

arena



THE AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE OF LEFT POLITICAL,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COMMENTARY

08 2011–09 2011

.....
№ 113

.....
Where to find us

Postal address:
Arena Magazine
PO Box 18 North
Carlton 3054

Web:

www.arena.org.au
Tel: (03) 9416 0232
Fax: (03) 9416 0684

Submissions

Arena Magazine
accepts unsolicited
submissions for
each of its sections:
commentaries & debate
up to 1200 words;
essays up to 4000
words; **features** up to
3000 words; **reviews** of
books, film, art, theatre,
music and dance up
to 1200 words; **photo**
essays; and **poetry**.

Please provide a brief
biographical note.

Send to:

magazine@arena.org.au

Style

We follow the ACPS
Style Manual.

The editors reserve
the right to change
titles and edit for space.

Refereeing

We formally referee any
published article as
requested by academic
authors.

Payment

Arena Magazine does
not receive government
funding. Published
contributors are
offered a half-year
gift subscription to
Arena Magazine.



.....
EDITORIAL

Alison Caddick
2 FIRE ON THE WATER

.....
LEAD GRAPHIC

4 Bruce Petty

.....
AGAINST THE CURRENT

Samuel Cossar-Gilbert
5 POSTCARD FROM A REVOLUTION
Grassroots mobilisation on the streets of Spain

Rohan Bastin
7 SHRILL DENIALS

Sri Lanka's killing fields and government culpability

Kendall Trudgen
9 YOLNGU DIPLOMACY

Dialogue or intervention? A history of cross-cultural exchange

Mate Kapović
11 ACADEMIC UPRISINGS
Croatian students and staff reject the neo-liberal university

.....
COMMENT AND DEBATE

Aurelién Mondon
13 WINDSCHUTTLE AND BREIVIK
The Caring Right fights back

Alan Roberts
14 ANTI-NUCLEAR CONVICTION
Why what happened at Fukushima was not clear

Chaz Dias
15 WHO ARE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY?
Who presumes to speak for the world? And who listens?

.....
ESSAY

Saskia Sassen
19 GLOBAL CHALLENGES
The city's potential to transform conflicts

.....
FEATURES

Clen Jennings
23 AI WEIWEI
That impudent monkey: a history of Chinese government paranoia

Boris Frankel
31 BORIS BITES PACKER
Humanist in the Postmaster General's Department: a memoir

Peter Karamoskos
35 NUCLEAR SICKNESS
Medical, social, psychological and environmental consequences of Fukushima

Eva Cox
38 INCOME MANAGEMENT
Paternalistic policy shifts in Australian social welfare

.....
REGULARS

THE COMMON TOUCH

Mark Furlong

17 'I WAS JUST ...'

Just a digression on the interactional theatre of life

POSTCARD

Jorge Sotirios

45 HOLIDAY IN CAMBODIA

Disaster tourism in Kissinger's secret war zone

COOPER'S LAST

Simon Cooper

54 WITH FRIENDS LIKE JOHN ARMSTRONG ...

Cultivating taste: neo-liberalism's new role for the humanities

.....
ARTS AND CULTURE

Valerie Krips

41 THE HARRY POTTER FINALE

Old-fashioned narrative meets contemporary culture

Kevin Murray

43 DIAMONDS ARE FOR EVERYONE

Jewellerymaking that questions notions of value

.....
REVIEWS

Alastair Nicholson

48 THE INTERVENTION IN CONTEXT

An informed assessment of the Intervention

Crazyna Zajdow

50 TELLING US WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

Will Hutton's case for 'due desserts'

Sam Langer

52 THE SLIM VOLUME REPORT

Three distinct new voices in Australian poetry

.....
POETRY

B N Oakman

16 VX 65595 BEAR.N.J.

CONVERSATIONS WITH MUGABE (FOR A.D.)

Alamgir Hashmi

44 THE CITY WITHOUT FOOTPATHS

.....
PHOTO ESSAY

Samuel Cossar-Gilbert

27 LA LUCHA ESTA EN LA CALLE: SPANISH REVOLUTION

Real Democracy Now in Madrid and Barcelona

.....
CARTOONS

Matt Bissett-Johnson

Fire

on the Water

The waters are lapping at the doors of respectable London, the dogs unleashed, the fires burning

London's 'third world' has hardly 'risen up', but it has made a huge statement about the nature of social life in Thatcher/Blair/Brown/Cameron's collapsing neo-liberalised society. If it breaks down in the consciousness of those looting and burning as not much more than putting it up the police ('Now they'll respect us', said one young female looter) or collecting their due in street wear (their class, after all, gave the middle classes gangster chic), that's not just what it's *all* about. And it's certainly not, if we consider the responses and their justifications—neither Cameron's right-wing rhetoric and policing solutions nor the 'community's' apparently cheery brooms and buckets to help 'clean up the mess'.

In several places locally we've been told that interpretation of the events in London is mere punditry without on-the-ground reporting (*Media Watch*, for instance), as if nothing can be said without the words and justifications as given by those involved themselves. Has our social knowledge, and the practice of interpretation, receded so far as to preclude considered judgements of a more general and systemic kind? Social life operates at different levels of awareness, and at different levels of emotional and practical commitment to the culture that shapes us. It used to be the role of the humanities—in universities that held interpretation to be a core function—to study such in broad terms, making our actions meaningful and meaning more complex. In fact, though marginalised and perhaps repressed, broader interpretations of neo-liberal life—what it means, and how it can't last—have been 'out there' for as long as neo-liberalism itself; the signs were always there to be read. We are nothing if not deeply mired in contradictions in our present world of radical cultural change and disparate social futures for different social groups. In the midst of collapse and confusion perhaps general thinking will again become popular as we are forced to work out what those contradictions mean.

While Cameron and his constituency are plugging crime and gang behaviour as the explanation for London's woes, more *social* commentary has focused on poverty and want, especially the alienating quality of Britain's huge housing estates and the poor's lack of education. More on the money still has been commentary that combines a focus on poverty with consumption and desire, or how want has been transformed and come to mean those contemporary identity fixers: products and lifestyle. If the underclass kids of England are not in want of food and shelter as such, but are undereducated and demeaned in myriad ways in their life circumstances, and at the same time bombarded with images of what counts in the society they liminally inhabit, it makes sense that what they want is an identity that holds sway—that means something to them and affects how others treat them. Harold Jacobson pointed out the Dickensianism of the images of kids labouring under the weight of huge LCD screens as they scurried or slinked or brazenly made their way round the streets of London, Birmingham, Manchester. But this is Dickens postmodernised, both in terms of consumption desire and, as Jacobson himself suggested, in terms of some notion of 'rights' as deployed by the young—an often empty call that bolsters a sense of entitlement but may have little actual content for those who have experienced extreme (cultural) disadvantage.

Of course, who can blame them for that? Some other commentary has been important in pointing out that there is a parallel in the apparent desires of looters/rioters and the scions of the neo-liberal order: consumption is where it is at broadly in the culture, and raised to an art form by that 'lucky' few—increasingly few proportionally speaking—who sit at the top of the pile. Financiers and corrupt politicians (moats anyone?) have figured in this assessment, and while some commentators have cast doubt on such a connection of corruption as directly linked to the riots, and fair enough—culture, it should be said, works by way of mood and undercurrent as much as the transmission of explicit views or the making of conscious connections. The mood across much of the Western world is not only one of fearfulness in the face of all kinds of change and collapse but radical suspicion and confusion, that is, where it has not already begun to transmute into explicitly radical anti-neo-liberal action (see the articles in this *Arena Magazine* on Spain and Croatia). If the markets can shudder and fall on the strength of 'emotion', as we are now being warned to expect at any moment, so too can 'volatility' erupt on the streets, although 'emotion' here may be some way from 'irrational'.

Neo-liberalism has been the executive philosophy and overriding form of governance of a supercharged capitalism for some thirty years, as its basis in the communications revolution and other high-technological advances have carried it past the wildest dreams of any common-or-garden capitalist of the first half of the twentieth century. Hayek and his neo-conservative acolytes, all the way down to our common-or-garden Liberal and Labor politicians in Australia, may have 'freed' the economy, and much of civil society, from social constraint and thus opened the way institutionally to production

←←←

Fire on the Water

Alison Caddick

and consumption on an unimaginable scale. But the real engine of change and 'growth' has always lain deeper and acted earlier in the culture and economy, propelling us towards a radical leap beyond the modernity with which we had all become familiar.

One aspect of that modernity was the welfare state, and understandings of care, comfort, education and morality writ large into state-based institutions, justified, contradictorily, as variously improving people or their social opportunities. Another was consumption, but within the bounds largely of the natural world and mechanical processes at the disposal of industry, and within the terms of an emergent but still only 'picket-fence' individualism, which was held in check by moralities of rectitude, or self-control, and softened by the ongoing existence of relatively stable local communities and their institutions. If the welfare state has abandoned many or most of its responsibilities to a broadly understood social constituency; if individualism now knows few bounds; and consumption has reached completely unsustainable levels environmentally and morally, 'neo-liberalism' is only partly to blame, though it will be the most visible target, especially the 'corruption' and 'greed' with which it is given a human face in everyday understandings of why things went wrong.

'Greed', however, is hardly a big enough or social enough concept to nail what has been going on—neither neo-liberalism itself, as theory or practice, nor, certainly, the underlying techno-scientific revolution that emerged in a range of fields, offering late capitalism new substances to work on (for example, biological entities, newly isolated compounds), new means for the transformation of the material world (reconstitutive (techno-)science), new means for the promotion of products as identity aids (new media), a new space to research them (the neo-liberal university) and new, globalised conduits for rapid expansion and movement of finance (networked communications technologies). Neo-liberalism has been an especially expansionist and brutal regime of executive power in its paring back of historically achieved conditions for (relative) social decency, as in the welfare state and its fundamental assumption of social inclusion, or education (including the liberal university) focused on the formation of

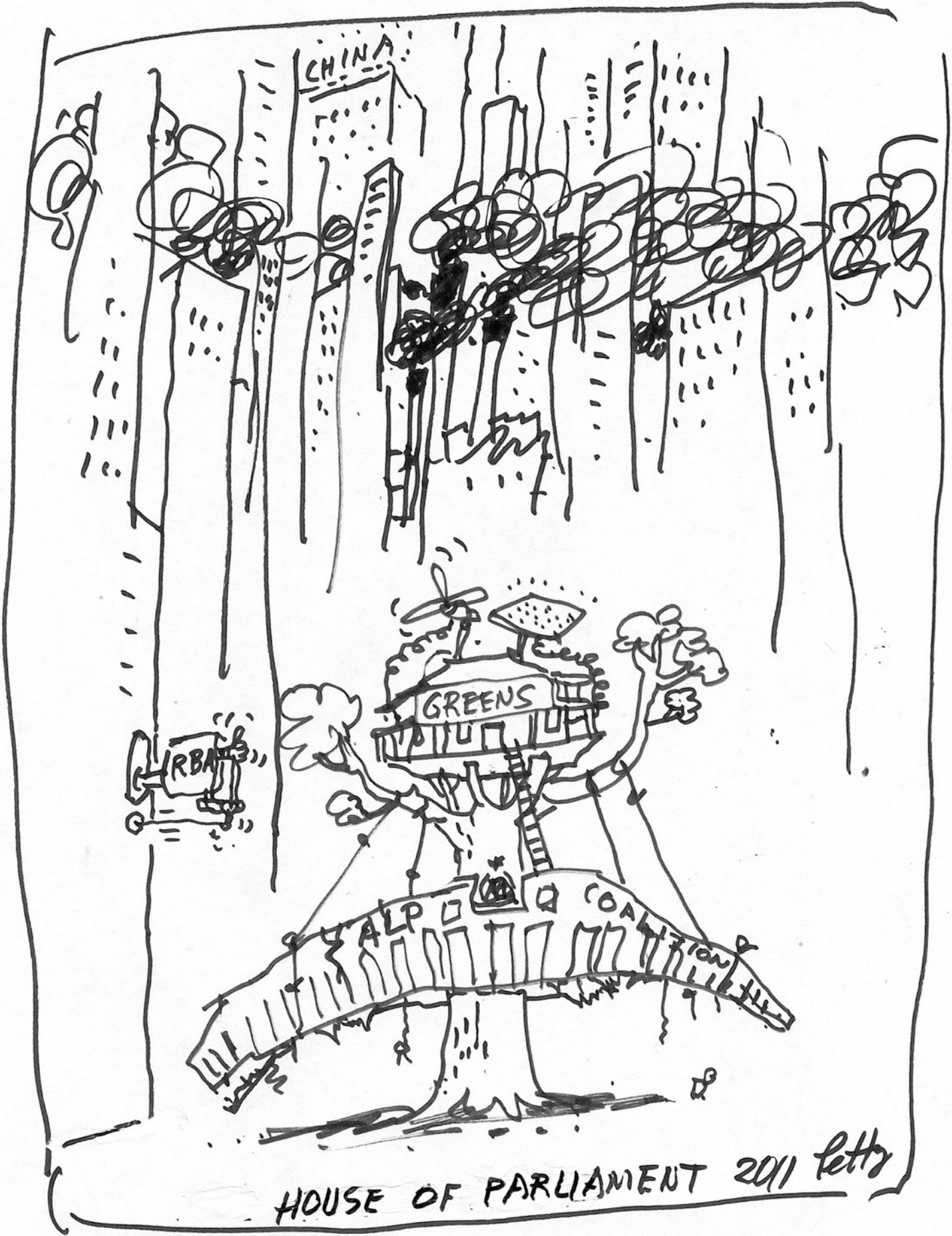
the person not just technique—with consequences like those witnessed in London. But that it has also ushered in, and in many respects obscured the deeper processes at work, in part because of its hubristic understanding of its own power has meant that the other layers of change unsettling culture and society today have not been easy to gauge or assess.

The Left's response has not assisted very much in this either. Overrun and overawed by neo-liberalism's apparent power, and with parts of the Left in any case deeply committed to a productivist view of society and any future we might inhabit, they fell in with the dominant project. In the case of Labo(u)r governments in the United Kingdom and Australia, they of course furthered the neo-liberal project, 'streamlining' the state, establishing new conditions for wealth accumulation and globalisation's free-wheeling financial arrangements and, in the United Kingdom especially, for the spectacular financial collapse of 2008. That their commitment to neo-liberalism, unwavering as it is, is a key element in environmental collapse and climate change barely rates a mention. Certainly there seems little consciousness of the legacy of left economism and modernist productivism within these parties which today ties super-consumption and 'growth at any cost' to both social decay and planetary disaster. The 'postmodern' Left, on the other hand, while decrying many of the inequities produced by neo-liberalism and often arguing on the basis of 'values' and 'rights' for a range of ethical positions, is similarly blind to the nature of the underlying transformation that has powered neo-liberalism. Indeed, in the way that cultures work, surreptitiously, beneath the level of our awareness, our worlds have been shaped not simply by 'neo-liberal values', but by an emerging, new relation to knowledge, each other and the natural world, effected in the present conjunction of technique and science as carried by its intellectually trained agents. Techno-science has not merely given us new frontiers and means for production (the emphasis of left and right neo-liberalism), but is transgressive of many of the fundamentals of previous ways of life, reshaping our being in the world today in myriad complex ways.

Harold Jacobson's comment about young people's sense of their 'rights' leading to a generalised sense of entitlement has a right-wing ring to it, but he didn't mean it like that, and it is worth examining further. We must be careful, given the coming period of potentially very serious right-wing reaction, to tease out this sort of question adequately. Just as the middle class has lived off the transgressive frisson of wearing gangster chic, so transgressive theory and practice generally on the cultural Left, as in mediated culture, celebrates the breaking of all sorts of bounds—of 'respectability', 'hierarchy', the 'natural' (the whole culture as an *avant-garde*). If there is 'no respect' forthcoming from London's rioting youth, it is hardly surprising, not only because they have been left out and are 'poor', but because they, like us generally, don't *understand* this transgressive ideology and where it comes from, deep in the common culture of techno-scientific capitalism, even if it fills up their lives and hopes and dreams. **a**

Alison Caddick

a ←



HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT 2011 Letty



Postcard from a Revolution

Samuel Cossar-Gilbert



Postcard from a Revolution

Samuel Cossar-Gilbert

Samuel Cossar-Gilbert is an Australian studying and living in Spain. He has been heavily involved in the M15 movement and the online media project <www.europeanrevolution.net>.

Ordinary Spaniards in the street

For the last two months Spain has been rocked by a wave of protests, occupations and direct actions carried out by a new grassroots political movement demanding a more participatory democracy and an end to harsh austerity measures. It is referred to as the M-15 movement, as it began on 15 May, when tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets all over Spain. The demonstration was organised by an internet group called Real Democracy Now, which published a manifesto calling for an 'ethics revolution' and critiquing neo-liberalism.

The generalist nature of the M-15 manifesto has enabled it to gain widespread support, with a poll in *El Pais* newspaper finding that 79 per cent of people support its demands. The rapid growth of the movement is in part related to the economic and political crisis affecting much of Europe. It is a response not only to harsh austerity programs, but also the feeling that something has gone wrong with the democratic system. Elected officials no longer seem to represent the people they serve, and social and economic policies are determined by the market, rather than by the community.

In Spain the situation is dire. Unemployment stands at 21.3 per cent, political corruption is rife, basic services are being cut, and the political system is dominated by two very similar major parties. In this context, the success of the 15 May demonstrations prompted a small group of 100 protesters to spontaneously start an occupation of la Plaza del Sol, Madrid's main square. In the early hours of the morning they were violently evicted by police, with several arrests and injuries, but the police brutality only strengthened the protesters' resolve, and a call to retake the square spread rapidly across the internet. The next day thousands of protesters returned and la Plaza del Sol was recaptured. I arrived late that night when the camp was still under construction, with tarps, megaphones, chairs and beds arriving out of nowhere to form an anarchic structure in the centre of the city.

Over the next week a radical transformation took place; the space became a kind of liberated zone and its own world. Every day more people joined the occupation and the camp continued to grow, with between five and fifty thousand people occupying the square at any one times. The mainstream media began referring to it as 'the

republic of Sol' and the 'Spanish Revolution'. Kitchens were set up to distribute free food, the main billboard was covered in the words 'Europe Rise Up!'; and 'peoples' assemblies' were held regularly to decide on the actions to be taken. The government directed the police not to intervene, due to the backlash from the previous eviction, and the protests expanded to nearby plazas. In other squares there were political theatre workshops running or people blockading banks. Within a few days, similar occupations sprang up in over twenty Spanish cities.

The timing of the protests was a key factor. One week before regional elections, the movement called for changes to electoral laws that would, in theory, end the dominance of the two major parties. The slogans were 'No nos representa' ('You don't represent us'), '*La lucha esta en la calle*' ('The struggle is in street') and '*Democracia real ya*' ('Real democracy now'). The protest movement, which developed as a direct challenge to the electoral campaign, had its desired effect. An Age headline on 22 May hit the nail on the head: 'Huge Spanish Protests Overshadow Election'.

From the beginning, the M-15 movement practised direct democracy. Assemblies were crucial to giving shape to a movement that started with only a very general manifesto and no formal political organisation. Demands were passionately debated and agreed upon in the streets.

From the beginning, the M-15 movement practised direct democracy. People's assemblies became the main forum for making decisions, organising actions and formulating demands. Assemblies were crucial to giving shape to a movement that started with only a very general manifesto and no formal political organisation. Demands were passionately debated and agreed upon in the streets. The Madrid occupation had some twenty-two commissions, which met almost constantly. One night I stumbled across the Commission for the Economy—two



hundred people had gathered at 3 am to debate the best way to nationalise the banking system. All commissions reported to the General Assembly, the highest decision-making body and platform for discussing the most important issues. The assemblies and commissions used a mix of consensus and majority rules voting, and had a very horizontal structure, with no leaders and rotating spokespeople.

After four days the Madrid occupation was declared illegal and ordered to disband. A general assembly of thousands, however, decided unanimously to ignore the ban. Every day the camp became bigger and more complex. A library and childcare centre were set up, solar panels were installed and ‘respect officers’ were trained to provide conflict resolution. The degree of organisation and infrastructure needed to run the occupation was incredible—by this stage it had become the size of a small town. The movement was also faced with the practical reality of up to thirty thousand people gathered together in a public space. How could they all be fed? Where would they go to the toilet? What was the best way to resolve problems in a community with no police? The occupation became the functioning example of the alternative world the protesters wanted to create and, largely, it worked. Everything was free and it was proudly pronounced that money had been abolished in ‘the republic of Sol’.

On 27 May the occupation in Barcelona was violently evicted by riot police and fifteen people were injured. The level of police brutality is exemplified in pictures taken of a riot officer breaking a protester’s wheelchair. This potent image, along with the twitter hash tag #Bcnsinmiedo (Barcelona without fear), spread rapidly through the internet. Within hours, solidarity protests were planned in every city across the country under the banner ‘We are all Barcelona’. I went to a demonstration organised in the small university city of Salamanca, where more than 500 people came to show their solidarity. In Barcelona 35,000 people returned that night to retake the main square and begin to rebuild the occupation. These events showed not only the strength of the movement, but also the importance of the internet in organising it. From the beginning Facebook and Twitter were crucial organising tools; by 10 June the Real Democracy Now Facebook group had 400,000 members.

On 15 June the protesters blockaded the regional parliament, which was set to pass measures to drastically cut spending to social services. The demonstration started in the early hours of the morning. Several thousand people created a human chain and barricades were constructed, blocking all entrances to the building. After hours of tense stand-offs the riot police dispersed protesters by force. Protesters ominously chanted the Death March from *Star Wars* as politicians, surrounded by riot police, entered the parliament. Sporadic outbreaks of violence erupted as protesters started to create moving barricades. These were so effective that twenty-five politicians had to be transported by helicopter, including the President of the Chamber, Artur Mas.

Although the large-scale occupations of main squares continued throughout Spain for a month, after about two weeks the initial energy and spirit waned slightly. The media stopped reporting on the protests and the



“..We’re going to protest until we’re the Government...”

movement began to discuss the need to change tactics and continue to expand. The first idea was to strengthen the movement at the grassroots level through the establishment of ‘assemblies of the suburbs’. In Madrid more than forty separate local assemblies have been set up, holding weekly meetings in public spaces to deal with local problems. The next strategy is to try and achieve small yet concrete changes. This has manifested in anti-eviction and immigrant support actions. At the time of writing, the movement is working with the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages and has already stopped banks from repossessing forty-seven houses by creating human chains at evictions. The third tactic is continued mobilisation. On 19 June, the protesters took to the streets again in an international day of action to protest against the ‘Euro pact’—neo-liberal austerity measures being imposed all over Europe. *El País* reported that more than 200,000 people participated in protests across the country; 100,000 people marched in Barcelona alone. Significantly, these rallies coincided with the end of many of the large-scale occupations and showed that the movement was not diminishing, but rather changing.

The M-15 movement has had a profound impact on the political situation in Spain. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets and created a new model of democratic participation. It is a beacon of resistance to the harsh austerity measures that are stripping away people’s rights across Europe. The ruling elite has started to pay attention—on 21 June the Spanish parliament unanimously passed a motion to undertake a study of the protesters’ demands. I do not know whether this movement will be strong enough to achieve the radical changes it seeks, but what is certain is that a new and powerful social force has been born here in Spain and it will continue. As I write this, 20,000 people have again retaken the main square in Madrid and are holding an alternative state of the nation debate. **a**

* See page 27 for Samuel Cossar-Gilbert’s photo essay on the Spanish protests.

←←←

Postcard from a
RevolutionSamuel Cossar-
Gilbert

→→→

Shrill Denials

Rohan Bastin

Rohan Bastin is an Australian-born anthropologist teaching at Deakin University. He is the author of *The Domain of Constant Excess: Plural Worship at the Munnesvaram Temples in Sri Lanka* (Berghahn Books, 2002).

Shrill Denials

Rohan Bastin

.....

War crimes and crimes against humanity in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's Killing Fields, recently shown on Australian television, is a UK (Channel 4) documentary about the final days of the Sri Lankan government's offensive against the Tamil Tigers in May 2009. It contains shocking evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the deliberate shelling of known non-combatant areas, such as hospitals in the so-called No Fire Zones; the summary execution of prisoners by Sri Lankan Army troops; and sexual violence against Tamil women, many of them militants.

The story of May 2009 is being told in conjunction with the release of a UN report indicating the Sri Lankan government's failure to protect the civilian population during those final weeks, along with the Tigers' use of civilians as human shields. As well as discrediting the Sri Lankan government's version of the events, the report provides credible evidence of crimes perpetrated both by the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Tamil Tigers.

Not surprisingly, the report is condemned in Sri Lanka. Demonstrators have not only burned effigies of the UN General-Secretary Ban Ki Moon, but one demonstrator was filmed furiously biting the neck of an effigy before ripping it apart and then setting it alight. Combined with other protests, partly organised by government members, these images of furious destruction evoked for many people recollections of the anti-Tamil riots of July 1983, especially those families who were forced to flee and make their lives elsewhere.

Those riots helped transform a simmering ethnic conflict into a full-scale civil war involving international participation, the formation of a globally organised and funded militant group (the Tigers), and the deaths of hundreds of thousands, including one ex-

national leader (India's Rajiv Gandhi in 1991) and one incumbent (Sri Lanka's Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993) who were assassinated by Tiger suicide bombers. Dozens of other politicians and military personnel were killed or wounded by the Tigers' signature act, including in the last days of the 2009 conflict when militants, both male and female, attempted to storm advancing army positions and blow themselves up.

It was not unreasonable, therefore, for Sri Lankan Army troops to demand that surrendering militants remove their clothes. But this does not explain why prisoners were still naked when they were bound, abused, raped, tortured and executed, as shown in the Channel 4 documentary. Channel 4 first made this allegation in 2010 when it broadcast mobile phone footage of summary executions of male prisoners. In *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, it adds new footage, including of female prisoners, and in late July 2011 it broadcast interviews with anonymous military personnel who have not only endorsed the veracity of the accusations, but added that orders to finish the offensive quickly and to take no prisoners came from the top—the Defence Minister and brother of the President, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

These claims are hotly disputed by the Sri Lankan government and many Sri Lankans at home, and especially by Sri Lankans abroad. When Four Corners broadcast the documentary, its website was bombarded with demands that the program not be aired. The acting Sri Lankan High Commissioner wrote a press release alleging the footage is fabricated and that many of the Tamil witnesses interviewed are duplicitously linked to the Tigers. As with the demonstrator furiously biting the effigy of Ban Ki Moon, I suspect they protest too much. The Sri Lankan state has a long history of brutal treatment of its own population, including the use of paramilitary death squads to eradicate sections of the majority Sinhalese community.

Moreover, it is strikingly significant that from January 2008—when the Rajapaksa regime formally ended the shaky ceasefire with the Tigers that it had inherited from the previous government—the removal of witnesses began. Foreign journalist visas were revoked, outspoken foreign nationals were deported and popular press campaigns targeting organisations like UNICEF played up the idea of a global pro-Tiger conspiracy. In January 2009, the editor of the most outspoken weekly newspaper, the *Sunday Leader's* Lasantha Wickrematunge, was assassinated. Well aware of the danger he was in, Wickrematunge had already written his last editorial, which accused the Rajapaksa regime of his killing.

Australian-born UN spokesman Gordon Weiss served in Sri Lanka through this period. He was so moved by his experience, especially by what happened at the end of the war, that he stepped away from the UN to write *The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* (Picador, 2011). This highly readable and insightful account provides a brief historical background to the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict before recounting the events of 2009, when the Sri Lankan military occupied the Tiger-controlled territories, forcing well over 300,000 civilians to flee towards the north-east coast and ultimately a narrow strip of sand where, pounded by artillery and small arms fire, the final showdown took place. As Weiss describes it, the Tigers were accomplices to this human

a ←

08 2011–09 2011
No 113

tragedy not only by using civilians as human shields, but also by compelling them at gunpoint not to run away, shooting them if they did, and by pressing people, many of them children, into their dwindling ranks, only for these untrained soldiers to be killed in the massive military onslaught. The Sri Lankan government played up this situation by declaring its offensive to be a humanitarian rescue mission.

Weiss' non-specialist book provides a useful account of Sri Lanka's colonial and postcolonial history, the rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and the deterioration of ethnic relations. But it betrays a typical Western liberal suspicion of ethnic majorities and sympathy for underdogs that suggests Sri Lanka's Tamils had little choice other than to take up arms. It does not, for instance, examine the internal divisions (mostly caste based) within Tamil society, or how these were elided in an intense linguistic nationalism—articulated with similar social movements on the sub-continent, influencing a growing antagonism to a post-colonial state—that was always going to serve the interests of the Sinhalese ethnic majority. Ceylon was founded on democratic principles that were predestined to fuel communal discord unless the social and political elite—whose interests the British colonial administration had fostered—were to show foresight and courage about what was likely to happen.

The Sri Lankan gainsayers cry foul and demand to know why Sri Lanka stands accused when, for instance, the crimes of Tony Blair and George W. Bush are ignored—and while this is a good question, it's also an indirect admission of culpability.

At the heart of Sri Lanka's long civil war is internal social division and inequality, not simply between but within the ethnic groups. This division has inspired decades of unrest, including the brutally suppressed insurgency of 1971 by the then Maoist/Guevarist Sinhalese People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna or JVP), post-insurgency affirmative action intended to appease the JVP, and the growth of minority Tamil militancy reacting in part to perceived ethnic biases in such affirmative action policies. At the same time, Tamil militancy fed on the intense and largely caste-based inequalities within the Tamil population, a factor that inspired young Tamil women to embrace militancy. The Sri Lankan government then responded by deploying poorly trained and led Sinhalese troops in Tamil areas who were often encouraged by their commanding officers to mistreat Tamil civilians.

Weiss depicts the war as ultimately coming down to a struggle between two ruthless and efficient military men, the Tamil Tigers' founder-leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The former built one of the most efficient, cold-blooded militant organisations the world has ever seen. The latter, a Sri Lanka Army veteran who had spent several years in the United States working in IT until his brother's rise to power, set about destroying that organisation by rebuilding the army, asserting total control over its procurements and fulfilling his brother's quest to destroy Prabhakaran. It is important to note that Mahinda Rajapaksa based his political future on ending the conflict and, from stories I have been told by people who for various reasons met with the President in 2008, was obsessed with destroying Prabhakaran. Gotabaya, who narrowly survived a

Tiger suicide bomber attack in 2007, delivered the result. The war is now over, the Rajapaksa oligarchy (there are two other brothers and some forty other family members now holding the reins of government) is firmly in power, and the only irritation is world opinion that Sri Lanka's approach to the 'war on terror' should be condemned.

Many gainsayers demand to know why there isn't an equivalent reaction to the terrible deeds of the Tigers. Unwilling to appreciate that in international law sovereign bodies—nation-states—are subject to very different expectations than are voluntary associations such as militant organisations, these demands belie a concession that war crimes and crimes against humanity were indeed committed. The Sri Lankan gainsayers cry foul and demand to know why Sri Lanka stands accused when, for instance, the crimes of Tony Blair and George W. Bush are ignored—and while this is a good question, it's also an indirect admission of culpability.

Another argument raised by the gainsayers is that Channel 4, the United Nations and various others are part of a global conspiracy to suppress Sri Lanka's progress. Sri Lanka is carving out a new niche in the postcolonial world where it is no longer the simpering client of Western patronage but a proudly independent partner (client) of new donor states like Iran and China, states that don't question internal affairs but simply strive to extend their influence.

Here I am reminded of the tale of the Bibile orange—an indigenous fruit rumoured to have been deliberately destroyed by an introduced disease to create a market for imports. This is a popular JVP story in the south of the country that celebrates nationalism in the anti-imperialist guise of uncovering the wicked European conspiracies that have for so long kept Sri Lanka small, and especially the Buddhist Sinhalese. A JVP off-shoot, the National Heritage Party (Jathika Hela Urumaya, JHU) of Buddhist monks can be grouped here, especially in their sometimes violent antagonism to Christian missionaries and other European NGOs.

Sri Lanka is, of course, not unusual in boasting a long history of paranoid conspiracy theorists, and indeed such views are not always fanciful. Under the Rajapaksas, however, and in the flush of their victory, the ranks of the gainsayers have swollen. In Australia the University of Adelaide's Sri Lankan-born historian-turned-anthropologist Michael Roberts wrote on a website on 20 June this year

←←←

Shrill Denials

Rohan Bastin

that Gordon Weiss reminded him of the missionaries he dealt with as a young man growing up in Sri Lanka. Weiss, he argues, belongs to one of the ‘engines’ of the international ‘coalition of forces’ levelling war crimes accusations, one of the ‘people of righteousness’ working in conjunction with ‘Tamil migrants in the Western world bent on vengeance’ (note, not justice). Basing his opinion of Weiss on nothing more than the photos Weiss includes of himself on his website, this is a pernicious and ridiculous

ad hominem argument. Regarding the documentary footage, quoting no evidence, Roberts declares that it is Tamil Tigers training propaganda, nothing more.

All of this begs some questions. Why is the Sri Lankan government so adamant in its denials? Why is it so anxious to depict the allegations as conspiracy? Is the answer simply that the allegations are false, or is it because the crimes are still continuing? Is the Rajapaksa regime still at it, still plundering the country, still displacing and brutalising the Tamil population? Does it still maintain an absolute and terrifying grip on power, perpetuating the brutality of a state that took war as its object and made truth the first casualty? This makes books like *The Cage*—and, even more importantly, proceeding with the investigations of war crimes and crimes against humanity—vital. **a**

Yolngu Diplomacy

Kendall Trudgen

→→→

Yolngu Diplomacy

Kendall Trudgen

Kendall Trudgen works as a community development facilitator and mediator in Caliwinku, Northern Territory.

Cross-cultural diplomacy and the Intervention

In July 2008, at Yirrkala in the Northern Territory, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his entourage were camped under a marquee on a section of the town park. In the same park were tribal political leaders from across East Arnhem Land, the home of the Yolngu people. Everyone had hoped for sunshine but it was drizzling with rain. At a certain point the tribal leaders walked the distance between the two groups and handed the Prime Minister a petition. Despite the awkwardness of the exchange, the Yolngu people, through their delegated political leaders (the Dalkarramirr and Djirrikaymirr), had just requested Australian federal constitutional recognition of their ‘way of life’.

Ten years earlier, in February 1998, former Prime Minister John Howard had visited Caliwinku. He was met there by several tribal political leaders and was given the great honour of having the group’s Dhulmu-mulka Bathi hung around his neck. By doing this the leaders hoped to impress upon him the inherent depth of Yolngu law. Later the same day John Howard travelled with his group to Yirrkala, where he was given a petition by the Yolngu people. It read:

We request that you recognise:

1. the Dhulmu-mulka Bathi (Title Deeds) which establish the legal tenure for each of our traditional clan estates. Your Westminster system calls this ‘Native Title’.
2. the jurisdiction of our Ngärra/Traditional Parliament in the same way as we recognise your Parliament and Westminster system of Government.
3. [and] our Madayin system of law.

Neither of these petitions was ever tabled in Parliament. Rather the 2008 and 1998 petitions, together with the 1988 Barunga Statement requesting a treaty and the 1963 Yirrkala Bark Petition, merely appear on the government website <www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/bark-petitions-indigenous-art>. In fact, despite all these petitions, under the leadership of John Howard and Mal Brough the 2007 Intervention has meant the undermining of Yolngu autonomy and authority. As widely reported, Indigenous people across the Northern Territory are subject to blanket welfare quarantining, compulsory acquisition of lands and the removal of

Aboriginal customary law from consideration in NT courts.

The Intervention has also seen a large investment in housing in designated communities (denied to those not willing to sign land leases) and more alcohol restricted areas. But unbeknown to most, the Intervention coincided with a raft of NT government actions, including the forced restructuring of local governance away from community-controlled associations to new super-size regional shires, the desertion of bilingual or ‘two-way’ education policies, and the Working Futures policy (aka ‘growth towns’) diverting funding from homelands, as well as an increased police presence in remote communities.

The result has been a huge centralisation of decision-making, with a large power shift from Yolngu governance to that of an outside jurisdiction. Indeed, the Intervention has meant that over five decades of Yolngu requests for recognition of their culture, legal and governance systems from Australian authorities has come to nought, and the very opposite is now occurring: the denial of land and legal rights, as well as culture and language.

The response of Yolngu leadership to the recent federal govern-

a ←

08 2011–09 2011

Nº 113

ment announcement of a second round of NT Intervention measures into Aboriginal communities, then, comes as no surprise. In a press release on 27 June 2011, tribal political leader the Rev. Dr Djiniyini Gondarra responded:

The Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory will only endorse a new initiative by the Government to improve the lives of Aboriginal people if the Government first establishes a diplomatic and respectful dialogue, negotiation and relationship with the traditional lawmen and lawwomen in the communities to be affected. These are the people that are seen as the true leaders by their communities, who are charged with maintaining ceremony, language, law and order. They must be properly consulted before any new initiative can take place in their communities.

As with previous attempts by Yolngu, Dr Gondarra is asking the federal government to approach Indigenous people government to government, jurisdiction to jurisdiction, leadership to leadership. It is a request for appropriate diplomatic relations between peoples.

The Intervention coincided with a raft of NT government actions, including the forced restructuring of local governance ... The result has been a huge centralisation of decision-making, with a large power shift from Yolngu governance to that of an outside jurisdiction.

The response of recent federal governments notwithstanding, such an outcome is not without precedent in Yolngu relations with the Australian state. But we have to go back to the beginning of last century to understand the Yolngu expectation that respectful diplomatic relations are possible, and even fruitful in bringing about mutual advantages.

Prior to 1906 the Yolngu had uninterrupted dominion of the East Arnhem Land region, complete with international trade with the Maccassans of Sulawesi. They had an ordered life, with political organisation based on clans, tribes and clan-nations, and a common system of law called Madayin.


In 1906 the South Australian government barred the Maccassan trepang-traders of Sulawesi from entering Australian coastal shores, thus beginning an economic decline that could be said to continue to this day. However, twenty-nine years later, it was this embargo that indirectly led to possibly the first and best instance of diplomatic communications between Yolngu and Australian government jurisdictions.

Following the removal of the Maccassans from Australian shores, others took over the northern trepang trade, and some Yolngu collaborated with these new trepangers. Yet such partnerships were often volatile, lacking the protections of the contractual and family ties that had been established with the Maccassans over centuries. This led to trespass on Yolngu land, legal violations of Yolngu law and personal abuses. One such incident culminated in the killing of five Japanese trepangers in 1932, and the 1933 killing of police constable Albert McColl, who was sent by Australian jurisdictions as part of an expedition party to investigate the Japanese deaths.

As a result of a naive missionary gesture of peacemaking, and because of a betrayal by Australian government officials, four Yolngu men (Natjiyalma, Maaw, Narkaya and Dhakiyarr) were jailed for the killings in Darwin. All of these men were considered son (gathu) to the Djapu tribal political leader Wonggu.

In the midst of calls for revenge expeditions from frontier populations in Darwin, the Melbourne-based anthropologist Donald Thompson was able to convince the federal government to help fund an expedition into East Arnhem Land where he might negotiate a solution. Thompson began his expedition in 1935, and through doing so developed a strong mutual friendship with Wonggu. As leader (Djirrikaymirr) of the Djapu tribe, Wonggu gave Thompson a letter stick declaring peace with the outside authorities. It does not seem that this stick was actually delivered to Australian government officials, but instead Thompson gave his sanctioned advocacy and assurances. As a result Wonggu's three remaining sons were released and personally returned by Thompson to East Arnhem Land.

Unfortunately the son charged with Constable McColl's death, Dakiyarr, had been released earlier and disappeared under suspicious circumstances. Nonetheless, the communication between Wonggu and Donald Thompson—underpinned by the Yolngu and Australian governing authorities—is the first clear example of diplomatic communications between Yolngu and Australian jurisdictions. In other words, the Australian government had sent an ambassador into East Arnhem Land to negotiate terms of peace, the ambassador found the appropriate authority, and with mutual respect the two were able to come to an agreement.

The question that might be asked in 2011 is why a version of that careful, open and authoritative diplomatic action can't be undertaken today. Both Labor and Coalition governments seem incapable of understanding this requirement of appropriate cross-cultural decision making. A change of paradigm is needed that honours the voice of the Yolngu people and existing mechanisms of Indigenous government. In East Arnhem Land at least, the parameters for respectful relations across jurisdictions have been consistently defined. Through decades of their own diplomatic engagement Yolngu political authorities have made it clear: a helpful approach requires mainstream recognition of law, land tenure, Yolngu 'way of life' and Yolngu jurisdiction where decisions affect the lives and culture of their people. These requirements are the Yolngu basis for mutual dialogue; without them, what can really come next? 

Academic Uprisings

Mate Kapović

→→→

Academic Uprisings

Mate Kapović

Mate Kapović is assistant professor in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb, Croatia. He is also an activist involved in several political initiatives. Ruža Lukšić helped in the translation of this text.

Neo-liberalism and student activism in Croatia

The fight against the commercialisation of higher education in Croatia began in 2008, initiated by students' protests against education reforms. A new student movement and a new teachers' union were formed, both founded upon the principles of direct democracy; at the same time, the concept of neo-liberalism was challenged.

The introduction of fees for graduate courses, and the problems caused by the chaotic introduction of the Bologna reform—which split the previous unitary four-year cycle into two separate cycles, creating three to four year degrees and one to two year Masters—became the subject of the first wave of protests, in the spring of 2008. That autumn a second wave of protests began, culminating with the 5 November demonstrations in Zagreb and Pula. A single demand was formed during the preparations for the protest—fully publicly financed education at all levels, accessible to all (at this time around 60 per cent students in Croatia were paying some kind of tuition). Academic bureaucrats and even the political elite subsequently accepted the idea, at least nominally; thus in 2010 both presidential candidates had to publicly support free education.

That same year, students also mobilised around an issue not directly connected with the student population but of wider social importance—Croatia's accession to NATO. An initiative begun by students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) collected 125,000 signatures for a referendum on Croatia's accession to NATO; the students also helped to organise an anti-NATO protest during George W. Bush's visit to Zagreb.

The third phase of the student movement started with the spring occupation of FHSS, in April/May 2009, which resulted in the occupation of about twenty university faculties in eight Croatian towns—one of the biggest European student protests of the year.

The students created a self-organised direct democracy implemented at FHSS in the form of plenums (plenary/general assemblies) and working groups, with the student representative system completely abandoned. Other methods included depersonalisation and the refusal to individualise the students (with the aim of putting the emphasis on the demand and not on individuals) and the refusal to negotiate or compromise.

The end of the first wave of occupations was interpreted by some as the unavoidable end of a singular event, a kind of contemporary Croatian 1968, likely to be equally utopian and unsuccessful. But the end of the occupations did not mean the end of the struggle. By mid-2009 the economic crisis in Croatia had worsened, and workers and farmers started to organise their own protests. The fourth phase of the student movement was linked in solidarity with other sectors in society. Shortly after their occupation of the FHSS, the students supported a farmers' protest (as shown in *Encounter*, a documentary film by Igor Bezinović) in the autumn of 2009. The students' co-operation with the farmers resulted in the first farmers' plenum, which took place at FHSS, during the protests against falling milk prices. Meanwhile the university occupation continued in ten faculties across four towns.

A single demand was formed during the preparations for the protest—fully publicly financed education at all levels, accessible to all.

The students succeeded in formulating the first serious public critique not only of the commercialisation of education but of neo-liberal capitalism and liberal democracy in general.

Another student issue was introduced at this time—opposition to the proposed Universities Act, a draft of which was leaked to the public by the students, and which intended to curb university autonomy and introduce further commercialisation. When the bill was officially presented, it was almost unanimously rejected by the academic community.


The fifth phase of the students' movement began at the start of 2010, and was characterised by direct co-operation with other protesting social groups, primarily workers, at a time when workers' strikes, factory occupations and protests across the country were becoming increasingly radical. Communications took place via the direct democracy working group, which has since grown into a country-wide platform. The student movement also took part in the fight against privatisation of public space in Zagreb together with civil society organisations like the 'Right to the City' movement.

The activities related to free education also continued. On 30 March 2010 another FHSS student protest was organised using the 'popular front' method, and uniting with students from other faculties. The direct result was approval for the third consecutive year of free graduate courses, as well as the abolition of fees for all undergraduates in their first year of studies.

The end of 2010 saw the rise of an academics' initiative called Academic Solidarity, which formed in response to the proposed Universities Act and the commercialisation of higher education and science in general. On the fringes of the student

movement, a left-wing anti-EU initiative was also formed towards the end of 2010 (Croatia's accession to the EU is scheduled for 2013). In March 2011 both the student movement and Academic Solidarity joined the large anti-government protest in Croatia, with the 10,000 strong protests in Zagreb spearheaded by the student movement's anti-capitalist and anti-EU banners.

Academic Solidarity, a union which grew out of the academics' initiative, was formed in March 2011. It is the first official direct democratic (non-hierarchical) union in Croatia, with its members coming not only from within the ranks of academic workers but also students and the unemployed. The union has gained support within the Croatian academic community. Thus in 2011 even the university provosts and the otherwise quite conservative members of Croatian Academy of Science and Arts spoke openly against privatisation and commercialisation of higher education and science.

During the first wave of university occupations, the students succeeded in formulating the first serious public critique of not only the commercialisation of education but of neo-liberal capitalism and liberal democracy in general. As a result, the very word *neo-liberalism* became widely used in Croatian public discourse; today the term is pejorative, and usually even avoided by neo-liberals themselves. Additionally, public discourse has shifted to the Left. While Croatia is not a significant country in the world context, radical activists from around the world could perhaps learn something from these events. It is possible to rise against the neo-liberal status quo, and radical opposition can appear in most unexpected places, often due to the initiative of just a few activists. The student occupations also shows that it is possible fight the system in one sector, while having the wider scope in sight at the same time, and that radicalisation and ideological consolidation can be achieved only through direct action. 

The Medical Association for the Prevention of War

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW) is an Australia-wide association of health care professionals which works for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and the prevention of armed conflict.

To request our fortnightly Peace e-Script, with extensive links to peace and disarmament news and events, email mapw@mapw.org.au.

To search our resources for fact sheets on nuclear weapons, nuclear industry and conflict issues, to join our organisation or to make a tax-deductible donation, visit www.mapw.org.au.



COMMENT AND DEBATE

←←←

Academic Uprisings

Mate Kapović

.....
comment
.....

Windschuttle and Breivik

Aurélien Mondon

→→→

Windschuttle and Breivik

Aurélien Mondon

Aurélien Mondon teaches politics and history at the University of Melbourne and Victoria University. He is the co-founder of the Melbourne Free University. His research focuses on populism and racism and their impact on democracy, and some of his work can be found on <www.briefandfalseadvertising.net>.

A lesson in populist rhetoric

That's it! Keith Windschuttle has had enough: 'It took just two days after Australians awoke on Saturday [25 January] to the terrible news of the mass murder in Norway for the left-wing commentariat to start exploiting the event for political capital'. The *Quadrant* editor and revisionist writer on Aboriginal matters has had it with the Left, and particularly with Aron Paul, who wrote a piece in *New Matilda*, and *Crikey's* Guy Rundle. No longer will he stand stoic and composed in the face of the vicious attacks waged against defenceless and moderate conservatives. No longer will he let his name and that of his colleagues be tarnished by simplifications and generalisations. Even though Anders Breivik quoted Windschuttle in his 1500-page manifesto, Windschuttle stands by his statements and refuses to accept that this links him to the 'lone madman'. Fair dinkum? A very short analysis of his article demonstrates the cheap trickery that he uses, and yet the damage this has done to the very idea Keith Windschuttle pretends to defend.

In the midst of the *News of the World* scandal and the long-overdue recognition that there is a problem with the way the media interacts with politics and democracy, Windschuttle's article really shows those who still doubted the bias of Australia's media. Interestingly, this is something Windschuttle and I agree on. Needless to say, our shared understanding stops there. The *Quadrant* editor feels it of utmost importance to denounce the scavenging tactics of the 'left-wing commentariat' who 'exploit' 'the terrible news of the mass murder in Norway' 'for

political capital'. This vocabulary, used in the sub-heading of the article, should suffice to undermine the whole piece, was it not published by Windschuttle in *The Australian*. What can we learn from someone as influential as Windschuttle, an ABC board member, and his unashamed populist attacks?

First, that the most outrageous claims can be made in the Australian media. Windschuttle states that 'it took just two days' for the Left to viciously attack the Right, defender of 'the concepts of free speech, the rule of law, equality of women and freedom of religion'. Just two days? That is how long it took for the Left to regroup. In that case, Windschuttle should not worry too much. After all, how long did it take for so many in politics and the media to assume the attacks were part of an Islamist terrorist plot? When it appeared Breivik was part of the Christian Right, how long did it take for the conservative media to render this attack the deeds of a madman rather than a political or religious fanatic, like Muslim suicide bombers for example? Finally, how many European newspapers have published the

.....
Windschuttle states that 'it took just two days' for the Left to viciously attack the Right ... In that case, Windschuttle should not worry too much. After all, how long did it take for so many in politics and the media to assume the attacks were part of an Islamist terrorist plot?

comments of the extreme right denouncing the attacks and demanding that no link be made between their organisations and the 'mad man', sometimes even threatening to sue? Come on, Keith, let's not jump on our high horses; your firepower is a lot more potent than that of the Left and it would be silly to believe otherwise.

Yet Windschuttle finds it fitting to turn the Left into a caricature, even at a time when the Right has been made to face its extreme. Note how the word 'commentariat' takes us back to the Soviet regime. Are we to think that writers like Aron Paul or Guy Rundle want the gulags to return? Were I to write an article on a couple of conservative writers expressing their concern about the rise of Islam in the world and tagged them part of the 'Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda', I doubt it would be long before I was sued for defamation. Yet Paul and Rundle 'exploit' the news and the murder of many innocent Norwegians. Something conservative commentators would never do; after all, for Windschuttle, 'the quality that stands out in the work of most conservative writers today is restraint'. For someone who 'reads Bolt regularly', it seems grotesque at best to make such claims. Since Windschuttle uses his own self to push his point, allow me to do likewise. I was once exposed by Andrew Bolt—whose specialism in French politics I had somehow ignored—on 'the most-read political blog in Australia', and needless to say his comments on French youth (as well as myself incidentally) expressed very little restraint.

Having dedicated the past four years to studying the extreme right and its impact on mainstream politics, it is clear that the 'vocabulary wars' which began in the 1980s in most of the Western world have intensified the growing sense of insecurity and played a part in creating the atmosphere which led to the attacks on Norway. However, it is wrong to jump to



unwarranted conclusions such as those of both Paul and Windschuttle. I do not believe for example that Blainey was for the return of the White Australia Policy. However, he clearly played, perhaps unwillingly at first, a part in legitimising a discourse which later led to the growth of ethno-exclusivism in our countries and to the growing irrational fear of the 'Other'. Blainey, like Bolt, Windschuttle and others, is of course not responsible for the attacks on Norwegian soil. These were the act of an individual who pushed his beliefs to the extreme. However, while such acts are at present uncommon, the beliefs held by Anders Behring Breivik were allowed to gain prominence over the past three decades, and to be accepted as a normal part of our daily political life. The stigmatisation of the entire Muslim population after the 9/11 attacks has been a useful decoy in a world which had lost its nemesis after the fall of the USSR. The creation of the Muslim 'other' offered a scapegoat to those who increasingly feared the system was not delivering them with what it had promised.

It is in this context that a profound reflection on the role of the media is not only overdue, but vital for the wellbeing of our democracy. In times of crisis it has always proved easy to rally people with the use of exclusion and racist or neo-racist trickery. As our world is currently facing a multitude of crises, be they real or fantasised, it is indeed vital that our media provides us with news which will allow us to make an educated decision about our future. As it stands, the future is not so bright. ☒

.....
comment
.....

Anti-nuclear Conviction

Alan Roberts

Response to Richard Broinowski

I think Mr Broinowski has missed the point of my article ('Fukushima', *Arena Magazine* 111). It is summed up in the quotation from an observer of the Detroit nuclear crisis:

The most frightening thing for the scientists and engineers was not knowing the cause of the trouble.

There were guesses at the meetings as to how long it would take to find out what had gone wrong inside the bowels of the reactor. Some figured it would take a year, if all went well ...

The article suggests that after a serious malfunction the risk of such a dangerous situation is in fact *intrinsic* to a wide variety of reactor types. The danger is evident: not knowing exactly what has gone wrong, and being unable to find out, the responsible staff cannot know what is likely to happen next, and what protective measures are called for. And a disabled nuclear reactor cannot be stripped down and analysed like a car engine.

Mr Broinowski clearly rejects any such pattern of deficient knowledge as sketched above. He points rather to the 'authoritative account' by Dr Mathias Braun, 'released on the web by the French nuclear conglomerate AREVA (of all companies)'. ('Of all companies'? Perhaps Mr Broinowski missed the addresses given for Dr Braun on page 2: Matthias Braun PEPA4-G, AREVA-NP GmbH, and Matthias.Braun@AREVA.com.) He counterposes the AREVA account (dated 27 March) to my assertion that 'no clear description' of the Fukushima events yet existed. But almost immediately he undermines this usage: 'And we now have the news that there has been a full-scale melt-down in at least one of the reactor cores'. His 'now' is 13 May—over two months after the crisis started! How adequate to the engineers' needs was that early 'authoritative account' when they did not know all this time that 'a full-scale melt-down' had occurred?

And of course this was only one trickle in a steady stream of 'news' announcements that went on for months and may not have stopped yet. It was June—nearly three months after the earthquake—before the most ominous news of all arrived: 'fuel rods in reactors No 1, 2 and 3 had probably not only melted, but also breached their inner containment vessels and accumulated in the outer steel containment vessels'.

Mathias Braun cannot be justly blamed for his early report. Rather, direct any blame at the fantastic notion that the course of a serious nuclear accident, with the reactor's internal state known poorly or not at all, is routine and predictable from the outset; it isn't. Breakdowns have often included a 'side effect': a no-go zone, in which the

Mr Broinowski's letter does not show anywhere that he recognises the phenomenon of the nuclear no-go zone, or the way it seriously constrains access to information just when it is most needed.

strength of radiation is too lethal to permit human life. It was only in Chernobyl that people went about their jobs despite the radiation intensity. Some thirty of them died, mostly from radiation burns and/or acute radiation sickness.

This might make a nuclear reactor unique among technical devices: when it breaks down seriously, it can forbid on pain of death any close study (at least if non-robotic) that would detect what exactly is the device's internal state, and what to expect next. Surely this repellent quality deserves wider recognition. It is hardly surprising that AREVA's account does not publicise this 'unapproachability'—it is in the business of selling, both rhetorically and literally, the nuclear production of electricity; the property under discussion is not a particularly good selling point, to put it mildly. But why is it featured so little by nuclear opponents?

Mr Broinowski's letter might offer an answer. It does not show anywhere that he recognises the phenomenon of the no-go zone, or the way it seriously constrains access to information just when it is most needed. Thus the answer might be that people simply don't know about it.

←←←

Windschuttle and Breivik

Aurélien Mondon

↙↙↙

Anti-nuclear Conviction

Alan Roberts

Alan Roberts is a former member of the advisory Nuclear Safety Committee of the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency.

I think my views on nuclear power are fairly evident in my article—which ends for example with a reminder of that ‘packed energy which, given the chance, can metamorphose into flame and (far more damaging) into radioactive particles to send around the world’—and in the final words, ‘It is extraordinary that such a monstrous companion could be wished on us, as a *rational* way to get a kettle of water boiled.’

Yet Mr Broinowski found it a ‘bemused’ article with a ‘lack of conviction’. I don’t know why. **a**

.....
comment
.....

Who are the International Community?

Chaz Dias

The Western minority who act on our behalf

This year we’ve heard countless references to the so called ‘international community’ with regard to the events taking place in Libya. We were told how the *international community* expressed concern about Gaddafi’s crackdown on civilians. We were told how the international community was deciding what to do about old Gaddafi. We saw images of important men sitting around at important meetings in Europe, contrasted with footage of a cartoonish super-villain in the Middle East threatening death and destruction. Then we heard the media cheer as the *international community* ‘finally got its act together’, passed a resolution at the UN Security Council and started bombing Libya to protect its civilians.

So who are the international community? The term itself leads us to believe that it is the community of countries that make up our world. But is this really so? The UN Security

Council, where the Libya resolution passed by a slim margin, only represents fifteen out of the 192 member states of the UN. India, China, Brazil and Russia did not support the Libyan intervention. India expressed regret at the allied force’s air strikes on Libyan targets. China affirmed its support for Libya’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin condemned the intervention, calling it a ‘crusade’. And we never even heard how a rally in Moscow demanded President Obama relinquish his Nobel Peace Prize due to the war in Libya—a sentiment echoed by Bolivian President Evo Morales; or how protestors in Philippines burned a US flag over the issue; or even how the African Union had spoken out against the bombardment.

Indeed the vast majority of the countries of the world, representing the vast majority of the peoples of the world, were not in favour of enforcing the ‘no fly zone’. So they could not have been ‘getting their act together’, so to speak. The international community we keep hearing about must then just mean the United States, United Kingdom, France and the Arab League (of dictators). And even within the Arab League, support came only from those most sycophantic despots who owe their rule over their own populations to US dominance in the region.

How can this be considered an international community then, if it excludes countries consisting of around 90 per cent of the world’s population?

Are we justified in excluding these countries because some, like China, are not democracies and therefore the views of their governments do not represent the views of their people? Not really. Even in democratic countries, governments’ decisions on foreign policy are often out of line with the wishes of their people. A case-in-point being the decision by the US, UK and Australian governments to invade Iraq despite the majority

of their populations being opposed. In fact, around 50 per cent of the US population is thought to be against the current Libyan intervention, despite 95 per cent of the US media seemingly in support of it. Even if we accept the democracy argument, it does not justify the exclusion of countries like India, Brazil and many others in the developing world that have strong democratic credentials.

It would seem that the only criteria for being considered part of this exclusive club is that one must be a Western nation—or at the very least agree with Western nations on the issue at hand.

The Libyan crisis, however, has seen the corrupting of the term rise to new heights. The Western media morphs the international community into different groupings at different times, depending on the argument being put forth. When it is seen to be taking action or making big decisions, the international community consists of Western nations who have some kind of unstated moral authority.

Yet when it is instructed to act, the international community becomes a more amorphous mass whose membership is unclear. It is this permutation of the international community that is lectured on how it must

.....
When it is instructed to do something, the international community becomes a more amorphous mass whose membership is unclear.

→→→

Who are the International Community?

Chaz Dias

Chaz Dias has worked in international organisations for a number of years and is currently undertaking a doctorate.


a ←

not 'fail' to act on Libya. But in whose view is it a failure? Nations decide what action they take based on their own interests, assessments and beliefs. The mere fact that a nation does not do what certain others want it to do does not mean that it 'fails'. To suggest so reveals an omnipresent 'Western gaze' whereby all international issues are assumed from the perspective of a handful of countries.

One media commentator stated early on in the Libya crisis that the United States may be pressured to act in support of the rebels by the international community. Here the international community has been morphed into an even more exclusive club, this time consisting of only those

who support the views of the particular media outlet making the comments—even the US government has not made the grade.

Such exclusive, limiting uses of the term international community, adapted to suit the purposes of the speaker, are dangerous and misleading. Western publics are presented with a false picture of the international world—one based in the twentieth century where the great decisions of war and peace are solely in the hands of a few Eurocentric powers. The present reality is much different. The sleeping giants of Asia are awakening and, for the first time in 500 years, they're starting to throw their weight around. China and India have independent foreign policies and

hold their own views on many global issues. Western publics need to be aware of this. Discussion of any 'international community' that excludes them is dangerous fiction. In the real world of international relations, Western governments are already realising this and attempting to adapt to the new realities. The Western media, however, has a lot of catching up to do. 

VX 65595 Bear.N.J.

my uncle's dog tags
for many years not lost

just unfound
(as Hardy might have said)

turned up the other day
in a Havelock tobacco tin
two numbered metal discs
strung on thick brown string

my dead meat tickets
is what he liked to call them

to know you
when you're dead

an uncomfortable observance
for a poet yet uncoffined

unknown and unregarded
just dying to be read

Conversations with Mugabe
(for A.D.)

maybe I mumble
or Anthony isn't listening
when I request
*Conversations with my Gardener**
at the video store
because he asks if I want
Conversations with Mugabe
although he knows I dislike
magical realism or fantasy
that flees from the nasty bits
into fuzzy make-believe
where some sentimentalist
at the heart of darkness
sips small-leaf tea
and chats with an attentive tyrant
just an oxymoron
couldn't be science fiction
which
after all
sometimes does come true

* *Dialogue Avec Mon Jardinier* (dir. Jean Becker, 2007)

B N Oakman

THE COMMON TOUCH

←←←

Who are the International Community?

Chaz Dias

‘I was just ...’

Mark Furlong

→→→

‘I was just ...’

Mark Furlong

Mark Furlong lectures in social work at La Trobe University.

←←←

VX 65595 Bear.N.J.

Conversations with Mugabe (for A.D.)

B N Oakman

B N Oakman's poetry has been widely published in magazines, journals and newspapers in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. His collection In Defence of Hawaiian Shirts was published last year by Interactive Press.

On living justly: how we evade responsibility with a sentence qualifier

In our newly minted world a multi-purpose token is gaining strong interpersonal currency. If one has forgotten to return a book, is late for an appointment, has been thoughtless, has bumped into someone, wants to interrupt a speaker—whatever the social transgression—one can simply use the qualifier ‘just’. ‘I have just been too busy to get your book back to you’, ‘I am just having a heck of a day’, ‘I just needed to get across to there’, ‘I just want to ask a quick question’. The insertion of this measure avoids guilt or shame as the haptic subject is now buffered and justified. The sin has been minimised into extinction, gainsaid into oblivion. One can never cause offence if the frontier of awareness is outlined by one’s sensitivities, focus and entitlements.

Of course, in this social practice the other must collude. The person who has suffered discourtesy or disadvantage must move on in order to get along; to do otherwise would court awkwardness and the possibility of confrontation. That is, there is in this complicity a charmed coincidence, a co-terminus of interests. Parallel play, one hand washes the other, hold your nose with one hand and shake the other’s with your other. Such an alignment is possible conditionally, up until either a repetitive asymmetry is established, a circumstance in which one party is regularly advantaged over the other, or this practice increases in its general frequency to the extent that everyday sociality is disrupted, an outcome that can occur if common courtesies around other-orientiedness fail to be generally respected.

Before returning to the matter of micro-social practices it is important to note that, in itself, the little word just has an interesting valance. On the one hand, the rhetorical statement ‘I was just ...’ employs just as a diminutive, a discounter that acts to deflate—even

evade—personal responsibility. ‘What occurred was a nothing, a trifle, a mere bagatelle’—but there is more going on than this. Like your little black dress, ‘just’ can also be used for a grander purpose. In its more accusative iterations the word carries a riper connotation: ‘How can you say that about me?’ ‘I was just putting it out there, just expressing an opinion!’ In both cases an antidote to accountability appears, which presents great advantages in a milieu where interpersonal responsibility is becoming passé.

Tones of voice are at issue here. Just as *Frontline*, the beloved and now departed current affairs TV send-up, brilliantly satirised the way the supposedly positive Aussie word ‘mate’ is often used derisively, a disregard, even a sneer, can accompany any instance where ‘just’ is said. As we all know, most communication is conveyed non-verbally, by body language, context and most densely by tone of voice: think how service staff can use the words ‘madam’ and ‘sir’ not only to distance but to damn. In the interactional theatre that is everyday life, a wonderful complication is that ‘just’ has a high caste definition in addition to its minimising, throw-away sense. In its meaning as ‘fair’ and ‘right’, our little term has a deep identification with what is ethical, literally lordly and above reproach. Billy Bragg tagged this high sounding meaning in his pop polemic skewering the legal system: ‘This is a court of law, son, not a court of justice’. Some agents, like New Zealand’s Just Therapy group or Christina Colgate’s book on ethical relationships, *Just between You and Me*, use this metonymy with playful seriousness.

The term ‘just’ can be used to ward off responsibility, and this can be done with a deprecating, sincere, careless or even denigrating inflection. On the other hand, it can be raised up to convey, and be identified with, what has legitimacy, even majesty.



Between you and me, the term 'just' can be used to ward off responsibility, and this can be done with a deprecating, sincere, careless or even denigrating inflection. On the other hand, it can be raised up to convey, and be identified with, what has legitimacy, even majesty. What fascinates—and vexes—is that when 'just' is said with ripeness in the first context the meaning approximates the connotations of the latter. Say it out loud with as much melodrama as you can muster: 'What about me—I just want my fair share!' There is a fine double entendre in play here, a tango of high dignity and espoused self-deprecation that is hard to unpick or respond to. Such a statement is a rhetorical intervention, a move in the ongoing drama of a relationship.

A small stage is a wonderful theatre for depicting politics. This has long been said about cabaret, but it is equally true for personal relationships. Although the privately inter-personal, the locally social, is not public in the formal sense, it is inevitably a realm which is suffused with, and in part constituted by, lived politics. In each and every relationship ideological practices develop, are naturalised and may come to be contested, but this becomes a complicated issue to deal with once regularities arise. As the communication theorist and sometime anthropologist Gregory Bateson observed, 'the ripple that lasts longest lasts longer than the ripple that doesn't last as long'.

In the interactional theatre that is everyday life, a wonderful complication is that 'just' has a high caste definition in addition to its minimising, throw-away sense. In its meaning as 'fair' and 'right', our little term has a deep identification with what is ethical, literally lordly and above reproach.

In every established relationship it comes to pass that costs and benefits—whether they are material, symbolic or emotional—will tend to be unequally distributed even as this is often difficult for the participants to perceive. Patterns can more readily be seen by outsiders, but are often opaque to insiders. These patterns concern what will be recognised and what will be ignored; what is seen to have value, and to what degree; whose preferences and dislikes, which discourses and whose reality, will prevail. That said, if you are getting the raw end of the stick you are more likely to notice this arrangement than those who are privileged: a steady tailwind is less palpable than a headwind against the face and chest. Unless an inequity is naturalised, or is misattributed to nature, injustice stings. In such patterning the interpersonal illustrates the political more clearly than does the personal.


Yet it is always hard to get to grips with the relational, in which there is always a spaghetti junction of moments present. Righteousness and coerciveness jostle; a concern for fairness is present, as is the operation of force, albeit one that is frequently disavowed. There is the pragmatic and the naive, the ideal and the self-serving, the spontaneous and the overly determined. Blackmail can be interpenetrated by goodwill while good intentions can be trumped by the paradoxical effects their enactment triggers. Alignments are welcome, but seem hard to predict or to guarantee. Negotiation between parties is always possible but this

requires certain attitudes and skills, and some luck, if it is not to make things worse.

Being able to focus on personal accountability and interpersonal fairness, and not only to one's sensitivities and personal entitlement, is one precondition. Another is to be emotionally literate, as Suzie Orbach and Daniel Goleman have so richly discussed. A pattern of avoiding difficult differences is unhelpful. Such a preference tends to be based on the assumption such exchanges will be too awkward, or that such interactions are fantasised as inevitably conflictual. This aversion not only supports the status quo, but it embeds dissatisfactions, making them all the more likely to be acted out.

Many years ago I worked with a bunch of cockney men in pre-trendy Soho. We were paid daily in cash and unless the seedy toff who ran things turned up, an event that had the locals habitually grab their forelocks and change their register, the atmosphere was like a feisty caricature of old London town. One day, and for all to hear, John, one man in the group, called out to another in a clear and pleasant voice, saying, 'Georgie, where's that fiver you owe me? It's past Thursday and you've not said a word!'

The indebted man stopped what he was doing. Without apparent embarrassment he recounted to John that it had been a bad week. Financial difficulties had unexpectedly arisen, which he detailed: a relative had hit him up for a favour; he'd been caught out in the scam he'd been running to milk his local council; his other job wasn't paying as well as usual. More relaxed than put upon, he ran on for a considerable period. I was a visitor from abroad and assumed this soliloquy would be followed by an embarrassed 'Oh, that's no good—can you manage to get it to me by next payday?' kind of response. Keeping his tone light and avoiding eye contact, John then said, 'Georgie, my old uncle, don't piss on my shoes and tell me it's raining'. There was no menace in the delivery, but his message was clear. A boundary had been crossed and redress had to be organised. More, an expectation had been reinforced that the credibility of one's word had to be preserved. Georgie said nothing, just gestured a kind of 'all right' and went back to work. John's turn of phrase was striking, but there was no sense an escalation was brewing.

I was not party to what went on later, how these two resolved the debt, but to all appearances their relationship remained affectionate. As we all did, they continued to drink together after work, joked while at work and seemed not at all out of sorts with each other. Apparently they had reached an understanding, done the talking, and were then able to do the walking. It did not seem there were undercurrents; it did not seem like either was stewing about what the other had done. Too crude and blokey for many, their way seems a whole lot better than any conjoint assertion that 'I was just ... (but now I am licensed to be a prick)' .

ESSAY

←←←

'I was just ...'

Mark Furlong

Global Challenges

Saskia Sassen

→→→

Global Challenges

Saskia Sassen

Saskia Sassen <www.saskiasassen.com> is the Lynd professor of sociology and co-chair of the Committee on Global Thought, Columbia University. She is the author of several books, most recently **Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages** (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008) and **A Sociology of Globalization** (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2007).

Can cities take us beyond asymmetric war and environmental violence?

Cities have a distinctive capacity to transform conflict into the civic; in contrast, national governments tend to militarise conflict. This does not mean that cities are peaceful spaces. On the contrary, cities have long been sites for conflicts, from war to racism and religious hatred. And yet militarising conflict is not a particularly urban option: cities have tended to triage conflict through commerce and civic activity. Even more importantly, the overcoming of urban conflicts has often been the source for an expanded civic sense.

Today cities are at risk of losing this capacity and becoming sites for a whole range of new conflicts, such as asymmetric war and ethnic and social cleansing. Recent events give us a mixed message: the protests in Tunisia's and Egypt's cities succeeded to a large extent, but this was not so in most of the other Arab countries. Further, the dense and conflictive spaces of cities overwhelmed by inequality and injustice can become the sites for a variety of secondary, more anomie types of conflicts, from drug wars to the major environmental disasters looming in our immediate futures. All of these challenge that traditional commercial and civic capacity that has allowed cities to avoid war when confronted with conflict, and to incorporate diversities of class, culture, religion, ethnicity.

The question I examine here is whether this emergent future of expanding conflicts and racisms contains within it the conditions that have historically allowed cities to transform conflict into the civic. What are the challenges today that are larger than our differences, our hatreds, our intolerance, our racisms? I do not think it can be what made European cities historically spaces for the making of a civic sensibility—commerce and the fact that the powerful found in the city the strategic space for their operations and for their self-representation and projection onto a larger stage.

The unsettling of the urban order is part of a larger disassembling of existing organisational logics. This disassembling is also unsettling the logic that assembled territory, authority and rights into the dominant organisational format of our times—the nation-state. All of this is happening even as national states and cities continue to be major markers of the geopolitical landscape and the material organisation of territory. The type of urban order that gave us the open city in Europe, for instance, is still there, but increasingly as mere visual order, and less so as social order.

In what follows I first elaborate on dynamics that are altering the familiar urban order and then argue that this is also a moment of challenges which are larger than our differences. Confronting these challenges will require that we transcend those differences. Therein lies a potential for reinventing that capacity of cities to transform conflict into openness rather than war. But it is not going to be the familiar order of the open city and of the civic as we have come to represent it, especially in the European tradition.

The Urbanising of Governance Challenges: Disassembling the National?

Some of what are usually understood as *global* governance challenges are increasingly becoming particularly concrete and urgent in cities. They range from environmental questions to the flight of war refugees from and into cities. This urbanising of what we have traditionally thought of as national/global challenges is part of a larger disassembling of all-encompassing formats, notably the nation-state and the inter-state system. It could explain why cities are losing older capacities to transform potential conflicts.

In the last two centuries the traditional foundations for the civic in its European conception has largely been the 'civilising' of bourgeois capitalism; this corresponds to the triumph of liberal democracy as the political system of the bourgeoisie. Today capitalism is a different formation, and so is the political system of the new global elites. These developments raise a question about what might be the new equivalent of what in the past was civic.

Cities are going to have an increasing prominence given a multiplication of a broad range of partial—often highly specialised or obscure—assemblages of



bits of territory, authority and rights once firmly ensconced in national and inter-state institutional frames. These assemblages cut across the binary of inside and outside, ours and theirs, national versus global. They arise out of, and can inhabit, national institutional and territorial settings; they can also arise out of mixes of national and global elements and span the globe in what are largely trans-local geographies connecting multiple subnational spaces. Cities, particularly global and globalising cities, are a very complex type of this dis- and re-assembling.

We can organise the urbanising of these various challenges along three axes.

Global warming, energy and water insecurity
These and other environmental challenges are going to make cities frontline spaces. Such challenges will tend to remain more diffuse for nation-states and for the state itself. One key reason is the more acute and direct dependence of everyday life in cities on massive infrastructures and on institutional-level supports for most people—apartment buildings, hospitals, vast sewage systems, water purification systems, vast underground transport systems, whole electric grids dependent on computerised management vulnerable to breakdowns. We already know that a rise in water levels will flood some of the most densely populated cities in the world. The urgency of some of these challenges goes well beyond lengthy negotiations and multiple international meetings—still the most common form of engagement at the level of national politics and especially international politics. When global warming hits cities it will hit hard. New kinds of crises and the ensuing violence will be particularly and preparedness becomes critical. A major simulation by NASA found that by the fifth day of a breakdown in the computerised systems that manage the electric grid, a major city like New York would be in an extreme condition and basically unmanageable through conventional instruments.

These challenges are emergent but before we know it they will become concrete and threatening in cities, contrasting with possibly slower trajectories at the national level. In this sense cities are in the frontline and will have to act on global warming whether national states sign on to international treaties or not. Because of this, many cities have had to develop capabilities to handle these challenges. The air quality emergency in cities such as Tokyo and Los Angeles as long ago as the 1980s is one instance: these cities could not wait until an agreement such as Kyoto

The urbanising of what we have traditionally thought of as national/global challenges is part of a larger disassembling of all-encompassing formats, notably the nation-state and the inter-state system. It could explain why cities are losing older capacities to transform potential conflicts.

might appear, nor could they wait till national governments passed mandatory laws (for car fuel efficiency and zero emissions, for example). With or without a treaty or law, they had to address air quality urgently. And they did.

Asymmetric wars

When national states go to war in the name of national security, nowadays major cities are likely to become a key frontline space. In older wars, armies needed large open fields or oceans to meet and fight, and these were the frontline spaces. The search for national security is today a source for urban insecurity. We can see this in the so-called war on terror, whereby the invasion of Iraq became an urban war theatre. But we also see the negative impacts of this war in the case of cities that are not even part of the immediate theatre—the bombings in Madrid, London, Casablanca, Bali, Mumbai, Lahore and so many other places. The traditional security paradigm based on national state security fails to accommodate this triangulation. What may be good for the protection of the national state apparatus may come at a high (and increasingly higher) price to major cities and their people.

New forms of violence

Cities also enter the domain of global governance challenges as a site for the enactment of new forms of violence resulting from these various crises. We can foresee a variety of forms of violence that are likely to escape the macro-level normative propositions of good governance. For instance, Sao Paulo and Rio have seen forms of gang and police violence in the last few years

that point to a much larger breakdown than the typically invoked fact of inadequate policing. So does the failure of the powerful US army in Baghdad; to call this anarchy is too general. In terms of global governance questions, one challenge is to push macro-level frames to account for and factor in the types of stress that arise out of everyday life violence and insecurity in dense spaces. Some of these may eventually feed militarised responses, and this may well be inadequate or escalate the conflict. The question of immigration and the new types of environmental refugees are one particularly acute instance of urban challenges that will require new understandings of the civic.

Urban Insecurity: When the City Itself Becomes a Technology for War or Conflict

The pursuit of national security has become a source for urban insecurity. This puts the traditional security paradigm based on national state security on its head. What may be good to protect the national state apparatus may come at a high (increasingly high) price to major cities. Since 1998 most terrorist attacks have been in cities. This produces a disturbing map. Access to urban targets is far easier than access to planes for terrorist hijacking or to military installations. The US Department of State's Annual Report on Global Terrorism allows us to establish that today cities are the key targets for asymmetric attacks, a trend that began before the 9/11 attacks on New York. According to this report, from 1993 to 2000 cities accounted for 94 per cent of the injuries resulting from all terrorist attacks, and 61 per cent of the deaths. Secondly, in this period the number of incidents doubled, rising especially sharply after 1998. In contrast, hijacked airplanes accounted for a larger share of terrorist deaths and destruction in the 1980s than they did in the 1990s.

The new urban map of war is expansive: it goes far beyond the actual nations involved. The bombings in Madrid, London, Casablanca, Bali, Mumbai and so on each have their own specifics and can be explained in terms of particular grievances. These are localised actions by local armed groups, acting independently from each other. Yet they are also clearly part of a new kind of multi-sited war—a distributed and variable set of actions that gain larger meaning from a particular conflict with global projection.

Asymmetric war found one of its sharpest enactments in the US war on Iraq. The US conventional military aerial bombing took only six weeks to destroy the Iraqi army and take over. But then asymmetric war set in, with Baghdad, Mosul, Basra

and other Iraqi cities the sites of conflict. And it has not stopped since. Asymmetric wars are partial, intermittent and lack clear endings. There is no armistice to mark their conclusion. They are one indication of how the centre no longer holds, whatever the centre's format—the imperial power of a period, the national state, even in powerful countries.

A second set of features of contemporary wars, especially evident in the less developed areas, is that they often involve forced urbanisation. Contemporary conflicts produce significant population displacement both into and out of cities. In many cases, in African conflicts or in Kosovo, displaced people swell urban populations. At the same time, the warring bodies avoid battle or direct military confrontation, as Mary Kaldor has described in her work on the new wars. Their main strategy is to control territory through getting rid of people of a different identity (ethnicity, religion, politics). The main tactic is terror—conspicuous massacres and atrocities pushing people to flee.

These types of displacement—with ethnic/religious cleansing the most virulent form—have a profound impact on the cosmopolitan character of cities. Cities have long had the capacity to bring together people of different classes, ethnicities and religions through commerce, politics and civic practices. Contemporary conflicts unsettle and weaken this cultural diversity of cities when they lead to forced urbanisation or internal displacement. Belfast, Baghdad or Mostar each is at risk of becoming a series of urban ghettos, with huge implications for infrastructure and the local economy. Baghdad has undergone a deep process of such cleansing, a critical component of the (relative) 'peace' of the last two years.

The systemic equivalent of these types of cleansing in the case of very large cities may well be the growing ghettoisation of the poor and the rich—albeit in very different types of ghettos. It leaves to the middle classes, rarely the most diverse group in cities, the task of bringing urbanity to these cities. The risk is that they will supplant traditional urban cosmopolitanisms with narrow defensive attitudes in a world of growing economic insecurity and political powerlessness. Under these conditions, displacement from countryside to town or within cities becomes a source of insecurity rather than a source of rich diversity.

A Challenge Larger than our Differences?

The particularity of the emergent urban landscape is profoundly different from the old European civic tradition, even though Europe's worldwide imperial projects remixed European traditions with urban cultures that belonged to other histories and geographies. It shares with that older time the fact of challenges which are larger than our differences. Therein lies a potential for reinventing that capacity of cities to transform conflict into (at least relative) openness rather than war, as is the case for national governments. But it is not going to be the familiar order of the open city and of the civic as we have come to represent it, especially in the European tradition. My sense is rather that the major

Against the background of a partial disassembling of empires and nation-states, the city emerges as a strategic site for making elements of new, perhaps even more partial, orders.

challenges that confront cities (and society generally) have increasingly strong feedback loops that contribute to that disassembling of the old civic urban order. Asymmetric war is perhaps one of the most acute versions of this dynamic. And so is climate change. Both of these will affect both rich and poor, and addressing them will demand that everybody joins the battle. Further, while sharp economic inequalities, racisms, and religious intolerance have long existed, they are becoming activating political mobilisers in a context where the centre no longer holds the way it used to hold, whether it be the imperial centre, the national state or the city's bourgeoisie.

Against the background of a partial disassembling of empires and nation-states, the city emerges as a strategic site for making elements of new, perhaps even more partial, orders. In *Territory, Authority, Rights* I identify a vast proliferation of such partial assemblages which re-mix bits of territory, authority and rights once ensconced in national institutional frames. Mostly these continue to exist within the nation-state, but this fact in itself entails a partial denationalising of what was historically constructed as national. These assemblages are multivalent in the normative sense. For instance, in my interpretation World Trade Organization (WTO) law and the new International Criminal Court (ICC) are two of the hundreds of such assemblages. Their normative stances are clearly very different. A final point that matters to elaborate on the question of the city is that since these novel assemblages are partial and often highly specialised; they tend to be centred in particular utilities and purposes, often with extremely narrow scopes (see chapters 5, 8 and 9).

The normative character of this landscape is, in my reading, multivalent—it ranges from some very good utilities and purposes to some very bad ones, depending on one's normative stance. Their emergence and proliferation bring several significant consequences even though this is a partial, not an all-encompassing development. I see in this proliferation of partial assemblages a tendency toward a disaggregating and, in some cases, global redeployment, of constitutive rules once solidly lodged in the nation-state project, one with strong unitary tendencies (see chapters 4, 5 and 6).

These developments signal the emergence of new types of orderings that can coexist with older orderings, such as the nation-state, the interstate system, and the city as part of a hierarchy dominated by the

national state. Among these new types of orderings are complex cities which have partly exited that national, state-dominated hierarchy and become part of multi-scalar regional and global networks. The last two decades have seen an increasingly urban articulation of global territory, and an increasing use of urban space to make political claims not only by the citizens of a city's country, but also by foreigners.

Conclusion

In this context the city is an enormously significant assemblage because of its far greater complexity, diversity, and enormous internal conflicts and competitions. Rather than the univocal utility logics of WTO law or the ICC, the city forces an elaborating of multiple and conflictive utility logics. But if the city is to survive—not become a mere built up terrain or cement jungle—it will have to find a way to triage at least some of this conflict. It is at this point that the acuteness and overwhelming character of the challenges I described earlier can serve to create conditions where the challenges are bigger and more threatening than the internal conflicts and hatreds.

Responding will only work if it is a collective process. We are in it together and we can only overcome it together. Thereby that response can become a new platform for the making of open cities, or at least the equivalent of the traditional civic, the cosmopolitan, the urbane. All of these features will probably have different formats and contents from the iconic European version. My sense is that the formats and the contents of this new possibility will be so distinct from those traditional experiences of the civic and the cosmopolitan that we will need a different language to describe them. But these formats and contents may have the power to create the open cities of our future.

At a time when the open city is under attack from so many sides, one question we might ask is whether there are challenges we confront in cities that are larger than the hatreds and racisms and inequalities that beset our cities. Yes, both the urbanising of war and the direct threats to cities from climate change provide us with powerful agendas for change. The urban consequences of asymmetric war are a major call to stop war, to rethink war as an option. The disarticulation between national security and human security is becoming increasingly visible. And the direct threat of climate change will affect us all, regardless of religion, class, race or whether we are citizens or immigrants. Cities face challenges that are indeed larger than our differences. If we are going to act on these threats, we will have to work together, all of us. Could it be that here lies the basis for a new kind of open city, one not so much predicated on the civic as on a new shared urgency? **a**

* This text is based on two publications where the reader can find extensive bibliographic and empirical materials: chapters 6, 7 and 8 of *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008; and 'When the City Itself Becomes a Technology of War', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2010, pp. 33–50, accessible at <www.saskiasassen.com>.

←←←

Global Challenges

Saskia Sassen

→→→

Ai Weiwei

Glen Jennings

Glen Jennings previously studied in China, was an Asialink fellow in 2009, and currently works with international students for Trinity College Foundation Studies at the University of Melbourne.

Ai Weiwei's *A Mysterious Land No. 10* appeared on the cover of *Arena Magazine* no. 91 (October–November 2007).

a ←

08 2011–09 2011

Nº 113

Ai Weiwei

Glen Jennings

The Chinese art of silencing dissent

'I write condemnations of this unjust world'

Ai Qing, poet and father of Ai Weiwei

(written in a Chinese Nationalist prison, 14 January 1933)

Any high-profile Chinese who effectively tells the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to get fucked is unlikely to stay free of persecution for long. Ai Weiwei, the world-famous artist and designer who is best known for his international exhibitions and as a co-designer of the iconic 'Bird's Nest' sports stadium in Beijing, ran the gauntlet of criticising, or even ridiculing, the CCP for longer than most people, including his friend the literary critic and Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, who has been in prison (again) since 2009 for also advocating basic human rights and freedoms. But on 3 April 2011 the CCP took Ai Weiwei off the street and into secret detention, stopping him at Beijing airport as he prepared to fly out to Hong Kong. He was held for over eighty days, and finally released on 22 June, just a few days before Premier Wen Jiabao flew to Britain for a high-profile state visit and to sign a series of major economic deals.

The secretive machinations of Chinese official politics, and the opaque nature of China's tightly controlled legal system, mean the reasons for Ai Weiwei's arrest remain open to speculation, although the official accusation was tax evasion. But behind the stony facade of economic crime it seems obvious that the CCP could no longer tolerate Ai Weiwei's attempts to embarrass Chinese officials and hold them to account. Vaccinating ordinary Chinese people against contamination by the Arab Spring was also a likely factor in Ai Weiwei's arrest.

For some time before his arrest Ai Weiwei had lambasted official censorship and popular apathy, and had spoken out in defence of individual rights and against official corruption and abuses of power. Since the Sichuan earthquake of 2008 he had campaigned against a system that led to children being crushed to death in poorly constructed schools. Increasingly his artworks were being viewed as too provocative and impertinent, and the CCP does not respond kindly to direct challenges or satire.

Histories of Threat and Iconoclasm

Ai Weiwei may be a troublesome individual, but actions against him should be understood in the broader context of Chinese history and the CCP's attitude to dissent. 1 July 2011 marked the 90th anniversary of the CCP. At its inception it was a tiny underground movement predominantly composed of urban intellectuals inspired by foreign ideology. This clandestine circle of librarians, academics and literary critics eventually rose to complete domination of the world's most populous nation, speaking on behalf of the mass of peasants, workers and soldiers, and today also representing China's bureaucratic elite, entrepreneurs and the new rich. From a total of

approximately twenty members in Beijing and Shanghai in 1921, the CCP has grown to a current membership of roughly 75 million, with members in every province, city, township and village.

The CCP has internalised its own experience of suffering as an underground organisation for many years in its torturous growth to achieving power. It also remains conscious of imperial China's long history of secret societies and popular rebellions. As a result of these visceral personal and historical resources, the CCP deeply suspects the threat posed to established authority by small, secretive and religiously motivated or ideologically inspired movements and charismatic leaders.

As a result of these visceral personal and historical resources, the CCP deeply suspects the threat posed to established authority by small, secretive and religiously motivated or ideologically inspired movements and charismatic leaders.

To contemporary Western observers of China, the CCP overacts appallingly and counter-productively to *qigong* practitioners and self-cultivators in the syncretic religious movement known as Falun Gong; to Christians in underground churches; to human rights lawyers or activists such as Liu Xiaobo; to ordinary citizens petitioning for justice; and to netizens (online activists), sympathisers with the Arab Spring, ethnic minorities and iconoclasts or provocative artists such as Ai Weiwei. But the CCP remembers what it achieved as a determined minority after decades of suppression by warlords, Nationalists and Japanese invaders. The historians and theoreticians within the CCP also know that emperors in past dynasties were shaken or dethroned by religious fanatics, bands of sworn brothers or peasant rebels who harnessed widespread despair or dissatisfaction. The Ming dynasty fell to a peasant rebellion, and both Buddhist and Muslim uprisings rattled the Qing. In the mid-nineteenth century, Hong Xiuquan, the self-proclaimed younger brother of Jesus Christ, led the Taiping Rebels in a mass movement against the Qing. That civil war alone resulted in more than ten million casualties.

The CCP views sectarian movements like Falun Gong in the context of previous religious, superstitious and millenarian movements within China. It was shocked in April 1999 when Falun Gong suddenly appeared at the gates of the Central Committee’s residential compound of *Zhongnanhai* as a broad-based movement willing to agitate for the interests of its leader Li Hongzhi and its many adherents. Ten thousand protesters materialised on the Party’s doorstep in the largest public demonstration in China since the 1989 Protest Movement on Tiananmen Square. When the CCP investigated this phenomenon it found to its horror that Falun Gong had adherents across the nation and inside the Party itself. Falun Gong emerged in the Chinese ideational and belief vacuum created by the discrediting of Maoism in the Cultural Revolution, the killing of protesters in 1989, and the demise of official Marxism in the ruins of world communism in the 1990s. Falun Gong was swiftly banned and labelled a ‘heretical organisation’.

When considering other threats to its hegemony and survival, the CCP—which in its first decades of existence relied so heavily on European socialist texts, Soviet Party models of organisation and Comintern advisers and support—views human rights, religious freedom, democracy and even iconoclastic or ‘indecent art’ as foreign-inspired (or specifically Western-led) attacks on the CCP and China itself.

In a country with over 450 million internet users and literally billions of micro-blogs each year, traditional Chinese censorship cannot cope with the traffic of information or work with the efficiency of the Maoist period. This is despite the notorious Great Firewall of China, the fact that Ai Weiwei amongst others had his popular and critical blog closed down on sina.com, and despite the allegedly state-sanctioned hacking as well as the official licensing problems and censorship constraints that necessitated Google’s withdrawal from China’s mainland in 2010. Nonetheless, the Chinese state monitors carefully and censors when it can. On 23 May 2011, for example, my television screen in Tianjin repeatedly went blank when the BBC World Service interviewed Lobsang Sangay, the political successor to the Dalai Lama for Tibetans in exile. Each time the interview was repeated, the screen suddenly went blank again and the sound went off.

Despite its extensive and expensive surveillance network, the Chinese state cannot censor or monitor every micro-blog, text message or mobile phone call, but the state does ensure that it acts decisively and with a massive show of force when users of new social media attempt to move into the physical world of organising rallies or public acts of defiance. This was seen when huge numbers of police and internal security forces appeared at a meeting point for a few Chinese individuals inspired to gather in the street by Tunisia’s Jasmine Revolution of February 2011. What is considered an overreaction in the West is a necessary security measure

to the CCP. Their logic is that there will be no Jasmine Revolution if all buds are carefully and systematically nipped before they can bloom. They do not want a repeat of the Taiping Rebellion, the Protest Movement of 1989, or a civil war like the current conflict in Libya.

China’s New Social Contract

Ai Weiwei is no Mao Zedong. He acts openly and peacefully, blogging rather than blasting. His international supporters (and the media who report on his art, his social activities and his problems with Chinese officials) are not secret revolutionaries or clandestine organisations like the Comintern funnelling guns or ideological weapons to programmatic, disciplined and nationally coordinated subversives. Ai Weiwei’s activism exposes the abuses of the Chinese state system, such as the official corruption and shoddy work that led to the deaths of thousands of children in the Sichuan earthquake. He printed the names of the dead children on the walls of his Beijing studio, and sought legal redress on behalf of grieving parents. In return for Ai Weiwei’s artistic independence and peaceful social criticism of the Chinese system, he has been abused by that system, beaten up while trying to speak to a Sichuan court, denied a permit for his Shanghai studio (which was then demolished), constantly monitored and then held in secret custody for eighty days.

After Ai Weiwei’s detention and the subsequent search of his home and Beijing studio, he was confined in a secret location and vilified in the pro-Beijing press of Hong Kong’s *Wen Wei Po* as a ‘plagiarist’, ‘bigamist’, ‘fraud’, disseminator of ‘indecent images’ and perpetrator of unspecified ‘economic crimes’. His wife, Lu Qing, was allowed only limited access to him to provide medicine for his diabetes and hypertension. On his release the normally outspoken Ai Weiwei was subject to a gag order preventing him communicating with the media, and his movements were prescribed. He is not allowed to leave Beijing and he has reportedly agreed to pay the Chinese government 12 million yuan (AUS \$1.8 million) in taxes and fines.

In addition to the modern weapon of arbitrarily enforced tax law, the CCP uses tactics against religious groups, democracy advocates and individuals like Ai Weiwei based on models from pre-modern China or from the time of the CCP’s own clandestine and violent rise to power. But conditions in China today are completely different. Since the suppression of the Protest Movement of 1989 and the instructive collapse of the Soviet Union into poverty and crime in the early 1990s, and with the rapid expansion of China’s economy and improvements in the standard of living for most Chinese in the past two decades, there has been a tacit agreement between the Chinese people and the CCP. Ordinary people can pursue private wealth, but they cannot directly challenge CCP authority. This implied social contract has been stunningly successful.

←←←
 Ai Weiwei
 Glen Jennings



If China is taken completely out of the equation, in the past thirty years the world has achieved very little in alleviating absolute poverty. The hundreds of millions who have risen above bare subsistence in this period are overwhelmingly Chinese, and anyone familiar with China recognises the extraordinary and impressive transformations achieved since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. China has a great deal of which to be proud, and ordinary Chinese people have much improved calorie intakes, housing conditions, employment opportunities, transport and communication networks, travel options, and education facilities and pathways than ever before. But Chinese society is far more unequal than societies such as Australia's, and the costs of rapid development have been extremely high in terms of pollution, environmental degradation, inadequate social welfare, the ubiquity of fake (and often dangerous) goods and corruption.

China is making important strides with solar energy and other green practices, but as more coal-fired generators are built to meet the needs of rapid urbanisation and increased consumption, and as more cars pour out of the factories and onto the newly built roads, China faces intense pressures from the weight of its own development. China is a land of billionaires, luxury goods, and conspicuous consumption, with China's economy now the world's second largest after the United States. But the ordinary Chinese person's standard of living is well below the OECD average, and to reach that level would take an enormous toll on the planet and is inconceivable given present circumstances and population size. Moreover, many of the 'sustainable' initiatives across China are more assertion than reality, just as equality and constitutional rights are more theory than fact. Tensions and fault lines exist in the Chinese polity, but the lack of such things as critical and independent media, an independent judicial system, and the opportunity to stand freely for election and to vote, mean that China does not have the pressure valves of civil society or a history and culture of public scrutiny of the CCP and accountable government.

China's tensions and fault lines occasionally burst into protest or even violence, including the murder of brutal or corrupt local officials who expropriate land, extort taxes, solicit bribes or harshly enforce birth control policies. Nonetheless, despite tens of thousands of annual protests that take place across China at the grassroots level, there is no social movement or political organisation that seeks to unify these small acts of resistance into a coherent, ideologically driven and oppositional force to the CCP. The people largely accept that things have improved for China as a whole and in most cases for themselves as individuals or as families. They believe that disunity, widespread violence and chaos are to be avoided. Peasants are not rallying around a new Mao Zedong to surround and defeat the cities, they are moving in great numbers to the cities to make the most of opportunities to advance themselves and their families, contributing to the greatest and most rapid mass urbanisation movement in human history.

Killing a Chicken to Scare the Monkey

Ai Weiwei has never advocated turmoil or violence. But he is, in Chinese official minds, an impudent monkey who has too openly and directly affronted and insulted the CCP. Unlike many Chinese people from both imperial times and today, Ai Weiwei did not self-censor. As he said to the documentary filmmaker Alison Klayman: 'If you're too

afraid to turn on your camera, it's like they have already taken it away'.

Before being seized at the airport, Ai Weiwei was a friend and collaborator of the jailed human rights gadfly Liu Xiaobo who also spoke out against the CCP imprisoning Liu. Ai Weiwei tried unsuccessfully to represent Liu at the Nobel ceremony in Sweden, delivering a major slap in the face to the CCP. Not only did Ai Weiwei out-Spielberg Steven Spielberg by pulling out of the organisation committee of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, but as a co-designer of the Bird's Nest, his withdrawal and subsequent public criticism delivered another slap in the face to the CCP on the eve of its biggest global event of the decade. He aggressively publicised the death toll from the Sichuan earthquake and held authorities responsible for the criminal state of the infrastructure, thereby delivering another slap in the face to the CCP when the avuncular premier Wen Jiabao had been personally visiting and showing sympathy to the earthquake victims and expressing the Party's care and compassion to the ordinary people. In his own art practice Ai Weiwei also produced works considered indecent or insulting, such as the statue of a strong arm (currently exhibited in Hong Kong, reportedly the only Chinese territory where his works are on public display) with a hand giving a middle finger salute.

In a further (and perhaps decisive) insult to the CCP, anyone familiar with homophones in the Chinese language will note the way an Ai Weiwei text has found its way into popular parlance. This subversion of the language may be intolerable to the CCP, a self-important party that shares the authoritarian's lack of humour and a complete refusal to tolerate satire or impudence. A common insult in Chinese is *Cao ni ma*: 'Fuck your mother'. But very similar sounds can mean 'Grass mud horse' or alpaca.



A photo of a naked Ai Weiwei with a toy alpaca blocking his penis from public view has the phrase *Cao ni ma dang zhongyang*, 'The alpaca blocks the middle'. But these basic sounds, with different characters, mean 'Fuck your mother, the Party Central Committee'.

The Chinese have a phrase expressing the exemplary nature of punishment designed to keep people in line: to kill a chicken to scare the monkey. To mix animal metaphors, we can see that Ai Weiwei is no chicken. In recent years he has spoken out at great personal risk in the interests of transparency, accountability and justice.

He has done this repeatedly and bravely, having seen his own father, the poet Ai Qing, 'reformed through labour' in remote regions and officially silenced by the CCP for twenty years because he defended the writer Ding Ling in the Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957 and because his own literary works were then deemed unacceptable. Shortly after his father's official rehabilitation and return both to Beijing and to print after decades of enforced silence, Ai Weiwei wrote posters on the short-lived Democracy Wall of 1978. (This rallying point for the views of ordinary people became famous for the 'Fifth Modernisation' of democracy, demanded on behalf of all Chinese people by the Beijing electrician and former Red Guard Wei Jingsheng, who ended up in prison for fifteen years.) Ai Weiwei has continued his social critique despite the state suppression of his blog and the beating he suffered in 2009 which necessitated an operation to relieve a brain hemorrhage. So he is not a chicken. But he is a naughty monkey.

.....

Ai Weiwei has never advocated turmoil or violence. But he is, in Chinese official minds, an impudent monkey who has too openly and directly affronted and insulted the CCP.

Like the mischievous monkey Sun Wukong in the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, Ai Weiwei did not have as much freedom or immunity as his talent, wealth and status as an internationally recognised artist may have suggested. Sun Wukong could leap 1000 miles, but when he thought he had flown to the edge of the world he realised that he had not even jumped out of the Buddha's palm. When Sun Wukong behaved too independently, spontaneously or facetiously, a priest's controlling prayer could tighten the golden bands on monkey's skull, rendering him speechless and immobile. Despite Ai Weiwei's international profile and his years living in New York in the 1980s, he remained Chinese and subject to Chinese control. Despite his wealth and exhibitions scheduled for London, New York, Berlin and Hong Kong in 2011, when it came time for the CCP to tighten the bands on Ai Weiwei he realised that he could not leave China or determine his own fate.

When Ai Weiwei was one year old, his father Ai Qing was labelled a Rightist. He accompanied his parents into internal exile in Manchuria and then to the remote western region of Xinjiang. He learnt at first hand the extremes of China's

temperatures and the depths of Chinese poverty. He saw how his father, one of China's most famous writers, was denied the right to publish for twenty years. In the dangerous craziness of the Cultural Revolution Ai Weiwei even helped Ai Qing burn the poet's prized collection of books, because Chinese classics and foreign ideas were deemed enemies of the revolution. Like his father, who was imprisoned both by the Nationalists (who he opposed) and by the Communists (who he supported), Ai Weiwei is known as someone who smiles and laughs a great deal. But both know personal pain and the suffering of their societies. Ai Weiwei also feels responsible for the suffering of others, including friends and associates detained during his arrest. On 9 August he broke his silence (outside China) by tweeting details of the incarceration and subsequent heart attack of the designer Liu Zhenggang. At the time of writing, it is yet to be known if he will suffer retribution from the Chinese state for this act.

Avoiding Mistakes of the Past

While Ai Weiwei remained hidden away in detention, China was suffering its worst drought in fifty years. If China can escape this drought without mass starvation, this will be a significant milestone in Chinese history, where more than 1830 major famines have struck the people since 108 BC, including the worst famine in recorded history, which killed more than thirty million people from 1959 to 1961. If China succeeds in addressing the current drought's ravages, the Chinese will again be justly proud of their social and economic transformations achieved in the past three decades. At present, despite hardships confronting the people, the land, and the rivers of China, there are no signs of mass starvation in mid-2011. China is not doomed to repeat its past; not from the imperial period and not from the famine years that immediately succeeded Chairman Mao's Great Leap Forward.

China need neither repeat its past concerning its treatment of religious minorities, democracy advocates, iconoclasts or artists. Conditions have changed markedly since imperial China and since the heyday of Maoist orthodoxy, including access to information and education, the relationship between the individual and the state, and the relationship between China and other states. Avoiding violence and the collapse of China's economy is in the interests of all Chinese and most foreigners, not least of all Australians. Ai Weiwei does not advocate the violent dissolution of China; he seeks China's peaceful extension of rights and opportunities. In the year of its 90th anniversary, if the CCP can help to steer China through a course of economic development without famine, and without ecological degradation that threatens China's rapid expansion, then in ten years' time the CCP will be able to look forward to a glorious centennial. But where will Ai Weiwei be in a decade from now, and will he be able to speak freely? **a**

←←←
 Ai Weiwei
 Glen Jennings
 →→→
 La Lucha esta en la Calle: Spanish Revolution
 Samuel Cossar-Gilbert
 Samuel Cossar-Gilbert is an Australian studying and living in Spain. He has been heavily involved in the M15 movement and the online media project <www.europeanrevolution.net>.





'These are our weapons', Plaza del Sol, 18 May

Manifesto for the M-15 movement:

We are ordinary people. We are like you: people who get up every morning to study, work or find a job. People who work hard every day to provide a better future for those around us.

We are all concerned and angry about the political, economic and social outlook which we see around us—corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers—leaving us helpless, without a voice. This situation has become normal, a daily suffering without hope. But if we join forces, we can change it. It's time to change things, time to build a better society together. Therefore we strongly argue that the priorities of any advanced society must be equality, progress, solidarity, freedom of culture, sustainability and development, welfare and people's happiness.

For the full manifesto see <www.european-citizens-network.eu/civil-en/spip.php?article42>. For regular updates on the M-15 and other social movements in Europe see <www.europeanrevolution.net>.



Metro station, Madrid, 17 May

←←←

La Lucha esta en la Calle: Spanish Revolution

Samuel Cossar-Gilbert

→→→

A solar powered occupation, Plaza del Sol, 20 May



Plaza del Sol, 19 May

→→→

Liberated billboard, Plaza del Sol, 21 May

a ←

08 2011-09 2011
Nº 113





General Assembly, Plaza del Sol, 21 May



Protesters form a human chain around Barcelona's houses of parliament, 15 June

←←←

La Lucha esta en la Calle: Spanish Revolution

Samuel Cossar-Gilbert

→→→

Boris Bites Packer

Boris Frankel

Boris Frankel will sing the lead role of Rupert Murdoch in the forthcoming New York production of the new Philip Glass opera 'The Alchemist'.

a ←

08 2011–09 2011

Nº 113

Boris Bites

Packer*Boris Frankel*
.....**How I accidentally thwarted Sir Frank and discovered Madame Blavatsky**

The ABC production *Paper Giants*, about Ita Buttrose, Frank and Kerry Packer and the founding of *Cleo* magazine in November 1972, was an entertaining mini-series even though it glossed over crucial issues and romanticised *Cleo* as being at the centre of the feminist avant-garde. It did, however, bring back memories of my accidental role in disrupting Sir Frank Packer's plans to open the first private cable television stations in Australia. This is not a story of being humiliated by the Packers, like others have recounted, because our paths never physically crossed. Yet in an era of print media crisis and political divisions over the National Broadband Network, understanding why Frank Packer wanted a cable network as early as in 1969 is a tale with many contemporary resonances.

A majority of readers would certainly remember the giant physical, commercial and political presence of Kerry Packer. They may, however, have been too young or not yet born when his father Frank (known and feared as 'God') exercised his media and political power in the decades before his death in 1974.

Between the Depression of the 1930s and the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, Australian print and electronic media were subjected to a lengthy process of monopoly concentration in the hands of the Fairfax, Murdoch and Packer stables. Before the rise of the media barons, various businesses and organisations such as trade unions and state Labor Councils also owned newspapers, magazines and radio stations. Most were run as commercial entertainment, sports and news media but were eventually sold to the large private companies. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) owned the *World*, a struggling newspaper in Sydney. In 1931 the AWU sent their former Queensland president

'Red Ted' Theodore to report on the paper's prospects. Immortalised as 'Red Ted Thurgood' in Frank Hardy's novel *Power Without Glory*, Theodore had recently been forced to resign in 1930 as Federal Labor Treasurer in Scullin's Labor government following corruption allegations involving his part ownership of the Mungana mine.

Theodore's media and gold mine connections with John Wren and Frank Packer were 'consolidated' in subsequent years. Together with Frank Packer, he purchased the *World* from the AWU in 1932 and they went on to found the *Australian Women's Weekly* (1933) as well as adding the *Daily Telegraph* (1936) and *Sunday Telegraph* (1939) to their new company called Consolidated Press Ltd.

Although Theodore died in 1950, the Theodore family interests continued in partnership with 'God'. Television now beckoned and it was Packer's television station (TCN9 Sydney) that was the first to officially broadcast in Australia on 27 October 1956. Shortly after, in 1957, Frank Packer renamed the company Australian Consolidated Press (ACP) after buying out the Theodore family interests and gaining majority control of the company. Always on the lookout for new money making media vehicles that would beat his corporate media rivals, Packer took a controlling stake in GTV9 Melbourne in 1960. With the opening of the Sydney–Melbourne coaxial cable in 1963, 'God' launched the Nine Network which remained the dominant TV business long after his death and up until the death of his son Kerry in 2005.

Sir Frank Packer's increasing media power was also vital for the Menzies Coalition government and conservative anti-Labor politics. It is legitimate to ask whether Tony Abbott could have become leader of the Liberal party without Packer's earlier contributions to preventing Labor from winning office. It would, for example, have been impossibly expensive for Bob Santamaria and the National Civic Council to pay commercial television rates if Santamaria had not been given a free weekly show on the Nine Network. 'God' was thus instrumental in helping to ensure that a whole generation of right-wing Catholic voters made the transition from Labor to the Liberal Party via the Democratic Labor Party. Once well known as a non-Catholic and even anti-Catholic party, the Liberal Party today is packed with Catholic politicians and directly attracts the votes of many conservative Catholics.

Just as the Packer stable bolstered conservative political and social causes, so too were Fairfax media outlets equally anti-Labor, as was the Melbourne *Herald and Weekly Times* empire (not yet controlled by Rupert Murdoch). It was the rise of Rupert that posed an increasing threat to Frank. In the suffocating Australian conservative climate, the launch of *The Australian* in 1964 was a breath of fresh air. While Packer was a strong Menzies supporter, Murdoch's *Australian* criticised everything from Menzies' state aid for Catholic schools to neglectful socio-economic policies, conservative cultural attitudes and Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. After Robert Menzies retired in 1966, *The Australian* dismissed his government's record as '17 Wasted Years'. It is hard to reconcile the younger reformist Murdoch with News Limited's

aggressive right-wing papers that have dominated the Australian media since Rupert changed his political views during the 1970s.

How does my experience intersect with this narrative? My first media job was in 1960 as a fourteen-year-old copy boy in the sub-editors' office at the *Herald and Weekly Times* fortress in Flinders Street, Melbourne. Apart from witnessing the almost daily antics of the subs—throwing paper planes at each other for instance—my brief stay was notable for two events. The first was tripping and breaking a fine china cup while clearing away managing director Sir John Williams' morning tea tray. The fact that Sir John was another knight of the realm indicates that in those days nearly all the media barons were made knights for services rendered in defence of the status quo.

The second event was more fortuitous. I entered a footy tipping contest run by radio 3DB (which operated downstairs in the *Herald* building) that required entrants to name not only the winners of the main matches but also all the winners in the reserves. Confirming my belief that sporting bets have little to do with expert knowledge, I fluked the jackpot that had not been won for three weeks. Winning the Phoenix Biscuits football jackpot of seventy-five pounds was a relative fortune given that I was on a weekly wage of four pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence.

After leaving the *Herald* I worked for almost six years in a range of factories, department stores and offices while attending night school for five years in order to finish high school. After enrolling full-time at Monash University in 1966 and completing a combined honours arts degree in history and politics in November 1969, I awaited news as to whether I would get an academic job or a post-graduate scholarship. I was told that I would probably get a post-graduate scholarship and part-time tutoring at Monash beginning in March 1970. In the meantime, and given this was a period of full employment, I took the path taken by thousands of others: I joined the public service.

At the time, the Commonwealth Public Service was eager to recruit honours graduates. As I had a good honours degree, I didn't have to pass elaborate qualifying public service exams. Instead the officer in charge offered me a choice of jobs in several departments. I was not inspired. Sensing my lack of enthusiasm, he came back with another option—a job in the Postmaster General's Department. 'Not the PMG', I moaned. 'No, this is a special job', he assured me. 'You will be the first "humanist" working on projects with our leading team of engineers and telecommunication planners,' This sounded more appealing and so, just before my 24th birthday, I began work in December 1969 at the PMG offices in William Street.

There were virtually no other institutions in the world like the PMG, except geographically small-scale versions in the United Kingdom or New Zealand. As a large government department, the PMG employed hundreds of thousands of workers, either directly in public postal services and telecommunications, or indirectly through all the private contractors in the manufacturing and service sectors providing materials and supplies. As private companies in North America dominated telecommunications, this meant that the geographical size of continental Australia gave the PMG a territorial sweep unrivalled by other public telcos in Western Europe. In contrast to mass poverty in Asia,

Africa, Latin America and the Soviet Union, the affluence of late 1960s Australia meant that the PMG had unique political pressures placed upon it to provide egalitarian public services at standard affordable postage and phone rates across a giant continent. It also had a world-class, high-powered team of engineers, technicians and planners working to devise innovations and major national infrastructure programs.

I had little idea of what I was supposed to do working as a 'humanist' alongside these planners and engineers. After formal introductions and a briefing about the work being undertaken by these senior second and third division officers, I was asked by my superior to prepare a report on whether cable TV was needed in Australia and, if so, what should the PMG's position be in relation to this technology. 'Cable TV', I exclaimed. 'What is it and where does it operate?' My superior replied that he didn't know much about it but that Sir Frank Packer had made an application to start a cable network. My task was to analyse the social, economic and cultural aspects of cable TV and whether or not the PMG should grant a license to Packer's ACP.

One thing was certain. I was not alone in my ignorance of cable TV. The more I researched it, the more I realised that most Australians had never heard of it. What also became clear was that most politicians, policy makers and business leaders—apart from a handful of people—also knew nothing about the potential of cable TV or, very importantly, that 'God' wanted to introduce it to Australia. Remember, this was 1969 and there were hardly any computers, no internet and no Google. The news came to Australia by camel. How was I to write this report?

I began asking some of the PMG engineers about cable and searching for relevant information in university and public libraries. Initially I discovered that cable had been used since the late 1940s in North America and Europe primarily as a technical device for communities to gain good free-to-air TV reception in those cities or regions affected by environmental obstructions such as mountains or city buildings. It was even called CATV or Community Antenna Television. I also visited a number of foreign consulates and embassies to learn about different national communications policies. Little new information was gained from

←←←

Boris Bites Packer

Boris Frankel



08 2011–09 2011

Nº 113

the diplomatic officers or their small embassy libraries apart from greater familiarity with various national communication legislation and regulatory statutes.

The US and Canadian telecommunications scene nevertheless did provide hints of the potential attractiveness of cable TV. As an alternative counter-cultural option to the big TV networks, US radical media advocates were beginning to explore the possibility of using cable TV as a narrow-casting device to give voice to community groups, sub-cultures and others excluded from mainstream broadcasting. Politically, Frank Packer would certainly have not been interested in giving a platform to these alternative voices. In fact, to this day the use of cable TV as alternative news and cultural media has never emerged or flourished in Australia.

However, 'God' (or somebody else in ACP) may have been aware that local TV stations in the United States and Canada were upset that cable TV stations were transmitting CBS, NBC and ABC network programs into US and Canadian regions, thus taking local advertising dollars away from the free-to-air local stations, which were dependent on a mix of network and local regional programming. Could it be that 'God' was planning to increase competition with other TV operators by indirectly overcoming or bypassing Australian federal media regulations and penetrating capital cities and regional towns with a multi-channel pay TV cable network? Or was I imputing too much forward thinking to Packer and ACP? Perhaps they were just interested in providing better TV reception in Sydney and other places? After all, no cable network existed in the United States in 1969 (this only emerged in the late 1970s) and cable stations were still relaying existing network material rather than producing their own programs. Today, with hindsight, it is possible to see that it was only in 1972 that the Home Box Office (HBO) became one of the first cable companies to produce original programs. US rival cable TV networks with multiple pay TV channels and future hits such as *The Wire*, *Mad Men* or *Curb Your Enthusiasm* were inconceivable as models for extending media power at the end of the 1960s.

While researching and writing this report in 1969 and early 1970, I was also gaining a valuable insight into the political divisions of the upper echelons of the PMG. First, it was clear that many in telecommunications wanted to have their own department or statutory body separate from the postal services. Second, a more profound division

existed between those who wanted to retain the provision of egalitarian national public services and those senior officers who favoured the adoption of market-based efficiency practices. These divisions were a dress rehearsal for future telecommunications policies that still divide Australia this present day. Many pro-market senior people expressed a profound dislike of Country Party politicians regularly lobbying to have expensive telecommunication infrastructure connected to isolated regional communities and the farms of wealthy 'cocky' mates. In contrast, they loved the 'rivers of gold' of the Sydney–Melbourne phone networks that earned the PMG a fortune. They told me how inflated phone call pricing disguised the reality that calls in these two cities could actually be provided free to the public or for a nominal 1 cent a call, as the infrastructure had long been largely paid off by taxpayers.

In the suffocating Australian conservative climate, the launch of *The Australian* in 1964 was a breath of fresh air. While Packer was a strong Menzies supporter, Murdoch's *Australian* criticised everything from Menzies' state aid for Catholic schools to neglectful socio-economic policies, conservative cultural attitudes and Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Within five years, the senior levels of telecommunications had their wishes fulfilled. The Whitlam government broke up the PMG in 1975 and divided it into two statutory bodies: Australia Post and Telecom Australia. Whitlam, like others (particularly many working at *The Australian* in the 1960s), advocated a mixture of a modernised social democracy and economic rationalism. The two elements proved incompatible during the 1980s and 1990s as neo-liberal market values swamped social democracy.

While the break-up of the PMG into Australia Post and Telecom Australia may have sounded logical on paper, it was a prime example of what happens when public sector reformers adopt business practices and pander to the market's definition of 'efficiency'. If service was not very good prior to 1975, it deteriorated in later decades as staffing numbers were drastically cut back and the weaker and poorer members of society were neglected. The narrow focus on market definitions of productivity also resonated in cultural analysis. Far too many Australian cultural studies papers and media commentary continue to emphasise content and software while neglecting the vital issue of local and global hardware, especially the issue of who creates and produces communication hardware and how it either enables local autonomy or guarantees future social dependence.

The year 1975 marked the beginning of the end of the PMG's high-powered centre of technological knowledge. Although initially retained by Telecom, it was eventually heavily scaled back under subsequent corporate and privatising managers. Telecom and Telstra increasingly outsourced or contracted off-shore at the expense of local jobs and innovation. A near fatal blow was struck against key sections of Australian engineering, electronics and other parts of the manufacturing industry, as well as against skill formation and apprenticeship training.

Despite all the nationalist fantasy talk about the ‘knowledge economy’ promoted by the ALP and Liberals in recent decades, actual industry, education and trade policies told an entirely different story. By the year 2000, there was such a loss of vital skills and technical knowledge that there was not a hope in hell that Australian manufacturing could give rise to a local giant such as Finland’s Nokia, let alone end its heavy reliance on imported IT and electronic goods.

It was Margaret Thatcher who recognised the market value of Whitlam’s break-up of the PMG. This was the model she adopted in dismantling Britain’s PMG (1981) and then fully privatising British Telecom in 1984. By contrast, it was almost thirty years after 1975 before the Howard government fully privatised Telstra. Telecom and Telstra, unfortunately, had long operated as ruthless businesses rather than organisations providing essential public services for all Australians.


‘Cable TV’, I exclaimed. ‘What is it and where does it operate?’ My superior replied that he didn’t know much about it but that Sir Frank Packer had made an application to start a cable network. My task was to analyse the social, economic and cultural aspects of cable TV and whether or not the PMG should grant a license to Packer’s ACP.

In my March 1970 report about cable TV I advised that Sir Frank Packer’s application be rejected, as cable was too valuable a media platform to be handed over to private companies before the PMG had even worked out the future of public broadcasting or its own future media policy. I do not know what ever happened to my report. It may have been accepted as PMG policy or pigeonholed like so many others. Whatever its fate, two things were confirmed by history: ‘God’ never opened a cable TV network and it was a quarter of a century before cable or pay TV began operating in Australia between 1993 and 1995.

Today, pay or cable TV is relatively stagnant in terms of household penetration. It has been weakened by the internet and will be overtaken by new media platforms when the National Broadband Network is completed. However, one thing has remained constant: the complete lack of desire by Coalition and Labor governments to democratise news and cultural production by breaking the power of the media monopolies. Paul Keating and John Howard especially left contemporary Australia with disastrous telecommunications and media legacies.

My short few months’ experience at the PMG had an eventful conclusion. After handing in my report I gave notice that I was returning to academia. In our office section there was an elderly, well-groomed senior clerk who had probably been with the PMG most of his life. He fussed about and regularly irritated the senior engineers and

planners by enforcing bureaucratic rules such as requiring them to sign on or off if they were late for work or out of the office. On my last day he surprised me by coming up and giving me a gift in a large package. ‘Don’t thank me and don’t open it until you get home. If you don’t find it of interest, please pass it on. Good luck.’ Curiosity got the better of me and on the train home I opened the package to find two large volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91), a founder of the Theosophical Society. The following week I asked my history professor, the late Alan McBriar, what he knew about Madam Blavatsky. He told me that she was known as ‘HPB’ and was famous for her seances and her recruitment to theosophy of prominent Fabians such as women’s rights activist Annie Besant. The Theosophical Society had active branches in India and in Sydney. From the 1930s prominent spiritualists moved to Melbourne where the Theosophical Society still owns very valuable real estate in the heart of the city. Alan McBriar also said that I had probably been selected as a potential valuable recruit, hence the gift of the books.

Although I was not attracted to theosophy I kept the two volumes. While writing this article and refreshing my memory about ‘Red Ted’ Theodore of the AWU and the young Frank Packer, a strange experience occurred. Something prompted me to take the *Secret Doctrine* down from the bookshelf. While reading Volume One, I suddenly heard a women’s voice calling my name. I turned around but nobody was there. Then I heard the faint voice saying, ‘Paul Howes loves Bill Shorten’. Startled, I called out, ‘Is that you, HPB? And why are you telling me that Howes loves Shorten?’ ‘No, Boris, you misheard me. Not “loves” but “Ludwig”. I said, “Paul Howes, Bill Ludwig and Bill Shorten”. Beware the AWU and the mining industry for the danger they pose to the environment’. Before I could ask HPB another question, my phone started ringing. I picked it up only to hear not a spiritual voice, but the familiar and annoying echoing sound of a person in a faraway Indian call centre: ‘Mr FrAankeel’. ‘Yes’, I answered. ‘As a former Telstra customer we have a very good deal for you ...’ ‘Sorry’, I interrupted, ‘not interested’, and slammed the phone down. Alas, by the time I regained my composure, HPB had disappeared into the ether and I have not heard from her since. 

←←←
Boris Bites Packer
Boris Frankel
→→→
Nuclear Sickness
Peter Karamoskos
Dr Peter Karamoskos is a nuclear radiologist, a public representative on the Radiation Health Committee of ARPANSA (Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency), and treasurer for MAPW (Medical Association for the Prevention of War) and ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons).



Nuclear Sickness

Peter Karamoskos

Fukushima's deadly health legacy

Japan continues to struggle with the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant five months after the second worst nuclear accident in history. Three reactors have experienced full core melts, and spent fuel fires have also added to the fallout burden. The plant is yet to be brought under control and continues to discharge radioactivity into the environment, albeit at a lessening rate. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) continues to rate the situation as 'very serious'.

Utilising CTBT monitoring data, the Austrian Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics calculated that in the first three days after the meltdown, the levels of iodine-131 (I-131) emitted was 20 per cent and caesium-137 (Cs-137) 20–60 per cent of the entire Chernobyl emissions of these isotopes. Although Chernobyl emitted significantly more fallout than Fukushima has to date, it was the I-131 and Cs-137 that accounted for most of the terrestrial human and environmental hazard, and these are Fukushima's main fallout components. Indeed, as of June 2011, 770,000 terabecquerels (TBq) of atmospheric fallout had occurred, roughly 20 per cent of the total Chernobyl fallout.

There has also been extensive contamination to the nearby coastline, with approximately 170,000 TBq of radioactive elements discharged into the sea and groundwater. A further 800,000 TBq of contaminated seawater (120,000 tonnes), used for cooling at the height of the emergency, is still contained within the reactor buildings. Concentrations of radioactive iodine off the coast have been measured at over 4300 times the legal limit, making this the worst maritime radioactive accident in history. Seawater contamination has compromised the fish stocks along the local coast and destroyed any remnants of the fishing industry that were not wiped out by the tsunami. The longer term consequences on sea creatures and vegetation are unknown.

France's Institute for Radiological Protection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN) estimated in the first week after the disaster that within 20 km of the plant the levels of contamination would exceed that of Chernobyl, and there would be 'a strongly contaminated zone', extending to 60 km in which there would be 'measurable impacts but not dramatic impacts' less than the comparable area around

Chernobyl. Beyond this zone contamination would be measurable as far as 250 km but with health impacts not able to be determined. This situation has indeed eventuated.

Shortly after the explosions, a 20 km exclusion zone was established and residents between 20 and 30 km were advised to remain indoors. The IAEA and US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (US NRC) suggested this was inadequate and advised an 80 km exclusion zone, which the Japanese government ignored. As of June, airborne radiation mapping confirmed that a broad plume of contamination extending 80 km northwest exceeded the levels of the Chernobyl exclusion zone, with a larger area at its periphery exceeding the Chernobyl agricultural restriction zone. In certain 'hot spots' 40 km from the plant, the IAEA found levels over fifty times their 'operational criteria for evacuation'. The consequences would have been worse if the prevailing winds in the first week of the disaster were not offshore.

◀ ◀ ◀ ◀ ◀

Radioactive fallout from a nuclear reactor mainly consists of the radioactive isotopes of iodine, caesium and tellurium. These elements form fine suspended particles in the air (aerosols), which due to their weight will fall to the ground gradually, with their distribution consequent on meteorological conditions. Although we speak of radial zones from the plant, the shape of the fallout represents a directional plume or plumes. Such particles contaminate all vegetation, clothing and any other surfaces including water sources within their path. Those that pose the greatest health threat are Cs-137 (with a half-life of thirty years) and I-131 (eight days). Iodine is absorbed into the bloodstream through inhalation and ingestion, concentrated by the thyroid gland, whereas caesium is deposited throughout the body. Caesium takes between ten and 100 days for half of it to be excreted from the body, so it poses a significant hazard once absorbed. Unlike iodine, which loses most of its potential for harm in a few months, caesium remains hazardous for several hundred years.

Although there is effectively an 'air curtain' at the equator that prevents contamination from reaching the southern hemisphere, minimal amounts have been detected in northern Australian monitoring stations.

There are two types of recognised ionising radiation (IR) health effects: deterministic and stochastic. The severity of deterministic effects is directly proportional to the absorbed radiation dose. These include skin damage and blood disorders due to bone marrow effects. The higher the dose the worse, for example, the skin radiation burn. These have a threshold below which they do not occur (although this may vary between individuals), which around 100 millisieverts (mSv), at which point blood cell production begins to be impaired.

Deterministic effects exceeding 1000 mSv induce acute radiation sickness—with vomiting, diarrhoea and shedding of mucosal linings of the gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts—bone marrow suppression and sterility. Once the dose exceeds more than 3000–5000 mSv, death is likely in a matter of days to weeks.

Stochastic effects are ‘probabilistic’ in nature; in other words, the higher the dose the greater the chance of them occurring, although their eventual severity is the same, irrespective of the original dose. The main stochastic effect is cancer; however, because it is indistinguishable from other unrelated cancers, attribution is very difficult. The current risk coefficients for the development of cancer are approximately 8 per cent per 1000 mSv (a one in twelve chance) and 5 per cent for cancer fatality (one in twenty). The US National Academy of Sciences reviewed the effects of low-level IR (defined as less than 100 mSv) in their seminal 2006 report, concluding: ‘there is a linear dose-response relationship between exposure to ionizing radiation and the development of solid cancers in humans. It is unlikely that there is a threshold below which cancers are not induced’.

Ionising radiation imparts its deleterious carcinogenic health effects via damage to the cell’s genetic blueprint (DNA), leading to genetic mutations. This then predisposes the initiation of cancer when the regulatory mechanisms of the cell fail. Most solid cancers do not appear for at least ten to twenty years, although some may take many decades, and leukaemia can arise in as little as five years. IR is classified as a Class 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research in Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organization (WHO), the highest classification consistent with certainty of its carcinogenicity.

Concentrations of radioactive iodine off the coast have been measured at over 4300 times the legal limit, making this the worst maritime radioactive accident in history. Seawater contamination has destroyed any remnants of the fishing industry that were not wiped out by the tsunami.

We can consider two broad groups at risk. Firstly, emergency workers at the plant, unlike the general population, are at risk of developing deterministic effects as their upper allowable occupational doses have been increased to 250 mSv from the original international maximum of 100 mSv in an emergency, and up from the 100 mSv total occupational dose limits for nuclear workers over five years, and the 1 mSv per annum dose allowable to the public. One incident induced radiation burns to two emergency workers’ legs after they stepped in highly radioactive water in reactor two, with each worker receiving a calculated total dose of 600 mSv. By mid April over thirty workers had received doses in excess of 100 mSv, although the average dose was only 7 mSv per worker. In order to limit occupational doses, workers have been recruited on a rotating basis from a large pool. A temporary base of 2000 workers, composed largely of itinerant contractors from around Japan, has been established at the nearby resort town of Iwaki-Yumoto. They are referred to as nuclear gypsies, the name writer Kunio Horie gave to workers who have traditionally performed the dirtiest, most dangerous jobs for Japan’s power utilities.

The industry has relied on temporary workers for maintenance and repair work since the nuclear plant construction boom in the 1970s. Now, as then, those from the lowest rungs of Japanese society work for meagre wages, with little training or experience of hazardous environments. It is questionable whether proper monitoring of so many workers can be thorough enough. TEPCO, the plant owner, has already confessed to inadequate internal dose monitoring of workers in the first few months. Even if the doses they receive are below reference limits, it is highly likely that some of these workers will die of cancer. No cases of acute radiation sickness have been reported to date.

The general public is also exposed to radiation from the deposition of fallout, predominantly I-131 in the first few weeks and then Cs-137 and Cs-134 subsequently. The eventual contamination plume has extended beyond the initial 20 km exclusion zone, thus putting at risk many who were not evacuated or subject to adequate counter-measures. Potential annual doses for these residents, according to the French ISRN, may eventually reach up to 200 mSv.

It is not clear to what extent counter-measures were adopted for the populace beyond the immediate evacuation zone. It is of note that the US NRC and the Australian government had shortly after

←←←
Nuclear Sickness
Peter Karamoskos



Emergency workers at the plant are at risk of developing deterministic IR effects as their upper allowable occupational doses have been increased to 250 mSv from the original international maximum of 100 mSv in an emergency ... Even if the doses they receive are below reference limits, it is highly likely that some of these workers will die of cancer.

the commencement of the disaster advised their citizens within an 80 km radius to evacuate. There are of course other considerations before an evacuation is contemplated as a mass evacuation in such a heavily populated region would not be without risks of its own. Nevertheless, the Japanese government failed to even advocate a simple counter-measure such as advising the public to stay indoors beyond 30 km which would have minimised the risk to these people. More cynically perhaps is the observation that increasing the exclusion zone also massively increases the compensation bill which will be ultimately paid by the government.

The Japanese authorities have shown questionable regard for the safety of children, including pre-schoolers, infants and the unborn, by raising the 'acceptable' public dose to children in the Fukushima prefecture from 1 mSv per annum to 20 mSv, which corresponds to the occupational limit of adult nuclear workers. We know that children are at up to five times more risk of developing radiogenic cancer than adults. As a consequence, Professor Toshiso Kosaku, a senior prime-ministerial nuclear adviser, submitted his resignation on April 29, saying could not stay and allow the government to set what he called improper radiation limits for primary schools near the plant. Concurrently, a worldwide medical campaign was instituted to reverse this decision, and it appears that this is in the process of being redressed. Targeted evacuations of the most highly contaminated areas are proposed, and personal

dosimeters are to be given to 34,000 children in Fukushima city 65 km from the plant to monitor their cumulative doses.


Caesium contamination has been identified at levels exceeding acceptable limits in spinach, mushrooms, bamboo, tea leaves, dairy and fish from the regions surrounding the plant. Contaminated hay has been found as far as 120 km away, raising concerns about the true extent of fallout. In July, beef from over 1000 herds of cattle with from contaminated feedstock was found to have been sold throughout much of Japan, with caesium levels up to six times higher than the regulated maximum. Although eating such meat on a few occasions is not likely to be hazardous, it underscores the difficulties inherent in the food-testing regimes designed to protect the public over the longer term. This minimal public health service should be functional several months after the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl, and yet it appears the Japanese simply don't have the time, money or capacity to accomplish it in the midst of such a large disaster.

In the longer term, excess cancer cases will be much harder to define given the relatively high background incidence of cancer and the long latency period of its appearance. It took at least twenty-five years for the excess cancers to become statistically evident in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atom bomb survivors. The prompt evacuation of people from the immediate surrounding environment of Fukushima, notwithstanding the insufficient exclusion zone, and other counter-measures will also have significantly mitigated the development of cancer. Even though risk models of cancer induction can be used to predict the likely cancers over the next six decades, it is possible that we will never know the true number of actual excess cancers in the general population due to inherent statistical limitations and large uncertainties, even several decades after the event, unless appropriate large-scale population studies are implemented and adequately resourced. Excess thyroid cancers are a rare malignancy and hence more easily statistically detected. The Japanese government has just announced lifelong thyroid monitoring of some 360,000 Fukushima prefectural residents aged eighteen years and under to detect thyroid cancer.

There are broader social and psychological implications of nuclear catastrophes that are difficult to accurately assess, much less predict. The zones most severely affected by contamination will remain no-man's lands for one to two hundred years. Assurances that these large areas can be adequately rehabilitated to any significant scale seem wildly overoptimistic. The fact that people from these highly populated areas will never return home again is traumatic enough; the social dislocation and fragmentation of once tightly knit communities will only serve to exacerbate psychological alienation, leading to the increased levels of depression, substance abuse and other psychiatric disorders.

Nuclear disasters are unique in their potential for devastating social, economic and health outcomes, the reach of which can be international and the consequences profound. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in April, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster:

To many, nuclear energy looks to be a relatively clean and logical choice in an era of increasing resource scarcity. Yet the record requires us to ask painful questions. Have we correctly calculated its risks and costs? Are we doing all we can to keep the world's people safe?

The unfortunate truth is that we are likely to see more such disasters. 

Income Management

Eva Cox

Seismic shifts in welfare provision, but where is the evidence for income management?

This Federal Labor government claims both to have Labor values and to use evidence as its policy driver. These claims are confounded in many of the social policy areas they are pursuing but none more so than in their current policy initiatives on income management. Here the government shows few signs of either fairness or a serious examination of any evidence that income management works to benefit its unwilling participants.

This article deals with the various forms of compulsory income management that involve quarantining a proportion of government payments imposed on certain categories of people. The policy was first applied in 2007 as part of the NT Emergency Response, also known as the Intervention. It targeted all Commonwealth income recipients in seventy-three NT Aboriginal communities, quarantining half of their payments and specifying what the money was not to be used for and where it could be spent. The policy was part of a package, ostensibly to reduce child abuse, and was not based on any evidence that controlling 50 per cent of income would bring about the changes desired by government or by local communities. There may be arguments about what comprises evidence, but this is a particularly data-free zone, both before and since this program was introduced.

The government also funded two less universal versions of income management, in Western Australia and Cape York, which targeted identified 'problem families'. After three years of the NT scheme being applied to all recipients of payments in the specified Aboriginal communities, the program was reworked and in 2010 was amended and extended to most income recipients in the Northern Territory on a non-racialised basis. This last change was partly the result of UN criticisms of the

government's suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act that had allowed it to apply income management to Aboriginal people alone. Rather than cancel the racially discriminatory compulsory aspect of the policy, it has now been extended to non-Indigenous groups, which begs the question as to whether this was always intended. The government, in a recent Budget 2011 decision, has further extended income management programs using the less compulsory WA version of this program. From 2012, it will apply in five new areas in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia.

The rationale for selecting these new areas is unclear but their diverse locations suggest this move is the beginning of a full national roll-out to what the federal government would define as appropriate target areas with higher than average numbers of welfare income recipients. This strategy is in line with government assumptions that the problems faced by those who are not in the paid workforce are partly communal but mostly personal, not structural.

The solution, therefore, is pressuring people, via their entitlements to payments, to re-order their lives so they are pushed into paid work. The Budget contained other targeted coercive participation requirements to be placed on working-age recipients of benefits, designed to further pressure the million-plus not employed to look for paid work, without noting that there are only 200,000 job vacancies. This proposed set of changes moves them further from having any sense of control over their lives as even their payments will be seriously conditional.

The signs are, therefore, that by the next Budget ever more working-age recipients of welfare payments will be subjected to control over their spending. While the current spending limits are fairly broad, usually 50 per cent to be spent in designated stores, with alcohol and cigarettes barred, last year's tender for a new Basics Card suggests including product barcode readings. This change would allow further controls at a later date. Comments by Minister Jenny Macklin on the Menzies Health Research NT purchasing study suggest that she would like to see such 'unhealthy' products as soft drinks targeted.

The increasing use of income management brings Australia closer to the US food stamp model of welfare. It confirms a seismic shift away from the post-WWII model of state entitlements to a decent basic income for all, to a paternalistic, conditional welfare model that rewards the 'deserving poor'. What is particularly worthy of comment is that this change has been introduced into general welfare policy and to the community by using Indigenous recipients of payments as a stalking horse. Indigenous income recipients were targeted because of their presumed inability

←←←
Income Management
Eva Cox
Eva Cox is a long-term activist and feminist. She is currently working with Jumbunna Indigenous house of learning at the University of Technology, Sydney, and is developing alternative policies to make societies more civil. She can be reached at eva.cox@uts.edu.au.



to manage money and families, a racially based assumption that disguised basic changes to wider policies. Because these changes started in Aboriginal communities, few have noticed that they might be harbingers of broader policy shifts.

Where is the Evidence?

There has been little formal support for the imposition of compulsory income management. From the original concerns raised in 2007 by many Aboriginal groups, through to the 2008 report from the NTER Review Board chaired by Peter Yu, and the available reports from the extensive consultation run for the government by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), there has been a consistent view that income management should not be compulsory. The only group to publicly support the imposition of compulsory income management has been the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC). Their support has allowed Minister Macklin and others to define this as a gender issue, but many other women in Central Australia and elsewhere do not support the compulsory model.

There have been various formal inquiry and submission processes on both the program and possible changes. Before passing the Bills that facilitated the 2010 changes, the Senate Community Affairs Committee held an inquiry into the proposed income management legislation and related changes. Of the more than eighty submissions received, nearly all those covering income management opposed the extension of forms of coercive income management. This included groups such as the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA), the medical group AMSANT, and various land councils, which all stated serious concerns. Objections also came from major welfare agencies that had looked carefully at the evidence and statistics. Many claimed there was a lack of evidence that the program was working and that none of the studies offered clear evidence of the program's benefits exceeding possible harm.

Many of the studies used as government evidence were criticised. For example, Australia's peak social services body ACOSS commented:

Data collected by Centrelink on purchasing patterns have ... been shown to be of limited value. The Department of Human Services gave evidence to the Senate Select Committee on Remote and Regional Indigenous Communities inquiry that 64 per cent of income managed funds were being spent on food. This was then clarified as being money spent at stores that primarily sell food.

A survey of store owners by FaHCSIA was also of limited evidentiary weight. Conducted by departmental staff rather than independent researchers, store owners' perceptions and observations were relied on, in lieu of quantitative data, to inform conclusions not only about purchasing patterns but also about supposed broader social and behavioural change among income-managed customers. As well as customer shopping habits (with a reported increase in the amount of healthy food purchased), store owners' comments were relied upon for evidence of change in familial relationships and humbugging, and in relation to mistrust and confusion about income management.

These are serious criticisms by a major agency of the main research reports the government claims offer evidence for the decision to maintain and extend income management. Another report they mention was by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which claimed that small surveys done or funded by FaHCSIA did not offer evidence that the program worked, although they have since been used to justify the types of changes the government has pursued.

There are other studies, never quoted by the government, that cast further doubt on the legitimacy of these programs. The study by AIDA showed that possible short-term benefits were outweighed by

potential long-term serious damage caused by the processes employed. The Menzies Health Research Unit's careful statistical study of purchases pre and post the introduction of income management in a group of stores showed no statistical evidence of better purchasing patterns after income management.

The majority Senate report noted these objections but oddly failed to use lack of evidence as a reason to amend or delay the legislative changes. Despite recording concern about the lack of evidence, the ALP backed the Bills, which were then passed with support from the Opposition. ALP senators did ask that more evidence be sought before any further extension of the program beyond the Northern Territory, but the new programs announced in the 2011 Budget show this has not happened.

The government has committed funding for a three year evaluation of the NT scheme, but in their requirements for a design for such an evaluation, they clearly signalled they wanted a report by the end of 2011, to inform further policy changes. These changes are already in train, despite the lack of the report and the little data on the benefits of the NT scheme so far, except for the numbers of people enrolled.

The so-called pilot scheme in Western Australia, Perth and Kimberly has just been refunded till June 2012 and it is a version of this model that is being expanded in the 2011 budget. This more limited project covers child protection-referred families and 'voluntary' recipients. The current scheme has just been evaluated. The pilot covers a city and a rural Indigenous community, with a mix of families under voluntary income management and compulsory child protection income management. The government has claimed that the recent evaluation showed clear evidence that potential recipients benefited, but a careful reading of the evaluation does not support this view.

The evaluation was based mainly on the reported views of 100 or so recipients of the two types of income management from both locations. This means the numbers were very small, and thus unreliable. Participants' responses did agree that income management had been useful in helping them manage money and care for children, but there was no supporting hard data, from bank accounts or health reports, to validate their claims. Given the possibility of gratuitous concurrence (being polite to interviewers), the small numbers responding, and the payment of \$50 to take part in the evaluation, the reliability of the evidence is questionable. My doubts as a researcher are similar to those voiced in a report by the WA Council of Social Services, which concludes with the following:

Whilst this initial evaluation provides focus and initial qualitative data, it fails to answer many questions, and raises further questions about the effectiveness of the government's income management programs in the longer

term. Furthermore, there are enough doubts around the rigour of the research, such as sampling error, attribution, and satisfaction survey methodology that the Council cautions very strongly against relying on it as a basis to formulate new, or validate existing, public policy.

Despite this judgment, the original research report is one of two main studies used in the Budget papers as supporting the extension of the program. The other study, which FaHCSIA also claims as support for the new extended program, was the original research write-up by the most scrupulous of government statistical collectors, the AIHW. Mentioned above, that report expressed doubts to FaHCSIA in 2009, which continued to claim it as evidence children were eating more and were healthier due to income management. The small survey in the NT was described thus:

This was based on interviews with parents in which more than half of those interviewed reported their children were eating more and were healthier. A majority of clients interviewed also reported that there was less gambling (63 per cent), less drinking/alcohol abuse (60.9 per cent) and less 'humbugging' (52.1 per cent). The authors of the (AIHW) report, however, were careful to identify the limitations of the available evidence. They stated that, 'The research methods used in the income management evaluation (point-in-time descriptive surveys and qualitative research) would all sit towards the bottom of the evidence hierarchy'. Later they commented: 'Due to the absence of a comparison group, the evaluation was dependent on the perceptions of a range of stakeholders, which would have been strengthened if supplemented with empirical indicators.' (Quoted in the ACOSS submission to the Senate inquiry.)

Surely these two reports, which are quoted by FaHCSIA as supporting the latest extension, together with the inadequacies of the research also noted above, are an inadequate basis for making major policy changes. More doubts about the usefulness of income management will be detailed in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Indigenous Policy*.

Widening Income Management

The above process of selective reading of research reports and the turning of a blind-eye to the many contending views, allowed a core group of ministers and bureaucrats to implement a big, general policy shift almost unnoticed, and certainly without

the wide public discussion such a change should generate. The new legislation passed in June 2010 was supported by both the government and the Opposition and only opposed by the Greens. Now the government has the power to apply this policy to selected areas with welfare recipients anywhere in Australia.

The 2010 policies included some changes that would make income quarantining more generally acceptable. This included a shift of focus from all welfare payment recipients, the blanket restriction on any Aboriginal recipient under the Intervention, to covering just working-age benefit recipients. The change excludes those on age, disability and carer payment in the general population, as these are the more 'respectable' state dependants and likely to attract public support if upset by loss of control over their money. The legislative changes cover, with some time factors, recipients of Newstart, Youth Allowance for non-students, Parenting Payments and some recipients of Special Benefit, for example, some refugees. These categories are convenient tabloid media targets who are the least likely to attract major public support.

The new legislation does allow those declared to be recipients to apply for exemptions, but relatively few Aboriginal people have achieved this in the Northern Territory, and we are told that forward estimates assume about only up to 10 per cent will be granted. There is also a bribe available to encourage those in the Northern Territory no longer covered by compulsory income management to stay on as voluntary recipients for an extra \$250 after six months. There are some recorded examples of confused or even angry people being pressured to stay on when they want to opt out.

We are now facing a major shift in policies on payments that is likely to be imposed, slowly but surely, Australia wide. Given the costs are considerable (the estimate for staff and administration costs in the Northern Territory was about \$4000 per recipient per year), the government should have clear evidence that there are benefits for the communities and individuals affected. However, as shown, the evidence is that this policy does not create more individual or community well-being. It does not make children safer or communities less violent and there is very limited evidence that many of the local communities affected want it or find it beneficial.

Such serious policy changes need more than assertions to validate their worth. From 1 July 2012, income management will be applied to more 'vulnerable families and individuals' as assessed by Centrelink social workers, and as there is no proof it works, this is a problem. There are some suggestions that it may undermine self-confidence and a sense of autonomy which is elsewhere seen as a major consequence of inequality. The negative effects of income management are yet to be studied.

The whole process outlined above raises serious questions about the social policy credentials of a supposedly Labor government. The use of initiatives like the Howard government's Intervention to maintain policies that are discriminatory against outgroups, and racist in origin, is seriously problematic. What is interesting is that few in the progressive community are looking at these areas of social policy and considering what needs to be done to move back to a human rights and equity model. **a**

←←←
Income Management
Eva Cox

→→→
The Harry Potter
Finale
Valerie Krips

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



ARTS AND CULTURE

The Harry Potter Finale

Valerie Krips
.....

Crossover fiction: childlike wonder or infantilised culture?

phenomenon: a thing that appears ... the cause of which is in question.

Oxford English Dictionary

The Harry Potter phenomenon has reached its climax: the last film, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2*, is undoubtedly playing in a cinema near you, probably on a couple of screens, in 2D and 3D, and in many sessions per day. In London, where the film had its premiere in July, fans slept out for days in Trafalgar Square. They were waiting for the moment when the film's stars would walk across the red carpet sweeping down the steps of London's most famous square to reach a podium set up at the base of Nelson's Column. Those who weren't lucky enough to get one of the 8000 wristbands giving admittance to the square itself on the day contented themselves with lining the route. This was also decorated and carpeted in red, and snaked from Trafalgar Square to Leicester Square, where the film was to be shown simultaneously in several cinemas to accommodate all the guests at the premiere. The many stars of the film, the books' author J.K. Rowling, associated directors, screenwriters, directors of photography and so on were greeted with an acclaim that was almost elegiac in its intensity. The premiere marked an ending to a saga that has, so it seems, extended beyond the books and films.

The books have been greeted with cries of joy: look, children reading. Within a very short time the Harry Potter series took its place among what are called crossover books, which are read by adults as well as children: look, adults reading too!

The first book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published in 1997; the film of the same name was released four years later. Many of the fans interviewed on the day of the premiere told stories of listening to the first book as a bedtime story: they've really grown up with Harry Potter. London's *Evening Standard* reported a twenty-one-year-old from Oklahoma saying, 'Everyone feels like they're taking part in a major historic event'. Leaving aside the hyperbole brought on by what must have been acres of red carpet, not to mention Trafalgar Square itself rigged up with huge banners carrying portraits of the stars, and the presence of all those highly photogenic actors (it has been said, with perhaps only a little exaggeration, that the films have employed almost every living British actor, many of them present at the premiere, to the delight of the fans), the scale of the Harry Potter phenomenon is obviously worth thinking about.

The series has sold more than 450 million copies. The first book, retitled *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in the United States, is available in Latin and sixty-six other languages (and counting). By the time the second book was published, fans were queuing at bookshops waiting for the doors to open on the day of the book's release. After their purchase, some of the keener buyers began to read as they walked out of the shop, a sight I actually witnessed in a small market town in England. I imagine it wasn't the only place where readers simply couldn't wait to see what happened next.

The books have been greeted with cries of joy: look, children reading. Within a very short time the Harry Potter series took its place among what are called crossover books, which are read by adults as well as children: look, adults reading too! Such a readership is not new: many 'classic' books were written in the knowledge that they would be read aloud to families: all of Dickens' major novels, appearing in serial form, were family reading. But whether J.K. Rowling has captured the same kind of audience as did Dickens—who was, of course, also very popular and feted in his time—is not entirely clear.

To begin with, the Harry Potter books were written for an audience of children. Most of the well-known motifs of children's fiction appear in them: the hero, Harry, is an orphan; he lives with a family who do not treat him very well; at eleven he learns his true nature (he is a wizard); he discovers the existence of a parallel world to which he belongs; he also learns that he has an enemy. He goes off to boarding school, where he becomes good at games and has adventures; he makes two stalwart friends who become his helpers; he finds that he must fight for the good and risk his life doing so. Most of the elements of childish wish-fulfilment are in place here, as are those from myth, folk and fairy-tale.

And of religion, it seems. When still a graduate student teaching fellow at Yale, Danielle Tumminio, now a minister, proposed the class 'Christian Theology and Harry Potter' in 2009; bombarded by requests, she was forced to turn some students away. Her book *God and Harry Potter at Yale: Teaching Faith and Fiction in an Ivy League Classroom* followed in 2010. Hers is one of a number of books about Harry Potter and God, good and evil, spirituality, and other religious themes published in the last year or so. There's no doubt that the crossover has gone very far indeed. Rather than children coming to understand a little about an adult's world through reading or listening to books written with adult readers in mind—as, say, in Dickens—here we have adults thinking in terms of a book written primarily for children.

Unlike Dickens, whose interest in social reform is integral to his characters and narrative development, Rowling's world is childlike, in what is already an old-fashioned sense, from the simplicity of its concept of good and evil to its plot devices and themes.

All children's books, from picture books to those for young adults, have passed through a series of processes, beginning with writing, and moving through the defiles of publishing: editing, marketing and so on. If nothing else (and there is much else, importantly including the role children's books play in creating the childhood they represent), books for children constitute a category of their own, have their own critics and market and, above all, must run the gauntlet of parental and educational approval. Adults undertake almost all of these processes on behalf of children or, to put it another way, for children. Adults, in short, are the producers and children are the market. This is not to dispute, of course, that child readers have the same privileges as do adults in terms of making meaning in a text, so long as their comparative lack of experience of the world, and the place of reading in it, is taken into account.

One of the themes to which the US critic Neil Postman returned again and again was the importance of the difference between adulthood and childhood, which he took to be one of the cornerstones of Western society. He thought that the differences between children and adults were disappearing as Western societies lost touch with an idea (or ideal) of childhood that, arising in the late Middle Ages, reached its height in the early years of the twentieth century. By the century's end that idea was in the process of dissolution. As the idea/ideal of childhood began to decline, so too did the idea of adulthood, childhood's opposite pole. A general tendency towards immaturity and irresponsibility in adults was the likely result. One of the signs of this (unfortunate) change could be found in an increasing tendency for adults and children to like the same music, films, and television programs.

He didn't have anything much to say about books, but it's not hard to draw general conclusions from his argument.

The lost childhood that Postman had in mind is played out in the Harry Potter books that, in many respects, are reminiscent of British children's books of the 1950s or 60s. Middle-class children, dressed in nice uniforms, walk across quadrangles, go to classes in harmonious if slightly gothic surroundings, and sleep snug in their boarding school dormitories. Working and playing hard, and in many ways ordinary, the children become the means by which the fantasy of the wizard world is stitched to the fictional 'reality': the fantastic world is an addition to the real world, not a viable alternative to it, as the ending of the books and films makes clear. Nineteen years after the final episode in the Harry/Voldemort drama that has driven the series, Harry and his wife Ginny see their son off to Hogwarts as he begins his own wizarding education. Once he's on the train they will turn away and go back to their lives in the hidden wizarding enclaves that exist beside the 'real' Muggles' world.

With or without his fantasy self, Harry doesn't pass very well as a contemporary boy in either the books or the films. He's a hero of the old-fashioned kind. Chris Columbus, the director of the first two films in the series, remarked that he wanted to create a sense that the films could have been made in 1955 or 2001; what he was hoping to achieve was a 'sense of timelessness'; the timelessness, in other words, of the idea/ideal of childhood, the one which Postman thought to be in rapid decline.

The popularity of Harry Potter and his fantasy world can be thought of as a response to the loss that Postman and many other critics have anatomised, pointing to an increasing sexualisation and 'adulthoodification' of childhood, to use Postman's term. From this perspective the books and films can be interpreted as a last flowering, not just of the childhoods of the fans who thronged Trafalgar Square, but of the idea and ideal of childhood that has taken shape over the past 500 years. If Susan Greenfield, the British scientist and professor of synaptic pharmacology at Oxford's Lincoln College, is right, children's brains are changing as I write, a result of developments in modern technology and social networking sites. She frequently remarks that children today tend to live in a world that limits them in ways that older generations could not have imagined. An example of this limitation is one that any person over about forty might point to: a lack of freedom from adult supervision. Children's range of literal geographic freedom—that is, the area in which they are free to roam unattended—is, so some research claims, 90 per cent less than experienced in childhoods just twenty years ago, for example. Childhood cannot be the same again, if it ever was: childhood is as much a cultural construct as a physical stage in life, and like every other cultural form is ever-changing.

A retreat into fantasy as a compensation for the ills of the world is probably as old as time. Fantasy can

←←←

The Harry Potter
Finale

Valerie Krips

also be a means by which to launch a critique of the real world. Compensatory rather than critical, Rowling's novels are an old-fashioned kind of children's writing, in spite of all the hype and wizardry. The technology of Harry's world, for example, is remarkably primitive in comparison to the technology that brought it to the screen. Harry and his friends and adversaries depend on spells—magic—to manage their world, not some astonishing extension of the human technology of the fictional 'real' world of Muggles, the non-magic folk, over which some wizards marvel with a kind of charmed but baffled condescension. It's a world of fairytale myth and folklore, dressed up in modern clothes and complete with modern references. Yet, unlike Peter Pan, that prototypical figure of children's books of the golden age of children's fiction, Harry does grow up. And he does so happily ever after, with Ginny and their children, a male Cinderella figure no more.

Postman's analysis of the end of childhood took account of the history of the ideal we

have inherited, pointing out the stages of its development in which children moved from being co-workers to dependents, from marriage at eleven to schooling well into adolescence and beyond. Perhaps children's brains are changing as a result of contemporary technology, and perhaps a new kind of childhood is emerging, for good or ill. Rowling's novels and the films that followed them have little to say to this conundrum. Unlike Dickens, whose interest in social reform is integral to his characters and narrative development, Rowling's world is childlike, in what is already an old-fashioned sense, from the simplicity of its concept of good and evil to its plot devices and themes. Whether this is in response to an increasingly childish or infantilised culture and/or another element in this culture's creation remains a puzzle over which many heads will be scratched. Whatever the case, 450 million copies of the book and eight films are out there, at work. What is certain is that, for the moment at least, the Harry Potter series is a phenomenon, the cause of which poses more questions about our contemporary world than can at present be easily or simply answered. **a**

Diamonds

are for Everyone

Kevin Murray

→→→

Diamonds are for
Everyone

Kevin Murray

Kevin Murray is an independent writer and curator and an adjunct professor at RMIT University. For links related to this article, see <www.craftunbound.net>.

a ←08 2011–09 2011
No 113

New trends in contemporary jewellery

Melbourne has recently become the site of a radical jewellery practice that seeks to question the conventions of value, particularly in monetary form. This group sits within the marginal but globally diverse realm of contemporary jewellery.

The contemporary jewellery movement began in post-war Europe as a critique of preciousness. The aim was to liberate ornament from a purely monetary value. Rather than use only diamonds and gold, artists celebrated the preciousness of alternative materials, such as aluminium and plastic. While this was initially a way of giving value to labour, particularly creative innovation, recent jewellers have been more radical in questioning the basis of monetary value itself.

At Schmuck, the annual festival of ornament in Munich, the jeweller Stefan Heuser presented a work titled 'The Difference Between Us'. It consisted of one hundred identical cast sterling rings. The only difference between them was the price, which ranged from \$1 to \$100 in dollar increments. While most rushed to buy the cheapest rings, a few chose prices for aesthetic reasons. Would you prefer a ring costing \$49 or \$88?

Ethical Metalsmiths from the United States promotes jewellery production that doesn't involve environmentally damaging mining. In their 'Radical Jewelry Makeover' events, participants bring their unloved jewellery to be recycled into new original pieces. They receive a credit for their contribution, which goes toward purchasing a new piece. Money doesn't have to change hands, just the bracelets.

Jewellery provides a way of deconstructing money as a material substance. In a recent survey of Latin American jewellery, Argentinean Elisa Gulminelli created a small sculpture that juxtaposed a mountain of pesos from the past with a tiny coin representing their current equivalent: today's currency is tomorrow's trash.

This jewellery re-connects with ornament's origins as a form of protection. In contrast with the pearls and diamonds that find a resting place on the bodies of the status-conscious wealthy—with little resale value—the power of amulets increases through circulation.

In New Zealand, Matthew Wilson has applied his Maori heritage to the fine weaving of metal. Alongside this, he has developed a striking technique of extracting the motifs of coins from their background. Out of mass manufactured articles, he has created individual works of art. There is something magical in the way he has liberated coinage from its heavy duty of exchange. His work brings into stark relief the enduring national symbols.


In Melbourne, a particular school of urban jewellery has evolved that seeks to make value out of nothing. This can involve collecting aged plastic from gutters, as Roseanne Bartley does in her *Seeding the Cloud* project, where she uses her Coburg neighbourhood to create an elegant necklace out of what the streets provide. Bartley is a New Zealand ex-pat who was originally taught bone-carving by a Maori in Auckland. She has specialised in using leftover materials, such as her series 'Homage to Qwerty' that made handsome jewels out of typewriter keys and strikers. She has been particularly interested in the sociology of jewellery as a way of connecting people together, even constructing human necklaces for a performance work. *Seeding the Cloud* employs the jeweller's craft to create poetic expressions of place out of its detritus.

Caz Guiney, a colleague of Bartley's, attracted controversy through a 2003 project that questioned the notions of preciousness. Her project *City Rings* involved placing gold ornaments in secret locations around Melbourne's CBD, a gold brooch on a rubbish bin, for example. This quickly became the topic of the day for talk radio, with accusations of government funding being thrown away on trash. Meanwhile, in an almost atavistic gold fever, prospectors scaled city buildings to find Guiney's jewels. Guiney eventually had to call her project off to prevent law suits from those injured in the process. Since then, she has continued in a more modest way to plant jewellery in public urban spaces, short-circuiting the relationship between preciousness and private property.

More recently, the collective Part B has sprung up to realise jewellery 'flash mob' style events in the city. Last year, their exhibition titled 'Burgled' invited the public to come and steal works on display in a Melbourne lane. Another collective, Public Assembly, is located in the Camberwell Market and produces jewellery from curious vintage objects that visitors find in the nearby stalls. The resulting pieces can then be paid for by donation. For these collective jewellers, the worth is not in the materials themselves but the stories that people bring with them.

Of particular note is Vicki Mason's *Broaching Change Project*, which is designed to introduce the idea of an Australian republic into everyday life by person-to-person contact. Mason has produced three beautifully made brooches based on the wattle, oregano and rose, as currencies of communal gardening. Despite their obvious value, she distributes these for free. The only proviso is that when someone notes how attractive these are, you are obliged to give them over, as long as they agree to do the same when it comes to them. Since the project started in early 2010, various hosts of these brooches have been contributing their comments about a garden-led republicanism.

This jewellery re-connects with ornament's origins as a form of protection. In contrast with the pearls and diamonds that find a resting place on the bodies of the status-conscious wealthy—with little resale value—the power of amulets increases through circulation. 'Southern Charms', an exhibition opening next year at RMIT Gallery, includes charms newly designed by jewellers from Australia, New Zealand and Chile to bring luck to contemporary problems, such as school exams and environmental disaster.

It's easy to dismiss much contemporary art as a means of constellating closed networks of cultural elites. Contemporary jewellery is even more vulnerable to this criticism through its association with status symbols like diamonds and pearls. But this is exactly where its power lies today, as a way of subverting fetishised forms of value. 

The City without Footpaths

The city without footpaths
is one for skywalking
in the coy glimmer of star routes.
So many tracks under these lights here
that one may not take at the same time,
switching will take another life, and to make up
for scrabble is offered a juicy postscript;
the same turning for a pitch one thought
was known—but the toes hit
the lumpy edge of a rathole.
It too belongs to the base.
What's that ground to grab your feet?
Only a step back and the apple blossoms,
earnest of season perhaps or due,
light up the distance, over there.

Alamgir Hashmi

POSTCARD

<<<

Diamonds are for
Everyone

Kevin Murray

Holiday

in Cambodia

Jorge Sotirios

→→→

Holiday in
Cambodia

Jorge Sotirios

Jorge Sotirios' South American odyssey **Lonesome George, C'est Moi!** will be published by Big Sky Publishing in 2011.

↙↙↙

The City without
Footpaths

Alamgir Hashmi

Alamgir Hashmi has published eleven books of poetry and several volumes of literary criticism. **A Choice of Hashmi's Verse** (Oxford University Press, 1997) was followed by another selection in the United Kingdom. He has been Professor of English and Comparative Literature in European, US and Asian universities. Email: <alamgirhashmi@hotmail.com>.



08 2011–09 2011
No 113

Disaster tourism in the Killing Fields and bomb trekking tours in Laos

The post-punk era certainly had its defining moments, with songs of teenage angst seared onto the memory of a generation. In the period from 1978 to 1981 jarring guitar chords were often married to leftist politics, and served with a high dose of youthful cynicism. The Dead Kennedys' 'Holiday in Cambodia' summed up a generation's malaise with an aural blast that coupled insolent lyrics with killer riffs: *It's a holiday in Cambodia / Where people dress in black / A holiday in Cambodia / Where you'll kiss arse or crack*. Jello Biafra's screeching vocals provided ironic commentary to Pol Pot's nightmarish regime (1975–78) when world attention focused on the Killing Fields and the infamous torture school Tuong Sleng (S-21), some fifteen minutes by pedalled rickshaw from Phnom Penh. Flared jeans and ritual murder sat side-by-side in this confused and contested period. Why would any holiday-maker want to visit this hell-hole?

But if we're honest in our historical memory, we'd recall that Cambodia was previously a holiday destination. Jackie Kennedy and Catherine Deneuve swanned about on the palm-fringed beaches of Sihanoukville in the late 1960s—evidence of a prior history when Cambodia was a pleasurable sojourn for jaded tourists. Today, tourism is once again thriving in Cambodia.

No tourist would ever lead a revolution, of course, so they are still welcomed in oppressive regimes (Burma anyone?) and kept safe by governments keen on safeguarding the foreigner. Dictators don't rule Cambodia nor is it oppressive, but it has a compliant government keen on following neo-liberal programs, competing in the global economy while tightening police and army into the party apparatus. Tourism fits nicely into this paradigm by bringing in foreign currency and some favourable PR (a glance at weekend travel supplements is proof enough). Hun Sen's Cambodia People's Party (CPP) is committed to reminding tourists of Cambodia's raw holiday potential (Phnom Penh's cultural clout is evident in the gilded palaces, likewise in the bespectacled intellectuals playing chess at sidewalk cafes), but

balks at acknowledging the UN War Crime Tribunals to bring the Khmer Rouge to justice. But as a youthful nation (the average age is twenty-two) emerging from its horrific past, do Cambodians need to be reminded of past traumas by the West's conscience?

Tourists visit Cambodia's shrines of remembrance out of curiosity and respect—a form of disaster tourism pioneered by Chernobyl. The Choeung Ek genocidal site that focuses on one major Killing Field showcases nine tiers of densely packed skulls, bones and bloodied rags in a memorial tower. Surrounding pits used for disposing corpses have been reclaimed by tufts of overgrown grass, with the occasional butterfly weaving an aerial *danse macabre*.

◀◀◀◀◀

Tourism can handle irony, so I wasn't that surprised by blurbs about 'unforgettable experiences' accompanying pictures of saffron-robed monks beside bombs on brochures advertising neighbouring Laos. The People's Democratic Republic of Laos, a compact landlocked country ruled beneath the fluttering flag of the hammer and sickle, has become an example of controlled capitalism rather than heavy-handed communism. Having avoided a civil war, Laos is more developed than Cambodia; it is influenced by the Thai economic model, meaning commercial and tourist development is a priority for the fifty-year governing Pathet Lao Communist Party. In truth the government acts as a centralised state corporation exercising monopoly power, with an obvious zeal for telecommunications, constructing roads to access the verdant jungle, and advertisements for skin-whitening creams. Any indication of an Orwellian closed society is immediately quashed by numerous satellite dishes beaming fifty international and domestic channels into the thatched huts of far-flung villages (some so aged they seem to have rusted in the countryside).

The country's attempts to become a hydroelectric power have been shelved, with the Xayaburi project—consisting of eleven major dams and reservoirs along the Mekong—stalled by Vietnamese objections. That's a saving grace for the next decade because if there is a more enchanting country than Laos, I have yet to see it. Sheer limestone karsts jut upright; the mist swirling around the peaks resembles a mink stole around the neck of a *grande*

dame. I completed overnight treks in Luang Prabang, as well as Luang Namtha in the north, and inland around Nong Khiaw. At the latter, the silky Nam Ou River drifts past geological formations that rise like totems in the morning haze.

But Laos is also the most bombed country per capita in the world. Between 1964 and 1973 half a million US sorties dropped two million tonnes of ordnances on unarmed Laos. 'The Secret War'—sanctioned by that diabolical duo of Nixon and Kissinger, bypassing Congress approval—meant the indiscriminate bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail to destroy North Vietnamese supply lines. Carpet bombing, saturation bombing—call it what you like—occurred in abundance in the Xieng Khouang province. Maps dotted in red ink to indicate dropped ordnance show a severe rash along the border of Laos and Vietnam. The exploits of the fighter pilots responsible are documented with glee by Christopher Robbins in *The Ravens*. Robbins portrays gung-ho mercenaries, high on adventure but short on conscience, acting in covert operations in something of a freelance air force. The pilots dropped cluster bombs that split in two in mid-air to scatter 'bombies' (tennis ball-sized mines) or defoliants on the unarmed civilian population, destroying lives—and also livelihoods when one accounts for the slaughtered livestock and poisoned agriculture. An annual average of 350 casualties continues to this day from mine-related mishaps, causing disabilities that require attention in the capital Vientiane.

And yet in Luang Prabang you might find pamphlets—devoid of any irony whatsoever—advertising 'bomb trekking tours'. Perched on the elevated banks of the Mekong, Luang Prabang is an elegant town that maintains its sophisticated French ambience. From here it's a six-hour drive east to Phonsavan, a major target for US bombing raids due to its 130 km proximity to the Vietnamese border. Phonsavan was destroyed twice: first it was bombed by the United States; then it was re-built by the Soviets. A dusty main street contains double-storey buildings with a slab-like socialist aesthetic. Drab shops sell mobile phones and state-of-the-art TVs, and also advertise the 'latest photocopiers'.

I stayed at the King Keo Guesthouse, adjacent to a disused airport shadowed by a defunct transmission tower. My room was at the end of an abandoned runway. At reception I was handed a key attached to a brass shell one finger in length, with the bullet and gun-powder removed from its nose. Mortar shells pierced light down the hotel corridor; overturned cluster bombs, split in two, served as metal benches. The surrealism of place was furthered by the patio's panoply of artillery better used by Rambo: a crisscrossed cartridge belt displayed beneath a helmet next to a rusted bazooka. War occurs first as tragedy, second as kitsch?

In Phonsavan everyone is in on the act. At Dokkhoun Hotel downtown they've dressed up the foyer as part museum, part theme park, and a dizzying array of weaponry is displayed. Types, serial numbers and countries of origin are imprinted on their cold metal casings: BLU 42, BLU 61B, M127. There are green, yellow and blue bombies; UXOs (unexploded ordnances) courtesy of China, the United States and the USSR



**"..I bought a snow dome with a hard working farmer in it.
The snow flakes are cluster bombs..."**

including missiles, hand grenades, mortars, rockets, 'pineapple' mines, projectiles, parachute flares and fragmentation bombs. Perversely, these instruments of death were finely crafted out of high-grade metal and resilient alloys. Military contractor Honeywell was a creative industry of the time, specialising in this dark science of design and destruction. Next door to the hotel, the British-based Mining Advisory Group (MAG) displays its own artefacts of the Secret War including plastic defence guards (forerunners of bullet-proof vests) with 'PLACE IN FRONT OF ENEMY' boldly stated lest combatants wore them back to front (so-called grunts were US youths with little education).

We began our bomb trek on Route 7, the highway paved by the French. MAG's red and white markers demarcated a safe corridor bounded by unseen, sunken bombies. We walked for two arduous days, enjoying spectacular vistas while side-stepping mines. Not only was there genocide and eco-cide in Laos but culture-cide and religio-cide as well, with gold-filigreed pagodas and the Plain of Jars also bombed. The latter are a must-see for the cultural tourist: these ancient vessels in Ban Phakeo bear monkey and turtle designs on their lids, but their uses still remain unknown.

In Ban Tajo, an impoverished village of no more than twenty families, they've made use of the bombs in enterprising ways. Cluster bombs have been erected upright to create a long fence; others have been filled with earth and used as vegetable patches flower beds. And so Laos reclaims its history by incorporating its recent past.

Arriving in Ban Khai we saw enormous craters hollowed out in the parched earth. At fifty-six strides in diameter, their size corroborates with local stories of decibel-breaking howls from the sky as bombs rained down to crush Pathet Lao guerrillas in this zone (now completely treeless as defoliants cleared out the jungle entirely). MAG's de-mining programs, along with support from NGOs in Australia and New Zealand, are providing personnel and resources to clear mines left over. It's a daunting task. Of the 250 million bombies dropped from the

←←←

Holiday in
Cambodia

Jorge Sotirios

sky, approximately 30 per cent remain unexploded, and it's estimated that at this rate it will take 250 years to rid the area entirely.

The United States spent \$7 billion to drop bombs over Laos. It's spending a paltry \$3 million a year to clean them up. That Henry Kissinger still can parade the world as an elder statesman pitching his geopolitical views is a measure of the West's selective memory, no less hypocritical than Hun Sen's reluctance to bring the Khmer Rouge to justice.

In downtown Phonsavan's Craters Cafe—where upright missiles form a faux Chinese portal—youngsters seemed more interested in the 'all Stallone' weekend on TV. Soft power still does what hard power couldn't: Laos resisted US imperialism but allows it to re-appear via the back door, or rather an open window with fifty channels. A communist nation in thrall to Hollywood? The skin-whitening creams perennially advertised throughout Laos were beginning to make disturbing sense.

If Phonsavan's setting is strange, so is its calendar. New Year celebrations occur over four days in April, with festivities reaching fever pitch as the 'water wars' are enacted. Battles, duels, fights and surprise attacks delight the young and old, Laotian and foreigner alike. Toyota utes packed with water barrels ferry a teen army out for skirmishes against opposing vehicles equally armed, and telecommunications firms sponsor various colour-coded teams. The fun lies in dousing pedestrians or pelting powders of purple, green or yellow on every unsuspecting *farang* in sight. Westerners participate, particularly backpackers, having bought their brightly coloured weapons at stores selling Mickey Mouse merchandise. Armed with plastic pistols, do they see any irony? This war played out as farce is a reminder of Phonsavan's strategic location for US attacks on the Pathet Lao.

To evade these antics I joined a trek visiting the Hmong hill tribes, a few hours' walk into the evergreen jungle. More remnants of the Secret War were common in this small village centred by a communal well and an ancient mill. Pigs poked their snouts in cluster bombs used as troughs. I slept in a bare wooden hut, drank *lao-lao* at midnight to fire up the body (it has a 50 per cent alcoholic content) and conversed with youngsters by gestures. They assumed I had strayed out of the TV powered by the village generator and refracted via the ubiquitous satellite dish.

It was only from the Hmong that I heard any dissent regarding the one-party system that Laos has endured over the past forty-five years. Yang Xang, our Hmong tour guide, summed up neatly: 'Loyalty is to our tribe first. Then our country'. Ever keen to keep foreign aid coursing through the state coffers, the Laotian government makes all the right gestures by protecting its hill tribes, celebrating 'minority people' in smiling billboards. Originating in Mongolia, and escaping

a ←

08 2011–09 2011

No 113

Mortar shells pierced light down the hotel corridor; overturned cluster bombs, split in two, served as metal benches. War occurs first as tragedy, second as kitsch?

as refugees from Burma, in Laos the Hmong have made advances to protect their culture. Their presence here and in Thailand is a reminder of the geo-politics of Southeast Asia that causes entire people to cross borders that only seem real on maps.

I admired the Laotians in their shyness and their robust sense of mischief. How they deal with their memory of hardship is significant: they recognise it and seek to disarm it by incorporating it into daily life in an ever-present reminder of the past. Bombs used as flowerpots or metal forged into utensils turn the tables on the war industry. By contrast, Cambodia wants to get over its traumas by not opening up old wounds for fear of destabilising the nation. Behind the ever-smiling Cambodians is a fragile society. *Chacun à son goût*, I guess—to each their own—but my money is on Laos emerging from its past with greater strength.

◀◀◀◀◀◀

The Cambodian beach resort of Sihanoukville was as alluring as brochures promised it would be, and the Ream National Park a small gem of nature. Greater resources for rangers monitoring the reserve have minimised deforestation over the past years. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of Cambodia's islands. Some are earmarked for tourism by Russian developers, and have been sold off in lots over the past five years by CPP Cabinet Ministers. Only the GFC has stalled the bulldozers' cull of old-growth trees. Tourists who visit these islands savour the moment—it's a pleasure that will soon sour, as it has already on Thailand's islands in recent decades. But having conveniently forgotten the Dead Kennedy's rant, I enjoyed my holiday in Cambodia. The crystalline beaches of Otres, Hawaii and Serendipity on the Sihanoukville coast helped soothe the soul after a detour to the Killing Fields. a

book **The Intervention in Context**

review by *Alistair Nicholson*

Peter Billings (ed.), *Indigenous Australians and the Commonwealth Intervention*, special issue of *Law in Context* (Federation Press, Sydney, 2011)

The Howard government's 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), colloquially described as the 'Intervention', will form a major landmark of our country's history in the twenty-first century.

To many, it will be yet another dark chapter of Australia's history and a classic repetition of the major mistakes that have plagued the relationship between the white community and Indigenous Australians since the arrival of the First Fleet. To others it may have different connotations. What is important is that it be evaluated on the basis of evidence and not assertion or the pursuit of short-term political interests that so often cloud consideration of the issues.

This collection of essays achieves that object. It is true that the contributions do not come from apologists for the Intervention, but at the same time the tone is cool, credit is given where it is due and the arguments of Intervention apologists are found within.

Most contributors concede that the objectives of the Intervention evolved from a genuine concern to bring about a change in the relationship between the government and the Aboriginal community for the eventual benefit of the latter. While some, including me, may have doubts about that, all agree that the situation of most Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory in 2007 was completely unsatisfactory. However, with some minor exceptions in relation to particular aspects of the Intervention, the essays' authors point out that there is little evidence that the Intervention has improved the situation, while there is a considerable body of evidence that in most areas it has either done nothing or made matters worse. This makes it more difficult to understand the Labor government's stubborn persistence in maintaining it.

Those who question the Intervention's failings are unanimous that the fault lies in the failure of successive governments to appreciate that real change cannot be brought about by politicians and bureaucrats in Canberra or the Northern Territory (fuelled by polemicists such as Helen Hughes and Gary Johns, or people representing but one strand of Aboriginal opinion). The message that emerges from these essays is that unless and until federal, state and territory governments stop merely consulting Aboriginal people, and instead bring them into the decision making process as equals, any government initiative will inevitably fail.

The tone of the essays is set by Peter Billings' introduction, as well as the evocatively titled first essay by former Human Rights Commissioner and Kungarakan elder Tom Calma, 'The Northern Territory Intervention—It's Not Our Dream'. Calma provides a useful historical survey of the events surrounding the beginning of the Intervention, and what has followed, and makes the point that one of its worst aspects was the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act. In doing so, the Australian Parliament converted the Indigenous citizens of this country into second-class citizens and revealed the shallowness of the guarantee of racial equality the Act had provided. This is something that should concern all of us, not only Aboriginal Australians.

Billings and co-essayist Anthony E. Cassimatis are similarly critical of both the Liberal and Labor governments' treatment of the Act and of the attempt by the Labor government to preserve aspects of the Intervention, as 'special measures', upon the basis of questionable consultations with Aboriginal people.

As Jonathan Crowe points out in the collection's final essay, 'Giving Back the Space—Freedom, Meaning and the Northern Territory Intervention', while the Act is not part of the Constitution, it is a law that Australians have come to rely upon as a bulwark against arbitrary and excessive government actions.

Calma makes the point that the three elements of good Indigenous policy are a human rights approach, Indigenous participation and government accountability to demonstrate the success or otherwise of measures taken. He argues that the Howard government and its successors have failed at all three of these tests. He and other contributors point to the almost uniform condemnation of the Australian government's policies by the United Nations and other human rights bodies. This seems to be something of little concern to the major Australian political parties, other than the Greens, but I for one feel very uncomfortable when my country behaves like an international pariah. The resulting damage to Australia's international standing and capacity to influence human rights issues is immense.

In their chapter, 'In the Best Interests of the Child? Determining the Effects of the Emergency Intervention on Child Safety and Wellbeing', Fiona Arney, Kate McGuinness and Gary Robinson document the shift in the Intervention's thrust from preventing child sexual abuse to addressing Aboriginal disadvantage and the issue of the neglect of children. As Thalia Anthony points out in 'Governing Crime in the Intervention', statistics for child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory have been steady since 2003 with a slight decline in the rate of successful prosecutions. This is not surprising as the spectre of extensive child sexual abuse and paedophile rings so heavily relied upon by the Howard government has proven to be a myth about as credible as its 'children overboard' line in relation to asylum seekers.

The sad irony of the Intervention, as documented by Anthony, is that the major effect of additional policing has been the increase in imprisonment rates of whites and Aboriginals alike for driving offences, a number of which carry with them mandatory penalties of imprisonment. Thus the focus of the



The Intervention in Context

Alastair Nicholson

Alastair Nicholson was a barrister in 1963–82, Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria in 1982–88, Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia in 1988–2004 and is currently a professorial fellow at the University of Melbourne. He has written and spoken widely on human rights issues.

Intervention has shifted from child sexual abuse to unlicensed drivers and unregistered vehicles. At the same time the already unacceptable level of imprisonment of Aboriginal people is driven higher in a territory where imprisonment rates increased by 23 per cent between 2006 and 2009 and where 82 per cent of the prison population is Indigenous. The Intervention’s exacerbation of this situation invites comparisons with the apartheid regime in South Africa. These figures make a mockery of the need for increased police powers and the involvement of the Australian Crime Commission in the Intervention.

In ‘Closing the Gap between Policy and “Law”—Indigenous Homelands and a Working Future’, Marcelle Burns deals with the issue of Indigenous homelands, which raises the troublesome question of what the Intervention was really about, and what it continues to be about, under the Labor government. Burns’ view, which I share, is that successive government policies towards homelands form part of a wider neo-liberal agenda intended to destroy the culture of Indigenous people and convert them into ordinary dwellers living in an Indigenous version of market driven suburbia. She argues that what amounts to the forced relocation of residents from homelands into some twenty designated settlements embodies an economic rationalist approach to Indigenous peoples at the expense of their rights under the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other international instruments, which Australia purports to support. Burns refers to the resemblances between the Labor government’s *Closing the Gap* policy and the Howard government’s approach to Indigenous policy, with its emphasis on statistical equality over protecting and promoting Indigenous peoples’ human rights. This is mirrored by the NT *Working Future* policy of reducing education services in remote areas in order to force Indigenous people into larger communities.

The message that emerges from these essays is that unless and until federal, state and territory governments stop merely consulting Aboriginal people, and instead bring them into the decision making process as equals, any government initiative will inevitably fail.

Another example of this broad and sinister design not dealt with in Burns’ essay relates to the leasing by government of land held by Traditional Owners, by way of long-term leases, in return for the provision of housing and services—the cost being paid by Indigenous peoples themselves out of mining royalties.

A number of contributors deal with the vexed question of income management, introduced as part of the Intervention and continued by Labor in a modified form. Arney, McGuinness and Robinson refer to the Noel Pearson-led ideology behind this scheme. They and others are highly

critical of the lack of effective evaluation of the program. Billings and Cassimatis comment that the law and policy prescription applied in the NT, particularly to income management, treats people as simply incapable of acting responsibly irrespective of personal circumstances.

The authors point out that the Labor government’s ‘consultations’ have been marked by their lack of transparency in relation to the summary reports and quantitative data which have been used to justify its income management scheme. They also suggest that there are instances where income management will actually promote rather than reduce individuals’ dependence on state control, a point also made by Crowe in the final essay. They are critical of its blanket application to ‘disengaged youth’ and long-term adult welfare recipients upon the basis that it is punitive and runs contrary to the universal right to social security. They are also critical of government approaches that purport to set one set of universal rights against others, in this case the rights of children against that universal right.

Finally, in a broad philosophical discussion of the Intervention, Crowe examines the role of social space in enabling humans to live meaningful lives and applies this to the Intervention. He suggests that the lack of consultation and reliance on Anglo-Australian law in response to criminality and socio-economic problems in remote communities has troubling colonialist overtones, and that the substitution of the government’s vision of Indigenous welfare for the views of those affected is a form of ‘epistemological violence’. Indigenous people, Crowe writes, must be able to shape their own space if it is to be meaningful—and this requires a genuine commitment to self-determination that is lacking in the Intervention. He uses income management as a particular example of pushing Indigenous peoples into narrower spaces in which to live and having their lives controlled, thereby reducing their opportunity to live full and meaningful ones.

This contribution is a fitting note on which to end this series of essays, which should give pause to the federal and NT governments’ plans for the future of Indigenous peoples in Australia. **a**



poetry **The Slim Volume Report**

review by Sam Langer

Peter Bakowski, *Beneath Our Armour* (Hunter Publishers, Melbourne, 2009); B N Oakman, *In Defence of Hawaiian Shirts* (Interactive Press, Carindale, 2010); Petra White, *The Simplified World* (John Leonard Press, Melbourne, 2010)

Recent rumours of poetry's constitutive impossibility (Justin Clemens, *Overland* no. 203) may have been exaggerated. Three recent collections show confidence in an audience for poetic address to central issues of human experience.

Peter Bakowski's poetry manages to be both dry and sentimental, at once comfy and nomadistic. In a soft-tough voice his persona dreams of torrid affairs, wandering bluesmen, mad artists and Chicago assassins, while lying on his couch in Melbourne, reading a library book and hearing his wife 'biting into a home-made Choc-chip biscuit'. His self-portraits show boyhood growing seamlessly into the poet we read. At these moments his tone can charm and inspire with a type of wild blandness:

Reading those books I travelled with the characters
to alien planets of great cold or heat

...

At the age of twenty-eight I went travelling for seven years.

The young existentialist travelled to read:

In those books it was
what a character faced,
how they responded, viewed themselves and the world,
that kept me reading till dawn ('Of Fathers, Books, and Libraries').

Several of these poems remember (without fanfare) a bygone world where vagabondage was paradoxically more intrepid and more accessible, copies of *On the Road* permitting. 'In cheap rooms in San Diego, Paris, London and Khartoum'—one wants to shout the line incredulously!

In an introduction to the book Bakowski declares (not unself-servingly) that he aims 'to write clear and accessible poems, to use ordinary words to say extraordinary things'. (Don't all poets?) In this book he does and doesn't, mostly in portraits (actually, descriptions and dramatic monologues) that bring his plain-water style to people extraordinary in place, time, and situation.

We hear from the artist or writer as (anti-)hero, intensely involved with the world but also resisting it:

Dougal alone on the shorefront
with pencil and sketchpad,
looking out at
that entrancing line
where sea and sky appear to meet.

It's not the evening's coolness
that moves him back to his studio,
but something understood,
clarified now ('Dougal Nunn, Painter').

From persons in various kinds of extremis:

In the prison camp I begged a fellow prisoner to slash my throat.
'Not for a double ration of rice,' he said ('Jose Anok, Former Prisoner of War, Hong Kong').

We also see those who live 'ordinary' lives, into whose moments of quotidian grace the poet allows us to peer.

There is pleasure taken in smoking, spitting,
yawning,
biting a spiced pork dumpling in half.

In a tree shaded Plaza
four men sit playing cards at a stone table,
argue over
whether fortune is bestowed or earned ('In Old Macau, October 2007').

Criminals appear too, appreciated by the semi-detached observer for their large sense of the permissible and the narrative variety that accompanies this; neither romanticised nor particularly moralised upon.

Bakowski's disarmed simplicity lets him down occasionally. The poem set at Brunswick Heads, for instance, is a twee Aussie pastoral that underestimates reader and landscape in one go:

This coastline asks you to name yourself,
fisherman, beachcomber, surfer, retiree,
to examine whether you're more than that.

This is as depressing, and about as unworldly, as a family holiday in adolescence. And what are we to do, in twenty-first-century Australia, with his 'Portrait of the Colour Black'?

◀◀◀◀◀◀

B N Oakman writes a topical, vernacular and didactic poetry that is reminiscent (possibly accurately) of an irascible but not overly high-minded academic holding forth at a dinner party. He belongs to that large and flourishing poetic school that promulgates musings on oneself for the benefit of others. The audience watches Oakman place himself with deliberate gestures against the background of a familiar world—current affairs, ancestors and friends, lovers and football—a drama that is supposed to mediate one's own sense of relationship.

I've been shaking hands, playing
funeral charades,
kissing people who like me sparingly,
just the way I like them ('A Friend of Mine').

Oakman is most interesting when writing local with a sense of global time and space. Several of his penchants—sobering in front of relics, letting the air out of monuments, and griping—are most successfully combined in 'James Cook's Bendigo'. This portrait of 'the great navigator's bronze' is the Faber style refreshed with dashes of Eddie Izzard:

And while his pose—right-hand clamped
on his buttock, left foot thrust forward—
might look a tad flouncy on the poop deck,
a jolly jack tar would be wise
to conceal his mirth from the captain,
who disdained foolishness ...

He often zooms out too quickly. In 'My Grand-

←←←

The Slim Volume
Report

Sam Langer

Sam Langer has
published poems in
Cordite, *The Age*,
Otoliths, *Overland*,
Arena Magazine and
543, a free poetry
magazine that he
edits and publishes
irregularly.

parents' Address', for example, he blunts some clear and phrasally arresting observation with Audenisms that lean the style towards that of Gray's *Elegy*:

Stumps of quartz protruding like smashed bones,
broken ground rough stitched with scraps of thin turf ...
This ransacked borough, too emaciated for rabbits,
consigned to the endnotes of an ascendant history,
yet frugally consoled by a silence borne of neglect,
and in winter by a lamentation of daffodils ...

Elsewhere we hear of 'seedlings struck in nurseries of sorrow/and christened with futurity's tears' ('An Avenue for England'). When covering ground, though, the poems attain a headlong elegance and intensity.

There is something to appreciate in the bluntness of Oakman's political statements, particularly 'The Tragic Sense of Life' with its clear equation (war on terror equals fascism), and the painfully familiar 'Credo for a Labor Leader': 'I am not a socialist. I have never been a socialist and I never will be a socialist'. But where Oakman is topical or political, he as often seems dutiful. Like Bakowski, he practices history painting, but rather than focus on presentation tends to let us know how we ought to feel about tyrants, monstrous deeds, etc. In the winningly-titled poem for which the collection is named, we get jokey commentary on Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* that belongs in the 1930s or on YouTube. One usually feels that the audience's prior agreement with the poet—being 'against' Franco, US imperialism and so forth—demands a more 'nuanced' approach to political topics. An alternative solution to this 'aesthetic' problem (preaching to the converted) would be to extend poetic commentary beyond the literary journal and the slim volume—something attempted in our time by Patrick Jones, for example, and certainly available for further imaginative use (tag poetry? Pirate TV poetry? Meat poetry—in the supermarket?).

◀◀◀◀◀◀

In her second book, *The Simplified World*, Petra White develops a refined, personal lyricism ('who I am and what I think', to quote Ted Berrigan) out of predominantly autobiographical topics and by exploring various kinds of intimate address. But White is unwilling to diarise or simply record 'what's goin' on'. Her private messages are for us to decode; the anecdotes are honeyed, or raise a monitory finger. The book's title plays on the Western literary idea of pastoral, that world unbroken by sociopolitical conflict where incongruously erudite rural types sing out their love and sadness, and dress up as each other for seduction purposes. The world here, however, is dystopian, simplified by bereavement, melancholia and fear.

Life is eaten up on the racks of angst and work, where 'lost skulls orbit one another / in their fleshfolds', with only brief flashes of holiday brightness treasured and unpicked almost in the same gesture. The living struggle blindly with 'the love that sets us' as babies, 'never to change, forever' ('Public Service'). How different from Bakowski's beatnik pastoral! Rent/wage slavery and HECS debt; neurobiology 'replacing' existentialism. As usual, social being has a determining influence on aesthetic results. 'Debtor's Prison' plays a camp *divertissement* on this theme, with its 'silver clogs we now repent' and 'credit cards we spent to space like rockets'.

Childhood memories of injustice (sickness, deformity, religious dogmatism) energise the poetic present. The child 'loved her stigmatising pain', and as an adult stands graveside

observing 'embryo losses hatching in open air'. Amid this 'pungent, non-descript hell' ('Description of a Ritual'), poetry is a way to moments of intense knowledge of the self and world, how they relate, how one is in the other. Recognising the present's trap seems to loosen the disappointment of it: 'truth changes / like sand underfoot, / this moment a coffin, / the next a hope that sails.' In this the child is mother to the poet:

Lunchtime was a wave pool of noises:
she'd strain to decipher
what sound burned in the centre of that
roar ('The Poet at Ten').

What White calls 'the fuse hope' ('Notes for the Time Being') breaks through, dourly enough, in images of survivors 'Humanly / getting-on-with-it', as she says of a dying priest ('Visit'); 'a three legged dog / running as if on four' ('Ode to Coleridge'); a girl amputee, 'her artificial leg thrown sideways and forth / with each dancing step' ('Imagination'); a man driving away from a funeral 'gripping the wheel with hungry speed ... For once at peace with GPS' ('Description of a Ritual').

The poems manifest a strong urge to define that sometimes feels unjust to the objects it transforms:

And no mother is wholly mother.
That is the splinter: the still there self
longing to be other ... ('The Poem')

Not news to most mothers, or children, I imagine. And I disengaged when the contemplative freight got too ponderous:

What is darkness,
where does it come from?

Heavy as our fleshload,
weightless
as petals ('Ode to Coleridge').

Or in these lines, where precise definition gets swamped in Valuable Simile (probably understandable in a poem addressed to William Drummond):

They are not calling me, but I am tensed,
listening to their stern goodnights,
long as sleep that Macbeth murdered
when he claimed his own gigantic solitude...

And when someone is described as 'Beloved / as a woman out of Hardy' I can't help muttering, 'Which book?' Perhaps I am a philistine.

Meanwhile, the self thirsts for purity, a good simplicity, in which its position would be clear:


I stepped into Beauty, this was it: islands,
mountains, water, clouds and sky ('Beauty').

We surge on the breast of life as it
should be,
no rocks or seaweed or monsters
(*'Holiday'*).

a ←

Ironically, perhaps, it is good old 'Nature's anti-depressants' that provide an out from the anti-pastoral milieu.

I did find myself asking: are any of these books' poems of our time, or for it? The sense of the essential in all three collections locates in the presence of the past. What about the presence of the present? Many of the poems look like they could have been written at any time in the last fifty years. Needless to say, almost, that this 'look' is due to how poetry's formal means are treated and questioned. Or in the case of these books, *not* questioned. Voice, rhetoric, and imagery are the only resources these writers give evidence of having worked, much less any

questioning whatsoever of what might constitute subject matter (memory, death, subjective happiness or not), or where the borders of what constitutes a 'topic' for poetry might be drawn. As White puts it, the smoke 'shuffl[es]' out into a 'clear space' that 'stark cypresses guard' ('The Weatherboard at Menzies Creek'). The sonnets continue. Poetry may be news that stays news, but it does have to be news first. 

book **Telling Us What We Already Know**

review by *Grazyna Zajdow*

Will Hutton, *Them and Us: Changing Britain—Why We Need a Fair Society* (Little, Brown & Company, London, 2010)

'Western capitalist society has now learned what the primitives knew: if you don't run an economy and society fairly, it quickly becomes dysfunctional.' So writes Will Hutton in his latest tome. Reading this I wonder where this man, with all his learning and experience, has been all his life. As a sociologist, I could give you chapter and verse on how health and welfare in developed societies are tied in to equality and the relative differential between the wealthiest and the poorest in any particular country, and none of it is fair. The birth of modernity in the seventeenth century began the idea of equality in political and legal systems. However, Hutton argues, modernity 'has gone too far in relegating due dessert to the moral graveyard'; he believes fairness in any system must have at least a shade of 'due desserts'. How one distinguishes between a desire for fairness and retribution for perceived misdeeds is something he never comes to terms with. Yet if you ignore this claim (which does take up a fair deal of space in a large book) and squint your eyes as though you were looking into the sun, there is a wealth of information and argument here about the causes and effects of the Great Financial Crisis (GFC) in the United Kingdom that is rewarding—often infuriating, but rewarding.

Will Hutton's book tries to do more than just analyse the GFC; it also presents possible remedies for the United Kingdom. It is a long and winding exegesis that's difficult to know what to make of, particularly in its willingness to give the current British Coalition government the benefit of the doubt. There are resonances between Hutton's belief in the hard-wiring of the importance of fairness into human brains (a statement he explicitly makes) and David Cameron's restatement of the Third Way as 'the

Big Society'. For Cameron, the Big Society is really the tight local community, in which due desserts can be played out as if in an episode of *Midsomer Murders*.

Hutton likes to see himself as a social democrat, but he firmly believes in capitalism as an economic system, underpinned by a state dedicated to what he calls 'fairness' in all matters social and economic. 'The state best serves society and the public when it actively facilitates open competition', he writes. This 'open competition' should be based on encouragement of entrepreneurship, allowing the best and the brightest to flourish. He lionises the life work of individuals like James Dyson who invented the bagless vacuum cleaner and bet the company on its success. This twentieth-century inventor could be compared, according to Hutton, to the great Victorian-age inventors like Watt and Wedgwood who were non-conformists, outsiders in an 'open-access system'. (What intrigues me is that Hutton also includes in this pantheon the man who pioneered modern mass tourism—the inventor of Easyjet. Having been a customer of Easyjet, I find it hard to consider its creator to be in the same category as Josiah Wedgwood or John Cadbury.) The problem in the late twentieth century, for Hutton, was the dearth of 'real' entrepreneurs and the plethora of rapacious money-men.

This huge book uses moral philosophy to argue that the British need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to shame the bankers and their minions, including politicians like Tony Blair, into taking the blame for the GFC and its aftermath. 'The Greeks were explicit. We should get what we deserve—in terms of both punishment and reward', Hutton writes. At times he speaks in an almost archaic moral language: 'Virtue, effort and contribution should and will be rewarded; malevolence, fecklessness and idleness must be punished'. He accuses bankers as well as dole recipients of malevolence and fecklessness. Each individual in our society should bear responsibility for their actions, while the state's job is to indemnify individuals for bad luck and circumstances beyond their control. Hutton's aim is to outline how this should be done.

British society has succumbed to the neo-liberal philosophies espoused and entrenched by the Thatcherites. Hutton comes very close to arguing a Marxist theory of class, but his dominant class consists not of the owners of the means of production, as Marx proposed; instead this ruling class is based in The City, as in the city of London—they may be employees of the huge financial conglomerates, but they reserve the right to act as if they owned them. At one point he suggests The City 'bullied' New Labour into deregulating the financial sector. Certainly the mining companies in Australia and their battle with the Labor government over the



The Slim Volume Report

Sam Langer

resources tax come uncomfortably to mind here. As in Britain, Australia's Labor Party has been captured by the Harvard-educated technocrats and economists and bought the line of growth and free markets, hook, line and veritable sinker. This makes it highly susceptible to such 'bullying'.

The global deregulation of the financial sector in the 1980s, coupled with new technologies that allowed new and mind-bogglingly complex financial instruments, not only helped separate fools from their money but also the highly intelligent from their commonsense. When these financial instruments are presented in all their complex glory, it becomes crystal-clear why they failed and why the world is in the mess it's in (at least financially). The treasurer of Orange County in California used municipal funds to bet on falling interest rates, and instead took a \$US1.5 billion bath. Banks and financial institutions bought bundled-up Credit Default Swaps (CDS)—groups of sub-prime and legitimate mortgages insured by large insurance companies in case of failure—and then bet that they would fail, as they inevitably did. The holder of the CDS might take a bath, but the dealer who bet on their failure made a fortune. It's these and other well-told stories—including some, on a smaller scale, concerning some municipalities in New South Wales—that at least make the book worth reading.



Telling Us What We Already Know

Crazyyna Zajdow


Crazyyna Zajdow lectures in sociology at Deakin University and is an editor of Arena Magazine.

Hutton likes to see himself as a social democrat, but he firmly believes in capitalism as an economic system, underpinned by a state dedicated to what he calls 'fairness' in all matters social and economic.

Hutton also presents a devastating analysis of the relationship between modern politics and the news cycle that is all too well-known in Australia. While his anger at the capitulation of the political classes to the incessant battering of the media is obvious, he valiantly tries to jettison postmodern cynicism to argue that the citizenry need to be reminded that politicians are human too. This is not enough to convince me that that he is actually producing a contemporary prescription for a new world order, as he claims.

Hutton believes Britain's current demise is essentially the fault of two groups of elites, the inhabitants of The City and trade unions. Blaming the trade unions and the Left is a leitmotif of Third Ways (although Hutton doesn't use this term anywhere in the book), and comparing a group with the privilege of class to organisations whose membership has no privilege other than their will to band together is neither logical nor historically accurate.

Hutton argues fervently for a nationalised health system and a welfare system that the middle class has a full stake in, as way of legitimising fairness to all. Yet even while arguing for universal welfare systems, he plays into the perception the middle class have of welfare cheats, by arguing that 'reflex egalitarianism is not necessarily fair'. 'Due desserts' mean that the person who gains some benefit from the public purse should pay this back in some way, but how this squares up with the need for universal welfare and middle-class support for the welfare system is just one of the inconsistencies that run through this book.

In *Them and Us*, Will Hutton has tried very hard to remake himself in the image of the new British government. (The book was written, or at least finished, just as the new government was settling in.) He has since headed the government's Fair Pay Commission, and has recently released a report on public sector pay. In this report, rather than recommending, as he has in his book, that the cap on senior public servants' pay be no more than a certain multiple of the lowest earner, he advises that 10 per cent of a senior manager's pay be kept back until certain agreed-upon objectives have been met. To show the fairness he is so enamoured of, Hutton also proposes that all senior public servant salaries be available online to the public. Huge bonuses should be out; fair pay for a fair day's work should be in. Understandably, the private sector has laughed this off. It will be interesting to see how long Hutton lasts as a social democrat in these circumstances, and whether he agrees with his assessment that Britain is beginning to see a new—and improved—politics taking shape. 

Arena Magazine Appeal

Arena Magazine depends on the volunteer work of many friends and supporters.

Contributions to our appeal go towards supporting a part-time staff member and other aspects of production.

Since our last notice the Arena Appeal has raised \$850, with generous donations from E.E., and from

Jennifer Walpole and Madga Wroblewska, as well as a number of anonymous donors.

Some of your donations have gone towards our revamped website: <www.arena.org.au>.



08 2011–09 2011
No 113



With Friends like John Armstrong ...

Simon Cooper

Cultivating taste in the neo-liberal humanities

John Armstrong, senior adviser to Melbourne University's Vice Chancellor and 'philosopher in residence' at the Melbourne Business School, has plenty of advice for the humanities. Indeed he has a plan to save them. Armstrong has become something of a presence in the Australian public sphere; his articles appear in *The Australian*, magazines like *The Griffith Review* and *Island* and in significant online publications. He is a regular guest on Radio National, and he is the author of a number of books on 'big' subjects such as love, art, civilisation and beauty, all designed to make the humanities resonate with a wider public. He has been likened to Alain De Botton in the way that he connects the philosophical tradition with contemporary life. With this kind of exposure and influence, Armstrong might be the ambassador the humanities need. One could imagine his passionate defence of the 'great tradition' of culture as being the antithesis of Andrew Norton, whose higher education policy is steeped in economic rationalism. It would seem an almost Dickensian opposition of instrumentalism and cultivation. Yet a recent *Age* opinion piece finds Norton enthusiastically supporting Armstrong's view of the humanities.

So what is wrong with the humanities, according to Armstrong? His major claim is that the 'crisis' in the humanities can be blamed largely on humanities scholars. The humanities have become too insular, a hangover from the 'mandarin culture' that developed last century. Academics in the humanities talk to themselves, rather than the public. Scholarly research no longer grapples with the big questions but pursues arcane trivia where success lies in outdoing or outperforming one's peers. An oft-repeated anecdote from Armstrong's book *In Search of Civilization* encapsulates his position. The author, surrounded by prestigious art scholars, enquires about their research. One explains that he is researching why in certain Renaissance paintings camels have their legs crossed and in others they don't. Armstrong wonders what the ultimate purpose of such research might be, but remains dissatisfied with the response. To him, this example reveals the triviality of much contemporary scholarship.

In making such claims Armstrong verges dangerously close to anti-intellectualism. He never considers that knowledge 'for its own sake' might be good for cultures and civilisations, that curiosity is essential to the life of the mind, or even that 'trivial' research may lead to other things. Armstrong's prominence and success in the public realm rests on a careful balancing act—he speaks in the name of the humanities, culture and civilisation, but is also dismissive of much in the contemporary world. The things Armstrong does like tend to be safely in the past—Victorian literature, some classical philosophy, the commonsense philosophy of Montaigne, the plots of Mozart operas or the architecture of roman villas. For Armstrong, there is 'too much consensus amongst people in the humanities', in fact there is a 'political monoculture'. He dismisses the dominance of 'theory' and its inflated sense of significance. He links the 'arrogance' of theory with the withdrawal of the humanities from any wider social relevance.

Few would take issue with Armstrong's desire that the

humanities should have a contemporary relevance. Beyond this, however, his diagnosis is misplaced on a number of levels. To begin with many in the humanities *do* make contributions to the public sphere—in daily newspapers, small magazines, public speaking and online. Many of those contributors are trained in 'theory' but manage to translate this into an accessible form. This is not to deny the influence of the humanities has declined, but to question this requires more than unsubstantiated attacks on so-called mandarin academics, theory and political radicalism. Instead one could engage in the kind of specific historical analysis Armstrong dislikes.

One might note the changes in the public sphere—the lack of diversity in ownership that prevents or discourages a spectrum of opinion. If Armstrong wants to find a 'political monoculture' he might begin with the Murdoch press that publishes his opinions. At another level there are structural changes that transform the public sphere—the fragmentation of audiences in the digital age and the resulting pressure on traditional small magazines and print journals. Beyond this lies the massive transformation within the university itself. The heightened emphasis on research over scholarship, where contributions in the public sphere count for little compared to peer-reviewed publication and research grants. Despite inhabiting the university, Armstrong has nothing to say about any of these changes: he never acknowledges that the 'audit culture' driving university funding derives from the same business environment that he in turn fails to fault.

The uncritical idealism that underpins Armstrong's endorsement of Western culture means that he has no difficulty in regarding the humanities as simply a civilising framework for the market.

Unencumbered by any knowledge of the above, Armstrong advises that the humanities return to the more general project of 'cultivating wisdom and taste', that they could again become a 'source of maturity in our society'. Cultivating 'dispositions' and 'capacities' should be the core mission of the humanities rather than 'clever discussion'. Words like 'wisdom' and 'maturity' are thrown about frequently in Armstrong's work, but they are vaguely defined and lack any sense of context. The same applies for his version of capitalism: simply 'the economic expression of individual liberty'. Even ardent enthusiasts of market forces might recognise that capitalism changes as it progresses through history, from early forms of the market to modern industrialism to today's consumer capitalism in which virtually all human activity is commodified. That

Simon Cooper is an Arena Publications editor.

this shift might impact upon the meaning of existence or influence human behaviour is lost on Armstrong. In his most recent book he sings the praises of civilisation, declaring that ‘no one ever bothered him’ in its name. Armstrong seems unwilling to accept that others might have been ‘bothered’ by the wars and colonisation that occurred under civilisation’s guise. He even takes Gandhi’s comment about Western civilisation being a good idea and interprets it to mean merely that the achievement of thinkers and artists has not influenced enough people, ignoring the anti-colonial context that informed Gandhi’s remarks.

Surely ‘maturity’ would constitute recognising that there is a politics to knowledge and culture—that they have been used to enshrine power and domination as much as they have ever liberated anyone. Walter Benjamin’s line about there being no document of culture that is not also a document of barbarism is apposite here. Whatever charges Armstrong might be able to point at ‘theory’, it has been very good at asking to what purpose is a particular idea or concept being put to use, and in whose name. The uncritical idealism that underpins Armstrong’s endorsement of Western culture means that he has no difficulty regarding the humanities as simply a civilising framework for the market. He argues that the ‘humanities could contribute powerfully to the good education of executives’, that consumers could be trained in matters of ‘taste’ and learn the habits of ‘serious thought’ from the humanities. No doubt this emphasis complements Armstrong’s time in the Melbourne Business School and no one would suggest that the world of business and the humanities should remain apart. The problem is that the critical and interpretive spirit that underpins so much of the humanities has been neutralised under Armstrong’s idealism and dislike of criticism or politics. Instead of a philosopher in the business school he reads like a businessman cast upon the shores of the philosophy department, unable to grasp what is before him.

When Armstrong speaks of the civilising role of the humanities he concedes that there has to be a ‘body of scholarly knowledge’ that informs university teaching, but that a ‘single scholarly base can serve pretty much the whole world’. It might ‘come from Harvard’ or from ‘across the campus’, it doesn’t really matter. The point is that there is enough ‘existing knowledge’ to do the job. Given that Armstrong believes there’s little point in generating new knowledge, that the critical function of the humanities is no longer needed given the state of freedom we inhabit, the result can only be a surplus of academics. Thus we find him endorsing the massive cuts made to humanities departments in the United Kingdom. No wonder Andrew Norton approves of his work, or that Armstrong is senior advisor to Vice-Chancellor Glyn Davis who decimated the arts faculty at Melbourne. Like Armstrong, Davis is a big fan of teaching ‘wisdom’, as is Steven Schwarz, another VC known for downsizing the humanities. There seems to be a new discourse appearing in higher education; those who preach the cultivating merits of the humanities, but use the same logic to legitimise less than civilised practices. The very things Armstrong rejects—the critical interpretation of culture and the generation of new ideas—are precisely what the humanities might give to a world in crisis. **a**



New Subscribers’ Subscription Offer

- I want to subscribe
- I would like to purchase a gift subscription
My name is
- Recipient is
- I want to purchase books (see over)

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

arena magazine

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$36 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$66 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$94 |

arena magazine and journal

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$51 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$95 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$132 |

NON-WAGED RATES

- arena magazine \$27
- arena magazine and journal \$38

MEMBERSHIP

This is a way of supporting Arena. It includes subscription and access to the Arena serials library at 2 Kerr St, Fitzroy.

arena magazine

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$47 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$88 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$127 |

arena magazine and journal

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$62 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$117 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$165 |

ORGANISATIONS, LIBRARIES, BUSINESSES

arena magazine

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$88 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$154 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$220 |

arena journal

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$66 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$121 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$176 |

arena magazine and journal

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 year | 2 years | 3 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$143 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$253 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$373 |

OVERSEAS

- add AUD \$28 pa (magazine only) or
- AUD \$46 (magazine and journal)

ADDRESS DETAILS FOR SUBSCRIPTION

Name

Address

.....

Email

Subscription to start with issue No.....

I enclose a cheque for \$.....
(include book orders)

Please charge my:

- Bankcard
- Visa
- Mastercard

Card number

Cardholder name

Expiry date

For new subscribers only.

Return this form to Arena, PO Box 18,
North Carlton, VIC Australia 3054



Other Publications

- Imagining the Future: Utopia and Dystopia
**Andrew Milner, Matthew Ryan
& Robert Savage eds.** ▪ \$27.50
- Scholars and Entrepreneurs **Simon Cooper,
John Hinkson & Geoff Sharp eds.** ▪ \$27.50
- Current issue of **New Left Review** ▪ \$15.40
- No Ordinary Judgement
Nonie Sharp ▪ \$32.95
- The Morning Star in Papua Barat
**Nonie Sharp with Marcus Wonggor
Kaisiepo** ▪ \$15.50
- Nation Formation **Paul James** ▪ \$38.50
- Critical Politics **Paul James ed.** ▪ \$20.95
- Papua New Guinea: Which Way?
Utula Samana ▪ \$11.95
- A Proletarian Life **Audrey Blake** ▪ \$9.95
- Settle Down Country
Dick Japanangka & Pam Nathan ▪ \$14.50
- An Australian Newtown
L. Bryson & F. Thompson ▪ \$13.95
- John Batman and the Aborigines
Alistair H. Campbell ▪ pb \$28.00
▪ cloth \$55.00

Payment must be enclosed with order.

Coercive Reconciliation:

Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia

Arena Publications, Melbourne, 2007
RRP in Australia: \$27.50

Inquires: glenise@arena.org.au

Phone: 61 (0)3 9416 0232

Fax: 61 (0)3 9416 0684

Post: Arena Publications,
PO Box 18, North Carlton, Australia 3054

I wish to order copy/copies
of Coercive Reconciliation

(RRP: \$27.50 Bulk orders of 10 or more copies
receive a 40% discount

Name

Address

Please charge my:

Bankcard Visa Mastercard

Please deduct:

\$

Card number

Cardholder name

Expiry date

Arena Journal № 33/34

INTRODUCTION

Arabism Now
Christopher Wise

POEMS

Aisha Khawaja Razem

ARAB IDENTITY AND POLITICAL RECOGNITION

Arabness: Between Life and Death
Hala Abu Taleb

Black, Jew, Arab: Postscript to **The Wretched of the Earth**
Ella Shohat

Identity: On Recognition and Nation
Diana Abu Jaber

Displacement: In Cities of the Unrecognized
Paul James

ARABISM AND DIASPORIC VOICES

Diasporic Thinking: Between Babel and Babylon
Ella Shohat in conversation with Christian Höller

Diasporic Visions: Al-Andalus in the German Jewish Imaginary
Ned Curthoys

Democratic Potentials: Bish-Arabism in Israel–Palestine
Matthew Jess Atwood

ARABISM AND NATIONALISM

Arab Nationalism after Iraq
Gilbert Achcar in conversation with Christopher Wise

Arab Nationalism and Islam at the Crossroads
Jamal R. Nassar

Encountering Pan-Arab Nationalism: A Culture War
Ralph Coury

ARABISM AND AFRICA

Afrabia: From Divergence to Afro–Arab Convergence
Ali A. Mazrui

Taboo Racism: The Mouride Perspective on Arabism
Fallou Ngom

Arabism and Jihad in the Sahel
Christopher Wise



Arena Magazine

is published 6 times a year.
We welcome manuscripts
up to 4000 words, letters
up to 500 words, poems,
cartoons and
photographs. We follow
the AGPS Style Manual.

Email submissions are
preferred. Send to
magazine@arena.org.au.
The editors reserve the
right to change titles and
edit for space.

Arena Magazine

retails at all
good bookstores and is
available for purchase on
the **Arena website:**
www.arena.org.au
PO Box 18 North Carlton 3054
Tel: (03) 9416 0232
Fax: (03) 9416 0684

Email: magazine@arena.org.au
Website: www.arena.org.au

ISSN 1039-1010 indexed and
abstracted in the Bibliography
of the Social Sciences.