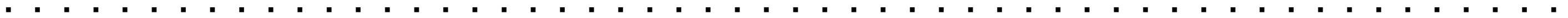

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Arab Awakening

Firas Massouh

Arab Awakening

Firas Massouh

Firas Massouh is??????

On the streets of the Arab world

In the Arab world there are times when politics appears to be in suspended animation for decades on end, and then there are periods when developments tumble over each other in rapid succession. The last few weeks have been one of those periods of accelerated change, as Tunisians were able to rid themselves of their president of twenty-three years following a series of mass demonstrations sparked by the self-immolation of twenty-six-year-old Mohammad Bouazizi. The ouster of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali raised hopes for political change in the region. Since then, Arab cities, most notably Egyptian cities, have been teetering, as more youth continue to protest against their governments, some by setting themselves ablaze, others by marching through the streets in the name of freedom, occupying public spaces and clashing with police and pro-government supporters.

When Hosni Mubarak appointed the first vice-president of Egypt in almost thirty years this only served to further enrage the demonstrators. By the end of the first week of demonstrations, a beleaguered Mubarak addressed his nation a second time, stating that he would not stand for re-election but that he intended to remain in office until the end of his term. Again, this fell short of appeasing the crowds watching the televised address in Tahrir Square, who waved their shoes in the air and vowed to carry on the protests until Mubarak was deposed.

While many around the world have voiced their resounding support for the Arab protestors, those who advocate the rhetoric of order and stability continue to pose the main obstacle for a region plagued by corrupt governments and in desperate need of change. In a bid to quell protests in their own states, Arab leaders such as Syria's Bashar al-Asad and Jordan's King Abdullah II have publicly acknowledged that the events in Tunisia and Egypt have ushered in a new era in the Middle East, and that Arab governments need to do more to accommodate their people's rising political and economic aspirations. Well may we raise an eyebrow at such proclamations! Only time will tell whether they will turn into sincere actions, or end up in the fat file of broken promises.

As the world anxiously watches the skirmishes taking place on the streets of Cairo and in other Egyptian cities, it is indeed clear that in Arab nation-states the rhetoric of order and stability is alive and well. This is most clearly shown in the poverty of Arab political philosophy, and is much less the result of a paralysing fear of power vacuums and political alternatives than the product of an outright rejection of Western reformist ideas and democratic values. In 2003 the Egyptian state-owned *Al Ahram* newspaper responded to George W. Bush's address on democracy in the Middle East by stating that 'Our people, whose civilization is 7,000 years old, does not expect and does not need to expect, others to give it lessons in democracy or in anything else. Therefore, attempts to impose democracy from outside will fail'.

This kind of cultural particularism is precisely what the champions of Arab despotism have so successfully been hiding behind. In an interview with *Le Figaro* a decade ago, Mubarak was asked about the idea of relegating Yasser Arafat to a more symbolic presidential position while a prime minister assumed the responsibility of governance. The Egyptian president stated that what characterises 'our political culture' is that a leader is expected to govern; indeed, that he is indispensable. To stress this point Mubarak used the example of Gamal Abdul Nasser's resignation which was met with a popular call for his return to office.

It is no wonder then that the embattled Mubarak has been scrambling to subject his government to a raft of cosmetic alterations in a bid to maintain his presidency. In his address to the demonstrators on 2 February, a defiant Mubarak turgidly equated the protests with the kind of chaos that would only serve to jeopardise the chances of democratic reform. But the democratic reform that Mubarak, or any other Arab autocrat for that matter, has in mind is one that relieves him of any responsibilities other than the maintenance of the status quo, and not one that in any way endangers his supremacy. For him, as Egyptian author

Moustapha Safouan once wrote, ‘it is a matter of the presence or absence of rule, that is of order or anarchy’.

But the rhetoric used by authoritarian regimes to remain in power is not exclusive to Mubarak and other Arab leaders. The response from commentators has, by and large, been supportive of the demonstrations. It has nonetheless been particularly wary of the influence of Islamist elements, despite the clear absence of any regimentation amongst the protestors. Sceptical spectators, both inside and outside the Arab world, argue the following: ‘While good people clean the streets, those who want power are plotting’; or ‘we have no idea what role the radical Islamic element will play’; or ‘Egypt does not belong to Egyptians more today than it did one week ago’.

Moreover, the condemnation of Mubarak has been lukewarm at best, with David Cameron, Angela Merkel and Nicholas Sarkozy echoing Barack Obama’s call for a ‘rapid transition’. This only came after deadly clashes between protestors and the government-orchestrated pro-Mubarak demonstration. At the time of writing, however, neither the Europeans nor the White House have explicitly called on the Egyptian president to resign. It goes without saying that for the West, stability, in the form of long-serving authoritarian allies, performs the service of keeping Islamic radicalism in check, while some of these regimes have sugar-coated the deal by signing peace treaties with Israel.

For many observers, however, the resilience of the demonstrators has been born out of the latent dissatisfaction that has festered in the Arab world for decades. For the moment, the protests are not about drawing a map of a better future. Rather, they are about the Arab revolutionary spirit taking the present to task, and combating the political lethargy that has riddled the Arab psyche for much too long. It is, in fact, the very thing that the West has been asking for.

In a recent article in *The Guardian*, Slavoj Zizek points out the hypocrisy in the position of Western liberals by writing that ‘they publicly supported democracy, and now, when the people revolt against the tyrants on behalf of secular freedom and justice, not on behalf of religion, they are all deeply concerned’. As one Egyptian demonstrator said to an American journalist: ‘Your country has the right to be worried, but we have the right to choose who is going to lead our country’.

In light of the recent developments, the West contemplates what course of action to take as it realises that it may have no other choice than to prepare itself for a radically different political landscape. Whatever happens, what takes centre stage for now is the looming threat to pharaonic despots everywhere in the Arab world. a

W(h)ither

Remote Indigenous Economic Development?

Jon Altman

The Australian’s coverage of Indigenous policy ignores the real issues in ‘closing the gap’

As 2011 unfolded, some reflexive summer copy appeared in *The Australian* on disappointingly slow progress in Indigenous development in remote Australia. For several years now *The Australian* has taken a lead role in advocating for intervention, championing the decisive actions taken in 2007 in the Northern Territory under the policy umbrella of a ‘national emergency’, and strongly editorialising and commentating on the need for forms of individual responsibility, private home ownership, education, employment and business development that are regarded as the cornerstones of Australian economic progress.

The issue of Aboriginal economic development in remote Australia is hideously complex; it will require careful policy thinking and the delicate right mix of market and state interventions and community initiative. I use the word ‘delicate’ quite intentionally because delicacy will be needed in negotiating development pathways that will vary enormously place by place, region by region; and delicacy will be needed both in assessing development needs and communicating possibilities cross-culturally.

What is not needed is the simplistic reduction of the Aboriginal development problem, which has arguably been occurring since Anglo colonisation, to a series of false binaries: enable or enforce; state or market; reality-based or utopian; public or private sector led; progressive or conservative.

The Australian promotes the line that the NT Intervention has stalled and that both major parties have lost the reform zeal required to address this almost intractable, certainly very difficult, issue. This to my mind can be readily explained. First, in developing the ethically unchallengeable, but highly utopian, policy

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Arab Awakening

Firas Massouh

goal to Close the Gap, both sides realise that this is unattainable unless we see some momentous increase in the level of financial commitment and fundamental shifts in regimes of property rights in commercially valuable resources, which would be politically suicidal strategies. Second, the Rudd and now Gillard governments (and the Howard government before them) have demonstrated an inability to address many hard issues facing Australia today like climate change, tax reform, water allocation, environmental degradation, so why should Indigenous affairs be any different?

What we have seen in remote Australia, perhaps most clearly in the Northern Territory, which is the most Indigenous and most wholly remote jurisdiction, is an inability to actually deliver despite considerable commitments and good intentions: there are real limits to the reach of the state out there as well as many 'rent seekers'. So we see emerging petty quibbling. For example, in the flagship Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP), are appallingly inadequate housing targets being met or not? How should a house be defined (one, two, three or four bedroom)? Does a house constitute completion if it is not occupied? And given the extent of overcrowding and associated costly health implications, does the nature of ownership (community, public or private) actually matter?

In such pedantic debates, mainly played out in the mainstream media, we are losing sight of the fact that thousands not hundreds of houses are needed. Why is it that other far poorer countries, such as South Africa, can address such challenges and we cannot? The same debates occur in other areas: when we know that inactivity is a key problem, why does it matter if a job is part-time or full-time; or if it is funded by the Community Development Employment Program or a public sector agency; or if it is in extractive mining or in conservation work or in the arts? And in education, why is it that in the name of improved English literacy and numeracy we promulgate schooling models that have historically failed, as if ramping up effort will generate improvement rather than more failure? Why is it that bilingual education and homelands teaching is identified as the problem when there is no evidence that this is the case? And there is no evidence that mainstream western education outcomes are a sufficient condition for mainstream employment, if desired, to occur; unless people migrate for jobs, which few do.

The answers to many of these questions is provided by an inability to openly acknowledge that the two key concepts that dominate Indigenous policy, normalisation and Closing the Gap, are ideological and divorced from reality. The dominant policy and popular narrative is that self-determination, a term with much currency but little practice during a short period between 1972 and 1975, has failed and so now the state must paternalistically enforce discipline and development on Indigenous subjects. It is imagined that this will happen via a 21st century version of the much maligned modernisation paradigm: the institutions and development pathway of mainstream, predominantly urban, mainly white Australia are going to be replicated in non-mainstream, predominantly remote, mainly black regions—another dichotomy that overlooks the intercultural reality. Why is such fantasy, which has been shown to entrench inequality rather than close gaps in many third-world contexts, revered as unproblematic dogma in Australia, even as the evidence indicates that progress is either too slow or non-existent? And even in promoting such an approach there is a fundamental inconsistency: if more exposure to the market is truly needed, why is this being mediated by more and more layers of expensive bureaucracy, much of it Canberra-based and far removed from the development challenges?

There is an alternative—asset-based community development. The role of government is to enable, not enforce, development. The means to enable is to recognise Indigenous people and their lands and their customs and cultures as assets in remote Australia that can contribute to Aboriginal wellbeing and Australia's public benefit. An assets-based approach will counter-balance the demeaning deficit-based statistical modeling that currently dominates policy thinking. Development, though, must be reality-based, which means that lofty utopian ideals of economic equality will need to be shelved; the real Indigenous economy in the foreseeable future will be very different from the real mainstream one. Economic development will only occur through a combination of market, state and Indigenous community partnerships that will vary considerably from place to place depending on opportunity, capability, speciality and environment, as well as negotiation leverage.

The challenge that policy makers face is to enable Indigenous Australians to actively participate in tackling the complex development problems that a top-down technical approach has failed to address. Paradoxically, this will require the very community-based organisations that are being rapidly disbanded by state managerialism. The risks associated with the current monolithic approach, and the comfortable Canberra consensus of our political leadership, is significant because it is wrong and it is failing. Something very different needs to be tried before too much more damage is done, too much is needlessly wasted and before the 'new' normalisation approach becomes a part of yet another future narrative of failure. A more asset-based participatory approach must be a crucial part of any solution. a

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W(h)ither Remote Indigenous Economic Development?

Jon Altman

Jon Altman is a research professor at the Australian National University. A version of this article was offered, but not accepted, as an opinion editorial to **The Australian**.

Field Notes
from the Thai–Burma Border

Tom Bamforth

The refugee camp appeared by no means as bad as I had expected. I had been bracing myself?the camps I had worked in before were bad. In Pakistan families froze in the rain and mud of the Himalayan winter, living for months beside open sewers and in ancient canvas tents. In Sudan vast temporary cities grew in the desert. They were violent microcosms of conflict, unemployment and persecution. Women risked attack in the daily search for water and firewood. But in the Mae Hong Son camp?on the Thai-Burma border?I found a pleasant village filled with ethnic Karennyi refugees. Children ran through the streets, men played volleyball on the central *maidan*, and from the schools the sounds of music, laughter and learning drifted across the humid afternoon air. The houses too were in good shape?the cool, deep-eaved buildings with thatched roofs were a far cry from the squalid settlements where I had worked with others fleeing war and natural disaster.

Resplendent in a pink shirt and fresh from a recent scholarship to Oxford, the Thai camp Commander dazzled with his enamelled self-confidence, progressive views and conviction that he was soaring to the top. Here were schools and resources, committed NGOs; the Commander expressed his concern for the plight of the refugees and his willingness to bend the strict application of Thai law in order to allow the people in the camp the chance to lead as lives as ordinary as possible. His body language acted out his words of friendship and unity?a supportive hand on the shoulder, a touch of the arm, a courteous incline of the head.

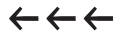
But this was more like 19th-century Russia than the modern day: a liberal feudal?almost falsely at ease?presented his progressive 'new model' village. For him, this was a harmonious, almost Tolstoyan, experiment where 16,000 people would lead the ordinary lives that had been denied them by their own state, Burma, under the watchful beneficent patriarchy of Thailand. There was even a decent enough clinic, staffed and equipped, and roosters meandered in and out of the maternity ward. Once the women in the community knew I was coming, endless streams of woven shawls and fabrics were produced for sale. The air of the place appeared to be one of functionality, normality, even jollity.

The reality of refugee life in Thailand, however, takes place below the surface of such choreographed interactions. Occasionally hints of a different world emerged subtly through the cloud of bonhomie and busy, but ultimately purposeless, activity.

Men in uniform accompanied me everywhere and took an endless series of photos?some of which found their way onto the Commander's Facebook updates. And when the Commander placed an empathetic and comradely arm around the refugees to whom I spoke, they recoiled perceptibly. Even if he was one of the more liberal bureaucrats, with populist sympathies, he was still a representative of a state that had not signed the UNHCR Refugee Convention. It is a state that has also created an elaborate system of variegated citizenship and residency rights which excludes as many as 3 million people (refugees and hill tribes) from its formal legal protection, keeping them in a condition of economic and social vulnerability. To benefit from this influx of stateless people, the Thai government had established major manufacturing centres along the border where labour is cheap and desperate and rights are few. Human traffickers lurk near here promising better futures for the rural poor, who instead are led into a sexual and industrial slavery that would be unimaginable were it not real.

Similarly, the impression of ordinary village life was misleading?refugees could not legally leave the camp, could not work, or gain access to the upper levels of the Thai education system. While rules were periodically bent, the refugees were entirely reliant on the ongoing delivery of food and supplies by aid agencies and had lived in this condition of compound, inter-generational dependency for twenty-five years. With the financial crisis, aid budgets had been cut and already food supplies had been reduced and discussions about sustainability and potential camp closure had begun.

The Karennyi refugees could not return home owing to ongoing persecution of ethnic minorities by the Burmese state. Resettlement of the entire community had been offered by Scandinavian, Australian and US governments, but few?especially the older refugees ?were willing to resettle and lose their identity, culture and the possibility, however remote, of going home. What, after a life of farming in the Burmese hills, would such people do in freezing Minnesota, where most were granted re-settlement? Effectively, the majority was stuck in an inter-generational limbo



Field Notes from the Thai–Burma Border

Tom Bamforth

Tom Bamforth is a humanitarian aid worker and recently visited refugee camps in Northern Thailand.

that will not end until the fall of the current Burmese regime or until the Thai government loses its patience.

Of the refugees, some fought while others were resigned, slowly fading hope forming corrosive lines across their faces. Some, like the young school-teacher, tried to impart language and computer skills for those brave enough to seek a future overseas. A local self-help group?the Karennyi National Women's Organisation?combined fiery political activism with household industry to generate at least some income. It was the women who carried on, kept things together and were politically active; their high seriousness and dedication was astounding. A malaise seemed to have descended over the men. Some younger men, who had been away, returned to the jungles to fight but had quickly realised the futility of taking on the well-supplied armies of the state and become disillusioned by the fractured politics of the hill tribe opposition movements which had been militarily defeated more than fifteen years ago. So not for these refugees the exuberance and the hugs of the camp Commander. Theirs is a limbo for which a workable solution will not be found within their lifetimes.

Those who were able to leave did so with nothing, their future sealed in an envelope containing a chest x-ray and bearing the random letters that would shape the rest of their lives?an identification number and the formula: MHS/IOM/MIN (Mae Hong Song Camp?International Organisation for Migration- Minnesota). For the remaining 3 million who had fled war and persecution across the border, not even this was an option. a

Selling Love

in the City of Death

Colm McNaughton

Selling Love in the City of Death

Colm McNaughton

Colm McNaughton tutors in journalism at Monash University and won a Walkley Award for his radio documentary **Awakening from History** in 2008.

In crime-ridden Juarez an unlikely Christian offers respite to the damaged

It was while hanging out with writer Charles Bowden for a few days, in the lush desert of the Southern Arizona, that he asked me, 'Do you want to meet El Pastor?' El Pastor, Jose Antonio Galvan, is an evangelical Christian who runs an asylum for some of the mentally impaired and destroyed people from the city of Juarez. With my heart beating a little faster and my nerves starting to fray, I answered an unconvincing, 'Yeah, I do'.

Juarez, on the Mexico–US border is, to put it mildly, an intimidating place. The violence of this city is at such a level that it can strike anyone, anywhere and at anytime. And it does—with alacrity! With an average of fifteen executions a day—and rising every year—this city of just over one million people has been dubbed 'the murder capital of the world'.

Three days later, I am a passenger in a late model sports car, driven by El Pastor, racing down the *caraterra* (freeway) to visit the asylum he runs on the edge of the city. In wanting to tell the human stories of what goes on in such conflicted places, one must be willing to face life—and death—with a smile. As we drive out of the city, and houses give way to cardboard shacks, El Pastor explains to me that with many *maquiladoras* (factories) closing down because of the deteriorating security situation, the only choice for many of the women in this area is between sex work and selling drugs. 'Five dollars is the going rate for a fuck', he says, 'and one dollar for a blow job'. He nods to some young girls on the street. 'And they start young.' Life is pretty tough in the badlands of Ciudad Juarez.

When we arrive at the asylum, just off the freeway, it is a refurbished abandoned factory surrounded by scrubby desert. The asylum consists of a large courtyard and an array of adjoining rooms—a kitchen, dining room, doctor's surgery and administrative offices. It is rough but functional. We enter the courtyard that houses 110 inmates; some folks rush towards us, others begin shrieking and howling, many hugs are given and lots of people are touched, caressed by El Pastor. Big, toothy smiles break out on otherwise broken brown faces. It is plain to see these folks love El Pastor, and he loves them. As Charles Bowden says, 'El Pastor is selling love in a city of death'. Truly, a wonder.

The asylum was set up by El Pastor fifteen years ago, after he was deported to Mexico for being an illegal migrant in the United States. After years of drug addiction, womanising and time in prison he 'found Christ' and realised, in his words, that his path is 'to care for the human garbage of Juarez'. Since that time he has dedicated his life to helping 'his congregation'. As we walk around the courtyard he tells me some of the stories of the people we meet. One woman is locked in a cell with only a twenty centimetre square hole for light. 'She recently crucified a cat, pulled out its eyes and ate them', he tells me. She's locked in of her own free will. Another guy with Down's syndrome is very effusive. He wants to hug and touch all the visitors and shriek at every opportunity. 'Last week, he beat another patient to death', El Pastor explains. Another woman, an ex-lap dancer whose brain exploded because she was raped one time too many, takes my arm and is very affectionate. She starts to rub my belly and El Pastor bellows, 'She likes to fuck!' and lets out a big belly laugh. Welcome to Juarez.

More visitors come and there is more screaming and more hugs. Lunch is given out, and some of the inmates take a liking to me and follow me, babbling incessantly. I wander inside and outside, meeting people and checking out the building, trying to gather my thoughts and feelings.

I am invited to sit in on a conversation in English between El Pastor and a new inmate. He describes his addiction to cocaine; he shows us his chest, and tells us how he got the bullet hole there, and the thirty centimetre scar on his belly. All the time El Pastor is praising him for his language skills, for his ability to survive. At one point El Pastor beckons one of his helpers, an inmate with extra responsibilities, who starts to clean up the new inmate's finger and toe nails. The quiet dignity with which this new person was treated was moving.

Fifteen minutes after saying our goodbyes and leaving the asylum, we are driving back to the border and El Pastor receives a phone call. Oscar the chef/*sicario* (assassin) is dead. 'It's sad ... but he was bad to the bone.' El Pastor asks if it is OK if we make a detour into one of the poor barrios of Juarez, to talk with Oscar's family. The family has disowned Oscar because of his ultra-violent ways. They want the funeral to be held at the asylum, at the place which accepted him—'his family'.

In a city of broken dreams, it is people like El Pastor who keep the possibility of real magic alive. a

Positive Efforts
to End World Hunger

Don Monkerud

Worldwatch's 'State of the World 2011' report brings a rare optimism to a planet in need of alternatives

Recent figures indicate that 2010 tied with 2005 as the hottest year on record. Indeed, nine of the ten warmest years occurred since 2001, as climate chaos creates havoc around the world. Last year, frigid snowstorms blanketed the United States and Europe; floods ravaged Pakistan, Australia and the United States; and scorching heat led to forest fires and deaths in Russia.

The resulting climate chaos bodes ill for the food supply. The most recent projections indicate this will likely be the worst year since 2008 for grains. Corn stocks will likely be at the lowest supply since 1995, and soybeans will be at their lowest levels since becoming a major crop in the United States. Observers predict food riots over higher prices around the world, similar to those in 2008, with these developments increasing world hunger.

According to the United Nations, 925 million people around the world go hungry every day. A third of these live in sub-Saharan Africa. Meagre agricultural investments haven't helped; they've fallen from 16 per cent of total development investment in 1980 to 4 per cent today. With slum dwellers increasing 1 per cent a year-14 million people-and urbanisation increasing four percent a year, 1 out of 7 people in the world face a grim future. Speculation exacerbates hunger by driving food prices higher. Climate chaos disrupts harvests, and wars and political strife dislocate populations. Current agricultural policies are sadly out of date because genetically-modified seed offers a short-term solution that exacerbates long-term environmental problems and does little to help small farmers rise above poverty.

In an effort to tackle such problems, Worldwatch conducted a two-year study on ways to eliminate world hunger. The State of the World report, 'Innovations that Nourish the Planet', focuses on the small landholders who produce 70 per cent of the world's food. In sub-Saharan Africa, 90 per cent of food supply is produced by small landowners. Historic land ownership patterns, culture, and lack of investment will prevent corporate farming from changing these figures any time soon. In the meantime, people are working on their own solutions.

Teams of experts visited twenty-five

Selling Love in the City of Death

Colm McNaughton

African countries to study agricultural innovations that are protecting the environment, reducing poverty and meeting basic human needs. The report focuses on fifteen environmentally specific projects that currently work to alleviate hunger and poverty in Africa. According to Worldwatch, assistance programs for official development assistance in Africa amounted to $1.7 billion in 2008. Investments neglect to take into account environmental destruction, global warming trends and such problems as soil destruction, distribution and storage, and small-scale irrigation.

Danielle Nierenberg, co-director of the project, states that 'The international community has been neglecting entire segments of the food system in its efforts to reduce hunger and poverty. The solutions won't necessarily come from producing more food, but from changing what children eat in schools, how foods are processed and marketed, and what sorts of food businesses we are investing in'.

Current agri-business practices are tremendously destructive of soil, use large amounts of fossil fuel in production and distribution, poison the land and water with fertilizer and insecticides, contribute to species destruction, and ultimately augment climate change.

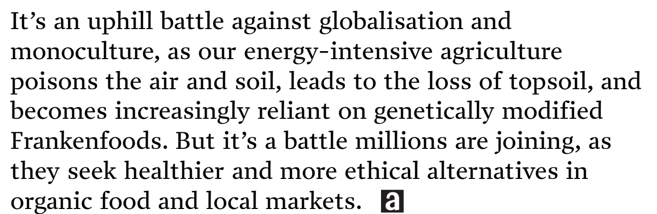
Current agri-business practices are tremendously destructive of soil, use large amounts of fossil fuel in production and distribution, poison the land and water with fertilizer and insecticides, contribute to species destruction, and ultimately augment climate change. More than 33 per cent of global greenhouse emissions can be traced to current food production practices. Moreover, the Green Revolution focused on staples of rice, corn, cassava and wheat, which do little for the one billion people in Africa who have nutrient deficiencies.

Worldwatch looked at alternatives to agribusiness practices and found abundant examples in Africa. Some 530,000 farmers use green manure, crop rotation, composting and biological pest control to grow organic produce. Over 417,000 farmers mix trees and shrubs with croplands and pasture to absorb nutrients, recycle water, promote wildlife and moderate microclimates. Some 350,000 families practise zero or minimal tillage, permanent soil cover, and topsoil management to increase food production by 30 to 100 per cent.

Water is a major problem in many areas and innovative approaches such as human-powered pumps, affordable drip micro-irrigation, and effective use of rainwater is increasing yields. School breakfast and lunch programs blend community gardens, food preparation and nutrition information to feed hungry children. Scientists are currently working with farmers to cultivate local seed stocks that will increase crop diversity and drought resistance. For example, after root rot decimated the bean harvest in the 1990s, scientist developed 245 new disease-resistant bean varieties and distributed them to 35 million farmers.

Such projects represent a new approach to agricultural development and slow the dire progression of climate chaos. The Western world can learn from methods that promote biodiversity, work within natural limits, target root problems, improve soil quality, and lead to sustainable solutions.

It's an uphill battle against globalisation and monoculture, as our energy-intensive agriculture poisons the air and soil, leads to the loss of topsoil, and becomes increasingly reliant on genetically modified Frankenfoods. But it's a battle millions are joining, as they seek healthier and more ethical alternatives in organic food and local markets.



Positive Efforts to End World Hunger

Don Monkerud

Don Monkerud is a writer based in Aptos, California, who follows cultural issues and politics and writes occasional satire.

Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia

Edited by Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson

On 21 June 2007 a national emergency was declared to combat child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory. In an unprecedented action the Commonwealth Government would take direct control of communities, overriding the authority of both the NT government and local community organisations. In this book, prominent Aboriginal leaders, academics and social commentators provide a devastating critique of the Howard government's draconian intervention from the perspective of human rights, alcohol and health policy, welfare and land rights reforms, Indigenous representation and reconciliation, and the recognition of cultural diversity.

Contributors: **Jon Altman** Ian Anderson **Judy Atkinson** **Larissa Behrendt** Kay Boulden **Maggie Brady** Tom Calma **David Dalrymple** Megan Davis **Michael Dillion** Michael Dodson **Patrick Dodson** Bill Fogarty **Raimond Gaita** John Hinkson **Melinda Hinkson** Ernest Hunter **Melissa Johns** Michael Mansell **Joe Morrison** John Morton **Gregory Phillips** Tristian Ray **David Ross** Tim Rowse **Guy Rundle** Mathew Ryan **Will Sanders** John Sanderson **John Taylor** William Tilmouth **Pat Turner** Nicole Watson **Rex Wild**

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Keeping it Light

Mark McFurlong

The unavoidable lightness of being

Call it a kind of herd behaviour, but many oldies like to follow the fads and the fashions of the young. Gen Omegas may not own the best attitudes and aphorisms: they just seem to. You know what I mean? Being able to 'keep it light' is a case in point.

Talking about a US television show with some media veterans?a bunch of students in a seminar break at uni?brought this into focus. The main character of the TV show, a woman of humane disposition but over-written with a keen drive to succeed as a high-powered lawyer, had had a bad day. She had been inadvertently caught up in a compromising, no-win situation where the lesser evil, at least from an ambition point of view, was to get in the gutter and be even shittier than her legal rival. After work, one of her colleagues invited her out for a drink, knowing the kind of events she'd had to navigate.

This was a welcome and collegial gesture but one our heroine knew she could not take up without having to lie her way out of a previous commitment. She told her colleague that, with regret, she couldn't go out as she had made a prior arrangement. But her colleague challenged her, responding something along the lines of: 'You know you want to come out and get thrashed but you are using the "I've got an earlier commitment" thing as an excuse. Really, all you'll do is sit around being morose pretending it's your conscience that's troubling you. Let it go, hook up with me and you can take responsibility for stopping yourself acting like a giant downer'. At this compelling argument the heroine could not but raise her eyes in a gesture of surrender. Then they both went out and got pummelled.

The students identified with the lead character and, even more, with the logic of the plot line. 'She would have just sat around being grim'; 'Hell, why not get away from the whole place. She'd been set up'; 'Just do it. She did the right thing moving on'?these were the kinds of comments and responses offered by the students. Rather than getting bogged down, caught up in wrestling with the unpleasantness, the ethical conflict over which the protagonist had been brooding, it was preferable to take the more diverting path. Awkwardness?that's really what must be avoided. Keep it bright and shiny. I was unconvinced, but they were clear.

It seems their premise was that taking the higher road is winning: 'The dogs may bark but the caravan moves on', as Paul Keating once famously said. Once it was good to be thoughtfully troubled when something was complex or vexed, to move slowly or not move at all if the cross-roads were congested. Now, to be uncertain is to be preoccupied and equivocal, to commit the sin of vacillation. Worse, if one perseverates one falls through the crust. Like shame, this is a living death; others, those who are better adjusted, will then look at you askance. To be targeted as someone who is grim, unenthusiastic, negative, puts you on the outer in the staff room or the change team, in the board room or on the sporting field. Misery used to love company, but that is so yesterday. Keep it light. This norm is now becoming more and more appreciated, just as its opposite is increasingly unwelcome.

Yet, is it really a step forward to avoid saying what is 'awkward'; articulating what is iniquitous, ambivalent or conflictual? An example: limiting, even curtaining, criticisms from the less powerful reinforces the hierarchical status quo in couples, friendship groups and organisations. The more privileged need not speak aloud as their preferences will be sensed and acted on by the switched-on underling. If matters get ugly? an awkward silence, for instance?the more powerful may be forced to imply a sanction. If necessary, a consequence can be outlined which will stimulate the other's anxiety. This is not ideal but it's acceptable as long as the worst option? experiencing the awkwardness of direct conflict and raised voices?is avoided. As with price fixing conspirators or black operation spies, it is unacceptable to communicate directly about differences or disputes. In crucial ways this pattern takes us back to earlier, pre-democratic days where lines of power were taken as given.

Being said to be at the shallow end of the pool was once an epithet of abuse. Now, those who can keep it light are welcome, even celebrated. Contrarians, old-fashioned iconoclasts, like Shelly Gare in her nay-saying *Triumph of the Airheads*, obviously, even willfully, miss the point about an attitude that has attained untouchable status. The right-thinking subject focuses on the scenery, enjoys the journey, looks out for the low-lying fruit. There is no one to do the crying for you, and you are not here to cry for anyone else. If you don't keep it light you are a sissy and no grown-up ever wants to own up to that. a

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The Common Touch

Mark McFurlong

Mark McFurlong is a social worker who teaches at la Trobe University.

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London Calling

Sebastian Kubitschko

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comment

London Calling

Sebastian Kubitschko

Protest in Europe and the end of the university

Moving house from one European country (I have just moved from Germany to England) to another feels like sliding from one state of crisis into another. While Germany manages to constitute itself as the 'new motor' of Europe thanks to the unwitnessed saturation of its economy with precarious working conditions, England remains stuck in the aftermath of the financial meltdown. Crisis in the European context must be understood in its etymological sense: a decisive turning point; the unsettling of existing arrangements; a break with an existing situation at its most sensitive developmental point.

This sense of crisis is not only subjective. It is in the air. People talk about it, feel it, react to it. Large-scale protests and strikes are happening almost daily: in Greece against the cuts dictated by the IMF; in Italy against parliament's confidence in Berlusconi and severe cuts to cultural institutions; in France against the increase in the minimum retirement age; in Belarus against the forced re-election of Europe's last dictator; in Germany against the extension of the phase-out of nuclear power. The list could be extended comprehensively. Albania has been in political deadlock since the 2009 elections and regularly sees mass protests. In Belgium, Portugal, Ireland, Slovenia and Lithuania tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets against austerity measures.

In England the crisis is best captured in the 'reform' of the country's higher education sector. Since November 2009, Lord Browne—former CEO of British Petrol, director of Goldman Sachs, chairman of the private equity group Apax Partners, and currently European managing director and managing partner of Riverstone Holdings and chairman of the advisory board at Stanhope Capital—has chaired an 'independent' review of higher education funding and student finance. (Independent is in quote marks as Browne also acts as the current government's 'Lead Non-Executive Director'.) The results of the review were published in October 2010 and the bulk of its recommendations passed by parliament only two months later, on 10 December, leading to an outcry by students and various affiliated bodies. Between the release date of the report and the MPs' confirming vote, the nation experienced one of the largest protests in a generation. Students around England—from Cambridge to Kent, London to Newcastle, Sussex to Oxford—marched in the streets, protested, demonstrated and occupied buildings.

What did the Browne Report, entitled *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education*, contain that led to this eruption of civil disobedience? According to Nick Couldry and Angela McRobbie, what we are experiencing is nothing less than 'The death of the university, English style'. The key facts causing this apparent death are the 80 per cent cut in teaching grants to universities, the triplication of student fees to around £9000 a year from autumn 2012, and the focused support of so-called priority courses such as medicine and other science, technology and health care degrees.

From an economic perspective this is a response to the fact that saving is at the top of governments' agendas around the globe. Using the education sector as the prime area of retrenchment, however, suggests a lack of options in the regulatory imagination and developmental strategies. Beyond the fact that the pain of these cuts and the increase of tuition fees will be felt most by these same disadvantaged groups, something even more fundamental can be seen in the reforms. Underlying the entire Browne report is the idea that universities are no longer institutions of the public good but rather service providers for paying customers. They are part of an industry, where education is the commodity they sell. Agreeing with Browne, the government believes that a system for distributing resources based on individual market choice will somehow generate the university system that society needs.

This neo-liberal approach is most evident in the underlying ideology manifest in the report's omnipresent 'competition' rhetoric used by members of the government, as well as Wendy Piatt, Director General of the Russell Group, an alliance including Oxbridge, Imperial College London and other prestigious institutions. As Piatt notes, 'the UK's world-class universities perform a vital role as the engine room of economic recovery'. In a globalising world, she carries on, 'it should not be forgotten that our competitors are injecting vast amounts of cash into their universities'. Hence, 'to remain in the higher education premiership, we have to give our universities access to vital additional investment—otherwise we will be relegated to the third division'. According to Piatt, 'a substantial increase in graduate contributions is the only viable and the fairest way to secure this vital investment'. It is rather challenging to work out what the term 'fair' means in this context. What is obvious, though, is the propagation of a culture of competition by socio-political elites at every level of social and political life.

Most striking of all perhaps is the government's own incoherent logic. Governments around the world have joined the consensus that reducing debt is the most efficient way to make states less dependent on private financial

actors, such as investment banks and rating agencies. Paradoxically, what the government is applying in its own economic and bureaucratic structures does not apply to citizens. The message to them is exactly the opposite: if you want a specific product from a service provider, you must accumulate a debt. This paradox is even more complex, given that the times have probably never been more difficult and arbitrary. The message thus runs that you must accumulate debt for something you cannot be sure will have any value in the near future.

Such incoherence is also evident in the much celebrated illusion of a free market mechanism. Whereas demand defines supply in an ideally functioning free market system, the current reform comes nowhere near such an ideal as subsidies are given to courses prioritised by government. Free choice is doubly annulled, with only certain groups able to afford these new products, which are already chosen for them.

What these ideological inconsistencies point to is an almost 'natural' progression across the various social domains, a development that is especially disturbing in respect of the university. Death in social and cultural matters has a circular flow: the dying of an ideal contains the seeds of a counter model. The death of the university rests on the death of the principle that, as Rod Beecham put it in *Arena Magazine* 108, 'education is the expansion of your awareness of abilities' and is 'vitally concerned with exploring the unknown'. Over time, the range of degree courses offered to students will become increasingly dominated by courses that are skills- and vocation-oriented or carry high social prestige. If the financing of higher education is predominantly driven by income from student fees, and student decisions are narrowly channelled or led by calculations of future earnings, why will anybody study art history or philosophy in ten years time, or any other course not on a government's priority list? This is not putting 'choice in the hands of the students', as Lord Browne promises; rather, clearly the reverse.

With the decline of broad-ranging study possibilities, people's awareness and general abilities will diminish. Actively constraining the extent and type of discourses will lead to a decline in innovation—in all its manifold meanings—and, along with it, methods of resolution and even ways of posing problems.

What defines the unknown is an endlessness of possibilities, approaches, aims, methods, perspectives. Once we limit ourselves to a particular path what we perceive as the world around us and our enquiries into can no longer count as an attitude towards the unknown. For the sake of competition, the very ideal of the unknown is undermined. All those human peculiarities that build the fundament of our living together?imagination, faith, devotion, capability, affection, intellect, impulse and aspiration?are placed under threat. Certainly our examination of them is.

The effects of both these elements—the idealisation of competition and the undermining of multiplicity—can already be witnessed in enrolment numbers. A record 335,795 people are chasing 2011 university places in the United Kingdom before fees rise in 2012. This means an additional 8000 candidates are pursuing the same number of places as last year. All David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science, has had to say about this status competition over scarce resources is, 'Going to university has always been a competitive process, and not all those who apply will be accepted'. So of course not everyone can be a winner, because in competition there must always be winners and losers.

Among those who have enrolled, a clear tendency is apparent: a decline in European languages of 1.4 per cent, and a drop in demand for history and philosophy of 2 per cent. On the other hand, the numbers applying for medicine and dentistry are up by 3.5 per cent and for law by 2.9 per cent.

Death can be a long drawn-out process. We have been witnessing the dying of the old ideals for some time, but now the British government is speeding up that process enormously. Besides reform to the universities, radical structural changes to migration and health are on the way, following the same inconsistent neo-liberal logic. 'I want a system where we continue to attract the top students coming to our top universities', Home Secretary Theresa May said in defence of her plans to refuse 120,000 skilled workers and overseas students a year their current right to settle in the United Kingdom. In relation to National Health Insurance, Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Public Health, is aiming for 'improved productivity and efficiency'. From April 2011 on the NHI 'are not going to pay hospitals for providing a sub-standard service'. Following this logic, the financial sector must have provided a vastly above-standard service in recent years: British taxpayers' support of the banks lies somewhere around £850 billion.

Crisis in the European context perhaps must not only be understood etymologically but also, and perhaps more importantly, taken literally: a state where reality is turned upside down. Fines and cuts for hospitals, doctors and universities. Aid and substantial support for financial institutions, high-risk investors and speculators.

How much more can economic motives and political criteria merge? Can the peoples' representatives continue to move further from our expressed human and civic needs? While the planet reaches an unwitnessed level of complexity, 'solutions' are conceived in increasingly one-dimensional terms and removed from solidary realities. The crisis European countries and other nations around the world are currently experiencing is, as much as anything, a crisis of representative democracy.

People have an enormous urge for equal and just relationships, for creative output and, as the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk put it recently, a degree of civic pride. This element, he said, should never be underestimated. It is less a question of will than a matter of organising existing participatory energies into an efficacious political movement able to formulate an alternative; to create a refreshed solidarity of thought and practice to sustain a multidimensional approach towards life. a

The Militarisation of **Defence**

John Langmore

John Langmore is a Professorial Fellow in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. He was the federal MP for Fraser for twelve years and a Director in the United Nations for seven. These arguments are elaborated in John Langmore, Calum Logan and Stewart Firth, **The 2009 Australian Defence White Paper: Analysis and Alternatives**, Austral Policy forum 10-01A, 15 September 2010

The Defence White Paper assumes an aggressive posture and receives unprecedented funding

One of the most shocking features of contemporary Australian defence policy is that military expenditure has a longer and larger guarantee than any other type of Australian public spending has ever been given before. The 2009 Defence White Paper concluded with a final chapter entitled 'The Government's Financial Plan for Defence', which was an astoundingly brief page and a half long. This guaranteed the Defence Department increased funding of 5.5 per cent every year until 2017–18 and 4.7 per cent each year from then until 2030. No other type of Australian public expenditure has ever been promised such largess for such a long period.

When this is questioned, ministers have said that the Defence Department has been directed to undertake 'a substantial program of reform, efficiencies and savings' which are expected to yield $22.7 billion of savings during the next decade. However, that only allows internal changes of priority: these so called savings will simply be used for building up other areas of military activity, whereas other areas of government which are subject to an 'efficiency dividend', like the CSIRO and the National Library, lose funds every year.

Supporters could also argue that the promised increases are not likely to substantially increase the proportion of military spending in national income and that would be true. Real national income may well grow by an average of around 3 per cent a year and inflation is unlikely to be less than 2 per cent a year. But that is not the point.

Guaranteeing military spending each year for the next 20 involves abandoning careful analysis of requirements. It assumes that the international military situation will steadily deteriorate and that purchases of more weapons and employment of more military personnel will be essential. This is a doctrine of despair, and is consistent with weakness of discussion about means which could contribute to strengthening security.

An early expression of the White Paper's plans was the Defence budget for 2010–11, in which spending was increased by $1.57 billion to $26.8 billion. In the same budget the allocation for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was $1.1 billion. So the increase in Australian military spending in 2010–11 is 50 per cent greater than the total allocation for diplomacy. This is simply irresponsible at a time when we have 18 per cent fewer diplomats posted overseas than in 1996 (due to the depredations of the Howard government). Australia has fewer overseas diplomatic missions than any other member of the G20. Yet diplomacy is the prime means of avoiding conflict as well as of representing Australian interests overseas.

This is happening at a time when the government's principal commitment is to achieving a balanced budget by 2013. Such fiscal austerity requires spending cuts in many high priority activities, and constraints are being imposed on most. Why should defence be immune from those? It is also happening at a time when all other developed countries are searching for ways of reducing their military spending and many have already announced major cuts. The United States announced plans in January 2011 to slash $78 billion from the Pentagon's budget during the next five years including by cancelling orders for new weapons. The British conservative government announced in October 2010 that defence spending would fall by 8 per cent over the next four years. 'Harrier jump jets, the Navy's flagship HMS Ark Royal and planned Nimrod spy planes are to be axed and 42,000 MoD and armed forces jobs cut by 2015', reports the BBC.

The Australian increases are also happening at a time when there is no electoral pressure for increased military spending. Public opinion does not support the White Paper's plans. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute Special Report on *Public Opinion in Australia towards Defence, Security and Terrorism, Issue 16* concludes that 'support for more defence spending has dropped to its lowest level since the end of the Cold War'. The reason is that 'The proportion of voters seeing a security threat to Australia has declined consistently since the late 1960s'. Most voters are far more concerned with employment and living standards, health services and education than with defence. The Medicare card is of greater importance to the

cartoon to come?

security of most Australians than increased military spending.

Why then have these perverse and sectorally skewed plans been made? Governments are necessarily in the business of prediction and no more so than on issues of defence and national security. So they turn to 'defence planners', who predict the future in order to enable governments to decide on defence policy. Those people, by training and environment, are pessimistic about what is going to happen. Their task is to warn of possible threats to national security, and when they sit down to think up threats and spend their professional lives discussing threats with their colleagues they end up with a long list of things that might just conceivably happen.

From a theoretical point of view, their starting point is the nation-state, and the assumption that nation-states are armed against each other in a global anarchy: best, therefore, to arm one's own state to the teeth lest some other state invade. Never mind that the end of the Cold War, the emergence of globalisation and the development of new international norms about peacemaking and peacekeeping render such a view simplistic.

Unlike an earlier generation of Labor ministers in the Hawke and Keating governments, the Rudd government did not resist demands from the Defence Department, the weapons manufacturers, and the other members of military-industrial complex. In place of a focus on 'defensive defence', low-level threats and regional peacekeeping, they opted for 'offensive defence'. The 2009 White Paper intensified key elements of Howard government defence policy, that is, forward projection of forces, strike capability, and high technology weapons systems, and, like the Coalition, promised increased real spending on defence every year.

In detail, the White Paper proposes buying: twelve submarines, which would be Australia's largest ever single defence project; air-warfare destroyers and a new class of frigates to replace the ANZAC class ships; maritime-based land-attack cruise missiles; naval combat helicopters; 100 F-35 joint strike fighters; Wedgetail early warning and control aircraft; maritime surveillance and response aircraft; and around 1100 armoured combat vehicles. The period of acquisition is long, twenty years, but the costs are unprecedented in Australian peacetime defence spending.

The Military Silo

The White Paper discusses Australian defence as if it is in a silo, which enables defence to be planned in isolation from other dimensions of global affairs. The isolation of military strategy prevents discussion of the relative priority and weight given to other aspects of foreign policy such as comprehensive reviews of bilateral, regional and multilateral relations and alliances; political contact and discussions; diplomatic activity; multilateral engagement; peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, especially negotiation, mediation and conciliation; development policy including official development assistance; international economic, financial, social (including human rights) and environmental relations; and global governance including its economic, social and environmental dimensions. Although the White Paper does mention some of these, they are not incorporated into the analysis.

A more holistic approach to national security would reflect a qualitative improvement in strategic thinking. Such a change would require a creative re-evaluation of Australia's security requirements for a new Asia-Pacific century. This would entail the recognition that conventional military forces are commonly ill-suited to achieving desirable international outcomes. This in turn would require a considerable reallocation of human and financial resources to increase the capabilities of other national departments and national and multilateral agencies. The White Paper even acknowledges that many 'argue that Defence should be considered in a whole-of-government security context that includes aid programs and diplomacy and contributions to non-government organisations' (WP: 18) *but explicitly chooses not to do this*, instead treating military spending as if it is a closed world which can be considered in isolation from other factors which determine the degree of co-operation or hostility between countries.

In the wider world, political and social attention has turned to issues such as humanitarian emergencies, mass human rights abuses, intra-state conflict, state failure, terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Militaries are frequently required to play a key role in

Australian security would be strengthened if defence is liberated from the silo within which it is imprisoned so that the framework for foreign and defence policy could be addressed holistically.

responding to potential conflict and its consequences and to natural disasters. So the range of activities that the military may be required to undertake has expanded substantially. This security-centred paradigm requires a reinvention of the roles for which the military prepare.

The largest single deployment of Australian troops in recent times has not been to our northern borders to protect the country from invasion or even to Iraq and Afghanistan, but rather to East Timor at the head of INTERFET, a coalition of the willing with UN authority. The interventions in East Timor and the Solomon Islands brought together the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Federal Police in joint projects for restoring law and order while building the state. The determining consideration in Australia's defence planning should be likely contingencies of this and other kinds, not the remote possibility of international conflict or invasion.

Misjudging Threats

The Minister's preface to the White Paper begins 'There is no greater responsibility for a national government than the defence of the nation, its people and their interests'. This familiar claim for the pre-eminence of defence needs to be put in context. Protection from external threats is certainly one aspect of national and personal security but so are economic stability, opportunities for employment, environmental sustainability, high quality health and education services, safety on the streets and much more. The Minister's claim exaggerates the importance of defence in peacetime and lays a foundation for the misleadingly narrow analysis. National security is only one aspect of national wellbeing.

The White Paper asserts that the 'primary obligation [of defence] is to deter and defeat attack on Australia' and moves straight on to address force structure, rather than discussing whether resisting a threat of invasion is currently or foreseeably the highest realistic priority. So the principal issue which the comment raises is neglected. It also works against the White Paper's own assessment that there is neither currently nor foreseeably any power in the region capable of mounting such operations. The fear of invasion is close to fantasy: there is no credible interest anywhere in attacking this country nor has there been for two thirds of a century. As Kim Beazley said when tabling a committee report on threats to Australia over three decades ago, only one country has the capacity to invade Australia, the United States, and it is able to obtain all it wants from Australia without such action!

The White Paper points out that China will become the strongest Asian military power 'by a considerable margin' and that the Chinese military modernisation which is under way 'appears potentially to be beyond the scope of what would be required for a conflict over Taiwan'. The implication is that Australia needs to prepare for Chinese aggression. China may or may not become a military threat as it expands economically, but to posture against it before evidence justifying this emerges risks encouraging aggressive Chinese preparation in return. Allan Behm writes: 'Quite simply, in the timeframes considered by this White Paper, China will have neither the intention nor the power to mount a direct attack against Australia. The chapter's key judgement is breathtaking in its naivety and lack of nuance'.

The White Paper recognises that 'The enduring reality of our strategic outlook is that Australia will most likely remain, by virtue of our geostrategic location, a secure country over the period to 2030' yet it fails to plan on that reasonable conclusion. Geoff Miller, the former Director-General of the Office of National Assessments, concludes that 'the White Paper only makes the case for the huge expenditure it projects by focusing on the stated principal task of deterring and defeating attacks on Australia without relying on the combat or combat support forces of other countries, while ignoring its own conclusions about the limits to self-reliance and about the likelihood of Australia having to defend against a major power adversary on its own'.

The White Paper makes the case for the extraordinary increases in military spending by exaggerating the threat to Australia—which has been the normal tactic of governments for the last sixty years. The effect of exaggerating military threats has been to justify current expenditure which is already far larger than is necessary, $73 million a day. Australia does not need military spending per person more than twice that of Japan or Russia or 50 per cent more than Canada.

The Benefits of Seeking Peace

The world is less threatening than the drafters of the White Paper claim. Most states now prefer to avoid inter-state conflict, and military activity is constrained by national economic and political interest and as well by rules, norms and conflict resolution processes. The traditional concept of state-based military power utilised to pursue national interest is being supplanted by the view that war is a threat to national interests. A recent example is the Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), which argues that 'The downside risks of waging aggressive war in a globalized interdependent world are seen today as outweighing almost any conceivable benefit'.

Military power is no longer regarded by most nations and policy makers as the only basis of security. Alliances enable countries to strengthen their security. Multilateral rules, norms and conflict resolution processes constrain aggression. National economic goals are overwhelmingly achieved through commercial and political activity. And countries which act aggressively face penalties. The global order of the early 21st century is one in which great net benefits flow from co-operating with the international community.

The White Paper offers little explanation about what might cause conflict or war and nothing at all about peaceful means of attempting to resolve potential conflict.

The White Paper offers little explanation about what might cause conflict or war and nothing at all about peaceful means of attempting to resolve potential conflict. Australia's interest is as much in peaceful conflict resolution as is that of all United Nations member states, yet this top priority is neither mentioned nor discussed. Nor is the value of regional political and economic bodies in strengthening integration and stability acknowledged.

The White Paper mentions the formative role of the UN Charter in establishing a rule-based international system and recognises that the maintenance of this multilateral system is a key consideration for Australia's security. It does not, though, go on to discuss how to participate so as to act in ways consistent with the commitments of member states or to contribute to enabling the United Nations to do its work more effectively.

The UN Charter is the foundational document of postwar multilateral relations. Article 1 of the Charter describes the first purpose of the United Nations as being:

> To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and the removal of threats, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.

Article 2 requires that Member States act in accordance with stated principles, the third of which is that:

> All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.

That is, membership of the United Nations requires countries to attempt by all reasonable means to avoid the threat or use of force and to seek non-violent means of minimising and resolving conflict. There have been many resolutions in the Security Council and General Assembly elaborating the theme of peaceful conflict resolution. For Australia to effectively fulfill this responsibility would involve taking the following steps.

First, defence planning should be more thoroughly integrated with other aspects of foreign policy. Recognition of the complementarities of foreign and defence policy would create the basis for a public and governmental discourse in which a range of perspectives and possibilities could be included. Australian security would be strengthened if defence is liberated from the silo within which it is imprisoned so that the framework for foreign and defence policy could be addressed holistically.

Second, for all these reasons and to conserve scarce funds for other higher priority international and domestic programs, proposed defence expenditure should be rigorously reviewed and some proposed weapons purchasers cut or cancelled — as the US has just announced it will do. This would limit competition for finance for services which voters regard as of far greater importance. Good public policy should not treat one kind of public outlay differently from all others by conferring on defence the unique privilege of announced real increases until 2030. The quarantining of defence spending discriminates against every other area of public service, introduces rigidity, and eliminates a financial incentive to strengthen the efficiency with which defence is provided.

Third, funding for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) must be substantially improved. Why should diplomacy, the instrument supposed to sustain a global and regional web of relationships and co-operative arrangements favouring Australia, receive one twenty-sixth of the funds allocated to defence? The Lowy Institute argues carefully for reversal of these trends, opening of new missions, increased appointment and training of qualified diplomats and expansion of other vital supporting activities. Swift implementation of those recommendations is vital. Steadily improved funding would allow DFAT to build up its capacity for engagement in peaceful conflict resolution through bilateral and multilateral analysis, consultation, mediation, negotiation and the other means listed in the UN Charter.

Fourth, continued expansion of the Australian aid program as promised by the Rudd Government is vital so that Australia can make a fairer and more effective contribution to economic, social and environmentally sustainable development, achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and reduction of despair, alienation and poverty. Seeking peace with justice is a more effective and constructive way of making Australia more secure than is militarism.

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The Militarisation of Defence
John Langmore

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Diary of a Disaster
Paul Maunder

Paul Maunder has worked in both the film industry and in community theatre. He has published articles in cultural magazines and short stories in a variety of collections. He has moved to the ex-coal mining village of Blackball on the West Coast to give himself a promised 'writing time'. He has been involved in the building of a memorial to the Blackball 1908 strike, which triggered the development of a national labour movement.

Diary of a Disaster

Paul Maunder

A week in the life of a West Coast community following the Pike River Mine explosion

Day One

darkness was on the face of the deep

Late in the afternoon it looks like rain, so I decide to mow the lawns. At this time of the year you can pause and see the grass growing. I get as far as the roadside verge when the ambulance sirens out of the rooms and heads toward me. It comes to a halt and Laura tells me to get in.

'Explosion at Pike River.'

'What!' I race inside for my boots and uniform.

As we drive through Moonlight, I think back to the afternoon, when, on the occasion of the Runanga School Centenary, I'd recorded on video a dozen or so surviving workers and relatives of workers killed in the Strongman Mine Disaster of 1967. They'd come together and remembered 'that fateful day', as one of them called it: the news disseminating, the waiting, the misunderstandings, the knock on the door.

We turn off the main road and drive through dairy farms to the control gates of the mine. Pike River, like all industrial complexes in rural settings, has a surreal feeling, particularly strong in this case as the mine is discreetly nestled in national park beech forest. Weka forage in the garden outside the office blocks, a creek rattles beside the narrow road, alongside which the coal is carried as a slurry in two pipes.

But now a row of ambulances assembles and we are divided into teams, assigned numbers and leaders and equipment. A 4WD arrives and two men are led out, covered in coal dust, a whiter scale around their eyes and mouth where tears and saliva have mixed with the coal. 'Where am I?' one of them mutters. 'Was there an explosion?' He is confused as I help lead him into an ambulance.

There is no further action, other than the rescue helicopter arriving from Nelson and grim-faced managers striding between meetings. The ambulance leaves, carrying the two survivors to hospital. Twenty-nine men remain down there. Banal conversations take place, half hearted introductions are made, hunger bites – it is past tea-time. People become slightly more extreme versions of themselves. The mayor is here as part of the fire crew and we discuss the situation. We agree it is not promising. Like a number of prominent people he has grown a moustache for Movember. It gives him a Latin American look.

Already the question begins to hover: given modern equipment, how can such a thing happen? I remember one of our interviewees talking about Strongman. Lax practices, bad habits creeping in, taking shortcuts were the cause. And Pike is a gassy mine as they've had to tunnel through an extensive fault line of fragmented crust, not sealed off from the volatile layers below. Miners get to know Gaia in an intimate sort of way.

As we continue to wait, the rain begins and we have to shift under shelter. The boredom grows and I regret mowing the lawns and thus being noticed. War must be like this I realise: 90 per cent boredom, officers trying to make sense of chaos, sparse information. I go and make a cup of tea. A middle-aged man, in shock, sits staring in front of him. I make a banal comment and he tells me he was driving down into the mine and the motor of his vehicle started to cut out. Not enough oxygen. He turned around and made it to safety.

Pizza arrives and the hunger is assuaged. But nothing's happening. The Nelson crew leave in their chopper. Eventually, us locals are stood down as well. The rescue team won't be going in tonight. This seems odd. I remember at Strongman they went in straight away, established a fresh air base, then started to penetrate further.

We drive back to Blackball, drop in our paperwork to the ambulance manager's house and learn that the Blackball men who work at Pike are safe. Names are ticked off. 'What about Rob?'

'Oh.' He hasn't been working there long. 'Don't know.'

We drive back to the rooms, past Rob's house, praying his truck is there. It isn't, and there are more cars parked there than normal. The realisation grows. Bloody hell! Two years ago he married his Filipino pen pal, a delightful young woman who, despite the cold winter, quickly settled into the community of her countrywomen on the Coast, many of whom work at the supermarket. Recently, she and Rob had their wedding anniversary at the Working Men's Club. It had been a lovely occasion, the Filipino women like fairies as they danced and posed for photographs.

We park the ambulance and Murray comes out to tell us that he's been over with her, but now her friends have come. Murray is close to tears as we hug. Laura kicks a stone. 'Fuck it.'

In a community, events and places are personalised by the stories that surround them. Rob's house had almost burnt down and he'd built a new place inside the shell of the old. One day he'd taken down the shell and there, like one of those Russian dolls, stood another, smaller, perfect little cottage with joinery you only dream about. He liked those comic novels, had leant me one—extraordinary works really, half pornographic, half satiric. I'd given him a copy of Jared Diamond's *Collapse*, a book about the decline of civilisations, and he'd enthused over it. He grew huge sunflowers and tirelessly planed demolition rimu on his veranda for use in his projects. He'd only been 'down mine' for a couple of months. When I last spoke with him he hadn't been enjoying it – too much the craftsman, too much the loner. 'I never know what I'm supposed to be doing,' he complained. Hard to imagine him now, huddled, concussed, in a corner. Or a charred remnant.

I sleep. One continues to sleep.

Day Two

let the dry land appear

In the morning I go for a run, past Rob's house. If he's dead, it will be difficult to pass that house; the story it contains will be too resonant. When I feed the chooks, his dog wanders in, looking confused. Each morning the dog walks down to the shop and gets a pie from the owner. He then goes back home, pie in mouth, before eating it. A couple of days ago he stole into our kitchen, took a cake tin outside, somehow prised off the lid and consumed the cake. I'd been waiting to tell Rob. Now it is probably too late.

It is a grey, drizzly day. Cloud coats the surrounding hills. The helicopters buzz to and from the mine. No real news. The rescue team is still not going in. Gas sampling is taking place. Confusion. My daughter arrives and we go for our Saturday walk down to the creek. The father of one of her students is among those trapped. My daughter's partner works in Spring Creek mine and last night they'd had a succession of worried phone calls from family and friends. 'It's all a bit close to home,' she wryly comments. I've got a play due to open later in the week and I wonder whether we should cancel it. 'People might be a bit pre-occupied,' she says. An interesting way of putting it.

That night my daughter and her partner come to dinner and we watch the news. Nothing is happening. Daniel can't work out why the rescue team hasn't gone in and is suspicious that a cop is in charge. 'What's he know about it?' John Key looks uncomfortable, as if he's so used to smiling he finds it difficult to keep his face appropriately grim. He reminds me a little of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

It's a time of waiting, in limbo, like the souls of new-born, unbaptised babies. But, as we eat, there is a desire for normality. Daniel talks about getting his head around fishing down here. It's all about using the right bait. Last night he caught a red cod, a useless maggoty fish, so he'd thrown it back. But a mate had caught a trout. Then he talks about an ex-skinhead he works with who is covered in tats: Hitler, a swastika and, in the middle of it all, Bugs Bunny. The blokes have him on. 'What's Bugs Bunny doing there?' 'It's the first one I got done,' the ex-skinhead told them. What a crack up.

But after the laughter, thoughts of the disaster return. That's the rhythm of these days: two different realities. Those in charge are feeding the relatives the hopeful image of the men huddled around a pipe feeding them fresh air. A sort of fairy tale.

We go down to the Club for a bit of company. Here, life's going on—the pool table is busy, the CD player turned up. The Spring Creek delegate arrives. 'Why aren't the rescue team in there?' I ask him.

'I'll tell you, comrade,' he says. 'The gas readings are going up, not down. They're frightened of another explosion.'

'Not good.'

'No, not good. It's a big one.'

'There's been rumours ...'

'I know.'

I walk home gloomily. The lights are on in Rob's house. His wife is back. In bed I read a teenage novel set in Gaza. A tough life. No room for self-pity. I try to think through the ethics of doing the play or not. Then my thoughts turn to Mitch, another of those below. I'd got to know him and his family while doing a video on the school closures a few years back. He'd brought a wind-up mallard duck along to the protest march. Labour had done some dumb things while in office, Helen Clarke's feral comment perhaps the dumbest, closing the schools a close second. Each of those schools was a rich site of stories.

Day Three

let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years

Next morning nothing's changed. Still no rescue attempt. As I walk the dog the kereru sit on the power lines. Waiting. The drizzle continues. Last night a ruru hovered around the village.

I decide I should write this diary and immediately I'm faced with ethical dilemmas. If it turns out a decent piece should I send it out there? Is that parasitic, especially if I get paid for it? Even if I give the money away.

I begin writing, and immediately stylistic concerns present: past or present tense? Choices arise which might be called aesthetic, and then the wider questions pounce: why, who for, what context?

Nevertheless, I continue. Further problem—to name the people? Locals will know, so an initial will do. The same problem exists out there it seems, whether to name the trapped miners?

I write up the experience so far, then turn to the question of the play. The problem down here for the artist is that most people work with the realities of the physical world. Here people are not divorced from it by urban infrastructure, by working in offices. So the imaginative act is tested. In the city, tunnelling through the earth can easily exist as a symbol. Here, the reality is too close.

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I go and visit the '08 Memorial. Suddenly a Dutch tour bus pulls up. They alight, in that strange time capsule of the tour party, self-absorbed, cameras at the ready. They are interested in the current exhibition centred on a local family. One woman asks for an explanation of the sculpture. The Maori carving captures her

attention. Nga Hau a Wha, people brought by the four winds. But it is time for them to leave. They've had their half hour here.

After that, ironically, I have the need to do something physical. I've been told there's a wheel from the overhead that used to carry the coal from Blackball to Ngahere lying in the bush over the road. I take a saw and pruning shears and begin to hunt through the gorse and blackberry. Just as I'm about to give up, I spy an old washing machine and a pile of other rubbish. I cut my way to it and yes—a metre away is the rim of the wheel. When I clear the gorse I see the wheel is of admirable size and structure. We will mount it on the museum site and it will become a memorial to those killed at work. A kaupapa which, right now, is overly resonant.

That night, TV3 devote an hour long special to the disaster, but there's not enough information, so segments are endlessly repeated; a tearful statement by a young man beginning to brand the whole affair. I try and watch the movie on Maori TV but it seems a stupid affair. Cindy comes home. A busy night in maternity. Women are still giving birth. Another sort of reality.

Day Four

and the evening and the morning

This morning the tone has changed away from the hopeful. That the men are dead, which has been obvious from the moment the ambulance crews were stood down, is now being gently implied. Are these things planned? That would be too cynical. It is simply the cycle of things. Talk of an enquiry begins, of impending judgement. The mayor's voice is less gravelly. I realise that because of exhaustion his larynx has relaxed.

This has become an 'event', as defined by the post-Marxists, a site of excess and scarcity. The excess is of technology, knowledge and skill, the scarcity one of opportunity. The earth smoulders and technology, knowledge and skill are useless. Greenies say that we should leave the captured CO2 in the ground. Or, if we do dig it up, use it more wisely. Are they right? A mining disaster such as this, in a national park, certainly raises questions about the use of the commons.

I get out the lawnmower and finish mowing the lawns, then decide to continue onto Rob's section where the grass has grown long. Laurie drives up and stops, and tells me Rob was working down the mine for money to build a house for his wife's parents in the Philippines. This becomes, like so many stories in this century, a global one.

As I clean the mower, I realise there's something mythologically resonant about people trapped underground. It's to do with the earth as womb, benign or suffocating; it's to do with Hine Nui Te Po; it's to do with the underworld; it's to do with Rangi and Papa and separation and birth.

The radio tells me that the borehole down to the mine will be finished tonight. Robots stand ready. But the message is clear: this mine's atmosphere is poisonous. The men are dead. A father complains that there was no rescue attempt. 'They went

down Strongman straight away. That was the best time.' I think back to the interviews I had with surviving workers from the Strongman disaster. It was hellishly hot, but they got out all the bodies bar two, then it became too dangerous. Maybe there's too much risk management, too many protocols today. In contrast, the ludicrously simple is being used: they're tying a rag to the robot to see if there's any wind current down there.

The cop in charge talks, finally, about the possibility that some of the men are dead. For God's sake. As Laurie said to me, 'The explosion would've ripped the air of their lungs. Finito.'

Day Five

let us make man in our image

The business news, on before 7.00 am and presumably designed for those who run the world, is always realistic. After that, the mystification begins. Pike shares are discussed. After the news of the explosion, they immediately fell and were then suspended. I would suspect their current value is around zero. A rumour that shortcuts may have been taken in order to get much needed coal to the market is rebutted. Ireland is under the economic hammer. New Zealand's credit rating might be downgraded by Standard and Poor's. I write this and wonder about the name. Is this agency owned by Mr Standard and Mr Poor? Is this a joke? Is it possible, I ponder over muesli and toast, that the system is falling over, and that the task now is to build the architecture of the local societies that will survive? In which case, locally, we need to find economic ventures that, unlike mining, are sustainable. But that's a sacrilegious thought on the Coast.

Suddenly my pager beeps and I don overalls and boots. Someone is threatening suicide in a rural town down the road. We head off, lights flashing, siren blaring.

There's a performative quality to driving an ambulance under flashing lights and siren. Farmers in paddocks pause and watch, before the customary wave of the arm. Road workers move aside. We drive past the mine road. Pukeko loiter at the verge, ready to do an often death-resulting dash to the other side.

We get the unhappy woman safely to the hospital and I brief the doctor.

'I see,' he says. 'Having a bad day.'

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There's a crowd of cars at Rob's place. His wife has come back for a visit. As we hug, she seems to have become even smaller, her face that of a sorrowful child, all tears and lips, overwhelmed, the ego crumpled. Rob's mother introduces herself before they go back to another family meeting. 'Where they'll tell us the same old things,' she says cynically.

People are starting to get pissed off. It seems the robot managed 500 metres then broke down because of water dripping onto it. 'Why the hell didn't they put plastic over it?' fumes the mayor. 'Don't they know mines are wet places?' When Gaia vents her spleen, technology is reduced to a sophisticated toy. Still, more toys are coming, from Australia, from the US. But even NASA won't solve this one.

On the news at six there is CCTV footage of the mine entrance at the time of the explosion. We can see the forces that were at work at a two kilometre distance; half the explosion vented through the fresh air shaft. No one could survive that. Except the two that got

out. The inevitable question is asked: 'Why didn't you show us this before?' There's no easy explanation and the people running this are no villains.

I am half-aware, though, of an ideology operating at the intuitive level. In the old days—before kids were stopped from climbing trees, before risk assessment forms were required in order for a class of school children to walk around the block, before a spot of rust on a car bonnet made the vehicle unsafe, before cycling to the shop without a helmet became illegal—maybe they would have gone straight in. Or maybe, if it was absolutely unsafe to do so, because the atmosphere was so toxic, they would have said, 'Look, they're most probably dead. We'll still hope for a miracle, and do everything we can to get in there, but common sense says there's not a lot of hope. Prepare for the worst.'

Maybe, then, the families would've spent the night together, then gone home and started the grieving process, waiting for the bodies to be recovered. Instead there's been this drip-feeding of despair, a sort of spin, which has incrementally changed course, without ill intent. Even with the utmost humanity. But perhaps, in doing this—instinctively, intuitively—the family members' grief has been sabotaged, tinged with bitterness, outrage, disgust, even hatred. Which, in turn, has to be suppressed. For it is unfair. This is the strange emotional texture of the current world.

The EPMU calls for the return of a mine inspectorate. I remember the Strongman people wanting the same thing. One of the rescue team for Strongman subsequently bought a takeaway business: 'The health and safety manual for the takeaway bar is as thick as a bloody encyclopaedia,' he'd reported, 'whereas the manual for a mine is as thin as an exercise book. It's bloody ridiculous.'

'To sleep, perchance to dream.' As I fall asleep, Hamlet's monologue flicks through my mind.

Day Six

everything that creepeth upon the earth

Time has become almost stationary in the mediatised world—at best we experience the odd movement. To compensate, I find I have a greater awareness of the natural world going about its business, its busyness. Cindy's car fails a warrant because of uneven rear braking so I drive down to Daniel's to use his trolley jack; I take off the wheels and brake drums and clean out the gunk. The physical detail of chocking the wheels, jacking up the car, removing the nuts, tapping the drums so they come off, is pleasurable.

Daniel's been back down mine. I ask him how it is. 'The thought's there,' he says. I tell him these disasters seem to occur at fifty-year intervals so he should be okay. He tells me his work mates are upset. Some of their best friends are down below.

I clean the rehearsal space before going home where I turn on the radio and there it is: a second explosion at the mine. That's it folks. Now the fact that those down there are dead can be acknowledged. As a matter of fact.

On the news at six, one of the fathers, a lean, unforgiving man, analyses the week. 'Should've gone in. The rest of it's been a PR exercise,' he says. But the CEO, a rotund uncle of a man who has gained everyone's respect, continues 'the exercise' in the best possible way. Two kinds of people, really. Now, the opera of solace begins — from church and state. We eat a sombre meal, then I remember there's a meeting and a working bee at the swimming pool. 'Surely they will have cancelled it,' says Cindy.

But no, everyone's there, the kids catching tadpoles and small frogs in the muddy water that has accumulated at the deep end of this pool, which was dug out by the miners on strike in 1908. After the meeting there is a cacophony of lawnmowers and weed eaters. Rob's house silently watches this frantic activity, which could be seen as a bizarre avoidance of grief. Cindy is horrified, but it seems okay to me. 'What's the problem?' I ask.

'I don't know. It's spiritual, I think. Things should stop for a while.'

And afterwards people do go to a number of wakes. We gather some flowers and take them around to the Memorial, write 29 in coal. Murray and his family join us and I sing, *Kia whakarongo ake, ki te tangi*. I don't know what to say. Their daughter cries. On the way home, a little boy on a bike proudly shows us the graze he suffered when he fell off. 'It almost bled,' I say and he vigorously nods, unaware of the irony.

I dream that Rob's house catches fire. And then I dream that I see his ghost planing demolition rimu on the veranda. And then the ambulance pager goes off. But after stumbling around donning clothes I realise I'm not on duty, and simply forgot to turn the pager off. Cursing, I go back to sleep.

Day Seven

God ended his work which he had made

I wake up to the dawn chorus and remember my dreams. All that is a tangle—ghosts and spirits and hauntings. There'd be no end to it. The flax has flowered. When I come back from my run, there's a pair of tui and a kereru sitting in the big tree. I feel the grief stir inside of me for the first time, an archaic sort of a feeling requiring laceration and pain.

We were to have had a private performance tonight, but the cast email saying it is inappropriate. One is part of a trauma team. So there is a series of phone calls before I go into town for the first time since the event. Here there is diversion; the tourist train has arrived and the hustle of buses and rental cars is normal. But I don't know what to say to the bank teller or the bulk food shop women. The supermarket checkout operator still tells me to have a happy

> **Daniel's been back down mine. I ask him how it is. 'The thought's there,' he says. I tell him these disasters seem to occur at fifty-year intervals so he should be okay. He tells me his work mates are upset. Some of their best friends are down below.**

day. Their manners have become more upmarket since the take-over. The union office displays emails of support from around the world. The Council lawn is scattered with satellite dishes and pup tents and reporters are filmed as they give their update. We have become a global media event. Tama wanders along and we hongi. 'About time those bastards pissed off,' he says.

I head up to the school where my daughter teaches, to join her class' cricket practice, but it has been cancelled. I find her in a room where instead she is testing individual students. On my way out I pause at the principal's office and we talk over the situation. She's a delicate seeming woman, like an aristocrat, but a wonderful leader. She tells me being in a school at a time like this is in many ways a good thing. The children demand the same level of input. They don't care.

'Like the birds,' I say.

'Exactly.'

As usual this has hit the vulnerable the hardest. She pities the miners who may well be out of work, many of them from overseas. They've become a tight group and they love it here.

The paper's front page features the twenty-nine dead miners. A trust fund is being set up for the families. But inside is news of the welfare reform group: people are to be assessed as to how much they're liable to cost over their lifetime. Solo parents sent out to work when the child is one year old. The twenty-nine families could prove to be costly. The contradiction goes unnoticed.

Daniel is off fishing again and my daughter comes to dinner. We discuss how difficult it must have been for the policeman heading the investigation, and the Pike CEO. I wonder how Daniel is coping. 'He's fine,' she reports. 'He just wants to go back to work.' His uncle wants him out of the mine, but it's Daniel's career. At the end-of-year dinner the foreman had told her Daniel will get to be shift leader, and he'll be able to work anywhere in the world. 'It means he's not just a labourer all his life,' she says. Some of their Wellington friends are a bit snooty about it, but they simply don't understand. 'Since coming down here I realise mining's a culture,' she says. As for danger, when Daniel worked on construction sites in Wellington there were at least two people killed a year.

Afterward we go down to the Hilton where the union officials are staying. At dinner the secretary's phone goes at regular intervals: BBC, Radio Ireland, New York … I'm suddenly on the margins of the media centred power game. He who speaks most has the most power. Courtier stuff really. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern again. With CNN for King Claudius. I join the locals outside. Murray is getting pissed. Must be having to look at Rob's house all the time from his kitchen window. The publican says he's going to let off twenty-nine fireworks some time soon—our own memorial service. He says that just before the second explosion they'd been going to send in the rescue team, but one of those assessing the gases had luckily said no. Now that would've been a total fuckup.

We go inside and a man sits at the bar, a boundaried, together sort of bloke. Someone you'd trust with explosives. He's the hole borer. He says it's been a circus up at the mine. Now most of them have pissed off and they can get on with it. He's spent all day filling out paperwork so they can drill a second hole. To do anything in a national park requires a lot of paperwork. He tells us that after they've drilled a second hole at the end of the mine tunnels, they'll put a jet engine in the mine entrance, start it up and that'll hopefully blow all the gas out the hole. Then they can pump in nitrogen. After it's been sealed for a few days, it should be safe to go in and get the bodies, which won't be in a good state.

'They were dead after that first explosion,' I say.

'Course they were.'

On the late news the British government, at the same time as slashing jobs and benefit levels, is setting up a happiness enquiry, in order to measure not only the GDP but the Gross National Happiness. The hypocrisy of the system is mind-boggling. And then a woman who used to be a grief expert, whatever that might mean, gives a sound bite on how hard it will be for the families.

I think over the last week. Are we really now in a time when our very feeling structure is being manipulated via the media? Is this the 1984 Orwell worried over, where every moment is stage-managed at this intimate level by the many involved, unaware of what they're doing or how they're doing it? All simply playing their part. Hamlet has crept in again. The quotes begin tumbling: There's something rotten. Mark me …

But I reject this theatricalising. We go outside and the publican lets off a firework. The boom echoes through the village. If only we had the guts of the Zapatista.

We say goodnight, give everyone a hug and wander off home, past the bucket of fresh flowers beneath the memorial. a

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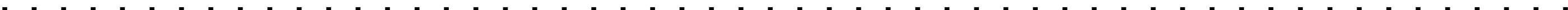

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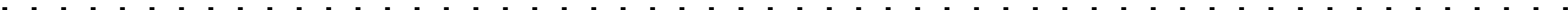

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From page 26

Australian Climate Politics 2010

Ian Bailey

An outsider looking in sees co-operative ways forward in a leaderless policy debate

Months on from the 2010 election, just how the new minority government will develop a new climate change strategy for Australia remains a very open question. The government has every reason to be cautious in how it elaborates its strategy. Climate change has become one of the most divisive issues in Australian politics. The main outcomes of an increasingly partisan debate on the issue over the past two years have been the demise of Labor's flagship emissions trading system—the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS)—and the curtailing of the party leaderships of both Malcolm Turnbull and Kevin Rudd.

For the past few months I have been attempting to make some sense of the twists and turns of Australian climate politics during a research sabbatical at the University of New South Wales. I've talked to a great many people from state and federal government, business and environmental groups, as well as numerous independent commentators. The overall impression I've gained is that Rudd's failure to secure Senate support for the CPRS, the clarion signals of Australia's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, and the uncertainties created by the 2010 election have prompted unprecedented reflection by all sides on the challenges involved in steering Australia towards a low-carbon economy. Most expressed similar views on the mistakes made with the CPRS bill, but only a minority has been prepared to venture opinions on how the government might de-polarise Australian climate politics enough to engineer political, business and public acceptance of substantive emissions-reduction measures.

My aim in this essay is to offer an outsider's view on key political obstacles Australia needs to address to make greater progress on the climate issue. By this I do not mean my personal views on what targets the country should adopt, what form of carbon pricing mechanisms Australia needs, or what levels of assistance should be given to energy-intensive industries. Getting these right are crucial to developing a robust and realistic climate governance regime, but they should all be eminently negotiable in a political system that is clear about the problem it is addressing and has the capabilities to work through disputes in a solution-focused manner. Unfortunately, many of these ingredients were lacking during the CPRS debate and need to be re-established swiftly if climate change is to avoid spiralling into further partisan bickering with no end result.

The first ingredient, the need for political leadership, seems so self-evident that it would seem scarcely to need mentioning. However, it receded rapidly during Rudd's premiership and current signals remain uncertain. Having swept to power in 2007 promising leadership in key areas where John Howard dawdled, including climate change, Labor's chief tactic during the CPRS debate swiftly became one of following everyone, by trying to devise a CPRS that appealed simultaneously to the party, the Coalition, resource companies and the electorate. This tactic backfired badly, leaving the policy—and Rudd—friendless and ripe for political assassination.

There are limited signs yet that the Gillard government is prepared to assume such a leadership role. Instead, careful political risk management seems to be the order of the day. During the election campaign, Labor and the Coalition both tried their hardest to bury climate change as an issue, in Labor's case, to stem Tony Abbott's slogan factory on the government's goals and parlous record on climate change. The imperative for the Coalition, meanwhile, was to avoid exposing rifts between its pro- and anti-climate policy factions by focusing on negative campaigning while avoiding mention of its own insubstantial policies.

While both tactics made perfect sense in avoiding adverse headlines during an election campaign, the swing to the Greens in the House and Senate demonstrates that a significant proportion of the Australian public remains concerned about climate change and wants government action even if it is unsure about specific measures. The lesson here is that defensive political management on climate change may avert short-term losses but it does little to persuade voters that party leaders are prepared to deal with contentious, long-term problems even where they may be fundamental to the country's welfare. The perhaps predictable outcome was voter disillusionment with the two main political parties and a drift to parties that were willing to make such claims.

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Management of political—rather than policy or public—risks nevertheless still appears to be the touchstone of Labor's approach to climate policy. Julia Gillard's Citizens' Assembly was a mercifully short-lived attempt to test the public's appetite for action before announcing any measures. The Climate Change Commission and the business and non-government roundtables are more serious attempts to nurture a cross-sector rapprochement but still imply that an ill-defined 'consensus' should precede any action. Finally, Greg Combet's announcement of an Australian Productivity Commission investigation into carbon prices in other OECD countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, China, Japan and India, might be another prudent step to prevent the Australian economy being disadvantaged against its major trading partners but still smacks of a government preoccupied with hedging against all risks to its political standing. The Productivity Commission investigation itself is a direct consequence of a deal between Labor and Tony Windsor, one of the 'balance-of-power' independents, and was a condition of Labor gaining enough seats to remain in power. This is again symptomatic of a policy shift driven by party priorities rather than one based on reasoned analysis of necessary steps to establish a carbon price in Australia.

This does not mean that such initiatives are misjudged, simply that they must be accompanied by real political leadership if they are to avoid becoming vehicles for confusion and inaction. A necessary starting point is for the government to send strong (and regular) signals of its reasons for acting, its determination to do so, and the need for other parties to tailor their demands accordingly. If one thing wrecked the CPRS, it was the Rudd government's failure to make a sustained and evidence-based case for carbon pricing based on the risks climate change poses to Australian water supplies, agriculture, eco-systems and mobility. Instead, it became sucked into debates on the workings of emissions trading and how compensation to industry would be calculated. It is little surprise that voters and businesses lost sight of the case for action and started seeing only the costs. It also sent a message that the government was prepared to compromise on every aspect of the policy and had little stamina to deal with its self-proclaimed great 'moral, economic and social challenge'. This can only have withered voter confidence further and emboldened groups that wanted to kill the CPRS.

Another key element of political leadership on climate change—more but not wholly in evidence in the new government's strategy—involves initiating an honest and transparent debate on the implications of climate policy for electricity generation and consumption, transport and mobility, planning, agriculture and forestry, and trade relations. As Nick Rowley points out in *The Politics of Climate Change*, achieving climate stasis requires an unprecedented shift in the nature of the global economy (and national economies); questions about how to achieve emissions targets across each affected sector just cannot be avoided.

Leadership in this respect cannot mean trying to build support by pretending climate policy will be costless to consumers or Australia's commodity industries, as Rudd seemed to do in the concession packages offered and in the ill-defined way the CPRS was portrayed as a cost-effective policy instrument. Neither does it mean using obstruction by other countries to justify inactivity in Australia or trying to gain an impossible consensus for policies that risked sacrificing the Australian economy or lifestyles. It is about a political approach that deals directly with the hard choices a transition to a low-carbon economy involves, giving as much policy certainty as can be provided to affected groups, but insisting on challenging and measurable emissions-reduction targets. Some gains may be made through envisioning the new economic opportunities that climate change mitigation may present, as suggested by David Hetherington and Tim Soutphommasane in *What's the Story? Nation-building Narratives in Australian Climate Politics*, but again not at the expense of recognising the structural adjustments and costs required. The crucial step, therefore, is not the convening of the Climate Change Committee and roundtables but the way in which they approach their task and how the government guides these debates. The decision to reduce economy-wide emissions is a strategic choice that requires commitment rather than relying on cost-benefit analysis. This does not mean that the costs and trade-offs are unimportant but, as Rudd's demise shows, it is not possible to triangulate on reducing emissions in an equivocal way, especially if it makes action a matter of urgency one day and then worthy of delay the next.

One of the most disheartening aspects of listening to the CPRS debate was the extent to which a policy aimed at promoting the long-term common good of avoiding calamitous climate change fell prey to short-term electoral politics. When Kevin Rudd introduced the CPRS White Paper in December 2008, he stated: 'We will be attacked from the far right for taking any action at all. We will be attacked from parts of the far left for not going far enough by refusing to close down Australia's coal industry. The government believes we have got the balance right'.

It is important to be clear here that political disagreements fall into two broad categories: those based on convictions about policy goals and the means to achieve these—both of which are crucial elements of democratic politics—and those based on gaining some form of electoral, group or individual advantage. The two do not separate neatly, but at least three instances where the CPRS was used for electoral advantage can be identified. First, there was the Greens' refusal to support the CPRS, based in part on principled objections to a policy that its leaders decided would lock in failure until at least 2020, but also a calculated manoeuvre to improve the party's electoral standing by appealing to concerns about Rudd's lack of commitment on climate change. Second, there was Rudd's decision not to call a double dissolution election following the Senate's second rejection of the CPRS bill. Among other things this betrayed a tactical reasoning that even if Labor won that election, it would have faced a Senate in which the Greens held the balance of power and where Labor would be forced to deal with the Greens on all major policy issues while giving them a platform from which to corrode the left flank of the Labor vote. Put crudely, electoral interests trumped conviction. Finally, Malcolm Turnbull was a casualty of both an ideological rift within the Coalition on human impacts on the climate system, and more primitive arguments by elements within the Liberals and Nationals that supporting the CPRS would cost votes and, potentially, the split the Nationals from the Coalition. Turnbull stood his ground, to his credit, but was trampled.

Whatever layers of complexity one adds to this analysis, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that

cynical, victory driven party politics is immensely damaging to a consistent long-term approach to climate policy. Many have argued that it was better for the Greens to oppose a weak policy so as to secure a stronger one later. Others warn against disenfranchising voters on such a crucial issue. Both arguments are valid but at the same time, the United Kingdom and Germany have achieved greater progress on climate policy and have not compromised democratic principles by fostering cross-party agreement on the issue. The argument is not about suppressing dissenting ideas but about recognising that achieving long-term emissions reduction requires consistency. This cannot be achieved while parties play short-term electoral politics with climate change.

Whether there is any prospect of a more conciliatory tone to climate politics in Australia while Tony Abbott leads the Coalition is doubtful. However, the problem is arguably more structural in origin. The two-party preferred voting system encourages parties to avoid being unpopular on a broad range of issues, in order to maximise their first and second preferences, rather than seeking an outright majority by taking clear stands on core issues. Compulsory voting within a constituency-based system tends to encourage parties to target the concerns of a small number of relatively disengaged voters in a few marginal seats rather than addressing the major issues or even the concerns of the majority whose voting behaviour is pretty much guaranteed. These are intensely difficult issues, not least because Australia's variant of Westminster style democracy has delivered long periods of stability and economic prosperity. Arguments for reforming the system to cope with the new political challenges of the 21st century—be they climate change or balancing corporate power and accountability in a globalising world—will need to be evaluated carefully. Political opportunism nevertheless remains an insidious feature of Australian climate politics and must be addressed—whether through changes in mindset, constitution or other means—if the country is to develop clear, long-term emissions-reduction policies.

Another conspicuous feature of Australian climate politics is how much winning the next vote in parliament has become an overriding objective. This is especially evident in some commentaries about the influence of energy-intensive, trade-exposed industries (EITEIs) on the CPRS debate. After all, corporations do not vote in the House or Senate, or in elections, so why be concerned about what they think? Something of the same argument has also permeated opinion pieces on seeking the support of opposition parties. If you have a majority of one, why bother negotiating?

It is understandable that advocates of stronger climate policy want to clear the hurdle at which the CPRS stumbled and maintain the pressure on major emitters. However, those who believe a '50 per cent plus one' approach will deliver consistent and focused climate policy may learn some salutary lessons from Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky's classic book *Implementation*. It tells a story of policy implementation where achieving outcomes depends on complex bargaining between multiple organisations with different priorities at multiple stages, during each of which the probability of agreement or sound coordination diminishes. The object lesson here is that if implementing a far-reaching policy reform (like emissions trading) is difficult when it enjoys broad support, it is virtually impossible to implement if the policy enjoys only a slender majority and alternative viewpoints are ignored. The almost certain outcome of a 50 per cent plus one approach would be a return to a siege mentality among targeted EITEIs and a redoubling of their efforts to prove how much the economy will suffer—and how little the global environment will benefit—from even a modest carbon price. Such resistance may take several forms. Companies may release statements connecting climate policy with falls in profitability or deferred investments affecting growth and employment. No general election has ever been won or lost solely on climate change but plenty of governments have been unseated on their economic record. Companies may also campaign inside political parties for policy or regime change. It is also hard to think of a policy that devolves more responsibility to companies and markets—and thus relies more on their co-operation—than emissions trading.

Adherents to such an approach would, I presume, propose three main counter-arguments. The first is that trying to work with EITEIs led to a CPRS that lacked rigour and political acceptability. The second is that opposition to a carbon-pricing mechanism will quickly peter out once it becomes law, much as happened with the GST. The third is that even if EITEI opposition to robust emissions trading continues, the government retains the whip hand because it controls the emissions cap. The second and third arguments are fairly straightforward to deal with, in that limited parallels exist between the competitive effects of a GST on all affected goods sold in Australia irrespective of their place of origin, and those of a carbon price for Australian products in the absence of similar prices in competing economies. Similarly, although there are problems with drawing parallels between EU service based economies and Australia's commodity based export industries, useful lessons can still be drawn from Europe about how corporate and state lobbying can distort emissions caps and allowance distributions from their theoretical optimum.

The first argument is harder to refute but still offers few practical suggestions about how the government might defend against the lobbying efforts of EITEIs. Focusing

only on parliamentary majorities also disregards the contribution of EITEIs towards the creation of a new, low-carbon infrastructure; it merely alienates important potential partners. The EU's painstaking negotiations with its member states, industry and environmental groups to gain their acceptance of each next step in its climate strategy, in contrast, has proven much more productive. This does not mean the EU trading scheme has been problem free or is working to its potential, but it provides strong counter-evidence to the tactic of divide and conquer.

Moving towards a more co-operative path requires a more open and detailed debate than has taken place so far, happened on the risks carbon pricing poses to Australian investments if we were to agree on principles for transitional support for industry, and the mechanisms for reviewing and reducing assistance. The devil is clearly in the detail: industry may easily be drawn back into a Molotov mentality if it sees the assistance package as inadequate; too much support or secrecy and the government will be accused of collusion. But it needs to be recognised that almost every major economic reform, in Australia and other countries, has involved transitional measures. For instance, the introduction of the United Kingdom's climate change levy and the German ecological tax reform were both accompanied by reductions in employers' social security contributions, while energy-intensive firms in the United Kingdom were offered an 80 per cent reduction in their levy in exchange for legally binding targets on emissions reduction. In a similar vein, the introduction of the GST in Australia involved exemptions on basic foodstuffs as well as deals on the distribution of revenues to the state governments. An adversarial approach contributes virtually nothing towards resolving transition issues facing energy-dependent sectors. Rather, the key is to create policy with an in-built 'strengthen-ability', a capacity to tighten targets and trim down assistance without running the parliamentary gauntlet each time. This does not mean locking in failure but nor does it mean steamrollering industry concerns. It means creating commonly agreed trajectories and evidence-based review processes (recognising that no-one really knows the abatement potential in each sector or how international negotiations will unfold) which are sufficiently independent of party politics to be trusted by all major groups. Garnaut's proposal for an independent carbon bank was a move in this direction; the creation of a UK style Climate Change Committee as an independent scrutineer of government and industry actions would be another important step. Care will be needed to define the criteria and benchmarks such a committee would use to evaluate government policy, but a key element is likely to be ensuring measures are consistent with the achievement of short, medium and long-term emissions targets. Ultimately, the value of an independent committee lies not in its existence but in the clarity of the link between its remit and effective action to reduce Australia's emissions.

The final arresting feature of Australian climate politics is the apparent widespread presumption that the main task in triggering low-carbon investment is the confirmation of a carbon price. It reminds me of a joke where an engineer, a chemist and an economist are marooned on a desert island. The engineer binds driftwood into a raft but it is too flimsy and sinks. The chemist tries to alchemise sand into a glass vessel but his lens is inadequate for the task. The economist watches them with amusement before eventually saying: 'You're doing it all wrong. It's very simple ... First, assume a raft'. It's a cheap shot but tells a serious story about the perils of economistic thinking in relation to creating a low-carbon pathway. To be sure, price signals are a powerful way of rationing demand for using the atmosphere as a carbon sink but, as Malcolm Turnbull has often said, emissions trading and carbon taxes are just pieces of economic plumbing to help fix the wider, structural problem of decarbonising the energy system, industry processes, transport, construction and buildings, agriculture, forestry and so on.

The vital thing to recognise is that each of the above has an economic dimension, a technological dimension, an infrastructural dimension, and an attitudinal and behavioural dimension. The last is least easily controlled by a carbon price since it involves a host of social beliefs, and geographical and socio-economic factors that make human decision-making more complex than a worldview which portrays people as economic maximisers who respond rationally to a carbon price can capture. A carbon price is necessary but insufficient for the range of transformations needed. This realisation must be integrated more fully into the optics of ministers, their officials, investment bankers and industry. It is part and parcel of what makes climate change such a wicked problem. Rather different lessons can be gleaned from Europe here, where despite far-reaching reforms to its emissions trading scheme, most emissions cuts gained so far by sectors in the scheme have come from structural adjustments resulting from the global economic downturn. The danger is that serendipitous gains are wrongly attributed to carbon pricing, leading to the neglect of complementary (and possibly unpopular) measures to deal with the multitude of other challenges involved in transforming human behaviour.

Several people in their analyses of Australia's climate politics have recalled the final chapter of *The Lucky Country*, in which Donald Horne unflatteringly remarks that 'Australia is a lucky country, run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck'. Some of Horne's diagnosis is clearly anachronistic but other parts retain a haunting relevance to the forms of politics that have evolved as a result of Australia's party system, its mineral riches, and a collective reluctance by political and business leaders to develop a broader vision of Australia's fortunes than as a commodity provider to Asia. On balance, I prefer the book's final passage, where Horne invokes other qualities that have helped Australians to face down adversity: their non-doctrinaire tolerance, their sense of fair play, their adaptability and talent for improvisation, and their courage and stoicism. Refocusing on these facets may provide Australian politics and the Australian people with potent weapons for dealing with the multidimensional challenges of climate change. What they especially imply for me are a basic realism about the commitments involved in mitigating climate change, and a concern to join a global effort rather than finding reasons to remain apart from it. It also means demanding greater transparency and accountability from its politicians and business leaders. The signs so far are that the new Labor administration is giving it a go but that a further injection of the first priceless quality I mentioned, political leadership, would give the process a much-needed boost. a

Earth and People in Concert

Nonie Sharp

A Living Earth

When scientist Tim Flannery wrote *The Weather Makers* five years ago he gave us an eerie sense of human footprints on the Earth that may presage a descent towards climate catastrophe. He describes there the beginnings of his own awakening. Twenty-five years before he had been troubled to find that the tree ferns of the grassland had already taken root in the alpine forest floor of Papua New Guinea.

Other minds were stirring too in the 1980s, and here in Australia scientists with CSIRO felt obliged to speak out on the signs of dangerous change in the climate. They were silenced ... Fortunately we now have what Tim Jackson, an independently minded, fearless and down to earth thinker has called a critical mass of informed opinion on what has gone wrong, and importantly, the moral/practical commitment to people and to the planet to act responsibly.

Today, while sharing his deepened understanding of the planet as a living Earth, Tim Flannery offers us all an argument for hope. In *Here on Earth* (Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2010) he concludes that the realisation of our hopes rests on the ending of the ingrained belief that the planet exists for us. Unless we come face to face with this misconception, he concludes finally, there is no hope: 'if we do not strive to love one another, and to love our planet as much as we love ourselves, then no further human progress is possible here on Earth'.

Notwithstanding this heartfelt warning carried in his concluding words, in the several hundred pages in between, Tim Flannery makes an imaginative argument for the triumph of the co-operative endeavour over our capture by self-interest. His canvas is not restricted to the realm of climate—what is happening in the atmosphere—the 'great aerial ocean', Alfred Wallace's poetic description.

Flannery's searching analysis centres on a belief that we are not simply the creatures of ruthless, selfish genes bent on acquisition, as Richard Dawkins and others would have us believe of ourselves, and which the time of market supremacy has brought into dominance. We are two-sided, with both a history of reckless manipulation of nature and all living creatures, with also a demonstrable history of co-operation—a way of social being with deep (if increasingly invisible) roots in all cultures and among all living creatures.

Flannery draws this conclusion from his deepening understanding of Earth and its myriad species. Right throughout nature the life-giving note is co-operation. And central to his argument here is the view of Earth as a living organism, an understanding with origins in the ideas of Alfred Russell Wallace, Darwin's fellow naturalist. Importantly in our time James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis—the view of Earth 'as a self-regulating system'—rests at the core of Flannery's argument for hope. He separates himself not only from Charles Darwin's conception of competitive natural selection but most radically from Richard Dawkins' neo-Darwinist belief in a selfish gene lying at the heart of evolution.

It is in this realm—the nature of Nature—that Flannery makes an especially valuable and lasting contribution to our understanding, one that carries the possibility for hope. Importantly, he sees mnemes (also memes), derived from the Greek word for memory, as carrying the inherited tendency towards both co-operation and selfishness in nature and in social life. A nature 'red in tooth and claw',[1] so central to Dawkins' view of Earth and social life, is totally alien to Flannery's understanding of the potentiality of life. His knowledge of the co-operative communities of the non-human species—ant colonies for example—serves him well.

Tim Flannery, philosopher, poet-scientist, is at his brilliant best in the realm of comparative zoology where human social life is the province of one species among so many. The author's deepened and extended knowledge of the complex and many-sided modes of interaction within and between the species and their complex environments create a dense complexity that extends across the centre of *Here on Earth*. This is the province of his singular creative contribution to our understanding.

Yet there is a sense in which, while recognising the social as being critical in his argument for hope—or otherwise—Flannery the natural scientist is hemmed in by biology. Given the respect which his work demands, it can be said that he takes for granted the 'givenness' of human nature. After all, it is in social life that we humans find our humanity and have our being. A life that may or may not go beyond and suppress what

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Nonie Sharp

Bio to come?

Flannery, in his poet's voice, terms 'the siren song of self-interest'.

Rightly, he sees causes and solutions in social terms. Yet it is in the breadth and depth—the inner functioning of the social—where one need look to find solutions to today's most pressing and ever-looming crises. As I hope to show, taking human nature for granted today is a perilous assumption. Most important yet least understood is that the very fabric of human being, socially created and persisting over aeons is today being overtaken and refashioned. That refashioning, if allowed free rein, will willy-nilly bring about the very consequence that Flannery fears: 'no further human progress'. Yes, but much worse than that: neither a viable planet, *nor* a protesting humanity! So if Tim Flannery makes a necessary digression into dense discussion, so must I. Mine centres on the social logic of co-operation between humans and with other species.

In Concert with One Another: The Primacy of the Social

'Those berries are for other people.' Gabriel had eaten several strawberries and been offered another from a large bowl. The small boy's answer is learned in places where sharing, co-operation are the keynote. The family, child care, kindergarten—the good of others—is absorbed as part of a moral code.

Tim Flannery's discussion of the practise of co-operation found among all living beings and its source in mneme is both exciting and timely. It is also confirmatory of my own conclusions about humankind, which come from a different source. Among the strands that make up 'co-operation and the good of others' two stand out. One is the reciprocities that began their endless life in the rudiments of the social.

French anthropologist, the late Claude Levi-Strauss identifies the beginning of social life with a taboo on incest. If we must find our marriage partners from within an unrelated group, we then become bound to that group through marriage—and forever. Beyond incest we find a host of giving, returning and renewed giving, a process that sprang, sealed and perpetuated a social life in which any hypothesised 'selfish gene' is suppressed by the impetus towards co-operation.

In his landmark study *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss (who happened to be Levi-Strauss' nephew) provides an elaborated study of how social life came to be ongoing through exchanges of gifts drawn from neighbourhoods with different ecologies. As Mauss and a host of others have shown (and Karl Polanyi's work is important here), reciprocal exchanges of enormous complexity and range grew up in many places of the world, forming a groundwork in the history of all civilisations. And reciprocities with others includes those between humans with plant and animal kingdoms, an understanding now having a wide airing, especially in the realm of ecocriticism. A highly relevant example is found in the Massey Lecture series 'How Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World'.

Importantly for all of us today, reciprocity remains the key word in locating and understanding how our small boy came to berry sharing. Cultural shaping, not some sort of unfolding human essence is at work here: so 'those berries are for other people!'

There is a second strand within contemporary cultures that feeds, strengthens and perpetuates reciprocities—the impetus towards co-operation. Put briefly, it emerges from the world's great religions. And it is from the Judaeo-Christian tradition from which I take my cue; one too that has shaped Tim Flannery: 'A new commandment I give unto you,/that ye love one another' (John 13).

Where the neo-liberal market has come to rule, the keynote of life is not co-operation (except in the narrowest sense), but survival of the fittest as defined and regulated by the market. Where the market creates, expands and comes to shape the individualist ethos—where self-interest comes to reign supreme—we are pressured into losing the very thing that can save us and the Earth ...We lose ourselves.

Hoping against Hope

Long ago my mother told me that hoping against hope was hoping very hard yet fearing the worst. Could be in the face of oncoming tragedy. The outcome of the December summit at Cancun, Mexico has underlined the conclusion reached a year ago that disastrous climate change is more than just a prospect. There mitigation was the active word. A rise in temperature of just two degrees is lost: 3.2 degrees rather than four degrees has become a new target. A tragedy for the planet in 2060, and for the bright-eyed strawberry sharer who is my grandson.

A decade into the new century, we have a wide range of lucid thinkers awakened from the spell of unlimited economic growth to its moral and practical implications.

Is hope forlorn under these circumstances? No. For to give up is to relinquish part of ourselves, part that we carry around within the layers of our humanity. It would be like betraying ourselves, not only those who come after, but also those who came before us. Anyone can find hope, writes Alexis Wright, a daughter of the land-sea Waanyi people of the Gulf of Carpentaria region. They can find hope by listening to the stories of the old people. Her epic

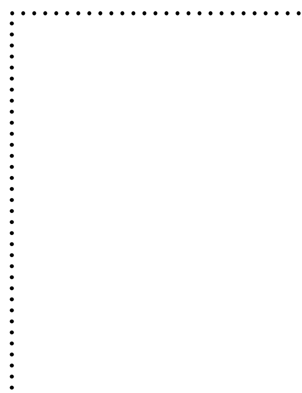
Carpentaria ends with the song of a watery land. Here in the face of terrible calamity, the ecology of place takes in, Gaia-like, the living of all kinds within the mystery of life: '... there was so much song, wafting off the watery land singing the country afresh'.

Sadly, our 'terrible calamity' at present remains invisible. And it is by no means identifiable simply as oncoming disastrous climate change. More to the point is that it pertains to changes in us, changes that are invisible and therefore all the more deadly for that reason ...changes that incapacitate us.

Recasting Humanity?

Tim Flannery has known for years that our consumption of the Earth places our future and that of the other species in jeopardy. Yet surely the move towards tragedy goes deeper and potentially much more tragically than the stalemate he identifies at the close of his book. There are all too visible signs that 'the siren song of self-interest' is intensifying as to so transform us that we come to be at the mercy of our worst selves. Could it be that the side of us that teaches our children to share, that comes to one another's aid in time of flood and fire, sits alongside that other side growing in us like the cancer cell?

Although Tim Flannery doesn't engage explicitly with this changing social reality that begins to envelop us, the sad truth is that we are becoming so self-interestedly wrought that we begin to place in abeyance that very quality that could save us and all the species.



Fortunately, a decade into the new century, we have a wide range of lucid thinkers awakened from the spell of unlimited economic growth to its moral and practical implications. 'We can't go on crashing the economy and wrecking the planet', says UK economist Tim Jackson. He is much nearer than the other Tim to identifying how the siren song of self-interest has come to threaten a sense of common endeavour. This change, Jackson concludes, is a consequence of the transformation of social life into an economy of individual consumers. The public good is increasingly sidelined or made redundant.

In his fearless and inspiring book *Prosperity Without Growth* (earthscan, London, 2009), Jackson tackles the question of economic growth head-on. Any other attempted move will continue to foster the limitless growth mirage, and in turn, place in jeopardy the future of all species and the Earth.

The most fearful possibility is as I have stated; how we might lose the very quality of ourselves that could save us and the planet. Coming to be at the mercy of our worst—and transforming selves!

It so happens that an ongoing transformation of humankind is both fundamental and mainly invisible in its operation. How to talk about it without the listener or reader switching off? Turning deaf ... Behind Tim Jackson's insight into a world of individual consumers there lies a transformation of a new order. That order rests within the realm of the technosciences. Communication changes in form: as it fillets the dense combination of the senses within the interchange between the you and the me of direct presence, it also changes us. Here we are exiting the realm of common sense reality and moving into a reality 'within a different register'. A 'reality' which beckons us as if from the entrance to another place'.[2] As others associated with Arena have further concluded, there is evidence that the basic layer of our humanity—variously identified as the co-operative, the reciprocal, a sense of the common good—is likely to assert itself; to reject that effort destined to leave our common humanity behind, or even to discard it. Let us hope so ...

Notes

1 Gaia, the living earth, is a far cry from 'Nature red in tooth and claw' shrieking against God's Creed that cares for each single life. Tennyson's words hitting out at nature were the poet's response to his dearest friend's tragic and untimely death ('In Memoriam', *Poems of Tennyson* 1830–1870, Oxford University Press, London, 1912, p. 393). Dawkins uses Tennyson's phrase to suit his own purposes: it sums up 'our modern understanding of natural selection admirably' (*The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 21).

2 See Geoff Sharp, 'To Market, to Market', *Arena Magazine* 100, 2009, pp. 35–42; Arena Publications editors, 'Reflections on the Current Condition', *Arena Magazine* 100, 2009, pp. 4–8.

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Earth and People in Concert

Nonie Sharp

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Almaza
A letter from the Saifi in Beirut, a haven amid the rising tension

Chips Mackinolty

Chips Mackinolty is a writer and artist who has been based in the Northern Territory for thirty years. With Therese Ritchie, he has held a retrospective of their work, Not dead yet, a collection of political and social justice issues over forty years. He currently works in policy and research for the Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance Northern Territory. This is an edited extract of a series of the author's emails from Lebanon.

Almaza

A letter from the Saifi in Beirut, a haven amid the rising tension

Chips Mackinolty

You reach the Saifi via a narrow, steepish alley which steps down from Pasteur Street towards the bus station, below via some terraced garden beds. Most of my time, here at least, is spent at Cafe em Nazih on the ground floor; it mirrors the veranda areas two floors above me. A quarter circle perhaps six or seven metres in radius, a bar and another room behind it, tiled floors, a high ceiling. A kitchen buried behind the bar. Inside, scattered tables and chairs, a couple of low sofas. An outdoor area for sitting and cooking, with a wood oven, barbeque and a *saj*, a gas fired round metal dome for heating bread and manaa'eesh (a sort of calzone of unleavened bread stuffed with cheese or a combination of herbs and spices, meat and vegetables). Did I say the kitchen was buried? Not so. It is the focus of all here at Cafe em Nazih: it's where the Saifi draws its breath in the morning.

The Saifi itself is an improbable set up. Part boarding house, part Arabic language school, part bar and restaurant, part hangout for people who share its enthusiasms, part genealogical construct—just about the entire family is involved. Its staff and owners are passionate about Arabic culture, language and music. It's run by Rana Dirani, eight months pregnant, who's the director and inspiration behind the Arabic language school; and her American husband Mac, a lad from Colorado who has somehow been lobbed onto the east coast of the Mediterranean, a continent, an ocean and a sea away from the college football he still watches on Fox. Rana is from the Bek'aa Valley, over the mountains to the east of the country, but surrounded by family here in the big smoke. The office is run by Nazih, a Levantine Lothario, perhaps: he looks the part though that's probably unfair—he can't help looking like God's gift, from sharp casual to sleekly suited. And of course he is Rana's brother. Behind all this is Francis, an oldish, retiring Liberian; he's a slightly stooped, gentle, hard-working bloke who always has a gentle smile of greeting and a few words. He is the general behind the scenes: factotum to the Saifi—cleaning, sweeping and generally keeping an eye on the place.

The *saj* is the fiefdom of Nejah and, when it comes to BBQ time, her husband Ali: they are the soul of cooking here, from breakfast through to meals at night. They work through the week: soaking and preparing, sometimes a couple of days in advance for food which appears to be available for the best part of a day. Hummos, muttabal, kibbeh, tabbouleh, lentil soups and stuffed grape leaves are staples, and there is a daily turnover of a score of other less day-to-day dishes.

Ali lived in Sydney for a time, working as a butcher, and still plies his trade and much more besides at em Nazih—and this includes achieving land speed records for the production of omelettes. Nejah, well, she is a gorgeous women of constant good humour whose frustrated efforts to teach me Arabic cause her only some exasperation.

And all the dishes are Lebanese, a strong part of the ethos of the Saifi. The food is fresh, sourced from the Lebanese countryside for the most part—and that in itself is the ideology behind eating here: it is supremely local, always hand-prepared with care that is a million miles from fast food. Nejah's sister Zahuwa does the late evening shifts—constantly on the move, she cheerfully urges people to eat.

The breakfast menu here, among other things, offers foul or eggs. I discovered on my first morning that the initial offering, despite the spelling in English, was not a misspelling of fowl, but the Arabic word for a bean dish. So breakfast here is not really a chicken and egg dilemma at all: most days I eat beans—along with tomato, fresh cucumber, olives and unleavened bread.

On evenings the empire of the bar at Saifi is run by Hassan, a handsome and charming twenty-two year old who looks endlessly amused as I order another Almaza, the local beer, and squeezes out an eclectic diet of Arabic and Western music after the old folks have gone to bed. Hassan lives in a strongly Shi'a part of town, Dahayeh, which is about an hour away in peak traffic. Hassan is Rana's cousin; he is also from the Bek'aa. He has worked from the age of fourteen, and now works with and for his family.

The Arabic classes, especially the advanced ones, are obsessive, intense, with mostly young students drawn largely from North America; then there are some from Turkey, Armenia, Russia and Europe, with the occasional Pom and Australian. Discussion of politics and religion is banned in classes, though there is much discussion in the café afterwards. I've rarely been cheek by jowl with so many Americans—I've led a sheltered life—and not sure I like it that much. They're too young, too loud and too self-assured for my taste. There's almost certainly a spook or two among them; they're learning Arabic and talking derivatives, college football future jobs with the Federal government, and Al Jazeera with their countrymen and women. And Beirut has long been a stamping ground for spies. George Blake was here in the early 1960s; so was Kim Philby before he hot-footed it to Moscow in January 1963, after being finally nailed as a KGB agent.

> **On the one hand I have been feeling comfortable here, and on the other there is a sense of growing tension in Beirut. Not a nameless dread—but an all too familiar slide in Lebanese political life.**

A number of Lebanese nationals, including generals, are right now facing trials or the death penalty for spying for Israel. The new EU ambassador has just presented her credentials and Obama has just appointed a new ambassador to Syria. The talk around today is the deterioration in the government here: just over a third of the national unity Cabinet—the March 8 faction—have resigned, or threatened to resign, leaving the whole issue of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in more of a limbo than it was yesterday, though its findings have yet to be released. Prime Minister Saad Hariri is in the United States, or maybe on his way back; Hezbollah are blaming it all on the Yanks and the Isarelis. Jumblatt, the Druze leader, has just said there was going to be a Cabinet meeting, but 'occult' reasons prevented Hariri from calling it. Some of the Americans here have been ringing their embassy; I wouldn't even know how. Al Jazeera and CNN are not broadcasting at the moment—or at least we can't get them—and the internet is down again, as it has been on and off for five days. According to one of the locals—with a shrug of the shoulders—it's just another month in Lebanon.

On Sunday I take a day drive with Mohammad, who makes a living driving people around in his Mercedes. Shortish, talkative, casually guiding the Merc just as easily through mountain hairpins as he does in Beirut gridlock, he's envious of the low-slung Ferrari that overtakes us at one point; derisive of the suicidal Honda riders; resentful of the police-led motorcades swooping past us in charcoal, dark-windowed, chauffeured government 4WDs. He is from the south, he tells me, quite near the Israeli border. While he identifies with his home village, he senses there's a pointlessness to it: his family home was destroyed during the 2006 invasion. Maybe we will build a new one in fifty years, he tells me. His life now is in Beirut, saving money with his fiancée until they can marry and afford a place in the mountains. He is disparaging of Western males who cannot commit to one partner; they don't value family, he says.

And the mountains are a dream, if not a reality, for many Beirut residents, especially on summer weekends. Our first foray is south towards Saida, then east and north away from the coast up into the Chouf, the stronghold of the remaining famed cedars of Lebanon, now much depleted. Within forty minutes we are up a thousand metres, ears popping with altitude, the road hugging steep cliffs as we wind up east into the heartland of Lebanon. Glimpses of snow-clad mountains stretched even higher to the north; villages with houses grand and humble perched on the slopes; valleys, clearly once farmed intensively, with elaborate stone terracing tightly wrapping their contours. Much appears abandoned now, though perhaps this is to do with recent drought conditions.

One thing about Lebanon—and this is even more apparent out of town where concrete blocks hold less sway—is that it is a land of stone, and stone is the preferred building material, from pale through to yellow sandstone to limestone. The country's history, Ottoman, French and Arabic, laid in stone.

Postscript

At midnight on my the second last night in Beirut, I wake to yelling and screaming outside the window, two floors below—running feet on steps, someone scrambling along a patch of loose stone, a couple of men and a distraught sounding woman. Or maybe two women, I can't tell. It goes on for a while, then it stops. It starts again; it stops again. Obviously a vicious altercation—I have no verbal comprehension other than that it sounds awful. Should I intervene in some way? The perennial question in these situations, made more excruciating by being in a strange town, without language or context. Should I call the cops? How? The management of the Saifi? Finally I climb up to the window to see if I can make sense of it and work out what to do.

Bugger me. It's a Beirut film crew shooting a scene for a local drama. Lights, camera, action and a couple of hoses running to simulate rain for what is obviously a very noir scene. Relief: the violence is make believe.

But it spooks me, more than a little bit, and I can't sleep for a while; on the one hand I have been feeling comfortable here, and on the other there is a sense of growing tension in Beirut. Not a nameless dread—but an all too familiar slide in Lebanese political life.

That night, as I sleep, teams of Hezbollah militia spread across west Beirut as far as Downtown. From what I can gather the next day, they have occupied important intersections, with squads forming in front of key buildings. They are unarmed, but described as 'disciplined' by the local press. Later that day, kids are pulled out of schools. Back in 2008, in response to previous political tensions, Hezbollah's first move was to mount an armed occupation of the Rafik Hariri International Airport. Scores were killed across Lebanon. I am meant to be flying out the next day.

Hezbollah's response on this occasion has been just as measured, if not as spectacular. A 'dress rehearsal', as it has been described: the Hezbollah militia withdraw early in the morning as armed police move

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in. The Lebanese had government collapsed after the withdrawal of Hezbollah from the unity Cabinet—not that the Cabinet has met properly in months. That in turn produced a flurry of regional diplomacy, which now includes Turkey and Qatar, as well as Saudi and Syria, with lots of noises off stage from the UN, the United States and France. All revolves around the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) inquiring into the assassination of Rafik Hariri, after whom the airport was named.

Sunday night sees the Hezbollah leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, give a national television address—a prelude to the STL's prosecutor sending secret indictments to the judges in the international court the next day. The response of the judges is in the lap of the gods ... and that depends in which god you believe in this land of sectarian 'consensus'. The process could take weeks or months. The parliamentary speaker is holding constitutionally required discussions about forming a new government; the Turks and Qataris have abandoned conciliation talks with the various parties. The Hezbollah militia, regarded as being at least the equal of the Lebanese army, are biding their time—but they too have no apparent interest in an escalation at this stage.

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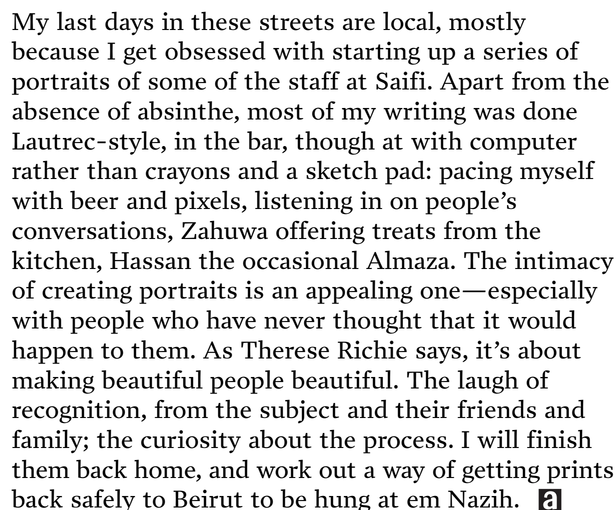
As the editorial today in the *Daily Star* said:

> Behaving according to the Constitution is in the interest of all sides—but the Constitution also assigns a lofty status to sectarian consensus. Lebanon's politicians have only a few days left to resolve this conundrum, and all past experience points to the utter failure of any attempt to exclude the leader of a major community.



It's a mess: *plus ça change*. The sectarian consensus must appear to continue, even when it palpably doesn't work. Meanwhile, many of the police are now wearing dark blue uniforms; they are heavily armed, travelling around in 4WDs, or lonely, blank-faced, one man sentries on the Charles Helou freeway—a casual, almost bored presence as they rest their arms across slung automatics.

My last days in these streets are local, mostly because I get obsessed with starting up a series of portraits of some of the staff at Saifi. Apart from the absence of absinthe, most of my writing was done Lautrec-style, in the bar, though at with computer rather than crayons and a sketch pad: pacing myself with beer and pixels, listening in on people's conversations, Zahuwa offering treats from the kitchen, Hassan the occasional Almaza. The intimacy of creating portraits is an appealing one—especially with people who have never thought that it would happen to them. As Therese Richie says, it's about making beautiful people beautiful. The laugh of recognition, from the subject and their friends and family; the curiosity about the process. I will finish them back home, and work out a way of getting prints back safely to Beirut to be hung at em Nazih. a

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10 Conditions of Documentary

John Hughes

John Hughes recently spoke with Jeff Daniels about his film *10 Conditions of Love* and his new project on the Jewish Defence League.

The Power of Documentary

Generating an international market for Jeff Daniels' controversial film *10 Conditions of Love*, about Uyghur activist Rebiya Kadeer, was probably not the ambition of those whose 'cyber-war' assault on the film's inclusion in the 2009 Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) caused such a stir. But it was one of the results.

You may remember the fuss when online bookings for all the films in the 2009 festival were shown to be sold out when they were in fact just booked out. The system was in chaos. Seven Chinese-language films, from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, were withdrawn in protest at the showing of *10 Conditions of Love*. The New York Times reported 'Film Festival in the Cross Hairs' and quoted a twenty-four-year-old computer programmer from Nanjing saying he hacked into the MIFF site as 'the Government's protests are useless. It's patriotic to use my own skills as a common citizen to fight back'. Chinese flags appeared on the MIFF site with messages such as 'We like film but we hate Rebiya Kadeer!' IT experts had to stay up for days resetting the booking system, time after time. The press reported death threats.

As effective as it was technically, purportedly costing the festival something like $50,000, the incident produced terrific publicity for the film, and very negative international reporting about China. Despite official Chinese demands that Australia 'immediately correct its wrongdoing', and cancel the screenings and a proposed visit by Kadeer, demand from audiences to see the controversial film resulted in extra screenings, including 1500 people at the Melbourne Town Hall and a short theatrical season in Melbourne.

The international distributor TVF International reported that although the film had created media interest, it hadn't translated into sales, and that broadcasters in Japan, South Korea and Canada 'all declined the doc for fear of souring relations with Chinese broadcasters'. It was feared that in Australia the ABC might quietly shelve it, having acquired the film after the MIFF controversy. But ABC Managing Director Mark Scott said this was a 'ludicrous' suggestion, and the film went to air on ABC in May 2010.

Controversy has followed the film around the world. *The New Zealand Herald* picked up something of the Melbourne kerfuffle and ran a story featuring Kadeer. Immediately following the broadcast of *10 Conditions of Love* on NZTV, a current affairs story made by Chinese National Television (CCTV News) was screened. Focused on the Uyghur riots of July 2009, in which 197 people were killed, the story's sensationalist depictions of shocking violence were accompanied by an editorial uncompromising in its depiction of Kadeer and the World Uyghur Congress as terrorists, a designation that the United Nations and the United States once endorsed but have since departed from.

The Chinese government objected to an invitation to screen the film at a film festival in Taiwan's second largest city, Kaohsiung. Here Chinese threats produced similar results to those in Melbourne: a hugely increased appeal to audiences. The director of the Kaohsiung festival decided to have it both ways: he pulled the film out of the festival and scheduled a series of screenings immediately. Hong Kong journalist Ting-I Tsai reported that 2000 local viewers came to the rescheduled screening and another forty-five community-based exhibition events were subsequently held. In Kyrgyzstan three scheduled screenings were blocked. In one instance, the film screened in the cinema while festival organisers argued with security police in a foyer; the police then turned on the house lights half-way through the screening, sending outraged audiences into uproar.

Without a doubt this film's screening around the world—and in such heightened circumstances—has done more to advance knowledge of the Uyghur people's situation than any other intervention.

'When are your people more important than your family?'

Jeff Daniels' work is marked out by its engagement with questions of identity, justice and violence. As a young New Yorker present during the Al-Qaeda attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, Jeff experienced 'funeral after funeral' in the immediate aftermath of September 11, and over the following months. But as he and his family mourned the deaths of friends and colleagues lost in the violence of those events, he also realised how useful the designation 'terrorism' could be in propaganda war.

> The Chinese government was claiming that this Al-Qaeda associated group was coming to China and wreaking havoc … What interested me was how I was duped by the Chinese government into believ ing Osama Bin Laden was hiding in the hills of 'Uyghur town'. That was really one of the stories at the time. I read it in *The New York Times* and I didn't give it a second thought. I later realised how quick I was to believe a lot of what my govern- ment and media were saying because I was looking for someone to blame.

John Hughes

John Hughes is an independent filmmaker based in Melbourne. His most recent film, **Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia** (broadcast on ABC TV in December 2010), won the Australian Writer's Guild award for best broadcast documentary in 2010. Jeff Daniels' **10 Conditions of Love** is widely available on DVD in bookshops and video retailers.

10 Conditions of Love is one response to that moment. The film is a powerful, personal story of a determined, complex East Turkestan Uyghur woman and the dilemma she faces as an exile in the United States and activist against China and its treatment of the ethnic minority she represents. Twice married, and twice nominated for a Nobel Prize, Kadeer has been a victim of at least one apparent assassination attempt. The film's pre-title sequence shows striking archive footage of the Chinese annexation of East Turkistan in 1949, including public executions, and concludes with the voice-over question: 'When are your people more important than your family?'

Her first husband, a Communist Party member, was pressured to divorce her, and her six children were removed after she was found to be engaging in 'capitalist practices'—manufacturing embroidery. The unstoppable entrepreneur Kadeer relates how a post-Mao China began to embrace the dynamic of a strategically controlled market economy. This was the beginning of what seems, ironically, remarkably like a Marxist theory of underdevelopment and 'class consciousness' which arose in her understanding as she travelled the region developing what became a very successful property business. The '10 conditions' of the film's title are those she sought from her life partner: he must be incorruptible and 'a noble man who could free my people'. The man she chose was a dissident leader who had served seven years in prison.

By 1994 Kadeer was the richest woman in China. The rapid development of China's western province led to a huge influx of Han Chinese into the area, and the previously diverse Uyghur ethnicities became unified by their shared displacement. The Uyghurs' 1997 demonstrations against Chinese suppression of their Muslim religious and social practice led to crackdowns by the military, armed retaliation by militants, bombings and further repression. Across the region an unknown number of Uyghurs were executed.

Shortly after delivering a critical speech on conditions in the region to the Chinese People's Congress, Kadeer was sentenced to eight years imprisonment in solitary confinement. On release to the United States for medical treatment she swore 'absolutely for the unification of China', but after renouncing her political activism in the days before her release she returned to it with a vengeance upon arrival in the United States. Her campaign drew support from both Republican and Democratic senators and human rights organisations.

On China's 'Children's Day' in June 2006 her sons, still in China, were arrested and beaten, and her daughter-in-law instructed to phone her so that she could hear the cries of her children and grandchildren. Kadeer's response was to organise demonstrations and international press against the Chinese actions and 'their unlimited shamelessness'.

One of the most moving scenes in the film is an observational account of Rebiya denouncing the Chinese arrest of her children on radio. She speaks with enormous strength and courage:

> They think they can break my heart because I'm a mother... the Chinese government has taken me very lightly... my current position is not because of myself, it's the cry of 20 million people, and my tears are mixed with theirs. I will work until my last breath ...

Afterwards she is congratulated by the radio host. 'You spoke like a poet', he says. She is dismayed by this and replies, 'I am not a poet; it is reality—this is what fills me!' Near collapse, she breaks down and, reaching for her companion for support, says, 'I want to die ... I want to kill myself ... I want to explode'. These, clearly, are the other conditions of love (and courage). And yes, this is the nub of the thing: if only there could be a right and a wrong, a true and a false, a one-love-fits-all for the dedicated activist faced with her 21st century 'Sophie's choice', her overburdening reality.

Making Documentary in Australia Today

Getting *10 Conditions of Love* made came with a high degree of difficulty. Like many similarly maverick documentary projects, neither the work itself, nor its research-based, longitudinal documentary practice was welcomed by the agencies and broadcasters tasked with encouraging and supporting Australian documentary. Both public broadcasters, for example, turned the film down when support was needed most: at presale stage. Without endorsement from television in the form of a presale commitment from a broadcaster (25 to 30 per cent of a production budget in exchange for a license for Australian broadcasting rights), it is extremely difficult to finance documentary. Almost all of the existing funding programs require, at a minimum, an Australian television presale.

10 Conditions of Love's screening around the world—and in such heightened circumstances—has done more to advance knowledge of the Uyghur people's situation than any other intervention.

Support for Australian film and television production has over recent years been shifted away from direct to indirect financing. The result has been a tax-offset system that does not work for documentary, as opposed to feature films, a fact widely acknowledged and apparent at the point of the policy's implementation.

Australian documentary production is in the process of being reconfigured from a tradition and practice of small teams of filmmakers developing and producing works in an artisanal mode—like novelists, writers, independent scholars or painters—in favour of a rationalised 'creative economy' where consolidated, larger companies deliver factual television programming as outsourced producers. For decades 'independent documentary', separate from the 'National Interest Programs' commissioned by government, received modest support from state and federal agencies for this purpose. Public broadcasting, with its charter requirement to 'support Australian creative resources', commissioned work proposed by filmmakers in a contested context where, even though only about 10 per cent of projects proposed were commissioned, for the most part the ideas were initiated from the grassroots creative community.

Over recent years the system of financial support from government for documentary has been restructured. Three federal agencies (Film Finance Corporation, Australian Film Commission, Film Australia) have been collapsed into one (Screen Australia). Support for Australian film and television production has been shifted away from direct to indirect financing. The result has been a tax-offset system that does not work for documentary, as opposed to feature films, a fact widely acknowledged and apparent at the point of the policy's implementation.

With the so-called Australian film renaissance of the late 1960s and early 1970s, through the policy planning of 'Nugget' Coombs, Barry Jones, Stanley Hawes, Phillip Adams and others, film industry development was supported by direct subsidy. Governments since the 1980s have sought various mechanisms to draw in private investment. The most recent structural change has established a new indirect mechanism, deploying a tax rebate to producers. Feature films can structure their financing to recover up to 40 per cent of approved expenditure, whereas television drama and documentary (considered as television by the policy planners) can recover up to 20 per cent, in practice more like 15 per cent. This funding mechanism is designed to encourage big budget feature films. There are advantages; it has the potential for filmmakers to have more equity in their work. But it is structured in such a way as to encourage bigger budgets, with the ambition being to create 'viable businesses'. The actual work itself and the objectives of cultural policy have long since left the stage.

In various ways the changes implemented in 2008–2009, attended by complementary policy priorities favouring 'enterprise development' within the new Screen Australia, are squeezing the already marginalised documentary sector into increasingly predictable patterns of factual programming. Within Screen Australia only a single fund countenancing documentary proposals without a television presale survives. This program receives less than 5 per cent of the documentary allocation, but produces a high proportion of the 'creative documentary' made in Australia. Works supported by this low-budget, minority mechanism regularly receive critical accolades and local and international festival invitations.

Public broadcasting has also shifted gear over recent years, compounding the problem. SBS Independent was liquidated years ago, while Film Australia was lost in agency amalgamation, with some functions disbursed to the National Film and Sound Archives, with its main production funds—the National Interest Program—surviving as the family jewels at Screen Australia. Both public broadcasters are increasingly interested in factual series and Screen Australia documentary allocations are divided, very unevenly, in that direction.

The producers of *10 Conditions of Love* (Jeff Daniels, John Lewis and Dennis Smith) managed by sheer bloody tenacity to achieve a successful claim on the new tax rebate scheme; in fact theirs was the first documentary to do so.

The new tax offset system is so elaborate and arcane in its reporting and compliance requirements that the amount of time and money that must now be allocated for administration, bookkeeping, accountancy and auditing requires filmmakers to either dedicate themselves to administration or develop budgets that can pay for the skills of expert staff. The new system requires borrowing to cash-flow the proposed offset, that may (or may not) be paid out a year or so later by the Tax Office, if compliance is determined satisfactory by Screen Australia. It is as if you had a job where you were required to borrow money to cash flow your salary, and that of your colleagues, with a promise that perhaps, if officials approved, you may get some of it back in a few years' time.

With this pattern dominating the landscape it is remarkable that Jeff Daniels' film achieved what it did on the fringes of this system. Yet none of this seems to have been recognised in the critical reception of the film, and may not be recognised in documentary reviewing generally.

Despite the impact of *10 Conditions of Love*, its local, critical reception was muted. An odd consensus developed: it suffered the faint praise reproach. A popular view seemed to be that, yes, the material was interesting and important but it was not a very

accomplished film. No one said, 'OMG, a young filmmaker with his first film delivers an emotionally rich, research-driven "hidden history" story that is having an international impact, requiring foreign ministers and opposition politicians in several countries to take a position on what is going on in East Turkistan. What an achievement!' Indeed there was little serious attempt to critically review the film and its strengths: Daniels' deft handling of complex historical material affecting those 20 million Uyghurs, his skilful storytelling deploying the tangled complexities of Kadeer's family life and political commitments.

Daniels' New Project: The Jewish Defence League

Jeff Daniels is now pursuing another politically troublesome and ambitious project, this time concerning the Jewish Defence League. As with *10 Conditions of Love*, this project asks questions about identity, justice and violence, and will face an uphill battle to secure financial assistance given the restrictive structures for financing documentary in Australia. This new film is also a further working through of Jeff's responses to September 11.

The making of *10 Conditions of Love* led Daniels to want to 'take it a bit closer to my own experience' and look at those 'Jews who seemed to be committing acts of terrorism in order to get their voice heard'. Rather than 'calling it "terrorism", they called it "radical violence"? something that was common in the '60s and '70s?as a way of making an impact'.

Daniels' new project approaches highly contested terrain. The story of the Jewish Defence League is a controversial international story with its beginnings in New York in the 1960s, linking to current conflicts in Paris as well as the Israel–Palestine conflict. It deals with that minority of Jews around the world who, feeling threatened and unsupported by local authorities when anti-Semitic attacks happen in their city or neighbourhood, take matters into their own hands. They did so in the late 1960s and 1970s in New York, bombing the Black Panthers' headquarters, as well as Aeroflot's headquarters (in response to Russia's refusing to allow Jews to leave for Israel in the 1970s), and firing on visiting Russian officials. The League had 15,000 members by 1972 and was one of the most active terrorist groups in North America in the 1970s and 1980s.

While most of Daniels' new film follows the current activities of the Jewish Defence League in the United States and France, it is also a historical and philosophical inquiry. Informed by his own experience of Jewish identity, Daniels' inquiry turns on a dilemma with parallels to Rebiya Kadeer's story: 'How far will you go to defend your people?

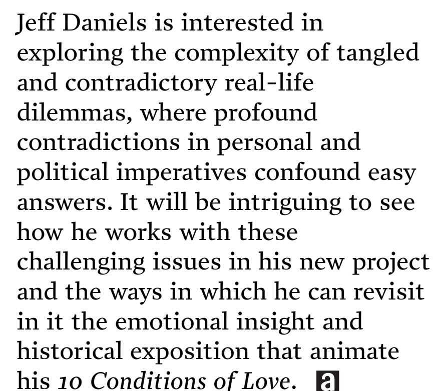
While most of the film follows the current activities of the JDL in the United States and France, Jeff's approach is also a historical and philosophical inquiry. Informed by his own experience of Jewish identity, his inquiry turns on a dilemma with parallels to Rebiya Kadeer's story: 'How far will you go to defend your people?'

During the initial phase of the project Daniels interviewed celebrity lawyer Alan Dershowitz, who defended the JDL in the early 1970s. Illegal wire-tapping of the League by the FBI provided an opportunity for Dershowitz to represent the JDL, despite disagreeing with their strategy and practice. In Daniels' interview Dershowitz says:

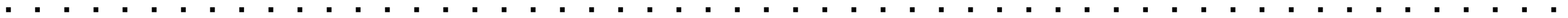
> The image of a tough Jew, of a strong Jew?that's a good image, as is the image of the intellectual Jew and the moral Jew, the ethical Jew. All of that together is what makes up the image that I would want, not someone who bullies others in order to have their voice heard, not someone who does the same things to others as was done to Jews during World War II, during the Holocaust.

Daniels explains:

> So there are a lot of very reasoned voices in my film that emphasise pride in Jewish strength, but not to the effect of spitting in the face of lessons learnt after 5000 years of exile and persecution. The JDL motto 'Never Again', referring to prevention of another Holocaust, is read very differently by other people I've interviewed. I hope all the different voices shine through in my film so that one may feel better informed about the JDL's intentions and why so many non-violent Jews feel safer knowing they're around.



Jeff Daniels is interested in exploring the complexity of tangled and contradictory real-life dilemmas, where profound contradictions in personal and political imperatives confound easy answers. It will be intriguing to see how he works with these challenging issues in his new project and the ways in which he can revisit in it the emotional insight and historical exposition that animate his *10 Conditions of Love*.



film The Speaking Subject

review by Valerie Krips

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The Speaking Subject

Valerie Krips

Valerie Krips is an Arena Magazine editor and an Honorary Fellow in the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne.

Another Year (dir. Mike Leigh, 2010) and *The King's Speech* (dir. Tom Hooper, 2010)

A friend of mine lost her voice for a couple of years. There was no physical reason for it but, all the same, she couldn't rely upon being able to utter a word when she needed to. It was a terrible experience, and not only because she was required to speak publicly: she became afraid of the telephone, for example. If she picked it up, could she say anything? And if she couldn't say anything, what would she be? Not merely silent, but silenced, disempowered. It doesn't take Lacan to remind us that it's through talking, through hearing what we say when we say it, and looking for a response to what we say that we come to know ourselves. Being shut out of the conversation is disempowerment of the most profound kind.

Two recent films explore the importance of speech and of speech being heard. One of them, Tom Hooper's *The King's Speech* (2010), as surely by now everyone knows, deals with a king who couldn't make himself heard. Mike Leigh's more subtle *Another Year* (2010) explores the infinite human need to be heard and recognised through the speech of the everyday.

Leigh's film begins, pre-title, with a woman (Imelda Staunton in a cameo role) asking her doctor for sleeping pills. The art of showing not telling—that aspect of the narrative writer's skill which provokes the reader into interpretation—is in part provided for in cinema through the invocation of one of our earliest skills: reading another's face. The staunch stubbornness with which Staunton's character meets the doctor's enquiries and, later, those of the counsellor to whom she is recommended (who happens to be Gerri, a key character) is conveyed largely by Staunton's face in close up: she projects a study in mute and anguished resistance. Both her doctor and the counsellor are working on the assumption that some underlying causes explain her insomnia. She blocks their questions, repeating that all she needs is help with sleeping. Her face betrays a history that will remain unspoken, annealed. 'Nothing changes', she says.

It's a telling beginning for a film in which the rhythms, idioms and clichés of everyday speech are offered as interpretive tools. Language, as we are often reminded, speaks us. But what is the result if we can't make it speak for us? Through the alchemy of ensemble acting Leigh lays out for inspection and recognition what is revealed and concealed in articulation, what is hidden away, locked in a secret box in childhood: these are the issues for *Another Year*.

Jim Broadbent plays Tom, a geologist married to Gerri, played by Ruth Sheen. They are in their early 60s. Both enjoy their work, their home, their allotment and, importantly, each other. The year through which they pass in the film is relatively uneventful: friends come and go, dinners are cooked, bottles of wine are drunk, their son comes home with a girlfriend and a sister-in-law dies. The real action of the film lies in the talking, everyday stuff about food, work, family, old times. Questions of identity, loneliness, fruitfulness, presentiments of death, the inevitable turning of the year: the film takes on most of the big themes without having to name them. Tom and Gerri (who are by no means cartoon characters) are happy in their pleasant, comfortable and homely house. It's a refuge for one of their friends in particular: Mary, played by Lesley Mandeville, who in this role shows once more how powerful and intelligent an actor she is.

Mary works in the same NHS practice as Gerri. Divorced and living alone in a rented garden flat she presents a cheerful face to the world. It's not long before the veneer of cheer dissipates in the face of her evident need, a need that leads inevitably to an overwhelming demand directed at Tom and Gerri. As the focus of her demand they assume a symbolic role; her distress when the relationship she's established with them and their son is threatened is evidence of the extent to which she has come to depend upon them. She's a woman who desperately needs to love and to be loved, and she's a woman alone, childless, partnerless, who is growing older. She has little money and a neglected garden: the latter a sure signal, in this film, of a failure of proper nurture and growth.

Tom and Gerri are shown over and against a series of lonely and despairing people who, in one way or another, have failed to find a place for themselves, or have lost the place they once had. Tom's friend Ken, played by Peter Wright, is first seen on a train, stuffing himself with crisps while drinking canned bitter. One of his fellow passengers, a middle-aged woman, clearly finds him repellant. Bored, and, as he relates, finding himself more and more out of step with his fellow workers and their sociality (no one goes to the pub any more), Ken drinks steadily all night. Tom takes the temperature of his friends by asking how they are managing in their domestic setting, how they are looking after themselves (that's how we know that Mary's garden is neglected): Peter's flat is obviously a disaster. Blundering about, lost, drinking himself out of speaking his misery, his final attempt to connect with Mary leads to what must surely be yet another rejection.

One of the issues that has concerned reviewers of the film in Britain is the role Tom and Gerri play in all these proceedings. Are they really the concerned, affable, kind and loving couple they seem to be, or

are they part of the problem, a symbol of the successful and self-congratulatory middle class against which, in a culture that celebrates them, everyone is measured and self-measures?

The situation of class politics in Britain is deftly explored in a visit to Hull undertaken by Tom, Gerri and their son Joe (Oliver Maltman) for the funeral of Tom's elder brother's wife. Ronnie (David Bradley) lives in a terraced house in an area unlikely to receive the advantages of gentrification any day soon. Stunned, his longest remark is 'How will I manage?' Ronnie's look of puzzlement takes in his younger brother's solidity and his sister-in-law's tactful help in a recognition that leaves him ever more bemused and lost. Tom gently suggests that Ronnie come home with them for a while: 'Might as well', Ronnie replies, after the brief appearance of his angry, alienated and unemployed son. The difference that education, steady employment and sheer luck make to all aspects of contemporary life doesn't need to be spelled out here. There is no social group ready to support Ronnie where he lives. And he looks like a fish out of water at Tom's. The brothers gaze at each other across a divide that even their shared history and affection cannot bridge; Ronnie remains speechless to the end.

Tom and Gerri seem to be leading as good a life could be hoped for. Imperfect and sometimes impatient, they will of course always be incapable of meeting Mary's demand, which is endless in her desolation and loneliness. Yet she's still there at the end of the film, on the fringe of things. Partly, she's put herself there and as much as Tom may understand her (Gerri, the professional in caring is much more dismissive) in time she may outlive her welcome. Tom and Gerri, who believe in keeping on keeping on, turning the soil, getting ready for the next year, working towards new growth can't resolve Mary's problems, or Peter's or Ronnie's. *Another Year*, in Leigh's return to an open-ended narrative, leaves the viewer with much work to do in interpreting the silences of characters who remain in the mind long after the film's closing credits have faded.

The Duke of York, whose journey into the role of king is traced in *The King's Speech* was luckier in many respects than any of the speechless characters in Leigh's film. Hooper's film is, as its title implies, much more literally about speech as such, and is not so subtly analytic of its role in the construction of the self. The stuttering Duke (Colin Firth, who is again impressive in his ability to show distress rather than tell of it) is a person in possession of many signifiers of selfhood when the film opens. However, as he slowly comes to reveal himself to Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), his Australian therapist, his various difficulties in his upbringing make his purchase on that selfhood uncertain. Safe and happy in his marriage, he takes on a task and life that he did not expect with stoicism rather than enthusiasm: duty bound, a duty which of itself does not unbind his voice.

The story of this unbinding has all the hallmarks of success: well-known actors, high production values, a beginning, a middle and an uplifting end. *The King's Speech* is, perhaps inevitably, concerned more with the work that the king had to undertake to speak to the nation and the empire at the outbreak of war than the role that speaking or not speaking played in making him the man he was. Presented as a reluctant hero George VI is a highly attractive, if mythological and archetypical, character. There are far worse fates for kings. a

book **Reading Art Criticism**

review by Roger Nelson

Rosalind E. Krauss, *Perpetual Inventory*, The MIT Press, 2010

'Possibly steel is so beautiful because of all the movement associated with it, its strength and functions ... Yet it is also brutal: the rapist, the murderer and death-dealing giants are also its offspring.' So claimed sculptor David Smith of his chosen medium. Smith is barely mentioned in this collection of over twenty essays drawn from the 1960s to the present day; however, Rosalind E. Krauss' doctoral thesis (completed at Harvard in 1969) centres on his work. That artist's fascination with the technical particularities of his medium and with its cultural and political connotations—not to mention his ponderous and poetic turn of phrase—are a silent influence on much of Krauss' best writing.

That Smith died in the 1960s was fortunate for Krauss, as the conservative Harvard institution was likely never to have permitted a dissertation on a living artist at that time. Krauss' commitment to contemporary art has been unwavering, and essays collected here on Richard Serra and Sol LeWitt were instrumental in launching those artists' luminary careers. That it is quite unexceptional today for academic art historians to focus exclusively on living artists is in no small part thanks to the pioneering work of Krauss and her contemporaries. Unlike her predecessors, Krauss largely avoids comparisons between new and classical art. Rather, her contribution has been to bring contemporary theory (and in particular, French philosophy, semiotics, psychoanalysis and literary criticism) into the service of art history. While her work is today often scorned for being too prescriptive, her theoretical and interdisciplinary approach remains a powerful influence on progressive writing on art. The very title of this volume asserts that, as a critic, she sees it as her duty to remain abreast of new developments in art. She explains it thus:

> a critic constantly revises not only her conception of the direction and most important currents of contemporary art, but also her convictions about the most significant work within them. This entails a perpetual reassessment of the field she surveys and the demand that it be articulated in her writing.

Krauss' sensibility is thoroughly contemporary, and her tireless 'reassessment' of shifting trends at times makes *Perpetual Inventory* a frustrating book to read sequentially. It's a

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collection of essays of varying lengths from the 1960s to the present, and in many ways it is most rewarding when dipped into rather than taken as an amorphous whole. It is difficult to extract a dominant theme from this volume, but the starting point must surely be an examination of the author's relationship to the work of Clement Greenberg. He looms large over *Perpetual Inventory*, and much of Krauss' contribution to 20th century art theory can be seen as a narrative of increasing distance from and hostility toward the mythically influential modernist critic.

Greenberg was the definitive formalist critic, and his influence (and not just on Krauss) cannot be overstated. He was instrumental in positioning New York as the perceived centre of the international art world, a shift away from Europe that has yet to be fully undone (despite an increasing interest in the last decade in the West, at long last, in contemporary art from Asia, Africa and the Middle East). Greenberg's primary contribution to the discourse of contemporary art—and certainly his most controversial—was his assertion that the modernist project in art centred on an ever-increasing focus on the formal properties 'unique to the nature' of the artist's chosen medium. In *Modernist Painting* he famously championed abstract expressionist painters for their emphasis on the simple flatness of the canvas. His assertion of the pivotal role of medium specificity was linked to his larger insistence that, as Krauss succinctly explains it, 'one not talk about anything in a work of art that one could not point to'. For Greenberg and his followers, formal qualities—and not socio-political context, biography, market machinations or anything else 'extraneous' to the actual artwork—were the only things worthy of art historical analysis. Aside from being stultifyingly narrow, this approach had the insidious effect of divorcing art from lived experience, rarefying the role of the artist and critic and rendering these inaccessible to the layperson.

These two grand theses of Greenberg's are crucial to an understanding of Krauss. *Perpetual Inventory* constitutes a kind of a loose narrative of her shift away from Greenberg's brand of formalism, and an articulation of her own much more nuanced emphasis on the importance of coming to grips with how an artwork functions, rather than what it says (or 'means' or any of the other loaded words that can be brought into service). The narrative is necessarily loose because of the sheer breadth of topics covered in the essays here, many of which were first published as exhibition reviews or curatorial statements. But, in brief framing introductions to the six sections of the volume, Krauss does obliquely hint at the overarching theme of her *Perpetual Inventory*. The 1972 essay *A View of Modernism*, written for the tenth anniversary of *Artforum* (which was at the time the leading international publication for academically engaged art criticism) and collected here, defiantly delineates her departure from the formalist orthodoxy; in a brief introduction to that piece written for this volume Krauss describes it as 'an analysis of the distance I had by then staked out from the historical assumptions and theoretical categories of Clement Greenberg, the most powerful critical voice and eye of postwar American art'.

A View of Modernism displays much of what is most likeable in Krauss' style. The essay begins conversationally: 'One day while the show "Three American Painters" was hanging at the Fogg Museum at Harvard, Michael Fried and I were standing in one of the galleries'. This is typical of Krauss: while she is often accused of writing 'difficult' academic prose, a closer look (especially at the opening and closing passages of her essays) reveals that she routinely roots her analyses in a description of her lived experience of the art she is discussing, and consistently situates herself within her account and in the larger discourse in which she is intervening. Moreover, the opening words of *A View of Modernism* reflect that Krauss consistently found herself at what is now historicised as the epicentre of the zeitgeist of Western art. Her contemporary Michael Fried—next to whom she was casually standing—is now widely regarded as equally important in breaking Greenberg's stranglehold over art criticism; the exhibition 'Three American Painters' is considered to have been instrumental in securing that country's predominance after the abstract expressionists had become passé (or died); and the Fogg has become a worldwide model for the university museum as locus of academic study and curatorial exposition.

Krauss wrote *A View of Modernism*, she tells us, at the age of thirty-one. When she first began writing art criticism eight years earlier, she frequently encountered surprise when meeting her readers. 'You're Rosalind Krauss?' one man exclaimed. 'I had expected you'd be at least forty.' She quickly came to realise that to write in the arrogantly highbrow, near-dissociated tones of strict Greenbergian formalism was to fail to describe the often visceral effect a work had when one was standing before it. To focus on the experience of seeing art is for Krauss an inherently progressive method that countered elitism and facilitated a reintegration of understanding art into the lives of laypeople. Krauss' unfailing interest in the viewer's physical encounter with the artwork led her to champion the minimalist art (or 'Specific Objects', as it was also known at the time) of Donald Judd, Robert Morris and others in the mid-1960s.

This marked an important shift for Krauss. After all, the three-dimensional, often industrially produced objects that Judd, Morris and the minimalists made could not neatly be classified as either painting or as sculpture—and indeed the artists themselves refused these categories. As such, they were scorned by Greenberg and disregarded by many others who had broken with him, Fried included. Krauss was one of the first critics who saw that these works, while not strictly reflexive of properties 'unique to the nature' of a conventional medium, nevertheless derived their impact through engaging with the way in which their physicality is perceived by the viewer. She eloquently contends that the

'experience of a work of art is always in part about the thoughts and feelings that have elicited—or more than that, entailed—the making of the work'. This sentence is a summation of her fundamental method of analysis. Krauss favours art which prompts the viewer to think about how it was made, and which ties its content (the 'thoughts and feelings' involved) to its form. She does not, as did the Greenbergian formalists, deny the importance of content. She does, however, insist that the understanding of a work's content is richest when that understanding is arrived at through a perception of its formal properties.

Soon after writing *A View of Modernism*, Krauss left Artforum to establish the interdisciplinary cultural journal *October*, which she continues to edit. As is implied by the name, *October*'s mission constituted something of a revolution in cultural criticism: when it was founded it was unheard of for academic art criticism to be published alongside writing on film, music, literature and philosophy. Despite the radical leftist politics of Krauss and her co-founders, *October* has tended to avoid explicit political content. Stories abound of Krauss' feisty political invectives during lectures at Columbia University, where she is a professor, yet disappointingly she refrains from including overt commentary in her writing on art. One notable exception is her brilliant essay on the architect Daniel Libeskind, whose aesthetic achievements she lucidly champions, yet who she lambasts for his cynically commercial impulse. Describing a housing project conceived for the site of a concentration camp in Germany, she excoriates Libeskind for cunningly using tricks of language to symbolically 'purify' land tainted by pollution or history in order to profitably develop it: 'thousands of yuppies will be happy to live in housing … despite the fact that below it is the site of the first active crematorium in Germany'. While such candid political remarks are rare in Krauss' work, her approach is deeply progressive in its emphasis on the viewer's experience of the artwork. Moreover, while her writing is challenging, it is never needlessly obscure.?

Among Krauss' first and most lasting contributions in *October* was an elaboration on her concept of 'technical support', a term she invented as a more flexible and inclusive description of what an artwork is made from than the traditional 'medium'. She explains that 'for those artists who needed to refer, reflexively, the postmodernist condemnation of painting and sculpture as specific mediums forced a turn to some other support than oil on canvas or plaster on metal armature. These innovative foundations I began to call "technical supports"'. In Krauss' conception, this opens the possibility for investigating artists' engagement with non-conventional materials as diverse as automobiles (for Ed Ruscha) and heads of cabbage (for Giovanni Anselmo, whose 1960s works made with organic materials Krauss describes evocatively and defends persuasively). It also allows her to champion video artists, whom she sees as engaging with the working of the moving image, and in the case of Christian Marclay, the soundtrack and projection. Many advocates of installation and video will resist this insistence on self-reflexivity, and indeed Krauss' lengthy ruminations on the actual turning of reels of video tape are somewhat dated and overly literal. But in this era when video and installation are widely held to be the dominant forms of visual art, her attention to the specificities of the work's 'technical support' is impressive and convincing. Video artworks can be all too often so heavy-handed with their content as to be closer to documentary film, or so uncritically pretty as to be closer to moving wallpaper. To be sure, Krauss' more hyperbolic pronouncements—such as that 'the abandonment of the specific medium spells the death of serious art'—can be dangerously prescriptive and disturbingly reminiscent of Greenbergian absolutes of judgement. However, elsewhere she happily concedes that 'One's own perspective … is the only orientation one will ever have'. There is an openness and adaptability to Krauss' model of the 'technical support' that has yet to be fully appreciated.

Perpetual Inventory is a sprawling volume, a collection too varied to be easily digested whole. Krauss uses Lacanian psycho-analysis to re-read early cubist works and the symbolism in Miro; she identifies the regional nuances of Italian *arte povera*; and she often draws startlingly insightful links between visual art, music, and literature. The essays collected here include reviews of exhibitions, shot-by-shot deconstructions of video artworks, and historiographical quibbles over the canonisation of Cy Twombly. There are moments when her writing can be infuriatingly closed-minded, frustratingly silent on socio-political contexts, or excruciatingly detailed. But far more common than these are the moments of revelatory insight and lyrical analysis. Krauss shows us that the way art is made—and what it is made from—can be deeply revealing about its meaning and its power. a

film **Palestinian 'Reel Time'**

review by Kate Harper

Zindeeq (dir. Michel Khleifi, 2009), *Miral* (dir. Julian Schnabel, 2010), *138 Pounds in My Pocket* (dir. Sahera Derbas, 2007), *Divine Intervention* (dir. Elia Suleiman, 2002), *Budras* (dir. Julia Bacha, 2009)

Audiences have been turning out to the Palestinian Film Festival in Sydney since it first launched there three years ago; last November Melburnians were treated to this event for the second time. Spread over four days, each session consisted of one short film, followed by a feature that was thematically connected in some way. An initiative of Cultural Media, a not-for-profit organisation aiming to promote Arab arts and culture in Australia, it is a small festival with big aspirations. In 2009 the festival's goal was clear: 'Not enough is known, or shown, about Palestine

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Reading Art Criticism

Roger Nelson

beyond politics ...We hope to share with you some of the faces, places and stories of Palestine. Palestine, for all its pain, suffering and challenges ... and Palestine, for all its beauty, love and hope'. Showcasing a variety of perspectives from Arab and non-Arab filmmakers across the globe, the event hopes to foster intercultural dialogue and serve as a modest intervention into the marketplace of mediated depictions of Palestine.

The theme of the festival in 2010 invited audiences to 'Visit Palestine in Reel-Time', promising a cinematic tour of a landscape that is extremely difficult and, for some, impossible to visit in 'real time'. That we observe Israel—Palestine in 'reel-time' almost nightly on the news is obvious enough. However, we gain little sense of the 'real' embodied and nuanced experiences of the various peoples living in Palestine's Occupied Territories or, outside these shifting borders, in exile and diaspora. Indeed, for many non-Arab Australians our impression of Palestine are shaped in 2D—flattened out by mainstream news media which frequently focus on the terrorist activities of Hamas and ongoing conflict with Israel, as if this were the only story to be told. Thus, given that film and television can only ever *represent* events, the conceit of the Palestinian Film Festival's theme was that it offered viewers a 'reel-time' tour closer to the 'real thing': its diverse program intended to imbue mediated portrayals of Palestine with more fleshy contours.

With its spotlight firmly focused on presenting a range of voices and views on the region, Joumanah El Matrah, one the festivals organisers, said on opening night that a key feature of the mixed program was 'the convergence of the political and the personal'. This is an intrinsic structural component of the festival's program given that for those in the Occupied Territories and in diasporic exile, everyday (personal) life and politics goes hand in hand. But while the majority of the works in the festival zeroed in on individuals involved in the collective ongoing struggle for peace in Israel—Palestine, the various filmmakers' approaches remained refreshingly varied.

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Palestinian 'Reel Time'

Kate Harper

Kate Harper is a graduate of Cinema Studies at the University of Melbourne and is a freelance writer.

The festival's first feature film *Zindeeq* (2009), directed by Michel Khleifi, centred on uncovering the trauma through memory of the Nabka (when the state of Israel was declared in 1948). Writer Hamid Dabashi cites this event as the pivotal narrative of Palestinian films: 'the Nabka is the defining moment of Palestinian cinema—and it is around that remembrance of the lost homeland that Palestinian filmmakers have articulated their aesthetic cosmovision'. When the unnamed protagonist (played by Mohammed Bakri) of *Zindeeq* returns from France to his hometown of Nazareth it is to make a film about the Nabka—exploring this time of rupture, trauma and collective identity formation for Palestinians. This moment of national dislocation having occurred before he was born, the filmmaker in *Zindeeq* obsessively tries to conjure it in the present through surreal dreams, the recollections of others, and in the redolence of the landscape. His camera assistant, Rasha (played by Mirna Awad), an ephemeral figure in the film, wonders why he continues to ask people about the Nabka, saying, 'It's the same story, what more is there to tell?' For the protagonist, however, who has grown up outside of Palestine, hearing eyewitness testimonies of 'the story' of the Nabka, helps ground his identity in the present by connecting him to a shared cultural history.

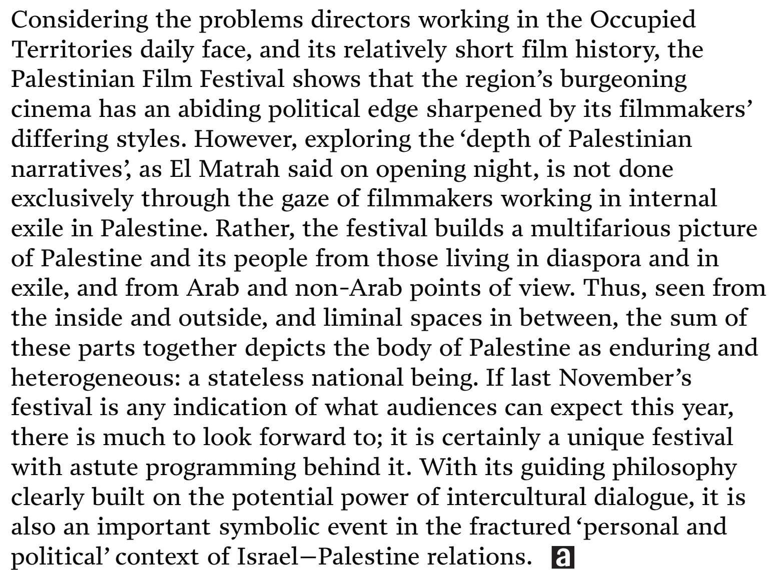
Also looking to the Nabka for its narrative's point of origin is *Miral*, the latest film by artist-turned-filmmaker Julian Schnabel. The film's narrator says, 'I was born in 1973, but my story really begins in 1947'. A disjointed epic, it is based in part on the real-life events of Hind Al Husseini (played in the film by Hiam Abbass) who gathered fifty-five children dispossessed by the Deir Yassin massacre of 1948 and quickly established an orphanage and school in Jerusalem that still operates today, known as the Dar el-Tifel Institute. *Miral* was proceeded by a short documentary called *138 Pounds in My Pocket* (Sahera Derbas, 2007) about Husseini's, and now her daughter's, struggles to keep the school alive amid pressure from Israeli authorities. This short but enthralling documentary celebrates Husseini as an enduring symbol of hope by blending archival footage with that of the contemporary school, which has swollen since its unplanned beginnings to more than 1000 students. In *Miral*, however, Husseini gradually fades into the background as two other narratives take over before we finally meet the film's namesake Miral, played by Indian actress Freida Pinto. After having spent much of her youth in Husseini's orphanage, at seventeen she becomes perilously involved in the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) resistance movement in the first *intifada* of 1987. Like Zindeeq, but in decidedly different styles and genres, both *Miral* and *138 Pounds in my Pocket* evoke trauma from Palestine's past to suggest history's continued reverberations in the present.

Aside from *Miral*'s thematic continuity with other films in the festival's program, the production story of the film itself might be seen as a microcosm for the collaborative sensibility of the overall politics of the Palestinian Film Festival. Schnabel said at the Venice Film Festival, 'coming from my background, as an American Jewish person whose mother was president of Hadassah [the Women's Zionist Organisation of America] in 1948, I figured I was a pretty good person to try to tell the story of the other side'. Working closely with Palestinian-born television journalist Rula Jebreal—who wrote the original semi-autobiographical novel in 2004 and subsequent screenplay—Schnabel 'dedicated [the film] to everyone, on both sides, who still believes peace is possible'. Despite what was, for me, a flawed film—its expressionistic style could not mask the rambling state of its narrative—its inclusion reflects the broader ethos of the festival: in its determination to explore Palestine from a variety of angles, it is not limited to screening works made exclusively by Palestinian directors.

As well as suggesting the festival's concern for intercultural dialogue through film, the procuring of *Miral* for pre-release screenings in Australia perhaps reflects the aim of the event to reach broader audiences in the future. Made by a well-known and Oscar-nominated director, *Miral* undoubtedly attracted the largest crowds to the festival—and 'bums on seats' is a matter-of-fact necessity for any event wishing to carve a resilient position in the expanding market of 'niche' and, in particular, 'national film festivals' in Australia, especially since there is a plethora of national film festivals to choose from throughout the year: the Alliance Française French Film Festival, the Lavazza Italian Film Festival, the Indian Film Festival, the Greek Film Festival and the Spanish Film Festival to name only a few. However, while all of these film festivals exhibit 'national cinemas' from regions where their respective governments nurture a film culture through funding initiatives, Palestinian films do not receive any form of national funding. More uniquely, as Dabashi has noted, Palestinian filmmaking is paradoxically 'a stateless cinema of the most serious national consequence'. Thus the Palestinian Film Festival faces challenges intrinsic to the film culture it is trying to showcase that other national film festivals in Australia do not. In this way, the festival's inclusion of *Miral* not only suggests the festivals attempts to extend its audience appeal but also how difficult it is for Palestinian filmmakers to produce elaborate films comparable to Schnabel's given the lack of financial support available to them.

Aside from the obvious merits of encouraging a diversity of representations as a form of cross-cultural exchange, the vast majority of the works included in the festival were fascinating in their own right. The highlights were Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (2002) and Julia Bacha's *Budras* from 2009. *Divine Intervention* has become a seminal film in what is being dubbed 'New Palestinian Cinema'. Made by, and starring, Suleiman—whose beautiful, still face rivals Buster Keaton's—*Divine Intervention* is a black comedy about the absurdities of living life on the Israel–Palestine borders. Border checkpoints are places for clandestine romantic meetings in cars; while caressing each other's hands, Suleiman and his girlfriend from Nazareth blankly observe the buffoonery of the Israeli border police going about their business.

In an entirely different mode and genre, *Budras* is a documentary about the very real power of non-violent protest. A hit at last year's Sydney Film Festival, the film looks at Ayed Morrar—unofficial leader of the Palestinian town of Budras—who inspired his community to protest daily against the Israeli government's 'Separation Wall' being built through their land. Objectors began joining their cause along with the local Hamas leader when the news of their plight spread through the media. Together they successfully prevented Israeli bulldozers from constructing a concrete wedge though their community, which would have uprooted their ancient olive groves and cultural connections to their land. In their divergent takes on everyday life in Palestine, *Divine Intervention* and *Budras* both demonstrate the scope of Palestinian narratives—from the deliriously eccentric, to the horrifying and inspiring.



Considering the problems directors working in the Occupied Territories daily face, and its relatively short film history, the Palestinian Film Festival shows that the region's burgeoning cinema has an abiding political edge sharpened by its filmmakers' differing styles. However, exploring the 'depth of Palestinian narratives', as El Matrah said on opening night, is not done exclusively through the gaze of filmmakers working in internal exile in Palestine. Rather, the festival builds a multifarious picture of Palestine and its people from those living in diaspora and in exile, and from Arab and non-Arab points of view. Thus, seen from the inside and outside, and liminal spaces in between, the sum of these parts together depicts the body of Palestine as enduring and heterogeneous: a stateless national being. If last November's festival is any indication of what audiences can expect this year, there is much to look forward to; it is certainly a unique festival with astute programming behind it. With its guiding philosophy clearly built on the potential power of intercultural dialogue, it is also an important symbolic event in the fractured 'personal and political' context of Israel–Palestine relations. a

comic strip **Can Racism Be Funny?**

review by Chris Beach

The boundary-pushing comics of Matt Emery

Matt Emery, who has been self-publishing comics since the early 1990s, relocated from Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, to Melbourne in 2007. Over the last two years he has posted over 150 comics on his website ‹www.guzumocomics.com›, mostly four or eight panel gag comics, but also quite a few that are a full page or longer.

In an October 2009 posting on 'From Earth's End', a blog about the New Zealand comics scene, Adrian Kinnaird described Emery's work as 'some of the most memorable, and possibly x-rated comics titles the country has ever seen'. He went on to list 'some of the best examples': *Let's Kill White People*, *Run! Faggot! Run!*, *Some Day I will Kill You* and *Choose Your Own Fucking Adventure*, among others.

Emery, a master at finding humour in deliberately crude and unsettling subject matter, writes funny strips on a range of unlikely themes: casual brutality; sexism and male violence; cruelty and insensitivity towards women; racism; homosexuality and homophobia; and incest, rape and even sexual slavery. His strips push at the edge of politeness, political correctness and taboo, and most occupy territory between the mildly disturbing and the outright stomach-churning. Some are silly, a few reach heights of nightmarish surreal poetry (don't read *Macho Faggot Cop*

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Can Racism Be Funny?

Chris Beach

Chris Beach is a graduate of Writing and Publishing at NMIT and a cartoon aficionado.

‹www.guzumocomics.com/2009/10/ macho-faggot-cop› late at night and expect to have pleasant dreams), and others are just plain bizarre.

Emery's art style—vividly realised in bold blues, pinks, greens and purples—has a disarming simplicity and directness which might be dismissed at first glance as crude or naive. After reading a few of his strips and getting a feel for them one is struck by how Emery's ideas seem to surge up from some inaccessible, subconscious place to manifest directly on the page before his internal censors (if he has any) can dilute their raw power. In fact in the vision behind his work there is a harmonious balance of form and content; it is likely that much of his material would be too disturbing if rendered more realistically.

A lot of Emery's comics find humour in capricious acts of cruelty. In an episode of *Fun at the Beach* ‹www.guzumocomics.com /2009/11/fun-at-the-beach-2›, after a mermaid brushes up against a couple of swimmers' legs and comes to the surface, the female swimmer grabs her, and the male swimmer withdraws a knife, saying, 'Hold her still so I can drink her blood!' There is no given explanation for this sudden violence or for why the man might want to drink the mermaid's blood. The anger and random violence enter unexpectedly, pulled out of nowhere like the knife itself. But the unsettling moment also has to do with the mythology of the mermaid and the human proclivity for destruction, even of the things that fascinate us.

In *Helpline* ‹www.guzumocomics.com/2009/08/helpline›, a man contemplating suicide calls a suicide prevention line only to experience the despair and utter disillusionment of hearing the counsellor laugh over the phone. We see in the last panel that a man at the call centre who has dropped his pants is pulling faces, making the counsellor crack-up. This strip appeared in Emery's self-published book of collected comics, *Everything Ends in Tears*.

Emery's *Warlock* series of strips feature a warlock who intends to do evil but finds it too inconvenient so stays at home instead. In the first strip in the series ‹www. guzumocomics.com/2009/06/warlock›, he plots to steal a baby from the hospital but, after glancing through a window and discovering it's raining, decides to stay home and look at porn on the internet instead. In the second in the series ‹www.guzumocomics. com/2009/08/ warlock-2›, the warlock plans to 'expose [his] rude bits to the young folk at the local public library' but finds that his bicycle has a flat tyre. The last panel reveals he has stayed home to vacuum and dust the house. If we are discomfited by this cartoon, it is because it is an apparently casual reflection on the banality of evil.

In one particularly funny and disturbing comic, *Skeleton Army* ‹www.guzumocomics.com/2009/03/skeleton-army›, a reporter interviews the daughter of Bill Gates after his death and asks about her plans. The last panel is either her dream or a jump into the future. She sits on a throne made from human bones and gleefully watches as her army of skeleton warriors massacre everyone in sight. This final panoramic image, although not necessarily a direct reference, has a nightmarish tone and dimensions similar to Picasso's *Guernica*.

In *Boat and Moon* ‹www.guzumocomics.com/2009/02/boat-and-moon›, a boat that has been lost at sea without fuel and adrift for months begs the moon for help. The moon replies, 'Yes little boat, I will help you. / I will push the tides to guide you home', but the moon instead pulls the boat through a storm. In the last panel a giant octopus and a sea monster resembling the Creature from the Black Lagoon are pulling the boat to the bottom of the ocean while the moon is calling out, 'Suckerrr!' This comic is a good example of Emery's work, with many signature elements. The moon is cruel for no apparent reason, and the giant monsters lend the strip a B-movie sensibility. Many of Emery's strips involve alien invasions, time machines, 1950s-style giant robots and monsters, as well as nostalgia for early 1980s toy and movie franchises. What the cartoon plays on here is the unexpected malevolence of the moon despite the children's fairytale style of dialogue. Evil again where you don't expect it.

Many of Emery's Guzumo comics explore homophobia (see *Dick from Above*, www.guzumocomics.com/2009/03/dick-from-above) but often have an unexpected twist. In the comic strip Fudo: *The World's Smartest Fucking Dog* ‹www.guzumocomics.com/2010 /02/fudo-2›, Fudo's master is doing a crossword puzzle and is stuck on the clue, 'Six across. Bundled twigs'. Fudo, standing at the doorway says, 'Faggot' and the owner replies, 'F-A-G-G-O-T! Thanks, Fudo! You're really good at crosswords!' The dog replies, 'Crosswords?'

In *The Gayness* ‹www.guzumo comics.com/2010/07/the-gayness›, some men take a pill that cures cancer but has the side effect that 'it makes you feel a bit gay'. The men comment 'Ha! Ha! That's not exactly a bad thing!' before engaging in a public orgy. Before taking the pill they would have regarded being homosexual in negative terms; now it's fun. In the final panel, hundreds or thousands of years into the future, an alien robot probing through ancient ruins says to another, 'We still haven't been able to determine how they became extinct!'

Emery also plays with racist stereotypes, in ways that expose them to ridicule. In *The Maori Guys* ‹www. guzumocomics.com/2009/11/the-maori-guys›, Maori teen hooligans drink alcohol and smoke marijuana, then smash a bottle over the head of a white guy having a picnic with his girlfriend in the park because they suspect him of planning to 'slip' them some rohypnol, which they sold to him earlier. All of this behaviour occurs in a single comic and has the effect of exposing the stereotype's total lack of credibility. Racism is also explored in *Racist Pen* ‹www. guzumocomics.com/2009/02/racist-pen›. As a white man selling a piece of property to a black couple passes

Facebook goes to the Movies

Simon Cooper

Film fails to capture the ideology behind social media

The rise of Facebook as a cultural phenomenon meant that it would inevitably become a subject for cinema. Yet it is not easy to use social networking as a vehicle for narrative film. Facebook might be a hot phenomenon, but it is a 'cool' form of media. The detached intimacies among Facebook members don't easily translate to the big screen, nor do the big ethical questions that drove films like *Network*, *All the President's Men* or even *The Truman Show* resonate because the 'public' doesn't exist for social networking like it does for the television, radio or newspaper. Moreover, the maintenance of Facebook pages mimics the kinds of knowledge work many of us do on a daily basis, and cinema has always struggled to represent intellectual labour on screen. So when two films 'about' Facebook—the Hollywood produced *The Social Network* and the independent 'documentary' *Catfish*—receive critical and popular acclaim, it is worth asking what happens when social networking meets the cinema.

The Social Network explores the origins and disputed ownership of Facebook. Derived from the book *The Accidental Billionaires*, the film focuses upon Facebook's creator Mark Zuckerberg, whose warped personality stands in for whatever critical attitude toward Facebook can be taken from the film. Facebook itself is virtually absent; we learn of its creation, that everyone is using it, that it's worth billions of dollars—but as an object it remains unexamined. Instead the film plays with the ideas that drive Facebook; the desire for communication and friendship. The notion of failed communication brackets the film. It opens with Zuckerberg and his girlfriend engaged in the kind of frenetic dialogue that writer Aaron Sorkin became famous for in *The West Wing*. Yet despite its intensity the conversation is dysfunctional. Zuckerberg is bright but incapable of understanding his girlfriend; his responses are miscued, pedantic, untimely. At best he's caught up in his own world, at worst he's arrogant and alienated. When his girlfriend dumps him he's not sure if she's joking, failing to understand all the contextual information that has gone before. He's not unfeeling, however. Bitter at being dumped, he returns to Harvard; in just a few hours of hacking he creates a site that allows Harvard men to rate female undergraduates. This alienates him from the female student body but his talents draw the attention of some wealthy students who have an idea for a website that would allow Harvard students and alumni to connect with each other. Zuckerberg, arguably inspired by this idea, creates his own wildly successful site. From these origins in communicative failure, abandonment, deceit and technical prowess, Facebook is born.

Anyone concerned about privacy on Facebook, that intelligence agencies or corporations are harvesting personal data, or who simply thinks social networking is a banal form of communication will be gratified by this portrayal of Zuckerberg, with its implication that Facebook's motivations lie in paranoia and misogyny. That there might be something missing from Facebook, despite all the frenzied communication, is driven home in the film's final scene. As Facebook goes global, we see Zuckerberg, now a billionaire, slumped over his laptop sending 'friend requests' to his lost girlfriend, repeatedly refreshing the page in expectation of her reply, which never comes. If this 'Rosebud' moment enables a neat closure, and yet more irony about communication and friendship, it bears little relation to reality, where Zuckerberg has been in a steady relationship for years. Creating a monstrous, if tragic, version of Zuckerberg allows the film to evoke the cultural anxieties about social networking without having to examine what actually occurs.

Yet the film's version of Zuckerberg is an ambivalent creation. At times a borderline sociopath, he is also portrayed as a subversive, even countercultural figure. Zuckerberg may not fit in anywhere, but he especially doesn't fit in at Harvard. The film celebrates his underdog status and ability to transcend social and electronic barriers. Harvard, with its snobby social scene, is a static institution. Even Larry Summers, Harvard president, fails to recognise the significance of Facebook and tells the Winklevoss twins (who accuse Zuckerberg of stealing their idea) to just go and 'invent something else for the internet'. As the narrative invests in the growth of Facebook, these Harvard elites seem doomed to play catch-up, thwarted by their own sense of superiority. When Zuckerberg dismisses their claims to ownership with the calmly-delivered tautology: 'If you guys were the inventors of Facebook you'd have invented Facebook', it's clear whose sympathies we are meant to share.

As the film progresses, an equally powerfully myth about the subversive and democratic nature of the internet manifests itself. Facebook escapes the narrow confines of Harvard and becomes a universal phenomenon. Zuckerberg hooks up with former *Napster* entrepreneur Sean Parker, and moves to California. An army of programmers tries to maintain the whole enterprise as Facebook grows out of control; there are parties, naked women, drugs and booze. Zuckerberg and Parker stick it to a few corporate media types along the way. The viral qualities of Facebook resemble the subversive activities of the men's groups in Fincher's earlier film *Fight Club*, and in many scenes the editing and music is similar. In the earlier film the quasi-terrorist fight clubs spread uncontrollably across the country just as Facebook groups do in this film. But if Facebook breaks down barriers, it's hardly anti-capitalist. It may shake up a few media empires, but it's the very model of the new economy in its ability to exploit human needs for the service of capital.

If *The Social Network* is driven by an exaggerated portrait of Zuckerberg as a figure lacking humanity, *Catfish* attempts to focus on the human element in social networks. A low budget 'documentary', the film has received a remarkable level of praise. A hit at the Sundance Film Festival, *Catfish* was described one of 'the movies of the year', a film that provides a 'stunning dismantling of Facebook', and so on. If Facebook was largely absent from Fincher's film, *Catfish*

Simon Cooper

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attempts to create the 'feel' of social networking for the cinema viewer. The cheap production values and the use of design touches taken from the web, like Google Maps and Google Earth, add a semblance of authenticity. Doubts have been raised as to whether the film's story is genuine, but more problematic is how the film masks a structure of exploitation under the guise of a story about human connection.

Catfish starts out as an account of an unlikely relationship conducted via digital media. Nev, a handsome New York photographer, receives a package from eight-year-old Abby, who has painted one of Nev's photographs that appeared in a newspaper. Charmed, Nev starts a correspondence with Abby, and ends up communicating with her whole family. He becomes smitten with Abby's older sister Megan and the two of them conduct an intensive and increasingly erotic relationship at a distance. Via Facebook and text-messaging, Nev and Megan form such a connection that Nev decides to travel to Michigan to meet in person.

At this point the fairly predictable twist occurs. The farm where Megan is supposed to live is abandoned, as we discover in a lurid night-time scene straight out of *Blair Witch*. Nev continues to Abby's home and after some awkward exchanges discovers that Megan does not exist—that she has been created by Abby's mother Angela (who also created the paintings), who stole another person's image from the web and used it to create 'Megan' on Facebook. Nev is shocked by the deceit, but all this is mitigated by Angela's situation. Isolated in a rural town with two severely handicapped children from a second marriage, Angela elicits sympathy as a lonely person and a frustrated artist who just wanted to communicate. Ultimately she and Nev are reconciled. The film's end tells us that Angela has been added as a 'friend' to Nev's Facebook page.

Catfish has been praised as a study of cyber-romance, and for exposing the falsehoods we tell to each other and ourselves, deceits made easier by new technology. Yet whatever anxieties are exhibited by this small moral tale are alleviated by the reconciliation of Nev and Angela, who end up 'friends' despite the lies that brought them together. But the narrative twist in *Catfish*, the thing that excites viewers and critics, gains whatever force it has by exploiting not so much the difference between truth and illusion, but by trading off social and economic divisions. As the digital 'other', Angela is effective because she is all things Nev isn't—rural, poor, failed artist, struggling with family and so on. If she happened to be another New Yorker I doubt *Catfish* could transcend its platitudes. In one sense the faux-revelations and fuzzy humanism of *Catfish* are entirely appropriate when exploring Facebook, a place where banal self-affirmation, benign friendships and the absence of negativity rules the day. The ideology behind such 'participatory culture' is a subject both films ultimately avoid.

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the contract to them saying, 'Just sign here, folks, and the place is yours', his pen writes, 'Don't touch me Nigger!'

Emery takes a similar approach with the strip *Sexist Glasses* ‹www.guzumocomicscom/2009/03/sexist-glasses›. In response to a female cashier accidentally giving a him the wrong change, a male customer's glasses say, 'Get it right, you dumb moron'. When he tries to explain that it was his glasses, not him, she doesn't believe him, and his glasses say, 'You better watch that smart mouth, bitch'. The man starts to cry as he tries to convince the woman that it's not really him speaking. Do his sexist attitudes have a life of their own? Is Emery suggesting that sexism and racism are like accessories, in some sense external constructions we have little control over?

Emery is relentless in his twisted, insightful representations of male violence against women. *I Just Woke Up* ‹www.guzumocomicscom/2009/08/i-just-woke-up› begins with a man telling a story to two other guys at the office which ends with him saying, '.... then I told that bitch to get the fuck out!' and his colleagues erupting into such convulsions of laughter that they both spill their coffee. The man then goes on to brag about how he woke up in the morning and found that his penis had turned into a sword. When he pulls it out to show them, one of the others touches the tip and comments, 'It's so sharp'.. The man becomes angry, saying, 'Don't touch it, fag!' and points the tip menacingly at the other's face. The other man then undoes his fly to reveal two demon heads on long shafts instead of a penis. He says, 'Yeah! I just woke up this morning and my dick had turned into twin demon heads of Khalid!' The strip ends with the man with a sword for a penis looking disgruntled: 'Fucking Dave! Always has to outdo me at everything!'

The simple cartoony style of Matt Emery's artwork, coupled with the juvenile elements and black humour of his stories, tends to close the reader's mind to any expectation that they might be dealing with thoughtful and provocative subject matter. But this colourful and seemingly simple exterior masks a more challenging interior.. His style is a Trojan Horse that gets past the ordinarily more critical 'walls' of the mind after they have relaxed their defences. It is easy not to take Emery's work as seriously as one should, and to find out too late that, like a seemingly silly and harmless child with a charming smile, he has sharp teeth that bite.