand people crammed into the Melbourne Town Hall to celebrate the launch of the Transition Decade (T10). This initiative is the beginning of an attempt to forge an alliance of groups and people who recognise the depth of the problems we face from climate change and who have a collaborative approach to creating a response to this pressing crisis. Most importantly, it seeks to build the momentum required to re-create the Victorian economy to be 'fit for purpose' in a carbon-constrained, global-warming affected future within the next decade.

Someone recently said to me, 'If you want something to change, change what you're doing'. That is exactly the idea behind T10. The genesis of the idea of a transition decade comes from a range of sources. In many ways it is not even a new proposal, having been proposed by a range of people and organisations in recent years. But for a group of campaigners and thinkers in Melbourne, who had been watching the climate change drama play out during 2009, it was clear that even with a greatly strengthened climate movement and plenty of rhetoric about the need for change, in many ways we were going backwards as greenhouse emissions kept rising.

There was the inability of the federal Labor Party to commit to deep emissions reductions, and a growing backlash from climate change deniers who felt emboldened by the shift in the political landscape. In Victoria, we were witnessing plans to begin an export industry for Victoria's brown coal, construction of a massive desalination plant, and a proposal to introduce legislation

which would enforce draconian measures against people engaged in peaceful protest against coal-fired power stations. There was a growing sense that the state Labor Party has all but given up on a progressive social democratic vision in favour of a focus on areas more the traditional terrain of the Liberal Party, such as law and order and financial management. Globally we saw the collective failure of world leaders at the climate change negotiations in Copenhagen. And yet at the same time many were deeply inspired by the massive climate justice movement on the streets outside the UN negotiations, and the sense that we are entering a new stage in the creation of a people's movement around climate change. If this is to happen we will require new organising models.

For anyone tracking the detail of climate science, it is clear that we have run out of time for half-measures. The next ten years are critical for our planet. It is no longer an option to just work harder—we need to work smarter, and act as fast as possible. The concept of the climate emergency is now widely accepted, as is the need to create conditions that will allow for a safe climate. There are seemingly endless numbers of new climate groups and an ever-changing series of alliances around the issue. What we set out to do with T10 was to start by building a core group that understood the gravity of the situation. We pieced together a cross-section of groups with a range of skills, diverse networks and an ability to work collaboratively. A dominant issue within the environment movement is the need to 'brand' events and activity to generate profile, income and members, but this can be deeply counter-productive when it comes to collaborative work. We agreed that a movement approach was important, one that allows people to think beyond their specific group as we work on broader issues.

Now, having announced the alliance to the world, and having

a broad but very basic range of plans and strategies, the next task is to build the road map that we believe will get sufficient participation from the community and decision makers so that we can then—hopefully within a few years—actually start the transition. We are just beginning this planning process now, and we are building the alliance itself as new member groups join. Although we are still developing our approach, there are three key elements that are likely to play a major role in our work in coming years.

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Firstly, we must develop clear plans that explain exactly how the transition might work. We believe it is vital to explain that we already have most of the technology needed to bring about change. We don't have to keep pouring millions of dollars into researching ideas like geo-engineering or 'safe' nuclear



power, or carbon capture and storage—we need to start rolling out the renewables and efficiency technology we already have. In the case of T10, much of the work in this regard has been developed by Beyond Zero Emissions; in coming months we will build on the sector-by-sector work already carried out by this organisation. Timelines for transition are also a vital element of the mix.

Secondly, we hope that many local groups and individuals around the state and country will be suitably inspired by the T10 vision and will start to ‘place’ their local work—be it in food production, climate campaigning, community building, or revegetation—into the broader T10 framework for transformation. This will hopefully generate a much more connected range of movements across Australia, which will then react at key times in a co-ordinated fashion in the political realm.

Thirdly, we intend to collaborate intensely at the local level on

specific issues (possibly using the idea of ‘saturation mobilisation’, where all the member groups and supporters pool their resources, contacts and networks to campaign in a specific town or neighbourhood to maximise their impact). It is this idea, of stepping outside the traditional boundaries of movement politics—of ‘silo-ism’, and of the need to badge and brand—that most strikes me as new and incredibly powerful way to generate the groundswell needed to bring about the necessary changes. Within the T10 network we already have a range of groups with strong contacts across a range of sectors and communities: business and trade unions, the social sector and local councils. By bringing all these contacts together we hope to greatly increase synergies, reach and effectiveness.

T10 brings together an alliance of groups and individuals to build a decade of change—all working to define how a safe climate can be

achieved through lifestyle and technical change and political action. We do not underestimate the scale of this project. But we do also understand that we live in remarkable times: we find ourselves at the very end of humanity’s chance to actually do something about global warming before we leave the zone of living within a ‘safe climate’. We know that the terrain beyond—of dangerous global warming—would be a new and frightening place, and one we cannot easily escape. So we intend to do our very best to turn our state around within the decade. We hope you share our vision and we would welcome your involvement.

Further information about T10 can be found at <www.t10.net.au/>. 

Being Arab: Arabism and the Politics of Recognition

Edited by Christopher Wise and Paul James

Being Arab appears at a time of unprecedented historical crisis for non-sectarian Arabist thought and social movements. Events of the last decade, especially the US-led occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, have drawn many analysts to conclude that the era of Arab identity politics has passed. Some even assert that the ‘defunct’ category of ‘the Arab’ was little more than an ideological tool of Western imperial powers, one that never served the interests of the peoples of the Middle East and Africa.

This volume rejects the assumption that the dream of a strong, unified Arab world was never more than a fantasy of out-of-touch academics, nor little more than a crude instrument of Arab elites and Western imperialists. It is clear that the embattled concept of ‘the Arab’ urgently requires investigation, analysis and rethinking. Some

commentators even suggest that the resurrection of ‘the Arab’ and political Arabism is the pre-eminent issue.

The theme of the historical meaning of Arab identity is pursued in this book in the hope of making a modest contribution towards strengthening viable, non-sectarian and democratic alternatives to Islamist fundamentalism in the Arab world. The question of what it means ‘to be Arab’ is deliberately oriented towards the future, while remaining attentive to the setbacks of the past.

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ESSAY

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The Transition
Decade

Cam Walker

Green New Deal

— or Globalisation Lite?

Ariel Salleh

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Green New Deal—or
Globalisation Lite?

Ariel Salleh

Ariel Salleh's latest book is **Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice** (Spinifex). A researcher in Political Economy at the University of Sydney, former Associate Professor in Social Inquiry at UWS and a co-editor of **Capitalism Nature Socialism**, she is widely published: <www.arielsalleh.net>. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Institute for Critical Social Analysis, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin, 2009.

The new green Keynesianism still rests on productivist assumptions

In response to global climate crisis and the breakdown of international financial institutions, green new deals are being discussed in local, national, regional and international settings. But the word 'deal' gives the lie to new, for these are mostly trade-off packages designed to hold together the narrow political arena of business-as-usual. The *Transatlantic Green New Deal*, the *Global Green New Deal*, as well as British and Australian versions, look rather like a revved-up Hobbesian social contract, drafted in the realisation that life under global capitalism is more 'nasty, brutish and short' than ever before. The outline of the contract is on the table, but only one voice is represented in the text. Class difference appears only as an employment statistic and the systematic exploitations of race and gender that underpin the global economy are ignored. The neocolonial South, the domestic North, and material nature at large, remain sites of subsumption in green new deal discourse.

Rosa Luxemburg recognised the geographic periphery of capitalism, today called 'the global South', as an indispensable source of new labouring bodies and markets for the accumulation process. Subsequently, feminists in the North identified a 'domestic periphery' of capital in women's freely given reproductive labour time. And just as the exploitation of colonised peoples and women is taken for granted in capitalist production, so too is the ever yielding ecosystem—as is indicated in concepts like the ecological footprint and ecological debt. Each of these three forms of life is silently colonised in the productivist economy.

The first requirement of a green new deal should be to help people understand how the dominant global system relies on this abuse. And how everyday injustices are rationalised by the old idea that a fundamental contradiction or dividing line separates humanity from nature. The artificial separation of economics from ecology is one result of this cultural contradiction. But bringing this ideology to consciousness, and acknowledging that it is both Eurocentric and gendered in origin, is a first step in gaining the confidence to reject unsound institutions and policies.

So far, however, there is little socio-cultural analysis or political reflexivity in the various green new deal programs. Like the financial crisis, the ecological crisis tends to be addressed in Keynesian style as a failure of governments to manage markets. The deals

reinstate an overly optimistic 1990s ecological modernisation strategy—calling for a kind of green welfare state based on profitable technological innovations. Basically, the approach is directed at saving capitalism, without any deeper engagement with its real bottom line—healthy people in a healthy ecosystem.

The Transatlantic Green New Deal

The *Transatlantic Green New Deal*, prepared by Worldwatch Institute for the Boell Foundation in 2009, outlines the dimensions of the climate crisis as follows. It concedes that in industrial economies the main emission sectors are buildings, 35 per cent; steel manufacture, 27 per cent; transport, 23 per cent; and cement and paper production close behind. The paradigmatic measure is that 1 tonne of steel will result in 2 tonnes of CO₂. Meanwhile, Worldwatch cites an International Energy Agency (IAE) estimate that it will cost US\$45 trillion to transition out of oil, a figure put forward by the IAE in support of the nuclear option.

The intercontinental blueprint calculates that the United States and the EU as leaders in world trade together consume approximately a third of global energy resources and emit approximately a third of greenhouse emissions. This figure contrasts sharply with estimates from the global South, whose periphery claims that its own 60 per cent of humanity produces only 1 per cent of global emissions.

Worldwatch states that it is in favour of 'fundamental green transformation' and it cautions against 'restarting the engine of consumption' but it also resorts to the doublespeak of 'a new paradigm of sustainable economic progress'. For instance:

properly designed carbon-markets can be effective instruments for meeting a societal goal while tapping into *the discipline and efficiencies of markets* ... But markets for ecosystem protection, whether to conserve the atmosphere, waterways, or species, are not silver-bullet solutions; *the economic logic of markets may not match the scientific necessities of ecosystems* (emphasis added).

Unfortunately, the clarity of this last sentence does not characterise the Transatlantic blueprint as a whole. If 'the economic logic of



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markets may not match the scientific necessities of ecosystems; equally, the mathematically derived logic of engineering ‘may not match the scientific necessities of eco-systems’. Under the influence of the humanity versus nature contradiction, the separation of abstract disciplines into economics or engineering means that it is very difficult to arrive at commensurable measurements of natural processes. Nevertheless, this methodological weakness does not limit the reliance on technological efficiency in the *Transatlantic Green New Deal*, buoyed up as it is with scientific rhetoric and management hubris.

Take, for instance, the line that ‘the annual costs of reducing gas emissions to manageable levels would be around 1 per cent of global GDP’. What is the empirical basis of this judgement? Reliable data on aviation and agro-industrial generation of greenhouse gases is still hard to get hold of; estimates of the volume of global emissions rely very much on informed guesswork; and the translation of emissions into dollars is as arbitrary as the GDP construct itself.

Worldwatch recommends gearing up education for scientists, engineers, and technicians; welfare through green jobs; a ‘leapfrog’ into sounder production methods; energy renewables, water harvesting, smart grids, efficient refrigerants, plug-in vehicles, fast rail and bike paths, recycled scrap, and leasing household goods in preference to purchasing them. There is faith in energy savings through dematerialisation, such as nano-broadband and teleconferencing, but at the same time the blueprint acknowledges that computers—the medium of all contemporary knowledge making—are both ‘voracious users of energy’ and toxic to dispose of.

The authors recommend that carbon markets and water banks be encouraged, but note that there is no political will among governments to fund ecosystem protection programs directly. The *Transatlantic New Green Deal* refers to the Millennium Environmental Assessment observation that 60 per cent of ecosystem services have been destroyed since World War II, but its own equally culpable instrumental rationality appears in the statement that ‘Eco-systems are “natural infrastructures”’. Overall, this green new deal statement is heavily infused with psychological denial. There is not an inkling of the basic incompatibility between capitalist accumulation and ecosystem integrity.

If the ecological conceptualisation of the *Transatlantic Green New Deal* is weak, so too is its sociological framing. The new social contract is on the table, but its terms are plainly limited to the perspectives of entrepreneurs, workers and consumers in the global North. Thus, a number of EU states are experimenting with environmental tax revenues, yet as the authors point out, it is important that governments do not create exemptions or subsidise bad practices:

more can be done to rationalise current tax systems, which tend to make natural resource

use too cheap and labor too expensive. Using eco-tax revenues to lighten the tax burden on labor (by funding national health or social security programs through eco-taxes rather than pay-roll taxes) would help lower indirect labor costs and boost job creation without hurting workers’ interests.

In the EU, key alliances are forming between the Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and environmental NGOs, and these groupings are doing important work in skills training and support for displaced workers. In the United States, the Sierra Club, the United Steelworkers Union, the National Resources Defence Council, Communications Workers and Service Employees are talking. But according to Worldwatch, the only other constituencies needing to be brought to the table are ‘consumers and business’. Given that capitalist interests shape the entire deal, is it any surprise to see business getting its hand in a second time round as a ‘special interest group’?

The *Transatlantic Green New Deal* statement is heavily infused with psychological denial. There is not an inkling of the basic incompatibility between capitalist accumulation and ecosystem integrity.

On the whole, the Worldwatch analysis gives little attention to structural differences in opportunity or differences of skill by class, race or gender. Cheap resourcing of the global South, and in a parallel vein, uncounted economic inputs from the domestic labour sector, are each bracketed out. This is tantamount to silencing the voices of 80 per cent of humanity. The only moment when the intercontinental brief comes close to acknowledging the existence of the geographic and domestic peripheries is when ethanol is rejected as an energy alternative because food-growing land will be taken away from peasant farmers.

Significantly, the positive climate mitigating effect of self-sufficient provisioning in the global South is not registered, even though it is noted that these ‘environmentally friendly activities ... are often more labor-intensive than “brown” capital intensive industries’. Unfortunately, this statement—compatible with a re-productive (as distinct from productivist) economy—is made merely in passing. The labour of workers at the meta-industrial margins of capital is simply ‘other’. In this green social contract no economic or political agent exists beyond the cash nexus.



Green New Deal—or Globalisation Lite?

Ariel Salleh



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Australia’s ‘Joint Statement’

In 2009, the *Joint Statement: Towards a Green New Deal* was issued by the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Council of Social Services, the Climate Institute, the Property Council, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Green Infrastructure Council and the Institute of Superannuation Trustees. These are familiar political personae, although the Australian Green Infrastructure Council (AGIC) is fairly new. Prominent AGIC members include the environmental consulting firm GDH and expert tunnel builders Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (SMEC). The nation’s single most powerful corporate lobby, the Minerals Council, is noticeably absent from the list of *Joint Statement* signatories. But so too is the Women’s Electoral Lobby, as well as any Indigenous Australian organisation.

Omission of the latter political voices skew the *Joint Statement* in a particular way, which is to say that its well intended focal points remain thoroughly productivist. To paraphrase these objectives:

- retrofitted buildings to enhance energy and water efficiency carried out nationwide in residential, commercial, and public sectors; assistance for low income people as the first to undertake household efficiency audits.
- sustainable infrastructure like public transport, freight rail and small renewable-energy installations—solar, wind, geothermal—to reduce the carbon footprint; special attention to the construction industry and materials sector.
- green industries for the manufacture of internationally competitive new products and services, projecting 500,000 green jobs, with an ‘immediate effort invested in green skills for Australia’s trades men and women’.

The *Joint Statement* is understood as a ‘job stimulus package’ to build prosperity and insulate the Australian economy from future shock. However, when ‘the economy’ itself is anthropomorphised as a social actor, the moral agency of bankers, engineers, share traders and developers, as a class, is disguised. And while the economy may need to be insulated from shocks, the authors do not acknowledge that the ecosystem might also need such protection—particularly since human bodies are in continuous metabolic exchange with nature.

As in the *Transatlantic Green Deal*, where social justice is reduced to an employment ratio, here too the environment is translated as ‘energy efficiency’. In line with the humanity versus nature contradiction, nature is objectified as ‘out there’, thought of only as a resource and reduced to a numeral. Moreover, in the solipsism of economics, energy efficiency is said to have ‘value’ because it will ‘reduce the \$ cost of the CPRS’. This plan is described as generating ‘both technology push and market pull’, which means that the business sector will be rewarded from both the turnover in green construction and new profits from emissions trading.

The Australian *Joint Statement* considers the simultaneous decrease of carbon pollution and increase in green industries to be a ‘double dividend’ of ‘natural and social capital’. Capitalist, indeed neo-liberal

reasoning, and ‘domestic competitiveness’ also marks the ACF’s and ACTU’s assertion that:

Australia’s ambition should be to capture a quarter of a trillion dollars of industry share in what will be a global industry worth almost US\$2.9 trillion dollars.

This is a clear commitment to export-led growth and international free trade in efficient technologies. The priorities are urban consumerism, manufacture and exchange value. There is no attention to employment options like a youth ‘green corps’ for landscape restoration projects, despite the regenerative ‘metabolic value’ of such work. Agriculture is put to one side, even though agro-industry has massive greenhouse emissions. Sustainable small-scale farm employment based on local food sovereignty could be of enormous benefit socially, particularly in old rust belt areas like Wollongong where youth unemployment tops 30 per cent.

The environmental crisis is indeed a case of ‘unsecured ecological credit’, but not everyone everywhere has abused this line of credit or mortgaged the earth. The key drivers of this mortgage are the masters of global finance—a very specific class—along with their advisers. Yet today, even unionists and conservationists appear to believe that capitalism can be rendered sustainable.

The population argument is both racist and sexist, shifting the responsibility of Australian consumer-citizens on to the backs of women in the global South.

If activists and policy makers are seeking effective strategies for socio-ecological reconstruction, then it is critical to keep social and cultural diversity in clear view. Structural variables like class, race and gender may denote sites of discrimination and deprivation; but they also denote specific skill-sets which can be relevant to the preservation of life-support-systems. Academics, public intellectuals and political leaders could contribute significantly to re-framing the climate debate by examining the transformative potential of what might be named vernacular science. One thinks of ‘other knowledges’ inhering in traditional Indigenous land care practices, or the precautionary capacities of mothers.

Then again, if 60 per cent of global greenhouse emissions are generated by industry, another 20 per cent by transport, and a fair proportion by agro-industrial enterprises, why target housewives on saving carbon emissions in the home? This tackles the crisis from the wrong end. Yet it is precisely what British Petroleum and other corporates have been doing in Australia with their widely orchestrated PR campaign ‘One Million Women’.

Meanwhile, the Rudd Labor government gives away pollution permits to coal mining companies, instead of taxing coal to fund the transition to a clean economy. Rudd also supports forest logging, with 80 per cent of each cut exported to Japan for computer paper. Under the scheme for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest

Degradation (REDD), the Labor government also makes overseas cash payments to preserve trees on Indigenous land in South East Asia. These subsidised ‘carbon sinks’ buy indulgences, as it were, for global warming caused by Australian coal exports, but locals lose their livelihood resources in this modern ‘enclosure movement’.

Again, in recent days, there has been a revival of old-style environmentalist talk about global population as a critical climate change variable. This is yet another ruse whereby responsibility is deflected from middle-class consumption and pollution. The population argument is both racist and sexist, shifting the responsibility of Australian consumer-citizens on to the backs of women in the global South. The argument is also thoroughly irrational, for as noted already: if 60 per cent of humanity in the non-industrial world is responsible for only 1 per cent of global warming, why talk about population?

The UK and UN Green New Deals

The UK report *A Green New Deal: Joined Up Policies*, launched in 2008 by the New Economics Foundation (NEF), is certainly a more thoughtful document than the Australian one but, like all such deals, it risks putting the economy back on a growth trajectory. The NEF deal is squarely framed by productivist economics, with its emphasis on banking and securities regulation, low interest rates, controlled lending, a Tobin tax on capital movements, minimising tax evasion, and debt cancellation instead of bailouts. Like the Stern Review, it encompasses a managerial agenda of energy audits via renewables, technological efficiency, retrofits, forest protection, and zero waste. But unlike the *Transatlantic Green New Deal* and the *Australian Joint Statement*, it does consider social lifestyle and living density, community building, local economies and food miles—challenging climate-costly refrigerated distribution networks.

Also in 2008, the Division of Technology, Industry, and Economics of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) brought out its *Global Green New Deal*. The press release read: ‘Green New Economy Initiative to Get the Global Markets Back to Work’. Designed as a toolkit for governments, it develops earlier work from the G8 study group for the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, the ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organization of Employers. It is written with assistance from the European Commission, Deutsche Bank, and the World Bank’s Global Environment Facility.

The stated goals of the *Global Green New Deal* are: valuing and mainstreaming nature’s services into international accounts; generating employment through green jobs; developing policies and instruments for the economic transition. The initiative prioritises clean energy, clean technologies and recycling; rural energy, renewables and biomass; sustainable and organic

agriculture; ecosystem infrastructure; REDD initiatives; sustainable cities, green building and transport. This is certainly a more comprehensive approach than the other proposals, but it is still hinged to the market. In fact, even the speculative hyper-economy is offered as a new deal option:

US weather derivatives and other insurance linked products are being piloted and bundling numerous smaller projects including cross border ones together, to make them more attractive to investors.

The UNEP *Global Green New Deal* is brimming with success stories. It notes that already nations in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America have set renewable energy targets; in China 600,000 people are employed in the solar-thermal industry; and in India over 100,000 homes are equipped with solar power. The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is assisting a hydroelectricity program for Madagascar, and energy generation from sugarcane waste in Kenya. The document talks about ‘securing livelihoods’ at the geographic periphery and goes some way towards recognising differential benefits by class—though differential benefits by gender in the domestic periphery are not registered.

The one-size-fits-all thinking behind these new deal proposals is worrying, since not all areas of the globe are equally integrated into the capitalist economy, and many peoples are even striving to be free of it.

The *Global Green New Deal* is certainly more environmentally grounded than the other propositions, and this reflects its international framing, with attention to rural economies and natural habitat in the global South. It points to the remarkable fact that 40 per cent of the world’s workforce are farmers, and observes the highly destructive impact of agricultural subsidies, amounting to some US\$300 billion around the world annually. In fact, the FAO has an irrefutable body of research showing that organic agriculture and integrated pest management is not only more resistant to climate stress than agro-industry is but improves soil fertility, biodiversity, water control, carbon sequestration and crop yields.

Further research indicates that organic farming could actually feed the current world population

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and even a larger one. The benefits are doubled where perennial crops are used. Farmers not only receive higher prices for organic produce, especially after certification, but income is saved by not having to buy fertiliser, pesticides or GM seed. In terms of social benefits, organic production is knowledge intensive and enhances community bonding. Even more significant is the fact that the majority of world food producers are women. Could their expertise be called on now?

The UNEP brief calculates that deforestation due to development projects, usually sponsored by the global North, is now responsible for 20 per cent of greenhouse emissions, and it expects that unless there is an immediate intervention, by 2050 the accumulated loss of reefs, wetlands and forests will be equivalent to an area the size of the Australian continent. In response, it recommends protection for endangered species by ‘smart instruments’ like ‘cap and trade’. It supports marine protection, pointing out that reefs provide value in fisheries, tourism and flood protection. Wetland deterioration is to be mitigated by bio-banking, as devised in New South Wales—although locally this scheme has been criticised as a de facto legitimisation for land clearing.

In principle, conservation might well become a source of green jobs yielding use value, exchange value, and metabolic value. To quote UNEP:

The world’s 100,000 National Parks and protected areas generate wealth via nature-based goods and services equal to around US\$5 trillion but only employ 1.5 million people.

UNEP puts the ‘service value of nature’ at a trillion dollars higher than profits generated by the international automobile industry, although it is not clear how this figure is arrived at. In Mexico and Brazil thousands of people are now paid to manage watersheds. If nature is ‘natural capital’, UNEP notes ‘the flip side of the coin’ will be the massive benefits to be had from ‘the green technological revolution’ and the ‘huge untapped job potential’ of managing ‘nature based assets’. The well-documented negative externalities of the green revolution experiment, especially lost soil infertility, are not factored in.

With considerable enthusiasm, UNEP envisages that the global market for environmental products and services can double by 2020, a form of ecological modernising development that will include genetically engineered products. In the words of Executive Director Achim Steiner:

natural ‘utilities’ ... for a fraction of the cost of machines store water and carbon, stabilize soils; sustain indigenous and rural livelihoods and harbor genetic resources to the value of trillions of dollars a year.

A thoroughly capitalist model frames the UNEP report, deepening the humanity versus nature contradiction and people’s alienation from their embodiment.

Vital Questions

Does the proliferation of green new deal proposals offer hope for socio-ecological transformation? A conversion to what exactly? And what is actually meant by ‘a green job’? The one-size-fits-all thinking behind these new

deal proposals is worrying, since not all areas of the globe are equally integrated into the capitalist economy, and many peoples are even striving to be free of it. It surely behoves researchers, publics and politicians to ask how democratically inclusive green new deal logic is. Are some social groupings ‘othered’ by these deals into invisibility? Who profits? Who is colonised and subsumed? Do these deals generate new forms of ecological and embodied debt? Are certain groups treated as victims, or used in a tokenistic way, rather than acknowledged as skilled re-productive labour? How can more industrial development be supported in the same breath as eco-sufficient provisioning based on regenerative criteria?

A post-crisis social contract should take the form of an earth democracy in which human bodies are understood as part of nature. The class of mothers, peasants and Indigenes, as a result of their hands-on work in balancing natural cycles, is acutely aware of this. In a green political economy, the metabolic value catalysed by this skilled labour would have a place alongside use value, and its protection would be the guiding principle of socio-economic transformation.

In order to roll back the current ecological and financial crises—both symptoms of capitalist overproduction—these groupings must join the political conversation. For as things stand, the narrow focus on engineering ‘infrastructure’ and obsession with ‘economic growth’ invert the thermodynamic order of nature, emptying out its metabolic value. Self-sustaining ecological flows are reduced by capitalism to stocks, tradeable biota and profitable services, leading to the collapse and pulverisation of ecosystems. At the same time, capitalist economics causes social entropy, wherein rich and complex relations between people are reduced to a singular dimension of meaning. Growth is disconnected from vital relations and turned into an index of man to man exchange.

Happily, a new social contract is already in the making among the diversity of global justice movements meeting at Seattle, Porto Alegre, Copenhagen and Dakkar. And this contract is premised on nothing less than the ‘common sovereignty’ of energy, land, water and air. It would leave fossil fuels in the earth, assert community control over production, reduce the North’s over-consumption, localise food, hold up Indigenous rights, and reparate ecological and climate debts to the South. This plan for ‘another globalisation’, a really green new deal, is both ecologically coherent and humanly inclusive.

Key reports referred to in this article:

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Australian Council of Trade Unions, *Green Gold Rush: The Future of Australia’s Green Collar Economy* (ACTU, Melbourne, 2008)

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UNEP, *Global Green New Deal* (London/Nairobi, 22 October 2008). [a](#)

Weak Link

in the Eurozone?

Guy Rundle

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The financial crisis reveals profound contradictions at the heart of Greek society

‘You know, I think the Greeks want the Germans to come down hard on them’, Duncan remarks. We’re in Exarchia Square, the semi-autonomous zone near the Athens Polytechnic, long a centre of the Left, now filling up with chic cafes. It’s late afternoon on one of the three general strikes that occupied the country during March, and the city has only just started to settle down. Earlier, after 50,000 workers had marched down the main boulevard to Syntagma square, the ‘black block’ anarchist contingent had marched back the other way, smashing shop windows and invading the Finance Ministry. When the police charged, the protesters had scattered sideways down Themistocles Street, back to Exarchia where the police won’t come.

The event had a raw and edgy air to it, but it also felt like an enormous game of chasey. One thing was agreed, here and in the metropoli of the West—Greece was a powder keg waiting to go off, as the PASOK government imposed a series of austerity measures designed to stave off national bankruptcy. The march had felt as if it had come straight out of an earlier era, militant and uncompromising. Now Duncan, a journalist on the Athens English language paper, was suggesting it didn’t matter, an observation met with agreement from a motley court of archaeology students and autonomists (‘lazy anarchists’, someone had said). Many people were cynical about the campaign, but the Germans, really? ‘Who else is going to do it?’ someone, an actual Greek, asked.

Who indeed? Answering that question tells us a lot, not only about Greece but about modernity and politics. The Greek crisis emerged almost unnoticed in the latter part of 2009, as part of the general fallout of 2008’s GFC, but it quickly became a focus of general concern. As the government fell and Georges Papandreou, son and grandson of previous prime ministers, was given the unenviable task of reconciling the budget, it became clear that the crisis was not merely financial but one of state legitimacy, of Europe, and of the impossible promises made in the ‘boom’ years of the zeroes.

By now, the story of the Greek crisis has hardened into cliché. After years of cheerfully running a budget deficit far higher than the 3 per cent mandated for countries in the eurozone, and hiding much of it with questionable accounting, the 2008 GFC sent interest rates on bonds rising. After the collapse of US investment banks such Lehman Brothers, the attention of the markets turned to sovereign debt, in particular the so-called PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain), who had

never fully implemented the eurozone rules on austere fiscal management. Ireland, hit by the evaporation of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy, imposed a rigorous austerity package, which met with very little political opposition, while the Mediterranean countries continued to drift on. In 2009, Greece’s centre-right New Democracy party called an early election, and was surprised to be devastated by a 10 per cent swing returning PASOK to power. New Prime Minister Georges Papandreou initially rejected the charges laid by the bond markets that the country would default, and by the Communist Party (KKE) that Greece was the fissure in European capital, and attempted to treat the situation as business as usual.

But in January, at the Davos conference, Papandreou made a stunning reversal, taking the language of the KKE and using it to advance the analysis of the financial markets. Greece, he told the EU, was the ‘weak link’ in the euro, default was a real possibility, and the whole European project was at stake. The announcement not only made Papandreou’s problem Europe’s problem, it also made it possible for him to go back to his country and tell them that there was now no alternative to real financial reform. Europe was laying down the law.

‘I didn’t think Papandreou was smart, but now I do.’ In his enormous art-deco office at Athens agricultural university, Leonidas chuckles as he rolls another cigarette, an act that in any other city of the West would have the whole campus in lockdown. ‘But the thing is he’s not really Greek.’ Forced into exile with his family at the age of thirteen, Papandreou has an

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accent shaped in Sweden and the United States, and a perspective developed outside the complex, dynastic politics of Greece. The background means he still makes occasional errors in wording and slang, but it has clearly been part of his approach to the problems besetting the country, an approach that of a sprawling, clientalist public service, and a budget that can be rendered in whatever number one likes. ‘He doesn’t seem to spend much time in Greece’, Leonidas observes. ‘Sometimes it’s like he’s a provincial governor.’

The subsequent proceedings captured world attention. Greece submitted a preliminary plan to reshape the budget to the EU in February, with the assumption that a bailout or a debt-guarantee to lower bond rates would follow. But Germany refused, with Angela Merkel also facing domestic political pressures. Meanwhile at home, the Left, students and the labour movement swung into action. Though the general strikes gained the most publicity; the country was gripped by actions almost every day. Farmers blockaded rural roads to demand more support; taxi drivers and small business-people occupied the centre of town, protesting the government’s intent to make them shoulder a large burden of the tax evasion practised across Greek society; and undocumented immigrants and their supporters marched as an assertion of ‘precarious life’. The uproar fascinated a Europe that had not seen such scenes for some time, and helped Papandreou convey the impression that his country was crazy and couldn’t be controlled.

The crisis was not merely financial but one of state legitimacy, of Europe, and of the impossible promises made in the ‘boom’ years of the zeroes.

For Greeks the events conveyed the opposite. ‘That strike, what was that?’ Lingering over an espresso with three newspapers beside him, Stavros, a leftish-PASOK staffer was dismissive of the first strike, when the public service union and the Communist Union peak body had rallied (separately, as the public service union is usually fairly conservative). ‘They couldn’t even fill Syntagma!’ The reaction around town was similar; the displays that riveted Europe had been seen as a political failure in Greece. ‘The public servants will never get public support ... Greeks and the state—fehhehheh. The public support doing something.’ The polls seem to bear this out, with up to 60 per cent of people ostensibly supporting the broad outlines of Papandreou’s plan. Much of it may be for the same reason that the Irish austerity measures were accepted so easily—a widespread realisation that the game was up. In Ireland’s case this was around the semi-fictional status of much of its IT ‘new economy’; in Greece’s case it was an acceptance that reliable financial data has been fudged for more than a decade.

‘We have, but so have the EU and Eurostat’, says Apostolos, a sociologist and one-time supporter of Synaspismos, the Euro-communist left party favoured by academics and the intellectually trained. ‘We never even made the euro criteria.’ Greece’s deficit was hidden by its archaic systems (much of the budget is not controlled by Treasury), and this subsequently became clear through the use of the notorious credit-default swaps sold by Goldman Sachs and others, which allowed the country to keep its imminent debt off the books by incurring huge

margin payments designed to fall years later—that is, now. Like the entire GFC itself, the unsustainable nature of the arrangement was simply ignored for years, through ideological blindness or simple desire to avoid unpleasant reality. But in the case of Europe and the PIIGS countries, it has arisen from an unwillingness to acknowledge that the whole process of creating the eurozone was a political rather than economic process in the first place, a continuation of the idea that a post-political United States of Europe could be created in stages. The result has been that the PIIGS nations’ monetary supply has been governed by the neo-liberal assumptions of the European Central Bank, while using national fiscal policy to combat the deflationary effect of a strong currency on semi-developed economies. The dominant picture in Europe and the Anglosphere has been of profligate non-Protestant types who won’t curtail their spending. From inside the PIIG it looks otherwise.

According to Synaspismos MP Dimitroulakis Papadimoulis, ‘the problem of Greece is a problem of Europe and of Europe’s democratic deficit’. For Synaspismos, which has nine seats in the 300 seat parliament (the KKE has twenty-four), the current structure of the EU is crisis-producing. ‘Because the ECB has no way of investing in countries, they have to go to the markets. If the ECB bought Greek bonds at a lower rate, there’d be no crisis at all.’ For years Synaspismos has trod a difficult path, advocating a pro-Europe policy to a country whose Left, both Communist and PASOK, have been dominated by anti-EEC/NATO politics and the notion that joining to the European centre would result in permanent under-development. Having advocated joining a European Union and attempting to make it more democratic and social from within, they are now faced with an EU whose anti-democratic nature, as solidified by Maastricht, the euro and the Lisbon Treaty, was beyond their wildest imaginings. Their ultimately pro-EU stance has gained them scathing criticism from the KKE.

‘Synaspismos basically deceived people about Europe’, KKE supporter Yhios Ghokas tells me at one of the daily rallies, this one for undocumented migrants, a festival of banners covered in different alphabets, Greek, Cyrillic, Hindi and the strange Martian scrawl of Georgian. The KKE is the last powerful Leninist party in Europe (‘Leninist? Absolutely Stalinic’, says one Synaspismos MP), and could have reasonably hoped that it would benefit from the crisis. But its absolute anti-EU rhetoric limits that support, for it seems to

many that the EU has been a boon for some sections of Greece, with annual growth of 4 per cent since 1994, after two decades of stagnation. In vain it is pointed out that the currency changeover permanently raised the prices of staple goods, drove down manufacturing exports, and increased the proportion of consumption in the economy. Athens and other cities filled with Western chain stores, and a suburban building boom ensued. The 'stabilisation' funds, used by the EU to compensate for the loss of a competitive currency, tended to slow the process of economic transformation and reform in education, health and agriculture.

The Greeks are thus in the unenviable position of having laid up significant debts from a process that has made the economy more dependent and lopsided in key areas. But it is a position that is affecting the whole of Southern Europe (Portugal is unable to compete economically; Spain has 20 per cent unemployment; development has stalled in Southern Italy)—a re-appearance of the longstanding centre—periphery split along cultural, political and geographic lines. And though George Papandreou has cannily played the role of old anti-European populist to the Greeks, responsible functionary to the EU, the formula has been the same as always—a series of austerity cuts, with the world of everyday life liquidated to appease a crisis created by financial structures.

The undeniable need for structural reform is one of the reasons why Papandreou has gained such support for his austerity package. Yet the inefficiency and petty corruption of Greek bureaucracy is a small factor in the Greek deficit, the bulk of which is accounted for by servicing accumulated borrowings, deriving especially from the 2004 Olympics.

This is a familiar story; indeed, it had happened almost everywhere else before it arrived in Greece. This is one of the things that makes the situation interesting because it might be suggested that the country is a 'weak link', though not in the way that either the KKE or Papandreou imagine. This is not so much a clash purely on the economic plane, of centre and periphery, or traditional classes, but one of two frameworks of self-understanding.

The first is the assumption, by the EU, Papandreou and the financial markets, that the process of depoliticised modernisation will occur everywhere identically, and that Greeks can be persuaded to see themselves as atomised individuals subject to the flows of money and consumption within a featureless historical space.

The second is that of a remnant political and social form which has not been swept away to such a degree as it has at points further west. There is a profound contradiction within Greek society—an overarching support for the idea that 'something must be done' existing simultaneously with a resistance to any concrete proposals once they emerge.

This extends into every area of Greek life, from the double attitude to the state (something to be avoided in matters of tax or regulation, yet to be sought after in the form of a public service job) to the desire for institutional reform sitting cheek-by-jowl with a culture of family networks that extend throughout the state and the professions. Indeed, this double character has led to enormous misunderstandings between Greece and the prosperous North, especially over the high payment rate of the civil service pension. Yet in a family-based society with no individual welfare safety net, the civil service pension of one person functions as support for a whole family, a mode of welfare now alien to the hyperindividuated Protestant European states.

Most important to this clash is the remnant modern and pre-modern structure of Greek life. The form, if not the content, of old class politics fused with the bonds of family life extending to cousin-networks are coming into contact with an attempt to roll society over into one dominated by consumption and debt. Though many Greeks will suggest that this has been worn away to a degree over the last decade—and interestingly that this disruption is one reason for the repeated uprisings and actions of youth, from discipline anarchists to the 'koukouloforoi' (the hooded ones), kids in US-style hooded tops hovering in an undefined space between criminality and proto-political resistance—the process does not compare in any way to the process of social dissolution in the more developed West.

In that respect, although the Left as such do not have the language to speak of it, Greece may indeed be a 'weak link' in the chain of postmodernisation. What has taken place over decades elsewhere has occurred in a process of years here, and the events have been too sandwiched together for the capacity to differentiate between different social and political forms to develop, while elsewhere social transformation has occurred too gradually to be visible. The Left believe that Papandreou's broad support for austerity packages, for the social payment of a financial crisis, will dissipate as those abstract commitments are filled out with concrete demands. Some of that has erupted in a silly chauvinism—German magazines telling Greece to work harder, the Greek deputy PM saying that 'the Nazis should give our gold back' and so on. But with the possibility of a second wave of recession on the way, one indeed caused by a failure of Greece to conform to the EU's austerity packages, Greece may be the point at which a wider European rejection of the neo-liberal model begins. Around Exarchia square, the thought may well be that the Greeks have a secret desire for the Germans to sort it all out. But another slogan, 'we are not Ireland', warns the powers that be not to assume that the continent is identical end to end. 

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The Atheist Convention

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The Atheist Convention

Stephen Ames

A Christian response to Richard Dawkins and militant atheism

Recently I attended the Atheist Convention in Melbourne and found myself with 1500 people in something like a revivalist meeting, with speakers larger than life on giant screens, well-groomed hosts, stamping of feet, cheering and ecstatic interjections. This was strident, militant, self-confident atheism in full voice and on the move to make everyone atheists. One speaker noted the irony that they were meeting for a weekend to discuss something that didn't exist. Why meet? The official brochure said the convention was 'a celebration of global atheism, an opportunity to enjoy the thoughts of some of the world's most distinguished rational minds and a statement to political leaders of our concern about the negative effects of religion on society'. Fair enough.

I had gone along for a different reason. I'm an Anglican priest who for the last eight years has been lecturing in 'God and the Natural Sciences', a second and third year subject at the University of Melbourne, which I co-designed with my colleague and co-lecturer, Neil Thomason, a lifelong atheist. Over 100 students from all over the university enroll each year. About 40 per cent of the students are committed atheists, another 40 per cent are committed to a religious tradition, and 20 per cent are agnostics. Neil and I conduct a constructive public conversation in which we disagree on the fundamental question of God. The convention seemed like a good opportunity to listen to high-profile atheists.

Two messages from the convention were that religion is utterly irrational and that, because religion is destroying our lives, atheists should do all they can to get rid of it or weaken its power. I was surprised at how often these messages were repeated and how loudly applauded. A more discerning note could be heard from time to time, for example from Philip Adams, that religious people had brains, weren't all stupid, and that some were even good people.

To ignore the public opposition of religious leaders to the war in Iraq and to terrorism is unacceptable and silly. Unacceptable because it is false, and silly because atheists deny the possibility of collaborating with religious groups on shared social justice concerns.

The claim that religion is destroying our life was spelled out, for example, by Russell Blackford, in terms of religion promoting terrorism and dictating to governments how people ought to live—opposing abortion, contraception, physician-assisted suicide, gender equality (especially the education of women), therapeutic stem cell use, and the teaching of well-corroborated scientific findings.

Yes, there are religious fanatics and extremists who think God is well served by suicide bombers. But to ignore the public opposition of many religious leaders to the war in Iraq and to terrorism is unacceptable and silly. Unacceptable because it is false, and silly because atheists deny the possibility of collaborating with religious groups on shared social justice concerns. On each of the questions of abortion, contraception, gender equality and stem cell research there are arguable positions that can be found within and across different traditions, religious and secular. Some of these positions are literally the opposite of destroying life.

Russell Blackford is a disciple of J. S. Mill and so does not want to stifle freedom of speech, but he does invoke Locke to argue for the separation of church and state, a separation based on different functions, spiritual and temporal. From this point of view, the spiritual function of the church is concerned with the salvation of each person on the other side of death. The state is concerned with the right ordering of temporal matters, like money, property, capital offences and national security. As a Christian I could never accept that division of function between church and state, for it easily co-opts religion in the service of the state. We end up with 'The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate'. How convenient for the rich. God it seems is only interested in the poor man's soul. The issue here for me is that this is the wrong eschatology for Christianity, which is centered on the coming of the reign of God, now in anticipation, finally in glory. It is not about souls going to heaven but about the end (eschaton) having started to arrive in Christ, in his life, death and resurrection, with good

news of the reign of God calling everyone to live according to the Beatitudes in the hope (not wish) that the dead will be raised, as will the whole of creation. If Jesus had operated according to Blackford's or Locke's views of church and state, the state would not have crucified Jesus. Christians do well to remember that the New Testament is deeply ambivalent about the state because the state, like the rest of human living, is deeply ambiguous. We would also do well to consider the atheists' criticism that Christians don't really follow Jesus' message.

Theologically, I can accept Dawkins' idea of God and his evolutionary explanation of improbable complexity within the universe, without making the latter do metaphysical work of defining the creator of the universe.

I would prefer a discussion with atheists, indeed with everyone, about what things are destroying our lives. The most prominent contender is climate change. Among a wide range of people in our pluralist society there would be a common view of what these things are and an interest in the common good of overcoming them. I expect there would be shared understanding of many of these drivers of destruction, though not on all of them. There is a common cause that many atheists (but not all) would find among many religious people (but not all) in working to overcome these destroyers of our life, where the 'our' is now life on the planet. Are these threats not deeply irrational? On a show of hands the 1500 people at the convention were almost entirely left of centre. There would be a common interest with many religious people in developing forms of life locally and globally not pervaded by this irrationality. As part of *Science Week @*

The Cathedral 2010 in Melbourne, Anglicans are looking at what life would be like if each person had a carbon footprint of 2.2 tonnes per person per year for a sustainable climate. This accords well with Genesis I, as well as with Ross Garnaut's idea of an equitable response to climate change.

The other claim was that religion is utterly irrational. The standard of rationality was taken to be the natural sciences. One speaker even claimed that atheists were the only defenders of Enlightenment values. (No critique of the Enlightenment was on offer.) Many at the convention made the point that there is no evidence for God, meaning no scientifically acceptable evidence. Even with this standard of rationality I do not accept this claim. I will note just two reasons why. At the convention Richard Dawkins touched on one. He referred to the work of Simon Conway Morris, professor of paleontology at Cambridge University, who argues that the evolutionary process converges. That is, the same solutions to evolutionary problems show up independently many times, for example the camera-eye in the cephalopods (such as octopi) and in vertebrates, and the independent emergence of intelligence. Morris asks whether convergence might be sufficiently ubiquitous to count as a sign of direction. He thinks it is a 'straw in the wind pointing to a deeper pattern of biological organisation'. Dawkins rejected this because he thinks Morris uses it as evidence for a 'weird belief in Christianity'. But Morris was speaking of convergence and 'direction' as a paleontologist and should be assessed on that, scientific, basis.

I would argue that there is an answer to the question 'Why are the laws of physics the way they are?' The answer is that the universe is structured according to the laws of physics in order for the universe to be knowable by inquiry using our senses—that is, empirical inquiry, which we see exquisitely in the natural sciences. This is an argument to design, not the traditional argument from design; it has nothing to do with arguments based on 'fine-tuning', anthropic principles, intelligent design, or 'god of the gaps' arguments. It moves rigorously, rather than sliding from physics to metaphysics. The conclusion follows from showing that the laws of physics can be derived by assuming idealised inquiry and some other factual assumptions. (A similar result from a different approach has been obtained by V. J. Stenger, until recently the professor of physics and astronomy at the University of Hawaii. Stenger is one of the 'new atheists'. How his argument leads to atheism but mine to theism is a revealing story, but for another place.) I call this result the 'rational tuning' of the laws of physics to idealised inquiry. It is very different from the well-known 'fine tuning' of the physical constants. It cannot be explained by evolutionary cosmology and is unaffected by the theoretical prospects of multiple universes.

The claimed irrationality of religion was also supported by old arguments against the idea of God. If God created everything, who created God? This was Philip Adam's question and, in a more complex form, also Dawkins': Who designed the designer? In *The God Delusion* Dawkins thinks he has an 'un-rebuttable refutation' of God, understood as 'the supernatural intelligence who designed and created the universe and everything in it,



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including us'. But if God is the creator of the universe, indeed of all things, then there is nothing 'prior' to God that can create or design God. Adams' and Dawkins' questions do not point to an objection to this idea of God but rather to their failure to understand this idea of God. There are other objections that could have been put, but weren't, for example that the world 'just is'—a brute fact that provides no grounds for belief in a creator.

As an alternative to his idea of God Dawkins proposes that: 'any creative intelligence of sufficient complexity to design anything comes into existence only as the end product of an extended process of gradual evolution'. This refers to the ingenious Darwinian explanation of 'how the complex, improbable appearance of design arises in the universe'. (The 19th-century temptation was to explain these appearances of design as due to actual design.) Then Dawkins asks, 'Who designed the designer?' His argument is that the complex and improbable is being explained by appeal to a designer. On Dawkins' view the designer must be even more complex and more improbable and so could itself only have arisen from a gradual process of evolution. But on his idea of God as the creator and designer of the universe, God cannot have arisen from an evolutionary process within the universe, as noticed in the preceding paragraph. Despite being an alternative to Dawkins' view, the idea of God is assumed to conform to it! Theologically, I can accept Dawkins' idea of God and his evolutionary explanation of improbable complexity within the universe, without making the latter do metaphysical work of defining the creator of the universe.

I am thankful for the evolution of life in the physical conditions of the evolving universe, as this has been brought home to me by the scientific story about the universe. But I was thankful for life long before I knew the scientific story.

Dawkins allows that if there were even one example of irreducible complexity then Darwin's theory would be wrecked. This was also Darwin's view. However, no such example has yet been found. But here is the rub. Dawkins countenances, for the sake of argument, that one such example may be found and says, this 'would wreck Darwin's theory'. But, no worries, 'it has already wrecked the intelligent design theory ... because [God] would have to be very very complex and irreducibly so ...' This is only a problem for the idea of God if the creator and designer God still has to be explained in terms of a Darwinian account of complexity, even though for the sake of the argument Dawkins acknowledges this account would be wrecked by the assumed example of irreducible complexity. Have I missed something?

An old issue was cunningly introduced by the ABC's Robin Williams. He joked about being 'caught short' as an atheist, citing some events that, he said, were perhaps 'signs' of God's activity, as religious people often do. But then he abruptly changed focus by

citing from *The Rape of the Congo*, an incident of appalling slaughter and rape. Williams wanted to know where God was in this and countless other occasions of human violence. His answer was that God's only excuse for not intervening is that God doesn't exist. I gather this was also a satire on the little signs of God's presence garnered by religious people.

A Christian response would point to the crucifixion of Jesus and of the countless others who were horrifically executed by Rome in defence of empire. There were no interventions, not even one to stop the killing of a man who, according to the story, was the incarnate Son of God. The crucified God is very different from what is expected on the standard view of God as all powerful, all knowing, wholly good, who should not end up on a cross, and should not enter into human suffering as another victim of human violence. Some people cope by dropping one of the superlatives, usually the 'all powerful'; others follow Williams.

I can only begin to indicate a third possibility. It starts by arguing that this God creates things with their own real powers, whether matter and energy or eventually human beings with power and freedom for good or ill. What is of value to God is that creatures are co-creators and God maximises the realisation of this value in the created universe, which is therefore a life-producing universe, with all the suffering due to evolution and all the risk of human co-creators creating hell on earth. Would a wholly good God do this? Yes, because this is a better type of created world than other types of worlds that exclude co-creators, such as an inert or a chaotic or a mechanically interacting world. A student wanted to know on what basis I could say it was 'better'. The answer is that a life-producing universe is more like the wholly good God who gives life than any alternative. But an objection screams out: wouldn't this God be reckless and cruel? One reason for Christians thinking God maximises this value of creatures as co-creators is the creation story in Genesis where humankind is given extraordinary power as part of being created in the image of God. Another reason is Jesus' parable of the prodigal son who demanded half the inheritance, thereby indicating he wished his father dead. Even more shocking, some would say 'reckless', is that the father does what his son demands, with all the risk involved. That father loved his son in leaving and in return. God is like that father. A final reason is even more outrageous—the incarnate Son of God submits to these powers on the cross. This third possibility would continue by plumbing the outrage of God being a victim of human violence.

Many people will ask what good is such a God. One 'good' has already been indicated. This God, so the story goes, will have the 'last word', with the resurrection of all the victims, when justice will be done to them. The prophet Micah said that God requires us to love kindness and to do

justice and to walk humbly with God. This kindness and justice is the contested, vulnerable, but finally invincible, mark of what will have the last word. Kindness and justice given and received is recognition of the unconditional worth of human beings. I explain below why I see this as the ‘sign’ of God’s presence.

My reference to Micah should not be taken to mean that without God we would have no idea of the good, nor any motivation for the good, nor succeed in doing any good. Here I connect with one of the strongest emotional currents running through the convention and which showed up in the cheering, stamping of feet and applause whenever a speaker affirmed the possibility of human beings living a good life without religion, especially without the denigration of this possibility by religion.

The prophet Micah said that God requires us to love kindness and to do justice and to walk humbly with God. This kindness and justice is the contested, vulnerable, but finally invincible, mark of what will have the last word.


I have some sympathy for the atheist objection. I refer you to the scene in Matthew’s gospel concerning the last judgment. The ‘sheep’ and the ‘goats’ are on the right and left hand of Christ. The ‘sheep’ are saved, the ‘goats’ are not. This will already be too much for many people. But I ask you to wait. It is the criterion that is important. The people who end up on the left hand of Christ are those who did not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or visit the sick and those in prison. The people on the right hand of Christ did. The key point is that the text shows these people as never having heard the gospel, as acting without reference to God, or Christ or even their own salvation. The person in need was sufficient motivation as it was for the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable. Atheist friends say to me that this is not the message they got from their experience of the church. Well there is more to say of course (including taking seriously the ambiguity of all human living, not least the

dreadful things done in the name of high ideals, secular and religious). But any ensuing conversation would not deprive us of this point from Matthew.

The last speaker was Richard Dawkins on the theme ‘The Evolution of Gratitude and Gratitude for Evolution’. Evolution gives us reason to be thankful. This evoked surprise in the audience and of course Dawkins gave it a rhetorical emphasis: ‘Give thanks? To whom?’ This ‘gratitude’ is an example of what Dawkins calls a ‘misfire’. A behaviour hard-wired by evolution ‘fires off’ in another context where its evolutionary rationale no longer holds. In his *God Delusion* this is how Dawkins explains what he calls the Good Samaritan in each of us—the tendency to feel compassion for strangers. In the case of feeling gratitude for being alive, he suggests it is a misfiring of the early childhood learning to calculate what is fair, and feeling grateful. So we find ourselves thankful for all the green lights that give us an easy drive. This is the basis for Dawkins’ strong exhortation for us to be thankful and to be inspired by the fact of our existence.

As I reflected on his exhortation, I was reminded of the different theme of thanksgiving that is part of Christian life—thanksgiving for all life as a gift from God. This is central to the meal and the conversation that is at the heart of worship for many Christians. This gift and thanksgiving is what I wake up into and why I get out of bed in the morning. It frames everything else, come what may.

For Dawkins this is just another example of misfiring, with my gratitude projected onto a non-existent God. But I would need something better than a misfire to follow Dawkins’ exhortation. Recall his own words: ‘The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference’. I think this places the suggested gratitude for life due to a misfire in a larger context. It helps us ‘see through’ such gratitude, seeing it as a misfire. Indifference, especially blind, pitiless indifference, doesn’t warrant gratitude.

On the other hand, like many people, I am grateful for being alive. Yes, I am thankful and amazed at the evolution of life in the physical conditions of the evolving universe, as this has been brought home to me by the scientific story about the universe. But I was thankful for life long before I knew the scientific story, even though my gratitude is now deeply informed by that story. From early in my life, before becoming a Christian, I had a strong sense of the unconditional value of life. I still take this as one of the clues to reality, even when, or especially when, this value is dreadfully violated. This sense of value does not accord with a worldview, a metaphysics, in which everything conditions everything else. The unconditional value of life must have its roots in something that transcends all the conditions of life. My gratitude for life comes from recognising that life is a precious gift. The Christian message illuminates this gift and promises it will be honoured. At bottom, I think there is a gracious giving of existence and the giver is the living God who will have the last word for the whole created universe, and it will be ‘Yes!’ 

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Black Saturday Forests
Tom Fairman
Tom Fairman is studying his masters of forest ecosystem science, and also works for the Department of Sustainability and Environment. He lived in the Dandenong Ranges before deciding to spend too much money living in Fitzroy.

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Mixed forest in Wallaby Creek regenerates from epicormic buds under the bark. This is commonly called a second canopy, providing trees with its photosynthetic need throughout recovery.



After the fires of February 2009, stories of horror and hope have played out against a smouldering landscape, leaving many with poignant memories of what once was familiar parks, gardens and vistas. However, less attention has been given to the resilience of the Australian landscape. In that short year, sprigs of green have returned to the forest of the Hume Plateau and Toolangi. This essay documents some of these landscapes one year after Black Saturday, as life begins to emerge after a brief dormancy.



←←←

Black Saturday
Forests

Tom Fairman

←←←

Fire-killed snow gum
on Lake Mountain.

→→→

Wallaby Creek weir,
the source of
Melbourne water
supply, trickles
alongside resilient
tree ferns and
moderately burnt
mixed species
eucalyptus.

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Black Saturday
Forests

Tom Fairman

→→→

Positive Psychology

Mark Furlong

Mark Furlong lectures
in Social Work at La
Trobe University.

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A stand of contorted
fire-killed adult snow
gums on Lake
Mountain provide
shelter for their
regenerating kin that
shoot from their base.

a ←

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Positive

Psychology

Mark Furlong

In every dream scheme, a slip knot

Martin Seligman, president of the American Psychological Society, recently informed Radio National listeners that his research has proven how adept US military drill sergeants are at inculcating new recruits into the constructive mindset that is positive psychology. If these junior soldiers internalise the correct system of thinking, he assured *Breakfast's* Fran Kelly, the risk of soldiers returning home to the United States traumatised from placements in Iraq and Afghanistan is minimised. Further, if recruits master the right regime of thought, it follows that some of these young fighters will even thrive: they will actually benefit from the difficult experiences they encounter in these dangerously challenging places.

Initially listeners might have found themselves sceptical on several counts. Firstly, however well supported they might be by consulting psychologists, how could hard-as-nails career soldiers whose reputation if not role is to ruthlessly discipline recruits be an ideal vehicle for delivering positive thought reform? How could such toughened veterans teach the young and the poorly educated to live and fight to the tenets of positive psychology? Listen up, Seligman seemed to be saying, I will lead you to a pragmatic truth.

Seligman delivered a measured performance—a lesson designed to assure his audience that senior army trainers could be a decisive resource for the task at hand. And what was this task? If one puts preconceptions and mystification to one side, he plausibly contended, the task is no more difficult than any other practical job. In the context of war, the goal is to fix the disposition of young soldiers appropriately. More behaviourally, the training amounts to a precise program of vocational instruction delivered by competent authorities to psychologically up-skill a designated workforce. The methods used are as well proven as they are practical.

Thickly communicating his rank and credentials, here was a spokesperson who had knowledge, real data that was distilled and scientifically warranted. More, it was implied, it was his duty to pass on this incoming information. Like those with the burden of duty to dispense noblesse oblige, he communicated between the lines that he had been called upon to realise the task of patiently informing those who were less advantaged. Only weeks before this scion of progress and science he had been invited to share a stage with the Dalai Lama and, clearly, one can't be granted better recognition than that.

With this weight, it was no surprise the briefing he presented was authoritative. A busy president of a high-status guild, Seligman's claim to prominence was two-fold. On the one hand, he is a secular heavy weight, the most senior office bearer for a high-powered professional-commercial interest group, a company that has both

pro-social affectations and the profile of a big corporation. On the other, far from being a merely instrumental success, Seligman's history is that of a lead figure, even for many the father figure, of the new god-head that is positive psychology.

Positive psychology is an increasingly prestigious school of thought, even movement, in (and around) psychology, which focuses on the skills, strengths and resilience rather than the deficits, problems and inadequacy that for so long have been the basis of the discipline's calculus. Competing with the other brands—mindful psychology is a discontinuous and incoherent pseudo-discipline where, for example, behavioural, neuro-biological, psychoanalytic, humanistic, critical and cognitive schemas remain conceptually incompatible—positive psychology has moved from the fringe to contend for prominence, if not absolute hegemony. Far less normative than its major competitors, it has an interesting valence for its followers as a right-line, even green approach. But this ideological attractiveness has a cost: positive psychology is fungible to the point of amorality as it can be applied to and has utility for a spectrum of purely self-profiting operations.

In this trajectory, Seligman has made a sustained contribution with his well-publicised work on learned helplessness, learned optimism and beyond. With this background, he is held to be a progressive and a pioneer, but this should not be allowed to disguise his worldliness and political savvy. Deep of register, with an elder's weight, this spokesperson is a fine example of Richard Sennett's idea that 'it is precisely because the strong believe in themselves and in what they do that they become credible in the eyes of others'.

Surprisingly, a little more than a month later two different media items appeared which decentered, if not ruptured, the certainties

Seligman had deposited with Radio National's listeners. Firstly, the Murdoch press published two feature articles in the same edition of *The Australian* making fundamental criticisms of positive psychology, particularly as it has been applied to those trying to live with cancer. Although presumably coincidental in their timing, in the narrow sense these items challenged the psychology president's argument—that there is a program of technical support that is readily available which can be used to maintain 'our' involvement in these difficult circumstances.

The second media item was possibly, but not necessarily, cued by the first and involved an extended feature on positive psychology in the *Life Matters* program on ABC radio. The first part of this was an interview with Barbara Ehrenreich, the author of *Bright-sided: How the relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America*; the second an interview with two psychologists, one whose specialty was sports psychology and another in a senior academic position whose research concerned those living with cancer. Each of these latter speakers agreed, to some extent perhaps unconvincingly, with the critique Ehrenreich had presented: if people believe the treacherous assumption they only have themselves to blame if they haven't got all they want, if they feel sick, discouraged or defeated, and this is done under the flag of positive psychology, this is a terrible indictment. Such an indictment is not of the consumers of positive psychology, however they may have been recruited, but of the approach's capacity for misuse. Ehrenreich argued that a rampant self help industry, amoral marketers and the prevailing individualistic ideology of 'it's about me' were jointly implicated with positive psychology.

Standing back to observe, it seems there is an unstable relationship between the advantages and disadvantages of positive thinking. Vietnamese Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan made a strong case when he noted that 'pessimists are right, but optimists get more done'. Yet, if we become harnessed to the mindset that 'it is only what you make of it', 'you have to move on' and so forth, we are oxen who have been crudely shackled to till a narrow furrow.

Thinking outside this blinkered idiom,

post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be viewed as an ethically charged and philosophically significant phenomena rather than simply a private dysfunction. For example, the narrative therapist Michael White suggested PTSD was an expression of 'violated compassion'. Seligman, on the other side, offers a technical, scientific anodyne. It is possible, he contends, to take the practical step of inoculating our troops against the toxins generated by their involvement in troubling environments. Positive psychology in general, and Seligman in particular, may not have a public position on the deployment of troops but, whew, to the public and the policy makers it is certainly reassuring to know that an expert is telling us we can wrap up those men and women who are our soldier-delegates in a ball of good science that will roll them back to us in one emotional piece.

Positive psychology is fungible to the point of amorality as it can be applied to and has utility for a spectrum of purely self-profiting operations.

More broadly, in effect what Seligman is offering conservative thinkers is a grand rationale, a thesis which de-contextualises person and environment and fillets the consideration of consequence from the realm of ethics. Coming from such a reputedly scientific and apparently authoritative source, in some quarters such a line of argument is manna from heaven, supporting as it does the perceived legitimacy of the neo-liberal principle that there are only personal solutions to what might appear to be complex problems. Loved by the ideologues of market thinking, those who get a guernsey to authenticate this welcome message publicly tend to be richly rewarded. Heralding the efficiency of technical, individualistic responses to problems like PTSD, or to the 'challenge' of living with cancer or poverty, homelessness or injustice, gives a certain prestige to those who can walk this talk.

But however siren-like, this talk should never be allowed to elide an awareness of context and ethics. Herbert Marcuse noted many years ago that:

Freud's fundamental insight [was] that the patient's trouble is rooted in a *general* sickness which cannot be cured by analytic therapy. Or, in a sense, according to Freud, the patient's disease is a protest reaction against the sick world in which he lives. But the physician must disregard the 'moral' problem. He has to restore the patient's health, to make him capable of functioning normally in his world.

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Positive Psychology

Mark Furlong

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Frantz Fanon, for a time also a psychoanalytic therapist, offered a brief but dramatic case vignette that engaged with the question of the relationship between professional ethics and the context of professional practice. Working in Algeria in the 1950s during the ghastly war of independence between Algerians and French colonialists, Fanon became frustrated when one of his patients, a man who initially presented with nightmares, did not improve, despite being the subject of a properly rigorous psycho-analytic technique over a considerable period. The persistence of the symptoms was a mystery: the patient was healthy and well presented the therapeutic technique sound and well conducted, so what could be going wrong? Direct enquiries could not be countenanced as, amongst a broader set of disciplines, the therapeutic protocol insisted the analyst should be practically, if never emotionally, aloof. Finally, deciding he had no choice but to transgress the custom of avoiding intrusiveness, Fanon asked the man directly what he did for a living. One suspects with a mixture of relief and shame, the patient replied 'I work as a torturer'.

Together with its high-toned cousin positive psychology, positive thinking has for some time been top of the pops in the hit parade that makes up our collective common sense. Given this status it is

especially sensible to interrogate the habits of mind that this pairing offers, patterns of thought that are apparently both constructive and progressive. Ehrenreich has very recently presented a public cue (as did Marcuse many years ago in his writings on 'the triumph of positive thinking'). Yet, still susceptible to Seligman's argument—that a technical fix can trump a contextually generated pathology—presents us with a salutary reminder that there remains another loop in the slip-knot of uncritical thought: we continue to share an abiding, probably accelerating, tendency to pine for individual solutions to problems which seem complex, even intractable. Here, Fanon's vignette might be remembered as a hint to remain curious about the context of every problem which is assumed to be personal in its construction. **a**

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Muslim Thailand: **Patani Discontent**

Dennis Walker
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Report from Southern Thailand’s Prince of Songkla University

Nationalist revolutions are not for the squeamish or for aesthetes who favour blended colours and shades. They are binary and they dichotomise. Some revolutions do start out as exhibitions of delicate embroidery, but even then they are more than banquets and seminars for the fine-mannered. Revolutions are uprisings by which long-excluded classes and nations that have been systemically degraded, de-cultured, brutalised and robbed rise up against the classes and nations that nearly finished them, and end their power.

In 1969 at Dhaka University I saw the high-cultural beginnings of the East Bengalis’ struggle for independence from Pakistan. It was in the form of seminars in chaste Bengali (Bengali dramas and poetry are far removed from the way ordinary Bengali Muslims speak) and academic print-arguments that East Bengal had been exploited by ‘West Pakistan’ in a colonial economy for two decades. Then the fire jumped from the Bengali neo-bourgeoisie bent on power to the urban masses who turned up in huge crowds to hear independence leader Mujibur-Rahman orate. When hatred reached a fever-pitch, Pakistani troops and hundreds of thousands of Bengalis spontaneously started to fight, causing massive havoc. In the end, Bangladesh was born.

On the weekend of the 16–17 January I attended the so-called ‘Peace Southern Thailand Festival’, held on the grounds of the Pattani City campus of the Prince of Songkla University (PSU) by the Union of University Students of Southern Thailand, an organisation run by Malay nationalists and Jihadist sympathisers. It was highly cultural, comprising comic sketches performed on stage in local Malay; speeches by middle-aged intellectuals, in something close to Kuala Lumpur’s print-Malay, urging the crowd seated before them to defend the Malay language from the Thai system’s projects to exclude and destroy it; beautiful handicrafts such as painted bags of the ancient national rural type; elegant versions of the delicate, deadly cane nets and traps of old-style Patanian fisherman; and a host of books on Islam and the Patanian Malays’ history, written for the most part in Thai.

From the outset I found it hard to think of this packed gathering as any kind of a ‘peace’ or ‘national reconciliation’ event—the scattergun lecturers on the stage spoke before a huge blow-up of the chipped-away brick edifice of the Kruseh mosque, the first mosque founded in Patani, which was stormed by Thai forces during the Patani uprising of 2004; in front of this was a

picture of a sobbing infant in a hijab with the slogan ‘Kruseh mosque is still weeping’. This festival was not about Buddhist and Muslim Thais moving forward together from their past bloody interactions. There were rumours that Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, visiting the South at the time, had intended to come and open the Peace Festival to show Thailand’s hold but, wisely, only the Minister of the Interior, whose portfolio includes the intelligence agencies, turned up. He made a speech with many quips that his officials and the Patanians would keep up their close, relaxed relationship.

I had the chance to talk afterwards with one of the speakers, Ahmad Samboon Bualuang. He is a veteran historian who has published (in Thai!) works about ordinary rural Malays in Patani, rather than elite groups. Bualuang did not present himself as hard-line. He sounded like a depressed ameliorist who would have liked to make the Thai system work in a way that would leave some distinct culture and space for manoeuvre for the Patanian subjects of His Majesty the King. Bualuang lamented that ‘the Thai government has no plan to build up the Malay language’—a motif that suggested he might very well come to terms with any Thai government that might switch to such a policy. Bualuang was aware of the weakness of the Patanians’ position, due to the restrictions administrations in Kuala Lumpur had placed on Malaysians who wanted to provide resources and aid to Patanian relatives. It had not always been thus: he and other Patanian thinkers were often invited to Malay studies conferences in Malaysia in the 1980s and early 1990s—but not now. Bualuang seemed unaware of the unbroken stream of Malay books and scholarly articles about Patani that has flowed in the last ten years from the University of Malaya and the Malaysian National University. At least, as he declared it to me, Bualuang would accept a modified Thai system in which all citizens were equal, all Thais with a common language, but with some resources of the state also flowing to ‘local languages’. Bualuang had chosen Thai as the medium of his articulation of Malay history and

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Patani Discontent
Dennis Walker
Dennis Walker is
writing a book on
plural languages,
Islam and identities
in Patani at the
Monash Asia
Institute, Monash
University.



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History of Patani

Malay Muslims in Southern Thailand (Patani) number around 2,000,000. After centuries of visits from Arab merchants, the Patanians decisively adopted Islam in the 15th century, it becoming their national religion. Under its independent Sultanate, Patani became a prosperous centre of entrepot trade, tying together China, Japan, Thailand, India and the Middle East.

Patani was conquered by Buddhist Thailand in 1832, but it took to the mid-1970s for Thailand to develop enough modern communications to actually govern most of Patani. (Thus, Thailand achieved control in Patani around the same time as Indonesia did in East Timor).

In the 1970s and 1980s small insurgencies united aristocrats, Arabic-literate Muslim clerics, and dirt-poor peasants and bandits in struggles for independence from the Thai rule they branded 'colonial'. The ideologies of the insurgents mixed Islamic jihad; spatial patriotism; and threads from the Nasser, Sukarno and Islamic socialist ideas they encountered while studying in the Arab world and Indonesia.

In the 1990s a minority of Patanians were inducted into Thailand's new parliamentary politics under a compromise settlement. However, Thailand only stepped up its drive to make Thai the language of the Patanians. Malay Muslims continued to have much the same scant opportunities in the civil service, the economy and education as before.

The recently formed neo-Wahhabi group, bankrolled by Saudi Arabia and Gulf businessmen, chose collaboration with the Thai state as a means to build modern IT educational institutions at tertiary level. But in 2004 a new insurrection for Patanian national independence broke out that, as in the 1970s and 1980s, mixed Islamic Jihad with threads from modernising Indonesian and Arab ideologies.

identity, yet he vented to me a dislike of the 'Buddhist character' that inherently saturates it.

In the books for sale I saw none of the Arabic-script classics of legalist-mystical Shafi'ite traditionalist intellectualism, launched by the great Shaykh Dawud Abdallah al-Fatani (1769–1847). The yellowed title-pages of the first editions of those Malay books printed in the Middle East, and photographs of its later authors, were prominent among the images exhibited at the festival. At least for the present, or at least in the sector of students who attended, this so-called Peace Celebration of Southern Thailand was about a new ethos that is still under construction: its adherents need not be well-read in Patani's Arabic-script literature, the 'old yellow books'. There were not so many Malay books for sale: a book of Sufi mystical writings—*Bahr al-'Ulum* (The Ocean of Special Knowledge), and Southern

Thailand's only current Malay magazine, the Arabic-script *Pelita* (Lamp), linked to politicians who seek positions in, and hope to communicate the needs of their electorates within, Thailand's local government and its Bangkok parliaments.

In the cool night I and a high office-bearer of the Union of University Students of Southern Thailand sat on facing plastic chairs for an hour. In attendance alongside with former Prime Minister John Howard, Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer raised Excalibur high, assuring Thailand that Australia was her ally in the war against terror. It is, of course, illegal for citizens of our pan-Anglo state of Australia to sit with any termed 'terrorists'. I stand with that, of course, but knew that from this Patanian I might just coax out some reports, albeit third-hand, of the motives and ideology of the insurgents in Patani. I have no time to beat around the bush. So I opted for an approach that I rarely risk: pre-empt their loyalist Thai masks by striking a hyper-Thai stance, which can explode their papier-mache so that their real feelings flood forth. He asked me how I had found Southern Thailand.

'Well, I feel tranquil in an area of Thailand progressing towards modernity as fast as yours is, along with the rest of your country.' (Boredom and fear—might he KO me?).

He queried if the presence of 'violent miscreants' (*pengganas*) did not worry me in Patani. I replied not at all, given that they are so few and weak. They fight only for the drugs their commanders pump into them and for the thrills of killing innocents: they are just wild animals, amenable to no rational discourse and a group with which no one could ever negotiate. The patriotic masses of the Muslims in Patani were informing the Thai army of their whereabouts and in three months the last of the terrorists would be wiped out.

He drummed on my knees. 'But that quickly, after fighting for five years?'

'Four months the maximum—the date for the end of the insurgency set last week by those Thai generals.'

His gums laughed. 'But what has enabled them to keep fighting for so long? What do they want?'

'I answered that before: drugs and the thrill of shedding blood.'

'Some say they are fighting for a new country.' Drum drum. 'You understand us?'

I believe that a hard core has indeed evolved among modern-educated youth in Patani, who feel billowing pride and exultation at the insurgents' capacity to keep fighting for so many years although outnumbered twenty or thirty to one by Thai forces in the South. As Thai forces grow, more young recruits only swell the secessionists' ranks. The zealot youth want a 'new' (*baru*) Islamo-Malay country completely independent from Thailand, and to have some modernising West-aware thrusts. The rebels mingle Jihad with promises of Islamic socialism and a welfare state if they win.

The photographs at the Festival fell into three categories: sharp, almost three-dimensional, photographs of 20th-century Patanian nationalist leaders and *ulama*, digitally remastered from faded grainy originals; coloured photographs of village life—the ornate fishing boats that are the national symbol of the Patanian people, a fisherman on the shore holding up two gigantic squids—and photographs of the streets of Pattani City in the 1950s and 60s; and scenes of massacres by Thais at the Krusek Mosque (2004), Takbai (2004) and the Mosque al-Furqan (2009). There were many shots of the Takbai incident,

with Buddhist troops manhandling and stripping Muslims and heaping them six-deep into trucks in which they duly suffocated, in a long and circuitous journey to a distant barracks. But the most visually shocking were the coloured snapshots of the bloodied corpses from the al-Furqan mosque massacre of 2009. It was indicative of the political links of the organisers that they had downloaded the massacre pictures from the Patanikini website, a site which boasts that it speaks for ‘jihad warriors in the field’. The coloured line drawing of the four great queens of the pre-Thai Patani Sultanate, an entrepot for international trade, was also from the website. It showed their bare shoulders and arms, a violation of Middle Eastern Islamic norms of dress. A lethal photograph caught a green-uniformed Thai soldier, machine-gun in hand, striding in hob-nailed boots along the margin of the roof of the Kruseh Mosque. Patanian nationalists are astute communicators.

It was highly cultural, with beautiful handicrafts such as painted bags of the ancient national rural type; elegant versions of the delicate, deadly cane nets and traps of old-style Patanian fisherman; and a host of books on Islam and Patanian Malay history.

What have Patanian attitudes been to the neo-Wahhabi faction that has built many educational institutions in Patani since the early 1990s, through generous donations from Sa’udi Arabia and the Gulf Arabs, and then from Thai governments for their advice, services rendered, and ideological validation of membership in Thailand? Some pro-rebels I met in Cairo and Pattani City would certainly like to get their hands on them, but one of the student organisers of the Festival told me that his group had nothing against those ‘Wahhabis’ who had delivered some resources and chances. He doubted that there would be any violence between the Jihadists and the neo-Wahhabists if the Thai system fell. One or two youthful sympathisers with the rebels have let slip that a splinter from the neo-Wahhabis did jump over to the uprising, but overall the relations between Islamo-Malay nationalists and neo-Wahhabi religion ‘reformers’ do not appear to be friendly. The Wahhabi educationists have restructured Islam to make it endorse the Thai state; some of them have also said that they advise the Thai governments on how to restore peace in Southern Thailand. It was natural that they would take the side of the Thai government because full-blown Wahhabism, intent to conduct Protestant surgery on Islam, comes close to classifying most Patanians, with their mystic-legalistic Shafi’ite Islam, as non-Muslim. They need the

Thai state as protector and patron while they brilliantly construct colleges and universities to inculcate their ideas.

It would be hard to separate Islam and Arabic from the Malay language and nationality in Southern Thailand. The orations and skits at the festival referred to harm being done to Islam by the distorted modernity the Thai state has brought, and there were some syrupy *nashid* religious songs consisting solely of Arabic words and simple Arabic formulas from the Qur’an repeated again and again. Yet Arabic words and phrases were not too plentiful in the orations at least, which were more like the Patanian Malay linguistic nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s than today’s Islamic Jihadic reinvention of ‘the movement for independence from Thai colonial rule’. Crayoned messages from young students who attended bear out that the Arabic language, and the Qur’an as an Arabic language text, may not have too prominent a hold yet on at least a section of the militant new generation, although a highly generalised Islam is a focus for resistant emotionalism. However, it does seem that the Arabic script for Malay, and the standard Malay language itself, are holding more strongly in Patani, where the Thai state treats Malay like Franco did Basque, more so than some Western scholars have descried.

The chance to get directly within the minds of ordinary youths who support, and in some cases aid, the uprising was provided by a hessian-canvas screen in the covered labyrinth of the photos of the interconnected tents; crayons were provided with which anyone could dash down their thoughts for the public. The jottings were a mix of Arabic-script Malay; the Latin letters of Malaysian Malay, showing that a section of the population is striving to plug Patani into Malaysia’s print-culture and polity; and of course many (around 50 per cent) in Thai, the language in which Bangkok dunks all Muslim children. On the whole, the abundance of inscriptions were in a Malay not too far removed from Patani’s old theological books, and the print-Malay of Kuala Lumpur showed that a section of youth are keeping up their uneven knowledge of the nationalist tongue and intends to restore it through a struggle for independence.

Sentences dashed down in Thai included: ‘We don’t need any soldiers’; ‘We want justice’; ‘We must fight for justice’; ‘Let us unite: then one day the country will progress’; and ‘Our country is Patani’. The Arabic-script Malay was clearer: ‘We don’t

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want to live under the government of Siam'; 'Unite O [Islamic?] Nation of the Malays: if we love our religion it is our duty to wrest independence' (or 'we then will inevitably become independent'); 'We want independence'; 'Drive out the infidel pigs'. In Malaysia's Latin-script Malay: 'Once the Language is lost, the nation disappears'; 'Siam will be destroyed: Patani will become independent' (which is now a possibility, given the paralytic years of deadlock between the established political forces in Bangkok); 'Cultivate the plant of Jihad in your souls: rise up children of my people: build the independent Patani'; 'Live/find life through blood: why are you so afraid?: Die with blood, then'. In Arabic script again: 'The best of luck as off to the Jihad you go'.

Scattergun lecturers spoke before a huge blow-up of the chipped-away brick edifice of the Kruseh mosque, which was stormed by Thai forces during the Patani uprising of 2004.

The rage was focussed by the threat the Thai system's century of programs to de-culture the Patanians now poses to the survival of Malay; and a superficial, or at least basic, Islam. One phrase that alternated English, Roman-script Malay and Arabic: 'I love Islam. *ALLAH merdika*. Allah give us aid/victory against the infidel people' (a prayer from the Qur'an). '*ALLAH merdika*' is ambiguous: it juxtaposes Allah and independence (*merdika*). It could imply that the sovereign God will inevitably effect independence for the outgunned Patanian Malays, enabling them to bring down the Thai system. But I think there is a more immanent meaning: that Allah incarnates Himself in the homeland and the Islamo-Patanian Nation as they struggle for independence. I have often encountered motifs of Allah's special closeness to the Patanian Nation as it wages Jihad. In early 2009 I spoke with two giggling, beautifully dressed Patanian girls of sixteen and seventeen who were studying Islam and Arabic in Kelantan, Malaysia. I asked if there might be some tension or gap between the secular homeland/Malay language and Islam, but they said 'We fight for Islam and the *tanah air* (territorial homeland) together. Allah is in the homeland'. I asked if a compromise settlement might not save lives. They said, 'We mean to win complete independence'. The Patanians have traditionally been strong Sufi mystics; they believe that very spiritual individuals get close to God and are a vicarious channel to a delegated presence of God for ordinary believers. In Islamo-Patanian nationalism it is not an individual saint with special books who gets close to God, but the section of the Nation that conducts Jihad warfare to expel the idol-worshipping Siamese

imperialists, whom the graffiti at the Peace Southern Thailand day termed *kafir babi*, 'the porcine [Thai] infidels'. God's light does bathe them as they fight. This is the view of God and the Nation that I believe was at the back of much of the graffiti not dashed down by teenagers or young people well-read in Arabic-script Islam.

Little slivers that do not fit in properly are often highly significant in Patani. Two visitors crayoned, in Roman-script Malay, the sentence '*Jangan berdarah*' ('Do not take the road of bloodshed, don't bleed to death, do not besmirch yourself by shedding the blood of others'), and in English 'Leave me alone'—an individualist's pathetic plea not to be sucked into the havoc, perhaps, or a national demand to the Thai system to stop fiddling with his/her intimate psyche through its totalitarian deculturising programs?

These unmeditated outbursts caught a final disintegration of the moral standing of the Thai state in Patani. Educated Patanians have crossed the line of fear: now they voice total contempt for the militarised Thai state to its face, as against the decades when they pent it up in hideaway psyches and layers of deception. Some older educated Muslims respond with half tones and ambiguity to the new daredevil youth. One PSU scholar told me that the Union of Southern Thai Students had held much the same exhibition a year back in Yala. He described them as an ultra-nationalistic minority among the students—one with the superior nationalist resolve, though, to have won control of student organisations throughout the south of Songkla and the three statelets of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, into which the Thai state sliced up the historic homeland of Patani. My friend thus questioned the representativeness of this ultra-nationalist stratum of students, just as I, as a greenhorn, once queried the minority of youthful Bengali linguistic nationalists at Dhaka University. Yet he reacted as if to a snake bite when I read out what those spontaneous kids had crayoned about Buddhists on the hessian: 'Who said that? Who said that?' (Who had said in 2010 what few Patanians have not harboured at some level in their beaten-down psyches over the past century?) In 1969–70, some middle-aged academics at Dhaka University objected to the students burning the Pakistani flag on campus—it was 'treason'. No matter how grossly dysfunctional a constructed state has been, many people fear the unknown and the disorder its disintegration ushers in. Vacation by the Thais may set off heavy bloodletting between the Patanians themselves, as the rebels finally get their hands on the neo-Wahhabis who made Islam justify submission to the Thai state.

But I believe that Patani changed utterly in later 2009 and 2010. The students' exhibition of January 2010 was not like the one before in Yala. The fire among the students has leapt high enough now to jump to a further range of functional groups and classes beyond those already mobilised by this revolution.

The surface of monolingual Thai ordinary life looked calm on the campus, but under it anger at the crisis of Malay, and the system that inflicted it, ran deep among PSU undergraduates in early 2010. At PSU's student elections of January–February 2010, Malay was the gagged, roped-down guest that everybody had to pretend they did not see. Students that I had known for two years at last spoke out loud what they had always thought. The government refused to establish justice between Malays and Buddhists. That government was neglecting Malay. It was the policy of the state to starve Malay to death by not making it an official language alongside Thai. The proportion of Malays in the enrolled students had shot up as young

Buddhists migrated to central Thailand instead, but PSU was still an environment that worked against any scope for Malay in the modern. Student politicians felt concern that adolescents in Pattani City spoke ‘a mixed language’, while most Muslim children in the towns now spoke only in Thai. Hence much Malay culture had been lost forever. Back in the villages, though, there were old people who spoke only Malay, and people of all ages who spoke it for the most part.

But the discreet activists on campus were also held in the grip of the same language determinism. Formally they could not use Malay in campaigns because those in a student campaign have to project their ideas in a language intelligible to all students and staff—which in PSU, with its mix of Buddhists and Muslimism could only be Thai. All teaching was in Thai and the students understood that language better. On that campus, the only use made of Malay was as a language of speech between students and sometimes in religious Islamic talks or posters, they lamented.

Overall, the students of our new century at PSU have had contact with Thai, and more and more been immersed in it, throughout their lives. Yet PSU looks the best setting in which Malay can be made a medium of literate modernity: the Thai system keeps them busy with activities in its language, but they have more time to develop Malay than professionals with jobs. But, sons and daughters of a people for decades atomised by state power, they lack specific ideas on practical ways to insert Malay into their university studies and life. It is here that de-culturation becomes dangerous for the peace. Educated youth in general are not able to carve margins of agency and space for a satisfactory national culture within the ferociously monolingualist Thai system. That the starting-point is so bad, and the practical procedures to restore Malay are not there, or not formulated, leaves the jungles, the mountains and the caves—the jihad, the bombs—as the only road to save Malay, and the only way to vent the pain of not being able to have genuine communication with parents and older relatives who have

little Thai. Franco (why not admit he stood for many speakers of Spanish?) barred Basque from schools, governance and public space. That violence left two-thirds of the Basque region unable to speak it. However, Patanian nationalists are well-read on the devolution of power to groups that do not speak Spanish in post-Fascist Spain. Most Basques again speak Basque, and some Patanian nationalists might accept such a regional autonomy within Thailand that would make Malay a language of government and thus save it.

Younger Wahhabites I spoke with elsewhere on campus no longer put much hope in the little professional careers they had been trying to build. Economic ameliorism has no credibility now the economy is even more depressed than it has been in the last three decades. But what the Wahhabis cannot cope with is the Jihad mechanism the rebels have set off in the minds of the Patanians. This life, the rebels whisper, is only a brief transition to the second, much longer life. Will that other eternal life be good or bad? That will be determined by how much we pray, by how much we avoid—or resist—unclean things (unlike the Buddhists who eat those pigs), how ready we are to risk our lives to achieve the sovereign state that is the inherent meaning of Islam. To be shot dead or blown up here only interrupts life, and as martyrdom Jihad will win you the resurrected life of total bliss. The neo-Wahhabites have no answer to this discourse that defines them as corrupt materialistic sell-outs who seek only petty ameliorist benefits that will not reach most Malays.

Many PSU students seem to be weighing how likely it is that the current insurgency will be won. They are wiping the last shreds of their erstwhile loyalist masks from their faces and declaring *kemerdekaan*, political independence, as their goal. Muslim staff and students at PSU’s two campuses provide the rebels with reports on Thai intentions, morale and capacities to stay five jumps ahead of them, and the scientific knowledge to upgrade their bombs and other weapons. There are rings of sleepers at PSU too for future uprisings should this one fail.

Yet most of the students worry about the military odds. Many Thai soldiers avoid combat because they do not in their hearts really believe Patani to be part of Thailand. Yet fifteen or twenty Thai soldiers/militias to every guerrilla is terrifying odds, even for hyper-optimist young Patanians who believe Allah intervenes, or will intervene, to grant their side victory. If the Thai system were to declare Malay an equal official language alongside Thai, and immediately carry that out (not flick the current sops), that might drain most tension from some of the students so that they would not take the unpaved forest tracks to the rebels. They would settle for Patani as an autonomous bilingual state-unit within Thailand, in close ASEAN exchanges with Malaysia’s print-Malay and the Patanis’ Islam. I feel that such a post-modern synthesis of the Malay language and Malaysia with a decentralised Thai state would be the best solution for everybody.

Perhaps it is too late for even a radical transformation of the Thai state’s policies to bring peace. Buddhists born in the South—that is, the Thais who know the Patanian Muslims best, including those in the military—expect the rebels to be able to keep fighting for years, given the passion they mobilise around religion and language. Both sides have dug in for a bruising protracted war that one Thai high official has predicted will last for twenty years, however much economic prosperity Thailand might deliver at the grassroots. Given the identity politics that the rebels tap, this is likely to prove true.

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Muslim Thailand:
Patani Discontent

Dennis Walker

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Travelling to
WOMADelaide

Crazyna Zajdow

Crazyna Zajdow is an
editor of *Arena*
Magazine.



Travelling to **WOMADelaide**

Grazyna Zajdow

The transformative power of music was palpable at this year's WOMADelaide

I am doing my yearly road trip with my friend Carole. As we have done for the last three years, we drive to Adelaide on Friday and return on Monday. In between we listen and dance to music, and occasionally see some street theatre or art. We feast on what is called WOMADelaide, that music festival begun in England in 1982 by Peter Gabriel. It could be the cynical middle-aged critic's bonanza of bile—but isn't. Instead it has become the memory which sustains me for first the few weeks of the year's classes and lectures, and reminds me of the power of music.

This year, the festival is huge. There are seven stages, ranging from the main one that can accommodate an audience of perhaps 30,000 to much smaller, more intimate spaces. Everything runs like clockwork, a feat that fascinates the former stage manager in me. What sort of discussions must take place to convince artists and musicians to stop on time, even when the audience is screaming for more? Is it coercion, or is it part of the same phenomenon happening in front of the stages and throughout the park? This phenomenon means hundreds of queuing people are pleasant to each other first thing in the morning in front of the Combi Coffee stand. It allows people to drink alcohol from midday to midnight and not become aggressive. And it enables the premier of the state, in the middle of an election, to walk around without the press following, and without any particular interest from the rest of the crowd. They are there to enjoy life, after all. Musicians walk around too and listen to music—they become part of the world in which we exist as audience and participants. A pair of Dutch performers dressed as workmen walk through the crowd carrying a piece of metal fence. They plop it down and then start ordering people around. We all do as we are told, happily, goodnaturedly, bemusedly. Everyone just seems to get into the spirit of the thing.

'Why does it work?' I wonder. I put it down to the music, from the quiet and contemplative (of which I sometimes partake), to the raucous (of which I partake a little too much for my ageing back). This year I watch an English musician playing with Cretan musicians on traditional Cretan instruments. They have little stage presence but remarkable abilities that force us to listen and enjoy. Then there are the Japanese taiko drummers (who have stage-presence galore), Hungarian gypsies, Spanish gypsies, singers from the Western Sahara, Afrobeat musicians from Melbourne—lots of musicians from Melbourne, really. There's a band who

play a mix of Turkish, gypsy and hip-hop, and another playing Russian prison songs (with a couple of Polish songs in there too). There are young musicians from Byron Bay playing reggae as if they had only just discovered it, but also a band from Jamaica who really did invent ska almost fifty years ago.

Away from the stages acrobats fly through the air. During a storm, a French troupe is hoisted upon a huge crane; dressed as little drummers they become a human mobile hundreds of metres above us.

On the Sunday afternoon, while watching the Afrobeat band, I look at the audience. What strikes me is the lack of a generational divide. People in their sixties dance alongside people in their twenties. No one is too cool for school, and no one notices that they might be dancing next to their parents. I have seen one man here for a number of years. He comes in his board shorts and sensible shoes; some years he has worn a very large sun hat, kept in place by the string under his chin. He doesn't seem to understand a simple four/four beat, but that doesn't stop him. He just dances, as do the young girls who spend their time in front of mirrors practising their moves before they get out in public. On Saturday evening we watch a classic Cuban salsa concert and I dance my practised salsa moves alongside another woman who looks my age but could make me swoon with the way she moves her hips.



Spanish gypsy band Ojos de Brujo

Away from the stages acrobats fly through the air. During a storm, a French troupe is hoisted upon a huge crane; dressed as little drummers they become a human mobile hundreds of metres above us. Children have their own little area that produces a parade on Sunday afternoon, and parents are seen walking with their children too young to be left to wander—of whom there are many. How different is this place to quotidian life in Melbourne where parents don't let children out of their sights for reasons best known to them. Toddlers do get lost here, but they are quickly found as well. Young fathers carry babies all day and way into the night. Even the young men who are caught jumping the fence are quietly walked away by the security guards without aggro (but then I am probably too blissed out to notice it in any case). The police walk through but they seem to have very little to do. They seem oblivious to the smell of dope smoke that moves through the crowd every once in a while.

The more I write this the less I believe it, but it is true. Everywhere are massive rubbish bins divided into compostable, recyclable and other refuse. I don't know if the festival is as it claims, carbon-neutral, but it may even come close. There are stalls that sell the products of Indigenous women from the Andes and short people from Southern Africa. An artist from England works with Indigenous women from South Australia, who produce the beautiful and large flags around the area. For those three days it seems like it is possible to live without static in this world, and move closely surrounded by thousands of others without feeling put-upon.

We drive back knowing that the hail-storm that hit Melbourne

I watch an English musician playing with Cretan musicians on traditional Cretan instruments ... Then there are the Japanese taiko drummers, Hungarian gypsies, Spanish gypsies, singers from the Western Sahara, Afrobeat musicians from Melbourne ...

over the weekend could have damaged our houses, but that does not dampen our feelings. My iPod will be fattened by ten discs of new music, which we listened to on our trip back. I realise that I have taken a holiday away from the anxiety of global warming, demanding students, even more demanding university management and the coming football season. But this experience reminds me of the transformative potential of music and the human desire to live and enjoy the world of music, art and dance. **a**

ARTS AND CULTURE

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Crazyrna Zajdow

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The Visual and
Meaning in Film

Valerie Krips

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Watching *A Single Man* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*

March was an instructive month in film. Interested filmgoers, having seen many of the films in Oscar contention, learned that realism has ousted fantasy: *The Hurt Locker* won roundly (Best Film and Director, making Kathryn Bigelow the first women director to grasp the golden statuette) while the otherwise hotly-tipped *Avatar* had to content itself with Best Art Direction and Cinematography. And Colin Firth did not win the prize for best actor in Tom Ford's film *A Single Man*, the only category in which the much-praised film was nominated. In the meantime Neils Arden Opley's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* opened nationwide to more-or-less favourable reviews and good box office. As the sub-titled Swedish film was making its debut, rumours that Hollywood was considering a remake caused some interest, as did the report that Stieg Larsson, upon whose posthumously published novel the film is based, died intestate and that his partner of thirty-two years would not benefit from the bestselling book sales or, presumably, the film rights.

The story was revealing of other things beside family feuds. The couple had remained unmarried because had they entered matrimony their address would have become publicly available. Larsson was known to be anti-Nazi, and his life was threatened. Thus he needed to keep his address private. These insights into Swedish life made viewing the film all the more interesting, of course. If we had not heard of Nazi threats in Sweden, it would have been even more startling to be confronted by the crudely drawn nastiness of many of the characters in the film, people who were getting away with murder both literally and figuratively.

The criminal classes in Scandinavia have become familiar enough to viewers of SBS through television detective serials. The Emmy Award winning Danish series *The Eagle: A Crime Odyssey* makes addictive viewing. In it around six or seven people seem adequate to manage an international criminal investigative unit in Denmark, while helping out in Norway, Sweden and Iceland now and then. The central character, Hallgrim Øm Hallgrimsson (Jens Albinus), is believable and charismatic, a man with dilemmas that are worked out as the plot develops. The criminals he comes across seem as much metaphors, ways of representing aspects of Hallgrimsson, as they are characters in their own right. If Hallgrimsson can wrestle his own demons and overcome them, presumably the criminal investigative unit will become redundant. So while it's clear that all is not happy in the state of Denmark, it remains difficult to shake the underlying image of pristine landscape,

snow, and that odd mix of sexual libertarianism and civic rectitude which clings to the Danes, Norwegians, Icelanders and, of course, the Swedes. The revelation that you need to keep your head down in Sweden if you are an anti-Nazi adds an unexpected element to this picture: good enough for a thriller.

Shifts of plot, scene, changes in tempo and mood are all part of the art of the televised serial, and all are in evidence in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo is just that, a thriller. In it, Mikael Blomkvist (Michael Nyqvist) a disgraced financial journalist, is employed by a wealthy and respected man to find his niece, who disappeared at a family function forty years earlier. At the same time, a gifted hacker, the tattooed Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace), hacks her way into the journalist's hard drive, and is eventually co-opted into the investigation. The two then embark on a series of leads, unravelling a story with more twists and turns than a maze. If this sounds more like a television plot than one written

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Colin Firth in *A Single Man*

for film that's because it is: the film is recut from a 12-part series made for television. Television audiences, unlike those who have submitted themselves to a couple of hours in a cinema, are presumed to retain a potential of distraction, made even more likely by the interjection of advertisements. Shifts of plot, scene, changes in tempo and mood are all part of the art of the televised serial, and all are in evidence in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* which, in spite of its frequently episodic and frenetic activity, can seem oddly unmotivated. It is almost possible, for example, to forget, or to forget to care about, the purpose of all this activity, which is finding the long-lost niece. So, oddly, as fast-paced as Opley's film is, it would be entirely possible to cut even more chunks out of it without damage. The plot is fast and furious but without depth: none of the characters, even the remarkable Lisbeth, come to life. In fact, watching the film is rather like seeing a crudely imagined version of a computer game in which real actors play the parts assigned to computer-generated avatars.

By contrast, in Tom Ford's *A Single Man*, adapted from Christopher Isherwood's novel, the sight of a beautifully made wooden drawer,

sliding open silkily to reveal neatly arrayed white shirts, each clasped in a wide strip of blue paper, leaves the viewer in no doubt that something much more important more than just fine furniture and old fashioned laundry is at stake. George Falconer (Colin Firth) is a British university teacher of English literature living in California in the 1960s. He is preparing to kill himself. We follow him through his day as he puts his affairs in order, and reflects upon the past. His has been a life of careful public appearance with few hints of his private and passionate home life. His lover is dead, killed in a car accident in Colorado. In a flashback we see George learning of the death and, even as he begins to register his loss, realising that he is not welcome at the funeral. Firth is a master of registering emotion in close-up and as he listens to the voice at the other end of the phone we see a short history of his relationship, and his growing awareness of its terrible and sudden end written on his face and in his eyes.

In Ford's film the action of a single day is shot against a background of Californian sun and interiors; everything shines with perfection. The house is a clue to George's personality, of course, but its semiotics go beyond the purely personal and reach into the lives of college professors in 1960s California. They can clearly afford both housekeepers and the services of a professional laundry, and houses full of light and reflective surfaces. George's home is a place of considerable beauty, a container for a similarly beautiful life. So the story ought to go. But he is destroyed by grief. His preparations are almost complete: he tucks money into a package of bread for his housekeeper to find, and lays out the clothes in which he wants to be buried, with a note imploring that his layers-out fasten his tie with a Windsor knot. For the remainder of the day he packs up his office at the university and has a final dinner with a friend, with whom he had an affair before he had fully admitted his sexual preferences. Through all of this he is his urbane self, the same self who later wanders the house with a revolver, trying out possible suicide spots one of which, unbearably comic, is his beautiful and spotless bedroom. Here he goes through the motions of shooting himself while zipped up in

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The Visual and
Meaning in Film

Valerie Krips

a sleeping bag. It proves impossible, so the bathroom is tried. But of course shedding one's own blood by blowing one's brains out is scarcely likely to be aesthetic. This is no trivial problem for George.

In a recent BBC interview Peter Greenaway, the redoubtable British film director, repeated the point that visitors to his installations and films at last year's Melbourne International Arts Festival will remember: the birth of realist, narrative film was a worm in the bud. Now, in Greenaway's opinion, film is dead since the image has become the handmaiden of texts. Greenaway brooked no argument from his interviewer, nor did he find irony in the fact that the interview was in part about his film about Rembrandt, *Nightwatching*. Its filmography alone is interesting: it had its first airings in a variety of film festivals in 2007 and was released in DVD in 2009, appearing in Melbourne the same year. It is only now on general release in the United Kingdom.

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Watching the film is rather like seeing a crudely imagined version of a computer game in which real actors play the parts assigned to computer-generated avatars.

It is true that Greenaway's film takes image as its starting point, not words on a page. It is also true that every scene in the film is richly furnished, and presented in the manner of an old master painting. To argue that the narrative (and there is one) is carried as much by what the audience sees as hears (which includes, apart from dialogue, wonderful cello music by Wlodek Pawlik) presents no difficulty: it would be almost impossible to leave the cinema unaware of the careful selection of what is seen. Indeed, the film includes a series of tableaux vivants, sometimes not as vibrant as might be desirable. Greenaway's points have their validity, and it is hard to resist the sense that even as he is overstating his case there's something to it.

Take Neils Arden Opley's film. In spite of a brilliant piece of casting (Noomi Rapace as Larsson's extraordinary central character is the highlight of the film), the visual effect of the film is uninspiring. Neither glossy nor gritty, it's easily forgettable, and seems almost beside the point. It really doesn't matter where this film is shot: it's all about what happens. When compared to *A Single Man's* careful and studied (some might say over-studied) manipulation of semiotics, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* seems to be the result of a grim determination to provide a different set of references, perhaps a more 'realistic' one. And to follow the text, the written narrative, closely. In a scene roughly a third of the way through the film, Lisbeth Salander has turned the tables on her legally appointed guardian, who has been forcing her to have sex with him in return for releasing some of her money. She has him bound and gagged, and has rigged him up so that she can rack him. He is fish-white and flabby, the very picture of a nasty

fascist piece of work who, when the tables are turned, begs for mercy. There is a violence about the scene that is oddly dispassionate, as if torture was just another way of making someone pay. Readers of the novel on which the film is based may have a better way of understanding Salander's need to torture her tormentor, a position generally left to the more despicable characters in film, not their apparent heroines. But the crude violence in this scene does not make it more real; it just means that characterisation is driven by a sketchy plot, with the result that the image is boring rather than horrifying. It follows that there is no place for the viewer to empathise with either of the characters or what they intended. The scene is, to use Roland Barthes' term, without a *punctum*—that is, the place at which the viewer enters the scene, and is affected by it.

In Greenaway's argument, film is finished because of a lack of attention to the image. If this is so, this is quite some failure. A film's narrative, the backbone of its meaning, is told through images, words, music, and the skills of its actors and directors. A good film manages to bring these disparate elements together in ways that go largely unremarked as those watching laugh and cry; a great film may leave the audience wondering just how that was done, just why that scene was so memorable. It may be that the scene in which George chooses a clean shirt will stay with some of its viewers; it is doubtful if any of the scenes in Opley's film will manage to do the same. The failure of Opley's film is not just its plotting, but the ways in which its narrative was realised, which includes the way it all looked, and how the audience was enabled to see, to empathise. To neglect the visual and its power to construct character and meaning is to mistake what films can do: even Greenaway would agree with that. **[a]**

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The Tragic Sense of Life*

On 12 October 1936, during the first year of the Spanish Civil War, Nationalist soldiers, supporters and sympathisers gathered in conquered territory at the University of Salamanca to celebrate Columbus' discovery of the Americas (which he believed to be Asia). They were addressed by several speakers, including the rector of the university, the distinguished philosopher, novelist and poet Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936).

they bay their slogan *viva la muerte!*...
long live death!...*viva la muerte!*...a senseless
 and necrophilous remark
 as the old shaper of paradoxes knows
 and tells them so
 prompting a general with one arm and one eye
 to scream *muera la inteligencia!*...*death to the intelligentsia!*...
viva la muerte!... *muera la inteligencia!*...
 over and over
 a froth of rage shooting from his mouth
 his remaining arm outstretched in the fascist salute

causing Unamuno to warn the audience
 to beware of a cripple who will mutilate all of Spain
 to flatter his own image
 then in defiance of their inchoate fury he says
you will win
because you have more than enough brute force...
but you will not convince

some officers draw pistols
 many want to lynch him but are squeamish
 fancying they might distress Franco's wife
 and when the Generalissimo is told of the old man's words
 he too wants Unamuno shot
 but fears another distracting fuss
 like after they murdered Lorca

so the philosopher is confined to his house
 and dies on the last day of the year
 reviled by those he thought his friends
 his books listed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*
 his cautionary words forgotten or ignored

and unheeded on shores unknown
 until Columbus sailed the forbidding seas
 where flourishes a great and bloody republic
 that offers up its bravest unto death
 and whisks back home its crippled youths
 from foreign sands and alien swamps
 where they deploy to press their nation's cause
 but fail
 despite more than enough brute force
 to convince

B N Oakman

**Del Sentimiento Trágico del la Vida* is the title of Unamuno's most famous work.

REVIEW ESSAY

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The Tragic Sense of Life

B N Oakman

B N Oakman's poetry has been widely published in Australia, England and the United States. A full-length collection, *In Defence of Hawaiian Shirts* (Interactive Press), will be released later in 2010.

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Coming Out Communist

Peter Eade

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Coming Out Communist

Peter Eade

Tariq Ali, *The Idea of Communism* (Seagull Books); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Harvard University Press, 2009); and Slavoj Zizek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (Verso, 2009)

One can't help noticing a contrast between the beginning of the present century and that of the last. Unlike the 20th century, the 21st does not really declare itself as beginning so much as continuing or unfolding what had already begun towards the end of the previous century. The 20th century, with its avant-gardes vowing to recreate art, its revolutionary politics attempting the same in relation to society (and even 'man'), not to mention its astonishing scientific advances, seemed from the outset to declare itself a beginning, its future open. For the most part, the 21st century opened with a sense that radical change was either undesirable or futile. Some portray this as wise caution after the disastrous events that unfolded in the last century, but in a world with spiralling inequities and unsustainable habits one senses this attitude is equally a consequence of apathy and fear.

A disturbance in this consensus appeared with the financial crisis, when suddenly established norms seemed groundless and contingent. A peculiar sign of this was the return of the word 'capitalism' to mainstream discourse, moving as it did from a transparent, unquestioned medium to something now not only perceptible but even a little harsh on the eye, to say the least. Even in unlikely places the question was (and is still) raised: is the system as it stands the one we want? Alongside this there has been a push from certain figures on the Left to revive the word 'communism' and reappraise its meaning and legacy. This began with the 'Idea of Communism' conference at Birkbeck, University of London, and now sees the publication of recent books such as Slavoj Zizek's *First As Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Commonwealth*, and Tariq Ali's *The Idea of Communism*, with many more on the way, all of which are concerned with the direction the Left should take in these times and with attempting to answer some of the difficult questions surrounding the use of this word and its history.

Tariq Ali's *The Idea of Communism* is the first in a series of books published by Seagull Books entitled

What was Communism? that take as their point of departure the idea that, with capitalism in crisis, it is time to 'reopen the vault' on communism.

Ali's book is not really about 'the idea of communism' so much as a basic history of communism as an empirical movement. In broad strokes, he takes us through how the Enlightenment ideas driving the French Revolution were married to the workers' movements arising out of the Industrial Revolution, culminating in the upheavals of 1848 and the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*, and then through the First International, the Paris Commune and the brutal setbacks suffered by the workers' movements. But the real focus of the text is the October Revolution, the hopes it engendered, its descent into Stalinist bureaucracy, influence on worldwide communist movements and final collapse. Ali introduces the reader to the debates surrounding the transition from Lenin to Stalin (Did Stalin continue or corrupt Leninism? Are the seeds of Stalinism already in Marx's texts? Or was Stalinism a consequence of imperialist aggression?). He also relates debates around how to typify the Soviet Union and the other communist states (Were they really communist? If not, should we call them 'state capitalist', 'socialist' or simply 'totalitarian'?). In the end Ali's book is a story of the disparity between theory and practice, anguishing for what could have been. He ends by noting the current democratic socialist movements in Latin America, suggesting the only way to revive communism in the West is by concrete examples of it working elsewhere, such as the social movements in Bolivia or Venezuela.

But while Ali's book may be a useful introduction to students and newcomers, it fails to engage in the very debate its title suggests: what exactly is the idea of communism? While readers may feel they have a clearer grasp of what went on in the Soviet Union and its offshoots, or where to go if they want to find out more, they will not really have a sense of what was genuinely compelling about communism as an idea, why so many sacrificed their lives for it, or even

how it was interpreted differently by movements outside the main trajectory embodied by Stalin and Mao. And, as Ali's book opens by defending the word 'communism' and ends with a passionate plea for 'socialism', readers will be none the wiser as to what these terms might really signify. Further, the fact that sections of the text are taken from works published many years ago can't help but give the sense that for Ali, nothing really needs to be reappraised or rethought in any significant way? it just needs to be done properly this time. Perhaps this is why he doesn't engage with any of the questions raised by contemporary thinkers like Hardt and Negri or Zizek. What separates their approach from Ali's is an openness to questions such as whether there even ought to be a revival of communism, whether the very word communism is forever doomed, and their conviction that if there is to be a 21st century communism, it will have to be premised on a recognition of the total failure of communism thus far and the need to reinvent it from the ground up.

Zizek's *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* takes its initial cue from Marx, who once remarked that history tends to repeat itself: first as tragedy, then as farce. The tragedy of Napoleon, the farce of Napoleon III; the tragedy of the first Gulf War, the farce of the second; perhaps even the tragedy of Howard and the farce of Abbott ... The farcical repetition, whilst potentially being more intolerable, exceeding even the tragedy in its excesses, nevertheless heralds the unfolding of the logic in which they both operate, or the ideology sustaining them. Zizek's contention is that having received the initial blow of tragedy with the September 11 attacks and ascent of terrorism, the Fukuyamian consensus around liberal democracy and capitalism representing the 'least worst' form of governance and economy, and consequently the end of history, has now descended into farce with the economic meltdown of 2008.

Weighing in with the opposite perspective, Fukuyama himself has published an article in *Newsweek* titled 'History is Still Over'. Beneath pictures of bustling stock exchanges around the globe, Fukuyama reaffirms the neo-liberal mantra that 'over the past three decades, market based growth and globalisation have brought prosperity and lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. With that growth came the spread of democratic government'. And that although problems arising from the crisis persist, 'signs of recovery abound, and confidence is returning both to consumers and businesses'. In response to this rosy picture Zizek would counter with the image of a Loony Tunes character who, having run over the edge of a cliff, continues to run on thin air, yet to realise that the ground beneath has disappeared.

Despite representing opposite ends of the political spectrum, if Zizek and Fukuyama share anything it is this basic recognition that, in

Zizek's words, 'although crises are painful and dangerous they are ineluctable, and ... are the terrain on which battles have to be waged and won'. Zizek acknowledges this explicitly, whereas Fukuyama's very need to repeat his position (if it's really over, why bother?) betrays an implicit adherence to this principle. In the midst of a crisis in which commonly held assumptions and beliefs suddenly appear groundless and the future contingent, everything depends on who is able to effectively symbolise its causes and remedies.

Like many on the Left, Zizek's contention is that the crisis was not simply a by-product of lax regulation or a few unscrupulous operators, but inherent to capitalism itself. His brazen solution, contrary to the trumpeters of a better regulated status quo, is to charge headlong into the breach waving none other than the Red Flag, affirming that communism is once again at the gates. For now, however, the task is less to spearhead the revolution than implore the Left to take a step back, rethink the very fundamentals of its core beliefs and values, and prepare for the task of beginning again from the beginning ...

His concern in *First as Tragedy* is twofold. In first half of the book, he mounts a critique of the ideological contours of contemporary society that serve to naturalise capitalism and foreclose the consideration of alternative futures. Zizek shows us how today 'on account of its all pervasiveness, ideology appears as its own opposite, as non-ideology'; and how today things are depoliticised in such a way that, for instance, everybody knows that Martin Luther King fought for civil rights but has forgotten about his wider role in the class struggle in general, fighting not just for equal rights based on race but against poverty and inequality (he was shot while supporting striking workers); or how the focus on human suffering or the 'inner mind' of those involved in particular situations often functions to obfuscate the wider logics of domination and exploitation at work. In the second half he argues that once we are able to wade through these layers of ideological mystification, it can be seen that capitalism is riven by a series of antagonisms that render its indefinite continuation impossible, and that 'communism' is still the best name for what to replace it with. According to Zizek there are four such antagonisms: 'the looming threat of an *ecological* catastrophe; the inappropriateness of the notion of *private property* in relation to so-called "intellectual property"; the socio-ethical implications of *new techno-scientific developments* (especially in biogenetics); and, last but not least, the creation of *new forms of apartheid*, new Walls and slums'. (It must be said, however, that the first three antagonisms get their bite with reference to the last, the Inside/Outside division between, say, the super-rich and those excluded from the economy altogether, which is Zizek's structural rendering of class struggle.)

The question is then: why 'communism'? Isn't this word irrevocably tainted, and its system discredited? This is a problem Zizek confronts in much of his recent work, which boils down to confronting the Left's ambivalent relationship with its past: is it necessary to abandon all ties to totalitarianism, to utopias, to communism? Or is it possible to return to missed opportunities, like anarchism or Trotskyism? Or is it better to renounce this question altogether and look for new directions? In his previous major work, *In Defence of Lost Causes*, Zizek's target is the left-liberal standard line that totalitarianisms, whether fascist or communist are equally undesirable and should be renounced (the distinction doesn't matter as they are essentially alike). He even refutes the leftists who would dispute this conflation, maintaining that what separates communism from Nazism or Fascism is that one, at least, aimed for the good and failed, whilst the others were radically evil from the beginning (although we should nonetheless move on from violent revolutionary politics due to the danger it

poses). Zizek's object is not simply to defend the leftist heritage no matter how violent or oppressive, but to defend its attachment to a radical emancipatory core, visible for Zizek even in its worst failures, and nonetheless to be ruthlessly critical of these projects, this criticism constituting the highest form of fidelity. In this way, Zizek defends the radical egalitarian politics of the Jacobins, but sees in the Terror a kind of impotent acting out that is a sign of their failure both to radically transform culture and society and of their attachment to this emancipatory core, the communist ideal. In this way his strategy is to both sever the links to Really Existing Socialism and yet remain faithful to communism by rendering it not as a system of government or empirical movement, but instead a core set of axioms or principles that persist in any emancipatory struggle and guide its undertakings. The signification of the word 'communism' is thus reworked, reducing its temporal and empirical associations in favour of abstract, eternal principles (in the words of Alain Badiou, Zizek's master in these matters: that the subordination of labour to one dominant class is not inevitable, that another collective organisation is possible, and so on), and it is claimed that the task falls to every new generation to reinvent communism in the practical sense on the basis of these principles and lessons gained from past failures.

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The question is then: why 'communism'? Isn't this word irrevocably tainted, and its system discredited? This is a problem Zizek confronts in much of his recent work.

Essentially, Zizek's book is designed to compel the reader to take a step, not simply a step to the Left but also a step into the dark: renounce your tolerant liberal or social democratic tendencies that bind you to capital, and risk fidelity to the idea of communism. Whilst it seems unlikely that the World Trade Centre attacks and the financial crisis will go down in history as the dual events marking liberal democracy's demise, Zizek's critique of capitalist ideology is compelling reading and excellent fodder for debate within the Left.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's latest book, *Commonwealth*, is the third in a trilogy of books that began with *Empire* (2000) and then *Multitude* (2004). Perhaps an indication of the force and significance of these books is the fervour with which they are routinely denounced by various partisans of the status quo: dark, evil books according to the *Wall Street Journal*, vast and unreadable claims *The Australian*, 'feelgood blather dressed up as neo-Marxian analysis' according John Gray in the *Independent*. In a little known incident typical of the

Howard era, a conference at the University of Sydney Negri was scheduled to attend (but had withdrawn from due to illness) was cancelled after Keith Windschuttle slurred him in *The Australian* with the two gravest insults in his book: terrorist and postmodernist! It seems the university thought it best to derail the entire conference anyway, just for good measure. It is difficult to decide whether this was simply in line with the regular denunciations that greet so many good ideas arising out of the humanities or whether capitalists are in fact scared of Hardt and Negri.

Together, the *Empire* trilogy aims to conduct for the 21st century what Marx did for the 19th, incorporating all the theoretical tools developed since then in various strains of social theory and philosophy, and bringing them to bear on new forms of power and exploitation at work in today's world. Although both the terms of the debate and its goals have shifted, Hardt and Negri nonetheless remain thoroughly Marxist by preserving the basic form of Marx's analysis: new structures of power and exploitation breed new forms of resistance which have the potential to drastically reconstruct society in more democratic and equitable forms. Thus Marx's bourgeoisie—proletariat dyad is replaced by Hardt and Negri's Empire—multitude, and in place of the state-centred communist fiascos of the 20th century Hardt and Negri envision a sort of high-tech anarchic paradise where the multitude reigns and private property is history.

The scope of the project and the narrative they outline strike an interesting contrast to the structures and processes they describe, which are without exception amorphous, interconnected and diverse. In this sense its dilemma lies in proposing a sort of grand narrative for the post-modern era. This is a problem running through the entire trilogy: how to speak of multiform and interconnected power structures as a singular 'Empire'? How to speak of diverse political groupings and movements as constituting a singular political subject with a common enemy? In philosophical terms, it is a matter of negotiating the passage from the modern to the postmodern, or between enlightenment universalism and its dissolution; in political and practical terms, it is a problem of deciding whether the struggles engaged in by, say, your local environmental collective might link up with the various collectives of Linux programmers.

The specific contribution of *Commonwealth* is to re-elaborate the key concepts of Empire and multitude in light of contemporary political events, and with renewed emphasis on their relation to the key notion of the commons. They propose the notion of the common as an

alternative to the private versus public/state-owned opposition which regulates contemporary politics, and which they equate with capitalism and socialism respectively. Being 'common' could apply to natural resources, but equally to knowledge, language, space, computer code, and so on. Capital's mechanism today is less the mass production of commodities than the privatisation and exploitation of the commons for profit—whether this be water in Bolivia, transport in Melbourne or shared information networks. Hardt and Negri argue that modern political constitutions without exception inscribe private property as their ultimate basis, and that consequently the multitude needs to form new political institutions and norms based instead in the concept of ownership in common. They end on what is almost a programmatic statement on how the revolution of the multitude ought to take place.

Previously, in *Empire*, Hardt and Negri attempted to renew the Marxist analysis of imperialism, arguing that in the globalising world, power was no longer divided up between sovereign nation-states (as in the 19th century), but nor was it parcelled out between monolithic and competing imperial powers. Instead, power was shared between multiform state and non-state agents—states, corporations, NGOs, financial institutions, global juridical structures—a concept that is now so widely accepted it seems almost commonplace. Only for Hardt and Negri this does not mean we live in the smooth-running, horizontal world envisioned by Milton Friedman in a book published around the same time: the globalised world order, in spite of its multiform elements, is singular—though not localised in a single nation-state—hierarchical, and its reign is synonymous with 'war, suffering, misery, and exploitation'. Given that many had seen this analysis challenged after the seeming return of super-state sovereignty after the September 11 attacks, they take the opportunity in *Commonwealth* to reaffirm the position of *Empire*. US unilateralism was merely a botched attempt to revive the days in which a sole state superpower lorded over the world, and its failure only proves their initial thesis.

The concept of the multitude, introduced in *Empire* and refined throughout the trilogy, is the contemporary political figure of resistance, and is designed to encompass not simply the industrial working class, but any disenfranchised group, from those excluded from economy altogether to the various social or rights movements, as well as labourers in what Hardt and Negri term biopolitical (as opposed to industrial) production, insofar as they become politically resistant to capitalism. Its multiplicity is both what connects it to and separates it from the multiform but ossifying structures of Empire: 'multitude is a form of political organisation that, on the one hand, emphasises the multiplicity of the social singularities in the struggle and, on the other, seeks to coordinate their common actions and maintain their equality in horizontal organisational structures'. Thus, instead of

criticising, for instance, the various organisations and movements that make up the alterglobalisation protestors as unstructured or naive, Hardt and Negri see their multiplicity as precisely their weapon against Empire. Through their research Hardt and Negri seek to clarify both protestors' common enemy, Empire, and its political form, multitude, developing concepts like 'parallel struggle' to account for their diversity and tactics.

According to Hardt and Negri the possibility of a democratic society not grounded in capitalism but in the commons is possible today in a way it never has been before due to an ongoing shift in the mode of production. Today, they claim, the industrial model of factory-based manufacture, whilst still prevalent, is being rapidly supplanted by labour in 'images, information, knowledge, affects, codes and social relationships', shifting the basis of production from the material to the immaterial. Their thesis is that this 'biopolitical labour' and its products are spontaneously resistant to privatisation, and better off if conducted in collaboration and its products shared. 'Rather than an organ functioning within the capitalist body, biopolitical labour-power is becoming more and more autonomous, with capital simply hovering over it parasitically.' The strategy they recommend is therefore no longer strike or sabotage, but for the multitude to subtract itself from the capitalist apparatus and go on producing. (If this sounds a little soft to those geared up for revolution, Hardt and Negri reassure that the exploiters won't let anyone go without a fight.) Hardt and Negri's multitudinous utopia need not be labelled 'communist' or even bother with adopting the symbols or history of the communist movement, but in essence this is what it would be.

Whilst Žižek shares with Hardt and Negri a common anti-capitalist point of departure (and borrows their notion of the 'common' as the basis of communism), he effectively dismisses their approach, arguing they perpetuate Marx's error of assuming that capitalism produces its own gravediggers in the proletariat or the multitude. Like many on the Left, Žižek doubts whether the heterogeneous and un-unified multitude is capable of resisting the colossal forces that stand in the way of change, and thinks some sort of unity or discipline is needed to be able to act politically. While Hardt and Negri are concerned with conducting detailed analysis of the intricate networks of power and exploitation and the immanent figures of resistance that reside within them, Žižek engages in rigorous ideological critique to destabilise the symbolic logic that sustains power, with the aim of sparking a movement aligned around the word 'communism'. In other words, Žižek sets out to rethink and recreate the Left, through critique and conversion, whereas Hardt and Negri provide a philosophical basis to and promote a self-understanding in already discernible figures of resistance to capitalism.

As for the direction of the Left and the question of which, if any, of these writers to endorse, this is difficult to answer. Ali's analysis may be historically precise but it is incapable of confronting the serious questions that arise over any revival of 'communism' as the proper name for a left politics in the new century. Hardt and Negri's strengths lie where Žižek's weaknesses lie, and vice-versa. Hardt and Negri's combination of abstract Marxian schema and local political singularities tends to hinder attempts at grasping the logic of particular situations and events in the way Žižek excels, and their faith in the multitude prevents them from being sufficiently critical of it (such as examining the way elements of capitalist ideology permeate the multitude). But equally one suspects that Žižek's reluctance to engage with the nitty-gritty of activism and resistance betrays a deficiency in his theoretical resources. From this perspective, an adequate account of the 'idea of communism' and the problems arising from this word and its troubled history remains to be written. **a**

REVIEW

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Coming Out
Communist

Peter Eade

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Reading Shlomo
Sand

Les Rosenblatt

Les Rosenblatt is a
Melbourne-based
writer.book **Reading Shlomo Sand**

review by Les Rosenblatt

Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (Verso, New York, 2009)

Shlomo Sand's finely written work (even in its English translation from the Hebrew, by Yael Lotan) is a remarkable pleasure for mature and enquiring readers. Sand states that 'Since no institution or fund financed it, I felt completely free in writing it, a freedom I don't think I had ever experienced before'. Perhaps it was this freedom that allowed him to move across disciplinary fields and through the minefields of traditional interpretation to produce a highly plausible argument, all the while inspiring confidence in the breadth of his analysis and scholarly integrity.

The Invention of the Jewish People proffers striking historiographical, archeological, intellectual and political insights into Jewish nationalism, from its precursors in antiquity through to fully blown contemporary Zionism. Notably, it challenges influential historians, archeologists and theologians working in this field. It also reveals the use to which current bio-genetic science is being co-opted apace in the service of Jewish identity politics.

Sand's painstaking examination of the works of theorists of nationalism, historians, and the records and evidence of Jewish life since ancient Babylon, leads him to reject the widespread view that Jews constitute 'a nation', or even 'a people'. For him, Jews are people who participated at different times and places in culturally distinctive religious observance of forms of Judaism, or who formed their identities in relation to it and, to varying degrees, to the peoples and cultures they lived amongst.

Although ancient Jewish communities were confessionally, for most of the time, distinctively monotheistic in observance (notwithstanding occasional syncretistic 'back-slipping' to, or absorption of, paganism, Hellenism, animism, messianic and cultic creeds and rites), Sand concludes that they were never largely or enduringly monolithic or hegemonic in what are now the 'holy lands' of contemporary monotheism.

Sand works methodically through extant source materials, documentation, commentary and reasoning to sustain his argument that the people who experienced the tragedy of the destruction of their temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and again, half a millennium later, by the Romans, were not demographically large enough to sustain any major exilic mass or significant unity in dispersal. He convincingly discredits the commonly held belief that the capture, deportation, and exilic practices of Babylonians and Romans involved sufficient numbers of people to be described as 'entire populations'. Relying on varied historical and archeological evidence, he points to several significant times and places of extensive conversion of non-Jews to Judaism by Jewish proselytisers in receptive populations on the Arabian Peninsula, the Horn of Africa, parts of northern Africa

and Central (near-East) 'Asia', notably ancient Khazaria. In doing so he powerfully contradicts the now conventional view that Jews did not seek or obtain converts to any significant extent in the lands to which they came or went.

In the 1970s Arthur Koestler gave prominence to the conversion of the 10th-century Khazars to Judaism as the likely precursors to East-European Jewish demographic history, extending into modern epochs. Now Sand refreshes this argument and recontextualises it in his depictions of other successful Jewish proselytising influences in and around the south Arabian Peninsula and Northern Africa.

Sand argues ... that the people who experienced the tragedy of the destruction of their temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians were not demographically large enough to sustain any major exilic mass or significant unity in dispersal.

In this he provides excellently chronicled material deserving of rigorous follow-up research, although, as Sand himself points out, it is unlikely to be pursued by mainstream Zionist interests in Israel because of its serious contradiction of their adamantly held national narratives of dispersal and return. I found his quotes from Jewish Biblical and Talmudic sources in support of proselytising very telling. Buttressed by his persuasive accounts of Judaic-Christian contest and confusion in the first four centuries of the Christian era, Sand gives us a rich picture of the complexities of this period as well as that following the subsequent rise of Islam as the new monotheistic force in the second half of the millennium.

But before he takes these factors into account as major weaknesses in the intellectual armory of the nationalistic stronghold of the Zionist establishment, Sand prepares the platform of his work with a wide-ranging examination of



the development of modern concepts of nationalism, peoplehood and identity. This is concentrated in the first five chapters but is interwoven and extended throughout the book. Commencing with a discussion of the derivation of the word 'people' from Biblical times on, Sand acknowledges the 'terminological slackness' in the use of this term which has 'completely blurred the profound differences between past and present, between the ancient agrarian universes and the new commercial, industrial worlds in which we still live'.

Acknowledging the repudiation of the concept of 'race' since the 1950s in favour of 'the more respectable concept of *ethnos* in order to preserve the intimate contact with the distant past', Sand finds that 'its main attraction lies in its blending of cultural background and blood ties, of a linguistic past and a biological origin'. But he concurs with the French Marxist Etienne Balibar that the concept of 'ethnicity' is 'entirely fictitious', despite its resurgence in popularity. His discussion of nationalism, the nation and the state encompasses early 20th-century Marxists, the work of Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Hans Kohn and Carlton Hayes, amongst others. With regard to religion as a constituent of nationalism, he accepts that religious cultures can provide 'valuable raw material for the forging of nations', but argues that 'Peoples, populations, native populaces, tribes and religious communities are not nations, even though they are often spoken of as such'.

In a recent *New Left Review* critique of Sand's book, Gabriel Piterberg accuses Sand of neglecting the 'concrete evidence' of settler-colonialism as a major force in national formations and, in particular, in relation to the Palestinian situation. Important as this is, Sand's analysis of Israeli nationalism in this section of the book, particularly with regard to the 'significant differences between nationalism and traditional religions', is crucial. One such difference is that 'the nation almost always worships itself, rather than a transcendental deity', even if 'nationalism is the ideology that most closely resembles the traditional religions in successfully crossing class boundaries and fostering social inclusion in a common system of relationships'.

An historiographical banquet follows in Sand's exploration of the perspectives, dissonances, blind spots, mythologising and trustworthiness of some of the more influential and reputable historians of ancient, medieval and modern Jewish history. Flavius Josephus, Jacques Basnage, Isaak Jost, Leopold Zunz, Heinrich Graetz, Moses Hess, Theodor Mommsen, Simon Dubnow, Ze'ev Yavetz, Salo Baron, Yitzhak Baer and Ben-Zion Dinur are all grist for Sand's mill to deal with the Biblical and post-Biblical record of Jewish history.

Sand builds on all this material in subsequent chapters where he draws on archeological and linguistic findings, as well as Russian, Central Asian, Babylonian, Roman and European records to drive home his key points that the historical Jewish 'dispersal' was not as dramatically total as Zionist 'mythhistorians' would have it, and that many, if not most, of today's Jews are not descended from ancient Israeli patrimony. Indeed, according to Sand, they are very likely to be descended from proselytised converts to Judaism early and late in the first millennium CE. He also fascinatingly points to evidence to support the possibility that many of the Palestinian farmers who became refugees in 1948 (and also those who remained to become a fifth of today's Israeli citizen population) may be descendents of Jews who converted to Islam centuries ago.

Sand undertakes an intriguing exposure of the efforts of Israeli geneticists and specialists in the biological sciences to identify Jewish genes to indicate the 'scientific rationality' of the concept of Jewish peoplehood.

Sand systematically explores the ideological underpinnings of the various historical corroborations of the Jewish exilic narrative to establish how, when and where, events have been condensed into important moments in the course of Jewish history. He deplores the distinctions made in Israeli academia between Jewish and 'national' history departmental structures and 'general' history, the former being much more in the service of sustaining national narratives and myths than the latter. He does, however, acknowledge the changes in contemporary archeological methodology and interpretation, as well as in historiography which are increasingly resistant to the shoring up of ethno-religious Jewish essentialism at the core of the Israeli national project.

In this light, he undertakes an intriguing exposure of the efforts of Israeli geneticists and specialists in the biological sciences to identify Jewish genes to indicate the 'scientific rationality' of the concept of Jewish peoplehood. As the blood and race arguments that earlier sustained settler colonialist and national causes are no longer globally acceptable, the effort has been for ethno-biological arguments to be mounted as plausible explanations instead.

This has resulted, according to Sand, in all sorts of biological research aimed at linking bio-markers that might genetically locate the immigrant Jewish new Israelis, whether from the East or from Western Europe or Russia, or from the surrounding Arab/north African countries, with the genetic characteristics of the ancient Judaic tribes. But these efforts appear to have encountered serious obstacles: the findings either don't corroborate the hopes and expectations of the researchers, or they actually contradict them. This material is enormously revealing of the extent to which bio-genetic science can be placed at the service of nationalist narrative interests. However, its particular relevance to Sand's overarching purposes blends well with the other historical and archeological sources he has assembled to realise the argument of the book's title.

Sand proceeds to take a sober look at Israeli state and society today, their relation to the Jewish diaspora, Palestinian and Arab Israelis, the Palestinian national cause, and state secularism and multicultural democracy, which he prefers to ethno-religious Jewish exclusivism. Tracking the ideological project of Jewish exclusivism through Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Max Nordau and Arthur Ruppin, he moves on to contemporary contradictions of citizenship, civil rights and a critical

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Reading Shlomo Sand

Les Rosenblatt

analysis of the Law of Return, including its 'grandchild clause' which enabled 'not only Jews but also their "non-Jewish" children, grandchildren and spouses to immigrate to Israel'. He notes that "This important clause would later open the door to the huge influx of immigrants that began in the early 1990s, with the fall of Communism". Paradoxically this appears to have strengthened rather than weakened the concern to shore up ethnic and religious homogeneity in the national imagining.

Finally, Sand explores the problems of 'ethnic democracy' through the work of Haifa University sociologist Sammy Smootha, who concludes that Israel cannot be categorised as a liberal, republican, consociational or multicultural democracy. 'Instead it could be classified, along with states like Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia, as an "incomplete democracy" or "low-grade democracy"'. Sand himself opts for the descriptor of Israel as a 'Jewish ethnocracy with liberal features—that is, a state whose main purpose is to serve not a civil-egalitarian *demos* but a biological-religious *ethnos* that is wholly fictitious historically, but dynamic, exclusive, and discriminatory'.

With regard to diasporic complexities and the overseas Jewish *ethnos*, Sand identifies the current weakening of Zionist power bases outside Israel as 'a fly in the ointment', exemplified by the decline in uncritical support for Israel amongst Jewish families under the age of thirty-five, a trend which can be observed here in

Australia as well. A careful reading of recent Australian Jewish community survey and census data will confirm these emerging fracture lines which have been glossed over by their more prominent interpreters. Taking into account the possibility of a weakening in Western support for Israel as well, Sand arrives at a conclusion that,

If it is senseless to expect the Jewish Israelis to dismantle their own state, the least that can be demanded of them is to stop reserving it for themselves as a polity that segregates, excludes and discriminates against a large number of its citizens, whom it views as undesirable aliens.

He admits that this is far from ideal in terms of resolving the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and concedes that 'the mood at the end of this book ... is more pessimistic than hopeful'. Many of his readers may be disappointed that he can see no further than Israel becoming a state for all its citizens, whilst leaving larger problems unresolved, but his contribution to a rethinking of the meaning of a 'Jewish nation' and the revelation of its more spurious foundations are a great achievement in themselves. **[a]**

book An Artistic Degustation

review by Roger Nelson

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An Artistic Degustation

Roger Nelson

Roger Nelson is a freelance writer and the Director of No No Gallery in North Melbourne.

Joan Kerr, *A Singular Voice: Essays on Australian Art and Architecture* (Power Publications, Sydney, 2009)

Joan Kerr's death in 2004 was a great loss to Australian cultural criticism, not only because of the lamentable dearth of comparable politically minded leftist critics in this country, but also because hers was a voice unique in its conversational accessibility, structural insight and easy wit. A curator, academic, journalist and activist, a feminist and a lover of road trips with her husband, Kerr's essays collected here range from explications of amateur sketches by colonial women to celebrations of Papunya Tula and performance art, via reveries on early Australian churches and attacks on governmental conservation policies. It's an astonishing range of subject matter, and the brevity of most essays—the longest reaches only nineteen pages—will allow most readers to dip into an unfamiliar

topic out of curiosity, only to emerge armed with new arguments and anecdotes.

Whatever her subject, Kerr's writing style is consistently vernacular and succinct, always avoiding jargon and frequently using humour to underscore a point—or sometimes simply to be funny for the sake of it. She can't resist mentioning that she 'can't believe [she] would ever agree with John Howard about anything' or speculating that an 1892 writer who criticised Queen Victoria's skills as a writer and watercolourist 'never got a gong'. And her unpretentious, colloquial approach allows her to succinctly explain quite complex ideas, making them appear almost like common sense, as with her casual assertion that 'penal buildings were at first mere incidents, transitional places one passed through if one was unlucky enough to have drawn the "Go to Jail" card on life's monopoly board. There was therefore no reason for any penal building to have any special stylistic features'. Kerr deftly interweaves personal anecdotes about her caravanning travels through rural Queensland with historical details of shifts in government conservation policies, constructing an argument on the need for meaningful content to cultural tourist attractions which is all the more convincing for its heartfelt sincerity. If she verges perilously close to positing rural Queensland as emblematic of Australia as a whole, the reader will forgive this when chuckling at Kerr's quip that 'truthfulness ... is quite a novel [subject] for Sydney'.



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By far the strongest writing in *A Singular Voice* is on gender, or more specifically on the systematic devaluing of women in traditional art history and art institutions. It has become a truism now that women artists are under-represented in the cultural canon. Kerr's great contribution is to unpack that piece of received wisdom, to reveal the myriad of entrenched structures and prejudices that have created this situation and that reinforce it.

Perhaps Kerr's most important book is *Heritage: The national women's art book*, a collection of 500 works by 500 Australian female artists working before 1955. Rather than printing excerpts from that volume here, the editors have chosen to include an excellent paper delivered shortly after its publication, titled 'Art and Life'. In it, Kerr contends that redressing the gender imbalance and injustice will require more than simply admitting more women artists into the canon. Rather, she argues, 'By redefining art as an activity within society—an integral part of everyday life, not a rarefied activity separated from it—not only are well-known images transformed but a quite different range of artist-authors are allowed into the pantheon of the past'. It's not enough, Kerr posits, for curators and art historians simply to dig up examples of women who made paintings of a comparable size and style to men. For much of the 19th and early 20th centuries in Australia, there simply weren't women making that kind of work. Rather, the task of progressive cultural workers is to value the kinds of work that women *did* make: sketches, watercolours, miniatures and activities traditionally thought of as craft, such as needle-point, painted fans and so on.

'By redefining art as an activity within society—an integral part of everyday life, not a rarefied activity separated from it—not only are well-known images transformed but a quite different range of artist-authors are allowed into the pantheon of the past'

As Kerr patiently explains, because these kinds of objects have not been valued by the art establishment, they have not been collected by major cultural institutions. The implications of this are appallingly far-reaching. If objects are not easily accessible to either art historians or the general public, they aren't popularly discussed or written about. Moreover, too many of these kinds of objects aren't professionally preserved, meaning that already fragile materials like paper and cloth deteriorate in private or minor collections. Once this has happened, even in the 21st century museums are loath to exhibit them. And even those works that do make it into galleries today are so very easily overlooked: a miniature sketch or a decorative vase appears hopelessly insignificant alongside a large framed oil painting. As Kerr points out, the very architecture of our cultural institutions is built to privilege the latter kind of artwork—and, thus, to privilege the male artist. In one of the most affectingly ambitious passages in the book, Kerr asserts that 'There is nothing sacred about the architecture of our international crop of late modernist galleries' and boldly proposes that 'the solution is not to exile everything

except the big pictures to the vaults, but to redesign the gallery. We live in an age of technology capable of doing this quite easily—and, after all, it is about time'.

Essays like 'Art and Life' can often run the risk of becoming litanies of complaints, listing case after case of women artists who have been omitted from major collections, surveys and histories. Kerr skilfully avoids crossing the line into victimhood or negativity. She explains, in refreshingly plain-language terms, the importance of documenting such omissions: 'It's as if Charles Conder was represented throughout Australia by one fan painting. How then could we argue that he was a major Australian artist?' As this pithy statement makes clear, the historical exclusion of women artists becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even when Kerr 'rediscovers' a long-forgotten female watercolourist, her readers won't easily be able to go to see examples of the work.

The article on contemporary artist Vivienne Binns is an example of Kerr at her finest. Originally published in 1993, the editors' introductory blurb explains that this was the first feature article on Binns ever to appear in *Art and Australia*. It's a fairly straightforward chronological account of Binns' work and Kerr's encounters with it, drawing out some recurring concepts (collaboration, sexuality and so on) in a refreshingly vernacular style: at one point even stating that '[Binns] was a bit of a bushie'! Kerr deftly describes important nuances of the artistic and political climate in which Binns first came to prominence. She succinctly offers insight into the male-dominated mainstream media and art education system, and also explains that the 'avant-garde in the 1960s was as rigid and patriarchal as the academy, and there was no way it could embrace either her style or subject matter as "relevant" (the buzz-word of the day). Therefore, she had to be merely shocking'. This critical examination of the avant-garde is typical of Kerr's uncompromising politics. Too often, progressive art criticism expends all its energy attacking the easy targets (national institutions, mainstream taste-makers and the like), with the result being that so-called 'advanced' artists and the Left are let off too lightly. Kerr celebrates Binns for her willingness to challenge conservatism in supposedly enlightened circles as much as in wider society.

Elsewhere in this volume, though, this outstanding essay is let down by the strange choice of illustrations. The two works included (*Suggon* of 1966 and *Tower of Babel* of 1989) are neither the best-known nor the most obscure of Binns' major works. Why was the iconic *Vag Dens* (1966) not included? Kerr chronicles its purchase by the National Gallery of Australia in 1966—and laments the fact that it has not been publicly displayed there ever since. She convincingly contends that it's a work that deserves a central place in the story of 20th century Australian art, yet it's one that non-specialist readers will have

←←←


An Artistic
Degustation

Roger Nelson

trouble locating. And perhaps the editors might have done the curious reader the favour of illustrating a later work, such as the fascinating-sounding 'enormous painting of a pair of aubergines [which] paid unexpected homage to the first produce from her newly created garden, and monumentalised the domestic in a different yet comparable way to the 1970s collaborative works—being just as full of abstract and figurative, high and low art reconciliations'. This is Kerr at her most succinct and intelligent, describing a richly rewarding painting. An accompanying image would have saved the reader a fair amount of effort in locating one elsewhere. Most illustrations are printed in monochrome. This makes it impossible to tell, for example, which is the 'red-headed figure' that Kerr is referring to—surely something that the editors could have spotted and corrected. Many of the images chosen are referred to only in passing, while works which Kerr discusses in some detail are left out.

The editing of *A Singular Voice* is rather inconsistent. Superb introductory blurbs for each essay—most only a paragraph or two long—are invaluable in situating the text in Kerr's career and in historical context. In these blurbs the editors use surprisingly few words to convey many important facts and ideas: that Kerr was 'always on the road or on the airwaves' during 1995, for example, or that artist Barbara Campbell (the subject of a delightful essay recording a 2001 performance art piece) worked as Kerr's research assistant. Yet in several places the editors have neglected to delete clumsy references to 'this afternoon' from Kerr's conference papers. An excess of detail about

Howard's prime ministership unnecessarily dates an overly long book review, and a potted biography at the end of the volume is awkwardly written and tediously chronological. These are minor complaints, but it is a shame that Kerr's final (posthumous) publication should be marred by careless errors of editing such as these, especially given the sensitivity and insight displayed in the editors' introductory blurbs.

A Singular Voice is a feast of a book, a degustation that tantalises and delights in the breadth of its subject matter and in the clarity of its argument. Like a degustation, it may leave the reader wanting for more. A monograph on Vivienne Binns, or a follow-up to *Heritage: The national women's art book*, would be as welcome today as the original texts were in the mid-1990s. Kerr's critical and political project remains a work in progress, her cause one that others must take on and advance. 

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04-05 2010

No 105

Are You a Gadget?

Simon Cooper

The Nobel peace prize has had its share of controversial winners, but one of the strangest nominations recently occurred with the suggestion that 'the Internet' be awarded the 2010 prize. Strange, clearly, because a technology rather than a human subject was being suggested for an award that traditionally measures the pinnacle of human achievement. Yet the nomination also intrigues, suggesting that the relation between the human and the technological cannot so easily be uncoupled.

The 'internet for peace' movement has attracted a variety of advocates, including Iranian human rights activist and Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi, self-styled communications guru Nicholas Negroponte, and fashion designer Giorgio Armani. Arguing that the internet is 'a tool for peace' and can 'sow the seeds of non-violence', the movement's website manifesto claims that 'digital culture [lays] the foundations for a new kind of society' where 'dialogue, debate and consensus' are made possible through 'communication'. Noble sentiments perhaps, but the manifesto goes on to claim that 'democracy has always flourished where there is openness, acceptance, discussion and participation'. It seems that 'internet for peace' equates with democracy for peace. Of course democracy, openness and enhanced communication are worthy ideals. But such terms are context-dependent: while we are communicating more than ever, our democratic institutions are declining in a culture of spin and incessant media cycles. Meanwhile our 21st century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been fought precisely in the name of democracy, so we might want to be careful about any evangelical celebrations of the internet as a force for peace when it is framed in this way.

It's worth remembering too that communication technologies have not always been agents for peace. Marshal McLuhan noted that after the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand 'all the world's telecommunications facilities ... which should have been turned to peaceful uses were set to the frantic uses of war'. The 'failure of

diplomacy' which contributed to World War I was partially due to the impact of communication technologies such as the telegraph and telephone. Stephen Kern has noted how such technologies helped usher in a new age of informational speed that undermined older modes of diplomacy, predicated upon time for reflection and negotiation. The ability of any communications technology to destabilise prior categories of experience (such as space and time) needs to be thought about together with any benefits gained by a greater capacity to spread information.

Outside the offbeat utopianism of this nomination, there is a growing sense that the idealism of early internet culture is now dead. Rather than a force for peace, many see today's internet as merely a medium for degraded mass culture, commercialism and boorish behaviour. Indeed many once prominent enthusiasts of the internet are criticising what they once loved. Andrew Keen's *Cult of the Amateur* launched a well-known assault upon web 2.0. Early cyber enthusiast Douglass Rushkoff makes a living these days creating books and documentaries about the passivity and exploitative trends in digital culture. Now virtual reality pioneer Jaron Lanier has come out against mainstream internet culture in *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*.

In the early 90s, Lanier wrote enthusiastically about the joys of virtual reality where 'you can be whoever or whatever you want', where race, class and gender 'all become invention'. VR didn't really get off the ground and the net's early days of experimentation have been replaced by the mass culture of web 2.0. Instead of freedom we now have what Lanier calls 'digital Maoism', a toxic environment where the 'hivemind', a culture of conformity, produces a degraded mediascape of triviality and anonymity, an environment of recycling and mash-ups where 'genuine' individuality and creativity

are destroyed. Like Andrew Keen, Lanier is concerned that real creativity is under threat as intellectual property rights are undermined by file sharing and digital piracy.

This mixture of banality and intellectual piracy signifies a crisis in popular culture, where, to take an issue close to Lanier's heart, for the first time in decades there is 'no new music', music that 'would provide an identity for young people who grew up with it'. Instead there is an endless shuffling of the musical archive. Yet the very idea that music might provide an identity for a generation presupposes an idea of a strong public sphere, something that Lanier has never been strong on. His VR fantasies were forms of individual escapism and even now he remains unable to think of how the idea of 'being whoever or whatever you want' in cyberspace tends to fragment the idea of a shared culture. In other words there is more than a question of property rights to be considered here.

You Are Not a Gadget has made quite an impact both on the net and in major newspapers. Its snappy title conjures up our anxieties about the post-human; the term 'gadget' captures the sense that a posthuman future might also be dominated by triviality. Lanier's description of banal mass culture and passive populations resonates partly because it follows a long tradition of media and cultural critique that began in the early 20th century. However, while 20th century writers like Brecht and Benjamin acknowledged that mass culture was exploitative, there always remained the hope that audiences might overcome this and become active *producers* of culture. Lanier's chief claim is that web 2.0 allows this to occur—the audience becomes an active creator of culture—but this only creates a further layer of exploitation. The participants of web 2.0, posting YouTube clips, exchanging data, chatting with friends on social networking sites as they update their profiles, constitute an expanding audience to be sold to potential advertisers. By circulating and creating information in this way, digital members of the 'hivemind' do the work

for capital, carving out new realms for sponsors and advertisers. Web 2.0 participants who create content do not so much initiate a democratisation of digital media as a commodification of the acts of creativity and participation. At its best Lanier's book articulates this transformation.

However, the problem with Lanier lies in the grounds through which he launches his critique of digital culture. *You Are Not a Gadget* romanticises terms like the individual, the human, creativity and freedom and sets these against the terrors of the dehumanising digital masses. In this sense Lanier really is a symbolic child of the 60s, regarding these categories (humanity, creativity etc) as essences that can only be developed or corrupted through technology. He remains at ease with his own form of libertarian digital capitalism based in the heady days of the 90s while disowning the current form of the same thing. He rails against mob rule, the passivity of the crowd and the banality of mass culture while seemingly unaware of how the logic of commodification has always produced these phenomena. On an individual level he celebrates the possibility that the virtual world unshackles you from the constraints of materiality, yet objects when this happens on a mass scale and ends in banality and commercialism.

This would not be so bad if it were merely an error in understanding. The danger in the kinds of digital backlash in the work of Lanier and Keen is how they can be connected to growing corporate and state reactions against the internet—from Murdoch's attempt to build walls around media content, to Google and China, to the Rudd government's 'net filter'. Envisaging the internet merely as a place of banal information exchange makes it easier to justify limiting access to it. Stephen Conroy's remarkable claim that the internet is 'nothing special', that it is just an updated platform for content delivery, both misrecognises the genuinely transformational possibilities of the net and also makes it easy to argue that there's nothing wrong with paternalistic policies that restrict access to information. The failed idealism of early cyber-enthusiasts now breeds a mixture of cultural conservatism and a panicked defence of the old economy. It is possible to find an analogy with Labour governments in Australia and Britain, who anchor life in the market and reinforce this with a thoroughgoing social conservatism: invest billions in high-speed broadband because it's good for business, but control what people can do with their broadband access.

As many commentators have pointed out, the Wikileaks site (which recently released the Baghdad airstrike footage) is on the list of Minister Conroy's banned websites. *Contra* Lanier and Keen, examples like Wikileaks show how the collective can occasionally transcend the 'hivemind' and keep governments accountable. So while we ought to remain suspicious of the utopian sentiments behind the 'Nobel for Peace' manifesto that naively celebrates the power of communication, we might remember that many current critics of the internet were also holders of similar sentiments not so long ago. **a**



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