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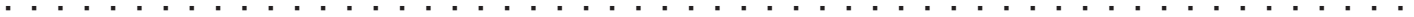
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“..I’m not just leaping out the window, I’m emulating our share prices in interpretive dance...”



Matt Bissett-Johnson

Asylum Seeker Solutions

Anne McNevin



Asylum Seeker Solutions

Anne McNevin

Anne McNevin is a lecturer in International Studies at RMIT University and associate editor of the journal *Citizenship Studies*. She is author of *Contesting Citizenship: Irregular Migrants and New Frontiers of the Political* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

Regional refugee protection is a good idea, but it's not the 'Malaysia Solution'

Policy debate on asylum seekers is once again dominating the news cycle as the government attempts to modify its offshore processing strategy in the wake of the High Court's August decision that the Malaysia Solution was unlawful. Both sides of politics are making claims about how best to protect the human rights of asylum seekers and to engage the region in doing so. In the midst of this charged political debate, it is worth considering what a genuinely regional approach to refugee protection might look like and whether either side of politics is making suggestions that can steer us towards a sustainable refugee protection framework.

The High Court's decision called into question whether Australia's obligations to asylum seekers could be guaranteed in any of the offshore locations that have formed part of its Pacific Solution over the last decade, or any of those proposed for the future. Despite calls from Labor's Left to draw a line in the sand on the policy of offshore processing, the government is attempting to amend the Migration Act in order to circumvent the High Court decision. The Opposition has stated its intention to refuse to pass the amendments, unless they include accession to the Refugee Convention as the baseline for any potential offshore processing countries. This would remove Malaysia from the list of potential partners, and make Nauru a viable option—an outcome that would serve the political interests of the Opposition well.

Regardless of the outcome, the broader point to be noted here is that both Labor and the Opposition have rejected the spirit of the High Court's finding—that is, that the protection standards owed to asylum seekers under the Refugee Convention are not best served by the offshore strategy, regardless of whether states like Nauru are signed up to the Convention or not. A signature does not count for much if the legal, administrative and political wherewithal does not exist to make protection standards realisable in practice. It is this practical element of refugee protection that both sides of politics seem

willing to disregard in the version of Migration Act amendments each is suggesting it would pass.

Even if the government could muster the numbers to amend the Migration Act and even if the offshore strategy withstood further legal challenge, would it do what the government wants it to do? Would a revived Malaysia Solution or a similar 'solution' elsewhere remove the product people smugglers are able to sell? The product being sold, of course, is the prospect of security. Does the offshore strategy take that prospect out of the hands of smugglers?

The offshore strategy may stop the boats for a period of time if asylum seekers and smugglers alike find that there is little to be gained from a journey across the sea. But the 'little' to be gained is crucial. Ultimately, the boats come because conditions in countries of origin, and prospects in transit countries, are riskier and less hopeful than the slim chance of security that a smuggled journey to Australia entails. Unless and until those conditions and prospects change, asylum seekers will continue to risk their lives moving to safer ground.

There is another way. The alternative starts by acknowledging that many people are forced to cross borders in order to escape persecution, that it is frequently impossible to obtain the relevant documents in advance, and that the legality of seeking asylum under those conditions is upheld by principles of international law. The alternative comes, in turn, from inter-governmental collaboration at regional and global levels that starts from the basis of protection for such people, rather than the basis of border defences against them.

The architecture for such an approach already exists. The Bali Process is the shorthand term for an Asia-Pacific consultative process tasked with finding co-ordinated regional responses to people smuggling, trafficking in persons and related transnational crime. Established in 2002, the Bali Process was undoubtedly framed from the outset around border defence against the irregular movement of people. More recently, however, meetings of representatives from thirty-eight source, transit and destination states have provided forums for the promotion of a Regional Cooperation Framework (RCF) around refugee protection, proposed by the UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR. Tabled in late 2010, the UNHCR's discussion paper on an RCF was endorsed at the most recent Ministerial Conference of the Bali Process in March of this year. An RCF has also been endorsed by regional civil society networks, concerned with refugee rights, as a step in the right direction.

The UNHCR proposes the harmonisation of protection standards in the Asia-Pacific region. This means more than encouraging accession to the Refugee Convention for countries in the region, though this is an important dimension. An RCF would require that Convention





"..It's alive!!... No wait... No it isn't..."

principles are realisable in practice. Across the region, this would mean addressing disparities in treatment of refugees and asylum seekers and establishing standard access to work rights, healthcare and education. Importantly, those standards would be legally enforceable.

Clearly, countries like Malaysia have a long way to go in this regard. But standardisation would also imply, for instance, that Australia's mandatory detention policy, for which there is no international equivalent, is out of step with international best practice. Recent research has shown that alternatives to immigration detention generate better outcomes. Community-based options are workable, cost-efficient, and improve compliance with the outcomes of status determination decisions, regardless of whether those decisions are in asylum seekers' favour or not.

An RCF would also involve the collaborative resourcing of an effective and timely status determination procedure as well as case management of applicants for refugee status. This may well involve a regional processing centre, but one that links to realistic and sustainable options for resettlement and integration in the region. The process would shift the burden for refugee protection away from countries such as Thailand and Malaysia—which currently host tens of thousands of Burmese refugees—and redistribute costs, administration and resettlement options more fairly and according to capacity. While at present Australia is one of the few countries in the region adequately resourced to play a major role in processing and resettlement, the longer term goal would be to have processing and resettlement available, resourced and implementable region-wide.

If asylum seekers felt that fair treatment and a fair hearing of their claims to protection were available to them, wherever they were in the region, and that at the end of it all there were genuine prospects either for resettlement in a variety of countries or a dignified return to their country of origin, *then* they would be much less inclined to hire a smuggler and get on a boat to Australia or anywhere else. Only *then* would the potential to lose one's life when a boat capsizes at sea be averted. Both sides of politics continue to insist that such loss of life is one of their chief concerns.

The comprehensive framework proposed by the UNHCR is a far cry from the bilateral arrangements that Australia has negotiated with various Pacific and Asian countries, including Malaysia and Nauru, over the last decade. We should be wary of proposals such as a revived Nauru or Malaysian solution, not only on account of their failure to uphold human rights standards, but also because they fail the test of a genuinely regional approach. These proposals in fact take little account of regional burden-sharing and do not offer sustainable ways forward on enduring questions of forced migration and protection of human rights.

In terms of a genuinely regional approach, one aspect of the Malaysia Solution was laudable. The fact that Australia promised to accept 4000 refugees for resettlement from Malaysia, in addition to its existing humanitarian quota, signalled that Australia was willing to increase its share of responsibility for long-term refugee protection in the region. In the fall-out from the High Court decision, however, the government raised the prospect of subtracting the 4000 from the existing quota. This sends quite a different message to its regional and potential 'protection' partners—that when push comes to shove, Australia's commitment to burden-sharing comes second to political expediency. This makes it all the more difficult to argue the case that countries in the region should act any differently, which sets us back, in turn, from establishing solid baselines for an RCF such as mandatory accession to the Refugee Convention.

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Asylum Seeker Solutions

Anne McNevin

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The Road to Damascus

Felix Attard

As a student, Felix Attard interviewed slum-dwellers in Damascus at the time of the early demonstrations against the Assad regime. He is presently studying urban sociology in Paris.

Civil society across the region is willing to work with governments to develop the legal, administrative, and social infrastructure necessary for comprehensive protection and settlement options. When will an Australian government show leadership on this issue and break the cycle of poll-driven, short-term policy that compromises on human rights? When will it credit the Australian public with the intelligence and compassion to respond to an enlightened, long-term and sustainable response to the ongoing reality of forced migration, provided that response is explained without fear and hyperbole? **a**

For steps in the right direction see:

UNHCR, 'Regional Cooperative Approach to Address Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Irregular Movement', discussion paper for the Bali Process Ad Hoc Group Workshop, Manila, 22–23 November 2010, <www.bali.process.net>.

International Detention Coalition, *There Are Alternatives: A Handbook for Preventing Unnecessary Immigration Detention*, <www.idcoalition.org/cap>.

J. Menadue, A. Keski-Nummi and K. Gauthier, *A New Approach: Breaking the Stalemate on Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, Centre for Policy Development, August 2011, <www.cpd.org.au>.

The Road to Damascus

Felix Attard

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Internal and external conflicts mean the Arab Spring will come late to Syria

When protests in Syria first broke out mid-March, the Western media was experiencing early Arab Spring optimism, and allowed itself to simplify the movement in the same way it had pro-democracy protests in Egypt and in Tunisia. To see just how far Syria was from any sort of solution, the media should have reflected on the ethno-religious complexity of Syria's neighbour Lebanon, the Assad dynasty's hard-line rule over the past forty years, and the competing positions inside Syria in an increasingly complex situation.

From its humble beginnings with only a couple of hundred supporters in the southern border town of Dera'a, to symbolic visits from Western diplomats to various centres of resistance and, more recently, protests of hundreds of thousands of people in Homs and even Damascus, the movement has obviously come a long way. What is increasingly worrisome, however, is that no one fully understands what direction the opposition is heading in, what sort of outcome it will have, what the ideal outcome is, and how those involved—both internally and externally—feel about the situation as a whole. Western powers have often failed to accurately calculate how much support authoritarian regimes actually have, making military intervention all the more complicated. Very few initially expected NATO's intervention in Libya to take so long, and if it had not been for a quick turn of events in early September, some might still be comparing the operation to the United States' failed intervention in Somalia in 1993. Until Syria's opposition movement makes the switch from being predominantly grassroots, and gives itself a label—as was the case in Libya despite tribal divide and relatively strong support for Gaddafi—the civilian bloodbath we have been witnessing would seem far from over.

When Ben Ali of Tunisia fled his twenty-three year presidency, tens of millions of people around the world celebrated the role social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter played in empowering the country's youth. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube triumphed once again when Hosni Mubarak of Egypt faced a similar fate, and when protestors in Syria grasped similar tools to make up for the lack of foreign journalists allowed into the country, most outsiders without knowledge of the nation's ethnic, religious and political intricacies expected protests to play out in a similar way as they had elsewhere in the Middle East.

One of the major obstacles in Syria has been the lack of international exposure. From the beginning, virtually all foreign correspondents were deported and no press passes were issued to those trying to enter the country. This resulted in most reporting coming from journalists stationed in Beirut or border towns with access to refugees fleeing across the border. This resulted in the Western media being initially skewed. In one instance during the first weeks of protests, Al Jazeera entirely devoted itself to reporting anti-government protests, civilian casualties and the government crackdown. It was reluctant to show the thousands of pro-

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government supporters parading through the centre of Damascus who eventually stationed themselves in front of Al Jazeera's Damascus bureau and threatened to storm the building until they were given air-time. This could have given Bashar al-Assad an opportunity to persuade sections of the population in Damascus and Aleppo, where the bulk of the country's middle class resides, that the internal crisis was simply a foreign plot.

If one thing can be said about the civil war fought in Libya over the past six months, it is that the only side to truly come out triumphant in the conflict has been NATO. Prior to its intervention in Libya, most would have agreed that there was little need for an international police force more likely to bring mayhem than a cohesive oppositional bloc. With events in Libya quickly turning in favour of the National Transitional Council (NTC) and the country's rebel forces, the possibility of a similar intervention in Syria has been raised. Dick Cheney came out saying he had previously tried to convince the Bush administration to bomb Syria. We can't even begin to imagine how disastrous such a scenario would have been, and that is still the case today. In recent weeks, opposition forces

inside Syria have made public statements asking for Western intervention of some kind, yet what the nature of such an intervention could be is difficult to conceive.

The international community may have a role to play, but the chance of a solution involving a peaceful ousting of Assad is very doubtful. Western powers have taken significant strides to isolate Syria economically, but it is unlikely that Iran will ever fully withdraw its support for Assad in the same way that Turkey is appearing to do. The United States and Israel have no interest in seeing Assad step down, considering what is happening to Egypt's ties with Israel since Egypt's revolution, and Russia and China would most likely veto any UN draft resolution concerning Syria. This means that despite the West's facade of pushing for democratic change in the region, Syrians struggling for greater freedom are pawns in a far greater regional context, which makes any outcome extremely complicated.

Although there have been reports of some skirmishes between the army and opposition, of military casualties and important defections, Syria's opposition has neither the firepower nor the unity needed to wage a war with government forces. In Libya the situation unravelled far quicker, in that within just a couple of weeks some communities had already declared complete autonomy; the NTC succeeded in bringing together tribal factions and declaring a unified front; and entire units of the military defected, giving the movement the means to defend itself. The NTC's various contact meetings in Abu Dhabi, Doha, Rome and Paris put opposition forces firmly into the spotlight, while in Syria it is not yet clear what is happening, or who best to talk to, even eight months on. **a**

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Bill Hannan is a Melbourne writer who writes about art and the school curriculum. He taught English and languages and was magazine editor for the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association. Later he became chair of Victoria's State Board of Education and assistant chief general manager of the Education Department of Victoria.

Economies of Education

Bill Hannan

Great ideas thwarted, failures imported

As I watched James Murdoch toil through his script about how he knew nothing at the time, was shocked when he at last found out and would set up a process (with a short 'o') to ensure accountability and transparency, my mind drifted to the line-up of supporters behind father and son. Wendi the third wife, sharp-featured and tense sitting behind Rupert; and over James' left shoulder Joel Klein, expressionless, perhaps because he'd already heard it all at rehearsal, perhaps because he has the job of making the Murdochs' promises of transparency seem real.

Before his move this year to News Corporation, Joel Klein was chancellor of New York's public schools. During that time he was an honoured guest and adviser to Julia Gillard when she was Minister for Education. I recognised him at the trial from the photo heading an article he wrote about schools in the *Atlantic Magazine* in June 2011, entitled 'The Failure of American Schools'; not the first article or book to carry a similar title but nonetheless grandiose for all that.

'Failure' called to mind a piece by David Zyngier of Monash University, published in *The Age* in July this year. 'Most of the so-called innovative and ground-breaking educational policies and reforms adopted in Australia over the past 50 years, in the areas of policy, curriculum, pedagogy or assessment', he wrote, 'have been copied from failed projects in the US or England'. This overstates his case: much of the radical reforming of the 1960s and 1970s, successful and not, was home grown, and the most monumental failure of all, beginning in the 1970s, when we started to hand out cash without conditions to non-government schools, is undoubtedly of our own making. But if we narrow the timeframe Zyngier is on the right track. In the past couple of decades kicking our own goals has given way to importing super clangers, many in the name of 'choice', others under the mantra of accountability and 'transparency'. James Murdoch was emphatic about transparency, but not in a good position to advocate choice. His new coach, Joel Klein, was strong on both when he ran New York's schools and offered solutions to fawning Australians.

Klein advocated what he calls a 'competitive marketplace'. It failed, he says. But it was failure in the manner of News Corporation: nothing to do with the bosses, everything to do with disloyal workers in the field; nothing to do with the processes, everything to do with the teachers.

Klein's advocacy of the features of the school marketplace probably appealed to our leaders because we were already well on the way ourselves. Our curious version of choice, for example, is probably as much our own doing as anyone else's. In fact a news item in *The Age* on 30 August said we are the world's leaders in competitive choice. And we have plenty of local enthusiasts for mass testing, league tabling, teacher grading and union bashing. Versions of these stand out in our educational history. Payment by results is the usual historical example, but our exam systems and our

attachment to social selection as a feature of schooling have served that mentality well. Our secondary schools in particular have long been selective in their structures, their curricula and their outcomes. National rhetoric advocates success for all but national practice requires both success and failure. So we are a ready host for further ways to embed selection.

In Klein's scheme a 'competitive marketplace' is a public school system, fully funded, in which parents can choose the best from a line-up of good and bad. The fundamental step is therefore to create, or more accurately bolster, a divided school system in which parents choose, and ideally the money, in the form of vouchers, follows the choice. Having opened up choice, the next step is to publish some easy indicators for the choosers in the form of outcomes of teaching quantified, like a stock market index, from mass tests of a few—more or less measurable—skills. The final step is to use these outcomes as tools to control teaching and teachers—hire Mr Chips, fire A. S. Neill. The appendix in this case is an article blaming the failure of the 'marketplace' on teachers and their unions.

This is demonstrably the same plan that rules currently in Australia. Ours has developed over a good while and may or may not have been pushed further by Joel Klein's visits and advocacy. Were he of a mind to, Klein could have learnt much from us about dividing systems and propagating choice. Australia's set-up is a world beater in the division race. Our ideal school is a posh private school, publicly subsidised. We then stand by as publicly funded Catholic systemic schools make common cause politically with these elite private schools. Finally we set about dividing state schools into selective and unselected in line with our historical commitment to theories of mind and hand, academic and applied.

Joel Klein's division between 'charter' schools (fully funded but self-managing within a charter) and public schools is comparatively benign compared to our homegrown divisions, and indeed one that we have tried already under the rubric of self-management. Where he appears to have been more influential is in our recent

embracing, via *My School*, of mass testing as the source of alleged teacher outcomes. Again, we are not beginners in the field: Australia devises and sells tests of literacy and numeracy around the world. It is only recently, however, and under a Labor government advised by measurement experts and encouraged by Joel Klein, that we have nationwide test results in a form that reinforces the ideology of choice by creating categories of good, indifferent and bad schools. These same data have also been proposed as indicators of teacher quality that could lead to a regime of rewards and punishments of teachers.

It is only recently, and under a Labor government advised by measurement experts and encouraged by Joel Klein, that we have nationwide test results in a form that reinforces the ideology of choice by creating categories of good, indifferent and bad schools.

As I have noted, Klein thinks all this stuff has failed in the United States because of teachers, and political resistance orchestrated by teachers' unions. Our position is different. The unions have stuck to bewailing the funding of non-government schools but have said little about the growing divisions among state schools. They do after all have members in all kinds of schools. They oppose vouchers and deplore league tables based on test data. They have gone along with the NAPLAN testing despite its educational limitations and the uses to which it is put, probably because opposition is unwinnable or at least against their other interests. Needless to say they oppose payment of teachers by performance but again they are caught in having to

maintain a bargaining presence. In short, Klein's marketplace is not the failure here he says it is in the United States.

Even so, the unions have not escaped some demonisation. They have not been blamed straight out for thwarting everything good, as Klein has done on his old patch, but they haven't escaped either. The school curriculum has been made into a battleground, especially in history and English (usually referred to as literacy). The Coalition government drew schools into the history wars and their campaign against political correctness. School history, they claimed, had fallen to the progressives, either by being absorbed into other subjects or being biased in favour of Aboriginal and Asian studies and peace, and against pioneers, our British heritage and the ANZACs.

In that context progressive is meant to be a dirty word. Progressives, goes the story, have wishy-washy ideas, send their own kids to good schools and conduct experiments on other people's children. Progressive is a very short way along the dog-whistle chain from Leftist. Its equivalent in US abuse is liberal, but obviously we can't say that here. Leftists, says a more distant dog-whistle, are manipulated by hard-line communists, the kind that run teachers' unions.

Labor doesn't follow that chain of dog-whistles but it does follow another when it carries on about the 'basics'. Julia Gillard was especially keen on getting schools 'back to basics'. The idea in this case was that progressive teachers had abandoned phonics and grammar. Her new national curriculum would bring them back. Once again the cat and the mat would be joined by the action word sat. Rattling the same dog-whistle chain the Libs had used about history proved enough to charge progressives as the enemies of grammar. The road was different but the destination ended up being the same.

The burden of Davis Zyngier's case is that when we import ideas, we ought to bring in successes rather than failures. Finland is the commonly cited success story (based on international testing programs) and it is as unlike the competitive marketplace as you can get. The United States and England, from whom we borrow quite a bit, perform much worse than we do, but press on regardless with their quaint ideas of a market for public education.

The OECD ranks us as high in quality but low in equity. Finland ranks high on both counts. The United States is low on both counts. Unfortunately we have gone so far with our own quaint ideas that a set-up such as Finland's is out of the question. Finland has highly qualified teachers, pays them well, is content that they are all unionised and doesn't bother with the paraphernalia of selection, mass testing, league tables and punitive teacher 'accountability'. There are few private schools, mostly religious; like public schools, they are free, lunch included. Secondary schools are comprehensive. Streaming is not used. The differences, in short, are stark.

What we are much closer to is Crown Woods College in Greenwich, South London. A failing school, Crown Woods was recently beautifully renovated, according to a July article in *The Guardian*, and re-designed as a set of three mini-schools. The mini-school idea makes life among a large enrolment less forbidding. The article suggested the idea came from the United States—Victoria has pursued the same idea in both organisation and building for forty years but we're not on the world's worth-copying list. Be that as it may, the startling news in the article was that each mini-school houses a stream based on entry tests at age eleven, one for the gifted, one for the middle ranked and one for the rest, and each is colour coded—buildings, school uniform, the lot—purple for the bright, red and blue for the others.

The headmaster maintains that this combination of streaming and extreme separation 'is the only way to survive in the brave new world of market-driven education'. (The Aldous Huxley reference suggests perhaps a bit of tongue in cheek.) While it sounds mad, the parents have flocked to it. The scary thing is the headmaster might be right. **a**

Responding to **China's Rise**

Andrew Hunter
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Responding to
China's Rise

Andrew Hunter

Andrew Hunter is
deputy national
chair of the
Australian Fabians.

As the federal government announces a White Paper on the 'Chinese century', might a concert of powers in the Asia Pacific region foster peace and understanding?

Christopher Pyne's speech given to the Henry Jackson Society in London this year, 'The Rise of China and the Future of US Asia-Pacific Policy – a View from Australia', has been lauded by Greg Sheridan for its intellectual rigour and mixture of balance and boldness. Sheridan's review, which appeared in *The Australian* in August, went on to compare Pyne's speech favourably to speeches made on China by the shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop. This comment was surely tongue in cheek.

Pyne began his speech, delivered in July, with a series of reasonable yet hardly astonishing comments about China's economic growth driving trade links in Asia. He cited a poll by the Lowy Institute to show that Australians believe that China's growth is a good thing. He also noted that China was unconstrained in engaging with the world's most odious regimes (not exactly a point of difference with other great modern powers), referred to the 'neo-mercantilist cast' to its external activities (but failed to remark that Japan and Korea act similarly, or that this inclination broadly reflects the way in which East Asian societies have been organised since ancient times) and spoke briefly of its state-run banking system that allocates capital in response to political guidance. These statements could hardly be described as 'bold', or 'intellectually rigorous', but together broadly reflect Pyne's liberal political values.

Chinese investment in Australia has received popular attention in Australia recently. Pyne rightly asserted that it is 'entirely proper that state-owned enterprises are subject to proper scrutiny'. The number of Chinese investment applications would in fact be significantly higher if not for fear of rejection. A rejected application would be perceived as a loss of face, so there are compelling cultural reasons for the Chinese to withdraw if uncertain of the outcome. I am unsure how interested his audience would have been in this issue, but thus far it was an unspectacular but sound account, from an Australian perspective, of China's rise.

Pyne's oration was praised by Sheridan for its self-confidence and robust sense of liberal political values, yet as the speech progressed some troubling elements emerged. The self-confidence no doubt was abetted by the knowledge that many in Pyne's audience would have shared his identification with the geo-strategic objectives of the United States, and complete reliance on Western historical and cultural contexts for understanding global political trends. European precedents were used forebodingly, such as the 'painfully instructive' example of twentieth-century Europe. Pyne unabashedly described the previous centuries' European dominance in Asia as 'the world we are all used to'. He could just as easily have

said that it was 'the only world I am comfortable with'.

Pyne's statement that 'China's rise ... along with its benefits brings significant challenges' is axiomatic. Most significant changes are, after all, challenging. Complacency is certainly not an option. When referring to the 'darker side' of China's rise, however, he embarks down a path that could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The threat that China poses may well partly depend on how Australia and other nations respond.

Diplomacy not informed by an understanding of China's historical, cultural and geo-political background—the origins of which precede the Vasco de Gama era by some two millennia in most cases—would bring a perilous future to Asia. Pyne is certainly not alone in harbouring such insecurities. According to a Lowy Poll conducted in March and April, 44 per cent of respondents believed that China will pose a military threat to Australia. It is difficult, however, to imagine a plausible scenario where this perceived threat would materialise into actual conflict.

The assertion that 'China's missile and sub-marine forces in particular have created a capacity for China to counter US military power in the Western Pacific' echoed sentiments expressed in the 2009 Defence White Paper. But is it not entirely natural that China will continue to increase in its maritime power to the extent that its growing economy allows? The Opium Wars and subsequent humiliations during the Vasco de Gama era, not to mention the bitter experience of the Japanese invasion, have taught China the great importance of naval strength. There is nothing in China's past that suggests that this investment in further developing its maritime strength will lead to an attack on the United States or its regional allies. While historical continuity provides no guarantee for the future, it does offer strong suggestions regarding the choices Chinese leaders are likely to make.

Ironically, the strength of Australia's alliance with the United States provides a solid foundation to further develop our relationship with China. The first day of September marked the sixtieth anniversary of ANZUS—an alliance supported by 59 per cent of Australians, according to a recent Lowy Institute poll. When Sheridan wrote that Pyne's speech was 'the best speech made on China by any Australian outside of government this year', he surely meant to say 'any Australian politician outside of government'. The importance of the ANZUS alliance and its implications for Sino-Australian relations has been articulated with a greater depth of understanding by several academics this year. Sheridan referred to the work of the Lowy Institute's Andrew Shearer, who argues that ANZUS gives Australia great confidence in its dealings in Asia. Interestingly, many of Pyne's declarations (and in some cases phraseology) closely mirrored passages that subsequently appeared in a paper written by Shearer, entitled 'Uncharted Waters: The US Alliance and Australia's New Era of Strategic Uncertainty'.

Malcolm Cook, former program director for East Asia at the Lowy Institute and current dean of the school of International Studies at Flinders University, has also spoken with great understanding on this issue. Cook argues that the ANZUS alliance will facilitate stronger ties with China in much the same way that it allowed Australia to negotiate the 1957 Agreement on Commerce with Japan. He suggests that ANZUS continues to smooth the progress of Australia's ever-deepening Asian engagement, with China today as it did with Japan in the postwar period. Many other East Asian states appear to be following suit.

South Korea, Japan, Vietnam and Singapore are also developing closer security ties with the United States. Each has significant and increasing economic interests in China, as do other nations in the region. As the ANZUS alliance eases domestic concerns in Australia's dealings with China, the strengthening of security ties with the United States in the region may provide a favourable domestic backdrop for a concert of powers that accommodates an emergent China.

Pyne's dismissal of a concert of powers that could provide sustained peace and prosperity is probably due to his propensity to apply European historical precedents to an Asian context. While concerts of powers, based on a rough balance, served Europe well but for short periods only, they have in the past survived for centuries in Asia. Considering the ongoing rise of China, the only alternative to a concert of powers in this Asian century is confrontation.

A future concert of powers would require an adjustment in the geo-strategic goals of both

the United States and China. It appears that the former, at least, has no intention of making such an adjustment any time soon. Despite Sheridan's early misgivings over Obama's 2008 election victory, he has since been delighted with the intensification of the United States' Asian engagement. Despite a domestic fiscal context that will demand careful strategic prioritisation, the recent AUSMIN meeting suggests that the United States will seek to further strengthen its position in the region. Ongoing US engagement in Asia is in the region's interest, but attempts to preserve its primacy in the face of a rising China are not.

If the United States is incapable of adjusting its geo-strategic goals, could key allies like Japan and Australia play a role in a developing a concert of powers in a region, which would also need to accommodate the aspirations of India, and perhaps Russia?

Even if it were seen to be in the national interest, this would not be a simple task. US postwar primacy in Asia is abetted by its extraordinary penetration into the domestic politics of its key regional allies. This is never more evident than in Japan. Many of Japan's postwar political leaders benefitted from the 'Marquat Fund', a CIA-controlled fund named after the fund's initial manager, US Major General William Marquat, used to finance the careers of hand-picked politicians to ensure that Japan would remain agreeable to US leadership. Exceptions have been rare, but it is plausible that the independently rich Yukio Hatoyama, whose grandfather on his mother's side founded Bridgestone, was such an exception. As former prime minister (September 2009 to June 2010), Hatoyama attempted to achieve a paradigm change in terms of Japan's foreign policy by talking about a cooperative approach to China in the context of an emerging 'Asian Community'. He did not last long, and was replaced by Naoto Kan.

More than a month after Pyne's speech, Yoshihiko Noda was elected by the ruling Democratic Party of Japan as the man to succeed Kan. It is unlikely that Noda will work towards a Sino-friendly Asian Community. He has in the past made a string of controversial comments about China's military spending and has said that Japanese military leaders convicted at the international tribunal at the end of World War II were in fact not criminals. Such comments caused great angst not only in China but also Korea. It appears that Japan will continue to accommodate US objectives in the region, at least in the short term.

And what of Australia? Will Australia's leaders draw a distinction between US engagement in Asia, which is in our national interest, and US primacy, which is unsustainable? This is unclear, but doubtful. Will China attempt to counter US influence in Australia? It was recently reported that China has sought, since Hu Jin-Tao's visit to Australia in 2003, to use developing economic and political ties with Australia to dilute US influence. China will struggle to achieve the political penetration the United States enjoys, but may seek to exercise a level of influence through a deep investment in agricultural and mineral resources by state-owned companies. Such investments also reflect China's food and energy needs.

The mutual distrust between each of the United States, Japan, Australia and China still exists despite an extraordinary forty-year period in which, with the exception of the Vietnamese overthrow of Pol Pot in Cambodia in 1978 and subsequent Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979, no Asian power has attacked one of its neighbours. Such mistrust must be overcome. Prudence, rather than hostility, would serve the best interests of Australia, Japan and other nations of the Asian Pacific. Together with a reasonable readjustment of geo-strategic objectives of both the United States and China, an appropriate environment for a concert of powers could be achieved through careful middle-power diplomacy. Such a concert would maximise prosperity and minimise the risks to regional security. It would be naive to contemplate such a concert of powers in Asia that excludes the United States, but ignorance of China's past and a confrontational approach to it in the future will equally do little to serve the national interest. **a**

PEAK FOOD

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Responding to
China's Rise

Andrew Hunter

→→→

Food Sovereignty

Nick Rose and
Fran Murrell

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Food

Sovereignty

Nick Rose and Fran Murrell

Responding to the National Food Plan

The global food system, it seems, has gone bonkers. In theory, its main aim should be to make sure that everyone has enough good food to eat. It would of course be nice too if the people doing the work of producing the food had decent livelihoods, and that ecosystems weren't destroyed or the climate destabilised in the process. But let's start with the basic goal: good, healthy food for all.

Some of us are indeed eating well—but more and more aren't. Estimates of the numbers of malnourished hover around the one billion mark, and are likely to increase as GFC Mark II kicks in. Perhaps as many as two billion additional people experience constant food insecurity, because they live on or beneath the poverty line of the equivalent of two dollars a day.

Then we have obesity, no longer an epidemic but a pandemic, according to the *Lancet*. A pandemic is an epidemic with wings on—think HIV, cholera and smallpox. Six years ago the World Health Organisation put the numbers of obese adults globally at a minimum of 400 million, or 10 per cent of the total adult population. Rates in the United States and Australia are three times as high and growing, and childhood obesity is also on a steep upwards curve. To date, no government has made any serious inroads into stemming this modern-day scourge.

What we have, in fact, is a deeply dysfunctional global food system that generates the paradoxical 'stuffed and starved' phenomenon, as author Raj Patel so succinctly puts it. Why does it do this? Quite simply, because its basic purpose is not actually to feed us all well, but to generate growing profits for the large transnationals that

are its true beneficiaries. And the global food system excels at producing profits.

Take US-owned Cargill, for example, the world's largest grain processing and meat packing corporation. Cargill's sales have more than doubled since 2000, while its profits have risen 500 per cent to \$US2.6 billion in 2010—and that figure is a hefty fall from the \$US3.95 billion it earned in 2008, during the last round of extreme food price volatility. So far this year its profits are up nearly 50 per cent on the 2010 figure, once again taking advantage of sharp rises in commodity prices.

There's a slight hitch in this happy story of profits ever after. The global food system developed in its current form largely as a result of the bounty of cheap fossil fuel energy that became available after World War II. Some say the dependency is such that it takes ten calories of this form of energy to produce one calorie of food. Fossil fuels, as the name suggests, are a finite resource. There's an emerging consensus that we've entered, or are now entering, the peak of oil production. Peak gas production is due in another decade or so.

Because it's capitalist, the global food system wants to expand, and expand endlessly. Because it's utterly dependent on cheap energy, it can't achieve this, certainly not in its current industrial-scale form. This conundrum has led people to predictions of 'peak food'—the point in time when global food demand outstrips supply—followed by mass famine, chaos and the return of the four horsemen.

This sort of neo-Malthusianism has its difficulties. To begin with, when we take into account the amount of grain that's diverted to feeding animals in the factory farming system and used to produce agro-fuels, the world actually produces enough food now to feed ten to twelve billion people. And yet this system is incredibly profligate: as much as half of all food produced in OECD countries is wasted at some point in the food chain.

While the world's not actually short of food—even as millions starve amid abundance—there

With food policy formation driven so far by large industry and commodity groups, there is every reason to expect that the National Food Plan will respond mainly to their needs for infinitely expanding production and constantly growing profit.

remains the social problem of a decades-long rural crisis which has seen farmers who are surplus to the system's requirements dispossessed and mistreated globally. There are various ways in which this has been achieved, most recently via trade liberalisation. In agriculture, far too often this has meant that wealthy regions like North America and Europe dump their heavily subsidised surplus commodities into Southern markets, undermining conditions for millions of small farmers.

Arguably, a system so dysfunctional and fragile requires a thorough overhaul, if not complete replacement. But that's not what the Australian government has in mind, as it consults with the Australian public on the formulation of a first-ever National Food Plan. On the contrary, we as a country are 'food secure', and our main challenge is to lift our rates of 'competitiveness' and 'productivity'. The path to global food security is most assuredly through further trade liberalisation, disregarding that the numbers of malnourished—most of them, paradoxically, small farmers, with the majority women—have actually risen more than 30 per cent since the World Trade Organisation came into existence. Peak oil and its impacts are not deemed worthy of mention, while technological change—no doubt in the form of GMOs and nanotechnology, productivity improvements and free trade—are the guaranteed recipe for a sustainable food future for Australia.

The government's approach to formulating food policy is hardly surprising: the idea of a National Food Plan was prompted by discussions with large retailers, large commodity producers and agri-business. Representatives of these sectors have been meeting with the Federal Minister of Agriculture, Joe Ludwig, as a Food Policy Advisory Working Group since shortly after the 2010 federal election. The agenda is unknown: despite repeated requests, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has not made available the minutes of any of these meetings.

Discussing the need for a National Food Plan is a step in the right direction, at least beginning to inject some coherence into a food system that is fragmented across so many government departments. Unfortunately, with food policy formation driven so far by large industry and commodity groups, there is every reason to expect that the plan, when it appears, will respond mainly to their needs for infinitely expanding production and constantly growing profit.

Who's left out of this picture? For starters, the majority of Australian farmers, who are not commodity producers but grow food for domestic consumption. Since farming and food generally has become devalued in our culture, most farmers depend on other sources of income to make ends meet; the pressures are such that, on average, five leave the land every day. Many of the remaining farmers form part of the growing community food sector, which also includes the hundreds of thousands of Australians involved in the community gardens

and farmers' markets that are increasingly common features of our urban and rural landscapes. This sector has been largely ignored in the policy development process, as have the ranks of dedicated and experienced health professionals who are confronted daily by the consequences of the obesity pandemic. Finally, there is the general Australian public, of which two million are food insecure at some point during the year.

Yet the government's business-as-usual approach is not the only show in town. For twenty years small farmers from around the world have been talking to each other about everything that is wrong with the current food system, and working on their alternative: food sovereignty. In the food sovereignty vision, food systems are diverse, de-centralised and democratic. They serve the basic needs of people for good, healthy food and decent livelihoods, not the interests of corporations for profit. Food is produced according to agro-ecological methods that restore health to damaged ecosystems and waterways, with reliance on external inputs, including fossil fuels, progressively reduced. The community food sector flourishes as markets and distribution networks are localised. People everywhere reconnect with the sources of their food, and the ecological rift between humanity and nature begins to be healed.

Can food sovereignty feed the world? Extensive research by leading experts like Miguel Altieri, and Olivier de Schutter, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Food, is showing that agro-ecological polycultures outperform the yields of input-intensive monocultures by 20 per cent or more, when total production from all crops is taken into account. It's often said that the Green Revolution staved off disaster with its high-yielding hybrids. In response, we agree with Vandana Shiva and others who say that these yield increases came at the unsustainable cost of ever-greater additions of agro-chemicals and massive amounts of irrigation. Great chains of dependency were created for farmers—and for society as a whole—in the process, while genetic modifications only deepen these dependencies further.

Humanity in the twenty-first century faces the profound challenge of forging a path to true sustainability. This means learning to understand and respect the ecological boundaries established by our collective home, the Earth. It also means addressing and eradicating the gross inequalities that at present we tolerate in so many spheres of social life. This will require abandoning the goal of ceaseless growth and production and replacing it with a different social purpose, based on a vision of a life lived in harmony, with each other and with the Earth. This is captured by the emerging pan-Indigenous concept of *buenvivir*: living well. Food sovereignty is an essential pillar of *buenvivir*, and it is showing the way to a fair and sustainable future. **■**

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Food Sovereignty

Nick Rose and
Fran Murrell

Praise the COW

Ben Falloon



Praise the Cow

Ben Falloon

Ben Falloon manages Taranaki Farm <www.taranakifarm.com> with his partner, Nina Grundner. Taranaki is a multi-generational small family farm north of Melbourne, specialising in 'beyond organic' salad bar beef, pigerator pork, pastured eggs and pastured meat chickens for local consumption. Taranaki Farm features the Australian Polyface Project, which aims to establish a fully operational integrated open Australian farm modelled on the Polyface Farm in Virginia, United States.

Dear reader,

To write to you, I must imagine you are here and experiencing this very moment on the farm to appreciate the scene. Just a moment ago I turned over a rusty old bucket to sit among our beloved herd of cows and draw inspiration from the balance I witness before me. To help you visualise, I will describe what I see.

I'm surrounded by our herd of cows, as they quietly graze on about an acre of pasture (their present daily ration) on our family farm 'Taranaki,' situated in Central Victoria, just west of the small township of Woodend. We're at the top of a primary ridge of gentle undulating country, overlooking a broad valley formed over millennia by a tributary of the Campaspe river, and edged by a eucalyptus forest.

The sun provides gentle warmth with a moderate breeze regulating the temperature beautifully. You can practically smell the pasture growing! After moving to new pasture this morning, the cows are very content, chewing cud or nursing the farm's newest occupants—the adorable little calves born in the last few weeks, full of life and epitomising the season. Nearest to me, an affectionate new mother—number 22—dotes over her newborn calf, licking his ears, while he leans into her attentiveness with clear enthusiasm.

On this farm, dear reader, cattle form the backbone of our soil fertility program—they are magical in their ability to regenerate land through the stimulation of soil life. They boast carrying capacity, while increasing biomass and sequestering atmospheric-carbon-building top soil. Their rich organic manure composts the earth while miraculously returning more nutrient than they harvested. A social species if there ever was one.

On Taranaki Farm, animals are managed to mimic nature. We employ light portable electric fence systems to keep cattle in high density while moving them daily to new pasture. This approach simulates

natural herbivorous herd dynamics where predators 'mob' grazing animals into large populous clusters for protection as the herd (the super-organism) sweeps its way across the landscape. This high-density clustering effect works to stimulate grasslands and accelerate species succession through high impact disturbance (short duration) and heavy manuring (nutrient exchange). The net result—provided the herd moves away for a minimum period of time—is pasture regeneration and ecosystem balance.

Once a day our cows are given new pasture, and moved away from yesterday's manure. Cows love routine, and we reward them daily. They happily flow into today's regenerated pasture and begin converting solar-harvesting grasses, legumes and forb plants into nutrient-dense protein, either in the form of milk (to nurture the next generation) or meat for our own sustenance. They will only return to today's spot when the land has recovered.

Indeed, because of their special relationship to grasslands, and because of our management choices, this parcel of land will regenerate even more by the time the herd returns. This is nature's way of encouraging our environmental choices—more forage diversity and more nutrient exchange and more biological activity beneath the soil surface. So thank you, herbivorous grazing animal, for the special place you occupy in this grassland ecology.

Cows love routine, and we reward them daily. They happily flow into today's regenerated pasture and begin converting solar-harvesting grasses, legumes and forb plants into nutrient-dense protein, either in the form of milk (to nurture the next generation) or meat for our own sustenance.



After all, the soil is far more than a medium for holding up plants. It is an infinitely complex ecosystem analogous (though arguably more sustainable!) to the economics and social activities of a city like New York, with all its busy banter, exchange and hyper-activity. This stands in contrast to the soil equivalent of a remote desert town, where nothing much happens and the economy revolves around the local pub with its mere handful of characters.

The more diverse and complex the ecosystem, the more life and nutrient availability—and, in turn, the greater the carrying capacity. Life then regenerates in the ectropic sense (in thermodynamics, ectropy is a measure of the tendency of a dynamical system to do useful work and grow more organised), vastly more appealing than the inverse concept of entropy, which suits better those with a tendency to decompose! On Taranaki Farm we consider ourselves ectropic stewards of the land we are responsible for.

Please reconsider any pre-judice you might have against the cow, for as I frequently say, ‘Anyone who doesn’t like a cow never knew one’.

Dear reader, please ask yourself a question. What would the content of Australia readily—and naturally—supply for your occupancy? Ask honestly. I have pondered this question and, after much consideration, realised that *protein* is the answer. If we were not farming cattle, Australia would readily supply multiple other forms of protein such as kangaroo (tasty!), pork (quite tasty!), wild camel (don’t know about that!), horse (exotic!), or witchetty grubs (please spare me!) and so forth. In contrast, I cannot imagine the Australian continent providing a naturally occurring harvest of annual cereals (wheat, oats, rye) or the market vegetables salivated over by our predominantly European and Asian forebears.

Sure, we can live in denial and continue our industrial production of ancestral taste preferences over ecosystem health, but aren’t we well enough aware that the mechanical synthetic/chemical approach is the very definition of unsustainable farming? In the words of UK agronomist Sir Albert Howard (1873–1947), ‘Artificial manures lead inevitably to artificial nutrition, artificial food, artificial animals, and finally, to artificial men and women’.

To be fair, in Europe, which is blessed with metres of productive top soil, complex carbohydrate-based culinary artworks like ratatouille evolved without the immediate negative efforts of soil tillage and erosion. (For those unfamiliar, ratatouille consists of tomatoes—the key ingredient—with garlic, onions, zucchini, eggplant, bell peppers, carrot, marjoram and basil, or bay leaf and thyme, or a mix of green herbs like *herbes de Provence*. Ooh la la.) But can someone point me to a place in Australia where such an indulgence could be harvested naturally from the wild?

On account of Australia’s lack of recent volcanic activity and its recently memorable status as the ‘world’s driest continent’, we must challenge ourselves to consider what our land can honestly provide—without swimming upstream. It seems to me that Australia will comfortably support both grasslands and forests, both of which are stable ecosystems that sustain and regenerate themselves. They are also suitable habitats for animals not dissimilar to cattle—animals that efficiently convert solar-

harvesting grasslands into biomass and reciprocate by returning nutrients to the soil ecosystem. Broad-acre ecosystems are well suited to balancing the relationship between herbivorous animals and their predators.

It has been my experience that if we are clever with our animal management, we can have our cake and eat it too. This means that by leveraging the fertile [re]generation by our protein production, we can subsequently grow our carbohydrate requirements and satisfy our exotic diets. But we must also overcome the stereotypes and dogmatic misinformation campaigns leveraged against cattle in this country. Cattle in Australia have been ‘systematically scapegoated and demonised’ (to misappropriate W. S. Burroughs’s words), blamed for all kinds of ecological and environmental crimes. And yet it is not the animal, but always the *management* of the animal.

Australia’s native bovine equivalent, the diprotodon (or giant wombat), only became extinct less than 50,000 years ago. On an ecological timeframe this is only a fraction of a second, so to the conservationists who argue that cattle have no place in our landscape, consider that it’s no environmental crime to property-manage and balance ecosystems with a view to supporting more life. Abundant environments benefits both people and wildlife.

Furthermore, when asked when were the glory days of the Australian continent from a productivity and ecosystem-health standpoint, noted mammalogist and palaeontologist Tim Flannery argued that during the residency of the diprotodon Australia could ‘support more biomass, more kilograms of life sustainably than any other time’. That’s with the cow-equivalent diprotodon eating grass and forty-eight hours later putting that grass back onto the paddock as a lovely big diprotodon pat, and dung beetles and the like returning the nutrients to the soil. That’s like an ecosystem where a dollar changes hands every minute. Whereas without diprotodons, on the other hand, the grass grows up and eventually burns, and all the nutrients are lost to the atmosphere: an ecosystem where a dollar is spent once a year and half of it is lost from the system.

Anyway, the wind is picking up and I’m told a change is forecast for this evening, so I must get back to work. The first of our spring internship applications, for a program educating the next generation of young farmers, has just arrived via email. And it’s time to check the water troughs and finish work on our new ‘turkey’s nest’ dam, a plumbing system that will effortlessly supply gravity-pressurised clean water to all our daily moving animals’ systems—our pigs, chickens and, of course, cows. So thank you for reading and please reconsider any prejudice you might have against the cow, for as I frequently say, ‘Anyone who doesn’t like a cow never knew one’. **👍**

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Praise the Cow

Ben Falloon

Growing Lightly

Karen Halasa

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Growing Lightly

Karen Halasa

Karen Halasa teaches at Holmesglen Institute of TAFE in the writing program, and until recently ran an organic farm and produce shop in Korumburra.

A climate change response to food production

It is apparent even in the mainstream media that food has become one of the hottest and most politicised issues to arise as a corollary to the effects of climate change. The threats to food supply come not only from the desertification of once arable land through over-farming and reliance on chemical fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides. Our insistence on supermarkets stocking foods whether or not they are in season or grown locally, and that this produce should be as cheap as possible, has led to a reliance on imports and products that have been transported huge distances within Australia. It has also resulted in the squeezing out of the smaller producers unable to compete with agribusiness and the relationship it has with supermarket chains. Primary producers who do supply the supermarkets often find that control of what they grow—as well as its quantities, its keeping properties and how it looks on the shelf—are prescribed not by an open market but by their trading relationship with one buyer.

The transportation of food over large distances, consuming volumes of fossil fuels, has led to the concept of food miles and a recognition that, in an era of peak oil (the argument is no longer whether oil production has peaked but exactly when it did), the security of mass-produced food for a mass market may be seriously under threat. The carbon footprint of our food also seems an unnecessarily high price to pay for tropical fruit or tomatoes out of season.

Other arguments about the way our food is produced are based on equally valid and perhaps even more immediate concerns. For many years consumers have complained of a lack of flavour and vitality in much of the fresh produce bought, even when in season. Michael Pollan's seminal work *The Omnivore's Dilemma* horrified readers with tales of the industrialisation and mechanisation of food production, like the process by which tomatoes for ketchup manufacture were grown in the United States: the crops were planted so close together that weeds could not grow between them and mechanical harvesters could harvest them all in one hit. The inevitable result—a proportion were under-ripe and the produce was contaminated by animal matter—was remedied by spraying green tomatoes red, with Rodent Hair Content (RHC) later measured to ensure the sauce was within guidelines. Ethical concerns about the rearing of animals in feed lots and vast areas of US farmland becoming monocultures, largely planted with corn, raised the levels of debate and consciousness.

Another system that disempowers the farmer, whether in the developed or undeveloped world, is the attempt by Monsanto to introduce genetically modified seed with a terminator gene preventing it from being saved from one generation to the next. Clearly our treatment of food and the land on which it depends as just another manipulable commodity requires re-examination.

The benefits of food grown without chemicals, with regard to local biospheres and soil, for biodiversity and for our health are well known—and the organics industry is growing. Most interestingly, small-scale producers and consumers have initiated and supported farmers' markets, which have sprung up all over Australia. Local growers of fresh produce bring their wares to a traditional-style market and sell directly to the consumer who can then ask questions about how the food is grown and learn more about what it is they consume and how it can be produced ethically, cleanly and sustainably. Heritage varieties of vegetables and fruits can be purchased, ensuring the survival of a range

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of free pollinated varieties and maintaining control of seed supplies, and consumers can avoid the unwitting purchase of genetically modified food. This scaling down of the food market to smaller producers selling in smaller communities has enormous benefits but can only be part of a small farmer's income: its profitability is limited.

One of the difficulties of farming on a small scale is the level of financial risk involved. In Europe and the United Kingdom schemes have been in place for a number of years in local communities that attempt to share this risk across producers and consumers. Community Supported Agriculture allows consumers to become 'shareholders'. In return for an up-front payment of a nominated amount, the consumer receives a weekly box of produce direct from the farm. The quality and freshness of the produce is generally superior to anything that could be bought elsewhere but the continuity of supply is dependent on the things farmers usually rely on—their labour and the rainfall, pest activity and seasonal variations. Consumers share some of that risk, and for the farmer the other variable—whether or not they can sell their produce for a reasonable price—is obviated.

The quality and freshness of the produce is generally superior to anything that could be bought elsewhere but the continuity of supply is dependent on the things farmers usually rely on—their labour and the rainfall, pest activity and seasonal variations.

A modified form of this scheme exists in Victoria in South Gippsland. Grow Lightly, initiated by permaculture practitioners and bushfood growers Meredith and Gil Freeman, brings local growers together with local consumers. Any Sunday morning, come rain, hail or shine, a band of dedicated growers pack vegetables, fruit, eggs and nuts into boxes for local customers at the old cordial factory at Coal Creek in Korumburra. Consumers pay a month in advance for vegetable boxes, which supply them with a variety of locally produced fresh produce. The aim is to source the produce from the point at which it was grown and to distribute as close as possible to the ultimate consumers. The mainly small-scale growers live on farms within a 20 kilometre radius of the township of Korumburra: Kardella, Loch, Outtrim and Leongatha. Consumers come from various local areas and there are several distribution hubs, at Korumburra, Loch, Inverloch, Fish Creek and Ellinbank. Recipes for cooking the produce, especially some of the more exotic or unusual varieties (for example, Jerusalem artichokes, Daikon radishes and tamarillos), are often included in the boxes.

To increase variety and quantity, vegetables are sourced from larger growers like the organic farm Cafresco at Dalmore, while the centre of Victoria's asparagus-growing area Koo Wee Rup supplies seasonal organic asparagus. All produce is grown either by certified organic producers or is guaranteed pesticide free (the costs of certification for very small growers can be prohibitive).

One of the remarkable things about the weekly vegetable boxes is the variety of produce Grow Lightly manages to source. South Gippsland is a fertile area for enough different fruits and vegetables to provide a range and variety of produce. In each box the producers include items from the following groups: potatoes, onions (leeks and garlic), greens for cooking or salads, fruiting vegetables, fruit, herbs, nuts and eggs. The co-operative stocks their boxes with an awareness of the importance of eating a variety of different colours every day—red to ward off cancer, orange/yellow for heart health, green to preserve eyesight, blue/purple to protect the brain.

Beyond being a collective for the selling of surplus produce through the box system, Grow Lightly has a monthly presence at the Korumburra Farmers Market on the second Saturday of the month, with some members also selling homemade produce like jams, butters, baked goods, seedlings and cut flowers. Once a month, after box packing, a Sunday morning breakfast is provided at someone's home, and a working bee is organised to net fruit trees, plant seeds or weed garden beds.

It is no surprise that many of the members of Grow Lightly are also involved in other local projects such as the Local Food Network, set up under the auspices of the South Gippsland Council. The network runs workshops on small-scale farming which are well attended by the local farming community. The Energy Innovation Co-op, which runs an annual 'expo' in Wonthaggi highlighting recent innovations in alternative energy, also involves members of Grow Lightly, and there is a lot of interest in the Transition Town movement.

If the responses to climate change were only those manifestly inadequate ones mouthed by our politicians then we might have reason to despair. Attempts by Grow Lightly consumers and producers to scale down production and consumption of basic foodstuffs to human proportions, to reinvigorate and empower local communities and their economies, may be a small step in the direction of an effective response, but there are many such initiatives worldwide and they are gaining strength. These are encouraging signs and may lead us to hope for a new way of life, one that will be simple, community-oriented and even very tasty. **a**

COMMENT AND DEBATE

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Crowing Lightly

Karen Halasa

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debate
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Losing Sight of Ourselves

Anthony James

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Losing Sight of Ourselves

Anthony James

Anthony James is a writer, musician and lecturer in post-graduate sustainability studies at Swinburne University's National Centre for Sustainability.

Taegen Edwards and John Wiseman in *Arena Magazine* no. 111 describe their deep concern about climate change and the need to act comprehensively to avoid potentially catastrophic effects. They conclude correctly that it is also vital that we move in the right direction, that 'the required emissions reduction targets cannot be achieved without substantial rethinking of economic growth targets and definitions', yet concede that technological fixes are not solutions in themselves: 'Aside from the truly apocalyptic scenario of geo-engineering solutions overshooting, the greatest risk here is that faith in a potential technical fix can undermine the essential sense of urgency for more immediate action to reduce greenhouse gases'.

To be sure, this is an enormous risk. But there is arguably a greater one, more immediate and insidious—one that is fundamental to our ability to develop a 'far deeper understanding of the essential reciprocity' in nature that the authors suggest must inform a reduction in consumption and rethinking of economic growth. The greatest risk of the 'tech fix'—indeed the pre-eminent 'environmental problem', exceeding even climate change—is no less than the loss of what it means to be human.

Energy: What Is it Good For? Energy-intensive industrialised societies are celebrated as enabling unprecedented financial and material wealth. Yet other telling outcomes include gross and worsening inequity, environmental degradation nearing on ecosystem collapse (climate change being just one factor), and heightened conflict related to relatively diminishing access

to fossil-fuel-based primary energy sources.

The system we have organised appears to be doing the wrong thing right in achieving financial and material wealth at the expense of its 'embedding systems'; that is, of society within nature. Therefore, the 'more right' the system works, the 'more wrong' it becomes, regardless of the intentions of individuals or institutions that are part of the system.

While relatively diminishing access to fossil-fuel-based energy sources may result in increased conflict, this need not be the case, for the same reasons that it need not be taken as a spectre of diminished human wellbeing in general. Conventional energy use and its forecasting by institutions like the International Energy Agency have been underpinned by a range of flawed assumptions, including that human wellbeing (read narrowly as ongoing economic growth) is necessarily coupled to increasing energy use revolving around specialist development of enabling technology.

Significant in its move to embrace a broader context, the 2004 UN World Energy Assessment update noted that beyond a certain point, increasing energy use does not lead to increases in human wellbeing (as measured by the Human Development Index, or HDI).

Professor of environmental studies Vaclav Smil revealed in 2003 that the highest HDI rates were found to occur with a minimum annual energy use of 110 giga-joules (GJ) per capita (roughly Italy's rate, the lowest among industrialised nations, and around a third of the United States'), noting no additional gains past that point, with diminishing returns past the threshold of 40–70 GJ per person. Developing energy-intensive technology past the point of beneficial utility brings to mind the analogy of using a chainsaw to carve butter. Smil's conclusion from a decade prior to this research remains relevant: 'higher energy use by itself does

not guarantee anything except greater environmental burdens'.

Echoing these findings, extrapolation of the links between these 'environmental burdens', energy-intensive lifestyles and impacts on health is increasingly common, appearing in publications including a prominent 2007 series in *The Lancet*, and in the 2009 report *Coal's Assault on Human Health* by Physicians for Social Responsibility.

The decoupling of energy use (past a certain threshold) from human wellbeing casts the problem of climate change in a new light. By exposing flawed assumptions related to energy use within industrialised societies, we might think of ourselves as liberated from the limits of context-less, 'technology-driven' strategies for dealing with climate change. Even if we were successful in developing cleaner technologies to allow current energy use patterns, what would have been achieved if we had averted 'dangerous' climate change only to find that a broader range of environmental and social problems persisted?

The range of environmental and social problems is better recognised as symptomatic of an underlying cause. We suffer to the extent that we fail to adequately perceive the inter-relatedness of these issues (as part of a non-linear natural world). The indications are that to achieve improved human wellbeing within a healthy environment we need to create ways that enable outright reductions in energy use in industrialised societies. Developing the intellectual basis for this approach, Frank Fisher has coined the term 'conservation mining', geared towards altering the perception of what constitutes an energy 'source'. It posits conservation as arguably the major energy source opportunity of the immediate future within these societies, while framing it in such a way as to provoke recognition of the ability to generate investment (financial and other) in ways



similar to conventional mined energy sources.

Conservation is the only energy source (within Western consumer societies) that genuinely offers no negative environmental or social impact and, as such, the largest gains towards our more enlightened goal of reduced energy use as part of broader sustainability strategies. It reflects an integrated approach that directs the system towards closing the gap between current energy use patterns and improved environmental and social outcomes (including but not limited to climate change). Most significantly, it constitutes part of an approach to energy use geared towards resolving our underlying 'crisis of perception'.

Asking the Right Question about Technology

The technical debate regarding how to deal with climate change fails to address the dualistic interpretation of nature that underlies that debate. In this contextual vacuum, technology tends to be regarded as a force separate from the societies that create and apply it. This view fails to recognise that if our current use of technology has resulted in certain problems, it is not the technology but our way of thinking that underpins it that requires development. Relying on technology to solve our problems equates with abandoning any pretence of responsibility. In this sense, more important than the question of technology's role in dealing with climate change is its *place*.

In his article 'Response Ability' (2006), Fisher neatly illuminates this distinction, describing technology as a subset of technique: 'In a mechanistic world-view, technique resides in the dualistic gap between people and nature. It can, however, be used to facilitate closure of the gap and when it does this, it is "appropriate"':

Appropriate technology for energy use in the future may well incorporate aspects of the current dominant energy-related technology discourse. Its appropriateness, however, will not be determined by what the technology is, but rather the manner and context in which it is applied; that is, upon the degree to which its application narrows the gap in our dislocated perception of nature.

Use of the 'bicycle/public transport' combination for urban commuting, for example, reconnects the cyclist to the world around her or him. This includes

being more open to public interaction, along with the experience of de-trivialising the topography and general landscape which otherwise passes relatively unnoticed in the private car. At a broader level, the appropriateness of this technology to the task effects a 're-location' of the devastating array of environmental and social consequences of energy-intensive transport, mitigating one's energy-related impact upon land, air, water *and* atmosphere.

Critically, this impact includes not only the 'direct' consequences associated with the bike and private car in this case, but also consequences stemming from the related meta-structures that enable them. These include those responsible for manufacture, maintenance and disposal of the bike or car, as well as the paths, roads and other related physical infrastructure. They also include the legal, parliamentary, marketing, security and insurance structures and so on. When we consider this more complete context, it highlights the gross inefficiency of the car as a tool for urban transport, and the potential in other existing and simpler technologies such as the bicycle.

More importantly, it demonstrates the contextual framework that needs to be applied to assessments of renewable energy systems and other technologies commonly proposed to deal with climate change. And it helps us to see how the conceptual tool of 'conservation mining' offers a significant pathway to sustainability.


As a subset of technique, these technologies are also enabled within diverse contexts by more subtle meta-structures, forms of social behaviour (social institutions, taboos and so forth). Bicycle technology is reflected in the range of associated behaviours and understandings that the bicycle commuter must develop regarding the social dynamics of the road—the way people 'see' and react to the commuter cyclist, for example. From this point of view, as Fisher describes it, the bicycle is essentially a *social* device, rather than simply a material one.

This approach points to the inadequacy of applying technology to designated objectives isolated

from broader contextual considerations. Most profoundly, in this relational sense, the dominant focus on the technical debate in dealing with climate change perpetuates the failure to recognise that the entirety of human meaning (including the nature of technology) is derived from our interrelations within nature. We strip ourselves of the very basis of that meaning when we incorrectly perceive technology as a force apart from us as its bearers.

This problematic perspective persists as if the world was a human-configured machine, such as a car, able to be worked upon by a spanner directing a mechanic. When the car runs poorly, the challenge is perceived as developing a more evolved spanner rather than a more evolved person. A dislocated perspective on reality has at once disempowered the mechanic and de-valued nature. In fact, the action is one and the same, resulting in the dualistic gap that reflects the failure to perceive the inherent relational complexity of the person within nature.

Dealing with climate change in more contextually aware ways that act as pathways to sustainability may be seen in Richard Rabkin's terms (from his 1987 lecture titled 'The Indian Rope Trick' at the New York Academy of Sciences) as using energy-related techniques to achieve a better 'fit' rather than a precise 'match' of our actions in complex social relations with nature. The notion of becoming increasingly sensitive to our fit within nature is described by Fisher: 'Exposing the systems of knowing that are the womb of our designs and that enable those designs to be operationalised in practice is the path to closing the present hiatus between us and nature while preserving in a careful way those techniques coherent with us as nature'.

Increasing our awareness of such techniques as coherent with us being 'nature' was described by mythologist Joseph Campbell in 'The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology' (1964) as 'the long process of the Opening of the Eye of European man to a state that is no state but a becoming'. It is empowered participation in how things work, how they are derived, and what consequences ensue to self and the 'extended self' implicit in the broader system of life—human and non-human. 

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Losing Sight of
Ourselves

Anthony James

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Between the Rivers

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, US and Asian universities. <alamgirhashmi@hotmail.com>

Between the Rivers

So deep a man once dived into the sea
to find that rare flower of eternity
at the river's final drop. And there!

Who would bring it so far up to the lee?
What's left there was a withered branch
in the dying wind.

In Mesopotamia, plucked from home,
it turns a leaf, swaps memory:
rich river valleys with orchards
and a date-palm ripening at the edge
of the world.

Embarras de choix?

Those clear-eyed men and women figure out
bloodlines that criss-cross into the plains
from every mountain slope.
Night is a whisper under the morning star.

Now up and about their daily chores,
working the land.
Out the toxic growths of years of despots.
So rough the step east
all re-set the watches, have another business.

They are ploughing again,
demining country for their children.
Here they come
an unlikely spot,
tut-tutting.

Driving their cattle and themselves
with some hoo-ha about
sowing foreign grain in the sand.

Alamgir Hashmi

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Living in the sky

Guy Rundle

China, the West and cultural hubris

Perhaps there are more ironic places to see *The Tree of Life* than the Langham Centre in Hong Kong, but it would take some searching to find them. The skyscraper/mall/hotel combination is forty stories amid the scumble and chaos of Kowloon, the Chinese side of the city: low-level streets crowded with markets, discount stores, by-the-hour hotels, neon, rickshaws, carts, trucks, people, people, people, six deep on each pavement. Above it the Langham soars, a familiar steel-and-glass challenge to the city's warren sprawl.

Inside, however, something different has been done, for the central atrium is vast: ten, fifteen stories high, and irregularly shaped, with jutting angles, narrowing at the top—as if a cavern has been hewn from the finished skyscraper. At its base, lush trees and plants soften out the look, crisp and perpetually watered amid the air-conditioned chill. A vast, steep escalator takes you to the top. It seems unsupported. Near the apex, it's dizzying, vertiginous—near successful in its attempt to imitate a sense of the sublime found in nature. Then you step off, into the multiplex cinema.

The multiplex is always at the top of malls. Perhaps for reasons of space, or perhaps it is part of the marketing. Cinemas remain, despite (or because of) the spread of the DVD and direct download, the primary modern manner in which an escape from the bounded ego is possible—the body dissolving into the dark, the two dimensional image rendered three dimensional by our projection into it, the manufactured dream state that plays at the boundary between the head and the world. To place them at the very height of malls seems a reward, an endpoint to the pilgrimage of consumption. Working your way up the levels, you become steadily more loaded with anxiety, frustration and dissatisfaction until, as a reward for your labours, you can dissolve entirely for a couple of hours at the point nearest the sky.

Curiously, though it is an art film, *The Tree of Life* seems made for this multiplex experience.

The fifth film—in forty years—from legendary director Terence Malick, it is the most unusual of things, a genuine, audacious, ambitious work of art (as opposed to that distinct genre, the 'art film', of middlebrow psychologistic drama) with a mainstream release. Malick's previous films, such as the thrill killer movie *Badlands* and the early twentieth-century historical epic *Days of Heaven*, were concerned with matters of existence and being, rather than psychology—as befits a former philosophy professor and Heidegger scholar. Malick then took a near two-decade break. After two successful relatively conventional films gained him a degree of latitude, *The Tree of Life* represented an uncompromising go at making not a bolder statement about life, but a different sort of encounter with it. Using the frame of psychological drama and memory, the film bursts open into something entirely other.

Ostensibly, *The Tree of Life* is a memory film. An architect (Sean Penn) working on a large skyscraper project, a building of cold monotony even by contemporary standards, recalls his childhood growing up in Waco, Texas. In reality, most of the film is taken up with this, the family's story told backwards, from the news of the death of the architect's brother in Vietnam in the late 1960s, to their childhood in the 1950s. Such a precis doesn't capture it of course—Malick's style is a film essay, memories and moments, montage and deep focus, reminiscent of the classic Soviet filmmakers. More importantly, in the middle of the film is a third section which sets all on its head, for an extraordinary near half-hour sequence. Rendered in CGI graphics, it essentially tracks the history of the universe, from an abstract rendering of the sudden beginning everywhere (erroneously, usually described as the big bang) of the universe, via the formation of stars and galaxies, the planet, the seas—and then, suddenly, a jellyfish-like creature seen from the underside, swimming through the deep ocean, distant light perfusing the surface. If description of the other sections falls short, here it is actively misleading—using up-to-the-minute HD vision, the sequence is continually arresting, astonishing, even when it teeters on the edge of self-parody—as when, emerging from blackness again, we realise we are looking over the sleek back of a brontosaurus-type dinosaur. Taking the risk that the audience's mind

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Living in the Sky

Guy Rundle

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might wander in the direction of Monty Python, Malick's cinematic intent is nothing other than to be present not to Creation in any limited sense, but to Being. The movie that surrounds this sequence is entirely resituated by it—both the architect remembering his childhood in the throes of a mid-life crisis, and the fraught psychological drama of an angry mid-century father, squeezed by industrial work, threatened and rivalrous with his growing sons.

Without the 'third sequence', the film would be no more than another memory film, better than most. The sequence centres it instead on the pure process of life, running beneath the particular, the historical, the encultured. The psychological drama of the film is a giant McGuffin, a false lure to draw the attention while the movie does its work. The film is a general critique of the idea that meaning can be found in existence simply as the summed product of a series of meanings, of intention and desires, without a ground beneath. This is given form in the very different look of the present-day and 1950s sequences, and with a gesture to Heidegger's fundamental notion of the Earth and the Sky, as separate realms and orders. The silver and blue of the present-day, the reflected emptiness of the skyscrapers, is contrasted with a 1950s shot in earthy, brown tones, the drama taking place in low-slung single storey houses in a small regional city. One of the most quoted parts of the film in reviews is a rapturous sequence in which the mother lifts one of her children up and points to the sky. 'See that—that's where God lives', she says. Reviewers have assessed that for religious sentiment, but it is equally interpretable in an a-theist fashion—the Sky is the realm of God, or the idea of God. The Earth is where we live. Trying to live in the Sky—the architect's buildings with their mirrored surfaces look like nothing less, spaces carved into the heavens—is worse than hubris. It's an error.

There's no way of knowing what *The Tree of Life* will look like in ten years time—either a classic or period kitsch. But coming out of the cinema, staring down the escalator into the fake cavern, the world was thrown into sharp relief. Beneath lay the Kowloon streets, arrayed much as towns and cities have been for seven thousand years, the intersection of people in tight spaces, engaged in the business of life. Beyond, visible out the windows, was Shenzhen, the companion city to Hong Kong, which the Chinese government has put up in a quarter century. Pretty much a fishing village the day before yesterday, it now sprawls hugely, mega-block on mega-block of new skyscrapers, a 400 square kilometre supercity. Hong Kong has a compactness to it, shaped by the natural focus of the harbour. Shenzhen is a city on a plain. There was nothing to stop it continuing across the earth forever.

Good place to see *The Tree of Life*. A good time too. After six weeks travelling down through China, Shenzhen stood as a continuing reminder—most especially of the inadequacy of most accounts of the place. Endless colour supplement articles about the place joining the world, cranes on the horizon, don't really capture the categorical nature of what is happening; that China is embarked on the largest-scale transformation in human history, something of another order entirely to the relatively piecemeal way in which it occurred in the nineteenth-century West. Financial journalists and the like write of the vast pace of new building and urbanisation, but they cannot capture how that feels or what it means—that cities of two, three, five million people have been, in effect, entirely demolished and rebuilt, soaring into the sky and doubling their size in the process, as people come in from the country. It has been done before, elsewhere, this shift from the

horizontal to the vertical, with all that that entails, but not on this scale or even at this magnitude. Even for a stranger, with no knowledge of what was there before to compare it to, it is a confronting experience, unquestionably unprecedented.

To travel down the middle of the country from Beijing was to move in a state of double ignorance—cities of which one had never or barely heard, yet larger than all but the half-dozen Western mega-cities, arose ahead, entirely new-minted, yet with thousand-year histories that nothing in the city disclosed. Wuhan, Chengdu, Chongking ... it was impossible to know what had been there before. What is there now is mile on mile of apartment towers, business hotels, shopping malls—Western-style in origin, but only in the sense that the West had got there first. Once you take as given that modernity—capitalist, socialist, or mixed—will focus on urbanisation, industrialisation and consumption, then skyscrapers and malls follow automatically, accumulation patterns written down in concrete.

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There is little mystery as to how this categorical shift came about. For three decades after the 1949 victory, the Chinese experimented with radical models of social transformation, drawn from the wildest dreams of pre-Marxist utopian socialists. In the late 1970s they changed direction. To the outside world that looked like a capitulation to a set of unquestionable rules about modernity—markets, property and eventually liberal parliamentarianism—when in fact it was a transformative plan as radical as those that had preceded it. The Cultural Revolution had been directed towards one type of transformed society; its successor was directed towards another, but with a similar determination to sweep away pre-existing structures with resolute lack of sentiment. Cultural icons, symbols of ancient privilege, had been smashed in the Cultural Revolution, but what came after it would level

whole cities, annihilate villages in their thousands, and rupture the pattern of life—of the hutong—that went with them. Because the country remained a planned society, in which the planning was overwhelmingly concerned with directing how and where market forces would flow—while also preparing the way with state-inaugurated projects far beyond the capacity or imagination of the post-Keynsian West—China’s progress was essentially super-charged by this dual effect, modernity’s transformative capacity refined and distilled.

Planning mitigated the anarchy of capitalist production, its flow towards consumer goods; property and the market kicked a high-growth high capitalist economy into top gear. Western Thatcherites and neo-liberals visited over the decades to hold the country up as an example of the existence of enduring economic laws—even as the application of such laws in the West were draining it of industry, coupling growth to consumption, and turning the entire region from creditor to debtor status. My arrival in Shanghai had been propitious, because it coincided with celebrations for the ninetieth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. At night, on the front of the largest skyscraper in Pudong, the massive financial district built across the river from the old European Bund, the hammer-and-sickle was projected thirty storeys high on a background of red, the whole thing reflected, shimmering in the river. For a moment one felt science-fiction, caught up in the familiar plot of a time-traveller waking in an alternate reality—like Francis Spufford’s recent *Red Engineers*, the documentary novel in which it is imagined that Khrushchev’s USSR, steered by technocrats, races ahead of the West. Then one remembered—this was real; something had happened that could not be easily assimilated to simple models of privatisation. Capitalism was the means; the re-engineering of being—Chinese in particular, human in general—was the aim. Amid the pitiless skyscrapers, the vanishing hutongs and courtyards, brown, earthy, had the same look of ground-hugging closeness as the low, plain houses of *The Tree of Life*. China’s project was to make such a transformation into humanity’s unquestioned path; the film’s power arises from its understanding that that historical moment has occurred, and that, under its sway, life—its character, its qualia—becomes the thing in question.

Throughout that journey—which in retrospect would feel like a journey to the film—the world outside China provided a descant of sorts. While the Middle Kingdom appeared to have entered a sustained period of *post-histoire*—reading modern histories, one’s attention wandered after the Cultural Revolution, because there seemed little further history to tell—the West seemed to be

coming apart at the seams. In the United States, a President both diffident and stymied was unable to articulate any notion of how the nation might either regain its dynamism or change its idea of what counted as success. Meanwhile his opponents in the Republican Party left the sphere of modern politics altogether—the organisation, driven by its radical wing, became the political expression of a cult, fusing not merely distrust but hatred of government with literalist Christian beliefs.

By this conception, America’s woes were the result of error in heaven and on earth, turning away from both God and the sovereign individual. Though they paid obeisance to the Founding Fathers—indeed fetishised the Constitution—their beliefs were no longer grounded in Jefferson or even Hamilton. Instead the discourse of the newly elected Republican Congress was dominated by one thinker—Ayn Rand, inspiration not merely to marginal figures such as Ron Paul, but also to principals such as Paul Ryan, the man charged with drafting Congress’s 2011 budget. Filled out by a Tea Party movement, inaugurated by right-wing media, but now ranging free of it, the American Right has essentially taken a fundamentalist turn, a hysterical reaction to a national and economic decline rooted in larger global trends. Like all fundamentalists, from Calvinists to Wahhabists, it had honoured its founders by wholly replacing their ideas. Christian grace became Calvinist predestination, Mohammed’s radically universal monotheism became Wahhabist disdain, and the American founders’ notion of a balanced polity reflecting human multiplicity has become Rand’s manic and nihilistic gospel of self.

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In Europe there was equal and opposite reaction to the same stimulus, the official acknowledgement of what had been obvious for half a year—that there had been no real revival after the crash of 2008, that what commentators were describing as a ‘double dip’ was simply the evaporation of the minimal funds directed towards recovery, and the re-emergence into visibility of a deep stagnation. There was no revival because there was little to revive. The states of southern Europe were effectively broke—having got short-term benefit from the euro, they were now constricted by the EU’s tight control of the money-supply—and the whole of European economic policy tilted towards Europe and the North. In Britain the past three decades’ evisceration of manufacturing, the reliance on banking, intellectual property and other services—like rents—made any simple re-starting of the economy difficult; and the cuts imposed by the Tory-Libdem government rendered it impossible.

In one corner of Europe, Greece’s agony became an emblem of the contradictions faced by the West—bowing to every austerity demand, its ruling socialist party managed to contract the economy by 7 per cent. Still, neither its interest rate nor its credit rating improved and it moved inexorably towards default. The familiar image of its black-clad *koukouloforei*—the hooded ones, a mix of political anarchists, petty criminals and a middle section of semi-politicised disaffected youth—were played gleefully on China Broadcasting’s English-language channel (often as not fronted by former ABC newsreader Edwin Maher).

In August they were joined by images from Britain, as first London and then cities of the North and West erupted with unrest, uprising, rioting. Triggered by the police killing of a black man in a suburb where riots had erupted a quarter of a century before, they rapidly became something else—fluid, separate breakouts targeting shopping high streets, mixing confrontation with looting. Some were kickstarted by professional anarchist activists but they kicked on as kids from the city’s public housing estates poured into the streets. The riots were a testament both to the postwar Labour settlement—the idea that public housing should commingle with private areas rather than be ghettoised—and the post-1979 abandonment of it, as inequality soared between people living cheek-by-jowl. Thatcherite culture had—unwittingly—elevated personal consumption to the apex of British values; unlike the Reagan revolution, no spiritual dimension partnered the new invitation to define your worth by your wealth.

As the high streets filled with chain stores offering the sort of goods that were as much symbols of meaning as objects of utility, a ghastly social experiment was inaugurated. How long can you sustain a population of millions of people—unemployed, semi-employed, untrained—on the bare means of life offered by benefits, while around them a privileged class enacts the idea that consumption is life? The answer was: until August 2011, when masses of such people attacked not police stations, MPs’ offices or the like, but Footlocker (a shoe chain specialising in trainers) and Currys (a TV/computer/electronics chain). They looted them, then they burnt them down, a double-whammy whose significance would be hard to miss.

Pundits of both Left and Right struggled to assimilate the rioters into a framework. That they related to the cuts—and the sense that even New Labour’s limited attempt to address poverty had been abandoned—was obvious; there had been no riots in Scotland or Wales, where cuts had been limited by regional governments. But the actions had no recognisable political content—even the vestigial one of smashing up a

McDonalds. Essentially it was the other of the autonomous processes by which the Western economy was run—any sense of property or propriety had been abolished at the highest levels of the Western economy, well before 2008. In a world where money, production and opportunity are mysterious, inexplicable flows, bearing no relation to work, worth or effort, the looting of one branch of a 300-strong chain store, the removal of goods from China—they may as well be from space—seems a mere continuation of a process. A glass window, in that respect, becomes not a mark of ownership, but a barrier of no reason or right, like the invisible impediments encountered in dreams. Smashing it, in that respect, is a sudden return to the real, a bringing of the impossibly immaterial, skyward trending economy back to earth.

Such an act resonates. Watching it on TV in Hong Kong—the island proper, that charming imperial remnant daily leaching energy, opportunity, life, to Kowloon and Shenzhen—it appeared to be, in its inchoate way, a rupture of the same order of Malick’s film. The riots combined protest, criminality and amorality in equal measure, but at their core was the desire to interrupt, to record a dissent from a totalising system, even if those carrying away plasma TVs did not present it to themselves in such a way. From the Tea Party, through the riots, to *The Tree of Life*, there was a common sense—that this could not go on. The Tea Party’s answer is to retreat so deeply into fantasy as to be lost to dialogue; the rioters were excluded even from the purposeful language of political manifestation of a generation ago. Malick’s film proposes that the breach has occurred within our lifetimes, that the error is not departing from God, or Jefferson, or Hayek—or Keynes for that matter—but from a primordial truth, that we cannot live in the Sky.

China has gathered the twin forces of modernity—the will of communism and the Prometheism of the market—and put itself at the head of humanity in seeking to refute this idea. Malick’s film—journeyed to in a fake cavern, amid manicured and tamed foliage, at the top of an escalator to nowhere—was an argument against such a thing, drawing on an idea of life, of being, sprung from insights prior to modernity’s prejudices and assumptions. Did the times produce it now, this meditation Malick has struggled with for decades? Did they ensure that it would be the first great ‘transcendental film’—cinema that tackles Being in the manner of Dreyer, Bresson, Antonioni—to achieve multiplex success? Does one’s conviction, leaving it, that a social irruption both political and beyond political may be closer than one had hitherto suspected, testify to the power of its rhetoric, or the fatal conceit of revolutionaries, that the absurdity of the present is a guarantee of its imminent crisis? Or is it the world speaking through the artist, opening both creator and audience to a more radical vision than they could otherwise conceive, with all the possibilities that that suggests? **2**

Our Agency is **Powerful**

Roger Nelson
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Environmental art activist Natalie Jeremijenko creates future foods for humans and the planet

‘Reducing the carbon footprint and reducing the food miles and reducing the negative effects is important and I think necessary. But it’s not sufficient. It’s radically insufficient.’ Natalie Jeremijenko’s art practice centres on utilising the creative potential of science and of the imagination to find solutions to the problems of environmental degradation. In recent years her work has been increasingly focused on food production. Through her ongoing *Cross(x)Species Adventure Club* project (which will visit Melbourne for the second time this December), Jeremijenko combines rigorous research, radical politics and rich imagery to propose that the future of sustainable food lies in a complete rethink of how humans relate to the natural environment. She employs highly specialised technologies yet insists on the importance of collective engagement to create what she poetically terms ‘shared public memories of possible futures.’ Hers is a creative practice that engages with artistic and political concerns in a way that renders them both inextricable and irresistible.

Jeremijenko, whose background includes studies in fine art, biochemistry, physics, neuroscience and precision engineering, prefers to call herself an ‘environmental art activist’. A dazzlingly prolific and articulate multi-tasker, Jeremijenko spoke by telephone with *Arena Magazine* while riding a bike through dense New York City traffic carrying water samples from the Bronx and Mississippi Rivers, balancing two computers in a basket, and toting a bagful of electrical cables—all the while wearing a cowboy hat to keep the sun out of her eyes. She has been known to hold office consultations on a raft constructed out of recycled plastic bottles floating on New York’s East River, yet she is also a past recipient of the prestigious Rockefeller Fellowship: Jeremijenko navigates between eccentricity and the establishment with ease and charm.

She has exhibited at several respected US museums, including the Whitney, but the primary focus of Jeremijenko’s practice is public and participatory. Past projects have included *Feral Robotic Dogs* (2003), for which the artist rewired off-the-shelf children’s toys, equipping them with complex toxin-detecting and communication software and ‘releasing’ them in a range of contexts including within public art museums. As is typical of what is often called ‘new media’ art, the object (the rewired robots) and the performance (their release

in public) are equally integral to the work: that is, the project only becomes fully meaningful with the active involvement of a public audience. That *Feral Robotic Dogs* was reported in specialist science and art journals as well as in *The New York Times* is testament to Jeremijenko’s success in harnessing the communicative potential of art to capture public attention to a degree to which an academic experiment would never aspire.

‘There’s a lot of accounting and measuring of the negative effects’, Jeremijenko explains, but she recognises that diagnosing the problem is only the beginning. The *Feral Robotic Dogs* ‘sniffed out’ toxins, but the edible cocktails and *amuse-bouches* Jeremijenko is currently working on actually seek to make a positive contribution to the health both of the human consumers and the natural environment. The artist has been holding regular events under the moniker of the *Cross(x)Species Adventure Club*, intimate public gatherings that combine elements of an art performance, a science lecture and a cocktail party. This December’s instalment in Melbourne will interact with the exhibits collected in the Melbourne Museum as part of a week-long program of participatory events and activities. Jeremijenko believes that ‘the food movement is a huge movement—in the US it’s the biggest social movement by a long way. There are a lot of people interested and engaged’. Her project strives to contribute a positive and playful spirit to this movement, to seek possibilities rather than solely cataloguing problems.

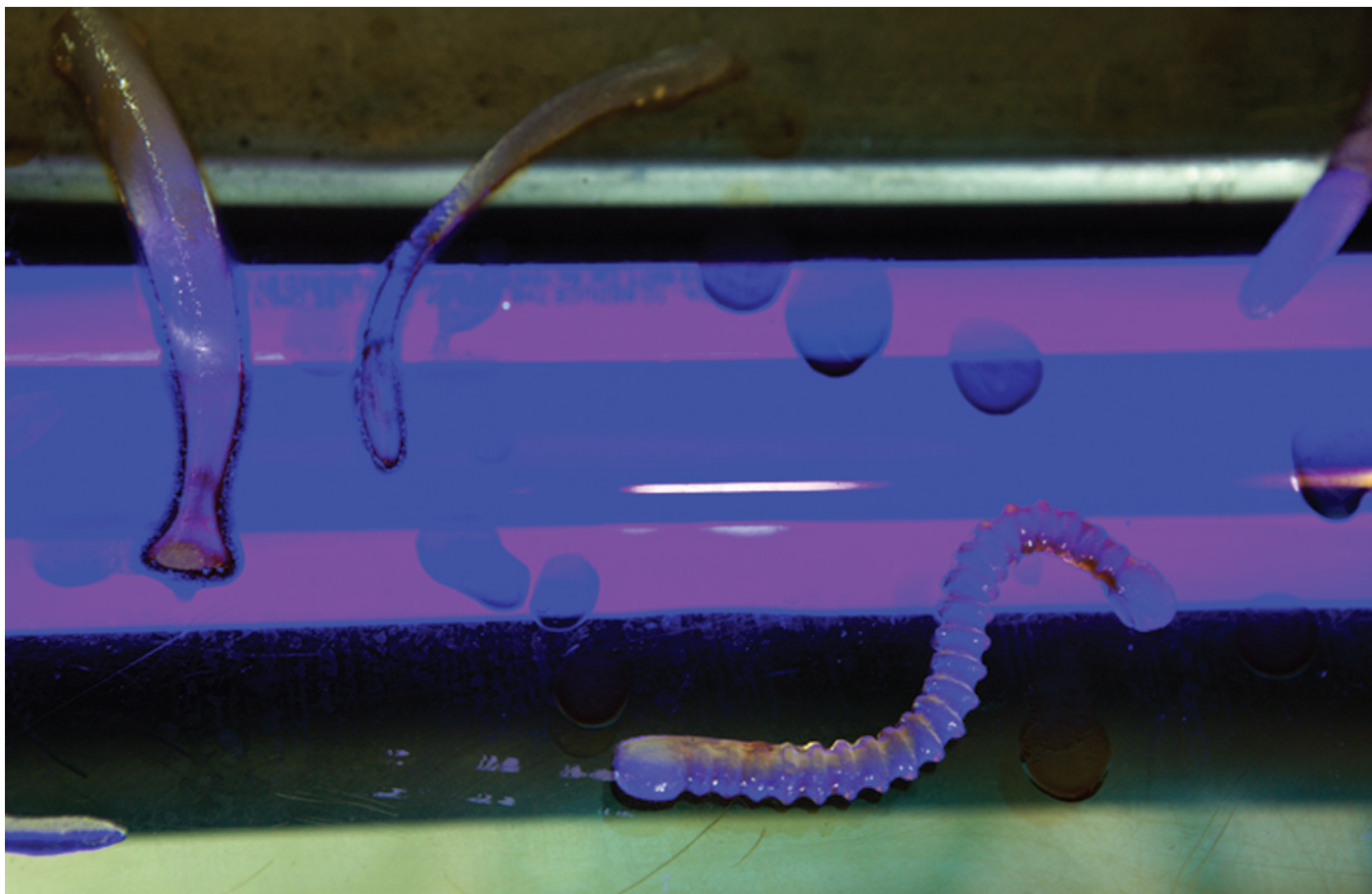
‘The *Cross(x)Species Adventure Club* is creating a convivial context in which we can think about the extraordinary challenge of redesigning and reimagining food systems’, Jeremijenko says. Her ambition is to ‘design food systems so that they improve environmental health, so they augment biodiversity, so they actually have positive effects. This is a huge design challenge and there aren’t actually people working on that, [asking] “How the hell do we do this so that it radically improves

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Lures: wishing fish well—an edible cocktail that contains a chelating agent to improve fish (and human) health

environmental health and biodiversity?” What makes the club ‘cross species’ is that the menu offers positive nutrition both for humans and other creatures: one dinner consists wholly of foods edible—and delicious—to both humans and geese, another employs preparation processes in the kitchen with a corollary process in the estuary ecosystem. Past offerings concocted by Jeremijenko in collaboration with molecular gastronomer Mihir Desai have included *Lures: wishing fish well*, which contain a chelating agent that binds to bio-accumulated heavy metals when ingested by either humans or fish, allowing these toxins to pass out of the body in a less harmful form. It’s like a ‘fish restaurant where you feed the fish’, the artist explains. The addition of gin, tonic (which fluoresces in UV light) and rosemary make for a tasty and titillating pre-dinner edible cocktail. The *Wetkisses: the marshmallow for kissing frogs formerly known as Prince*, another edible cocktail, is coloured purple to evoke a soil bacteria found in wetlands known to protect frogs from disastrous fungal infections. Jeremijenko believes this purplish bacteria may help redress the mass extinction of amphibians, which many claim rivals that of dinosaurs in its scale and devastation.

For dessert, participants (or ‘adventurers’) have been offered *Nano water buffalo ice-cream*. Jeremijenko is an ardent advocate of water buffalo milk as an alternative to cow milk that is more beneficial for humans—being higher in protein and nutrients and

lower in fat—and also for the environment, as water buffalo require a smaller land area than cows and their cultivation necessitates the reclaiming of wetlands which in turn are havens of biodiversity, providing vital ecosystems for endangered amphibians and other creatures, and neutralising carbon dioxide.

She has been known to hold office consultations on a raft constructed out of recycled plastic bottles floating on New York’s East River, yet she is also a past recipient of the prestigious Rockefeller Fellowship: Jeremijenko navigates between eccentricity and the establishment with ease and charm.



Wetkisses: the marshmallow for kissing frogs formerly known as Prince—an edible cocktail, coloured purple to evoke a soil bacteria found in wetlands known to protect frogs from disastrous fungal infections

At the *Cross(x)Species Adventure Club*, the buffalo milk is treated with liquid nitrogen to boost its creaminess. This kind of molecular gastronomy is hardly applicable for everyday real-world use, but Jeremijenko, with the help of her students completing an assignment she calls ‘How stuff is made and how it can change’, has been lobbying multinational ice-cream manufacturer Ben & Jerry’s to begin commercial production of buffalo ice-cream. By creating a market for water buffalo products,

she hopes to pressure large-scale manufacturers like Ben & Jerry’s to increase the number of wetlands, thus enhancing biodiversity. ‘I would argue that to eat water buffalo milk ice cream because of the known environmental health benefits is much more effective than to not eat dairy ice cream’, Jeremijenko contends. ‘I don’t think that these simplistic categories—vegan, vegetarian, non-dairy—solve any

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AgBags—plant hanging systems that utilise vertical space for food-producing agriculture

problems. That's not where our agency is powerful is not participating powerful? No. There are plenty of people who will keep eating dairy ice cream.' Jeremijenko rejects the received notions of what constitutes ethical eating. 'A moral philosophical position, like the Peter Singer way ... reduces our sense of the capacity to redesign and re-imagine and actually use both our creative and analytic capacity to figure out how to make it better. To say "I'm not eating that, I have a safe moral position" is bullshit.'

This attitude is typical of the artist's emphasis on positive possibilities rather than problems and prohibitions. It is evidenced in the lingering cuteness of the *Feral Robotic Dogs* that were once children's toys, in the glowing lights of the *Lures: wishing fish well* and in the playful naming of the *Wetkisses: the marshmallow for kissing frogs formerly known as Prince*. It's a deliberate strategy of play, Jeremijenko explains, as 'play is enlisting. Humour enlists and is convivial whereas moral certainty need not be'. Accepting that 'there's no one genius that's going to redesign the food system', she insists that 'play becomes important if you think it's important to enlist and engage. If you think that the power of analysis and argument itself is not enough, that the actual participation and public experiments and the willingness of people to suspend disbelief and to change is really what creates a social force'. Cocktail

parties and molecular gastronomy foams may sound like an exclusive kind of activism for the elite, but the artist's ambition is to inspire and engage a broader public. And, if she succeeds in her negotiations with the Ben & Jerry's corporation, she might just succeed on a grand scale.

The Ben & Jerry's intervention grew out of a course Jeremijenko teaches at New York University that asks students to investigate how everyday commodities are made. She begins by asking her students 'if there's anything they have on them or that they carry every day or that they use that they can give an account of how it's made and who made it. And of course, there's nothing. And all these things in their bags, the pens and books and things they can see in the room: the students have no idea how any of it is manufactured. 'This kind of profound ignorance is a condition of the information age. We talk about information excess and information overload ... but that veil between production and consumption is radically thickened.'

One way in which Jeremijenko is seeking to lift that veil is through her *AgBags*, simple pouches to hang from windows or balconies and in which to grow edible plants. In a sense, the *AgBags* are simply well-designed hanging pots. But the research Jeremijenko is conducting into efficient plant varieties and new food production techniques reveals that 'the charge of the *AgBags* is to use urban agriculture as a radically different thing from rural agriculture.' Jeremijenko firmly believes that cities can be effective sites for food production. The *AgBags*, while primarily an agitational gesture, have the potential 'to redesign



Natalie Jeremijenko—the 'X' of the **Cross(x)Species Adventure Club** is emblazoned on her white lab coat

agriculture —what it is and where it's done ... In a rural context you don't have any problem with access to land, but you have a lot of problems with access to people. Here in New York City you've got no shortage of labour—intelligent participants—but you don't have any access to soil!

Perhaps it's unlikely that cities will become major producers of food but, in proposing this, Jeremijenko is striving to repair 'our intimate relationship with non-human organisms', thus making city-dwellers feel a sense of connection with our eco-system. This is central to the artist's intervention in the environmental movement. 'Traditional environmental conservation and preservation groups ideologically are polar opposite to what I do', Jeremijenko insists, as they are 'not about actively constructing and reimagining and redesigning ... I think this is the representational challenge of the time. We have this legacy of believing that anything we do, any kind of human, urban effect on natural systems is bad, so it's better just to leave them alone, stay away as far as possible.'

Unlike many in the environmental movement, Jeremijenko accepts that an ever-increasing number of humans are living in urban centres. Instead of seeing cities as inherently bad, she seeks out their potential as hubs of environmental renewal. She hopes to 'invert our cultural preconception that nature is out there and the city is not where nature is. Our cities are natural systems'. She cites a number of studies (as well as her own 1998 project, *OneTrees*, for which she planted a thousand cloned walnut trees in San Francisco) that suggest trees actually grow faster in urban environments. 'Paradoxically, in the city, because there's more pollutants, it actually catalyses the breakdown of

ozones much more quickly than in the rural areas where it just lies like a blanket over the trees', Jeremijenko explains. She imagines a future in which cities host healthy populations of fish, and in which tall buildings house hundreds of different edible plants.

Jeremijenko's practice, in its emphasis on participation and in its celebration of the enlisting power of play, challenges the conservative elements in the environmental movement and points to opportunities for the food movement to transcend individual lifestyle choices, and to engage urban populations in collective projects of resistance and renewal. 'Our agency is powerful', she insists. Swept up in the excitement and sense of possibility offered by her *Cross(x)Species Adventure Club*, it's hard not to agree. **a**

*Natalie Jeremijenko, together with Mihir Desai, will be in Melbourne from 25 November to 4 December 2011 for a string of *Cross(x)Species Adventure Club* events produced by Carbon Arts <www.carbonarts.org>, an organisation working to facilitate artists' role in generating awareness and action on climate change. The week will feature a progressive edible cocktail party through the Melbourne Museum on 1 December, with plans for a supper club, an *AgBag* workshop and a forum on future foods. The Arena Project Space <www.arena.org.au/project-space> will be the base for of the *Cross(x)Species Adventure Club* during this period.

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Europe's Greek
Moment

Yanis Varoufakis

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Minotaur: The True
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Books, London,
2011.

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Europe's Greek Moment

Yanis Varoufakis

Planning for a controlled disintegration of the eurozone?

It's all Greek to Them

It took German Chancellor Angela Merkel two long years to visit President Barack Obama after his inauguration. She eventually arrived at the White House in June of this year. After the considerable pomp and ceremony had been done away with, the two leaders sat down at the Oval Office for two long hours discussing the most pressing world affairs. After the meeting, their press secretaries told a stunned world that the leaders of the West's two most powerful nations had spent one hour and forty five minutes discussing ... Greece (with the remaining quarter devoted to debating the pros and cons of bombing Libya).

Ancient myth has it that pre-classical Athenians maintained, in the name of peace and prosperity, a steady flow of tributes to the Cretan Minotaur. From 1980 onwards, the 'rest of the world' sent a tsunami of capital to Wall Street to finance what I call a *Global Minotaur*.

Only once before has Greece managed such prominence in the minds of the West's top leaders. The month was December 1944; the occasion was the eruption of the Greek Civil War; and its significance was that it constituted the beginning of the Cold War, the Truman Doctrine and all that flowed from it. Could the Greek Debt Crisis be for the post-2008 world what the Greek Civil War was to the postwar era? Perhaps. But if so, the reason will not be Greece's debt—indeed it will not be anyone's debt.

Before examining the true origins of the crisis, it would be helpful to revisit a more recent official visitation: on 18 September 2011 US Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner dropped in on Europe's finance ministers' regular gathering to share some thoughts on how the bewildering euro crisis could be ended. Quite astonishingly, Geithner's sensible advice was rejected unceremoniously—the Treasury Secretary received the diplomatic equivalent of his marching orders. The Austrian Finance Minister, Maria Fikter, presumably summing up the predominant feeling amongst Europe's powers-that-be, declared her puzzlement that 'even though the Americans have significantly worse fundamental data than the eurozone ... they tell us what we should do and when we make a suggestion ... they say no straight away'.

This statement reveals the deep ignorance in which our European leaders' thinking is veiled. When they refer, for instance, to 'fundamental data' comparatively worse in the United States, they are obviously referring to the eurozone's lower debt to GDP ratio. Ergo, they clearly believe that Europe's problem is a debt crisis which, courtesy of being less severe than the United States', is unlikely to be cured by the remedies purveyed by the visiting US Finance Minister. Tragically, the euro crisis is as much of a debt crisis as the pain caused by a malignant tumour is a pain crisis. It is my contention that Europe's unravelling catastrophe is due to its leaders' grand failure to grasp the essence of the crisis they are trying, unsuccessfully, to face down. And as if this were not troubling enough, theirs is a keenly motivated grand failure.

The Minotaur in the Room

With the sound of crashing markets and the roar of burgeoning uncertainty reverberating in our ears, it is time to take pause to ask a simple question: why is the global economy finding it so hard to regain its poise after the Crash of 2008? In my recent book *The Global Minotaur* I argue that in 2008 the world lost a Global Surplus Recycling Mechanism (GSRM) which was keeping it in the precarious equilibrium that US Federal Chairman Ben Bernanke had mistaken for some 'Great Moderation', and which had caused UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown to think, calamitously, that the era of boom-and-bust had ended. Grasping how this GSRM worked and why it perished is a prerequisite for coming to terms with our current global predicament—which, in turn, is key to understanding why Greece has become so prominent in the headlines.

Sustainable growth in a capitalist economy is a rare blessing that is predicated upon the successful recycling of surpluses. Every nation, every trading bloc, every continent, indeed the global economy itself, is made up of deficit and surplus regions. California, Greater London, New South Wales and Germany will *always* be in surplus *vis-à-vis* Arizona, the North of England, Tasmania and Portugal respectively. Given this chronic chasm, which market forces can never obliterate, the deficit regions are unable to maintain demand for the goods and services of the surplus producers. Thus, without surplus recycling, stagnation beckons for surplus and deficit regions alike.

Surplus recycling is commonplace at the national level (in the United States, for example, military procurement often comes with the precondition that new production facilities are built in depressed states; the Australian welfare state ensures that Western Australian and New South Welsh surpluses end up propping up demand for *their* goods and services in Tasmania). However, it is at the global level that the issue of surplus recycling becomes more pressing and harder to institute.

The postwar era was remarkable in that two GSRMs saw to it that the world economy achieved unprecedented growth. The first GSRM lasted from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. The United States exited the war with enormous surpluses which it quickly sought to recycle to the rest of the Western world in a multitude of ways (the Marshall Plan, wide-ranging support for Japanese industry, endless backing of the European integration project and so on), effectively functioning as a GSRM itself. Alas, this first postwar GSRM broke down, predictably, when US surpluses turned into deficits toward the end of the 1960s. The loss of that meticulously planned GSRM threw the world into the 1970s crises which did not subside until a new—most peculiar—GSRM was put in place, again courtesy of the United States. This time the nation absorbed the surpluses of the rest of the world, running ever increasing trade and government deficits. Those deficits were, in turn, financed by capital flowing *into* Wall Street, as the rest of the world recycled its profits by investing them in the United States.

Ancient myth has it that pre-classical Athenians maintained, in the name of peace and prosperity, a steady flow of tributes to the Cretan Minotaur. From 1980 onwards, the ‘rest of the world’ sent a tsunami of capital to Wall Street to finance what I call a *Global Minotaur*: a GRSM that served to pull the world economy onto higher growth planes, giving the semblance of some ‘Great Moderation’.

The world witnessed the most intense and profligate financialisation possible, built upon the Minotaur-induced mass capital flows into Wall Street. Wall Street, the City of London and a host of international banks (currently known as ‘too big to fail’ banks) indulged in printing voluminous quantities of private, toxic money. When these paper pyramids combusted and burnt down, the global Minotaur was mortally wounded—and the US deficits’ capacity to recycle the world’s surpluses disappeared.

Since then, the best paid plans of Central Banks, G20 nations or the IMF have failed to put back together the rude energy of the wounded beast. Without a functioning GSRM, the crisis that started in 2008 will continue to migrate across continents and sectors, regularly threatening us with imminent collapse.

The Euro as the Minotaur’s Simulacrum

The euro was put together under the assumption that the global Minotaur would remain in rude health *ad infinitum*. Less allegorically, Germany came to believe that the eurozone could operate like a Greater Germany built upon the twin postwar pillars of German prosperity: a hard currency (the Deutschmark cum euro) and aggressive trade surpluses to be absorbed voraciously by the United States, which in turn would finance its trade deficits courtesy of the capital that flowed from the rest of the world (including from Germany) to Wall Street.

While eurozone was formed under those assumptions, the

euro’s formation engendered deepening stagnation in Europe’s deficit countries, including France. It also enabled Germany and the surplus eurozone nations to achieve exceptional surpluses that quickly found their way to Wall Street. They became the financial means by which German corporations internationalised their activities in the United States, China and Eastern Europe. Thus Germany and the other surplus countries became the global Minotaur’s European simulacrum. As the Minotaur was creating demand for the rest of the world, the simulacrum was draining the rest of Europe of it. It maintained Germany’s global dynamism by exporting stagnation into its own European backyard. So when the crisis hit, the European periphery was ripe for the fall.

First as History then as Farce: Europe’s Bank Bailouts

When the GFC shook the world in 2008, Wall Street and the City of London collapsed. Washington and London immediately sought to recapitalise the banks. By means ill and fair they dipped into taxpayers’ pockets and cranked up the Central Banks’ printing presses to ensure that the banks did not become black holes, as Japan’s had in the 1990s. In Europe, nothing of the sort happened.

Despite European gloating that the crash of 2008 was an Anglo-Celtic crisis, and that its own banks had not been taken over by financialisation’s equivalent of a gold fever, the truth soon came out. German banks were caught with an average leverage ratio of €52 borrowed to every €1 of own funds; a ratio worse even than that raked up by Wall Street or London’s City. Even the most conservative and stolid state banks, the *Landesbanken*, proved bottomless pits for the German taxpayer. Similarly, France’s banks were forced to admit to having at least €33 billion invested in US sourced toxic derivatives (also known as CDOs). To this sad sum, we must add the European banks exposure to the indebted euro zone states Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Belgium (€849 billion); to Eastern Europe (more than €150 billion); to Latin America (more than €300 billion); and to around €70 billion of bad Icelandic debts.

Between 2008 and 2009 the European Central Banks and the member-states ‘socialised’ the banks’ losses and turned them into public debt. And yet, unlike their US or British counterparts, they failed to plug enough capital into Europe’s banks to stop them from being insolvent after the loss of their assets’ values. Instead they kept them on a drip feed (connected to the ECB) that kept the ATMs

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Europe’s Greek Moment

Yanis Varoufakis

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working without dealing with the root problem of Europe's public sector: its fundamental insolvency. Interestingly, bankers did not mind. If their banks had been recapitalised by the European taxpayer, the bankers' own control would have been diluted. Instead they found other ways of profiting while their banks were ... bankrupt. In early 2009 hedge funds and banks alike had an epiphany: they not use some of the public money they were given and *bet* that the strain on public finances (caused by the recession on the one hand, which depressed the governments' tax take, and the huge increase in public debt on the other, for which they were themselves responsible) would sooner or later cause one or more of the eurozone's states to default?

The more they thought, the gladder they became. The fact that euro-membership prevented the most heavily indebted countries (Greece *et al.*) from devaluing their currencies—thus feeling more the brunt of the combination of debt and recession—focused the bankers' sights upon these countries. They started betting, small amounts initially, that the weakest link in that chain, Greece, would default. At the same time, they hedged their bets (that is, they also bet that the default would not come because Europe would not dare let one of its member-states declare bankruptcy). In addition, the bankers used the bonds (the IOUs) of countries like Greece as collateral to borrow from each other to place more of these bets. In short, every euro of Greek debt spawned countless euros of French and German bank bets and even more debts that one European bank owed to another.

Essentially, the European variant of the banks' bail out gave the financial sector the

opportunity to mint *private money* all over again. Once more, just like the private money created by Wall Street before 2008 was unsustainable and bound to turn into thin ash, the onward march of the new private money was to lead, with mathematical precision, to another meltdown. This time it was the public (also known as sovereign) debt crisis whose first stirrings occurred at the beginning of 2010 in Athens, Greece.

The Trouble with Greece

Greece was bearing a large public debt-to-GDP ratio well before the crash of 2008. Nevertheless, while its GDP was growing healthily (between 4 per cent and 5 per cent for more than a decade), it was finding it spectacularly easy to borrow cheaply from international funds replete with the private money printed by the global financial sector. Once the pyramids of private money had turned into ashes and the global recession annulled Greek growth, it was only a matter of time before a run on Greek bonds would occur. It started in late 2009 and gathered cruel pace in 2010.

Once a run on the bonds of a eurozone member-state begins, with no possibility of shock-absorbing devaluation, the country in question becomes insolvent; unable to refinance its public debt. And when its eurozone partners offer it a lifeline in the form of expensive new loans on condition of GDP-crippling austerity, a wholesale depression is added to the state's insolvency. At that point it is game over for the poor country in question. Moreover, the domino effect begins—one failed member-state leans upon the next marginal state which then stumbles on the next, and so on.

At some point, this sequential tumbling will force Europe's elites to let the ugly truth come to light about its banking sector's sorry state. Since there is only so much good money that can be thrown after bad to keep buying time, and given that there is a limit to how much depression the peoples of the indebted eurozone can bear, the moment will come when the most indebted state—Greece, in other words—will have to be allowed to declare bankruptcy. However, given the mountains of derivative debts and bets that have been built upon the comparatively small Greek debts by bankers in Europe and elsewhere, a Greek default on its debts will cause these mountain ranges to subside, giving rise to a new 2008—hence Chancellor Merkel and President Obama's long chat about little, otherwise insignificant, Greece.

Europe's Conundrum

Technically speaking, fixing the euro crisis is a relatively simple matter (see Y. Varoufakis and S. Holland, 'A Modest Proposal for Overcoming the Euro Crisis', Levy Economics Institute, 2011). If this is correct—and given that a Greek state bankruptcy will be Europe's Lehman moment—why is Germany resisting all rational approaches to resolving the crisis? The answer is, unfortunately, straightforward: to save the euro we need to implement policies that will make it economically impossible for Germany to exit the eurozone. Even though Germany does not wish to exit presently, it knows that its 'option to exit' (which as the main surplus country of the common currency area it possesses uniquely) guarantees it the exorbitant privilege of enormous hegemonic power within the eurozone. Thus Merkel does not feel she has the authority, or legitimacy, to renounce Germany's immense powers, fearing also that such a move would bring her government crashing down. And so the dithering continues.

To sum up, while the world is labouring without the Global Surplus Recycling that it was used to under the Global Minotaur, when one hears that Germany is planning for a Greek exit from the eurozone, even for a Greek default, one ought immediately to suspect that Germany is planning a controlled disintegration of the eurozone. One ought also to fear that such a move will only manage to achieve an uncontrolled disintegration whose end result will be massive recession in the European north, a gargantuan stagflation in the European periphery, and the descent of the global economy into a postmodern 1930s. Europe has managed twice in the last hundred years to drag the rest of the world down with it. It is about to do it again, with Greece as a convenient scapegoat. **a**

West Papuan Futures

Setyo Budi
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Independence or autonomy? A report on the Indonesia –West Papua dialogue

The Jakarta–Papua dialogue is a test of political will for both the Indonesian government and the West Papuan leadership in their search for a long-lasting, peaceful resolution to the question of West Papua. Initiated by the co-ordinator of Papua Peace Network, Dr Neles Tebay, in 2003, the dialogue is intended as an avenue for reconciling two conflicting interests: independence versus integration.

The dialogue process is based on a recommendation by the Indonesian Institute of Science—the Indonesian government’s think tank—and its ‘Papua Roadmap’, which was developed in 2007. It calls for a dialogue between Jakarta and key Papuan leaders, including the provincial government, traditional and ethnic leaders, religious groups, women’s organisations and NGOs. Indonesian politicians and top military officials consider the project ambitious. The dialogue is framed as a free and frank discussion, covering such issues as the 1969 *Act of Free Choice* and other sensitive political matters.

Reactions from both sides have been mixed. A US diplomatic cable recently released by WikiLeaks shows there was disagreement among Indonesian officials about the proposal. Dated 9 March 2009, it shows that the Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, A. S. Widodo, opposed the idea despite then Minister of Defence Sudarsono’s encouragement. Opposition also came from the Ministry of Home Affairs and ‘most of the Indonesian intelligence and security agencies’. The cable continued: ‘They rejected any attempt to review the *Act of Free Choice* or other sensitive issues [as] the dialogue could challenge the most fundamental value of Indonesian nationalists—the unity and territorial integrity of Indonesia. Hard-line nationalists will likely do all they can to stop it’.

Opposition to the dialogue continues. It was evidenced in presentations by top Indonesian officials at the conference ‘Make Papua a Land of Peace’, which was held as part of the preliminary process of the dialogue in July this year at the University of Cendrawasih, Abergpura. Djoko Sujanto, Indonesian Minister–Coordinator for Politics and Law, dismissed the conference theme, painting a rosy

picture of a peaceful Papua. He did not recognise any human rights violations by the Indonesian military against West Papuan civilians.

As pointed out by Richard Chauvel, an academic and author of several books on West Papua, who attended the conference, ‘His speech fundamentally opposes the theme of conference’. Sujanto called on statistics to prove that West Papua is peaceful. But this statement begs a question about the number of troops deployed in West Papua, which far surpasses other parts of Indonesia. Impartial Jakarta-based Human Rights Monitor reports that to date there are thirty thousand security personnel in West Papua. Fourteen thousand are under Cendrawasih regional command, the rest under Jakarta command. If the national liberation army, the Free Papua Organisation (TRN/OPM), does not pose a threat to the region, might business interests account for such deployments?

In another leaked cable, dated 1 October 2007, Berty Fernandez, a Department of Foreign Affairs official seconded to the provincial government to handle border issues, said ‘the Indonesian Military (TNI) has far more troops in Papua than it is willing to admit to, chiefly to protect and facilitate TNI’s interests in illegal logging operations’. He added, ‘The governor had to move cautiously so as not to upset the TNI, which he said operates as a virtually autonomous governmental entity within the province’.

Shooting incidents between TNI and OPM rebel groups as well as human rights violations perpetrated by TNI continue, particularly in the Central Highlands region. The latest shooting incident took place in Paniai on 17 August, Indonesian independence day, when John Magay Yogi, a twenty-three-year-old field commander of the TPN/OPM Region IV, and his rebel group ambushed police headquarters in Komopa, a sub-district of Agadide, seizing two SKS rifles. The incident was followed by a shoot-out at 1.55 am the same night around two villages close to the Paniai capital, Madi. Yogi’s rebel group later attacked the police and army headquarters.

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West Papuan Futures
Setyo Budi
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As a result hundreds of Indonesian army and police officers have reportedly been deployed by air and land to the Paniai district. The incident generated fear among local people, who have deserted their homes to live in the jungle. They are afraid of the heavily armed troops who are present in the town, and do not want to become casualties.

Since the attacks the police have also been intimidating the local population. Yuven Tekege, a West Papuan political activist, said that one of the police commanders in Paniai sent an SMS to the district administrator calling for two residents to be ‘captured, tortured and killed or buried alive’ for allegedly being members of the OPM.

Yogi comes from a family with a history of opposition to the Indonesian government. His father, Tadius Yogi, was in charge of Territorial War Commands (KODAP) IV in Nabire and Paniai. His rebel group is one element in the West Papuan struggle that opposes the dialogue process. ‘I am ready to wage war with traditional weapons. I reject any dialogues with the Indonesian government, and I want UN troops deployed in Papua,’ Yogi has said.

Rex Rumakiek, Secretary General of the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation, believes Yogi’s proposition is not effective and is too costly. ‘Negotiation with Indonesia is the best way to solve the conflict. The Papua congress in 2000 also decided that negotiation is the way forward.’ Rumakiek was selected at the conference as one of five expatriate Papuan representatives in the Jakarta–Papua dialogue.

At the end of the conference delegates produced a declaration that emphasises, among other points, the importance of ‘dialogue between the Papuan people and the Indonesian government, mediated by a neutral third party’. The involvement of a third party was perhaps not expected by the Indonesian government. After all, the government wants to define the conflict as a domestic issue—and this is likely to confirm Indonesian nationalists’ worst fears.

A West Papuan source has said that a new militia organisation, Melanesia Papua for Indonesia, was formed early this month. Enrico Guterres, a notorious East Timorese militia leader who now resides in Indonesia, will work with this organisation.

The conference showed up a gap in perceptions about the nature of the conflict between Indonesian officials and West Papuans. While government officials offered informal ‘constructive communication’ without clearly articulating what they had in mind, activists responded with a demand for a much more formal dialogue. ‘The conference reveals that the strength of independent sentiment in Papua among that section of the population is as strong now as it was ten years ago,’ said Chauvel. Chauvel feels that the Special Autonomy Law, Jakarta’s response to try and persuade Papuans to move away from independence, has failed. Under that law, enacted in 2001, the provincial government assumed responsibility for all matters except for foreign affairs, defence and security, fiscal and monetary policy, religious affairs and justice. The Special Autonomy Law also required that Jakarta give the provincial government a greater portion of the revenue from Papua’s natural resource exports.

Diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks show that both Papua and Jakarta have failed to follow through on this matter. There is a lack of trained personnel and administrative structures to assume the new responsibilities and lack of coordination among Papuan leaders over priorities and corruption related to mining and forestry concessions.

At about the same time that Sujanto was delivering his speech in Puncak, three soldiers from Infantry Battalion 751 were shot, one while on patrol and two at their post in Kalome, Tinggimambut. On 12 July two soldiers from Battalion 753 and a civilian were wounded in another attack in Kalome, while several civilians were wounded as the TNI were searching for the perpetrators. Anton Tabuni, secretary-general of the OPM for the Central Highlands region claimed responsibility for the attacks, which he said in a press conference on 5 August were ‘a way of showing to the world’ that the struggle for West Papuan independence is here to stay.

The National Committee for West Papua is another group that rejected the dialogue process. They have argued that the goal should be a referendum not dialogue. Demonstrations organised by them on 2 August were attended by thousands of West Papuans in Jayapura and other cities in West Papua. The demonstrations coincided with a seminar on the 1969 *Act of Free Choice* held in Oxford, organised by International Lawyers for West Papua.

To date there is no a formal government response to the conference outcome, but Rumakiek is hopeful that the dialogue will go ahead. ‘We will keep talking to Indonesia as a friend, as a neighbour,’ said Rumakiek. ‘The international community also wants Indonesia to engage in the dialogue.’

International pressure worries the nationalists in government. East Timor has set a precedent for Indonesia. And perhaps for this reason the Indonesian Special Forces, Kopassus, has spied on human rights activists and government officials in West Papua and abroad. Recently documents were leaked that range from internal briefings, presentations, teaching tools and intelligence products such as daily and quarterly Kopassus reports to a paper, ‘Study on the Claim of the Historical Correction of the Act of Free Choice’, on the status of Papua under international law. These approximately 500 pages of documents from 2006 to 2009 include detailed reports of military surveillance of civilians and provide military perspectives on social and political issues in the area. Most are from Indonesia’s Kopassus and the Cendrawasih military command in Jayapura. ‘The Kopassus documents show the deep military paranoia in Papua that conflates peaceful political expression with criminal activity,’ stated Elaine Person, deputy

Asia director at Human Rights Watch, in the organisation's press release.

One of the documents, 'Anatomy of Papuan Separatists', reveals that Kopassus has classified public seminars, demonstrations and press conferences as pro-separatism activities. It contains detailed information about organisational structures, figures in the OPM and NGO activists. Prominent West Papuan leaders such as the Papuan province's governor Barnabas Suebu (Governor of Papua province), John Otto Ondamawe, Rex Rumakiek, and Benny Wenda are noted as being under surveillance. US senators, NZ members of parliament and Australian politicians, journalist and academics were similarly listed. A separate document describes a surveillance operation still in existence in 2011.

The Indonesian military's actions are familiar to activists. During the struggle for independence in East Timor, the military used surveillance to monitor and control the movement of Falintil guerrilla fighters, human rights activists, students and others, including the church. Later militia groups were set up to intimidate those who supported independence.

A West Papuan source has said that a new militia organisation, Melanesia Papua for Indonesia, was formed early this month. It is suggested that this is a step taken to counter the current political situation in the region. Enrico Guterres, a notorious East Timorese militia leader who now resides in Indonesia, will work with this organisation. In East Timor militia members who were recruited, trained and aided by TNI were used to fight those who struggled for independence. This conflict was then used as justification for military intervention.

The timing of the formation of new militia coincides with the organising of Papua Peoples' Congress III

that will be held in October this year. Five thousand people are expected to attend the congress from Indonesia and abroad. Kofi Annan, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Pope Benedict XVI and Desmond Tutu will be invited as keynote speakers. The congress is designed as an avenue for West Papuans to decide on future development in the region and to empower indigenous Papuans in all aspects of life. The congress will be used to formulate a strategy for the West Papuans' future.

As a strategy to bolster the dialogue with Indonesia, the West Papuan leadership has lobbied diplomats from various countries. They have used the latest Pacific Island Forum as an avenue to promote interest in the situation in West Papua. The outcome so far seems positive, with the New Zealand government saying that in principal it will be ready to facilitate the dialogue.

Another positive outcome of the Forum for West Papuans came from the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, who stated that the issue of human rights is something that should be discussed with the Decolonisation Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. Although this is a very positive indication of movement forward for West Papuans, the impact will not be immediate. Because any such process will be implemented through recommendations of member countries and before passing through the United Nations Assembly, as noted by Rex Rumakiek, 'It has a long way to go'. **a**

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West Papuan Futures

Setyo Budi

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What Price Carbon?

Rebecca Pearse

Rebecca Pearse is a research student at the University of New South Wales and member of Friends of the Earth Sydney.

These Towns

To Gwen

It is a moral education
To drive through the country
With you: the good people
In terrible places; good places
Ruined by bad choices.

And the whole comedy
Is reduced to a quip:
This town may yet flourish;
This town once was rich;
This town used to have a center,
Now is gutted;
This town gave its mountain
To be stripped and blasted.

We make our pronouncements
With the caprice of gods or children.
But what pleasure it gives!
Not through meanness,
But knowing that it's all in practice
For that one day when we both,
Well journeyed, will look in the other's eye
With certainty and say: This
Is where we want to live!

Ben Jasnow

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These Towns

Ben Jasnow

Ben Jasnow is a PhD student in Classics at the University of Virginia, where he teaches ancient language and literature.

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Rebecca Pearse

A critical analysis of Australia's plans to join the carbon market

The much anticipated carbon price has been announced. It has strikingly similar features to Kevin Rudd's failed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS), albeit now with additional income tax cuts and a bundle of promises for renewable energy. Emissions trading is the centrepiece of the package. Other complementary and compensatory measures included in the scheme, such as \$10 billion in interest free loans for 'clean energy' and \$8 billion in income tax cuts, are secondary in terms of cost and political emphasis.

What should we make of this next version of climate change policy in Australia? This article offers a critical reflection on the *Clean Energy Future* package and the serious flaws founded in its reliance on emissions trading to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I illustrate how carbon offsets traded on the market excuse emissions reductions where they are most ecologically and politically necessary; meanwhile, a host of additional social impacts lie in the wake of offset projects in the global South.

Although the position taken here is that carbon trading is inherently flawed, there are other avenues for critique available to progressive intellectuals and social movement organisations concerned with the trajectory of climate politics. A first step towards reviving the climate debate is informed and open deliberation over the use of emissions trading to address climate change.

Emissions Trading and Market Failures in Europe

Emissions trading and environmental taxation came into favour with policy makers and their advising economists in the United States and Europe through the 1980s and 1990s. In rhetorical terms, 'market mechanisms' have come to be accepted as cost efficient alternatives to 'command and control' regulation such as uniform performance standards. Emissions trading is essentially the creation of an artificial market via government regulation where the previously hidden social and ecological costs of production are given a price in the form of tradeable permits. This price signal is supposed to help companies and consumers make different decisions about the goods produced and consumed that take into account these costs. However, the logic of carbon trading and its reality in Europe, home to the world's largest carbon market, departs in significant ways from the textbook economics drawn upon by carbon trading proponents.

'Cap and trade' schemes set out to achieve an environmental goal by setting a cap on the level of pollution. Permits to emit carbon to achieve this level over a set period of time are distributed among scheme participants by auction, or usually by handing them out for free (this is called grandfathering). Permits can be traded among market participants, typically companies deciding what the least-cost options are. If it is cheaper for a firm to buy emissions reduction credits than to undertake reduction measures on their utility, they will buy credits from someone selling them. If abatement is inexpensive for a firm, they might find selling permits a profitable strategy.

In theory, scarcity of carbon permits generated through the legislated cap will encourage the price of carbon to rise, making it more expensive to pollute and so encouraging emissions reductions in new production and consumption patterns. But the practice of emissions trading to date has shown that the carbon market does not produce reliable equilibrium carbon prices to deliver emissions reductions. The price of carbon in Europe has dropped a number of times over the years due to the over-allocation of carbon permits to firms, VAT fraud scandals and phishing scams (with fake registries set up to entice companies to sell credits), and hacking, where permits were stolen from companies for sale on the spot market.

The price of carbon permits fell to €0.01 at the end of 2007 due to an overabundance of permits before the end of the scheme's first phase (2005–2007). Companies have consistently received generous allocations of permits to pollute (in excess of 4 per cent of the total emissions covered by the scheme). Point Carbon research for the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) has estimated that power companies gained windfall profits of €19 billion in phase one of the EU scheme, and they look set to rake in up to €71 billion in phase two (2008–2012) from a second round of over-allocated permits. The glut of excess permits can be 'banked' or held over for firms to count as reductions in phase three, starting in 2013. This will allow firms to avoid reductions until as late as 2017.

Further, there is always a cheap way out with carbon trading. Firms can buy carbon 'offsets' that attract lower prices than permits generated in industrialised nations. Carbon offsets are projects that generate 'emissions savings' that are located outside the geographical and industrial scope of cap and trade schemes. Offsets are

usually from projects in developing countries that are deemed to compensate for ongoing pollution in industrialised nations. China, Brazil and India are host to approximately 70 per cent of UN Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) offsets.

The theory and practice of carbon offsets illustrate that emissions trading is essentially an exercise in abstraction, with complex carbon accounting and regulation in between. New property rights need to be generated for a common metric that can be traded in the market. This is what is known as equivalent tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂e). The common measurement of CO₂e necessary for tradeable permits must be calculated across a range of locations and activities. The process of creating property rights to CO₂e seeks to produce equivalence between a diversity of socio-ecological situations: from permits to emit greenhouse gases from coal-fired power stations in the Hunter Valley, to offset credits generated from destroying refrigerant gases in China, to offset credits from avoiding a palm oil plantation in Indonesia.

Larry Lohmann has pointed out that this abstraction obscures the political and ecological significance of place. In political terms, carbon offsets displace the responsibility to reduce emissions in industrialised nations to the developing world. Ecologically, it is false to think that emissions reductions in a range of polluting industries and 'sinks' for CO₂e storage across different locations can be weighed against each other in a simple calculus of plus and minus generated through a carbon market.

Take, for instance, industrial gas offsets generated from the destruction of trifluoromethane (a by-product of refrigerant gas) and nitrous oxide (a by-product of nylon production). They are the largest source of carbon offsets used to compensate for continued emissions in Europe's electricity generators, oil refineries and manufacturing industries. Over 80 per cent of the offsets surrendered by firms in the scheme to date come from industrial gas projects mostly undertaken in China and Brazil.

These offshore offsets have compromised the ecological outcome of emissions trading in Europe. EU Climate Action Commissioner Connie Hedegaard admitted to *The Guardian* in 2010 that industrial gas offsets have a 'total lack of environmental integrity' as the CDM provides a perverse incentive for new and continuing operations at HFC plants. Research by Michael Wara of Stanford University has shown that HFC producers can earn almost twice as much from CDM credits as they can from selling refrigerant gases. Meanwhile, a tiny minority of CDM offsets are produced through renewable energy projects. A ban on the use of industrial gas offsets has been delayed by the Commission until April 2013 in response to lobbying from industry groups.

The EU carbon market also illustrates that the singular focus on CO₂e emissions does not

address the systemic causes of greenhouse gas pollution: over-consumption and economic growth. The most marked reductions that have occurred in Europe are attributable to the global financial crisis, not its carbon trading scheme. Emissions from installations covered by the EU ETS fell by 11.6 per cent in 2009, a much higher decrease than the 5 per cent in 2008. The watchdog NGO Sandbag has pointed out that the emissions drop in 2009 paralleled falls in the production of electrical and industrial goods of 13.85 per cent that year, a result of economic recession. European emissions rose again from 2010.

So there is a history of failure for the world's biggest emissions trading scheme, and a host of reasons not to replicate this mistake. Nonetheless, the Australian carbon price package repeats many of the flaws of carbon trading in the EU, as well as introducing a unique set of loopholes.

The Clean Energy Agreement: Locking in Emissions Growth

The Australian emissions reduction target is an unconditional 5 per cent reduction on 2000 greenhouse gas emission levels by 2020 (4 per cent of 1990 levels). The longer term reduction target (a comfortable ten or so elections away) is an 80 per cent reduction from 2000 levels by 2050. These targets are themselves a sleight of hand. The year 1990 is base year for greenhouse gas levels used in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Australia secured a loophole in the accounting rules for emissions in the Kyoto Protocol such that emissions from land use and forestry at the time of 1990 were included in the national base year emissions estimate. 1990 was the year Australia increased its emissions by 30 per cent through land clearing, with the rate dropping since. This exaggerated baseline has hidden an increase of emissions in all sectors up until 2000, and means the 2000-oriented target translates to a net increase in emissions to 2020.

More fudging emerges when one looks at the forecast for emissions associated with the Clean Energy Future (CEF) package. Treasury modelling accompanying this scheme confirms domestic emissions will increase to a peak at about 2030 and forecasts only a 5.7 per cent reduction on current levels by 2050. This is a significant admission of the inadequacy of the scheme. Coal mining will have doubled and gas will have tripled. Transport, native forestry and agriculture are not given mandatory obligations in the scheme, and Australia's coal exports will continue to treble since they are not included in the first instance. Coal exports are set to double over the next ten to fifteen years. Australia currently exports more than 270 million tonnes of coal annually. This volume of coal amounts to approximately 730 million tonnes of CO₂e, or 120 per cent of national emissions each year.

Treasury forecasts that renewable energy will provide approximately 40 per cent of stationary

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Offshore offsets have compromised the ecological outcome of emissions trading in Europe. EU Climate Action Commissioner Connie Hedegaard admitted that industrial gas offsets have a ‘total lack of environmental integrity’.

energy by 2050. Thus the electricity sector will still be dominated by fossil fuels, which are legitimised in the modelling by the assumption that carbon capture and storage (CCS) for coal and gas will become viable 2030 onwards. Seventy-five per cent of total road transport is forecast to be replaced by 2050 with biofuels, liquid fuels from fermenting crops. This has important social and economic implications as biofuels rely on the conversion of large tracts of agricultural land to grow fuel, and threaten food security.

How did this incredibly unambitious vision for Australia’s energy sectors and future carbon emissions come to be? In addition to the deception in defining emissions reduction targets, much of this gap between the negligible reductions forecast to occur in Australia and the targets can be explained by the plan to use carbon offsets to compensate for continued domestic emissions at ‘least cost’.

Carbon Offsets: Sending Responsibility Offshore

Parties to the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee (MPCCC) have negotiated that 50 per cent of reductions may come from international offsets in the period 2015–2016. This is an improvement on the previous CPRS where no cap on international offsets was given. In another dispirited assumption, however, Treasury modelling forecasts that 66 per cent of emissions reductions will come from offsets at the 2020 mark (101 Mt CO_{2e} from a total of 152 Mt CO_{2e} reductions). Of these, 62 per cent will come from offshore permits and 4.5 per cent from domestic offset permits. Treasury will presumably alter this assumption in its next round of modelling to reflect the 50 per cent limit on offsets that the Greens intend to secure.

Nonetheless, 50 per cent offshore offsets is a much higher proportion than the 0–22 per cent offshore credits allowed for EU nations in the first two phases of their ETS. The 50 per cent cap also undermines a 2001 decision in the UN

negotiations that international offsets should be ‘supplemental’ to domestic abatement in the developed nations that are party to the UNFCCC. The quantity and types of offsets will be reviewed by the Climate Change Authority in 2016.

International offsets in the Australian carbon trading scheme will come from UN-sanctioned projects only. In a welcome development, the scheme bans the industrial gas CDM credits relied on in the EU, although this may not always be the case. The CEF framework states that the government reserves the right to include any other type of domestic and international offset deemed appropriate in future regulatory arrangements. This means that existing limits on offsets recognised in the scheme could be removed by a Coalition government or a Labor government not reliant on Greens support. The future reviews of offset regulation delegated to the Climate Change Authority will be critical, constituting a potential source of criticism of the scheme.

The European experience shows that the quantity and type of carbon offset included in a scheme is subject to ongoing political contest. The open-ended nature of the CEF framework in this regard may serve as a way to include novel and ‘low-cost’ forms of land-based carbon offsets in the future. Land-based offsets have been subject to interest and heated debate between experts and international negotiators since the 1990s. There are pointers to what new forms of carbon offset will emerge in future international policy, and in the Australian scheme.

A new class of land-based carbon offsets is being developed called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Nations (REDD). REDD is a form of conservation that involves cordoning off land in tropical forests that is at risk of logging, clearing for plantations, mining or agriculture. The decision to design REDD as a carbon offset has been all but decided between nations party to the UNFCCC.

There are ongoing governance challenges in developing nations where REDD has been piloted, and sound methods for measuring forest carbon are yet to be determined. Despite this, international institutions, businesses, NGOs and state agencies are moving forward at a great pace to install REDD offset market architectures. The speed and logic of these efforts has in turn created new social problems and attracted resistance from social movements and affected communities. Across the developing world, particularly the Asia-Pacific region, REDD pilot schemes are being carried out to the detriment of forests and the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Australian agencies have been involved in one such example. AusAid and the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (DCCEE) have been anticipating the potential for REDD offsets since 2007. A pilot forest offset project in Indonesia demonstrates the vagaries of REDD being set up as the next round of carbon offsets. Called the Kalimantan Forests and Climate Project, it is located in Central Kalimantan, where some of Indonesia’s highest rates of illegal logging occur. The project is funded by official development assistance, and is explicitly described by the DCCEE as a means of demonstrating the viability of marketised REDD.

Since 2007, when the project began, community consultation has been poor. Friends of the Earth groups in Australia and Indonesia (WALHI), along with community groups in the region, have asked for the end of this project. The likelihood of carbon leakage in the region is certain. The Environmental Investigation Agency and Telapak exposed illegal logging near the project site in June 2011. Logging had occurred in a pilot site reserved under the Norway/Indonesia REDD program (the largest of three bilateral partnerships to trial REDD in Indonesia). Carbon leakage is when an offset project displaces emissions elsewhere—in this case logging continues in areas outside the borders of the project—and the result is that aggregate emissions are not reduced. The issue of leakage is intractable since individual offset projects can never guarantee that the industries causing emissions will not move elsewhere.

Finally, REDD projects have replicated tensions between NGOs and local communities typical of conservation projects in the developing world. Community groups have expressed no confidence in the NGO facilitators of the Kalimantan project. They claim its design and implementation does not recognise customary Dayak wisdom and no process consultation process has yet established free and informed prior consent. After participation in the consultation process, the Yayasan Petak Danum (Water Land Foundation) and AMAN Kalteng (Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago—Central Kalimantan Chapter) have both mobilised to resist REDD.

The situation in Central Kalimantan is common in pilot REDD projects in the Asia-Pacific region. If the Australian emissions trading scheme allows REDD credits in the future, the market will stimulate the progress of these projects and thus the social impacts of carbon offsetting.

Carbon Farming: The Home-grown Offset Loophole

At home, the federal government has been developing a domestic land-based offset scheme, now passed into legislation. The Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI) will be linked to the ETS, yet the governance of the CFI is weak, even compared to REDD schemes.

There is good reason to believe that the CFI will not generate emissions reductions. In the jargon of environmental policy makers, CFI projects must demonstrate 'additionality', which means that CFI emissions reductions must be additional to any 'business as usual'—the financial incentive is paid only for new emissions reduction practices. However, rather than establishing additionality on a project basis (CDM practice), the CFI accreditation system has a 'streamlined' process whereby project developers need only undertake certain listed activities deemed automatically additional. This will do nothing to ensure that a CFI project has itself led to the specified activities. Even if landowners have undertaken the designated

activities for years, they may still claim CFI credits. The current activities under review are an assortment of land management practices: culling of feral camels, capture and combustion of methane from waste, and savannah burning.

The carbon price framework puts no quantitative limits on the use of CFI offset credits in the trading period starting 2015; CFI offsets will be included in the count towards domestic emissions reductions. Thus the rules allow for 100 per cent carbon offsets when international credits and CFI credits are combined. The logic of carbon trading produces a situation where we can have new coal-fired power stations and coal and natural gas expansion while on paper emissions reductions are achieved so long as enough camels have been shot and national parks created in Indonesia.

International institutions, business, NGOs and state agencies are moving forward at a great pace to install REDD offset market architectures. The speed and logic of these efforts has in turn created new social problems and attracted resistance from social movements and affected communities.

The recent Australian Climate Commission report *A Critical Decade* reminded us that there is no equivalence between fossil carbon and carbon in land ecosystems. The authors expressed concern that carbon in the living carbon cycle could be used to compensate for fossilised carbon under Australian climate policy. There is no parity between fossilised carbon stored for thousands upon thousands of years in the ground before we dig it up to burn, with carbon stored in the atmosphere—land—ocean cycle, which is much more dynamic and in flux. For instance, carbon stored in trees is subject to the risks of bush fire in Australia, particularly with increasing temperatures. The Climate Commission authors tell us that the best way of dealing with emissions from the land sector is to eliminate harvesting of old-growth forests.

Finally, CFI offsets illustrate that emissions trading ignores complex social and political issues. Contention over carbon farming offsets and Indigenous land rights has already begun. A \$13 million pastoral property 130 kilometres from



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Alice Springs has been purchased by R. M. Williams Agricultural Holdings with two-thirds funding assistance from the federal government. The Henbury Conservation project, which is funded by the Caring for Our Country initiative, seems to be planned as a pilot for CFI methodologies such as managing fire, water, weeds and feral animals on this former pastoral property. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website states carbon credits generated from the project could be bought with the \$250 million to the Non-Kyoto Carbon Farming Initiative Fund announced in the Clean Energy Package.

But local Indigenous people have objected to the project. The Central Land Council is disappointed that they were unable to purchase the land—they were advised of the sale of the land only after funding had been arranged and a Memorandum of Understanding negotiated with the leaseholder. At the project launch Indigenous Arrernte man Barry Abbott interrupted proceedings, claiming that proper consultation had not taken place. ABC reporting showed that other related issues include accurate measurement of carbon stored in the land, the conversion of the property from a cattle station to carbon farming, ongoing access to land for Indigenous communities, and the distribution of proceeds from sale of carbon credits. Before the CFI was passed in the Senate, the Greens negotiated carbon rights for non-exclusive Native Title holders (previously, only exclusive Native Title holders had a claim to carbon rights). While this demonstrates improvement, consultation and dispute processes are still lacking in the CFI.

Whether carbon offsetting occurs here or abroad, additional social and ecological consequences are accrued in the process of market creation. These issues are new market failures that will be locked in under the carbon price package.

Dilemmas of Compromise

There are larger political issues at hand here. Does the Clean Energy Future Agreement warrant the political support of those concerned about climate change? In the space of three years there has been a shift from concerted rejection of an inadequate federal climate change policy to dedicated public support from left-leaning groups and the Greens. This is curious given the similarities between the former policy and the current one. Both of John Garnaut's reports and the CPRS debates across 2008–2009 held emissions trading and reliance on carbon offsets to be the central means of emissions reduction. Both the CPRS and the CEF rely heavily on the use of offshore offsets to achieve reductions, and forecast growth in fossil fuels such as gas and coal for energy and export. Both versions of Australian emissions trading policy promise generous compensation to industry in the form of free permits and cash to the tune of \$20–22 billion.

The largest polluters in the coal, gas and steel industries have won allowances far beyond what is necessary to secure their competitiveness, considering the low carbon price set in both the fixed price period and the availability of cut-price offsets when trading begins in 2015. The most cogent critique of this overly generous compensation has come from liberal think tank the Grattan Institute. John Daley and colleagues are concerned that this practice amounts to industry protectionism. There is plenty more to be said about this feature of the ETS package, including the criticism that Australia may well repeat the EU history of overcompensation of the corporate sector, leading to windfall profits.

Both versions of emissions trading policy in Australia have proven to be immensely unpopular with the public, who seem confused and understandably cynical about who will pay the most for an ineffective scheme. Meanwhile the \$8 billion of income tax breaks is questionable. While the break for low-income earners seems positive, it is worth noting that middle-income brackets will get the brunt of the impact, with an increase in their marginal tax rate. No comparable increase in the tax rate at the top end of wages will occur. This is a limited tax reform, and likely to diminish in the future. We need a progressive tax system that funds essential social services and meaningful climate change mitigation. Between generous corporate compensation and the secondary tax relief, the CEF package does not stand up on these counts, and will cost in excess of \$4 billion dollars, despite its paltry ecological credentials.

Clearly, arriving at an effective and broadly popular method of reducing greenhouse gases has proven extremely difficult—and even a consensus on the reality of climate change remains tenuous. But equally essential, meaningful debate over how to respond has been lacking. Al Gore's 2006 film *An Inconvenient Truth* and the UK *Stern Review* of the same year marked the apex of political consensus over the reality of climate change. This defining moment in climate change politics, however, has not inspired a convincing way forward. Emissions trading—the *sin qua non* of climate policy across the world—has done little to capture our imaginations. It is, however, the option presented to us, and is not likely to be shelved.

Progressive intellectuals and social movements face the dilemma of compromise in the everyday struggle for social and political change. When is it strategic to accept less than ideal offerings from political elites as part of a long-term strategy for change? When should state mechanisms and when should market mechanisms be used to address social and environmental problems?

I have offered a perspective here that sees emissions trading as inherently flawed, in its logic and practice. This, I propose, is a basis to resist Australia's plan to join the carbon market. It is not, however, the only basis for criticism of the carbon price proposal. Centrist groups that have supported the carbon price to date need not accept the utterly unambitious terms of this framework. Why not at least complicate the picture a little and push for a better deal? To begin, the role of carbon offsets must be a point of contention for all those seeking action on climate change beyond a carbon lock-in. And if vital questions of justice in climate policy are to be broached, then the resource sector has to be called to account.

Progressive individuals and groups are the key to developing a meaningful debate about the realities of carbon trading. Wherever you sit in relation to the dilemmas of political and ecological compromise, now is the time to disrupt the banal and obfuscatory dispute over climate policy and ask hard questions of our federal politicians proposing an Australian carbon market. **a**

On Special Religious Instruction

Michael Leahy

Time for churches and secularists to negotiate a more democratic arrangement

‘Modern politics is civil war carried on by other means ...’ Noted philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre is here challenging the possibility of liberal democracy. Democratic unity, he holds, depends on a shared conception of justice: substantial agreement on how the benefits and burdens of membership are to be shared. Since liberal democracy implies a plurality of views on this matter, MacIntyre argues that agreement is impossible, and public policy debate is but the waging of war in words.

Democrats should note the strong support lent to MacIntyre’s thesis by the current Victorian controversy over the place of Special Religious Instruction (SRI) in government schools. Today’s conflict perpetuates a bitter debate that has divided our society since the nineteenth century. The original antagonists, the churches and the secularists, have been succeeded in somewhat reduced form by carriers of their respective batons. Access Ministries is the joint body formed by the Anglican and several Protestant churches to provide SRI, while Fairness in Religions in Schools (FIRIS) and the Humanist Society of Victoria lead the opposition to SRI. Access Ministries continue to insist on the priority of their churches’ mission to evangelise over the state’s duty to preserve the secular autonomy of the classroom. The modern day secularists persist in their efforts to interpret the secularising education acts of the colonial parliaments as ideological banishments of religion from the school curriculum, or to reduce its content to teaching *about religion*. These secularising acts were supposed to be the liberal solution to this conflict: the liberal state was bound to be neutral in relation to religious belief or non-belief but to uphold citizens’ right to freedom in relation to either.

However, the liberal attempt to preserve state neutrality by defining religious freedom in terms of individual ‘rights’ has entrenched rather than resolved the conflict. A right is non-negotiable: you either have it or you don’t—if you have it, it trumps all counter claims. But the right to religious freedom can be invoked to support both positions here: Access Ministries’ mission to evangelise and the secularists’ right to protect their children from such evangelisation. In MacIntyre’s terms, the abstract ‘rights’ status of their claims protects the antagonists from any obligation to negotiate their substance for the sake of the common good of democratic harmony. Construal of their rights as

competing ‘goods’, however, exposes the substance of their claims to scrutiny and makes those goods negotiable.

Scrutiny reveals both positions to be anachronistic. Access Ministries, like their nineteenth-century predecessors, recognise no distinction between the function of church and school when they define their vision as ‘to reach every student in Victoria with the Gospel’. The churches’ blindness was perhaps defensible in the nineteenth century, when this distinction was inchoate. Now that this is well established, Access Ministries’ persistence in equating an act of a secular parliament permitting SRI with ‘a God-given open door to children and young people’ simply perpetuates the nineteenth-century view of church and school. Moreover, the change in the faith or non-faith status of students since the nineteenth century, which should discourage such a facile equation, has had no apparent effect on Access Ministries’ conception of the role of the church in schools.

It is also anachronistic to see the permission of SRI as violating an ideological principle enshrined by the Victorian *Education Act 1872*. When the churches of the day failed to agree on a religious instruction syllabus, the government resolved to fund education in a minimum number of subjects deemed ‘secular’ within a very limited—four hour—time frame. The Act left open the teaching of a range of other subjects including not only religious instruction but also sewing and French, for example, in the school outside these hours, provided only that religious instruction was not taught by teachers at the relevant school. The ideology driving FIRIS’ secularist position is evident in their demand for the abolition of SRI and its replacement by ‘an objective, fair and balanced comparative syllabus for *education* about religions and beliefs’ (emphasis in original). Religion is admissible to the school curriculum, not on its own terms as a valid form of human experience offering answers to life’s ultimate questions, but only on secular humanist terms as an empirical phenomenon.

Scrutiny of the substance of these contending positions also reveals their reliance upon contested claims about the authoritative sources of truth. For Access Ministries that source is the Bible, but for secularists such as the Humanist Society of Victoria, to which the FIRIS website provides a link, it is ‘the exercise of reason’, with a view ‘to explaining events on the basis of cause and effect’.

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On Special Religious Instruction

Michael Leahy

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‘a view [that] has long been accepted in the physical sciences’. The authority of reason, according to Ian Edwards, writing on the Humanist Society’s website, is such that ‘There is no longer any need for revelation as a source of knowledge’. But both sides represent the authority of their sources tendentiously.

Only the most extreme form of evangelical fundamentalism would claim absolute certainty for doctrines derived from the Bible, and then the certainty would be ascribed to the Bible’s status as the word of God, not to the demonstrability of the doctrines by human reason. Analogously, it would take faith in ‘scientism’ rather than science to maintain the doctrine that science can provide an exclusive and exhaustive account of truth, and thus be the sole guarantor of human progress in any circumstances, let alone in the face of such foreboding consequences of scientific endeavour as climate change. While their adherents may have good grounds for clinging to them, only absolute certainty of the doctrines of religion or science could exempt them from doubt. Since such certainty cannot be demonstrated for either, presentation of them in any forum as if it could is unwarranted. This is all the more so in a secular classroom, part of whose function in a democracy is to enable students to critically appraise all content presented to them.

While their adherents may have good grounds for clinging to them, only absolute certainty of the doctrines of religion or science could exempt them from doubt. Since such certainty cannot be demonstrated for either, presentation of them in any forum as if it could is unwarranted.

Even this limited scrutiny of the substance of these contending positions is sufficient to expose the goods they point to and, goods being assessable against other goods, the possibility of a negotiated settlement of the dispute. The good exposed in the religious position, stripped of the particular doctrinal clothing of SRI, is a religious education which offers for student appraisal a view of the universe and of the place of humans within it, a view that is quite distinct from any non-religious view. Of course, it is more accurate to say that there is a plurality of religious views rather than a single general one. In the twenty-first century no credible religious education curriculum could ignore the question of how to discriminate between or integrate the multiplicity of religious views. In my opinion, many Christians could support the replacement of SRI with such a form of religious education without compromising their own doctrinal commitments. Believers do not diminish the truth of their own doctrines by conceding that instruction in the doctrines of their own faith alone—by restricting student freedom to consider alternatives to these doctrines—violates the values inherent in the very notion of education, the values of freedom and truth. Believers would be compromising the good embodied in such a religious education curriculum, however, if they allowed that curriculum to be reduced to

‘education about religion’ rather than one which addressed religion on its own terms: students must be enabled to ask themselves such questions as what it would be like to address the issue of climate change, for example, if one believed that humans were divinely appointed stewards of the creation.

When the secularist position upholds science as a way of explaining ‘events on the basis of cause and effect’, it points to an uncontroversial good. That good would not be compromised by separating it from Edwards’ very controversial claim that ‘There is no longer any need for revelation as a source of knowledge’. This is not itself a scientific claim but rather a doctrine of secular humanist faith. Like the doctrines presented in SRI, therefore, in the form of religious education I am proposing, this doctrine would be one of the plurality of religious and non-religious views presented for student appraisal. Holders of this doctrine would no more be diminishing it by conceding that, in an educational setting, it is subject to critical appraisal than would religious believers by making the same concession in regard to their doctrines.

Since only certainty about the substance of the religious or secularist position could eliminate the pluralism MacIntyre sees as threatening modern democracy, his doubt about its possibility cannot be definitively resolved. His own prescription for viewing politico/ethical questions in terms of competing goods rather than conflicting rights, however, provides some help in making substantive debate and negotiated settlement of such disputes possible. Many religious believers of twenty-first-century Australia will respect religious pluralism and renounce any claim to a knockdown argument refuting atheism. They will therefore have no trouble in accepting a religious education curriculum that reflects these positions and respects the autonomy of the secular classroom provided only that this curriculum does not reduce religion to something less than it claims to be. Similarly, many secularists will concede the limitations of science and their lack of a knockdown argument to refute religious belief. They too will have little difficulty in accepting such a form of religious education. If I am correct in this assessment, modern democracy may, at least on this issue which has so long and bitterly divided Australia, become something more than ‘civil war carried on by other means’. **a**

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Returning to Bulgaria

Roland Boer

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The road from communism to capitalism, between Islam and Christianity

The line of cars squealed to a crawl, some swerving to avoid the ones they were tailgating. The reason might be a horse and cart, trundling along with a grizzled and bent farmer or two, or perhaps a forty-year old Moskvich, which travels at about the same speed. One after another, the cars stacked behind careened out into oncoming traffic in order to overtake the slow offender, risking a head-on collision yet again, before swinging wildly back in and racing off to find the next obstacle. I was solidly seat belted in the back of an ageing Saab, praying that the much-vaunted safety features of such a vehicle were as good as they were supposed to be. And I ignored the fact that the other passengers considered seatbelts a car's unnecessary accoutrements, the recourse of wimps and other such weaklings. Our driver was Natalia, a retired opera singer with a penchant for seeing what would bring about her end first: the unbelievably strong cigarettes she chain-smoked, or the car itself—smashed into a tight ball after her reflexes missed a nanosecond response.

But what was I doing in a beaten up Saab, fearing for my life as we hurtled along a goat-track that our driver obviously believed was a formula-one racing circuit? I was in Bulgaria for the second time in five years, on a road trip from one end of the country (Sofia) to the other (Albena on the Black Sea). And I was here to see what life had become since then—or at least to try and do so between the thunks as we hit yet another canyon of a pothole (no wonder the suspension was shot) as Natalia tested the car's road-holding ability on one more tight curve overlooking a stomach-churning drop.

What did I notice this time? In between the antics of our desperately heroic driver, I began to take note of what was the same and what was not, especially the skyrocketing prices, ladies of the road, glimmers of the hope once embodied here in communism, capitalist anarchism, the possibilities for Islam and Christianity, and indeed the revolutionary possibilities of Christianity itself.

Much remained the same, such as the impossibly tight jeans on stunning women and men, young and old, the impression that even children smoke from the moment they are born, the endless rough road from communism to capitalism (Marx, in a moment of forgetfulness, had neglected to deal with that outcome), and the best salads and capsicum dishes in the world. But much had changed as well. A blunt reminder came when we stopped for fuel. Last time I was here, petrol was cheap, tied in with the internal economy, but now it cost as much as the rest of Europe—a lot. Since the country joined the EU people's incomes had not risen much at all: a good salary after tax was a little over €600 per month. I must admit I was there in the midst of the economic crisis of 2008–10, so life was tough, despite the subtle signs that people were repairing and renovating their places—there was less chance than before of a brick falling on your head as you walk down the street. But the shops were almost empty, the roads quieter: government cutbacks all about. One plus was that the air of Sofia—usually full of mad car lovers, who were now forced to drive as little as possible—was much cleaner.

I am sure that the ladies of the road had more leisure time too, as their clients tightened the purse strings and used their five-finger friends. Ladies of the road? Lightly clad young and not-so-young women, with cleavages shown to their advantage, tottered beside the highways in high-heels offering their relatively cheap services to anyone who should care to pay: five lev for French, British, Greek or straight sex, and so on. These ladies with multi-national aspirations were usually gypsies, plying one trade among many that these people—integral to but always at the edges of Bulgarian society—felt called upon to deploy.

Instead of the false utopia of quick sexual release, another utopia, faded in this part of world and often spat upon and despised, was embodied in the towns through which we drove and occasionally stopped, for a smoke and a coffee and a quick check to make sure all four wheels were still attached to the car. For a long time I wondered what it was that made these towns unique, a strange impression that came with the first sight of a town in a fold in the hills or as it emerged slowly from the fields of Eastern Bulgaria. And then it hit me: most of them have high-rise apartments, in the middle of the mountains or the countryside. I am used to such towns having single level dwellings, scattered about a village square or main street, but definitely not high-rises. They were built during the half-century of communist rule, dwellings for workers, factory or rural, all similar to one another. But coming upon such a town with the late sun glistening on its white towers, one can imagine what they looked like new, a cluster of modern apartments in a village that would have been more at home on Mars or in the far future. In short, they embodied the hope that communism would provide that leap into a far better future.

Now, of course, that hope has all but gone in this part of the world, although there is a good bit of nostalgia among the older folk for the

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Returning to Bulgaria

Roland Boer

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welfare state that is slowly being eroded. Everyone was poor, I was told, but had no want for education, medicine, hospitals, transport or generous working conditions such as sick leave and maternity leave. Many still assume these are a right, but the state uses any opportunity to wind them back (and blames the EU or the IMF for such deprivations).

But I also encountered a very different response, a radical new direction in economic ideas. My conversation partner in the back seat for 1100 kilometres was Morris Fadel, lecturer in literature at the New Bulgarian University, devout Christian, son of a Lebanese communist father and Bulgarian mother, and enthusiastic smoker. Morris helped me take my mind off the antics of our driver: he told me of friends who had developed what can only be called capitalist anarchism: since the state is always corrupt (their own experience is strong on this matter) and since only the state oppresses, engages in wars and treats people shabbily, the state should be abolished. No law, no army, no police, no immigration authorities, no welfare, no state-sponsored education, medicine, business, anything; only capitalist relations should remain and everything should have a price, including children. In this situation there would be no war and no corruption. The problems with such a theory are obvious, such as the push by large companies for monopolies by whatever means, or private armies in the employ of such companies, but it also struck me that this theory has resonances with Marx (but they don't read Marx any more, if they ever really did), some elements among the Greens (local versus global) and of course anarchism itself—except that it is an anarchism of the Right, not the Left. I couldn't help wondering whether this theory would have arisen where the state is largely successful in redistributing wealth and keeping itself from wars (such as Sweden).

My conversation partner in the back seat for 1100 kilometres was Morris Fadel, lecturer in literature at the New Bulgarian University, devout Christian, son of a Lebanese communist father and Bulgarian mother, and enthusiastic smoker.

Morris also turned out to be a deft guide in some of the towns we visited, pointing out one extraordinary religious site after another. By this time I had already visited the palace of a Romanian princess at Balchik, which she had designed to resemble the Garden of Eden (with its four rivers), albeit with one modification: she had fallen in love with a Muslim fisherman, so Eden had a simple Orthodox chapel at one end and a small mosque at another. In between was a blending of Muslim and Christian symbols. In a similar moment that transcended religious bickering, Morris guided us to Obochishte where both a Muslim Sufi saint and a (later) Christian saint are venerated at the same site, in the same building. Standing there

in the late sun, I couldn't help wondering why Western nations don't look more to places like Bulgaria for tips in dealing with Muslim and Christian relations.

Morris also took us to a sixteenth-century church, built low and simply during the Ottoman era, with the whole Bible painted on its walls and separate sections for men and women. In response to my questions, uttered while ducking beneath low doorways, no one seemed to know whether this was the result of Muslim influence, for such a practice is not usual in Orthodox churches. Yet the most stunning site was the Church of the Forty Martyrs in the medieval capital of Veliko Tarnova. We climbed the fortified hill, passing by the ruins of old homes that sheltered within the walls. But as we entered the church I was blown away: it had been built during the communist era, using communist architects and artists to paint its interior. The result: none of the traditional Madonnas were to be found, nor the shifty-eyed Jesuses with a coif, nor the saints with the halos. Instead I saw full-bodied ordinary people—a mother with her child in plain, every-day fullness, large breasts and pointy nipples, workers' muscled bodies gathering for communion, the saints conquering oppression, a Christ suffering for the common people—in short, a very earthy redemption. It was one of the most spiritual places I have visited in a long time.

Pushed to thinking further, I asked Morris on the walk down the hill about V. Levski, the national hero, who became a martyr for the cause of a free Bulgaria from the Ottomans. He had been a monk, goes the story, but his deep Christian faith had nothing to do with his political agitation. I was not so sure, so I questioned Morris. Yes, Levski remained a monk for his relatively short life. Yes, Levski organised revolutionary cells to resist the Turks. Yes, Levski saw no contradiction between his religious and political lives. Above all, he argued for a new Bulgaria in which Christians and Muslims would live in peace, with forgiveness rather than revenge being the key. Not a bad national hero, if you ask me.

One simple act remained for this journey: since I had come so far to a sea I had never seen, and even though it was a coolish October day and the beach was empty, I simply had to take a plunge in the Black Sea. Which I did. **a**



book **A Different Silence**

review by Sarah Maddison

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Diane Austin-Broos, *A Different Inequality: The Politics of Debate about Remote Aboriginal Australia* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011)

Silence has long been a theme in academic and policy debate about Indigenous Australia. In his 1968 Boyer lectures, anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner spoke of the ‘great Australian silence’, arguing that the level of inattention to the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australian history books could not be explained by mere ‘absent-mindedness’. Stanner had surveyed books on Australian history and politics, finding that in the almost complete absence of Indigenous people—let alone Indigenous perspectives—in these texts there was a ‘cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale’.

Anthropology, as the discipline by definition devoted to the study of human society and culture, was never silent in the way that historians and political scientists were. It has, nonetheless, proved problematic. Early Australian anthropology was interested in Indigenous peoples as ‘primitive’, often meaning that those who had been subject to the earliest onslaught of colonialism through an intense occupation of their land fell outside the interests of the discipline. The focus on a certain experience of Indigeneity and cultural difference proved contentious for many critics who perceived anthropology and anthropologists as complicit in the colonial project. In response to such postcolonial criticism, many anthropologists eventually came to recognise these shortcomings, and to take a more critical view of the extent of the discipline’s complicity in informing damaging or racist policy. Recent publications, including this latest contribution from Diane Austin-Broos, continue in this vein, offering critical insight into the strengths and limitations of various positions among anthropologists and their counterparts in certain think tanks and media outlets.

Austin-Broos’ specific focus is on the recent debates about remote Aboriginal Australia that swirl around what she describes as the ‘rights–pathology axis’. She maps out the terrain of two discourses about remote communities: one with a focus on equality, the other emphasising difference. Austin-Broos perceives silences between and within both of these discourses. She argues that there is a deliberate effort by those most focused on equality—or anti-separatism—to pathologise Aboriginal culture, while those focused on protecting Aboriginal cultural difference have been silent on the reality of suffering in remote communities. As she puts it, the book

takes its departure from the observation that in the remote communities debate, the pathologising by opinion writers *and* the denial of distress by some academics were real factors in the debate. Forms of silence marked both sides and reflected fundamental

issues. On the one hand was a failure to acknowledge cultural difference and the complexity it brings to policy-making geared to address disadvantage; on the other was a failure to grant that the suffering and the distress brought by marginalisation are not simply defined away by Aboriginal forms of life.

The characterisation of these two discourses owes much to the analysis of ‘postsocialist’ politics as articulated by Nancy Fraser, a point belatedly acknowledged by Austin-Broos in her concluding chapter (although she does not speak to the wider philosophical debates about recognition and redistribution evident in the writing of Axel Honneth, among others). Rather than a politics of recognition and a politics of redistribution, however, Austin-Broos wishes to articulate the challenge involved in the tension between a politics of cultural difference and a politics of equality. Like Fraser, Austin-Broos recognises the need to try to reconcile these two political demands, and in her conclusion offers some modest proposals concerning primary education in remote communities that she sees as being of potential benefit.

Austin-Broos’ articulation of these debates is not particularly new. Peter Sutton, identified in the book as among those who pathologise Indigenous culture, has also argued that considerations of justice (that is, Indigenous rights) have been given too much weight at the expense of considerations of care. Sutton, like many others in the field, is concerned with high levels of violence among Aboriginal people, particularly where such violence involves women and children. He rejects, however, what he describes as the ‘myth’ that the recognition of Indigenous rights will in any way be able to improve this situation. Austin-Broos is more nuanced in her analysis, arguing that cultural difference ought to be protected from blatantly assimilationist approaches, but nonetheless conceding that a greater focus on care, or at least a greater acknowledgment of inequality, marginalisation and suffering, is now essential.

It is disappointing, then, that in making this argument Austin-Broos seems compelled to set up something of a straw person, or at least a ‘straw anthropologist’. There are other, more overtly political, factors at play in these debates that receive scant attention in the book. Past policies of assimilation—and current policies under the banner of ‘intervention’—have left a bitter legacy. Government programs targeting Indigenous inequality are viewed by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with deep suspicion—and with good reason. There have been too many instances of the settler state insisting that it knows best and attempting to impose its will on Indigenous people. These efforts will always be resisted and government policy and programs will always deliver far less than is hoped.

This view is more likely to be supported by the cultural difference anthropologists than by those who reject what they see as separatism. Where the difference paradigm has also engaged with economics, public policy and the realpolitik of Indigenous life choices and aspirations—as the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development has in the United States, for example—then it is likely that their policy prescriptions might offer genuine hope. It can almost certainly be guaranteed that coercion and assimilation—even when motivated by the deepest concern about inequality—will never succeed. Austin-Broos never quite seems to concede this point.

REVIEW



A Different Silence

Sarah Maddison

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Thus, inasmuch as Austin-Broos is eager to point out the silences in the two positions she has mapped, she seems oblivious to the silences in her own account. Although her concluding chapter purports to speak to the politics of difference and inequality, both her analysis and her prescriptions for a way forward seem strangely depoliticised. Her focus on anthropology as a discipline and on a close reading of a few specific contributions to the field render much of the debate a conversation between anthropologists (with some neoconservative political intervention from certain think tanks and media commentators). She has little to say about the wider political context and the ongoing struggles by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for quite specific forms of recognition. For example, although entirely ignored in this book, it should be evident that current debate about possible recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution could have a direct bearing on the issues of concern to Austin-Broos. What would be the effect, for example, if a referendum were to allow new possibilities for agreement-making between Indigenous groups and the state? How might remote Aboriginal communities be able to harness a changed political context for themselves in ways that allowed a renegotiation of the politics of difference and equality on their own terms? Another significant silence in the book is the voices of Aboriginal people themselves. Only Martin Nakata, Marcia Langton and Noel Pearson are heard in any detail in these pages and the vast and complex landscape of Aboriginal political culture in which Indigenous leaders and activists express a range of views, concerns and solutions concerning

the very problems of interest to Austin-Broos are missing. This makes the book very much a conversation about Aboriginal people rather than a conversation with them. In this sense the book perpetuates all the problems with the discipline of anthropology that have been articulated by postcolonial critique, which Austin-Broos acknowledges and yet somehow fails to take on board. In this sense too, she perpetuates a particular type of relationship: between the knowing white expert and the silent and pathologised Indigenous victim.

There is much to commend A Different Inequality to anyone interested in understanding the complex ways in which remote Indigenous people and communities are understood and problematised by (mostly white) anthropologists and others eager to influence policy in this domain. As an intellectual history it is an engaging and interesting analysis of the field of debate. Where it falls short, however, is in situating this analysis more effectively in the wider political context, including by drawing on a wider range of Indigenous perspectives on these issues. In this regard Austin-Broos has perpetuated some of the silences she seeks to break. [A]

book Dispatches from a Global Springtime

review by Max Kaiser



Dispatches from a Global Springtime

Max Kaiser

Max Kaiser is a review editor for Arena Magazine.

Tania Palmieri and Clare Solomon (eds), Springtime: The New Student Rebellions (Verso, London, 2011) Springtime: The New Student Rebellions is an edited collection of pamphlets, articles, blog posts and tweets from and about the recent student and worker rebellions in the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States, France, Greece and Tunisia. It is a compendium of chronologies, analyses and reportage that gives a snapshot of and some insight into the revolts currently taking place. That there are forty contributors to the volume with no central narrative or structure means that Springtime is not always an easy read. Some pieces, particularly in the UK section, make several assumptions about the reader's prior knowledge. If you have closely followed the UK student protest movement

that erupted in 2010 after the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition announced billions of dollars' worth of cuts to higher education and a trebling of student fees, then you can fit these pieces into your own knowledge. Otherwise expect to be doing a bit of background research. The UK chapter does convey well the sense of excitement and momentum surrounding the student movement there, yet it is not so much an explanatory or analytical section as a collection of primary documents from the times. However, in some ways it is this mix of primary documents—chosen for the significance of where they were written and who they were written by—with deeper analysis that creates the biggest flaw in the book. The publication doesn't seem to be entirely sure of what it is and its identity crisis gives it something of a messy tone. Is it meant to be movement media? If so, how does it carry the struggle forward? Is it preserving important statements for posterity? If so, a little bit more context is required for it to make sense in a book format. Still, what could have been a misjudgement but is instead a highlight from the UK section are the pages of tweets from participants in protest rallies. These are a selection of excellent little vignettes that manage to capture the mood



and excitement of the time. One of my favourites is illustrative of the protesters' innovative methods of counter-acting the police tactic of 'kettling' students into a set space and holding them there for hours on end: 'Reports of mass clothes swapping inside kettle [as police] try to identify "suspects"?' Moments of solidarity like this are direct counterpoints to mainstream media efforts at creating false divisions between 'non-violent protesters' and 'violent hoodlums'.

Student activists in Australia often compare the student political situation here to the one in the United Kingdom. In both, a National Union of Students (NUS), and student politics overall, are overwhelmingly dominated by Young Labo(u)r. Part of the excitement of the UK protests was the sudden ability of self-organised students to bypass the official Labour-dominated student power structures, making them effectively irrelevant. The UK NUS refused to call more student protests after the initial mass protest ended in an occupation of the Conservative Party Headquarters. However, through social media, students outside these official structures went on to organise further mass protests and university occupations across the country.

A welcome piece in this section is James Meadway's analysis of the material basis for New Labour's dominance in student politics under the previous Labour government, which provides for the reader a historical context for the student protests. The conditions were that increases in tuition fees would be minimal, while the expansion of the higher education industry as a whole was prioritised and employment would be available upon graduation. When the Global Financial Crisis hit Britain, and the scale of the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat cuts were announced, this material basis exploded.

Under the Labor government in Australia we have a similar situation. Fee rises are kept steady; one of Julia Gillard's stated aims as part of the 'Education Revolution' is to increase the rate of participation in higher education, especially to bring more working class students into the system; students are kept happy through new student scholarships; and the economy continues to grow, creating more employment for recent graduates.

On the face of it these conditions seem to guarantee a pliable and divided student body led by ineffectual aspiring Labor politicians, yet cracks are starting to show. As the higher education system expands, tertiary qualifications will diminish in value; the fracturing state of the global economy means a continued slide into a two-speed Australian economy, with growth in mining but not much else. These factors combined mean that higher education graduates will find it increasingly hard to get jobs.

In contradistinction to the vignette and statement-based UK section of *Springtime*, the chapters on Italy delve deeper into an analysis of why higher education has become such an important battleground in the class struggle shaking Europe. Contributor Giulio Calella explains how universities today are tasked with the reproduction of the working class; that is, higher education under neo-liberalism is not premised on the creation of social mobility but works through differential inclusion rather than exclusion. There is a

proliferation of different degrees or courses one can undertake. Calella explains that this plethora of tertiary qualifications available at many different levels acts as a complex system of social sorting and class reproduction. Because of the shifting nature of the labour skills now required by capital, the task of universities is to produce an army of qualified yet malleable workers.

For Marco Bascetta and Benedetto Vecchi, the changing class composition of Italian students has led to increased possibilities for student resistance to take hold. Those with less stake in maintaining the status quo are far more likely to challenge it. This analysis, when applied to our local context, signals that a further massified system of higher education in Australia coupled with an increasingly difficult path to class mobility could potentially spell an end to Labor-dominated student politics and the emergence of new struggles.

As the Italian analysis suggests, if education is a 'positional good' that depends on its own scarcity for value, then the expansion of and increased intake into higher education leads necessarily to a downgrading in its value. In Italy this is manifested in the children of the upper class increasingly eschewing Italian public universities and attending private institutions and/or going overseas. The Australian answer looks something like Melbourne University's controversial restructure, the 'Melbourne Model'.

Contributor Giulio Calella explains how universities today are tasked with the reproduction of the working class; that is, higher education under neo-liberalism is not premised on the creation of social mobility but works through differential inclusion rather than exclusion.

In the California section we learn how protests over cuts and fee increases became so much more. The writers of the 'Communique from an Absent Future' chapter ask what we are struggling for when we protest to save the university. 'A free university in the midst of a capitalist society is like a reading room in a prison.' This section raises important tactical questions. If student revolts worldwide are to be more than defensive battles against the latest onslaught of neo-liberalism, how do we transcend visions of social change that are little more than 'social-democratic heel-clicking'?

The Californian anarchist answer to this is to 'occupy everything, demand nothing': fight for the immediate creation of microcosms of the new society without regard for building movements to force institutional reform. Some may judge this as adventurist and utopian, but these groups at least provide alternatives to a politics that reduces the moments of rupture contained in grassroots student revolts into policy questions to be resolved by government.

The message to be taken from this section is that we need to develop a structural understanding of global austerity measures as the implementation of further wealth and power grabs by the ruling classes. We can't petition politicians to reverse neo-liberal reforms as if they were representing working people rather than the interests of capital. An analysis of neo-liberalism as such means we need to find ways of making our



Dispatches from a
Global Springtime

Max Kaiser

struggles revolutionary rather than reformist. The California section of *Springtime* is a useful exegesis of some experiments in this direction.

The last section in this volume regards Tunisia. The writings collected here are various incendiary commentaries calling for the downfall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the then Tunisian dictator. This is a tantalising preview of the subsequent political eruption that has taken place across the Arab—and indeed European—nations, defined by spontaneous and decentralised protests occupying public spaces, the creation of popular assemblies for decision making and the bringing down of governments. As I write, this phenomenon has spread as far as Israel, which has just seen the largest social justice protests in its history.

An unfortunate part of this book is its unwarranted inclusion of past writings from the revolts of the 1960s and 70s, containing everything from Eric Hobsbawm to Mick Jagger's *Street Fighting Man*. There are obviously good intentions behind these inclusions—a desire to situate the current uprisings historically—but, if

anything, they are politically flattening additions. One is reminded of Marx in the *18th Brumaire*:

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionising themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language.

Marx compares this phenomenon to that of the beginner learning a new language, always translating it back into her mother tongue. 'She assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses herself freely in it only when she moves in it without recalling the old and when she forgets her native tongue.'

As this volume suggests, we are becoming more comfortable with a new language of social upheaval, which certainly seems to be the case post Arab Spring. This new language is developed, though not fully embraced, in *Springtime*. **a**

book **A New Dangerous Class**

review by Godfrey Moase



A New Dangerous
Class

Godfrey Moase

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Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2011)

The Precariat is infuriatingly interesting. Its author Guy Standing, a professor of Economic Security at the University of Bath and a former economist for the International Labour Organisation, has set out to explain the rise of a new class, and explore the socio-political implications of this 'class-in-the-making'. *The Precariat's* originality lies in the journey on which the author takes the reader. Standing's starting point is simple enough: his understanding that we cannot return to a mythical Keynesian capitalist Golden Age where (nearly) everyone had a decent job.

Standing's central argument is that neo-liberal restructuring has shifted economic risk onto workers, and in turn created a new class—the precariat. This class can expect neither stability nor security; it is angry and divided. As such it is a dangerous class, susceptible to the influence of neo-fascist and/or authoritarian leaders. Only a new type of emancipatory politics which speaks to the needs and experiences of the precariat has any chance of achieving lasting positive social change.

For Standing, the precariat is the Other of the working class. It is the growing class of workers (and their families) who cannot access the multifaceted forms of labour security built up during the twentieth century by the union movement and social democratic parties. The creative dynamism of *The Precariat*, however, lies not in its identification of this new class but in mapping out the political implications of this

fundamental economic shift. In the context of recent political developments such as the UK riots, Standing at times writes with an uncanny prescience: 'Many in the precariat have lost (or fear losing) what little they had and are lashing out because they have no politics of paradise to draw them in better directions'.

Another interesting aspect of this book is its resurrection of the ancient Greek differentiation between both work/labour and leisure/play. Standing sees work as being a 'reproductive' activity necessary for the strengthening of the household as well as familial and social relationships. Work is the platform from which one can even begin to engage in paid labour. Leisure, in contrast to unthinking play, is 'participation in public life', whether that is in the cultural, artistic or political sphere. For Standing, it is the higher value that Western society accords labour over work and play over leisure that informs the precariat's malaise. Part of Standing's motivation in writing *The Precariat* is 'to rescue work that is not labour and leisure that is not play'.



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Only a new type of emancipatory politics which speaks to the needs and experiences of the precariat has any chance of achieving lasting positive social change.

With the marginalisation of true leisure comes the commodification of education. It may be my own personal bias (owing to my enormous student debt), but it seems that one of the strongest aspects of *The Precariat* is how Standing describes the commercialisation of higher education as feeding ‘disappointment and anger’. Education has gone from being an intrinsic to a contingent good, subservient to the process of profit-making. This means pushing more students through to graduation in any course where there is sufficient demand, regardless of the underlying merits.

It is unsurprising then that further education is trumpeted as a source of hope in a market economy—an individual can invest in their skills and thereby receive a higher income over time. Education is thus seen as contemporary alchemy—the magical answer to being dealt a raw start in the birth lottery. Standing, however, hits this myth hard. He calculates that in the United States alone ‘only a third of all new jobs will be available for young people who complete tertiary education’. The result is a generation of young graduates filling insecure and mindless jobs (if they’re lucky), burdened by the debt of a substandard education. As Standing highlights, the response of a contemporary graduate is almost akin to that of a Soviet worker: ‘They pretend to educate us; we pretend to learn’.

What makes *The Precariat* so fascinating is also what makes it so frustrating—Standing thrashing out the implications of the growth of the precariat. There were points in the book where I wanted to jump into the pages and start arguing with the author there and then. He writes of the need for the precariat to organise and have a collective voice in the public domain but he quickly considers and dismisses the utility of trade unions in this regard: ‘Progressives must stop expecting unions to become something contrary to their functions’.

At the heart of this dismissal of the union movement lies Standing’s positioning of the precariat as a new class with ‘interests [that] are not the same as those of ... core employees’. In attempting to illuminate the novelty of the precariat, Standing marginalises aspects of continuity. For example, he does not consider how perhaps the precariat is a novel way of keeping a reserve army of labour *in labour*—thereby maximising both productive activity and placing downward pressure on wages. After all, the rise of precariousness has

had a negative impact on the welfare and income of the ‘old’ industrial working class. Standing conflates how capital has changed the way it disciplines and controls labour since the 1970s with the creation of a new class that is discrete from the rest of the working class.

This in turn influences Standing’s treatment of the evidence he presents. Two examples are particularly jarring. Firstly, Standing writes that ‘more UK youth say they belong to the working class than think their parents belong to it’. Yet this claim is given no further consideration. I would have thought that an upswing in youth self-identifying as part of the working class would affect how to organise a generation. Secondly, Standing examines the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) 2010 inquiry into meat and poultry processing factories, contrasting the documented appalling conditions and practices in the industry (from seventeen-hour shifts to being unable to take toilet breaks) with the EHRC’s recommendation that ‘the industry should improve its practices voluntarily’. Yet Standing does not even ask why this inquiry started in the first place. The answer is that it was the state’s response to UK trade union Unite’s ‘Every Worker Counts’ campaign—a campaign that was directed towards UK supermarket giant Tesco. The campaign’s aim was to pressure Tesco to alter its meat supply chain so that no worker was employed in precarious or unethical conditions. For Unite, complaining to the EHRC was but one component of a campaign that united (largely white) core employees and migrant agency workers.

This dismissal of the trade union movement then hampers the rest of Standing’s strategic thinking. In outlining a politics of paradise, Standing puts forward both worker co-operatives and the universal basic income as positive policy solutions for the precariat. In dismissing the trade union movement and then moving to worker co-operatives, Standing misses how the interrelation and synthesis between the two movements could build a better future. As an example, US union United Steelworkers and the giant Spanish group of co-operatives, Mondragon, are in partnership to establish and invest in union co-operatives in the United States. In Australia the Earthworker co-operative has launched (at the Victorian Trades Hall) a union and community campaign to gain enough investors to build a solar heater factory. But as far as the universal basic income is concerned, it is hard to see how such a measure could become law without the support of organised labour. It can be no accident that Brazil, under the administration of the Workers Party (PT) President Lula da Silva—a former union leader—in 2004 became the first nation on earth to pass a commitment to introduce a basic income into law.

Strategically, Standing does recognise that the precariat cannot be organised in the same manner and with the same language as the twentieth-century industrial working class. The wider Australian progressive movement needs to propose more innovative solutions to growing precariousness than cite rates for all workers or casual conversion clauses in awards or enterprise agreements. Standing’s proposed ‘paradise’ is likewise persuasive: reconstructing dominant notions of ‘work’ so as to create a new economic system that avoids the constraints of the industrial era and addresses the chronic and multifaceted insecurity of the fast declining neo-liberal age.

Overall, *The Precariat* provides one of the more compelling structural explanations going around for a rise in right-wing populism throughout the Western world. Although it can be challenging and takes some unexpected directions, Standing has written a book that is vital to understanding the workings of the contemporary global economy. **a**

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A New Dangerous
Class

Godfrey Moase

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Habermas'
Achievement and
Critics

Norman Wintrop

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Flinders University,
South Australiabook **Habermas' Achievement and Critics**

review by Norman Wintrop

David Ingram, *Habermas: Introduction and Analysis* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2010); and Lasse Thomassen, *Habermas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, London, 2010)

Both of these books analyse and assess the enormous range of Habermas' writings. They concentrate on the texts that have established his reputation as a leading post-1945 philosopher, sociologist and political thinker, and both find in his work a combination of continuity and change.

However, where Thomassen emphasises a continuity in which each new stage of his thinking develops out of earlier work, Ingram detects what he considers to be an unfortunate break from Habermas' pre-1980s thinking. Indeed, Ingram's account of the post-1970s work is best described as a critique. Nevertheless he agrees with Thomassen about the erudition, originality and other outstanding qualities of Habermas' main texts, which both authors date from *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962).

In this work Habermas argued that the eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere, for all its patriarchal and other limitations, demonstrated the democratic potential of the evolving social life and institutions of modern Europe. His argument, however, was not that this potential for freedom, equality and solidarity has been actualised in capitalist democracies, rather that it has been distorted and suppressed by free-market and state capitalism, hierarchic and bureaucratic power structures, and the displacement of politics by a consumerism that has been pandered to by the mass media.

The next major book highlighted by Ingram and Thomassen is *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), a work that was firmly in the critical theory tradition of Habermas' Frankfurt School predecessors, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Its central propositions were that empirical sociologists and other social scientists should be more open to philosophic insights, and that instead of value freedom and an imagined neutrality they should commit themselves to promoting human welfare and liberation from irrational forms of domination.

The first of Habermas' books to receive international recognition, however, was his *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), which influenced the New Left and generated controversies about New Left politics. Its thesis was that post-war Keynesian and welfare-state reforms had constructed an 'advanced capitalism' which, contrary to its admirers, had not ended overproduction and other causes of economic crises, but had transferred their effects to the political arena. The main outcome, Habermas argued, would be persistent and worsening governmental difficulties in balancing welfare expenditure and private profits, unemployment and inflation, taxation and investment incentives, and the demands of voters and powerful pressure groups. These balancing acts were likely to lead to

mismanaged rather than efficiently managed economies, and to political parties and governments having their legitimation eroded.

But more than any other book, it was Habermas' two-volume *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) and its English translations (1984 and 1987) that became the foundation for his reputation. These volumes made rationality and rational communication central themes and ideals. Habermas argued that rationality should be understood, primarily, not as what was rational or irrational for persons but for communities. In order to sustain themselves, national and other communities required the co-operation of their members; a co-operation which, if it was not to be a product of coercion or deception, depended on speech and other communications being for the good of the community and having as their ends empirical truth and moral rightness. By contrast, modern individualist conceptions of rationality encouraged manipulative individual and group attitudes and irrational societies. They exemplified what earlier Frankfurt School theorists had called 'instrumental'; and Habermas 'strategic'; rationality.

Instrumental or strategic thinking refers to individuals and groups trying to apply the most efficient means for achieving their particular purposes, irrespective of the effects on others. It rests on the belief that goals and ends are subjective choices, between which there is no rational arbitration. At the most there are compromises. Instrumental rationality thus has a value-relativist conception of ends that Habermas believes offers little resistance to nihilism. He did not, however, challenge it by turning to pre-modern philosophical or religious traditions that drew moral criteria from ultimate universal principles and ends. Instead, he constructed and shaped what he called a post-metaphysical, 'discourse' ethical theory.

This discourse theory is intended to clarify and answer value, normative and moral questions by considering the likely results of rational communication. It appeals to what would be the most probable decisions reached by democratic discussions among equals, in which all participants had access to relevant information, were honest and avoided deception when communicating

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with one another, and no participants were more influential than others, unless it was due to the relevance of their contributions to common interests. Private interests are not excluded, but they have to be justified by reasons that others find acceptable. In such democratic discourse, unlike in instrumental reasoning, everything may be questioned. Ends as well as means, and value and normative as well as empirical claims, are all subject to argument, with reasons being given for and against. The idea that rationality, communication and democracy are interrelated and dependent on one another is therefore basic to the discourse theory of Habermas' *Communicative Action*.

A major political conclusion that follows from these close relations is that democracy should be understood and defined not in terms of voting but in terms of rational communication. It follows from such an understanding that Western democracies have many 'shortfalls', with their elections, party rivalries and pluralist pressure-group politics producing limited and deformed, rather than effective and substantive, forms of representative government. It also leads to Habermas contending that a primary cause of the shortfalls and defects of Western democracy is the subordination of politics to profit-driven market economies. This contention is partly expressed by the argument that systems colonise the lifeworld. 'Systems' are defined mainly as capitalist economies and bureaucratized legal and political power structures, in all of which instrumental rationality is dominant. The 'lifeworld', however, consists of those oases of rational communication that have managed to survive in parliaments, courts, universities, other branches of education, and elsewhere in public and private life.

Although Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, published in 1983, two years after *Communicative Action*, is not discussed in detail by either Ingram or Thomassen, both see it as illuminating the purposes of Habermas' work. It is a defence of reason, modernity and what has become known as the 'Enlightenment project', with its main target being postmodernist criticisms. Other targets include conservatives who follow Edmund Burke in opposing tradition to reason, social scientists who wish to restrict social change to piecemeal social engineering, and laissez-faire liberals for whom reason means little more than market exchanges between free individuals. Against all of them, Habermas insists that it is not reason and the Enlightenment project that are the underlying cause of the twentieth century's political disappointments—world wars and other disasters—but the abandonment of Enlightenment reason.

A more recent and larger scale political-philosophical text by Habermas, to which both Ingram and Thomassen pay considerable attention, is *Between Facts and Norms* (1992). In it, as in much of his subsequent work, Habermas examines and assesses national and international politics and law on the basis of his discourse theory. It is a book which Ingram and other critics of Habermas believe marks a profound change in his politics, from his being a radical social critic to a more moderate reformer of law, parliamentary democracy, economic globalisation and current politics.

Unlike Ingram, Habermas holds to the classical democratic-socialist view that if there is to be a serious challenge to contemporary political and economic structures that offers richer and superior ways of living to those of capitalist civilisation, then such a challenge must retain and build upon modern liberal and democratic political principles and institutions. Ingram, by contrast, contends that the links between the so-called liberal-democratic politics and institutions of Western nations, and those of contemporary global capitalism and neo-imperialism, are so strong that the politics that Habermas derives from communicative rationality and action cannot break them. Only revolutionary struggles, beginning with mass national and international protest movements, have the necessary strength. Curiously, although this objection to Habermas' politics

comes as a left-wing criticism, it rests on a conservative premise: the inability of reason to overcome human folly and wickedness. Along similar lines, Ingram also criticises Habermas' thinking on international law and politics.

In recent years, especially in his writings as a public intellectual, Habermas has sought to promote moves towards global governance, but governance that falls short of a world state. He urges greater co-operation between nations, especially on matters of human rights, the modifying of national claims to sovereignty, making the European Union more unified and democratic and using it as a model for other regional associations, and widening, codifying and strengthening international treaties and laws. He also advocates a radical reform of the United Nations. Ideally it should become a kind of world parliament with two houses, one for the representatives of national governments and the other, as far as it is possible, for the world's citizens.

These proposals, which owe much to Immanuel Kant's thinking about how nations can attain perpetual peace, are part of a cosmopolitan project that Habermas sees as an alternative to the United States' quest for international hegemony, for the neo-liberal dream that global markets be substituted for global politics, and for a world divided between rival hemispheric power blocs. For Ingram, however, Habermas' cosmopolitan project and proposals are unachievable. They defy the entrenched interconnections between international treaties and law, and regional associations and the United Nations, on the one hand, and global capitalism and superpower politics on the other.

On these criticisms of Habermas by Ingram and others, Thomassen says little and concentrates on exegesis. But despite this and other differences between their books, both can be recommended. Their authors succeed in putting the English translations of Habermas' often highly technical and complex analyses into clearer English, though Ingram is a little less successful at this, as he tends to be overfond of abstractions. The main difference between their books is probably that Thomassen's, as its title indicates, is addressed to university students and others who find Habermas' work too far-ranging or otherwise difficult, while Ingram's longer and more ambitious book is intended more for academic specialists and other readers already familiar with Habermas' work. **[a]**

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Habermas'
Achievement and
Critics

Norman Wintrop

book Hitchens vs. Blair

review by Ramon Glazov

Rudyard Griffiths (ed.), *Hitchens vs. Blair* (Allen & Unwin, 2011)

In the middle of his debate with Tony Blair on the benevolence of religion, an event that took place in Toronto, November 2010—the transcript of which forms the basis of this book—Christopher Hitchens makes a curious remark: ‘If I was a member of a church that had preached that AIDS was not as bad as condoms, I’d be putting some conscience money into Africa, too’. Let’s rephrase that a little: ‘If I’d spent most of the noughties supporting a war that caused over a million civilian deaths, turned Iraq into an Iranian vassal state and eroded the US economy, I’d be putting some conscience money into “New Atheism” too.’

See, if you keep your ideas at a perfect 60:40 balance between neo-conservatism and fluffy liberalism, you can trick the chattering classes into calling you a ‘free thinker’. You don’t even need any original ideas, so long as you can mix old ones nimbly enough to ‘avoid categorisation’. Cheer when NATO kills Serbian civilians, but attack Clinton for adultery. Embrace atheism, but insist that a foetus is an unborn child.

This is a sign of depth to some people, who assume there’s a powerful, unique philosophy lurking behind all those disparate opinions. But in fact right-wing politics is full of supposed mavericks—libertarian hipsters (the so-called *South Park* Republicans) do it all the time. ‘I might support keeping our troops in Af-Pak, cutting health and education, slashing welfare, climate change denial and union busting but, hey, I’m all for gay marriage and legal weed, so you can’t just put me in a box, dude!’ Hitch, too, should only fool you if you give the same weight to every policy position: ‘+1 Left Point for being in favour of medical marijuana, +1 Right Point for supporting a trillion-dollar war—I guess that’s what a centrist looks like’.

Since he’s debating a fellow Bush sycophant, we have to wait for audience question time before someone points to the elephant in the room: how does Hitchens reconcile his Dubya-loving with Bush’s ‘very public evocation of faith in terms of his rhetoric around the invasion’? Hitch starts to sweat. ‘I don’t think you can point out any moment’, he says, ‘when George W. Bush said ... he had any divine warrant for the intervention in Iraq.’ True, Bush mightn’t have used that exact wording, but he got over 60 per cent of the Southern Baptist vote in two elections and a key part of his support came from fundamentalist evangelicals. His party was (and still is) full of anti-abortionist snake-handlers. Bush was in bed with these people at every level.

It gets stranger. Hitchens spends most of the debate accusing Catholicism and Islam of being bloodthirsty. But then, in a huge backflip, he claims that ‘what’s surely striking’ about the Iraq War debate ‘is the unanimous opposition of every single Christian church to it, including the president’s own and without doubt

the prime minister’s own’. Really? Is that the best he can produce? A few pages earlier, he was trashing the Irish for ‘killing each other’s children’ and Rwandan Catholics for ‘preach[ing] genocide from the pulpits’. Now his issue is with ‘sickly, Christian passivity’. One moment Catholicism is ‘a kind of divine North Korea’ then, apparently, it’s not fascist enough.

Hitchens also needs an excuse to let Judaism off the hook. He’s too cowardly to pick the same fights with Jews that he picks with Muslims. Hitchens insists, in a post-debate interview with *Maclean’s* magazine:

Judaism is much nearer to being philosophy than religion, or rather much nearer to that claim than Christianity or Islam are ... Leo Strauss thought that the great Jewish philosopher Maimonides wasn’t a believer, but that he just dressed himself up in that way.

Like most great Sephardic theologians, Maimonides lived in Cordoba under Islamic rule and picked up Greek philosophy from the surrounding Muslims—the same Muslims who reintroduced Aristotle to Christian Europe. Hitch, please! If you’re trying to argue that Judaism is more philosophical—more capital ‘E’ Enlightened—than Islam, don’t use the twelfth century as your proof.

As for Blair: ‘it is undoubtedly true that people commit horrific acts of evil in the name of religion. It is also undoubtedly true that people do acts of extraordinary common good inspired by religion’. And later: ‘there are many situations where faith has caused harm. But there are many situations in which wrong has been done without religion playing any part in it at all’. Despite having sat in the House of Commons for nearly twenty-four years, Blair debates like a schoolie. He never goes on the offensive, and Hitchens promptly beats him.

Neither define what they mean by ‘religion’ or ‘good’ at any point in the debate, rendering the whole argument meaningless. ‘Good’ according to whom? The Pope? Karl Marx? Ayn Rand? The Marquis de Sade? And are we talking about ‘religion’ in the sense of blind faith (in which case, neo-liberals are probably religious since they worship a murky abstract deity called the market, to which earthly regulators are supposed to relinquish control)? Or ‘religion’ as a form of identity politics stemming from social background? And are these the only options? No one really addresses this issue. Hitchens is too busy with his revisionist take on the Bush era and Blair too busy washing his hands of the tragedy that was his Iraq. **a**

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Hitchens vs. Blair

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Knowledge Markets

Simon Cooper

Scholarly publishing: information monopolies and the decline of trust

Earlier this year Aaron Swartz, a US writer and political activist, was arrested and charged with wire fraud, computer fraud and unlawfully obtaining information from a protected computer. Swartz had entered the MIT campus and used MIT computers to download thousands of scholarly articles. Despite the fact that JSTOR (the owners of the database containing the articles) stated that they had suffered no damage from Swartz's actions and had asked the US government not to proceed with prosecution, the government went ahead and arrested Swartz. He now faces up to thirty-five years in prison. The charges focus not on the act of accessing and downloading articles *per se*, but that Swartz had downloaded too many articles at once and that by exceeding the publisher's license agreement he was engaged in serious hacking. Such zealous pursuit of intellectual property, in spite of the wishes of the 'aggrieved' party, indicates the degree to which knowledge capitalism has become an entrenched phenomenon.

The basis for prosecution, that Swartz was downloading the articles so as to redistribute them freely via torrent sites, is unlikely given the unwieldy result of such an action: lacking the search functions and architecture of JSTOR originals the information would be largely useless to any downloader. In fact Swartz's previous work dealt with tracing the funding sources of legal research, where nearly half a million articles were analysed. Thus his actions make sense as a means of generating large scale quantitative data rather than internet hacking or piracy.

Swartz's case has renewed focus upon the role of contemporary scholarly publishing and the related question of access. In 2002 Paul James and Douglas McQueen-Thompson pointed out in *Arena Journal* that the rising costs of individual academic journals and the various strategies used by transnational academic publishers were creating a market monopoly from the products of publically funded labour. Corporate takeovers of journals once run by groups of academics and individual university departments, the creation of software to measure citations and impacts (owned by the same publishing companies), hyperlinked footnotes that lead to other articles within the publisher's 'stable', and the growing emphasis on the journal articles as a measure of academic distinction has meant that within a decade the whole field of scholarly publishing changed. Prices went up, editorial practices became more impersonal and disconnected from place and institution, outputs became more frequent and the link between academic research and public debate became more tenuous.

The situation today is even direr. Paper-based journals are in the minority and the majority of articles are found online. This has a twofold effect on access—members of the public can no longer simply walk into a library and obtain a journal from the shelves; they have to be paid-up members of an institution. Outside of university membership, public libraries have their own difficulties—in an era of budget cuts, database subscriptions are often the first thing to go. A lack of paper content impacts not just upon current journals but archives as well. Many libraries jettison their hard-copy holdings for reasons of space or 'convenience' but if the subscription is not kept up, access to past and present research disappears.

The result of all this is that the handful of transnational journal

publishers that dominate the landscape find themselves the beneficiary of the current environment of academia where universities, faculties and departments compete with each other for funds—with journal publication a key measure of performance. While universities jostle for meagre funding and staff complain routinely of the pressures of overproduction, the winners are commercial publishers that derive huge profits from publically subsidised work. At the same time these publishers limit the degree to which research is able to circulate in the public domain.

JSTOR is a relatively benign organisation, though it still can cost to up to \$20 for an individual article, which is prohibitively expensive for independent researchers. Commercial publishers such as Sage, Elsevier, Springer and Wiley, however, can easily charge triple this amount for individual articles. Journal subscription prices have rocketed, with some science journals now costing \$20,000 a year. It is getting to the stage where many university libraries cannot afford such costs, so access to research and archival material is lost. A new division between 'elite' universities and the rest opens up, with only a select few academics being able to read essential material. While in theory the digitisation of information makes it easier to circulate, the larger framework of knowledge capitalism means that intellectual property regimes have been strengthened. Copyright laws in many countries have been extended, and previously free information has been recommodified, which is why it still costs money to download a paper by Albert Einstein.

There have been attempts to address this situation. Some academics place their material on their homepage, and some open access journals do exist. But alternatives like these have been hindered by the degree to which scholars remain attached to 'known' journals (even as these are taken over by corporate publishers), and the rise of auditing regimes which use citation statistics and the like to favour commercially produced journals that have widespread distribution patterns. A return to more locally based forms of co-operative publishing among scholars would redress the situation but the current disposition of universities is unlikely to see any value in such an arrangement.

The corporatisation of the university and the commercialisation of knowledge have restricted wider access to research at a time where 'trust' in information is at an all-time low. To some extent this is due to the changed way in which we engage with news and information. The transformation of the public sphere via the internet has increased public participation but also led to the creation of customised information environments where users can privatise their information needs. Geert Lovink has noted the decline of the 'netizen', a representative figure of moderation and tolerance

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prominent in the early culture of the internet. Lovink argues that the netizen has largely disappeared in today's polarised information landscape. Discussion and debate has been subsumed by the rise of extreme opinions that never need engage with alternative viewpoints. This kind of information bunkering does not simply occur on the net, however. Lovink's depiction of the change in net culture might equally apply to the practices of the Murdoch press, among others.

One of the strongest elements of Robert Manne's recent *Quarterly Essay* on Murdoch concerned the comprehensive distortion of the debate around climate change in *The Australian*. Manne convincingly argued that the newspaper 'had waged war on science and reason' by publishing 'scores of articles' from the few scientists who rejected the overwhelming consensus on climate change, and even more articles rejecting climate change by writers with little or no scientific background at all. The deeply partisan nature and insularity of *The Australian* could not have been symbolised better than by Paul Kelly's no-show at a debate with Manne—*The Australian* only likes to talk to itself.

Whether the Australian government's various media inquiries will be able to address the problems of ownership and accountability, trust and diversity remain an open question. The lack of focus upon media ownership means that the distortions made possible through media monopolies are likely to continue. It would be a shame, however, if the monopolies of print and broadcast media were allowed to encroach further into new media. Despite the tendency for net culture to fragment into communities of sameness, the digitisation of the media also contains the potential for more accountability in terms of public debate.

Whatever significance one might attach to Julian Assange's philosophy of radical transparency, his more modest project of 'scientific journalism'—where journalists work with documents placed in the public domain so that members of the public can check and engage with the same material—is a step towards the restoration of trust in the media. In the United Kingdom, *The Guardian* used a version of this model with respect to the politicians' expenses scandal and the cables released by WikiLeaks. In an age of declining trust the sharing of source information between media organisations and the public can open up new forms of exchange.

This is why the privatisation of public research—the locking up of academic research behind paywalls and prohibitively expensive journals—needs to be contested. How can there be an adequate debate over climate change or genetic engineering if information cannot enter the public domain? One of the casualties of the degradation of the public sphere has been the status of informed opinion and expertise. Nowhere is this more evident than in the cynicism about scientific evidence of global warming, although one does not have to go far to see other instances of the marginalisation of experts. The main purpose of university research is to foster a critical and interpretative culture, not generate profits for publishers by renting out material whose production they never funded in the first place. Brecht once asked whether the greater crime lay in robbing a bank or starting one. In the case of Aaron Swartz and the corporate publishers, one also has to ask where the real crime lies. **a**



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