invading boats

water, trees

wine, churches

crocs, grey nomads

pineapples, grey nomads

harbour, gangs

pen-pushers

rocks, money

sport, gangs

WHAT IS AUSTRALIA FOR?

Some Provocations

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Grabbing the moment

Julianne Schultz

THE first weeks of June 2012 were an auspicious time to be launching this collection. During these past weeks we have been celebrating two crucial milestones in the creation of modern Australia – the transit of Venus, and the twentieth anniversary of the High Court's Mabo decision. In many ways these two events provided a useful backdrop for asking the question, *what is Australia for*?

This collection is by no means comprehensive. It is designed as a discussion starter on some topics that need to be taken more seriously and addressed with well informed imagination: cities, environment and sustainability; culture; the Asian century; reconciliation; mining; research; identity; manufacturing; governance. There are of course many other topics that could be addressed – but this is a start.

Over the next two weeks some of these essays will be extracted on The Conversation (www.theconversation.edu.au) so you can engage with the issues raised; others will be made available elsewhere in the media.

There is an odd disjunction in Australian public life at the moment – we know we are doing better than the rest of the world economically, but this is failing to translate into a sense of well-being or ambition about the future.

The problem is that golden moments like this do not come around very often – if we fail to grasp this one to think and act ambitiously about the future, the moment will pass; other countries will fill the gaps and we will look back and wonder how we let it slip through our fingers.

It is time to be bold and pragmatically ambitious.

By publishing this special e-book Griffith REVIEW hopes to contribute to a lively, proactive discussion.

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Not beyond imagining

Songlines for a new world

Brendan Gleeson

IT'S five-ish on a dark November evening in Maynooth, the thriving university town on the edge of Dublin where I presently live and work. I'm standing in the middle of a massive tarmac that seems to beckon the arrival of a squadron of Superfortress bombers. But to the locals it's merely the 'wonderfully grand' car park in the busy edge-of-town shopping centre that opened a couple of years ago. Apart from the withering rain and the blustering Kildare wind, I could be in an Australian suburb. Cars wend their way constantly through the asphalted paddocks; people surge in and out of the luminescent shops, especially the mega-sized Tesco supermarket. Loaded trolleys with children hanging off them descend ramps to waiting vehicles, many of them expensive-looking four-wheel-drives. The shopping fleet is engorged by the steady arrival of commuters stopping by after work, a small sample of the tens of thousands of single-driver vehicles that burden Dublin's motorways in the evening and morning peaks. Even in a scarifying recession the consumption show must go on.

I'm not a detached observer. I have to eat; I have to stock my own cupboards. And this is how you do it in suburban Dublin, unless you are rich enough – and have time enough – to get your food from the widely dispersed and shrinking array of local providores and markets. That's now the exclusive province of a dwindling brood of determined old ladies and hard-fastened locals.

I lumber with bulging bags across the glistening tarmac, towards the town and my semi-detached villa. Like Australians, and most westerners, the Irish love suburban living. No romantic attachment to 'urban villages' here, thanks. Most of the vehicles arriving and leaving the shopping centre are parked each evening in suburban driveways or garages within the haphazardly strewn commuter estates that encircle outer Dublin, a legacy of the Celtic Tiger boom that hit the wall with sudden destructive force in 2008. Many of the people swarming through the retail park around me are debt-burdened, with hurriedly built suburban villas in negative equity, credit cards creaking towards default, the strands of wider family support stretched to breaking.

But the good life, *the necessary life*, must be made and remade every day; suburban lots don't produce food, or clothes, or the gadgets that kids (and adults) crave. All roads lead to Tesco and its packaged retailers. And I shouldn't neglect Harvey Norman, purveyor of home goodies to Australians. Harvey has a substantial beachhead in the Dublin commuter belt, its raucous Australian ads squawking improbably from TVs and radios – an antipodean contribution to the white noise of everyday life in the mouldering suburbs of contemporary Ireland. Mark Latham would surely be delighted with this export of Australian desire.

Except for the weather, I could be in outer Brisbane, or an 'out of town' shopping centre in England, or a beltway retail park in 'Anyburg', USA. I could be anywhere in the English-speaking world, and therefore it feels like I am nowhere. Dublin's inner city is still unique, but even here the celebrated quirkiness is ebbing away as retail and tourist facilities are repackaged and harmonised to satisfy the universal expectation for quick ingestion and safe surprise: fast food, caricatured tourist offerings, themed bars (with blaring widescreen TVs), 'contemporary dining experiences'. Open-topped amphibious 'ducks' haul sodden tourists through the city streets in a parodic encounter with the city's Viking past. Except for the frigid rain, this could be the Aussie Duck tourist experience, familiar on Sydney's streets and waterways.

CITIES WERE ONCE the crucibles and kilns of the western imagination, where the cultural synapses fired and misfired, and from whence flared marvellous, sometimes terrifying new propositions about the good and the possible. They were defined and threatened by their unruly glowering innards: the dangerous slums, the perfidious elements that lurked within them and which on occasion turned the civilised world on its head. In 1871 Parisian communards proclaimed a new socialist city-state in defiance of laissez-faire capitalism. It ended in a bloodied retributive orgy, when reason, order and imperial ambition were re-established by force. The communards fell but their vision stood through the twentieth century as a counter proposition to liberal and social democracy.

In Australia, the historian Chris McConville reminds us, disruptive and profane slum orders troubled officialdom and the usually ridiculous self-regard of the colonial elite. He describes one rough confluence of light and dark in the 1890s, when a parade of Salvationists encountered a push of 'ruffians' in North Melbourne. The fur was torn aside as clashing ideals of the urban 'good' life were put to the test publicly. The Sabbatarians were opposed by those who could expect no rest in a heartless industrial order.

Cities were also pedestals of vaulting ambition, where bold new statements of scientific and commercial desire were pushed into the sky: from the nineteenth-century international fairs of industrial progress, which left Melbourne with its marvellous Exhibition Building, to the first skyscrapers of American cities, which

poked defiant fingers at heaven. A brazen new technology of movement blew aside the traditional bounds of human assembly and productivity. Railways, tramways and later motorways cut their way through country to create a new circuit board of economic and cultural ambition. Through this was fired the burgeoning human desire for freedom and self-determination.

Modernity promised much to our species. *Stadtluft macht frei* (city air brings freedom) was the rejoining cry of the first moderns – cities would be the vessels of liberation. Not the most practical of visions, given the plenitudes that wanted to clamber aboard. Progress demanded a compromise and a workable way forward through modern necessity and challenge. How to extend the freedom promised by urban life beyond the guilds and the burghers? The suburb: it contained the desire lines of modern fulfilment that in the twentieth century became the map work of suburban expansion. It was also a model of human growth freighted with self-endangerment, but this was not to become clear until late in that century.

WAS AUSTRALIA THE first suburban nation? asked the historian Graeme Davison. He knew the scientific answer didn't matter. We were, whatever the carbon date, among the most enthusiastic of peoples to embrace the suburban promise. Despite the mythic outback imagery that Australia has vigorously exported and exploited, the record shows we like suburbs more than any other way of living. We enjoy living together more than we care to admit – but not too closely. The suburb struck the perfect balance between collective security and individual possibility. The great quilt of this human accord hugs the continental coastline. Sea change and tree change means no change, really – more suburbia, only in new places.

In Ireland I relate these mysterious truths to the large group of undergraduate students taking my urban geography subject. The course's popularity has little to do with me. I suspect that a lot of the students in the crowded lecture theatre are boning up on Ireland's favourite current emigrant destination. Many of these young people will journey as their forebears did to a distant continent, where they will probably prosper and improve themselves. But unlike their earlier predecessors they will embrace a land and lifestyle that is not so strange and which looks rather like their Irish way of life, only with nicer weather, poorer beer and better job prospects. Many who stay on will stumble through party years in backpacker neighbourhoods, towards a suburban settlement of some description. That end point is probably already filed away in their consciousness. Television and the net have already joined their minds to the Australian psyche and its predilection for settlement over surprise. They can't wait to come to a new land they already know. How different to my own ancestor, Martin Gleeson, who made the epic voyage from the small rural town of Gowran in Kilkenny to the moonscape of Ballarat in the early 1850s.

As comforting as this new cinemascoped world might be, it speaks also of a narrowing of vision and ambition in an age when humanity will need every ounce of its resources to confront and survive the storms that are about to break upon us. The German-American political theorist Hannah Arendt spent a lot of time considering our capacity for malfeasance and self-harm, most notably the Holocaust. Nonetheless, she believed that we are 'in a most miraculous and mysterious way…endowed with the gift of performing miracles'.

In the near future we will need to recover and redeploy this gift as never before, for unprecedented peril lies in our path. We have almost certainly condemned ourselves to a dangerous climate-change regime. Most of our resource stocks are in freefall, and their collapse will escalate the scale and intensity of war and morbid migration. Through globalisation and 'financialisation' the capitalist system has developed a large and lethal underbelly. Much of humanity languishes in the fetid, violent slums that have grown convulsively in the developing world in the past fifty years.

THE AGE OF endangerment is also the urban epoch. Most humans now live in cities or towns: we have redefined ourselves as *homo urbanis*. This has brought our long love affair with the city to a new height. The affair will only intensify. By 2050 it is expected that three out of every four people will live in an urban setting. Australia got there early, settling in suburbia before most other nations.

The urban age defines what some scientists call the Anthropocene – an epoch in which human ambition dominated, reshaped and injured the planetary natural order. We now face the consequences of unbridled species ambition, in a set of global perils that may end the Anthropocene and the project of endless material expansion that defined it. Cities, the new human homelands, will carry us through this transition and into what the British scientist and environmentalist James Lovelock describes as 'The Next World' – an era much less propitious to human flourishing.

Just as the scale and complexity of threat opens radically before us, recent history marks the progressive closure of the human imagination. The stalling of species ambition is captured in the universal urban lifestyle that has hypnotised our collective mind's eye. We now view human possibility solely through the lens of the market economy. Consumptive suburban and city landscapes franchise and confine the human conversation about development and self-realisation. It is a model of urbanism dependent upon resource and human exploitation in near and distant hinterlands, largely the developing world. The earth could never afford the model's universal extension, which in any case is prevented by its need for subordinate regions – repositories of resources and depositories for waste and failure. No amount of technical refinement will resolve this contradiction. The 'green city' of western progressive intention is a

rushed sketch of something that will never be built. The desired urban model is opposed to, but also dependent upon, the shifting, boiling hinterlands that constitute the alternative and larger human reality – what the American urban theorist Mike Davis calls the 'planet of slums'. It describes the purgatories of urban disappointment to which most of our species seems condemned.

The sociologist Michael Pusey talks about the withering of the Australian political imagination since the rise of economic rationalism in the late 1970s. Elsewhere politicians like Margaret Thatcher proclaimed the 'TINA' mantra – apparently 'there is no alternative' to a society based on economic reason. This was not always the case and indeed it misuses the idea of reason, which is meant to liberate human thought, not bind it. Through the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, western thinking was opened to a contest of new and often starkly opposed possibilities based on different values and interpretations, insights and priorities. These played out roughly and spectacularly in the rapidly growing, often festering cities of the modern industrial era. This drove urbanisation, the greatest material project of innovation and improvement in our species' history. But we live now in the sharp light of its manifest limits and contradictions. It was riveted to the cause of industrial capitalism; alternative models could not compete or were swept aside.

The contemporary path of 'development' is urbanisation with visceral not imaginative intent, concerned with filling the belly not the mind or the heart. The early moderns broke with the heavenly city, wanting the good life now. The grounding of human ambition opened the cause of human philosophy and social imagination as the 'good city' was debated and experimented with. Reduction of that cause to a city which embodied the accumulative impulse of the market was the ultimate contradiction of modernity, a journey of human liberation that created its own new bonds of thought and possibility. The great stirring of human doubt that we know as the Enlightenment was eventually anesthetised by the ever grander claims of reason and certitude. The German sociologist Ulrich Beck now considers modernity to have been overshadowed by 'excessive reason' and the death of imagination. Human sensibility is 'no longer defined by religion, tradition or the superior power of nature but has even lost its faith in the redemptive powers of utopias'.

Within its western heartlands the enlightening contest of ideas has dimmed in recent decades. Politics has narrowed on the liberal-democratic consensus and a constricted sense of liberty – freedom to do things (consume, develop), not freedom from things (poverty, environmental harm, alienation). Economics has been redefined from the pursuit of human welfare to the rule of profit and accumulation. It has also promulgated the idea that free markets define democracy, and thus the prospects for human freedom and fulfilment. Discussion about the environment rests on the narrow assumption that

ecological crisis must be fixed through 'adjustments' to the status quo, not profound social or economic change. Despite the agonies that attended its birth, Australia's carbon tax is a child of the system, not its antithesis. It reinforces the authority of technocratic and econocratic thinking, which holds that solving the crisis means perfecting rather than usurping markets. The philosopher Slavoj Žižek, in *Living in the End Times* (Verso, 2010), speaks of a central paradox in human sensibility: a will to 'normalise' endangerment that strengthens as the precipice of catastrophe is approached. The political humdrum around climate and resource 'challenges' seems to bear out his claim.

Consensus is normally taken to be a good thing, but we can have too much of it. Commentators of various ideological persuasions have detected in our public life a lack of 'imaginative argument', of deep debate about alternative futures. Australia's government lacks a guiding vision, or is at least very poor at communicating one, it is said; its Opposition is opportunistic, not led by coherent values. Paul Keating argues that the Labor Party has not presented (or more pointedly, *sold*) its 'story' to the Australian people. This presumes there is a story to be told, a vision to behold, apart from the daily reproduction of a settled and consumptive suburban lifestyle, or its newest sibling, the urban village. By contrast, the conservative side of politics seems less troubled by the missing big picture – it's not so keen on galleries, anyway.

There is ever more criticism about the oppressive consensus that has narrowed the Western outlook to the point where we seem locked into the structures and habits that are exposing us all to harm: economic crisis, environmental degradation, terror and insecurity. The British sociologist John Urry believes that the escape hatch to new structures and ways of living is through a reopened human imagination, through a new contest of ideas about our basic values and priorities. If the project of closure continues we risk, as Ulrich Beck points out, a confluence of crisis and incompetence that will 'justify an authoritarian state'. This would be a horrid twisting of our miraculous capacity for healing and improvement. We could survive the crises we have generated, but our greatest social creation, democracy, might perish in the process.

TONIGHT I'M AN expat Australian feeling homesick for the wrong reasons. This is not yearning for a comfortably different past. The Maynooth streets I make my way along feel a lot like the suburban Melbourne I grew up in, especially its wintriest days. The familiarity of the thing makes you yearn for family and friends in an especially poignant way. Surely, however, this blankets the special possibilities for miraculous thought that Australia might offer an endangered, cynical world? In the past we opened up sharp arguments about egalitarianism and fair treatment, before we seemed to tire of our successes. This lethargy looks lethal when set against the dangers breaking upon us. Salvation from self-harm

will necessitate new creativity, and a profound questioning of verities and interests. To liberate this energy Australia will have to set aside the scorn for free thinking it has lately cultivated.

In the 1890s, in the midst of a plague of droughts, recession and systemic failures, Australians drew bold diagrams of possibilities for their continent and the world. Our forebears were not as transfixed by the task of making and remaking everyday life as we imagine. They had no Tesco or Harvey Norman, and for mostthe daily grind was just that. But many of them still made time and space for the larger work of imagination. In *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954), the critic Vance Palmer wrote that people of the time had 'some vision of the just and perfect State at the back of their minds'. Everyday life was hard yakka, but 'it was the prospect of writing, on a virgin page, a new chapter in the history of humanity that touched their feelings and quickened their imaginations'. This is not to sanctify. They missed much, including the miraculous history of the Indigenous peoples of their land. The historian Bill Gammage observes, in his book of the same name (Allen & Unwin, 2011), that the pre-settlement Aboriginal order managed 'the biggest estate on earth'. 'A few Europeans recognised this…*but for most it was beyond imagining*.' (Emphasis added.) The Indigenous peoples survived the imposition of a brutal new world upon them, the theft and despoliation of the estate they had managed for millennia.

We are walking backwards into a Next World of natural despoliation, and probably much violence and dispossession. It is nearly here. To have any hope of forestalling and managing its most destructive possibilities we must acknowledge and ponder its arrival. Our resources may have run down, our imagination may be ebbing low, but the human capacity for 'performing miracles' that Hannah Arendt identified remains our last resort – and our greatest. The scale of endangerment is dire but we haven't yet deployed our miraculous powers. And we will not do so until we give free play again to the imaginative energies we possess, which must first be directed at clearing out the sclerotic consensus of liberal democracy, to restore liberty, the central discovery and legacy of modernity. For Arendt, 'the miracle of freedom resides in the ability to make new beginnings.'

In the groundhog daze of globalising suburbia, the idea of a new beginning sounds infernally remote. Beneath my wind-whipped hood I wonder what Australia might have to offer. The British social theorist Eric Swyngedouw thinks we must end the fiction of neo-liberalism, with its fantasies of sustainable growth. Surprisingly, this requires 'an urgent need for different stories and fictions that can be mobilized for realization'. Songlines for a new world?

The bitter cold here always makes me think of my homeland, its extremities of heat, and the desert peoples who thrived in that hotter estate. I'm a suburban kid from Melbourne and – regrettably, if predictably – I know almost nothing about

them. But I suspect their 'stories and fictions' might be a good place to start in seeking a new Australian imagination. They changed and managed their land. We changed and mismanaged ours – and theirs. The original Australians survived with culture in the new world we thrust upon them. This is worth contemplating with humility and openness as we drift inexorably into the storms of change. We have a great testimony of human survival that is sung, danced and wept all around us. There will be a way out of, or at least beyond, this crisis. Australians should be the first to assert that this not beyond imagining.

Brendan Gleeson was recently appointed Professor of Urban Policy Studies at The University of Melbourne. He was previously Professor of Geography at The National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

For us all

An alternative Australian narrative is available

Alison Broinowski

DAWN at Bondi reveals a snapshot of today's Australia: nightclubbed couples prone on the sand, Chinese tripod photographers framing the sunrise, young women lifesavers marching to *Scotland the Brave,* laconic line-fishermen trying for a feed of whiting, boot-camp fitness instructors yelling at the northern end of the beach, silent yoga and tai chi practitioners on the southern ledge, human shark bait swimming between the two, and the driver of a sand-grooming machine having a smoko with a council garbage-picker. People arrive at Bondi in waves throughout the day, bringing, binning or taking away the duties and diversions of their many diverse demographics. The whole thing is a continuous animated cartoon. It's the Australian beach cliché, updated.

Australia, you could even say, is a country of clichés. We inherit them, we reproduce and export them. Then others play them back to us from abroad. So often have we heard them repeated that we forget to ask what they mean or if they are still relevant, and unthinkingly we let them become mandatory. Australians wear the clichés as obligatorily as sheltering hats, rashies, and sunscreen, and swim obediently between them. We are regularly assured that these flags of identity will preserve us from whatever rips and currents may lie beyond our security zone or excised territory. Our tourism clichés led a Japanese ambassador, a few years ago, to joke that shorthand for Australia in his country was KK – kangaroos and koalas, RR – rock and reef, and LLL – large, lucky and lazy. Boat people all, we inculcate the Australian clichés in new arrivals too. John Howard even set tests on them, though he was quick to deplore 'the endless seminar on the national identity'.[1] Our obsession with identity is a cliché in itself. I am, you are, we are Australyun. As Barry Humphries, cliché aficionado *par excellence* (now *there's* a string of them), used to sing, 'all ye who do not love her, ye know where ye can go'.

We all know the list of our clichés by heart, not that it's challenging: they are simple and mostly self-deprecating. The overarching cliché is that of the Australian 'way of life'. It has four components: bush, beach, beer and bayonet.

English landscape romanticism laid the seedbed for images of the bush poet, the leathery, laconic drover, the lost child, the lonely wife, the Southern Cross, and the sunlit plains extending. Irish resistance bred the bushranger, the rebel, and the republican. The boozing larrikin came from the currency lads. Whig egalitarianism created mateship, then sports fanatics and surfies, and eventually slobs, bikies and bogans. In Australian suburbs, novelist David Foster claimed a few years ago, two categories of homeowner are recognisable from the street: the handyman and the drunkard. Australia's two cultures, if you like, with women, children, and all our ethnicities scarcely rating a mention. Sentimentally distilled, beer and barbecues are what Australians supposedly live on, though we may in fact consume more wine, soy sauce, and even books. Bush nationalism remains the default Australian cultural narrative, even now, when Australia rides on minerals conveyors, not on the sheep's back; when our population is one of the world's most urbanised and multicultural; and when the closest most Australians get to the wide brown land is a suburban block, a McMansion, the view from a high-rise unit, or a fly-in fly-out job.

Tourism promoters everywhere thrive on clichés, and so do the airlines, which is why you should never judge a country by its brochure. National occasions bring out grand parades of clichés. The Australian icons that opened the Sydney 2000 Olympics mystified many foreign observers who didn't detect the self-satire, and annoyed others, like visiting Japanese author Haruki Murakami. Irritated by *Oi Oi Oi*, he wrote that 'everyone made a great racket, drank copious amounts of beer, and sang *Waltzing Matilda* about fifty times'.[2] But we insiders recognised Director of Ceremonies Ric Birch's skilful send-up of the clichés: the stockhorse parade, Hills hoist, Victa mower, and corrugated iron, the flora and fauna, and the huge banner saying 'G'day'. They were invoked again by Baz Luhrmann in his 2008 movie *Australia*, which seemed as much a promotion for tourism and Bundaberg Rum as it was an introduction for Americans to a fanciful Australian history. Coles supermarkets in 2012 promoted Australia Day with food to be consumed around barbecues, much of it labelled with brands formerly Australian-owned, and prawns that were most likely imported. At such times, a collective wince can be heard around the world from Australian expatriates, and from diplomats who are supposed to encourage regard abroad for Australia as a 'clever country' of diversity, talent, innovation and multiculturalism. But when asked to appear in national dress, and to produce Australian cuisine, the temptation is to default to beer, barbecue, and bushman's clobber, for want of better. As one of them lamented to a PhD researcher, 'Australia has no national dress, national songs nor literature that are widely embraced…and we are left with an apologetic use of indigenous imagery (which most of us do not understand), Crocodile Dundee images of the outback (where few of us live), kangaroos (which we shoot) and Kylie. Hardly enough to

define a country'.[3] In a televised Commonwealth parade to celebrate the Queen's jubilee in 2012, Australia was not even represented by Dame Edna, but by Rolf Harris.

A national narrative made up of bush, beach, and beer (or Bundy) clichés, modest and harmless as they are, is anachronistic. It sells Australia short, or not at all.

National identity seems, like nature, to abhor a vacuum, so into the space where a different Australian narrative might live and grow slouches the digger, originally a gold-seeking opportunist, then a ten-bob-a-day volunteer in the AIF, later sanitised by CEW Bean, and eventually blown up into a heroic Anzac. He is ennobled on large monuments in Australian cities and on small ones in country towns, on honour rolls in RSLs and private schools and on wooden panels in railway stations. This is the bayonet cliché, the one that is not harmless but aggressive, not modest but big-noting (as Robin Gerster has called it). Blameless Australians in every generation since European settlement have fought and died, first in British conflicts and later in American ones. Few of them went to war to be big-noted, and some old diggers now want no more of it. But this brave, conditioned, or pointless behaviour – depending on your point of view – was what dominions were expected to do. Wars provided a political stockwhip with which successive Australian leaders rounded up the waverers and instilled patriotism. WM Hughes' conscription referendum taught politicians never again to ask the people for their views on being sent to war. Nor did the polticians ever invite voters to decide who Australia's enemies were. To this day an Australian prime minister can more easily send troops into conflict than can a president of the United States, as John Howard demonstrated in 1999, 2002 and 2003. Every year, in the countdown to Anzac Day, the muffled drumbeats begin again in the news media, another generation of young enthusiasts turns up at dawn services, and spines shiver to Laurence Binyon and the Last Post. As if Alan Seymour's classic 1960 play, *The One Day of the Year*, had never been written, war books and television documentaries keep the bayonet cliché alive, ready for the next war. So do Australia's overseas representatives: in Paris in July last year, in the vast public space of the Harry Seidler-designed embassy, the only display was of brochures in English for Australians visiting World War I battle sites.

Our cultural and public diplomacy may have its deficits,[4] but Australia is uninhibited in exporting the bayonet cliché. The first Australians ever encountered by the people in several Asian countries were in uniform, whether they came as enemies or allies. The same was true, of course, for Indigenous Australians, and for many people in Africa and the Middle East. Australians have taken part in some 19 wars, and only once in defence of Australia. Putting on military uniforms so often has hereditary consequences for the national

mindset. Writing from Malaysia in 2000, Vin D'Cruz and William Steele detected a 'militarist streak in the Australian psyche'.[5] That impression was powerfully reinforced, lest we forget, by the Iraq invasion, in which Australia was observably the only country in our region whose troops were there from the start. Howard's threat in November 2002 to make first strikes against terrorists in neighbouring countries was widely noticed in Asian capitals, as were reports that he saw Australia as the 'strong man of Asia' and the United States' 'deputy sheriff'.[6] But Howard merely confirmed what many in the region already knew from experience of Australia. Japanese surveyed at the time of the Iraq invasion saw Australia as a militaristic nation, more so even than heavily-armed Japan.[7] Many Indonesians remain convinced that Australia is a military threat (just as some Australians see Indonesia), poised for invasion. Chinese official media have asked whether Australia thinks it is a bat or a bird – an independent country or not.[8] When they asked Foreign Minister Bob Carr this question again in 2012, his answer was still ambiguous.

FAR FROM SEEKING to dispel impressions that Australia lacks independence, the Rudd and Gillard governments have opened military bases in Australia's north to United States marines, with no clear explanation of their purpose, no sunset or review clauses, no clarity about whose law will apply to them, and no assurance that they will not make Australia a target in a future American war. Worse, the notion is now being dribbled out that the Cocos (Keeling) Islands may take the place of Diego Garcia and become a permanent United States base on Australian soil. Successive Australian governments have progressively degraded our sovereignty, widening the scope of the ANZUS treaty far beyond its intent, allowing Americans to choose our wars and our enemies for us, and thus undermining what little independence we have in defence and foreign policy. They are circumscribing our trade policy and our economy too, since one of those putative enemies is China, Australia's biggest trading partner. Yet prime ministers continue eagerly to send Australians to war, and then, as always, line up for the cameras when the bodies return. Their short-term hope of winning khaki elections, it seems, eclipses any thought of seeking lasting peace in our region, or of representing Australia as a conscientious party to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation – which, in apparent conflict with ANZUS, forbids its parties to threaten or use force.

Australia has, Gareth Evans once said with masterly understatement, 'something of an image problem'.[9] That was in 1991. To this day, ignorance, negativity, irritation and even hostility towards Australia persist in several of our Asian neighbours and important trading partners – and for good reason. So militarised is Australia's widespread image that the children's puzzle book, *Where's Bin Laden?* (2006) identifies Australians in London by their old army

uniforms and slouch hats. Take away the bayonet cliché, after all, and what would be left to distinguish Australians, in their current Afghanistan gear, from Americans? It makes sense for any country, finding itself in this situation and hoping to improve the image it has created and exported, to address the perceptions held by others, the reality of its own behaviour, and the deficiencies in its self-representation. If it is true that Australia's national narrative is clichéd, static, anachronistic, and damaging, then it needs revision, and when better to do this than now, in what's being called the Asian Century? What better time than when Australia is seeking a seat on the UN Security Council? Or when we may be asked to attack Iran or North Korea?

An alternate Australian narrative is available, if we choose to use it. Paradoxically, it is unfamiliar to many, because mainstream historians and cultural commentators have traditionally ignored it. It's the story of Australia in Asia, and it not only makes better sense of our evolving national experience than my five clichés, but also illuminates what distinguishes Australia from all Western countries. For a start, it drops the notion that Australians don't know or care about Asia. It dispenses with the notions of the 'isolated outpost', the 'tyranny of distance', and the 'Asian hordes'. It recognises that in the mid to late 1800s people from China, Japan, India and other Asian nations joined the multicultural mix that was Australia, and that many Australians were also travelling to, living in, and learning from Asian countries, as they still do today. It acknowledges that many of the Australian connections that flourish within Asian societies are not new and strange, but centuries old and, if we read our history, familiar. There have always been Asian Australians, and 'Asia-literate' Australians, many with far-sighted views that deserve more credit than they usually get. To cite only one example among many, in the early twentieth century Griffith Taylor, Professor of Geography at Sydney University, challenged the White Australia policy by pointing to the advantages of intermarriage between Australians and Chinese, and in 1923, proposed relaxation of immigration restrictions. He foresaw an 'unprecedented amalgamation of peoples in the next few centuries', urged Australia to develop closer contact with Asia, and well ahead of his time, anticipated China becoming a great power.[10]

Whenever business opportunities beckoned, Australians hurried to Asian capitals. Culture, tradition, and religion lured others, and after World War II more Australian travellers, journalists, and writers developed a fascination for Asia. The Colombo Plan in the 1950s, and the Whitlam government's burial of the White Australia policy in the 1970s, enabled more Asian collaborations. The first tentative moves were made towards an Asian forum that would seek collaboration rather than confrontation or containment. The long peace after Vietnam, and the ascendancy of Northeast Asia, enabled Hawke to foster APEC,

and Keating to engender more Asia-enthusiasm. But opportunism is transient, and peaks turn to troughs whenever we have wars, economic crises, terrorist attacks, or mass movements of migrants.

Today, acceptance of Australia in Asia remains a work in progress, both among Australians and in Asian countries. Asian regionalism is a large house whose inner sanctum is reserved for ten Southeast Asian nations, while three Northeast Asian ones inhabit the outer rooms, and three more occupy the veranda – Australia, India, and New Zealand. Who's invited and who isn't will be decided by those inside, and certainly not by Australia, as Kevin Rudd found when he suddenly and unsuccessfully proposed an Asia Pacific Community in 2008. As a result, Australia lost its one chance of renting a room in an all-Asian house: allowed to mount the front steps, as it were, were two new guests, the United States and Russia. An American presence lurking inside Rudd's Australian Trojan horse had been widely suspected, and the compromise was to offset that by inviting the Russians as well.

In the discourse, whenever something is called 'Asia-Pacific', that means it includes the United States, legitimized by their Hawaiian islands and Pacific West coast. The founders of APEC, remember – who originally conceived a forum for Australia and free-market economies in Asia – were pressured in 1979 to include the Americans, and then Canada and most of Latin America as well. And it was Robert Gates, as Defense Secretary, who declared in 2010 that any Asian regional organisation had to include the United States, which he said was 'an Asian power', 'a resident power in Asia'. What then are we to read into the omission of 'Pacific' from the title of the Gillard government's 2012 White Paper on the Asian Century? Does it distance itself from the United States? The Prime Minister has cultivated the United States and supported the alliance even more assiduously than her predecessor, and nothing she's done suggests she is seeking defence or foreign policy independence: quite the opposite. The idea for the Asian Century study was clearly a retirement brainchild of Ken Henry, and its terms of reference have economics all over them, with only passing references to defence, culture, or Australia's national reputation, or even to our place in the regional architecture. There appears no acknowledgement at all of the fact that the discussion began in the late 1900s about an Asian Century, continued through the twentieth century, and culminated in a Singaporean author's advocacy in 2008 of the 'new Asian hemisphere'.[11] No doubt submissions to the committee will remind them of all that, and point out as well that our region is not solely about trade and investment.

The White Paper presents an opportunity for the Prime Minister to consider a new Australian way of thinking about Asia, one that draws on the past, but whose terms should now change radically. It requires rethinking of what Australia is for. There can be no better time to free ourselves of anachronistic

clichés, put an end to peaks and troughs of Asia-enthusiasm, make the most of the rich variety of cultures that make Australia unique, and ensure that our society evolves in harmony with our neighbours. If this reconsideration results in Australia being seen in our region and around the world as an interesting, relevant, useful, independent country, and in our becoming the best informed people in the world about the affairs of Asia, it will have been worth doing.

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[1] Quoted by Andrew Shearer, *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, 25 January 2012.

[2] Quoted by Leith Morton, 'Murakami Haruki's *Sydney Diary*', Alison Broinowski ed. *Double Vision: Asian Accounts of Australia*, Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005, p.156.

[3] Quoted by Caitlin Byrne, *Public Diplomacy in an Australian Context: a policy-based framework to enhance understanding and practice*, PhD thesis, Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bond University, 2009, p.175.

[4] Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade, *Australia's Public Diplomacy: building our image*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, August 2007; Lowy Institute Blue Ribbon Panel, 'Australia's Diplomatic Deficit: Reinvesting in Our Instruments of International Policy', Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney 2009; Caitlin Byrne, *Public Diplomacy in an Australian Context: a policy-based framework to enhance understanding and practice*, PhD thesis, Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bond University, 2009; Fergus Hanson, 'A Digital DFAT: Joining the 21st Century', Policy Brief, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney, November 2010.

[5] J.V. D'Cruz and William Steele, *Australia's Ambivalence Towards Asia: Politics, Neo/Post-colonialism and Fact/Fiction*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Book Publishers Association, 2000.

[6] Howard quoted by Alison Broinowski, *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia*, Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2003, p.186.

[7] Yoshio Sugimoto, '"Japanese" accounts of Australia: A Player's View', Alison Broinowski ed. *Double Vision: Asian Accounts of Australia*, Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005.

[8] Alison Broinowski, *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia*, Melbourne: Scribe, 2003, pp.62-3.

[9] Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations and the World of the 1990s*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1991.

[10] Quoted by David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999, p.192-4.

[11] Kishore Mahbubhani, *The New Asian Hemisphere: the irresistible shift of global power to the East*, New York: Public Affairs, 2008.

F**k popular culture

Why quality matters and can be judged

Julian Meyrick

IN the winter of 1980, in the last few months of her life, Queenie Leavis, wife of renowned literary critic FR Leavis, and co-editor of the dyspeptic pre-War literary journal *Scrutiny*, came to my school in England. A group of bug-eyed sixth formers were summoned to her presence, chaperoned by a squad of equally awed teachers. The burning question concerned the novelist Saul Bellow: *Was he part of the Great Tradition or not?* Hard to credit the trepidation with which our inquiry was put. I forget the answer; 'Yes', I think. The gathering was steeped in the high-church atmosphere of Literature as Religion, Leavisites the shepherds of the ever-straying masses, returning them to writing of True Value, separating sheep from goats. I bought it, of course, as only boys of a certain age will do, more comfortable reciting the poetry of Philip Larkin than chatting up girls. For years after (has it ended, this period?) my response to disaster has been to reach for a book, preferably a tome of skull-thumping complexity, the sort Leavis argued was a moral compass for life but I hoped was an antidote to it.

She was old. She was also dignified, knowledgeable, impeccably accurate in statement, not generous but carefully interrogative. In retrospect I see she was held together by two contradictory forces that make sense only in terms of each other: on the one hand, a passion for literature, for all that it can contain by way of experience, by way of life; on the other a detached interest in how it achieves its effects, its style and structuration. This was the basis for the 'polemical sociology' that was FR Leavis' stock-in-trade. Queenie was more muted in approach, but fired by the same impulses. The dual gravities that pulled in opposed directions shaped the orbit of their engaged, sometimes enraged, critical analyses; provided for endless and empowered discriminations, in other words. A literature without such distinction-making was the sound of one hand clapping. It was inert, dead. The critic *had* to bring it alive, no matter what the cost, no matter the opprobrium that judgement incurred. And FR and Queenie incurred much, much opprobrium, always in the critical wars for Saying Something or for Not Saying Something, for adopting, in the huffy charge of Lionel Trilling, 'a bad tone'.

The body of literature the Leavises considered it their duty to construe was unapologetically Modernist High Art. In 1980 this was still a permissible restriction (just). On the Right, a hundred University dons extolled the verities of New Criticism and the intentional fallacy. On the Left, the Frankfurt School kicked butt, dumping glittering vitriol on 'affirmative culture' for its rank inanity and US-sponsored crypto-fascism. Art's job was to be abstruse, allusive, rebarbative and (key word) ironic. The last was not so much an intellectual value as a layer of consciousness, something that protected you against *embourgeoisement*. I practiced my 'ironic look' in the toilet mirror, angling my head and adopting an I've-seen-it-all-before lip dip. I bought a silver cigarette case from a flea market and read Marx. There was no disjunction between revolutionary socialism and maintenance of the literary canon in my mind. Wasn't that the *point* of revolution? To put an end to pap, to the witless frivolity of what JB Priestly pejoratively skewered as 'admass'? A Chaucer and an Eliot in every home was the goal. If you wanted entertainment, go to the pub. Art meant Thought and Thought was Good.

When did that change? Let's leave that hanging for a moment, and ask another stumper: what are the consequences of the change, and are all of them beneficial?

FOR AUSTRALIAN CULTURE, the impact of Modernism in the years following the Great War was a splintering one, coinciding as it did with an emergent Anzac myth and a loosening of imperial ties. Four types of artistic response can be detected, each different in affect, politics and aesthetic implication: a traditionalist nationalism (best represented by the literary section of the *Bulletin)*, a traditionalist cosmopolitanism (Norman and Lionel Lindsay et al.), a modernist internationalism (every artist who fled the country to join the avant-garde abroad) and, the runt of the litter, a nationalist modernism, ignored, derided, internally exiled. The last is what the Leavises would have regarded as Australian Culture, and its abject status is a matter of wonderment and despair. Why didn't the new nation embrace its nascent cultural consciousness more fully? One explanation, fateful, sees the root of the problem as a split between high art and popular forms. Until the war, art came in two modes: local/simplex and imported/sophisticated. Australian culture was popular culture, full stop. After 1918 a new bifurcation erupted. The historian John Rickard observes of Vance and Nettie Palmer, for example, 'the crux of the problem was that, unlike populist [writers], they were uncertain of their audience. Whereas the *Bulletin*… deliberately maintained a popular dialogue with its readership, the Palmers and their circle attempted to intellectualise this tradition, yet with expectations of retaining its mass appeal' (129).[1] These expectations were quickly crushed:

The self-conscious attempts in the 1920s to found a national drama with which these writers were associated amply demonstrates the gulf between artist and audience. Louis Esson, whose particular ambition was as a playwright, had been persuaded by the… example of Dublin's Abbey Theatre that what was needed were 'plays on really national themes'… Yeats advised them to get a theatre going 'no matter how small', and this they did with the aptly named Pioneer Players. Although some productions had modest success, audiences were indeed small and the theatre necessarily amateur. The Players petered out after a few years, disappointed not so much in the size of their audience as by the lack of ferment in the stalls. (130)

Theatre is a signal example of the execrated state of Australian modernism because unlike the visual arts, music and literature it had almost no access to overseas markets and could not leap-frog the issue of local appeal. While other cultural forms shipped out, found success abroad, came back and paraded it, theatre, dependent on buildings, set machinery, actors who could remember their lines and people who would pay to see them do so, was stuck in its own back yard, literally and metaphorically. And there it died a thousand insulting deaths. Sumner Locke Elliot's *Rusty Bugles*: banned and bowdlerised. Douglas Stewart's *Ned Kelly*: dropped from production for the 1956 Olympic games. Patrick White's *Season at Sarsaparilla*: critically and popularly abjured, likewise *The Ham Funeral* and *A Cheery Soul*. Alan Seymour's *One Day of the Year*: blocked by the RSL from inclusion in the 1960 Adelaide Festival. And these are the *success* stories, the playwrights who survived the odds. It does not include the stunted careers, wilted hopes, and paralysed souls of those who, sensing defeat at the hands of their own, gave up the theatre altogether.[2] By 1965 Australia has gone backwards culturally – again, in Leavisite terms – less confident and creative than it had been fifty years before. It had acquired a chronic psychological stoop, AA Phillips' 'cultural cringe', the mark of a collective bewilderment. Thus a situation transmogrified into a condition. No need to explain what had gone wrong: in Australia, it was simply the way things were.

When the resurgence came – theatre the fighting front of Donald Horne's *Time of Hope: Australia 1966–72*[3] – is it any wonder Australian drama presented itself as both 'popular' and historically minded? These two impulses, hand in glove with a relentless experimentation, provided New Wave playwrights with values, methods and assumed audiences. On stage they could be fused together. *Marvellous Melbourne*, the Australian Performing Group's first production, and *The Legend of King O'Malley,* the show that kick-started the Nimrod Theatre, were both historical pastiche, borrowing the tunes, turns and structural whimsies of musical hall and vaudeville traditions. Thus was begat a love affair with 'popular theatre' and an unstated belief that 1970s drama was less something *new* than something *true,* an art form that had climbed back from outlier status to reclaim

its podium in the public mind. A director like Jim Sharman seemed to incarnate in one extraordinary figure the popular culture incursion. The experimental developer of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and the authoritative reviver of the plays of Patrick White, he was also a scion of Jimmy Sharman of Sharman's Boxing Tent fame and stager of smash hit musicals *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar.* When in 1978 he joined forces with director Rex Cramphorne to found the short-lived Paris Theatre in Sydney's Kings Cross, White backed him financially and rhetorically, announcing 'the company could tap a public that has never known theatre…could perhaps even tempt the unfortunate western suburbs in which politicians are always talking. Theatre belongs to a city, not the institutions. It belongs to the night life, the streets and the lights and is not for people who come because they want to go back to the suburbs yawning.'[4] This from the author of *Eye of the Storm* (1973), one of the most recondite novels of the twentieth century.

That the New Wave's success was the result of energy drawn from the legacy of Australian popular theatre is an assumption that has gone largely unchallenged. The journal *Australian Drama Studies* devoted its first number (1/1: 1982) to exploring the theme. Likewise *Meanjin*'s performing arts issue (43/1: 1984), edited by cranky Pramocrat Jack Hibberd, underscored the debt contemporary drama owed to the cheeky, cheerful, whistle-able theatre of its colonial past. No mention of the Palmers and the Essons, or Sydney Tomholt, or Wal Cherry and the blighted Emerald Hill Theatre. These modernists were flawed progenitors at best, hobbled by foreign notions of what culture should be, blind to the untapped riches of their own past (an interesting metaphorical transposition of Australia's mineral wealth). Now what had been divided was made whole again. By returning to its popular roots Australian theatre had recovered not only its appeal, but its soul.

The trouble with this view is that it is certainly overstated and very probably wrong. The best evidence are New Wave plays themselves, which are satirical, polemical, flamboyant, occasionally offensive, often with complicated agendas and world views. There are, it is true, a variety of styles on offer, from the retro-realism of Ron Blair, David Williamson and Alma de Groen, to the anarchic funstering of Bob Ellis, Steve Spears and Dorothy Hewett. But whatever forms these playwrights borrowed from the past, their investment of them, and the resulting sensibility, is entirely their own. And the word that best sums up that is: *ironic.* That is, the New Wave as a cultural phenomenon was less about history coming to the rescue of contemporary practice than contemporary artists retooling moribund historical forms to give them purpose, density and edge. A good example is Circus Oz, that came out of Soapbox Circus, that came out of the Pram. What we value in this company's productions today are not the tricks – done better, for what they're worth, in countries where traditional circus is extant

– but the mood, the humour, the concepts. A form cramped by a restrictive athleticism and a fixation on customary outcomes is liberated into complexity and fuller meaning; is turned into *an art*. Popular theatre didn't rescue the New Wave. High art, via 1970s artists, redeemed and transfigured popular theatre.[5]

This confusion between source and target, cause and effect, in the minds of critics and artists would itself be a historical curiosity if it had not fed the underlying Australian bias against anything that looks like minority arts practice. The sense of connection that came with the popular theatre trope (however illusory), of at last meeting expectations, of being *at one with the community*, was (and is) tempting for an art form long the object of suspicion and contempt. Australian drama as a 'people's drama' offered (and offers) the hope of organic connection between an abject class fraction and a traditionally indifferent public.

But there are limits to this imagined state of *gemeinschaft*. If Sharman and the Paris represent the zenith of the New Wave's popular theatre ambitions, and Circus Oz one of its surviving achievements, *Manning Clark's A History of Australia – the Musical* might be considered a candidate for its most resounding failure. Peter Fitzpatrick calls the production, assembled for the 1988 Bicentenary and involving both Pram and Nimrod artists an 'inconceivable conjunction', but is adamant that the strange marriage between its form (toe-tapping musical) and its content (Clark's magisterially stern *magnum opus*) was largely successful.[6] Right from the start its artistic qualities as a show were gazumped by its political significance as a skirmish in the History Wars (the *Herald Sun* then beginning its campaign against federal Labor and their layabout associates, 'the Carlton mafia'). Numbers like 'Wentworth Samba', 'The Folly of Gallipoli' and 'Nance the Ferret', together with a high-kicking chorus of historical figures – Ned Kelly, Caroline Chisholm, Queen Victoria, Robert Menzies, to name a few – make it as mind-bogglingly surreal as anything the New Wave got up to. Despite opening night accolades (Hawke and cabinet leaping to their feet in standing ovation) the show closed after seven weeks. The *Herald Sun* stuck the boot in again: 'the sheer awfulness, the crudeness and epic dullness of this Bicentennial bash'[7]; and the mythology of catastrophe, as Fitzpatrick calls it, was born. So what made the show a stinker, if indeed it was one? Or is retrospective assessment necessarily either partisan or beside the point? What are the *grounds* for judging the show, any show? Let's leave this one hanging for a moment, too, and return to the Leavises.

FR LEAVIS, ONE my teachers recalled (a six-foot Cornishman in a nailed-on graduation gown who informed me that Shakespeare was the greatest transcendent genius who ever lived), preferred to hold tutorials in his pyjamas and slippers. The book his students had been reading would be brandished aloft. *What is its value?* If, after discussion, judgment was adverse it would be hurled

forcefully into the bin. Criticism was a serious business. Terry Eagleton notes the impact of this style of commitment: 'In the 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else.'[8] Leavis's trenchant opinions got him into trouble with his peers though. When he refused to testify for the Defence in the Crown case against *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960, despite having championed DH Lawrence as a writer for thirty years, reactions ranged from the quietly puzzled to the openly furious. Leavis was unrepentant. Lawrence *was* a great writer. But *Lady Chatterley* was an average book and the arguments put forward to justify lifting the ban on it were at best spurious, at worst misconceived. 'Lawrence is henceforward the author of *Lady Chatterley*. This is what the new orthodoxy of the enlightenment reduces him to,' he maintained in the pages of the *Spectator*.[9] Leavis could be harsh and negative in his views, increasingly so as he got older. But he was always erudite and precise in articulating them. He was right about *Lady Chatterley*, though the world at the time told him he was not. He stood by his judgments and did not expect them to be either uncontroversial or uncontested. What was the point of that? To take literature seriously was to engage in open assessment of it. There was a cost to this, and in a life fully lived one had to be willing to pay it. Sean Matthews points out the sociability of this stance, Leavis's belief in 'the collaborative ground of the critical function':

> On *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the trial Leavis was absolute and specific: 'it is important this obvious enough truth be recognized – [it] is a bad novel'. Recognition of the 'truth', though, is not a matter of easy individual assent but requires intellectual effort, a struggle with evidence, conscience and the Other's argument. Critical competence necessitates effort of resistance to conventions, preconceived ideas and personal relations that might disrupt or distort the response to a text. Such disinterestedness is a precondition of critical discussion… Throughout his work, value judgments are expressed in interrogative or consensual forms, contingent on a discursive currency for their force. Leavis maintains all critical statements are of the form 'This is so, isn't it?' and presuppose a response 'Yes, but'. This leads back to the importance of a vital critical environment, that other major theme in his writing, as the guarantee of the articulation of genuinely representative values.[10]

If someone tells me one more time 'art's meaning is subjective', I'll brain them with my copy of *The Common Pursuit* (1952), one of Leavis's longer books. That the essence of cultural value lies in personal response is inarguable. Art is a singularity, if it's any good at least. But personal response is the beginning, not the end, of having an opinion about it, the first step on a long road entailing both personal reflection and exegetical analysis. The Leavises' judgements count for

something because they are, in a larger, moral sense, *going somewhere.* This was the Modernist approach to life: committed, eristic, a little humourless. You sit up straight when you read Leavis, turn off the TV, knit your brows. You listen to what he has to say because you know he means it.

The transition from *engagé* ornery late Modernism to miasmically unstable postmodernism, with its diacritic flourishes and jokey mergers of form, has not brought with it an end to a concern with judgement, far from it. Star ratings, 'expert panels', thumbs up/thumbs down SMS juries, medals, awards, prizes of all kinds pervade our cultural world, turning it into a riot of preferment, a continual, enervating contest where *there's always a winner.* In other words, the business of judgement has either been pathologised – outsourced to the Academy, whence no one can understand it – or trivialised – a talk-show-host *Australia's Got Talent* opinion-fest with Kyle Sandilands as mad *Maître de jeu.* There's no social transformation without there being something inconvenient about it. Losing the guts of the opinion-having process might be an acceptable loss but in Australia it compounds the felony outlined above: to whit, a rank populism that, in claiming a *de jure* equality of value, rapidly works its way to the bottom of the cultural barrel, catering to our worst proclivities, and putting itself beyond reach of censure by vitiating the criteria by which it might be judged. *If people like it, that's enough.* When you point out that, historically speaking, people have also liked bear-baiting, witch-burning, torture lynchings and public executions but we don't think this a reason for bringing them back, you get an exasperated look. *Of course* these things are wrong, just as *of course* in art there *is* no right or wrong. But there is. *The Biggest Loser* is a pile of crap. Face painting is not on a par with installation art. Interpretive dance is a genuine art form because it has a long tradition of practice, an exacting critical history and a community of past and present artists who mediate relations between the two. It is certainly the case that the broadening of the definition of culture in the last fifty years has brought with it a welcome loosening of high art–pop art boundaries, a plethora of new media and different conceptions of creative agency (though this last remains, to my mind, still largely aspirational). But it does not mean, nor should it mean, an abandonment of the search for standards by which to judge the results, nor an unwillingness to call a spade a blunt instrument for shovelling dirt when it puts itself forward as something more.

Why are qualitative criteria so important? Why were the Leavises right to champion a community-wide dialogue about them? Put another way, what's so special about high art, since that's the end of the playground concerned with such distinction-making? Again, theatre is exemplary because it is so vulnerable to short term perception. Paintings, sculptures and symphonies stick around. Live performance, however, a capitalised and collaborative enterprise, can only be prolonged or revived under certain circumstances – usually when it meets

with strong approval in the first place. The struggle for integrity of judgement is not a distal matter for theatre therefore, and the regular exchanges of fire between critics and artists in the public arena bear witness to it. If absolute standards are spurious nonsense, 'a vital critical environment' is not. When judgements aren't out in the open, they burrow underground and do real damage, becoming pockets of insidious in-group opinion considering themselves superior to the common view because, well, there aren't the criteria to challenge them.

So here's a thumbnail Leavsite analysis of *Manning Clark's History of Australia – the Musical*. It's a bad play. It is not bad in conception. New Wave dramatists did many out-of the-box things in their time, a high percentage successful (Tim Robertson, John Romeril and Don Watson were the writers on *History* and their list of achievements is a long one). Nor is it bad because of any imagined political agenda. Both earlier and later drafts of the text are available on-line and anyone but a *Herald Sun* editor would be hard put to find an offensive point of view in them. And there's the rub. There *is* no real point of view in the play, no wider intellectual movement or operating principle.

It is ultimately a collation of narrative incidents bound together by the thinnest of conceits. Fitzpatrick argues that 'its structural movement is consistently integrative and ameliorative'[11], but this is only a virtue if an informing conflict is established to begin with. And in *History* it just isn't. I could, as a dramaturge, put this technically and say 'the play fails to find an adaptive metaphor whereby the *agon* of its source material is put to work as an effective dramatic force.' But I can also put it in plain English: in a drive to develop a 'popular' vehicle the writers jettison the intellectual substance of their subject matter. Clark's vision is, after all, a critical one. It is nuanced, complex, conflicted, *ironic.* The New Wave did many weird and brilliant things with popular theatre forms but *History* stands as evidence that the trope had, by 1988, exhausted itself. In trying to be something for everyone the play ends up nothing for anyone. Thus does the popular slide into the populist and a feisty cultural formation lose traction, shape and critical force.

Perhaps if New Wave dramatists had been more self-aware they could have gone on for longer, matured, achieved the full consciousness they always seemed on the brink of attaining. As it was, the movement fell to bits in an egregious romantic populism, unwilling to see the constraints behind its fantasy and take steps to mitigate its ultimately ruinous effects.

THAT'S THE PROBLEM with popular culture: it has to be, well, *popular.* And while 'popular' as a concept doesn't lie in direct opposition to 'critical' it doesn't sit snugly beside it, either. When Rickard talks about the Palmers'

'intellectualising' of Australian cultural traditions, what he means is 'making them critical'. And being critical (and criticised), in however edifying a fashion, is not what Australians have historically gone to their art for. That's an issue because that is what high art does: ask the hard questions, the *un*-popular ones, the ones no one wants to hear. So, while there's nothing wrong with popular culture there is a big problem with the belief that all culture must be popular. By valorising the first, you end up with the second. Or at least you do in Australia, with two centuries of oppressive conformism, intolerance of minorities and indifference to art behind it. In this context, seeing popularity as the mark of cultural worth risks raising old ghosts in new sheets and becoming another excuse not to do the hard work of both creating a diverse culture and critically understanding the diverse culture we are creating.

This was the Leavises' goal: to illuminate our social and imaginative landscape by guiding and goading us to deeper cultural connections; to say what is good art not for the sake of grandstanding judgement, but because such judgements are part of a committed person's *life.*

And what are we doing now, exactly? Or, as a Leavisite critic might polemically put it: what the *f**k* are we doing now?

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[1] Both quotations from John Rickard's *Australia: A Cultural History.* London and New York: Longman, 1996 (1988). The bifurcation is discussed at length by Peter Goodall in *High Culture, Popular Culture: The Long Debate.* St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995.

[2] For detailed discussion of these and other playwrights of the period see Leslie Ree's *The Making of Australian Drama Volume 1.* Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1978; and, more recently, John McCallum's *Belonging: Australian Playwriting in the 20th Century.* Strawberry Hills, NSW: Currency Press, 2009.

[3] Australia: Angus and Roberton, 1980.

[4] *Week/end Australian* 18-19 March, 1978.

[5] I deal with this issue in more detail in "Loved Every Minute of It: Nimrod, Enright's *The Venetian Twins* and the Invention of Popular Theatre" in *Nick Enright: An Actor's Playwright* ed. Anne Pender and Susan Lever. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008, pp 157-172

[6] "The Historian in the Spotlight: Manning Clark's *History of Australia – The Musical"* in *Against the Grain: Brian Fitzpatrick and Manning Clark in Australian History and Politics".* Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 2007 (pp 240-257). For a quick overview of the history of *History* see http://historyofaustraliathemusicalahistory.blogspot.com.au/2009/02/1988-and-all-that.html

[7] Quoted Fitzpatrick: p 253.

[8] *Literary Theory: An Introduction.* USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 (1996, 1983) p 27.

[9] Quoted Sean Matthews. "The Responsibilities of Dissent: F.R. Leavis after *Scrutiny*". *Literature and History.* 13(2): 56.

[10] Matthews: 59-60.

[11] Fitzpatrick: 243.

Beyond the 'smell of an oily rag'

A new way of thinking about financing cultural production

Cathy Hunt

THERE is a need for a significant paradigm shift in how we support and grow the cultural sector. If the potential economic output of this sector is to be realised this change is urgent and provides an opportunity for Australia to provide global leadership.

The shift needs to foster a system based on a new approach to the use of funding (grants and donations), financing (loans) and investment (equity). It needs to lead to financial inclusion for artists, cultural enterprises and organisations. If we are to achieve the innovation and excellence called for from the sector, we need to design innovation and excellence into the systems, business models and resourcing used to get there.

All those in the cultural economy experience some form of financial exclusion. As an artist you are likely to have been supported by family or friends throughout your career, have had one small grant at some point if you're one of the 29 per cent of Australian artists a year who do; and luckier still to get through the doors or an interview at your local bank, let alone secure a loan appropriate and affordable to your circumstances.

If you operate as a non-profit entity, because that is appropriate to your purpose, you will be unable to access a loan from a bank, let alone service one, given your limited assets and the short-term nature of any grant funding you may have.

If you are a creative business, you are likely be too small or have not been trading long enough for government business support programs, and as a commercial enterprise, you will be ineligible for arts funding programs. You'll also be too risky for angel investors if you are a start up because of the perception that you are more concerned about your creative practice rather than creating a commercial venture and building profit.

You may not be able to demonstrate the level of return on investment or exit strategy even as an established creative business when compared to other traditional sectors, which will rank your investment opportunity below technology, health, biotech and resource based opportunities. For venture capital level investment, you will probably have to go overseas to secure investment for games, entertainment, screen or design based companies with boutique firms that understand the risk/reward profile of creative businesses that don't exist in Australia currently.

In its present form, the public funding system is not changing this picture. The need to maintain investment in existing infrastructure and institutions, the capacity of rising costs to absorb new money, and the focus on outcomes tied to the life of grants, all tend to preserve the status quo. Although there are calls for an 'investment mindset' by government from the sector, the system we have for building capacity and financing is not geared to respond.

YET AUSTRALIA IS in a unique position to make the changes needed. While Europe and North America grapple with these issues in a time of crisis, Australia has the ability to invest in the future and build the resilience into the cultural economy to prepare for the structural changes ahead.

The answer is not just in increasing government program grants nor simply diversifying the funding base of our organisations through following the US tradition of philanthropy, but in creating a model that blends different forms of funding, financing and capital to build the tangible and intangible assets of the sector and hence its future resilience.

We need to take lessons from the emerging capital market for the social economy canvassed at length by the Senate Economics Committee in its November 2011 report *Investing for Good: The development of a capital market for the not-for-profit sector in Australia*.). There is a need to model an appropriate structure for the cultural economy. We need to recognise that the sector is, to use an American term 'mis-capitalised' to undertake the work expected of it.

There are two contexts in which the changes need to occur. The first concerns the sector itself, with organisations and enterprises taking a good hard look at their own operations, whether they are 'fit for purpose' in the changing and challenging environment we all face; across their programs, operations, and financial structure; their preparedness for digital and online engagement; why they do what they do and how; as well as clearly articulating the value they are creating along the way, as both storytellers and statisticians. And most important of all how they will take control of their own destinies, creating those 'untied' income streams and an asset base that this will require. The leadership of some organisations, including executive management and boards, will need assistance and mentoring to exploit the opportunities that lie ahead.

More often than not cultural organisations are forced into a position where they simply adapt to change, trying? to do more with less, driven by passion for their mission and a desire to achieve.

THE SECOND IS how government engages with this sector, which must include three elements.

First, a new accord between government and key institutions and organisations (both large and small) is needed. This needs to focus on long-term individual contracts rather than annual and triennial standardised funding agreements, including clearly identified funds to build capacity and assets as well as grants for programs to pay for the cultural outcomes required. There is a need to retreat from the fear that these organisations represent a high level of risk. They don't – they are part of the core infrastructure and institutions within the ecology of the cultural sector. Many have been funded for twenty years or more continue to deliver great art and relevant programs but are or no more resilient as organisations than they were when they started. A new approach is needed to create stability and income generating opportunities that in turn will attract new funders, financers and investors. It will also generate increased value for money for the government dollar and stop the unnecessary waste of time and energy of endless grant rounds on both sides – a key distraction from engaging with other partners and paying customers for the work itself.

There is an urgent need for a new Culture Fund, to sit alongside the reformed Australia Council which builds on the innovation seen in the technology sector for 'proof of concept', and the social sector for social investment; blending government, philanthropic and capital investment, accessible and affordable for individuals, new cultural and creative enterprises (non profit and commercial), and delivered in a mix of grants, loans and investment models. An endowment is one structure that would offer the government a mechanism to create an enduring and more flexible pool of funds.

There is also a need to develop new partnerships to deliver this. It will require foundations and high net worth individuals who seek new ways to invest alongside financial intermediaries with the capacity to model funds for investors seeking a social and cultural return on their capital. This must also include a new form of accord between federal and state governments to respond to the different community and sectoral ecologies across the country, and finally changes to the legislative and taxation environment to stimulate investment from other sources, building on the success of tax offsets for film and responding to the key recurring recommendations from recent government reviews are required. Legislative change is a big ask. But in some other countries this has been a valuable contributor to the changes in income generation. Community Interest

Companies in Britain, and limited-dividend entities in the United States, are examples of new ways in which the framework could be altered, without reducing government tax revenues.. Australia does not need to emulate others. It can evolve its own legal structures that encourage enterprise within the non-profit sector without damage to the public purse.

THE CULTURAL ECONOMY, with its mix of entrepreneurs, commercial and non-profit organisations, generating ideas products and services from the creative expression of our culture, is at the heart of the digital economy, and a key resource to grow, diversify and strengthen Australia for the future.

To date the Mitchell Review into Private Sector Support and the Review of the Australia Council for the Arts have touched upon but failed to grasp the breadth and depth of change required to build resilience into the sector and to take advantage of these assets for the future.

Culture and creativity cannot be one of the drivers for the future of Australian society and economic well being from a position of marginalisation. If the cultural sector is to be 'mainstreamed' as Minister Crean envisions, those working in it need to be able to access to mainstream finance. This needs a sectoral reform package, not a few dollars to fix the holes here and there.. There is plenty of underpinning research including the work undertaken through the *New Models New Money* initiative and examples from overseas. In the United States the Non Profit Finance Fund is providing sector-specific financial consulting services and access to capital through grants and loans.

In Europe the creative sector is one of the few areas of the economy that has not undergone a significant decline in the last few years. The European Commission is now giving consideration to a significant new funding program 'Creative Europe' to deliver finance to small creative businesses in the film and media sectors to guarantee loans from local mainstream banks utilising the European Investment Bank and Investment Fund as an intermediary.

In the UK, this shift in thinking is happening largely through the pioneering work of the cultural think tank Mission Models Money. Arts organisations have begun to access new forms of loan investment for cash flow and asset building including purchasing and refurbishing their own buildings for cultural and commercial purposes and developing new streams of business and enterprise activity.

Mindset is a critical issue. Both governments and arts organisations have to unshackle themselves from the constraint of thinking that the current system (and the unhealthy dependency culture that comes with it) is the only system possible. This just becomes a self-limiting prophecy.

We don't need more research – we just need some action – starting with the National Cultural Policy.

This is one area in which Australia could be a world leader: isn't that what Australia is for?

As co-director of Positive Solutions Cathy Hunt has worked extensively on arts and cultural policy and strategic planning in Australia and abroad. She is an international adviser to the UK cultural think-tank Money Mission Models.

She co-authored the *Platform Paper – A Sustainable Arts Sector – What will it take?* (2008), a member of the *New Models New Money* research project, and lead the research into international models for new financing and the feasibility study -*Foundation for the Artist*.

She is the cultural sector consultant to Foresters Community Finance, a leader in the development of capacity building strategies and loan finance for the non-profit sector.

Perspectives of identity in being Australian

The gift of the rainbow serpent

Paul Newbury

THERE are, for many Australians, constant tugs of conscience about the fate of the Indigenous Peoples of Australia – the Aboriginal people of the mainland and the Torres Strait Islanders, who became Australians when Queensland annexed the islands between 1872 and 1879. The founding story of Australia is one of brutal dispossession and every Indigenous man, woman and child in Australia bears the trauma of that violence.

Acknowledging our inheritance should not engender a paralysing guilt, but rather a mature realisation of the moral obligations created by our past, which we won't ever escape. This is the beginning of pride in belonging. Anthropologist Patrick Sullivan's *Belonging Together*: *dealing with politics of disenchantment in Australian Indigenous policy* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011) argues that Australians should recognise their futures as inextricably bound with that of Indigenous Australians.

Sullivan contends that Australians limit their identity because they do not perceive Indigenous heritage as a factor in being Australian, or that Indigenous peoples are essential to the identity of other Australians. I believe we must revitalise our subjective understanding of being Australian. Non-Indigenous Australians must embrace an identity that is commensurate with living in an Indigenous land and Indigenous philosophy and spirituality should be a guiding theme in our identity.

I REACH OUT for a sense of belonging because I do not want to be forever an immigrant in Aboriginal land. My quest for identity began with reading the revised history of Australia which emerged in 1968, when the anthropologist WEH Stanner delivered the ABC Boyer Lecture series later published as *After the Dreaming* (ABC Books, 1969).

In the second lecture, *The Great Australian Silence*, Stanner rebuked Australian historians for eulogising European achievement in a hostile environment and leaving the massacre, dispossession and tenacious resistance of Indigenous peoples out of the story. It was an expression of the racism of the time that Aborigines were considered as being of anthropological rather than historical interest.

Henry Reynolds, former professor of Australian History at James Cook University and noted writer on the Indigenous experience, was profoundly influenced by Stanner's writing, and consequently began to investigate the record of relations between Aborigines and Europeans since 1788, documenting his research in *Why Weren't We Told* (Viking, 1999).

The revision of Australian history had an important influence on Australian society – enough to inspire the legal profession and make the Mabo decision possible. The revised history represents colonisation as invasion, frontier conflict as war, the Indigenous response as resistance, dispossession as greed and the lack of moral restraint as racism. I believe that it is only in redress of the wrongs of the past that we can go forward into a future beyond the debilitating shadow of our history.

One of the great pursuits of my life has been learning how I might generate a sense of belonging to this country. Travelling around outback Australia including Cape York Peninsula has been part of my quest. However, my most beneficial endeavour has been to read stories like Deborah Rose and the Mak Mak People's *Country of the Heart: an Indigenous Australian Homeland* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011) set in the Northern Territory. There is a constant stream of books of this kind. They are a rewarding way of finding out how Indigenous people relate to country. *Caring for country* in the indigenous sense is holistic and addresses the needs of ecosystems.

IN THE MABO decision of 1992, the High Court of Australia ruled that at the time of the British invasion in 1788, Indigenous peoples owned the Australian continent and they were entitled to have their right of ownership protected under British law. As of 30 June 2011, successful determinations of native title cover 1,228,373 square kilometres, or 16 percent of Australia. This is in spite of the fact that until recent years, federal and state governments have been native title's most determined opponents.

The Mabo decision was a major fillip to non-Aboriginal Australians whose identity is bound up with acknowledgement of Indigenous rights. However, it soon became evident that Australian governments, both state and federal, were not whole-hearted in their approach to native title. The Noongar case that began in October 2005 is a prime example of their attitude. Noongar country covers the

southwest corner of Western Australia – it stretches from below Geraldton to the south-coast west of Esperance and includes the Perth Metropolitan Area.

In September 2003, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) lodged a native title claim on behalf of 218 family groups of Noongar people over this area with the Federal Court of Australia (FCA). The WA Government and the Commonwealth were the primary respondents but sixty-six other groups were listed as parties including utilities like Telstra and local government bodies.

SWALSC commissioned two historians, John Host and Chris Owen, to write an account of the claim that was published as *'It's still in my heart, this is my country': The Single Noongar Claim History* (UWA Publishing, 2009). The FCA split the Noongar claim into two parts: Part A concerned native title rights over Perth, and Part B, which covered the remainder, was set aside by the court for a separate proceeding.

IN HIS DECISION, Justice Wilcox of the FCA found in favour of the Noongar people. He ruled that the traditional norms the Noongar claimants follow today are to a large extent those that Noongar society observed at the time the British claimed sovereignty in 1829. He accepted that Noongar society continues largely as a group united by common observance of traditional laws and customs and he ruled that the Noongar people hold native title rights over Part A of their claim.

There was considerable support for Justice Wilcox's decision in WA and across the nation. However, the WA Government and the Commonwealth appealed immediately. The Full Federal Court of three judges heard the appeal over three days. On 23 April 2008, the FCA upheld the appeal and referred the matter back to the court for hearing by another judge.

The Justices ruled that the Noongar people had failed to prove continuous recognition and observance of their traditional laws and customs from 1829 to the present day. They said Justice Wilcox had not determined whether the Noongar people had observed their traditional laws and customs substantially uninterrupted *in each generation* (my emphasis) since the British assumed sovereignty in 1829.

They also criticised Justice Wilcox for considering the changes inflicted on Noongar society by European settlement as a factor in the people's retention of their customs. They said the reason why Noongar society stopped following some of their traditional laws and customary practices was irrelevant to the case. The ruling demonstrates the onerous burden of proof native title claimants have in proving their claim. Nonetheless, there was a twist in the tale of the Noongar case.

Immediately following the appeal verdict, both SWALSC and the WA Government acknowledged they could not afford protracted court battles. Subsequently, deputy premier Eric Ripper informed the WA Parliament in December 2008 that the WA Government and SWALSC had signed a Heads of Agreement document to work together to assist native title negotiations in the southwest corner of WA.

Under the agreement, the WA Government agreed to provide $2.65 million over three years to implement a capacity building program for claimant groups and to establish legal entities for managing the benefits that flow from negotiations. SWALSC is now in a position to engage with the WA Government to reach settlement of the whole Noongar claim.

The agreement provides the broad parameters for negotiations in a spirit of cooperation. The agreement sets out a two-year timeframe for the negotiation of a settlement package that will resolve all current and future native title claims across Perth and the southwest region of WA. The readiness of the WA Government to negotiate is due to the validity of the Noongar case and the government's recently acquired enlightened perception regarding native title rights.

SWALSC says a just settlement package is not only about native title but should include a land package, an economic package, a social justice package and maintenance programs for Noongar language and culture. SWALSC will seek a statement of the unique status of Noongar people in their country as traditional owners. Non-Indigenous Australians should consider that resolution of Indigenous claims to reparation for dispossession is a valid part of their identity as Australian.

INCREASINGLY, AUSTRALIAN HISTORIANS are writing about how Aboriginal people shaped the continent of Australia. Historian Bill Gammage argues in *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia* (Allen & Unwin, 2011) that Aboriginal people created the continent of Australia through precise firing of the landscape. Their practices showed long-term planning and the firing of land for hunting opened up the landscape to provide lush pasture for native animals to graze upon. This is possession in its most fundamental sense.

The objective of traditional burning was to produce a mosaic of patches of country at various stages of recovery. Much has changed since the 1788 invasion – topsoil has blown away, hills have slipped, salt has risen to the surface because of the removal of trees, and soil has compacted through the introduction of cloven-footed animals. This has caused once soaking rain, once soaking, to run off scouring gullies and eroding the soil. After dispossession, the Aboriginal

mark on the continent diminished rapidly. Acknowledgement of the prior possession of Indigenous peoples, belated though it might be, should be a source of pride for a modern Australia.

THE ABORIGINAL DREAMING is a comprehensive account of the activities of ancestor beings in creating the world. Songlines are ceremonial narratives about how land was distributed among the people, following the path along which a creator ancestor moved to bring country into being; they crisscross Australia, linking people otherwise separated by thousands of kilometres. Songlines are ceremonial songs of country that connect Aboriginal people and place.

Aborigines have often been portrayed as living on the edge of want and they have been depicted as the playthings of nature without the security of a bed for the night. However, they were not the scavenging people the British believed them to be. Apart from times of prolonged drought, they had a material and spiritual life of abundance.

This was not mere chance – they made their lives through providential management of country in which they aligned themselves in balance between a religious orientation to the land and low impact hunting and gathering practices. They were an energy conscious people and at the time of the British invasion, they lived a sustainable way of life.

If non-Aboriginal Australians are ever to feel at home in this land, we must learn to identify with our country. If we succeed, one day we might become as Australian as the Aboriginal people of 1788 were. We might even consider our identity as encompassing Aboriginal values in relation to land. But we need to identify the factors involved in having a spiritual empathy with this land.

THE PROCESS OF reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians requires balancing our history through addressing injustices of the past with acts of justice now and in the future. Our identity as Australian depends on the implementation of social and land justice for Indigenous people.

We must actively respect the status of Indigenous people as traditional owners and the value of traditional eco-knowledge if we seek to live in harmony with the land. We need to acknowledge that the country is profoundly rich in spirit and meaning that Indigenous peoples have nurtured and passed down over millennia. This is our heritage if only we would grasp it.

We must respect the deep spiritual strength of Aboriginal lore and acknowledge the injustice of their story but also their indomitable courage and warmth of heart. We must hear their plea to educate their grandchildren and

embrace them in our prosperity. Indigenous philosophy and spirituality should be a guiding theme in building kinship with country. I believe there is a groundswell developing across the nation to resolve the injustice over land through collaborative processes.

THE PROCESS OF colonisation has impacted on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people – the connection between the people and the country of their birth was severed and must be reinstated. In the Indigenous worldview, land has spiritual meaning; nature and culture are inseparable; and the health of the natural environment and its people are intimately connected – our wellbeing is influenced by the degree in which we are actively involved in caring for the earth. This is a conceptual framework that can promote holistic responses to climate change and other environmental challenges.

We should recognise that traditional indigenous eco-knowledge is much more than the heritage of Australia's Indigenous peoples; it is vital for creating a sustainable future for our island continent. Through our relationship with the earth, we are motivated by the spirituality of our existence and our wellbeing is enhanced by a commitment to sustainability. We should explore the ecological foundations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures so we too can become nurturers of the earth.

MANY AUSTRALIANS WHO consider the issue of belonging to the land in the indigenous sense speak of being alien to this place. In *Born of the Conquerors* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991), noted Australian poet Judith Wright said that for non-Indigenous Australians, alienation from the land is born of our inability to feel kinship with plants and animals.

Dr Deborah Rose was one of three anthropologists commissioned by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to conduct a study of totemism among Aboriginal people. The paper *Indigenous Kinship with the Natural World in New South Wales* (2003) was the outcome of research among the Yuin people of Wallaga Lake on the state's south coast and the Ngiyampaa People of Cobar in the central west. The Yuin people say they consider totemism to mean *relationships of kinship with the natural world*. The research shows there are subtle differences between each group's totemic practices.

Dr Rose says the study revealed that totemism conveys three main meanings among the Aboriginal people of NSW – identity, kin relationship and worldview. In the *identity* dimension, the purpose of the totem is to represent the individual's connection to country. The dimension of *relationship* is found in Aboriginal people who share a common totem that establishes a relationship of mutual life-giving between the group and plant and animal species. Totems can

also extend to entities like wind, rivers and mountains. The Pacific Black Duck is the principal totem of the Yuin People.

The dimension of totemism as *worldview* includes relationships of connection between humans and other entities of the natural world such as sacred sites and creation beings like the Rainbow Serpent. *Worldview* is about a people's basic assumptions about what kind of world they live in, what forces control it and what the place of humans is. Dr Rose says the NPWS is in a unique position to advocate Aboriginal forms of respect across species, landscapes and ecologies to become a living reality in NSW and in Australia.

One of the Yuin Elders in the study said of the Rainbow Serpent: 'It brings us all together. It is for all Australians.' She proposes non-Indigenous Australians have a bridge to cross – to leave our alienation from the land and step into a future of caring for country under the auspices of the Rainbow Serpent. What a gift that is.

Paul W Newbury writes on indigenous issues and the environment. In 2011, *Eureka Street* online magazine published his *Reconciliation Trilogy: Why Wattle Day should be our National Day*, *Forgotten Aboriginal War Heroes* and *Why Mabo Deserves a Holiday*.

Mining the Mabo legacy

Hidden layers of the resource boom

Marcia Langton[1]

AFTER World War II, geologists and others (such as Lang Hancock) discovered a series of gargantuan ore bodies. These discoveries – iron ore in the Pilbara, bauxite in Cape York and Arnhem Land, for instance – heralded two developments in Australia: a vast expansion of industrial scale mining by corporations and conflict with local Aboriginal groups. Mining had a key social and economic role across the continent from the time of the 'gold rushes' of the nineteenth century, and played a part in the booms and busts from the 1890s onwards. Whereas gold mining had been largely artisanal with diggers pitching their tents in the anarchy of the early goldfields, a different scale of mining such as at Broken Hill starting in the 1880s and at Mt Isa from the 1920s, represented the beginnings of the corporate mining industry that is driving the mining boom today. In the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth century, mine operators and governments paid little regard to the detrimental impact of mining operations on neighbouring Indigenous people. Indeed, governments often removed Aboriginal people from the areas of mining operations to allow their unimpeded establishment and continuing operations.

In 1963, events occurred at western Cape York that resulted in a campaign against a mining company that joined Aboriginal people with churches, unions and international groups to protest at the treatment of Aboriginal people. The Queensland police burnt down the houses and church of the Aboriginal community living at the Mapoon mission and forcibly relocated the residents to New Mapoon near the tip of Cape York. The official explanation referred to the rationalisation of missions in the region, but it was clear that the Queensland government's intention was to remove the community to allow the unimpeded development of the bauxite mine at Weipa. This event had lasting implications for relations between the Indigenous people and newcomers to the region thereafter, and damaged the reputation of the mining industry. Several Aboriginal land councils were formed as voluntary organisations to prevent such

occurrences and to obtain recognition of their rights to their traditional land, the North Queensland Land Council in 1977, and the Cape York Land Council in 1990.

Only an official apology by the Premier of Queensland and the successful negotiation of the Comalco Western Cape York Communities Coexistence Agreement in 2001 has overcome the legacy of the police operation at Mapoon in 1963. But this is to anticipate the advent of the recognition of native title.

Conflicts with Aboriginal people exploded in the 1980s.

Events in the Kimberley in 1980 at Noonkanbah also pitted the mining industry against Aboriginal people seeking to protect a sacred site when the Western Australian government ordered the drilling of the site by Amax Pty Ltd to pursue mineral exploration objectives. In 1978, elders and traditional owners established the Kimberley Land Council to obtain recognition of their rights to their traditional land and to prevent mining companies from proceeding without their approval. Again, an international campaign protesting the desecration of Aboriginal sacred sites damaged the reputation of the mining industry. There were other similar events during the mining boom of the 1960s and 1970s.

The standing of the industry changed. Whereas there had been few questions about the way the industry operated, and governments had encouraged the opening of new mining operations and exploration because of its contribution to economic growth, concerns were raised that caught the public imagination throughout the world as protests were delivered to national and international forums. A view of the mining industry emerged among its critics that forced the industry to rethink its relationships with Australian Indigenous people. The rights of Indigenous people, cultural heritage, environmental management, and the reputation of Australia as a first world nation with a fourth world underclass suffering at the hands of mining industry; all of these issues troubled those Australians who wanted a better deal for Indigenous people. Some in the mining industry and in government were sceptical about the purpose of what they saw as the 'politics of embarrassment', yet the incentives for the mining industry to build and maintain distinctive internal capabilities, such as the ability to handle and resolve social issues to maintain their mandate, grew, and this involved reconsidering their relationships with Indigenous people.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the mining boom and the removal of discrimination against Indigenous people and recognition of Aboriginal rights to land (such as in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*), coincide. At that time, some leaders and lobbyists in the mining industry held that Aboriginal responses to the many proposals for exploration and mining were unreasonable because they were different from the conventional arrangements with land-owners and others impacted by the industry. The industry bodies of the day also

insisted that Aboriginal objections to the rapid encroachment of mining operations into their domain was holding back economic development in Australia with the result that Aboriginal people were demonised in the industry. Gloomy investor forecasts contributed to the deteriorating attitudes towards Indigenous people. Some feared that a future of open-ended land claims by Aboriginal people would limit the expansion of the exploration and mining industry, and that the new land rights legislated for Aboriginal people would lead to unsustainable legal and financial consequences

When mining company employees began to explore the reasons for Aboriginal opposition to mining in the 1980s, they discovered that many Aboriginal groups were not opposed to mining itself, but were concerned about the racist and inequitable situation of the past being replicated and consolidated in new ventures.

It was widely assumed that Aboriginal people were making ambit claims for land and financial returns to which they were not entitled, and many in the mining industry treated Aboriginal objections to mining proposals with contempt. The State governments had dealt with Aboriginal demands in less than constructive ways that further held back the possibility of mining companies and Aboriginal groups talking about the issues constructively.

It became clear as communications improved that Aboriginal people were opposed to potential for worsening racial discrimination and abuse that so often accompanied mining projects imposed on them by State governments (such the *Comalco Act 1957* achieved). Aboriginal people want guaranteed recognition of Aboriginal inherent rights and entitlements, and acceptable terms and conditions for their cultural, social and economic futures. It became clear also that the mining industry was the target of criticisms about these issues while Federal and State governments were escaped accountability for their responsibilities to provide education, training and health services in the areas where mines were operating.

At that time, the legislative framework that the mining industry relies on currently for consulting with Aboriginal people about mining proposals either did not exist in most States, and in the Northern Territory where the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* had been introduced, the mining provisions had not been tested. At this time, the mining industry in Western Australia was expanding, with the Pilbara mining operations growing, CRAE exploring for diamonds in the Kimberley, and other companies exploring for uranium in the Western Desert.

Mistrust and fear on both sides had prevented clear communication of the issues. At that time, Indigenous people were poorly consulted about new proposals, and feared that their cultural heritage would be destroyed, the environment irreversibly degraded and that their rights and interests as

traditional owners would be lost as leases and other interests were obtained over their traditional areas by companies. In making their objections, Indigenous people were fulfilling their customary responsibilities to 'look after country' and to protect and promote their cultural integrity and social vitality.

Aboriginal people had long been discriminated against in employment and training, and there was little evidence that companies would provide employment for local Indigenous people.

IT WAS THE Mabo decision of the High Court on 3 June 3 1992 that changed this history of conflict.

The twentieth anniversary of the Mabo decision in the High Court is upon us. In these two decades, I have been party to developments that I could not have imagined before that decision. Whereas Aboriginal objections to mining projects were the norm in the 1970s and 1980s, native title rights have been instrumental in bringing Aboriginal people and mining company personnel together to negotiate the terms of their engagement.

Mr Koiki (Eddie) Mabo, Mr James Rice and Rev David Passi, three men born on the Torres Strait Island of Mer (or Murray, in English), were joint plaintiffs in the cases referred to as Mabo No. 1 (in the Supreme Court of Queensland) and Mabo No. 2 (in the High Court of Australia.) They sought to have their native title in the island of Mer, or Murray Island, recognised at law[2]. In 1992, the High Court of Australia recognised native title as a form of customary title arising from traditions and customs.

While in most other settled colonies there were treaties with the indigenous inhabitants, Australia and Western Sahara were the notable exceptions to this practice. In Australia, the legal justification for this absence of treaties was set out in the decision by Justice Blackburn in the famous Yolngu case, *Milirrpum v. Nabalco,* another Aboriginal conflict with a mining company. Blackburn used the 'ceded' colonies (or *terra nullius*) doctrine set out in Blackstone's commentaries published in 1832 to pronounce that Australian law could not and would not recognize their traditional rights to the land. By denying the primary cultural and economic resource of indigenous people, their land, the decision effectively ruled out any right to negotiate the terms of use or access, or to receive compensation for that use. The Mabo case overturned this legal fiction and established that customary rights to land had pre-existed and, under certain conditions, survived British sovereignty. Many of the common law principles of the judgement, including the extinguishment principle, were then codified in legislation, following many months of contentious debate and difficult negotiations between Prime Minister Paul Keating, state governments, mining, farming and grazing industry bodies and Aboriginal representatives.

On 16 November 1993, the *Native Title Act* was passed into Australian law. In the second reading speech of the Bill, the then Prime Minister outlined the intention of the legislation: '[to] make the Mabo decision an historic turning point: the basis of a new relationship between Indigenous and other Australians.[3] This proved to be the case, especially in relation to the outcomes of The Right to Negotiate, a key provision of the Act.

Since the proclamation of the *Native Title Act 1994* (hereafter *NTA*) protecting the native title rights and interests that Mabo secured in the famous High Court case, there has been a proliferation of agreements with Australian indigenous people.[4] Though unanticipated at the time, the 'Right to Negotiate' and the provisions enabling the negotiation of Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) passed in 1998, provide a formal place at the negotiating table for Aboriginal people whose newly won native title rights place them in a key position with companies seeking land access issues in the market economy. It also provides what the recognition of native title itself does not: a practical route to fungibility.[5] This may be the most significant legacy of Eddie Mabo, and the best opportunity to deliver economic opportunity for Indigenous communities. Despite a widely held view that native title has failed to live up to the expectations that followed the High Court's decision in 1992, Indigenous Land Use Agreements (land access and impact benefit agreements) have delivered unprecedented social and economic outcomes for Indigenous communities, particularly in the case of resource projects.

ALONGSIDE THE MECHANISMS for the recognition and determination of native title, the *NTA* also legislated for future dealings on native title land. As discussed, the interests of mining companies were at the forefront of the debate around native title, and the legislation always envisaged that mining companies and the resource extraction industry would seek access to, and the use of, native title land. Thus, the 1993 legislation also defined a range of future government actions called 'future acts':[6] acts of government that would be permitted to take place on native title land, such as exploration, mining and compulsory acquisition by governments.

Whilst native title holders had no right to veto dealings on land held under native title, the *NTA* provided a right to negotiate the terms and conditions upon which land use and access could occur. This right provided an opportunity for Indigenous parties to sit at the negotiating table with government and miners, and – for the first time – negotiate the use and access to their land. As such, its impact is significant, because it reflects a practical reversal of the doctrine of terra nullius. Whereas that doctrine had denied Indigenous people access to the land market, the Right to Negotiate provided them a position in that market, providing opportunity for economic participation previously denied.

Today, approaches to formulating agreements are being developed across the country in both a formal and informal capacity. Existing structures and frameworks — including the *NTA* and the right to negotiate procedures - are being targeted as part of local and regional strategies aiming to carve out a place for Indigenous people in the regional polity and economy and to better facilitate effective governance structures.[7] In some instances, the processes put in place by an application for native title are now diversifying as Indigenous communities pursue an incremental capacity-building approach to local Indigenous governance structures, while at the same time engaging in strategic agreements with outside agencies and the private sector.[8]

As a result, these agreements have become more complex as Indigenous people and their representatives become more experienced with the scope of the legislation and because several of the large corporations have developed policies, approaches and programs to demonstrate corporate social responsibility on behalf of their shareholders. The rapid increase in the last two decades in the negotiation of agreements to formalise the relationship between companies and their Indigenous neighbours indicates the importance of this approach to securing the conditions for the social licence to operate that companies need to develop sustainability of their operations. The numbers, breadth of agreement types and subject matters of agreements made with Indigenous people is demonstrated by the data held in the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements (ATNS) database.

At March 2012, there were 588 ILUAs registered with the NNTT. Between them, the ILUA provisions and the provisions for the making of agreements through the right to negotiate, have resulted in many thousands of agreements; agreements which amount to a bargain between Indigenous peoples and those over use and access to land. Twenty years following the Mabo decision and the rejection of the doctrine of *terra nullius,* this legacy is indeed profound. There are weaknesses in this statutory system of agreement-making, however, and there have been various proposals for addressing them. None have been adopted for a variety of reasons.

THERE ARE LIMITATIONS in the present legislative and policy framework for the development of an institutional environment that encourages diverse Aboriginal economic opportunities. While native title corporations are statutory institutions for the negotiation and related native title issues, they are largely excluded from functions relating to the commercial issues that agreements present. The lack of government investment in these mining provinces and the declining economic status of Aboriginal people draw attention to the matter of accountability that is referred to in the literature on the 'resource curse.'[9]

With regard to the models for the distribution of benefits, one of the increasingly consistent features of ILUAs negotiated to secure access to resource extraction companies is the establishment of trusts to manage the financial benefits negotiated under the terms of those agreements. Their importance, not just as an example of good practice in financial management, lies in their potential to strengthen Indigenous governance.

However, as vehicles for Indigenous economic development (especially in the context of the extraordinary opportunities that mining projects offer for contracting and ancillary service provision), these trusts have had a mixed record. This is largely because of the limitations of the definition of 'charitable purposes' and the difficulty of using these trust arrangements to participate commercially in economic development initiatives. There are several outstanding cases of commercial enterprises initiated by trusts or native title groups using the native title benefits to forge a place for themselves in the Australian economy. Some 50 Aboriginal contracting companies are operating in the Pilbara at present, with financial annual turnover in the hundreds of millions. As well, there are joint ventures involving Aboriginal corporations and large contracting corporations and project management firms.

Mabo's legacy is extraordinary, not simply because his High Court case overturned 200 years of dispossession of indigenous people around Australia, but also because it paved the way for the *Native Title Act* and the Right to Negotiate. By translating the recognition of their native title into tangible economic and social benefits for their communities, native title groups have achieved far higher levels economic participation and wealth creation. These are the two outstanding outcomes of Koiki Mabo's successful legal challenge to the dispossession of indigenous people twenty years ago.

1 I am grateful to Alistair Webster of the Centre for Health & Society, University of Melbourne, for his assistance with legal research and fine attention to detail. All errors are mine.

2 This island is one more than a hundred in the archipelago stretching approximately 150km between the northern most tip of Australia and the south coast of Papua New Guinea. Coral cays, reefs and exposed sandbanks are scattered throughout the Straits. The archipelago was governed by The State of Queensland after annexation and legislation for that purpose was quite different from that which regulated the affairs of Aboriginal people on the mainland. The disputes over garden plot boundaries played a significant role both in their status under colonial and post-Federation Australia and in their land tenure traditions which were recognised partially under the Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1993, and at common law with respect to Mer or Murray Island following the Mabo No 2 case decided by the High Court. It was this extensive court record of land disputes that provided a wealth of evidence supporting their claim to native title heard first by the Queensland Supreme Court. Their rights in sea were similarly discretely demarcated as between the various groups, although these rights were not pursued in the Mabo case. It was this extensive court record of land disputes that provided a wealth of evidence supporting their claim to native title heard first by the Queensland Supreme Court.

3 Prime Minister Paul Keating, *Second Reading Speech* to the *Native Title Bill*, Hansard, House of Representatives, 16 November 1993

4 See the Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements website at: http://www.atns.net.au

5 Fungible objects are defined by the Macquarie Dictionary as goods 'of such a nature that one unit or portion may be replaced by another in respect of function, office, or use.'

6 S 226, 227 and 233, *NTA*; a future act is an act taking place after 1 January 1994 that either extinguishes native title or is wholly or partly inconsistent with the continued existence, enjoyment or exercise of native title rights and interests (s 223, s 227). Future acts may include the making of legislation (s 226(2)(a)), the grant or extension of a licence (s 226(2)(b)) or any other act with the capacity to extinguish native title rights or interests. Where a 'future act' is wholly or partly inconsistent with the enjoyment of native title rights and interest, the act is invalid unless a provision of the *NTA* provides otherwise. Part 2, Division 3 of the *NTA* establishes a regime for the validation of future acts. Within this regime, certain categories of 'permissible future acts' are outlined.

7 Strelein 'Native Title in Law and Practice,' *op. cit.*

8 *ibid*. See, for example, the joint venture between NRW Holdings Pty Ltd (a major project management firm) and the commercial arm of the Eastern Guruma native title group, Eastern Guruma Pty Ltd, to undertake earthworks and primary civil works at two Rio Tinto Iron Ore projects in the Pilbara– Brockman 4 project phase 2 and stage one of the Western Turner Syncline project.

http://www.perthnow.com.au/business/local-business/nrw-holdings-eastern-guruma-jv-wins-160m-rio-tinto-contract/story-e6frg2s3-1226046099910

9 See M. Langton & O. Mazel, The resource curse compared: Australian Aboriginal participation in the resource extraction industry and distribution of impacts and C. O'Faircheallaigh, Curse or opportunity? Mineral revenues, rent seeking and development in Aboriginal Australia, *In* Marcia Langton and Judy Longbottom (eds), *Community Futures, Legal Architecture: Foundations for Indigenous Peoples in the Global Mining Boom*, Oxon (UK): Routledge, (A Glasshouse Book), 2012: 23-44; 45-58.

From little things social catastrophes grow

Art and tragedy in Central Australia

Gary Clark

What of the real present, the men-of-no-politics,
the once respectable Golden Mean?
Obsolete; in any case, lost sight of.
Thomas Pynchon, V.

 I SPENT my recent holidays taking a trip from Adelaide to Alice Springs, travelling up on *The Ghan*, that modern day homage to Australia's Afghan cameleers. I thought it'd be a good idea to travel through country I had been long familiar with, but in the kind of lazy window-gazing way that only a train ride affords. The trip was also partly research for a novel-in-progress, providing an opportunity to get a better insight into not only the past but also the present state of remote life. And I had long wanted to go out to Papunya, the community about two hundred kilometers west of Alice where the Western Desert Art movement first began in the 1970s. But there were also other, more difficult and personal reasons for the trip that are a littler harder to get into words.

Over the past decade I worked as a teacher with remote Indigenous students both in the city and out bush. And I had also written about various aspects of classical Aboriginal religious thought and its influence on Australia's broader cultural life, something I was keen to get a better grasp of. Traditional religion and the embodiment of dream-life in Aboriginal ceremonial activity had long fascinated me. The transposition of that ritual consciousness onto canvas using acrylic paint had begun at Papunya in the 1970s and given rise to what I felt was the richest and most vibrant eco-aesthetic to have evolved out of the post-colonial contexts of Australian history. Yet any thoughtful consideration of the communities from which those paintings emerged and are still emerging somehow negates the richness and vibrancy to which they give expression. That some of the most beautiful and affirmative art of the last and present century has

developed out of contexts of profound social disintegration can be a painful duality to contemplate, particularly for those of us who have witnessed the atrocious dysfunction on many communities up close. As Rosemary Neill wrote in *White Out: How Politics is Killing Black Australia* (Allen & Unwin, 2002) 'the same communities which incubated an artistic rebirth, have simultaneously suffered a kind of social death.'[1] This duality between the riches of traditionally orientated art and cultural decline, if contemplated without the safety net of optimistic illusions, can be demoralising to say the least.

The famed linguist and anthropologist TGH Strehlow experienced such feelings when witnessing rapid social change, cultural loss and decline earlier last century. The elegiac tone of his *Songs of Central Australia* (1971), while being a perfectly logical response to a tragic situation, has proved anathema to many who have preferred flinching from bitter truths. He is one of the few writers who have been able to hold this duality in balance, combining both a sense of the spiritual riches of classical Aboriginal tradition with feelings of loss and personal grief. Fortunately for Strehlow he died before witnessing the state of crisis that has developed over the past two decades on many remote communities, a situation that makes his elegiac tone more apposite than he would have ever dared to imagine.

While in Alice I spoke to many people, from young European tourists staying at Annie's Backpackers where I spent a week reading and writing, to remote community workers and local Aboriginal people. One brief conversation with a bloke working on a remote community sticks in my mind as emblematic of the political atmosphere of not only Alice, but also the divisions with which Indigenous politics is fraught in Australia as a whole. He was working with the older members of a community near Alice Springs, organising trips onto country in order to teach young Aboriginal people about traditional ecological knowledge. It was a noble aim. Collaboration with older members of remote communities in courses on ecology was something I admired and had long been advocating. For the past decade or so I had been teaching subjects in ecology with a bicultural emphasis to students from the Western Desert, making significant use of Peter Latz's wonderful *Bushfires and Bushtucker: Aboriginal Plant Use in Central Australia* (IAD Press, 1995). The potential for harnessing traditional ecological knowledge, yet combining it with scientific understanding of ecosystem functioning and plant biochemistry, as Latz had done so well, seemed a fruitful approach with two main benefits; it not only facilitated cultural heritage preservation but it also provided a basis for introducing students to Western scientific discourse, and therefore Western paradigms of knowledge in general.

Initially we shared very similar approaches to the education of remote students. Eventually, however, the subject of the recent intervention in the

Northern Territory, itself a partial response to the 'Little Children are Sacred' report, became a subject of discussion. We also discussed the South Australian 'Mullighan Inquiry', a report with similar aims and ramifications as the 'Little Children are Sacred' report. The Mullighan Inquiry focused on communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, and the catalogue of abuse towards children it details makes for disturbing reading. I had thought, along with a raft of other people, including Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Peter Sutton and Bess Price, that there were virtues to both these reports and the consequent governmental interventions that should not be rejected lightly. For many the intervention seemed like a recapitulation of former paternalistic policies, a kind of later day neo-colonialism that would compromise the goals of self-determination. Having seen first-hand the levels of social and domestic violence, child abuse and general atmosphere of lawlessness in communities, I always found such a view unconscionable. And I knew of anecdotal evidence where women in particular were glad to have a sense of order within their community, leading to a decrease in violence and a reduction in late-night drinking and fighting sessions, a reduction which enabled children to gain some sleep and therefore, if they wished, attend school. It may have been heavy-handed but it was definitely not without positive outcomes. Not long into the conversation with the community worker, however, I realised picket-lines were being drawn and that we held profoundly divergent views not only on the intervention but on the broader issue of remote Indigenous settlements themselves. Experience had taught me that people's convictions about such issues are held with a kind of religious ardour and that any apostasy against the sanctity of creed is often condemned as heretical. Considering I was a visitor in the area I decided to bite my tongue and avoid discussing contentious issues. So we discussed what was essentially common ground; the importance of country to older Aboriginal people and also the virtue of helping them through school programs to pass on their knowledge to young people. Yet what lingered in my mind was how this brief conversation, and the argument I tactfully avoided, resounded with the major fault lines of our national political life. The emotionally fueled Babel of voices that afflicts public debate concerning Aboriginal politics was evident, in miniature, in this brief conversation.

I explained that in responding to the 'Mullighan Inquiry' the government had increased funding to city-based boarding facilities to enable Western Desert students to experience cultural and linguistic immersion in a mainstream English-speaking environment. His immediate response was to reject any initiative that removed young people from remote settlements, from their traditional country. I had long come to the conclusion that the concept of remote government-funded settlements was on the whole a failed project and that the best way of giving students a decent future was to educate them in a mainstream

setting. The repatriation of traditional lands through the period of native title claims, although a necessary historical phase, had produced unforeseen and profoundly tragic consequences. Although the move for judicial acknowledgement of native title began earlier, that momentous symbolic occasion in 1975 when Gough Whitlam poured sand through the hands of Vincent Lingiari, acknowledging the Gurungji people's claim to their traditional lands, marked a decisive and important turning point in Australian history. It was the same decade that the Western Desert Art movement began to flourish, a decade when many of the paternalistic and ethnocentric assumptions of former times began to ebb away. The post-1970s political landscape signaled the emergence of Aboriginal culture as an important part of our national cultural life, giving a more prominent place to Aboriginal concerns, aspirations and cultural values than any previous period in our history.

Yet what slowly began to dawn on me in the early 2000s while teaching in the Western Desert, was that the concept of remote settlements devoid of economic infrastructure and propped up by government funds was not only unfeasible in the long term but also a social and economic aberration. I could think of no example in human history where an entire culture was absolved of the necessity to engage in some of kind of meaningful labor for subsistence purposes. In other words, no culture had to my knowledge ever existed where the necessity of doing something during the day in order to provide food for yourself and your family was absent. Classical Aboriginal societies were by no means exempt from the burdens of economic necessity and the reasons for living in a specific region were fundamentally pragmatic; the proximity of waterholes, hunting grounds or fishing spots. If the resource base, which forms the foundation of a hunter-gatherer economy, was removed – if, for example, there was a drought year and the number of available game had significantly declined – the group would move into country that would provide adequate resources. Similarly in modern industrial societies, if the demand for minerals or livestock declines then people in mining or pastoral communities will move to regions where a more robust economic infrastructure exists.

Due to the introduction of government services, housing and welfare, people on remote communities no longer needed to subsist by traditional means. And this change to sedentary living is not, particularly in more remote regions, the result of the coercive herding of Aboriginal people into settlements and the forcible denial of their rights to continue their traditional way of life. From the 1930s onwards the Pitjatjantjara and Pintupi moved into settlements such as Ernabella, Papunya and Haasts Bluff frequently of their own free will. The provision of perennial water supplies and food had the effect of making traditional hunting technologies and practices obsolete, dependent as they were upon the capriciousness of seasonal climatic fluctuations. In pre-contact society

attrition rates during periods of drought were significantly high, a burden that was in many ways relieved with the arrival of missionaries, whose perennial and abundant supplies of food and water Aboriginal people naturally gravitated towards and actively exploited. The developments of the 1970s saw a movement away from mission and government control of remote settlements to a rights agenda and an ideology of self-determination, one supported and facilitated by increasing injections of government funds in the areas of housing, health and education. The period saw not only the repatriation of land, but also the provision of funds so that people were able to remain on and raise their children on that land. It was an important national gesture of largesse to the original inhabitants of this country that should not be underestimated.

However, the solution to an older problem, that is the denial of proprietary rights, created a whole new horde of problems which we have inherited today. Since the mid-'90s researchers began publishing studies of exponential rises in homicide, suicide, domestic violence and child abuse on remote communities. Serious questions need to be asked as to why life on these communities has severely deteriorated during a period of increased funding, social and educational opportunity and unprecedented levels of political representation and acknowledgement of Aboriginal rights. The problem essentially boils down to this: you can not put people on their land when there is nothing for them to do there, when there is no economic infrastructure and therefore no opportunities for employment. Such a situation devoid of purpose breeds boredom and despair, psychosocial factors that are elements in the causal nexus implicated in the current state of social and cultural disintegration. We have absolved an entire people *en masse* of the burdens of economic necessity, but not come to grips with what that really means, nor have we really begun to think through the long-term ramifications of such an experiment in social engineering. Many of the problems on remote communities become explicable when the factors I have intimated are taken into consideration. I suppose the final irony here is that a political attitude of benevolence, in which the state supported the perpetuation of classical Aboriginal culture and the attendant attachment to land, has itself produced a social catastrophe.

ALL OF THIS I refrained from mentioning to the community worker and for good reason, or rather reasons. Firstly, I know this is a complex issue with regional variations of which I have little knowledge or expertise. I do know that some communities, particularly some of the smaller ones, are relatively benign and are not dysfunctional ghettoes as are many of the larger remote settlements. Secondly, and more to the point, I have lost count of the times I have offended people's sense of political piety, provoking their reflexive ire by merely suggesting that the current levels of dysfunction on remote communities are in

many cases not historically linked to the dispossession of land or the loss of language and culture, but to the liberal reforms of the 1960s and '70s. The perception of such dysfunction through a rights-based schema, and the idea of it being historically and casually linked to dispossession and the loss of language and culture, is one of the most insidious delusions in Australian cultural and political life. Rosemary Neill took such thinking to task in her rigorously researched and eloquently argued *White Out*, although without making too much of a broader intellectual impact. While in Alice I bought Peter Sutton's recent *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the end of the liberal consensus* (MUP, 2009). Once I read the first few pages I could not put it down, consuming the book in a day. Sutton has launched an aggressive and extremely cogent full frontal attack on the kind of thinking Neill took to task. Sutton's book is the kind of seminal work that both signals and inaugurates a paradigm shift, a change akin to that produced by Koestler or Orwell mid last century, whose novels exposed the idiocies of calcified political dogma. Such works not only outline the birth of a new paradigm and way of thinking but they are also a kind of funeral oration, announcing the death of previous certainties and convictions.

Sutton's book confirmed and consolidated what I had long thought about the state of cultural decline that has been occurring in the Western Desert since the 1960s. When the Ernabella Mission and School were being established in the late 1930s and early 1940s on the Pitjantjatjara Lands it was requisite for teachers to learn to speak Pitjantjatjara as a condition of employment and students were taught to read and write in their mother tongue. It is for this reason that Pitjantjatjara is one of the strongest and most ubiquitously spoken Aboriginal languages in the country. The people, particularly further to the West, were never dispossessed of or removed from their land and they were free at all times to continue traditional hunting practices and ceremonial activities, many of which have persisted into the present. It only requires reading books written before the 1970s to appreciate the nature and extent of the historical changes I am alluding to. Charles Duguid's *No Dying Race* (1963) and Winifred Hilliard's *The People in Between: The Pitjantjatjara People of Ernabella* (1968) not only depict a reasonably functional economic community under the auspices of the Presbyterian Mission, but also inadvertently alert us to the social and cultural deterioration that has occurred since these books were written. The Western Desert is not an isolated example. Deterioration during the period of self-determination and collective welfarism is a point Noel Pearson has made many times when reflecting on the Mission era at Hope Vale in Cape York. Sutton traces a similar historical trajectory in his analysis of cultural change in Aurukun in Far North Queensland. It is common for older Pitjantjatjara people and older teachers to reflect on the degeneration in the social and cultural fabric that has occurred in the past thirty years, escalating at an exorbitant rate in the past

decade or so. Pitjantjatjara language, culture and attachment to land have remained strong for the past eighty years, yet it is only in the past twenty that problems have escalated to the point where it has necessitated government enquiries such as that undertaken by Commissioner Mullighan. Something definitely requires explaining here.

The only long-term option for young people from remote communities is to equip them to be able to function in a mainstream setting. It is not possible to do this on the more remote communities, where abominable attendance levels and very little contact with the broader English-speaking community effectively compounds already unacceptable rates of illiteracy in English. With an increasing drift of Aboriginal people into towns and urban centers, acquiring the requisite skills to function in such settings is imperative. Such urban drift occurred on the eastern seaboard in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in the wake of conquest and de-tribalisation and the result was the creation of a fringe-dwelling urban underclass with all of the attendant problems that entails. In order to avoid such a prospect for current and for future generations who are negotiating the transition from a tribal, nomadic society to that of modern sedentary living, being educated on remote settlements is unacceptable and counterproductive. It actually prevents students from acquiring the skills necessary to function in the modern world. This was one of the main concerns of the 'Mullighan Inquiry' and why the government responded to the report with increased funding for urban boarding facilities.

The bloke I was chatting with preferred that young people remain on country and that they should not live and work in urban centers. Such an attitude is common in Alice Springs, particularly among the alternative sub-culture. An eco-activist girl I had a chat with beside the pool at Annie's Backpackers shared such an outlook. The conversation with her was interesting. She had suffered a psychological crisis in the city and she consequently moved to the desert in search of some sense of inner coherence. Her feeling of vexed depression lifted when she moved from the city to Alice and began working with Aboriginal people. Alice was for her a place of spiritual discovery, an alternative to the boredom, despair and mind-numbing work she experienced in the city. I sympathised a great deal with what she was saying and despite her language being somewhat misty and vague, she seemed quite reflective and sincere. Yet, as I pointed out, others had to work monotonous jobs and be bored and depressed so that she could smoke her rollies lazily by the pool. Not only did she not seem to appreciate her cultural and economic embeddedness in the system she decried, she was also of the opinion that traditional culture was not only a panacea for her own fraught existence but that its resuscitation would somehow improve the quality of remote people's lives. Like the community worker she thought it best that Aboriginal people remain on communities segregated from

mainstream language and culture, and that the necessity of entering the mainstream economy is something Aboriginal people should be insulated from.

The allegiance to a rights-based agenda and the government-funded maintenance of traditional culture on remote lands is not confined to those seeking out an alternative spiritual paradigm. For example, the much publicised recent debate between Bess Price and the human rights lawyer and academic Larissa Behrendt was a result of the latter's recalcitrant allegiance to the rights-based thinking of the 1960s and '70s. Price, a Walpiri woman from Central Australia, had supported the intervention and also supported the need for the racial discrimination act to be held in abeyance for the intervention to occur. Her recent support for the intervention on the ABC's *Q&A* program provoked the emotional ire of Behrendt, an urban intellectual of Indigenous descent whose academic career is focused on law and human rights. Price, as a woman who has to deal daily with profound dysfunction, homicide, abuse and suicide amongst her kin, is aware that the rights-based paradigm has failed to deliver on its promises. It is for this reason she is searching for alternative solutions than those offered by what Sutton has called the 'liberal consensus', the ideological schemata that have dominated thinking in this area for the past forty years.

Allegiance to the rights-based ideology of the '60s and '70s is also deeply entrenched in much academic thinking and it is the intellectual support for such a notion that is under attack in *The Politics of Suffering*. Consequently the book has drawn defensive reviews from those holding the kind of views that Sutton has taken to task. Those, for example, who are still under the delusion that the maintenance of remote settlements is an ethical imperative that will somehow produce positive outcomes in terms of English language acquisition for remote students. The desire to flog such a dead horse is partly borne of a lack of on-the-ground experience and also a reluctance to abandon long-standing moral convictions. For example, in her review of Sutton's book in *Oceania*, Dianne Austin-Broos, fearing the spectre of assimilation in the kind of mainstreaming of education Sutton is suggesting, instead advocated 'incentives…both for the teachers and the taught, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to realise English literacy and numeracy in remote schools.'[2] I am not suggesting that remote schools should be closed down and that people should be forcefully herded into urban settings. But what the above author is advocating has been attempted for the past thirty years. Her failure to recognise how such an approach has actually produced the appalling statistics in illiteracy is a case in point of clinging to an ideology when its practical outcomes have proven disastrous. Yet this is not an isolated form of politically fueled myopia. Such blindness runs deep and afflicts even the highest sectors of government and bureaucracy.

It is instructive to consider the different sources of funding on remote settlements and how they inadvertently negate one another. For example, one

sector of government financially supports a situation which is perpetuating the problems that another sector is seeking to solve. That is, one sector provides funding for housing, welfare and other services to enable remote settlements to be artificially propped up economically; another provides educational funding to try and alleviate the levels of virtual cultural and linguistic illiteracy that is perpetuated by such economic scaffolding. It is not realising this that makes such problems seem so intractable and why fallacious reasons for policy failure are sought, sought everywhere except where they actually exist. They are not to be found in lack of funding, discrimination, loss of land or culture, but in the artificial preservation of traditional culture in regions so remote that the creation of economic infrastructure is not possible and therefore the financial impetus which makes education meaningful does not exist in such places. The attempt to explain remote Indigenous illiteracy and attempts to 'close the gap' more often than not seem like people grasping at phantasms of their own creation, more smoke and political mirrors than actual reality. Why there is an inability to actually see this situation more clearly, which is not particularly complex, is most likely due to intellectual and moral inertia. The likes of Austin-Broos fail to perceive that severe illiteracy on remote lands is historically linked to the provision of government housing and welfare and the artificial maintenance of remote communities that lack any genuine economic infrastructure and therefore any cultural rationale for education being important. Education leads to jobs. Without jobs education is deprived of its significance and meaning. Many parents do not make their children go to school, because without an economic rationale for schooling, a sense of its economic necessity, it becomes devoid of significance. It is this broader systemic problem that underpins appalling attendance standards. On most remote settlements in the Western Desert, there is cultural blank space, a kind of semantic vacuum, when the concept of gainful employment is mentioned. This is because it has collectively been absent from people's experience for more than thirty years. Advocating education on remote settlements as a cure for Indigenous illiteracy is effectively advocating conditions that will exacerbate the situation you are seeking to solve – like suggesting more grog as a cure for alcoholism.

Sutton also details the increase in violent crime on remote communities over the past thirty years. The book opens with a catalogue of suicide and homicide statistics in Aurukun. Such events were very rare prior to the '60s, yet during the period of self-determination their frequency rose rapidly. Sutton looks at a number of factors; the increased availability of alcohol, welfarism and the transposition of practices that evolved in a nomadic stateless society into the context of sedentary living. These include traditional protocols regarding the treatment of women and retributive violence. In a nomadic stateless society lacking an objective and impartial judicial system, violence is a functional means of settling grievances between groups. Yet traditionally, when living vast

distances from one another in small groups of thirty or forty people, spatial dispersal would enable anger and rage to be defused. In sedentary communities of five or six hundred many of those traditional protocols not only become dysfunctional but explosive. This is one of the many problems of resuscitating traditional culture within the context of modern sedentary living. Sutton is arguing for a profound reconsideration of the notion that culture is inherently worthwhile, virtuous and in need of preservation. In many situations the dysfunction of a community is linked to aspects of culture that are disjunctive with modernity and which would be best consigned to the past. Traditional protocols surrounding the treatment of women, children and the use of violence as a means of social control, need to be understood not as the sole cause but as contributing factors to the current state of social disintegration on remote communities. Such cultural practices when enacted in the context of sedentary living, collective generational welfarism and substance abuse, contribute to an increasingly discordant ensemble of causal factors resulting in the kind of social death Neill analysed in *White Out*. A situation where on the Pitjantjatjara Lands, since the year 2000, amongst a population of about two thousand five hundred residents, there have been 248 allegations of sexual abuse against children.[3] A situation where an eight-year-old girl was seen by a teacher in a classroom simulating masturbation with various objects, where a four-year-old boy was seen giving oral sex to a doll and where a five-year-old girl was diagnosed with an STD.[4] So much for the social death side of things, the hell that life has become for many on remote settlements. If you have made it this far you may want to persist to discover at least some of the good I found there.

ONE OF THE books that I took with me to read was Nancy Munn's *Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1973). I began reading it on *The Ghan* and it became, over the two weeks I was away, the book that made the most significant impression on me. It also opened up the world of desert art, linking it with social organisation, dream-life and cosmology in ways that I had not previously grasped. I spent a few days lying on my bunk at Annie's Backpackers finishing it off, noting and commenting on interesting passages, notes which form the basis of much of this essay.

Munn is an American anthropologist who carried out field work in the 1950s among the Walbiri people of Yuendumu, a Western Desert community about two hundred kilometres west of Alice Springs. Munn's book is a rigorous anthropological analysis of the various symbols used in traditional body painting and sand design, the iconographic system that we have since become familiar with over the past thirty years due to the flowering of the Western Desert Art movement.

Munn emphasizes two distinct levels of socio-political organisation, one based on descent from the mother, the other from the father. As I understand her, the maternal line is associated with pro-creation within the family, yet this personal dimension is also linked with the association that a young man has with his father in terms of ritual life. The association with the paternal line forms the basis of male fertility rituals which are not confined to the mere perpetuation of the family line itself, but incorporate the maintenance and fertility of the land, the resources base if you like, upon which society as a whole is dependent. They are in this sense cosmic and transgenerational, a kind of ritualised resurrection of the eternally present creative beings upon whose actions the continuation of life is thought to be dependent. And it is here that the two aspects of political organisation intersect. Male fertility or 'increase' ceremonies are associated with the continuation of life as a transpersonal process. Yet by virtue of being part of, and an expression of this process, the fecundity of the more personal and familial dimensions of life associated with the maternal domain are also maintained by male ritual activity.

For example, the vivifying of a child's spirit in the womb is thought to be caused by the procreative power of that child's totemic ancestor. And the fertility rites performed by men, by virtue of ensuing fertility of the entire known cosmos, are thought to indirectly facilitate this personalised embodiment of ancestral power, power which is manifested in the maternal domain and the maternal line of descent. In this way women's rituals which are more focused on 'growing up' or nurturing the immediate family intersect and are complimentary to the male fertility rites and ceremonies which are believed to ensure the fertility of nature as a whole. Munn delves into much more detail regarding how such a system works in terms of moieties, marriage law and various kinship subsections, details most of which were and still are beyond my grasp. Nevertheless, as you may have guessed, I really like this book – despite its complexity it is definitely worth reading, particularly if you want to try and grasp some of the inwardness and richness of Aboriginal religious life.

How do these two levels of social organisation, expressed in matrilineal and patrilineal ritual life, relate to traditional body decoration and ceremonial sand designs and their transposition onto the canvas paintings that are now so well known across the world? When a person paints their Dreaming or *Tjukurpa* they are painting the ancestral spirit which was planted in them in the womb. The painting may tell the story of that ancestor's journey through country, how various sacred features of the environment are embodiments of that ancestor, and how the individual is spiritually linked to those sites. Each icon in a painting – whether animal footprints, people sitting around a camp or a waterhole, or the depiction of ancestral journeys – represents an element within the *Tjukurpa* of that particular person. In the Western Desert language block *Tjukurpa* in its

simplest form merely means *story*, but the term also encompasses what we often refer to as Dreamings. The concept of a person's *Tjukurpa* not only embodies their totemic affiliation with an aspect of the non-human world, such as the rain, honey ants or kangaroos; it also conceptualises that feature of the environment as not only consubstantial with a particular human being, but also the spiritual ancestor from whose creative acts both owe their genesis. Another way of saying this is that the idea of distinct essences as we have inherited it from Aristotle is completely alien to classical Aboriginal ways of thinking and feeling. During ceremonial activity, when a performer decorates his or her body and re-enacts ancestral journeys or activities, he or she is transformed into something other than their everyday individualised self, having become, through artistic mimesis, consubstantial with that specific totemic ancestor – that is, of the same essence or substance.

To understand how such issues are conceptualised in classical Warlpiri thought it is necessary to appreciate how existence is divided into two realms, that of *djugurba* (*tjukurpa* in Pitjantjatjara)[5] and *yidjaru*. *Djugurba* refers to the abstract creative period when the ancestors emerged from the earth, created the present day environment, and again entered into the ground from which they had originally emerged. However, *Djugurba* is also linked with sleep and dream-life, hence the translation into the English expression Dreaming. *Yidjaru* on the other hand refers to actual individual people living in the here and now, the realm of waking individual consciousness, something which is distinct from dream-life and sleep and their association with the creative period. Yet it seems the membrane separating these two realms is permeable, for the dimension of dream-life frequently finds its way into the waking world of concrete everyday perception. Ritual is the most efficacious means of doing this, but art using the same iconographic system similarly achieves the same thing with the added benefit of offering such embodiments of dream-life to the broader public.

What I failed to appreciate before reading Munn's book was the nature of the transformation that occurs when a performer mimics or becomes his or her totemic or creative ancestor. When an individual acts out the creative journeys of their totem during ritual performances, although they remain the same physical body, they have literally *become* a being from not only another order of reality but also another dimension of their own existence. And that other dimension is their totemic double or soul which was implanted in them in the womb and to which they still, even in the realm of waking adult consciousness, remain connected through dream-life. Ritual thus becomes a kind of inversion of reality, the sacred totemic self becoming actualised in concrete form. As Munn writes:

> Through the designs and songs the sense of values and tradition bound up with the notion of *djgurba* 'surfaces' or becomes publicly visible, and so is integrated into the perceptual field and sense experience of the social world of

waking reality… Dreams and rite constitute complementary poles of a single process. The dream works in a private consciousness of sleep, while the ceremonial works in the waking rational order of the social world; both structure the relation between actor and event in a different way from that of ordinary experience, for in the latter the subjective integration of the individual with the 'cut-off' *djugurba* range of experience is not central, while in dreams and ceremony this is the key feature.[6]

I discovered over the few days reading Munn's book that ritual is not only a form of con-substantial communion, but also an inversion of reality; in everyday life the dreaming self is thought to be hidden within the individual, not part of the social world's sensory perceptual field. When the performer dresses as his or her totem in ritual that hidden dimension of the self is objectified and made concrete, with the everyday individualised personality being hidden by the decoration and regalia of the ancestor they are mimicking through dance and song. Ritual performance, as Munn writes, is an 'impersonation of the ancestor within which the dancer himself is hidden.'[7] In other words the self that is usually hidden in everyday life – we might say unconscious – is ceremonially retrieved from its place of hiddenness and symbolically embodied in external concrete form.

I find great reassurance that cultures exist in this country in which people still speak about the riches of dream-life in such terms. The dualistic ontology of classical Aboriginal religious thought emphasises a definite sense of demarcation between dream-life and waking consciousness, a demarcation that delineates the realms of the profane and sacred. And this demarcation is strictly enforced culturally. When people speak of these things a sense of distance and separation is thought to exist between these two realms, between dream-life and waking reality. The conceptual preservation of this sense of distance and difference makes classical Aboriginal thought some of the most sophisticated and graceful phenomenology to have been conceived of in this country. That sense of distance is strongly demarcated through the protocols of religious law and the sense of secrecy and circumspection that surrounds spiritual life. As a culture with our lingering allegiance to Socratic and Cartesian rationalism, with its implicit denigration of mytho-poetic consciousness, we no longer possess awareness of another self that is hidden and distinct from everyday life, from our external social self – a self which requires some kind of ritualised or artistic expression. Such a sense of disconnection was given eloquent expression by WEH Stanner in his book *White Man got no Dreaming: Essays, 1938-1973* (1979). Although collectively we do not posses such a sense of the riches of dream life, we do have various manifestations of such an impulse, in the occasional writer or poet, Les Murray being one of the few to have emerged in Australia in recent times. And of course in our own, more clandestine, private dreaming lives, where love and a

sense of 'things more deeply interfused' may surface from the rich subsoil of our minds. Ceremonial body decoration and the paintings that have evolved out of them, despite innumerable differences, achieve the same thing as, for example, the poetry of Wordsworth or the novels of Dostoevsky. That is making our unconscious and buried sense of the sacred concrete and actual. It is also what part of this essay is clumsily trying to do.

So the hidden mytho-poetic foundation of individual life according to Warlpiri thought is represented collectively and concretely in ritual life. Yet this otherworld of experience also makes its way into collective social reality due to people sleeping and dreaming together in the same space. This is most evident in the overlap at the level of language between the words for the social group, the place of sleep and dream-life; a family is said to share one 'camp', or it may also be said that they share 'one sleep' or 'one dream'.[8] Such a sense of communal feeling is the emotional foundation of sociality, maintained and nourished by that society's collective dream life.

PEOPLE LIKE THE community worker and the eco-activist girl I spoke to beside the pool, I assume, get a vague sense of the richness and importance of such ideas and how they are played out in people's lives, from the non-acquisitive egalitarian ethos of kinship reciprocity, to the high sacred traditions of ceremonial life. The emotional attraction – or aversion – to such aspects of classical Aboriginal culture may turn out to be one of the most important factors implicated in how we position ourselves in the Indigenous political debate. The sense of dream-life being embedded in the small family group of the camp, yet transcending that human domain into kinship with the natural world, is a longing many of us may share or, if burdened by the weight of experience, struggle against as being unrealistic and unsustainable in a post-industrial capitalist economy. Do we value the supposed social values of a closed tribal society, what Marx referred to as *primitive communism*, or do we value the development of the individual and his or her political liberties in an open democratic society? The answer to this question may determine whether we lean to the Right or to the Left in regards to Indigenous politics. To be able to understand how our political attitudes covertly expose our own subjective bias and emotional proclivities, often revealing more about ourselves than any objective state of affairs, may go some of the way to untangling the skein of confusion and mutual misunderstanding that seems to hobble political debate in this area.

WHAT BEGAN TO dawn on me as I understood more of what Munn was getting at became simultaneously beautiful and acutely depressing. Aboriginal religion and art represents the graphic articulation of a coherent world view in which spiritual fertility, fertility in terms of offspring, and the actual fertility and

ordered continuity of the cosmos is maintained. For me this sense of being in the world in such an affirmative sense, and being able to artistically represent such affirmativeness, seems a logical impossibility. Our world seems out of joint, as though a simple faith in the nature of things as they are is no longer feasible. To live on the personal level, on what Munn calls the level of the familial unit, is still a possibility for us, to create life within the context of the family. This has its own life sustaining and affirming qualities; the joys of listening to your child's first wonder-packed questions about the world, of sharing the love and beauty of those experiences with your partner. More tragically for us however, the other plane, that which is associated with male fertility rites, one that is 'cosmic and societal, or sociopolitical' has become more morally and spiritually fraught. What bothered me lying in my bunk tormented by insomniac terror was the sense of absurdity and unreality that attends the sociopolitical and cosmic dimensions of contemporary life. Another installment, I suppose, of the existential-crisis routine I have become all too familiar with. So horribly familiar that at times it does not bear thinking about. Classical Aboriginal culture was not an ideal, but it possessed the requisite naivety to affirm life at the cosmic level and be completely certain in that affirmation. The limited horizons of traditional Aboriginal culture did not have to take into its conceptual view millennia of war, the de-animated and toxic nature of our urban and industrial environments, nor the possible collapse of our civilisation's resource base. Not to put too much of a negative spin on things but the question remains, whether we wish to think about it or not: is that sense of affirmation and fertility, in terms of the human soul and a broader politics and cosmology, a possible option for us any longer? Or are we forever condemned to live among those inhuman spaces and silences that so terrified Pascal, which now, being redolent with the scent of fossil emissions and chemical weapons, have become even more terrifying than they ever were for him?

BEFORE HEADING OUT to Papunya I organised to meet up with a guy I met on *The Ghan* to visit the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct which houses, among other things, the Araluen Arts Centre and the Strehlow Research Centre, where artifacts given to Ted Strehlow by senior Aranda men, are now stored. From the 1930s Stehlow began recording sacred ceremonial songs and with the benefit of having Aranda as a mother tongue, he was able to produce some of the most accurate linguistic analysis, translation and interpretation of Aboriginal poetry produced in this country. It was this research that eventually formed the basis of *Songs of Central Australia*, which was not published until 1971. What gives the book such pathos is the underlying sense that he was mourning the loss of a tradition as he was in the process of recording and preserving it. As he states, being linked 'to the soil of Central Australia by...birth and years of residence and travel over its vast spaces, the close of every ceremonial festival has been an

event of deep sadness, even a major personal tragedy.'**9** Strehlow feared that the sacred traditions of the Aranda people would soon fade into history, and when writing in his diary at Maryvale Station, he noted the following: 'The silence that knows no end is about to close in upon this peaceful site. My heart tonight is sad – because there is no hope that this fate can be averted.'**10**

Loss and tragedy is a theme that Barry Hill takes up in his biography of Ted Strehlow, *Broken Song: TGH Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession* (Knopf, 2002). Hill sees a strain of negativity running through Strehlow's life, one that began when as an adolescent he witnessed his father die of dropsy at Horseshoe Bend, a sense of negativity which, according to Hill, ended up informing the elegiac tone of *Songs of Central Australia*. This melancholic strain continued to be an undercurrent in Strehlow's personal life, which culminated in his obsessive reading of Revelations in his later years, a section of the Bible Hill believes to be perfectly suited to the socially aggrieved. Hill sided with those attempting to resuscitate Aranda cultural traditions in the 1980s and '90s, and he therefore found the elegiac tone of Strehlow's *Songs of Central Australia* indefensible both politically and as a developed theory of cultural change. Hill interpreted Strehlow's melancholic musings as more a symptom of personal malaise than a legitimate response to tragic historical and cultural circumstances.

I THINK HILL'S book is one of the best biographies recently written in Australia and the epic and tragic nature of its subject makes it an important work. Yet Hill seems to have been influenced by the notion that Aboriginal traditions can somehow be resurrected and maintained in a postcolonial, capitalist economy. He, like many others, was blind to the fact that those traditions, outside the context of a hunter-gatherer economy, have become in most essential ways obsolete. The sacred ceremonial songs, dances and graphic designs associated with traditional ritual have a very basic, pragmatic purpose. It is through such artistic mediums that young men learn where waterholes and hunting grounds are in order that they will be able take a wife and provide for a family. That economic base has been removed and Aboriginal people, at times by coercion and necessity, at others due to informed choice, have decided to move into the modern economy. It is for this reason young people are less interested in their cultural heritage than people of three or four generations ago, for the economic necessities of hunting are no longer the basis of their lives. They do not need to know the songs and sand designs, which are essentially aural and visual maps of country, in order to survive. The provision of a welfare cheque enables them to do that and with much less effort than it would require if they were engaging in hunting for subsistence purposes. Hill seems to have been blind to these facts of cultural evolution when writing the biography. I think Strehlow's sense of cultural loss, far from being a projection of personal malaise, was actually an

appropriate assessment of the cultural changes that were occurring mid last century. And I think his elegiac tone is more resonant with the current situation, which is difficult to describe in terms that are not imbued with a sense of tragedy.

The highlight of the visit to the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct was the Araluen Arts Centre. One of the more recent developments in desert art has produced some wonderful works with a much wider range of colours than the older works; in these paintings, bright luminous reds and greens seem to burst from the canvas. One painter I remember was Tiger Palpatja, a Pitjantjatjara man from Amata. As I have since found out from *Tjukurpa Pulkatjara: The Power of the Law* (Wakefield Press, 2010), Tiger was born in 1920 and grew up at the Ernabella Mission where he learned to speak English as a young boy. This was a time when many Pitjantjatjara were gainfully employed and consequently had a sense of pride, dignity and purpose, something which is absent from many of the younger generations. Tiger's main job at the Mission was shepherding, fencing and building stockyards. The book tells us he was renowned as a 'top gun shearer' when he was younger. When I was walking around the gallery the beautiful bright colors of the paintings, particularly Tiger's *Wanampi Tjurkuppa* (Snake Dreaming), lodged themselves in my mind, fusing with everything I had read about iconography in Nancy Munn's book. The idea of a painting being a visual externalisation of the soul that was implanted in a person at birth by their totemic ancestor, a soul that in adulthood one remains connected to through dream-life, all of a sudden seemed quite natural and perfectly explicable.

As I drove out to Papunya a few days later the impression of the paintings, or the kind of insight I had gained into their meaning, remained with me. Although it had been my aim I was not sure if I would be able see the school murals the old Pintupi men had done in the '70s. Thankfully, however, the school was still open and the principal kindly allowed me to have a look around. The original Honey Ant mural that was painted by the old Pintupi men as a 'gift to the white man's school', as Geoffery Bardon wrote in his *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story* (MUP, 2005), had been since painted over with another mural that was nevertheless impressive. Some of the original door murals, although damaged, remained as a testament to those early artistic efforts.

In the 1970s Bardon had been sabotaged in his efforts to facilitate the sale of paintings in Alice Springs. He was trying to get good prices for the paintings the men had done and the Papunya Tula gallery, which still exists in Alice today, was set up for this purpose. White officials had stopped funds returning to Papunya, which infuriated the Aboriginal men who blamed Bardon for not paying them the money that was due to them. People were also buying the paintings for a few dollars and then selling them at exorbitant prices. Bardon was trying to respectfully encourage and facilitate the growth of a local art culture

and it is obvious that he had a great deal of affection for not only the people but also the art that they produced. Yet he was undermined by the less benevolent concerns of those trying to make a dollar at whatever cost and of others who seemed to have resented his admiration of Aboriginal culture. Bardon, after being turned on by both the Aboriginal and white people in Papunya, headed to Sydney, suffering a severe mental collapse from which it seems he never fully recovered.

As I was driving from Papunya out to the Tanami Track on my way back to Alice a storm broke out and my four wheel drive almost slid off the road. When the roads out here get wet it is as though someone has attached ice skates to your wheels, even at ten kilometres an hour. But the storm and cloud-filled sky was wonderful. I did not see it in terms of a beautiful landscape, though, in the tradition of painters like Glover or Von Guerard. Aboriginal people's feeling for nature is much different, almost antithetical to this disembodied conception of landscape, the colonial visual aesthetic that an American historian has aptly described as the 'magisterial gaze'. Classical Aboriginal art evokes a fresher and more intimate sense of being part of the land than we find in colonial landscape aesthetics, which seems to exclude the rich texture and interplay of the entire sensorium, being as it is a primarily visual art-form. Aboriginal sand designs or *maps of country* – which many of the paintings are based on – are physical and tactile as well as visual mediums, something a dancer moves through as he or she mimics the actions of his ancestor travelling across the land. He is actually *in* the design, moving around within it, in bodily contact with each represented feature of the landscape in the same way that people live and move *in and through* the environment in actual life. When Aboriginal people describe the stories in a painting, running their fingers over each represented feature of the environment, they are similarly 'moving through country.'

When I was driving slowly along the road looking out across the horizon, to the outcrops of mountains, the low lying scrub and the dark grey clouds, I did not think of the environment in terms of landscape aesthetics, as something *out there* distinct from me. It was something that I was *in*. This sense of the land as an enfolding, transcendent presence has the effect of dwarfing pretensions of individuality, yet it also paradoxically enlarges the sense of self, which seems to expand, becoming as limitless as the land itself.

This simple and natural sense of transcendence expressed in the paintings has a kind of joyful exuberance about it, a quite natural sense of loving country as if mountains and clouds and trees were actual kin. The contrast with the self-enclosed and fragmented subjectivities we find in modern European art, for example in works by Picasso or Francis Bacon, which are so expressive of inner desolation, is something probably best not thought about too much or too often. Bacon and Picasso are not to be denigrated for the work they produce, for it is a

faithful representation of a certain modern malaise of the soul, a real phenomenon more prevalent that we like to admit. Western Desert Art, and particularly the exuberance of more recent developments within the movement, express a kind of innocent fullness of being that is perhaps impossible to maintain in a modern post-industrial society, with all of its hyper-business, social and economic anxieties and general condition of spiritual anaemia. It may even be impossible in a modern context – at least, for most of us – to even fully appreciate what such art is articulating.

THIS REFLECTION ON the spiritual riches of classical culture, and the significant impact it can have on us, always raises other issues. Sutton makes the point that a growing number of people have a respect and reverence for Aboriginal high sacred traditions, yet also hold reservations about many of the cultural practices associated with those traditions. I had long felt such a sense of ambivalence towards traditional culture, particularly when it comes to the more brutal aspects of initiation. In an article on ceremonial life, MJ Meggitt quotes a Warlpiri man who stated that in initiating young boys he was 'killing' them.[11] At the close of the initiation period, the symbolic death of the child is followed by their rebirth as a man who is able to marry and become an adult member of the community. This process of symbolic homicide has deep resonance with the ancient and widespread practice of sacrifice, symbolic death and rebirth. The difference, however, with child sacrifice of the kind we find in, say, Aeschylus's *Orestes* trilogy, is that in Aboriginal culture the child's death is symbolic and psychological, not actual.

This is a very complex and morally fraught area. Are we to judge such rituals as unacceptable and condemn them, or is it possible to see in them impulses that may foment beneath the veneer of civilised amiability, continually rising to the surface despite moral censure and attempts at social conditioning? There are indications here that classical culture, while articulating and embodying some of the richer dimensions of spiritual life, may also turn out to be a mirror in which the darker reaches of our own minds are reflected. When men engage in symbolic murder during such ceremonies, up to hundreds of women and other family members, from whom the initiates have been separated for months, lie around the camp wailing all night, as if mourning at a funeral.

There are very complex things going on here that I think are still difficult to for us to understand. Aboriginal ceremonies, like the Eleusian rituals of ancient of Greece, express and enact themes of death and rebirth, enact and produce conditions of social and psychological fragmentation and separation, yet they also seem to be seeking a higher unity or form of reconciliation. Much of the sacred dimensions of male ritual are a symbolic expression of the separation and sundering of the masculine and feminine domains of personal and collective life.

The child prior to initiation is considered part of the maternal matrix. A violent demarcation and separation of the child from this maternal sphere and his entry into adulthood is the basic function of initiation. Such rituals are structured around the polarities of childhood (in the female domain) and adulthood (in the male domain). Yet the apotheosis of male ritual life seems to move towards a higher unity and integration of these polarities, one not unlike those evident in the Eleusian mysteries or the condition of spiritual hermaphrodism we find in the work of some of the Medieval alchemists Jung was so fond of.

Many of the negative reviews of Sutton's book have a defensive tone about them, perhaps from reviewers who remain wedded to the moral schemata Sutton is attacking. One of the few genuinely important criticisms of *The Politics of Suffering* was offered by Tim Rowse in the journal *Aboriginal History*. Sutton advocates the dismantling of the artificial welfare economies that exist on remote communities, seeing them as being implicated in many of the problems that exist today, from the cultural and linguistic ghettoisation casually implicated in plummeting literacy standards, to the mental lethargy and torpor caused by intergenerational welfare dependency. But, as Rowse asks, will the movement of people to towns and cities, where opportunities exist for engagement with the mainstream labour market, produce as many problems as it solves? Will it produce, in other words, more 'vulnerable individuals'?[12] The historical pattern of colonisation in Australia has been conquest, detribalisation, urban drift and the creation of an urban underclass. This is what happened around major towns and cities in coastal regions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The people of the Western Desert, due to their remoteness from civilisation, are only now going through a process that Aboriginal people on the coastal regions had undergone decades, if not a century or two ago. Many Western Desert people were never colonised or dispossessed like those on the coast. The process of detribalisation and urban drift, however, is nevertheless occurring at an increasingly rapid rate as people choose, of their own volition, to become part of the modern world. The moral dilemma this produces, hinted at by Rowse, is that such a process may produce as many problems as it solves.

It is common for the teachers and youth workers I work with to comment on the marked differences between students whose families have spent one or two generations in Alice Springs or major towns and who are consequently more proficient in English, and remote students who have basic English communication difficulties. There are also marked psychological and social differences. Remote students tend to lack the abrasiveness of character evident in more urbanised students. I am not sure if such an assertion could be sustained statistically, for I have taught many very pleasant and friendly urbanised Aboriginal students. But it is a general impression of some validity. On an anecdotal level, one night walking down the main street of Alice Springs, I came

upon a group of young boys. A number of them began talking to me. One of them, who would have been lucky to be fourteen, told me he was gay and propositioned me for sex. Then a number of his older friends came up to me and asked me for five dollars. I refused and began to walk off. One of them consequently bashed me in the head and another, grabbing me by the arm, would have done the same had I not broken free and headed towards a crowd lining up outside the local pub. It was not a brutal assault – I only had a sore jaw for a few days – but it was behavior I had not encountered from more traditional remote students over ten years of working with them.

A distinction needs to be made between traditional violence related to inter-kin conflict and the kind of violent impulses I experienced in Alice that night. Living on community it is very rare that a white person will be the object of a violent assault. Much of the violence is directed against other Aboriginal people. This is why it is relatively safe for a white person to live on communities which have extremely high statistics of violent crime. Aboriginal people tend to be very protective and considerate of white people living on their communities and do everything possible to insulate them from violence associated with internal kin-based conflicts. The violence I experienced in Alice, however, seems to have its origins in factors other than traditional protocols surrounding violent behavior.

What I am suggesting, and what lurks at the edges of Rowse's criticism of Sutton's book, is that the inevitable drift into urban centers may create a whole horde of new problems. Remote children and adolescents are generally very friendly, and in my experience would never accost a stranger in the manner I was accosted. We might say they possess the quality of naïveté. There is a definite sense of shyness, warmth and affectionate interest in other people that seems to be absent in the more streetwise urbanised students I have worked with. The tragedy is those more wholesome qualities, I fear, will be lost with the increasing urban drift. Further, if we fail to equip students with the linguistic and cultural knowledge to cope with that situation, catastrophic consequences lie ahead of us over the next two to three generations. Many remote young people, who at the age of thirteen or fourteen still have the literacy skills of a five- or six-year-old, are currently moving into larger towns and cities. I fear what the future has in store for them and for their children.

What Sutton has analysed is a crisis within the Left itself when it comes to Indigenous politics. *The Politics of Suffering* is by no means the work of a conservative or reactionary thinker. Yet many of the problems Sutton raises are those that have been raised by the Right in this country in an attempt to bring Leftist ideologues to account when it comes to dysfunction on Indigenous communities and the realm of realist politics. Historically the Left has had a habit of clinging to ideological systems that are politically and philosophically appealing, but which turn out to be disastrous when implemented in the real

world. Periods of crisis within Leftist thinking occur when allegiance to cherished ideological systems overrides reason and the ability to register the facts of social reality objectively. Often it is from within Leftist traditions themselves that thinkers emerge who bring such intellectual inflexibility to account. There is a long history of such internal rejuvenation; from Arthur Koestler's expose of the Stalinist purges, Orwell's attack on Russian totalitarianism, Solzhenitsyn's revelations of the Gulag penal system in Siberia, to Christopher Hitchens' critique of reflexive anti-Americanism from a socialist and human rights perspective.

I have for some time felt an intellectual and moral aversion towards the Left in this country when it comes to Indigenous issues. I have consequently had more sympathy with the Right politically. But it has been an uneasy alliance. I am not temperamentally sympathetic to the political Right, but it does have the virtue of being intellectually more open and therefore not hobbled by the kind of ideological chains that hinder honest debate on the Left. The virtue of Sutton's book is that it enables people who instinctively lean to the Left with regard to Indigenous politics, to do so again in good conscience, and without sacrificing one's intellectual integrity. Prior to reading Sutton's book and some of the other works in its bibliography, I felt as though I existed in a political no man's land. Among those of a Leftist persuasion you felt gagged when speaking about Indigenous issues and the failure of liberal policies over the last three decades. Among the Right you could speak your mind but there was a sense of unease as to how such issues as community dysfunction and Indigenous illiteracy were being hijacked for the purposes of a conservative political agenda. And there was very little understanding of the riches of traditional culture amongst those of a more conservative political persuasion, riches which I value a great deal and which I feel may form an important component of a future high culture in Australia. Such a combination of honest, pragmatic and realistic thinking on policy combined with a sense of blanket disdain for traditional Aboriginal culture is evident in Gary John's recent *Aboriginal Self-Determination: The Whiteman's Dream* (Connor Court Publishing, 2010). It is rare to find a pragmatist who does not advocate this kind of conservative disdain for Aboriginal high sacred traditions, who doesn't filter Aboriginal issues through a preconceived political schema. Sutton is one of the few who possesses the impartiality and depth of knowledge to avoid such ideological distortion.

The general poverty of our intellectual culture has also been demoralising, particularly its debasement to the level of political partisanship.I was pleased to see Sutton drawing on American writers such as Gass, Wolfe and Vonnegut in his treatment of the self-serving pieties of much of our bourgeois political culture – what Wolfe referred to as *radical chic*. It is possible that with work the calibre of Sutton's being produced, things may take a turn for the better and the ideological

shackles that have prevented the development of an open and honest intellectual culture may be consigned to the past. If we can develop a genuinely native high cultural tradition, that tradition, as Les Murray was saying in the 1980s, is one that may be imbued with elements of classical Aboriginal sacred and mythological traditions. In the same way that the rituals of antiquity and their mythological underpinnings became the basis of works like Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and the literary and artistic traditions that developed in their wake, Aboriginal tradition is an untapped storehouse of mythological riches that could form the basis of a truly rich cultural tradition grounded in the specificities of our environment, in the kinds of animals, plants and climatic conditions that we are familiar with and which form the often unnoticed background of our experience. This was the hope with which Strehlow, countering much of his book's despairing tone, ended his *Songs of Central Australia*.

FOR THE RELEASE of *The Politics of Suffering* Sutton gave an interview with Marcia Langton in Melbourne.[13] He talked about issues of cultural transformation and that some aspects of traditional culture, such as culturally sanctioned violence and child abuse – a process of toughening-up young children referred to as 'cruelling' – would be best consigned to the past. Yet the high sacred traditions, he argued, will continue to be preserved and studied by all Australians. Sutton made the point that we can enjoy Latin poetry, but this does not mean we would today tolerate Roman military barbarism. The analogy set my mind right with regards to the mixed feelings and plain confusion I felt about Aboriginal culture. Sutton also mentioned that it is better to equip remote people with the ability to be functional adults in a mainstream urban setting as opposed to 'shattered drunks'. These are limited but achievable aims. I have resigned myself to the fact that you cannot stop the ship from sinking but you can pull some passengers into your lifeboat, watching the ship descend into the ocean, as many of the less fortunate drown. These two comments of Sutton's gave my teaching some impetus and sense of direction. As well as offering a program of realist pragmatics, Sutton was the first person I had read since Strehlow who spoke to the sense of despair I experienced working on community, but who also shared a sense of the riches of traditional culture. There is something deeply poetic and beautiful about totemic affiliation and its expressions in classical and post-classical art, something that is by turns affronting and renewing, the sense I suppose of an innocent spiritual kinship with the non-human world. This primitive sense of affiliation with the more-than-human world has been all but lost in modern post-industrial cultures. Yet it is something precious, and it is a good thing that it is being offered to the broader community as a gift by people whose culture is grounded in the land we live in, grounded in our environment through the poetic dimensions of dream-life.

In the Afterword to the second edition of *The Politics of Suffering*, Sutton discusses the difficulties of accepting the failure of an idealistic program to which one may have dedicated one's life. This points to the more personal and emotional dynamics for maintaining a form of ideological allegiance whose practical outcomes in terms of pragmatics and rational analysis have proved disastrous. Sutton is at his most reflective and compassionate in these few pages. As he writes, the 'failure of such an idealism can be a small death of the spirit…a dark and terrible one, but it also offers a lightness that comes from facing down, resolving and shedding the negative past without forgetting the positives.'[14] Few writers in this country have dealt with the personal impact the national crisis in Indigenous politics has had, and will continue to have upon many of us, with such sensitivity and insight. They are important words. Let us hope we do not lose sight of them.

Gary Clark is an author and teacher with the Wiltja Program, an initiative of Pitjantjatjara people which provides access to urban secondary schooling.

[1] Neill, Rosemary *White Out: How Politics is Killing Black Australia*, Allen and Unwin, 2002, pp. 38-9.

[2] Diane Austin-Broos, 'Making a Difference: The Politics of Writing About Suffering', *Oceania*, 80, 2010, p. 110.

[3] *Children on Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands: Commission of Inquiry. A Report into Sexual Abuse*. Presented to the South Australian Parliament by the Hon. E.P. Mullighan QC Commissioner. p. XIII.

[4] ibid, p. 212. These are incidents the inquiry reported as a result of interviewing teachers on the APY Lands. They are the kind of stories I had frequently heard when teaching out bush and it was not particularly surprising reading about them in the report. They are not unusual.

[5] In Pitjantjatjara and related languages the word for dreaming or story is spelt *Tjukurpa*; in Warlpiri it is spelt *Djugurba*. '*Tj*' does sound very similar to '*Dj*'. I'm not sure if the differences are due to differences in the language or traditions of transcription into the English phonetic system. Your guess is as good as mine.

[6] Munn, Nancy. *Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society*, Cornell University, 1973, p. 103.

[7] Munn, Nancy. *Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society*, Cornell University, 1973, p. 50.

[8] Munn, p. 37.

[9] *Songs of Central Australia*, Angus and Robertson, Australia, 1971, p.xlvi.

[10] ibid.

[11] MJ Meggitt, 'Gadjari Among the Walbiri Aborigines of Central Australia', (*Oceania* Monographs, No14).

[12] Rowse, Tim. *Aboriginal History*, 2009 Vol. 33, p. 243.

[13] http://www.themonthly.com.au/politics-suffering-peter-sutton-marcia-langton-1891

[14] Peter Sutton, *The Politics of Suffering*, 2nd Melbourne University Press, 2011, p. 219.

Spelling and making sense

Twenty-first century literacy

dale spender

LET'S start with spelling: it's often the first plank of literacy.

As a child, I was renowned for my spelling ability. My parents proudly boasted that I had never made a spelling mistake. All I needed was to see a word in print – and thereafter, I could spell it!

I didn't aim to be a good speller. It was something that just happened to me. Something I didn't even think about until the twenty-first century – when I began to realise that I couldn't spell any more. (This along with the recognition that I couldn't remember current phone numbers any more – only the ones that I had known as a child. That's another 'sign' – and I hope it's not an indication that I am getting dumber – or demented.)

I am of course the world's worst typist – for many reasons: (one being that as a teenager in search of a career, I believed that my refusal to attend shorthand-typing classes would protect me from becoming a secretary.)

I am used to having a screen where as a result of my poor keyboard skills, so many of the words are errors, and underlined in red. But what has come as a shock is that when I look at these words and think how I should correct them – I can't remember the right spelling. I've lost my images.

The representation of the word – the shape of it – that I have held in my head and once so effortlessly reproduced, is no longer there. It has slowly receded; these days I have to go to spellcheck to fix the errors. (Takes but a second however, compared to a dictionary.)

Once upon a time when my eyes cast on the standardised printed word in the countless books that I read, on the rare occasions that I encountered a misspelling, it was a typo that I had discerned. AND IT STOOD OUT!

I would almost whoop at my discovery of the error. There was a red alert that this was not the right image; speller beware. But these days when so much of my communication is by iPhone, where spelling has been redesigned to meet the

needs of the small screen, the so-called old disruptions are more often the norm than is standardised print. And this makes a difference to my 'literacy'.

I routinely use 'u' for you and 'c' for see (among many others) and if I am writing something formal (where the requirements have also changed), I have to get someone else to check my text as I cannot 'see' the right and wrong versions of the word any more. I use these new forms without thinking about them – in the same way that I once automatically used the correct spelling.

I am not apologising for this – no more than I would apologise for putting aside my pen and moving to a keyboard. Language forms constantly change. It's about 'keeping up' with the changes; not about putting energy into resisting, and trying to preserve the old and familiar.

I HAPPILY ACKNOWLEDGE that I like the fun of text – along with its utilitarian value. It's a bit like the shorthand I refused to learn – but with many more literary and fanciful opportunities. It's become something of an art form in many contexts. As early as 2001, *The Guardian* held the first TXTNG poetry competition. Just as a sonnet has a specific format, so too there are form requirements for the txt poem. *160 characters to fit the screen*. The newspaper was astonished by the more than 7,500 entries that the competition attracted; and the panel of prestigious poets who participated in the judging – were equally astonished at the quality of the poems:

TXTN iz messin

mi headn' me englis

try2rite essays

they all come out txtis

gran not plsed w/letters she gets

swears i wrote better

b4comin2uni

&she's african[1]

 (And it's hard to do this at a keyboard without spell-check messing with **my** text.)

In the decade since that first competition, hundreds of thousands of TXT poems have been entered in a multitude of competitions and events – and countless thousands have been inspired by the constraints of the TXT message to create an extraordinary range of literary/ literacy works.

Of course there are many who don't see this as progress.

John Humphreys for example, the widely acclaimed BBC announcer publicly declared that texters are nothing but 'vandals doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours 800 years ago; they are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped'[2]

He is not alone in his condemnation. Nor would he have been alone in the century that followed the introduction of the printing press when publishers of the new 'pagan texts' (that is, the classics), were themselves burned; their books were torched and banned, and the authors banished in the attempt to stop the new machine from destroying the beauty and the power of the sacred manuscripts.

Many have died in the interests of changing the language. In the fourteenth century there was no English version of the bible, just Latin; only the priests could possess the meanings that were conveyed to the congregation. In the struggle to translate and publish a bible in English – to open up communication to the people, 'hundreds were martyred, dying the most horrible deaths for their part in creating and distributing to the people the first English Bible'.[3] All in the name of preserving standards.

WHILE THERE IS no record of anyone dying for the legitimacy of TXTNG, there have been some outstanding protests about the extent to which the language is being ruined by such assaults. David Crystal, the distinguished linguist and academic has written a rather playful book on TXTNG and its many advantages; he has also asked why this new form of communication is the source of so mach fuss.

The basic objections are that TXTNG will erode the ability of the population to spell, punctuate, and capitalise correctly, students will soon be unable to write proper English – or spell, and they will as a result get poorer results in their exams.

And while he tries to dispel (one or two 'l's in that word I ask myself?), these so-called myths, I can attest that four years after the publication of his book – I can state with authority that the protesters were right all along: the 'myths' have become reality.

According to the report of the National Year of Reading – nearly half of Australia's population has poor levels of literacy and can't read with fluency: and despite our mammoth efforts, half of our fifteen to twenty-four year olds are unable to read to an adequate level to properly function in society.

Would I qualify as having a poor literacy level, I wonder? I am no longer the perfectly correct speller. In my online world I have pretty well abandoned punctuation (certainly the dreaded apostrophe) – and I haven't used capitals for

decades. (I can't help it if 'Word' keeps putting these extras in – and my emails often provide relief because my txt remains unedited, and I can use lower case to my heart's content and simply make use of the dot … and the dash ---).

But I'm still here. I'm still writing. And I can't recall anyone complaining that they can't understand my messages. They may not be correct but they are clear.

Altering the conventions doesn't mean the end of the world. And – besides – we have been here before.

Prior to the invention of the printing press – *there was no such thing as correct spelling,* no single way of representing a word. (Shakespeare spelt his own name in many different ways. And while there is some debate about what he did and didn't write – it has nothing to do with how his name was spelt.)

People then seemed to manage – not just with creative spelling, but with the absence of punctuation and capitals. The idea that there is only one way to spell a word, and punctuate an utterance – and that any variation is an error – only came in with the printing press: and with the commitment to standardisation and conformity.

'Correctness' however, is not such a big thing in the information age – where innovation and creativity are being highly valued; even the rhetoric of education these days encourages us to break out of that old conformist strait jacket.

Good writing and communication have always tested the limits, challenged conventions and stretched the possibilities. We just do it more quickly – with the assistance of spellcheck, predictive txts – and a vast range of other amazing tools that earlier writers and readers would have loved.

THE TROUBLE IS that we don't have tests for these twenty-first century skills. Despite the allegations by established critics that we have all been dumbed down by the digital revolution – the problem is not that I have changed and lowered the standards; it is that so many of the educational policy makers and examiners have not kept pace with the transformational changes in communication.

We are testing the wrong things.

Examiners can still regard correct spelling and good handwriting as the basis for literacy testing (which is why you can't take your iPad into exams. It would be cheating to abandon the pen and the dictionary). Too many people of influence continue to measure previous century print habits when students have moved on with the skills of the new millennium.

It's not images of correct spelling words that fill today's students heads; it's how to make the right decision to get to the next level of the game, how to create a good 'app'; how to come up with a cool solution. They aren't immersed in the printed word, or perfect images of standardised spelling (as I once was); nor are

they required – outside of educational circles – to engage in prolonged handwriting exercises.

But give them an iPhone or an iPad and they can be wizards at finding, assessing, collating, creating new videos, podcasts, graphics, solutions and explanations.

Proud parents point to their babies performing on iPhones – and upload the videos to prove it on YouTube. This is the starting point for those teenagers who can display that extraordinary hand eye coordination that makes their elders appear clumsy at a keyboard – and consigns handwriting to an earlier era.

It's perfectly possible that a street sweeper would not be able to read and answer questions on a passage from Jane Austen – or indeed Centrelink forms (the meanings of which often elude me); but no problem with a sat-nav system – or downloading a YouTube tutorial that could demonstrate any skill required at work.

AND WE DON'T need examiners to tell us who has the appropriate skills.

In a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, education editor, Anna Patty[4] quoted Professor Barry McGraw, head of the national curriculum authority trying to explain the latest results that indicated the reading abilities of *bright* students were in decline. And that it was at least clear that this could be because schools were focusing on 'basic achievements' rather than teaching the more sophisticated readings of more complex texts – such as Jane Austen or Centrelink forms.

I don't think that teaching fifteen-year-olds more sophisticated readings of more complex (print) texts is the issue; nor do I believe that the skills of bright readers suddenly decline. (And I don't believe my language skills have deteriorated because I now use a screen rather than read or write books.)

But I do think it is more than likely that teenagers have moved beyond the printed word to the fast moving flickers of the screen, where they become skilled at scanning, skimming, sifting, sorting and selecting their own digital 'bits' to make their own new 'messages'.

And once you have started to create your own 'messages' it's a bit of a bore to be asked to follow some one else's and to learn to spell – to pass a test you won't face outside an educational institution. But that's another story.

[1] David Crystal, *txtng the gr8 db8*; 2008, Oxford University Press, p14

[2] Crystal, p 9

[3] Melvyn Bragg, 2003, *The Adventures of English*, Hodder & Stoughton, UK

[4] Anna Patty, Sydney Morning Herald, 'Focus on basic skills blamed for decline in reading standards', 21September 2010

http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/focus-on-basic-skills-blamed-for-decline-in-reading-standards-20100920-15ju1.html

[2]

From this time forward I pledge

Reflections on new citizenship

Caroline Lenette

14 OCTOBER 2007: This date will remain significant for us both. We now share a flag, national anthem and citizenship. Patience and Caroline, both dressed up for an affirmation ceremony at the Roma Street Parklands during the Queensland Multicultural Festival. It is bewildering to think that our lives have converged towards the same milestone under vastly different circumstances. Patience is from a refugee background; I am a skilled migrant. Today, we are becoming Australian citizens.

Patience was born in Burundi. She comes from a rural part of the country, and has lived outside of her homeland for several years. When I met her in early 2007, she was proud of the fact that she was only a few months away from becoming an Australian citizen. Today's event is significant as Patience came to Australia through the 'Women at Risk' program, as a single mother of four. At the time, her family had spent six years living in refugee camps in Rwanda and Tanzania. Her husband had become sick and the camp's medical staff did not get to him on time. She became a widow at thirty-one. It took another three years, but she was overjoyed to be granted a permanent protection visa to a distant country called Australia. She often jokes that there is a good reason why her name is Patience.

She arrived on Australian soil on 17 July 2005, exactly two weeks after I arrived in Queensland. No migrant ever forgets the date of his or her arrival in a new homeland.

My journey was a relatively privileged one. I was born in Mauritius, and I had experienced the Australian way of life first as a tourist, then as an overseas student. When I returned to my home country after completing a postgraduate degree, I had trouble re-adapting, so decided to apply for permanent residency in Australia through the offshore 'Skilled Migration' program. It took eighteen

months. My then-future-husband was looking for new challenges and decided to pursue further studies in Queensland, so we travelled to Australia together. We were lucky to go through the adaptation process at the same time albeit in different ways. We both spoke fluent English and were competitive on the job market. I applied for citizenship as soon as I had lived in the country for the required twenty-four months, just before the citizenship test was introduced. Travelling plans were postponed until then, since going away would delay my eligibility for citizenship.

I MET PATIENCE while I was volunteering in a community-based organisation, which offered subsidised driving lessons to single refugee women in their first language. We exchanged a few polite words in English, before I took a wild guess, 'Do you speak French?' She responded with a big smile, '*Un p'tit peu*' – a little bit. She said how happy she was to meet someone who spoke French – one of the many languages Patience knew from her homeland and from living with other refugees in exile. Conversing in French meant that she could momentarily forget about the pressure of finding the right word in English and could revert to a language that was a bit more familiar. She knew that her limited English language abilities prevented her from finding a good job even after two years in Australia. She understood what others were saying – most of the time – but struggled to formulate a sentence and kept apologising for her hesitations and her accent.

I consider myself lucky for being fluent in English. In Mauritius I learnt English in primary and secondary school, even though French is my first language. So my experience of Australian systems and institutions as a migrant has been relatively easy. I can argue with the telephone company or ask for clarifications about my work contract. When I chose Australia as destination for my tertiary studies, it was with the knowledge that I was proficient enough to make the most of my time at university. I loved studying and missed it when I went back to Mauritius. I yearned to learn more. This is what motivated me to begin my PhD a few months after I migrated to Australia permanently.

Patience also wants to obtain formal Australian qualifications, as she will remain the provider of her family for many years to come. In fact, her eldest daughter has just had a baby and lives with her mother. Over the years Patience spent living in refugee camps in Rwanda and Tanzania, she practised as a midwife. Families in the camps trusted her more than the official medical staff. She remembers every baby that she's helped bring into this world. She has come across some of these families when they happen to resettle in Brisbane. They remember her as their 'benefactor'. She wants to continue midwifery in Australia but not until she can overcome the language barrier. This means she is considering going to university, even if it takes years to complete her program.

Patience wants to learn how to drive, because many community-based jobs she wants to apply for require a valid driver's licence. As a single mother, she needs to drive her children around, which she does even though she knows it's illegal. On some days, she has no one else but herself to count on. She has attempted the written road rules test twice so far, and really hopes to pass the next time. When she heard about the subsidised driving program, she was one of the first to apply.

I was anxious about getting my driver's licence in 2005. I had three months as a new permanent resident to sit for the test. It seemed time enough, but amid the tasks of finding accommodation, getting settled in my new job, and adapting to a new environment, three months went by quickly and it became a mad rush to get my licence. I passed the written test but failed the practical test at first. I smiled at my own picture on the plastic card when I was successful the second time – here was undeniable proof that I was a Queenslander!

When I think back to those first few months adaptating to life in Australia, I remember feeling frustrated because of my lack of credit history to apply for loans or rent appliances. I washed our clothes in a bathtub until such a time when we could afford a washing machine. Before we owned a car, we did the grocery shopping by foot. My husband and I laugh about this now: why did we have to buy half the store knowing we had to walk back to our unit?

For Patience, the challenges she remembers vividly were learning how to use an ATM without fearing that her bankcard would be lost in the machine. It took months to get used to leaving items unattended in the front yard of her rental property, without being afraid that these would be stolen within minutes. She struggled with finding the confidence to ask a bus driver for directions, as she did not want to cause trouble – she got lost a number of times, particularly in the Brisbane CBD. Fairly different to the refugee camp environment, but at times equally daunting.

The simple, everyday things can be the most challenging. It is not until we hear the details of the triumphs and obstacles in the mundane that we can clearly begin to understand someone's life.

EVERYONE EXPERIENCES MIGRATION and settlement differently, but it is difficult for anyone to leave behind family, friends and homeland. It is the beginning of an exciting and difficult journey of belonging 'neither here nor there' and of loving and sometimes loathing several places to which there are strong attachments. The migrant 'status' yields an entangled and fluid identity, a mixture of our own sense of self and the way we are perceived as migrants (which I call the POS, Perpetual Outsiders Syndrome). Being a migrant involves appreciating that we are offered opportunities we may never have dreamt of,

while also relinquishing a feeling of belonging – which some may never find again. The rollercoaster of emotions migrants go through as circumstances change fosters an ability to overcome major crises as well as an ongoing struggle with the mere fact that our core values are shifting without us even noticing. Sounds complex, and it is. Throughout those multifaceted experiences over the years, change is the only constant.

Patience and I are thrilled that we will be part of the same citizenship ceremony. This is a moment no one forgets and we are glad that we will be part of each other's stories.

Patience is proud of how her life has turned out to be in Australia. It wasn't always easy, as a single woman who chose not to remarry, to raise four children alone. Her second eldest daughter is now applying to go to university. According to the norms of her local community, this is a clear sign that Patience has been 'successful' in her role as mother. She remains actively engaged in community-based activities, helping newly arrived families to navigate the maze of systems in this unfamiliar environment. She knows what they are going through. She is respected in the community because of her ability to manage multiple responsibilities without the presence of a man in her house.

I am also proud of my life in Australia thus far. My husband and I work hard, and constantly seek new challenges to learn even more. We bought a house as soon as we could afford one, because being the proud owners of a mortgage created a vital sense of feeling 'at home'. I have started my PhD and I am excited about the prospect of making a 'contribution to knowledge' and work in close collaboration with refugee women. We have plans to travel to Europe and visit our families in Mauritius very soon. We are slowly extending our network of friends and acquaintances in Brisbane. These things take time.

RECEIVING A LETTER from the Australian Government that says I am now an Australian citizen is a strange experience. I have only had two years to build a solid relationship with Australia. It doesn't seem quite long enough for such a big commitment. At the same time it feels like I have always been here, as so many significant events have taken place since our arrival in July 2005. When I see 'Love it or P*** off' stickers at the back of a car, with a picture of an Australian flag conveniently plastered in the background, I feel like screaming out the window, 'Unlike you Sir/Madam, I can love it *and* loathe it *and* stay!'

During the citizenship ceremony, I can barely hear myself utter the words to *Advance Australia Fair*. Part of me feels I am singing someone else's national anthem. Am I betraying my own which I have sung since I was a little girl? I wonder if Patience feels the same way? Is it any different for her and her family who didn't have any formal documentation for many years? Is she already

thinking about applying for her Australian passport so that she can travel back to Africa and find long lost relatives and sponsor them to migrate here?

As we stand to say our pledge to our new country Australia, I can see Patience and her children a few rows away from me. I can sense pride and emotion, and it makes me realise the real significance of the moment. I am fighting back tears. There is a collective understanding in the room even though we don't know one another. Although our journeys thus far may have been quite different, we have all gone through difficulties in our own ways, and have overcome them in our own ways. We are all resilient. We are extremely lucky to be living in Australia and we all stay because we love what this country has to offer. By taking this pledge, we show our eagerness to contribute to this country.

A federal election is called on the same day as our citizenship ceremony. Australians will exercise their civic duties in a few weeks' time. Now that our electoral enrolment forms have been signed and collected, we will also be participating in this significant event, not as passive bystanders, but as active citizens.

Patience and I look towards the future with a new outlook, acknowledging the achievements and ready for further opportunities to come our way.

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Since migrating to Australia in 2005, she has worked in Queensland's multicultural sector in policy, transcultural mental health and cross-cultural awareness before joining Griffith University in 2010.

During her PhD fieldwork Caroline explored resilience and wellbeing among single refugee women, and she is interested in visual ethnography, international social development, and refugee and migration issues.

Caroline lives in Brisbane and has a two-year-old daughter.

Merchants of light

Research of the future

John Armstrong and Carsten Murawski

I: The great question

The term 'research' is central to the discussion of higher education. There are research rankings, research-focused universities, research-funding bodies, research institutes, research students and research degrees. The idea of undertaking research is crucial to the professional self-conception of most academics.

But of course, research – understood broadly – is also a fundamental human and social need. At the grandest level, we do not know how to make societies that are stable, prosperous and just; we do not know how to build cities that are beautiful and convenient; we do not know how to ensure good relationships; we do not know how to use technology to make ourselves wiser, rather than merely busier; we do not know how to bring out the best in everyone. These are vast aspirations for knowledge. And the kind of knowledge at stake has many aspects: it is evaluative, practical, empirical and theoretical. We certainly know some things about some of these aspects, but we are still far short of the comprehensive, effective understanding that we need.

At a very slightly less imposing level, we do not fully understand how our brains work, we do not know enough about how the global economy is really structured, we do not know exactly what lessons we should learn from the past, we do not know how to prevent and cure all cancers; we do not know how, in practice, to prevent or mitigate climate change – or even how to assess the precise threat. These are slightly less grand (thought still incredibly important) because they are contributions to – but not guarantees of – healthy, wise and happy lives.

So, what expectations should we have for research in universities? In our world, universities are the single biggest concentration of research activity and the only institutions that undertake research in all its relevant aspects. The

unwritten, but real, social contract for universities includes – as a crucial element – the idea that universities are organisations that deploy resources to conduct research on the big problems in such a way as to contribute to collective well-being.

Holding together the natural – if often inarticulate – aspiration for the most important knowledge and the role of the university as the key place where important knowledge is sought – raises a crucial issue: How to organise these efforts. This is the key question: *How should we undertake research to create the kind of valuable knowledge that is needed and bring it powerfully to effect in the world?*

We propose a radical answer to this question.

In this essay, we focus particularly on the humanities and economics – our own broad areas of research. These large fields ultimately address two of the most vital questions of these times: what should we care about and how are resources allocated. The world desperately needs the best thinking on these matters to guide individual and collective endeavours.

Strikingly, research in both these fields is financially precarious. This is masked by the fact that most university research in these areas in Australia is subsidised by windfall income from overseas students. Such income is likely to decline significantly as universities across Asia become more globally competitive. It is really shocking that core intellectual work in areas of such obvious relevance has had serious difficulty developing a realistic and sustainable financial platform.

In fact, as we shall show, this precarious situation is caused by flaws in the way research is conducted and organised. This is a symptom of a deeper problem. But the goal of improving the model of research is not that universities will benefit; the ultimate aim is that society should benefit.

II: The best model

The best-developed model of research is found in medical faculties. In recent times, medical faculties, have by far the largest research budgets. For instance, at the University of Melbourne almost half the research income comes from biomedical research. What are they getting right?

There are two key elements of medical research that explain its tremendous social impact and strong financial base. Medical research is mission driven. It establishes real goals. Medical research sets out to develop effective treatments for identified conditions – cardio-vascular diseases, cancer or mental illness (to start the list). These goals are widely shared. Everyone wants improvements in these areas.

The idea of mission-driven research can be easily stated. But its importance cannot be emphasised enough. Everything flows from it. Essentially, medical faculties are organisations devoted to fulfilling a great mission.

The second element is that medical research is vertically integrated. This is a somewhat technical way to describe the flow of information between different stages in a process. Imagine a dedicated athlete training for a competition. Everything she does – what she eats, how much she trains, what exercises she concentrates on, her mental preparation – is directed to a later stage: the actual performance on the day. But the preparation is only helpful if it is guided by insight into what it would actually take to perform well in the race. In other words, in a well-integrated process, the needs of the final stage dictate earlier efforts. Just as earlier efforts are directed to ensuring eventual success. This is the ideal. In practice such integration is not perfectly achieved. Nevertheless, it points to an important lesson that other fields of research could learn from.

The idea of vertical integration is not new. Its classic formulation comes, in fact, from Aristotle and arises from his analysis of the relationship between means and ends. If you seek a particular end, you have to marshal adequate means. But the path to that end is governed by developments in the means available. In Aristotle's example a bridle manufacturer has to take into account the needs of riders. But riders can enhance their skill by adopting fine innovations from the manufacturers.

In medical terms to be healthy demands organising the means of prevention and cure. But equally, understanding how to do this depends on the development of available techniques. Preventing or treating an illness alters with improvements in science and technology.

The process may be thought of as a 'value-chain' – with different stages adding value to the achievement of the end at which they are directed. Vertical integration, therefore, means oversight, engagement with or even control (sometimes through ownership) of the various stages of a process.

Medical faculties have pursued vertical integration to a remarkable degree. In order to carry out their mission, they need access to the people with the problems. So, they are closely involved in hospitals. Those in need come to them, so that their actual diseases and problems can be studied first hand, and the efficacy of treatment observed in action.

In order to make treatment more effective, new techniques and understanding is required so, of course, research is necessary. But that research is in constant contact with practice. Often the same people are involved in both. The consultant who diagnoses a rare eye disease in a particular patient in the morning, is in the afternoon conducting research. And later in the year will attend a conference on laser technology and another on developments in anti-inflammatory pharmacology.

Information and insight flow relatively seamlessly between the different stages of the chain, from basic research to the patient and back, often within one institution. This means that the research is powerfully connected to critical sources of evidence: how things actually go with patients. So 'blue sky' fundamental research can over time connect in a powerful way with its final purpose – keeping people healthy. A key point, is that the problem is brought to the researchers. Patients come to the hospitals seeking diagnosis; drug companies seeking research output come to the university.

Vertical integration relies on good management. The medical education process helps with this because as individuals move through it, they are introduced in a gradual way to greater levels of administrative responsibility. Thus by the time someone is appointed to a senior role, they have already had experience managing people and resources, tried and tested in lesser leadership roles.

The effectiveness of the mission can be traced and analysed from laboratory bench to bedside to national statistics. This enables resources to be allocated in a principled way. Ultimately the aim of the people in the laboratory is to make a difference to the statistics. And it is possible to make an informed decision about the success, or otherwise, of their efforts. The people who have oversight of the whole chain have a good grounding in most of its parts. The character of medical training ensures that specialists have a working understanding of the whole.

The medical faculty manages the money flow and investment; some stages are costly, but the cost can be met because they are linked effectively to other stages that are income generating. The institution purses or has ownership (in some appropriate form) of all the key stages. In fact, there are many forms of vertical connection. Sometimes there is actual ownership: a medical faculty might own patents or sophisticated research facilities. Sometimes there is a market interface: independent institutions or corporations interact with the faculty. But in all cases there is strong mutual understanding of the purpose of the interaction and a powerful flow of information: 'you need, we need…'

The medical model also exhibits a high degree of 'horizontal integration': research in one institution is integrated with that in others. In other words, researchers working on immunology in one institution are in close contact with, and learn from, those elsewhere working in the same field. They are all engaged in fundamentally the same project. They are all working, ultimately, to answer the same socially important questions. Therefore important research done anywhere is necessarily of value to researchers everywhere. But it is significant that this horizontal connectedness is embedded within a powerful vertical organisation. As a result the benefits that come from horizontal connections – many researchers in different institutions sharing their knowledge – end up directed towards social benefits.

In these ways, a medical faculty integrates all the activities needed to solve the problems. It pursues vertical integration, because you must, if you are serious about fulfilling a mission.

Because vertical integration has often been deployed in business practice it is worth spelling out the difference between the medical model and, for instance, a supermarket chain, which – in a commercial sense – might be a prime example of the phenomenon. The difference lies in the mission. Although the supermarket may keep an eye on the social good, and argue that providing low cost food is of collective benefit, its mission is bounded by its duty to provide financial returns to its shareholders. By contrast: although a medical faculty must keep an eye on finances and cannot function well unless it uses resources efficiently and operates in surplus, its mission is bounded by its duty to provide the best possible medical treatment, at an acceptable cost, to society. A healthy financial position is not a goal in itself but a necessary condition for the pursuit of the mission.

AN INTERESTING FEATURE of the medical model is that it draws the boundaries of the institution in a way that is, as yet at any rate, anomalous within universities. If you were to draw a map of the people and assets directed to medical research, it would include businesses, government and public infrastructure all operating in close connection with medical faculties. The faculty does not stop at the end of an office corridor or at the door of a laboratory. It extends, more or less explicitly into a wide range of institutions, corporations and organisations. But, of course, all this occurs for the sake of vertical integration: so that the required resources can be harnessed and directed to a great public end.

Beyond the medical field we actually see cases in which powerful agents in lower stages of the value-chain develop their own research entities. Thus Apple and Google, which are large consumers of research, have taken the view that it is more efficient for them to own their own research institutes. McKinsey and Co has vigorous in-house training that focuses on certain aspects of philosophy: the rigorous analysis critique, formulation and reformulation of arguments. These examples of vertical integration – successful businesses take ownership of a resource that otherwise they would have to purchase in the market – are reminders that research can be highly valued without universities. And although universities retain many advantages which derive from having been involved in research longer, and more widely than any new competitors, they are not guaranteed 'first mover' benefits forever. Increasingly, universities compete in the market place of ideas and, if research is to flourish, it must be organised on a more efficient and effective model.

The impressive cohesion and efficacy of the medical model is not an accident. If we scroll back a hundred years, this medical model did not exist. It is an achievement: the result of crucial strategic insights, decisions and the evolution of a culture over a long period of time.

III: Learning the lessons

Our question is how research should be organised and undertaken. The radical answer – drawn from study of the medical model – is that this should be done in the light of two great, interconnected principles – *mission driven and vertically integrated*.

By comparison with the medical model, research in economics and the humanities is radically under-developed. It's not, of course, that research does not occur. Obviously it does, involving many hundreds of academics across Australia. Let's consider how these disciplines might evolve if it were mission driven.

The mission-driven approach to research is not dominant outside medical faculties. In economics and the humanities, research is fundamentally conceived as 'investigator driven'. That is, individuals or small teams decide what they would like to work on, seek funding, and pursue their interests.

The investigator-led strategy has deep roots in the history of universities. Academics in most fields have been incentivised as contributing to the advancement of a discipline – or, more recently, to the evolution of interdisciplinary research. This is not, in principle, opposed to the fulfillment of a social mission. It's just that the mission is an object of distant and indirect hope. One undertakes research on Kant or the stockmarket in the belief that eventually this will benefit the wider community. The knowledge gained will trickle down or influence students who will perhaps later put it to work in the world.

Collectively, investigator-led research pursues many different topics. And while these have affinities and correlations, they are not organised around a clear, over-arching ambition. In fact, such an ambition would sound bizarre within the existing culture of the humanities or economics. It's just not what the disciplines do, or how they are structured, or what people signed up for, or how the system works. You don't go into economics or the humanities to undertake a specific mission, you become a researcher in these fields in order to pursue your own research interests, in the belief that indirectly and in the long-term this will turn out to be beneficial for society.

We believe, however, that these fields should take inspiration from the mission driven approach to research. Starting perhaps with pilot projects, economics and the humanities should evolve into mission driven endeavours.

What are the great ends that research in economics or the humanities should seek; what great societal problems should they set themselves to answering (or at least to contribute to answering)? To state this in term of our initial question: *What valuable knowledge do they aim to create and bring to powerful effect in the world?*

- Allocation of resources: How do we set incentive structures in society to ensure the provision of basic resources like food and water to everyone (e.g. to alleviate poverty)?

- Short- vs. long-term: How do we make sure that in our decisions we adequately take into account the long term? How do we avoid unwanted negative consequences of our actions on later stages of our lives (e.g. retirement savings, healthcare), and on the lives of future generations (government debt, pollution, running down infrastructure)?

- Innovation: How do we direct resources towards fundamental, long-term research as a basis for future technologies? How do we train enough scientists to address the undersupply of qualified workers in science and technology?

- Art: what is art, why does it matter – and if it does matter, how can we get the kind of art we need?

- Value: How do we quantify the economic and social value of cultural activities and engagements?

- Experience: How do we learn, individually and collectively from experience – our own and that of others (including the accumulated experience of the past)? Are there specific things that, in general, should be learned?

- The quality of relationships: how to we improve the quality of our relationships to people, ideas and objects?

- Psychological well-being: The causes, impact and resolution of issues caused by psychological unease?

Before examining two of these great projects in detail, we address the idea of vertical integration as it applies to economics and the humanities. Different academic disciplines vary greatly in the extent to which they control (or interact with) the value chain. As we described, medical research tends to control many stages of the chain all the way from basic research in molecular genetics, for example, to performing surgery in university-affiliated hospitals. While other

disciplines, such as philosophy, cover only a narrow stage of the value chain, often only certain aspects of basic research.

So, what determines the 'boundaries'? Medical faculties often control hospitals or parts thereof because this facilitates their ability to treat medical problems. The question is, why are other parts of the university less integrated with, and control, far fewer stages of the chain?

The fact is, researchers in many disciplines have no interest in or incentive to engage powerfully with the rest of the chain (or to then create a virtuous circle). And that is a serious problem because, as we have been arguing, it is through engagement with the chain that research becomes valuable to others. The whole point is that research, ultimately, needs to matter in the lives of others. And the value chain is sensitive and responsive to what other people happen to care about.

SUPERANNUATION IS A good test case to study this value chain. Australia – like many other countries – faces a huge long-term economic problem caused by demographic changes. As the population as a whole ages, and as people on average live longer, and medical as well as living expenses increase, the question of how to provide adequate income post-work becomes more and more pressing. Can this problem be solved?

In pursuit of an actual solution, university based researchers would need much closer contact with superannuation funds. What problems do they take themselves to face? What problems could they most accurately be seen as facing? What kind of knowledge to they really need and how could relevant knowledge be created and brought to them in useable form?

Voluntary savings might be crucial. We need to understand much better how and why people save and (ideally) how to actually get more people in Australia to save more. For this to happen, we need empirical research on the causes of prudence. Or if mandatory saving is envisaged, how can this approach gain enough popular acceptance to be politically viable? This highly 'practical' issue dovetails with deep philosophical concerns about the relation between short-term and long-term concerns. Indeed the topic originates with Plato and Aristotle. Plato conceives of the problem in terms of ignorance: the imprudent person does not fully understand what is at stake. Aristotle tries to understand the psychology of discounting the future and under the moral concept of weakness of will – the individual does in some way understand what is at stake, but does not act upon that knowledge.

In other words, we begin to see how a mission driven research project would lead to vertical integration. It's not that universities need to own superannuation funds – a literal extension of the medical model that would wrong. Rather, integration concerns the flow of information and the understanding of the needs

of later stage users in a chain of value. For example, it's not much use coming up with a strategy for superannuation-fund management that fails because it does not take into account the actual needs of managers, or because it is not properly directed to getting their attention.

Likewise, if the aim were to actually change the behaviour of individuals – and make more people save more – we have to know a great deal about the real causes of such behaviour and about channels of influence.

A related problem is intergenerational transfer of wealth. If people don't save for their retirement, they will fall back on governments (social security). But this will likely be at the expense of future generations. The more the current generation relies on government, the less investment in the future the government will be able to make, in infrastructure, education, or research. And if the government raises more debt to finance social security expenses, there will be a higher debt burden on future generations.

Trading off short-term benefits or costs against future benefits or costs is a crucial decision that people individually and as a society make all the time, a decision that often seems to be poorly made and is yet very poorly understood scientifically.

THERE IS A FAIRLY widespread assumption that art is a public good. In some way it benefits a whole society. There exist many institutions both public and private that trade on this assumption. Art schools and state galleries are supported by taxation; there are art classes in schools indeed it forms part of the national curriculum. Even auction houses – which are ferociously commercial entities – trade on the assumption that what is being bought and sold is of high cultural worth. And high prices play a part (for better or worse) in defining excellence. Tourism is quite often interwoven with the allure of visiting major galleries or exhibitions (or other cultural icons) around the world.

This great issue is curious because there is as yet little understanding of the underlying problem. We tend to assume that all we need is more. But this does not engage with the true question: are we getting the things we need? So there is a great deal of work to be done, in the first place, in terms of consciousness-raising. This task probably arises at various stages in relation to all the great issues, but here it comes right at the start.

In connection with art, we actually see a strange phenomenon. Universities already possess close contact with, or even ownership of many key resources: they own art schools and galleries, or are intimately involved in their running. But these resources are not, as yet, organised vertically nor are they devoted to a proper mission. Their overt 'missions' – train artists, get people in to enjoy art – are just tactical goals. They are like the missions of accountancy night schools or

supermarkets – train more, get people in and sell more. These are not terrible goals by any means. It's just that they are not like the pursuit of the great ends or societal goods addressed by the medical model.

Thinking through the value of art – which includes fostering creativity, conveying important insights and educating our emotions – one might come to the conclusion that these institutions and people work with many confused and inaccurate assumptions. But getting better ideas to be powerful is a collaborative enterprise, it cannot be done simply by producing some research and conveying it in specialist journals. The ambition is to get the best understanding to flow through the practice of institutions. In other words: vertical integration.

THE ECONOMICS PROFESSOR is not likely to be a director of a merchant bank or the head of the research group in this bank – in fact, that might be regarded as a conflict of interest. Although it is not considered a conflict of interest if a medical professor is on the board of a hospital let alone a consultant in a hospital. A senior lecturer in philosophy is unlikely to work half-time for an advertising firm – although such firms have great need of expertise in defining ideas. These suggestions may sound fanciful and even offensive to the ideals of these disciplines. That's not surprising, because given the current priorities academics have not been specially or extensively trained for these roles. That should alarm us. It's not a sign of excellence that academics are unequipped by education and experience for such engagement. It is, rather, a sign that the education and experience is not what it should be (or that it is not valued by the potential employing organisation). This is not to assume that the external institutions are perfect and that all academics need to do is adapt themselves to their needs. It is part of our argument that such enterprises are often flawed in crucial ways.

A natural worry occurs here. Surely, it will be said, a philosopher working part time for an advertising firm is radically unlike a medical consultant being both a practitioner and a professor. For a hospital is ultimately directed to the same ends as research – curing diseases, restoring people to health – whereas an advertising firm has a completely different (some might say opposed) agenda to that of an arts faculty.

Imagine an alternative world in which medical practice and medical science had developed at a distance from one another. The researchers did not get involved with hospital, and regarded it as dangerous to the purity of their enterprise to do so; hospitals would set up their own research and development units that took only occasional interest in what was happening in the universities. Both sides would be radically the poorer – and the world, to be sure, would be much less well served. But isn't this a picture of where we are in the humanities and economics?

The medical model reveals that the pursuit of the public good is not at odds with integration with markets.

Medical faculties tend to be wealthy because they serve the public good so well – and because of the reverence that attaches to their life saving and enhancing *raisen d'être*. And it is a mistake to suppose that a school of philosophy, say, is short of funds because it is so devoted to public ends. Rather it is the perceived lack of contribution to the public good that explains why society does not more richly support and reward its academic philosophers.

The root of the confusion is this. The public good, as a real end, has to be enacted. People have to value the ideas promulgated by the professors; find them helpful able to be put to work in people's lives and businesses and in the processes of state activity. And, in practice, success in these activities is tied up with money, our primary means of exchange. You may decide, for societal reasons, to make a service free – but if that service is truly valued, there will be political will to enable its free or at least subsidised provision. The problem with much research is not that it is too noble in purpose to be supported by any kind of market. Rather it is too disconnected, too remote from actual interests and needs to earn widespread devotion, love and (in the end) money.

Vertical-integration is a necessary – but difficult – requirement for a flourishing research culture in the humanities and economics. The traditions of academic life have, in effect, worked in the opposite direction. To pick up the earlier sporting metaphor: in these areas researchers are (frequently) like the training program for an athlete. The wider world is, in effect, the big event. But the training has become separated from competitive performance. It's as if, in these fields, we have decided just to concentrate on preparation and have lost sight of what, in the end, the training is for.

For instance, a successful researcher in philosophy, working on Kant's theory of beauty would (in the normal course of things) be deeply concerned to gain 'horizontal' impact: to be highly regarded by other researchers in the same field. But she might give only occasional thought to what these ideas need to do outside the academy, and how they would have to be shaped and conveyed in order to achieve this. Vertical integration, leads to both consequence and prosperity, whereas horizontal integration on its own leads to neither.

IV. Reforms for progress

We have argued, that research is a contribution to an end that lies outside and beyond itself. If the 'end' is benefit to society, what are the means to embrace it?

What steps do universities need to take, with respect to research, to realise the task?

The analysis of mission-driven vertical integration sheds light on the difficult, but crucial issue of research assessment. It reveals what research assessment should try to measure – to quantify the value of the actual contribution to a significant end. The highest value research makes a necessary, major contribution to a very worthwhile end. In terms of the value-chain analysis: assessment should measure the *value added* by research at some point along the value-chain.

This point is extremely important for the relationship between universities and their societies (what we have called 'the social contract of research'). Universities need to be very adept at making a contribution to society, and need to measure the quality and quantity of that contribution. The question is, what are the indicators of the value of the contribution?

One option is to look at demand. Someone further down the chain values knowledge – they want it, or need it for some reason. Hence, level of demand is an indicator of perceived value. But it is crucial to distinguish between demand at a further stage of the chain and demand within the same stage. There is horizontal, or internal, demand for research within the academic community. But this is not the same as external, or vertical, demand. While the quality of interaction amongst academics is obviously important, it does not directly address the fundamental issue behind research assessment, which is the contribution beyond the academy.

For example when the Australian Research Council gives a grant in exchange for research it is the expression of demand. But the ARC is not an actual user of research, it does not stand further down the value chain. It should be understood as a facilitator, not a user.

There is an unfortunate – but very understandable – tendency in the academy to regard winning grants as the objective. That's because in practice, it is an institutional measure of success. It creates academic employment; it brings prestige within the peer group. This need not be a problem in itself. But it is a problem when getting grants is treated as the main game. Properly understood, the grant is only a facilitator, it provides an opportunity to create value for users beyond the academic system. In many subject areas, internal demand is in fact the basis of research assessment. Because, for the most part, it is journal publications that determine the outcome of the assessment.

We have identified six proxies for external demand: Evidence of external interest; readership; industry consultation; industry based grants; career paths of graduate students; extent of career cross-over and earnings from intellectual property. Demand is not a perfect measure of the value of a contribution. But if

we measure demand that provides an incentive for a very important undertaking: the propagation of demand.

This is a really central point. Worries about market indicators are really worries about the quality of demand. To be a bit brutal: when academics decry the market, what they mean is that they think the market is not intelligent or sensitive enough to appreciate what they have to offer. This must sometimes be true. But it invites a mistaken response.

The temptation is to say that because the market is (in this instance) wrong, we should keep on producing the research that they should value, but actually don't. Which is noble, but futile.

Rather we should take very seriously the underlying insight: they should value it, but don't – the sign of an important opportunity. But to grasp and exploit the opportunity we would have to acquire new skills: precisely, those required to create demand.

Broadly speaking, research in universities was not developed with what might be a bit brutally called 'selling' in mind. The assumption seems to have been that either research would trickle down serendipitously (which turns out to be slow and random) or that 'users' would come to the university (which turns out to be over-optimistic). Those assumptions made more sense in the past when universities had greater cultural authority and when there was less of a competitive market for ideas. The fact is, that if we want the ideas we create to be powerful we have to reconstruct the university as an institution that 'sells', as well as creates, ideas.

The word 'sells' may be slightly misleading. We do not mean that the university has to set up a stall and put a price tag on intellectual content. Rather, they need to become agents that strive to create demand for products (that is, ideas) that they believe should be consumed because they are genuinely beneficial to society.

The quantification of internal demand is not a problem – so long as we recognise it for what it is. When the chain is operating well, then the level of internal demand is a sign of real achievement. But in the absence of external demand, the level of internal demand is actually a problem. For that is the situation in which a lot of academics are producing work, citing one another, reviewing and arguing – when there is no demand in the rest of society for what they do. In other words, high internal demand and low external demand is a sign that the system is broken – that academics are only talking to themselves. At the worst case, areas with low internal and external demand, suggests a marginal activity. On the other hand, high internal and external demand signals a vigorous intellectual culture, and the other permutation of high external demand and low internal signals an area ripe for development.

The assessment process allocates resources and operates as an incentive mechanism.

We want to move more research towards the quadrant of high internal and external demand. There is a need to measure the integration of internal and external demand. The first stage is to assess external demand; since this is our biggest problem we should use this as a multiplier. That's because internal demand (the level of interaction amongst academics) is more important if it is more closely bound up with external demand.

There are particular problems that could arise with the model so far described. But these could be avoided by building in safeguards. The first is that it does not accommodate the long developmental trajectory of certain fields of research. It does not accommodate 'blue sky' or fundamental research. This may feed into the value chain, but it will feed into the academic level first. A researcher who embraced the idea of external demand might still be caught out by a long time-lag in the evolution of demand, which will be there one day.

The second is that demand may be a poor indication of public good. That's because the 'value to a later stage user' is not necessarily the same as the 'contribution towards a good end'; these two would only be the same if the later stage users were accurately pursuing good ends. The solution to both these worries lies in the role of the university as a research institution.

We have been arguing for mission-driven vertical integration. And within that framework, long evolution and fundamental research are not misunderstood or devalued; on the contrary, they are grasped as necessary features of a complex process – the medical model shows why this is the case.

The trouble for fundamental research and long time frames occurs – precisely – when they are disconnected from missions and from vertical integration. The time-frame and blue-sky problem is solved, commercially, by absorbing the lessons of experience. Car manufacturers, for example, know how long it takes to go from a new concept to sales. It might be five or ten years. Their blue-sky thinking is not expected to pay its way in the short term. Rather, it is funded because they have a system that enables insights to flow into later stages of development. So, people involved in later stages are brought into close and continued contact with those working on fundamental problems. This, obviously requires an organisation that is big enough to absorb costs in long-term projects that are, nevertheless, financially viable. And it requires an organisation that knows how to feed off fundamental work.

When research is integrated vertically, it is assessed by near stage users – so the assessment process is more accurate. This does not count against small areas of research, because these are integrated in bigger projects. If funding is directed to a mission, then it is allocated internally according to the judgment of those

who understand the whole process. Thus, if the mission is to improve savings or transform the art world, there is an obvious place for high level, abstract research. That value does not initially have to be grasped by society as a whole – it has to be grasped by those responsible for the mission. And, ultimately – as with medical research – the public perception of fundamental research evolves. There is sympathy and funding for fundamental work in medical research because there is confidence that this is a crucial early stage in the delivery of things that are obviously of public value.

Rather than counting against fundamental research and long time-frames, the model of research we advocate would strengthen its position.

Another worry is that a business that pays for research might put pressure on researchers to arrive at favourable results. The wine industry might like the idea of research the shows that drinking more wine is good for life-expectancy. An internet games corporation might want to sponsor research on the expectation that it will show that playing lots of games makes you smart. But these contracts for research sound compromised because they do not simply search for the truth, but tend (one might readily think) to invite undue effort to ensure the desired results.

However, this real danger can be addressed. In the long-run it benefits an institution to maintain a high reputation for integrity. In the short-term there are commercial advantages to producing and selling one-sided research. But the great problems cannot be solved in this fashion. So, it would be in the interests of an institution to guard against its researchers undertaking such compromised work. In order to tread the narrow path of worldly impact and intellectual honour (and we have to have both) institutions will have to evolve effective methods of oversight that can keep the long-term advantages in view.

RECENTLY A VERY high calibre student was talking through career options. 'I've been thinking about doing a Ph.D,' he said, 'but I've decided I'd rather work in an investment bank where all the action is.' It's an instructive anecdote. Where does the fault lie? Is it that this very able student misunderstands that the Ph.D. is the road to the great arena? In which case, how did this misconception get entrenched in the mind of the kind of student we'd like to see continuing with higher education? Or is it that – in a rough and ready way – it picks up on an awkward truth: as things stand, academia (in crucial areas) is not 'where the action is.'

The Ph.D. is essentially a research degree. It is designed to qualify an individual to undertake serious research. Therefore, as our conception of research evolves the requirements of the Ph.D. should develop accordingly. We need to refine our thinking about the kind of education and training involved in undertaking a doctoral degree.

Firstly, we need to ensure that candidates see the big picture. We need them to thinking of their research as part of a value chain. More than just 'seeing' this, they need to be equipped to fit their work into such a chain. This is especially true for those candidates who will go on to become leaders in their fields and take up responsibility for the futures of their disciplines.

Secondly, we need to broaden the experiential base of the degree. Ideally, candidates should have experience that brings them close to the needs of later-stage users. A Ph.D. student in literature might spend a year with an accounting firm; an economics Ph.D. might spend a year with an advertising firm.

Above all, we want to create an intellectual culture in which it is *de rigeur* to ask seriously about the value of research and in which that question is answered ambitiously and accurately, and in which the answers flow on to guide the practice of research.

Obviously, this would add to the time and cost of undertaking (and delivering) a doctoral education. We'd suggest – therefore – a pilot program, involving a small number of students. The aim is to show that the extra investment is well made. The later benefits – in terms of career advancement, personal income, improved focus of research, better understanding of the needs of later-stage users, improved relationship between the university and industry, will justify the greater initial cost. And that budgeted in an appropriate time frame this will prove to be a profitable exercise.

IN THIS ESSAY we suggest that universities reorganise their research activities in a new way. Research activities should be integrated vertically across different stages of the research chain, from very fundamental research to application. And research should be driven by missions, with the aim to solve the big problems society is facing. But ideally integration of universities with the rest of society would happen much more broadly. Teaching as well should be more closely connected with society, for society (e.g. businesses) to be able to communicate to universities their needs (e.g. the skill set graduates should have), and for universities to prepare students better for their lives outside of university.

The title of this essay – which comes from Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1620), a fantasy about a whole society organised around a research institute – alludes to the twin concerns which a really successful research culture will have to integrate. Firstly, we must be merchants of *light*. That is, we must propagate the truth (as best we can grasp it); in particular, the truth that enlightens: that is, that guides of understanding of issues that are important to us.

And, secondly, we have to be *merchants* of light: we have to operate within a competitive market of ideas. In our society, markets are the primary mechanism through which we allocate our resources. Today, being able to exchange an idea

for another is an important sign that the idea is important to someone else. It's not so much that we have to make a profit by selling intellectual content – although that is an important signal. It's rather that ideas become active and powerful through market structures. We want our best ideas to be important in the world. We have to achieve consequence in the form appropriate to our society. And that means internalising the idea that we are, in a noble sense, merchants of light.

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Thinking for money

Moral questions for Australian research

Robert Nelson

AMONG the highest hopes for Australia is our intellectual capacity. We already have a substantial profile in education and research, underpinned by a vigorous culture of independent debate which promotes original scientific ideas as well as theory and analytical narrative in the humanities. Our sceptical and anti-authoritarian temper, already manifest among primary school children, serves us well when it comes to challenging canonical verities.

Australia is also capable of producing a lateral critique of the world thanks, among other factors, to the independent non-globalised worldview of our Indigenous people, whose artistic productions have shown cultural leadership on a world stage. So Australia is good for thinking. But I wonder: is it good for research? When it comes to how we do research – which perhaps represents the pinnacle of thinking – what moral, creative and cultural leadership does Australian research management offer?

Contemplating the criteria that the Australian Research Council uses for evaluating applications (itself mirrored in numerous other research selection and evaluation processes) presents a potential moral lacuna. A very large proportion of the ARC's judgement is attributed to the applicant's track record, begging the question: is it fair?

Imagine an undergraduate marking rubric where 40 per cent of the grade is attributed to the marks that you got in your previous essays. Throughout secondary and tertiary education, we scrupulously hold to the principle that the work of the student is judged without prejudice on the basis of the quality of the work. The idea that we might be influenced by the student's grade point average is preposterous. Either the academics who mark have the faculty of judgement to assess independently or they do not; if they cannot rely on their independence of judgement, they should not be in the business of assessment.

Research managers would argue that grant processes are not about assessing research but assessing a proposal for future research. Proposals are funded on

the basis of past research – which is reckoned to be predictive – as well as ideas for new work; and this prospective element makes it more analogous to a scholarship, which is decided on the basis of past scores in undergraduate performance. But the problem with this logic is that each of those past scores from school to honours is established on the basis of fully independent evaluations (where at no stage is past performance counted), whereas many of the metrics used in research have a dirty component of past evaluations contaminating fresh judgements. Track record is a kind of aristocratic capital inherited from one circumstance and passed on to another; and, like some reputational arrogance, it is held up by an inscrutable chain of congealed approbation.

To be fair, there are parallels between research grants and employment – it could be held that the contract established between funding body and academic is analogous to getting a job. As with a selection process for appointing applicants to an academic post, we are happy to aggregate the judgement of others in previous evaluations; we assiduously examine the CV and we assume that previous judgements were independent in the first place. But is this not a portrait of moral complacency, where we justify one flaw by the consolation that it is no worse than another flaw?

A good selection panel will, in any case, take the track record with due scepticism; after all, dull and uncreative souls could walk through the door with a great track record. If the selection panel is earnest about employing the best applicant, its members will read the papers or books or musical scores or whatever the applicant claims to have done, irrespective of where they are published, on the principle that you cannot judge a book by its cover. The only reason that research panels attribute 40 per cent weighting to track record is so as not to have to make a fully independent evaluation and take responsibility for it.

If, as an art critic, I relied on track record for even 5 per cent of my judgement, I would be considered incompetent and ineligible for the job. It would be professionally derelict to stand in front of an artwork and allow my perception to be swayed by the artist's CV; and I am not sure what makes it more ethical to institutionalise such prejudice with a research proposal, which also deserves a totally innocent experience of merit. My judgement must absolutely not defer to anyone else's, even to a small percentage. If it does, I disappoint the public in its expectation of independence and, above all, I disappoint my conscience.

MY CONCERN IS not with the ARC, which is no worse than the several institutions that are its suppliants. My concern is with research management as an arbitrary code across Australian institutions, which is less than creative and open to moral questions.

The excellence of institutions is understandably tied to their research. But how do we measure research – which has been the subject of the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative – when the measure is likely to dictate research production and promote research in its image? Sadly, while the ERA had the potential to realise an unprejudiced and independent evaluation exercise, it adopted the prior evaluation dependency which characterises most processes in research management. In 2010, the ERA evaluations were informed, among other things, by 'Indicators of research quality' and 'Indicators of research volume and activity'. Amazingly, research income featured in *both* of these measures. Even volume and activity are measured by income.

So we substantially measure research according to income, irrespective of the proportion that goes to eyeballing publications – intellectual objects that one can read and judge for oneself as an independent scrutineer. Again, we should not especially blame the ARC, because it follows the typical patterns that institutions and external agencies worldwide have adopted in ranking universities. But with regard to the ARC, its embarrassments over the ranking of journals (gratefully rescinded by the government last year) were a typical case of research management trying to judge quality mechanistically. In essence, its leadership on that score amounted to judging a book by its cover, which even children are taught never to do; I still blush that so many top academics were complicit in maintaining that prejudice, like brand-snobs who will only consider Prada or Moschino or Kenneth Cole. And while the Commonwealth eventually revoked this backward practice, analogous distortions of judgement persist in the arts and humanities, as with the categories of publication that are determined on the basis of refereeing or commercial distribution (as if that matters or can ever be consistent) which have a retrograde influence on open-source publishing – so clearly progressive and in the public interest – through the internet.

How wonderful, then, that we have research income as an objective metric which avoids such embarrassments! Research income is the major driver, as they say, for institutional funding as well as being a key indicator in various league-tables that are not the responsibility of the ARC, the top places on which are jealously contested for obvious reasons. Inside institutions, research income is used to determine all kinds of benefits, such as Research Training Scheme places and scholarships for research graduates. And so we see the same problem. We judge merit by a deferred evaluation, in this case according to the grants that the research has been able to attract. It entrenches past judgement on criteria which may be fair or relatively arbitrary.

The grant metric is applied in various contexts with little inflexion beyond benchmarking according to disciplines. In any given field, academics are routinely berated for not attracting research funding, even when they do not need it. They are reproached for not pursuing aggressively whatever funds might be available in the discipline and which their competitors have secured

instead. As a result, their research, however prolific or original in its output, is deemed to be less competitive than the work of scholars who have gained grants. So their chances at promotion (or even, sometimes, job retention) are slimmer. Such scholars live, effectively, in a long research shadow, cold and punished for their failure to get funding, even when the intellectual incentives to do so are absent.

Directing a scholar's research by these measures might be suspected of being not only somewhat illogical but immoral. On average, the institution already directs more than a third of the salary of a teaching-and-research appointment toward research. That percentage should be enough to write learned articles and books, if that is the kind of research a scholar does. In certain fields, the only reason one might want a grant would be to avoid teaching or administration. But most good researchers enjoy teaching and think of it as immensely rewarding, a nexus which, in any other circumstance, we should be trying to cultivate. I have always found it sad that the rich synergies between education and research are implicitly devalued by an overriding structure which promises a delivery from teaching, as if this extrication is academically redemptive.

To get out of administrative duties is more admirable; however, even a $30,000 grant entails considerable administration, and with larger grants there is more employment, and thus more administrative work. You end up with more paperwork, not less, if you win a grant. The incentives to gain a grant are much less conspicuous than the agonies of preparing the applications, which tie the researcher into a manipulative game with no intrinsic reward and a great likelihood of failure and even humiliation by cantankerous competitive peers.

Because the natural incentives are absent, the unwilling academic has to be compelled by targets put into some managerial performance development instrument, where the need for achieving a grant is officially established and the scholar's progress toward gaining it is monitored.

As a means of wasting time, this process has few equivalents; but if it were only wasteful, we could dismiss it as merely a clumsy bureaucratic incumbency that arises in any institution that has policies. But after a long period of witnessing the consequences (as one of those erstwhile academic managers) I suspect this wasteful system may also be morally dubious, because its inefficiencies are so institutionalised as to disadvantage researchers who are honourably efficient.

As a measure of the prowess of research, research income has a corrosive effect on the confidence of whole areas and academics who, for one reason or another, are unlikely to score grants. Research income is a fetishised figure – it is a number without a denominator. If I want to judge a heater, I do not just measure the energy that it consumes but the output that it generates as well;

because these two figures stand in a telling relationship to one another: the one figure can become the denominator of the other to yield a further figure representing its efficiency.

To pursue this analogy, research management examines the heater by adding (or possibly multiplying) the input and the output. In search of a denominator, it then asks how many people own the heater and bask in its warmth. Similarly, we find out how many people generated the aggregated income and output. Sure enough, we attribute the research to people. But the figure is structurally proportional to income and therefore does not measure efficiency.

I question the moral basis of this wilful disregard for efficiency. Research management does not want to reward research efficiency and refuses to recognise this concept throughout the system. The scholar who produces a learned book or several articles every two years using nothing but salary is more efficient than another scholar who produces similar output with the aid of a grant. Alas, the concept of research efficiency is inimical to the structure of research management, because the mathematics of research quantification only contemplate research income as an arrogant numerator, perhaps to be multiplied by research output, but in no circumstances conceived as the pronumeral which divides research output to yield a construct of research efficiency.

The moral structure of Australian academia in its three main portfolios – coursework, research training and research – may be set out by analogy to certain historical epochs. Undergraduate studies may be likened to industrial modernism: efficient, keen on quality-control and risk-management, a bit impersonal to be sure, but economical, scrupulous, with aspirations to egalitarianism and a rigorous legal system to guarantee fairness of marks and opportunities.

Research graduate studies, on the other hand, would belong more to the stage of ethical development encountered in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Once their candidates have been lured and taken into the fold, a seductive protocol of favouritism develops in the name of support: the patrician supervisors quite forget the rubrics and tallies that belong to coursework but function with as much nepotism as they wish in order to swing favours, indulgences and dispensations for their protégés and launch their careers in the court or the See.

But research? Research functions according to a yet anterior model, as if deep in the archaic past. It is feudal, consisting of thousands of rival knights in small principalities, each managing its hunger in relation to any opportunistic signals that spread across the land. Once elected to the peerage, a knight or lady can depend to some extent on aristocratic privileges, which – if sufficiently established by barons who are sufficiently fat – will yield promises, fearful

pledges of continuities and support from princes. One of the main occupations of the knights is to keep pretenders out of the exclusive peerage.

If, suddenly, research efficiency became a factor in the formula – do not hold your breath – institutions would instantly scramble to revise all their performance management instruments, not because it is right but because there seems to be no moral dimension to research management, only a reflex-response to any arbitrary metric set by a capricious king. Individual cells of research management will do not what is right for research and knowledge and the betterment of the human or planetary condition but whatever achieves a higher ranking for their host institutions. Research management may be likened to sport in this regard, where the rules are largely arbitrary, and all that we can see is a contest that we are locked into and which we have to win to survive in the league.

It is commonly believed that research income as an indicator of quality is at least an economical metric, if not always fair. We tend to view such matters in a pragmatic spirit because we cannot see them in an ethical spirit. On the quality of funded research, I am personally agnostic because, when all is said and done, there is no basis for faith. There may be a strong link between research income and research quality, or there may be a weak or even inverse link, depending on the discipline and, above all, how we judge it. If a sage study were conducted in ten years' time reviewing research in the arts and humanities, for example, many good academic souls would not be surprised should the report conclude that no book developing radical ideas was written during the period on the basis of a research grant, and most funded research can be considered unimaginative, judiciously dressing up orthodoxies as progressive increments in knowledge or theory.

Perhaps, being circumspect, one could say research management is less immoral so much as amoral – in the sense of outside morality or free of ethical judgement, on the basis that it pretends to science – but any argument to unburden the field from moral judgement, thanks to an aspiration to neutrality, is not persuasive. Research management is never in a position where it can be amoral, because it concerns the distribution of assets that favour and yield advantages, and being outside the sphere of moral judgement is not an option.

It is good that we have research grants, because they allow research – especially expensive research – to prosper more than it otherwise would; but the terms of managing research, which rely so heavily on a chain of deferred judgements and which yield invidious and illogical rankings, involve processes of dubious moral assumptions. We can accept that research management is inexact and messy. None of that makes it ugly or immoral, just patchy and occasionally wrong. But the structural problems with research management go

further; they skew research and damage the academic psyche, which has the same tragic loss of good karma that is the outcome of every moral lacuna.

Lecturers commence their academic career as researchers and, from early days, are researchers at heart. They love research: they become staff by virtue of doing a research degree and are cultivated thanks to their research potential and enthusiasm. Bit by bit, and with many ups and downs, they divide into winners and losers: a small proportion of researchers who achieve prestigious grants and a larger proportion who resolve to continue with their research plans on the basis of salary, perhaps with participation in other workers' funded projects and perhaps with a feeling of inadequacy, in spite of their publications, sometimes promoted by pressure from their supervisor. Within this stressful scenario, even the successful suffer anxiety; and for the demographic as a whole, the dead hand of research management makes them anxious about their performance. In relatively few years, academics become scared of research and see it as more threatening than joyful; they pursue it with an oppressive sense of their shortcomings, where their progress is measured by artificial criteria devised to make them unsettled and hungry.

Though we dress up this negotiation in the language of encouragement, it is structurally an abusive power relationship that demoralises too many good souls in too little time. It is not as if we do not know about this attrition of spirit, that many academics get exhausted and opt out of research with compound frustration for good reasons.

Research management, which governs the innovative thinking of science and the humanities, is neither scientific nor humane nor innovative; and my question, putting all of this together, is whether or not it can be considered moral or in any way progressive to match the hopes that we have in research itself. A system of grants, however arbitrary, is not immoral on its own, provided that it is not coupled to other conditions that affect a scholar's career. This process of uncoupling research evaluation from grant income on the one hand and future intellectual opportunities on the other seems necessary to its moral probity. Is it ethically proper to continue rating researchers by their grant income simply because it is convenient in yielding a metric for research evaluation? The crusade to evaluate research has been conducted on a peremptory basis, either heedless of its damaging consequences or smug in the bossy persuasion that greater hunger will make Australian research more internationally competitive.

Is such a system, so ingeniously contrived to spoil the spirits of so many researchers likely to enhance Australia's competitiveness? We were told at the beginning of the research evaluation exercise that the public has a right to know that the research it funds is excellent. But after so many formerly noble institutions have debased themselves by manipulating their data sets toward a

flattering figure, we have no more assurance of quality than we did before evaluating it. Besides, no member of the public that anyone can name – other than perhaps one belligerent stirrer who also cast aspersions on the legitimacy of Aboriginal people – has ever entertained any doubts about the quality of Australian research. Who are these people who demand reassurance of quality in research beyond the bureaucrats who instigated the various schemes? The conspicuous public attitude to research is respect and admiration, bordering on deference. So I wonder if there is any justifiable basis for research evaluation other than to provide the illusion of managerialism, or perhaps a misguided ideology that identifies hunger and anxiety as promoting productivity? I see massive disadvantages in our systems of evaluation but fail to see any advantages.

To maintain this disenfranchising system in the knowledge of its withering effect strikes me as morally unhappy and spiritually destructive. It would take a diabolical imagination to come up with a system better contrived to wreck the spirits of so many good researchers and dishearten them with their own achievement. It needs to be rebuilt from the ground up and on the principle that dignifies the generosity and efficiency of researchers. I look forward to a time when the faith that the public has in our research is matched by the faith that researchers themselves have in the structures that manage them.

Associate Professor Robert Nelson is Associate Director Student Experience, Monash University. Among Robert's favourite themes are method and vision, as in 'Toward a history of rigour: an examination of the nasty side of scholarship', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 2011, and his book *The Jealousy of Ideas*, Goldsmiths 2009.

Robert has a research interest in sustainability, with his book *The space wasters: the architecture of Australian misanthropy*, PIA 2011, and *Moral Sustainability and Cycling*, St Andrews 2010.

He has written 1,000 articles as art critic for *The Age*, as well as two books on art, *The Visual Language of Painting*, ASP, 2010, and *The Spirit of Secular Art*, Monash 2007. Robert is a painter himself, creating scenic backdrops for Polixeni Papapetrou.

A necessary marriage

Interdisciplinary approaches in a scientific age

Ann Moyal

EARLY in 1959 the British novelist and physicist CP Snow delivered his famous Rede Lecture *The Two Cultures* at the University of Cambridge. In it, he attended to the widening separation between the cultures of science and the humanities which he believed had overtaken Western intellectual life since World War II. As a physicist and novelist with a foot in each camp, he told his audience: 'I felt I was moving among two groups – comparable in intelligence, identical in race, not vastly different in social origin…but who had almost ceased to communicate with each other'.[1] His lecture was republished in America and extracted in a number of foreign languages, from Russian to Japanese, while his telling phrase 'the two cultures' passed into our vernacular – and with it, his belief that at a time when science was increasingly determining much of our destiny, it was 'dangerous to have two cultures which can't and don't communicate'.

Snow's message found instant resonance in Australia. During 1959, prime minister Menzies, addressing the theme of university education, took the occasion to make a strong argument for the place of the humanities in the national domain. 'We live dangerously in the world of ideas just as we do in the world of international conflict,' he declared. 'If we are to escape this modern barbarism, humane studies must come back into their own, not as the enemies of science, but as its guides and philosophic friends.'[2]

FEAR OF THE Cold War together with the bloom of liberal democratic tendencies in Australia opened new opportunities for the humanities during the 1960s, when enrolments in Arts faculties outstripped those in science.[3] Yet nationally, science was in the ascendant. The Australian Academy of Science was founded in 1954, both tax-free and financially well resourced by government; Australia's major scientific institutions – the CSIRO, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Bureau of Mineral Resources – grew as influential statutory bodies. A separate Department of Science was established in 1974 under the

Whitlam government, while three years later, under the Fraser government, the advent of an advisory Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC), with a strong membership of Academy of Science Fellows, signalled the rising prominence of science in the national polity. The impression was confirmed in 1989 by the creation of the Prime Minister's Science Council as 'the principal source of independent advice to government on issues in science and technology'.

The social sciences, by contrast, fared less favourably in the national domain. The Academy of the Social Sciences of Australia (ASSA), established in 1971, was taxed by government for several years and has been conspicuously less well-funded than its scientific sibling. The social sciences also were not mission-based and, except for a brief interlude of policy connection during the 70s, they lacked advocacy skills and failed to find an authoritative place in policy development.

Writing in his book *The Poor Relation*: A *History of Social Sciences in Australia* (MUP, 2010), Stuart McIntyre, a former ASSA president, suggests that social scientists believed they were 'undervalued', were envious of their more prosperous colleagues and 'had a readiness to take offence'. If called on by scientists to help implement their discoveries, they 'were loath to serve in subordinate roles'.[4]

Given this scenario, it is hardly surprising that a strong belief has grown up in society that it is by turning to science and technology that we will solve the nation's most critical problems regarding the environment, population, conservation, sustainability, health, ageing, security, nanotechnology and the man-made influence of climate change. All now fall into that basket so pertinently described by Julianne Schultz in *Griffith REVIEW 32* as 'wicked problems that resist simple linear solutions'.

SO WHERE DO we go from here? As long ago as the 1920s, that great scientific populariser, Jacob Bronowski, was informing us of what we in Australia now know to be a fundamental truth in floods and fires – 'Nature is more deeply influenced by human history than we once thought: it shifts under our gaze, it interacts with us and the knowledge that it yields has to be interpreted by us.'

The interpretation requires manifold inputs. In a 1990 keynote address to the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Art historian Professor Margaret Manion was at pains to stress that 'the scholarly and interpretative role of the Humanities and the arts is essential to ensure that we implement policies with both hindsight and wisdom, and that we direct concerted energies to this task'. There was cause for hope, she believed, that Australia would play a special role in the world response to the environment through its people's 'awareness of and alertness to the variegated web of values to be protected or rescued'.[5]

Addressing the topic of an 'Environmentally Sustainable Australia' on behalf of the same Academy in 2003, Tom Griffiths, Professor of Environmental History at the Australian National University, went further. Problems in the relationship between nature and culture which had once been seen as purely scientific or material or environmental, he contended, are now more readily understood as 'fundamentally social and humanist'. And here Australia, with her confrontingly different and unique ecology, had a distinctive competitive edge. Echoing Bronowski, Griffith wrote that in such a continent, 'we can never blithely assume the dominance of culture over nature, nor can we believe in the infinite resilience of the land'. In his view, an environmentally sustainable Australia would depend on our knowledge of ecosystems and resources, 'but even more on our ability to initiate, advocate and absorb radical shifts in desired life style, values and technology'.[6]

Griffiths judged that the sciences were increasingly looking to the humanities and social sciences for their prized insights of 'holism, synthesis and connectivity'. But there are many counter indications. Indeed in general the cultures of science and the social sciences continue to exhibit signs of being both spiritually and methodologically divided. Scientists cling to the concept of the so-called renowned 'authority of science', and contend that the social sciences lack the analytical rigour and standards of proof of their scientific counterparts. In turn social scientists maintain their strong commitment to their disciplinary modes and expect recognition of their particular knowledge in many science-related fields. Above all they resist the role of playing as 'extras' in a theatre where scientists define the problem, produce the solution, and ask social scientists to effect the necessary behavioural change.

Some prominent social scientists have searched for 'a collaboration of equals'. Political scientist Professor John H Howard of the University of Canberra has argued directly for a policy of integration and greater commitment to interdisciplinary research working at the boundaries of disciplines through what he terms '*a scholarship of integration*'. He sees this as 'the ability to synthesise knowledge from disparate disciplines to resolve pressing problems in the natural environment, energy, health, transport, emerging industries and innovation,' and argues that only through this broad-based approach is it possible and feasible to develop options and actions that address national problems and produce national benefits.[7]

Kindred recommendations have come from the University of Adelaide's 2010 Australian Institute for Social Research report *Connecting Ideas – Collaborative Innovation in a Complex World*, which reiterates the need to value the contribution of the humanities, arts and the social sciences and harness them for 'sophisticated collaboration' with the physical and natural sciences, technology and engineering. And notably, writing in her article 'More than human, more than nature' in *Griffith Review 31: Ways of Seeing*, Dr Lesley Head, director of the

Australian Centre for Cultural Environment Research at the University of Wollongong, has plunged to the heart of the two culture question: 'Framing an opposition between the sciences and the humanities…wastes time and effort. This is not to deny profound differences in how they go about things, nor the significant differences within what we call science and the arts… They are not facing each other across the divide; they are both facing the same direction, albeit equipped with different tools.' Hence she concludes, 'To undo the destructive practices of modernity, and reconstitute them into something better, we will need everything in the Enlightenment toolbox, science and arts included. But they will be most effective plunging into the river together, rather than attempting to bridge it.'[8]

SO, THEN – AS Nicholas Gill of the University of Wollongong's interdisciplinary School of Earth and Environmental Sciences asks in his article of the same name – 'What is the problem?' (*Australian Geographer, 2006)*. His answer returns again to the central need, true for all the social sciences, to explore the most useful way to make their disciplinary research relevant to policy makers and to close the 'research gap' between the researcher and the 'user'.[9] In an ideal world social scientists believe that they could improve policy if only they were given the chance to apply their insights. Politicians and policy makers In turn have difficulty in understanding the nuanced research of social scientists and find their advice impractical, out of kilter with political datelines, and at times misinformed. There is now a whole field of discourse in public administration and political science journals bearing on these themes.

THERE IS, HOWEVER, a real hunger for community consultation and people involvement in the solving of these 'wicked problems'. There is, too, a keen appetite for greater public communication of science. A 2011 poll conducted by the ANU Centre for Public Awareness of Science showed an overwhelming interest among the public in scientific issues – notably health, environmental and new scientific discoveries – but offered clear evidence that half the survey's respondents did not feel very well informed about science. 'What these figures suggest,' according to poll co-ordinator Will J Grant, 'is that society is tired of the message that a magic bullet might be provided by some new scientific discovery. To solve the really big problems, society wants its scientists to be engaged, realistic and integrated, working alongside and with the other committed actors of society.'[10]

IT IS A VIEW that Australia's independent-minded Nobel Laureate, Peter Doherty, is eager to support. While CP Snow asserts that 'scientists believe that they have the future in their bones', Doherty, in *The Beginner's Guide to Winning*

the Nobel Prize (MUP, 2005) observes that 'scientists are really no better at guessing the future than anyone else… Most specialists can speculate about the long term consequences of established trends, but novelty and radical change can take anyone by surprise.' In a period when anthropogenic climate change presents humanity with a greater problem than it has ever faced, Doherty affirms that it is desirable 'to move science from its remoteness and embed it much more in normal human experience'.

Against this backdrop of shifting perspectives, in February 2010 Senator Kim Carr, then minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, released the report *Inspiring Australia: a national strategy for engagement with the sciences*. Based on an edifice of leading science groups including the CSIRO, Questacon, Science Technology Australia (STA) and the ABC, its aim was to increase community knowledge and understanding of science and facilitate informed citizen participation in decision making and science policy. Importantly the statement included the social sciences and humanities as 'critical to the interface between science and society' and 'especially relevant to discussion of public engagement with the sciences'.

Well-funded by the Commonwealth government to the tune of $21 million from 2010 for three years, the *Inspiring Australia* strategy has already initiated communication conferences and a multidisciplinary workshop for discussion and exchange between a broad range of communicators, opening up dialogues between academic disciplines, between academics and policy makers, and between policymakers and the public. Subsequently, under the lee of this strategy, the Department has committed five million dollars from its 'Impact' purse to 'grants to humanities research' (ranging from $5,000 to $500,000) that will promote a link between what government continues to call the *enabling sciences* (physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics) and the social sciences, humanities and engineering.

Clearly the essence of this forward thinking stems from Senator Carr. A one-time teacher-historian-turned politician, he has expressly joined the natural and social sciences in his inclusive term *the sciences*, using the word *science* in its wider European sense as the 'systematic accrual of knowledge'. His sense of the broad church of science and of its overarching contribution to the future of *homo sapiens* and planet Earth, marked a distinctive contribution to Australia's political thinking.

THIS YEAR BROUGHT a new player, Senator Chris Evans, renamed Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Science and Research, to this promising inheritance. In April 2012, Senator Evans allocated $10 million over three years to the Australian Council of Learned Academies (embracing Science,

Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences) to enable leading researchers to conduct research to assist the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council (PMSEIC) to address the complex and diverse challenges that will shape Australia's economy and society in the future. Australia's management of science policy is lodged with the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council, functioning under the aegis of the Chief Scientist and conducted with the aid of relevant ministers and a panel of six experts representing CSIRO, Materials Science, Engineering, Medical Research, Genetics and cultural and social fields meeting three times a year. But within this ambit the hard sciences – the *enabling sciences* – prevail.

HERE THE BRITISH Government offers an instructive, alternative approach. In the past decade it has been active in attempting to address the management and balance of science and the social sciences in national policy. While a Chief Scientist has been in place in Britain since 1964 and, in recent years, ten individual Chief Scientists (wearing special hats) have been scattered through each department to fuel interdepartmental exchange on science, in 2002 a Chief Government Social Science Researcher, serviced by an Office of the Chief Social Science Researcher was established in Treasury, with responsibility for professionalising the role of social science researchers working across government and promoting evidence-based policy.

The appointee, Susan Duncan, an eminent civil servant with connections in academic, commercial and public sectors, served for three lively years, and departing pinpointed some of the thorny difficulties that face government and academics in closing the research gap. These touched the nature of social science knowledge, incomplete knowledge and inconclusive findings, the disjunction between academic research timetables and political timetables, and the problem of connecting public opinion with evaluation studies.[11] They have a familiar ring. But Duncan's advice to the social science community was bracing: 'Nowadays, it is not enough to be good at research; you have to be good at communicating, negotiating, challenging, all those things'.

EVEN SO, THERE had been substantial gains in creative development and review between policy makers and social scientists, and qualitative research had become an important part of governmental policy evaluation. Above all, Duncan underlined the need for 'horizon scanning' – looking for the problems that are coming up on the horizon – in the exploitation of research and using social research to think about and understand the things that are going to happen in the future. Despite a hiatus caused by the resignation of Duncan's successor from the post, the House of Lords Sub-Committee on Science and Technology has firmly pressed the government to reactivate the Chief Government Social Science

Researcher post and to introduce behavioural scientists into policy arenas to study and influence societal attitudes in confronting major national policy challenges that lie ahead.

AUSTRALIA'S MANAGEMENT OF science policy, and its machinery in a smaller government milieu, differs substantially from the British model, but a persuasive case can be made for the appointment of a Chief Social Scientist in Australia to work alongside the Chief Scientist in sustaining a whole-of-government approach to issues of national policy. Such a step could heighten our understanding of behavioural attitudes involving society's acceptance or denial of policy approaches, offer insights on social goals and values and directly involve the contributions of the social sciences, the humanities and arts. Speaking 'knowledge to power', a distinguished Chief Social Scientist could emerge as a vital knowledge broker across disciplines, sectors and policy.

Dr Ann Moyal is a historian and a one-time director of Griffith University's Science Policy Research Centre. A widely published author, she founded the Independent Scholars Association of Australia in 1995.

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[1] *The Two Cultures : & A Second Look*.CUP.1963] And see *From Two Cultures to No Cultures*. Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society, London, 2009

[2] Foreword to the Australian Humanities Research Council survey of *The Humanities in Australia*. Quoted Graeme Davison, 'Phoenex Rising. The Academy and the Humanities in1969,' *Humanities Australia. P 07.*

[3] Ibid.

[4] p. 223 and p. 558.

[5] Margaret Manion,' The Humanities and the Australian Environment, in D.J. Mulvaney (ed) *The Humanities and the Australian Environment.* Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1991.

[6] Tom Griffiths,' The Humanities and an Environmentally Sustainable Australia. An address to a Conference convened by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training on the subject of a Contribution of the Humanities and Social Sciences to National Research Priorities, Canberra 28 March 2003: DEST 2003, pp. 2-10.

[7] John H. Howard, CHASS Website Papers, 2008.

[8] *Griffith REVIEW 31: Ways of Seeing*, 2011, pp. 74-89

[9] Nicholas Gill, 'What is the Problem?', *Australian Geographer,* vol 34, 2006

[10] *ANU Reporter*, p 9. Autumn 2011

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Securing tomorrow's Australia today

Blind to our own success

Tapan Sarker

IS AUSTRALIA really the 'lucky country'? Not according to most Australians, who will tell you about the rising cost of living, the strain the new carbon tax will put on their household budgets, and the need to 'Stop the Boats'. Not according to industry, who frequently complain to the media that such-and-such a new law will drive them into bankruptcy if the government doesn't heed their demands. And certainly not according to our politicians, who instead focus their energy on short-term political manoeuvring calculated to gain a few Newspoll points against their opposition.

Australia's current political discourse is characterised by a denial of our current economic prosperity. This curious myopia in Australia's social and political discourse, perhaps caused by an ingrained cultural refusal to acknowledge our achievements – the 'tall poppy syndrome' – is fast becoming one of the biggest threats to Australia's future.[1] The longer we Australians refuse to see our country and our economy for what it really is, the more we risk forfeiting future opportunities. Instead of perpetuating the cultural myth that Australia is but a distant colonial outpost of Mother Britain, populated only by Steve Irwins and Baywatch babes, we need to face the reality of Australia's economic prosperity and power that exists quite independently of nostalgic political alliances with the failing economies of the United States and Europe.

CONSIDER THE UNITED NATIONS' Human Development Index, of which Australia held the top spot from the 1980s, until we were knocked down to second place by Norway at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[2] Consider the OECD's latest economic outlook, which shows that, despite the debt crises in Europe and the United States, Australia's economy remains one of the best performing in the developed world, with growth well above, and unemployment well below, the OECD average.[3] Over the past twenty-five years,

Australia experienced the highest growth in the developed world, and this growth predates the resources boom.[4] Perhaps we should start seeing Australia for the global economic leader it really is, and not as the poor cousin of the Western world.

THE GOOD NEWS for Australia doesn't stop there. This economic prosperity has made Australians some of the wealthiest people in the world: we have the highest median income and the second highest average wealth in the world, second only to Switzerland.[5] Our poorest 10 per cent of households alone have experienced faster income growth than the income growth of the rich in almost any other country, while no other country has been able to top the income growth of our richest households. All of the above and we still have the third-lowest debt and the sixth-lowest taxes in the OECD.[6] A low tax nation with high quality, state-funded institutions, good infrastructure, and a welfare system that ensures a minimum standard of living and healthcare for all – sounds like a model economy.

YET NO RECOGNITION of our global economic leadership can be found in our politics. Instead we have introverted political leaders, media scaremongering, and a curious colonial paralysis that prevents us from taking leadership on international issues. Why, when Australia is an economic leader in the developed world, should it refuse for ten years to ratify the Kyoto Protocol – because the United States also refused? Why could Prime Minister Julia Gillard admit to having no interest in foreign affairs,[7] just when the waning of the West and the rising of the East presents new opportunities for Australia, a country ideally situated between the two? Never before has a country been so ignorant of its own successes and so reluctant to build on them.[8] Australia's cultural and political myopia has birthed a lack of vision for the future.

IT IS VISION, not luck, required to secure Australia's future. Calling Australia the 'lucky country' is a misnomer: it ignores that our prosperity predates the resources boom. Although digging minerals out of the ground and shipping them to India and China has certainly been great for the economy in the past few years,[9] our prosperity can be traced to the policy reforms undertaken between 1983 and 2003 that saw Australia move away from protectionism to become one of the most flexible economies in the world. The Productivity Commission found that these policy reforms caused huge growth in Australia's productivity, which is slowing again because of the very mining boom we seek to nurture.[10] What can be learned from Australia's past experience is that far-sighted policy reforms are necessary for future prosperity. *The Economist* warns that Australians must now decide what sort of country we want our children to live in: we can enjoy

our prosperity and squander our wealth, or actively set about creating the sort of society that other nations want to emulate.[11] But vision and self-belief are something that current Australians, and their politicians, seem to lack.

This failure of vision was shown by one of Australia's most shameful recent political events: the mining tax debacle, a missed opportunity if there ever was one. Australia has some of the richest natural resource deposits in the world, profiting from the historically high commodity prices and booming demand from China and India. The value of Australia's commodity exports hit $179 billion in 2011 (a 29 per cent increase from 2010) and are forecast to reach a record $206 billion in 2012. Iron ore, coal and gold alone made up over a third of Australia's total exports in 2011.[12] Booming commodity prices may benefit mining companies and their direct employees, but surrounding communities, businesses, and non-mining industries often suffer.[13] Natural resource deposits won't last forever, and one day Australia will have to rely on an industry other than mining to drive its economic growth. A far-sighted politician would keep back and invest some of the wealth from mining so that Australia will continue to grow when the mining boom ends. In 2010, Kevin Rudd and Ken Henry proposed to do just that, with their Resources Super Profits Tax (RSPT) that would place a 40 per cent tax on the profits of mining companies above the 6 per cent rate of return. The revenue from the tax was to be used to fund increased superannuation and cut company tax: this would provide for the ageing population and help other sectors that are hurt by mining. [14]

THE MEDIA HYPE created by the mining companies and Tony Abbott against the RSPT proposal should go down in Australia's history as a period of national shame. Instead of reasoned political debate, a panicked maelstrom erupted. Fears that Australia's mining industry would be halted and economic growth would cease were widespread.[15] Advertising campaigns were launched urging Australians to support the mining industry and, by extension, Australia's future – Kevin Rudd was painted as threatening the core of Australia's economy and countless jobs. Calm was only restored when Rudd was knifed and a Prime Minister more accommodating to the mining companies was installed. The new watered-down Minerals Resource Rent Tax, negotiated between Julia Gillard and the three biggest mining companies (BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Xstrata), was criticised by economists as actually being more inefficient than the royalty charges it replaced.[16] Keep in mind that BHP Billiton reported record profits of $23 billion in 2011. Keep in mind that the commodity price boom is likely to continue into the future, but natural resource deposits are finite and that other Australian industries are struggling because of the mining boom.[17] How did we somehow end up confusing the interests of multinational mining companies with our own national interests?

AUSTRALIA MAY BE one of the luckiest countries in the world, but this came from good economic management and sound policies. Just as Rome wasn't built in a day, the benefits we now reap from Australia's current prosperity are the results of economic foresight decades ago. To ensure that future generations experience the same economic prosperity we do, we need to exercise the same economic foresight now. If Australia is to continue its prosperity, we need economically sound policies that focus on achieving long-run growth. The recent mining tax debacle shows how Australia's political discourse has become dominated by self-seeking short-termism. We need to reverse this trend. The luckiest country in the world needs a government that can work out how to stay lucky in the long term. Political short-termism does nothing to secure a future for tomorrow's Australia, nor the future of generations to come.

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY DOES not happen by chance, but by design. We need to restore a vision for the future to our politics and political debate, and policies focused on securing Australia's long-term economic prosperity. We need to focus on long-term productivity, not short-term profit, considering future generations by designing policies that secure the living standards of our children's children, not just our own.[18] Mining is a cyclical industry, and to avoid irreversible harm to our natural environment and achieve sustainable economic growth we must implement policies that ensure Australia's prosperity continues when our natural resource deposits have been exhausted. We need to secure Australia's tomorrow through implementing sound, future-focused policies today.

NATURAL RESOURCES ARE becoming ever scarcer, and wise management of these resource deposits is an area of strategic interest around the world.[19] Rather than using natural resource depletion simply to increase Australia's export figures, we need to consider how to use this wealth to ensure the long-term prosperity of all Australians. Investment in human capital, long-term community development, and redistributing the benefits from mining to ensure inclusive development can alleviate the symptoms of 'Dutch disease' in the manufacturing sector and combat the social exclusion, inequality and underdevelopment that often flows from resource extraction activities, to ensure Australia's long-term economic future. Australia is a world economic leader: the challenge now is to ensure that our economic policies reflect our economic reality, not deny it.

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A country that makes things

Rethinking and broadening manufacturing

Chris Gibson

THE announcement in August 2011 that BlueScope Steel were about to close one of its Port Kembla blast furnaces and cease steel exports quickly spurred public debate in Australia, not just about steel but about the very future of manufacturing in Australia. Australian Workers' Union national secretary Paul Howes thus suggested: 'The question the Australian community needs to ask itself – is do we want to be a country that still makes things? Do we want to value-add to our natural resources, or do we want to become just one big sandpit for China and a tourism resort for North Asia?'

In this piece I want to argue that Australia should think positively of its future as a country that makes things. Exactly what things we make, and how we make them, is the difficult part of the equation.

At the outset, the idea that Australia is 'a country that makes things' is loaded with cultural baggage. As a rhetorical device it is used regularly by union leaders and federal politicians to signal the 'real' economy of making money from material things, versus conjuring money out of thin air as stockbrokers do. This is a moral positioning: an appeal to the working-class man, to industriousness and usefulness, but also to a generation who rebuilt Australia after World War II through manufacturing industries, with memories of rations and material shortages.

I want to argue here that making things does not necessarily require this cultural baggage, or some kind of backwards steps to a protectionist era when import tariffs meant Australian fridges, shoes or cars were artificially cheap. But nor is the future of making things in Australia necessarily dependent on global markets, on competing with low wages in China or India for 'bread and butter' manufacturing. That presumes we join in the 'race to the bottom' through cheapening labour and relaxing environmental standards. Judging by the spectacular failure of Howard's WorkChoices in 2007 Australians won't accept cuts in wages and conditions in the name of global competitiveness, and in any

case our reserve army of labour is just too small. Likewise, although cynicism towards Federal Government policies on climate change is at an all-time high, Australians care deeply about the environment (especially our beaches, national parks, air and water quality) and won't accept deterioration in how industrial waste is handled simply to enable things to be made more cheaply.

So, in the face of seemingly impossible competition abroad, the question is whether it is worthwhile making things here in Australia at all?

The *Sydney Morning Herald*'s economics commentator, Ross Gittins, seems to think not. Gittins editorialised in August last year that the decline in manufacturing in Australia was part of an inevitable and permanent transition, a 'historic shift in the structure of the global economy as the Industrial Revolution finally reaches the developing countries'. According to this argument, popular among proponents of economic globalisation, all rich countries such as Australia must now find other things to do to replace manufacturing: dig up resources to supply manufacturers in China; focus on the so-called 'knowledge' industries (where the greatest proportion of the value of a product is in its intellectual or design content, not its material fabrication); become tourist destinations or service industry hubs – exporting 'know-how' rather than physical commodities. Hence for Gittins, 'the knowledge economy is about highly educated and skilled workers… Jobs in the knowledge economy are clean, safe, value-adding, highly paid and intellectually satisfying'. The *Herald*'s business editor and ex-television commentator, Michael Pascoe, agrees: 'Australia's never going back to having armies of people sewing buttons on shirts and gluing shoes together. Or at least, we should hope not.' For Pascoe, like Gittins, those wanting to maintain manufacturing in Australia merely 'want to be frozen in the past'. Education, rather than protecting existing manufacturing jobs, is the answer.

There are several problems with this line of thinking. First, it oversimplifies what we mean by manufacturing, smuggling into the debate certain assumptions (manufacturing work is deskilled and unsatisfying, requiring uneducated workers) that don't match with existing manufacturing workers, their skills, or how lots of things are now made in Australia. Over decades Australians have become expert producers of hearing aids, hi-fi speakers, agricultural equipment, kayaks, saddles, metal detectors, four-wheel-drive accessories, satellite dishes, shock absorbers, musical instruments, and many other 'quality' things, none of which rely on cheap labour or deskilled or uneducated workers. Andrew Warren, an economic geographer at the University of Wollongong, details a great example in a forthcoming book: the Australian custom surfboard industry (*Making Surfboards, Making Waves: Local Creativity and Cultural Heritage,* University of Hawaii Press, 2012). In contrast to cheap mass-produced surfboards, which are imported from China, Warren describes Australia's global dominance in custom surfboard production, given our cultural and natural

advantages as a nation of coastal-dwellers. Custom-making surfboards is a far cry from spitting out sneakers or cheap plastic toys: it requires craftsmanship, artistic flair, precise environmental knowledge of prevailing wave types and dynamics, a sense of care for the finished product and connection with the consumer who will use it. Custom-made boards last longer and perform better on Australian waves. Innovation, creativity and the knowledge economy are not separate from manufacturing, but are deeply embedded in it. The industry has survived half a century in places such as the Gold Coast, Byron Bay and Wollongong in New South Wales and Torquay, Victoria – although it now hangs in the balance, under threat from cheap standardised imports, lack of lobbying power and an ageing workforce. Beyond the high dollar are more difficult questions of industry organisation, skills recognition and succession planning.

Second, talk of the death of manufacturing in Australia stems from a predictable brand of market economics that gives scant consideration to the underlying *geography* of Australia's physical and human resources (and for that matter, to the geography of physical and human resources outside Australia too). To have abundant supplies of natural resources required to make things and to fuel their production, as well as accumulated stocks of manufacturing expertise, and yet not seek to make things from these competitive advantages, runs counter to basic laws in locational economic geography. Some products, such as paint, continue to be made in Australia because they are heavy and expensive or tricky to transport; others such as high-tensile steel and mining equipment are made here because customers in the construction, defence and resources sectors want customised products and ongoing support and therefore seek manufacturers who respond quickly, can visit in person and who speak the same language. Distance and speed still matter despite the more-integrated nature of the global economy. All countries need a certain amount of locally-based production, and necessarily so because factors of production other than cost of labour are significant.

Our natural and human resources are also geographically differentiated within Australia: skills and materials are not homogenous or evenly distributed, but clustered and specialised. Sydney does financial services, Wollongong does not – and probably never will. But Wollongong has coal, steel, enormous port capacity and specialised knowledge in industrial design, machinery, operational health and safety, robotics, battery cell technology. Beyond the consequences of an inflated Australian dollar for all forms of manufacturing, the debate about making things in Australia is therefore actually a debate about Australian regions and their differential contributions to the national picture. The thousand workers that lost their jobs at Port Kembla after BlueScope's blast furnace closure are not likely to get replacement jobs as graphic designers, financial advisers or lawyers. To suggest that workers in specialised regions must adjust to an

inevitable shift to the knowledge economy is little short of what English academic John Lovering has called a 'transition fantasy' (*Managing Cities*, Wiley, 1995), in effect calling on sacked factory workers to achieve the impossible by reinventing themselves as something they are not, or are unlikely to want to be. Meanwhile re-educating masses of workers already skilled in something is inefficient and expensive.

Yet steelworkers' skills could form the basis of new kinds of manufacturing industries geared towards solar, wind and sustainable building technologies. Reading the writing on the wall, efforts have already been made by the South Coast Labour Council to build exactly this kind of industrial base in Wollongong, with some limited federal and state funding. But much, much more is needed to support potential centres of regional expertise in new sustainable technologies, if we are to seriously compete with countries such as Germany, countries that through massive public investment have already leaped well ahead of us – and have ridden out the global financial crisis on the back of advanced manufacturing. The private sector cannot be relied upon to fund the long lead-time in research and development such industries require, nor should we expect it to wear continual losses in the early years when fledging new manufacturing industries are developed. Australia's regional economic variegation will require policy responses more subtle than generalising statements about the future of the national economy, responses that are attuned to the realities, existing skills and aspirations of workers in different regional contexts. Massive public investment in manufacturing doesn't have to be nostalgic or nationalistic. Rather, in a more calculating fashion, governments could take seriously the possibility that there are regional competitive advantages already in the hands and minds of manufacturing workers that serious long-term investment could help gear towards future needs. These are not obsolete people, regions or skills.

Third, the kind of thinking that dismisses Australian manufacturing is poorly placed to address the challenges posed by climate change and the pressing need to integrate human and ecological systems. If humans are to respond adequately to the need to reduce our carbon emissions and integrate more effectively with (rather than forever extract from) nature, then we must find ways to make things that last, that can be repaired, recycled or reused. The end-game of economic globalisation and low-cost labour is one where the only stuff we buy is cheap, poor-quality and disposable, to be replaced shortly by more cheap, poor-quality, disposable stuff. Corporations go to lengths to assure customers that their products made in low-cost labour locations adhere to standards equivalent to those in western nations. But the truth is that ever more industries are premised on the logics of the fashion cycle – furnishings, home renovation, appliances, computers, phones – where obsolescence is in-built and rapid. The retail sector is complicit in this regard. This kind of high-throughput existence isn't tenable for

humans if we are to take seriously the challenges of climate change or the need to conserve habitat and resources.

Ruth Lane from Monash University argues precisely this point in *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability* (Ashgate, 2011): what is necessary in response to climate change is nothing less than a transformation in how we connect a sense of stewardship to the ordinary things in our lives: our appliances, furniture, clothes, toys, electronics. Stewardship over material goods is a crucial ingredient in producing more sustainable households: whether people consume less, look after the things they have, repair rather than replace, or recycle materials more comprehensively when they are no longer useful. Such a sense of stewardship is not necessarily pinned to nationality: one might feel equally responsible and careful about an Italian suit or a Japanese car. The point is that people are more likely to feel this sense of stewardship over things when they are well made and clearly involve human ingenuity, care and creativity. Imagining manufacturing as only ever guided by global market forces towards low-cost labour locations and cheap price-points for finished goods is the low-road alternative. To shift manufacturing offshore doesn't alter its unpalatable elements: it simply shifts geographical scales, sending the dirty, unsafe and poorly-paid elements of making things to some other country – an option that surely isn't morally defensible if we want to uphold labour and environmental standards here in Australia, or make a difference to climate change. Some responsibility must rest with the consumer to buy things that last, to look after them throughout their lifecycle and 'un-make' them conscientiously, through how we deal with waste. Addressing this would go some way towards kicking our addiction to the fruits of cheap offshore manufacturing.

What is not clear is whether the transition to knowledge-economy and offshore manufacturing is in fact inevitable after all. What commentators such as Gittins and Pascoe assume is that the global economy trumps the national economy every time in its capacity to shape possible futures. This belies the extent to which Australian governments and the Australian people are able to mould the economy, making Australia the country that we want it to be. Contrary to what most market economists would tell you, the Australian economy is and has always been open to be shaped in ways we wish to control, amidst the influence of global forces. The key is how we imagine the Australian economy into being. The insights of Timothy Mitchell, New York University's Professor of Politics, are most helpful here. In an essay entitled 'Rethinking the economy' (in *Geoforum*, 2008), Mitchell documents how what we call 'the economy' only fairly recently (he argues since the mid-twentieth century) came to be understood, defined and managed as a free-standing object. Through examples including electricity infrastructure markets and property title systems, Mitchell shows how the economy was literally built through the actions, ideas

and behaviours of 'experts' – inventors, technocrats and especially economists, who 'claimed only to describe this object [economics], but in fact…participated in producing it'. Economists invest belief in a 'thing' called the market that has some kind of ontology outside humans – a logical impossibility that they pursue anyway because it suits their ideological ends. Instead for Mitchell, the economy is not a separate entity, but a 'project', a 'twentieth-century invention' that particular actors work towards.

The same could be said about how the Australian economy is being imagined and moulded now: with Australian mining companies superimposing their own 'project' for the Australian economy on the Australian nation and people, running public advertising campaigns about the contributions of mining to the national interest, and thwarting Federal Government attempts to introduce both a mining tax and a price on carbon. The problem is that this project (which we now describe shorthand as the 'minerals boom' – as if an unequivocally positive and fortuitous, happenstance event) has driven the dollar to unparalleled heights, rendering manufacturing (and all other) exports uncompetitive. The Australian economy as mining company project has come at the expense of other Australian sectors and workers.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We can imagine the Australian economy differently. Just as the mining lobby have forwarded their project for the Australian economy, so too can we imagine other alternatives. The task is, following Mitchell's logic, to envision competing 'projects' for how the economy could be put together differently. At stake are jobs, livelihoods and carbon emissions. One option is to revisit the basic notion of the economy as the 'proper husbanding of material resources', as Mitchell puts it. This was a notion much more widespread in earlier decades of the twentieth century, and it got Australia through the Great Depression. It is an interpretation of the economy that was conveniently relegated by neoliberal ideologues in the 1980s, but it could be revived now and inflected with a contemporary twist in light of climate change. What I mean here is that, as a nation, we might do well to explore 'economy' not as a set of global forces 'out there' impinging on us, but as an internal question of how Australians access, use, exchange and value financial and material resources as *moral and social beings*. What matters less is whether or not we want to make *things*, and more that we want to make *high quality things* that last, with decent wages and environmental standards, and that these things are available widely to all Australians.

Such thinking is not new: it underpinned earlier attempts to organise production outside the factory system such as the arts and crafts movement in early twentieth century architecture and furniture, and the Bauhaus school in industrial design. Both had at their heart utopian visions of how to arrange production to maximise quality, democratise the possession and use of well-

made things, and to nurture and showcase human creativity. Inklings of a revival in such thinking include: the trend towards hand-made things gaining pace in the inner-city set (made-to-measure suits, bespoke shirts and skirts, custom-designed cabinetry); the thriving market for well designed mid-twentieth century second-hand goods (objects that often survive precisely because they were of a high quality, from an era when the 'proper husbanding of material resources' was an overriding moral principle); as well as the broader shift across Australian households towards purchasing goods as longer-term investments rather than as disposable items.

There is also a link to a feminist take on 'economy', valuing and recognising the different forms of domestic and non-capitalist work that are productive, and not just a prerequisite to industrial development. We are a country that makes things all the time – we make babies, cakes, meals, beds, homes. Such things are not separate from the productive economy; in the sense of furnishing humans with the means to subsistence, they *are* the economy.

This is, then, an image of Australia with respect for productive labour in all its forms, for the skills required to design and make things, and proper stewardship of our natural resources. The offshore manufacturing model of making things cheaply and replacing them often only works if consumers throw out things before their utility is exhausted, if resources are plentiful, and if labour is perennially cheap. Australia cannot compete with this production of cheap and nasty stuff. But we do have choices whether to participate in this torrent of production and consumption – choices as consumers, voters, families, workers. We know that resources are not infinite, and as the global economy looks increasingly shaky, more people are choosing not to replace the phone, television or car quite as often. Consumers want, and will buy, quality things made in Australia that suit Australian conditions best. There are likely many export markets too for such things even with the high Australian dollar. What counts is how we value the making of things, beyond cheap labour, and beyond a narrow view of what constitutes the Australian economy.

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A market for a nation

Beyond the neoliberal grind

David Ritter

AUSTRALIA was a nation established behind walls. The outward barriers of racially restrictive immigration, Commonwealth defence, and the desire for an inwardly free trade system protected by external tariffs, were the imperatives for federation. Within the protected economy of the new country, centralised wage fixing and social welfare generated a society of broadly increasing equality and rising prosperity. By the 1950s and sixties, an economy and society had emerged in which the individual and the collective good were in some degree of balance. In a world rent by the great ideological struggles of the twentieth century, Australia seemed to have charted a middle course, with capital and labour in reasonably fair exchange. It was a 'not quite golden age' of high levels of employment under generally reasonable wages and conditions, subject only to the dismal tarnish of equal opportunities being denied to women, homosexuals and non-whites, and the egregious treatment of Aboriginal peoples.[1] However, by the end of the sixties it appeared that the new liberation movements would eliminate discrimination, ushering in an era of unadulterated bullion in which the rising equality was available to all.

But then something unexpected happened. The international economic crises of the 1970s created the conditions for the radical transformation of the world economic system. Capitalism was husbanded into a new form that was elusive, transnational, ubiquitous and vastly more powerful. And Australia, ever obedient to the needs of empire, got with the program of redesigning the nation in order to conform to the new way of things. The project was as much metaphysical as economic: the market, it was foretold, would make us free.

The ramparts of the Australian settlement were demolished in a massive renovation of the national political economy. The reforms of the Hawke, Keating and Howard governments swept away the old order, substituting a new open economy. The dollar now bobs around on the sea of currency exchange rates. Tariffs are largely gone. Foreign investment has poured in, often to Australia's vast resource provinces, which are being exploited at Olympian speeds by

transnational corporations. Numerous national institutions have been privatised. Central wage fixing has been replaced by increasingly decentralised and individualised contractual relationships. It is now an often told story, how big backward Australia learned to stop worrying and love the market. And for many, the trust has paid off in pecuniary terms. In the decade to 2007–08, the average disposable weekly household income for people in both low and middle income brackets increased by more than 40 per cent.[2] The 'long boom', we called it – a period of unprecedented economic growth that was only interrupted (and then, so far at least, only just) by the global economic crisis that exploded in 2008 and continues to mutate. And new walls have soared up on the proceeds. In just one of the measures of the extraordinary affluence of the times, by 2011, Australians were building the largest residences in the world – perhaps the biggest average houses of any nation in human history – each to hold no more 2.6 people.[3] It would all be such a glorious success story, if it were not for the grinding.

WHAT IS LIFE like inside the new walls? In opening the economy, deregulating industry, restructuring industrial relations, privatising public services and introducing competition to numerous spheres of social life, the institutions of the Australian nation and how they are regarded have both been fundamentally altered. The way we think and live has been changed. In May 1981 Margaret Thatcher, then less than two years in to her first term as British prime minister, vented her frustrations to a journalist from the *Sunday Times*:

> What's irritated me about the whole direction of politics in the last thirty years is that it's always been towards the collectivist society. People have forgotten about the personal society. And they say: do I count, do I matter? To which the short answer is, yes. And therefore, it isn't that I set out on economic policies; it's that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach you really are after the heart and soul of the nation. Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.[4]

The economic program which Thatcher implemented over the course of her time in power did indeed make over the culture of the United Kingdom – a change that continued under the 'New' Labour premierships of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, and has now accelerated to 'shock doctrine' speed under the Conservative David Cameron. Something similar has happened in Australia. Accompanying the economic reforms has been a revolution in national life, as the norms of the new approach have been transmitted to culture and social being. In changing the country's economics, Hawke, Keating and Howard transformed the heart and soul of Australia.

The transformation of economics and politics that has taken place over the past thirty years is most commonly known as 'neoliberalism'. In his essential short book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005), the political geographer David Harvey defines the ideology as:

> A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices…and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture.[5]

In practice, neoliberalism is not only an ideology, but a project that has been actively pursued by sections of society at the expense of the rest. Paradoxically, a so-called laissez-faire environment can only be enabled by extreme political agency, usually driven by class interests, centrally intervening to impose a 'free market' where none existed. Yet once the engine of disembedded capitalism is started the machine is self replicating, as new opportunities for accumulation are essential to maintaining growth on returns, until the system starts to consume the basis of its own functioning. Neoliberalism also – just as Thatcher forecast – has socio-cultural dimensions, as those who live in increasingly marketised, privatised and consumerist societies come to adopt particular subjectivities and social practices. Above all, people are invited to think of themselves as self-made individuals, who are acting in the right when they maximise their own self-interest at the expense of the collective. Neoliberalism also evokes the historical period and condition of post-modern late-capitalism. The great sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has described the age of neoliberalism as being characterised by 'liquid modernity', as institutions and social formations have been 'liquefied' by the pressures of globalisation, market forces, post-modern mentalities and advanced communications technologies, leaving human beings as anxiously free-floating.[6]

IN 2011, PRIME Minister Julia Gillard gave a significant speech to the Chifley Research Centre in Canberra.[7] At the time, the coverage focused more on Gillard's moderate suggestions for reform of the internal functioning of the Australian Labor Party – a perennial favourite for the press gallery. However, of more enduring interest were the Prime Minister's efforts at evoking Labor's essence, the values her party had 'fought for in the past and that we will fight for

to our last breath'. According to Gillard, Labor's imperishable values are opportunity for all through access to education, leaving nobody behind due to health or disability, and a general sense of intergenerational responsibility, all accompanied by pride in 'union heritage and union links'. Noble sentiments no doubt; but rather anaemic as an invocation of the Labor vision of the good society, and made even paler by the analysis that followed. Having set out her version of Labor's values, the Prime Minister then (rightly) contended that one of the central predicaments of our times is that unprecedented liberty of choice has come at the cost of grave insecurity:

> We live in an age which at its best is one of individual empowerment and at its worst is one of stress, anxiety and confusion…For too many people, the lived reality of a world of so much promise is actually one of feeling adrift in a sea of information and overwhelmed by too much change. The lived reality is one of feeling that they have lost control of their own lives.

In this context, Gillard argued that the great political problem of the day arises from the tensions between liberty and equality. Her response is to suggest that the emancipative purpose of the latter is straightforwardly to facilitate the former:

> [T]oday our ethos of collective action must respond to individual needs and demands for choice and control…Australians want to make their own choices and control their own lives. But this can only happen if the power of collective action, in creating opportunity, sharing risk and not leaving any one behind, is joined to meaningful individual empowerment, joined to personal choices and control. This is our Labor mission today.

Choice, choice, choice. Counting how often a key term is used in a speech can be a crude tool, but not so here. In Gillard's rendering of Labor's values, the word 'society' is not mentioned once, while the word 'choice' appears more than twenty times. In her interpretation of Labor values, the Prime Minister left out any sense of how community – which is essential to an enduring sense of the secure self – is meant to cohere or function in the face of the hurry and instability of liquid modernity. You cannot mend the existential insecurity of too much choice with more choice. In the Prime Minister's vision of the good society, there is no real sense of the communal as having a value beyond the fulfilment of self, or of any abiding purpose beyond realising gain on the part of individuals. It is a near complete inversion of John F Kennedy's soaring exhortation: ask not what you can do for your country, but what your country can do for you. The life paths referred to by Gillard are also revealing. She reifies the 'aspiration' for a 'decent job' and the 'dream' of running a 'decent small business', but mentions nothing else: vocations, professions, public service, farming and full-time care, for example, are hidden behind more narrowly economic possibilities.

The Australians imagined in Gillard's speech are also uncannily invulnerable. Care is impliedly conceptualised as resulting from poor fortune, to be provided for as a 'service' rather than something essential to realising our humanity. Incapacity is spoken of as a 'risk', as if it were somehow possible to never be a baby, or to avoid the mortal need for tender succour that precedes our dying. The implications of Gillard's choice of words are momentous. So invisible have the assumptions become that the current Labor Prime Minister defends a neoliberal conception of human relations as an expression of imperishable Labor values. The heart and soul of the country have changed.

Inside the walls, the condition of twenty-first century life for the majority of Australians is material abundance, accompanied by tiredness, time-poverty, jadedness and anxiety. Qualities of personal character like trust, loyalty and mutual commitment are eaten away by work that is short-term and 'flexible'. Institutions have been transformed for the worse by the application of the profit motive. As journalist Nicholas Shaxson has compactly observed, 'in competitive markets, whatever is possible becomes necessary', so tax is avoided as commonplace business strategy, and democracy is overwhelmed by lobbyists.[8] Businesses are driven to ever greater excesses, from the use of neuroscience to market goods to children, to screening scenes of voyeuristic humiliation on prime time television to bring in audiences, to cheapest production costs regardless of the most egregious externalities. In the financial sphere, food speculators literally bet on mass starvation as a legitimate business practice. Everywhere, place and space are colonised by advertising urging us to buy so as to secure our happiness. In order to create demand, adult consumers are enticed into a culture of instant and often narcissistic gratification, rewarding of elements of human nature that are inherently immature. Whole institutions have been privatised and shifted away from ideals of public service to private profit (often at the cost of reduced facilities for citizens) to the great benefit of the financial sector, significantly contributing to the growing venality of politics. Language is enslaved as the patois of economic rationalism, managerial efficiency and personal maximisation have taken over the way we talk to each other and monetary metaphors colonise day-to-day conversation.

The great public goods of health and education have been traduced by a culture of looking after number one through the private system. Medicine is seen by big business as an opportunity for profit rather than a tool to heal the sick. The ethos of education and truth-seeking in universities has been grievously damaged by imperatives to 'productivity'. The profit motive has entered our most intimate human relations: how our children are reared and the circumstances under which we die are now governed by transactional arrangements. The market has desacralised life, as much that we hold dear has become subject to the rules of profane exchange. The professions, turned

businesses, have lost their older vocational identities with resulting loss of public confidence, integrity and prestige. There seems no limit to what might be commoditised, including the natural world itself which, if it is to be saved, will have to be rendered in terms the market can understand.[9]

NOT EVERY CONSEQUENCE of the neoliberal period is bad, of course, and it is always foolish to exercise an uncritical nostalgia. Indeed, it seems likely that many Australians have became more confident, open to diverse cultural influences and accepting of differences in identity. The long scourges of prejudice feel more under control than ever. It seems probable that parochialism – at least certain varieties – has diminished, not least because of the unprecedented explosion in international travel by Australians. And of course we are materially better off – we have a lot more stuff – though evidence suggests that beyond a certain point, increased material wealth does not lead to greater happiness or contentment. But the list of downsides is long and worsening. The acid of neoliberal policies and attitudes corrodes the bonds of family, community and personal wellbeing and the functioning of democracies. 'The wages of vicious competition', wrote DH Lawrence, 'is the world we live in'. It is the fruit of the attempt to reduce human life to market relations that is the sacerdotal mission of neoliberalism. It is the grinding that we can hear outside our walls, constantly and becoming even louder, everywhere, all the time.

There has always been resistance to neoliberalism in Australia, practised by some intellectuals and politicians, as well as by every citizen who, when faced with some measure designed to economically 'rationalise' life in a nonsensical or offensive fashion, rejected the 'reform' as just so much bullshit. However, there was a particular moment in the middle of the past decade – even prior to the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008 – when it seemed as if a critique of neoliberalism was achieving some semblance of critical political mass. A cadre of high-profile thinkers including Robert Manne, David McKnight, Anne Manne, John Quiggin, Guy Rundle and Clive Hamilton, manifested a significant public intellectual challenge to the orthodoxy of neoliberalism and what it was doing to Australia. The grinding was being heard. Then, in a landmark essay published in November 2006, the anti-neoliberal camp was emphatically joined by the then shadow foreign affairs minister Kevin Rudd. Having quoted extensively from McKnight's influential primer *Beyond Right and Left* (Allen & Unwin, 2005), Rudd then proceeded to add his own analysis and a prescription for political action:

> Neo-liberals speak of the self-regarding values of security, liberty and property. To these, social democrats would add the other-regarding values of equity, solidarity and sustainability…Working within a comprehensive framework of self-regarding and other-regarding values gives social

democrats a rich policy terrain in which to define a role for the state. This includes the security of the people; macro-economic stability; the identification of market failure in critical areas such as infrastructure; the identification of key public goods, including education, health, the environment and the social safety net; the fostering of new forms of social capital; and the protection of the family as the core incubator of human and social capital. These state functions do not interfere with the market; they support the market. But they have their origins in the view that the market is designed for human beings, not vice versa, and this remains the fundamental premise that separates social democrats from neo-liberals.[10]

Rudd's intervention was deeply significant. Perhaps for the first time since Keating lost office (and for very different reasons), it was ideationally exciting to be inside the Australian Labor Party. As Robert Manne and David McKnight wrote later, Rudd 'was possibly the first Western leader for many years to launch a direct assault on the sacred cow of free-market economics.'[11] In Australia and globally, social democracy seemed to have acquired a new champion. There was an alternative.

WHAT HAPPENED OVER the next three years remains bewildering. Having been elevated to the leadership of the Labor Party, Rudd was elected to power in Canberra in 2007 with a decisive mandate. Then, almost immediately, the near collapse of the global financial system offered complete and dramatic validation of the critique of neoliberalism that Rudd had propounded – a legacy of vindication that the prime minister explicitly claimed in another essay published in February 2009:

> The current crisis is the culmination of a 30-year domination of economic policy by a free-market ideology that has been variously called neo-liberalism, economic liberalism, economic fundamentalism, Thatcherism or the Washington Consensus. The central thrust of this ideology has been that government activity should be constrained, and ultimately replaced, by market forces. In the past year, we have seen how unchecked market forces have brought capitalism to the precipice.[12]

The timing could not have been more propitious. The stage seemed set for a political counter-offensive against neoliberalism, led by the Australian prime minister. Instead, less than eighteen months later, Rudd had resigned from office with little achieved to alter the fundamentals of the prevailing system. It was a dispiriting dénouement.

There is already an extensive literature that seeks to account for Rudd's rapid fall. In the context of this essay, what is most interesting is the political failure of the critique of neoliberalism that he had brought to the heart of the Australian

Labor Party. In hindsight, the shallowness of the Rudd insurgency was given prominent showcasing early, at the 2020 Summit held on 19 and 20 April 2008 at Parliament House in Canberra. A thousand participants from across Australia attended the curious event 'aimed at harnessing the best ideas for building a modern Australia ready for the challenges of the twenty-first century'.[13] Enigmatically, it appeared that the man who determinedly confronted neoliberalism in print had come to bury, rather than praise, political contestation:

> What we are looking for from this Summit are new directions for our nation's future…And if we succeed, what we are looking for is also new insights into how we can govern Australia, a new way of governing our nation. Because the old way of governing has long been creaking and groaning. Often a triumph of the short term over the long term. Often a triumph of the trivial over the substantial. Often a triumph of the partisan over the positive. And the truth is all sides of politics, Brendan (Nelson, then opposition leader)'s and mine, we are both guilty of this. It is time we started to try and turn a page…Some say that consensus on anything is impossible because it produces the democratic divide. Whereas I say on certain fundamentals, the challenge is in fact, to build a consensus around those things that really count for the long term.[14]

It has been a folly of the centre-left over recent decades to imagine that, by consulting with a broad range of stakeholders, it is possible to come up with win-win, innovative, evidence-based solutions (the recourse to what Don Watson has called 'dead language' is deliberate) thus obviating the need for politics. At the 2020 Summit, Rudd implicitly disavowed embarking on a strategy to take back the heart and soul of the country, preferring the kind of 'post-politics' policy-making that has characterised politicians of the centre-left during the neoliberal period. The vision was essentially technocratic: get the smart people in a room and let them figure it out. Symptomatically, there was little democracy in evidence, as the summit's proceedings were given over to facilitation by management consultants.[15] Journalist and author David Marr, who attended as a delegate to the governance stream of the summit, recorded that:

> Within minutes our bright ideas collided with the needs of the facilitators. We have to build a house, we were told, and out came the butcher's paper. Ideas make up the foundations – scratch, scratch with a marker pen – the walls are our themes, and the roof is our ambitions. So, we were asked, did we think 'making the constitution say what it means and mean what it says' an idea, a theme or an ambition? At that point, we knew we were in trouble. And as we struggled with these vital distinctions, the facilitators hit us with another: 'the articulation of a theme' which is not quite an idea and not really an ambition. A day of housebuilding reduced many of us in many streams to teeth-grinding frustration.[16]

Nothing could have been more ironic or indicative than Rudd trusting management consultants, who are among the leading shock troops and enforcers of neoliberal norms, with the business of generating ideas for Australia's future. The prime minister eventually measured the success of the summit quantitatively, boasting that the occasion generated 'more than 900 ideas'.[17] A bemused Robert Manne wondered of the event: 'What will be accomplished by all this, God alone knows.'[18]

The Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci believed that the transformation of society required 'a long march through the institutions' of a country. Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and John Howard all understood that conflict was required to bed down their visions, and were ruthless in opposing organised sources of opposition including unions, local government, NGOs, universities and public service institutions. In pale contrast, Rudd's counter-revolution lacked any kind of confrontational strategy. Rudd came to power armed with an intellectual case, but no movement (nor even, arguably, his own party) behind him and no wider plan for how to politically realise his critique. If anything, the prime minister seemed to think that a new era could be ushered in by stakeholder consultation administered by process advisers. It was a mistake – political economy does not work like that. Power and privilege are not given up lightly and neoliberalism is an ideology that has thoroughly benefitted the richest and most invulnerable forces in Australian (and global) society. As celebrity capitalist Warren Buffett famously said, '*there's been class warfare* going on for the last twenty years, and *my class has won*', and the fruits of that victory will not be given up without a fight.[19] There is no weightless or costless way out: if power is to be redistributed there will be losers. It is magical thinking to imagine that society and economy can be refurbished by 'progressives' through natty policy solutions combined with a perfectly pitched communications strategy. Neoliberalism will not be overcome without a brawl: power must be shifted through the application of sustained and substantial political force.[20]

WHAT IS A NATION for? At the start of the second decade of its second century, the future of Australia – and of individual Australians – lies at the crossroads of the relationship between government and business; the interrelated configuration of state and market. Globally, the danger is that states are reduced to nothing more than enablers of business, facilitating the extension of market relations, often exercised by transnational corporate conglomerates, in to every nook and cranny of human existence. We have desperate need of new paradigms. We must take a fresh look. We must ask old questions again through the eyes of experience. If the neoliberal order is

to be overthrown, it is necessary but insufficient to win the intellectual argument. Neither is it enough to simply survey the debacle of the global financial system over the past few years and to conclude that the contradictions of the system have been exposed and the tide has turned. Rather than being dead, as Australian economist John Quiggin has memorably argued, the discredited policy prescriptions of neoliberalism have returned as 'zombies' and continue to stalk the land.[21] In the UK, the stark political irony is that the Conservative-Liberal coalition government is using the excuse of the financial crisis to rapidly engage in a further neoliberal offensive of extraordinary speed and ferocity against those lingering civic institutions, including tertiary education, welfare, the planning regime and the National Health Service. If Tony Abbott is elected in Australia, we can reasonably expect a similar program of attack on the vestigial remains of the public realm.

If neoliberalism is to be turned on its head, what is required is a comprehensive political and social strategy, prosecuted by a sufficient coalition of forces, and supported by a set of economic practices which offers a genuine alternative. At one level, of course, there's no choice in all of this because if things keep on as they are, we face environmental collapse. In the recent words of entrepreneur Dick Smith: 'there is no escaping the truth: with the global economy geared to only one speed, constant exponential growth, we are on an unsustainable trajectory towards doom.'[22] But *must* should never be confused with *will*: human societies have fallen before, because of an inability to leave the false road before the vehicle hits the wall. It's all to play for. What is needed, above all, is ambition: to think what for thirty years has felt unthinkable, but in light of extraordinary current events such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement, now feels like a new light just over the dark horizon.

In the twenty-first century, a fresh Australian settlement beckons, for a re-envisioned relationship between the state and the market; one which rethinks where we want the forces of economic competition applied, and what we want them to do. The power lies within us to build a very different house to our present circumstances, a shared abode that is warmer, stronger, livelier, and more truly a home, with foundations that will endure. It should be a fundamental purpose of the nation to actively guarantee the liberty and wellbeing of citizens against the depredations of predatory capitalism, recognising that the structuring of market-relations is a matter that properly belongs within the democratic remit of the people.

Let Australia again be the laboratory of the world, demonstrating that the purpose of economics should be to serve rather than master the human condition. Reaching back to a slogan of the sixties, we must be realistic in demanding the impossible, seeking a reconfiguration of society and economy

that is more faithfully conducive to our flourishing. Space, time and place must be reclaimed for human relationships; politics and economics reset within environmental limits, and the market re-embedded within society. Hearts can beat warmly again; souls may yet be set free; the fate of the natural world is still redeemable; the grinder can be halted.

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[12] Rudd, K 'The Global Financial Crisis', *The Monthly*, Feb 2009: available at: http://www.themonthly.com.au/monthly-essays-kevin-rudd-global-financial-crisis--1421

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[14] http://australianpolitics.com/2008/04/19/kevin-rudds-opening-address-to-the-2020-summit.html

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[20] To be absolutely explicit, the expressions 'brawl' and 'force' are being used metaphorically.

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The Republic of Australia and New Zealand

Swimming together in the Tasman

Rodney Crisp

AMALGAMATION of Australia and New Zealand is now approaching the final stages. The remaining barriers to a complete union are predominately societal: we still have two currencies, two national social security regimes, two national parliamentary systems and administrations. Even our social security organisations have been obliged to make reciprocal arrangements to follow our increasingly integrated populations. There are also regular exchanges among members of our two parliamentary systems. Just about all other aspects of our lives and activities have already been combined, harmonised, mutualised, assimilated, co-ordinated, co-operated and amalgamated. Another important barrier was removed in 2009, with the agreement to dismantle immigration and customs controls between our two countries, opening up a vast new domestic zone that spans the Tasman Sea.

We now represent, *ipso facto*, a single community with internally shared values and aspirations while continuing to maintain the external appearance of two separate, independent countries. This is a luxury which will inevitably become more cumbersome and obstructive as the years go by and increasingly more difficult to justify and maintain.

It seems it is now essentially a question of the preservation of identity. We, Australians and New Zealanders alike, are proud of our individual identities. We firmly believe we are very different from each other. Each of us cites the fact that his country is unique in that it is composed of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society including Indigenous people, Europeans and a rapidly growing Asiatic population.

According to our respective politicians the question of identity is the one single factor which, above all else, is said to constitute the ultimate impediment to full unification of our two countries. We must therefore carefully and

thoroughly address this question before proceeding any further. What is it that makes us so different from each other? We all know there is no point in asking a Mexican, an American, a Chinese, an Indian, a Slovakian or anybody else for that matter. They would not see any difference at all. If there are any differences, we are the only ones capable of perceiving them.

We must admit there are very few differences of identity to be observed among those of us who are of European descent. That is equally true for those of us who are of Asiatic descent. The most obvious differences are to be found among our Indigenous peoples, the Maori and the Aborigines. The Maori represent about 14.6 per cent of the population of New Zealand and the Aborigines about 2.4 per cent of the population of Australia. However, something like 73,000 people of Maori descent live in Australia and roughly five hundred Australian Aborigines live in New Zealand. Also, there are almost as many New Zealanders living in Australia as there are Aborigines and eight times more New Zealanders living in Australia than Australians living in New Zealand. One million Australians visit New Zealand each year and nearly one million New Zealanders visit Australia each year. To complete the picture, 23 per cent of New Zealand's population happens to have been born outside the country, one of the highest rates in the world. When you look at it carefully, what you see is a huge, growing melting pot in which it is becoming increasingly more difficult to distinguish any major differences in the inhabitants from one side of the Tasman to the other.

It is also difficult to imagine how the unification of our two countries could, in any way, modify the ancestral identity of either of our two Indigenous peoples. It has not so far, despite the migration and intermixing that currently prevails. Both would continue to enjoy the same freedom to live their lives and perpetuate their cultures exactly as they do today, whether they choose to live in Australia or New Zealand. This does not mean that best practices as regards the rights and obligations of our Indigenous peoples would automatically apply on both sides of the Tasman on amalgamation. It would only be a question of time before they did, except as regards the specific dispositions of the Treaty of Waitangi. This Treaty, concluded by the British Crown and the Maori chiefs in 1840, by which the Maori ceded the sovereignty of New Zealand to the United Kingdom in exchange for protection and guaranteed possession of their lands and considered to be the founding document of the independent State of New Zealand, would be deemed to continue without interruption in the event of amalgamation. However it would only apply to New Zealand.

There can be no doubt that every individual on this earth is different from every other individual but within our multi-ethnic and multi-cultural communities we manage to live together in fairly good harmony. We are all different – but we are all equally different. Our two countries have this highly

valuable quality in common. Both countries enjoy an exceptionally unique egalitarian culture. Contrary to what some politicians and others would have us believe, we would not suffer the sort of traumatism they often evoke in respect of loss of social identity on unification. If there were to be any loss of identity it would not be due to amalgamation but to the spontaneous integration of our two peoples which is already largely accomplished. Though perhaps instead of social identity, what they really mean is national identity. Both our nations are constitutional monarchies and it remains to be seen whether in either country we would wish to continue perpetuating our long standing constitutional subservience to the British Crown.

Generally speaking, politicians and other would-be leaders of opinion who invoke the objection of loss of identity in the event of amalgamation are also staunch advocates of replacing the current constitutional monarchy with a republican regime. They want the best of both worlds: their independence and what they feel is their unique identity.

Our politicians and social and economic leaders have taken amalgamation just about as far as it can go without overshooting their general mandate to act in our name. In order to respect the democratic principles of both countries, we now need to provide them with a specific mandate if we want them to complete the job of amalgamation. Failing this, the artificial facade will remain in place.

That is not the sort of question we can leave the politicians to decide. We need to think carefully and decide if we want a full amalgamation or not. We can retain the names of our two countries and join them together: *Australia and New Zealand*. We can all have *Australia and New Zealand* passports; we can combine our national flags and emblems – they are already similar. We could even retain our two national anthems if we wish, though some of our inspired musicians and poets might like to propose something new for the occasion.

The right to mint money is an important symbol of the independence of nations. New Zealand being originally part of the Colony of New South Wales, we both had the same currency until 1910 when Australia began issuing its first silver coins following federation. New Zealand issued its first coins in 1933. Since then, our two currencies have virtually grown up together. Both countries use the same currency valuation mechanism, the TWI (Trade Weighted Index) a basket of currencies of our respective countries' major trading partners. It would be simple to combine the two baskets and calculate the exchange rates for conversion to a new, common currency which we could perhaps call the Anzac Dollar (ANZ $). Whether it be from a purely monetary or economic point of view, there are no major obstacles to full monetary integration. Our economies converge quite favourably.

Full monetary integration would be facilitated by amalgamation. The new nation could merge our two Reserve Banks together on an equitable basis. The global size of the new nation would provide greater resistance to economic shocks and give us more clout in financial markets. The larger economic space would facilitate the internal redistribution of resources in the event of catastrophes such as floods and earthquakes, foot-and-mouth disease or swine flu, providing increased security at lower cost.

The adoption of a common currency would be just the start: there is still some important harmonisation to be implemented as regards the regulation of our banking, insurance and financial institutions. This is particularly important in New Zealand where the banking sector is 89 per cent controlled by Australia's big four banks: ANZ, Commonwealth, NAB and Westpac. It is a one-sided, lopsided problem as there are no major New Zealand banks in Australia. That makes it more difficult to find common ground for an agreement. We would both need to make a special effort in order to find an intelligent solution. Needless to say, amalgamation would be an added incentive.

Does amalgamation mean that each of us loses his independence? As it has already been largely implemented, we have, in fact, already lost a certain amount of our independence. However the trade-off has been extremely positive for us both, as it would be if we were to adopt a common currency. Some politicians and leaders of opinion nevertheless continue to express concern. It is not too difficult to imagine why. What they are really concerned about is that some of them, having already lost a fair amount of their independence, want to hang on to what is left. This may not in fact be in their country's best interests, or indeed their own. They would, without the slightest shadow of a doubt, better serve their country by looking up to see where they could climb rather than looking down to see where they might fall. Instead of clinging to hopeless illusions they would be better off reaching out to take hold of solid reality.

The forces at work are all positive. Our politicians have, by and large, served our countries well in bringing us together in an orderly fashion with absolutely no fuss, almost without us even realising it. We are now reaping the benefits of that but taking it for granted, as though it were evident that things should be that way. Nothing was evident. It has all been a lot of hard and patient work carried out over many years and our politicians must receive full credit for it. It is certainly not the time to abandon them to their fate. Greater co-operation and harmonisation between the two countries have meant less independence for them. We must, in return, assure them of our full support over the final stages of amalgamation and do whatever we can to secure a satisfactory outcome for them.

There is no reason why we could not all be independent together. At least we would be stronger and our independence better assured. The independence of a nation depends on its security – and there is far greater security for two fish swimming together in the Tasman Sea rather than each one going its own way. Instead of make-believe, as is the case of New Zealand at present, the independence and security of both our countries would be for real.

Participating in an amalgamated government would be similar to rugby players of different nationalities participating in a Barbarians team, except in this instance, instead of a one-off match, the players would have a three year contract, renewable once or twice. But with the passing years, the Barbarians team would eventually become the home side. We would have to ask our most talented artists to find the right combination of colours for their jerseys on the basis of the green, black, gold and silver of our two countries. The captain and the key players would have to be chosen on their merit but, equally important, the members of the team would have to correctly reflect the populations they represent, as equitably and as loyally as possible, throughout the community.

There is no reason why anybody should lose more independence than they have already lost. All the players, without exception, would be expected to move onwards and upwards, unless, of course, they preferred to let somebody else step in and take their place. It could be that some may have difficulty integrating a parliamentary Barbarians team, adapting to the new playing field and to the new rules of the game. But there is nothing negative about it. It is a challenge, a challenge to play in a vastly bigger stadium, at international level with much more responsibility that largely compensates whatever so-called independence may possibly have been lost in the process. As for those who prefer to continue to participate in the New Zealand parliamentary system, there is no reason why they should not do so. However, it would no longer be the national body. Its jurisdiction would be limited to New Zealand.

Historical precedents to the current amalgamation process in Australia and New Zealand are rare; Trinidad and Tobago provide one example. These two British island colonies were amalgamated in 1898, at about the same time New Zealand was taking the decision not to join the Australian federation. The two islands are thirty-two kilometres apart; Trinidad measures nearly five thousand square kilometres while Tobago is just over three hundred. Total population is about 1.3 million and GDP roughly US$30 billion. It has large reserves of oil, and is the fifth largest producer in the world of natural gas. It is one of the most dynamic countries in the Caribbean, with a flourishing tourist industry. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the islands were inhabited by various indigenous Amerindian tribes: the Nepoya and Seppoya in Trinidad and the Kalinago in Tobago. The country became a republic in 1976 and is a member of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations. The capital of the Republic of

Trinidad and Tobago is Port of Spain, on the island of Trinidad. Neither of the two islands' inhabitants appears to have suffered from lack of independence or lack of identity due to the amalgamation. On the contrary, both have retained their identity and reinforced their independence. It is interesting to note that the first operation was amalgamation, followed by the instauration of a republic.

In 1976 Trinidad and Tobago replaced the Queen of England as the head of state with a president elected by a special electoral college composed of members of the two houses of parliament. The president then named the prime minister chosen among the members of parliament. The new republic maintained its parliamentary system of government, with a thirty-six member House of Representatives elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term, and a thirty-one member Senate of which sixteen are named by the prime minister, six by the leader of the opposition, and nine independents by the president. While this system apparently works to the satisfaction of Trinidad and Tobago, the comparative size, complexity, history and culture of Australia and New Zealand may prevent this particular model becoming anything more than a rare example of a successful and harmonious amalgamation.

Of the fifty-three Commonwealth members, thirty-one are now republics. Republics have been allowed to be members of the Commonwealth since 1949. Ireland declared itself a Republic ten days before the date of effect and was excluded. It never re-applied for membership despite the fact that it is eligible to do so.

It is interesting to recall that New Zealand was officially part of the Colony of New South Wales for over half a century from 1788 to 1841. Its representatives actively participated in the discussions on federation with the representatives of what would become the six Australian states to form the Commonwealth of Australia.New Zealand, in the end, decided not to join the federation.

Clause 6, of the Preamble of the Australian Constitution reads as follows:

The Commonwealth shall mean the Commonwealth of Australia as established under this Act.

The States shall mean such of the colonies of New South Wales, New Zealand, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria, Western Australia, and South Australia, including the northern territory of South Australia, as for the time being are parts of the Commonwealth, and such colonies or territories as may be admitted into or established by the Commonwealth as States; and each of such parts of the Commonwealth shall be called *a State*.

Original States shall mean such States as are parts of the Commonwealth at its establishment.

The Hon Sir John Hall, together with Captain Russell, represented New Zealand at the first conference on Australian Federation held in Melbourne. Having later decided against membership, Hall was quoted as saying that the 1,200 miles of sea that separated New Zealand from Australia were '1,200 reasons' not to join the new nation. In fact, that was only one of the reasons why New Zealand decided against membership. There were about half a dozen in all, back in the 1890s, none of which would apply today. Even the question of distance has to be put into context. Hall had to make the trip by sailboat; today it is a two-hour flight, exactly the same as from Brisbane to Canberra. Today we can communicate almost anywhere in the world in real time by telephone, email and fax. We can participate in video conferences. None of this was possible in Sir John's time.

If we are to measure the distance between Australia and New Zealand, we should take into account the fact that Australia is not just one large land mass. It has a total of 8,222 islands within its maritime borders – one in particular, Norfolk Island, is about half way between the Australian mainland and the North Island of New Zealand. It is an Australian Territory with its own parliament like the six states of the federation. It has an area of three square kilometres and is home to nearly two thousand people. The island receives forty thousand visitors a year. Lord Howe Island, the popular tourist resort which is inscribed on the UNESCO world heritage list, is about six hundred kilometres east of Sydney and also nearly half way to New Zealand. As for New Zealand itself, the country has sovereign rights over a marine area that is fifteen times larger than its land area. Australia and New Zealand are so close to each other our maritime boundaries overlap. We signed a treaty on 25 July 2004 agreeing on a common boundary that is now recognised under international law. Sir John Hall, no doubt, would have been amazed to learn that our two countries actually share a common border on the continental shelf under the Tasman Sea.

It should also be noted that unlike the six other colonies that joined the federation in 1901, New Zealand did not hold a referendum on the question before deciding against membership. The political leaders of New Zealand chose to ignore this fundamental democratic principle and took the decision themselves. The door, nevertheless, continues to remain open for it to join the federation whenever it likes, without the prior agreement of the six Australian States. This is quite an extraordinary facility which has no precedent anywhere else in the world. It places New Zealand in an extremely comfortable position. Sir John was evidently a very shrewd negotiator.

It took Australia roughly ten years to thrash out an agreement on the federation and it was only in 1999 that the first referendum was held on forming a republic. Despite the negative result, public debate has been continuing sporadically ever since. As in the 1890s on the question of the federation, exactly

the same debate has been taking place in New Zealand. And as on the question of joining the federation, New Zealand has not yet considered it necessary to consult its people by referendum on the question of forming a republic. The only explanation that has been forthcoming came from one of its eminent politicians: 'we should not be doing it simply because Australia is doing it'. No one could disagree with that. The corollary, of course, is that New Zealand should not refrain from doing it simply because Australia is doing it. It is highly unlikely that Australians would be in any way offended if they did. On the contrary, they would surely consider that to be the most appropriate course of action to be taken under the circumstances.

In reality the debate in New Zealand on the question of a republic has been of excellent quality. The arguments that have been developed have nothing to do with simply copying Australia, but have always been quite sound and well informed. One of New Zealand's most highly reputed political journalists, writing for the *New Zealand Herald*, has published a number of well documented articles on the subject. The general public appears to be following the debate through the traditional media and the internet with an attentive eye. It would not be at all surprising if the New Zealand electors were invited by their government to vote on the question of a republic at about the same time, if not before, the Australian government were to take a similar initiative.

In Australia, a 2010 survey of one thousand readers of *The Sun Herald* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* found 68 per cent of respondents were in favour of Australia becoming a republic. More than half the respondents said Australia should become a republic as soon as possible while a third said it should happen after the Queen dies. This should, no doubt, reinforce the opinion of Prime Minister Julia Gillard, whose past declarations have consistently been in favour of a republic. Similar support for a republic has been recorded in New Zealand. Perhaps electors on both sides of the Tasman will be heading for the polling booths on exactly the same issue within a few months of each other.

The next question we need to ask ourselves is: do we really need two republics, or would it not be sufficient to have just one that we could share? After all, even if we complete the amalgamation, we do not actually have to live together. Each of us can stay on his or her own island if he or she prefers. Perhaps there are '1,200 reasons' for us to live together as a single nation while continuing to enjoy lots of room, comfort and privacy.

For any country to be independent it needs to be capable of assuming its own security. Neither Australia nor New Zealand has that capability and will not have it in the foreseeable future. That is why we both signed the ANZUS treaty with the United States following World War II. Since then, New Zealand has fallen out with the United States, having refused to allow an American nuclear

submarine to enter its territorial waters because of its anti-nuclear policy. The US retaliated by suspending its obligations to New Zealand under the ANZUS treaty – leaving New Zealand highly vulnerable in the event of hostilities and largely dependent on Australia for its security.

The political leaders of New Zealand have had ample time to reflect upon these developments and take stock of the situation, and presumably they have elaborated a plan for the future and mapped out what they consider to be the best route for the country. However it remains to be seen if they can persuade the electorate to walk in that direction. Unless, of course, they consider that issues such as amalgamation and a republic are too important to leave to the people to determine and impose their own decisions in the same paternalistic fashion as their ancestors took the decision not to join the Australian federation in 1901.

The all important question, however, should not be 'do you want New Zealand to become the seventh State of the Commonwealth of Australia?,' as it was well over a century ago. If that were the question who could doubt that the reply would be exactly the same today as it was then. The only sensible and respectful proposition which could and should be made to our two peoples is, 'do you want our two nations to amalgamate and form the new single nation of Australia and New Zealand?'.

Whatever happens, Australians and New Zealanders have a vested interest in each other's decisions and a right, if not an obligation, to participate in the debate on both sides of the Tasman. Our fates are inextricably entwined.

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Collective solutions for collective problems

Learning from the Russian laboratory

Nadine Hood

NO one wants global warming, or wider environmental degradation, to be reality. The prospect of Earth becoming inhospitable to life as we know it is a loss too painful to contemplate. Denial, as a first stage of grief, is an understandable but unhelpful human reaction.

Given the high stakes and complexity of interlocking problems, big bold innovative ideas are needed to prod us into widening our vision. There are many media articles detailing the metrics of the gathering environmental crises, but few explore deep-change solutions.

If the capacity of our democratic institutions is being stretched, they will increasingly flounder as environmental problems become more intractable. Papering over the cracks and pretending the foundations are still sound will not advance our prospects

Other cultures, ancient and modern, can help generate ideas. The trick is to jettison old prejudices and blinkered habits of thought, and to see with fresh eyes.

In this essay I explore some fundamentals by drawing on ideas formed during my time living in the Soviet Union. Insights from the Soviet version of the socialist experiment can contribute to a fresh synthesis, which in turn can inform the future.

Mere mention of the words 'Soviet Union' can evoke a visceral revulsion, but please hear me out. Terrible crimes were committed, but there are other issues to consider. To swivel the focus elsewhere is not to absolve the brutal behaviour.

It has always been the victor's prerogative to vilify and blacken the reputation of the vanquished, but it runs the risk of creating a blind spot in our own cultural self-definition. I suspect that our vehement repudiation of the alien Soviet 'other'

contributes to a serious imbalance in our current crop of self-focussing, socially-reinforced expectations and dominant public norms.

At present, the refusal to deviate from high-resource living, in defiance of nature's obvious limits, is a form of madness; and I can easily imagine the gods are jostling to puncture our hubris.

Environmental damage is a collective problem and needs collective solutions. Recalling some socialist notions back from the wilderness to which they have been banished would allow for new perspectives, and in turn could broaden our capacity to envision and plan for an unknown future.

MOST SOLUTIONS THUS far proposed to tackle environmental problems are mechanistic adjustments aimed at not disturbing our mindset or lives too much. Yet the problems we face are systemic. The very way we think and do things, how tasks and resources move through the system, lie at the core of our predicament. Fortunately, these social treadmills, roundabouts and ruts are pliable. The way work is organised, how life needs are met, how we confer together en masse, how we govern ourselves, are not cast in stone.

Ecological science offers some signposts. Young ecosystems function differently from mature ones. While invading new territory, young developing ecosystems rapidly colonise and exploit accessible resources. Production, growth and quantity are the key characteristics. This contrasts with mature ecosystems, which favour protection, stability and quality. Survival strategies change at different stages.

If the global spread of Western capital-intensive industrialism over the past two centuries (predicated as it is on growth) is analogous to the exploitive colonising features of young ecosystems, it becomes inevitable that this strategy must change. As opportunities to make easy profits become less available, old ways will not work so well.

Eugene Odum, a founding figure of ecological science, has pointed out that 'Cooperation has greater survival value than competition when limits (resources or otherwise) are approached'.[1] Continuing with competition at the planet's biophysical limits to growth will assure mutual destruction. When our sprawling humanity does come against this limit, the competitive rampaging drive of the free market must change to something more cooperative.

Odum's point about the survival-advantage of cooperation near limits' edges takes us back to the drawing board regarding socialist ideas and values. Yet there are big cultural obstacles to doing this.

The Cold War made us stupid. For half a century, it was hard to think straight, wedged within a highly polarised hostility, when open, thoughtful discussion

was pulverised by rhetorical slanging matches. A geopolitical enmity became entangled with an ideological stand-off which powerfully shaped our political culture and persists today. In 2010, US President Barack Obama's moderate public healthcare plan was caught in the same crossfire. Not for the first time, he was accused of being 'socialist' and therefore menacing.

It is little acknowledged that the massive Soviet social experiment was a genuine attempt to build something completely new. It provided a fabulous results-abundant laboratory, involving 250 million subjects and spanning seventy years. Failed experiments also offer up valuable information for analysis. Why waste the earnest efforts of millions of people by refusing to learn from them?

During any new conversation to retrieve some of these lost perspectives, a resurgence of Left–Right posturing would be counter-productive. A valuable new conversation would separate socialist ideas from the incendiary Marxist flint of 'class war', from state-controlled Communist practice, and would drop down into the lived experience of Soviets (as opposed to our habitual interpretations of their society). A quiet, non-pugilistic review, making sparse use of old terminology, could give some room for detours around twentieth Century dualistic thinking.

Typically, this area is approached in a theoretical manner, but mine is not a theoretical analysis. Instead, I worked inductively from my own experience, from Soviet friends, formal interviews and other conversations, to see what patterns of meaning emerged.

Rather than latching onto either ideology, I have found that both can be more usefully employed as sling-shots to catapult contemporary thinking out of the status quo towards new vistas.

MY CONTRIBUTION DERIVES from my deep immersion in the Soviet Union. I lived there for twelve months at the beginning of the 1990s; a small window of time when people finally felt free to speak to foreigners; yet they still lived Soviet-style lives. Many were eager to talk, which provided me with an excellent opportunity to learn about how life had been for them. (In time their newly found loquaciousness faded, as everyone became focused on survival. Reflection was a luxury they could no longer afford.)

My experience was unusual in several respects. I lived simply with Soviet people in their flats, sharing their food, going to their parties, shopping and queuing, relaxing at the *dacha* and vacation centres, standing in the freezing cold waiting for public transport. I discovered a land of insides and outsides. Unwittingly, I became deeply absorbed into the private personal realm, taken into homes and hearts as I moved through networks of people I lived with and

those I befriended. I surrendered and melted within their warm, enfolding embrace. It gave me a profound sense of belonging to those people. .

I was cut off from the outside world, with no reason and no means to contact anyone beyond Soviet borders. Free of obligations to family or any Western employer, my consciousness slipped away from its Western moorings. As my habits of interpretation and behaviour loosened, I morphed into some quasi-Russian-Soviet shape.

My Soviet life had a very solid, even stolid, quality. I was forced to realise the abstract and arbitrary nature of money. I learnt much about the generous and arduous spadework of commitment. I became less of a 'me-first' person and more attuned to the needs of others and currents around me.

IN GREAT CONTRAST to the generous, broad-spirited quality of life inside Russian homes, the public, official, exterior world was cold, difficult, unyielding, uncaring, even cruel. Only this external face had hitherto been seen by the Western world; and only this cold monotone has dominated Western accounts since. Sometimes, back home in Australia, I've wondered whether media images were depicting the same country in which I'd lived.

It is easy to dismiss this hidden face as unimportant, and yet this private world is where Russians tended to spend much of their time, not out in the civic domain. The fact that we discount the functional significance of this cultural ballast says much about us.

I taught at the university, and interviewed many about how their society worked. In 1990, Soviet progressives were engaged in comparing and contrasting their social practices to those of the West, in a bid to better understand themselves. I was drawn into this same process but from the opposite direction.

I wanted to understand what living in a society organised along socialist lines actually looked like. I was culturally of the Left before I set out, although I've never had much interest in submitting to dogma. My Soviet immersion challenged me personally and politically. Being sympathetic, I went to the Soviet Union with different questions from other commentators. Instead of setting out to condemn or confirm the superiority of our world, I was interested in discovering which Soviet insights might inform a brighter human future. With this as a starting place, I inexorably parted company from prevailing Western conclusions.

FIRST UP, THE positives: Everyone I met was extremely generous, with a deeply embedded sense of sharing. It was a most striking and attractive feature. Although this sharing ran parallel to the official line, it didn't strictly arise from their Communist ideology – it wasn't 'socially engineered'. It was more a

protective reaction against hardship, and happened around the edges of official stipulations about calibrated equality. In the real world of shortages, people had to share, below the radar, in order to survive.

In parentheses, I would add that there were pronounced limits to this open-heartedness. Such intense consideration could never ripple out indefinitely; and beyond the edges of clan-networks there was a sharp drop-off in civic regard.

Still, I became mesmerised by this aspect of their social and economic behaviour. I had the sense that people were guided by a completely different consciousness. I was surprised to watch them respond to others in ways that I couldn't predict.

This cosy Russian convivial, even cloying, interconnectedness contrasted strongly with the separation and the spaces between people which I experience at home; with our 'unbearable lightness of being'. Their texture of living favoured passivity, dependency, loyalty, conformity and surrender-submission to group needs. Cooperation was favoured, not competition. These are markedly different to promulgated Western values of self-sufficient individualism, variety, choice and freedom; and also different from corresponding splintering side-effects such as self-absorption and reluctance to cooperate. Their world was highly personalised; ours is impersonal.

The argument can go other ways. When I voiced these thoughts to one Soviet psychologist, he responded by saying that the price of their closeness was too high. Terrorising and herding people so that they cling to each other was 'a terrible way to touch the soul' he said. I wouldn't argue, but Russians do know about sharing (both the good and the bad) at close range; and this aptitude seems to be flying away with the centrifugal forces of our globalised world.

I discovered other deep differences regarding money. Tsarist Russia never made the full transition to a money-based society. Like most pre-industrial communities, people had muddled along, doing tasks and receiving life's basics. Even into Soviet times people continued to rely heavily on barter, with goods and access to services circulating through their networks of kith and kin. Most Soviet people could not easily accumulate currency in large sums and, with the rouble overhang, money did not wield a lot of clout. Daily cash did exist, but it wasn't a central obsession. Material acquisitiveness was socially frowned upon and comrades were encouraged to be modest in their requirements. Later I watched my Soviet friends change under the onslaught of the West. As one friend said: 'Money penetrates into all the crevices of our lives now.'

I saw clearly how competitive materialism nudges people to be separate, whereas collectivism enables people to stay in relationship. Money empowers the individual by extending solo reach, but erodes collective reservoirs. The absence of free-market forces in the Soviet Union allowed their ancient habits of

largesse to persist, rather than being swallowed up by intense pressures on the individual. Probably their communal consciousness could only blossom in a collective-economic milieu.

Living there often seemed to me to be more 'ecological' in a broadly social and multi-layered sense. We had time for relationships and for leisurely thoughtful conversations. Entertainment had a very light foot-print, most often occurring around someone's table over simple fare, sometimes with vodka; and there was a lot of fun to be had. It was the last period in my life when I remember luxuriating in time.

Another tendency I found among my Leningrad friends (and they included research scientists) was a soaring, transcendent, poetic view of life. They were far less shoe-horned into a rational, neatly delineated, empirical world view. Historically, Russia was a bystander-observer to the West's Industrial Revolution, and to hard-nosed mercantile accounting. From the eighteenth century, Russians respected and borrowed from our pursuit of scientific knowledge and technology, but that reductionist mentality never became fully lodged in their marrow.

The Soviet Union was no exemplar of environmental stewardship. However, if Odum is correct about cooperation and sharing having survival advantages near the limits to growth, the Russian aptitude for knockabout collectivism could make a handsome contribution to any twenty-first century paradigm.

IT IS SIGNIFICANT that Soviet 'sharing' occurred in a mass urbanised industrial society, as opposed to a village-based agrarian one. People worked in offices and factories, and lived in flats with electrical appliances and indoor toilets. Their society shared our technological capacity to harness the forces of the natural world to human ends. Yet people exhibited some modest non-materialistic self-restraint. This implies that industrialism does not have to breed materialism. It is the enfolding culture which counts. It shapes expectations and behaviour.

The lack of advertising incitement to consume ever more had to be enormously significant. Personally, I found the absence of glossy images a welcome relief. Bodies were more to be lived inside and enjoyed, like a comfortable armchair, as opposed to a commodified art object to be admired or reviled from the outside. Why would it be otherwise? Western advertising is in the business of revving up emotional insecurity and dissatisfaction, in order to boost higher levels of economic activity; and it inflates avarice and over-consumption in the process. It therefore follows that the elimination of advertising allowed these features to subside. (Of course the political propaganda which festooned Soviet public life was their form of visual pollution, and it also distorted psyches.)

Contrary to the conspicuous consumption of the West, the Soviet economy was not geared to pumping out consumer luxuries. Instead, basics were provided to citizens at subsidised prices; everyone was housed and fed.

It is salutary to remember that, as their society began to crumble in the sharp transition years of 1990 and 1991, the Soviet government gave all citizens monthly coupons for food and other essential items. The government also deeded them private ownership of the apartment they occupied.

Would our state act with such clear-headed transformational boldness in an equivalent upheaval, to hand citizens the necessary wherewithal to survive? America provided a contrast, when tens of thousands became homeless in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008.

The Soviet workplace provides another significant point of difference. In their labour-intensive set-up, productivity was 'inefficient' according to Western criteria, with the duplication of many workers assigned to one post. However, I had some affection for their doctrine of universal guaranteed employment. Everyone was included in the daily ritual of life. There was no fear of unemployment or penury; no marginalised enclaves of an underemployed underclass. The social cradle-to-grave guarantees soothed the anxiety to strive and acquire.

IN ANY FUMBLING attempts the West might make now to move forward in partnership with nature, an attitude of collective responsibility is crucial. Without strong assurances of social equity for all, coordinated moves to reorganise our industrial-societal structures into a more attuned complexity are unlikely to work, psychologically. There would be insufficient trust for people to let go of present certainties. Understandably, everyone has an eye on how they will fare personally. Why should some embark on belt-tightening, ecologically speaking, while they see others pollute and squander resources with insouciant abandon? This disincentive applies within, as well as between, nations.

Equity will be an enabler; not obsessive penny-pinching exactitude or fanatic appropriation, but rough and appropriate equity all the same. How to get there, from here? A major lesson from the Soviet exercise in equality is that coercion and calibrated formulaic sameness doesn't work.

I was highly enamoured with the country after I'd lived there. Annoyed by what I saw as the hastiness of Western commentators to condemn everything Soviet during the 1990s, I sought to cut a new path of interpretation through Soviet phenomena. Of one thing I was sure: popular critics were conflating all Soviet evils onto an alleged tragically flawed socialist model, while ignoring the means used over seven decades.

The totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime was most significant.

Their Communism was the abstract ideal of socialism grown in Russian soil, and thus was always going to be conditioned by Russian culture and political traditions. Take repression, for starters. The institutional machinery for a police state was constructed in the nineteenth century, under Tsars Nicholas I and Alexander III, in response to the 1825 attempted coup and the assassination of Alexander II, respectively. So the Bolsheviks did not create anything new. They merely availed themselves of the apparatus already laid down by their predecessors.

In the early years, Lenin took an extreme position, both theoretically and in action. Stalin refined it further in the 1930s, which degenerated into a long nightmare for the Soviet people. Marx's idea of 'Class War' also contributed to this tragedy, by inflaming atavistic human impulses. As theory implied, there were 'good' people and 'bad' people, and it led to the annihilation of many.

Although the regime did try to construct public procedures to ensure greater equality amongst its citizens (and there were plenty of examples of these) the violent implementation tore a gaping hole in the psychic fabric. My ear became attuned to the words 'I remember well', as a prelude to stories about the night a family member was plucked out of their flat and taken away. People would recount terrible abuses that their grandparents, or uncles and aunts, suffered at the hands of the state. People didn't forget these deeds; they stored these memories within.

Boris Yeltsin used those same words. 'When they took away my father one night – I was six then and I remember it well.'[2] Both of Mikhail Gorbachev's grandfathers were arrested. It is no accident that Gorbachev's Perestroika reformers were of an age to remember the Stalinist events of their childhoods. In hindsight, it was inevitable that the whole pressure-cooker would blow apart.

Another Russian feature of the Soviet version of socialism was the accentuated hierarchical nature of decision-making and bureaucratic implementation. Those above controlled those below – and some used their position mischievously, even malevolently. The back-drop of gulags and KGB reinforced power asymmetries, effectively handing great latitude to Soviet superiors.

The command-control structure in the workplace quelled initiative and innovation. Each Soviet work-position had a set of instructions which the occupant had to stick to: 'We are sacked for breaking instructions. If you adhere to the instructions and everything burns – well it's okay. If you break the instruction and manage to get things to work, then you can be sacked,' one lecturer told me. She gave compelling examples of inaction due to fear. The punitive nature of the public domain trained Soviets to be risk-averse. For most it was safer to do nothing; and so the 'do-nothing' torpor metastasised.

Another part of the massive go-slow, which any visitor to the country was confronted with, was sour resentment. It festered over what had gone before, plus the incredible bureaucratic labyrinths that kept everyone locked down in their place, plus the feeling of vulnerability that the system had dossiers that could be used against one, at any moment. Soviet desire for freedom from all this entrapment was fierce.

I gleaned a logic behind the many small stubborn acts of daily defiance. People told me they did not want to contribute to the regime's lifeblood because this would only perpetuate its grip. This principled malingering depleted economic performance and ate away at public life.

Much of the rot stemmed from emotional reactions to bureaucratised totalitarianism, not from specific antagonism against the espoused ideals of socialism (although I met enough people who did hate the very idea). It was the methods used and path taken which eroded good-will towards the workers' state.

The paternalistic, heartless regimentation denying most Soviet citizens of self-agency was a far cry from the socialist aspirations that I'd admired. Socialism implied liberation from ensnaring economic and class structures. We had certainly never chanted for state control at any march or meeting that I'd attended.

ARE THESE EXPLANATIONS sufficient; or are they merely excuses? Certainly, protestations alone will not establish that socialism is feasible. Foisting most of the blame for the failure of the grand nineteenth and twentieth century vision onto the Russians may be too glib.

My experiential lessons in Russian Communism did drive home the obverse negative side, at a practical level. I had to admit during my early months in Soviet streets, shops and offices that private enterprise has a dynamism that was nowhere to be seen in their government-controlled terrain. Personal reward definitely works a treat, and with it comes a psychological sense of freedom. Market-based economies are good at producing. No question. They excel at flexibility, innovation and can-do willingness. The Soviet motivational stick of coercion and punishment was paltry in comparison to the Western carrot of rewards and incentives.

There were potent arguments against their anti-capitalist system of centralised planning. Trying to micro-manage a complex economy from a central planning office led to paralysis. Their tireless procedures of allocating resources in pre-determined quantities into roughly 12 million disaggregated bits which moved through a network of monopolistic production-houses, especially across their far-flung localities, were unwieldy. It was too complex for the tangle of separate

departments, sectors, ministries and regions to coordinate. Cumbersome and sluggish, it was unable to adapt to changing conditions.

Arrayed against this, however, are the familiar evils of the Western free market. Great at material prosperity, at pumping out 'things', it can be blind to social and environmental well-being. It generates inequality, which inexorably widens in the absence of countervailing intervention. The 'unseen hand' invariably responds to the siren call of the individual purse, not to communal or complex non-material needs. It produces for those with money, ignoring those without. Both models have strengths and weaknesses.

Moreover, endless growth is no longer an option in a world of finite resources. Profit, as the central driver, is meeting its nemesis. To take the words of Michel Camdessus, a former head of the International Monetary Fund, completely out of context: 'Economic models are not eternal. There are times when they are useful and other times … [when] they become outdated and must be abandoned'.[3]

SO WHY REVISIT the now-defunct Soviet Union? Where does it get us?

Perhaps betraying some dialectical hardwiring, I have sought for some valuable synthesis of last century's ruinous Communist experiment with free-market gung-ho.

There has been some intermingling in the middle-ground; namely social democracies in the West, and the economically-more-liberal periods in the Communist world (such as during Gorbachev and Lenin's New Economic Policy years, in the Soviet Union). I submit that each resembles an ancillary lean-to to the predominant pattern, aimed at ameliorating the inherent shortcomings of each. The former softens some harsh impacts of an uncaring market on individuals, and the latter attempted to make the state-run economy more productive.

Are there other useful blends which could be embraced, if our collective mind could be rid of twentieth century binary ruts?

Added to this is the present contradiction between people and their planet.

ACCORDING TO HISTORICAL philosopher Roland Wright,[4] the last time human demands did not overdraw against nature's capital was in 1984. Annually, we extract more than nature's top-up interest. To reverse this, a balanced account with the biosphere has to be at the core of future public policy and private sector practice.

There is no way to squirm around it. Our physical drain on the environment will have to contract. But what is to be jettisoned? Opinions will clash wildly.

A strong contraction, as part of a transition towards a sustainable future, will be tough to negotiate. Gritty obstacles crisscross the terrain.

The forte of the free market is its vigour to produce – not to not-produce. So contraction poses a special challenge. Another Achilles heel is that free-market feedback loops work through the summation of haphazard individual choices. But we cannot afford to wait until most consumers have become informed and highly motivated enough to stop buying polluting and damaging products. The need for change is too urgent. We need more finely articulated information-relays.

Furthermore, how can a modern democracy, steeped in expectations of the unrestrained right to buy and produce, adopt an attitude of collective responsibility towards wise use of resources?

Here, I would float the idea that the Soviets might have got one thing right in seeking to rationally determine what is produced and what is not.

Industrial production is the engine-room of environmental degradation. In any brisk transition from present extravagant excess to sensible but elegant sufficiency, there is a need to exert some enlightened rationality. Why not harness intelligent parts of our brain, not just the hip-pocket nerve?

In the interest of dreaming up an innovative idea, and breaking up the hypnotic power of the status quo, I've tinkered and come up with a thumbnail sketch.

Let's entertain the idea of a hybrid between a free market and a planned economy. The inputs into the industrial–commercial zone, the impacts, and what comes out the other end, could be rationally deliberated upon, in a more a lightly planned approach. If firm overarching directives can channel activity towards goals of 'common social good', industrial objectives could be pared down and reset at the outset, before the mechanical and mercantile wheels start to churn.

If, unlike the Soviet Union, there is no micro-managing by any centralised power, freely operating agents could happily preserve capitalism's dynamic engine ticking over at the centre of industrial activity. Goods could still be bought and sold; not 'distributed' to the population. It amounts to moving the borders between public-private, and smudging the demarcations between the two.

Undoubtedly there are other ways to take apart the components of resources, need, motivation, production sequences and their impacts, product-worthiness, working tasks, personnel, and consumers, and fit them back together into a new matrix.

The Soviet industrialised design placed an emphasis on 'labour', near the front-end of production, due to the legacy of Marx. This blunted the influence of

user-consumers at the other end. Even Leonid Brezhnev acknowledged there was an urgent need for Soviet consumers to have a greater influence on what was produced.

Perhaps now is the point in history when it is imperative to dispassionately examine the output-end, of what is produced, who consumes it and why? Let's face it: junk is being manufactured, using precious resources for things that no-one really wants.

Industries, services and items could be judged on whether they are worth the degree of environmental damage their production entails. Products judged to be trivial or too damaging could be down-graded or abandoned; while those of high value would be retained. Select the best. Leave the rest.

A DETRACTOR COULD argue: why mess with our finely tuned social mechanisms, evolved over centuries? I would argue that they were shaped under past conditions, devised as the best solutions for that time – not ours. The detractor might continue: just let newly reformed financial incentives work.

The biting question is, what if improved efficiencies, triple-bottom-line accounting, new inventions, a price on carbon, and so on, fall short of what is needed? What then? Do we just sit on our hands, and keep our brains politely at half mast? Keep on with business as usual?

The grip of market ideology will come under increasing pressure because future environmental shocks are likely to force social equity issues back onto the political agenda. Even in the affluent West, contraction, whether voluntary or involuntary, will be more painful than the expansion of recent decades; and a continued heavy reliance on market-logic to shape public life will hurt those at the bottom more. What for some is trimming the fat, is cutting into the bone for others.

Sometimes when I look at my hybrid notion, it can shape-shift into a top-down Soviet-Frankenstein monster. Crucial questions instantly arise. Who will make the decisions, and on what basis? How would the integrity of such processes be protected? Would this system produce optimal results? Would feedback loops flow smoothly back into production?

At least 'the market' was an impersonal arbiter of production flows. (Well, in theory anyway.) By contrast, once people take up the reins, the opportunity to redirect the flow towards some and away from others can become too tempting. This sharpens the need to look carefully at governance modes.

The Soviet Union offers a cautionary tale. Ostensibly, it was a planned industrialised economy. In practice, it was not really impartially calculated and allocated. The central-planning hub, Gosplan, (which designed the entire production system of how much of what was made where) became subject to

political directives. Thus the moniker of 'command' economy became a more accurate descriptor.

The key here is who framed the priorities which determined industrial activity. As part of the privileged elite, both the Soviet leadership and those who translated their wish-lists into a workable plan, were untouched by the endemic shortages which blighted everyone else. Without common Western forms of accountability (such as elections or free press) public input was locked out. Thus the importance of common consumer goods for the masses slid down the priority-list.

Given the recent bowdlerisation of climate science in much of the Australian media, it's tempting to want to hand the whole kit-and-caboodle over to a technocracy of specialists. Then there would be no debilitating party-political stoushes, no dumbing-down of complex issues into lurid simplicities. Technocrats would ensure that scientific knowledge is handled appropriately, and they are well-equipped to delineate nature's terms. However, scientists have no special aptitude to decide on the best path forward. Moreover, their vulnerability to political pressure was demonstrated by the Howard government's attempt to muzzle climate scientists from speaking publicly about their findings. (A case for a new separation of powers, perhaps?)

Together these offer a strong negative lesson of how *not* to do it. Without the impersonal arbiter of money as the central pulse, it becomes more imperative that any rationally-crafted system pivots around mass input. Mass human experience, not solely the precise narrow focus of specialists or a political elite, is an essential part of feedback loops. The 'many' must be authentically involved. No more 'vanguards'. QED.

I'VE WONDERED HOW this might work. A rich twenty-first century mix of online participation, on-the-ground deliberative deep-democracy techniques and a reduced form of present executive style of government could democratically orchestrate an intelligent contraction in our industrial repertoire.

The public could participate in prioritising products, shaping quotas and choosing how the annual environmental budget could be allocated. This is not unlike Participatory Budgets, which are already in operation at a municipal level in South America. However, this proposed collaboration must be qualitative, considered and slow. Participants would be required to take in good quality information as part of their deliberative contract. A number-crunching exercise would fail dismally. It's not about juggling competing interests or marshalling the numbers. The aim would be to create optimal outcomes via an evolving process of mass conferring.

It's easy to be cynical about public participation, but I like to believe that if the general population were given a genuine seat at the table, they would become

motivated and informed. An observation made by John Reed, a left-wing journalist who lived in Petrograd during the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, is inspiring: 'All Russia was learning to read, and *reading* – politics, economics, history – because the people wanted to *know*… Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets…poured into the armies, the villages, the factories, the streets. The thirst for education, so long thwarted, burst with the Revolution into a frenzy of expression… Russia absorbed reading matter like hot sand drinks water, insatiable.'[5]

Alternative governance and industrial possibilities need to be discussed in public forums, not solely confined to specialist cloisters.

PAUL EHRLICH, AN ecologist and long-time environmental spokesman, has stated, 'the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of…the services that natural ecosystems supply to the human enterprise'.[6]

We operate as if it's the other way around. In fact, our value-adding is minor, even miserable, compared to the original cornucopia we receive.

In the end, only action on nature's terms will count. Our supplier of ecological services is deaf to persuasion, threats and political theatrics.

THE ECONOMIC EQUITY issues discussed in this article may seem dead and buried, 'so twentieth century'. Yet social ideas can break the surface, sink and then rise up again – the Occupy movement is a case in point. The declaration of the 'natural, inalienable and sacred' Rights of Man in 1789 was discredited after the Terror of the French Revolution, only to re-emerge in the middle of the twentieth century, dusted and reworded as 'universal human rights'.

Whatever the final verdict on socialism, we are suffering from a surfeit of individualism. Our present industrial system was developed under the Social-Darwinist survival-of-the-fittest paradigm. Now, the future needs to be freed from the impediment of resembling the past. Now, as we near the limits to growth, it is important for cooperation to be rewarded over competition by the social-economic environment.

The biosphere is a very collective concern needing collectivist solutions. Optimally, every niche of human society will readjust to a new pattern of living cooperatively with the earth and with each other – just in order to survive.

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[1] As quoted in Dale A, with Hill S B. At the Edge. Sustainable Development in the 21st Century. UBC press, Vancouver. 2001

[2] Solovyov V & Klepikova E. Yeltsin – A Political Biography. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London. 1992

[3] As quoted in Klein N. The Shock Doctrine. The Rise of Disaster Capitalism. Allen Lane, Vic 2007.

[4] Wright, R. Author of ABC Massey Lectures & A Short History of Progress, Text Publishing, Melbourne. 2004

[5] Reed J. Ten Days that Shook the World. Penguin, Middlesex. 1966, p39.

[6] As quoted in Dale A with Hill S B. At the Edge. Sustainable Development in the 21st Century. UBC press, Vancouver. 2001

Blind prejudice, blinkered vision

Time to ask the right questions

Rae Norris

WE all know, or should know, that Indigenous Australians are the most disadvantaged group in our community and have been for a long time. We know that they have higher rates of unemployment and welfare dependence, significantly shorter life expectancy, higher rates of incarceration, and so on through all the common indicators of social and economic well-being. We have known these things for at least the past three to four decades, but little that has been done has made much of a dent in these indicators. Nor has there been a general expectation in the community that all Indigenous Australians should experience a similar standard of living to the rest of Australia.

We need to improve our understanding of what is behind this disadvantage and why we have accepted it for so long. Asking ourselves 'What is Australia for?' provides a focus for developing this understanding.

Early colonists could have answered the question of Australia's purpose quite readily. At first it was a repository for Britain's unwanted convicts, and later a source of raw materials for Britain's insatiable economy. In the thinking of the time, a people who did not cultivate the land and live settled lives on it were in effect non-existent. The land was there for the taking and using for the benefit of the colonists and British Empire. Any animals, plants or people who got in the way of this effort could be eradicated, exterminated or imprisoned to ensure the continued growth of the introduced economy.

For the original inhabitants, on the other hand, such a question would have made no sense whatever. The value of Australia could never be measured in its usefulness in a monetary, commercial or industrial sense. The land was their mother, the source of their lore and livelihood, to be cared for along with all the plants and creatures which inhabited it.

Here is the essence of a clash of cultures which has resulted in the disadvantage of Indigenous Australians today and, more crucially, our acceptance that somehow they deserve this. My search for a reason for the

intractability of Indigenous economic disadvantage led me to conclude that deeply held prejudices have blinkered our vision. The British colonisers came to Australia with beliefs about black people which saw little place for the original inhabitants unless they accepted the new situation and became part of it. These underlying and pervasive beliefs were soon adapted to the Australian situation: beliefs in Aboriginal inferiority, laziness, incapacity, irresponsibility and need for improvement. As long as Aboriginal Australians maintained a separate cultural identity and refused to succumb fully to white dominance, we remained willing to accept that they deserved their disadvantage.

Little has changed in over two centuries. We have held tenaciously if unconsciously to the same set of beliefs and based our law and policy pertaining to Indigenous Australians on them. We have been able to hold these beliefs because we as a nation have never looked at Aboriginal people and cultures with respect, never acknowledged that the evidence does not match the prejudiced attitudes we have inherited, never reflected on the damage done by basing our treatment of Indigenous Australians on those misguided and dangerous attitudes.

We seem unable to properly recognise that Indigenous disadvantage and its damaging effects are outcomes of generations of neglect and our passive acceptance of appalling deficit in the services provided to Indigenous people and their communities. We as a nation act as if this is all they deserve. We overlook the fact that we have created that disadvantage. We have actively disadvantaged Indigenous Australians for over 220 years and we have advantaged ourselves at their expense.

The reality is that we still believe in Aboriginal inferiority; irresponsibility and incapacity; our ability to resolve their problems; and we still fail to respect their culture and values. There is abundant evidence to support the contention that the tenacity of each of these four beliefs has led to an inability to resolve the problems experienced by Indigenous Australians since colonisation t up to the present day.

Aboriginal 'Inferiority'

On June 21 2007, then prime minister John Howard and Indigenous affairs minister Mal Brough announced the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Notwithstanding that both politicians lost their seats in the subsequent federal election, there was no broad based, concerted outcry about such unprecedented forceful intervention into free Australian communities. When the Racial Discrimination Act was suspended to make the Intervention legislation possible, again there was only muted concern, not enough to break the bipartisan support for the legislation.

This demonstrates clearly that the rights taken for granted by the rest of us are able to be withdrawn from Aboriginal Australians, even without evidence that this will in fact address the issues of child abuse and neglect the Intervention was ostensibly aimed at addressing. It demonstrates that even where there is properly researched and considered advice based on full and frank consultation with Aboriginal people, in this case in the form of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report (2007), it can be ignored and draconian measures introduced without consultation and without reference to the evidence.

That this blatant exercise of power could occur with bipartisan support and without collective outrage provides some evidence that the belief in Aboriginal inferiority is still alive and well and providing balm for our collective conscience. But this is not the only indication of the continuing tacit acceptance of this belief.

It is also evidenced by the refusal of governments to pay compensation to Aboriginal people caught up in the Stolen Generations, or their refusal to simply pay Aboriginal workers back the money taken from their wages during the 'protection'/ 'assimilation' era. We as a society have nothing like this difficulty when it comes to paying compensation to victims of administrative bungles such as women wrongfully caught up in the immigration system. Most recently an Indian student incarcerated wrongly in Villawood Detention Centre was deemed to be owed over half a million dollars in compensation for his wrongful detention at a rate of a thousand or so dollars for each day of his detention. Surely then, morally, Aboriginal people whose lives and livelihoods have been interfered with are unquestionably deserving of financial redress. However we seem to apply a different moral standard to situations involving Indigenous injustice than we do to injustices affecting others.

If another Aboriginal person dies in jail, we may express our concern, but we don't question why they were in jail in the first place. Too many Aboriginal people are imprisoned for offences that would not exact the same penalty from other members of the community. We don't recognise the links between poverty and incarceration that result in Aboriginal people being jailed for non-payment of fines for common offences, like not having a current driving licence. We accept high Indigenous incarceration rates as if there is some endemic criminality in the 'Aboriginal character' that explains these high rates.

We fall back on the simple explanations too easily, and too infrequently examine the reasons behind Indigenous disadvantage. I believe this is because fundamentally we believe that Indigenous Australians are inferior. Too many of us have never met an Aboriginal person, but a few moments in the presence of people like Jackie Huggins, Pat Dodson and Marcia Langton would make any but the most intransigently racist among us question their assumptions.

Aboriginal 'Irresponsibility'

One of the most tenacious beliefs about Aboriginal Australians is that they are irresponsible with money. This belief underpinned all the laws and policies which have treated Aboriginal workers less favourably than other workers throughout much of Australia's history. Aborigines were excluded, at least until the late 1960s, from the award system which dictated pay and conditions for other Australian workers. Aboriginal wages were not only less than those of other workers, but many did not receive those wages in full, an issue which is still causing anguish to Aboriginal workers and their families and perplexing governments unable or unwilling to redress these past wrongs.

Even the main employment program for Aborigines in place for much of the period since the 1967 referendum, the Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP), paid Aboriginal workers based on the welfare system, not the industrial relations system. It had its problems, not least of which was its confused identity as fully neither a welfare nor an employment program. But the Howard government's reason for removing it was more about enabling the quarantining of a proportion of Aboriginal wages as part of the Northern Territory Intervention than it was about correcting the problems with the scheme.

'Income management', the governments' name for welfare quarantining was, and continues to be, an essential part of the Northern Territory Intervention. Underpinning the quarantining of welfare is a clear implication of Aboriginal irresponsibility: unless they are forced to do so, they will not spend their welfare money on the proper expenditure of food and shelter, but will fritter it away on gambling and alcohol. The same thinking guided those who drafted laws last century retaining rights to manage Aboriginal workers' money in the hands of government bureaucrats and others in authority. So strongly held was this belief that it never seems to have occurred to those in authority that the ones given the responsibility for Aboriginal money may themselves have acted irresponsibly. That they did in fact do so is still causing untold problems for Indigenous people trying to recover their stolen wages.

Associated with the view of Aboriginal people as being irresponsible is the popular view that they are lazy, that they sit around waiting for handouts and that they don't deserve to be given more than we have already poured into them; that would be throwing good money after bad. But such views are riddled with misapprehensions and assumptions.

Contrary to popular belief, Aboriginal people are taxpayers, directly and indirectly, and they have made massive contributions to the economic development of Australia, even if we count only the land stolen from them. Add to this the labour for which they were un- or under-paid, the money stolen from

their wages, and the knowledge of country which has been used, one could say (mis)appropriated, for the benefit of non-Indigenous Australia since the earliest days of colonisation. It is clear that Aboriginal people have more than earned anything we may give them to help resolve the problems we have caused.

This is the fact which we must face up to: the problems Aboriginal Australians now face are not of their own making. As Paul Keating so eloquently stated in the Redfern Address in 1992:

> …it was *we* who did the dispossessing.
>
> *We* took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.
>
> *We* brought the diseases. The alcohol.
>
> *We* committed the murders.
>
> *We* took the children from their mothers.
>
> *We* practised discrimination and exclusion.
>
> It was *our* ignorance and *our* prejudice.

As Keating said, 'the past lives on in inequality, racism and injustice' which, despite this public recognition of our culpability, is as true today as it was two decades ago.

That the situation has changed so little highlights the irony that we accuse Aboriginal people of being irresponsible when our system has never supported Aboriginal initiatives on an ongoing basis, even when they clearly work. Aboriginal-controlled health services have made incredible inroads into improving health outcomes for Indigenous people all over this country. But those services struggle to exist and provide services at the level needed. They waste untold time and resources in applying for funding, writing reports and accounting for every dollar, when similar vigilance is not paid to ensure that promises made by governments are fulfilled, that money goes where it is needed, and that the services are not bogged down in bureaucratic accountability instead of being able to focus on what they were established for: the provision of much-needed services.

Aboriginal 'Incapacity'

There exists a long-standing belief in the 'incapacity' of Aboriginal people; its tenacity is evidenced by the absence of consultation with Indigenous people prior to the Northern Territory Intervention. Who better than Indigenous people themselves to identify and find solutions to the problems faced every day by chronically under-resourced Indigenous communities? In fact, in constructing the

Northern Territory Intervention, the government sidelined the recommendations of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, which was based on consultation with Indigenous communities. Contrary to popular belief, there is strong and capable Aboriginal leadership successfully devising and implementing constructive solutions to problems. That these initiatives get little coverage in the mass media and that negative stories of Aboriginal communities' dysfunction are preferred to good news stories is again testimony to our abiding belief that Aboriginal people are incapable of identifying and resolving their own problems, with the support (*not* under the direction) of mainstream society.

The continuing belief in Aboriginal incapacity is clear in another important way. The emphasis in employment programs is and has long been on training Aboriginal people, on making them 'work ready', the modern version of what used to be termed teaching them 'industrial habits' in the early days of colonisation. The underlying assumption is that Aboriginal people have no skills, are inherently lazy and unreliable and therefore need to be transformed before they can be trusted to join the workforce. We don't ask: how do other workers attain their skills? In fact, most skills training occurs when people are in jobs, not before they enter the workforce. Why then are Indigenous people expected to get the training first? Perhaps this provides a convenient blindfold so that we don't have to recognise that one significant reason Indigenous people have a far higher rate of unemployment is because of the prejudiced views of employers about their skills, reliability and capacity for work.

Need for White Guidance

In the early days of colonisation, the 'Aboriginal problem' was framed in terms of Aborigines' need to become more like 'civilised' Englishmen, to recognise the benefits of white 'civilisation' and relinquish their old ways, settle down and become contributing members of the introduced society. When they refused to do so, ever more draconian measures were introduced to try to force them to conform to white notions of the proper way to behave. The so-called 'Protection' laws of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries are cases in point. They mandated the incarceration of Aboriginal people in reserves and missions, limited their freedom of movement, tried to take away their languages and cultural beliefs and practices, and economically disempowered them. From the 1930s the term 'assimilation' began to be used to describe government policy towards Aboriginal people, but little in fact changed. The aim was still to destroy Aboriginal culture and disempower Aboriginal people unless they relinquished their Aboriginal identity. These prejudiced attitudes and beliefs meant there was little chance of them taking an equal place in white society but this was overlooked.

From the late 1960s the whole legal regime of 'protection'/'assimilation' was dismantled – until 21 June 2007. The Northern Territory Intervention reintroduced the sort of draconian provisions that Aboriginal people had suffered under only a generation or so earlier. The permit system which gave Aboriginal people some control over who entered their communities was trashed. Communally owned land was to be resumed on long leases, a measure introduced by a government which seemed to find the notion of communal ownership abhorrent. Children were to be forced to attend school, with no consideration given as to whether adequate school infrastructure existed, whether the education provided was culturally appropriate for Indigenous kids, whether the teachers and educational bureaucrats had any understanding of Indigenous culture, language and learning styles, whether properly trained and competent teachers were even available. In other words, more of the same, despite the fact that these sorts of measures have never worked before and do not appear to be working now. They are based on a belief that we white Australians know best, we can make Indigenous Australians conform to how we want them to behave and we can punish them, by withdrawing benefits or withholding services, if they refuse to obey. The Intervention went even further with income management imposed involuntarily on people purely because of their Aboriginality, their lack of obedience assumed.

WE STILL SEEM to be unable to acknowledge our part in, our responsibility for, the current appalling situation in some Indigenous communities. Paul Keating was able to acknowledge the 'demoralisation and desperation' of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nigh on two decades ago. Is it too big a leap for us to realise that 'demoralisation and desperation' are outcomes of decades of inadequate services, inadequate provision of housing, poor nutrition, desperately poor health, high unemployment, welfare dependency in the absence of other options? We still fail to realise that such disadvantage inevitably leads to social dysfunction, while we miss the irony of its continuing existence even in the midst of the ongoing prosperity of the economy established over the past two centuries on Aboriginal land.

How dare we assume that we have the answers when we don't even know how to ask the right questions? When we can't acknowledge our mistakes and our responsibility for Aboriginal disadvantage? When we can't or won't hear when the people affected by these problems tell us what works and what they need to resolve them? Isn't it time that we recognised that Aboriginal people know the problems, they know the solutions and all they need is our respect and support to let them get on with the job? Of course this too is an essential point: we think we know best but we have never been prepared to allocate the funds and other resources needed to 'close the gap' between Aboriginal and other Australians' social and economic status.

This is the one good thing that can be said about the NT Intervention. It has cost a bomb, and both past and current governments seem to be prepared to pay for it, even if it has so far failed to make great inroads into 'closing the gap' between white and Indigenous social indicators. Unless the government is prepared to seriously fund the health, housing, educational and other needs in the order of billions of dollars, nothing will change. Our belief that we, the white people, have the answers will continue to ring as hollow as ever it has. It's not the answers we have, it's the resources. What's missing is the courage to once and for all make them available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to enable them to resolve their issues.

Respect for Aboriginal values and choices

Here is the crux of the issue. We don't have the respect for or confidence in Aboriginal people to entrust them with such resources. Ever since 1788, we have never fully recognised Aboriginal culture and traditions as having intrinsic value. We've continually expected them to relinquish everything that makes them Aboriginal. We expect them to settle in one place, get jobs, stay out of jail, look after themselves. But we seem unwilling to acknowledge that Aboriginal people and communities have their own priorities which they can and do act on without having to sacrifice their culture and identity, and they can do so in all the places where Aboriginal people choose to live. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of successful Indigenous devised and run programs and projects which fail to attract attention or ongoing funding at least in part because of our inherited limited and limiting attitudes.

If we came at the whole situation with respect and a willingness to listen and to trust in Indigenous capacity, and with a recognition that no amount of money would be too much to repay Indigenous people for what we've stolen from them, we could achieve true reconciliation at last. And maybe then we would be able to answer the question 'What is Australia for?' by pointing to the international commendation of this country's recognition of Indigenous Australians' historical and ongoing contribution to our prosperity.

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