

The Slaves' Chorus

Posts from 2016



Ronald G Young
2017

This too will pass.....taking the long view

Historians like Arthur Schlesinger and theorists like Albert Hirschman have recorded that every thirty years or so, society shifts - essentially, from the public to the private and back again. The grass, after a while, always feels greener on the other side. The late 1940s to the late 1970s was a period of the public, the late '70s to now, the private. Now the conditions are right for another turn, to a new common life and the security and freedom it affords, but only if we make it happen by tackling a market that is too free and a state that is too remote

Compass Think Tank 2011

Decade	Themes of intellectual discussion	Key names
1930s	The managerial revolution End of capitalism Lebensraum/fascism	J Burnham J Strachey Hitler
1940s	Keynesianism Meritocracy New world order	JM Keynes Beveridge/Michael Young R Niebuhr, EH Carr
1950s	End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour	D. Bell A. Shonfield; Tony Crosland JK Galbraith
1960s	Corporate planning, management Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals	R Ackoff, Peter Drucker Peter Berger C Pateman; Ivan Illich
1970s	Costs of economic growth Public choice theory Small is beautiful Change Corporatism feminism	EJ Mishan J Buchanan E. Schumacher; L. Kohr S. Beer; A. Toffler; D. Schon A Cawson Betty Friedan
1980s	Deindustrialisation Privatisation Pursuit of excellence ecology decentralisation globalisation	Blackaby; Dyson Consultancies; World Bank Tom Peters James Lovelock OECD J Stiglitz, Martin Wolf
1990s	End of history Flexibility and reengineering Reinvention of government; NPM Climate change The learning organisation Washington consensus	F Fukayama M Hammer D Osborne, OECD Scientific community P Senge World Bank
2000s	Good governance Neo-liberalism and its limits Environmental collapse Migration and social integration	World bank; OECD David Harvey Scientific community C Cauldwell
2010s	financial capitalism austerity Migration Inequality Populism	J Stiglitz M Blyth D Dorling, Wilkinson and Pickett, T Pikety ???
present	The commons Post-capitalism populism	J Rifkin P Mason

Source; RG Young

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PREFACE

I've been blogging since 2009, with a [resignation from a major project in China](#) I was leading in 2010 leading to a slow withdrawal from the paid labour front and giving me more time to enjoy the stretch of country between the Carpathians (where I summer) and the Balkans (where I winter) and to read, write.....and muse.....

Last year I put the year's posts in chronological order - setting out in an Intro why I thought the blog was worth reading as well as exploring why some of us have developed this blogging habit....



My claim for the reader's attention is simply expressed -

- experience in a variety of sectors (and countries) - normally closely manned with "gatekeepers"
- the compulsion (from some 50 years), to record what I felt were the lessons of each experience in short papers
- Long and extensive reading
- A "voice" which has been honed by the necessity of speaking clearly to audiences of different nationalities and class
- intensive trawling of the internet for wide range of writing
- notes kept of the most important of those readings
- shared in hyperlinks with readers

I confess somewhere to an aversion to those writers (so many!) who try to pretend they have a unique perspective on an issue and whose discordant babble make the world such a difficult place to understand. I look instead for work which, as google puts it, builds on the shoulders of others.....my role in a team is that of the [resource person](#)....who finds and shares material....

I think my father's spirit is evident in the format and discipline of the blogpost - he was a Presbyterian Minister who would, every Saturday evening, take himself off to his study to anguish over his weekly sermon which he would duly deliver from the pulpit the next morning.....

I looked recently at how I set out, all of 7 years ago, my motives for starting the blog -

I started this blog to try to make sense of the organisational endeavours I've been involved in; to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour which used to be known as "social justice". My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation

I read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time or inclination - as

well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium.

A final motive for the blog is more complicated - and has to do with life and family. Why are we here? What have we done with our life? What is important to us? Not just professional knowledge - but what used to be known, rather sexistically, as "wine, women and song" - for me now in the autumn of my life as wine, books and art...

I can see a glimmer there of the Protestant need to justify that a life has been a "well lived" one and has given something back - an almost spiritual "giving of account"!!

I have grown to appreciate the discipline involved in marshalling one's thoughts around a theme (in my father's case it was a biblical quotation).

I rather like the format of a blogpost of some 700 words (at most a couple of pages). Management guru [Charles Handy](#) famously said that he had learned to put his thoughts in 450 words as a result of the "Thought for the Day" BBC programme to which he was a great contributor.

For me a post written 4-5 years ago is every bit as good as (perhaps better than) yesterday's - but the construction of blogs permits only the most recent posts to be shown. A book format, on the other hand, requires that we begin.....at the beginning ... It also challenges the author to reflect more critically on the coherence of his thinking



Since the late-60s, I've been involved in various forms of "development" efforts - first "community" and "urban/regional" development in Scotland (with a touch of organisational development) then, since 1990, "institutional" and "capacity" development in Central Europe and Central Asia. Now, however with many others, I question the very concept of development....Indeed the title I gave a little (autobiographical) book in 1995 was PUZZLING DEVELOPMENT (A few years later

a collection of essays was called "[In Transit- notes on good governance](#)")

For most of the 70s and 80s I tried to straddle the worlds of teaching and politics- lacking the patience and discipline to keep my nose to any single intellectual grindstone - choosing rather to be a "reflective doer".....a butterfly chasing issues such as social injustice, organisational malaise, community business....National journals (such as *Social Work Today*; *Local Government Studies*, *Community Care*) were happy to take my long pieces (with titles such as "What Sort of Overgovernment?" and "Must the System always win?")

But, exciting as all this was, it couldn't make up for the fact that there was no security in what I was doing (elections of one sort or another every 2 years); and that I had basically sacrificed whatever career I might have hoped for in academia....Several winters of depression eventually led to my resignation from teaching - and to 5 years as a full-time politician.

In 1990 I got the chance of a 6 month assignment to the Head of WHO Europe's Health Promotion Division followed for the next 22 years by a roving mission in some 8 post-communist countries whose government DNAs I was trying to crack... Little wonder that I have developed an almost anthropological fascination for intellectual fashions and become increasingly sceptical of the baggage of social scientists. **The table on the first page is an update of a doodle I did about 20 years ago - trying to capture the main themes of debate in European and north American societies since the 1930s....**

**My position is that no one (but no one) can pretend to expertise in the field of social science - knowledge has become too specialised and diverse
The claims of social "scientists" to expertise have been thoroughly exposed in recent years**



Most of the reproductions are taken from my own collection of almost 200 oil paintings (mostly Bulgarian) and a similar number of aquarelles and graphics.....

Grigor Naidenov frequented Sofia's cafes in the interbellum period, throwing off aquarelles - his "conductor" is on the cover - followed by a Russe Ganchev (1895-1975) view of the Danube; a Peter Tergiev collage (of Bulgarian village life) starts the Preface with Yuliana Sotirova's gurgling river and one of the Vassil Vulev's (1934-) gouaches finishing the sequence

INTRODUCTION



It was in 2000 that I began to feel deep unease about the direction societies (with which I was familiar) seemed to be taking - increasing privilege, systemic corruption, centralization, ecological destruction, "consumerism", poverty, privatisation and a failure of European vision were the things I listed in a paper I circulated amongst friends in an effort to clarify where I should be putting my energies and resources when I found myself with more time.

I itemized the people and organisations whose work I admired; regretted the lack of impact they were having; and then explored what channels we seemed to have for making more of an impact.

A decade later - after the bursting of the bubble - I returned to the subject and beefed up the paper - the results of which can be read at [Draft Guide for the Perplexed](#)

But full-time projects still required my attention in Central Asia and Bulgaria during that period when I was also articulating an increasingly sharp critique of the assumptions of the sort of development assistance with which I was involved - eg [Play the Long Game, not the logframe](#) (2011)

With more time at my disposal from 2009, I started a blog about my various experiences - generally inspired (or angered) by an article or book I had read relating to my disparate interests in what we might call the field of "social endeavour" - and developed the habit of excerpting and including relevant hyperlinks.

At the time I suggested that any convincing argument for systemic reform needed to tackle four questions -

- Why we need major change in our systems?
- Who or what is the cause of the malaise we feel?
- What "programme" might start a significant change process?
- What "mechanisms" (process or institutions) do we need to implement such programmes?

Most books in this field focus more on the first two questions - and are much lighter on the last two questions (the awkward nature of the terms I have put in inverted commas is my attempt to distinguish loose "social" from more deliberative "political" processes of change).

The first two questions require pretty demanding analytical skills - of an interdisciplinary sort which, as I've argued, the very structure of universities actively discourages.

It is regrettable that the [literature of change is more evident in the fields of management and of development aid](#) than it is in the field of politics.....Money drives the first two - but ideological preferences the last..

As an avid reader for more than half a century, I have become more and more aware of the shortcomings of most recently-published non-fiction books. Their bibliographies may look impressive and their chapter headings riveting - but the books increasingly suffer, in my view, from the following sorts of deficiencies -

- They are written by academics - who write for students and other academics
- and lack "hands-on" experience of other worlds
- the author's speciality indeed is a sub-discipline - eg financial economics
- the focus is a fashionable subject
- written with deadlines to meet commercial demands
- making claims to originality
- but failing to honour the google scholar adage of "standing on the shoulders of giants" (despite - perhaps even because of - the extensive bibliographies)

I now have a litmus test for any book which catches my eye - actually not one but three -

- Does it reveal in its preface/introduction and bibliography an intention to build on the best of what has been written before on the subject?
- Indeed does it clearly list and comment on what has been identified as the key reading and indicate why, despite such previous efforts, the author feels compelled to add to our reading burden??? And can you, the reader, identify any obvious gaps in that list?
- Can the author clearly demonstrate (eg in the introduction or opening chapter) that the book is the result of long thought and not just an inclination to jump on the latest bandwagon?

In autumn 2014 I was so fed up with the constant emphasis by reformist writers on the "novelty" of their particular interpretation of the global crisis - and their failure even to try to find common ground with the thousands of other radicals - that I set up a new website [Mapping the Common Ground - ways of thinking about the crisis](#). Its purpose was to try to archive key books and articles which would help those wanting to get some guidance around the impossibly confusing literature on our social and organisational malaisesee, for example, [this section of the library](#)

Every now and again, my posts return to this theme - the September version bears the title [Despatches to the post-capitalist Generation](#).

I have posted a lot less frequently this year despite (or perhaps because of) the huge events which have marked 2016 - Brexit and Trump's massive upset.

I try to avoid mainstream media, preferring more marginal writing - so was prepared for the outcomes of those two votes. But the Brexit vote in particular was like a kick in the stomach.... ..my EU citizenship, after all, gives me more significant freedoms (to travel and reside) than does my British citizenship.... So almost a third of the posts dealt with these 2 issues....

As befits a blog whose title refers to two mountain ranges a similar number of posts deal with my (generally very pleasant) experiences of living in Bulgaria and Romania - particular experiences relating to art and wine.....

The final bunch of posts have more miscellaneous topics, generally occasioned by my reading..... or viewing (documentaries have been an important discovery for me this past year)

The cliff face is Veliko Tarnovo by Stoian Vassilev (1904-1977)

British Exit? Sleepwalking again???

The Introduction to my new book [In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#) reviews its 130 plus posts and suggests that the "Elephant in the Room" (ie the big issue which failed to be mentioned in my late posts of 2014 or those of 2015) was.....Brexit - ie the possibility of British exit from the European Union and the knock-on effects on Europe.....

My blog may have a clear policy of ignoring the chatter which passes for political commentary but I do not avoid big issues eg the nature of contemporary capitalism; the health of our democratic institutions; or the swings of public opinion...I did, after all, devote a lot of posts last year to the [question of Scotland leaving the "united kingdom"](#).

My failure to devote even a single post to what is the increasing possibility of British withdrawal from the EU was not a deliberate decision; rather a reflection of the absence of any SERIOUS discussion in British journals or publications about the issue....



As long as the referendum which the British PM had promised on the question of continued British membership of the European Union seemed to be in 2017 - and we were sitting in 2014 (when a Scottish breakaway was the threat) or 2015 (when so many other issues jostled for our attention), 2017 seemed so far away.

But here we are in 2016 and there is [suddenly talk that the government might put the issue to a vote in the summer of this year!!](#) And I don't see any serious discussion of what's involved. Or rather, I see a lot of press coverage of the Prime Minister's tactical discussions with European partners as he attempts to negotiate a new package which would satisfy the majority of his party (and citizens) - who profess increased distaste for the European project (see this European Council for Foreign Relations briefing [for graphs on how the support for Europe has trended](#) in recent years).

But I am aware of very little which would be of any help to the citizen who actually wants a reasoned assessment of what withdrawal would actually mean - in economic or political terms. A couple of Labour MPs have written about it - Pat McFadden in a pamphlet [What would Out look](#)

[like?](#) and Dennis McShane in a book [Brexit - how Britain will leave Europe](#) whose argument is rather sullied by his recent conviction for over-zealous expenses claims....

The European Union is its own worst enemy. Reform of such a sclerotic system of policies, institutions and above all power does indeed seem to be almost impossible. Behind the rigid institutions and policies lies the apparently invincible power of the permanent technocrats with their inflated salaries and protected status (I know because for almost a year I worked there!!) And yet the idea of the UK's withdrawal fills me with deep unease.

I'll try to explain why in future posts - while still trying to retain the respect I always try to grant the specific arguments I encounter.....

January 13

[David Bowie's "Must-Read" list](#)



Most of us resist the idea of our own mortality but, come the sudden passing of younger people who had some significance in our lives, we develop an almost morbid fascination with the prospect.....

We expect 98-year olds like Denis Healey, Helmut Schmidt and Albert Hirschman to pass away but the sudden deaths of David Bowie and [Alan Rickman](#) bring a powerful wake-up call to people of my age

I was, as it happens, in the middle of a large biography of Hirschman - [Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman](#) (the link gives an excellent overview of both the man and the book) - who died 3 years ago and was one of the greatest exponents of the nature and importance of challenging the "conventional thinking" and of "intellectual trespassing"...This has inspired me to devote a post to him....., But bear with me for a day or so while I collect and edit the numerous other goodies which cyberspace offers about the various sides to his life which I think his biographer has caught well with the term "odyssey".

In the meantime, Daniela and I were intrigued by the list of [David Bowie's 100 "Must-Read" books](#) which is part of a current exhibition in Ontario. Daniela is Romanian and had access in the 70s and 80s to the Romanian translations of not only Western classics but contemporary American and European texts which (despite the repression) were available after Ceaucescu struck his maverick stance in the Eastern bloc (most Romanians are proud of their country's refusal to join the 1968 repression of Czechoslovak liberties).

But she recognized only a few of the titles in Bowie's list - and has raised the interesting question of the "East-West gap" in mutual understanding of one another's literature (and cultures generally).

My Balkans residency of the past decade has made me more sensitive to the wonder that was 20th century Central European literature (my five page recommended reading list for Romania can

be accessed at section 4 of [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#)- although I cheated by including some English novels with a Romanian theme!).

The reading public, it seems, are developing a new interest in translations of older writers such as [Joseph Roth](#) and [Hans Fallada](#) who, however well-known in their home country, made little or no impact in English-speaking countries. The [New York Review of Books classic series](#) started a few years back to repair this fault - and there are also some great titles of mid-century central European books at small publishers such as the Pushkin Press.

Most of the works offer much more powerful writing than that from contemporary writers of the English-speaking world - however hyped the latter is. So there is every incentive to start using these catalogues.

Five years ago, the Guardian actually ran a fascinating series on world literature, inviting readers to suggest books eg this was [its Polish invitation](#) and this a [nice tabular presentation](#) of the final results.

[Chinese](#) and then [Russian](#) literature were also presented in the same way

No fewer than 200 books get close analysis in [these results of a reader's survey about French literature](#) - and more than 150 in [this survey of German literature](#).

Almost 100 novels get the treatment in [this table about Indonesia](#)

[Indian literature is analysed here](#) - and [Columbia rounds up the survey with this table](#)

Other countries were covered but without the tabulated results but, with this link, you can hunt down the ones of interest.....

But a few hundred responses don't suggest English readers' familiarity with foreign - let alone "Eastern" - literature. And of course most of this material covers novels - whereas Bowie's list is more general.

It also makes me realize that there at least three types of lists of what we might call "significant reads"

- those we once liked - which made an early personal impact eg early seminal reading - some examples of mine were captured in [this 2009 post](#)
- Those which matter - [which made an impact on our collective social understanding](#) (many of which we may not actually have read personally - let alone liked. (here's a short list I made for [the period from the 1970s](#))
- Those we like now - which might be recommended or bought for family and friends. I have apparently [done one list of favourite book - but it was some time ago](#) (December 2010)

Interestingly, central Europeans dominate that second list (although, thanks to Hitler, many of them wrote their most famous work in American English). And that's where perhaps a major shift has taken place.....in the 1930s European intellectual and literary writing was at the heart of the world's thinking - now it's at the periphery.....

Five years on - and while the snow lies thick on the ground, it will be interesting to do an update of the last list

Sunday, January 17, 2016

From Freud to Focus Groups

Television is banned from two of the three places I currently call home but a Torrent service I have access to in Sofia has, over the past few months, allowed me to view, on my PC, films (but of my choice), presentations - by people such as [Varoufakis](#) - and documentaries.

The experience makes me begin to question my previous reluctance to allow moving images into my home.....and [Frankie Boyle](#) is all to blame.....He is perhaps one of the most outrageous comedians ever to walk a stage (more risqué by far than my old

favourites of [Little Britain](#)) and has recently taken the unusual step of starting to write for the Guardian. I almost split a rib laughing at [his article](#) in today's paper. I do understand that humour doesn't easily cross borders (and his accent certainly doesn't) but this excerpt will give a sense of his style...



The Labour party has, from the beginning, been made up of diverse factions; that's its beauty - asking it to become cohesive is like trying to find one shampoo that will care for the hair of everybody in Angelina Jolie's house. Until recently, Labour politicians have been scared to tell anyone their opinions as they had to have one that appealed to every single person in the country. Under Ed Miliband the current manifesto would just say: "Good Adele's back, isn't it?"

A certain nostalgia in the parliamentary party is inevitable: it's hard to deny Blair helped to create a powerful movement. Unfortunately that movement was the Islamic State.

I started to read the discussion thread (2425 comments already!!) but, typically, got sidetracked early on by a reference to a documentary about the role of Saudi Arabia in post-war politics which turned out to be a mind-blowing piece - [Bitter Lake](#) - from [Adam Curtis](#), the Director of a powerful series I saw some years back called [The Century of the Self](#) which advances the thesis that Freud's views of the [unconscious](#) set the stage for corporations, and later politicians, to market to our unconscious fears and desires. It shows how advertising once aimed to influence rational choice. This gave way in the early 20th century to advertising aimed to connect feelings with a product.

Amazingly enough, at the root of this change was Sigmund Freud's nephew, [Edward Bernays](#), an American propagandist in WWI, who applied his wartime experience and his uncle's theories of the unconscious to peacetime commerce. He invented the field of public relations, popularized press releases and product tie-ins, and changed public opinion about matters ranging from women smoking to the use of paper cups — all to increase sales.

Viewing politics as just another product to sell, Bernays also helped Calvin Coolidge stage one of the first overt media acts for a president, and helped engineer the 1954 coup in Guatemala on behalf of his client the United Fruit Company, by painting their democratically elected leader as communist. This and more happens in just the first hour of the documentary, titled "Happiness Machines."



The second part focuses on the ascendancy of psychoanalysis and Anna Freud's consolidation of power. The point here is that the unconscious was seen as a dangerous menace that needed to be kept under lock and key. Rational choice, especially by crowds, was unreliable under its influence, so "guidance from above" (in Bernays' words) was needed from political leaders and corporations for the public good.

The conformity and mass-marketing of the 1950s reflects this view of a public that cannot be trusted to think for itself. The pendulum swings the other way in the third and best installment, "There is a Policeman Inside All Our

Heads [and] He Must be Destroyed."

By the 1960s the [human potential movement](#) urged the expression of impulses instead of their repression. Business was eager to help. By marketing products as a means of self-expression, business turned from channelling public impulses to pandering to them. There is a fascinating discussion in the film about political activism being co-opted in this process: making the world a better place gave way to making oneself better in ways that, not coincidentally, required buying more goods and services.

The final segment, called "Eight People Sipping Wine in Kettering," follows this impulse-pandering into politics. Instead of political leadership we now have politics led by focus groups. The public gets what it asks for not what it needs (healthcare and infrastructure improvements).

You can read the [full script here](#) and view [the documentary itself here](#).

Good documentaries require a rare combination - knowledge of the subject, experience of filming, appropriate selection and editing of text, images and music, and appreciation of how to fit them together. One of the best websites for challenging documentaries must be [Thought Maybe](#) - which I thoroughly recommend. You might also like this list of [the best 50 documentaries of all time](#) - from the excellent Sight and Sound journal.

Vassil Vulev's (1934-) women open the post - followed by Dobre Dobrev's (1898-1973) reading lady

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

[What Happens after Postmodernity?](#)

The ice and cold (minus 20 during the nights and minus 14 during daytime) are huge incentives to curl up with a good book (or documentary). The "Century of the self" documentary series I covered in my last post resonates with me - not least because it throws light on the huge changes which were taking place as I was growing up....

I was in my mid-teens when Vance Packard's [The Hidden Persuaders](#) (1957) began to make waves and I do remember the excited talk, in the aftermath of the Korean

war, of "brainwashing" techniques.....This [article nicely captures](#) the debates of the time - and JK Galbraith's [The New Industrial State](#) (1967) confirmed the view of our generation that large companies basically gave us what they considered good for them - rather than for us....

The youthful rebelliousness of that period, I have to confess, left me behind. What I hadn't realized was the role encounter groups then played in the direction young American activists took post-1968 when they became disillusioned with political action - and turned instead to personal or group therapy as a new form of politics. Social change, for this generation, was apparently to take place by osmosis - rather than through political parties. I was certainly aware of "flower power" in the 60s but missed its (alleged) "social edge".

Where the documentary is perhaps more convincing is in its portrayal of the concern of the corporate world that the "live for today" attitude of that generation was threatening the impetus generated by the second world war for higher living standards...and how psychologists and social scientists were enrolled to deliver - through focus groups - a sophisticated understanding of the new individualism - and how it could be corralled for corporate interests...

The Protestant ethic may have been dismantled at one level (with its notion, for example, of "saving for the future") but at another it was arguably being reinforced - as the new breed of "modern"



social scientists (such as myself) were given the tools to question and ridicule the thinking of the generation which had emerged successful from the ravages of the second world war

Of course young people have been rebelling against their elders since eternity - but this time there were some huge differences -

- We had just emerged from the world's biggest killing spree
- With mass industrial methods finely tuned
- Social science departments were being founded everywhere
- Student numbers started lift off - from less than 10% of the relevant age group to more than 50% within a generation

Scores of cheap books whose titles blazed with the phrase "What's wrong with.....?" gave us in this period the same sort of discontent in our civic lives which we were being encouraged to exhibit in our consumer selves....So now each of us has our direct line, if not to God then to "the truth" as revealed in whichever of the hundreds of thousands of books (or blogs) vying for our attention gets through our defences....

"Modernisation" became the slogan of the 60s - and still resonates today as we continue to dismantle all that went before.....even as it is [postmodernism](#) which legitimises so many different ways to make sense of the world

Milcho Kostadinov is a very versatile contemporary painter and this is a magnificent seascape

Sunday, January 24, 2016

[In Praise of...Political Economy](#)

Trust the Germans to spot a winner!

Some 18 months ago I bought a small book which I have carted from the Carpathiansand back...briefly dipped into but then abandoned - from my impatience these days with economics....Its title, [Austerity](#) (2013), was hardly calculated to bring me to orgasm but its subtitle - "[history of a dangerous idea](#)" - should have told me that this was no ordinary pseudo-technical stuff. It took author Mark Blyth's [electrifying youtube performances](#) (a more sedate performance is a recent [presentation at the University of Glasgow](#)) to bring [the book](#) back down from my shelves (metaphorically - since the book is still in the Carpathians) for more careful reading. What I found is a book I would rate as the best read of the new century!

Mark Blyth is that rarity - a Scot and political scientist (but with an American post-graduate specialism in "economic ideas and political change in the 20th century") whose book reminds us of the Scottish tradition of political economy. Since 2009 he has been Professor of International Political Economy at the Ivy League [Brown University](#) - quite an achievement for a Dundee lad from a poor working class background who generally pays warm tribute to the support he owes to the welfare state....

The book can be read in its entirety at [Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#) and you can get a good sense of the respect with which its being treated by colleagues in [the special symposium Comparative European Politics](#) ran on the book in 2013 - with [this being Blyth's powerful response](#)

For those impatient with academic jousting, Le Monde Diplomatique [ran this good summary](#)

Blyth's book is divided into two parts. The first is an account of the crisis, starting with the United States and moving on to Europe. Blyth's narrative does not drown in financial jargon. He sets out to explain as simply as possible what the jargon means and what role it played in the crisis.

For those interested in understanding collateral deals in US repo markets, the structure of mortgage-backed derivatives, repo transactions, correlation and tail risk, Blyth's book is a good place to start.

His explanation of the crisis is compelling: innovatory financial instruments were allied with a set of ideas about how the economy works, and in particular about how one should evaluate risk in the economy, which together contributed to a build-up of risks within the global financial system and their explosion in 2008. These ideas also facilitated the transfer of the crisis from the US to Europe.

Blyth dismisses the popular notion that the crisis is somehow the result of the moral failing of particular individuals — the 'Fred Goodwin problem'. It is, for Blyth, a failure of the private sector as a whole. That it has been paid for by the public purse can only be explained by the contradictory set of ideas, which prevail today, about the dangers of state intervention. It is these ideas that Blyth calls 'austerity'.

The second half of the book is a great primer in political economy. Describing the intellectual origins of the idea of austerity, Blyth gives us potted accounts of the ideas of Hume, Locke, Smith and Ricardo. He ties these ideas together with political developments, presenting us with a picture of the 20th century that sees Keynesian ideas fighting it out with older ideas about austerity and government probity. A short-lived victory for Keynesian economics after the Second World War was eventually overthrown by a mixture of economic crises, public choice theories of democracy and the rational expectations revolution in economic theory.

This journey through the idea of austerity ends with a chapter on its implementation.

This is a devastating account of how attempts at putting the idea into practice — from the struggle of governments with the Gold Standard in the 1920s and 1930s to the travails of more recent 'austerity successes' like Sweden and Ireland — never seems to work.

But it took those canny Germans to appreciate Blyth's genius. Given the choice last year to award a prize for the economics writing of the year which included Thomas Pikety's highly profiled (but, I suspect, seldom read) "Capital", they chose Mark Blyth's "Austerity" - for [reasons they explain here](#)

"Political economy" sank out of fashion in the 1970s as the pretensions of economics to be treated as a science overwhelmed academia.....Blyth's book (and chair at an Ivy league University) is yet another welcome sign of the grip of "scientific" pretensions being broken.....

historical note

The phrase *économie politique* actually first appeared in France in 1615 with a book by [Antoine de Montchrétien](#) - *Traité de l'économie politique* - with the world's first professorship in political economy established in 1754 at the University of Naples, Vienna University following suit soon thereafter (in 1763). And it was to be [Thomas Malthus](#) who, in 1805, became England's first professor of political economy, at the [East India Company College](#).

As it happens, I graduated (in 1964) with an MA (Hons) in "Political Economy and Politics" fromno

less than the University of Glasgow where [Adam Smith occupied a chair](#) (in Moral Philosophy) from 1753 for more than a decade - attracting students from many parts of Europe to his lectures which increasingly focused on the causes of national wealth. He then acted as tutor on the Grand Tour (engaging then with the French physiocrats) but returned after a few years to Kirkcaldy to write his magnum opus "[The Wealth of Nations](#)" which appeared in 1776.

The Glasgow course in Political Economy must be one of the longest running - it disappeared (as a name) only in the early 1990s....

Monday, January 25, 2016



Georgi Ruben's (1894-1975) view of Thassos

Women in Romania

Yesterday's visit to the "[Equal - Art and Feminism](#)" gave us access to some wonderful paintings from some 20 of Romania's women artists of the early part of the past century,

1916 is selected as the starting point since that was the date of the formation of the first woman artists' association in Romania - instigated by Olga Grecianu on her return from Brussels. The paintings on display cover the free period until King Carol established in 1938 what was to be the first of the dictatorships which so disfigured the country for the next 50 years ...

I was well aware of Elena Popa, Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck (see side pic) and Rodica Maniu - the last being a particular favourite. But I had not seen the works of artists such as Olga Grecianu, Nina Arbore, Nadia Bulighin, Maria Ciurdea Steurer, Irina Codreanu, Milita Petrașcu, Merica Râmniceanu, Magdalena Radulescu and Mina Byck Wepper.

I will now add some of these painters to my [Introducing the Romanian Realists of the 19th and early 20th Centuries](#)



I assume the exhibition's title is ironic since it would be difficult to argue that this 20 year period of this misogynist Latin country was characterised by respect for women's rights (however much Queen Marie may have made up for her husband's fickleness) A better title might have been that of an important essay of the 1970s - [Why have there been no great women artists?](#)

Fascinating though the paintings were, they mostly displayed the society women or domestic scenes - hardly signs of liberation. Elena's Popa's market scenes were the only exception - with Rodica Maniu (who is reputed to have painted many of husband Sam Mutzner's works) celebrating Breton peasants at work in the fields with somewhat romanticising colours..

The gallery's walls contain some extended text, presumably to explain the "thinking" behind the selection but it's only in Romanian. What does it take to produce one page in at least English for the



foreign visitor? The failure to do that simple thing shows the sheer arrogance of this genre of people....

National galleries in this part of the world suffer from being part of the political spoils system. They are "managed" by their respective Ministries of Culture whose Ministers (having so little else to do) obviously take full advantage of the power of appointment (and sacking) which goes with the job.

I have to admit, however, that the National Gallery apparatniks here do occasionally mount an interesting exhibition - I remember one at the National Gallery a few years back which actually

brought together Bulgarian, Greek and Romanian painters (sadly their website has no archives - although it now boasts [a lovely virtual tour of each of its rooms](#)) - but it missed the opportunity to challenge the indifference these nations now display to one another.....

I have two other complaints about the management of Bucharest's National Gallery -
- Although a catalogue (172pp) is available, it is entirely (as always) in Romanian
- They also try to charge 30 euros for taking photographs

Hardly surprising therefore that Romanian art remains unknown. I [have referred before](#) to the greater accessibility in Bulgaria to works of the early 20th century. Romanian "Collectors" - generally the dubious family members of old communists - have successfully squirrelled away most of the Romanian painting tradition in their large houses.

[Artmark](#) is Romania's auction house has become almost the only way to see this work - as it is transferred from one rich owner to another (the prices are ten times more than in Bulgaria!). See for yourself in their glossy catalogues - which can be sent to you on request eg [this one from September](#)

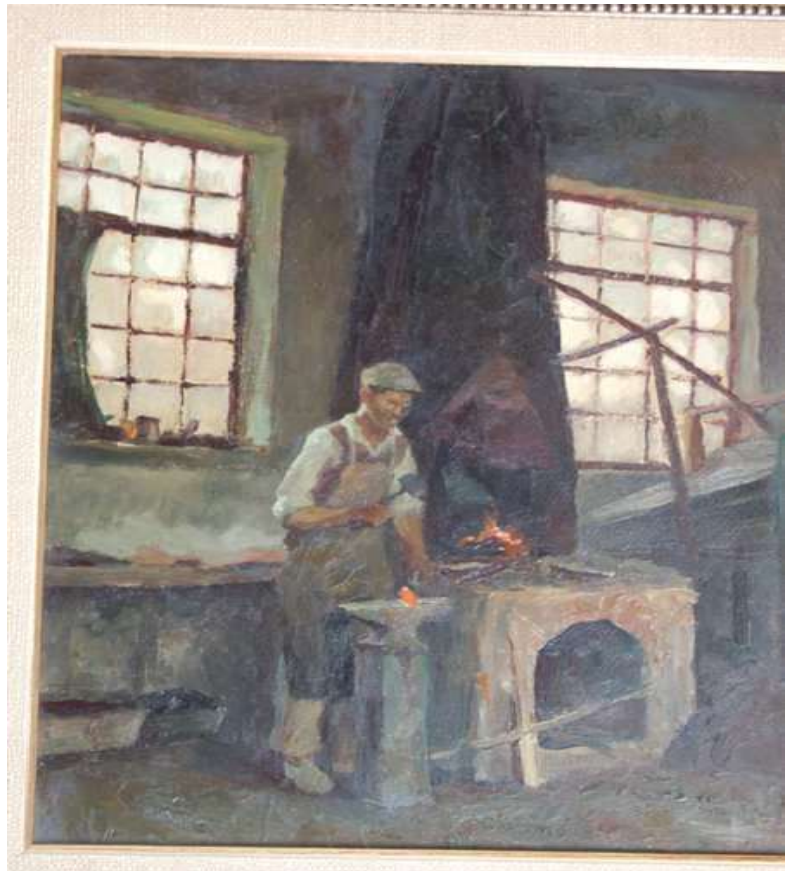
This, of course, makes the task of art curators all the more critical - and raises the larger question of how creatively art curators understand and practice their function - those at The Netherlands came in for some criticism recently for hiring philosophy-populising Alain de Botton to write some provocative tags/slogans....

[Simulating Brexit](#)

Most people are fed up with the way television presents "big issues" - either short soundbites or spokesmen for two extreme positions lined up to bash one another over the head with platitudes..

The Eurosceptic [website Open Europe](#) offered a brilliant example yesterday of an alternative format - that of [Wargames](#) - in which people are given a role to play in a simulated exercise whose object is to identify weak points in one's own and "enemy" positions.

Yesterday's Open Europe exercise was about Brexit - with the morning being devoted to the current negotiations and the afternoon to the scenario that the British people vote for withdrawal from the



European Union. Such events require good prior briefing - and this is Open Europe's [excellent 24 page briefing](#). A short summary of the [key moments and exchanges is here](#). And this is [the full event](#) - for those who have 6 hours to spare!

I am no friend of the European Union - despite (or rather because of) my two decades of working on its programmes since 1990.

I was an early visitor in the mid/late 1970s to the British Commissioners at European Commission HQ (eg Christopher Tugendhat) and helped establish in those days a high profile for Strathclyde Region in the EU ...I was not one of the Labourites (like Tony Blair) who supported the 1983 Labour manifesto for withdrawal - although by then I was getting a bit testy about the claims Europe was making for its funding programmes (whose financial input the British exchequer was quickly deducting from its budgetary support to the Region).

My experience in the 1980s of a variety of European working groups also made me very impatient with the overblown rhetoric of not only southern partners but with that of the French....it appeared that we talked easily only with Danes, Dutch and Germans.....

Most British newspapers have fed their readers for decades with tales of European bureaucracy - to the extent that its citizens seem now incapable of a serious discussion.

Few British people therefore appreciate that a vote for withdrawal would still keep them effectively bound up in the same set of regulations they profess to revile - as part of the "competition strategy" on which Britain has, ironically, led the pack.....

About a dozen key points emerged from the Open Europe war game yesterday -

None of the UK's reform demands are considered easy - With nearly all of the (British) press coverage of the UK-EU negotiations focused on the demands to restrict EU migrants' access to welfare, there is a perception that the other demands are comparatively easy. However, our negotiations suggested this is to underestimate the complexity and political sensitivity of other key issues. Reaching a UK-EU deal in February may not be as straightforward as some assume. In Britain, the debate about whether all member states should be subject to a centralising interpretation of 'ever closer union' is often seen as anachronistic, symbolic and abstract.

However, the emotional commitment of others to the integrationist ideal should not be taken lightly. As former Irish Taoiseach John Bruton noted, "Small countries like Ireland see the EU as community of law and mutual solidarity...Removing the commitment to ever closer union would be like removing EU's emotional cement." Meanwhile, former German Deputy Finance Minister Steffen Kampeter described the idea [of a 'red card' for national parliaments](#) to block EU legislation as "crazy", pleading with Britain to "please take that off the table."

Perhaps predictably, the UK's demand for greater EU 'competitiveness' was the least controversial, although even this prompted a fierce debate about why the EU was seen to overregulate - is it the fault of EU institutions such as the European Commission or that of the member states who often demand greater regulation?

Some states are ready to discuss fundamental structural reform, but others are not. It is tempting to see the negotiations as a battle between the UK and a cohesive EU bloc, and as the UK is the demandeur in these negotiations, there is much truth to this. However, our simulation highlighted that other member

states have very different views of how the EU should develop in the coming years. Enrico Letta, the former Prime Minister playing Italy, saw the UK's reform drive as an opportunity [to establish a 'two-circle' EU](#) with different rights and responsibilities for those countries that want to integrate further and more flexibility for those such as the UK that do not. He hoped Switzerland might be tempted to join an 'outer circle' and that the 'inner circle' would make progress on wholesale reform of the Eurozone.

But others - notably Germany, the Netherlands, and (for now) France - were for various reasons unwilling to countenance such a radical shakeup of the status quo.

UK ideas lost in translation? In the reform session, our continental negotiators all stressed their willingness to be helpful and make concessions to keep the UK in. However, certain topics (migration and welfare in particular) revealed how differently the British see things to their EU partners. To understand the opposition that many EU states have to any form of 'discrimination' between UK and EU nationals on access to welfare, you just had to witness how many around the table were shocked that the UK considers the free movement of EU citizens as 'immigration' at all.

However, for the British, as Sir Malcolm Rifkind said, this is a political issue where pragmatism should prevail. He noted that EU states and recent EU court rulings had established that it was perfectly possible to discriminate between your own and EU nationals when it comes to accessing out of work benefits and that [Denmark had been granted](#) special dispensation to apply restrictions on (predominantly Germans') purchase of holiday homes on its territory.

UPDATE

Today (18 February) [a full report was issued of the event](#) and some conclusions drawn

Sadly, most British viewers will dismiss the event as yet more proof of how impossible the EU is - after all all the "actors" (bar Norman Lamont and Rifkind) - were prominent fans of the EU. But the simulation was important in giving real emotional strength to European arguments we too often hear through the prism of British editorial spin....Other important points were -

Member states hiding behind the Commission and the EU Treaty - In the game as in life, there seemed to be a significant number of member states using the European Commission as a defence mechanism and hiding behind bureaucracy to avoid some difficult political decisions. This was particularly true on the issue of EU migrants' access to benefits where the Commission insisted no discrimination is possible, despite the UK player highlighting that law and treaties can be changed if there is the political will - it is in the end a political decision, EU law is not holy writ.

Some states hope this renegotiation will settle the issue - During the reform session the Irish player asked, "Can we be sure that you won't be coming back looking for more in ten years' time?" He went on to add that he hoped the matter "would not be reopened again...we can't live with this sort of uncertainty." Given the nature of the negotiations during the game and in reality, as well as the tight result expected, it seems unlikely this referendum will settle the issue.

Furthermore, as was noted by others during the session, Europe is changing and the issue of reform is not a one shot deal. Therefore, demands by other states for this to be the end of the UK's reform push or the end of questions around the EU's structure are likely to be sorely disappointed.

This is going to be emotional either way - Both the reform and the Brexit sessions roused passionate exchanges. "You were our best friend, and we had a marriage. Now we are divorced," was how former Swedish Trade Minister Ewa Björling reacted to Brexit, lamenting the loss of a liberal, free-trading ally.

We lost count of the number of times that Brexit was likened to a messy divorce. The Netherlands' representative, former Social Affairs Minister Aart Jan de Geus, noted that while the Dutch public might expect its politicians to be rational about Brexit, the politicians are likely to be irrational and this could result in 'sub-optimal' outcomes for all concerned.



There was a sense that the rancorous response of continental negotiators was not simply driven by the shock and anger of being spurned by Britain. It also revealed the vulnerability of the EU post-Brexit. The Spanish player summed up the potential impact of British withdrawal on the EU as, "A tsunami would be a very small thing compared to what would happen with a Brexit." The German player said, "There is no such thing as a free lunch. Brexit is something which

does not only affect you but affects our country." Furthermore, some of the resentment appeared to be due to the fact that other EU member states felt they had spent time and energy trying to reach a viable deal with the UK - but that deal had then been rejected by voters.

The afternoon session contemplated the scenario of life outside the EU - with the UK player, former Finance Minister Lord Norman Lamont, suggesting the best approach would be to seek a comprehensive free trade agreement, citing the EU deal with Canada as a good starting point since it removes almost all tariffs on goods and agriculture. However, given the links between the UK and the rest of the EU, clearly things would be more complicated. This led him to propose a 'Canada+' style agreement which could see such a deal extended to cross-border services, including financial services, with the UK expressing some willingness to compromise by granting EU citizens access to the UK labour market and providing some contribution to the EU budget in exchange. Ultimately, the UK will have to figure out what it wants outside the EU, but Lord Lamont's opening pitch was a strong attempt to lay out the potential terms of a new relationship, which the Leave campaigns have been reluctant to spell out so far.

Sending a message not to follow the example of Brexit - One of the more revealing moments of the Brexit discussion was the message that the Polish player Leszek Balcerowicz, a former Deputy Prime Minister, wanted to send to others that might seek to follow the UK's example. "The common interest of the remaining members is to deter other exits", he said, and added, "This should have an impact on the terms Britain gets - they should not be too generous." Lord Lamont responded that this was a strange reaction from what was supposed to be an organisation based on the premise of mutually beneficial cooperation. Brexit would add to the EU's list of crises - While some players warned that doing a post-Brexit deal with the UK would not be a top priority - perhaps as a negotiating ploy - former EU Trade Commissioner, Karel de Gucht, playing the role of the EU institutions, disagreed, saying that in reality a new trade deal with the UK would become the EU's "top political priority." This did not mean the UK would get an easy ride though, he warned.

Perhaps Enrico Letta summed it up best when he said that "We are discussing as though the European Union is the centre of the world. That is no longer the case. In case of Brexit, we risk having years and years of discussions and wasting energy, time and money when the rest of the world will run without us...We have to look at the big picture - the rest of the world is not waiting for us." For an organisation dealing with the Eurozone and refugee crises, Brexit could provide another existential threat.

*I discovered **Stanyo Stamatov's** (1886-1963) "blacksmith" in a pile of unframed paintings in a Sofia gallery basement and had it restored and framed...
the café scene is a typical **Naidenov** (1885-1983)*

Wednesday, January 27, 2016

Illness Break

My readers will be puzzled by my silence of the past few weeks - so let me explain. Global and European events do, of course, make it increasingly difficult to present the positive note I strive for here. After all, this is a blog crafted by someone who values discovery and openness and who has always opposed the ravings of ideologues and conspiratorialists which seem to overwhelm us these days.....

But that is not the only reason for my silence of the past 6 weeks..... I have been hit by a debilitating condition which doesn't seem to have a strong media profile - known in Britain by a term which resonates with seas-side holidays - that of "[shingles](#)". It's a virus which affects the nervous system and starts with Herpes (which I always associated with sexually-transmitted disease!) and can often then transmute (as it did in my case) into full-blown "[Post herpetic neuralgia](#)" which numbs part of the face and gives periodic sharp pains....

Initially I had toothache and the dentist was about to do an extraction (and a couple of implants) when the anesthetist alerted him to a heart irregularity, leading to a visit to the cardiologist who put me on a "halter" for a 24 hour test. By then the Herpes was identified - and, a week later, the full PHN.

For the next few weeks, therefore, I am resigned to this daily discomfort. I eat minimally and stopped all alcoholic intake - with my belly already showing the benefits! The downside, however, is listlessness.....

So please take advantage of this gap to read the various books I have put online....not just [In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#) but previous years' posts which are [available on an annual basis](#) And the thematic treatments which can be accessed at the top right of the blog.....

March

[Sofia's new galleries](#)

An impressive new gallery has just opened just 100 metres from my flat - the Red Point Gallery - with a display of young Bulgarian graphic artists.

With the opening in recent years ago of the [Finesse](#) and [Nuance](#) Galleries in superb buildings in the heart of Sofia and, last autumn of the [Nirvana Gallery](#), in a lovely 1920's house, Sofia now boasts an even more inviting choice for artistic exploration. And all within easy walking distance....

Clearly an update is needed of my [2012 post in which I extolled the virtues of the Sofia galleries](#), the more interesting of which I itemized in the little book [Introducing the Bulgarian Realists](#)

Then I listed 16 galleries - but the latest version of the book [Bulgarian Realists - updated edition](#) has 29 which offer examples of the older tradition in Bulgarian painting.

This makes commentary and comparison all the more challenging - but, owing no favours, I can let rip....

Well-displayed art in a lovely setting may warm one's heart but is not actually my favoured setting for finding art - it signals the curator well down the marketing path with an eye to the higher end of the price market.

I vastly prefer the cluttered spaces of Rumen Manov's Neron gallery (Tsar Samuel 12) and Stefan Stefanov's antique shop (in Tsar Assen 33) - where the promise of a hidden treasure lurks amongst the piles of paintings on the floor.... Valeri Filipov can also offer enticing piles of unframed paintings from the backroom of his impressive new gallery at 11 Vasil Levsky Blvd.

Up until November 2015 I thought [Victoria gallery](#) was Sofia's only auction house but [Enakor](#) gallery (just off Vitosha at the Court of Justice end) started strongly in summer 2015 and held 4 auctions in 2015 - the premises are probably the best Sofia has to offer....Their online catalogues can be accessed on the link.....

In a way I'm relieved (or my chequebook is) that I've been missing out.....perhaps because they're just starting. Their prices are a bit on the high side - and their sales therefore only about 15% of what's on offer. This is their [November 2015](#) catalogue

The [Loran Gallery](#) at 16 Oborishte St mounts exhibitions every couple of months - focusing on Bulgarian painters from the last century. Their website has a good collection of paintings - a nice feature being the portraits of the 100 or so artists in the list.



Despite the new galleries, however, it is Vihra Pesheva of [Astry Gallery](#) who remains for me Bulgaria's most brilliant impresario of private galleries - singlehandedly seeking out and promoting living artists - young and old - with frequent special exhibitions and materials. Vihra shares her enthusiasm so readily; and I never feel I am imposing when I drop in..... This is [what I said some years](#) ago about the Gallery -

Astry Gallery (under Vihra's tutelage) is unique for me amongst the Sofia galleries in encouraging contemporary Bulgarian painting. Two things are unique - first the frequency of the special exhibitions; but mainly that Vihra follows her passion (not fashion). I am not an art professional - but Vihra has a real art of creating an atmosphere in which people like me can explore the modern scene. I have been to a couple of other exhibition openings here and they were, sadly, full of what I call "pseuds" - people who talked loudly (mostly Embassy people) and had little interest in the paintings (except perhaps their investment value). Vihra and her Astry Gallery attract real people who share her passion and curiosity. It is always a joy to pop in there - and talk to her, visitors, artists and other collectors.

The café scene is by Olga Shishkova (1895-1978)

Monday, March 14, 2016

[The Royals and Brexit](#)

Fascinating story early this morning about an imminent (and potentially constitution-shattering) [intervention by the British Royals in Britain's current debate](#) on whether to leave the European Union

Using outside experts who advised that the intervention would need to be presented by a figure with impeccable European credentials, a strong affinity with the continent and the character to speak out, the family has decided that the move should be fronted by Prince Philip who has apparently "been hugely impressed by the way the EU stepped in, not just once but several times, to save Greece," said one official with knowledge of events. "He admires what Tsipras and Varoufakis achieved - in fact he told friends he sees something of his younger self in the charismatic, motorbike-riding, eye-for-the-ladies Varoufakis. Mind you," added the source, "he also thinks the Greeks would never have got into this mess if the colonels had still been in power."

The leader of Vote Leave is Michael Gove - "that awful little leaker who put it about that the Queen wanted out. They can't stand him. And as for Boris, the other main outer - he's a cycling maniac from Islington. All he has done for the royal family is make it difficult to get around London in a decent-sized Daimler. And the third of the trio - Farage - what another awful little man".

Only when I reached the reference to the Greek colonels, did I realise that it is, today, the first of April!!!

Friday, April 1, 2016

[On resilience; and wines and painters from Pazardzhik](#)



So much happening - the continuing human and political crisis of the ongoing wave of immigration to Europe's shores; [the Panama Papers](#) and its political fallout in Britain - not least on [the Brexit vote](#); the last remnants of the [steel industry being sacrificed in Britain](#) to the neo-liberal God.....and all I do is wallow in self-pity from the facial discomfort of the past 2 months!!

I know our various worlds have always been governed by cycles of gloom and bravado but, somehow, in the past half-century, social

"expectations" seem to have experienced a tectonic shift - such as to have made us incapable of dealing with a world that is in decline....

A few years back, there was [extensive talk of "resilience"](#) - the social capacity to deal effectively with crises....why some communities seem to have this....and others don't. Sad that this concept seems to have gone the way of all fads...Or is it perhaps that we have simply become overwhelmed with the notion of "Crisis"???

Bulgaria is a society which, at first sight, seems to have avoided the temptations of debt-driven modernisation....even in Sofia most people eke out a living - and one-person businesses seem to be the norm. A wine-tasting in young Asen's little [Vina Orrenda](#) (at the Russian Monument) offers a real social occasion in such a modest society and I was glad to have made the trip last Thursday. Not just for the excellent taste of the Riverside range of wines being offered by the [Manistira winery](#) (3 whites; a Rose; and 2 Mavruds) but for the easy conversation which flowed between us. The left part of my face is still semi-frozen and I therefore have problems tasting - but I coped manfully!

It was the first time I had attended a group wine-tasting - and I appreciated the ceremonial aspects as Asen and a young lady first introduced the winery and the wines and Asen then poured us our respective samples...

It was also nice to be approached by one guest and be asked for my opinion on the wines....and to have the chance to speak to the 2 young ladies representing the winery (who remembered me apparently from the November wine-tasting!). It's in a village near Pazardzhik and I suggested they might



put Pazardzhik's most famous painter on one of their etiquettes - **Stoian Vassilev**. He was a prolific painter (the local museum is reputed to have some 5000 of his paintings and sketches). I have 4 of his - the first being very untypical. The second is more typical of his style.....

Sunday, April 10, 2016

[Drawing Back the Veil](#)



Those wanting a sense of how the events of the last century have impacted on the soul of one Balkan country have a unique opportunity in Sofia these next few weeks. Three exhibitions in Sofia offer samples, first, of the paintings of Bulgarians who had the opportunity to study in France in the half-century before the communist takeover of 1944. By definition, those able to avail themselves of such opportunities came from richer families and were therefore often targeted in the immediate aftermath of that takeover. They included figures such as Nikola Tanev, Tseno Todorov and Constantin Shterkelov. The [National Gallery exhibition](#) runs until 30 May.

Sofia City Gallery has an exhibition which some may think overdue called "Forms of Resistance - 1944-1985" with exhibits selected and presented to give a sense of how the world of Bulgarian (and central European) artists dramatically changed as their countries slipped behind the Iron Curtain from 1944. The State Security files (and prison drawings) of Alexander Bozhinov and Alexander Dobrinov (leading caricaturists) and others are a powerful initial exhibit... as are the 3 large industrial landscapes of one of Bulgaria's greatest painters, Nikola Tanev, produced after his release from almost a year in jail. The roll-call of imprisoned or disgraced painters covers Bulgaria's main artistic names - and must have had a devastating effect on the creative spirit.....

The gallery has produced an excellent [video - with the paintings shown from the 4th minute](#)

I first realized the scale of the veil which has been drawn over this subject a few years ago when I was compiling an annotated list of 140 Bulgarian painters for my first booklet... "[Bulgarian Realists - getting to know the Bulgarians through their art](#)". The caricaturist Rayko Alexiev had died in his first weeks in prison and the superb landscape artist Boris Denev was basically banned for life but, slowly, the internet revealed (with help from google translate!) scraps of information which are not offered in the various catalogues and monographs which the Bulgarian galleries publish.



The Bulgarians, it appears, do not like to discuss this period.....there are still too many skeletons... the belated attempts at [official investigations have been half-hearted](#) - as one would expect when its main political party (BSP) is effectively the old communist party....

The (bi-lingual) text which accompanies the City Gallery's current exhibition is, therefore, for me the first detailed explanation of what exactly happened to artists in Bulgaria - both in the immediate aftermath and as communist power consolidated and evaporated.....

Fascinating to discover that, in the early weeks of the takeover (when the bodies of the murdered political and government elite were still warm), 30 artists were meeting to set up the first Union of Artists - and that Nikola Rainov emerged as its president!

The [Zhendov affair](#) (of 1950) named some 30 deviant painters and led to the dismissal from their academic jobs of painters of the calibre of Ivan Nenov and Kiril Tsonev. Any hint of "mawkish naturalism" was pounced upon as an act of sabotage. A hierarchy of accepted painting led with portrayals of political leaders followed by glorification of labour and liberation. Landscapes were accepted only if, like Tanev's, they showed socialism in action....

As the exhibition recognizes, artists responded in very different ways - some with alacrity, others by turning to other activities, a few with various forms of escape or rebellion....



Not surprisingly in a part of the world in which recent history is strongly disputed, the City Gallery exhibition - which runs until 26 May - has attracted some controversy.

The final exhibition I want to mention is that of Bulgaria's grand old man and doyen of Bulgarian art - **Svetlin Rusev** who is still very active at the age of 83 and whose latest work is on display in the [Seasons Gallery](#) at Krakra St. Rusev is a unique and towering figure - Chairman (1973-85) of the Union of Bulgarian Artists but then fell out of favour with the authorities for his rebellious activities. His position allowed him to build up a fantastic collection of art which he has donated to two [public galleries, one in Pleven](#), the other in Sofia at what used to be his studio very near the Alexander Nevsky Church.

He straddles both the communist and the modern period

Friday, April 15, 2016

[Another Danube Trip](#)

Another trip north 2 weeks back - first to Port Cetate via Belogradchik and one of its vineyards and the Vidin bridge across the Danube. A huge shell of a synagogue at Vidin is left unexplained in the guidebook...

A nice website about Bulgarian public transport gives [this experience of the Sofia-Vidin trip](#)



A writer in residence at Port Cetate turned out to be a Schwabian from an old Danube family who is now producing wines in Hungary and writing a book on the different values

represented by the Danube and Rhine rivers and the cultures around them... Claude Magris's [Danube - a sentimental journey from the source to the Black Sea](#) gave us an amazing take on that river (in 1989) but Ronnie Lessem's [Global Management Principles](#) (also 1989) not only identifies four very different clusters of values (north, south, east and west) but ascribes, to organisations and individuals alike, different life phases. There's a [nice summary here.](#)

A couple of decades ago, I used some fallow time I had to "bone up on" contemporary management writing (see chapter 6 of [In Transit -](#) notes on good governance) and have a continuing interest in the history of management thought (if that's not a contradiction in terms!!). Lessem's vignettes of



the various figures in the management canon bring people and ideas alive in an exceptional manner.

Lessem, I am delighted to see, is still going strong and has moved from management into the [wider field of economics](#) - there's a sadly [rare video here of one of his presentations](#)

He is one of these admirable people who challenge the narrowness of the intellectual boundaries which so constrain our thinking.....

After a couple of nights at Port Cetate, it was on to Craiova and a first visit to its superbly restored Art Gallery. Apart from great displays of the great work of Amman and Grigorescu, the visit was made worthwhile by a roomful of Brancusi sculptures and paintings by an artist so far unknown to me and who therefore doesn't figure in my [Introducing the Romanian Realists of the 19th and early 20th Centuries](#) - Eustatie Stoinescu about whom little is

known although I did find [this little nugget.](#)

This is a wonderfully coy painting of his....

Thursday, April 28, 2016

Poetry, Potted history and Geopolitics - "In Europe's Shadow"

The search for books which (try to) capture the soul of a country is an increasingly fascinating endeavour for me. Such books cannot be contrived novels or dry histories - the few exemplars I come across are generally travelogues containing a mixture of encounters (with contemporary or historical figures) and feel for landscapes and cultural contexts.....



Until now none of the english-language books on Romania (one of the dozen or so countries I've lived in over the past 26 years) has been able to do the country justice - although there are a couple of very impressive histories (Boia's [Romania - Borderland of Europe](#); and Djuvara's [A Brief Illustrated History of Romanians](#)); two very challenging takes on its post 1989 politics (by Tom Gallagher) - [Theft of a nation - Romania since Communism](#) and [Romania and the European Union: How the Weak Vanquished the Strong](#); and two travelogues - one from the indefatigable Irish writer, Dervla Murphy - [Transylvania and Beyond](#) (1992) - as she ventured into a country whose borders were open for the first time for 50 years; and a delightful 1998 book produced by a Frenchman (with photos by an Italian) - and accessible on google - [The Romanian Rhapsody; an overlooked corner of Europe](#) by D. Fernandez and F Ferranti (2000)

But Robert D. Kaplan's [In Europe's shadow: two Cold Wars and a thirty-year journey through Romania and beyond](#) (2016) now slips into top place of a unique annotated list I prepared 2 years ago of books which anyone seriously interested in Romania needs at least to know about. You'll find that list in [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#)

He reveals in the Prologue that his first foray into the country was in the 1970s as a bemused backpacker in central Europe; but that in 1981, as a 29-year old with few career opportunities, he spotted a hole in the western media coverage of south-eastern Europe and took a flight to Bucharest in what seemed then a forlorn hope of whipping up some media interest in the area.....

A good [review captures the poetry of the book](#) very well -

Kaplan's writing is like the places he visits. It's a terrain, a concentrated expression of a particular part of the world as he sees it, a very personal account though steeped in broad historical knowledge and familiarity with a wide range of sources. Kaplan's sentences are like streets that lead us around a place we come to know through his eyes, either only through his eyes if it's a place few people know (such as Romania).....

It's not a question of whether he's got it right or wrong (Does the landscape really look as he describes it? Is his history of a town or a local population or a people accurate?).

There is no right or wrong in this kind of writing. What we get is Kaplan's view of the world and what matters is whether it compels our attention, becomes memorable and integrated into our own understanding. After all, we all know so little of it first-hand. Maybe one day we'll go here or there, or at least in the neighbourhood, and we'll know if it looks and feels familiar.

Kaplan is not a tourist, he's a traveller. He doesn't look, he sees. He's not a visitor going from monuments to battlefields but one who lives his travels, immersing himself in every new surroundings, picking up—what makes us envious—new friends and colleagues that continue with him through decades.

This is the fourth Kaplan book I've read. As he explain in [this Youtube presentation](#) his latest book is a new departure with previous books (covering Asia, the middle East, Africa, the Mediterranean) giving horizontal slices to regions but this one being a "vertical" take on one country to which he has returned frequently in his life and by which he is clearly moved...

There can't be many Americans who know as many Romanians or as well as Kaplan, who is, so far as an outsider can get, inside as well as outside Romanian society and politics. And there may be no American who is so much simultaneously a travel writer and a geopolitical analyst, and happy to be so. When he discovered Romania in 1981 during the Ceausescu Communist years, "I felt that I was finally beginning to do what I always was meant to." Kaplan, in other words, became not just a travel writer or a serious scholar. He had a vocation.

"In Europe's shadow" amounts to a kind of historical anthropology plus geopolitics, a deep study of a particular country and people. The point is to understand Romania itself and to use it as a way to apprehend Europe's complex past. Romanian history involves the West and East, the geography between Western Europe and Greater Russia, more precisely the web of historical patterns and contemporary geopolitics between Central Europe and Eastern Europe. It's a story that continues to be relevant today.....

Those familiar with Kaplan's work know that he's as much a travel writer in the grand style as a geopolitical Realist whose studies of international relations and political leadership are also in the grand style, stretching intellectually over centuries and continuities of ideas.

As for the focus on Romania, it "was my master key for the Balkans... the Poland of southeastern Europe in terms of size, demography, and geopolitical location..." In Europe's shadow is a demanding book for the lay reader but it shows how, at one and the same time, Romania is distinctive and a key to a broader and deeper understanding of contemporary Europe.

Most of all, Kaplan's work exemplifies rare intellectual, moral and political engagement with the political order—and disorder—of our world.

The bibliographical references are impressive - although what seems to be an exhaustive list curiously fails to mention the only 2 serious studies of contemporary Romanian politics (by Tom Gallagher) - choosing instead to focus on older texts of Eliade and Cioran.....

My charitable interpretation of this omission is that Kaplan is not all that interested in contemporary Romania - despite a conversation with the previous PM and President. Readers might have expected more than his superficial impressions of new constructions; the brightness (or otherwise) of paint or the lawn upkeep of Bucharest's parks...and to find some allusions at least to the scale of political corruption and the apparent success in the last 2-3 years of the new judicial system in throwing politicians in jail.....

But geo-politics, it seems, sees such issues as fairly minor.....

Saturday, April 30, 2016

[Mapping Romania - a bumper new version!!](#)

Many of my readers, understandably, went elsewhere as my posts flagged at the beginning of the year but I am delighted to welcome my Russian readers back - and to pay tribute to their good sense in seeking out older posts which, for me, are as good as (or even better than) more recent writing....The country of my readers is about the only thing my blog statistics tell me so is something in which I take particular interest....

Anyway, now that I'm back in Romania and anticipating a visit later in June from three old friends, I offer a 250 page book - with hundreds of photographs and of hyperlinks. It's [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#), a new, expanded edition of a small E-book I first published 2 years ago.



I readily admit that it is an odd collection - consisting of three elements -

- First an exhaustive annotated list of writing (mainly in English) about the diverse cultural aspects of Romania - whether music, photography, literature, buildings, cinema.....with hundreds of hyperlinks.....you just dip in and view, read or listen as the mood takes you...These lists are interspersed with excerpts from papers and books to give more depth....

- I have, secondly, selected (mainly for the Annexes) some substantial articles which seem to me to capture an important aspect of the "soul" of the country - one is a harrowing description which appeared in the New York Review of Books in the 1980s (but written by a Romanian) of the suffering being experienced then by the Romanian people; another is a fairly coruscating view of the country in 2000 by the famous historian Tony Judt; and the final article is one on the new wave of Romanian cinema which I've included simply because the themes represented in the films capture so well the concerns of contemporary Romania....

- The third element in the collection are the 70-odd pieces I've posted about Romania on my blog. The most personal of the sections....

The nice thing about the version I have posted is that it can be read as a book - with facing pages which you can flick.....very nice feature.....courtesy of ISSUU website.....

Tuesday, May 10, 2016

Bogdan - old friend RIP



I want to pay tribute today to a Romanian artist friend who died earlier this week at the age of 59 - Bogdan Dumitrescu.

He was essentially a sculptor - with the knots of wood as his inspiration. He was Daniela's closest schoolmate and a penniless alcoholic - whose frequent telephone calls would sometimes lead to angry exchanges.....for his comments could often be cutting.

He was self-

taught - his attempts to get into art school in Iasi failed, there were about half a dozen places available for more than a hundred aspirants at the time.....What hurt more was the refusal of the Romanian Union of Artists to admit him to its ranks....

In the 80s he worked for a time at Bucharest's famous Village Museum.... but his artistic temperament was impatient with the discipline involved....

His flat in Ploiesti was the most unkempt I have ever experienced - the photo is actually of his sitting room (the cleaner part!) but his genius (of which he was all too painfully aware) showed in his selection of woodcuts and strange fittings.



He was also a heavy smoker and had been in and out of hospital so often for treatment for the abuse from which his body was suffering..... He knew he was near to death - but his wry if not macabre humour still showed

The second photo is one of two tryptyches which are lovingly displayed in our mountain house. The last two photos are of the 2 small pieces we bought on our last visit - just a week before he died....

In the 90s we visited the [Sapanta "Happy Graveyard"](#) in Maramures for which a local wood carver created colourful and amusing memorials to those buried.....We need an appropriate ditty for Bogdan....but these wood sculptures of his will, in our various flats and mountain house, remind us of his great spirit....

Friday, May 27, 2016



[Dawdling in Dobrogea](#)

We left Bucharest on Friday - first for Romania's port city of [Constanta](#) where Daniela had a friend's christening....the little [Dali hotel](#) on a charming promontory in the heart of the old city the Greeks called Tomis gave us immediate access to the city's excellent art gallery which absorbed us for the Saturday morning....

This is [an album of the paintings which I have posted on flickr](#) - about 150 paintings and a score of sculptures

You get a sense of the city's charm with [this panoramic video](#) from the tower of one of the mosques - although [the antics of their mayor](#) has allowed the jewel of their Nouveau Art [Casino](#)



[to reach a state of decay](#) which seems

irreparable. "A Patriot's Romania" blog had a [little comment about this](#) - and about the town's interesting [religious traditions](#) - which complements nicely this fascinating [paper on Jewish architecture in the city](#)

The meal which followed the christening was a rare opportunity for me to [study Romanians en famille](#) and I thoroughly enjoyed it.....so much

so that we were unable to attend the concert in the Art Gallery which was celebrating Night of the Museums....

We left Constanta early on Sunday reckoning that the 600 kilometre drive to Sofia was a bit much for one day and that a border crossing at Silistra on the southern bank of the Danube would avoid the 20 minute minimum wait on the old bridge at Russe which major repairs are causing. New security checks are also causing delays but only 3 cars were in front of us at the Silistra check

But before then we had been charmed by the rolling hills and smart villages [of Dobrogea](#) (the grapes from the famous Murfatlar and other wines clearly bring in some cash); and the huge white [memorial of Roman General Traian to fallen Roman soldiers](#) a 1977 rebuild of which towers over





the countryside. We passed the [vineyards of the Ostrov wine](#) but were unable to find any wine for tasting or purchase....

There's a nice [blogpost here about the Ostrov ferry](#) from A Patriot's Romania

Silistra was sleepy - with a small mosque in its main street and didn't detain us as we sped to Russe for the night... I just managed to get to its art gallery - which had [earned a black mark](#) from me when I last visited it some 4 winters earlier....

This time it made more impact - thanks mainly to the conversation with one of its curators....But I didn't remember seeing before the works of Radoykov (above) and Lazorov[This flickr album contains the photographs I took during the visit of the paintings](#)

And I'm now in Sofia - for the next week or so for the next stage of the dental upgrade and check-up with the dermatologist (for the shingles).

May 26

[Wood, Wine and...Canetti](#)

Sofia detained us for a week and we decided to have a leisurely return (to Bucharest) taking the middle of the three routes which sprout east from Sofia - the quietest and probably most scenic which skirts the edge of the Stara Planina (otherwise known as Blue Mountains).

I had forgotten that this is the road which offers access to the beautiful 19th century village of Koprovitsa (which played such an important role in the 1870s uprising against the Turks) and had no hesitation in veering right to see it again.....my third visit in the past few years....(the first had been in winter; the second [in autumn 2013](#)) .The wood carvings on the doors and ceilings remind me of what an art form wood can be.....RIP Bogdan.....and I realise, rather belatedly, that the superbly carved pulpit is an unusual feature of these older Bulgarian churches - features which are not normally seen in Orthodox churches. The friendly priest who waved us (inc the cat) into the church stressed the ecumenical nature of the congregation in those days.....



Dare I wonder that the sermons possibly played a role in the 19th century liberation??????

Karlovo and Kazanluk were on the schedule - the first to check whether any traces were left of the peaceful courtyards of the 1930s which Nicola Tanev painted so evocatively; Kazanluk, the heart of the rose valley, for possibly another visit to the municipal gallery which keeps the heart of the Bulgarian painting beating. More than 100 well-known artists grew up in this small town.....

We spotted only a couple of remnants of former architectural splendours in Karlovo - and a sign



for the Chateau Copsa winery soon had me distracted from thoughts of art galleries..... Standing alone in the vineyards stretching to the horizon with the Blue Mountains towering above, the Chateau is a tastefully-created and designed modern building which offers not only wine-tasting and meals but accommodation and sauna....Two superb whites and two great roses were soon trickling down our throats - tempered with chunks of cheeses, walnuts and dried plums.....all for 6 euros apiece.....one of the most delightful lunches we've had in some time.....

And there was still a couple of hundred kilometres to go before we reached our evening destination - Russe - over the mountains to Veliko Tarnovo and then the final 100 kms....most of it by now thoroughly familiar.

We pulled in just after 18.00 to the fascinating [Luliaka Hotel](#) plum on the Danube but just within Russe's boundaries.

It's rare for a hotel to attract my loyalty but I so loved the layout, atmosphere and quiet beauty of the site that I quickly booked a second night..... Their meals and house rose (from their own winery) were an added attraction which will draw me whenever I feel I need a restover on my way back from Sofia.....

And Russe has so many attractions - particularly, for us, the early 20th century buildings....I had been looking for the Canetti family house - which the Nobel prizewinner describes in the first part of his memoirs and came across





it completely by accident.....pausing to photo parts of the facade and only realising when I was inside that what seemed to be an arts complex was in fact the Canetti Foundation... hosting these days something called a "[Process-Space Art Festival](#)" (this is the statue the municipality recently erected to him at the entrance to his street) Canetti actually lived in Russe for only a few years before his family migrated to Austria and he subsequently spent most of his life in London and Zurich.

His "[Crowds and Power](#)" was one of many books written by central Europeans which made an impact on me at University and I recently enjoyed his "kiss and tell" [Party in the Blitz](#) which complements his more famous trilogy of memoirs. Clive James does a [demolition job on the man here](#).

A more sympathetic treatment of someone who typified that genre of central European polymath we have sadly lost is [The Worlds of Elias Canetti - centenary essays](#) (2005)

Our second evening we were treated to one of the most spectacular thunderstorms....

8 June

[Britain Set to Leave Europe - what's it all about?](#)

The UK referendum about membership of the European Union takes place in 12 days - and the latest poll has those intending to vote to leave the European Union a full ten points ahead.

If this is translated on 23 June into actual votes, the knock-on political effects in Europe will be profound - let alone the economic effects globally.....

I therefore want to devote the next few posts to the question of how we got to this point - drawing on personal experience first in the 1960s of trying to understand what we then called "The Common Market", then in the early 1970s on some recollections of the terms of the debate which took place as successive British governments first negotiated entry (Conservative) and then (under Labour in 1975) managed the referendum which resulted in a resounding support for British membership.



I remember listening on the radio to [Hugh Gaitskell's speech to the 1962 Labour Party Conference](#) in which he strongly rejected the idea of joining the "European Economic Community" - claiming that Britain's participation would mean

"the end of Britain as an independent European state, the end of a thousand years of history!" He added: "You may say, all right! Let it end! But, my goodness, it's a decision that needs a little care and thought."

[Vernon Bogdanor did us a great service earlier in the year](#) by taking us back to that period more than 50 years ago when key British figures were articulating their responses to the early stages of European integration - in the early 1970s it was the Conservative Party (including Margaret Thatcher) which was most enthusiastic about entry - the Labour party the most antagonistic...the reverse of the present situation....

In the past few weeks I've been following the discussions and [have selected one article](#) as offering the best insights -

If Brexit happens, with all the chaotic and uncoordinated consequences it will have for both Europe and Britain, it won't be because the [leave campaign](#) has the better arguments: [it absolutely hasn't](#). Or because the weight of evidence is on its side: it emphatically isn't. Or because it is clear what Brexit actually means: it's a complete leap in the dark. Or because it is masterfully led: that's not true either.

If Brexit wins, it will be because a majority of British voters have simply lost confidence in the way they are governed and the people they are governed by.

That loss of confidence is part bloody-mindedness, part frivolity, part panic, part bad temper, part prejudice. But it is occurring - if it is - in a nation that has always prided itself, perhaps too complacently, on having very different qualities: good sense, practicality, balanced judgment, and a sure instinct for not lurching to the right or left. Why is it so hard to persuade the British electorate that a corner of the globe in which such quantities of blood have been spilled for centuries, and where life is mostly incredibly secure, is better off together not apart?

We can all write about a Brexit vote being part of a wider trend in modern politics. It's about globalisation, the crisis of capitalism, widening inequality, fear of the other, rejection of political elites, and the empowerment of the web. Up to a point, these things are all present in the Brexit campaign. And there is no question either that the EU is far from perfect, not working in fundamental ways, failed in some particulars, too easily beguiled by the head-in-the-sand centralising notion of "more Europe", and scandalously passive about the needs of its people.

The EU certainly has to change. And yet if Britain walks away, it will be an act of immense political impulsiveness by one of the last countries in Europe that many would expect to behave that way. France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Hungary maybe, according to the old stereotypes. But Britain? How come?

We need to be far more honest and questioning about the specifically British things that underlie such an irrational and irresponsible impulse. British opinion is where it is on Europe because it is paying the price of past and present bad political habits.

□ *There has been no British prime minister, not even Tony Blair, who thought of Europe as "us" rather than "them". Margaret Thatcher set the template in her [campaign for the budget rebate](#). Ever since British ministers have gone to Brussels to stop things, get opt-outs, cut budgets and scupper common projects. We have never had the confidence to be a team player rather than act the diva. [David Cameron's EU reform package](#) is merely the latest example. Even Blair, who was certainly more comfortable in Europe, preferred to talk about Britain leading rather than playing its part. And we are reaping what they all sowed.*

□ *We are paying the price of our media. British journalism thinks of itself as uniquely excellent. It is more illuminating to think of it as uniquely awful. Few European countries have newspapers that are as*

partisan, misleading and confrontational as some of the overmighty titles in this country. The possibility of Brexit could only have happened because of the British press - if there were no other good reason for voting to remain, the hope of denying the press their long-craved triumph on Europe would suffice for me. But Brexit may also happen because of the infantilised and destructively coarse level of debate on social media too.

□ *It's payback time too for our failure to modernise and regenerate our politics. Modern Britain is ensnared by a complacent view of the past. We are not a democratic republic, with shared values, rights and institutions, a common culture and an appropriate modesty about our place in our region and the world. Ours remains a post-feudal state on to which various democratic constraints have been bolted through history. We therefore lack a shared culture, a settled civic sense, a proper second chamber, symmetrical devolution, effective local democracy and, until the human rights act, a clear and enforceable code of citizens' rights - which of course the anti-Europeans wish to abolish.*

Maybe remain will win in the end. I still just about trust the people to get it right on the night. But unless, and until, this country stops being so passive about these tenacious bad political habits, a remain win won't make as much difference as it should, and we will continue to sneer and snigger our way towards becoming a broken Britain in a broken Europe.

Ps The Dublin Review of Books had a [useful overview of the debate](#) which had been conducted in the pages of The Guardian.....

Here's Boffy's take - <https://boffyblog.blogspot.ro/2016/06/the-core-vote-will-win-it-for-brexit.html> - part of a [series of posts he's been writing giving a marxist slant](#) on the issue of UK membership of the European Union

The cartoon which heads the post is a wonderful one from 1900 whose text is also worth reading - showing the assumptions then being made in UK about the motives and attitudes of the various political players

11 June

Referenda or Neverenda??



[Richard Dawkins](#) is a name to conjure with - Professor of Evolutionary Biology, author of numerous books and a great sceptic..... He has [just entered the debate on British membership of Europe](#) by challenging the very idea of a referendum -

My own answer to the question is, "How should I know? I don't have a degree in economics. Or history. How dare you entrust such an important decision to ignoramuses like me?"

I, and most other people, don't have the time or the experience to do our due diligence on the highly complex economic and social issues facing our country in, or out of, Europe. That's why we vote for our Member of Parliament, who is paid a good salary to debate such matters on our behalf, and vote on them.....

I am indeed a true democrat, but we live in a representative democracy not a plebiscite democracy. To call a referendum on any subject should be a decision not taken lightly..... But to call a referendum

on a matter as important and fraught with complicated and intricate detail as EU membership was an act of monstrous irresponsibility: the desperate throw of a short-term chancer, running scared before the Ukip tendency within his own party. He may reap the whirlwind.

The 1975 Referendum broke new constitutional ground - it had never been used before....and was, in most people's minds, associated with dodgy regimes.....Vernon Bogdanon (to whose analysis of the 1975 Referendum I referred yesterday) is Emeritus Professor of Government and author, amongst much else, of [The New British Constitution](#). The grounds he gives for the support of such constitutional referenda do, therefore, deserve our attention.

His analysis of the 1975 referendum gave two arguments - namely

- all parties supported membership in the 1970s - but public opinion was divided. A significant section of society had therefore no voice...*
- the issue was so fundamental that the legitimacy of government was being threatened*

But that's not actually why or how the first ever British referendum came about.....

In the 1970 Election, the Labour Party was defeated. Heath was returned to office. At the end of 1970, Tony Benn raised the possibility of the Labour Party committing itself to a referendum on joining Europe at Labour's National Executive, but he could not find a seconder for the motion.

From 1971 onwards, the very complicated European Communities Bill made its way through Parliament, and in March 1972, a Conservative backbencher who was opposed to Europe, called Neil Martin, proposed an amendment calling for a referendum, and this meant the Shadow Cabinet had to decide what to do about it, and they decided to oppose this motion.

But the very day after this happened, President Pompidou in France said he was going to have a referendum in France on whether the French people approved of British entry into Europe...and he was doing this for internal party political reasons, to weaken his opponents on the left, who were split on the issue. But

there were going to be four new members of the European Community: Britain, Denmark, Ireland and Norway. In the end, Norway did not join. The other three countries were all having referendums. France was having a referendum on whether Britain should enter, but Britain was not. One cynic wrote to the newspapers that when Heath has spoken of full-hearted consent of Parliament and people, he meant full-hearted consent of the French Parliament and people...

After this, Labour's National Executive voted narrowly in favour of the Benn proposal. Then, a couple of days later, pure coincidence, the Heath Government announced there was going to be a referendum, though they called it a plebiscite, in Northern Ireland, on the border, on whether people wished to remain in the United Kingdom or join the Irish Republic. At this point, the Labour Shadow Cabinet agreed to the referendum.

So, it came about through a series of really unforeseen contingencies and vicissitudes, completely unplanned, this very fundamental change in the British system.

But there were, in my opinion, good arguments for it, and the first, I have already given, that the party system could not resolve the issue properly because all three parties were in favour of membership, so there was no way in which the democratic party machinery could work.

But the second argument, I think, is even more important, that even if the party system had been working efficiently, there are some issues that are so fundamental that a decision by Parliament alone will not be accepted as legitimate. This point of view was put forward by the Labour Leader of the House of Commons, Edward Short, in March 1975. He said: "The issue continues to divide the country. The decision to go in has not been accepted. That is the essence of the case for having a referendum."

The referendum is one of several major constitutional changes which Bogdanon's book assesses and which are superbly [critiqued in this LRB review](#). But, Dawkins asks, is that a reason to abstain from voting? Certainly not. We are where we are, and there's no use wishing we were somewhere else. I shall vote. And I shall vote to stay in Europe, exercising the Precautionary Principle which is appropriate to anyone lacking the confidence to push for a radical change in the status quo. Better the devil you know, or at least the devil that seems to be working adequately.

Moreover, as I listen to advocates from both sides I notice that, for all my lack of expertise, I am qualified to judge that most of the arguments for leaving are emotional. The evidence-based arguments tend to be the ones for remaining in Europe, whether they come from professional economists, historians, business leaders or powerful foreign politicians.

Comment;

1. Bogdanor's presentation correctly reminds us that the 1975 referendum was supposed to settle the issue of Europe for ever - but that it was only a few years later that the Labour Party officially committed itself in the 1982 Manifesto to withdrawal.....and a few years after that that the Conservative Party started to tear itself apart on the issue. Somehow the issue never went away....hence the term which came into use during the Scottish debate on Independence "neverendum" - never-ending discussion....
2. Yesterday's post emphasises the loss of trust there has been in the past decade in the political elite. But it more than that - it is a new lack of respect for arguments from people such as Dawkins and those whose opinion people like him respect....There is now a dangerous divide between professionals and the public

The two figures are by Emilia Radusheva, a contemporary Bulgarian who has gone quiet in recent years

12 June

Why immigration is the only issue in this referendum

One issue has dominated the British referendum debate of the past few months - and that is immigration.

Those wanting Britain to remain in Europe have talked in vain about the economic aspects - people no longer trust economic arguments and forecasts or those who use them. Even references to "European bureaucracy" - which for so long has been the staple fare of the overwhelmingly negative British media coverage of European affairs - have been put aside in favour of a focus on immigration.



And it didn't need last year's pictures of the hordes of Syrian refugees crossing the Aegean or smashing Balkan border fences to make this the number one issue in the campaign. Four million English citizens had in Britain's 2015 General Election given their vote to UKiP - the nationalist party - four times as many as had voted for the Scottish Nationalists (who had as a result gained 50 Westminster seats).

Such, however, is the nature of the British electoral system ("first past the post") that UKiP won only one seat!!!

The electoral support should have been a wake-up call but one solitary figure on the parliamentary benches has given the political elite the excuse to ignore the increasing alienation of the (mainly) the English citizen from the democratic process....The media attention given during the decade to parliamentary expenses (and business corruption) was certainly one factor in this but the two main factors in this alienation have been -

- the continuing economic decline in so many parts of the country; and
- the awareness since 2000 of a growing number of immigrants - even in these areas - with the [low-paid being nudged out of jobs by those prepared to accept less](#); and pressure on public services already being starved of resources

Just three weeks ago, a short House of Commons [Briefing Paper on Migration Statistics](#) set out (in chart 5) the facts very starkly - net annual immigration to Britain was a tiny blip from 1930-1960; actually negative from 1960-80 and less than a few thousand in the 1980s... Only from the mid 1990s did it start to rise - 50,000 in 1998. But in the next decade it shot up - to almost 250,000

The 2004 enlargement of the European Union (EU) to eight Eastern European countries (EU8) generated fears of large flows of low-skill immigrants from Eastern to Western Europe. For this reason most Western European countries (EU15) imposed temporary restrictions to the free movement of people from Eastern Europe. But the UK (along with Ireland and Sweden) did not impose any such restrictions - as a result "the Polish plumber" became a bone of contention in the country....

Gordon Brown and Tony Blair were the key players at the time - and it is therefore odd to see them popping up this week to argue the case for "Remain". Blair knows he lost all credibility during the Iraq war - but Brown does not seem to realise that his role in the final week of the Scottish referendum of 2014 finished him as a figure of influence

Very few British journalists operate outside the "Westminster bubble". [John Harris](#) is a rarity..... Some five years ago he started to go [round the country and use video](#) for carrying out sharp interviews with the public...to get a sense of their concerns.....all of which carried clear warnings for the political elite. [This article from February this year](#) was a great summary of what he was finding...Just a few weeks ago, [he ran with this warning...](#)

Today saw his final post - from the Labour stronghold of Stoke-on-Trent - where those canvassing what they considered to be Labour voters [could find only an angry determination to leave the EU](#) Rather belatedly, a few politicians have [been trying to address the concerns](#). But it is too late - the scale of disgust and anger of the public is simply irresistible....

update - a [further development here](#) - with an [important figure conceding that Europe needs to change](#) tack on free movement of labour...but such a change is totally impossible.....

Two weeks ago pundits were saying that "it would be OK on the night" - that voters would, in the privacy of the polling booth, vote remain. It is now obvious that the opposite is happening....My prediction is of a LEAVE VOTE winning margin of 7-8%. I may not be in the country - or been so for a few years - but the few reporters I trust have been on the doorsteps and [in the \(Labour\) party rooms](#) and have a very good [sense of the mood](#).....

Frank Field has long been a maverick voice in the Labour party but he has been [one of the few to articulate grass-roots concerns](#)....

14 June

[Making sense of the Referendum \(and UK politics\)](#)



The mood in England (less so in the other 3 parts of the UK - particularly Scotland) seems this past week to be consolidating around withdrawal from the European Union. We have known that a significant section of the British population has never found involvement in Europe to their liking but - that Brexit is holding at around 45% support according to the polls; that it has two ruling party politicians (the cabinet's most able

thinker and one time confidant of the prime minister, and the Tory's most popular star) as its leaders; that they are supported by around half of the party's MPs and a clear majority of Conservative voters; that they might even win!..... This should not be remotely credible.

My blogposts this past week have been trying to shed some light on how on earth the country has got to this point.

But I discovered this morning that someone has, in the past few months, been writing and publishing the definitive explanationand that is Anthony Barnett of the [Open Democracy website](#) whose [Blimey - it could be BREXIT!](#) has been serialising on a weekly basis on that site for the past 3 months.

It is, quite simply, one of the most stunning things I have read for many years - written by someone who has had a unique position at the heart of key debates about political power since the early 1970s and whose independence from any employer or ideology allows him to write with a unique balance of coherence and intellectual depth.

As Barnett explains in his introduction -

"Blimey!" is not 'about' the referendum or reporting its ups and downs week by week. My aim is to explain its 'meta-politics': what to make of why it is occurring, where it comes from, what forces are contained within this strange event, what the consequences may be for all of us in the UK and in Europe over the longer term.

I have not yet finished my reading of the 12 sections (at least 200 pages) but what impresses me is the clarity of expression; the width of his reading; and the generosity of his quotations and attributions.

Conscious that about 75% of my readers are not native English speakers, I will try to summarise the points which particularly impressed me and post this asap

In the meantime, just click and dip in.....see for yourself

[INTRODUCTION](#)

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Europe's Fateful Day

My last post predicted (on 14 June) that those voting to leave would significantly outnumber the others but, as one Prime Minister of the 1970s famously said, "a week is a long time in politics" I was, like most people, shocked by the killing of a young English Labour MP last week, this being the main reason why the promised summary of Barnett's book has not yet appeared. The murder may or may not be the factor which has apparently seen a significant swing toward "remain" (and the betting money is certainly on that result).

What people actually do when they reach the privacy of the polling booth (if they actually do) is always the imponderable as I well know from personal experience. In 1979, I was a very active public campaigner for a "no" vote in the referendum about creating a Scottish Parliament (I felt then it was the slippery path to independence); I appeared on public platforms with prominent MPs - but- when it came to vote - I actually found myself putting a cross in the "yes" box!!

So now, as British voters trek to the polls, the feeling is that "remain" might just make it.....

Here are two thoughtful pieces on the implications of the campaign from one of my favourite journals - this one which focuses on the fact that Britain has [always had a "semi-detached" view of Europe](#) and a [short magisterial piece](#) which refers to a writer (JB Priestley) from the area in which the young MP was born -

who is remembered mostly for a single play, which he wrote towards the end of the second world war but which he set two years before the start of the first. It covers a single evening in the life of a smug, prosperous Midlands family, the Birleys, who are enjoying a celebratory dinner. It is interrupted by an unexpected caller, an inspector of police. A young woman is dead.

It emerges in the course of his interrogation that every member of the Birley family contributed in some way to Eva Smith's suicide. It's all a bit schematic; at times it creaks. Yet this standby of tatty rep - with its old-fashioned Christian Socialist values, its whiff of the supernatural, its overhanging presentiment of mass slaughter, its mysterious denouement - somehow moves and provokes modern audiences. It has become one of the classics of our age. Young people love it.

Now, why might that be? It's a question worth asking at the end of this vicious campaign, as we look with foreboding to a denouement of our own making in the early hours of Friday. I suspect what appeals to young people about this play, what gives it meaning in their own lives, is that it preaches - and it does preach - the importance of moral responsibility.

Read the inspector's closing speech. I've retained the name of the original character, Eva Smith, but it might be interesting if you substituted the name of a young woman from an ethnic minority.

But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths left with us, with their lives, their hopes and their fears, their suffering and a choice of happiness, all intertwined with our lives and what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish.

In the end, the early summer of 2016 was never about money, about a balance of economic advantage, about notions of sovereignty, about the parrot cries of 'freedom for Britain' or 'Britain first'.

It was not even about immigration. It was about a shocking want of kindness, an absence of love, a grievous loss of humanity. The inspector is calling. Again he's calling. This time, he's calling on us.

Der Spiegel has [a longer article here](#). And the Dublin Review of Books does a good summary of the debate as it [took place in the columns of the Guardian newspaper](#)
If the vote is for "leave", this [piece will be worth studying in detail](#)

23 June

Why the natives are revolting

Only those wishing to see Britain destroyed could have wished for the events now playing out in the country in which I spent my first fifty years -

"Take back control" was the slogan of those wanting out of Europe - instead of which everything seems to be spiralling out of control. Owen Jones is the author of a book [The Establishment - and how they get away with it](#) which excoriated the British power structure and has given us perhaps the [pithiest view of the past week's events](#) -

- The Brexiteers have no plan; they began backtracking on their promises within hours, which may well produce a firestorm of fury in the coming months;
 - the Prime Minister is resigning (and the Leader of the Opposition has massively lost a vote of confidence from his parliamentary colleagues)
 - the economy faces turmoil, as do jobs and people's living standards
 - The country is more bitterly divided (and in so many different ways) than it has been for generations; Scotland is on course to leave and precipitate the break-up of the country, and who can blame them; xenophobia and racism have been given renewed legitimacy; the Northern Ireland peace process is under threat.
 - The hard right of the Tory Party is on the cusp of power;
 - and the EU—fearful of its future survival—is preparing to offer punitive terms to Britain.
- We may well be at the beginning of the biggest calamity to befall this country since the end of the war.

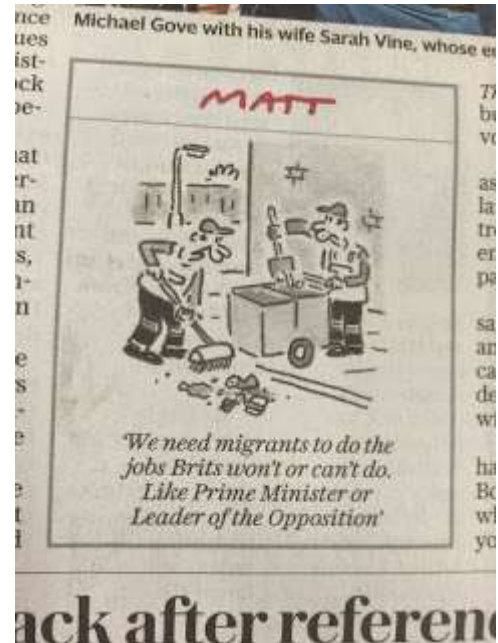
This [A-Z of Brexit](#) was apparently written the day after the vote to leave and is a rather longer and emotional commentary....

[The Current Moment](#) is an interesting collective blog which [draws attention today to the blow](#) which the referendum seems to have struck to progressives' beliefs in democracy -

every self-described leftist - even those who openly recognised the EU's undemocratic nature and brutal record in southern Europe - supported Remain.

Fundamentally, leftists doubted their capacity to lead the British public towards a progressive Brexit.

Instead, they warned, Boris Johnson would sweep to power and dismantle what was left of social democracy - apparently with popular consent.



They backed continued EU membership to maintain policies and institutions that they feared the population would not support in a fully democratic system. Lacking any real belief in the EU, the left was unable to offer a positive vision of EU membership and fell back on elite-led scare tactics.

The issues of democracy and self-determination were given up to the political right, as was leadership on both sides of the debate, allowing conservatives to define the debate over the future.

Ducking the issue of principle in the name of strategic nous, the vote was lost anyway, creating the outcome the left had feared all along: Brexit, led by the right.

After the vote, this defeatist orientation of the left has resulted in a social media spasm of vitriol directed against the old, the poor and the uneducated.

This piece on "[Why elections are bad for democracy](#)" seems to catch the mood well - although the book from which it is excerpted is part of a much older argument about representative democracy.....

But it is perhaps [Glenn Greenwald's "Intercept" column](#) which gives the most sustained analysis of the reasons for the [profound rejection of the political class we have been seeing in recent years](#)... His argument basically is that.....

a sizable portion of the establishment liberal commentariat in the West has completely lost the ability to engage with any sort of dissent from its orthodoxies or even understand those who disagree. They are capable of nothing beyond adopting the smuggest, most self-satisfied posture, then spouting clichés to dismiss their critics as ignorant, benighted bigots.

Like the people of the West who bomb Muslim countries and then express confusion that anyone wants to attack them back, the most simple-minded of these establishment media liberals are constantly enraged that the people they endlessly malign as ignorant haters refuse to vest them with the respect and credibility to which they are naturally entitled.

The referendum, of course, only seemed to be about Europe - in reality it was probably more about identity and fear of "the other"...what Europeans actually make of the referendum and its result is of little interest to the English electorate.....but, for what it's worth, the [inestimable Eurozine site offers some feedback](#)

The newspapers and journalists who are the subject of Glenn Greenwald's vitriol do, of course, contain exceptions - John Harris and Gary Younge being the two who try to keep the reputation of The Guardian intact. Younge's "[long read](#)" [today](#) packs eloquence and insight

Lying has consequences that last far longer than individual acts of deception: it ruins the liar's ability to convince people when it really matters. The source of the mistrust between the establishment and the country isn't difficult to fathom.

Next week the Chilcot inquiry will publish its findings into the Iraq war. After Iraq, we faced an economic crisis that few experts saw coming until it was too late. Then followed austerity; now the experts said this was precisely the wrong response to the crisis, but it happened anyway.

When leaders choose the facts that suit them, ignore the facts that don't and, in the absence of suitable facts, simply make things up, people don't stop believing in facts - they stop believing in leaders. They do so not because they are over-emotional, under-educated, bigoted or hard-headed, but because trust has been

eroded to such a point that the message has been so tainted by the messenger as to render it worthless.....

It may seem a minor matter in the wake of this referendum to say that our political parties are failing in their historic mission, but we would not have arrived here were they not doing so.

The party set up by trade unions to represent the interests of workers in parliament no longer commands the allegiance of those people. True, almost two-thirds of Labour voters did vote remain – but an overwhelming number of the working-class, the poor, and the left-behind put their faith in leave.

Meanwhile, the party of capital and nation has presided over a painful blow to the City and the Union. Neither party is fit for purpose.....

I generally have no time for Twitter - but feel that [this blow-by-blow analysis by one of the Economist analysts](#) says it all

30 June

[The Sleep of Reason produces Monsters](#)



Global events have struck me dumb...Brexit did not so much surprise as shock me - into a deep depression. But it's not so much the result per se as the new tone of global politics of which this is simply one expression - any pretence at reason has been surrendered to the [exercise of brute power and stirring of visceral hatreds](#) as evident in Trump's victory and events in Turkey, Nice and Munich.....let alone Baghdad and Kabul

They've apparently been talking in the US for some 5-6 years about ["post-truth politics"](#) but it was an important [recent article argues that technology is at the root of the new drift](#)

It was hardly the first time that politicians had failed to deliver what they promised, but it might have been the first time they admitted on the morning after victory that the promises had been false all along.

This was the first major vote in the era of post-truth politics: [the listless remain campaign](#) attempted to fight fantasy with facts, but quickly found that the currency of fact had been badly debased. The remain side's worrying facts and worried experts were dismissed as "Project Fear" - and quickly neutralised by opposing "facts": if 99 experts said the economy would crash and one disagreed, the BBC told us that each side had a different view of the situation. (This is a disastrous mistake that ends up obscuring truth, and echoes how some report climate change.)

Michael Gove declared that ["people in this country have had enough of experts"](#) on Sky News. [He also compared](#) 10 Nobel prize-winning economists who signed an anti-Brexit letter to Nazi scientists loyal to

Hitler. It can become very difficult for anyone to tell the difference between facts that are true and 'facts' that are not...

For months, the Eurosceptic press trumpeted every dubious claim and rubbished every expert warning, filling the front pages with too many confected anti-migrant headlines to count - many of them later quietly corrected in very small print. On the same day Nigel Farage unveiled his inflammatory "Breaking Point" poster, and Labour MP [Jo Cox](#), who had campaigned tirelessly for refugees, was shot dead, the cover of the Daily Mail featured a picture of migrants in the back of a lorry entering the UK, with the headline "We are from Europe - let us in!" The next day, the Mail and the Sun, which also carried the story, were forced [to admit](#) that the stowaways were actually from Iraq and Kuwait.

A few days after the vote, Arron Banks, Ukip's largest donor and the main funder of the Leave.EU campaign, [told the Guardian](#) that his side knew all along that facts would not win the day. "It was taking an American-style media approach," said Banks. "What they said early on was 'Facts don't work', and that's it. The remain campaign featured fact, fact, fact, fact, fact. It just doesn't work. You have got to connect with people emotionally. It's the Trump success."

Twenty-five years after [the first website](#) went online, it is clear that we are living through a period of dizzying transition. For 500 years after Gutenberg, the dominant form of information was the printed page: knowledge was primarily delivered in a fixed format, one that encouraged readers to believe in stable and settled truths. Now, we are caught in a series of confusing battles between opposing forces: between truth and falsehood, fact and rumour; between the few and the many, the connected and the alienated; between [the open platform of the web](#) as its architects envisioned it and the gated enclosures of Facebook and other social networks; between an informed public and a misguided mob.

What is common to these struggles - and what makes their resolution an urgent matter - is that they all involve the diminishing status of truth. This does not mean that there are no truths. It simply means, as this year has made very clear, that we cannot agree on what those truths are, and when there is no consensus about the truth and no way to achieve it, chaos soon follows.

Increasingly, what counts as a fact is merely a view that someone feels to be true - and technology has made it very easy for these "facts" to circulate with a speed and reach that was unimaginable in the Gutenberg era (or even a decade ago).

There are usually several conflicting truths on any given subject, but in the era of the printing press, words on a page nailed things down, whether they turned out to be true or not. The information felt like the truth, at least until the next day brought another update or a correction, and we all shared a common set of facts.

This settled "truth" was usually handed down from above: an established truth, often fixed in place by an establishment. This arrangement was not without flaws: too much of the press often exhibited a bias towards the status quo and a deference to authority, and it was prohibitively difficult for ordinary people to challenge the power of the press.

Now, people distrust much of what is presented as fact - particularly if the facts in question are uncomfortable, or out of sync with their own views - and while some of that distrust is misplaced, some of it is not.

update; I now see that there was talk in Britain [even in June](#) of "post-truth politics" - and that I must have borrowed my title for this post [from a post on 23 June by Chris Grey](#)

23 July

Academics who produce the goods

In the 2 posts I did after the 23 June Brexit result, I tried to give a sense of how subsequent events were covered by some of the UK, European and American "writers" I respect (whether in The Guardian, LRB, Eurozine, der Spiegel or New York Review of Books).

A strong theme which emerged in their comments was the extent to which balanced analysis has been replaced (in both the tabloids and social media) by shrill partisanship and the careless treatment of "facts"..... Everything these days is "relative" - there is always a different perspective - the world is too confusing - so it's not worth listening to "the experts"

Exactly how this translated into electoral behaviour is powerfully shown at page 15 of a fascinating presentation made at the LSE by a Professor only a week after the result - [After the EU Referendum - what next for Britain and the EU?](#)

Bear in mind that some 90% of the public advice given (by economists and global think-tanks) on the economic aspects warned of the very tangible damaging effect which Brexit would have on British investment, shares and employment. "Project Fear" was a term which had been skilfully used by the Scottish nationalists during the 2013-14 Scottish referendum to try to belittle the arguments of those who argued for Scotland to remain in the UK. And this was the term which was duly trundled into use this year to make light of the dangers of withdrawing from the EU.

The difference, however, is that a huge 42% of those polled in the last few weeks of the 2014 Scottish referendum campaign considered that they would be "worse off" in an independent Scotland (3 other options were given - "better off", "no difference" and "don't know").

In June of this year - despite several official estimates which put a very tangible figure of several thousand pounds as the annual cost per earner of Brexit - exactly half that number (21%) gave that judgement about British withdrawal from Europe.

By contrast almost half (45%) of those polled in early June this year for the UK referendum considered it would make "no difference" to them economically (compared with only 22% of the Scots 2 years ago)

In other words, "Project Fear" worked in 2014 but totally failed in 2016

Are the Scots more gullible (we did after all vote strongly for remain)? Can the same trick not work twice? More probable is Hix's more nuanced argument about the new social divide between the "precariat" and professionals - life is so bad for so many people that threats of it getting worse have lost meaning.....they just want to kick out.....

Simon Hix's presentation [can be viewed on Youtube](#) - and I really would recommend that you follow both the video and the power-point presentations since he gives the best analysis I have yet seen of the reasons for people voting the way they did - as well as an excellent assessment of what happens now.

It clearly helped that he was part of a multi-disciplinary team of academics who travelled around the country talking to ordinary people about the issue...it's clear that he learned a lot from the exercise. And (despite his own views - he is after all a Professor of European politics) he is emphatic that "Brexit means Brexit"

Academics get a bad name for talking down to us in abstruse language but the same research website [The UK in a changing Europe](#) has several excellent articles eg [this one written in the aftermath of the vote by the indefatigable Richard Rose](#)

And one more positive example of what academics are capable of if they turn their minds sufficiently to the real world is this 13 page memo published today by 2 British academics "[Getting out Quick and Playing the Long Game](#)

A 'three step' Brexit solution, including an ambitious transitional arrangement, is key to meeting the aspirations of the British people and reaching a mutually beneficial long-term relationship with the EU. This would see the UK leave the EU towards the end of 2018 and enter a transitional arrangement, possibly lasting until 2024, which would offer the time and space needed to more coolly and calmly negotiate a long-term agreement. The outcome of the EU referendum laid down the general parameters required for such a transitional agreement:

1. Parliamentary sovereignty should be restored. All EU law would be transposed into British law and a 'Petitions Committee', comprising a variety of representatives, should be empowered to hold hearings on whether an EU law should be repealed or amended on the basis of a petition from a certain threshold of British citizens or companies. The UK should no longer be subject to the formal force of the EU Court of Justice's judgments.

2. Crucially, this committee should involve not only the 'usual suspects' from stakeholder society - though devolved administrations, local government and key interests should be involved. It should also reach out to groups that are not usually involved in exercises such as this but who turned out in force to vote in the referendum.

3. A joint UK-EU commission could assess whether countermeasures were appropriate if judgments or interpretations by British regulatory bodies departed from EU law. These countermeasures could have consequences for UK exporters' access to EU markets.

4. Free movement of EU citizens cannot carry on in its current form. A compromise would be only to grant residence to those who have an offer of a full time job and a new income threshold for those seeking to bring their families to the UK, as is the case for UK nationals seeking to bring in a non-EU spouse.

5. The UK should no longer formally contribute to the EU budget. The UK's net contributions could be replaced by direct UK bilateral support to the poorer EU member states.

6. Scotland and possibly Northern Ireland will need a closer relationship with the EU than other parts of the UK. This could involve keeping EU law in place in Scotland, including free movement of person, in return for participation in the work of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) in Brussels.

The hurdles to such a transitional agreement should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, it could appeal to EU partners since it secures a quick Brexit and allows a high degree of economic predictability while negotiating a longer-term deal. Within the UK, such an arrangement would allow the broadest possible participation in the process of untangling the UK from EU law and responsiveness to unpopular EU laws, whilst securing an orderly exit.

25 July

[Celebrating what has gone before](#)

Every now and then I contemplate christening the elegant old house which has been home for me these past 7-8 summers - walkers occasionally give it an admiring glance but I discovered yesterday that it has acquired not only a new status (in a superbly produced little guide about traditional houses and skills in the area - entitled [Carpathian Gate](#)) but also a name "Burlacu Lucia".

A couple of charming young women arrived yesterday and presented me with a plaque about the house for installing on the fence at the road" (although I will have to question the idea that the house is late 19th century) - also a couple of copies of their little booklet in Romanian.



They belong to a small foundation ([The Centre for Mountain Ecology](#)) which is doing the sort of work Daniela and I were bemoaning was all too little evident in the country....this is another example of their work from their site <http://cem.ro/galerie/case-fundata/>.

One of the women was actually German, married to the Romanian who heads up the NGO

As you can imagine, I'm delighted that there are some people around here celebrating traditional architecture and skills.....For someone who earned his money these past 25 years from preaching the "modernist" agenda, I have developed quite a respect (if not passion) for the "old ways"... A few years back I did a couple of posts about this subject -

<http://nomadron.blogspot.ro/2012/06/village-tradition-and-solidarity.html> and <http://nomadron.blogspot.ro/2012/06/getting-under-skin.html> and a little section of my library here is about village life this past century in various parts of Europe eg - Geert Maak's [Island in Time](#) (2000) - "[Thin Paths - journeys in and around an italian mountain village](#)" (2012) beautifully written with black and white photos giving it a WG Sebald feel...

The full list of such books can be found on a post I did last year about some of the relics found in our house when we bought it in 2000 and [the extent of the work Daniela did](#) to bring it back to life

At my age it becomes particularly important to celebrate memories and traditional skills. I therefore liked [the booklet on "craftsmen"](#) on the NGO website - which reminded me of a lovely little booklet/notebook I have from 2010 ("Calet de notiste despre mesteri si mestesuguri" (ARHITERRA) which lists about 100 craftsmen throughout Romania - unfortunately it doesn't give a website although it does contain a reference to [this French site](#) .

Sirnea is a bit "off the beaten track" compared with the other nearby villages you will find in a lovely little glossy produced recently about a local poet and sculptor - "[Legenda Branului](#)". Indeed the village is almost in a bit of a "time warp" - which gives it an additional charm for me....that's the wrong word - but the life these people lived needs more recognition eg my old neighbour Viciu (age 89) down the hill was the postman in the 1960s and 1970s and delivered the mail on horseback -

from Bran!!! He lost his wife last year and has this year been living with his daughter in Bran. It would be great if people could talk with him about these days and record it in a proper book about village life in the middle of the 20th century.....

Some of you may be interested in [these flickr photos I uploaded today](#) of the area as experienced last month by 3 relatives who spent a couple of weeks based here

29 August

[The Fear of Old Age](#)



"[Forever Young](#)" has always had a special resonance for me - not simply because of my surname but rather because of what has been my disinclination to think of how ageing might affects me.

A couple of posts last August, eg [Intimations of Mortality](#) and [Facing up to our Mortality](#) were perhaps the first indication of how my attitude was beginning to change - identifying and excerpting from three important books -

- [Being Mortal - illness, medicine and what matters in the end](#); by a very literate and humane American surgeon, Atul Gawande (2014);

- [Ammonites and Leaping Fish - a Life in Time](#); by British writer Penelope Lively (2003) - a short but delightfully-written musing on what it is to be "old". [This article is a selection](#) of the first half of the book from which I have extracted this -

I think there is a sea-change, in old age - a metamorphosis of the sensibilities. With those old consuming vigours now muted, something else comes into its own - an almost luxurious appreciation of the world that you are still in. Spring was never so vibrant; autumn never so richly gold. People are of abiding interest - observed in the street, overheard on a bus.

The small pleasures have bloomed into points of relish in the day - food, opening the newspaper (new minted, just for me), a shower, the comfort of bed. It is almost like some kind of end-game salute to the intensity of childhood experience, when the world was new. It is an old accustomed world now, but invested with fresh significance; I've seen all this before, done all this, but am somehow able to find new and sharpened pleasure.

- [Out of Time - the Pleasures and Perils of Ageing](#) by British feminist and sociologist Lynne Segal (2013) I found rather too self-indulgent but the late-lamented Jenni Diski reviewed it superbly in the link the title gives , with this part focusing on the politics -

One of her primary concerns is the war between the generations. The one in which, to our surprise, we are now the old and tiresome. But this time, there are worse accusations being chucked around. We are the baby boomers, the demographic catastrophe waiting to happen that is now happening. Baby boomers lived

their youth in a golden time.

Far from having to go into tens of thousands of pounds of debt, we had free tuition and decent grants to live on while we received a higher education. The generation that bore us and lived through the hardships of war and austerity, while disapproving of us, also provided us with welfare benefits that allowed us to take time off from earning a living, to play with ideas and new ways (we thought) of organising socially and politically, of exploring other cultures, drugs, craziness, clothes and music.

Now, this free time seems mythic. If we wanted jobs, there were plenty of them. If we didn't, we benefited in a way that would be called scrounging now (it was then, but no one stopped it).

We are costing a fortune as we age and we'll go on to cost much more because medical science has promised us twenty more years of some sort of life than our parents expected. Our pensions, the medical expertise and equipment, the time and energy needed to care and cater for a disproportionately large aged population: all this, the young have been told, is coming out of their earnings and limiting their wellbeing. We got grants to do up houses we bought cheaply. They can't get a mortgage. Workers to our queens, they are providing our good life, in suburbia, beside the sea, in sunny Spain, filling hospital beds, out of their taxes.

We take our pensions, our cold weather payments, foreign holidays and cruises, while the young struggle to find jobs to pay for our needs, our strokes, our previously unhealthy lifestyles that caused the sicknesses which the impoverished NHS is obliged to cure.

Segal, quite rightly, doesn't blame the young for their anger, but mostly the media for provoking it. 'Older people lived the "good life". Why should the young have to pay for it?' the Guardian asks. 'Crumbies should stop whingeing and claiming priority over a scant welfare budget. We created this me-first world, now we should give something back,' says 74-year-old Stewart Dakers.

Some articles I archived in 2012 and 2013 show that the physical side of ageing was beginning even then to register on me - particularly "[Daddy Issues](#)"; [a review of the "Amour" film](#); a shocking [commentary about Japanese attitudes](#); and a piece [on the loneliness epidemic](#).

I notice that I now have a dozen or so books on the theme of ageing and death including a solitary humorous take on the subject - [Growing Old - the last Campaign](#) - by Des Wilson (2014). The link is actually to a powerful defence of the elderly from the resentful anger which Diski refers to - written by Wilson who was the most famous British campaigner of the second half of the century

The British philosopher [John Gray reviewed last year](#) a couple of important books on the subject - [The Black Mirror: Fragments of an Obituary for Life](#); by retired British gerontologist, poet and polymath Raymond Tallis (2015) - and [The Worm at the Core: on the Role of Death in Life](#); by American psychologists Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg and Tom Pyszczynski

Both books cite the work of the cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker. In *The Denial of Death* (1973) Becker, whose work is now undergoing something of a revival, suggested that flight from death is the driving force of civilisation. Many of humanity's greatest achievements, as well as its worst crimes, can be understood as attempts to ward off mortality.

Tallis' book is a complex philosophical read as indicated by this [Spiked Online review](#)

Tallis is a convinced atheist - not the all-too-familiar kind, typified by Dawkins, which rants on incessantly about the evils of religion, but the rarer, more intelligent variety that finds the very idea of God empty and incoherent.

The Black Mirror, he tells us, "is, ultimately, a work of praise and gratitude". It is true that the book contains many invocations of beauty and joy: "ploughlands bordered with bare hawthorn hedges scribbled on low dark and grey skies rifted with brilliance"; the simple pleasure in existing on a dull Wednesday afternoon. Overall, though, the mood is melancholy, heavy with regret for how much of the life that is gone was left un-lived. Pursuing "some dream of changing the world (and of course his prospects in it) for the better", the author "allowed himself to be indifferent to an April evening, glistening with dew and birdsong, that could have become itself in his consciousness". Now it is getting late:

The German television channel Deutsche Welle actually contains the best take on the second book's theme [in an interview](#) which allows the authors to explain their theory about how we handle our existential fear of death which they call, curiously "terror-management"

For most of human history, most people didn't have all that much. Life was short; you spent most of your waking hours trying to find something to eat. And in the absence of the technology for mass production, most folks did not accumulate all that much. The primary mode of production was that we had to make stuff by hand. If you were a shoemaker, you made an entire shoe - and if you made good shoes then you could feel justly proud for your accomplishments.

And then the industrial revolution comes along. And on the one hand, mass production gives us the capacity to produce high quality goods at prices that many people can afford. On the other hand, the division of labor just radically shifted the nature of work. Now, you don't make a whole shoe any more, you just slap the heel on it. And that's what you do for eight hours a day for forty years. You don't own a shoe; you take no pride in slapping the heel on it. And consequently, there is no longer the capacity for acquiring self-regard by virtue of what you literally do. From humans as makers to humans as takers - a radical shift from valuing yourself by your accomplishments in terms of what you tangibly produce to valuing yourself by abstract figures in a bankbook.....

And one thing that we can do is buy a lot of rubbish. Another thing we can do is to take the death anxiety and to pin it on other people either in or outside of our culture - and to just say "oh, these are the all-encompassing repositories of evil". It used to be the communists. And now, it's Islamic terrorists. Domestically, we used to hate the hippies - but they are okay now, because jeans cost 200 bugs and the hippies are hedge fund managers. So then, we hate homosexuals, right? But they are ok, so now, we hate old people or we hate people who don't speak English and so on... So, what will we do with those folks? Well, belittle them or we try to convince them that our way of life is better or - when that doesn't work - we just kill them.

And I actually unearthed (and downloaded) today [The Loneliness of The Dying](#) a short book written by the famous Anglo-German sociologist [Elias Norbert](#) in 1985 -

John Gray perhaps puts it best -

Religions have their afterlives, while secular faiths offer continuity with some larger entity - nations, political projects, the human species, a process of cosmic evolution - to stave off the painful certainty of oblivion. In their own lives, human beings struggle to create an image of themselves that they can project into the world. Careers and families prolong the sense of self beyond the grave. Acts of exceptional

heroism and death-defying extreme sports serve a similar impulse. By leaving a mark, we can feel we are not just fleeting individuals who will soon be dead and then forgotten.

Against this background, it might seem that the whole of human culture is an exercise in death denial. This is the message of Stephen Cave's thoughtful and beautifully clear *Immortality: the Quest to Live For Ever and How It Drives Civilisation* (2012). A more vividly personal but no less compelling study of our denial of death is presented in Caitlin Doughty's *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: and Other Lessons from the Crematorium* (2015), in which the author uses her experience of working at a Californian funeral parlour to show how contemporary mortuary practice - removing the corpse as quickly as possible, then prettifying it so that it almost seems alive - serves to expel the fact of death from our lives.

update; at the weekend, [this interesting article appeared](#) - attracting an equally interesting discussion and, in October, this [fascinating review about longevity](#)

At the end of the year, Joseph Epstein penned [this great piece on approaching 80](#)

1 September

[My Three Years in Uzbekistan](#)

[Uzbek's dictator has died](#) - having held on to office for some 30 years, His replacement could well be someone I knew from my 3 years as Team Leader of an EU-funded Civil Service Reform project in the country between 1999 and 2002 - [Shavkat Mirziyoyev](#) who served as governor of [Jizzakh Region](#) from 1996 to September 2001, then as governor of [Samarkand Region](#) from September 2001 until his appointment as Prime Minister in 2003, a position he has held until now.



The project was required to have 2 "pilot regions" which were his two of Jizzakh and Samarkand. He was chairman of the project's Steering Committee.....

Ours was quite a large team which was attached to the Cabinet of the President's Office - indeed we were supposed to be inside their building but it was blown apart by a bomb a few month's before I arrival so we had to put up with a big office overlooking the scaffolding as it was refurbished.

I had some amazing experiences in the country whose atmosphere was quite unlike anything I have experienced elsewhere - with a fascinating combination, for example, of ornate tea ceremonies and hard drinking.

Early on Al-Queeda gained some Jizzakh mountain passes near its capital Tashkent (this was before [Craig Murray's time](#)) which put them off-limits to us for some months. I acquired a taste for painting there - as well as rugs and terra-cotta figurines.

Some people might consider it [dubious to be involved with work in such regimes](#) but I felt privileged to be allowed to stand in a classroom of the Tashkent Presidential Academy for Reconstruction and present to civil servants the sort of perspective about power enshrined in Rosabeth Kanter's [Ten Rules of Stifling Innovation](#) - and also to lay out the European experience of developing local government over the centuries. One of the papers I did then was [Transfer of Functions - the West European experience 1970-2000](#) and can be accessed on the link - all 60 pages.....

Coincidentally or not, the esteemed President decided a few years later that [political science was not an acceptable subject and had its study subsumed under](#) the title of "Spirituality and Enlightenment"!



[The Search for Democracy](#)



In 1977 I published a little book called "[The Search for Democracy - a guide to and polemic about Scottish local government](#)" which was written around some 40 questions community activists and students were putting to me about the new system of Scottish local government which had arrived in 1975. I was in a fairly unique position to deal with this since I had, for some 3 years, been occupying one of the leading positions in the country's largest local authority - Strathclyde Region

Not least of my puzzlements was about the source and nature of power. And the story told by one of the architects of the British NHS ([Aneurin Bevan](#)) about his own search for power - from his own municipality through trade unions to the heights of the British Cabinet - used the powerful metaphor of the onion. As each layer peeled away, there did not appear to be a heart!

Like Bevan, I have been peeling away various slices to try to get to "the heart of the onion" eg (in Scotland) as community activist; manager of community development projects; political science

academic; local councillor; local manager; - then since 1990 foreign consultant (capacity development; civil service reform); change management expert; trainer.....

The subtitle to part I of the book was "Birthpangs or Death Throes?" The questions the book explored related naturally to those organisations which most immediately impacted then on ordinary people

As, in later years, I dealt with higher levels of government, the questions changed.....And, as local government has become emasculated, so the questions which people raise have perhaps become more pertinent....

But, for the moment, treat this as a history lesson.....

- - What were the new Districts and Regions supposed to achieve?
- - Why do we seem further away from these goals?
- - Will the new system not produce conflict and delay?
- - Are the new councils not too large and distant?
- - Does the public get value for money?
- - How much "fat" is there?
- - How much freedom does local government has?
- - Will a Scottish parliament not require the abolition of one of the tiers?
- - What do councillors do?
- - How do people become councillors?
- - What sort of power do they have?
- - Who are they accountable to?
- - Are party politics really necessary?
- - How does the party system work?
- - How does the committee system work?
- - What are its deficiencies?
- - Where does power lie?
- - Why are so many obstacles placed in the way of those wanting help and advice?
- - Will community councils make any difference?
- - What have councils done to improve their services?
- - How do councils know if their policies are working?
- - how might voluntary organisations/community groups play a bigger role?

Forty years on I am still, it seems, "searching for democracy"..... but, as the various papers in this website show, the questions have become global.

Indeed at the start of the new millennium I had been so concerned about its erosion that I had drafted a paper around a set of rather different questions an updated version of which - [Guide for the Perplexed](#) - I placed on a website some years ago.....

There it has languished, still unfinished.....but a recent exchange has encouraged me to pull it out again and do a bit of minor updating.....

It's now called [Mapping the common ground](#) and is a fairly rare overview of what has been written over the years about the democratic malaise from which we have been suffering for the past 2 decades...

2 September

FAST READING AND SLOW WRITING

As an avid reader for more than half a century, I have become more and more aware of the shortcomings of most recently-published non-fiction books.

Their bibliographies may look impressive and their chapter headings riveting but the books increasingly suffer, in my view, from the following sorts of deficiencies -

- They are written by academics
- who write for students and other academics
- and lack "hands-on" experience of other worlds
- the author's speciality indeed is only a sub-discipline - eg financial economics
- the focus is a fashionable subject
- written with deadlines to meet commercial demands
- making claims to originality- but failing to honour the google scholar adage of "standing on the shoulders of giants" (despite - perhaps even because of - the extensive bibliographies)

I now have a litmus test for any book which catches my eye - actually not one but three -

1. Does it reveal in its preface/introduction and bibliography an intention to honour what has been written before on the subject?

2. Indeed does it clearly list and comment on what has been identified as the key reading and indicate why, despite such previous efforts, the author feels compelled to add to our reading burden??? And can you, the reader, identify any obvious gaps in that list?

3. Can the author clearly demonstrate (eg in the introduction or opening chapter) that the book is the result of long thought and not just an inclination to jump on the latest bandwagon?

All of three years ago, I wrote about "slow books" - I wasn't aware of the phrase - it just came to me [in a creative flash](#). I was not really surprised, however, to learn that the phrase had already been coined - although fairly recently as I see from this [March 2012 article in The Atlantic](#) and this (rather local) [2009 website](#). In 2009 there was even a small book entitled [Slow Reading](#)

Let me push, however, for a wider definition of a "slow book".

"Slow food" is an entire process - it is the preparation, production and consumption. And abhors the formulaes, specialisation and slave labour which the logic of modern production and ownership systems require eg in MacDonal'd's and Amazon.

Similarly "Slow books" stand against marketing and "commodification" (sorry about the word!) and are about the relationships of real authentic people - whether as writers, readers, craftsmen or suppliers.

update; a review of a new book - [Slow Reading in a Hurried Age](#)

I will now reveal - exclusively for you - my ten tricks of fast reading and comprehension. They are very simply expressed -

General

- Read a lot (from an early age!)
- Read widely (outside your discipline)
- Read quickly (skim)

- If the author doesn't write in clear and simple language, move on to another book asap. Life's too short.....Bad writing is a good indicator of a confused mind

For each book

- Mark extensively (with a pencil) - with question-marks, ticks, underlines, comments and expletives
- Read the reviews (surf)
- Identify questions from these to ensure you're reading critically
- Write brief notes to remind you of the main themes and arguments
- Identify the main schools of thought about the subject
- Check the bibliography at the end - to see what obvious names are missing

5 September

Cotroceni scandal, seascapes and white wine - all in a Bucharest day's work

Sun still striking 30 here in Bucharest at midday. A lazy morning determined a journey to the Cotroceni Palace to see the seascape exhibition put together by the famous collector and painter Parizescu; we knew that security was strict but were still annoyed with the injunction to remove the camera from the rucksack (signs clearly indicated that a personal camera could be used for 4 euros but I wasn't sure that the collection would make this worthwhile).

In the event I was wrong - the room whose

brick ceiling looked like a cathedral but which is in fact the original kitchen turned out to house the most amazing little collection of early 20th century Romanian classics (Artachino, Pallady, Popescu,



Ressu, Steriadi) and had me scurrying back to the gatehouse for the camera - having checked with 2 pleasant curators that this was OK. At which point the Romanian system clicked into action - a phone call was made to someone and I was denied permission to photo - although the notices clearly say that only the grounds and church are banned.....



Furious, I returned and tried to get an explanation from the overbearing woman - who would only say that as the collection didn't belong to the Palace, photos were not permitted.....She did agree to make a telephone

call to the Director who apparently told her to have my camera brought up from the gatehouse.....smiles all round.....

Then, after a little picnic at the neighbouring Botanic Gardens, off to sample some white Romanian wines. The incredible price, range and quality of wines in neighbouring Bulgaria has meant that I am better informed of the wine scene there than here in Romania - good quality bottles of wine are 5-8 euros in Romania but 3-5 euros in Bulgaria.

Of course all Romanian cities are well endowed with wine "crameries" where you can get good regional wine from the barrel for just under 3 euros a litre. Hence my consumption of Romanian wines has tended to be restricted to the more common wines from Dealul Mare, Recas and Murfatlar - although I will buy bottles from the great [Cotnari](#) and Husi range in Moldova and I did find this week an excellent Riesling (in Lidl) for 4.5 euros (20 lei) from the [Satu Mare vineyard of Ratesti](#)

I have attended 2 of the recent [annual Sofia November wine weekends](#) and frequently consult the great little [Catalogue of Bulgarian Wine](#) produced each year by T Tanovska and K Iontcheva. Significantly, despite its much larger population, Romania does not (a far as my researches indicate) have such a publication ...the glossy coffee table book recently published purporting to be about Romanian wines is just a sloppy bit of PR work.....Perhaps I'll learn more at the big wine fair in Bucharest 2-6 November this year. Big date - it will be my first such Romanian event - insallah!! So it has been much more difficult for me to make an assessment of what the wine market offers here in Romania. I decided it was time to rectify that. The Dealul Mare vineyards are in the Carpathian foothills only an hour's driving north of Bucharest - this site offers [a nice introduction to what's on offer](#) - and this blog also gives [some useful technical notes on some of the better wines](#)

But I wanted to see what was available here in Bucharest so chose [Ethic Wine's Tasting Room](#) just 5 minutes drive away.....which is both a shop and wine bar. For 15 euros I had a taste of three great Romanian whites - [Liliac](#) Feteasca Alba (near Targu Mures); [Bauer](#) Sauvignon Blanc (near Craiova); and a Iacob white cuvee from the [Davino vineyard](#) at Ceptura (Dealul Mare), But, surprisingly no titbits were on offer to help sharpen the tastebuds - and only a few slices of bread were offered when I asked. A strange sort of "tasting room"!

Probably the most comprehensive guide to Romania's wine and vineyards is the [CrameRomania website](#) which includes [this list of about 130 romanian vineyards](#) And the [Dionysus wine bar](#) looks worth checking out

11 September

Post-Capitalism is here?

How might one read most beneficially a book which, from my google links, looks to be one of the most appreciated and reviewed of the past decade?

Paul Mason's [Post Capitalism - a Guide to our Future](#) came to my notice a year ago but it was only yesterday that I actually picked it off the shelves and started to read it.

I was unable to apply [my litmus test](#) to it since it lacks a bibliography - but I knew enough about it to have confidence that it would repay my study - I had, after all, thoroughly enjoyed his [Meltdown - the end of the age of greed](#) (2009) and his earlier [Live Working or Die Fighting - how the working class went global](#) in 2007.

This is someone, after all, who has combined an early career as a militant with a later one as both a print and television journalist - reporting on political and industrial struggles against capital...

The early pages of reading (the opening "Neoliberalism is broken" chapter) produced my usual squiggles which indicate appreciation but my attention started to wander in the middle of the subsequent discussion of the Kondratieff waves - despite the earlier nice little intellectual vignettes of people such as Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Rudolf Hilferding and Jenő Varga.

So I started to google for the reviews since these give me the questions which ensure that I am reading more closely.

And I came across at least 30 quite long reviews of the book to which I will give links at the end of this post.....

Chris Mullin was a contrarian Labour MP who [wrote a couple of amusing memoirs](#) about his life in parliament and was therefore someone I felt would have some sympathy for Mason's book but [his review is a tough one](#) -

one has to plough through more than 200 pages of analysis in the course of which the author examines one by one the various economic theories advanced by 19th- and 20th-century political philosophers and various IT gurus....

At no point on this long road are there any references to the impact of majority affluence on politics in the developed world. Nikolai Kondratieff (inventor of the wave theory of capitalism) occupies almost an entire column in the index. [JK Galbraith](#) and [Tony Crosland](#) do not merit a single mention....(Crosland actually has one!)

We have to wait until page 263, a chapter headed "Project Zero", to discover what the author has in store for us.

Methinks that Mullin is a tad too impatient - analysis and diagnosis are important!

The first part of the book ends with a series of annotated graphs which Mason suggests best summarise the massive shifts in debt, performance and inequality which characterise the decades of the last "wave". I really had to concentrate to get the points being made in the graphs



"Prophets of Postcapitalism" introduces the second section of the book (at page 109), paying tribute to the questions posed by the great [Peter Drucker](#) (then in his 90s) in his little 1993 book "[The Post-Capitalist World](#)" and to others who have understood the significance of the technological and social changes which have been shattering our worlds in recent decades eg Jeremy Rifkin, with his 2014 book [The Zero Marginal Cost Society](#)

It is at this stage that I needed one of these maps which identify the link between various intellectual schools - [such as this one](#) from the very [useful Commons Transition website](#)
In that context, [this article from Open Democracy](#) seemed to me to set the Mason book in an appropriate context

Anyway I am now half-way through the book but stuck in the section on the labour theory of value - whose relevance I am struggling to understand

For those with more patience, I came across at least 30 quite long reviews - in a few cases of more than 6 pages long...

- Ann Pettifor, for example, prepared a [very thoughtful commentary on the book](#) for a discussion she had with the author - suggesting, for example, "we are not the subject of impersonal forces but have human agency" and that capital gains (rather than rate of profit) is the main motive for owners...
- a long and rather [pedantic Real-World Economics review](#) focuses on the book's main thesis about low marginal costs and the new sharing economy
- Prospect gave [Mason an interview](#)
- one academic devoted 50 pages to his analysis - in 3 separate The [first part here](#), I can actually understand. The longer parts [here](#) and [here](#) I have to confess I find largely incomprehensible

One of the best reviews is one [from an Australian green](#) Senator and this one is good on [some of the book's contradictions](#)

A sample of other reviews

very good, [clear and focused one is here](#); a much more [critical one here](#)

a more sympathetic one from [the Take Back the Economy people](#)

<http://www.counterfire.org/articles/book-reviews/18008-paul-mason-postcapitalism-a-guide-to-our-future>

<http://www.alternet.org/world/post-capitalism-utopia-bit-farce>

<http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks/reviews/2015/2008>

<http://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/paul-mason-post-capitalism-a-guide-to-the-future/>

<http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-02-21/post-capitalism-via-the-internet-according-to-paul-mason-%E2%80%93-dream-or-reality>

<https://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2016/04/04/from-the-russian-revolution-to-socialism-on-mars/>

<http://the7circles.uk/the-end-of-capitalism-postcapitalism-by-paul-mason/>

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/paul-tritschler/is-there-life-after-capitalism>

<https://www.fastcoexist.com/3056483/welcome-to-the-post-work-economy>

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n13/owen-hatherley/one-click-at-a-time>

<http://socialistnetwork.org/book-review-mick-brooks-evaluates-paul-masons-postcapitalism-a-guide-to-our-future/>

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/09/16/have-we-really-entered-the-age-of-post-capitalism/>

<https://www.popularresistance.org/post-capitalism-rise-of-the-collaborative-commons/>

<https://www.popularresistance.org/issues/>

14 September

Things look up on the wine front

Things seem to be looking up on the Romanian wine front - if my experience yesterday afternoon is anything to go by. Had gone looking for the [Dionysus wine bar](#) which had excellent feedback on its Facebook - only to discover that the owner had sold up and that it was in the process of being refurbished. It is scheduled to open next week under the very unprepossessing name (the new owner told me) of "Industrial Winery" (??!!!)

So I wound my way instead to [Abel's Bar](#) which I had noticed last week (open, as seem all such places in Bucharest, from 16.00 to 24.00) and was nicely received by young Anda who advised me on the wine list which contains about 20 Romanian wines, mainly from nearby "Dealul Mare" but also from Vrancea, Dragosani and Transylvania.

I went first for the [Basilescu GOLEM](#) (a mix of Chardonnay and Feteasca from Dealul Mare) and was very impressed that she gave me a small sip for me to check before she filled up the glass. Indeed she did more - she poured me another white alongside the Golem to allow me to compare before I made the choice - the second taste was a [GARBOIU \(with Sarba/plavaie grapes\)](#) from Vrancea

And to help me decide on my second glass - which turned out to be GARBOIU Tectonic (Gewurztraminer) I was able (perhaps this explains the bar's name??) to taste a sip of [Avincis Cuvee Petit](#) (actually a Sauvignon Blanc) from Dragasani (a bit too sweet for me) and a [LICORNA Serafim Chardonnay](#) from Dealul Mare - the last of which was very good. But I don't often get the chance to taste Gewurztraminers so that's what I went for.....

Presumably it's the higher prices of Romanian wines (5-8 euros for bottles - compared with 3-5 in Sofia) that make real wine bars feasible in Bucharest. Opportunities to taste by the glass are simply not to be found in Sofia -except at the special events held by CasaVino and [Vina Orenda](#). While googling for these websites I found a serious Romanian wine blog - with the delightful name of [Good Things](#). What really impressed is that he has more than 200 posts [about wines under 20 lei](#) (just over 4 euros)

[a Curate's Egg](#)

Paul Mason is an engaging writer but, now that I have finished his [Post Capitalism - a guide to our future](#), I have to admit to a feeling of great disappointment.

The book simply fails to live up to the promise of its subtitle. Indeed at least one third of the book is actually devoted to writers and events of more than 100 years ago. Now I am someone who deeply respects the contribution which long-dead writers and people made and which is too easily forgotten - but I do draw the line at suggestions that we have something to learn from the travails of the early soviets of the Russian revolution (p267).

And it is nothing short of breath-taking that his reference to the potential of cooperatives and social enterprise (which employ tens of millions workers globally) dismisses them as "experimental and small-scale" and says that "with the exception of thinkers such as Bauwens and Wark, few have bothered to ask what a new system of governance and regulation might look like" (p 267).

This simply does not begin to do justice to the extensive material which is available - some of which can be seen in such posts as [The undermining of cooperation](#), [No Excuse for Apathy](#) and [Beacons of Hope](#)

But I am grateful to the book for drawing my attention to the writings of these "thinkers" one of whom is the founder of the [p2p Foundation](#) and the other the author of a famous [Hacker's Manifesto](#). Although I don't find their accounts coherent or easy to place in the wider literature - they seem the scribbles of young geeks...

The other text, however, which Mason references and of which I was also unaware, is much more serious - it is Jeremy Rifkin's 2014 book [The zero marginal cost society - the internet of things, the collaborative commons and the eclipse of capitalism](#) (the link gives the google book). This does seem a sustained examination of the phenomenon which, despite the title of Mason's book, he fails (in my view) to treat properly.....

Rifkin [summarises his thinking in this article](#) and [here](#)

There is also [this review](#); this [interview](#) and a long review from the [Ken Wilber integral school](#) Rifkin's book does, however, get a fairly severe mauling [from the right](#) - the [left](#) - and [others in between](#)

In short I find Mason's book a bit of [a Curate's egg](#) - ie good and bad....and suffering badly from the fault to which I draw increasing attention - not even trying to build on the relevant work of others...

18 September

Trump looks set.....

In 2014 I followed the [long debate about Scottish Independence](#) very closely on my blog - taking an agnostic view and offering no hostages to fortune. The 55-45% vote for continued membership of the UK confirmed my assessment about how things were panning out.

The shorter debate earlier this year on British membership of the European Union which culminated in the stunning 52-48% support for Brexit was [a decision I had felt in my bones](#)- although not one I supported.

I have the same feeling about the Donald Trump campaign..... The guy is clearly one of the world's greatest bastards - see, for example, this video on the [impact one of his golf courses is having on a small Scottish community](#).....

At the moment, however, he looks set to land in the White House - and the [Anywhere but Washington video series](#) gives us a good sense of why.....[small town america](#) has turned against the power elite....

Few journalists have seemed able to get his measure but [this peak-oil blogger is one of the few who has been able to make sense](#) of the interminable American election process of the past 12 months.

Massive giveaways to big corporations and the already affluent, punitive austerity for the poor, malign neglect for the nation's infrastructure, the destruction of the American working class through federal subsidies for automation and offshoring and tacit acceptance of mass illegal immigration as a means of driving down wages, and a confrontational foreign policy obsessed with the domination of the Middle East by raw military force.Those are the policies that George W. Bush and Barack Obama pursued through four presidential terms, and they're the policies that Hillary Clinton has supported throughout her political career.

Donald Trump, by contrast, has been arguing against several core elements of that consensus since the beginning of his run for office. Specifically, he's calling for a reversal of federal policies that support offshoring of jobs, the enforcement of US immigration law, and a less rigidly confrontational stance toward Russia over the war in Syria.

It's been popular all through the current campaign for Clinton's supporters to insist that nobody actually cares about these issues, and that Trump's supporters must by definition be motivated by hateful values instead, but that rhetorical gimmick has been a standard thought-stopper on the left for many years now, and it simply won't wash. The reason why Trump was able to sweep aside the other GOP candidates, and has a shot at winning next week's election despite the unanimous opposition of this nation's political class, is that he's the first presidential candidate in a generation to admit that the issues just mentioned actually matter.

That was a ticket to the nomination, in turn, because outside the echo chamber of the affluent, the US economy has been in freefall for years. I suspect that a great many financially comfortable people in today's America have no idea just how bad things have gotten here in the flyover states. The recovery of the last eight years has only benefited the upper 20% or so by income of the population; the rest have been left to get by on declining real wages, while simultaneously having to face skyrocketing rents driven by federal policies that prop up the real estate market, and stunning increases in medical costs driven by Obama's embarrassingly misnamed "Affordable Care Act."

It's no accident that death rates from suicide, drug overdose, and alcohol poisoning [are soaring just now among working class white people](#). These are my neighbors, the people I talk with in laundromats and lodge meetings, and they're being driven to the wall.

Most of the time, affluent liberals who are quick to emote about the sufferings of poor children in conveniently distant corners of the Third World like to brush aside the issues I've just raised as irrelevancies. I've long since lost track of the number of times I've heard people insist that the American working class hasn't been destroyed, that its destruction doesn't matter, or that it was the fault of the working classes themselves. (I've occasionally heard people attempt to claim all three of these things at once.)

On those occasions when the mainstream left deigns to recognize the situation I've sketched out, it's usually in the terms Hillary Clinton used in her infamous "basket of deplorables" speech, in which she admitted that there were people who hadn't benefited from the recovery and "we need to do something for them." That the people in question might deserve to have a voice in what's done for them, or to them, is not part of the vocabulary of the affluent American left.

What's ironic, of course, is that it's an uncouth billionaire who has challenged the conventional wisdom of the power elite.....

4 November

Populism - what is it?



A common theme of current journalism is the "populist" rage tearing through the fabric of western politics.....as expressed, for example, in Brexit and in the scale and nature of support for both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump.

I've [always had a problem with this epithet](#) - not least for its patronising tone about citizens and its assumption that our modern elites were incapable of being mistaken about globalisation.....

[A couple of years ago](#), I extracted this "deconstruction" from the

volume of scribblings on the subject-

- First, the 'people' is of paramount importance. Here, a feeling of community is stressed, and horizontal cleavages (such as left-right) are played down while vertical ones are played up for the purpose of excluding particular groups, e.g. elites and immigrants.
- Second, populists claim that the 'people' has been betrayed by the elites through their abuse of power, corruption etc.
- Third, populists demand that the "primacy of the people" has to be restored. In short: the current elites would have to be replaced and in their place the new leaders (the populists) would act for the good of the 'people'.

An [earlier post](#) referred to [a paper which gave more detail](#) -

1. Populism is the substitute for the eroded Left/Right divide in politics. It replaces it through the populist cleavage of 'the establishment' versus 'the people'. They are perceived as false unities and indeed pose a potential threat to the pluralist and constitutional dimensions of democracy.
2. Populism is a revolt against (the narrative of) globalisation.
3. Populism is a revolt against what the Germans call the Second Modernity, or late modernity: that is the modernity of individualisation, de-traditionalisation, cosmopolitanism, neoliberal capitalism and the global network society.
4. Populism is a revolt against expert-driven, technocratic policy-making.
5. Populism is the revolt of the working class and the squeezed lower middle class against the dominance of academic professionals in society and public discourse.
6. Populism is the revenge of the working class after the neoliberal betrayal (permanent welfare state austerity reforms) of socialist and social-democratic parties.
7. Populism is a dangerous, xenophobic revolt against ill-managed mass migration which negatively affected the lower end of society much more so than the upper end.
8. Populism is a revolt against a world that is changing too rapidly and where traditions, identities, and securities are no longer respected.
9. Where socialism and Christianity no longer act as moral and cultural restraints or breaks to the disrupting process of globalisation, populism has filled the vacuum: populism is a romantic, irrational, emotional revolt against the inhuman philosophy of efficiency in both the market and the state.
10. Populism is a revolt against the powerlessness of the political class who have seemingly lost all grip after handing control over to the anonymous forces of globalisation, the financial markets, and the logics of EU technocracy.

I would ask my readers to bear these definitions in mind as British and American events unravel in the next few weeks.....

The village scene is a typical Dobro Dobrev (1898-1973)

6 November

[How to Run a Government](#)

Michael Barber's 2015 book [How to Run a Government](#) has what to a Brit is a rather off-putting American sub-title - "so that citizens benefit and taxpayers don't go crazy"

But, for at least 5 years, he was Blair's right-hand man in the Cabinet Office trying to "deliver" better performance of carefully selected targets mainly in the educational and health sectors and has, for the past decade, used this experience to build a global reputation as a "delivery" or "implementation" guru in various parts of the world - not least Canada and the Punjab. And he is one of a small (if growing) number of people who has been able to both straddle the worlds of government and consultancy and write coherently.....

So I didn't hesitate to buy the book from Bucharest's [Anthony Frost Bookshop](#) - even although it failed [my "standing on the shoulders of giants" test](#) (ie its - short - reading list failed to mention some important texts from other practitioner/academic/consultants such as Christopher Foster and John Seddon let alone such writers as Chris Hood and Pollitt; Robert Quinn and the entire literature of change management)

But I'm at page 170 and thoroughly enjoying it - despite the occasional over-indulgent self-referencing..... Hardly surprising that he's made [a fair number of enemies in his time](#) but his straightforward language and description of the various techniques and working methods he's found useful in the last 20 years of advising political leaders in various parts of the world I find both useful and refreshing.

In 1999 I pulled together my own scribbles about reform efforts - for a new audience I was then facing in central Asia - [In Transit - some notes on good governance](#). This was just as New Labour's Modernising Government effort (which lasted until 2010) was getting underway. I followed these with great interest although the ex-communist context in which I was working was a very different one - see my ["The Long Game - not the logframe"](#) (2012) for its assessment of the chances of Technical Assistance programmes making any sort of dent in what I called (variously) the kleptocracy or "impervious regimes" of most ex-communist countries.

There are surprisingly few reviews for a book which has been out for some 18 months which says a lot to me about academics, consultants and journalists.....

8 November

Leonard Cohen RIP



For the past decade, Leonard Cohen's songs have captured me.....it was only a few weeks ago that I enjoyed the youtubes shown below.....one of them shows the most loving interaction between singers I have ever seen.....

Others show the most thoughtful conversations.....

Thank you Leonard.....RIP

<https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2008/12/18/leonard-cohens-anthem/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/oct/20/leonard-cohen-you-want-it-darker-album-review>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVJImYNGqwk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD8pe7Iwwb0#t=201.344211>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44-xVe_vivs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8Ux6d2b9Nq>

<http://vancouver.sun.com/news/staff-blogs/leonard-cohen-the-theology-of-love>

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/17/leonard-cohen-makes-it-darker>

Lonesome Heroes Documentary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BKx1LpxAt4>

His tracks have been playing around us all afternoon - and I salute this website which uses one of his lines as its title - <https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2016/11/11/goodbye-leonard-you-let-in-the-light-for-us-all/>

11 November

[A Fatal Detachment](#)

Last Sunday's blogpost - before the Trump victory which was so obvious for those with eyes to see - focussed on populism and on the rage which one finds in Europe and northern America. Bernie Sanders was a self-confessed socialist but such was the people's rage and need for a champion that they were somehow able (even with America's visceral hatred for the word) to take that in their stride.....

The same was true of Trump - the precariat and the left-behind whites forgave him his offensiveness (even relishing his political un-correctness) since he shared and championed their revulsion of free trade and movement of labour

Scales are beginning to fall from some eyes as the bubble in which the media lives (in their own company and that of the elites) is exposed - with few journalists having bothered to survey life in small-town America. John Harris, with Gary Younge, one of the few who bothered, used a wonderful phrase about "[a fatal detachment from the place where politics is actually played out](#)"



We know about the trivialisation of politics but have not quite fathomed perhaps the extent to which even the "higher" journalism indulges in it, with its fixation on personalities rather than issues. Citizens may not be policy geeks but they are experts in the problems/issues they see and feel around them.....

There are two articles I would urge people to read who wish to have a depth understanding of what is currently going on - first [Glenn Greenwald's piece of 9 November](#) -

The parallels between the U.K.'s shocking approval of the Brexit referendum in June and the U.S.'s even more shocking election of Donald Trump as president Tuesday night are overwhelming. Elites (outside of populist right-wing circles) aggressively unified across ideological lines in opposition to both. Supporters of Brexit and Trump were continually maligned by the dominant media narrative (validly or otherwise) as primitive, stupid, racist, xenophobic, and irrational.

In each case, journalists who spend all day chatting with one another on Twitter and congregating in exclusive social circles in national capitals — constantly re-affirming their own wisdom in an endless feedback loop — were certain of victory.

Afterward, the elites whose entitlement to prevail was crushed devoted their energies to blaming everyone they could find except for themselves, while doubling down on their unbridled contempt for those who defied them, steadfastly refusing to examine what drove their insubordination.

But the article which really helped connect the dots for me was this long one a few weeks ago in The Atlantic titled [How Democrats killed their Populist soul](#). I've read a lot about the "neo-liberal capture" of our political and government institutions but this is the single article that helped me understand (a) how crucial in the post-war period was the continuing commitment to anti-monopoly policies; (b) how the "Watergate babies" broke that in 1975 in the post-Vietnam and Nixon eras;

and (c) the role played in that break by such writers as Lester Thurow and even the great JK Galbraith...

Basically that's when the pass was sold on globalisation and equality; that's when my generation lost whatever commitment it had retained to small-town civilisation....

In a future post, I hope to expand on that.....

in the meantime the painting which heads the post is one from Tony Todoroff's latest exhibition in Vihra's superb [Astry Gallery](#)

13 November

[The real watershed of the modern era](#)

1979 is the year people point to as the critical date when the certainties of the immediate post-war period ended - with the election of Margaret Thatcher (and her ally Ronald Reagan a year later); and the overthrow of the Iranian Shah and arrival of theocracy...But it was, arguably, a few years earlier that the tectonic plates moved when [Nixon \(in 1971\) renounced dollar convertibility](#); and when (in 1973) the [oil crisis shook the developed world](#).

The significance of my last post is the story it tells of a world collapsing in the mid 1970s and the arrival in Washington in 1975 of a new generation of politicians - "[the Watergate Babes](#)"....who considered those who had borne the Democrat's flag for the previous decades as "old-fogies" who no longer deserved a place in power.....

I was part of that same generation - my first taste of power was indeed 1968 (as a town councillor and very soon a committee chairman) - although I was also holding down a position as an academic (until 1985) which gave me the opportunity to absorb the new thinking about political economy and public economics which was then being articulated in the States. Social science was still new then - and economists still few in number. We had, sadly, a certain arrogance about the new tools at our disposal and toward our elders.....Tony Crosland had been my hero - "The Future of Socialism" which followed James Burnham in arguing that management rather than ownership was the issue had been published in 1956.....

I vividly remember the words which came from my mouth at my inaugural meeting as Chairman in 1971 with an experienced Director - suggesting I could bring to our partnership a managerial experience which was at that stage entirely theoretical!!!



The [Atlantic article gives a wonderful sense](#) of the intellectual mood which was around then - it starts with the newly-elected young Democrats targeting in 1975/76 one of the great stalwarts of the Democrat part, Wright Patman, who represented the proud [tradition of American populism](#) -

In 1974, young liberals did not perceive financial power as a threat, having grown up in a world where banks and big business were largely kept under control. It was the government—through Vietnam, Nixon, and executive power—that organized the political spectrum. suspicion of finance as a part of liberalism had vanished.

Over the next 40 years, this Democratic generation fundamentally altered American politics.

They [restructured](#) "campaign finance, party nominations, government transparency, and congressional organization." They took on domestic violence, homophobia, discrimination against the disabled, and sexual harassment. They jettisoned many racially and culturally authoritarian traditions. They produced Bill

Clinton's presidency directly, and in many ways, they shaped President Barack Obama's.



The result today is a paradox. At the same time that the nation has achieved perhaps the most tolerant culture in U.S. history, the destruction of the anti-monopoly and anti-bank tradition in the Democratic Party has also cleared the way for the greatest concentration of economic power in a century. This is not what the Watergate Babies intended when they dethroned Patman as chairman of the Banking Committee. But it helped lead

them down that path.

The story of Patman's ousting is part of the larger story of how the Democratic Party helped to create today's shockingly disillusioned and sullen public, a large chunk of whom is now marching for Donald Trump.....

In 1936, Wright Patman authored the Robinson-Patman Act, a pricing and antitrust law that prohibited price discrimination and manipulation, and that finally constrained the A&P chain store—the Walmart of its day—from gobbling up the retail industry. He would go on to write the Bank Secrecy Act, which stops money-laundering; defend Glass-Steagall, which separates banks from securities dealers; write the Employment Act of 1946, which created the Council of Economic Advisors; and initiate the first investigation into the Nixon administration over Watergate.

Far from being the longwinded octogenarian the Watergate Babies saw, Patman's career reads as downright passionate, often marked by a vitality you might see today in an Elizabeth Warren—as when, for example, [he asked](#) Fed Chairman Arthur Burns, "Can you give me any reason why you should not be in the penitentiary?"

.....Patman was also the beneficiary of the acumen of one of the most influential American lawyers of the 20th century, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. In the 1930s, when Patman first arrived in Washington, he and Brandeis became friends. While on the Court, Brandeis even secretly wrote legislation about chain stores for Patman. Chain stores, like most attempts at monopoly, could concentrate wealth and power, block equality of opportunity, destroy smaller cities and towns, and turn "independent tradesmen into clerks."

In 1933, Brandeis wrote that Americans should use their democracy to keep that power in check. Patman was the workers' and farmers' legislative hero; Brandeis, their judicial champion.Brandeis did for many New Dealers what he did for Patman, drafting legislation and essentially formalizing the populist social sentiment of the late 19th century into a rigorous set of legally actionable ideas. This philosophy then guided the 20th-century Democratic Party. Brandeis's basic contention, built up over a lifetime of lawyering from the Gilded Age onward, was that big business and democracy were rivals. "We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few," he said, "but we can't have both." Economics, identity, and politics could not be divorced, because financial power—bankers and monopolists—threatened local communities and self-government.

This use of legal tools to constrain big business and protect democracy is known as anti-monopoly or pro-competition policy.....

J.P. Morgan's and John D. Rockefeller's encroaching industrial monopolies were part of the Gilded Age elite that extorted farmers with sky-high interest rates, crushed workers seeking decent working conditions and good pay, and threatened small-business independence—which sparked a populist uprising of farmers, and, in parallel, sparked protest from miners and workers confronting newfound industrial behemoths. In the 20th century, Woodrow Wilson authored the Federal Trade Commission Act, the Federal Reserve Act, and the anti-merger Clayton Act, and, just before World War I intervened, he put Brandeis on the Supreme Court. Franklin Delano Roosevelt completed what Wilson could not, restructuring the banking system and launching antitrust [investigations](#) into "housing, construction, tire, newsprint, steel, potash, sulphur, retail, fertilizer, tobacco, shoe, and various agricultural industries."

Modern liberals tend to confuse a broad social-welfare state and redistribution of resources in the form of tax-and-spend policies with the New Deal. In fact, the central tenet of New Deal competition policy was not big or small government; it was distrust of concentrations of power and conflicts of interest in the economy.

.....Underpinning the political transformation of the New Deal was an intellectual revolution, a new understanding of property rights. In a 1932 campaign speech known as the Commonwealth Club Address, FDR defined private property as the savings of a family, a Jeffersonian yeoman-farmer notion updated for the 20th century.

By contrast, the corporation was not property. Concentrated private economic power was "a public trust," with public obligations, and the continued "enjoyment of that power by any individual or group must depend upon the fulfillment of that trust." The titans of the day were not businessmen but "princes of property," and they had to accept responsibility for their power or be restrained by democratic forces. The corporation had to be fit into the constitutional order.

New Deal fears of bigness and private concentrations of power were given further ideological ammunition later in the 1930s by fascists abroad. As Roosevelt put it to Congress when [announcing](#) a far-reaching assault on monopolies in 1938: "The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism." In 1947, Patman even commissioned experts to publish a book titled *Fascism in Action*, noting

that fascism as a political system was the combination of extreme nationalism and monopoly power, a "dictatorship of big business."

This basic understanding of property formed the industrial structure of mid-20th-century America and then, through its trading arrangements, much of the rest of the world. Using this framework, the Democrats broke the power of bankers over America's great industrial commons.

To constrain big business and protect democracy, Democrats used a raft of anti-monopoly, or pro-competition, policy to great effect, leading to vast changes: The Securities and Exchange Commission was created, the stock exchanges were regulated, the big banks were broken up, the giant utility holding companies were broken up, farmers gained government support for stable agricultural prices free from speculation, and the chain stores were restrained by laws that blocked them from using predatory pricing to undermine local competition (including, for instance, competition from a local camera store in San Francisco run by a shopkeeper named Harvey Milk).

The Democrats then extended this globally, through the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and NATO—even as the United States simultaneously used that decentralization to mobilize local communities around the world against the Soviet threat. For example, when General Douglas MacArthur led the Allied occupation of Japan at the end of World War II, key parts of his economic plan included importing the Glass-Steagall Act and antitrust laws into Japan. Back home, Democrats poured government financing into science, and they [forced AT&T, RCA, and DuPont](#) to license their treasure troves of patents so that small businesses could compete and so that the scientific discoveries of the corporate world couldn't be locked away. Eventually, strong competition policy gained a bipartisan consensus, and the idea that anyone would allow concentrations of private power to dominate U.S. politics seemed utterly foolish.

I will continue the summary tomorrow -

in the meantime, the first photo is one taken at the glorious exhibition here in Sofia about the "Russian Impressionists" - "Gust of Wind" (1960s) by Grishchenko

The second is one of my Vasil Vullev's

16 November

Our Amnesia



Most of the material I come across about political economy is pretty abstract - individuals rarely figure (except those such as Thatcher, Reagan and Hayek) - rather forces...(such as neo-liberalism or globalisation). The material lacks what the literature has taken to calling "agency" ie actors who cause things to happen; or a narrative about how exactly these individuals achieved the changes being described.

I am serialising an edited version of the article about the "Watergate Babes" simply because it restores "agency" to the narrative. It shows that things are not pre-determined but come from human choices..... I remember the Johnson Presidency - the literature on the "War on Poverty" (particularly [Dilemmas of Social Reform](#) by Peter Marris and Martin Rein; "[Blaming the Victim](#)" by W Ryan; [Rules for Radicals](#) by Saul Alinsky) and was duly influenced by such writings of JK Galbraith as [The New Industrial State](#)..

This next part of the edited article reminds us of this context in which the new elements in the Democrat Party changed focus all of 40 years ago; and the intellectual sources they drew on in a changed narrative....

How the thinking changed.....After Humphrey's loss to Nixon in 1968, Democrats formed the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, also known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission, which sought to heal and restructure the party. With the help of strategist Fred Dutton, Democrats forged a new coalition. By quietly cutting back the influence of unions, Dutton [sought to eject](#) the white working class from the Democratic Party, which he saw as "a major redoubt of traditional Americanism and of the antinegro, antiyouth vote."

The future, he argued, lay in a coalition of African Americans, feminists, and affluent, young, college-educated whites. In 1972, George McGovern would win the Democratic nomination with this very coalition, and many of the Watergate Babies entering office just three years later gleaned their first experiences in politics on his campaign.

*.....Meanwhile, by 1970, both civil society and large American institutions seemed out of control. The National Guard shot antiwar protesters at Kent State, showing that the fissures over Vietnam were only getting worse. The Penn Central railroad had collapsed in the largest bankruptcy in U.S. history. Corrupt corporate executives mismanaged the nation's train system under an outdated regulatory system. Inflation was spiraling upward, and the ongoing corporate problems of important institutions—such as Pan Am and Chrysler—were becoming more and more evident. Plus, Japanese imports began displacing American jobs. But the new political class didn't pin the blame for social and economic problems solely on Wall Street or corporate management—as populists like Patman did—but on a broader malaise. In 1974, Charlie Peters, the publisher of the hot new magazine *The Washington Monthly*, wrote: "Yesterday, Penn Central. Today, Pan Am. Tomorrow? The American system is in trouble and we all know it." Inflation and a wave of corporate problems intermingled, indistinguishable from the claims of the counterculture. "We've grown fat and sloppy," Peters continued. "General Motors and the Post Office each have over 700,000 employees. One*

turns out lemons. The other loses packages ... The old organizations—public or private—simply aren't doing the job."

A key influence.....And the most important architect of this intellectual counterrevolution, the one who engaged in a direct assault on traditional anti-monopoly policy, was the libertarian legal scholar Robert Bork. His book *The Antitrust Paradox* undermined the idea of competition as the purpose of the antitrust laws. Monopolies, Bork believed, were generally good, as long as they delivered low prices. A monopoly would only persist if it were more efficient than its competitors. If there were a company making super-charged monopoly profits, bankers would naturally invest in a competitor, thus addressing the monopoly problem without government intervention. Government intervention, in fact, could only hurt, damaging efficient monopolies with pointless competition and redundancy. In an era of high prices, a theory focused on price seemed reasonable.....

On the Democratic Party's left, a series of thinkers agreed with key elements of the arguments made by Jensen, Stigler, and Bork. The prominent left-wing economist John Kenneth Galbraith argued that big business—or "the planning system" as he called it—could in fact be a form of virtuous socialism. Their view of political economics was exactly the opposite of Patman's and the other populists. Rather than distribute power, they actively sought to concentrate it. Galbraith for instance cited the A&P chain store, which, rather than the political threat Patman had decried, Galbraith declared should be recognized as a vehicle for consumer rights and lower prices. His theory was called "countervailing power." Big business was balanced by those subject to it: big government and big labor. Inserting democracy into the commercial arena itself through competitive markets was "a charade" and "the last eruption of the exhausted mind." Anti-monopoly measures had never worked; they were a "cul-de-sac" for reformist energy, leading away from the real solution of public ownership of industry.

For younger Democrats, the key vector for these ideas was an economist named Lester Thurow, who organized the ideas of Galbraith, Stigler, Friedman, Bork, and Jensen into one progressive-sounding package. In an influential book, [The Zero-Sum Society](#), Thurow proposed that all government and business activities were simply zero-sum contests over resources and incomes, ignoring the arguments of New Dealers that concentration was a political problem and led to tyranny. In his analysis, anti-monopoly policy, especially in the face of corporate problems was anachronistic and harmful. Thurow essentially reframed Bork's ideas for a Democratic audience.

.....Henceforth, the economic leadership of the two parties would increasingly argue not over whether concentrations of wealth were threats to democracy or to the economy, but over whether concentrations of wealth would be centrally directed through the public sector or managed through the private sector—a big-government redistributionist party versus a small-government libertarian party. Democrats and Republicans disagreed on the purpose of concentrated power, but everyone agreed on its inevitability. By the late 1970s, the populist Brandeisian anti-monopoly tradition—protecting communities by breaking up concentrations of power—had been air-brushed out of the debate. And in doing so, America's fundamental political vision transformed: from protecting citizen sovereignty to maximizing consumer welfare.

Early spotting of neoliberalism in the Democrats' society.....In 1982, journalist Randall Rothenberg noted the emergence of this new statist viewpoint of economic power within the Democratic Party with an [Esquire cover story](#), "The Neoliberal Club." In that article, which later became a book, Rothenberg profiled up-and-coming Thurow disciples like Gary Hart, Bill Bradley, Bill Clinton, Bruce Babbitt, Richard Gephardt, Michael Dukakis, Al Gore, Paul Tsongas, and Tim Wirth, as well as thinkers like Robert Reich and writers like Michael Kinsley. These were all essentially representatives of the Watergate Baby generation. It was a prescient article: Most Democratic presidential candidates for the next 25 years came from this pool of leaders. Not all Watergate Babies became neoliberals, of course. There were populists of the generation, like Waxman and Miller, but they operated in an intellectual environment where the libertarian

and statist thinkers who rejected Brandeis shaped the political economy.

.....In their first five years, the 1975 class of Democrats categorically realigned American politics, ridding their party of its traditional commitments. They released monopoly power by relaxing antitrust laws, eliminating rules against financial concentration, and lifting price regulations.

The Watergate babies accepted Reagan's demolition of controls; When Reagan came into office, one of his most extreme acts was to eliminate the New Deal anti-monopoly framework. He continued Carter's deregulation of finance, but Reagan also stopped a major antitrust case against IBM and adopted Bork's view of antitrust as policy. The result was a massive merger boom and massive concentration in the private sector. The success of the Watergate Baby worldview over the old populists can be seen in what did not happen in response to this quiet yet extraordinarily radical revolution:

There was no fight to block Reagan's antitrust restructuring. He reversed the single most important New Deal policy to constrain concentrations of economic and political power, and... nothing. Antitrust was forgotten, because no one was left to fight for it. And in response to the end of the Cold War, the administration restructured the defense industry, shrinking the number of prime defense contractors from 107 to five. The new defense-industrial base, now concentrated in the hands of a few executives, stopped subsidizing key industries. The electronics industry was soon offshored.....

A West Wing generation learned only Watergate Baby politics, never realizing an earlier progressive economic tradition had even existed.

The painting is a Tony Todorov

17 November

Sofia's Annual Wine Fair

My fourth annual [Bulgarian wine fair this past weekend in Sofia](#) and what a feast if not feat!! More than 200 wines tasted by yours truly in 3 days. And a hugely popular event as you can see from the pics.

I'm not prepared these days to pay more than 5 euros for a very good Balkan wine and twelve wineries caught my palate for their "best value" wines. Plus half a dozen old favourites.....I've selected them by Region.....



Danube Region

[Bononia](#) - this was the first year's tasting for this new Vidin vineyard, Their Istar Sauvignon and Traminer were amongst the best - for 5 euros.

[Gulbanis](#) winery is actually nearer Veliko Tarnovo and offers several award-winning whites - particularly the Moscata Bianco 2015, Gewurztraminer and Chardonnay - all for 4 euros

Black Sea

[BOY AR](#) from Pomorie whose Dimyat was only 3 euros.

[Dives winery](#) is also at Pomorie and had a Sauvignon as well as a Muscat and CS rose - all for 4 euros This was also the price of the Miskets, Pinos Gris and Gruner Veltliners from [Varna Winery](#)

The [Zelanos](#) whites from its winery just outside Burgas were a bit pricier at 7 euros



Eastern Thrace

"Angel's estate" wines offer a great SB and Chardonnay for 4 euros

[Domain Marash](#) is near Yambol and offered a lovely Muscat at just under 5 euros; and a tasty CS rose for 5 euros

[villa Yambol](#) had a great Muscat for only 3 euros; and a CS rose for only 2.5 euros!!

Sakar

The [Malkata Zvezda vineyard](#) is in the Rhodopes near the Greek border and offered a Traminer; Chardonnay and Rose each for 5 euros.

Western Thrace

[Karabunar](#) operates near Plovdiv and, in what they called the Bulgarian Heritage Original Collection, offered a Misket; a Dimyat and Mavrud Rose - each for 5 euros....

[Zagreus](#) also has its vineyard near Plovdiv but offers organic wines at great prices - white Mavrud; rose Mavrud at 3.5 euros each ,

Struma Valley

[Zlaten Rozhen](#) has its vineyards at Melnik and its Sandanski Misket has become a favourite of mine (5 euros); at the fair I had my first taste of its Chardonnay and Viognier - also 5 euros

old favourites

[Black Sea Gold](#) - Pentagram, Ponti 3.5 euros

[Ethno](#) - 3 euros

St Ilia (Sliven) - 3.5 euros

Targovishte (centre) - 3.5 euros

[Santa Maria](#) (south-east) - 4/5 euros

Here's [last year's notes](#) by way of comparison.....[and 2013](#)

21 November

Leftist, anarchist or fatalist???

I started this post with every intention of analysing the deep gloom which has descended on "progressives" not just this year but since it became clear that neoliberalism - far from dying since 2008 - seemed to be enjoying a second coming. I discovered, however, that this required a bit of a diversion into the issue of political labelling.....so bear with me....

Despite my 20 odd years' experience as an elected politician, I have never been happy with political labels.....from the very beginning (in the late 60s) I could see how my (older) Labour colleagues were closer to officials than to their constituents. And the sympathy I quickly developed for community development also gave me a slightly anarchistic approach in matters of political ideology.

I was lucky, of course, to be able to occupy a senior role at an early age - slipping into position after the Labour party locally had experienced a few years of electoral defeats - and had the luxury, after the first few elections, of knowing that my party had a fairly impregnable grip on power on the massive new Strathclyde Region which had been set up in 1973/74.

But, equally, the knowledge that the poorer citizens of this Region suffered from the UK's worst rates of deprivation drove a few of us to set up what were at the time (mid 1970s) unique deliberative structures (at both community and regional level) [which brought officials, councillors and community activists together in a creative and utterly non-partisan spirit](#).

To this day I consider these were the best things I ever achieved..... although the community business movement which I helped set up in the late 70s were a close second....

I've been out of politics for the past 25 years - and out of sympathy with British (and European) political parties for the past 15 of these. It was George Monbiot's [Captive State](#)(2000) which first alerted me to the scale of the corporate takeover of the British state - which has intensified globally since then.....

Since the 1980s I've had strong "green" sympathies but vividly remember, five years ago, being deeply offended when [an article I contributed to a magazine feature](#) marking the anniversary of the 2001 Twin Towers attack [was given a "leftist" health warning](#). This is how I reacted at the time-

Four separate issues arise from this -

- First, do the editors not realise that use of such a label for one (only) of the articles is effectively an invitation to their readers to ignore it or treat it with suspicion? What does this say about freedom of expression?
- Second, criticism of the logic and effects of "neo-liberalism" has come from a great variety of quarters - not least the [ordo-liberalism](#) which has been the backbone of the post-war German economy.
- Third, it has been recognised for a long time that the left-right labelling makes little sense. Wikipedia has [an excellent briefing on this](#). And I recommend people do [their own test on the political compass website](#) - which uses two (not one) dimensions to try to situate people politically.
- Finally, there is the issue of whether I deserve the label which has been thrown at me - either from the article or from the range of beliefs I actually hold. The references in my article are impeccably mainstream academia (Colin Crouch; Henry Mintzberg) and a final section clearly signals that I have no truck with statism.

All my political life I have supported community enterprise and been opposed to state ambitions and the "evil" it brings in, for example, the adulterated Romanian form. My business card describes me as an "explorer" - which refers not so much to the nomadic nature of my life in the last 20 years as the open

nature of my search for both a satisfactory explanation of how societies and economies work; with what results; and the nature of relevant mechanisms for adjusting what societies judge (through democratic processes) to be unacceptable trends.

I readily admit to having been attracted in my youth to the British New Left's analysis of British inequality in the late 1950s - but I was profoundly influenced at University by people such as Karl Popper and his [The Open Society and its Enemies](#), Schumpeter (his *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* and Ralf Dahrendorf; and, at a more practical level, by Andrew Shonfield and Tony Crosland who were also writing then about the benefits of the "mixed economy". More recently I have generally been a fan of the writings of Will Hutton (whose stakeholder analysis of UK society was disdained by Tony Blair on becoming PM).

As an academic I was influenced by the critical analysis of UK and US political scientists in the 1970s which went variously under the terms "Limits of the State" or "problems of implementation" and the softer end of the "public choice school" of institutional economics. But, unusually, the anarchistic/libertarian sweep of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire also got to me in the 1970s (which is why I am (unusually) located in the south west quadrant of the political compass).

I therefore not only disdained the injunctions of the dominant left and right extremes of British politics of the 1980s but, as an influential Scottish regional politician, used my role to create more open processes of policy-making. Indeed community activists and opposition politicians were more important partners for me than members of my own party. I held on to my leading political position on the huge Regional Council simply because I belonged to neither the left or right factions amongst my colleagues but was their natural second choice! The definitions I give in [my Sceptic's Glossary](#) reveal the maverick me.

It is "big business" and its abuses of power I have always been hostile to.....

The next post's analysis of the "apocalyptic" turn which progressive comments have taken in recent months and years should be read in this light.....

November 23

[Not with a bangbut a whimper.....](#)

Last year [I drew attention](#) to the fact that, despite their prolific output, economists seemed to have some difficulty in making sense of more global trends -

It's significant that the best expositions of the global economic crisis and its causes rarely come from economists.....somehow the framework within which the modern economist operates precludes him/her from even the vaguest of glimmerings of understanding of the complexity of socio-economic events. Their tools are no better than adequate for short-term work.....

For real insights into the puzzles of the modern world, think rather David Harvey (a geographer) and his [A Brief History of Neoliberalism](#) (2005); John Lanchester and James Meek (novellists and writers); [Susan Strange](#), [Susan George](#) or [Colin Crouch](#)(political science); or Wolfgang Streeck - a Koeln Professor of Sociology. All have extensive and eclectic reading; a focus on the long-term; and the ability to provoke and write clearly.

"Eclectic" is the key word; few economists are trained these days in political economy - which roots the study of economics in the wider context of history and political analysis.....

Wolfgang Streeck is Director of the Max Planck Institute and an unlikely scourge of capitalism - but his texts are becoming ever more apocalyptic. He has just published another - [How will](#)

[Capitalism End?](#) - a summary of whose basic thesis can be found in [this 2014 New Left Review article](#). The NLR is the favoured outlet for Streeck's long, clear and incisive articles eg [one in 2011 on "The Crisis of Democratic Socialism"](#) which led to the short book [Buying Time - the delayed crisis of democratic capitalism](#) (2013).

His latest book, however, explodes any idea of the inevitable arrival of a socialist paradise - On the contrary, his is a dystopian vision in which capitalism perishes not with a bang, but a whimper. Since, he argues, capitalism can no longer turn private vice into public benefit, its "existence as a self-reproducing, sustainable, predictable and legitimate social order" has ended. Capitalism has become "more capitalist than is good for it".

The postwar marriage between universal-suffrage democracy and capitalism is ending in divorce, argues Streeck. The path leading to this has gone via successive stages: the global inflation of the 1970s; the explosion of public debt of the 1980s; the rising private debt of the 1990s and early 2000s; and the subsequent financial crises whose legacy includes ultra-low interest rates, quantitative easing, huge jumps in public indebtedness and disappointing growth.

Accompanying capitalism on this path to ruin came "an evolving fiscal crisis of the democratic-capitalist state". The earlier "tax state" became the "debt state" and now the "consolidation state" (or "austerity state") dedicated to cutting deficits by slashing spending. Three underlying trends have contributed: declining economic growth, growing inequality and soaring indebtedness. These, he argues, are mutually reinforcing: low growth engenders distributional struggles, the solution too often being excessive borrowing.

The book finishes by exploring five systemic disorders - "stagnation, oligarchic redistribution, plundering of the public domain, corruption and global anarchy....." which Streeck [talks about here](#) and which are (very briefly) [defined in this summary](#)

Curiously, however, the book seems to give little coverage to automation...on which a recent article called [Four Futures](#) offers an insightful perspective - [reviewed in the Los Angeles Review of Books](#) - a review which also carried a good piece on [The Supermanagerial Rich](#)

Other Relevant Reading

<https://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.bg/2016/11/the-end-of-capitalism.html>

<https://www.ft.com/content/7496e08a-9f7a-11e6-891e-abe238dee8e2>

Buying Time http://www.panoeconomicus.rs/casopis/2015_1/08%20Book%20Review.pdf

<https://regulation.revues.org/11925>

David Harvey eg

<https://citizenactionmonitor.wordpress.com/2016/06/13/the-end-of-capitalism-part-1/>

<https://citizenactionmonitor.wordpress.com/2016/06/14/the-end-of-capitalism-part-2/>

<https://citizenactionmonitor.wordpress.com/2016/06/15/the-end-of-capitalism-part-3/>

<https://vimeo.com/91747532>

<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/107091/1/81811505X.pdf>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/09/wolfgang-streeck-the-german-economist-calling-time-on-capitalism>

<http://salvage.zone/in-print/neoliberalism-as-the-agent-of-capitalist-self-destruction/> (Neil Davidson on Neoliberalism)

student reading list; <http://www.brianmilstein.com/pdfs/syllabus-TheorizingCrisis-final.pdf>

November 27

In Praise of the Documentary

I have come late to the work of documentarist Adam Curtis. I had registered a year or so ago his [The Century of the Self](#) (2002) which told the story (as Curtis puts it) of "how those in power have used Freud's theories to try and control the dangerous crowd in an age of mass democracy"; and shows how the man who effectively invented the PR industry which then went on to take over the machinery of state propaganda..... was Freud's nephew [Edward Bernays](#). And his documentary [Bitter Lake](#) (2015) about the role of Saudi Arabia in post-war politics was a mind-blowing piece which brought forth [this post earlier this year](#) with its acknowledgment that - Good documentaries require a rare combination - knowledge of the subject, experience of filming, appropriate selection and editing of text, images and music, and appreciation of how to fit them together

His latest (3 hour) production - [Hypernormalisation](#) - hit our screens last month - with [Curtis himself setting the scene in his blog](#) thus -

We live in a time of great uncertainty and confusion. Events keep happening that seem inexplicable and out of control. Donald Trump, Brexit, the War in Syria, the endless migrant crisis, random bomb attacks. And those who are supposed to be in power are paralysed - they have no idea what to do.

This film is the epic story of how we got to this strange place. It explains not only why these chaotic events are happening - but also why we, and our politicians, cannot understand them. It shows that what has happened is that all of us in the West - not just the politicians and the journalists and the experts, but we ourselves - have retreated into a simplified, and often completely fake version of the world.

But because it is all around us we accept it as normal. HyperNormalisation is a giant narrative spanning forty years, with an extraordinary cast of characters. They include the Assad dynasty, Donald Trump, Henry Kissinger, Patti Smith, the early performance artists in New York, President Putin, intelligent machines, Japanese gangsters, suicide bombers - and the extraordinary untold story of the rise, fall, rise again, and finally the assassination of Colonel Gaddafi.

All these stories are woven together to show how today's fake and hollow world was created. Part of it was done by those in power - politicians, financiers and technological utopians. Rather than face up to the real complexities of the world, they retreated. And instead constructed a simpler version of the world in order to hang onto power.

And it wasn't just those in power. This strange world was built by all of us. We all went along with it because the simplicity was reassuring. And that included the left and the radicals who thought they were attacking the system.

The film shows how they too retreated into this make-believe world - which is why their opposition today has no effect, and nothing ever changes. But there is another world outside. And the film shows dramatically how it is beginning to pierce through into our simplified bubble. Forces that politicians tried to forget and bury forty years ago - that were then left to fester and mutate - but which are now turning on us with a vengeful fury.

Curtis is [not to everyone's taste](#) - with [some annoyance being expressed](#) at the randomness of his narratives - which do jump around in a rather tantalizing if not conspiratorial way....with music and

odd image clips (from BBC Archives). Indeed there is a [short mocking video](#) here which does capture his style.....

But I personally like the way he tries to capture recent intellectual history - and, in particular, builds bridges across the huge abysses that increasingly separate the social science disciplines.... We need a lot more of this....

Close readers of this blog may have noticed that it has occasionally mentioned the fascinating period of American intellectual history in the 2 decades after the second world war whose personalities and books in the late 50s and early 60s helped shape my own thinking people like JK Galbraith, James Buchanan, Ivan Illich...

An Adam Curtis Resource

The google search I did for articles and interviews about his work unearthed quite a few gems - my favourite being [this long interview](#) with him, the second of a series (the first being a fascinating account of how he came to stumble on his particular type of documentary)

<http://spectre-online.org/where-to-start-with-adam-curtis/>

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/32/68236/in-conversation-with-adam-curtis-part-i/>

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/33/68302/in-conversation-with-adam-curtis-part-ii/>

<https://soundcloud.com/e-flux-1/adam-curtis-in-conversation>

<https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2016/10/negotiating-the-pleasure-principlethe-recent-work-of-adam-curtis/>

"all watched over by machines"<https://vimeo.com/groups/96331/videos/80799353>

<http://johnquincy.blogspot.bg/2010/01/active-citizens-or-passive-consumers.html>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/2011/09/the_curse_of_tina.html

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/archives.html>

<http://critique-of-pure-reason.com/the-use-and-abuse-of-vegetational-concepts-adam-curtis-on-cybernetics-ecology-and-power/>

http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/strange_freedom_the_origins_of_the_neoliberal_leviathan

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/10/30/magazine/adam-curtis-documentaries.html?_r=0

Update:

<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/12/steve-bannon-films-movies-documentaries-trump-hollywood-214495>

November 30

Wine Boutiques

Markets are fascinating things - whether its farmers harvesting and distilling grapes and distributing the bottled product to supermarkets and wine boutiques - or artists crafting their materials to delight us in galleries with canvasses or sculptures. All the choices to be made - and the different activities and roles involved in bringing such things as wines and paintings together with customers and clients. Since a cycling trip through France as a teenager, I've always appreciated wines - but been happy until recently to settle for whatever was available cheaply in the nearest shop...

Bulgaria has made me more aware first of the scale of artistic endeavor - the annotated list of Bulgarian artists in the latest edition of [Bulgarian Realists](#) is now almost 300 (without even starting to give serious consideration to contemporary artists!) - and, now, of the scale and variety of its wines... ..

But it's been a gradual process of learning since the first stunning taste of a Targovishte Muscat at Balcik in 2002!

What has helped my education, of course, are the [annual wine fairs here in Sofia](#) - with more than 70 Bulgarian vineyards offering a sample of their wares....almost 500....But even that can be a bit overwhelming....

So I've been delighted to find these days that young Assen's Vinoorendo has been joined by no fewer than 3 other wine shops - first [Rumen's Winebar](#) 52, Alabin St where we had a lovely evening last week tasting 5 of the Santa Maria selection - for 5 euros

Then I stumbled across [Tempus Vini](#) at 81, Tsar Boris - open just 2 months ago and Yassen always poised with an open bottle to welcome us.

And yesterday morning I noticed [Enjoy Wine](#) 19, Ivan Shishman st whose Ivo welcomed us not only with amusing quips but with a couple of tastings. Most of Yassen's wine stock is Bulgarian - and the same is true of Enjoy Wine (which organizes not only wine tastings but trips to vineyards) If you have money, it's not difficult to part with it in such places - as the owners share their information and passion for the various bottles on offer!

While googling about the idea of wine markets, I came across this [superb blog by a Prof of Political Economy](#) who clearly takes his wines seriously - while making the whole subject of the wine market fascinating.....

A Problem of Identity

A recent post criticised "political labelling" but ducked the perfectly legitimate question of the descriptor someone with my set of values and commitments might find more acceptable.

I object to being called a "leftist" simply because it carries the connotation that I favour state power whereas I am a firm believer that "**power corrupts**" and **always needs an institutional challenge and balance**.... "The Open Society and its Enemies" was in the early 1960s one of [the key books](#) which influenced me.... So **central state power** needs to be balanced with **citizen power** - properly served by five other systems -

- strong *parliaments*;
- strong *municipalities*;
- diversely *independent media*;
- independent *judicial systems*; and
- real structures of *accountability*.

Parse most European systems and it's only the northern ones which come through positively from any ratings with such criteria.... the British one certainly doesn't fare well....

And **excesses of economic power** should be dealt with not only by appropriate structures of anti-monopoly legislation but by the encouragement (via laws and funding) of cooperatives and worker participation.

"Balance" is the key... and that is achieved by state actions which draw from what we might call the "Acton" toolkit (in honour of the English Lord's quip about "absolute power corrupting absolutely"). England is perhaps unfairly termed "perfidious" since the "balance of power" principle it pursued for so long served Europe well.... and is one which deserves more honour as a serving ideology for our times.... That's why I was so taken with Henry Mintzberg when, in 2000, he started to use the term "[rebalancing society](#)" And I have always admired [the German system](#)....

My father was, in the 1950s, part of a group of local dignitaries who used the label "**moderate**" when they fought in the municipal elections - neither left nor right.... interestingly they faced not only Conservatives and Labour but an increasingly vociferous groups of liberals..... If "Progress" had not got such a bad name recently, I might be tempted to use the term "**progressive**" of myself.... <https://www.thenation.com/article/fifty-most-influential-progressives-twentieth-century/>

I am an "**agnostic**" in matters of religion and "**sceptic**" vis-à-vis anything which passes for conventional wisdom or arouses new enthusiasms (hence my distrust of the "identity politics" of the past few decades) - but these terms don't do justice to the values I hold of equality, fairness, openness and challenge....

So help me!! What am I?

TINA - and the little Trumpets

In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher introduced us to TINA - her refrain that "there is no alternative" (to the liberalisation of national and global markets).

Social democratic parties bought into that argument and have shown no inclination to rethink policies since the global crisis began almost a decade ago. Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party, I grant you, is one exception - but has attracted vitriolic attack on the basis that there can be no going back to the world of the 1960s and 1970s.

The argument generally consists of the following elements -

- The state can't get out of the immense debt which it has taken on by rescuing the banks
- Although the operations of privatised industries are subject to increasing attack, the idea of reprivatization is rarely presented in social democratic programmes
- The ideology of greed has become so legitimised, lives so atomised and the commodification trend so strong that notions of collective and cooperative effort seem more and more unrealistic
- We can't stop automation
- Only eccentrics question the worship of growth

Much wailing and gnashing of teeth in the social democratic camp has so far produced little to convince - let alone inspire - people that a feasible programme exists which could attract electoral support. This short 2015 [Compass article](#) and book [Rebuilding social democracy - core principles of the centre left](#) ed Keven Hickson (2016) give a fair sense of both the mood and policy drift.....

Of course, convincing programmes need to be based on a sound story.....about what exactly has been going on in the post-war period? It's clearly not enough simply to blame neo-liberalism,,,,,
This week I watched of the best narratives I have so far come across - [Global Trumpism](#) - presented by Mark Blyth, author of *Austerity - history of a dangerous idea* which I wrote about [earlier in the year](#).

Blyth's style of historical ideas, colloquial language and slides is a gripping one which puts other economists into the shade....

His starting point is the growth of populism throughout Europe and now the States and the question whether (as I tended to suggest in [one blogpost on Brexit](#)) it is a reaction to immigration trends and fears - or has a more basic economic explanation.... He shows how the location of Brexit and Trump supporters correlates with the devastation caused by globalisation and recent Chinese imports; job insecurity et al - but then uses the largely [unknown figure of Michael Kalecki](#) to show how the post-war Keynesian consensus unravelled in the 1970s

Kalecki had [warned as far back as 1943](#) of a central flaw in the Keynes' model - which duly presented itself in the 1970s with the arrival of serious inflation which was dealt with by first monetarist and then neo-liberal policies. The post-war regime slowly gave way to one of secular disinflation; capital assertiveness; global markets; strong central banks; and weak trade unions and parliament

As befits a political economist, Blyth wants to know about losers and winners - none of this cosy nonsense about equilibrium....and uses Branko Milanovic's slide of global trends in income distribution [showing the shape of an elephant](#) to back up his argument about global trumpism....

- He returns, finally, to his initial point in exploring the various economic options we seem to have -
- The sort of spending on infrastructure which Trump's campaign envisaged? (probable but not with anticipated results)
 - the return of "good jobs"? (unlikely)
 - getting corporations and the rich to pay more tax? ("fat chance"!))
 - "technological disruption"? ([the digital disruption has already happened](#))

All in all a really thought-provoking presentation.....from a Professor of Political Economy - a discipline which hopefully will be finding a proper place for itself after almost a century of neglect.....

BLOGGING as a giving account of one's life?



I notice that I am not the only person who reflects on the year's blogging experience. Chris Grey is an organisational theorist who started a blog to accompany his fascinating book [A Very Short Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap book about studying organisations](#) - and has a post identifying [some of the year's themes](#) (as well as readership stats)

I particularly liked the description of his working method -

I also try to include in each post copious links to a wide variety of media sources and, to a lesser extent, academic works. I don't know how many readers follow these links but at any rate I feel better-informed as a result of digging around to find them. Typically, I think of a topic on Friday morning, ponder it during the day and write the post on Friday evening (yes, my life really is that exciting). Most posts take two to three hours to research and write.

I've been blogging since 2009, with a [resignation from a major project in China](#) I was leading in 2010 leading to a slow withdrawal from the paid labour front and giving me more time to enjoy the stretch of country between the Carpathians (where I summer) and the Balkans (where I winter) and to read, write.....and muse.....

And last year I collected the year's posts, put them in chronological order and wrote both a *Preface* and *Introduction* for what I called [In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#). The preface tried to answer such **questions why anyone should be bothered reading my material - and also why some of us have developed this blogging habit -**

My claim for the reader's attention is simply expressed -

- experience in a variety of sectors (and countries) - each closely manned with "gatekeepers" whose language and rules act to exclude us
- the compulsion (from some 50 years), to record what I felt were the lessons of each experience in short papers

- Long and extensive reading
- A "voice" which has been honed by the necessity of speaking clearly to audiences of different nationalities and class
- intensive trawling of the internet for wide range of writing
- notes kept of the most important of those readings
- shared in hyperlinks with readers

I confess somewhere to an aversion to those writers (so many!) who try to pretend they have a unique perspective on an issue and whose discordant babble make the world such a difficult place to understand. I look instead for work which, as google puts it, builds on the shoulders of others.....my role in a team is that of the [resource person](#)....who finds and shares material....

I think my father's hand is evident in the format and discipline of the blogpost - he was a Presbyterian Minister who would, every Saturday evening, take himself off to his study to anguish over his weekly sermon which he would duly deliver from the pulpit the next morning.....

I have grown to appreciate the discipline involved in marshalling one's thoughts around a theme (in my father's case it was a biblical quotation).

I rather like the format of a blogpost of some 700 words (at most a couple of pages). Management guru [Charles Handy](#) famously said that he had learned to put his thoughts in 450 words as a result of the "Thought for the Day" BBC programme to which he was a great contributor.

For me a post written 4-5 years ago is every bit as good as (perhaps better than) yesterday's - but the construction of blogs permits only the most recent posts to be shown. A book format, on the other hand, requires that we begin.....at the beginning ...

It also challenges the author to reflect more critically on the coherence of his thinking

*The photo at the top is of a new **Bekhiarov I** acquired this week (the 2nd is one I acquired a couple of years ago) - from the great Absinthe water colour gallery in Sofia where I found a wonderful 400 page catalogue of the International Watercolour Society's 2016 exhibition in Varna - with a superb global collection. This is [their 2013 catalogue](#)*



December 6

Romania's "progressive politics" on display again??

I haven't posted about Romanian politics for more than a year but - with parliamentary elections having removed the [technocratic government created in the aftermath of the November 2015 series of scandals](#) which had hit the ruling "social democratic" party - it seems an appropriate time to try to update readers about the situation here in Romania.

Last November this is how I described things -

Romanian politicians don't do resignations. When, a few years back, one of their previous Ministers who had migrated to Brussels as a Euro MP was one of three Euro MPs to be caught in a sting, the other two quickly resigned but not Romanian Adrian Severin.....

When Victor Ponta became Romania's Prime Minister some 4 years ago, he was almost immediately discovered by a global scientific journal to have committed extensive plagiarism for his PhD. He shrugged that off - although it had immediately led to resignations of German and other national Ministers guilty of such transgressions. But not in Romania.....Even being indicted by the country's powerful [anti-corruption brigade \(DNA\)](#) didn't seem to rattle him - only one of the charges would have been liable to remove him.

But [Ponta duly went](#) (pushed it appears) in November 2015 as public anger at political shamelessness reached boiling point - first from the death of a police outrider escorting a Ministry of Interior's car which had no right for such protection but then, at the weekend, from almost 50 deaths in a night-club which, like all such places in the country, had absolutely no fire or safety precautions..... The "Sarah in Romania" blog can always be relied upon for a [caustic comment](#) on such matters -

This time there seems some focus for policy change to the anger....the country now has a President (Klaus Iohannis) who has used at least the language of radical change - although the jury must remain out on whether he has the capacity to deliver. And the street protests - which were normally led by a party political element - look this time to have a slightly more hopeful base in the citizens.....but so-called "civil society" (about which one does not hear so much these days) has never really taken off in Romania - despite the extensive funding it got from external sources.....

Despite my own social democratic credentials, I have never been a fan of the Romanian PSD party which, for me, immediately absorbed the Ceaucescu lineage into a distinctive soup of social democratic rhetoric and finance capitalist reality. Tom Gallagher expressed it best when he used "Theft of a State" as the title of his book on post 1989 politics in the country.

The most physical expression you can find of the extent to which the apparatchiks still have their claws in everything is by checking in each city you visit the huge mansions in prime areas which have the various party insignia designating them as party possessions.....Hundreds of politicians are now in jail and it is entirely significant that the current PDS leader is on a 2-year suspended prison sentence for electoral fraud - occurred when the party tried to impeach the country's President.....

With considerable reluctance, he seems to have accepted that this prevents him from assuming the position of Prime Minister but has just executed what he considers a brilliant move by nominating an unknown Muslim woman to do his bidding instead.....

In May 2016 the local elections put this totally corrupt party back into power in most of the country's urban centres. Early December saw less than a 40% turnout in the parliamentary elections but the PSD took almost half of the vote and the majority of the seats.....They now control almost everything in Romania except the Presidency and the judiciary and are already making vague threats against both.....

One of the few English-speaking blogs is Bucharest Life (of which I'm no great fan) but [their updates are worth looking at](#)

Dec 25

Thank God it's Friday



I have, for the past month or so, been looking over the year's posts - with a view to compiling a little E-book which allows both their chronological presentation and some reflections on their significance (if any). I first tried this last year and titled the result [In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#) - although it had a double bonus in starting with some posts from the previous year and finishing with a "sceptic's glossary" whose provocative definitions deserve a higher profile and are therefore added to the 2016 edition

which I hope to publish in a few days - running at the moment with the title [The Slaves' Chorus](#) This is my 8th year of blogging - at their height, posts averaged one every 2 days....now they average one a week - arguably a more appropriate period for disciplined thinking and writing than the 24 hour frame.....Indeed one of my favourite bloggers - [The Archdruid Report](#) - sticks (religiously) to a weekly schedule

I try to avoid mainstream media, preferring more marginal writing - so was prepared for the outcomes of the British referendum and the American elections. But the Brexit vote in particular was like a kick in the stomach.... ..my EU citizenship, after all, gives me more significant freedoms (to travel and reside) than does my British citizenship.... Almost a third of the posts dealt with these 2 issues....

As befits a blog whose title refers to two mountain ranges another third of posts deal with my (generally very pleasant) experiences of living in Bulgaria and Romania - particularly experiences relating to art and wine.....

The final bunch of posts have more miscellaneous topics, generally occasioned by my reading.... or viewing (documentaries have been an important discovery for me this past year). Indeed I seemed

to find books less gripping this past twelve months - only seven made sufficient impact to inspire a post -

[Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman](#)

[Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#)

[In Europe's shadow: two Cold Wars and a thirty-year journey through Romania and beyond](#) (2016)

[Blimey - it could be BREXIT!](#)

[Post Capitalism - a Guide to our Future](#)

[How to Run a Government](#)

[How will Capitalism End?](#) - a summary of whose basic thesis can be found in [this 2014 New Left Review article](#)

Recommended Blogs

All blogs have a "blogroll" - many of which are outdated. I try to keep mine up to date

A few of the good ones send me automatic updates - generally the collective sites such as [Eurozine](#) journal, [RSA](#) and [the Real World Economist](#) blogs; the great [Scottish Review](#) E-journal; and one single blogger [How to Save the World](#). Those which deserve a special mention include -

- [Poemas del rio Wang](#) - the most amazing site which tends to focus on memories of old central and east European lands; which runs some trips to them; but whose [current series is on Iran](#)
- [That's How the Light Gets In](#) - the imaginative site of a retired Liverpoolian Polytechnic lecturer with strong cultural tastes
- [Michael Roberts blog](#) - an elegantly written Marxist economist blog
- [Stumbling and Mumbling](#) - a rather academic blog with, however, good hyperlinks
- [Britain is no Country for Older Men](#) - an informative (if rather sexist) blog which celebrates the life achievements of various unsung heroes

The painting is a recent acquisition - one of Plamen Todorov's dreamlike sequences.....

December 30

Conclusion

So there it is - my year's thoughts...

As I sign off on the year, I come across a fine bit of writing from Joseph Epstein, one of America's best essayists....it has [the title "Hitting Eighty"](#) and contains his reflections on approaching this milestone in his life.....

I drew excellent cards in life, both personal and historical. Personally, I was born to generous, intelligent, and honorable parents, who provided economic security and early gave me the gift of freedom to discover the world on my own. Historically, my generation was too young for the Korean War, too old for the Vietnam war, and lived through a period of continuous economic prosperity in the most interesting country in the world. Ours was a low-population generation—children born toward the end of the Depression—so that colleges and universities wanted us, and we evaded the mad, sad scramble to gain admission to those schools that the world, great ninny that it is, mistakenly takes to be superior.....

Santayana holds that the reason the old have nothing but foreboding about the future is that they cannot imagine a world that is any good without their being in it. The temptation, when among contemporaries, is to lapse into what I call crank, in which everything in the past turns out to have been superior to anything in the present. Not true, of course, but oddly pleasant to indulge—even though one knows, as Noël Coward, who later in his life himself indulged in crank, had it, "There is no future in the past."

The detractions of old age are obvious: the lessening capacity for the active life, the weakening of the body, the diminution of sensual pleasure, the irrefutable nearness of death. Toss in memory loss and you get diminishment generally. Cicero, whose own old age was not lived at the Ritz—he was forced into exile and murdered by order of Marcus Antonius, his decapitated head and right hand hung up in the Forum—claimed that "older people who are reasonable, good-tempered, and gracious bear aging well. Those who are mean-spirited and irritable will be unhappy at every stage of their lives.".....

In our twenties, at lunches, my male friends and I talked a fair amount about sports and sex; in our thirties and forties and fifties, food and movies and politics were the main subjects. Since our seventies, health has taken over as topic number one. Sleep is a big item: No one seems to sleep through the night without having to get up two or three or more times. The fortunate ones among us are those who can get back to sleep. The old brutish masculine question of our twenties—"Getting much?"—now refers not to sex but to sleep.....

Still, there it is, that rude number 80. Eighty, it occurs to me, might make one too aged even to qualify as a dirty old man. I was never a Casanova-like seducer, nor claimed to be a champion sack artist, yet it is saddening to consider oneself entirely out of contention in the sexual realm. The knowledge that the beautiful young girl one finds oneself staring at is likely to consider you, sexually, out of the question does take the air out of one's fantasies.

On the other, not-yet-palsied hand, near 80 I find (small compensation though it may seem) that I am able to compliment women on their beauty without their feeling that I am hitting on them. "Were I a mere 40 years younger," I found myself saying to a cheerful waitress not long ago, "I should pursue you with all the cunning currently at my disposal."

..... I am a man who has made a respectable living without having had to go into an office regularly since 1970, and owing to these jobs I am, today, a thing I'd never thought I'd be: a pensioner. To fill in the time, and to evade boredom, I have been able to write and edit 30 or so books. My luck seems to have held out, for thus far I haven't run out of things to write about or editors who agree to publish and, most astonishing of all, pay me for my various scribblings. We are all audodidacts. The only difference is that I, because of a certain small skill acquired over the years at constructing sentences, happen to have conducted my self-education in public.....

In politics, I seem to have arrived at the same position, if not the same politics, as the British historian A. J. P. Taylor, who once claimed for himself "extreme views, weakly held." Most of my views these days are backed up by very few facts. At 80, is one really supposed to take time out to read up on the trade bill, know the name of the Indian minister of defense, or have a clear position on the safe-road amendment currently up before the Illinois legislature? I don't believe so. My current interest in travel is nil. I shall die content not having seen Khartoum or Patagonia. I'll be all right without another trip to Europe. "When a man is tired of London," Samuel Johnson pronounced, "he is tired of life."

Very nicely put.....

ANNEX

Just Words? How language gets in the way

Ronald G Young MA MSc

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1. Purpose

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -
...Trying to use words, and every attempt
is a new start, a and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
for the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
one is no longer disposed to say it.*

*And so each venture
is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
with shabby equipment always deteriorating
in the general mass of imprecision of feeling*

East Coker; Four Quartets
TS Eliot

History is assumed to consist of hard events like wars and revolts. But such events don't just happen - they are caused by what goes on inside our minds - not just feelings of ambition; fear; greed; resentment; but the stories (theories) we use to make sense of events. And they are legitimised by the words we use.

Words are very powerful - indeed have a life of their own - some more so than others. Once we stop thinking about the words we use, what exactly they mean and whether they fit our purpose, the words and metaphors (and the interests behind them) take over and reduce our powers of critical thinking. One of the best essays on this topic is George Orwell's "[Politics and the English language](#)" Written in 1947, it exposes the way certain clichés and rhetoric stifle our thinking capacity - for example how the use of the passive tense undermines the notion that it is people who take decisions and should be held accountable for them.

Fifty years before Orwell, Ambrose Bierce was another (American) journalist whose pithy and tough definitions of everyday words, in his newspaper column, attracted sufficient attention to justify a book "[The Devil's Dictionary](#)" whose fame continues unto this day. A dentist, for example, he defined as "a magician who puts metal into your mouth and pulls coins out of your pocket". A robust scepticism about both business and politics infused his work - but it did not amount to a coherent statement about power.

Twenty years I started to develop a glossary of some 100 words and phrases used by officials, politicians, consultants and academics in the course of government reform. Its updated version offers some definitions which at least will get us thinking more critically about our vocabulary - if not actually taking political actions. While working on it I came across John Saul's [A Doubter's Companion - a dictionary of aggressive common sense](#)¹ issued in 1994 which talks of the

"humanist tradition of using alphabetical order as a tool of social analysis and the dictionary as a quest for understanding, a weapon against idée reçues and the pretensions of power".

¹ an interview with him at <http://www.scottlondon.com/interviews/saul.html>

Saul contrasts this approach with that "of the rationalists to the dictionary for whom it is a repository of truths and a tool to control communications".

I suppose, therefore, that this glossary of mine is written in the humanist tradition of struggle against power - and the words they use to sustain it. The glossary therefore forms part of a wider commentary on the effort various writers have made over the ages to challenge the pretensions of the powerful (and of the "thought police" who have operated on their behalf).

And, of course, the role of satire, caricature and cartoons, poetry and painting should not be forgotten! Nor the role of films and TV series these days.

2. Searching for the heart of the onion

I have been heavily involved in reform efforts (and words) now for almost 50 years. I was part of that post-war generation which first succumbed to the blandishments of social sciences² as my university subjects in 1962. Between 1968 and 1991 I was first a local councillor then powerful regional politician in Scotland; and the last 20 years I have spent advising government units in 8 central European and central Asian countries.

The social sciences were just beginning to flex their muscles in my student days and popular management texts also beginning to appear (we forget that Peter Drucker invented the genre only in the late 1950s). Books such as Marris and Rein's *Dilemmas of Social Reform* (1968); Donald Schoen's *Beyond the Stable State* (1971); and Hecllo and Wildavsky's *The Private Government of Public Money* (1974) impressed me enormously - not only for their application of social science to topics such as the fight against poverty; organisational structures and budgeting (respectively) but also for the clarity of their language. And the combination, between 1968 and 1985 of academic and political work gave me both the incentive and opportunity to explore what light that burgeoning academic literature could throw on the scope for government actions (and structures) for social improvement.

Not least of my puzzlements was about the source and nature of power. And the story told by one of the architects of the British NHS (Aneurin Bevan) about his own search for power - from his own municipality through trade unions to the heights of the British Cabinet - used the powerful metaphor of the onion. As each layer peels away, another appears - there is no heart!

I always knew that the best way to understand a subject was to write about it. And therefore developed the habit of writing papers to help me as much as others make sense of the various path-breaking initiatives in which I was involved - particularly trying to make government more "inclusive" both in its style and policy impact. The audience for such writing was practitioners - rather than academics - and also, with my first little book *The Search for Democracy* (1976), community activists who needed some help in confronting the more sophisticated bureaucracy (and words) with which they were confronted after a major reorganisation. So the language had to be clear - but not superficial.

This perhaps explains any idiosyncrasies in the voice I have developed. And writing that first book made me aware how few books seemed to be written to help the average person understand a

² inspired by the writings of such varied figures as Tony Crosland, RH Tawney [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R. H. Tawney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._H._Tawney), EP Thompson (eg *Out of Apathy*) and Bernard Crick (his *In Defence of Politics* (1962))

subject or question. When I looked again at the books I knew, I realised most were written for one of the following reasons-

- help people pass examinations (requiring compressing of knowledge into artificial disciplines);
- make a reputation or money (requiring minimising or discrediting of other writers)
- advance a new tendentious theory

The Readers and Writers Cooperative which started in the early 1970s (now the highly successful "For Beginners" series) was the first to use a more user-friendly approach to issues. And how helpful the Dummies' Guide series are! Even Rough Guides has muscled in on this approach.

This particular effort started, I suppose, way back in 1999 when I selected about 40 words for a glossary which accompanied a little book I wrote then (*In Transit - notes on good governance*) which tried to capture my understanding of what was then the fast-moving field of public administration - for a younger generation of central europeans. My definitions were jazzed up in order to provoke thought - eg performance measurement; "*judging an organisation by measuring what it produces, rather than whom it keeps happy or employed. Most usefully done on a comparative basis - over time: or among units performing similar work*".

In 2008, the glossary I left behind in a major report - [Learning from experience; some reflections on how training can help develop administrative capacity](#) - was more outrageous.

I should emphasise that this is not a Cynic's Dictionary - although I readily confess to the occasional lapse into self-indulgent delight in shocking. But the topic of politics, power and government reform is too important for cynicism. It does, however, require a strong dose of scepticism.

3. New words and phrases can cause amnesia!

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.. At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for "poverty" changed over time - inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc. Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about it in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then said ruefully, "at least my vocabulary is improving"!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propelled these verbal gymnastics - first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure - better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exploring why previous solutions have failed

Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition - and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.

And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests³ and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. "Evidence-based policy-making" is typical - first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! "There is no better lie than a big one!"

4. Critiquing the professionals....

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.

JM Keynes (General Theory 1935) http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Maynard_Keynes

In the 1970s, a South American priest Ivan Illich attacked professionals and to the mystification of their processes and language - with his various books which eloquently argued against the damage done to learning by formal schooling methods (*Deschooling Society*); and to health by doctors and hospitals (*Medical Nemesis*).

Stanislaw Andreski was one of the few academics who dared attack the pretensions of the social sciences - in his *Social Sciences as Sorcery* (1973 - now out of print).

The importance of demystifying complex language was continued by C Wright Mills in the 1950s and 1960s who once famously summarised a 250 pages book written in tortuous syntax by the sociologist Talcott Parsons in 12 pages!

Alaister Mant extended the attack to contemporary leadership (*Leaders we Deserve* 1983 - also out of print) - puncturing somewhat the mythology about business leaders which was being spread in the popular management books which were beginning to sell like hot potatoes. Henry Mintzberg - a Canadian management academic - is about the only one who has written simply about what managers actually do (and attacked MBAs) and, in so doing, has stripped management literature of most of its pretensions.

By reducing management exhortations to 99 self-contradictory proverbs Hood's *Administrative Argument* (1991 and also, mysteriously, out of print) showed us how shallow management ideologies are.

In 1992 John Ralston Saul gave us a powerful but idiosyncratic critique of technical expertise in *Voltaire's Bastards - the dictatorship of reason in the west*.

³ See section 6

In 1996 Harold Perkins gave us a highly critical account of *The Third Revolution - Professional Elites in the Modern World* - whose moral critique is all the more powerful for its academic origin.

By showing the parallels with religious doctrine, Susan George challenged the economic belief systems which sustained the World Bank (*Faith and Credit - the World Bank's secular empire* (1994). It was easier for people like Huycinski to take the scalpel to management gurus in *Management Gurus - what makes them and how to become one* (1993) since they are only peripherally of academia.

And a once worthy venture - the European Union - has, sadly, developed such powerful interests of its own that it too is part of this significant obfuscation with its use of such phrases as "subsidiarity".

5. GLOSSARY

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.
"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."
"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."
Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"

Accountability; the requirement that those in power *explain - in a transparent, regular, structured and truthful way - what actions they have authorised and why*. The corollary is that any failure of their explanations to satisfy will lead to sanctions - including dismissal. See also "Open Government"

Address; (as in "the paper addresses the issue of...") In the 2000s I got really fed up with the "newspeak" of a British HRM (see entry) consultant who would use this phrase (amongst other wanker phrases). It epitomised for me the spinelessness of the breed, the reluctance to "confront" problems.....When I hear the verb now, I am tempted to reply - "return to sender"!

Adversarial systems; the more political parties have in common (UK and US) the more they pretend to be poles apart and fight an aggressive, winner-take-all, no-holds-barred contest which leaves no room for civilised discourse; nor policy consensus. Bad policy-making is normally the result

Agent; *an intermediary who performs actions on behalf of another*. A huge theoretical literature was built around this concept in the 1980s - to try to demonstrate the way in which public servants developed interests separate from that of the public - and to justify privatisation and the separation of public budget-holders from those who supplied public services. Pity that there are so few of these academics now bothering to develop a literature about the (actual rather than

theoretical) self-serving and downright immoral behaviour of many of those who now own and manage the privatised bodies and "arms' length" agencies!

Agencies; *pretend companies* - with Chief Executives and others with hugely inflated salaries and pension rights.

Agnostic; *someone who doubts*

Ambition; *what makes the world go...*

"Our system obliges us to elevate to office precisely those persons who have the ego-besotted effrontery to ask us to do so; it is rather like being compelled to cede the steering wheel to the drunkard in the back seat loudly proclaiming that he knows how to get us there in half the time. More to the point, since our perpetual electoral cycle is now largely a matter of product recognition, advertising, and marketing strategies, we must be content often to vote for persons willing to lie to us with some regularity or, if not that, at least to speak to us evasively and insincerely. In a better, purer world—the world that cannot be—ambition would be an absolute disqualification for political authority" (David Hart).

Assumptions; *the things other people make* - which cause problems. Parsed - "I think; you assume; (s)he fucks up". Project management techniques do require us to list assumptions and identify and manage risks - but in the field of technical Assistance these are just boxes to tick. In any project, the best approach is to list the worst things which could happen, assume they will occur and plan how to minimise their frequency and effects.

Audit; *something both overdone and underdone* - overdone where it matters little and underdone where it really matters. A process more feared at the bottom than at the top as frequent recent scandals (Enron; global banking scandals have demonstrated). See also "Law"

Benchmark; *a technical-sounding term which gives one's discourse a scientific aura.*

Bottleneck; *what prevents an organisation from achieving its best performance - always located at the top!*

Bureaucracy; *literally "rule by the office" (and the strictly defined powers which surround it - as distinct from rule by whim). See "rule of law". The adjective (bureaucratic) has now become a term of abuse.*

Capacity; *something which other people lack*

Capacity development; *something which consultants recommend and which generally boils down to some training programmes. In fact capacity is developed by a combination of practice and positive feedback.*

Capital punishment; *"Everyone knows that capital punishment means that those without the capital get the punishment.*

Change; *something which was difficult to start in public organisations in the 1970s and is now difficult to stop.*

Change agent; *in the beginning a brave person - now a spiv.*

Citizen; *a displaced person in the modern polis - replaced by the customer who has to have money and spend it before any rights can be exercised. Here is [an excellent article](#) which explores the significance and implications of the various terms and roles*

Civil servant; *someone who used to be able to stand up to Ministers.*

Client; *someone receiving a (complex) service from a professional - usually with the protection of a professional code.*

Coalition; *a government composed of political parties which have normally fought one another in an election; who have not gained sufficient seats to form a majority government; and who cooperate with other parties to avoid facing the electorate again. Seen by some as highly civilised (encouraging consensual qualities) and by other as highly undemocratic (smoke-filled rooms)*

Collateral damage; *accidental shootings of innocent citizens.*

Commodification; *to put a market value on services which were previously offered voluntarily and offering them for sale on the market in order to make a profit.*

Communications; *the first thing which people blame when things go wrong - parsed "I communicate; you misunderstand; he/they don't listen".*

Compliance; *consistency with a required outcome. Traditionally called "obedience".*

Consultant; *a con-man who operates like a sultan! An outsider who knows almost nothing about an organisation who is brought in to give the air of objectivity to outrageous changes the bosses have already agreed amongst themselves.*

Consultation; *the skill of bouncing other people to agree with what you have already decided.*

Contract out; *as in "put out a contract on" - to wipe out.*

Control; *Something we try to do to others and lie that we do to ourselves. Government used to do it by fear - but now use a range of clever carrots and sticks - as well as words and language itself. Control used to be "ex-ante" (detailed instructions before the event) but is increasingly "ex-post" - through audit, monitoring and evaluation.*

Coordination; *the lack of which is the most annoying thing for the rationalist in organisations*

Corruption; *a fashionable thing to be against. A new anti-corruption industry of consultants has arisen which reformulates the public administration principles to which NPM (see below) is opposed, thereby generating maximum confusion. See also "integrity"*

Customer; *the person who has supplanted the citizen and is responsible for environmental destruction et al*

Decentralisation; *a system in which local people can be made scapegoats for deterioration in service.*

Deliberative democracy; *In contrast to the traditional theory of democracy, in which voting is central, [deliberative democracy theorists](#) argue that legitimate lawmaking can arise only through public deliberation - generally through the presentation of evidence and then dissection of this in discussion*

Democracy; *a system which allows citizens to select, at periodical intervals, from a small group of self-selected and perpetuating elites*

Development; *a good thing.*

environment; *what's around me which I can use and abuse for my benefit.*

Effectiveness; *the quality of combining the minimum of resources to achieve specified objectives*

[Efficiency;](#) *a positive ratio between output and input.*

Empower; *a classic word of the new century which suggests that power can be benignly given - when in reality it has to be taken.*

Evaluation; *job-creation for surplus academics. The EU has a very traditional model of evaluation - carried out by outside experts which takes so long (and is so tortuous in language) that its results cannot be used in the design of new programmes. See "learning organisation" below.*

Evidence-based policy-making; *a phrase which represents the hubristic peak of the generation of UK social scientism which captured the UK civil service in the late 1990s at the time its political masters succumbed to corporate interests and therefore were practising less rather than more evidence-based policy-making! One of the best examples of "newspeak"*

Focus group; *a supposedly representative group of voters who will give policy-makers good arguments for doing nothing.*

Governance; *an academic term to describe the obvious - namely that governments lacked the power to do things on their own and required to work in partnership with private and others. Found useful by the World Bank - which is not allowed to engage in political activity - to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. See [Gerry Stoker's take](#)*

Good governance; from a useful insight about the importance of good government to economic and social development, it has become a pernicious phrase which is used by the global community and its experts to force developing countries to take on impossible social and political objectives. It forms the basis of the UNDP Millennium Goals. It shows great stupidity to imagine that this could be developed by a combination of moral and financial exhortations by autocracies and kleptocracies. A few voices of common sense have suggested a more appropriate strategy would be that of "[good-enough governance](#)"

Greed; something which is killing humanity and the planet - and is epitomised by ownership of an aggressive SUV; its assumed that increasing petrol prices will drive these monsters off our street - but a touch of ridicule would also help!

Groupthink; *blinker thinking which overcomes the leadership of an organisation when its culture has become too arrogant, centralised and incestuous:* and when it is too protected from critical messages from and about the external world

Holistic; *a magical quality - creating harmony - which some people imagine can be created in government by appropriate mechanisms of coordination. Others argue that the job will be done naturally by a mixture of decentralisation and the market.*

Hubris; *something which politicians and policy experts suffer from - ie a belief that their latest wheeze will solve problems which have eluded the combined skills and insights of their predecessors*

Human Resource management (HRM); *a label thrown at those who mask a system which treats staff and workers like dirt. Time was when we defined "resources" of "land, labour and capital". Now "labour" is a dirty word and a 4th resource has been added - "knowledge management"....*

Humility; something which politicians and policy experts have too little of

Impact; the measured effect of an activity on identified groups.

Impact assessment; a process which (a) identifies of the groups which will be affected by a policy change and (b) measures its economic impact on those groups. Clearly, very demanding! See "systems approach"

Implementation; *the act of trying to bring an intended state of affairs to fruition. The word used in the Slavic language perhaps is more powerful - execution! In the 1970s political science developed an [important body of literature](#) which showed the various ways in which the good intentions of laws were undermined. The classic book by Wildavsky and Pressman had the marvellous sub-title - "How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All".*

Input; the resources which are put into an activity

Integrity; *something which NPM has cleaned out from public life. The strategy that came after anti-corruption when we needed to hide the fact that corruption was actually increasing.*

Joined-up government; *New Labour's euphemism for Stalinism.*

Kleptocracy; *A government system in which the transfer of public resources to its elite is a principles overriding any other.*

Knowledge management; *one of the many "rationalising" fads which swept across global management in the 90s which (specifically) imagined that "knowledge" (both tacit and formal) could be archived and distributed to be available at the click of a switch to anyone needing it...*

Law; *"the spider's webs which, if anything small falls into them ensnare it, but large things break through and escape". [Solon](#)*

Leader; *the head of an organisation or movement whose attributed qualities range variously from the saintly to the diabolical. Modern leaders are supposed to exercise moral authority rather than the exercise or threat of force - but few understand what this even means. Supplanted about 2000 by the notion of "followership"!*

Learning organisation; *a view that the best way for organisations to keep up with social change is through valuing their own staff by delegation and strong ongoing feedback - not by commissioning external experts to conduct complex and irrelevant evaluations.*

Legislators; *the most despised group in any society (see "parliamentary power").*

Lobbyists; *people who make the laws*

Logframe; *the bible for the Technical Assistance world which - with a list of activities, assumptions, objectives, outputs and risks - conquers the complexity and uncertainty of the world and removes the bother of creativity. For a critique see [Lucy Earle's 2003 paper](#) on my website -*

Manage; *to make a mess of.*

Market; *a place or system governed by rules which sets prices through the interaction of buyers and sellers. Under severely restrictive assumptions it can produce what economists call "optimum" results. The most important of these assumptions are - scale (large numbers of sellers; perfect information; and absence of social costs). In the real world, few of these conditions exist. See also "quasi-market" <http://rwer.wordpress.com/2011/06/09/markets-are-us/>*

Minister; *etymologically "one who acts on the authority of another" - ie the ruler. In some countries they last some time (longer often than many civil servants); in others (eg UK) they last barely a year!*

Mentor; *someone whose experience has given them a high reputation - whose advice can be used to guide others. Sometime adopted as a formal role in organisations.*

Modernise; *to dismantle something which just required a touch of oil.*

Monitor; a school prefect

Neo-liberalism; one of the deadliest ideologies

New public management (NPM); the body of literature which has in the past 20 years replaced that of old public administration. It has borrowed its concepts entirely from private sector management and has encouraged governments throughout the world -

- to see the "citizen" as a "consumer" of services
- to reduce civil service skills to drafting of contracts; definition of service targets; and regulation for services which are managed at "arms-length" by the private sector, other state bodies or NGOs
- to set up reward systems and penalties to ensure targets are met

It slowly dawned even on the NPM zealots that such an approach is positively Soviet in its inflexible emphasis on targets - and that the reward systems undermine the teamwork and policy coordination which good policies require. But NPM's apparent "rationality" gives it a legitimacy which makes it difficult to budge...

OECD; the club of the rich nations - an apparently neutral body which was in fact one of the most important proselytisers of NPM

Open government; an apparent contradiction in terms - "governing" classically involves haggling, compromising, striking deals which will never look good in the cold light of public scrutiny. And even the publication of raw data can prove embarrassing to governments. But Freedom of Information Acts are being passed throughout the world - initially reactive rather than proactive and generally protective of "sensitive" information. Just a pity that this coincides with the run-down of investigative journalism - although a combination of citizen activists with new technology could ultimately prove a powerful combination. <http://www.foia.blogspot.com/>

Outcome; the wider societal impact which a policy seems to have.

Output; the immediate way in which the faithful implementation of a policy can be measured.

Parliamentary power; when exercised negatively (in the critique and adjustment of incoherent government proposals), something to value very highly. When exercised positively (as legislative initiatives) something to treat as "pork-trough or barrel" politics.

Performance management; the system which sets targets and rewards and penalises accordingly.

Performance-orientation; a concern for the results of inputs and spending - supposedly in improved customer satisfaction.

Policy; a statement of the intentions of government.

Policy review; the critical assessment of the outcomes and outputs of a policy field. This can be carried out within government - or by academic bodies and think-tanks and commissioned by various bodies including government.

Political party; *the last bastion of scoundrels*

Politician; someone elected by voters who is, in theory, accountable to them but in fact does what his party and its leadership tells him - since this is the only way to survive let alone climb the greasy pole to advancement. Rebels become mavericks.

Politics, *"A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage"* (Bierce - Devil's Dictionary)

Populism; movements which take democracy too far.

Post-modern; Anything goes *"The refusal to describe humanity's progress as a rational process whose principles can be mastered - as though historical progress were one more step on the way to heaven"* (from intro to *Postmodern Public Administration* by HD Millar and C Fox)

Priorities; "Gouverner", as the French say "c'est choisir". State bodies and services can never do equal justice to all the laws they are required to implement. Many new member states continue to churn out strategic documents which are checklists of good intentions - which brings the law into disrepute.

Progress; cars travelling slower in cities than 100 years ago;

Project management; *a good idea!* The religion of the new generation which operates from hand to mouth on external funding. See also "assumptions" and "logframe".

Public administration; a phrase which reminds us that state bodies serve the public - not the state!!!

Public management; something cleverer than public administration - which therefore warrants higher rewards and excuses shady behaviour.

Quality management; a fashionable term of the 1990s of which we now hear little.

Quasi-market; *a pretend market.* In the misguided attempt to introduce business systems into public services, governments have tried to get everyone to compete against one another. Naturally this requires a lot of paperwork and bureaucrats (disguised under the term "transaction costs") - which is, curiously, what the reforms were supposed to get away from! See also "side-effects".

Rationality; how many people remember the incredible debate in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s about rationality, bureaucracy and politics - and whether it was ever possible to have significant policy changes as distinct from incremental fudge ("disjointed incrementalism" as Lindblom called it)? Now we seem to have the opposite problem. Sadly, few academics seem to be discussing it.

Reengineer; to take apart and build in a different way. A new term in the public sector for an interest that goes back to the zero-budgeting of the 1960s. Why is it I always think of Stalin's epithet for Soviet writers "Engineers of the human soul" when I hear the re-engineering word?

Reform; *to divert attention from core questions by altering organisational boundaries and responsibilities*

Regulation; as natural monopolies have been privatised, a vast system of public regulation has been set up to control the obvious consequences of private monopolies. See also "regulatory reform"

Regulatory reform; "reforming regulations that raise unnecessary obstacles to competition, innovation and growth, while ensuring that regulations efficiently serve important social objectives" (OECD)

Rule of law; the principle that no-one is above the law. See also "Law".

Sceptic; an aggressive agnostic - a quality which is greatly missed these days

Scrutiny; a political form of audit which became popular in the UK recently to give local politicians something to do after local government had been stripped of most of its functions.

Services; what the outputs of government activities should give us - but rarely does.

Side-effects; unanticipated and negative impacts of policy interventions - generally more powerful than the positive. Can lead to a fatalistic view of policy-making (see Hood)

Social capital; a term brought into the currency of think-tanks and government by the combined efforts of Robert Putnam and [the World Bank](#). Most of us understand it by the simpler trust 'trust'.

Society; what used to bear the responsibility for public services and is now being asked again to take them over (see "Big Society")

State; [a bad thing](#) - at least for worshippers of NPM

Strategy; a statement of how an organisation understands the environment in which it is working; what problems or opportunities it sees as priority to deal with - and how it proposes to do that.

Strategic; *what I consider important*

Strategic management; a proactive style of management

street-level officials; a term used to describe those officials who are in close contact with the members of the public and have to exercise discretion and judgement in their behaviour (field; front-line). Its positive sense is that they often have a better sense of what the public needs than

senior management. Its negative sense is that, distant from control, such officials can more easily engage in self-serving behaviour.

Subsidiarity; a term used by the Catholic hierarchy which is now part of EU rhetoric - can be used to legitimise the further stripping of state functions. Its origin lies apparently in Thomas Aquinas and the justification for government action only where private initiative is insufficient or lacking.

Sustainable; *a word which, by being placed in front of development, has lost its meaning*

Systems approach; an approach to management which appreciates the complexity of the environments in which interventions take place and invites teams to invent their own solutions based on a systematic definition of the problem facing the customer.

<http://www.thesystemsthinkingreview.co.uk/index.php?pg=18&backto=1&utwkstoryid=257>

Targets; what those in power use to measure the performance of - and to blame - others

Teamwork; *a word to beware!* Generally used by those in power to get their way while seeming democratic. While true that decisions taken as a result of joint discussion can be often better (and more robust) than those imposed, a lot depends on the manner in which the discussion is held - whether it is structured in a way designed to elicit problems and ideas or, rather, to sanction a dominant view (see groupthink). See Belbin for details of team roles and structures

Think-tank; *the shock-troops of neo-liberalism.* Apparently neutral bodies (funded, however, by big business) which marketed the products for the transformation of the rational-legal state into a state of neo-liberal governance.

Tools of government; the various ways government tries to make you do what they think is good for you. Laws do not implement themselves. Their implementation requires a commitment to change which cannot be taken for granted in societies whose populations are struggling to survive and whose new rulers - many uncertain of how long they will survive in office - are subject to temptations of short-term personal gains.

In such contexts, is it realistic to expect policy-makers and civil servants to have an overriding concern for future public benefit?

To explore that question requires us to look at the wider issue of motivation. The table sets out **seven different motivations** which can be found in people - and some of the policy tools which would be relevant for such motivations.

Legalism, for example, assumes that people know about laws and will obey them - regardless of the pull of extended family ties (eg for recruitment). Training and functional review assumes that people simply need to understand in order to take the relevant action.

Other tools assume that man is basically a calculating machine. And so on....In 2008 the British National Audit Office commissioned [a study on sanctions and rewards in the public sector](#) - the only such government review I know

However, as Colin Talbot points out in his new book on theories of Performance, the assessment is based on discredited rationalistic theory of behaviour

Table; Motives and tools in the change process

Motivating Factor	Example of tool	Particular mechanism
1. Understanding	Training Campaigns Counting and comparing - league tables	Rational persuasion Appeal to common sense Questioning when one's body compares badly
2. Commitment	Leadership Consultation and cooperation Training	Legitimation; inspiration Shared vision Pride (in behaving professionally)
3. Personal Benefit	Pay increase and bonus Promotion (including political office) Good publicity Winning an award	Monetary calculation ambition Reputation; Psychological Status
4. Personal Cost	Named as poor performer Demotion Report cards	Psychological (Shame) Monetary pride
5. Obligation	Law Action plan Family ties	Courts Managerial authority Social pressure
6. Peer influence	Peer review Bribery Quality circles	Pressure from colleagues
7. Social influence	Opinion surveys	Feedback from public about service quality

Source; an earlier version of this originally appeared in Young (EU Tacis 2005)

Governments trying to improve the performance of state bodies have also made increasing use of "league tables". This involves audit bodies, for example, collecting and publishing comparative information about the performance of individual schools and hospitals in an attempt to persuade senior managers to address the problems of poor performance (1.3 in table). This can also act as a market-type force - bringing the force of public opinion against the organisation (4.3 in table).

Training; *"surgery of the mind"*. A marvellous phrase an old political colleague of mine used to describe the mind-bending and propaganda which goes on in a lot of workshops.

Transparency; an EU buzz-word - meaning exposing the outside world to the tortuous procedures and language of the European Commission. The reaction to the coverage which Wikileaks gave to the leaked US Embassy cables shows how skin-deep is the commitment to transparency.

Trust; *something which economists and their models don't have and which, therefore, is assumed by them not to exist within organisations. As economic thinking has invaded public organisations, everyone has been assumed to be a "rent-seeker" - and a huge (and self-fulfilling) edifice of checks and controls have been erected*

Whistle-blower; someone without authority who blows a whistle - and brings everyone down on them for the chaos they cause.

Invitation

Feedback on definitions would be much appreciated - as well as further reading and references

6. Floating in words, metaphors and language

In 1979 some British citizens became so incensed with the incomprehensible language of official documents, letters and forms that they set up a campaign called "The Plain English Campaign". It was its activities in making annual awards for good and bad practice that shamed most organisations - public and private - into reshaping their external communications. Their website www.plainenglish.co.uk contains their short but very useful manual; a list of alternative words; and lists of all the organisations which have received their awards.

But they have seem to have worked in vain - since, in 2007, the Local Government Association felt it necessary to [recommend that 100 words be banned](#) (not the same thing as book burning!!), And two years later it had [expanded the list to 200 words](#). Some of the words have me baffled (I have not lived in the UK for 20 years!) but I find this is a quite excellent initiative. I have a feeling that it may not - in the aftermath of a General election and massive public cuts - have been taken seriously enough. The offensive words included -

Advocate, Agencies, Ambassador, Area based, Area focused, Autonomous, Baseline, Beacon, Benchmarking, Best Practice, Blue sky thinking, Bottom-Up, Can do culture, Capabilities, Capacity, Capacity building, Cascading, Cautiously welcome, Challenge, Champion, Citizen empowerment, Client, Cohesive communities, Cohesiveness, Collaboration, Commissioning, Community engagement, Compact, Conditionality, Consensual, Contestability, Contextual, Core developments, Core Message, Core principles, Core Value, Coterminosity, Coterminous, Cross-cutting, Cross-fertilisation, Customer, Democratic legitimacy, Democratic mandate, Dialogue, Double devolution, Downstream, Early Win, Embedded, Empowerment, Enabler, Engagement, Engaging users, Enhance, Evidence Base, Exemplar, External challenge, Facilitate, Fast-Track, Flex, Flexibilities and Freedoms, Framework, Fulcrum, Functionality, Funding streams, Gateway review, Going forward, Good practice, Governance, Guidelines, Holistic, Holistic governance, Horizon scanning, Improvement levers, Incentivising, Income streams, Indicators, Initiative, Innovative capacity, Inspectorates (a bit unfair!), Interdepartmental surely not?), Interface, Iteration, Joined up, Joint working, level playing field, Lever (unfair on Kurt Lewin!), Leverage, Localities, Lowlights (??), Mainstreaming, Management capacity, Meaningful consultation (as distinct from meaningless?), Meaningful dialogue (ditto?), Mechanisms, menu of Options, Multi-agency, Multidisciplinary, Municipalities (why?), Network model, Normalising, Outcomes, Output, Outsourced, Overarching, Paradigm, Parameter, Participatory, Partnership working, Partnerships, Pathfinder, Peer challenge, Performance Network, Place shaping, Pooled budgets, Pooled resources, Pooled risk, Populace, Potentialities, Practitioners (what's wrong with that?), Preventative services, Prioritization, Priority, Proactive (damn!), Process driven, Procure, Procurement, Promulgate, Proportionality, Protocol, Quick win (damn again), Rationalisation, Revenue Streams, Risk based, Robust, Scaled-back, Scoping, Sector wise, Seedbed, Self-aggrandizement (why not?), service users, Shared priority, Signpost, Social contracts, Social exclusion, spatial, Stakeholder, Step change, Strategic (come off it!), Strategic priorities, Streamlined, Sub-regional, Subsidiarity (hallelujah); Sustainable (right on!), sustainable communities, Symposium, Synergies, Systematics, Taxonomy, Tested for Soundness, Thematic, Thinking outside of the box, Third sector, Toolkit, Top-down (?), Trajectory, Tranche, Transactional, Transformational, Transparency, Upstream, Upward trend, Utilise, Value-added, Vision, Visionary,

And what about coach, mentor, drivers, human resource management, social capital, tsar ????

Anyway - a brilliant initiative (if you will forgive the term)

And in 2009 a UK Parliamentary Committee actually invited people to submit examples of confusing language which they then reported about in a report entitled [Bad Language!](#)

I suppose if post-modernists have done anything, they have made us more aware of language. After all, they spend their time deconstructing texts! And they have been active in the field of public administration - [Postmodern Public Administration](#) (2007) is one taken at random - The trouble is that they play so many word games amongst themselves that what they produce is generally incomprehensible to the outsider. Despite their critiques and claims, therefore, I do not consider them helpful companions.

Before the post-modernists came along, M Edelman's book [The Symbolic Use of Politics](#) was published in 1964 but then ignored - not least by myself.

I have never found Chomsky an easy companion - but books like his [Language and politics](#) (1988) are highly relevant to this theme -

One of the most insightful texts for me, however, is Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organisation* - a fascinating treatment of the writing about organisations which demonstrates that many of our ideas about them are metaphorical : he suggests the literature uses eight "images" viz organisations as "political systems", as "instruments of domination", as "cultures", as "machines", as "organisms", as "brains", as "psychic prisons", as "flux and transformation" and as "instruments of domination".

<http://www.civilservant.org.uk/jargon.pdf>

<http://www.thepoke.co.uk/2011/05/17/anglo-eu-translation-guide/>

6. The role of international agencies in creating La Pensee Unique

The World Bank is not allowed to engage in political activity and promulgated various words (governance; social capital) to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. The **OECD** has perhaps been an even more effective proselytiser through the way it brings practitioners together with researchers and issues publications selling NPM.

7. The importance of satire

Satire has long been a powerful weapon against the pretensions of power - Voltaire's *Candide* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* are well-known literary examples. Ralph Steadman and Gerard Scarfe are modern caricaturists in the tradition of Hogarth; and the Liverpool poets (McGough) sustained the protestors of the 1960s. British people are not so familiar with the Bert Brecht's City poems or the savage anti-bourgeois paintings of Georg Grosz in the 1920s and 1930s.

A more powerful satirical essay "[Democracy, Bernard? It must be stopped!](#)" was penned by the author of the *Yes Minister* TV series and exposes the emptiness behind the rhetoric about democracy and government. It is available only on my website.

In 1987 Management Professor Rosabeth Kanter produced "[Ten Rules for Stifling Initiative](#)" which I have often used to great effect in Central Asian training sessions.

1999 saw the appearance of *The Lugano Report; on preserving capitalism in the twenty-first Century* which purported to be a leaked report from shady big business but was in fact written by Susan George.

Management guru Russell Ackoff's great collection of tongue-in-cheek laws of management - [Management F-Laws - how organisations really work](#) (2007) As the blurb put it - "They're truths about organizations that we might wish to deny or ignore - simple and more reliable guides to managers' everyday behaviour than the complex truths proposed by scientists, economists and philosophers".

An added bonus is that British author, Sally Bibb, was asked to respond in the light of current organizational thinking. Hers is a voice from another generation, another gender and another continent. On every lefthand page is printed Ackoff and Addison's f-Law with their commentary.

Opposite, you'll find Sally Bibb's reply. A short version is [13 Sins of management](#).

A typical rule is - "The more important the problem a manager asks consultants for help on, the less useful and more costly their solutions are likely to be".

Robert Greene's *48 Laws of Power* may not be satire but it is a very salutary counter to the thousands of unctuous management texts which attribute benign motives to senior management.

A spoof on the British Constitution produced recently by Stuart Weir is another good example of the power of satire - http://www.democraticaudit.eu/download/Unspoken_constitution.pdf

8. The way forward (or back?)

Ever since my acquaintance with Uzbek President Karamov's philosophy of incremental "step-by-step" change, this metaphor of steps has always amused me. As I would mischievously say to the officials I met in training sessions, simply putting one step in front of the other can often take us round in circles! As I've worked on these words - and been reminded of various key texts which have, over the centuries, tried to puncture the pretensions and deceits of the powerful and the guardians of "knowledge" which sustained them - I have realised how rare this endeavour has been. Only the specialised cognoscenti have the knowledge and authority to undertake the effort - and they have too much to lose! Of course the discipline of economics, for example, is now subjected to a lot of criticism and adjustment (at least on its edges) - and post-modernists have cleverly dissected bodies of knowledge - but hardly in a reader-friendly language!

But we are overdue a text which will give the average interested citizen the incentive to understand just how weak are the intellectual justifications for so much of the behaviour of modern elites - and satire and ridicule will probably be important elements in such an expose.

9. Further Reading

In addition to the texts quoted in the introduction above, I would add the following as useful companions in the search for understanding -

The Art of the State - culture, rhetoric and public management; Chris Hood (2000)

The Future of Governing - four emerging models; B Guy Peters (1999)

Market-driven politics - neo-liberal democracy and the public interest; Colin Leys (2003)

[*How Mumbo-jumbo conquered the world*](#); Francis Wheen (2004)

Books like *Great Planning Disasters* (Peter Hall 1982) and *Seeing Like a State - how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (James Scott 1998) showed us how bad centralised decision-making could be - and Tony Travers (*Failure in British Government; the politics of the poll tax* 1994).

Christian Wolmar (*The Great Railway Disaster* 1996) and Allyson Pollock (*NHS plc*) showed us how wasteful the private end of the spectrum was. For the effect on transition countries see <http://beyondthetransition.blogspot.com/2011/01/polish-railways-failure-of-deregulation.html>

Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of hope - reliving The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1994); Robert Chambers (*Whose Reality Counts? - putting the first last* 1997); and Tony Gibson (*The Power in our Hands* 1996) are all important inspirations for those who believe in putting the ordinary citizen in the driving seat. Mintzberg's *The management of government* (2000) is one of the most thoughtful contributions to the question of how we should organise government.

Daniel Dorling's recent *Injustice - why social inequality persists* gives us not only a lot of useful material but, even more importantly, the suggestion that 5 belief sets sustain contemporary inequality - that elitism is efficient; greed is good; exclusion is necessary; prejudice is natural; and despair inevitable.

[Deconstructing Development Buzzwords](#)

About the author

"Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government. His next 22 years were spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects. Since 2012 he has divided his time tasting wines and paintings from a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains."

In such a manner is a life normally described - and how little of the hopes, pleasures and anguishes of life does it give away....so the following lines try to be more honest and revealing... ..

In 2008 I started a website which contains the major papers written over the years about attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles I'm lucky enough to have played - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propoganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

Since 2009 my blog - [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - has tried to make sense of my organisational endeavours - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

A new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

This book reflects a life (and perhaps attitude) shaped by the good fortune I've had -

- to work from an early age (26) with an unusually wide range of people (professionals, politicians, community activists - and a much smaller number of academics) who shared an aspiration to improve social conditions;
- To have had a job in a Polytechnic (and planning school) in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s which gave me the licence to talk and write about the issues relating to this work
- to have achieved a position of influence which helped develop a more inclusive style of government in the West of Scotland for 20 years
- to reengineer myself as a consultant, working and living for 25 years in central Europe and Central Asia - in the pursuit of what the turgid academic literature has come to call "good governance"

- all the while trying - through wide reading and writing - to try to make sense of what the masthead on my blog calls our "social endeavours", ie efforts to make the world a better place...

I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council - so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for - whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely - so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development - managing to straddle the worlds of community action and political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) - but imagine putting that word in a passport application!

For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.

At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics - with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.

All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term - so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threatening activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted - but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!

When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader - but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" - someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches - but I have a poor memory for verse.

This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me - "collector"! I collect beautiful objects - not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" - first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries - in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe - finally central Asia and beyond.

Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had - father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector - I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the

marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!

And it was TS Eliot who wrote that

old men ought to be explorers

I believe in people coming together at a local level to work for the common benefit - principles enshrined in [communitarianism](#) (about which I do have some reservations). I spent a lot of time supporting the work of [social enterprise](#) in low-income communities. None of this went down all that well with the technocrats or even members) of my political party - and the national politicians to whose books I

contributed (eg [Gordon Brown](#)) soon changed their tune when they had a taste of power. But, above all, I am a [passionate sceptic](#) - or [sceptical pluralist](#) - which is the reason for my adding the terms which form the glossary at the end - [Just Words?](#)

[This flickr account](#) gives with more examples of art.....[also this one](#)



LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#); my 2016 posts

[Bulgarian Realists - getting to know Bulgaria through its art](#) (Oct_2016) An unusual take on a country, the core of this book are 300 short notes on painters who caught my fancy in the decade I have known Bulgaria....

[Crafting Effective Public Administration](#) (2015);

This is a collection of short reflective notes about the efforts we have seen in the past 50 years to improve the machinery of government - with an emphasis on the role of the EU and its various programmes. They draw on (a) my pretty extensive reading of that extensive section of the literature on public administration reform which focusses on British experience (since 1970); but also on that of the various countries of central Europe and central Asia with which I have become familiar since 1991; and (b) my own experience as a political change-agent for 22 years and then consultant on administrative reform for the past 25 years

The book should be read alongside two long papers which I produced a few years ago -

- ["administrative reform with Chinese and European characters"](#) (2010) starts with an outline of the 12 features of Chinese public service which impacted on me when I lived in Beijing for a couple of months, preparing for a longer project. The rest of the paper is a summary of the sort of lessons I felt I had learned up to 1999 about public administration reform
- ["The Long Game - not the logframe"](#) was a caustic paper I presented to the 2011 NISPAcee Conference (building on an earlier paper to the 2007 Conference) in which I took apart the superficiality of the assumptions EC bureaucrats seemed to be making about the prospects of its Technical Assistance programmes making any sort of dent in what I called (variously) the kleptocracy or "impervious regimes" of most ex-communist countries.

With the exception of some 20 pages, they are, in effect, chatty notes on my everyday reading and thinking in a period - after 2009 - when I could be fairly relaxed. I had basically "hung up my boots". Although I was nominally Team Leader of an (EU Structural Fund) project in Bulgaria in 2010-12 and also involved in a bid for another (unsuccessful) project in the same country - my role was not a demanding one and gave me the time and opportunity to reflect.

[The Independence Argument - home thoughts from abroad](#) (2015)

How I tried to make sense of the 2 year debate which took place in Scotland about its referendum about independence.

[Ways of seeing ...the global crisis](#);

The structure of this book can, in some ways, be placed in the tradition of commonplace books - one reader's notes on items which have caught his attention since it became clear (from 2009) that this was no ordinary crisis

- Part One describes the central dilemma I now face since I realised the questionable nature of the rationalistic assumptions embedded in most of my thinking

- Part Two records my attempt to understand what has been happening in the past few decades
- Part Three is a despairing set of thoughts about the self-destruction of modern professional and political elites
- Part Four tries to summarise the best sources of positive ideas for the future - which boil down to **small-scale actions and mutual structures**
- The last section will try to pull it all together.....

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014) My (cultural) introduction to a little-known country

[Introducing the Romanian Realists of the 19th and early 20th Centuries](#) (2014) a disorganised set of notes about a little-known painting tradition...

[Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed](#); a short paper I wrote in 2001 to share my concerns about the direction in which Western society was going.....

[The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) (2011); an attack on the myopic and arrogant assumptions western development agencies have taken to the task of building effective institutions in transition countries....

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2010) my guilty contribution to a failed mission.....

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies](#) (2009) - this paper extracts some lessons from the work I've done in the last decade - particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Bulgaria. Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian](#) project

[Building Municipal Capacity](#) (2007) - an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan](#) (2007) - this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing and using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate \(2006\)](#)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries](#) - This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

[Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000](#) I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

[In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) The book I wrote almost two decades ago for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes on the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its systems work for people](#)