

# arena



THE AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE OF LEFT POLITICAL,  
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COMMENTARY

08-09 2010

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**Nº 107**

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AGAINST THE CURRENT

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Leunig

# Sustainable Population?

Charles Berger

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Sustainable  
Population?

Charles Berger

Charles Berger is  
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## Australia's sustainability measures are more rhetoric than practical action

It's great to finally see some national leadership on the question of a sustainable population. If only the national leaders in question were Australia's, rather than Ecuador's.

In case you missed it, earlier this year Ecuador quietly became the first country in the world to commit to an ecological footprint target. That means the nation intends to limit total environmental impact of the population at or below the nation's 'biocapacity', or the ability of its natural systems to sustain life. The policy takes effect from 2013 and is already changing government planning. By comparison, Victoria's ecological footprint is already 47 per cent higher than the state's biocapacity, according to EPA Victoria. In other words, we're living in a situation of ecological debt, running down our natural resources to fuel current consumption. But Australia has no long-term goal of reducing our ecological footprint to sustainable levels, at a state or federal level.

It should be humbling that a country with only one-fifth of our per-person wealth has shown such leadership. And this is not the only area where much less affluent nations are moving well ahead of Australia. Take Costa Rica, for example. With less than a third of our national wealth, and having contributed almost nothing to the problem of climate pollution, Costa Rica has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2021. That's a 100 per cent pollution reduction target, which makes the Australian major parties' target range of 5–25 per cent rather tepid by comparison.

Recent announcements by wealthier nations suggest Australia is being left well behind in the shift to a more efficient, cleaner economy. New Zealand and South Korea are putting a price on pollution this year. And spurred by the Gulf of Mexico oil calamity, President Obama committed at the G20 meeting in June to dismantling twelve specific tax breaks for fossil fuel producers worth billions of dollars per year.

In contrast, Australia turned up empty-handed at the G20. In an extraordinary instance of intellectual dishonesty, Australia claimed it didn't

have any fossil fuel subsidies at all—never mind the billions of dollars of tax breaks for fossil fuel assets, mining exploration and company cars.

Efforts by Labor and the Coalition to claim 'sustainable population' as their policy turf have been roundly criticised, but mostly for the wrong reasons. The main flaw in their respective approaches is not that they won't set a firm population target, but that they do not contain the policy commitments that would allow Australia's population to exist sustainably. So far, the Coalition has indicated it would limit migration, though it has been hazy on the details. Labor has preferred to emphasise measures to encourage a few more people to live outside our major cities.

**Eco-footprint targets, ambitious pollution reduction goals, getting rid of economically and environmentally damaging tax policies: these are the stuff that a sustainable population policy should begin with.**

A genuinely sustainable population policy must be about more than just population numbers, or the regional pattern of settlement. It must be about sustainability and the policies needed to deliver it in the broadest sense. If the parties are committed to sustainability, why do both refuse to commit to putting a price on pollution now? Can we not go at least as far as Ecuador and commit to reducing our footprint? Why not get



rid of the billions of dollars of wasteful tax breaks for fossil fuels? And why slash funding for solar energy (as Labor would) or halt planning for marine protected areas (as promised by the Coalition)?

Some commentators are concerned that the 'sustainable population' debate is just dog whistle politics, a thinly veiled appeal to racism and xenophobia. Given the mismatch between the rhetoric of sustainability and the lack of credible policies to back it up, such a cynical response is not surprising. On one level this is a pity, because underpinning both parties' sustainable population rhetoric are some sensible institutional reforms. It's a good thing to have a ministerial portfolio covering population sustainability for the first time in Australia's history. And the Coalition's proposed 'Productivity and Sustainability Commission' would be a sensible broadening of the mandate of the Productivity Commission. After all, productivity isn't the only thing that contributes to our wellbeing.

But that's where the kudos for the major parties ends. So far, the only party in Parliament to have

articulated a comprehensive sustainable population framework is the Greens, who would seek to reduce resource use to sustainable levels and manage migration for ecological and human rights goals, rather than short-term business demands.

The best way for the parties to dissociate themselves from suspicions of playing a xenophobic tune would be to show that they are fair dinkum about the 'sustainable' part of sustainable population. Eco-footprint targets, ambitious pollution reduction goals, getting rid of economically and environmentally damaging tax policies: these are the stuff that a sustainable population policy should begin with.

This is not to ignore population numbers. On balance, stabilising the population over the next forty years would give us a much better chance of living sustainably than rapid growth. This can be accomplished by modest progressive reductions in excessive business migration, while maintaining our commitment to humanitarian and family migration. But population numbers and settlement patterns must be situated within a broader policy agenda that also encompasses meaningful commitments to reduce resource use and pollution, protect natural systems and shift rapidly to a cleaner economy. The Ecuadorians are doing their bit. Let's do ours. [a](#)

# Gillard's Fair Work Act

*Phil Cleary*

## Labor's IR laws pose similar threats to workers' rights as WorkChoices

In 2007 the union movement mobilised around the Your Rights at Work campaign and the Labor Party's commitment to 'tear up' WorkChoices. Although there was a strongly held view among workers that John Howard and his lieutenants were driven by class hatred and an obsession with weakening the capacity of unions to finance the Labor Party, such concerns were lost in a campaign reduced to one cause, removing Howard from office. This absence of a developed class perspective probably explains why the Rudd government's failure to act on its promises passed with hardly a ripple.

Aided and abetted by Julia Gillard, the Fair Work Act (FWA) did nothing to address the contravention of International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions contained within WorkChoices. In some cases it actually weakened the position of unions in the workplace. 'The rules about

industrial action ... are largely similar to those that similarly appeared [in Workchoices]', wrote academic Andrew Stewart in the foreword to the Fair Work Legislation 2009 guide.

The Gillard government's continued outlawing of pattern bargaining and the unconditional right to strike, and its commitment to the repressive Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) and failure to repeal restrictions on a union official's right to enter workplaces, puts the government totally at odds with ILO conventions. In some instances, such as compulsory ballots for protected strike action, the FWA is even more draconian than Peter Reith's initial Workplace Relations Act. And it remains wedded to unfair dismissal laws that leave many workers vulnerable.

Notwithstanding the constraints organised labour has always faced in capitalist Australia, it has never been more compromised than it is today under the FWA. Whether the parlous state of industrial relations has its origins in the

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Sustainable  
Population?

Charles Berger



"..I wish Julia would stop dancing on it..."

productivity model pursued under the Hawke/Keating government is a moot point. Under the first Hawke government, union officials could at least enter a workplace without giving notice and producing a character reference.

Despite most journalists and media commentators continuing to write as if the right to strike is unconditional, nothing could be further from the truth. The days of workers downing tools and walking off the job is but a memory. Submerged in a legal mire that confines the withdrawal of labour to that period when an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) has expired and a secret ballot has been applied for and completed, organised labour is but a servant to capital. Whereas a worker can only legally withdraw his labour in a highly predictable and compromised manner, there are no such constraints on capital.

The ability to sack, as long as such actions don't run foul of the insipid unfair dismissal laws, and the use of redundancy clauses allows bosses to deal with labour as the market and political realities dictate. Only recently the entire workforce at National Foods in Morwell was made redundant and replaced with a contractor using a labour hire arrangement. Such arrangements—as adopted by Smorgan Steel in a protracted strike in 2003—have become standard practice in many industries. Once a company that prided itself on a welfarist approach to its labour force, Smorgan Steel came to grasp the financial advantages of such arrangements.

Gone too are the days of workers taking industrial action in support of the kind of universalist principles that might have bred a deeper class solidarity and consciousness. Notwithstanding the fact that workers have always faced the prospect of punitive action for withdrawing their labour, such are the financial and criminal imposts now faced that the differences are immeasurable.

A corollary is the difficulty union officials now face in building solidarity and political consciousness in the workplace. No union official can enter a workplace without first meeting a (fit and proper person) criminal test and giving 24 hours notice to an employer. If this wasn't bad enough, such meetings can only occur in a place and time

designated by the employer. A backyard car park, a room alongside the boardroom only reached by way of a corridor running past the boss' office—so much for the right of association.

If the rationale of the Keating enterprise bargaining model, begun in the 1980s, was to allow employers to divide and conquer organised labour it has been an unbridled success. The prohibition on pattern bargaining, something even Keating didn't countenance, is the crowning glory. The proscribing of industrial action and the relegation of wages and conditions battles to the local enterprise—allegedly based around productivity—might be the big picture but there's plenty of devil in the detail. Under Gillard's FWA award modernisation has stripped workers of conditions organic to their specific settings, in favour of generalised outcomes and conditions and in a sense contrary to the principles underpinning the EBA system. However as is the case with almost every clause in the FWA, erring in favour of capital is an article of faith under Labor.

If there was to have been a possibility of building political consciousness under the EBA regime it might have sprung from discussion regarding the content of EBAs. Unfortunately unions are barred from negotiating content that does not relate strictly to wages and conditions. Clauses in support of Australian Made goods, environmentally sound practices and quotas for women in the workforce are simply prohibited, thus ratifying organised labour's role as a master of 'economism'.

Contrary to the messages in the electoral games played out by Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott, Labor and the Coalition have more in common on industrial relations than they care to admit. The Fair Work Act and the policies that have preceded it over the past thirty years have assiduously excluded class struggle from the collective consciousness and particularly from trade unionism. In its place the wages struggle has become an activity in its own right, with workers conditioned by circumstance and legal framework to act like shareholders.

Denied the right to mobilise on a large scale and around broad political concepts, organised labour is left to quibble about the minutiae and fine print of the Fair Work Act as if it's a legal rather than political problem. If there's a bright side it's that unions such as the Electrical Trades Union (Victorian branch) have voted to disaffiliate from Labor and workers everywhere are expressing a sense of alienation from the once preferred party of organised labour and the kind of politics this has bred. That can only be a good thing. **Q**

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Gillard's Fair Work  
Act

Phil Cleary

Phil Cleary was the independent member for Wills between 1992 and 1996 and is the author of three books.

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# No Tea Party

Don Monkerud

## Disenchantment sets in across the United States

Americans love a circus. Nowhere is this more evident than in the events surrounding the antics of a small minority who recently grabbed the headlines by harking back to the Boston Tea Party of 1773 when the American colonies revolted against Britain. One of the earliest revivals of the Tea Party involved 100 people meeting in Seattle to protest the stimulus bill passed by Congress to keep the United States from descending into another Great Depression. After bloggers and libertarians spread a call for protest on the internet, the media blew it into a major event.

Right-wing groups poured funding into the nascent movement. These groups included Americans for Prosperity, a pro-tobacco, anti-healthcare and anti-tax lobbying organisation, and FreedomWorks, a lobbying firm devoted to opposing taxes, immigration, healthcare reform and solutions to global warming. Koch Industries, an oil, mineral, ranching and securities conglomerate, funds both these groups, while the Sarah Mellon Scaife foundation, with interests in oil, industry and banking, funds FreedomWorks.

After Fox News began promoting the Tea Party as a social movement, their crowds grew. Fox News commentator Glenn Beck invited viewers to 'celebrate with Fox News' by attending tax protests in Washington on 15 April, the date federal tax returns are due. A mere 3000 Tea Party supporters attended the rally and grabbed the headlines. Much smaller groups protested in several cities, and for weeks right-wing entertainers like Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly giddily talked about 'a growing movement'. Republicans Sarah Palin, Dick Armey, Ron Paul, Grover Norquist and Newt Gingrich jumped on board, hoping to revive their failed political careers.

Seldom has so much been made about so little. Supporters claimed the Tea Party was 'a non-partisan grassroots movement', but the reality is very different. Not only was the idea supported by right-wing money and promoted by right-wing propaganda mill Fox News, it also garnered no new support. When asked, 18 per cent of Americans said that they identified with the Tea Party, but only 20 per cent of them had sent money to the organisation, while 78 per cent had done nothing in support. Essentially, the Tea Party is a new facade for the same old reactionary forces that have long been working to turn the United States into a more racist and militaristic state with an unregulated free enterprise system, a weak government and low taxation.

According to a comprehensive *New York Times*/CBS News poll, the majority of Tea Party supporters describe themselves as being 'very conservative' and more conservative than most Republicans on social issues.



They almost always vote Republican and 60 per cent continue to favour George W. Bush, compared to 40 per cent of the general public. More than half are men who claim the government favours the poor, and they are twice as likely as the general public to feel African-Americans get 'too much attention'. Almost 50 per cent heard about the Tea Party on television; 80 per cent are white; and 60 per cent are older than 50. Ninety per cent are pessimistic about the direction of the country, disapprove of Obama, and believe the United States is becoming socialistic. Seventy-five per cent want to have a smaller government.

Many Tea Partiers live on Social Security, benefit from Medicare, and are frightened. Although they reported their personal financial situation as 'fairly good' or 'very good', 55 per cent of those who identify with the Tea Party fear someone in their household will lose their job in the coming year. Two-thirds say the recession caused them economic hardship and forced them to make life changes.

Analysts predicted mid-term elections would reveal the support for the Tea Party, but only two or three of the candidates they supported won, while two-thirds of registered voters stayed home. But a poor showing at the polls by this vocal minority does not mean all is well in the United States. The media attention paid to the Tea Party, deserved or not, reveals uneasiness in the country. Obama may enjoy a slight edge on healthcare reform, a hefty majority on withdrawing from Afghanistan, and a favourable rating from a slight majority of voters, but recent polls report that 61 per cent of the public believe the United States is in decline.

After a sharp economic downturn created by an extreme Republican agenda for deregulation, globalisation, free-markets and puritanical morality, voters turned to Obama in droves. His



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No Tea Party

Don Monkerud

Don Monkerud is a  
California-based  
writer.

promise of hope, of ending the stalemate in Washington, and of bipartisanship, inspired the public more than at any time since JFK.

After electing Obama, people returned to their daily struggles: looking for jobs, protecting their homes from repossession and adjusting the family budget to more austere times. In Washington, Republicans totally rejected bipartisanship and succeeded in bottling up most legislation. The resulting stalemate led the Democrats to pass bills by very slim margins. Promised change involved huge Congressional battles to pass a stimulus package and reform a monopoly-controlled healthcare insurance system. Americans are a restless lot; when the expected changes didn't materialise, they began to grumble.

Americans also have a short attention span and haven't noticed the extent of the structural transformation that has occurred over thirty years of laissez-faire capitalism. Economic and governmental restructuring proves difficult to reverse, partly because both political parties promoted the changes. Democratic politicians generally enjoy more widespread support of the people, but they are as easily corrupted by corporate lobbyists as Republicans.

Lobbyists are spending hundreds of billions of dollars to influence legislation, and are succeeding in preventing and watering down reforms. To compound the problem, in the last election Democrats gained a majority in Congress by supporting ultra-conservative candidates in more traditionally Republican districts. These interests now resist Obama and demand more conservative programs.

The Grand Old Party, or GOP, continues to move to the Right, driving out moderates. They rail against RINOs, or 'Republicans in name only', demand doctrinaire purity, refuse to compromise, and do everything in their power to stymie Obama. They hope voters will forget the GOP created the economic mess, and become so fed up with infighting that they will stay away from the polls at the next election. By counting on staunch supporters—nationalists, racists, the old, the wealthy—to get out the vote, they can gain a majority in Congress and defeat Obama.

Lacking ideas, the GOP continues to resist change and promote no taxes and no regulation. Essentially, the Republicans seek to give corporations a free reign, in the belief that a mythical free economy will solve all problems. Additionally, hardy bands of corporate-sponsored fringe groups, including a supportive Supreme Court, propose taking the country back to 1776. This odd group of libertarians, religious fanatics, no-tax refuseniks, gun nuts, abortion foes and gay bashers support a strict return to their interpretation of the Constitution, and promise to repeal all progressive legislation since FDR.


Meanwhile, progressives are disillusioned with a lack of progress. They accuse Obama of pandering to Wall Street bankers, promoting private charter schools in an effort to reform education, backing down on a government-run alternative to monopoly health insurance and increasing the war effort in Afghanistan. They disagree with Obama's decision not to prosecute crimes by Bush, Cheney and the CIA; his crackdown on immigration, which exceeds that of Bush; his abandonment of promises to gays; and the dropping of legislation guaranteeing workers the right to organise. Obama's methodical responses and cool exterior lack the passion needed to rally public support for

**Seldom has so much been made about so little. Supporters claimed the Tea Party was 'a non-partisan grassroots movement', but the reality is very different.**

overcoming the power of the lobbyists in the insurance and banking industries, which have each spent over \$1 billion to derail reforms.

Despite myriad problems, including the greatest man-made environmental disaster in the nation's history, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, jobs and the economy remain the most important issues for Americans. Over fifteen million are out of work, home foreclosures continue, and job creation lags behind job losses.

Americans resent the rich who are doing well. Last year, the top twenty-five hedge fund managers received pay totalling \$25 billion, more than they received before the economic collapse. After accepting a bailout, six banks are increasing their political and economic power, increasing their proportion of asset holdings by 300 per cent since the mid 1990s (to 60 per cent of GNP). Banks are paying their CEOs huge bonuses while they continue to engage in high-risk gambles on derivatives and option contracts, resist oversight and refuse to write down their losses from bad loans. The rest of the economy remains adrift and volatile.

There is a huge crisis of faith and a lack of confidence among Americans. Working people, forgotten by the media, are demoralised. They did not benefit from the economic boom, but are paying the price of its failure. Corporate money is hijacking politics, aided by courts and the GOP. Resentment grows. With the United States still wallowing in the reactionary politics of the Bush-Cheney Era, the prospects for progressive change may well slip away. 

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# Synergies of Best Practice?

Andy Scerri

## The Global Reporting Initiative's Conference on Sustainability and Transparency

Having recently attended the Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) Amsterdam Conference on Sustainability and Transparency <[www.amsterdamgriconference.org/](http://www.amsterdamgriconference.org/)>, I was surprised at the sense of urgency about climate change issues there. The GRI has until now been one among many global advocates of 'triple bottom-line reporting' by corporations and other businesses. However, this conference seemed to mark something of a turning point. It was recognised that 'the moment of truth is upon us. The Earth's ecosystem is in crisis ... The failure of current shareholder-oriented financial systems to properly reflect the real value of natural systems and to tackle issues such as poverty, development and over-consumption is a primary cause of unsustainable development'. Heady words indeed for a major international corporate event attracting 1200 business and government leaders from 77 countries.

On the back of this recognition, the conference resolved that 'by 2020, there should be a generally accepted and applied international standard which would effectively integrate Financial and Environmental, Social and Governance reporting by all [commercial] organizations'. While problematic in many ways, the incorporation of such reporting into national legislation and international treaties has the potential to reframe the prevailing discourse of market-capitalism, which asserts the compatibility of unconstrained economic growth and sustainable development. It would force business organisations to explain how, and at what non-economic costs, profitability is achieved.

Given these and similar resolutions, an ideological schism was clearly visible in both the plenaries and 'on the floor'. Present were, on the one hand, those calling for greater state regulation to achieve sustainable development and for a shift away from 'race-to-the-bottom capitalism'. Other delegates were, however, enthusiastic about the invisible hand's potential

to meet the challenges of sustainability and they, therefore, expressed their distaste for regulationist meddling.

It was encouraging that the former were not marginal to the conference. Indeed, they were the main faction present—a range of established business, political and cultural figures, including ministers of trade, finance, labour and the environment from the EU and across Europe, North and South America and Asia; the CEOs of major global corporations, including Dow Chemical, KPMG, Deloitte Touche, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Philips, Siemens and ITAUPU; as well as NGOs such as Save the Children and the WWF, the representatives of various trades union organisations and, yes, the United Kingdom's Prince Charles (beamed in via Skype). All were unanimous in their support for state intervention to 'save the planet'.

It was discouraging, however, that the strongest proponents of free-market ideas seemed to be relatively young, well-educated and career-oriented employees of and consultants to some of the big financial, service and industrial firms. This loose category included—on the balance of my informal straw-poll—all of the Oceania Delegation. These are the 'projective' individuals expressing what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello see as the 'new spirit' of capitalism—relentlessly seeking new 'networking' opportunities, readily skipping from project to project, ever in search of the new, fearful of having one's reputation tarnished through association with any issue deemed 'last year' and, most concerning, always eager to be seen as a booster and not a critic. Presumably, the inordinately long periods of free time between plenaries were included to allow delegates to create the new synergies of best practice necessary for sustainable career development in this, the newest growth industry of triple bottom-line reporting.

This situation raises questions of some interest in relation to recent debates over the 'end of neo-liberalism' and alleged signs of a 'return to social democracy', albeit with a green tinge. It also points to a big problem for those attempting to think about the issue of sustainable development in more imaginative ways, as Ariel Salleh and Ted Trainer have sought to do in *Arena Magazine* 105 and 106.

The main point is that a key ingredient required to establish a regulated green social democracy is missing. Compared with the situation in the mid- to late twentieth century, when organised labour helped to force distributionary social policy onto the agenda within the (liberal-democratic) state, the present push seems motivated by no agent with an identifiable political power base or socio-economic structural reason for doing so. The political and cultural force required to achieve better (that is, sustainable) social relations has no collective interest behind it.

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Synergies of Best Practice?

Andy Scerri


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Rather, what I witnessed at the GRI event was an outpouring of grief from well-educated and articulate private individuals who understood that climate change was getting out of hand. Indicative to me was that, across the event, the nebulous truism ‘we’re all in this together’ was used with gay abandon, second only to appeals to ‘leaders’ and ‘creative people’ to somehow ‘take charge’, act as ‘change agents’ situated ‘ahead of the pack’.

This leaves one to wonder whether or not the claims of business and financial leaders with socially and environmentally responsible aspirations may not be all so much greenish hot air. I am not suggesting that the delegates at the conference were engaging in deliberate ‘greenwash’. Indeed, many of the delegates were calling on government to regulate in ways that would make it increasingly difficult for ‘bottom feeders’ to undercut those firms that voluntarily or are forced to respect human rights or environmental limits. It is rather the case that human society faces a Catch-22 situation. Some of the very business, finance and political leaders who for several decades led the neo-liberal *putsch* (notably, the ‘big four’ global financial-auditing firms, Deloitte, KPMG, Ernst & Young and PWC, with many representatives at the conference) have apparently come to recognise a serious problem.

At least to some extent, they now recognise the existence of a structural contradiction between economic growth—consistently expanding economic activity that relies on the assimilation and accretion of human and natural resources—and sustainable development—qualitative improvement of the human and natural economic base,

maintained in a steady state by a throughput of matter—energy that is within the regenerative and assimilative capacities of the ecosystem. However, this is happening precisely at a time when the former free-marketeer’s chickens have come home to roost: the actual public will necessary to steer society from growth to development in these terms has been eviscerated.

In place of a collective will sufficient to force the issue of regulation, or indeed to go further, has emerged a cohort that is so deeply enmeshed in the ‘no free lunch at work and no safety net outside of it’, 24/7 workaholic world of projective individualism that—interwoven with high levels of education and an articulate culture—is an inability to articulate fundamental questions of how political power and socio-economic structures shape the conduct of social life. Moreover, in the absence of strong ties that would bind the new individualism into any other network of human relations—beyond those associated with work on the latest project or the consumption of goods and services—how such questions might even be formulated remains open. 

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# Hope and Engagement

Philippa Rowland

## Clean Energy for Eternity: positive and practical methods to combat climate change

I returned from the Copenhagen climate talks buoyed by the global community commitment to take action, irrespective of the failure of governments to lead the way. My sense is that a meaningful response to climate change requires us—individually, collectively and politically—to make three crucial transitions towards a low carbon economy:

1. From profligate to more sustainable lifestyles
2. From dependence on coal to renewable energy
3. From ignoring to valuing the role of our carbon sinks.

1. ‘Live simply so that others may simply live.’ This is absolutely *nothing* to do with hair shirts and living in caves—efficiency, technology and human ingenuity mean we can live very comfortably in houses that are designed solar passive or retrofitted to be far less expensive to maintain. Think elegant Scandinavian living rooms and Amory Lovins’ sustainable dwelling in the harsh mountain environment of Colorado’s Rocky Mountain Institute. Growing support for farmers’ markets and community gardens gradually improve our chances of eating fresh local produce and reducing the carbon footprint of our food consumption. Medical research identifies the clear ‘co-benefits’ of active transport (like walking or riding a bike) for health and climate mitigation.

2. At present Australia is highly dependent on the domestic use and the international export of coal. I went to hear Bishop Desmond Tutu in Copenhagen Cathedral and was deeply moved by three symbols of climate change—bleached coral from Tuvalu, a dried-up cob of maize from Africa and three glacier stones from Greenland. Pondering a symbol for Australia, it suddenly struck me like a bolt of lightning. A lump of charcoal: representing both our reckless but lucrative addiction to coal and our newly instated ‘catastrophic’ (Code Red) warning for extreme fire conditions. Australia’s dilemma is how to squarely face both realities. Moving to a low carbon economy may require additional effort to retrain and redeploy those moved out of fossil fuel industries but the long-term benefits will include more resilient regional communities with new opportunities in renewable energy and other ‘green’ industries.

3. Nature plays a crucial but often unrecognised role in maintaining a liveable environment for all species, including humanity (providing us ‘ecosystem services’). Biodiversity plays an important role in providing resilience in the face of change, and intact natural forest ecosystems are an essential natural mechanism for stabilising atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide—and maintaining hydrological cycles in water catchments. We need to avoid the lunacy of burning ‘native forest waste’ (aka remnant koala habitat) for biomass and instead focus on the landscape-scale rehabilitation of degraded lands and

the potential of diverse plantations. Survival requires climate mitigation and adaptation and a conscious move towards valuing our carbon sinks, particularly native forests and healthy soils. Peter Mares’ overview of the Eden Chipmill on ABC Radio’s *National Interest* and John D. Liu’s film *Hope in a Changing Climate*—available at <[www.hopeinachangingclimate.org](http://www.hopeinachangingclimate.org)>—offer encouragement about what is possible.

## The Clean Energy for Eternity Community Action Plan

Clean Energy for Eternity (CEFE) is a regional community climate change group with the knack for having good fun while raising serious money for real action on climate change. Begun in Bega in 2006 by orthopaedic surgeon Dr Matthew Nott, the group now has active chapters across the bellwether electorate of Eden-Monaro in south-eastern NSW and the Sydney suburbs of Mosman and Manly.

## Biodiversity plays an important role in providing resilience in the face of change, and intact natural forest ecosystems are an essential natural mechanism for stabilising atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide.

Communities and local governments have committed to CFEF’s community target of 50/50 (50 per cent reduction in energy consumption and 50 per cent clean renewable energy) by 2020. CEFE sees its key role as a catalyst inspiring practical local initiative, creating pathways to action and developing replicable models that encourage communities to seize their own opportunities to create a sustainable future, thus turning a threat into an opportunity.

The potential impacts of climate change are particularly real for the rural 50/50 by 2020 shires, where major economic keystones are tourism and agriculture. CEFE sees investment in renewable energy as a cornerstone to reducing our dependency on fossil fuels and our carbon footprint, both reducing our impacts on the environment and creating new opportunities for education, training and employment in regional areas.

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Hope and  
Engagement

**Philippa Rowland**

Philippa Rowland is a tertiary trained agricultural scientist who worked on sustainability and risk management for over twenty years for the federal government and community groups. In 2006 she moved to the Bega Valley with two children and volunteered her time with CEFE.



LifeSaving Energy—launched by Eurobodalla Clean Energy for Eternity on Broulee Beach, NSW

The 50/50 by 2020 target, driven by strong community support, has had bipartisan government support at local, state and federal levels. Federal member Mike Kelly is keen to see this challenging emissions reduction target adopted by the entire electorate of Eden-Monaro, putting the region into a position of leadership.

On the practical level, experience has shown that the general community generally disengages from the threatening and complex issue of climate change unless they can visualise and actively participate in being part of the solution. Combining practical science with artistic creativity has kept the journey lively. We've had art auctions, fashion shows and human signs. Most famously, on New Year's Day 2007, the Eternity Cyclone was created on Jellat Flats—a landscape sculpture made of a thousand washing machines collected over six months from local tips. Warning of the potential for future wild weather given inaction on climate change, the image also served as a reminder of our wasteful society and was adopted as CEFE's logo.

The LifeSaving Energy project started in 2008 when the local community raised funds to install solar panels and a micro wind turbine on Tathra Surf Lifesaving Club. CEFE works closely with a wide range of existing community groups and deliberately supports local emergency services that do so much to protect us all. The LifeSaving

Energy Big Swims series involves brave souls raising sponsorship by swimming 7–10 kilometres in iconic locations (including Lake Jindabyne, Wagonga Inlet, Brogo Dam and the Bega, Moruya and Bermagui Rivers). This has now funded renewable energy systems for five surf clubs, nine local fire brigades and St John's Church in Bega. In one example alone, the Merimbula Fire Station's grid-connected solar system, installed in February 2008, has saved almost five tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and generate \$500 per year. Encouragingly, brigades are keen to use financial savings from reduced electricity bills to set up a revolving fund for installations on other stations.

A major bulk buy led by CEFE encouraged over 1000 households to install solar panels, just in time to access the final days of the federal solar rebate. Pyramid Power, a key installation company, contributed a free 2 kilowatt system for a community building for each cluster of thirty participating households. When more than eighteen community buildings missed out on the rebate, the company honoured its promise but could only afford to install 1.5 kilowatt solar systems. Despite this, such a positive experience showed what can be rapidly achieved with awareness and willingness.

Over time, one of CEFE's highest profile activities has been the hallmark Human Signs. Thousands

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# The LifeSaving Energy Big Swims series has now funded renewable energy systems for five surf clubs, nine local fire brigades and St John's Church in Bega.

of Australians from all walks of life have now been involved in creating over forty signs. Over 5000 school children have spelled out their messages of hope and concern on school ovals across south-eastern NSW and the ACT, calling for climate change action and clean energy alternatives.

The original clean energy action plan (available on the CEFE website) identified opportunities for achieving the 50/50 by 2020 target. It was clear from the outset that all forms of renewable energy would need to be deployed and a decision made to attempt to demonstrate what could be achieved at a regional, pilot scale.

Consequently CEFE developed a plan for a 1–2 megawatt Community Solar Farm in an urban–rural partnership between Bega and Mosman. \$100,000 was secured from the federal government's Green Precincts Program for a feasibility study, with a further \$1 million promised. The concept was a replicable model to enable people without their own suitable rooftops, in the city or country, to invest in a community-owned solar farm. This potential shift to renewable energy has been hampered by policy decisions to deem community solar farms ineligible for either the Federal Solar Credits or the NSW Feed-In Tariff.

Developments since 2006 have identified other key opportunities for progress, including:

- Collaborating with the Transition Towns movement to build resilience and prepare communities for the dual challenges of climate change and peak oil
- Energy Clinics showing householders how to make their homes more comfortable and cheaper to run through energy efficiency measures
- Establishing community gardens and bioregional trade to help communities reduce greenhouse emissions and gain access to affordable, fresh and locally produced food.

## The People and the Politics

Australia has much to lose from climate change, not just irreversible damage to national icons such as the Great Barrier Reef and Kakadu. Extended inaction will only intensify the risk of floods, fires and droughts, storm surges and inundation

from rising sea levels, further drying out of the Murray–Darling Basin, long-term food security issues and a growing likelihood of political instability in our region.


Domestic and international policy in Australia should reflect this country's vulnerability to climate change—the cost of inaction makes it inexcusable. There is a great opportunity for bold leadership at all levels of government and from across the wider community and business sector. Sir Nicholas Stern, Professor Ross Garnaut and other analysts have all clearly stated that early action on climate change will be far more effective and less costly than delayed action.

Yet Australia's current policies to address climate change remain piecemeal, with little sense of urgency and apparently no overall plan for a transition to a low carbon economy. The situation requires holistic management and creative investment in transition strategies for the country as a whole. This flavour is coming through in the United States with talk of RePowering America, and Obama's national standards on fuel emissions. Taking funds from the Solar Flagships program to pay 'Cash for Clunkers' is not the answer, nor is a standing army for 'direct action without a price on carbon'.

Weak targets matter for many reasons. They send a signal to renewable industries that it's not worth investing in Australia. The science tells us that we need to rapidly limit atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, requiring aggressive global early cuts to greenhouse emissions followed by tough long-term targets in the order of 80 per cent reduction by 2050. It would help if Australia's infrastructure expenditure was perhaps focused a little more on improving the connectivity and efficiency of our national energy and water networks and a little less on improving our ability to rapidly export coal and other minerals. Be alert to any moves to sell quick-fix silver bullets to the climate dilemma, whether they are gilded promises of carbon capture and storage or nuclear futures.

Raising awareness and maintaining hope in our collective ability to make a difference is crucial. There are exciting opportunities for innovative community–industry–government partnerships. CEFE is encouraging individuals and groups to take action, small steps to building a safer, more secure and sustainable future for our communities and for future generations. Solutions and opportunities overcome paralysis and help to turn apathy into concern, and concern into practical action.

I was privileged to host nine Nepalese women who were in Australia on a record-breaking mission to climb seven peaks on seven continents and raise awareness of the threat that climate change poses to the poorest peoples of the world (<[www.sevensummitswomen.org](http://www.sevensummitswomen.org)>). If they can get out of bed in the morning and tackle the future with some good cheer and determination, so can we!

For more information contact CEFE via Philippa Roland on 0429 828 412 or visit the CEFE website: <[www.cleanenergyforeternity.net.au](http://www.cleanenergyforeternity.net.au)>. 

ESSAY



Hope and Engagement

Philippa Rowland



Embedded Anthropology and the Intervention

Andrew Lattas and Barry Morris

Barry Morris (University of Newcastle) and Andrew Lattas (University of Bergen) both received their anthropological training under Professor Bruce Kapferer at the University of Adelaide. Barry Morris is the author of *Domesticating Resistance*, a genealogy of different government attempts to manage and transform Australia's Indigenous people, and co-author of a number of edited collections including *Race Matters* and *Expert Knowledge: First World Peoples, Consultancy, and Anthropology*. Andrew Lattas did his PhD on changes in newspaper discourse in colonial NSW and has subsequently published on the changing knowledge/power nexus that informs race relations in Australia. He is the author of *Cultures of Secrecy and Dreams, Madness and Fairytales in New Britain*.

# Embedded Anthropology and the Intervention

Andrew Lattas and Barry Morris

## Cultural determinism and neo-liberal forms of racial governance

In June 2007, the Federal government staged a dramatic military-like take over of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, which was orchestrated around a moral panic concerning allegations of pedophile rings and the sexual abuse of children. Exploiting a growing public awareness of serious social problems in remote Indigenous communities, the subsequent measures known as the Northern Territory Intervention were exempted from the Racial Discrimination Act. Many of the measures had little to do with violence and the protection of children from sexual abuse. Along with increased numbers of police, they included: the appointment of managers to oversee seventy-three prescribed communities; additional restrictions on alcohol and kava; quarantining of a proportion of welfare income; the introduction of an electronic card to monitor and restrict everyday purchases to licensed stores; suspension of the need for permits for entry to prescribed Indigenous areas; the abolition of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP); the compulsory acquisition of townships through five year leases; and the removal of traditional cultural considerations from judicial-criminal proceedings. As it unfolds, the Intervention has become a new form of racial governance, which seeks to assimilate and re-discipline Aboriginal families by transforming their everyday practices and cultural dispositions. It is especially the culture of remote Indigenous communities that has been focused on as dysfunctional and this has pushed anthropologists to the forefront to offer advice on how to care for and transform people through culture.

In Australian history the protection of Indigenous women and children has often provided the humanitarian language that has legitimised extraordinary interventions seeking greater control of Indigenous people's lives. There is nothing unusual about Indigenous people being governed

through exceptional regimes of power that would be difficult or impossible to apply to non-Indigenous citizens. Whether it be the 'murderous activities of the frontier' or Indigenous people's incarceration onto reserves that functioned almost as total institutions, Indigenous Australians have regularly been governed through extraordinary interventions that promise to be temporary until people have been normalised and transformed into self-governing disciplined subjects. As the ex-army officer and government minister who initiated the NT Intervention, Mal Brough, put it: 'Stabilise, normalise, exit'

It was Carl Schmitt who noted that sovereignty lies in the legal power to create exemptions to the norm. Developing this point, Giorgio Agamben argues that exceptional measures have been made into a modern-day technique of government. The current Intervention justifies its extraordinary necessity through moral critiques of the welfare state, the pathologies and dysfunctions of Indigenous culture, and the policies and institutions of self-determination. There is a collective pretence that it has not been inadequate funding, high staff turnover, poor planning, constantly changing policies and ineffective management which have led to poor health, education, housing, employment and material living standards for Indigenous people. Instead, Aboriginal culture and self-determination are blamed even though there is good reason to question the token and limited forms of self-management given to Indigenous citizens. Today, many politicians, academics and journalists justify the Intervention as a movement away from the abstract, wishy-washy, idealist, political objectives of Indigenous self-determination and towards realising practical, measurable goals that will truly benefit Indigenous communities. Conveniently, this discourse shifts mainstream government failures onto Indigenous people—onto their assumed inability to govern themselves both at a collective and personal level.

Helping to legitimise the Intervention as the rational implementation of humanitarian objectives has been the creation of a huge statistical web around remote Indigenous people. Statistics dominates discussions about the Intervention's legitimacy. Those statistics measure deviations from the norm and promise to adjust and calibrate interventions to produce social and cultural progress. Statistics serve to create for officials and Indigenous people a state of anxiety about the future health, education, employment and safety of loved ones, which allows the Intervention to offer itself as a practical solution. The Intervention could not exist without the production of this heightened sense of risk—without this statistically mediated and managed moral panic which exploits genuine public concern about child neglect and abuse. This rational web of humanitarian surveillance



highlights Indigenous people’s collective and personal failures; it measures supposedly their collective preparedness and individual willingness to care for themselves and their children. Statistics have become part of a governmental apparatus that confronts Indigenous people, that interpellates and problematises them by mirroring them back in ways that reinforce mainstream critiques and judgements that nowadays focus not on race but on poor cultural practices.

Contributing to the rationalisation and normalisation of the Intervention has been a widespread use of ethnographic data and anthropological theory by politicians, public servants, journalists and the wider public. Some anthropologists have actively embraced the public limelight to articulate cultural determinist arguments which criticise both customary and contemporary Indigenous culture as the true, hidden source of Indigenous problems. Whereas culture, especially ‘traditional’ culture, was previously seen as the salvation of Indigenous remote communities, the focus now is on uncovering and eliminating the dysfunctional aspects of Indigenous culture. Under the Intervention, the rise of cultural determinist arguments has operated as a form of psychological reductionism that allows for the internalisation of moral fault. Cultural determinism has worked to relocate the internalised sources of racial dysfunctionality from the realm of inherited biology to the realm of inherited culture. In terms of the history of anthropology, this is paradoxical for cultural analyses were once embraced and used to escape the reductionisms of biology and psychoanalysis, which posited their own internalised forms of dysfunctionality.

In public debate, a certain amount of ventriloquism has been involved on the part of senior anthropologists and other non-Indigenous commentators who invariably quote and hide behind leading Aboriginal intellectual brokers, such as Noel Pearson and his critiques of the welfare state as producing a culture of passivity and dysfunctionality in Indigenous communities. Pearson occupies a prominent place in conservative newspapers like *The Australian* which present his views as compatible with their own neo-liberal desires to wind back the welfare state or at least create a more tightly policed version of welfare that will continually monitor and refer subjects back to themselves. There is an ongoing desire to reshape welfare into a system of surveillance and tutelage that can transform subjects and subjectivities. Professors of anthropology Peter Sutton and Francesca Merlan in particular have supported the current attempt to govern Indigenous people through instilling into them mainstream cultural dispositions. They accuse the welfare state of reinforcing aspects of Aboriginal culture which normalise and emphasise dependent states of being that are unsuited and dysfunctional in a modern world. Sutton calls for ‘a deep rather than superficial cultural redevelopment’. In her analysis of the school nutrition program re-introduced and expanded by the Intervention in ‘prescribed’ communities, Merlan warns against continuing it for too long because this might ‘make capacity for independent action a casualty’. Merlan here echoes neo-liberal claims that welfare state interventions do not emancipate individuals, but imprison them in forms of passive dependency. The Intervention’s initiatives ‘must only be temporary’ and deployed for ‘the shaping of human capacity’.

At the same time as we recognise the importance of adequate nutrition, we must also recognise a need just as

urgent, if not more so, that people in these communities see some reason to shoulder more effectively the social responsibilities, and recognise the implications, of feeding, cooking, and basic everyday activities.

What is anthropology, here, if not an ideological advocate for new pedagogic disciplinary technologies premised on an assumption that people do not shoulder fully their everyday, moral, domestic responsibilities. The fact that many Indigenous people choose not to cook in overcrowded houses with many visitors is treated as a learnt, dysfunctional, cultural trait rather than a strategic choice made in a situation where people cannot control access to the resources in a refrigerator or pantry. Buying ready-made store food and giving it directly to particular individuals ensures that they, at least, are looked after. Instead of looking for the causes of people’s everyday practices in the specificity of their current living conditions, there is a paternalistic assumption that people need to be taught how to realise their basic social responsibilities. Professor Jon Altman is one of the few anthropologists who has consistently publicly opposed the Intervention. In an important article he documents how anthropologists and public servants have re-contextualised and pathologised different Indigenous obligations to give. Lumping them together, they have homogenised different relations of reciprocity under the pejorative label of ‘demand sharing’. This treatment of Indigenous people as victims of a customary kinship system, which is deemed inappropriate and dysfunctional in a modern world, assumes that they are prisoners of a faulty cultural logic. It is perhaps no accident that two major supporters of the Intervention, Sutton and Merlan, come out of a linguistic tradition, for their model of culture is of a fixed and, in this case, deficient cultural grammar. Both selectively use ethnography to claim that welfare dependency has deep cultural roots in Indigenous people’s ritual, ceremonial and kinship obligations, such as between a mother’s brother and his nephew. It is absurd to assume that Indigenous people do not make distinctions between modern and customary forms of dependency, let alone to assume analytically that they are similar phenomena.

This cultural reductionist argument of an inherent cultural tendency to dependency ignores the different historical periods when Indigenous people were employed in rural areas. It also ignores the scholarly anthropological work on northern Australia that has focused on cultural

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autonomy and creativity within Indigenous communities. Berndt, Tonkinson, Kolig, Mackinolty and Wainburranga, and Rose have documented the complex world of creative borrowings through which Indigenous people have resisted by reformulating dominant hegemonic structures. Whereas the Intervention posits dysfunctional passivity to be a consequence of welfare, there have been many creative local responses and resistance to welfare policing, including the Intervention.

Current justifications for the Intervention include claims that it protects women, children and families from the demands of relatives by ensuring that half of welfare income is quarantined. We do not question the sincerity of the motives of government or its academic supporters but we do question the selectivity of the forms of governmentality that are being deployed around Indigenous people. What right does the state have to manage people's gifts to each other or even the persistent demands of certain relatives? Currently, Indigenous people's quarantined welfare income (that is, half their payments) must be spent at certain approved stores using an electronic card, which monitors and prohibits expenditure on alcohol, tobacco, pornography and gambling. If families wish to purchase larger items, such as whitegoods, then they must submit a quote and a special request to Centrelink, which will directly pay the supplier. A huge, administrative, electronic panopticon has been established to watch over everyday purchases to ensure that they are spent on family-oriented goods. This disciplining of Indigenous forms of consumption seeks to disseminate mainstream models of family life and to internalise 'more rational' forms of subjectivity that use a mainstream calculus in allocating scarce resources and affective care. The Australian Council of Social Services estimates that income management in the Northern Territory will affect approximately 20,000 individuals and cost \$4100 per person per annum to administer. Revealingly, the government has moved Indigenous people off community development work programs and onto welfare payments so they can become 'income managed'. When faced with a choice and a conflict between its own moral priorities, today's state, via its policies and practices, affirms the priority and transformative powers not of work but of keeping people in dependent tutelary states of surveillance.

As a social engineering project, the Intervention uses a massive surveillance system to realise not just health, education, food and welfare goals, for it also seeks to transform the desire and need for these forms of bio-security into mechanisms for re-organising Aboriginal forms of sociality. Diverse institutions for realising everyday needs such as health, education, food and

welfare are used to create a carceral state around Indigenous people, where the systems of surveillance, discipline and pastoral care that belong to total institutions are diffused into the social body. It is not just in the Northern Territory that the carceral state is being expanded around Indigenous Australians but also in Western Australia and Queensland. There, schools have become a means of monitoring and disciplining parents, whose welfare payments are reduced if their children fail to attend school regularly. Justified as reducing future forms of welfare dependency by improving children's education, such measures use Indigenous people's dependence on government funds and services to create surveillance and disciplinary regimes that also promise to integrate Indigenous people into mainstream society. We are dealing with significant shifts in the political rationality of how to govern. In particular, the rationality of governance ultimately seeks to transfer and implant the management of the social risk of poverty, health and education within individuals and their communities, making both into self-governing moral units.

**Diverse institutions for realising everyday needs such as health, education, food and welfare are used to create a carceral state around Indigenous people, where the systems of surveillance, discipline and pastoral care that belong to total institutions are diffused into the social body.**

For its supporters, the Intervention is not repressive but 'positive' and 'productive' in advancing a distinct way of life. 'Evidence-based policy' is the government's euphemism for its new transformative practices and technologies. Their aim is to incorporate empirical and practical versions of the social sciences into the design of more effective micro-technologies of social governance. In his philosophical analyses of European history, Michel Foucault related the emergence and development of the social sciences to the emergence and development of modern technologies of power. Foucault argued that power never exists independently of knowledge; instead structures of power create and deploy bodies of knowledge around the kinds of subjects they posit and seek to bring into being. As anthropologists, we are interested in why outdated and discredited bodies of anthropological knowledge have been revived in Australia under the Intervention. Concerns with social pathologies and cultural dysfunctions that featured in functionalist approaches in the 1940s were a form of anthropology suited to colonial concerns with the scientific administration of native subjects. In their contemporary teaching, many anthropologists will emphasise the importance of social functions, but they also point to functionalism as a morally laden approach that ignores how wider structures generate the socio-cultural practices labeled as dysfunctional. In Australia, it has not just been politicians, public servants and journalists who have rushed in to revive such problematic social science analyses, which internalise and subjectify the causes of social problems as moral problems, but also leading professors of anthropology, such as Peter Sutton, Francesca Merlan and Marcia Langton.

Currently, we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of compromised, conservative anthropology aligned with Australian government policies. Despite strong public disavowals of having a racial

character, these are above all policies that deploy and experiment with new forms of racial governance. This ideological re-alignment of Australian anthropology dealing with Indigenous communities has been facilitated by three factors: 1) the transformation of many academics into part-time or full-time consultants who celebrate and feel morally empowered by their ‘practical’ concerns; 2) the corporatisation of Australian universities and their desire to demonstrate the practical relevance of academic disciplines to government, students and the wider public; and 3) the imposition of national interest agendas on all Australian Research Council grants. Despite their highly lucrative private remunerations, many contemporary consultant anthropologists keep a foothold in the university system which adds academic status to their practical advice. Authorised by government concerns and a popular moral panic, which they have helped to create, these anthropologists have used books, academic journals, newspapers, television and the internet to propagate ideas which until very recently would be regarded as outdated ideological nonsense.

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**We are witnessing the emergence of a new form of compromised, conservative anthropology aligned with Australian government policies.**

Local Indigenous communities do face real problems and difficulties, but does this legitimate creating coercive governmental structures around them, which it would be highly problematic, if not politically impossible, to apply to non-Indigenous citizens? Both Merlan and Sutton have justified the initial military-like entry into Indigenous communities as a theatre of power necessary to notify paedophiles, bullies, drug addicts and corrupt oligarchs that their time is over. Both use ethnographic familiarity with Indigenous communities to personalise the need for exceptional forms of state power, which lump together diverse social problems and ignore other, more effective solutions.

Merlan and Sutton believe race has been overemphasised in explaining Indigenous people’s social problems and they especially reject seeing the Intervention as having a racial character. As Merlan puts it: ‘we should move away from the centrality of objection to the intervention as “racially discriminatory”’. Continuing a long tradition of conservative Australian anthropology, which often simplifies and marginalises ‘race’ as an analytic category, she argues, ‘Race does not, and never has, offered a full account of the burdens of marginalisation and dependency that these communities have come to face, nor of the social and cultural specificity with which they do so. Other factors, in combination with race, lie behind the plausibility of intervention that the government seized upon’. We do not dispute the existence of other factors but what needs to be

noted is how some Australian anthropologists will in a token way acknowledge that race cannot be dismissed from explanations of subordination and marginalisation. However, the other factors that they evoke in their supposedly more complicated picture invariably work to edit out and minimise race and especially cultures of racial resistance.

Highly problematic is Merlan’s use of anthropology to argue that the historical and socio-cultural specificity of Indigenous groups makes it often inappropriate to apply universal human rights. Such arguments prop up the Intervention in the face of international criticism that it breaches international human rights treaties. Like many commentators, Merlan participates in an ideological construction of the practical which is celebrated and juxtaposed against idealist abstract politics. Today, this simplistic dichotomy is frequently used to criticise international attempts to constrain Australian government policy by what Professor Merlan calls ‘rights normativity’. Drawing on the ethnographic specificity of Indigenous communities, Merlan argues that ‘universalist understandings of rights can be problematic in their application to people whose social lives differ from the mainstream’. Yet the whole point of universal human rights was to protect marginal groups from being created by their national governments into a legal state of exception. Reproducing Sutton’s argument, Merlan claims that a political culture emphasising rights and treating them as a form of protection has emerged since World War II and that: ‘This makes us incapable of imagining kinds of arrangements in which rights do not occupy the same position or are not conceived in the way we conceive of them’. Here, it is anthropology’s cultural relativism, its celebration of cultural pluralism, which is mobilised to claim that ‘the universality of equal rights’ does not fit in with the culture of Australia’s Indigenous people. Such sweeping ahistorical cultural claims raise questions about anthropological ventriloquism, which involves anthropologists revoicing their own political position as the cultural voice of informants. It is scandalous to use anthropology’s familiarity with the alterity of Indigenous cultures to legitimise their legal alterity, their transformation into a modern state of exception.

For Merlan, an emphasis on rights is based on a notion of the separate and distinct individual and that Aborigines have alternative ways of thinking about

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obligations. 'It is illusory to think of an individualistic and oppositional notion of rights as less coercive than other kinds of possibilities that might be developed.' Philosophers such as Hannah Arendt are called in to question our commitment to the 'right to have rights' and instead what is asserted is the importance of our concern to assist effectively 'rather than doggedly assume the applicability of a single, allegedly universalist system of rights'. Merlan even claims that Aboriginal customary culture accords rights a secondary status as compared to responsibility. The respected anthropologist Fred Myers is used to provide ethnographic authority to this tricky distinction which is of dubious relevance for discussing the modern relationship of the state to Indigenous people. What is also not questioned is whether Indigenous understandings of responsibility can be equated with how responsibility is formulated within a neo-liberal model of welfare that speaks of mutual obligations and the responsibilities of welfare recipients.

Currently, parts of Australian anthropology have become a means of realigning Indigenous people's voices and needs with a government position that manufactures the practical as being in opposition to Indigenous political rights. Claiming to be engaged in capacity-building, this new humanitarian ideology re-articulates neo-liberal views that Indigenous people and their culture are harmed by the 'free' care and rights that we give them and will be improved by more intrusive, controlling forms of care and conditional rights. While some anthropologists may believe that it is ethnography and social theory that underpin their views, it is possible to see the influence of popular neo-liberal understandings that claim we have been too soft in policing Indigenous communities (even though Aborigines form a disproportionately high percentage of the prison population) and too soft with welfare payments. There is a demand for Aborigines to give something back, despite their economic poverty. But what can they give back except tokens of compliance to mainstream norms? They must display appropriate evidence of a new found self-discipline through being supposedly more caring and diligent about their family's health, sending their children to school, cooking regular meals, and shopping in a responsible way. These are not just practical measures but disciplinary forms of racial hegemony that demand symbols of Indigenous people's acquiescence and compliance to the dominant culture's norms. These micro forms of everyday governance seek to problematise Indigenous people by implying, for example, that if parents do not cook regular meals or cannot ensure their children attend school regularly that these parents do not love or care for their children, that they are morally dysfunctional.

Nikolas Rose argues perceptively that modern ways of assembling risk are intimately related to the valorisation of community as a site of policing. Increasingly replacing the previous space of the 'social', 'community' emerges as the new space of governance, as the territory for new interventions. Along these lines, the Intervention needs to be seen in the wider context of other government measures introduced throughout Australia where Indigenous communities have been pushed into mutual obligation agreements, which seek to transform them into self-policing and self-disciplining communities. We disagree to some extent with Altman and Hinkson's argument that the 'individual' has replaced the 'community' as the focus of neo-liberal welfare concerns.

**It is perhaps no accident that two major supporters of the Intervention, Sutton and Merlan, come out of a linguistic tradition, for their model of culture is of a fixed and, in this case, deficient cultural grammar. Both selectively use ethnography to claim that welfare dependency has deep cultural roots in Indigenous people's ritual, ceremonial and kinship obligations.**

Both inform contemporary state practices, with technologies of individuation existing alongside a renewed emphasis and demand for communities to be self-policing. In Western Australia, on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert, the small Aboriginal community of Mulan signed up to what has been called a 'Hygiene Pact'. In return for government financial aid to install a petrol bowser, the community undertook to implement a program to ensure their children showered everyday and washed their faces twice a day, and rubbish bins were emptied twice a week. Such neo-liberal policies are not directly aimed at minimising welfare costs, but more at maximising the welfare's systems transformative efficacy. They are framed as part of a long-term goal to reduce welfare costs though first training people in the disciplinary social habits that will facilitate them joining the workforce. Here hygiene and health join job training and education to create a disciplinary carceral state around remote Indigenous people.

For many years, the welfare system has been progressively tightened up around non-Indigenous citizens, creating a surveillance system of self-reporting around the unemployed that seeks to instill psychological discipline and aspirational capacities. It is the capacity to have ongoing hope for a job which is being monitored through the pastoral reporting regimes of a welfare state. With regard to Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, the Australian state has gone further in its demands that welfare not be passive and has sought to perfect a system of welfare surveillance which seeks to be pedagogic while also operating as a form of punishment for being dependent. When Indigenous people on welfare gain employment, they become free of welfare quarantining whatever their personal qualities. It is work that confers individual independence, with welfare conferring a contingent form of freedom, a tutelary state of

being subject to monitoring by structures which have their own pastoral objectives and techniques for creating subjects.

Merlan and Sutton's emphasis that it is not poverty but culture that leads Aborigines to seek out dependencies is part of what has been called the Queensland school of anthropology. Apart from playing down race, it has also systematically played down and criticised anthropologists who have focused on contemporary Aboriginal forms of resistance. Other anthropologists, like Jeff Collmann and Barry Morris, who were part of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Adelaide, have documented the opposite, namely, Indigenous people seeking autonomy and seeking to evade capture and control by the welfare state. Today, it is not the essentialisms and determinisms of biology that serve to racialise Indigenous people but certain psycho-cultural essentialisms and determinisms that treat Indigenous people as prisoners of embedded cultural logics or grammars. Culture has replaced race as the new way of producing internalised essentialisms. Social problems are reduced to cultural problems and, indeed, to moral problems, to the inappropriate or dysfunctional use of Indigenous moral schemes.

Australia was founded as a penal colony, as a site for experimenting with the breaking and remaking of selves. Later, after the convicts, Australia's Indigenous population provided the ultimate subordinate group, which was experimented with through incarceration into various kinds of total institutions run by church and government. Freed from these direct forms of moral supervision and

discipline, Indigenous people now exist within the care of a *carceral state* where the surveillance and pastoral technologies of the prison, mission, government reserve and the asylum have been moved into everyday institutions. The NT Intervention is a huge experiment in tightening up this carceral state through increased forms of surveillance that use not just more police and non-Indigenous administrators but also schools, health, housing, welfare payments and even licensed shops. The aim is to instill a moral watchfulness and discipline in Indigenous people which will normalise and transform them into mainstream citizens who use an alternative calculus in their social relations. It is mainstream forms of the economic which are being disseminated as a way of grounding and forming subjectivity and social life.

The scandal of contemporary Australian anthropology is that it bends its ethnography and twists its theory to legitimise these new forms of racial hegemony, which claim that the securing of modern forms of bio-security requires the suspension of Indigenous people's civil rights and their hopes for self-determination. **a**

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Embedded  
Anthropology and  
the Intervention

Andrew Lattas and  
Barry Morris

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The School as  
Market

Bill Hannan

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# The School as Market

Bill Hannan

## 'Equity' and 'choice' delude Labor and create inequities for generations of students

With the government going to the polls with an inconclusive 'Education Revolution' and contested My School strategy, and without any breakthroughs in sight whoever wins power, the education debate has surely lost its way. We have gone down the market track, as in every other arm of government, and alternatives are hard to see. It's worth retracing developments in the Australian system over decades and even the century of public education to get our bearings.

There is good reason to believe that the education debate in Australia has lost its way. It is not an easy matter to get things right when it comes to education, and distortions in policy have been the rule for quite a few years. Recent emphases on education markets and on standardised measurement in the My School internet strategy have made their own contribution to this process.

Declarations of goals for Australian education are re-written every ten years and bear the name of a state capital: Hobart (1989), Adelaide (1999) and Melbourne (2009). A large assembly of federal and state authorities of all colours and from all sectors endorses and issues them.

The first goal of the 2009 *Melbourne Declaration* is to promote 'equity and excellence'. Excellence has figured in all three declarations, usually in the form of 'access to high-quality schooling'. 'Equity' appears for the first time in 2009, which may reflect the predominance of Labor ministers at the table. The Howard-era *Adelaide Declaration* spoke of 'all young people' and Hobart invoked the unfashionable concept of 'equality'. Equity is clearly a more inconstant goal than excellence. Of its several elaborations, the *Melbourne Declaration's* is the most explicit (if such a word can be applied to documents of this sort): socio-economic disadvantage will 'cease to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes', and other forms of disadvantage will be reduced.

In recent years, the measure of excellence has been how well we keep up with other OECD nations. Here, according to Barry McGaw, a distinguished scholar and current head of Australia's Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 'Australia is a relatively high performer, on average'. On the equity front, however, we are not so strong: 'students' social backgrounds', says McGaw, 'are more strongly related to achievement in Australia than in countries such as Canada, Finland and Korea'. Differences in

school performance can, he says, 'be explained by the social backgrounds of individual students and those whose company they keep. The negative effects of poor company may be much greater than any positive effect of good company'. 'Poor', in this case, can be glossed, in both senses.

**As many have pointed out, a choice between good and not good is scarcely a choice. Nor can such a choice be justified as a right. It is an illusion, an image in a distorting mirror.**

For some time now governments have pursued policies that effectively put good students in good company and poor students in poor company. The states have multiplied selective schooling, sometimes deliberately, as in New South Wales, and sometimes by default, as in Victoria. Annual listings of Year 12 results consistently advertise the virtues of selective schools. For other levels the Commonwealth uses its program of tests (NAPLAN) and its My School website to highlight parallel differences. Selective schools rank well. Non-selective schools have their results modified by indices of disadvantage. From this sort of 'transparency', as then Minister Gillard loved to call it, interested parents can have little doubt about the company various schools keep and conclude, if they hadn't already, that excellence is for their children, equity for other people's children.

No matter what states do, parents will always find ways to seek good company. But states seeking equity ought to reflect on whether official policies might actually vitiate the pursuit of both equity and

excellence. Official policies at present promote a doctrine of choice, and policy experts speak of school systems as markets. If such ideologies are ill-conceived or have unforeseen consequences, they should surely be reconsidered.

There was a time when it was taken for granted that the state would provide evenly for all comers, first in the local primary school, and thence in a district high school. In Victoria, a free, colony-wide primary system was set up definitively in 1872, but when secondary schooling was legislated in 1910 it was in multiple and selective forms. It was not until secondary schooling expanded enormously after World War II that it too became a system, highly centralised and regulated by enrolment zones, inspectors and ordained curricula.

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**Schools offer droves of scapegoats: parents who don't care enough about their children, leaders who can't lead and above all teachers who are not putting in.**

That idea of a heavily regulated public system began to change in the late 1960s. This was partly because it was so overwhelmed by numbers that it could not cope. Students could spend years with unqualified teachers in makeshift accommodation. One union of teachers, the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, rebelled dramatically against the crisis in the system. In a confrontation with government it enforced the related principles that teachers should be both qualified and trusted to get on with their profession without regular assessments from inspectors. Further, and this time in concert with a reforming Director of Secondary Education, Ron Reed, schools gained control over the curriculum. These were of course great challenges to central control, but both sides were as one on the essential principle that the state should provide good local schools for all comers.

Despite the crises that beset the system in those days, teachers' morale was high. They believed in the destiny of the system to provide for all. Today's situation seems to be the reverse. Conditions in schools are immeasurably better

but school authorities appear to have lost faith in the capacity or willingness of many teachers, even of entire schools, to do their job. The Rudd–Gillard era, I suppose unwittingly, highlighted this conundrum. Much was spent on material resources, but the maligning of teachers by both Commonwealth and state authorities and the promotion of choice undermined not only faith but also the system itself.

The ideology of choice had had a spurt of growth in the 1970s. It had been present since the time when Catholics resolved to run their own school system. Their choice, they maintained, should be aided by the state. For a century it was not, and the Catholic schools sank into deplorable conditions. Whitlam resolved to rescue the Catholic system, but in doing so set up a battle, which persists to this day, between public and private schools. Had the Whitlam and later governments brought Catholic schools into the public system as a condition of their being funded, the battle might have faded away. Such an arrangement had occurred in England thirty years previously and would shortly come about in New Zealand. Yet Australia let Catholics and wealthy Protestants form an unholy alliance. Parochial Catholic schools in desperate need of funds were lumped in with established grammar schools, which needed no public funds at all. A mix of class warfare and religious prejudice left little room for principles of equity or rational planning.

As 'private' schooling became cheaper, choice inevitably became the controlling slogan. Parents, ran the argument, had a right to choose between private and public schooling. The state should facilitate the exercise of this right.

For a good while, choice remained chiefly a function of the public–private dispute, to be exercised mostly on the competitive playing fields of examinations for university entrance. Since that particular choice had long been sold as a right, choice in general, at all levels, was destined to be accepted as a self-evident good. In the early 1980s, the Commonwealth Schools Commission ran a project called Choice&Diversity. In the states, selective schools were either deliberately established or allowed to grow. The rationale was to create serious competition between the public system and private schools. The result, probably unseen, was to create good and bad schools. Twenty years on, as Chris Bonner has pointed out in New South Wales and Stephen Lamb and others have demonstrated in Victoria, an insidious pattern has developed. In any area of reasonable size, there will be one popular secondary school, effectively or officially selective, and two or three also-rans.

Choice was built into legislation in Victoria in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*. It

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is also now the essential purpose of the Commonwealth's My School website. Again rights are invoked: 'informed' parents will be better able to exercise their right to choose. Accompanying spin about accountability, transparency and the power of information to change schools does not attempt to hide the reality that the choice is between good schools and others, the 'others' sometimes crudely described as below average, but more often as under-performing or disadvantaged.

As many have pointed out, a choice between good and not good is scarcely a choice. Nor can such a choice be justified as a right. It is an illusion, an image in a distorting mirror. It is not, however, a harmless illusion. It has consequences. Generations of young people will be relegated to the bad schools. Yet the policy makers, beguiled from outside the Giggie Palace by news of the success of choice and selectivity among the self-interested, have failed altogether to think of these consequences. Worse, seeing that the show is out of control, they hunt about for scapegoats. And schools offer droves of scapegoats: parents who don't care enough about their children, leaders who can't lead and above all teachers who are not putting in.

Intended or not, the result is to expose failing schools and expect parents to abandon them. Once the school is effectively abandoned, various schemes are advanced to repair the hole in the local provision. A task force may close the school and propose a new one, perhaps with some tempting specialism—music, sport, technology and the like. The possibility of importing the 'charter school' (in effect a fully supported private school) idea from England or the United States is canvassed. So too are vouchers, which put funding in the hands of parents.

In the minds of policy analysts, choice is but a part of a larger image of education as a market and there is no system in the traditional sense. Schools, they say, operate in a market. Authorities should do things to stimulate the market and sit back to watch it work.

If choice is an interesting concept vitiated by failure to consider its consequences, the market idea is simply foolish. When New South Wales took to the idea and created dozens of selective schools it was thinking of its system being in competition with other systems. What it overlooked was that it was creating competition also within its own system. However well the image of a market of competing systems might play out, the image of the system itself being a market is a triumph of image over reality. It might work as a description of the independent school sector in which each unit is comparable to a small business, but it is altogether inappropriate as an image of a fully funded public enterprise that pretends to universal provision. The markets we know do not consist solely of small businesses reacting directly to demand. If we must have a business image for a large enterprise with many units, it would be more like a corporation—a large bank or a supermarket chain, for example. These organisations run as systems. They do not offer customers a choice between good and bad branches, nor do they publish unfavorable comparisons between their customers (which My School does in the name of justice). Their corporate reputation depends on the quality and the accessibility of each of the units.

As I have said, Victoria did once have a deliberately planned school system. It had manifest fault—it was authoritarian

and inefficient—but its basic premise and overall goal remain valid. The goal rested on faith in education for all. Its premise was to aim for geographic completeness—a primary school in every locality and a secondary school in every town or suburb. For over half a century this even spread of provision was sustained by a quite strict enrolment policy: students had to go to the school in their zone. I well remember my principal in the 1960s consulting his street directory to decide on an enrolment. Today it is parents who use the directory to find how far they will have to drive their children to school.

**In the minds of policy analysts, choice is but a part of a larger image of education as a market and there is no system in the traditional sense.**

Nowadays it would be impossible to enforce zones, which is one reason why shopping around is encouraged. But the concept could be realised in other ways. If a school, for example, was defined as a district or sub-regional cluster consisting of multiple campuses, primary, secondary, tertiary or specialised, there could be some plausible restrictions on moving between districts. Choice could be made within the cluster but limited outside it. Sound leadership, management and control of quality would be more attainable, as would a more robust form of competition. The essential principle is that the basic units of a system have to be strong.

The many elements required to create strong units already exist. We are familiar with successful senior colleges, with specialised schools in arts, sports and the like, with teachers and youth workers skilled in getting through to resisters, with ways of breaking large campuses into small, caring sub-schools and so on. The weakness is that these elements exist haphazardly. Some students can get to them, but many are still in units too small to muster the resources needed to provide for all. Nor can such a haphazard system track the journeys through school and work of all the young people in an area.

Victoria's reservoir of tradition and innovation in schooling provides all the ingredients for a strong system. What is lacking is political will. Sensible direction, matched by realistic funding of the necessary infrastructure, could wind back some of the worst by-products of choice and yet permit

healthy versions of choice and competition within the system. But a search for equity cannot stop at reorganising the shape of the system. No matter how the system is organised, what is it that parents seek and schools must offer?

The answer to that question probably lies in the nature of secondary schooling and the way it connects to tertiary education. From its beginnings in the colonies primary schooling was imagined and organised as a universal system. But when Victoria legislated for state secondary education in 1910 its mind was on schools that would gain entry for selected students to tertiary education—university, teachers’ college or technical college. Selection was ultimately by examination but also initially by enrolment procedures. Tertiary destinations fell into a hierarchy of prestige, with university at the top. Equity of a sort was achieved through scholarships awarded by examination.

**If we must have a business image for a large enterprise with many units, it would be more like a corporation ... They do not offer customers a choice between good and bad branches, nor do they publish unfavorable comparisons between their customers.**

This continues to be a fair description of upper secondary schooling today. Year 12 results and tertiary entrance rankings are the essential stuff of school information and eventually league tables. Built into these results is the ancient dichotomy of head vs. hand. Academic studies yield more rewards than technical ones, and within the academic curriculum studies taken by the best students contribute most to the ranking. Selective schools, official or de facto, public or private, with few exceptions pursue success within this narrowly academic framework. For a long time governments have said the right things about the virtues of vocational education, but lack of provision keeps pushing the issue to the perimeters. Any re-organisation of secondary schooling has to right this imbalance.


Historically, the character of upper secondary schooling has determined the shape of middle and lower secondary school, but not that of primary school. Choice, however, has crept into primary schooling and is starting to sort the schools out academically. National tests are largely of things learnt in primary school, essentially the three Rs. The ministers of education expect that test results reported by My

School will wake parents up to their responsibilities and keep teachers on their toes. A national curriculum for the early years will straighten out those progressives who don’t teach phonics or grammar. The curriculum, former Minister Gillard told the press (at a doorstep on 1 March 2010), will ensure that once again children will be able to sound out the word c-a-t, then recognise its meaning, then be able to put ‘cat’ in a sentence: ‘The cat sat on the mat’. National assessment of the outcomes of this curriculum will show the world where the good and the bad teachers are. To act on this discovery, a dose of WorkChoices might help: let principals hire and fire staff and keep the unions out of it. And since it is teachers, not buildings, that make good schools, and since punishment works better than rewards, it can all be done within budget.

Teaching is the heart of the matter. Fortunately, no one doubts that good teaching matters more than anything else. The problem is that governments both red and blue currently believe that the cheapest and swiftest ways to buck up teachers is to have them all do the same thing and be exposed if they don’t measure up. A national curriculum is a means to this end. So too are the 1950s ideas of replacing teachers with barely qualified aspirants, and reviving inspectors. What is not considered adequately is improving teaching as a profession.

Better pay is clearly one way to improve things. So are greatly improving qualifications and training. Since the beginnings of state education, the qualifications of primary teachers have markedly risen, but those required of secondary teachers have changed little. To teach excellently and equitably, a teacher must be thoroughly on top of both content and method. If you still can’t teach well enough there should be ways to move you on. One way might be to augment the meagre ranks of para-professionals employed to free successful teachers from bureaucracy and so-called non-teaching duties.

Above all, teachers need to be trusted. There is a case for national consistency and objectivity in curriculum, but that can be achieved within a relatively simple framework and set of guidelines. The detail, progression, method and assessment are matters for respected professionals. Everyone agrees that reading and writing are essentials throughout school, but experienced professionals know that there are various ways of achieving success in these basics. They are not helped—rather they are insulted—by fanatics urging phonics upon everyone and ministers spelling out ‘The cat sat on the mat’.

When the nation really has faith in the educability of all young people, and trust in teachers to bring it about, we may be able to celebrate a revolution in another decennial declaration. 

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Re-enchantment of a Post-industrial World  
Ian Barns  
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# Re-enchantment

## of a Post-industrial World

Ian Barns

### Responding to Roland Boer on 'Red Toryism'

When David Cameron's Big Society project was launched in Britain recently, it provoked a good deal of critical and derisory responses from both sides of British politics. In their opinion pieces in *The Guardian*, columnists Jonathan Freedland and Madeleine Bunting endorsed the generally sceptical assessment of the credibility of the Big Society rhetoric, given that the new government was at the same time enacting savage budget cuts which would take away the funds from those very civil society agencies expected to enable any big society initiatives. However, at the same time they cautioned against throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Freedland observed that the Big Society initiative was a good idea being promulgated by the wrong people at the wrong time. He argued that the core idea of revitalising forms of local and communitarian enterprise was worth pursuing and indeed something for which the left could and should claim patrimony.

It seems to me that in his highly critical response to Cameron's promotion of a 'big society' and especially of the 'Red Tory' vision that underpins it, Roland Boer is indeed in danger of throwing a possibly valuable baby out with the bathwater. In Boer's view, Red Toryism represents a deeply flawed attempt to disentangle conservative politics from neo-liberal economics: flawed because of its dangerous nostalgia for an imagined bucolic localised past, for an organic and hierarchical society, and a likely slide into a neo-fascist admiration for a strong leader. What is apparent in Boer's account is not only his hostility to Phillip Blond's Toryism that in the end submerges any redness, but also to any serious consideration of the particular themes it addresses: localism, the renewal of the language of moral virtue in public life, and the recovery of a more frankly religious, or 're-enchanted', view of the world in which we live. For Boer, the central problem is capitalism and the solution is 'to do away with the system in question and to start anew', by which he presumably means a radical socialist reconstruction of the political ordering of industrial society. For many progressives, Green or otherwise, it is not just capitalism that is the problem but industrial modernity itself. Renewing the associational life of civil society, the re-moralising of the languages of public life and contesting the disenchantment of the world are not diversions from the main task of replacing capitalism but key sites for re-imagining a post-industrial modernity.

There is actually nothing all that new about David Cameron's Big Society project. It is the most recent

attempt to harness the economic and governmental potential of more localised civil society or community associations, networks and voluntary organisations. Of course civil society, social capital and community are highly contestable terms. Much of the mainstream celebration of these terms is highly suspect, insofar as it mediates the continuing neo-liberalisation of civic and social life. Yet the networks of civil associations and the practices they foster can and often do restrain the spread of market society and its values, especially when connected to a robust public sphere and supportive civic institutions (including state funding agencies). In particular they can provide the conditions for the creation of forms of strong, associative or deep democracy, for instance in practices of participatory budgeting and deliberative town meetings of the kind advocated by Archon Fung, John Gaventa, Carolyn Lukensmeyer and others.

As long as our globalising, growth oriented industrial order continues to generate its remarkable abundance of goods and services, civil society localism will probably remain a minor aspect of public life. However, in the event of an imminent system crisis resulting from a multi-dimensional ecological overshoot, that will almost certainly change. The rapid growth of re-localisation initiatives in recent years, most prominently in the Transition Town movement, has been a response to the manifest unsustainability of a global industrial order based on the exploitation of cheap oil. It is likely that the inexorable decline of global oil reserves during the coming decade will be the catalyst for a much more severe global economic recession, or what John Michael Greer calls a 'long descent'. As Jeff Rubin puts it, our world is about to get a whole lot smaller.

The response of the Transition movement, while no doubt in many cases drawing on a nostalgic yearning for renewed face-to-face community, has thus far been characterised by a creative recovery of skills and forms of community association that betray nothing of the kind of reactionary medievalism decried by Boer. Such progressive forms of relocalisation, far from being marked by 'village idiocy', may well provide the creative nuclei for resilient communities in a post-oil era.

For many on the Left, any 're-moralisation' of public discourse is regarded with deep suspicion as a conservative attempt to constrain the free expression of sovereign individuals within a liberal polity and to restore some kind of hierarchical order. Yet, as many progressives realise, the absence of a language of public morality does not make us freer, but rather more vulnerable to the manipulation of desire within a consumer culture. We thus need to recover those forms of public moral discourse that articulate the goods of civic life and the virtues of freedom and community.

Within liberalism, the languages of governance and the public sphere have been predominantly procedural and utilitarian: typically, the languages of economics, science and sundry

technical disciplines. To be sure, ‘values’ are important, but considered to be better confined as much as possible to the sphere of private preference. In his 2009 Reith Lectures and in several books, Michael Sandel has contested this liberal construction of public life, arguing that government policy necessarily and unavoidably involves making judgements and priorities that presume some kind of vision of ‘the common good’. Sandel argues that rather than attempting to constrain discussion of values, morality and religious belief in policy development and public debate we need to foster a more robust deliberation of the nature of the good life and its public articulation.

We also need to recover a shared moral discourse about the self: what it is to flourish as human beings. In the liberal conception of a clear division between public and private spheres, sovereign individuals should be free to live as they choose, as long as their choices do no harm to others. Yet, as many recognise (for example, Bowles and Gintis in *Democracy and Capitalism*), this conception obscures the reality that we continue to be learners (selves in formation) within the diverse contexts of civil society and public life and are unavoidably involved in shared moral practices through which we develop the virtues and capabilities considered appropriate to our culture. Yet without any articulate conversation about nature of the good life and what it is to be a good person, we are not actually free, but simply vulnerable to manipulation by the dominating discourses of the market and technocratic elites.

Despite Boer’s apparent dismissal of the very notions of enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment as merely an expression of the politics of nostalgia, the question of whether our sense of value, purpose and moral meaning is merely socially constructed within an objectively meaningless world, or whether it arises out of an orientation to a larger sacred or transcendental order, is a fundamental one. Within an optimistic enlightenment narrative, the progressive disenchantment of the world—the adoption of more rational and secular approach to the ordering and governance of public life, the displacement of various forms of religious authority, and the decoding of the reality of which we are a part in terms of objective science—is an unqualified good. It is a project that remains unfinished and maybe ultimately misconceived. The yearning for forms of life and a vision of reality that are suffused with a sense of transcendence and spiritual meaning remains strong. Old forms of enchantment persist. More surprisingly, new forms appear in the very heartland of a disenchanted world, in commerce, technology and rational politics.

The ecological crisis of global industrial society has deepened a widespread dissatisfaction with living in a disenchanted world. For many, there is an urgent need to restore a sense of the sacred-

ness of the natural world in order to resist the seemingly boundless project of commodification (hence the popularity of the image of Gaia). Interestingly, in his recent book *Requiem for a Species*, Clive Hamilton suggests that even in the domain of rational climate change science and politics there is an irreducible sense that human life is lived within a larger sacred order. Indeed, Hamilton even speculates that as the climate crisis really begins to bite it may well be a catalyst for religious renewal: a turning from the smaller gods of economics and technology to embrace ‘the celestial god’.

What of Christian theological accounts of disenchantment and re-enchantment? Boer portrays the radical orthodoxy school as fundamentally reactionary and anti-modernist. Anyone familiar with Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory*, and with the various collections of essays produced by contributors to the radical orthodoxy school (Pickstock, Ward, Cavanaugh and so on), would find Boer’s portrayal of Milbank to be something of a caricature. Be that as it may: what is a more interesting question is the nature of the politico-cultural logic of the Christian narrative, particularly in relation to the dialectic of disenchantment and re-enchantment. In his magisterial *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor argues that the dilemmas of modernity are deeply rooted in the historical articulation of the Christian story. In a way Taylor is arguing that addressing the spiritual malaise of modernity entails re-visiting Christianity’s ‘unfinished business’, especially with respect to whether the Christian story is, as many in the Green movement believe, implicated in the de-sacralising devaluation of nature, and also whether (as Boer perhaps implies) its theo-political vision is fundamentally hierarchical and oppressive or fundamentally emancipatory. With respect to the first, Taylor tells a story of ‘the work of reform’ to foster a more spiritual Christianity that laid the foundations for a rationalising, ‘excarnating’ approach to the body and to material life more generally. In Taylor’s view this was a misconceived trajectory that deeply contradicted the incarnational and sacramental logic of the central drama of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. With respect to the second, Taylor draws on the work of the activist Ivan Illich, best known for his polemical writings against the colonising discourses and practices of the technical professions, but whose political vision was profoundly influenced by the radical ‘servant’ politics of Jesus.

I don’t want to defend Blond’s Red Tory political vision. Far from it. I agree with much of Boer’s critique. However, as I have argued in this response, the challenges of a renewed localism, of recovering the language of virtue in civic and social life, and addressing the question of meaning in a disenchanted world, are not distractions from the progressive agenda of shaping a just society, but fundamental to it. **a**

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Re-enchantment of a Post-industrial World

Ilan Barns

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Kashgar—A Modern Medieval City

Michael Amendolia

Michael Amendolia has twenty-five years experience in journalism photography, both on staff at News Limited and as a freelancer. His core work is found in portraits, landscape and photo documentary. He was awarded first prize in 1999 and 2001 at the World Press Photo Awards, in the Science and Technology category, and third prize in Nature and Environment in 2003. Michael is also one of four founding members of the Sydney-based Bi-Annual Reportage festival. More of Michael’s work can be viewed online at <[www.obscurophotos.com/1/#/8](http://www.obscurophotos.com/1/#/8)> and he can be contacted at <[michael\\_amendolia@bigpond.com](mailto:michael_amendolia@bigpond.com)>.

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Children play in the water fountain in front of the world’s largest statue of Chairman Mao, Renmin Square.



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Taken at the turn of this century, these photos depict daily life in Kashgar, a bustling city in China's far western Xinjiang province, 200 kilometres from the Afghani and Pakistani borders. Kashgar is at its heart a medieval city—a vibrant Islamic centre within Chinese territory. It is home to the largest minority group in the province, the Uygur people, who make up 90 per cent of Kashgar's population. However, more and more Han Chinese are moving into the region as the Chinese government attempts to stifle the Uygur's wish to become an independent nation. In Kashgar's 2000-year-old history, the city once held an important strategic position on the old Silk Road. Now, the Uygur people are struggling to keep their traditional lifestyle alive while China slowly imposes its culture through modernisation.



A Uyğur girl watches as department store workers exercise before opening time.



When in public, Uyğur women cover their faces with a dark brown cloth.

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In a traditional Uyğur wedding ceremony, the bride arrives at the house of the bridegroom. The mother of the bride prostrates herself before her daughter.

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Confetti is thrown in celebration at a Uyğur wedding.

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- Women pray at the tomb of a loved one. This is a traditional Uygur structure.

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Drill, Baby, Drill

Chris James

- Dr Chris James is currently researching Transition Towns at Deakin University. She can be reached at <doctorchris.james@bigpond.

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# Drill, Baby, Drill

Chris James

## Are Australians aware of the risks posed by deep drilling and wild cat wells?

On 28 April 2010 a small Gippsland newspaper announced the discovery of gas and oil at the South East Remora-1 exploration wild cat well, the latest in several finds in Bass Strait and part of the federal government's expanded search for energy resources. The new well, located just 35 kilometres off the Victorian coastline, is one of the Latrobe and Golden Beach groups in the Gippsland Basin. The well was drilled in 57 metres of water to a depth of 3602 metres below sea level and is 50 per cent owned by Esso Australia Resources, a subsidiary of ExxonMobile, and 50 per cent owned by BHP Billiton Petroleum.

Since the middle of 2008, mining companies have been coming to towns across Gippsland and elsewhere in droves to—as US Vice Presidential Candidate Sarah Palin succinctly put it—'drill, baby, drill'. But no sector of government wants to talk about it and local communities lack useful information. Large leases have been taken up on and offshore with no community consultation. The details of the new mining boom in Gippsland are a well-kept secret because it is happening in an area of highly volatile seismic activity amidst risky combustible minerals on an already depleted aquifer and collapsing coastline.

Mining companies and their cohorts depend heavily on people's ignorance and personal sense of powerlessness. The fact is ordinary citizens cannot veto mining on their land or object to it in Commonwealth waters.

### Deepwater Horizon

By 28 April 2010 everyone was talking about the explosion at the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico and asking if it could happen in Australia. The explosion and subsequent fire on the rig was situated about 64 kilometres south-east of the Louisiana coast in the Macondo Prospect oil field. The explosion killed eleven workers and injured seventeen others; another ninety-eight people escaped without serious physical injury, but are likely to have life-long post-traumatic experiences. The Deepwater Horizon rig was destroyed and sank, leaving in its wake a massive ongoing oil spill gradually making its way to the Gulf of Mexico coast and sensitive wetlands. It has ruined the local fishing industry and is now on record as being the worst environmental disaster in US history.

The Deepwater Horizon platform commenced drilling the exploratory well in February 2010 at a water depth of approximately 1500 metres. The planned well was to be drilled to 5600 metres below sea level, and was to be plugged and suspended for subsequent completion. Production casing was being cemented in place at the time of the accident. Similar wells are planned for Australian coastal waters, some going deeper than the Horizon well. Australia, also, has pristine flora and fauna in need of protection. Can mining companies be trusted to care for communities and the environment? The record speaks for itself.

There had been numerous previous spills and fires on the Deepwater Horizon facility. The Coast Guard had issued eighteen pollution

citations and investigated sixteen fires and other incidents. These previous accidents were not considered unusual for this kind of Gulf platform and have not been blamed for the April 2010 explosion and spill. However, Deepwater Horizon experienced other serious incidents, including one in 2008 in which seventy-seven people were evacuated from the platform when it listed and began to sink after a section of pipe was accidentally removed from the platform's ballast system.

**The details of the new mining boom in Gippsland are a well-kept secret because it is happening in an area of highly volatile seismic activity amidst risky combustible minerals on an already depleted aquifer and collapsing coastline.**

The oil industry is renowned for its collapses, blow-outs and spills. It is known to push its employees to continually lift production. Trouble-shooting problems in the fossil fuels industries is a big multinational business in its own right. The men on the rigs work under stress and in isolation. It's a tough, dangerous job; they earn big money for dirty work and they play hard. Meet them in any corner café or hotel and they will happily tell you of the dangers and 'near misses'.

By 20 April the Deepwater Horizon well operation was already running five weeks late.

The pressure on riggers was mounting. Then the explosion came, and until late July, when a cap was finally installed, 60,000 barrels of oil a day were spilling into the Gulf of Mexico. This must be of concern to many Australians, especially those living near the coast.

### Australia's Deepwater Spill

On 29 June 2010 Greg Hoy, of the ABC's 7.30 Report, interviewed Minister for Mining and Resources Martin Ferguson, pending the long-awaited report on Australia's deepwater spill from the Montara exploration off the West Australian Kimberly coast. This well leaked oil into the Timor Sea for two months in late 2009. The minister was asked if he was concerned about the risks associated with deepwater projects but answered by highlighting the economic imperatives. When asked if the details of the Montara report would be made public, he said 'no'. While his first priority was to work with industry to actually get the well plugged, he was keen to get on with a 'no-blame inquiry' into the cause of the incident 'so we could learn from it'.

The Timor oil leak was potentially catastrophic but the government was able to play it down because it happened out of sight, with the oil heading away from Australia. (When the Thai oil company PTTEP blew out 30,000 barrels of light crude oil it spewed into the Timor Sea creating a 90,000 square metre oil slick that reached Indonesian waters.) There seems to have been a lot of confusion, not just at the time of the blow-out but afterwards too, centring on who was responsible for regulating oil head operations. The federal government pays the Northern Territory to do the policing, but the Territory had failed to conduct physical inspections because, as they said, 'it was not part of [their] routine operations'. Martin Ferguson's response has been to advocate for a single off-shore regulator, but will this really make any difference to the way oil companies operate?

The US federal agency responsible for ensuring the Deepwater Horizon well was operating safely fell way short of its own policy of monthly inspections. Not only were inspections not carried out as required, it has been alleged that inadequate records were kept and little, if any, accountability was exercised, which raises a number of questions about agency/regulator oversights in the offshore oil drilling industry generally. Members of Congress and President Barack Obama put it in terms of a 'cozy relationship between

## Wild cat wells are so named because so little is known about how to control them. They are a desperate response to peak oil and the need to boost the global economic recovery —but at what cost?

regulators and oil companies'. These are hugely dominant multinational companies operating in a highly competitive market. Why should we think oil companies are any more diligent in and around Australia than they are elsewhere? What should we know? What do we have to worry about?

When Wendy Carlisle, of ABC Radio's *Breakfast Show*, asked Minister Ferguson why no one acted sooner to protect the environment after the Montara well explosion, once again Minister Ferguson didn't want to talk about it. The federal government presumably requires safety procedures to be diligently carried out, but for two and a half years it seems no one had inspected the Montara well.

Dr James Watson, a marine ecologist from Queensland University, was belatedly, and in less than optimal conditions, commissioned by Environment Minister Peter Garrett's department to conduct a survey of the marine life in the waters surrounding the Montara oil lease. His team spent three days surveying waters covered by oil where 'thousands of birds, hundreds of dolphins and whales and many more animals feeding' were 'unable to survive'. 'In a rapid survey, we were able to come across dying animals ... the presence of dying birds and dead sea snakes suggest that there is an immediate risk to species utilising the water that has been affected by the oil slick'. On nearby Ashmore Reef, a marine reserve, his team found seventeen dead birds, some with large amounts of oil on them. Dr Watson was concerned about the government's lack of preparedness for emergency surveys like his; he was also 'amazed at how little Australia really cares about ... a huge oil slick'.

### More Wells, Deeper Wells: More Risks?

On 17 May 2010 Minister Ferguson announced thirty-

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one new offshore petroleum exploration areas. The announcement was made at the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association's conference in Brisbane. The designated areas cover five basins, with twenty-six exploration areas in Western Australia, two in the Ashmore and Cartier islands, two in South Australia and one in the Northern Territory. Particularly controversial is the south-west's Margaret River region, home to award-winning vineyards and a tourist industry that includes surfing and whale watching. An oil spill along this coast could wipe out a significant sector of Western Australia's tourism and leave a unique area devastated for generations.

There is no legislation requiring oil companies to pay for any long-term monitoring of the environment; it took six months before any in-depth audit of the damage caused by the spill at Montara began. How many more spills can we expect as the federal government pursues its hazardous deepwater program? When asked about the risks of a spill in the South West's Margaret River region, Environment Minister Peter Garrett said, 'there's always risk'. But managing risks in wild cat wells is an oxymoron.

Wild cat wells are so named because so little is known about how to control them. They are a desperate response to peak oil and the need to boost the global economic recovery—but at what cost? Drilling a wild cat well for oil is a trial by error process. The old wells are drying up so it is principally a deeper, more intense search for new oil sources. If there is no oil, gas is the next option. The depths at which drilling is now taking place means if there is an accident there is no tested technology to fix the problem.

### Rising Sea Levels

As for the residents of Gippsland, the government's mining boom in oil, gas and coal has serious long-term consequences. In a recent paper by Monash University geologists those risks were clearly stated:

Coastal subsidence in Gippsland is a direct consequence of fluid extraction from the Latrobe Aquifer by Bass Strait oil and natural gas extraction, and of onshore Latrobe Valley open-cut brown coal mining operations (GCB, 2006). There is a significant risk that ongoing lowering of fluid levels in the

Latrobe Aquifer will result in land subsidence along the Gippsland coast of between 1–2 metres over the next 70 years (GCB, 2006). Holzer and Johnson (1985) relate that other urban areas in the world have experienced significant flood events due to land subsidence caused by fluid extraction.


Seventy years is a conservative estimate. Gippsland locals will tell you that the subsidence is becoming very visible. Water loss at low tide is much greater and king tides are causing more flooding. This is making people feel very nervous. The threat here is exacerbated by multiple forms of on and offshore mining and exploration for gas, oil and coal. In these areas there is a lack of infrastructure and emergency services. There is no dialogue between parties; there are no checks and balances.

Concerns about increased mining along the Gippsland coast have been articulated by Professor Bruce Thom, a member of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, while the Department of Primary Industries Forum has revealed the risk of earthquakes associated with increased mining extractions along Bass Coast fault lines. The Gippsland Coastal Board post models of the changing coastline on their website at <[www.gcb.vic.gov.au/subsidence.htm](http://www.gcb.vic.gov.au/subsidence.htm)>.

### Profits before People

Property owners along Gippsland's Ninety Mile Beach have had 95 per cent of the value of their land wiped out over concerns that rising sea levels will cause their coastal blocks to be swamped. They have been led to believe the cause is climate change; sea levels rise, however, when the land collapses from deliberate industrial dewatering. As reported in local newspapers, up to \$30 million in value has been slashed from 2500 properties along Victoria's Gippsland coastline and 40 per cent has been wiped off low lying areas inland. We know there are long-term problems associated with climate change, but there is a more immediate danger that comes not from the weather, but the mining of fossil fuels.

The story is the same elsewhere. On the Liverpool Plains in New South Wales the food bowl is being depleted for open cut coal and gasification. In Queensland some of the best cattle and dairy country has been taken over by mining companies. In Western Australia Indigenous people are being duped into sacrificing their ancestral homes, when we know from past experience that the promised services to Aborigines are rarely forthcoming. A cursory look at the national mining tenements map would suggest the entire nation is going to end up a wasteland if this frenzy is not curtailed.

As the Native American Cree proverb states, 'When all the trees have been cut down, when all the animals have been hunted, when all the waters are polluted, when all the air is unsafe to breathe, only then will you discover you can't eat money'. 

**There is no legislation requiring oil companies to pay for any long-term monitoring of the environment; it took six months before any in-depth audit of the damage caused by the spill at Montara began.**

# On the Dalmatian Coast

*Roland Boer*

## Modern Croatia within Dubrovnik's ancient walls

'Don't you leave there in a hurry; stay and enjoy my beautiful former country.' So my Serbian friend in Australia had written to me when I told her in 2009 that I was in Dubrovnik, the stunning seaside fortress that rears from the rocky coast of the Adriatic in Croatia. It had of course been part of Yugoslavia until the war which marked the break-up of a country younger than Australia (Yugoslavia was first formed in 1918) into a host of new nation-states.

In contrast to so many ancient fortresses, the walled city of Dubrovnik is not a museum, for people live in houses that have been here from Roman times. (I too stayed within the walls of the fortress—it is the first and perhaps the last time I have stayed within a living fortress.) Since timber is still a precious item, the soil being too rocky for any substantial trees, the whole town is built out of the same greyish white stone from the nearby cliffs. The stone of the street becomes, once you pass through a doorway into inner space, the stone of a floor, the only difference being that the paving stones on the street are more smoothly worn. There are stone walls, stone stairs, stone ceilings, even stone guttering around the rooves—each of the thousands of stones bearing the marks of its quarrying and shaping.

The fortress is full of 'streets' that barely hold two people abreast, locals adept at dodging the regular plop of a pigeon dropping, endless stone stairs, small trolleys for heavy goods, children playing, a small open space for those who want to play football (soccer), a school, mosque, synagogue, Serbian orthodox church, Franciscan monastery, and Catholic churches out of which nuns seem to pour in a constant stream. You can only get into the old city over the moat and through one of the two gates—Ploca or Pile.

Standing beneath the walls and looking over the sea, I imagined Greek and then Roman triremes rowing into the small harbour, or perhaps, many centuries later, the crusaders refortifying the town as a bastion against the 'Turks' in the vain Crusader push to the 'Holy Land'. Later again, people from other parts of the small miracle known as Yugoslavia would come to the coast—Muslims, Orthodox, Roman Catholics and a good number of atheists all sharing the same space. And they still have the extraordinary ability to enjoy the day in a way that other places desperately try to emulate but can never quite match. It begins by finding a coffee shop open at 8am, ordering a stiff black 'Croatian/Serbian/

Slovenian/Bosnian' coffee (really Turkish coffee), lighting a cigarette and easing themselves into a day that will involve many more stiff coffees, cigarettes, strolling, eating some chocolate in the afternoon and then imbibing a few drinks in the evening—without leaving the same coffee shop.

But I was not in Croatia for a holiday. As part of my ongoing pilgrimage through former communist countries, I wanted to see how Croatia was faring. Three people embodied for me different elements of modern Croatia—a cleaner, an apartment owner and a younger social researcher.

### Croatian Women

The cleaner was actually a toilet caretaker at the airport. As each flight came in and a clump of men rushed the toilet to relieve over-full bladders and bowels, she would weave in amongst them with her mop, cleaning up spills of whatever, smile fixed beneath a curly crop of hair. She obviously had seen more penises than she cared to remember, but some of the men were not so comfortable with a woman calmly cleaning up and telling them to shove over. So they tried to turn their backs on her, shielding the vital piece of tackle should she be bothered to have a look—which of course she wasn't.

This calm assertiveness by women in a culture that occasionally threatens to become macho also appeared in Nives Racic, the proprietor of our 'apartmen' within the walls of the old city. I suspect that this confidence is one of the many relics of Yugoslav socialism when women had equal rights and opportunities to men, something to which women remain very accustomed.

One evening, Nives knocked on the door and made her way straight in. 'I have fresh fish', she said, smiling widely. 'Let me cook them for you.' She pushed aside the other dish (beans and rice) that was cooking. 'You can eat that tomorrow', she said. 'This is beautiful fresh fish from the new harbour, caught today.' The fish were filleted, dipped in bread crumbs and dropped into the oil. As she watched over the fish, she answered phone calls, talked with us, washed dishes, refilled the soap container, replenished the supplies, took out the garbage, washed some towels, and told us about her children. At the same time, she also cooked for the other two apartments she owned in the building. So we just sat, slightly stunned, as Nives did her thing. In no time we had fish, fresh bread and salad before us. Nives whisked away as abruptly as she had come. 'Hvala' (thank you), I said as she left. With some deft cultural skill, she had not once seemed rude and yet she had

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Roland Boer is a writer who lives in Newcastle.

been full of confidence and assertiveness. She had in effect made us an offer we could not refuse, and so we had sat back as the whirlwind blew around us.

### The New Croatia

Branko Ancic is slightly younger—in his thirties—and works at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb. As we sat together over a long drink in Dubrovnik I had the chance to fire off a few questions, for I was keen to find out what the current situation in the Balkans looked like from a Croatian perspective.

## Historians are scrambling to rewrite history with an eye to an independent Croatia. Even philosophers are engaged in research that concerns the ‘Mediterranean roots’ of philosophy—in which Croatia plays a distinct role.

What is it like to be in a new nation state? Branko replied that he was quite young, only a teenager, when Croatia became a state (1992). But he did remember that there was much confusion over what it meant to be a state. There was no Croatian social network, no police, education, hospital system, parliament, constitution or currency (it is now the *kuna*, equivalent to 25 Australian cents). All that had been part of Yugoslavia. But once the new state had these things in place, the earnest search for identity began. So it came as no surprise that university-based research focuses on a whole range of Croatian issues. Historians are scrambling to rewrite

history with an eye to an independent Croatia. Even philosophers are engaged in research that concerns the ‘Mediterranean roots’ of philosophy—in which Croatia plays a distinct role.

Is the Croatian language all that different from Serbian? There is about a 95 per cent overlap between them, Branko answered. In fact, there is as much difference between the dialects of regions like Split, Rijeka or Zagreb as there is between Croatian and Serbian. I suggested it was like Norwegian and Danish: in any other situation they would be dialects of the same language, but because of their own histories and the need for new nation-states to assert their distinct identities, they become ‘languages’. Yet in Croatia the politics of language is all too obvious. For Croats, the former ‘Serbo-Croatian’, the official language of Yugoslavia, was an artificial political fix. By contrast, Serbs regard Serbian and Croatian as the same language!

What about the war? Branko replied that they didn’t experience it that much in Zagreb. There was some gunfire and they had to go into their air-raid shelters every now and then, but that was it. In towns like Dubrovnik it was worse. There were Bosnian refugees inside the walls of the old fortress and Serbian troops up on the hills firing into town. It was obvious from travelling through the countryside that the war had touched Croatia lightly. In contrast to other parts of the old Yugoslavia, where I have seen bombed out villages slowly rebuilding, railway lines cut, bridges destroyed, and cities with piles of rubble still visible, Croatia’s infrastructure remained largely intact.

So what about the current relations between Serbia and Croatia? They are better now, Branko said. Actually, the government is much more hostile to the Slovenes, since they are blocking Croatia’s application for EU membership. The Slovenes want a few kilometres of Croatian coast and the Croatian government won’t give them a centimetre. Branko was still talking about the war. Since in the old Yugoslavia people used to mix quite freely, he said, we all have friends in Belgrade or in Sarajevo or elsewhere. During the war it was quite sad. There was a story about three children who had become the closest of friends—a Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic and Bosnian Muslim. When the war began they were about eight years old and their parents suddenly refused to let them see each other again. They have not spoken since. After he told me this story, I realised that they would be about the same age as Branko.

### Economics and Religion

As always, I am interested in the two questions of economics and religion. Serbia had suffered under the attacks by NATO, having to pick up not only after a prolonged war but also after the shift between two very different economic systems (socialism to capitalism). What about Croatia? Did it too show signs of economic stress? The buses were certainly newer than those further east and the cars were the characteristically small and efficient types found throughout Western Europe. Croatia, however, has



one great advantage: a stunning coastline. Travelling by ship up the coast and through the islands, from Dubrovnik in the south to Rijeka in the north, I soon realised that Croatia had drawn the long straw in terms of the division of territory—it is stunning, with mountains rising from the sea, villages and towns clinging to the small space between water and steep slope, and the iridescent blue of the Adriatic.

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**Within Dubrovnik there are two Roman Catholic church buildings, but also a Serbian Orthodox one, a mosque and a synagogue. In the north you might also come across a Protestant church. What place do they have in a self-identified Roman Catholic country?**

And one still doesn't have to sell a body part or two to spend a holiday there. Tourism has become Croatia's primary industry. Of course, the Dalmatian coast has always appealed to travellers of all types—cyclists, trekkers, canoeists, cruise ships and what have you. But it was not regarded as a favoured destination for Western Europeans. In the last decade it has become a primary holiday spot, with hordes of lusty and young (and not-so-young) Western Europeans descending on the coast, especially over July and August, to work on their skin cancer and cirrhosis of the liver, and add to their collection of STDs. But tourism is a fickle resource, subject to the whims and economic fortunes of travellers. Croatia did very well over the crazy 90s. People came, eager to spend their surpluses on Dalmatian holidays. But when capitalism began once again to implode in late 2008, Croatians—at least those dependent on tourist dollars—started to dread the summer of 2009. In the Croatian parliament, the president even called on all Croatians to pray—literally—for a good tourist season in the coming summer.

Finally, the question of religion has become an urgent one in this 'former communist' area of Eastern Europe. In Croatia, I was told, the Roman Catholic Church has been a major player in the definition and identity of the new state. The church has insinuated itself into politics,

the constitution, public education, and the networks of business. Seizing the opportunity with the formation of the new state, the Roman Catholic Church insisted that to be Croatian was to be Roman Catholic. And so catechism turned up in the school curriculum, up to 85 per cent of children began to go through confirmation, and some 92 per cent of the population identified themselves as 'Catholic' (although only 52 per cent trust God enough to give them life after death!).

Not unexpected, one might say, since such an identity was a way of distinguishing the new state from the Orthodox Christians in Serbia and the Muslims in Bosnia. But it has led to a whole new batch of problems which arise whenever a religion identifies itself with a state. When the kingdom of heaven becomes identical with the kingdom of earth, then religion becomes indistinguishable from nationalism. We have seen this all too often throughout the history of Christianity: to give but two examples, Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 312 CE and the declaration that Christianity was to be the religion of the Empire, and recently with the United States. In Croatia, such identification between religion and state means that parents with little or no religious commitment will put their children through confirmation so that the children will not suffer discrimination at school or when they are looking for work. It also means that children become confused when they hear in the school-based catechism that God made the world in six days—and then are taught the theory of evolution in their science lessons.

So in a state that is less than twenty years old, Croatians are engaged in intense debate about the role of religion in everyday life. Liberal theologians, philosophers and some educators want to restrict the role of the church, while the church itself defends its new gains. The place of minority religions has also become an issue. Within the old fortress of Dubrovnik there are two Roman Catholic church buildings, but also a Serbian Orthodox one, a mosque and a synagogue. In the north, closer to Hungary, you might also come across a Protestant church. What place do they have in a self-identified Roman Catholic country?

### **Balkanisation**

Ever since the Yugoslav war there has been a recovery of the term 'Balkanisation'—a centrifugal tendency of areas like the former Yugoslavia to splinter into ever smaller states. Much talk focuses on supposedly ancient animosities, the role of religion, and primitive nationalism of the rural areas. I must admit that I find this is a little puzzling, especially since Yugoslavia was a state that worked no worse, and often better, than many other states for eighty years. Instead, it seems to me that two forces are at work: one centrifugal, when there is too much central control, and then the other centripetal, when the fragmentation goes too far. Given the fact that there are many Serbs in Croatia, Bosnia and Slovenia, or that many Croats live in Serbia, Bosnia and Slovenia—in short that people throughout the Balkans have married, relocated for jobs, and moved for all the reasons human beings do—I can't help wondering whether that centripetal tendency might come into play again. After all, when it comes to the Eurovision song contest all the Balkan states vote for one another. **Q**

## ARTS AND CULTURE

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On the Dalmatian Coast

Roland Boer

# Poetry and Gore and More

Stephen Knight

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Poetry and Gore  
and More

Stephen Knight

Stephen Knight is Professor of English Literature at Cardiff University and Honorary Professor at the University of Melbourne.

**Continent of Mystery: A Thematic History of Australian Crime Fiction** appeared in 1997; his international survey **Crime Fiction, 1800 to the Present: Detection, Death, Diversity** has just been published in a second updated edition.

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## Peter Temple and Australian Crime Fiction

In spite of growing quantity and recurrent quality, Australian crime writers have made little mark around the world. Arthur Upfield's colonial caricature of an Indigenous detective sold well overseas and is still bafflingly popular in France and Germany. He's the only one. The Bronte of the Bush, Mary Fortune, remained unknown in Britain, as did Pat Flower, a less tricky equal of Ruth Rendell. Claire McNab and Kerry Greenwood have made some headway in the United States with a glamorous lesbian and a gourmet baker as detectives, but the excellent Peter Corris and Marele Day had limited impact on their release there.

In the last few years Peter Temple has been published widely and reviewed favourably in the United States and Britain, and even won the lucrative British prize for the best crime novel of the year, the Golden Dagger—if you think the title sounds outdated, be relieved they changed in it 1960 from 'The Crossed Red Herrings'. It was evident from the start—he won a Ned Kelly award for his first novel and has added four more—that he was introducing technical power and an approach bolder, more world-wide than we were used to. Winning the Miles Franklin Award for Fiction in 2010 tops this off, suggesting Temple has achieved more than even Raymond Chandler or John Le Carré in bringing crime fiction in from the cold.

Temple himself is international; born and brought up in South Africa, he worked there and then in Germany as journalist and sub-editor. He came to Australia in 1980 and continued his wordsmith's trade, including editing the notable *Australian Society*, and then taught writing at Melbourne's RMIT before mining criminographical gold from his base at Ballarat.

His first book, *Bad Debts* (1996), was modally familiar but also innovative. Jack Irish is a Melbourne-based small-time, even casual, lawyer; a local case leads him into dangerous encounters with a coalition of heavy

criminals, senior bent cops and local politicians interested in any purse, public or private. It might be a mix of Peter Corris' medium-tough urban detective with Shane Maloney's *faux naïf* amateur at the interface of crime and politics. But there is more to Irish than Sydney and Melbourne combined; indeed, he is not himself Irish—the family started back in central Europe.

A lawyer-investigator, in a big city, with much talk: to the crime buff that says George V. Higgins, and Temple has recognised the Boston master of louche law. *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, not vulgarised as in John Grisham, might be a model for Jack Irish's activities and attitudes. But Temple deploys other American modes, notably the detective's aura of confessional chaos, coming down ultimately from Hammett. Where Cliff Hardy or Murray Whelan have a little personal life, usually with the discursive lights off, Jack's feelings are recurrently in regretful ruin, with a daughter, a murdered wife, professional ladies smart of costume and mouth, friends of varied but potent kinds, all of them stirring the personal pot. His Melbourne is an up-front multi-purpose community of miscommitment before you even get to villains and victims.

But the structure is also social. The initial plot event evokes concern for the little people on whom pain, absence and mystery have descended, and true to some civic bond—an old client (sometimes very old), a fellow footie fan, a café regular—Jack will mount up. The second, elaborated, crime plot develops angst about civic security and urban corruption, and then with some elegance curls back, so the initial citizen needs protecting from the menace of mega-Melbourne, which may be on a wider scale. Temple excels at moving a power-involved mystery, usually condensing drugs and business, around the world, but with withering impact on some peaceful Victorian suburb or one of the fragile rural settings he convincingly creates.

If the interface of battler and the international forces of embattlement were not enough, Temple explores other lodes of local gold. Jack's dad was a hero of Fitzroy (for those with lives unwashed by the Yarra, a team now in Aussie Rules' ghostly pantheon) and Jack mixes with ancient, loyal, allegedly lovable Royboys. He is also spectatorially involved in racing, attending as a minder the betting raids of a former jockey turned man of the exploitative people. In the

third leg of this male-emotive tripod Jack helps an ancient, quirky cabinet-maker to create things like a grand library for a rich lady, who lusts equally for cultural capital and Jack's body.

Through these adventures flows an American kind of unashamed self-assertion, like Philip Marlowe's arty sensitivity or Stephanie Plum's penchant for rough trade. Neither the British nor the Australian traditions stage the narratorial self in this hyperbolic way, but Temple can give his big figure a socially real impact. He persuades the aged Lions to transfer affection to St Kilda, and so survive the mercantilised blighting of their beloved sport. The racing activist's main man is Cam, tough, multi-functional and wry; he is also, in an underplayed way, Indigenous, and can stand up for himself ferociously, with Jack's definite approval. Not unlike the writing of Chandler and Evanovic, the showier functions of Temple's text can both mask and emphasise its subtler operations. But the cabinet-making remains a bit wooden.

With this powered-up crime novel, Temple was well-placed for local success, and more so overseas, especially as other elements of the contemporary international thriller were taken on board. These belong to the remarkable recent development of what I recently described at a Limerick conference (the place not the verse form) as 'conspiracy, cruelty and capital cities'

These three caused a late-20th-century step-change, starting from James Ellroy and Thomas Harris. The 1980s had valued diversity in crime fiction, with feminist thrillers, gay mysteries and ethnic crime fiction across the world. The aftermath has been deeply, even painfully, normative, mostly through the coalition of cruelty and conspiracy, often in the new medium of the supermarket thriller. As sado-masochism flowed from the arteries of TV, mysteries came to relish not good old sex but torture and weaponry. One archetype is Patricia Cornwell: *The Body Farm* was just that, strips of rotting flesh on sticks, but all for a clean-living forensic purpose. Another is James Patterson: in *Cross Country* I make the body-count 108, with some possibilities the text does not nail down. The new cruelty crossed the world: see Mark Timlin's *Paint it Black* and Mo Hayder's *Birdman* for awkward British injections of brutality into otherwise amiable rambles through class-consciousness and possible guilt.

There's much more to say about cruelty itself, if we could bear it, but it goes hand in blood-stained hand with conspiracy: not only are people disintegrating in interesting ways but lots of the still intact ones are out to get the hero(ine). The human envelope is fragile psychically as well as physically. Cornwell did this best, with Scarpetta's arrestees, workmates and lovers (including a werewolf) taking it in turns to betray her in intimate and also world-destructive ways. The family gets it as well of course, routinely assaulted, imprisoned, and disposed of in designer ways.

What Cornwell and Patterson crucially did was separate the cruelty/conspiracy dynamic from its context, the capital city, and so deal personally with individuals, not socially with citizens. James Ellroy had used cruelty and conspiracy as instruments of modern sensationalism to alert readers to the drama of the decaying city: *The Black Dahlia* starts with a young woman cut in half and drained of blood, synecdoche for Los Angeles emptied of human vitality. By depoliticising late-20th-century sensationalism, Cornwell and Patterson and their ilk had the self-conscious consumer market tied up (a little discomfort is part of it). But, and here we can cheer up a little, Peter Temple transmits not just the blood-letting and scheming of this new *fin de siècle* mode, but is honourably

faithful to its originary plan, and often avows his respect for Ellroy's vision of the urban crucifix.

In the Jack Irish stories the bemused little people, the flashy corrupt, the wounded of both crime and law, do not suffer alone for our individualist frisson: they are part of a damaged and damaging structure, the city of Melbourne, mostly seen darkly, sometimes by flashes of kindlier light. With brushwork bolder than Corris' Sydney or Maloney's Melbourne, or the socially criminal Australia of Garry Disher and Gabrielle Lord, Temple makes the shocking a path to social revelation. The major sensationalists Wilkie Collins and Mary Braddon did that too, but they did not add the city: following Ellroy, Temple in fact looks back to the great (and long) Eugène Sue and George Reynolds of the 1840s, with their *Mysteries of Paris* and *Mysteries of London*. *The Mysteries of Melbourne* would be a fair Temple title—except it was used in 1873 by Donald Cameron in a forgotten but fine post-Reynolds novel about morality, gender, vice, colonisation, along the Yarra and its many swamps. Soon to be reprinted!

**In the Jack Irish stories the bemused little people, the flashy corrupt, the wounded of both crime and law, do not suffer alone for our individualist frisson: they are part of a damaged and damaging structure, the city of Melbourne, mostly seen darkly, sometimes by flashes of kindlier light.**

If Temple has combined a high-affect tone and a strong political infra-structure, he has one more major weapon. In our sad tertiary world of funding applications, training program and mickey-mouse management, it is consoling, nay inspiring, to identify a colleague who knows his stuff and can really make it count. Temple's stuff was, and is, writing. Most reviewers of *The Broken Shore*, notably overseas, highly praise its style. From the start Temple claims authority and ambition:

Cashin walked around the hill, into the wind from the sea. It was cold, late autumn, last glowing leaves clinging to the liquidambars and maples his great-grandfather's brother had planted, their surrender close. He loved this time, the morning stillness, loved it more than spring.

A mix of rhythms and references, taking positions, planting seeds. The mix will develop: Temple uses

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much direct speech and clipped narration, especially in action, often violent. A few sensitive (mostly UK) commentators have found some of the dialogue unacceptably brusque, but Temple might (and does) ask, how do you think cops and criminals talk? In this stylistic power, as in his overall positioning, Temple is not so much original in Australian crime fiction as more confident and assertive than predecessors. The recent classics—Corris, Day, Maloney—all write with wit, variety and irony, especially compared with the bossy banality of much American work and the timid descriptivity Christie bequeathed in England. But Temple does the local voice more confidently and with more of a showman's touch. It is there in the Irish books: *Black Tide* uses both the rapier—Cam is 'as elegant and insolent-eyed as ever'—and the bludgeon: 'Melbourne hated success. It didn't match the weather. Melbourne's weather suited introspective mediocrity and suicidal failure. The only acceptable success was to involve pain, sacrifice and humility. Sydney liked the idea of success, achieved at no cost and accompanied by arrogance.'

But because *The Broken Shore* is not so much a mystery as a novel about the Joe Cashin's healing wounds, plot and style work at a deeper level. This makes it sound as if Temple moved on with this book in 2005, as his career and acclaim certainly did. But he is more complex than that. While building up the Irish series he could go generically AWOL. *In the Evil Day* (2002, mystifying re-titled *Identity Theory* in the United States) is a very tough thriller set between South Africa, Germany and Britain; it reads like a shot at the Cornwell—Patterson market, with brutal opening, wealth of conspiracy and no real context beyond the hollow protagonist. It is excellently constructed but, for all its skill, *In the Evil Day* is a cold-hearted book. A parallel exercise was *Shooting Star* (1999), a Melbourne-set abduction-conspiracy story using an ex-soldier ex-cop less nuanced than Irish, with plot to match. More interesting than either was the earlier non-series novel, *An Iron Rose* (1998).

As soon as he had created Jack Irish, Temple realised in this novel his reflex. Formerly a busy police detective, now living with dog in a decrepit family home in southern ocean Victoria (strongly evoked), the hero is drawn into the local murder of an elderly man, with Indigenous involvement, which develops into a chilling revelation from the past, blocked by corrupt local cops and a combination of Melbourne rich and senior police, but he resolves the issues while pursuing a craftsman's life, interspersed with action including Aussie Rules and a classy lady.

That synopsis—a fair one, no tricks—actually works for both *An Iron Rose* and *The Broken*

*Shore*. The higher tension and the investigative internalising tone, through which *The Broken Shore* trumps the Irish series, is already created in *An Iron Rose*. There are differences: in the first, Mac Faraday is a federal cop turned hobby blacksmith (hence the title), against the wounded but still-serving officer and house-builder Cashin; Mac's posh totty is closer to fantasy than Joe's past school-friend; for Mac indigeneity only resides in a noble family friend who is the corpse at the start, not the whole Koori series Joe meets, from lost lads through getting-by mates to an Indigenous detective and an agenda-changing interventionist. The early novel is closer to the cruelty and conspiracy model than the more realistic and more generally socially-committed best-seller. But overall the almost always overlooked *An Iron Rose* testifies to Temple's early range and his ambition to do more than just update and amplify the Australian urban-detective story.

**Temple uses much direct speech and clipped narration, especially in action, often violent. In this stylistic power, as in his overall positioning, Temple is not so much original in Australian crime fiction as more confident and assertive than predecessors.**

That there was the early, and itself successful, version also helps to explain the confidence, flow and powerful impact of *The Broken Shore*. Cashin is himself broken: a good detective, he has been ferociously attacked by a drug gangster. His body is recovering from being crushed in a small car, but the wound of his young assistant's death—named Diab, he was one of the new multicultural police—is not even starting to heal. Back on the coast, in his old family home, planning to rebuild his great-grandfather's ruined mansion, with his two dogs (standard poodles are also town-country hybrids), Joe pulls back towards normality and renewed engagement.

A seemingly casual burglary-murder is pinned on local Koori boys, but not only is this against the evidence, when they return home they are shot in a police ambush, with Cashin and Paul Dove, Indigenous cop, deliberately sidelined. Ethnic politics develops. Cashin's cousin, general sales agent and fence (including of fences) is part Indigenous, as was Cashin's own aunt: the redneck killer cop calls him and Dove 'a pair of boongs'. A former schoolmate has

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become a new-model Indigenous politician, and it may be that the dark-eyed swagman, Joe's building assistant and general adviser, is himself Koori. Temple handles these volatile issues with a touch both light and serious, eluding patronisation and sentimentality. The blame for the initial murder, and many attendant crimes, is ultimately brought home to rich white corruption, reaching through business—and indicting one of those 'developments' that despoil fine locations around the world—into the higher reaches of politics and, most jarring of all to Cashin, the police.

Going deep into the corrupt past to find the patterns that disturb the present is an American manoeuvre, and though some commentators have likened what Temple does to Ross Macdonald, he never succumbs to the merely confessional excavations that made that writer so popular in shrink-ridden 1960s America, and forgotten today. Like Ellroy, Temple finds patterns of vicious exploitation in the past—a quasi-Christian camp for paedophile delight matches the horrors of the girls' home fiercely uncovered in *An Iron Rose*.

**However revealing the ultimate crimes in Temple's earlier books, they were deep in the past, a sort of historical unconscious. *Truth* comes right up-to-date ... Temple here projects a harsh light forwards from the painful urban present.**

Where both Ellroy's cops and Macdonald's roving folk-psychiatrist would always move on fairly serene, Cashin has been spreadeagled by his experiences. Complicit as he initially feels in the cop shootings, he finally realises the man he most admired, the hyper-Aussie head of Homicide, has himself taken money for silence on the paedophile plot, and this permits both the initial death and the spread of cruelty and conspiracy through the city, and the country towns. Cashin is left alone, hanging on, sentimentally unsentimental: he 'felt the sudden withering ache of loss and mortality and he turned and went back the way he had come, into the wind'.

But the wind comes off the sea, over the living trees, and the dogs frolic in it. By being a man of rural Australia Cashin is consoled and consoling: there can be little doubt the international success came to the book in part through its vivid localisation that links to the romantic image the world has of Australia the great outdoors. When did a Sydney/Melbourne novel or film do well overseas?

Cashin has other consolations—friendship, Aussie rules of a somewhat less technicolour version than in *An Iron Rose*, the

discreetly excitable lady lawyer, and ultimately his connection with the job. He is still in touch with Stephen Villani of Melbourne Homicide, who shares drinks and lodging with him when he goes to the city over his brother's suicide attempt—Cashin men are prone to depression. And through it all, through Cashin's own fidelity and the connection with Villani, there remains the prospect of good policing, even if it must be against the wind.

This goes beyond Ellroy's notoriously soft endings or the consoling closures, usually sexist or racist, of the classic American tough-guy stories. The notion that Cashin will heal, will keep going, like his cousin Bern, the swaggie Dave and indeed the ever-positive dogs, perhaps in the company of the quicksilver Helen, is the positive strand that matches the underlying mythical idea that the landscape embodies lasting values, that the shore may be broken but its grandeur and the surf that attacks it re-enact the dialectical vitality of life, suffering, belief, literature—to speak as Cashin can feel and think.

Such an ultimate positive is not part of the continuity from *The Broken Shore* into *Truth* (2009). The new novel can be seen as a continuation of Cashin's dark rural romance into a darker urban drama: *Odyssey* precedes *Iliad* here, and in the besieged city Jack Irish's robust flaneurism becomes the high-strain policing of Steve Villani. He is central to a story that combines new crimes with old corruptions, both rooted in the cadres of the powerful, and which tests close to breaking the will and endurance of its figure of value, with tensions both realised and concealed through a dialogue-focused style. Some chapters are all fragments of cop talk: the impact is, to some readers disturbingly, more like an action-movie script or a Manga text than your traditional arty reflective novel, a leisured tradition with which *The Broken Shore* was still in touch.

The city's modern dramas are stressed, from the West Gate Bridge tragedy in the opening, to the druggies and deadbeats who oppress the apparently respectable, and a series of complaints about traffic—but, as usual in Temple, with very rare and quite negative references to trams. As in the other novels Vietnam is a shadow, a valueless Gallipoli, a conduit for serious drugs and international corruption. The Koori engagement is now focused on the career of Paul Dove, proving himself braver and smarter than most in a still semi-racist world.

Such tough realism is varied, as before, by rural myth. Villani and his father have planted trees in the bush. Raging fires appear, as they did while Temple was writing, but the family forest is saved, as if by magic, or manly deserving. The novel has, some might think mercifully, dispensed with Aussie Rules and merely glances at racing. Villani's true Aussieness—and a multicultural one at that—is enacted in his determined quest for something like truth in policing, and in the collateral impact on his private life. Family are overlooked, with a tragic aftermath as his younger daughter spins down into the Melbourne gutters; his wife, like Irish's women,



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and More

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· moves off professionally. There is as ever a  
· sleek substitute, but she too is darker than  
· usual, clearly involved in the web of  
· corruption and deceit—or is it just media and  
· modernity?

· In the plot Temple also moves on, and towards  
· veracity. However revealing the ultimate  
· crimes in the earlier books, they were, as in  
· the Americans, deep in the past, a sort of  
· historical unconscious. *Truth* comes right up-  
· to-date, starting with savage sex-murder in a  
· high-security apartment over a casino, then  
· moving to a mega-dollar transport-focused  
· super-scam, involving the allegedly great and  
· good. As before there is some real detection,  
· forensic/mechanical à la Cornwell, and a few  
· crossed red herrings moments when Steve has  
· a hunch. But the novel's impact is bigger, more  
· teleological, than that. Like law, crime fiction  
· is usually retrospective, but Temple, not  
· unlike George Pelicanos and Ian Rankin at  
· their best, here projects a harsh light forwards  
· from the painful urban present.

· The only crime that links to the past is the  
· very cruel killing of some drug infantry: it  
· looks like the second big crime that will  
· explain the first, but Temple's plotting skills  
· are here more questioning. This vicious crime  
· is managed by a senior cop to avenge his own  
· lost family. Ambiguity about justice also  
· haunts Villani personally. A colleague saved  
· him from gambling trouble with a bag of cash,  
· then made him cover up a shooting in return.  
· It turns out he shot the man he squeezed the  
· cash from. But true to Temple's projection of  
· Ellroyesque social politics, this is not just  
· personal pain: the shooter becomes head of  
· the Victorian police and Villani is made his  
· assistant, as the government changes on the  
· last page. The murderous mobsters are  
· removed from power; the future lies in  
· stained, but still we hope partly honest hands.

· If you think that's truth, as in the title, the  
· novel says you might be kidding yourself.  
· Temple has commented that his publisher  
· would sometimes ask what's going on here,  
· and he would reply, you'll find out. In a  
· treasure-trove moment, three-quarters in,  
· Steve, reflecting on his father, is:

· unaccountably thinking about the first  
· horse Bob raced, the best horse he ever had,  
· the lovely little grey called Truth who won  
· at her second start, won three from twelve,  
· always game, never gave up. She sickened  
· and died in hours, buckled and lay, her  
· sweet eyes forgave them their stupid  
· inability to save her.

· Nothing evaluative works for sure in these  
· novels. It's Temple who can claim aspects of  
· truth. Cruelty is made moral, not sado-  
· masochistic; conspiracy is a social evil; and  
· the capital city is both aspirational and  
· desperate. There are jokes—mostly grim cop  
· humour or folk-fun like Jack's old footie fan-

club—and there may be some at the reader's  
expense: I'll buy Joe Cashin's initials as a fluke but to  
call your two honest cops Cashin and Villani implies  
ironical depths. But mostly Temple is pretty serious,  
and in the best tradition of crime writing is both  
compulsive (what happened?) and interrogative (how  
can such things happen?). Overall he has redirected  
positively the millennial cruelty and conspiracy  
nastiness through his social concern and powerful  
style. It was the *Washington Post* reviewer who  
coupled 'poetry and gore' as his headline phrase  
about Temple, but many readers will also see and  
want to add the political force of his work.

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conspiracy is a social  
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desperate.**

Like Marcus Clarke bringing Euro-swagger to the  
underfocused early Australian novel, Temple has  
imported self-assertion to the honourable but  
domestic domain of Australian crime writing. You  
might even think he absorbed back home in South  
Africa and has also transplanted the edgy  
flamboyance found in the white-cop black-cop  
procedurals of James McClure and the troubling  
mysteries about apartheid by Wessel Ebersohn.

Temple points a way in several ways. His is a very  
masculine world, in both strength and weakness, and  
hopefully women writers will accept the challenge to  
walk the other side of gendered mean streets. He  
gives Melbourne and Victoria a major place in a  
genre previously dominated by Sydney and the bush,  
which is unlikely to fade. Most importantly, he has  
suggested a path for inter-racial reconciliation  
fiction in popular literature.

Like Villani appointed as Crime Commissioner, hoping  
for more, wondering if it can possibly be better, we  
have to ask: what comes after *Truth*? **a**

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## Camp Office

Prayers were answered  
 with little rain  
 but that naughty bird  
 sent it down  
 pat on my forehead  
 if it wasn't for the windshield.  
 It runs to all sides and hardens  
 in your face—  
 lacquer it would not take.  
 Not that I wanted my pecap to hang  
 at home, on a brass hook,  
 whose very shape  
 cocks a snook  
 at everything up there.  
 In any case I need good wipers  
 before I land in office  
 and speak with club mates  
 on the flying bird-part  
 and a sanctuary for  
 what's equally endangered.  
 Go—try as you may  
 —see for yourself there,  
 and there, and there.

## Composition in Early Winter

On this frequency  
 though sound is clear,  
 sense agitates.

Familiar birds  
 wear foreign names  
 and intone their signals  
 in failing October light.  
 Leaf by leaf,  
 the summer signs off.

I can not help it all.  
 What is to fall now  
 will fall.

**Alamgir Hashmi**

## REVIEWS

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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 a professor of English and Comparative Literature in European, American, and Asian universities. Email: <alamgir.hashmi@hotmail.com>.

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Economic Crisis and Political Choice

Norman Wintrop

Norman Wintrop is a senior research associate and former senior lecturer in political theory at Flinders University, South Australia.

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books **Economic Crisis and Political Choice**

review by Norman Wintrop

Alex Callinicos, *Bonfire of Illusions: The Twin Crises of the Liberal World* (Polity, Cambridge, 2010); Joseph Heath, *Filthy Lucre: Economics for Those Who Hate Capitalism* (Scribe, Melbourne, 2009); Istvan Meszaros, *The Structural Crisis of Capital* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 2010); and Kevin Phillips, *Bad Money: Reckless Finance, Failed Politics, and the Global Crisis of American Capitalism* (Scribe, Melbourne, 2009)

Alex Callinicos, early in his book on the crisis, neatly summarises what are for everyone, apart from neo-fascists, the three possible political responses to the current economic crisis: returning to neo-liberal normality; achieving a more regulated form of capitalism; and socialist change. Of the books being reviewed, two urge the second response, a more-or-less Keynesian regulated capitalism, while the remaining two are written from a Marxist perspective. The review begins with the more moderate of the two Keynesian responses and concludes with the more revolutionary optimistic of the two Marxist analyses.

**Back to the 1960s**

Joseph Heath's *Filthy Lucre* has much of importance to say on current issues, but underestimates the scale of the economic crisis and the obstructions to political solutions. He considers the main cause of the crisis to be the theories of the Chicago School of Economics, which he is fond of describing as 'infamous' or 'notorious'. He trusts that, provided governments abandon the School's extreme laissez-faire theories, a speedy return to the better regulated financial institutions and global markets of the post-World War II decades can be expected.

Heath is a Canadian professor of philosophy who, as a sympathetic critic, writes extensively on economic theory, and does so with commendable clarity and a minimal use of technical terms. His book is intended for non-specialists and consists of the exposure of sixteen alleged economic fallacies, half of which have right-wing and the other half left-wing biases. Right-wing and conservative fallacies describe those encouraged by laissez-faire economic liberalism; left-wing fallacies are those which attract egalitarians and radical political liberals.

His attitude to mainstream academic economics is ambivalent. He challenges its foundations by viewing as fallacious the assumptions it makes about human psychology, behaviour and rationality, all of which are said to be far more complex than most economists allow. It follows that models of perfect markets, irrespective of whether they are constructed by individual researchers, teams of mathematicians or computers, rest on myths. Furthermore, even if it were possible to construct a model

of a perfectly functioning market economy, it would not establish that the closer an actual economy approximated to it, the more efficient it would be. This is because any departure from a so-called perfect market economy would have unpredictable and potentially harmful effects on the remaining parts. But despite this deep seated scepticism about the work of economists, Heath does not dismiss it completely, not even that of the 'infamous' Chicago School. Instead, he adopts the commonsense view that, despite the limits and imperfections of contemporary economic theory, if used cautiously it can cast light on economic behaviour and the likely effects of governmental policy.

**Heath ignores the difficulties in breaking from the pivotal neo-liberal ideological assumption that global capitalist markets are the means for generating endless economic growth, improving human life, and thus leaving governments with little more to do than watch over and fortify markets.**

Commonsense is also applied to current political dilemmas. Heath is confident that post-crisis democratic nations will again have mixed economies with strengthened governmental controls and public sectors. A crucial question, therefore, will be the standards which should guide the governments and citizens of mixed societies. To what extent should they try to promote market driven growth, and to what extent social justice and non-economic forms of human welfare? The highlighting of fallacies is Heath's method for clarifying the difficult economic and political issues which mixed societies must confront, and many of his

arguments are compelling. His book, however, overlooks the extent to which the globalising goals of neo-liberalism have weakened the national and international institutions, public philosophies and political will of the post-war mixed societies.

Thus, for example, he argues that it is a mistake to believe that nations, like business corporations, are economic competitors. Although this belief needs to be contested, it is not mistaken for the reasons Heath gives. He appeals to classical, 19th-century conceptions of free trade in which trade between nations is considered mutually beneficial. Even when small and poor nations trade with richer and more powerful nations, they will still benefit if they exchange easily produced goods for imports which would cost them more to produce. Such classical thinking may well be theoretically sound, but it has little relevance to today's world. Free trade now means, primarily, the unrestricted investment of capital from wealthy to poorer nations, along with the freedom for it to be withdrawn and moved elsewhere. Moreover, the United States, China and other powerful nations do act as economic competitors, and at times quite ruthlessly.

Both nationally and internationally, Heath ignores the difficulties in breaking from the pivotal neo-liberal ideological assumption that global capitalist markets are the means for generating endless economic growth, improving human life, and thus leaving governments with little more to do than watch over and fortify markets. It is to be hoped that Heath is right about the Chicago School's neo-liberal theories being discredited and on the way out. But even so, if all that replaces them is the hope that a slightly better regulated market capitalism will be more successful in achieving the utopia of endless growth, and the end of serious politics, then little will have changed, and the vested interests and political forces responsible for neo-liberal policies will remain.

**The United States, Phillips writes, has spawned a cowboy capitalism, inept elites, and corrupt politicians, largely in the hands of the lobbyists for financial and other greedy interests.**

### **The Need for Political Will**

Kevin Phillips, unlike Heath, does not underestimate the severity of the US and world economic crisis or the powerful economic and political forces which caused it and now stand in the way of effective solutions. An apt epigram he gives his book is a 1998 statement by John Gray. 'In a global free market, there is a variation on Gresham's law [that bad money drives out good]: bad capitalism tends to drive out good.' The principal theme of *Bad Money*, as illustrated by these words, is that in the decades preceding 2007 a cancerous form of capitalism displaced earlier forms. Although earlier capitalism was not irreproachable, its elites and beneficiaries were more willing to accept social responsibilities, and were constrained by governments which, more than contemporary ones, acted on conceptions of a common good for both their market economies and societies. Public and private sectors realised that modern capitalist nations required more than invisible hands if they were to function efficiently and benefit citizens.

Phillips is a prolific author and influential US commentator on politics and economics, whose political-economic perspective goes beyond technical and other debates between rival schools of economists. He was one of the public commentators who warned against the deregulatory and other policies of the Bush I, Bush II and Clinton administrations. These administrations are accused of having brought the American empire, as he calls it, to the condition of the Roman, Spanish, Dutch and British empires in their decades of disintegration. The United States, he writes, has spawned a cowboy capitalism, inept elites, and corrupt politicians, largely in the hands of the lobbyists for financial and other greedy interests. As a consequence, federal governments and Congress, instead of applying constraint, expanded the opportunities for the reckless banks, hedge funds, and subprime mortgage and other companies which, when housing prices fell, triggered the worst recession since the 1930s.

The political evolution of Phillips is of interest. In 1968 he was a senior strategist in Richard Nixon's presidential campaign and, a little later, prescient in spotting the ideological moves and strategies which would give the Republicans an electoral ascendancy over the Democrats. Since then, however, he seems to have walked a road to Damascus. He now combines his US patriotism with a politics and objections to the nation's home and foreign policies not unlike those of Noam Chomsky and the United States' other radical critics.

His accounts of the financial crash, subsequent US and worldwide economic meltdown, and the investment bubbles, massive private and public debt, collapse of house prices, and the policies which led to them, are the most thorough and detailed of those in the books being reviewed. He also relishes including several striking graphs. In addition, attention is paid to the danger of a major US and global oil crisis, as oil production peaks and global demand increases; to the United States' loss of respect and influence, resulting from the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions and quagmires; and, though more briefly, US environmental irresponsibility. But the main topic of *Bad Money* is the economic crisis and what are considered its principal causes: financial services becoming a major contributor to GDP at the expense of the manufacturing sector, and the gluttonous and huckster-like character of the banks, shadow banks and loan companies.

**Callinicos does not propose that the present-day Left should try to use and to push liberal-democratic parliamentary institutions in a socialist direction; his recommendation is that liberal democracy be combated and replaced.**

On finance and economics he writes as a pragmatist who seeks economic insights irrespective of whether they are those of Keynesian, Austrian School, institutionalist, Marxist or other branches of the economics profession. It is a pragmatism which, politically, is more like that of John Dewey, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the 1930s New Deal than the shallow party-political electoral pragmatism of recent years. It is a pragmatism which was once called statesmanship and now statecraft, in which politics rather than economics is upheld as the master science.

Phillips argues that the United States' economic strength, like that of other industrialised nations, was nourished by a strong manufacturing sector. For thirty to forty years, however, federal governments have allowed manufacturing to decline, a product of the delusion that the extraordinary enlargement of the financial sector and its contribution to GDP were adequate substitutes. He now sees the bank and other financial bail-outs of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations as demonstrating that the delusion persists. He is also angered by the way federal stimulus money has been used not to alleviate the plight of the unemployed, under-employed, and people who lost their houses and savings, but to pay the debts and prop up the financial sector which caused the crisis.

The comparisons made between the present sorry state of the United States and the failure of earlier empires to confront their crises adequately is not to lament or to predict a similar US fate. Phillips, like Arnold Toynbee, believes that civilisations rise or fall in accordance with how they deal with their crises. His book, therefore, is a timely political wake-up call, but one which says little about what exactly the people who have awakened should do. In the book's final paragraph, however, a 'silver lining' is offered. Phillips writes that the 'thirty- to forty-year tumble from national pre-eminence ... may be somewhat moderated for the United States because of its position as a North American continental economic power with a large resource

and population base'. But, he adds, the United States needs to abandon 'the hubris of military and financial imperialism ... postures [which] represent drags on the American future'.

**Marxist Economics and International Relations Realism**

The 'twin crises' of the sub-title to Alex Callinicos' *Bonfire of Illusions* refers to two sets of events which undermine neo-liberal illusions. One of these illusions is that capitalism's global markets can continually sustain economic growth. A related illusion is Francis Fukuyama's 1992 *End of History* thesis that humanity's political history is ending with an almost universal conviction that the best achievable society is Western, especially US-style, liberal-democratic capitalism. The first of the two illusion-destroying jolts was the 2002 Russo-Georgian war which concluded with Putin's Russia obtaining a decisive military victory. It thus ended the US-promoted European Union and NATO absorption of Eastern Europe's former Soviet dominated territories. Along with US failure to subdue Afghanistan and Iraq, Georgia's defeat both strengthened Russia vis-à-vis the United States, and emboldened US opposition in the Middle East, Asia, South America and elsewhere. Most of Callinicos' book, however, is on the second of the twin crises, the post-2007 economic crisis.

His analysis of the crisis, though briefer, supplements that of *Bad Money*. This is partly because of some different emphases, and partly because Callinicos' book was completed about a year later and covers more recent events. But one difference is that, in contrast to Phillips who regards the economic crisis as largely caused by an arrogant and irresponsible financial sector, Callinicos uses Marxist analytical tools to argue that both the financial collapse and economic downturn were products of inherent features of industrial capitalism. He maintains that both were outcomes of US and global capitalism having an underlying, unsolvable, post-1960s overproduction and profitability problem. After the less serious crises of the 1970s, and the deregulation and privatisation of the 1980s, he argues, there were frenzied searches for new markets and sources of profit, culminating in investment inflation, and subsequent housing and mortgage boom and bust. But Callinicos does not try to force everything into Marxist

categories. Apart from occasional lapses, he writes as a scholar rather than a propagandist. Neither economists nor anyone else should ignore his book on the grounds that Marxist economic analyses are inevitably flawed by alleged inconsistencies or other defects in Marx's economic thinking. But what exactly does Callinicos say about the political implications of the economic crisis?

In the preface he writes that he had second thoughts about the book's title as several major illusions have so far survived the bonfire. But one illusion which has been badly scorched, he writes later, is that global capitalism has drastically eroded national sovereignty and state power. He observes that the bulk of recent initiatives to control the economic conflagration, such as bail-outs, stimulus packages, currency rescues and austerity drives have come not from the International Monetary Fund and other international or regional organisations but from the governments of nation states. Even within the European Union the main decisions have been taken not by the bureaucracies of Brussels but by governments, independently or co-operatively with one another. He is pleased by this reassertion of state power as it makes possible nationalisation and planning, two necessary conditions for containing capitalism and embarking on socialist change. They are necessary for a socialism which, provided that there are radical democratic safeguards, would be very different from 'Stalinism'. 'Stalinism', however, is an unfortunate choice of language as it suggests that other varieties of Leninism might be acceptable.

This welcoming of initiatives by liberal-democratic states, however, is accompanied by the assertion that these states will still not be able to resist, effectively, the demands of national and global capitalism. There is some historical insight in this proposition as whenever capitalist institutions and laissez-faire theories have been seriously challenged by parliamentary governments, as in the United States' New Deal of the 1930s and Europe's Keynesian decades, pressure has been exerted on liberal-democratic governments by the presence of a firmly rooted and strong Left. Dominant classes and elites were confronted by labour, social democratic and/or communist movements and parties which were considered threats to capitalism, and by intellectual and popular suspicions of and hostility to capitalism. Callinicos, however, does not propose that the present-day Left should try to use and to push liberal-democratic parliamentary institutions in a socialist direction; his recommendation is that liberal democracy be combated and replaced.

Hardly any attempt is made, however, to explain why the Left should be so willing to discard liberal democracy. Presumably Callinicos' readers are expected to be familiar with his other writings or to guess their content. Neither does he explain the precise character of the institutions which should replace liberal democracy. Instead, there is a quasi-anarchist participatory-democracy rhetoric, lacking in information on how new institutions are to be achieved, and how their manipulation by elites and a Stalinist or other degeneration are to be avoided. There is little more than calls for 'a wholesale challenge to the capitalist division of labour (the hierarchical organization or production) and its replacement by cooperative forms of production', the 'democratic self-management' of nationalised industries by workers and consumers, and 'a self-managing society' in which power is in the hands of 'directly elected workplace and neighbourhood councils'.

Just as these unrealistic proposals, attractive only to their advocates, jar against Callinicos' thoughtful analysis of the economic crisis, so they also differ from the realism of his chapter

**On Polanyi's terms, the astonishing feature of the neo-liberal decades was the extent to which, apart from some brief 19th-century periods, governments, elites and public opinion tolerated and furthered the subordination of their societies to market laws.**

on international affairs, 'Empire Confined'. This chapter's realism, however, derives not so much from the Marxist tradition as from what academic specialists in international relations call 'realism', a realism which they contrast with sociological, liberal and other approaches to international affairs. As far as this realism has a theoretical source, it is Machiavelli rather than Marx. Practically everything Callinicos writes on global politics assumes that the main actors are states, primarily concerned about the wealth and power of their nations, protecting and extending their territories, and gaining economic and other advantages over rivals.

Nevertheless, whatever their source, these international-realist assumptions are put to impressive use. They lead to informed and perceptive observations on contemporary conflicts, and on the home and foreign policies of the United States, Russia, China and other nations. On the United States, from a different political perspective from that of Phillips, Callinicos reaches similar conclusions about its weakening position. China is also written on extensively, partly because it is emerging as the main beneficiary of a US loss of power, and partly because, more than any other nation, it exemplifies a new kind of authoritarian state-capitalist regime. Callinicos' assessment of this type of regime, however, suggests that there may be more to be said for liberal-democratic institutions than his brisk dismissal of them permits.

### **Marxist Economics and Revolutionary Utopianism**

Meszaros' response to the crisis, in his *The Structural Crisis of Capital*, is similar to Callinicos'. The crisis is explained in terms of capitalism's inherent structural problems; it is contended that neither Keynesian nor other regulation can stabilise global capitalism and counter its destructive social effects; and that the only alternative is a socialist transformation which is beyond the capability of liberal-democratic governments. His analysis of the economic crisis,

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Economic Crisis and  
Political Choice

Norman Wintrop

however, is less nuanced and thorough than Callinicos', and his book seems to have been constructed more hastily, with half of its chapters being written before the 2007 onset of the crisis. One reason for including these earlier chapters is their author's pride in being one of the few Marxists of the 1960s New Left generation to reject Herbert Marcuse's view that post-war capitalism had become better organised. In contrast to the view attributed to Marcuse, Meszaros has consistently maintained that global capitalism remained subject to major economic crises. But despite his overall argument being similar to Callinicos', the details often differ.


Western capitalism's current crisis is traced back even earlier than in the *Bonfire of Illusions*. For Meszaros, it goes back to post-1945 Keynesian planning, the main effect of which was to delay a recession by policies which would ensure a later, more severe recession. Post-Keynesian economic history, it is argued, consists of military expenditure, monetarist experiments, investment bubbles and other developments which further delayed but eventually caused a recession, and one which is likely to be worse than that of the 1930s. Meszaros' critique of contemporary capitalism, however, is not limited to its instability and proneness to economic disasters; it is also moral. Contemporary capitalism is condemned for, among other offences, inexcusable and intensifying inequalities between rich and poor nations, and the terrible effects of increasing unemployment. He points to how governments, media and many economists turn their backs on the plight of the unemployed and the poor, and ignore the cuts in welfare while gloating over share-price and bank rallies. But in view of Meszaros' prediction of a prolonged recession, surprisingly little attention is paid to the likely strengthening of fascist and other extreme-right groups and parties.

Revolutionary socialism is regarded as the only alternative to the current mix of drift and panic. In comparison with Callinicos, Meszaros seems less aware of the isolation of the Left, resulting from the fall of communist states and the abandonment of socialist goals—and sometimes a positive hatred of them—by the leaders and managers of labour and social democratic parties; and, because of this isolation, the lack of support for alternatives to reviving global markets. Neither are Meszaros' revolutionary politics identical to those of Callinicos. Whereas the latter's are reminiscent of the Trotskyist Fourth International, Meszaros' are closer to Maoism, principally to the belief that a necessary preliminary for Western imperialism's defeat is that it be surrounded by revolutionary third-world nations. Meszaros holds that the South American Venezuelan and Bolivian regimes of Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales have set revolutionary precedents for developing nations, which are likely to be followed in developed nations and thus begin a global socialist revolution.

This mixing of economic analysis with revolutionary projects, characteristic of both Callinicos and Meszaros, goes back to Marx. Marx linked the view that modern capitalist nations were riddled with

economic contradictions to the idea that they also gave birth to their gravediggers, the industrial workers. But whereas much of Marx's economic theorising has stood the test of time, and economists and sociologists are still able to learn from it, neither the industrial nor other workers of Western nations have ever looked like becoming revolutionary agencies. Their trade-union, political-party, parliamentary and other actions have always been defensive. On the issue of industrial capitalism's political and social conflicts, therefore, a more perceptive political economist has been Karl Polanyi.

In his 1944 classic *The Great Transformation* and other writings, Polanyi did not regard the main internal conflict in capitalist nations as being between classes but as cutting across class lines. For Polanyi, the main social and political divide was between, on the one hand, laissez-faire economists and vested interests which tried to force on politics and society the utopian, self-contradictory, and unworkable principles of market capitalism and, on the other hand, all who opposed labour and nature being treated as commodities, and subjected to the laws of supply and demand. As long as modern capitalism survived, therefore, there would be struggles over which parts of society should be left to market relations and which should be protected from them. On Polanyi's terms, the astonishing feature of the neo-liberal decades was the extent to which, apart from some brief 19th-century periods, governments, elites and public opinion tolerated and furthered the subordination of their societies to market laws. They forgot that, in democratic nations, the interests, objectives and political decisions of citizens, and the need to sustain and further develop social and political institutions and traditions should have a primacy over profits and markets.

Polanyi was a democratic socialist who supported and wished to broaden Keynesian and welfare planning. He rejected the Leninist blurring of the differences between liberal politics and economic liberalism, and its determination to destroy both. For Polanyi, the democratic parliamentary and other institutions of political liberalism were the main means for protecting societies from the market laws of economic liberalism and, potentially, for socialist change. His work, therefore, provides a mean between left-Keynesians and others who, like Phillips, seek a more socially responsible capitalism, and Marxist and other socialists, who seek a socialism which retains and advances liberal-democratic politics to prevent statist corruptions and abuses, and which finds a place, though not a dominant or unquestioned one, for private ownership and market relations. 



# book **Though much is taken, much remains**

review by Lorna Hallahan

## Havi Carel, *Illness: The Art of Living* (Acumen Publishing, Durham, 2008)

If I were to write a book about illness, I would want it to be just like this one. Well, almost just like this one.

Havi Carel's *Illness*, published in Acumen's series *The Art of Living*, applies a phenomenological approach to illness (and, indirectly, disability), weaving philosophical explication and reflection with narratives taken directly from Carel's lived experience of chronic, life-limiting illness. Carel writes as a woman who became ill at the rising height of her powers—physical and intellectual. She was clearly destined to go on and do well as a philosopher. Nothing has impeded that goal except reduced and reducing physical powers, which yield a limited horizon of mortality and a rich field of experience and reflection on which to build her explorations of frailty and struggle. It is her other life goals that are blown out of the water. She will not carry and deliver her own children; the scope of physical encounter with a world she clearly loves becomes more limited as each year goes by; and she no longer thinks about being an old woman.

Carel is navigating the realisation of thrown-ness or flung-ness. She has been sure in her place and her trajectory; then, post diagnosis, she is hurled into a new body, a new world and a new trajectory. By telling this with directness, poignancy and honesty, she catches our eye, holds our gaze and says, 'think about this for the sake of our shared humanity'. You cannot squirm away into a denial secured by a healthy body and mind. Fixing us this way with her candid stare, she offers us something that we all need to read and to think about, to incorporate into our self-understanding and to guide us in our interactions with our terminally ill friends, family and colleagues.

Recently I heard Australian sociologist Peter Beilharz say that for many of us the body is really just the transport system for the brain. We assume, then, as the body loses its mechanical efficacy we treat its dysfunction as an engineering problem. It is an amusing line but Carel won't let us get away with such a view of the embodied life. For her this is primarily an existential quest, not a technical tweaking task. Carel invites us to heed a conversation between the biological body (so often seen as the preserve of fitness trainers, on the one hand, and medicos, on the other) and the lived body (as the seat of subjectivity and consciousness). The notion of 'the body as the seat' undergirds her bid for us to become conscious of our bodies in ways that, when healthy, seem less compelling. She aims to make explicit those existential threads that bind our being and doing into one, and direct us to ask enduring and unsettling questions about knowledge, sensation and mortality.

Carel starts by working with Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) who wants us to understand that perception—an intentional arc—shapes our *understanding* of the world as well as the *means* with which we engage with the world. In this way we can see the body as subject-object. She invokes Merleau-Ponty's example of two hands touching each other: 'each hand is both touching, active, sensing the other hand and also being touched, passive, being sensed by the other hand'. Numerous times as I read this book I set it down and held my own hands to remind myself that my body in relation to the mind and to the world is integrated like

this. So what does terminal illness do to this relation? Carel says that illness is not simply an encapsulated glitch in performance but represents 'a systematic shift in the way that the body experiences, reacts, and performs ... the change in illness is not local but global, not external, but strikes at the heart of subjectivity'.

Through the rest of text Carel investigates just this change—note it is not 'changes' but 'the change'. The change is on all levels, in all interactions with self (take a moment to hold your own hands here) and others and the built environment. She takes us into the terrain of her hometown, the stairs in her building, the park. She dumps us smack down into gruelling encounters around dining tables with men who are so insensitive in their questions that they can't even see her discomfort and attempted brush-offs. I confidently predict that not one reader will avoid the agitation of this account—have we been victim and/or perpetrator? She takes us right into the coldness in and of intimate exchanges with nurses who are close enough to wipe away her tears but seem unable to see the sorrow. This makes so much sense to me. For over thirty years I have found myself in all these encounters, in those corners of the world where the crook and crippled tend to wash up—in pools in hospitals and disability services and scattered on the margins elsewhere. I have pondered and felt and pondered again in the ways that Carel invites us all to sense and to contemplate.

I was delighted to see that she also wants us to think about second person encounters—not only in these first and third person ways investigated through Merleau-Ponty—and that she takes us to Martin Buber and his familiar but still so fresh insights about I–thou relations. She sees the importance in the medico–sufferers connections, obvious and necessary. After all, 'the one who suffers' negotiates their mortality with the doctor—is there any other relationship freighted with such existential import? Perhaps between the cleric and the supplicant.

But I also wanted to see this taken further into other points of intimacy. It is here that those of us who live with frailty, mutilation, pain and weakness have to negotiate our sense of shame about appearance (that's the easy bit) and about our impaired being-ness. So many people have heard the voice of rejection whispered in their ear for so long that they introject the horror and turn an excoriating gaze on the self. Take another moment to hold hands with yourself. Contemplate what it might mean to find arthritic pain, to find a rasping skin, a burning rash where you last felt a comfort and softness. Both hands want to let go. This is where shame corrodes the





Though much is taken, much remains

Lorna Hallahan

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core that is more exposed in I–thou relations than all those meetings in the public world. The connections with parents, with siblings, close fiends who do not enter denial, with lovers, with our children. I–thou is not exclusively ‘private’ but it must be explored in that context. It is so much part of what Carel calls the social architecture of illness.

For Carel chronic illness means loss in many levels that are not acknowledged and succoured in health (read: illness and disability) settings and encounters. But, unlike Susan Sontag’s famous image of the two kingdoms of illness and health, Carel does not want to press home this dichotomy. Health is possible within illness; personal growth, surely a measure of health, is likely; and wellbeing becomes an intricate, multi-layered, subjective and evolving state of being not terminally destroyed by deficits. It lies within the questions we ask. Ask only about disease and that is all researchers will hear. Ask about change and we hear about loss, about adaptability, new meaning, frustration and limitation, new depths of self-knowledge— ‘about a rich texture of life even without medical resolution of the disease’.

Which takes us to dying. And the fear of death. Thrown-ness is paradoxically about boundedness as well as about freedom. As a central concept in phenomenology it recognises spatial and temporal realities, the finitude of life. What’s more, we understand that we are going to die and that we therefore live as finite. Living as finite is not simply contemplation; it requires what she calls ‘an active practical position’. Carel draws on Heidegger to explore

this aim to live authentically with the sure knowledge of finitude. I find his propositions attractive but far too cognitive, so I was delighted that she takes her thinking into conversation with Epicurus. Ah, hedonism. Not that code that I was always told would distract me from the path of righteousness, work and duty, but the celebration of a pleasurable attitude to the sensory moment and to one’s life as a whole. Carel’s explorations with other philosophers take us into deliberations about the good and the horrible, about fear and acceptance.

Yet Carel knows that unless all this philosophy addresses the ‘scream silenced by her good upbringing’ it is a lie, dressed in academic robes. So the final part of her work offers philosophy as therapy, as a way to naysay despair, as a source of ‘patient’ activist energy to address the needs of women living with her condition and to find a way to live honestly with the promise (and the perverse injunction?) of the Existentialists to be ‘here and now’.

This conclusion is unsurprising, gently expressed and quite satisfying in simple ways. But we do not read Carel for this conclusion. We read it to be reminded how much we can disrupt this being-with-pleasure-to-the-end through our thoughts, words and deeds, as we treat bodies as achieving machines and engineering problems. For too long medicine and its related disciplines have lived with the left hand not knowing of the right. Guided by the phenomenology of self-hand holding, we must not, through our care or denial, prize the grasp apart. We are challenged to see our health within our illness; we are encouraged to nurture hedonism in and through our living-in-suffering bodies. We are challenged to resist despair in all our interactions; and finally to be non-anxiously present with those whom we love and hold as they draw their last breath. 

## book **A Politics for our Times?**

review by John Hinkson



A Politics for our Times?

John Hinkson

John Hinkson is an Arena Publications editor.



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**Eric Aarons, *Hayek versus Marx* (Routledge, London, 2009)**

As we watch the disintegration of the political campaigns in the Australian election it seems a truism to suggest that politics as it bears on social life needs to be re-thought in its basics. It is not only a matter of the incapacity of political parties to formulate convincing policy about budget deficits, educating the young, population, climate or ways of life more generally. It is just as much the reduction of politics to the pursuit of media impacts, with policy formulation made on the run and driven by polling, that signifies a deep political crisis. Would anyone dare claim that politics today responds to the practical needs of the day? And all this at a time when the social crisis confronts us at every turn.

Any attempt to seriously engage this daunting hiatus in the political present is to be welcome. Eric Aarons’ *Hayek versus Marx* responds to this problem and does so via a review of the history of left argument from Marx to the present. His work has been a major influence on the work of David McKnight (see *Beyond Right and Left*). One must respect a lifetime of political commitment that seeks to justify and renew itself through the critical assessment of practice and ideas. Nevertheless, in my view, as a response it is not successful.

There are two core sources of argument in this book. They both arise out of the failure of the communist movement in the 20th century. First, Aarons argues, is the movement’s

incapacity to accept what he regards as inescapable—an accommodation to the modern economic market. However, this view leads to a serious awkwardness in his argument. In order to reflect on the limits of Marx and the meanings of markets, he introduces the work of F. A. Hayek, whom he largely wishes to critique, while simultaneously using Hayek to critique Marx. Secondly, Aarons turns to what he terms the ‘primacy of values’. This theme is drawn on to broaden the political-economic debate, partly in acknowledgement that the communist movement was overly influenced by arguments about economy to the exclusion of broader practices of valuing in social life. Aarons gives no definition to this broader concept of the social in life except to say, after von Mises, that valuing is important. However, it does provide an opening for him to address the crisis of the environment, almost entirely ignored by political economy. This crisis threatens not only the survival of political parties as we have known them, but also most of our assumptions about how we should live in the world. In other words, the crisis of the communist movement is assessed in its own right but also in terms of how serious political movements need to re-invent themselves in contemporary circumstances.

It is not possible to pursue a sustained consideration of the arguments of this book. For this review I will restrict myself to a few that bear on its core concerns. These are the question of the market and the assessment of the work of Hayek, the meanings of the environmental crisis and the importance of values. The way these concerns are taken up is actually more important than any one of them as such. By and large Aarons’ approach is one that simply engages with phenomena. What this means is that if the environment has become of increased concern today as a phenomenon, it should be added to our range of political concerns.

While one can hardly disagree with giving the environment political focus, that should only be a first step. We can all be in easy agreement about this—while Rome burns—but if such agreements leave our broad social assumptions untouched the ‘insights’ go nowhere. Hard work is needed in reflection on the social assumptions that support environmental degradation and how this reflection might lead to social re-direction. Aaron’s ‘add-on’ approach leaves us righteous but flat, while what is needed is to be able to see social practices and possibilities in a new light.

In similar vein we can by and large agree that the command economy of the Soviet era is indefensible but does it follow that we respond by simply adding the market to our political agenda? Here we come to a core issue that goes back to the communist revolution, one that has been hotly debated throughout the history of the movement. This would also be the reason why Hayek is a major focus of the argument of the book. As I understand it, Aarons considers that

there is no choice but to accept markets into modern economy but at the same time he is not willing to accept the ideology of markets. Thus much of the argument in the book is a critique of Hayek’s arguments about self-seeking and the foolishness of social planning together with a rejection of Hayek’s advocacy of endless social expansion, with its obvious environmental implications. Nevertheless he accepts one core aspect of Hayek’s argument: the need for market prices as a form of societal co-ordination.

## **Failing to take on board that markets represent a social setting that arguably calls into being an individualist consumption ethos with, in turn, profound environmental implications leaves a huge hiatus in the core arguments of this book.**

Many of these points are uncontroversial, but that is not the issue. The market as an institution can be taken up technically—as a neutral institutional sphere that facilitates circulation. This can only be achieved by abstracting it from its other practical effects. Or it can be considered in relation to ways of living and experiencing more generally. With the latter approach, the whole issue of whether modernity itself should be taken for granted arguably should be on the table—given the depth of the environmental crisis addressed by Aarons. After all, modernity is defined by market assumptions, orientation towards growth, rural–urban assumptions that empty out our countryside, and ways of life that are fundamentally individualist. But the social assumptions of modernity remain unquestioned in this book since Aarons is concerned only with certain emphases within modernity. This may be the result of conscious limitations Aarons has adopted for his argument, but nevertheless it is a choice that frustrates the possibility of a proper response to climate change and the environmental problem more generally.

However that may be, failing to take on board that markets represent a social setting that calls into being an individualist consumption ethos with, in turn, profound environmental implications leaves a huge hiatus in the core arguments of this book. It is important to call, as Aarons does, for a renewal of co-operative endeavour in social affairs in opposition to the dominance of self-seeking behaviour. But this is not enough. The sources of the constitution of and renewal of self-interest are themselves crucial and must be addressed, especially if one is advocating market-based institutions. Self-seeking is not merely a philosophical choice. It is socially constituted.

Even these kinds of re-framing of arguments would be insufficient to give a proper support to a renewal of social direction today. The environmental crisis is one expression of a range of crises that typify the present. They arise out of institutional developments that make many aspects of our social world radically unfamiliar. For example, even the narratives around markets and their institutional effects need to be re-evaluated in the circumstance of these developments. The role adopted in

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contemporary society by the neo-liberal market cannot be grasped unless the new powers it has accrued are seen to be derived from its transformation by the techno-sciences. A global market that calls out consumerist predispositions that overwhelm the environment; developments in the mode of production that both exhaust and rent asunder tangible nature: there will be no lasting response to the environmental crisis without coming to terms with the implications of the joining with capital of the intellectual practices of the techno-sciences.

But this is not only an environmental crisis but, more importantly, a social crisis. Even F. A. Hayek, if true to his word, would have to be on the barricades in opposition to a market that destroys the core relationships of human association that are prior to market forms of interchange. As he remarks in *The Fatal Conceit*, 'If we were to apply the unmodified, uncurbed, rules of the micro-cosmos (ie of the small band or troop, or of say, our families) to the macro-cosmos (our wider civilisation), as our instincts and sentimental yearnings often make us wish to do, we would destroy it. Yet if we were always to apply the rules of the extended order to our more intimate groupings, we would crush them. So we must learn to live in two sorts of world at once'. But this crushing of social relations of presence is exactly what the neo-liberal market 'achieves'.

The neo-liberal market, unlike the modern market, has advertising techniques available to it that are made possible by the techno-sciences. This has allowed it to reach into the social relations of presence—of family and community—and make them over into more abstract

associations. This is an implication that, practically speaking, Hayek did not envisage for the market. In principle he argued that any such effect would be devastating. And while we would not be advised to 'wait for Hayek' to assist us here, by implication there is a need for a renewal of social relations significantly based in presence. That is a social argument, but one that bears strongly on the environmental question. One lesson to be learnt from the period of modernity is the strong relation of markets, consumerist expectations and environmental degradation. If some form of market association is needed in the future it cannot lie at the centre of any cultural order: it cannot be the global market of the neo-liberals, or the universal market of modernity. These are core matters of our contemporary crisis that are not addressed in *Hayek versus Marx*.

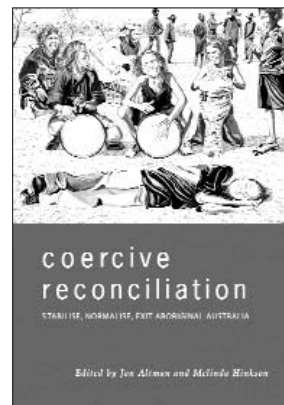
Any process of significant social reconstruction in the present circumstances will require 'every society to reverse the priority capitalism gives to individual material betterment and gain, and give that priority instead to social needs'. On this final point in *Hayek versus Marx* we can wholeheartedly agree. **[a]**

## Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia

Edited by Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson

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

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# film **Twilight and Teenage Fandom**

review by Zora Sanders

*Twilight*, dir. Catharine Hardwicke, 2008;  
*New Moon*, dir. Chris Weitz, 2009; *Eclipse*,  
dir. David Slade, 2010

Bella Swan, the seventeen-year-old protagonist of the *Twilight* franchise is, as even the most ardent fans grudgingly admit, not very likeable. She's sullen, obsessive, moody and self-involved. Which is doubtless one of the reasons for the unnerving success of the novels and their spin-off films. A heroine who earns adventure and romance by dint of strength of character, phenomenal beauty and intelligence is all well and good, but a heroine who is so decidedly ordinary is more comforting. And if *Twilight* is anything, it's comfort food.

The success of the franchise has been phenomenal. Taken together, the *Twilight* films are the third highest grossing in history. Think about that. Only *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) and *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) outrank them as a whole. It's pretty impressive for films about a sulky teenage girl in love with a similarly sullen teenage vampire, and the scramble to explain this popularity is proving at least as entertaining as the novels and films themselves.

A particularly nice theory takes the blame all the way to the White House. There is convincing data that suggests a correlation between the prevalence of zombie films and Republican government, on the one hand, and vampire films and Democrat government, on the other. The data goes back to 1953 and is particularly convincing for zombie/Republican films, somewhat less so for the vampire/Democrat ones. It's all about class struggle, apparently. Zombies are the working class: hordes of mindless drones who might rise up, band together and overthrow the ruling classes. An implicit fear filters into public consciousness, manifesting in film-making. On the other hand, vampires are a demonic manifestation of the ruling elite who are well-known to suck the blood of the common citizen, a fear that prevails during periods of Democratic rule. It's a neat theory, but hardly a conclusive explanation.

Meanwhile, recently in *Esquire*, Stephen Marche proposed another interesting, if again not entirely sound, theory to explain the popularity of vampires in the media. He suggested that women's attraction to vampires is a manifestation of their real-life desire for homosexual men. The reasoning is tenuous at best, but has to do with the chasteness of *Twilight's* central romance; it is a relationship of closeness and intimacy without sex, supposedly akin to the straight woman with her gay male best friend. Marche writes, 'Vampire fiction for young women is the equivalent of lesbian porn for men: Both create an atmosphere of sexual abandon that is nonthreatening'. Well, maybe.

The fact that the relationship of *Twilight's* central couple remains unconsummated until marriage (at the tender age of eighteen in Bella's case; Edward is technically seventeen, but has been since 1918 so it's a moot point) is a key talking point for many commentators. The most commonly proffered explanation surrounds *Twilight* author Stephanie Meyer herself, who is a devote Mormon with a firm 'no sex before marriage' stance. It would be easy to conclude that Meyer's message is that it's better to marry at eighteen than suffer a loss of virtue (as she would undoubtedly put it), but there are certainly other possible readings.

The great appeal of the *Twilight* universe is its extraordinarily accomplished romance. The writing is often abysmal and the characters wildly underdeveloped (Edward and Bella's eventual

daughter is delightfully and absurdly named Renesmee, an amalgamation of the couple's mothers' names: Renee and Esme), but Meyer has a seemingly instinctive understanding of the attraction of courtly love. In *Twilight*, vows of everlasting love and fidelity are as common as actual sex is rare. Edward is an all powerful, all loving protector and champion. But he refuses to sleep with Bella while they are unmarried. Ostensibly this is due to a fear of hurting her with his superhuman strength, but it is not hard to see how Edward's chastity fits neatly into his role as the courtly suitor. It may not be original, but it is potent.

And this type of love is, despite the proliferation of hormone-crazed teenage stereotypes, extremely beguiling to those for whom intimacy is longed for, but sex itself seems a mysterious and alarming ordeal. The teenagers of popular British drama *Skins* (2007–current, currently showing on SBS), with their terrifyingly precocious sexuality, are certainly the antithesis to Bella and Edward, but the orgy-having, pill-popping sexual predators of *Skins* are probably just as fanciful as *Twilight's* chaste lovers.

It's this concern with a different, more introspective version of teenage-hood that contributes to Meyer's success. It can feel at times like almost all Hollywood fare is aimed squarely at teenagers, but such films are rarely concerned with the day-to-day experience of teenagers themselves. It would be difficult to name any film more drenched in primordial teenage-ness than the *Twilight* saga.

***Twilight's* concern, and ultimately its appeal, is its depiction of the languid heightened spaces of teenage-hood. The school cafeteria, the bedroom, the privacy of woodlands, —these are teenage spaces running on teenage time.**

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Twilight and  
Teenage Fandom

Zora Sanders

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Bella Swan and the vampires from *Twilight*

And the choice of the word ‘saga’ should alert us to the nature of this particular beast. It is melodrama, far more concerned with the emotional upheavals of its characters than the goings-on of the outside world. The emotional register never strays from the insular, passionate language of teenage-hood. *Twilight's* concern, and ultimately its appeal, is its depiction of the languid heightened spaces of teenage-hood. The school cafeteria, the bedroom, the privacy of woodlands—these are teenage spaces running on teenage time. The fact that there are vampires and werewolves in these spaces is, frankly, incidental.

A criticism often levelled at *New Moon* (2009), the second instalment in the saga, is that nothing actually *happens* in it. In a sense this is true. There is a little action and a smattering of plot; mainly it is about Bella’s melancholy longing for her absent lover. Hardly great cinematic material perhaps, yet how often do we see portrayals of teenage depression that take the experience as seriously as it feels at the time? To the world at large there is nothing more trivial than a teenager’s emotions, and particularly if that teenager is a girl. But teenage girls, and those who were once teenage girls, are a huge and lucrative audience, as *Twilight's* success conclusively proves.

And it is the perceived femininity of the *Twilight* universe that explains the vehemence of the anti-*Twilight* backlash. *Twilight* fans are both obsessive and largely female, two states that do not sit comfortably together. They are invariably described as ‘screeching’, ‘hysterical’

and ‘manic’. They faint, they throw tantrums, they swoon. Natalie Wilson of online journal *In Media Res* discusses what she calls the ‘enduring contempt for female fans’, particularly by those who should by rights be sympathetic, that is, the male participants in fan culture, fanboys. Instead of sympathy, *Twilight* fans are the target of vitriolic responses, with the franchise commonly referred to as ‘gay’, Edward a ‘faggot’, female fans as ‘dumb bitches’, and considerably worse.

Anything that is popular becomes a target of criticism, but the tenor of *Twilight* criticism, even by those who are purportedly taking the phenomenon seriously, tends towards the dismissive, the superior and the downright discriminatory. Certainly the quality of the *Twilight* novels and films themselves is dubious at best, but quality is no prerequisite to popularity. The life of fads and crazes is finite and *Twilight's* popularity will no more last forever than did Beatlemania, disco, hula-hooping or the Macarena. But while it does last, *Twilight* fan culture provides feelings of community and identity for its participants, and those fans do not deserve to be singled out for derision and abuse simply because so many of them are young and female.

Ultimately the success of the *Twilight* franchise is illustrative of the workings of these kinds of fan cultures, which can elevate an otherwise undistinguished artefact, like a series of teen fantasy novels, into a cultural behemoth that captures legions of fans and their spending power. But there is little insight here into the perpetual allure of vampire mythology. Indeed it’s hard to imagine that Bram Stoker, or even Anne Rice for that matter, would recognise the Edward Cullen model of vampirism. But they would undoubtedly recognise the enduring appeal and romanticism of first love that, despite many flaws and caveats, remains *Twilight's* greatest attraction. **a**

**a** ←

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# Hitch 22

Simon Cooper

## Christopher Hitchens' memoir reveals the limits of liberal imagination in the age of Empire

On the cover of *Hitch 22* there is a laudatory quote from Ian MacEwan, who remarks that 'if Christopher Hitchens did not exist it wouldn't be possible to invent him'. Leaving aside this mildly amusing inversion of Voltaire, the truth is that Hitchens is *precisely* the kind of figure our culture would have invented. There's no doubt Hitchens is a talented figure with a wide-ranging factual knowledge, a prodigious memory, a voice perfectly matched to his oratorical skills and a written style that veers between the mannered prose of Anthony Powell and a visceral prosecutorial invective. His high-end polemics seem to cut through the morass of the information age, while his hard living lifestyle remains a constant preoccupation of fans and detractors alike. Yet none of these things are themselves enough to warrant his popularity, let alone his elevation in MacEwan's eyes to an imitable figure. In fact the public image of Hitchens verges on the cliché.

Of course what gives Hitchens a continuing influence well beyond that of a standard columnist is his very public identification with the events of 9/11 and their aftermath. In his conversion from left-wing columnist to neo-con pundit he became one of the most powerful advocates of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan and lost a lot of old friends on the way. Yet it was Hitchens' *image* as much as his words that helped make him a ubiquitous media figure. The more the war on terror was sold to the public as a clash of cultures or a defence of civilization, the more Hitchens stepped into the breach, hung-over, pale and trembling but generally able to demolish his opponents in a verbal joust. With his public school accent, his shambolic appearance and his literary allusions he seemed to embody the very idea of culture the United States was trying to defend. A contrarian in image, if not in thought, his difference from the US mainstream worked to his advantage, his slightly disreputable lifestyle symbolising the very freedom and individuality that we were all fighting for, especially when the enemy was sober as well as fanatical.

And yet there is no doubt that Hitchens genuinely and powerfully felt the importance of deposing the despotic leaders of Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. In this sense there is continuity in his work. Yet as the decade continued, and the war on terror flagged, Hitchens kept the faith. If his direct support for the war and for the regime of Bush and Cheney receded slightly, this was replaced by a declaration of war on all religion. Hitchens joined the ranks of militant atheists, Dawkins, Dennett and the like, pouring scorn on God and all those who believed. A war against God allowed Hitchens to maintain the rage against the same despotic regimes while deflecting the inconvenient politics of supporting the Bush regime. As well as God, Hitchens'

more recent work exposed such dangerous figures such as Prince Charles, and called for the Pope's arrest rather than Henry Kissinger's. The rage continued but clearly some other things had changed.

The last decade then has seen a substantial shift in Hitchens' life and politics. It has cost him much to swing to the Right. All this would seem rich material for a memoir, and surely a writer whose wit, passion and personality were so prominent would easily rise to the occasion. Sadly, *Hitch 22* is a lacklustre affair—long, rambling and uneven, at times plain boring. Quotes, sentences and large slabs are lifted and reworked from his columns and earlier books such as *Letters to a Young Contrarian* and *A Long Short War*. As the book's ostensible subject Hitchens is constantly present, yet on another level he barely registers. It reads as if an adoring but unperceptive fan put the memoir together through a pastiche of already-existing work and what they thought Hitchens would probably say.

Yet it isn't as if the subject matter is dull. We learn of Hitchens' formative years and his gradual politicisation while maintaining a double life—revolutionary firebrand by day at Oxford, dining with the establishment at night. There are parties, boozy lunches and all you'd expect from a dissolute radical journalist in the late 1960s. Moreover there are a number of salacious anecdotes—Hitchens' experience of English boarding school seems pretty standard in terms of perverse encounters but naturally there's a political twist—two boys with whom he had sexual relations end up as ministers in Thatcher's government. This narrative resolves neatly with Hitchens being smacked on the bottom a few years later by Thatcher herself. Nothing in the book will alter what you think of its author and true to form reviewers have cast him as either glamorous radical or fawning hypocrite.

Outside of these episodes from Hitchens' life there remains the question of his shifting politics and allegiances. He is able to name his pet hates—dictators, the Clintons and so on—but nothing in his memoir even hints at what caused such a giant political shift post 9/11. There are a few scattered anecdotes and generic assertions of the generosity of the American spirit, and a few half-hearted accounts of Hitchens' disputes with old friends and former comrades, but little to tell us what made Hitchens turn. In fact once we get to the United States the memoir loses its chronological focus and dissolves into a more rambling episodic form, largely shaped by chapters devoted to Hitchens' friends—Amis, Fenton, Rushdie, and former colleagues such as Edward Said.

Perhaps Hitchens is simply unable to transcend the subjectivity that emerges in his journalism. While he constantly refers to himself in his columns, it's a

Simon Cooper

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different manner to examine oneself. A notorious counter-puncher, Hitchens only comes alive when reacting to something or someone. Without an enemy to animate him, he is left with little to say. Most readers would expect some account of his support for the war on terror, the personal and political cost of his political transformation, and whether, in the face of the failure of all of the above in strategic as well as moral terms, he had experienced any doubts. Yet these subjects are never really dealt with. Even his notorious quarrels with figures such as Chomsky and Gore Vidal are discussed half-heartedly, as if Hitchens really didn't want to go there.

That a memoir—a document of self-examination by definition—can document how Hitchens once passionately denounced the bombing of Vietnam and Cambodia, and then barely discuss the consequences of his support for the destruction of civilian populations in Iraq is remarkable. Instead Hitchens writes about a young US soldier, a fan of his work, who was killed by an IED in Iraq. No doubt Hitchens was moved when learning of this individual, but in any other context he would lacerate a writer for using such a story as mere propaganda. That he does not consider the fate of those on the other side who died in their hundreds of thousands says more about where Hitchens is today. That he does not, perhaps cannot, reflect on this reveals the limits of the liberal interventionist line he so enthusiastically embraced.

If a smattering of English literature had always added value to Hitchens the journalist, it also informed the barbarism he increasingly embraced. Constantly upping the ante on his declared war on 'Islamofascism', his nadir came when he suggested that the problem with the Fallujah bombing was 'that the death toll was not nearly high enough'. To hear traces of Kurtz's 'exterminate the brutes' would not be inappropriate—in fact Hitchens invoked Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to describe the savagery of the Fallujah crowd. Perhaps, like Marlow, he is now haunted by the horror of Empire. This would explain the muted tone and obvious evasions of his memoir as it approaches and circles round the vexed issue of his political conversion and the consequences of going all the way with Bush and Cheney.

Like Marlow, Hitchens is also reticent when it comes to women, who occupy a fleeting existence in *Hitch 22* between moments of homoerotic bonding. When Hitchens recently appeared on the *First Tuesday Book Club* Jennifer Byrne could barely remain composed when discussing the marginalisation of women in *Hitch 22*. Watching this exchange, having already waded through the book, I decided I'd endured enough of the Hitch and switched channels to a rerun of *The Sopranos*. Yes, I thought, a fat man with a violent disposition in a changed world he doesn't understand, a world sharply divided between friends and enemies, a man whose world-view is increasingly visceral, whose relevance is waning, who has problems coming to terms with women, has repressed trauma and so on. The parallels were clear but at least this version was well written. **a**



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