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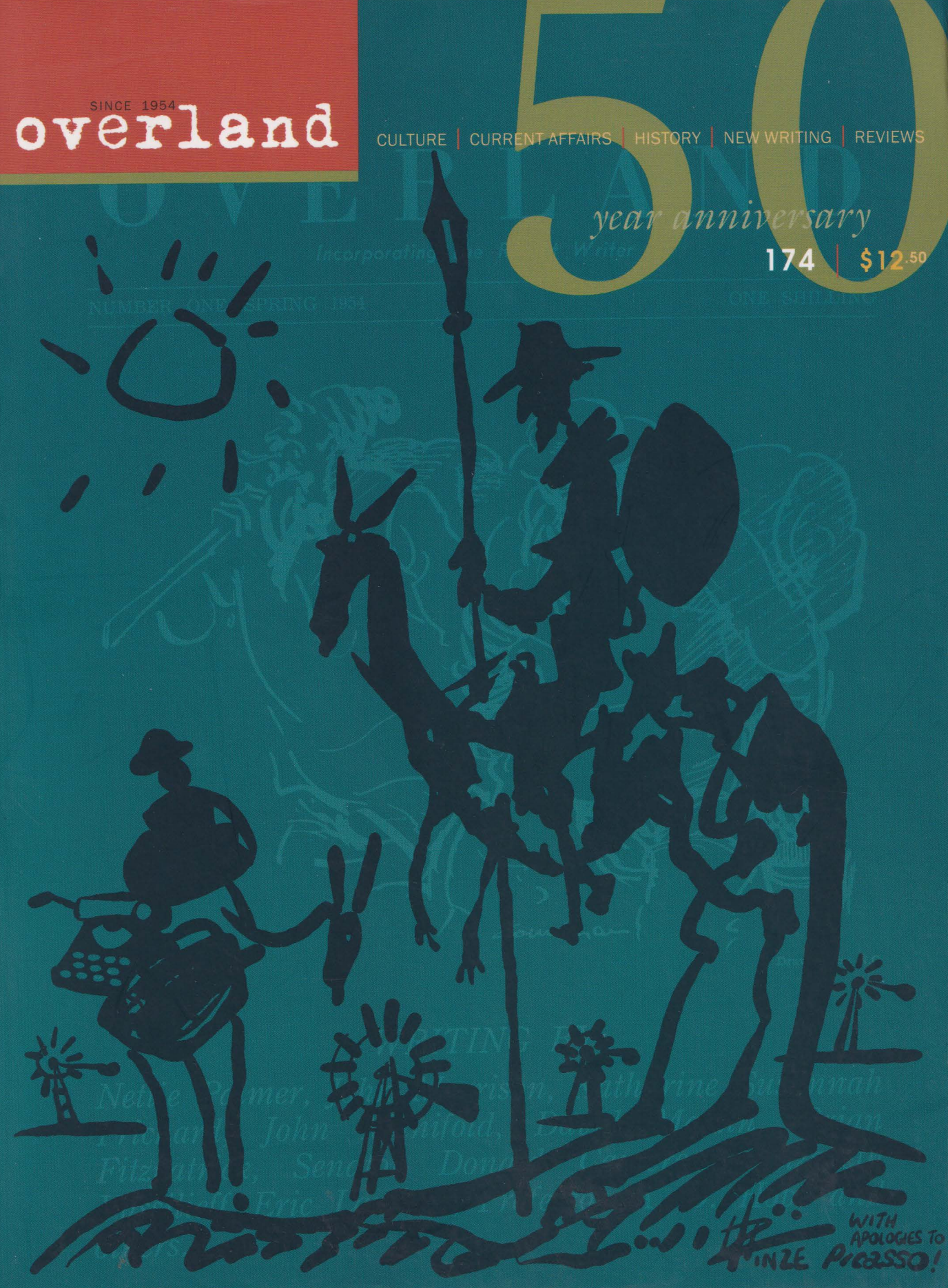

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AUTUMN 2004

TEMPER DEMOCRATIC, BIAS AUSTRALIAN

Overland and Australian culture

WITH THIS ISSUE *Overland* celebrates its fiftieth year of publication. For editors, especially new editors, the question of how to mark this occasion in the pages of the magazine is not easily answered. It is difficult to do justice to the monumental efforts of the people who founded the magazine and kept it going for such a length of time—through the Cold War, the dramatic social changes of the 1960s and more recently economic rationalism—without lapsing into sustained introspection and even self-congratulation. Any 'representative' selection from *Overland* could only be hopelessly arbitrary. A commissioned 'history' would be one perspective only, and historical articles commissioned to mark publication milestones face pressures to idealise rather than investigate thoroughly. There has, moreover, been a consistent 'monitoring' of the magazine's past and present identity and role, both within the magazine and outside of it, especially in important works by John McLaren. In this issue we have selected material that we feel does most justice to the different ***kinds*** of work done by *Overland*, material that engages critically and in an original way with the different dimensions of Australian culture. Overt reflection has been confined to the ever-cheerful Vane Lindesay. Readers will hopefully be left with the sense, still obtainable from even the earliest *Overland*s, that they have been entertained, informed and engaged in new and unexpected ways by people vitally concerned with Australian life.

'Culture', as everyone knows, is impossible to define in a completely satisfactory way. It is an extraordinarily contested term, valued by the political Right (who see it as a means of binding people together across class, gender and other 'structural' differences) and the Left (who see it as a basis of communal opposition against holders of political, economic and cultural power). In his 1994 *Brief History of American Culture*, Robert Crunden announced his intention to ignore questions of definition and just write about culture as 'creativity' at all social levels. The problem with any such cheerful rejection of theory is that one's own prejudices tend to then be left unexamined and unjustified, while existing cultural distinctions and hierarchies, and the technological, political and economic processes that help to shape these, are left similarly unquestioned. You end up being Peter Craven, fighting against cultural barbarism while implicitly defending (because ignoring) the political and material forces through which such barbarism appears.

'Australian culture' is a no-less contested term. Most people would agree that it does exist, but only in the most general sense of an Australian 'sensibility' or 'civilisation'. The Australian sensibility of course at any time, now or in the past, covers myriad different subcultures, separate and distinct social identities and habitudes. Alternatively, Australian civilisation might be considered a subset of Western and even global society. A more narrow definition of Australian culture, lending itself to more specific use, would centre on the arts and learning. This definition risks returning us to an elitist model of culture, dominant at the time of *Overland*'s arrival in 1954, when culturedness was the preserve of people with upper-crust English accents who went to the opera and could recite snippets of Shakespeare. The notion of culture as a particular sensibility, however, as the general way people use and understand their use of the physical world and its objects, fails to account for the political and economic relations and processes that, in addition to culture, shape consciousness and experience. The notion of an Australian 'civilisation' would be a broad enough definition of culture to include political and material factors excluded from the idea of culture as a sensibility or spirit, but is no less problematic: culturedness is here inextricable from its political and economic pillars, leaving us with the untenable proposition of the United States of America as the most cultured nation on earth.

As we often have the opportunity to explain to people who haven't come across the magazine before, 'Overland' refers to droving and was intended by its founders to evoke the true spirit of Australia, then popularly believed to have its origins in the bush and its living expression in mateship. Prior to the establishment of Cultural Studies and Australian Studies, Stephen Murray-Smith, his great offsider Ian Turner and their associates were involved in expanding the conception of Australian culture beyond the traditionally Anglophile 'high' cultural forms to include 'folk' and 'popular' culture, while refusing also to reduce questions of cultural production and value to the totalising economistic theorising of the Communist Party's official Marxism.

By the mid 1960s, however, the mythological basis of the 'democratic' and 'egalitarian' bushman was widely considered hopelessly idealistic, partly because most of the rural working-class had, with mechanisation and increasingly monopolised rural industries, been moved to the cities and suburbs, partly because cosmopolitan cultural trends made 'bushmen' appear quaint and old fashioned, and partly because, as pointed out by various activists and scholars, the bush mythology of traditional Australian nationalism was largely masculinist, racially-specific and homophobic. Turner argued that, while requiring modification, this nationalism remained valuable, but the weight of opinion was against him. The common cultural basis of opposition to Australia's 'ruling' groups and individuals was unclear, as was the target of such opposition. Britain, the 'mother country', the

imperial father, joined the common market, and Australia's relations with Japan and the USA continued to expand.

It is somewhat ironic, then, that the spirit of the Australian bush has in recent years reappeared in public life. As Sean Scalmer, Judith Brett and others have noted, Prime Minister Howard has somehow been able to use imagery from this mythological storehouse, completely divested of its labourist associations, to build support for a range of profoundly undemocratic and inegalitarian policies, a culturally insular and politically aggressive nationalism. The Left's relative lack of interest in populism and nationalism (in part a result of the specialisation and gentrification of intellectual labour), and its ongoing criticism of the 'Australian Legend', has left the door open for this mythology to be co-opted by the Right. Les Murray, the quality of whose poetry is the subject of some discussion in this issue, was a key figure in this historical process. It is no coincidence that Howard turned to Murray to write the proposed preamble to his constitution, nor that Murray's *idée fixe* has been 'the (politically progressive) elites' whose values are supposedly opposed to those of 'his' common people. The recent rhetoric of Opposition-leader Mark Latham suggests he thinks the liberal-left has made a mistake in allowing this earthy nationalism to be claimed exclusively by the Right. Where Howard's use of traditional Australian language has gone unchallenged, at least in the mainstream media, the Right have responded viciously to Latham's claim to a working-class upbringing and values.

In the best *Overland* tradition, contributors to this issue make original contributions to the different layers of Australian culture, and our understanding of these. Whether writing primarily on or for the arts and learning (Haebich, Watson, Grant, Ackland and Wilding, for example), the Australian sensibility (Hill), or Australia's Western capitalist civilisation (Sparrow, Pickering, Wilson, and Cahill), the contributors avoid advancing a narrow definition of culture as simply one or other of these dimensions. The conversation between these different cultural forms and levels is kept open, to paraphrase Donald Horne's description of his own life's work. Horne, one of the first thinkers to challenge Australia's 1960s nationalist complacency, is a contributor to our special supplement on cultural vitality, collated by Richard Holt of the City of Port Phillip and Judy Spokes of the Australian Cultural Network. Contributors to this supplement describe and advance a new grassroots movement for (democratically-conceived) cultural considerations to be enshrined in public policy (joining financial, social and environmental 'bottom lines'). As they and others in this issue make clear, writers and artists, working on their own or in groups, do make an impact on the quality of life of society as a whole, even where this impact only becomes apparent in the longer run. Our lead article (and twelfth public lecture) is provided by Barry Hill, a long-time friend and supporter of the magazine. In its striking of a balance between objective and subjective ways of knowing, between a clear-sighted attempt to understand the material and political forces impacting on culture and awareness of the particular ways those forces are lived, felt and responded to in life and art, Hill's work often embodies what is best about the *Overland* style. Here, he courageously and effectively examines the emotional impact of contemporary public policy on those people who haven't completely given up on the possibility of a decent Australian civilisation.

—**Nathan Hollier**

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CORRESPONDENCE PO Box 14428, Melbourne Vic 8001, Australia. Ph: 03 9688 4163
Fax: 03 9687 7614 e-mail: overland@vu.edu.au
web: www.overlandexpress.org

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✯ GERARD HENDERSON RESPONDS TO 173

IN THEIR EDITORIAL 'Utopia? Australian Idealism' (*Overland* 173), Katherine Wilson and Nathan Hollier maintain that, in my syndicated Fairfax column on 9 September 2003, I falsely "accused Iraqi intelligence whistleblower Andrew Wilkie of fabricating a quote from John Howard". The editors also asserted that I obtained my material from John Howard's office and "toed the line without checking . . . Hansard". Both statements are completely false.

During his appearance before the Parliamentary Joint Committee's Inquiry Into Iraq WMD Intelligence on 22 August 2003, Andrew Wilkie asserted that, pre-war, John Howard had claimed that Iraq possessed a "massive" and "mammoth" WMD arsenal. When asked by Labor Senator Robert Ray what was the source for this claim, Mr Wilkie replied: "Off the top of my head, I cannot recall."

In fact, the Prime Minister used the terms "massive" or "mammoth" on two only occasions in the lead-up to the Second Gulf War.

On 4 February 2003, John Howard told the Parliament that "in 1995, the international community was confronted by Iraq's massive program for developing offensive biological weapons . . ." In other words, the Prime Minister did not say (as Mr Wilkie alleged) that Iraq had massive or mammoth supplies of WMD. But, rather, that in 1995 evidence was produced with respect to Iraq's massive *program* for developing WMD.

In his *Address to the Nation* on 20 March 2003, John Howard referred to Iraq's chemical and biological weapons "which even in minute quantities are capable of causing death and destruction on a mammoth scale". In other words, the Prime Minister did not say (as Mr Wilkie alleged) that Iraq had massive or mammoth supplies of WMD. But, rather, that Iraq's WMD were capable of having a mammoth effect—even if used in "minute quantities".

It is true that Robert Manne accused me of misquoting Andrew Wilkie. In a postscript to my column of 30 September 2003 I rejected Professor Manne's allegation and wrote that I would provide, on request, a "documented explanation" in support of my claim that Andrew Wilkie had misquoted John Howard. I forwarded a copy of this document to Robert Manne—he did not respond. I would have provided a copy to *Overland*'s editors—had they bothered to ask.

One final point. Contrary to the assertion in *Overland*, the Prime Minister's Office did not draw my attention to Andrew Wilkie's misquotations. Rather, I noticed Mr Wilkie's errors when reading Senator Ray's comments—as reported in Hansard.

—GERARD HENDERSON

✯ ROBERT MANNE RESPONDS TO HENDERSON

MIGHT I COMMENT on the characteristically disingenuous Gerard Henderson letter? In his original article on Andrew Wilkie, published in the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Henderson claimed that "as part of his confused and confusing performance at a parliamentary inquiry" Wilkie argued that "pre-war, the government had maintained Iraq possessed a 'massive' and 'mammoth' WMD arsenal".

Henderson continued:

> When asked by Labor Senator Robert Ray what was the source for the claim that the Government had used the words 'massive' and 'mammoth' with respect to Iraq's WMD, Wilkie replied: "Off the top of my head, I cannot recall." Ray subsequently demonstrated that Wilkie's (alleged) quotes had been taken out of context. The former ONA officer did not seem to understand the seriousness of the charge.

In order to decide whether it was Wilkie who misled the parliament or Henderson who misled his readers (and now, with his letter, readers of *Overland*), a certain amount of detail is required. The opening exchange between Wilkie and Ray in the parliamentary Inquiry into pre-war intelligence occurred more or less in the way Henderson outlined. Later in the hearing, however, Ray returned to this question. He now acknowledged that Howard had indeed used the words 'massive' and 'mammoth' with regard to WMD, although not exactly in the way Wilkie had stated. This is what Ray said: "I will just clear one thing up. You use the words 'massive' and 'mammoth'. I could not find them, but I have found both quotes now. They do not actually refer to the *amount* of weapons of mass destruction, *so neither you nor I are wrong*. I will put the quotes on record." And he did. It is at this point that the matter should have come to an end.

Ray had acknowledged that Wilkie was not wrong. In his determination to discredit Wilkie, Henderson did not inform his readers that Ray had corrected himself. Instead, Henderson wondered aloud whether Wilkie "understood the seriousness of the charge".

The seriousness of what charge? The clear implication here was that Wilkie had misrepresented the Howard government's prewar position not merely on the matter of words, but, more substantively, with regard to the whole question of WMD. In his letter to the Editor in Chief of the *Age* Henderson appears to amplify the nature of Wilkie's supposed misrepresentation like this: "The fact is that Andrew Wilkie alleged that the Howard government had claimed that Iraq had a 'massive' and 'mammoth' arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. And the fact is that neither the Prime

Minister nor any of his ministers made any such claim." More than words seem here to be involved.

In order to show that it is Henderson and not Wilkie who is grossly misrepresenting the position of the Howard government, the context surrounding Howard's use of the word 'massive' with regard to Iraq's WMD arsenal is helpful. It came in the course of Howard's most important prewar speech, his parliamentary address in February last year. The context makes absolutely clear that Howard was talking about Iraq's WMD *capacity*— not a WMD *program*, as Henderson falsely claims:

> There are 6500 chemical bombs, including 550 shells filled with mustard gas, 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agent—including 1.5 tonnes of the deadly nerve agent VX, 3000 tonnes of precursor chemicals—300 tonnes of which could only be used for the production of VX, and over 30,000 special munitions for the delivery of chemical and biological agents—all unaccounted for. In 1995, the international community was confronted by Iraq's *massive* program for developing offensive biological weapons—one of the largest and most advanced in the world. Despite four years of intensive inquiries and searches, the weapons inspectors did not even know of its existence until Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamal defected. Faced with its duplicity Iraq finally admitted to producing aflotoxin—which causes cancers, the paralysing poison botulinum and anthrax bacteria. It admitted to manufacturing 8,500 litres of anthrax. A single gram is enough for millions of fatal doses.

The context makes it clear that Howard asserted that by 1995 Iraq already possessed a massive arsenal of biological weapons. He was not speaking of unfulfilled plans. It also makes clear that he suggested that Iraq still possessed the weapons. This is not a minor matter. It was because of such assertions that we went to war.

On 20 March 2003, in his speech to the Australian nation on the eve of the war, Howard returned to the question of Iraq's vast arsenal of chemical and biological weapons. He spoke thus:

> We are determined to join other countries to deprive Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction, its chemical and biological weapons which, even in minute quantities, are capable of causing death and destruction on a *mammoth* scale.

What Howard was suggesting here was that as Iraq possessed vast quantities of biological weapons agents (like the 8,500 litres of anthrax he had earlier spoken about), the deadly threat from them could best be grasped by the fact that even a tiny dose of a biological agent could cause death and destruction on a 'mammoth' scale. It is true that Wilkie misremembered Howard's use of the word 'mammoth'. Howard had previously spoken about Iraq's "massive" biological weapons program, and he now spoke dramatically about the "mammoth" destruction such weapons could cause. To regard this misremembrance as a serious error is, in my opinion, absurd.

On the issue of semantics, Henderson did not inform readers that Senator Ray had been obliged to retract his original (not particularly important) claim. As Ray acknowledged, Howard had, indeed, used both words with regard to WMD. On the more substantive matter, Henderson's original article asked Wilkie if he understood the seriousness of the charge he was making against the Howard government. The implication was that Wilkie had seriously misrepresented the government's prewar position when he argued that Howard had claimed that Iraq possessed a vast arsenal of WMD. It was precisely because of this case that we followed the USA and Britain in going to war against Iraq.

On both the semantic and substantive issues, then, it is not Andrew Wilkie but Gerard Henderson who has sought to obfuscate and mislead.

—ROBERT MANNE

This letter has been edited for space. A longer version is available on www.overlandexpress.org

✯ BEING JOHN LEONARD

I FOUND HARDLY anything that I could agree with in the review essay 'Reading Les Murray's *Collected Poems*' in *Overland* 172. I'm asking for the space to say so, because of course the name at the top and bottom, John Leonard, is also mine.

I'm the John Leonard who edited *Seven Centuries of Poetry in English* in 1987 (fifth edition two months ago) and three subsequent well-known anthologies of Australian poetry. My name is acknowledged for editorial advice in many books by poets spanning two decades, and I have written occasional reviews in the major quarterlies since 1964. The Murray review is not by me but by *Overland*'s new poetry editor, whose first book in this country appeared in 1997; yet a fair proportion of Australia's poetry community has been congratulating me on my appointment. I've clarified patiently, but there are many poetry readers outside this loop who will never question the difference.

This matters to me, and I'm sure it matters to you and to your poetry editor—who will be concerned to know (as I am) that his poetry also gets regularly attrib-

uted to me, though I'm not a poet. To readers, we share a field identified as 'poetry'. I was an editor for a national poetry journal, the inaugural *Blue Dog*, just last year. What to do? The standing convention—a courtesy to readers, basically, and to the bibliographical records—is for a same-name entrant to an environment to use a middle name or initial (Marion M. Campbell, Martin R. Johnson). If your poetry editor were to do this, it would greatly help both of us.

In fairness, given the confusion of names, may I tell my opinion of Les Murray's poetry? Discounting your reviewer's negating tone, I concur with his sense that *Collected Poems 1961–2002* opens a life work to evaluation. I know all Murray's poetry well; I love it, with occasional irritations and disagreements. But this *Collected* still surprised by being so large: yet dense, and not repetitive. It bulges with invention, and is almost too large to handle. I was shocked into asking, for the first time, if Murray is the best poet now writing in English as critics in several countries have pondered. I think he might be, and it's the exploding abundance of *interest* (whose "lack" is your reviewer's deepest disparagement) that does it for me, early and late. This includes much more than nation (a term Murray uses delicately), bush, Bunyah and the 'right-wing views' among his other views. (Murray has attacked what he interprets as leftist coercions in his time; otherwise his opinions tend to cut right and left about—there is a quick gut-view in his poem 'The Poisons of Right and Left'.)

'Thinking About Aboriginal Land Rights, I Visit the Farm I Will Not Inherit' is a more subtle poem than your reviewer sees. Because of the title, its solitary meditation is able to blossom backward in the final line into a humble solidarity with the now-disinherited Aboriginal generations who may be buried in that place: "I go into the earth near the feed shed for a thousand years." This is "thinking". Murray's personal concurrence with the High Court's ruling on Wik in 1997, documented on pages 283–4 of the biography by Peter F. Alexander, is of a piece with this: respectful, self-effacing, and informed by his own experience and thoughts upon land. The tone of a listening dialogue lies behind his lifetime meditations in verse and prose on his and our Aboriginal connections.

On page 85, Catholicism is misconceived from first to last; in particular, the notion of a necessary rift between that faith and a poet's art would have been unrecognisable to my former Jesuit self. Say, perhaps, that Murray is a worldly poet who appreciates—praises, appraises, increases—creation. See Peter Steele's thoughtful essay in *The Poetry of Les Murray* (eds Laurie Hergenhan and Bruce Clunies-Ross, UQP) and Murray's own writings on religion and poetry. As to the idea that rural readers might prefer a Hesiod type who is stronger on "what actually happens in the paddock or in the yards", it's unlikely. Murray readers that I know on the far-north tablelands are an outward-looking bunch.

I am recording my opinion of the quality of Les Murray's work simply because my name is in there—difference of opinion is itself unremarkable. But I have an actual problem—again an opinion, but readers can judge—concerning this essay. The above instances reflect an alarming naivety that I find throughout. Poets complain, rightly, that the review culture in poetry, with some bright exceptions, is at a low ebb of competency across the board; this at a time when, as I myself believe, more various and venturous poetry of abiding interest is being written in this country than at any other period. Quite a bit of it isn't well known. It requires a comparably alert criticism, selfless and knowledgeable. I've been concerned for some time that our literary editors need to think this through.

—JOHN LEONARD

✯ CRITICISING THE CRITIC

I AM ASTONISHED at the intemperate tone of the review of Les Murray in the latest issue of *Overland,* by your Canberra reviewer John Leonard.

I have criticised and, on occasion, parodied Murray's poetry. His work contains an embarrassment of riches for critics and pasticheurs. I do not, though, share your reviewer's near-vilification of the man and his work. Murray's work is at times verbose, otiose, intemperate and pompous. It is also often restrained and subtle in its argument and language. It is frequently spectacular.

Murray's politics and religious beliefs give his ordinarily interesting poetry considerable and further dimensions. The 'political' Murray often seems to me to come unstuck, and I share the chagrin of many of his readers who regret that his tendency to construct straw figures diminishes him. Every writer who betrays the craft by slumming with the polarising language of politics deserves the opprobrium of readers who care for values that transcend that debasement of thought. Murray draws big crowds when he reads in my part of rural Australia, and his listeners and readers are far from uncritical. In the twenty-six years that I have observed the response of general readers, the curious, and students of poetry to Murray's performances here and overseas, I have heard the full gamut of responses to Murray. He is not considered a 'typical' bush bard because, as thinking people know, there is no 'typical' bush person. This may come as news to your Canberran reviewer who, along with Murray, shows signs of being infected with the polarising virus.

Murray's pose of diffidence in much of his verse seems to have blinded your reviewer to the complexity of the writing and the man. What some take as a shyness reflecting his 'shame in crowds' and his 'solitary pride' may strike others as a cultivated mask for a monstrous ego. Your reviewer scarcely gestures toward elucidation of the poetry.

The cracks at Murray's religious beliefs are similarly gratuitous. The human sympathy that Murray manifests in much of his poetry is supported both by a belief he does not predicate and by rational argument that he espouses.

This is not the place to mount a defence of Murray: I expect some uncritical supporters of the man and the poetry will clamour to be heard. My second point of issue with your reviewer, however, requires another word. The Canberran John Leonard has probably inadvertently caused anguish to a finer critic than himself, the anthologist and retired academic John Leonard. In light of the curmudgeonly misreading of Murray that passes for a review, I do not think a note at the foot of your reviewer's column is sufficient to put the distance necessary between him and the Melbourne supporter of others' poetry. Your reviewer should—I almost said 'out of decency'—add something to his own name: John 'Elmore' Leonard—something of that kind.

—Michael Sharkey

✯ JOHN LEONARD, POET, RESPONDS

I AM INTERESTED in John Leonard's views on my review of Murray's *Collected Poems*. Naturally readers of the volume will have to make up their own minds about the value of Murray's poetry and the meaning of individual poems; my review is my reaction to the volume. One point: my review does not say that rural readers of Murray's verse will expect descriptions of "what actually happens in the paddocks or the yards", but the opposite.

I will leave *Overland* readers to ponder Michael Sharkey's response and decide for themselves about who is being "intemperate".

I would make one point, however: when assertions are made about Les Murray being Australia's "leading poet" and so forth, we are dealing with issues deeper than an evaluation of one writer's work. The issue then shifts to what Australia is and what is asserted when it is claimed that Murray's poetry somehow represents the nation. These are important questions, and ones that justify vigorous contestation and debate.

—John Leonard (*Overland* poetry editor)

✯ MORE ON LES AND THE TWO JOHNS

I WAS DISMAYED to read the review of Les Murray's *Collected Poems* by the poetry editor of *Overland*. Not only do I disagree strongly with John Leonard's opinions in regard to Murray's work, but I feel the hectoring tone of the review subverted any interest I might otherwise have had in the writer's ideas and opinions. I was most surprised by Leonard's statement, "In the later part of the book we find Murray's poetry becoming more and more vatic and more and more bereft of any humanity". This is a serious accusation. I find it an extraordinary statement when I consider, for example, Les Murray's poem about childhood autism 'It Allows a Portrait in Line Scan at Fifteen'. From its classic title (referencing the pronoun reversal difficulties experienced by a child with autism), through to its compelling last line, this poetic observation of the child with autism bristles with extraordinarily humane observation—it is one of the most sensitive portrayals of this condition in either literature or science. As it occurs in the *Subhuman Redneck Poems* on page 412 of the *Collected*, it is indisputably in Leonard's "later part of the book". Puzzling. Indeed, I could list other poems of similar integrity and I'm forced to wonder whether Leonard has read the *Collected Poems* with due thoughtfulness.

Similarly, I was surprised by Leonard's pretentious tone when criticising Murray for lacking "a cosmic sense of humour" (whatever that may be). Contrary to his contention that the "lumbering" and "elephantine" humour of Murray's poetry is "mostly cruel", in my opinion Murray's *Collected* brims with a great deal of comic vitality—read, for example, a selection from *Translations from the Natural World*, particularly poems such as 'Bats' Ultrasound' and 'Pigs'. When Leonard asserts that "I only realised that some of the poems in this volume were meant to be funny about halfway through, and wish I hadn't"—I fear it is as much a statement about the reviewer's ponderousness as about the rich, often eccentric humour in Murray's poetry.

Your poetry editor bears the same name as the well-established reviewer and academic John Leonard who has been writing on poetry in Australia for many years and who has edited a number of influential anthologies, the most recent being the fifth edition of *Seven Centuries of Poetry in English*. With interest, I've followed the comments and letters that have appeared in the *Age* and *Australian Book Review*. However, the heart of the matter has not been addressed. When John Leonard's name (as in the *Overland* JL) began to appear (and I must say I had never heard of him before), I mistakenly attributed his appointment as poetry editor of *Overland* to the more renowned John Leonard. In line with the editor's note from *Australian Book Re-*

view, I'm amazed that the John Leonard (as in the *Overland* JL) who is not yet an established figure in Australian literature, has not elected to differentiate himself and ensure that no misattribution occurs. I have confused the two on several occasions, to my embarrassment, and I can only imagine how it must be for both writers.

If the new poetry editor of *Overland* continues to issue rubbishy reviews of contemporary Australian poets, he needs to stand by his words without embarrassing a colleague. A differentiation initial would seem a simple solution, or the full swing of a middle name.

—Jennifer Harrison

✯ AND ANOTHER . . .

In September I sent you down a short piece of reminiscence which was probably of small interest to you. In any case I would like to withdraw it now and to state that I will send no further contributions to *Overland* while John Leonard remains your poetry editor.

This is because I have read Leonard's piece on Les Murray in your Spring issue. Do not think for one instant that the hostility I presently feel toward your journal is based on the simple fact that Leonard did not like the Murray *Collected*. I do not doubt for a moment that intelligent argument could be brought in fair criticism against Les's works, and that even if I did not accept such argument, I could accept that it was a fair point of view.

But Leonard's prolonged rave is not intelligent argument. His detractions will not match with a fair reading of the Murray text. His account of the *Collected*, and more defamingly, its author, is by turns mendacious, poisonous, glossing, puerile, and given the intellectual funk that will not allow him to quote any more than four lines of a poem that creates its own wondrous atmosphere and significance, it is profoundly dimwitted.

There are many resentful nonentities who swarm in the literary community, and if Leonard was a one-off reviewer for *Overland*, my hostility would be confined to the reviewer, not the journal. But it astounds me that you, as editors, should have allowed such mediocre argument, such vile spite, such immature commentary, onto your pages. Leonard's piece reads like the essay of a disaffected Year twelve student.

Furthermore, your publishing of it disappoints me, because 'temper democratic, bias Australian' is a watchword that has power to win my allegiance very readily. Stephen Murray-Smith, who I met once or twice and liked, would have been horrified by the paltry resentments that glimmer like a shoal of toadfish through the Leonard review. More than anything, I would like to see within Australian discourse, a strong journal committed to the views on society I espouse—the fair go, the equitable distribution of wealth, the fair access to justice and to decision-making, the consideration of ideas that allows an incisiveness of critique without spite toward the person. But Leonard's review is not the fair go. It is an intellectual disgrace made possible by your editorial tolerance of it.

And a last remark. I do not confuse the tactful, shrewd, independent, dedicated anthologist John Leonard, with this Canberra John Leonard.

My sympathy with *Overland* and the values it wants to carry at its masthead, will reconnect when you have ditched your present poetry editor, and found one with both intelligence and fairmindedness. I shall send a copy of this letter to the OL Society Ltd's present Board.

—Alan Gould

✯ IN PRAISE OF LEONARD'S CRITICISM

I haven't read Les Murray's *Collected Poems*. Not likely to, either. And not just because I read the John Leonard review in the recent *Overland*. Les Murray lost me as a reader a long time ago. Probably about the same time as Christopher Pearson championed him in the pages of the *Adelaide Review*. A good deal of those Murray poems, as Leonard suggests, comprise obscure words, and often several at a time; language I don't readily understand. And I hardly want to have a dictionary sitting on my lap to get a handle on what any poet is attempting to say or convey. Maybe this says something about my own lack of a formal education, but that is hardly an embarrassment to me. I consider myself a 'general reader', and this is the point of reference that Leonard sets out from in his review: what would the general reader of poetry expect to find in *Collected Poems*?

I'd collected *Overland* from my post box in Adelaide, en route to Melbourne on a road trip. I was lucky and was sharing the driving so I set about reading issue 172 on the South Australian side of the border. When I got to John Leonard's review I found myself laughing out loud. My friend enquired as to what was so funny. I told her what I was reading and said that Leonard had pegged Murray perfectly. Quote me something, she said. So I read out the following lines. "One of the symptoms of the lack of humanity in Murray's poetry is the lack of a sense of humour." It's so true. I've always pegged him as lacking a sense of humanity and humility. His stance on arts funding too, serves perfectly to suggest a selfish nature and greedy style.

It's not that my library shelves don't hold any Les

Murray. I've got a copy of an early selected poems *The Vernacular Republic: Poems 1961–1981*. I bought it second-hand some years ago. Virtually virginal. It falls open now to his poem, 'Driving through Sawmill Towns'. I told my friend about that poem and how when I now approach Nangwarry and Mount Gambier, invariably that particular poem is at the forefront of my mind. And that's the guts of what Leonard is saying in his review: some of those earlier poems are rippers and made Murray a legend. In 'Noonday Axeman' I'm sure he speaks to and for those men who have levelled forests. Most men who'd swung an axe would be hard pressed not to relate to the simplicity of the language and the labour. A news report earlier today informed me that a blockade of an old-growth forest is in progress today in Tasmania. I don't see Les writing poems about such matters, but it wouldn't be politically correct, would it? Knock 'em over and get a quid out of 'em, eh Les?

In Volume 1, No.1 of *Blue Dog. Australian Poetry*, Michael Sharkey stated: "Much verse that poses as 'serious' is in effect frivolous or pretentious. Bad poetry really exists. So does good poetry. It is critical that reviewers say how and where it does". Thanks *Overland* for giving space to John Leonard to do just that.

—Geoff Goodfellow

Dear John Leonard,
Congratulations on your review of Les Murray's *Collected Poems*. I almost felt like clapping! Although I know some of the opinions you expressed have been expressed elsewhere, I'm not sure so many in one place or with such assurance and long sightedness. It was a fine example of the 'emperor's new clothes'. Well done!

—Nicollete Stasko

✯ FIFTY YEARS OF OVERLAND

Is it fifty years? A crabbed note in ink, "Francis, I think you would be interested" accompanied *Overland* issue two, on rough cream paper, dense type and black images. A few small, refined sheets. Nettie Palmer was right. I was interested. Soon hooked! Here was a new voice; rumbustious ideas, a sense of independence and rigour, new/old dreams in vivid prose which drew and excited me; excited me for years to come. Later, coloured covers, thick issues, weighty subjects added to poems and stories, literary chatter always tinged with its proper values emanating from "Temper democratic, bias Australian". I grew up with *Overland*. I also nursed dreams of an egalitarian and generous nation reflected in an egalitarian and visionary literature which *Overland* championed.

With foolish undergraduate ardour, I began writing to Stephen Murray-Smith what became an annual comment, until generously he invited me to join the editorial advisory panel which met in a smoke-filled room at the University (of Melbourne) and which filled me with awe: Martin, Waten, Lindesay et al.; I was speechless, of little use. But attending 'clothed' my experience of *Overland* in the sense that both the issues and the people grew real, similarly the way forward to a better Australia. Anything was possible!

I married, went to Sydney as an architect/planner, eventually joining the 'Utzon In Charge Committee', fighting the philistines who wanted to scupper this unique and visionary building. The issue clarified who were friends, sadly few, and the rest. It dawned on me that 'the rest' would see to it that anything was never possible. So, we lost! Utzon (and I) left Australia.

But I kept my youthful dreams nurtured by *Overland*, and still nurtured! I still hold an image of a fair and beautiful country democratically tempered, generously Australian with no bullshit, in which its heart, no longer dead, beats for all of us with Dream-Time regularity and where anything is possible. If only! But we must keep on trying.

The need for journals of independence and vision is complex, yet simple: Unless 'the few' defend our dreams we will remain up shit creek without a paddle. A sense of what is possible makes life worthwhile; this map of the mind clarifies the journey we must and will make in due course. Maybe in the next fifty years.

—Francis Oeser

floating fund

Once again we would like to thank our friends and supporters for generously giving to keep *Overland* afloat. Thanks this quarter are due to: $120 J.R.; $95 A.O'B.; $58 M.G.; $50 M.L.; $42 D.H.; $18 J.T. ,C.C.M., V.B.; $15 K.S.; $10 P.H., M.T., P.D.; $8 T.G.&L.R., G.R.S., S.M., M.M., H.S.B., R.C., E.W., H.B., B.J.N-S.,V.D., D.J.W., P.G., J.C.; $5 W.&R.W.; $4 M.D.; $3 P.H., A.N., H.H., A.R.G.,: Totalling $589.

THE MOOD WE ARE IN

circa Australia Day 2004

> But politics, like all of history, is concrete. (To be sure, nobody who really thinks about history can take politics altogether seriously.)
>
> —Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

> Wu-men comments: Tell me, did he preach , or not? If you open your mouth, you are astray. If you cannot speak, you are astray.
>
> —Robert Aitkin

> *Defenceless under the night*
> *Our world in stupor lies;*
> *Yet, dotted everywhere*
> *Ironic points of light*
> *Flash out wherever the Just*
> *Exchange their messages:*
> *May I, composed like them,*
> *Of Eros and of dust*
> *Beleaguered by the same*
> *Negation and despair,*
> *Show an affirming flame.*
>
> —W.H. Auden, 'September 1, 1939'

I HAVE A POSTCARD from a shrink I know. As a friend, after a relaxed social conversation about the political situations we're in, he took pity on me and sent, as his note says, "some ramblings on the future and staying hopeful." The picture shows three freeway signs: *Depressed for No Reason*, *Depressed for A Good Reason*, and *Just Depressed, Don't Want to Analyse*. Down the road you can see *Still Depressed*, and a sign that says *Un-Done*.

It would be good to get to some of the *Un-Done*.

I didn't have a topic for this lecture until I found myself surprisingly happy. This happened during the second cricket test in Adelaide, just before Christmas, when the Indians were winning, and the Australians were losing. What was happening? I *wanted* Australia to lose because I had become fed up with the swagger, the surplus aggression, the lousy sportsmanship. Whereas the Indians were playing like their Lord Krishna, full of grace in body and mind. I knew this for a fact when a passionate woman I know, a great sports lover, removed Aaron Hamill from her fridge and put up Kumble. Meanwhile our commentators tried to keep up with them, at first declaring they did not have the will to win, then deciding that our heat must have suited them, and most of all going on oblivious to a whole tradition of warriorship that hinges on a deep metaphysic about the individual and fateful events. Their beauty did not come from the mangling we have let Capital make of Liberalism's cult of individual endeavour.

Once I had said 'yes' my thoughts ran on into Australia Day, when every image of our flag on the television made me queasy. By then, of course, cricket had come back into view with a vengeance, since the death of David Hookes outside that pub overnight produced yet another cricketing hero, and this only a few days after Steve Waugh got his award for Australian of the Year. The Hookes incident might equally well have had us reflecting on how it is that security guards have become "the stage managers" of modernity,[1] and the Waugh award should have had us noting how convenient it was for John Howard to have a cricketer who cares about the Indian poor at a time when Australia's foreign aid has slipped towards zero. In this depression about Australia, sportsmen came into my mind again. With regard to the cult of grief made of the Bali bomb-

ing, we almost forgot, it seems to me, the Balinese who died, and, crucially, the remarks that the fiendish Amrozi made about his hatred forming after a stint with Australian construction workers in Malaysia. Amrozi was focused on the sexual depredations of our young men in Asia, especially Bali, and his feelings would be shared by our cricketers in our country towns if well-heeled Indonesians were rampaging through 'their' local girls. We live through round after round of "simultaneous shows of mass grief and triumphal nationalism".[2] But the real ache—the void and the shame—goes back to the war in Iraq when soldiers in our name followed the Americans into a battle that was, to begin with, slaughter. Why, only tonight—Australia Day—the ABC television reporter from Iraq, sending us a story about HMAS Melbourne, was pronouncing lieutenant 'loo-tenant'. Where is our healthy distance from the mess? In Chicago there is a Muslim stand-up comic, Azhar Usman, with a spiel: "Look. Relax . . . I consider myself a very patriotic Muslim American. Which means that I would die for this country by blowing myself up in front of Dunken Donuts." At least Usman knows how to direct his black joke. In our jingoistic media circus you might kill for irony, except that irony, as Paul Fussell remarked, "is the attendant of hope, and the fuel of hope is innocence".[3] If we were ever innocent we are no longer that, not without abject self-delusion. But this is moving too quickly.

I also said 'yes' to doing this lecture because of an Oedipal connection with *Overland*. I was reading it as a boy, when Noel Counihan was on the cover. Around 1956—to name a pivotal date for the left— there it was on the desk with my father's union books. A welder in the Victorian Railways, my father was secretary of the Newport branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the 'Mindful Militants' (as their excellent historian, Tom Sheridan, called them), and the union subscribed to *Overland*. I would browse while helping the old man, signing his letters 'yours fraternally', enter figures into the Arrears Book. They were the days when most workers belonged to a union, and when to be constantly in arrears with your union dues was as untoward as it has become to be over your limit with the Visa card. They were days of necessary protest—industrial, political—but days also of hope. *Overland*, with its faith in social if not Socialist realisms, embodied much of that hope. Half the struggle about the Cold War was meant to keep that hope alive, even though, as we can now realise, much that that generation fought for has since been eroded, or reversed. Shameful enough that Stalinist Russia failed the Revolution: salt into wound of idealism has been the inexorable triumph of Corporate Capitalism, with its glittering vacuities. Back then though, I took in *Overland* with mother's milk and malt biscuits, in a spirit of domestic safety and optimism fed by my father's stamina as a left-wing humanist. *Overland* was ballast at a time when we thought we might, in the long run, keep making things get better.

So it is an honour to be giving this lecture, for the above personal reasons, that included the admirable Stephen Murray-Smith addressing a meeting at our little Housing Commission home, some time in the fifties, when he was campaigning for the Communist Party. I was a kid then and vaguely remember an unusual amount of sober fluency had entered a room that seemed too small for him. Later, at Melbourne University, Stephen was one of my teachers in the Education Faculty; this when he was not preparing to reoccupy Erith Island as a family commune. I was first published in *Overland*—'A Letter from Athens', in May 1968. I was on the way to London, incredibly relieved to be out of Menzies' Australia, with the prospect at last of growing up. Stephen once quoted Richard Neville saying that once you were in London you revelled in not being Australian, until someone at the party said something pejorative, and then away you went, passionately defending the place, rediscovering your nationhood beneath your carefully cultivated cosmopolitan veneer. I was not homesick until I went to the English seaside, or found myself ecstatically struck by the Mediterranean light. But that homesickness was nothing compared to the sickness of heart about being an Australian now.

How can we feel *strong* about this place when the institutions we thought designed to sustain and extend the best that has been thought and said are ruinously weak?

Look at the ABC. Here is an organ of national communications that should reflect, shape and transmit a healthy body politic. That is to say, it is our organ of communications, with a charter to be the lifeblood of our felt diversity, the wellspring of our pluralism, the heartbeat of our critical consciousness. All that. But what is it now? Emasculated, demoral-

ised, morbid. "It is hardly worth saving," a veteran broadcaster said to me the other day. "All I am doing", said another, "is bearing witness to its decline."

These people are not just speaking about the decade of cuts. They are talking about a corporate culture systemically obtuse if not vandalistic towards the sensibility that creates the programs. There are two cultures in the ABC: the managerial and the intellectual/artistic. They seldom meet. The rot set in about twenty years ago when the obsession with ratings crept into the woodwork: subtly, then grossly the ABC began to model itself on commercial television and radio. I wrote about this at the time, as the *Age*'s radio critic, and I was still writing about it fifteen years later, by which time the style and content of what went to air had been steadily diluted.[4] The latest act of vandalism was the erasure of *The Listening Room*, a program that broadcast and created art like no other. An historian of this period will have a record of an institution losing its intellectual nerve, all the time protesting that it can't do this and that because of budget cuts, but really, not being able to do them because of a loss of faith in artistic freedoms and deep intellectuality. And once that goes, how can you sustain a critical culture? I'm not talking here about that anaemic concept of balance, which has done so much to dilute the ABC's confidence in itself as a liberal-minded broadcaster. I mean 'critical' as intellectually courageous and radically open in its trusting application of cultural diversity: exactly the failing strength that goaded Senator Alston to attack the coverage of the Iraq war. This time the broadcaster fended off the attack, but only just. The ABC may well be doomed as a vital organ necessary to sustaining the critical culture of a healthy democracy.[5] Year after year it absorbs body blows from both sides of politics.

David Armfield, Building Worker, *pen drawing, as it appeared on the fifth issue of* Overland, *Spring 1955*

A few months before the last election I organised a small deputation to talk to Opposition Leader Beazley. The point was to discuss the centrality of the broadcaster to the health of our society. The little group had a top arts administrator (Hilary McPhee, former publisher and Chair of the Australia Council), a top scientist (Geoff Smith from the National Museum), a top broadcaster (Ramona Koval), a top historian (Ken Inglis, the ABC's official historian) and a top cleric (Bishop Philip Huggins, from the Anglican diocese of Grafton). The approach to Beazley was made from the Diocese. Beazley did not reply: the deputation was palmed off to the Shadow Communications Minister. For the group Bishop Huggins tried again a few months later. Still nothing. Beazley could not or would not meet. After the election he told Phillip Adams over lunch that he would prefer to talk with people on a picket line than members of "the chattering classes". Leave aside the fantasy image of Beazley on a picket line; Adams put it perfectly when he said that Beazley's remark was both contemptible and contemptuous.

We know what was besetting Beazley. The thought of not gaining office. Simple. All that mattered was gaining office. Hence the events that continue to sustain our great shame. *Tampa*, and all that followed. Labor knew, as it happened, that the photographs of children overboard were a stunt. It murmured, then went along with the lie. Everyone in this room knows the story, I hardly need go on. Labor lost the election out of moral cowardice. Many of us vowed never to vote for the rats again. I mourned that moment, but once my Green vote was cast, I felt strangely liberated. Yes, I had forsaken the fold, but all I had done really was vote with an international perspective. I had positioned myself with the left in Europe, where the social-democratic parties long ago revealed themselves to be bankrupt as agents for reform. So there was some pride to be had at joining 'the world', but potency did not come with it. Yes, the Greens have the best view of a desirable future, but deep down, they are not as optimistic as you might think, and they won't win office in their own right. It's one thing to believe, as I now do, that the Australian Labor Party had finally fulfilled its historical trajectory as a reformist party,[6] another

to feel that voting Green in Australia is practically enough. So voting Green set us free, but left us uneasily adrift, and it was in this state of limbo that we had to confront the American preparations for war, and the Australian government's conga line that took us slavishly into battle behind the Americans. 'Conga line'—with its Coalition 'suckholes'—is now an historic phrase coined by the then backbencher Mark Latham. An obscenity, yes, but it would be nothing beside the one to come: the annihilation of Iraq's conscript soldiers—'the pink mist'!—along with the civil society from which they came. Before the war we poured into the streets in that massive demonstration for peace, the gathering that linked millions of citizens around the world. That was good, wholesomely good, as one revived one's sense of common decency as a citizen. But of course, the conga line remark, perfect though it was at the time, has been—well, if not erased, so relegated to history by the man who uttered it, that it has been removed in the way Stalinists used to airbrush official photographs. The new leader of the Labor Party, whose relaxed airs and larrikin aplomb might revitalise some feelings of hope, cut his teeth in office by washing out his mouth of any 'anti-Americanism', so called. More than that: as if to avoid any confusion, he emerged from a meeting with the US Ambassador to give a press conference standing beside the American flag.[7] The American flag was on his left, our flag was on his right. The American, a man whose escorts had roughed up student peace activists in Perth a few months before, and who had tried to call then opposition leader Simon Crean to account for anti-Americanism, was nowhere to be seen because he did not have to be seen. Latham was doing the suckhole thing himself.

Jim Wigley, Aboriginal study, Port Hedland, *watercolour, as it appeared on* Overland 85, *October 1981*

But look, I don't like speaking like this. I don't like my own anger, as a matter of fact. Anger is corrosive and consuming: it has its place, but to live in it is damaging all round. Anger entails a will to power, which is an imposition on others, and on the precious interconnection of things. Soon after September 11, as we could see America panicking and becoming its worst self, I felt this: I had registered the attack on New York with horror, with an incredulity that lingers, but America's King Kong response made me angry, and I cursed the fact that I might have little choice but to turn away from my quiet contemplative life. I was furious, and furious at my fury—a selfish response, I admit. But it also came out of basic Buddhist teachings about power. Back in 1958, at the height of the Cold War, the lucid D.T. Suzuki was writing: "Power is always arrogant, self-assertive, and exclusive, whereas love is self-humiliating, and all-comprehensive. Power represents destruction, even self-destruction, quite contrary to love's creativeness. Loves dies and lives again, while power kills and is killed."

"It was Simone Weil", Suzuki added, "who defined power as a force which transforms a person into a thing. I would like to define love as a force that transforms a thing into a person."[8]

So none of this is new. In propositional terms, there is nothing new under the sun. But when Catholic Resistance meets Zen Buddhism at the *Overland* campfire Down Under, that's a bit new, and possibly useful with regard to depression produced by a knot of anger, impotence, shame.

The ALP's shamelessness and my shame are inseparable from the problem of national sovereignty in the globalised world of corporate America's empire. That world, as we have come to haplessly know, is more than three quarters full of poor people who are getting poorer. They live on a planet currently at the ecological mercy of America, which devours more resources than any other country, and does most damage to the climate. If the present rate of climate change continues, 25 per cent of the planet's species will be destroyed in the next fifty years.[9] Shamelessly, America continues, and even more shamelessly Australia—"the world's biggest per-

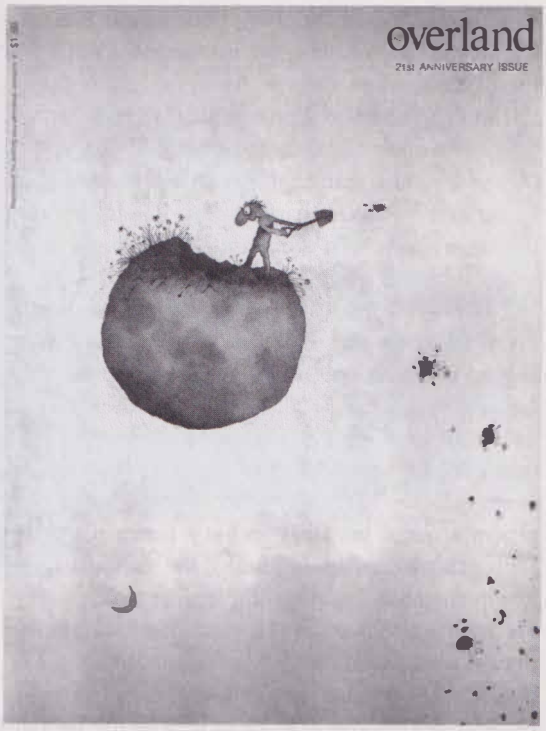
capita polluter"—follows.[10] The details of our hypocrisy are plain to see, and you don't have to read leftist publications to know about it. The point is: everyone knows about it, and most of us feel—realistically—that we can do nothing, as the Iron Heel of Corporate America treads where it wants. From its *modus operandi* we have inherited economic rationalism and the managerial culture that has gutted workplaces in less than half a lifetime, and as a result of which we have learnt a new language of loss. We don't lose our jobs—our means of livelihood—we become 'redundant', and the notion of redundancy gets drummed into increasingly isolated individuals who are encouraged to 'move on' as safe structures are dismantled. 'Redundancy' shares its semantic space with rejects, wastrels, garbage, refuse; and what else are refugees but the refuse of history that has happened, we like to think, elsewhere?[11] Of course some of the Enron men are being 'wasted', too, as they are from some high places in the Australian corporate structure. We witness this from below, the garbage being cleared from the top so to speak, and we suddenly understand crowd scenes in Peter Booth paintings: *impassively* we gloat. Thus garbage from top to bottom really, so that the language of hope becomes a discourse about recycling, a trying to retrieve common decencies from systems made to make us reject them, and therefore each other. All this happens in the macro ways that are killing the planet, and in microscopic ways that can ruin a day. I just 'lost the line' to the Telstra lady supposed to help me with information. She hung up on me as I was trying to explain how Penguin books, which did exist, and was in Melbourne, had changed its address. "Please don't hang up," I was saying, as she did. A supervisor explained that I "lost" the call because I had exceeded the time limit for each customer inquiry, and because I did not in the first place have the address of Penguin books! The supervisor took without apology another call in the middle of this explanation, and by the time she came back to me I decided to give up. Useless: I was talking into the wrong level of organisation, just as, when I tried to say hello to the monstrous Security Guard in the doorway of my local pub during the town's music festival, and he wouldn't and couldn't reply to a basic courtesy, I fell into silence. The dumb hulk, the stranger at our door, was there, not simply because the festival has got too big (and therefore bureaucratic) for our town, but because civic insecurities had linked 'us' to the services of an insurance company with its headquarters in Paris. I say Paris because the Geelong company with whom I insured my house is, I discovered during a claim for a pane of glass, now in Paris. Everyone is doing their job according to someone or something distant and depersonalising, which applies—at another level of 'local'—to a State Labor government trying to run a transport system it does not own, a hospital system in hostage to corporatism, and a school system administered by a public service trembling from the redundancies that have *happened* to it; and this at a time when those with a moral career left in them are trying to inspire teachers to be more professional! Everywhere, it seems to me, and at every level, we have a sense of things being done to us by people like ourselves who have lost a good deal of control over their own behaviour so that as we go about our daily business, moving frenetically from one human point of contact to another, we need something decently communicative to happen!

The other evening I had a sales-pitch call from the company that used to be the SEC. Again it came at dinner time, and again it was a young person, with a supervisor probably within earshot. I had already said 'no' to their special deals that had come in the mail, but this time I asked, as if I didn't know, who owns the company, where is it situated? "Texas," came the reply. "Texas!" I growled, "I hate Texas!", and the chuckle I got on the other end, a deeply cognisant chuckle that became laughter, was worth its weight in gold. It doubled in weight when I realised that I was speaking to someone from the Indian subcontinent. Who knows, he may have been related to Tendulkar! Anyway, united we stood impotently against George Bush, but we'd lightened each other up. The laugh put us on the same network and in touch with each other in an implicitly hopeful way.

In touch. I realise that my touch, my colouring of things here, is itself the result of being out of touch. Am I indulging a mood not uncommon to the solitary consciousness of writers, romantically inclined poets especially, whose structural isolation bespeaks morbid symptoms? Every morning, more offers of Viagra and penis enlargement; each day more bad news for the housebound—all a compound of impotence that just might not apply to those I know out there in workplaces, those *out*

there doing good things. Let's see. No loading the dice by reference to the academics I know, whose disillusionment with their places of learning and instruction knows no bounds. A simple focus on three close friends, one a unionist, the other a youth worker, the other a cleric in the Anglican Church.

One is the secretary of the Meat Workers Union. Graham Bird and I went to school together, uni together, and during uni holidays worked with the butchers at the Newport abattoirs during the summer. After a stint of teaching, travelling, then teaching again, he joined the Meat Workers Union as assistant to the famous Wally Curran, under whose leadership the union was not only an effective guardian of its workers' entitlements, but a decent prop to Hawke and then the Keating regime, for what they were worth. My mate has since stepped into Curran's wild and militantly effective shoes; this at a time, however, when every force, internal and external, has been brought to bear to weaken unions. They have been so weakened I can feel my father turning and sitting up in his grave. *His* last hurrah, as a matter of fact, was to organise the longest sit-in in Australian industrial history, an event I wrote about before he died.[12] The sit-in was crucial to a national award for a shorter working week: it was continuous with all that had been won since the 1890s, with the same Chartist thinking behind it. But it was a Pyrrhic victory, as just at that time the oil industry was restructuring and the whole culture of enterprise bargains, with new, coercive legislation, was coming in. To aid and abet this process of dismantling the achievements of generations of union work, the common law has been brought into operation, and a regime of lock-outs, prosecutions designed to break the will and the funds of the unions has been proceeding apace for the past decade. The MUA dispute was one showdown where, despite our feeling that we won the battle against the men in the balaclavas, Corrigan and others won the structural battle hands down. The battle in the building industry is ongoing, and rearguard, as it is in the Meat Workers Union as each dispute is made by federal law to test its resources. Bird is not so depressed as to have given up hope. He fights each day in a sound state of mind that includes trust in Latham's promise to remove the workplace agreements and let union organisers back on the job—elementary steps to check the ruination of strong unions. That said, Bird also knows that his working life will not make the union stronger. His stamina will hold lines, that's all.



Painting by Michael Leunig as it appeared on Overland's 21st anniversary issue, spring 1975

The youth worker is John Embling who runs the Families in Distress Foundation in Footscray, with his partner Heather Pilcher. They have made a safe house for desperate kids and their families. John's indomitable energies, his brilliant intuition and tact with kids and parents, his diplomatic intelligence with teachers, police, magistrates and clinicians, have created what he would call a mix of holding methods that have saved lives, literally, and restored many others. So this is an optimistic story; it need not feed my pessimism. Except that . . . this success was the result of such vocational self-sacrifice that it cannot reasonably be expected of all of us. As an exception to the rule, you can't propose it as a general solution. Furthermore, during these years of effort the 'underclass' in Australia (a term Embling put into the public sphere well before the official policy makers) has increased, not decreased. 'Fragmented lives' (to use the title of his too-quickly dismissed little book) are now more, not less, common among young people. John and Heather do not regret their life choices: how could they when

so many individual lives have been saved? But how would you feel, and how are we supposed to feel on their behalf, when the youth suicide rate has gone up, and the best social program for attending to it, the one so finely tuned by the work of Fiona Stanley (*last* year's Australian of the Year) had received only lip service.[13] Add Latham's authoritarian, populist parent 'training' and the road for Embling's thinking is even more uphill.[14]

My other friend is Philip Huggins, the Bishop involved in the lost cause to see Beazley. Now a Bishop in Melbourne, he flinches when I mention hopelessness as he is a Christian activist, of the firm belief that from good works a light of intrinsic worth emanates, and leads to more good works, and that thereby, as we help each other in the light of eternity, the world becomes and is a better place. Yet Philip also heads up Anglicare, the national lobby group currently campaigning against child poverty. He applies his vocation of love to this, too, but that does not stop him being a realist, politically speaking. He knows that to remove child poverty requires redistributive policies as well as the bandaid ones, and *that* is still as utopian as it was when a Labor Prime Minister put a date on his abolition of child poverty. Philip knows, even as he prays—especially as he prays—that an Australian economy dominated by corporate thinking will no more remove poverty here than in America itself, where a third of the people are poor, and 40 per cent of those people are children in poverty.

It is a shame to keep coming back to America.[15] I'm not the only one. Look at our cartoonists. Leunig said it all with his New Year drawing of the forlorn Australian couple saying to each other "Ah well, I suppose we'd better look and see what New Year Resolution America has made for us".[16] Bill Leak said it with unspeakable savagery on Australia Day weekend with a coloured illustration of Howard and Bush in bed, under the stars and stripes. Bush has a ten-gallon hat on, his six-gun swinging from the bedpost, his cowboy boots at the foot of the bed, and Howard is smooching up to him, saying "Trusting, caring, mutually satisfying." Bush replies, cigar in hand, ". . . and I'll still respect you in the morning." The cartoon was called *The State of the Union* and appeared beside a leader about 'Sweetening the US trade deal'.

Why can't more of us take a leaf out of the cartoonist's book? A little self-respect is called for. OK, we have the American bases here. Why do we need them? On whose terms, exactly, are they here? Have those terms changed in the past thirty years? What impact do they have on relationships we have with other people in other places? People and places we might need, in some longer run, more than we need the Americans, who have, all of their political life, only helped others when it has been in their own interests. What is the value of the American alliance?[17] Does it make us safer, or more vulnerable? Do we want, as our best friend, a nation that will not ratify international agreements on war crimes? To seriously ask these questions, as they are sometimes mutedly asked in Defence and military circles, to articulate them so that they became part of the national debate would now require a revolution in Canberra and revive all we have been able to find out about the death of Allende in 1973, and the demise of Whitlam in 1975. But it would be good for our souls *and* our safety. I wish someone would form a 'Go Home Yank' party. It might be construed as an offence under the *Crimes Act* or the ASIO Bill, but it would show many poor people of the world that we are not lost to them, and might sustain a debate truly in the national interests. What's at issue, after all, is a matter of applying what Orwell called 'moral effort' to that villain of history called Nationalism, a tribal notion of unity which hinges on power. All a necessary prelude to a Republic we might have without grandiosity.

Embling wrote me a shouting letter the other day: "Repeat after me, Barry. It is only politics." He's right, it is only politics. We can still love one another. The world is full of luminous things.[18] We are still planting trees, and sometimes even saving them. But again, who, exactly, is 'us'? It seemed to be us on the streets in protest against the war. But what happened to 'us' after the war, when the lies justifying it were clearly borne out? I stayed home, too, I must say; but by then I had a book of sonnets about the war, poems about the impotence and passivity of watching a war beamed into the lap from the other side of the world. Most of 'us' stayed home, and there we have remained as American and British voters have hounded their war-mongering governments into inquiries about their corrupt case for war. And the 'us', here in this sentence, should be refined towards my generation who once held office, and whose record in using that power (in so far as political office in Australia constitutes power),

Press clippings from Barry Hill's fridge

is not impressive, and whose speechifying and soliloquising about what happened is on a continuum with Ginsberg's 'Howl' about the lost best minds of a generation. Still *Un-done* is the exploring of that.

I suppose the 'us' should be broken down into the smaller local communities within which we have a say, kind of. On this matter I have been reaching out to friends. The shrink I mentioned before, Brian Stagoll, sent me his account of the local health groups he's been involved in for twenty years. An affable round-up of what multicultural committees had managed to do, pragmatically, and for their morale, during these dark times. Heartening. I envy Brian's involvement, and he reminded me, after all, that in my own town the most effective and the most rewarding political experiences have been the result of political actions that employed strategic manoeuvrings that assumed a continuity of personal relationships in community, not distancing polemical discourse.

At another level, Hugh Stretton, one of our deepest, most constructive social analysts, tells me he has not entirely given up hope of there possibly being "a decent Social Democratic program"—if, say, the right politician would act on the fact that, when asked, the Australian people are in favour of higher taxes for good things. And part of Hugh's hope comes from his sense that, despite all the formal indicators of poverty and so on, we as a people still have "an optimism, and cheerfulness", and "an easy relationship with each other".[19] Another friend, Ian Roberts, Chair of the Australia Day committee for Victoria, accepts my reasons for depression, and himself had "a cringing sick feeling" about Australia Day—until he got some of the feedback. That included a Koori mate of his saying that some events really worked: "One was a casual stroll from the Town Hall to Fed Square of a thousand or so gypsy Aussies from Poland, Cambodia, India, etc. The second was an afternoon-long concert in Fed Square called 'Voyages' which was a sort of World Music concert featuring Melbourne artists who had come from all over the globe . . . most of them never getting to perform in public or outside their own community." Roberts looks to the day when another ten thousand people, and more, fill our Square.

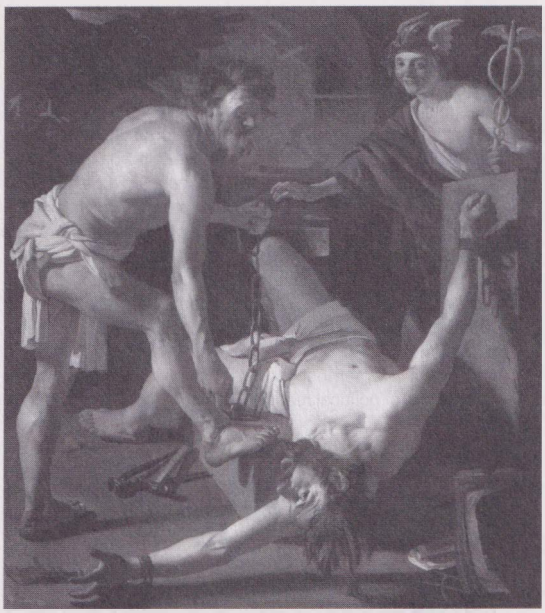
Communitas. Humanist thought, even when it is homeless, always comes back to that, especially in the face of large-scale capitalism in its virulent forms. *Communitas,* to use the title of Paul Goodman's great book of 1947, has a great tradition of affirmation even in America, where unions as we knew them were being defeated more than a century ago, the time when Jack London nailed things down with his prophetic novel of 1906, *The Iron Heel.* Paul Goodman said most of what one

would still want to say: the sound of his love and intelligence creates hope—conceptually, emotionally—and yet, and yet, it now seems an even longer haul to create and sustain reciprocities from inside our Empire Cities. Richard Rorty, remember, has an essay that looks back on the present as a dark age of Depression, and imminent military dictatorship in America, "where the quality of owning, freezes you forever into the 'I'". It is 2004 by the time the Democratic Vista Party, an alliance of trade unions and churches, overthrows the generals. It is 2096 by the time citizens can look back incredulously on this era of vast greed and inequality! Down the road the sign says *Still Depressed.*

But I have not given up hope, not really. Despair is a sin against our humanity.[20] And how could one commit that sin when Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Xanana Gusmao did not give up hope? But I can't help noticing that even John Berger set his last novel in a rubbish dump, and cast a dog into the role of his main protagonist. Garbage and modernity again. I was at a Buddhist retreat the other day, and a woman who once worked for Community Aid Abroad (another outfit that helps keep grassroots work alive and hopeful) told me she went to India with a group of Aboriginal people and witnessed their joy at meeting a tribe there to which they felt kin. She also witnessed their grief at the spectacle of people in Calcutta who lived among the garbage. They felt, almost instantly, as if they should do something: they should come back to Australia and raise money from Aboriginal communities to help the poorest of the poor in India. That spirit can't help but give one hope. Perhaps we need reminding how deep communality is in Aboriginal culture. That knowledge comes and goes in me, even though my sense of belonging to this country, of loving it in the way that might inform a decent intelligent nationalism, needs to take it in. I took it in afresh recently when alone in a flat in Canberra. The flat was owned by Alison French, the woman who curated the great Namatjira exhibition. I was in Canberra to read the work of the Buddhist poet Harold Stewart, a man who resolved his dismay at Australia by living a life of exile in Kyoto—and I say this to register, in passing, that the instinct to expatriate flight is currently very strong.[21] But the flat: it turned out to be a haven of respite and revival for me as a nationalist. For there, on the walls, were half a dozen small paintings from Central Australia. They were astonishingly strong and beautiful paintings straight out of the ground of the Centre—the centre as a radiant landscape, the centre as spirit, the centre as sacred ground of community. I felt as if I was in a temple, doing my own little dance of belonging, even though, as we all know, the deep work of reconciliation has not been done. It is one of the deadly *Un-Dones* with regard to the mood we are in.

Another *Un-Done* is the business of tackling our depression with the right voice, the one that unifies our sense of those who suffer in the rest of the world with our contemplative privileges at home. Our divided selves can be depressing. Every day, here by the sea, in my garden in this small beautiful town, with a beloved woman, with grown children coming and going, I am both aghast at the nature of the world and its revolutionary needs, *and* attached to this volume of Tang poet in exile. Grounded in privilege I keep having to work with the two voices, the two speech streams in me, one from my father, the other that has flowed from my poetry and spiritual interests. My belonging here, this place in particular, the part that is intact, is nourished by my father's voice. It is as if his sense of collectivism gives my body strength, as an Australian, and allows me to feel in my bones that there is something special about the Australian people, that the legend we have of ourselves as democratic, egalitarian, still lives in us, especially if we have the good fortune to be in workplaces that have not been *too* redesigned to weaken us. For it is the destruction of the unions as a political base, and the construction of jobs that squeeze and isolate individuals, which has done most, overall, to create the depression we are in.[22] And all this I say loudly and in good health, as Walt Whitman might say, with the help of my father's voice.

At the same time however, it inclines me into a leftist rhetoric that, while profoundly accurate about many things, makes me feel like it is four in the morning. Marxism is a powerful system for getting to grips with ourselves as "thinking subjects",[23] but when I try to do that for any period of time with the aid of Marxism I feel even more alienated by the concepts that are as 'out there' as a space shuttle. As to the other voice, the contemplative one, it wants to go quietly, more closely, more intimately. It wants to breathe differently, and to speak out of the right silence, the silence that consolidates moral fibre and spiritual clarity. And it wants not to be *so* invested in



Dirck van Baburen, Prometheus being chained by vulcan, *1623, oil on canvas, collection of Rijks Museum, Amsterdam*

anger, even the anger provoked by impotence. And so on. The two modes, I was hoping, would marry in the course of this lecture, bringing into speech something that is simultaneously inner ***and*** civic as a bird song. Alas. I am part of a Romantic tradition thwarted since Keats lamented the hiatus between his individual sensibility and the social order, a movement of thought that led him to speak of self-consciousness as "the most hateful seeing of itself".[24] At least, here, I have avoided Keats's self-laceration, even if not all the dualisms. And yet—here I come around the block again: there is a fundamental confluence with my two voices under the heading of internationalism. The independent left, as Orwell so splendidly affirmed when he railed against fascism ***and*** communism, was internationalist in its compassion for all peoples. My father's most 'political' strikes, those declared at the time to be treacherously against the national interests, were Buddhistic in their breadth of concern.

As surprising as it might seem to secularists that have dominated the culture of our left literary magazines, Buddhism provides a tough teaching for the purposes of peacemaking and political opposition. In the long run it may prove more enduring as a moral foundation for global resistance on behalf of others than the secular humanism culturally bound to the West. After all, if we get our ecology of mind right, the ecology of the planet can only be better off, and that is really why, as a totalising system, Buddhism is better than Marxism: it is without Promethean delusions, and wants to work with the fire rather than steal it from Nature. My father, incidentally, when he was about my age, felt honoured to meet the Japanese monk Sato on his eightieth birthday. Sato was famous for his victory over the Americans. They had planned a military airstrip, and he built a temple on it. The Yanks could not afford to remove it. Battle over.

Buddhism teaches that good spirits will be sustained by behaving well in the here and now. It sounds trite but it is not. It is hard work that only gets easier if you base it on a meditative practice that fosters mindful lack of regard for ego, and maximum alertness to the sufferings of others. And because the practice tries to overcome anxiety about an unknown future, it opens the way for surprises that, when they happen, you should not try ***too*** hard to make perfect sense of. Contemplativeness does not mean political quietism.

The other day, for instance, I met a Zen teacher from Argentina. His name is Augusto Alcalde, and he comes here a couple of times a year to teach at the Clifton Hill Zendo. He is deeply trained in Zen: twenty-five years of training with distinguished Chinese and American teachers in the monastic tradition. He has moved out from retreats towards political activism. His statement that he has not wanted to leave Argentina for a better life for himself and his wife, although the dictators killed so many, including members of his family, is one of the great statements—one I would hope to aspire to if our society were to be ravaged by political evil. Alcalde is drawn to the Zapatistas, the Mexican movement that happens to think that, in global terms, the fourth world war has already begun. I asked him, how did he bring Zen and the Zapatistas thinking together? "I didn't," he replied.

Alcalde gives talks to meetings at the Victorian Trades Hall---down in the basement actually, where the old Labour College used to be. I heard him the other night quietly tell a small group of Trots and Greens and Anarchists how, in a poor country area of Argentina, a five-hundred strong unemployed workers' group run a garden, health care and other community services for about seven thousand people. As a group they do not like to be labelled and avoid the usual power structures in favour of snail

pace direct democracy. "We don't confront," Alcalde said, unless the timing is right for them. And if they were crushed, he seemed to be implying, 'we still have what is our strength—our ways of relating to each other. This can never change.' He spoke about energy being "kept in for the important things", rather than always going out to "the road blocks".

I found this moving and confusing, and I am still thinking about it. He created in my mind the image of sheep in a fold, of creatures in retreat from previous slaughter. Of necessity, humanism was in retreat: it had to look after itself. He said: "Every victory is built on a thousand defeats." This spoken with great charm and patience and—dare I say it—bemusement, in the face of history. He also said: "The wind blows the dust into the corners of the room. We are dust."

Alcalde's Zen has made an impression among younger green activists, and, I believe, there is even a meditation group of young blokes from the Electrical Trades Union who come together in the basement of the Trades Hall. Yes, a contemplative group downstairs, with the 'sparkies'.

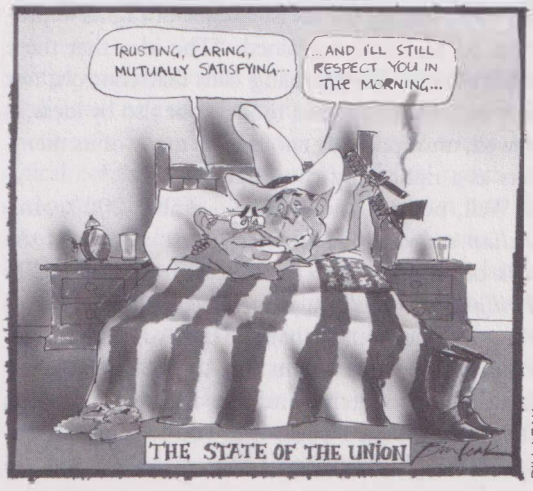
'Gawd strike me pink', I can hear my old man saying, on his way out to a picket line that would now be illegal.

1. Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, Polity, 2004, p.104.
2. The phrase is Geoffrey Barker's in 'Playing at Patriot Games', *Australian Financial Review*, 20 October, 2003.
3. *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford, London, 1977, p.18.
4. In an early column for the *Age* I praised a twelve-part series of Plato's *Republic*, with all the dialogue spoken on air. In response I got a very happy call from its producer, Richard Connelly, who has since retired. Connelly's subtext was clear: we need such a critical response because "inside this place" it is getting harder and harder to get such programs up. That was in the early eighties. The dilution is across the board and inexorable as programs are made thinner and shorter and are promoted with less confidence in what they are or should be. In one city, for instance, a man employed from Sydney's cash-for-comment station, 2UE, goes around telling arts broadcasters that the 'art' in their show should not be part of their advertising, as it 'puts the punters off'.
5. Senator Alston's attack anticipated Blair's attack on the BBC. His slanders were refuted, point by point, by the ABC inquiry, only to be reactivated by ABC management, the best outline of which was given by David Marr's *Media Watch* (so we can take heart from that program's precision and courage). But the dilution virus in ABC broadcasting is still the deathly thing, and it feels so irreversible that my shame is inseparable from my sense of impotence. In 1998, when many of us felt that Radio National was under threat as a network, I helped organise a very successful public meeting in Geelong. It was the biggest public meeting in Geelong for decades, with school principals, bishops, broadcasters, ABC board members, former state premiers, and opposition politicians on the platform. The event felt like the kind of public action that mattered. Around that time I thought that the Howard government and the ABC needed to know that it was not just left-liberal thinking that thought the network essential to our democracy, so I spent some time seeking signatures for a letter to the papers. Sir Zelman Cowen, Malcolm Fraser, Dame Elizabeth Murdoch, Sir Rupert Hamer, an official from the CWA, and several others, were happy to support the letter that was published in the main papers. The letter made a strong point, and one felt usefully potent. But I must also say that the experience of failing to get other signatures (for instance B.A. Santamaria, Dame Leonie Kramer, Henry Bosch) was acutely dispiriting. Each claimed to support the ABC, but shied away from such a public declaration. I remember putting the phone down with an easy sense of political realities. The thought also came to mind: when elites neglect to defend the institutions we need for a critical, liberal culture, that must be how Fascism starts. "We are a careless country," I heard Bruce Petty say on the radio. The Opposition politician on that Geelong platform was Chris Schatt, then Shadow Minister for Communications. From the mike I asked if Labor would commit to restoring the cuts. No, he said, they couldn't without knowing the budget figures. When they got the budget figures, still no promises, any more than there are now, in 2004.
6. That is to say as a party able to seriously commit to or even articulate redistributive policies with regard to wealth and power. I don't mean, simplistically, that it can no longer be a 'socialist' party (it never was). Rather, its policies over the past twenty years have either diluted our civic life or tried (and failed) to shore up what has been lost. In the larger scheme of things it has become a party of losing battles.
7. The background story is even more excruciating. The spot for the press had been picked before the flag was noticed, so Latham was faced with the option of lowering the flag before his appearance, or changing the venue. When Kerry O'Brien asked him, on the *7.30 Report*, "Whose idea was the American flag?" Latham bluffed his way onto other matters.
8. D.T. Suzuki, 'Love and Power' in *The Awakening of Zen*, Shambala Books, Boston, 2000, pp.68–9.
9. *Guardian Weekly*, 15–21 January 2004.
10. *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial, 13 January 2004.
11. The phrasing is Zygmunt Bauman's: *Wasted Lives*, p.12.
12. *Sitting In*, William Heinemann in association with the Left Book Club, Port Melbourne, 1991.
13. Fiona Stanley diplomatically reported to the National Press Club last year that the Howard government had appointed a junior Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, but that was about all she had to report from her concentrated lobbying. At the time of writing, Latham's rhetoric about the ladder of opportunity includes gestures about childcare, but shows no sign of having any real grip on either the psychology or the sociology of the problem. While writing this article I happened over coffee to remark upon this to Race Mathews, a former minister in the Whitlam government, and he said that "it was all there" in the 1970s reports of the Children's Commission and so on. The 'all there' stayed in the air because Labor, even then, could not and would not get its teeth into the issue.
14. Embling spotted Latham coming a year ago, when he called him the Ariel Sharon of the Labor Party (Phillip Adams, *Australian*, 7–8 December 2002). He recently wrote to Latham, trying to engage with the thinking behind his utterances. Latham's office sent back the form reply.
15. America is not the only exemplar of negative force in the

world, as a glance at the Middle East will show. And here comes China marching over the horizon, a juggernaut of modernity we have hardly begun to consider. For now though, America just happens to be the force to which we are most harnessed.

16. Leunig has been astonished at the amount of hate mail he has received for his American cartoons. "As if", he says, "they were more patriotically American than they are Australian. Whereas, when I grew up, a jovial anti-Americanism was accepted. I'm sorry to see that lost." And yet, during the Iraq war, as his hate mail increased, a major exhibition of his etchings remained undisturbed at the US consulate in Melbourne—a sign of hope, perhaps, considering they were distributed throughout the building!
17. At the time of writing Latham has called for a Senate investigation into the details of our trade agreement with America. If it turns out to be a bad deal the question for Labor will be that of what it would do about it if it could.
18. As Czeslaw Milosz could say after a lifetime of enduring the hell of modern political history. In *A Book of Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry* (Harcourt Brace 1996), he settles his painful account with 'realism' and the 'objective' by collecting poems either from or embued with the Buddhist tradition.
19. Stretton is probably best known for *Ideas for Australian Cities* (The Author, North Adelaide, 1970), and his *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment* (CUP, 1976). His latest book, *Economics: An Introduction* (UNSW Press, 1999), a text book and a monumental construction against economic rationalism, has been allowed to slip out of sight. More recently he has written a paper for the United Nations on the inefficiencies of the international money market. His work in progress is *Australia Fair*. When he read this piece he wrote: "I well understand the pessimism. But share the value you accord your friends. If I'm (distantly, uncertainly, more by temperament than reason) more optimistic, it's from old age. Even about the Americans. Not that they *will* improve, but they *can*. In the depth of the Great Depression Roosevelt hired young Jim Landis to create the Securities & Exchange Commission, the world's strictest and best corporate regulator for a generation or so. About 1941 he hired an unknown young Canadian (J. K. Galbraith) as national price-controller, and got near-zero inflation through the war. His successors (with the Marshall plan, etc.) were not the worst. Bush *is* the worst—but many of his best critics are American. Ken Inglis always calls that country 'the home of the best and the worst'. I also lived through the Attlee revolution, and taught along with Paul Streeten, Thomas Balogh and Christopher Hill. Balogh created the British Oil Corporation, which served the English people much better than our oil policy serves us. I knew both parties to Nugget Coombs' meeting with Menzies the day after his election in 1949. Expecting a courteous dismissal (he was Labor's Director General of Postwar Reconstruction) Nugget was offered the Reserve Bank or the Prime Minister's department, and for that and other reasons we got twenty years of full employment. And even under the present government I think all but our brutally poor are cheerful and easy with one another--and willing to vote for a bit more social democracy if either party would offer some. (That's what about 60 per cent keep telling most of the polls.)"
20. Even Kafka said, "The fact of our living is in itself inexhaustible in its proof of faith." Cited in Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organised System*, Random House, New York, 1960, p.139.
21. On the way back from Canberra I bumped into Hilary McPhee, who had just been to India. I told her my topic, and mentioned Stewart in exile. "We just have to do that," she said, "we have to get away when we can. Everything is unravelling. This place has become good for 'lifestyle'." I'd forgotten what an enduring response this has been among people like us, and which was so well recounted by D.H. Lawrence in *The Rainbow*: "'Though we curse it we love it,' says Gerald. 'We may,' said Birkin. 'But it's damnably uncomfortable love: like a love for an aged parent who suffers horribly from a complication of diseases, for which there is no hope . . . ' 'Yes,' said Gudrun slowly, 'you love England immensely, *immensely*, Rupert.'" It is Gudrun who finds the way through: "'After all, a cottage in the Abruzzi, or wherever it may be, isn't a new world. No, the only thing to do with the world, is to see it through.'" Cited by Terry Eagleton, 'The Novels of D.H. Lawrence' in *The Eagleton Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, pp.22–3.
22. Up until about twelve years ago there was a strong movement for workplace change, supported by all sectors of industry, including government, and radically facilitated by the techniques of the late, brilliant social theorist, Fred Emery, who drew upon Norwegian work in industrial democracy. The optimism of that movement has evaporated since 1995, when the very successful workplace conference of 1992 was unsuccessfully reproduced. (For an overview see my 'Our Yellow Brick Road' in Penny Thomson & Kate Nash, [eds], *Designing the Future: Workplace Reform in Australia*, Workplace Australia, Melbourne, 1991.)
23. *The Eagleton Reader*, passim, especially, 'The Idea of a Common Culture'.
24. Cited by Paul Hamilton in *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory*, University of Chicago Press, 2004, p.3.

Barry Hill has won Premier's Awards for Poetry and Non-Fiction, most recently the 2003 Victorian Premier's Award for his Broken Song: T.G.H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession *(Knopf), which also won the 2004 Biography Prize. His essay on George Orwell was published in* Best Australian Essays of 2003 *(Black Inc). He has worked as a teacher, psychologist and journalist (for the* Times Educational Supplement *and the* Age*), and is currently poetry editor for the* Australian. *He lives with singer/songwriter Rose Bygrave in Queenscliff, Victoria, and is just finishing the official history of the town.*



THE ROAD TO VOU WAH

Billionaire battlers and sweatshop elites

David Flint: *The Twilight of the Elites* (Freedom Publishing, $29.95)
Paul Sheehan: *The Electronic Whorehouse* (Pan Macmillan, $30)

IN 1997, A GROUP of anonymous Hansonites (later revealed to include retired academic George J. Merritt) published a book entitled *Pauline Hanson: The Truth*. In it, they endorsed Graeme Campbell's claim that "Australian leadership elites in politics, the bureaucracy, academia, big business, the churches and the media have effectively cut themselves adrift from the interests of the majority of Australians".[1] These elites, according to Merritt and co., promote a "new religion of internationalism, of anti-white racialism, multiculturalism, feminism and Asianisation" to the detriment of ordinary Australians.

The Truth also claimed that Aborigines ate their babies, and that by 2050, Canberra would be renamed Vou Wah. Australia, it revealed, was most likely to be ruled by Poona Li Hung, a lesbian of multiracial descent, who "was felt by the World Government to be a most suitable president". She is also part machine: the first cyborg president. Her neuro-circuits were produced by a joint Korean-Indian-Chinese research team.[2] Such passages left many wondering exactly who produced George J. Merritt's neuro-circuits. Even Hanson distanced herself from the book, leaving the fascist League of Rights to promote it. Merritt complained: "The idea that there exists a 'new class', a ruling elite that controls, not only by armed force and money, but also by ideas, is viewed, unsurprisingly enough, by many of its members as a right-wing conspiratorial idea".[3]

Well, not any more. In November 2003, *Australian* stalwart Christopher Pearson devoted the bulk of his column to the "great strengths" of *The Twilight of the Elites*, a book by Professor David Flint. Formerly the Chair of the Australian Press Council, Flint now fronts for Australians for Constitutional Monarchy, and like Pearson himself is about as privileged a fellow as you're ever likely to find. Though Flint remains silent about Poona Li Hung's activities, he shares most of Merritt's other concerns: elites have "captured the commanding heights in the arts, in the faculties of humanities, and in 'quality' journalism, while establishing important bridgeheads in the leadership of the political parties, the liberal professions and, surprisingly, the churches." Their aim? "Secularism, hard multiculturalism, judicial activism, an end to individual responsibility, Big Government".[4]

Where *The Truth* looks at higher education and discovers: "our universities are 'horrible lefty authoritarian places brimful of nonsense subjects and crazy PC rules'",[5] Flint finds in university humanities faculties a "strange menu of elite post-modern ideologies . . . frequently based on rudiments of Marxist thought and almost always expressed in incomprehensible language".[6] Nonetheless, "because of the fear of reprisals, university administrations have learned to live with post-modernism, and some of the cultural relativism it vigorously promotes has rubbed off".[7]

Merritt and friends assure us that "behind the gun controllers is the black claw of the internationalist elite of The New World Order. It is not too difficult to detect its sinister presence by consideration of some relevant facts and literature . . . The groundwork for a global gulag, a cosmopolitan police state has been already put in place".[8] Flint lacks only a claw:

> Some of these [UN human rights treaties] go further, and now sometimes include the agendas of particular lobbies, agendas which would not have been accepted through the democratic process. In other words, if the people will not accept your agenda, the elite guardians can have it adopted through the back door by a consensus among international elites.[9]

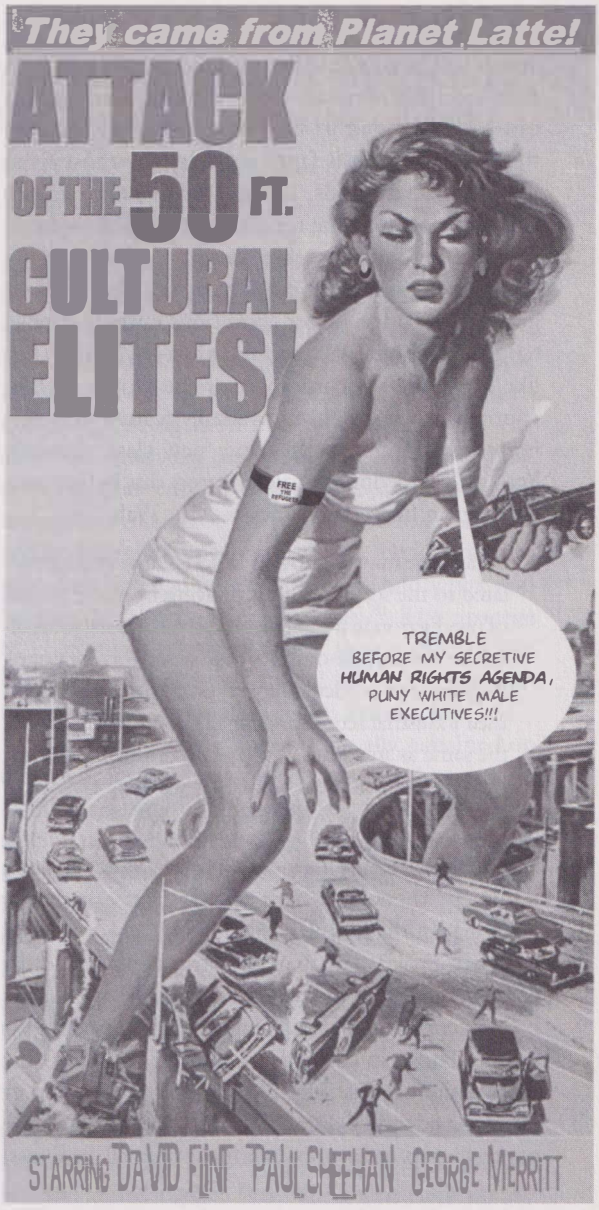
As he puts it elsewhere: "we are to be governed by unelected international elites who are in no way ac-

countable to us".[10] *The Twilight of the Elites* represents the final emergence, from the mainstream of the Australian Right, of a discourse once the exclusive province of gun nuts and conspiracy wackoes. How did this happen?

Two explanations suggest themselves. Firstly, it is possible that elements of the mainstream (that is, liberal) Right actually believe this stuff, that they have been convinced of the correctness of the diagnosis, initially advanced by more populist right-wing thinkers, of an Australian society dominated by pernicious elites. Secondly, and more likely, selected aspects of this more popularly circulating rhetorical opposition to elites are being picked up by the mainstream Right and interwoven with its existing rhetorical campaigns, for its own political reasons.

Clearly, the election of the Howard government in 1996 provides a defining moment, not only for Flint (who finds in it the twilight of his title) but for other right-leaning commentators on the 'new class', from Katherine Betts to Michael Thompson.[11] Howard's victory, riding a wave of right-wing populism, propelled 'new class' exponents like Hanson and Graeme Campbell into the limelight, simultaneously serving as proof of the new-class thesis. After all, did not the triumph of Hanson and Howard demonstrate that the ALP, under Keating and Hawke, had abandoned traditional links with working people to pander to the social agenda of educated inner-city professionals? Why else had 'battlers' flocked in such numbers to One Nation and John Howard?

There are many reasons why sections of the traditionally Labor-voting blue-collar electorate turned to Howard—like thirteen years of economic rationalism under Labor. Leaving aside alternative explanations, however, it can be noted that for the populist Right, the rise of Hansonism and the election of Howard does not signify the end of the dominance of elites. Within the rhetoric of Hanson, Merritt et al., the elites include members of the ALP, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the media and educational institutions, particularly at a tertiary level, as well as the Liberal Party. That is, for these populists, the elites are at least partly defined as a sociological category, in terms of their position in the socioeconomic structure. Alternatively, for the more mainstream Right, many of whom, like Flint, originate from and/or occupy an obviously privileged and powerful social position, elitism is a purely subjective category, able to be applied to almost any individual or group on the basis of their support for policies of affirmative action (multiculturalism, political correctness, feminism, Aboriginal rights and so on) against the dictates of the market and the desire of big business to behave as it pleases.



HINZE

While ideas of a 'new class', modifying classical Marxist models, have been important within (especially 'post-Marxist') left-wing intellectual circles over the past thirty years,[12] any meaningful definition of elites as a social class who exercise power in society (or of 'battlers' against this power) cannot be purely subjective. Clearly, not all supporters of affirmative

action will be privileged or able to exercise power. A dole-receiving feminist from working-class origins can hardly be said to be a member of an elite. By the same token, it is far from clear why those from wealthy backgrounds, in high-paying occupations and with access to the media and the public sphere, avoid falling into the 'elite' camp.

Many white-collar employees sell their labour power for a wage under conditions entirely parallel to the traditional factory, and thus—whether they like it or not—become part of the working class. Journalists, for instance, invariably feature as sneering elitists in most right-wing 'new class' theories. Yet as Keith Windschuttle pointed out before embarking on his own journey to Vou Wah:

> on any meaningful notion of 'class' as a concept related to the social relations deriving from the system of production in a capitalist society like ours, journalists are not 'middle-class' . . . Journalists work for wages, they are not particularly well paid, their union and their industrial actions are, for all intents and purposes, the same as any other group of unionists. Journalists, then, are part of the white-collar working class or, if you like, they are professional workers.[13]

And despite Jimmy Barnes, not everyone with blue denim in their veins is a working-class man (or woman). In the popular imagination, no-one could be more proletarian than the struggling farmer or laconic outback publican. Yet many of the classic bush occupations actually entail running small businesses. Those so employed therefore belong to the rural petite bourgeoisie. Do these distinctions matter? Consider Hal Draper's classic account of the contradictory pressures bearing on small business:

> From above, they are crowded out by the pressure of more efficient capitals and oppressed by the policies of a government more interested in the expansion of big industry rather than the tribulations of the local tailor . . . On the other hand, from below the petty-bourgeois enterprises may be harassed by the 'laziness' of their apprentices, shop assistants, or other hired help, who will not share their enthusiasm for self-sweating . . . They will resent the consumers who prefer the chain store to the corner grocery. Apart from these specific abrasions, the 'lower classes' always loom before their consciousness as the social abyss into which they and their families will fall in case of economic failure.[14]

Sound like anyone we know? Pauline Hanson, of course, ran a shop—the classic petit-bourgeois occupation—and drew most of her cadre from exactly the kind of people described above. As Michael Pusey notes from interviews with those he calls the "Hanson battlers":

> Over and over we find these workers self-employed in their own business, for example, as courier operators, truck drivers, handyman repairers or car cleaners . . . They complain of stress, of irregular and long working hours, and of tasks that outstrip either their willingness or capacity to undertake them, or both . . . They, perhaps, especially the women, detest politicians, big business, freeloaders, elites and anyone else who seems to be making claims on 'the system' that appears to give them an unfair advantage in the merciless struggle to stay afloat. Reactive, defensive, yet strong, anger is the dominant mood.[15]

Having clawed a fingerhold of respectability, the petite bourgeoisie in the countryside and outer suburbs lives in terror of falling back to from whence it came.

Interestingly, the initial anxiety of the rural petit-bourgeois manifested itself as explicit hostility to the working class of the cities, the force most likely to upset the rural applecart (or fish fryer). Five years before Hanson, a Warracknabeal demolition contractor named Danny Johnson mobilised, within the space of a month, fifty thousand people to march on Melbourne's parliament to oppose trade-union power and Victoria's "socialist Fabian government". His Save Australia rally—backed to the hilt by the Australian Small Business Association—is today largely forgotten, but in Danny Johnson's quixotic campaign ("I'm just an ordinary Australian trying to get a bit of commonsense back into the country and to return some Anzac pride")[16] we can see all of One Nation in embryo.

Or nearly all. Hanson revealed her distinctive political genius by concentrating her fire first and foremost on multiculturalism and "the Aboriginal industry". Racism gave her movement the stability which had eluded Johnson (Save Australia collapsed as quickly as it rose), while enabling her to drag demoralised elements of the working class into her orbit. Where Johnson brought the battlers from the bush into the city, Hanson offered them the convenience of scapegoats much nearer to home.

David Flint's *The Twilight of the Elites* represents the final emergence, from the mainstream of the Australian Right, of a discourse once the exclusive province of gun nuts and conspiracy wackoes.

But what allowed Hanson to identify Aboriginal rights, feminism, multiculturalism and the rest of the One Nation hate-list with freeloaders and a new class of elites? Despite what many on the right have said since that time, the social movements that raised such issues did not involve a privileged elite taking to the streets. Instead, they emerged squarely out of the white- and blue-collar working class. The modern land rights struggle sprang from a strike by the Gurindji for wages and land, a campaign which received substantial support from union activists. The first gay mardi gras involved a street riot. Women's liberation emerged from the Communist Party, the New Left and the trade unions.

TWO TRENDS APPEAR to be at work. Firstly, there is an extent to which the predominantly tertiary-educated supporter-base of the radical politics of the 1960s did come to place their hopes for social justice and equality in government and semi-government bodies, such as the public-sector bureaucracy and the universities. Many of these people were 'co-opted', as Andrew Milner argues, into the essentially conservative program of Labor under Hawke.[17] After 1983, the Accord between Labor and the unions both dampened down industrial struggle and fostered a climate in which women, the ATSIC appointees, professional environmentalists and so on could slide into the middle ranks of the bureaucracy. In many ways, this new white-collar middle class occupies a similar position to the traditional petite bourgeoisie. On the one hand, it feels superior to the ranks out of which it has just scrambled. On the other, it fears and resents the power of the real decision makers in the public and private sector.[18] The historical association of many in the 'elite' category with the upsurge of the late 1960s and early seventies provided an obvious target for Hanson and other populists. The most prominent figures associated with the social movements, however, dismissive (even fearful) of mass mobilisations, offered the most token resistance.[19]

Secondly, there is the long-running attack on principles of affirmative action, economic equality, social justice and cultural openness, that has since the Whitlam years in Australia been waged by the New Right and its descendants. As Thomas Frank, Mark Davis and others have made clear, this was a rhetoric, deriving most energetically from the US, aimed at removing the popular legitimacy of government intervention in the market (and hence government restriction on the behaviour of big business) and at driving a wedge between the felt identity and perceived political interests of blue- and white-collar members of the working class.[20] The upsurge of Hansonism is at least partly the product of this long-running campaign staged by right-wing 'culture warriors', especially via the Murdoch media.

Still, while Pauline Hanson actually remained on the political stage, real limits existed to the ways the mainstream Right could embrace 'new class' theories. Hence the curious waltz John Howard and the Liberals performed with the far-Right in 1996 and 1997. The mainstream Right liked the angry attacks on feminism and political correctness, and John Howard gave Hanson's constituency implicit encouragement. But the Liberals also knew that Hanson's small-business supporters bore a great deal of anger towards the big end of town as well. The farmers hated the banks that foreclosed on their properties; the small contractors feared the multinationals with which they competed. Thus the Hanson and Campbell versions of 'new class' theory combined attacks on multiculturalists and Aborigines with frenzied warnings about big business and its supporters, including the Liberals themselves.

David Flint's ability to expropriate the rhetoric of the Hansonites reflects the more recent disintegration of the rural populist movement. The collapse of the angry petite bourgeoisie into sullen apathy clears the way for what we might call Flint's 'populism without people'. He uses Hansonite tropes to describe the elites. But who does he counterpose to the new class? In place of Merritt's rural battlers, Flint injects John Howard and the Queen! The difference between 1997 and 2003 comes out most clearly in Merritt and Flint's treat-

ments of Tony Abbott. Abbott receives special mention in *The Truth* (with good reason, as it turned out) as a particularly pernicious member of the elite. By contrast, six years later, he contributes the foreword to Flint's book.

What the *Twilight of the Elites* illustrates is that, with the real populists out of the arena, it's possible to flay elites without challenging the status quo in the slightest. Opposition to the new class can be represented by pretty much anything, so long as it's counterposed to social engineers, snobs and other elitist know-it-alls. In *One Market Under God*, Thomas Frank documents a similar moment in the United States. He writes of "market populism", a trend which employs all the recognisable anti-elite rhetoric to slate those who oppose the free market. In this version, 'the people' are represented in their struggle against entrenched privilege not by horny-handed farmers, but by entrepreneurs who recognise the common folk's desires by the commodities they buy.[21]

Paul Sheehan's book about the media, *The Electronic Whorehouse*, provides an Australian variant on the market populist discourse. Sheehan's 1996 broadside against multiculturalism, *Among the Barbarians*, sold an astonishing seventy-eight thousand copies, a figure which explains the publisher's decision to puff his new title as an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie. "The Barbarian is back!" warns the blurb. "This time it's the media!"

Well, why not? There's definitely something of the berserker about Sheehan, who seems entirely indifferent as to whether his polemical blows land on himself or his enemies. Thus he slates journalists for becoming "more and more sensational", while studding his own text with emails about fellatio and irrelevant vignettes about the last meals of death-row inmates.[22] He denounces the media's "meanspirited obsession with writing about its peers" and launches an eighteen-page attack on Robert Manne, "an intellectual undertaker".[23] He fulminates against "genocide mongering" since the "sacred word" should not be "used as an intellectual ambit claim or a bludgeoning rhetorical device",[24] yet indicts Phillip Adams for venting insufficient wrath "against the genocidal tyranny of Saddam Hussein".[25]

As with the texts Frank cites, the Barbarian's rhetoric possesses a leftish tinge. His main complaint about the media, for instance, is that: "opinion, commentary and propaganda reign victorious; news is marbled with the saturated fat of policy agendas; the media's value system has become so cynical and insular that the entire edifice has tilted off balance, enough to make the difference between toughness and mean spiritedness".[26] Sounds fair enough, but for Sheehan, the opinions that reign are not, say, those of the media proprietors or their big-business allies but rather the liberal elite. Thus prior to the war on Iraq, namby-pamby journalists and politically correct commentators maintained a tight grip on the US media. The battlers of America only broke free from the liberal chokehold when "one very important Australian understood the depth and the breadth of the wrath inside the American heartland after 11 September 2001".[27]

This particular champion of the people, actually an American, went by the name of Rupert Murdoch. When Murdoch launched a campaign "against the entrenched traditional media powerbrokers—the broadsheet newspapers, in particular the *New York Times*, and the major TV networks",[28] it was not a matter of a ruthless billionaire seeking market share through the time-honoured technique of fostering jingoism.[29] No, Murdoch's company Fox "won this media war because it had something more powerful than its competitors. It was driven by the conviction—shared by its audience, including Rupert Murdoch—that the mainstream news media was not to be trusted, that hidden agendas and biases permeated its coverage".[30] Just as Flint rebadges Elizabeth Windsor as an anti-elitist, Sheehan gives us Murdoch the battler, fighting for the common man's right to enjoy unbiased news!

The section on corporate PR perhaps best illustrates *The Electronic Whorehouse*'s style. Sheehan turns to Naomi Klein and other left-wing intellectuals for their analyses of how huge corporations influence the media. Alas, the Barbarian complains, "none of these books ever exposed subterfuge and media manipulation by the 'progressive' side of politics, which is as hungry for power and influence as any corporation".[31] He documents that hunger via the anti-sweatshop group Fairwear. According to the Barbarian, a Fairwear representative claimed on TV that Vietnamese factory workers received $5 an hour. But subsequent investigations by the right-wing think-tank, the Institute of Public Affairs, 'showed' that they were really paid a princely $13! Why, those garment makers are practically elites themselves!

Sheehan unwittingly provides a much more ac-

curate picture of power during a promotional interview with the *Australian*. He discusses cutting four thousand words out of *The Electronic Whorehouse*'s section on PR because the publisher "just didn't want to take on big companies".[32] Funnily enough, the anti-sweatshop movement's mighty resources seem to have left Pan Macmillan entirely untroubled. We might, then, think again about Sheehan's central metaphor. If the media really is an electronic whorehouse, what does that make the newspaper magnates? Of course, such questions might involve taking on the big companies his publisher fears, whereas it's quite possible to attack liberal elites morning, noon and night without sacrificing an iota of your own comfort.

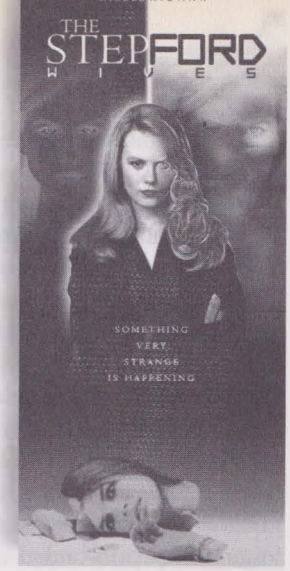
The cultural liberalism and economic rationalism that have characterised Australian society since the 1970s seem to be eroding a status quo in which the Hanson battlers feel they have only just acquired a stake. If these social changes have contributed to blurring lines of socioeconomic class, and made the operations of class power less visible and commented upon, it does seem clear that within Australian society and culture as a whole, the capacity to represent oneself as a battler, an anti-elitist, is something to be desired, a valuable political technique. The faultlines of class become far more apparent in times of direct conflict, but even now you don't have to look very hard to uncover where our loudest foes of elitism (and friends of Murdoch) really stand. In November 2003, for example, Christopher Pearson was lauding Flint's book on the elites and complaining about the commentariat's "disdain for their countrymen".[33] In December, our son of the people described a Christmas visit to the seaside. To his horror, he discovered "on egalitarian, cheek-by-jowl Australian beaches, you're apt to meet (and share an ablution block) with more hoons than at football matches". "I'm not entirely averse to beaches", he concludes, "and 'feeding on the vastness of the sea', as Shelley put it, if memory serves. But it's best done on an isolated strand, in winter and wild weather. You get a better class of sunset that way, too".[34]

1. George J. Merritt, ed., *Pauline Hanson: The Truth*, St. George Publications, 1997, p.86.
2. Merritt, *Pauline Hanson*, p.159.
3. Merritt, p.87.
4. Flint, *The Twilight of the Elites*, p.53.
5. Merritt p.92, quoting M.C. Connor.
6. Flint, p.144
7. Flint, p.144
8. Merritt, p.223.
9. Flint, p.162.
10. Flint p.233.
11. As noted for example by Sean Scalmer, 'Polemic Without Principle', *Overland* 158, 2000, p.113.
12. Left-wing uses of the 'new class' theory are outlined by Sean Scalmer, 'The Battlers Versus the Elites', *Overland* 154, 1999, p.12.
13. Keith Windschuttle, *The Media: A New Analysis of the Press, Television, Radio and Advertising in Australia* (second ed.), Penguin, Ringwood, 1988, p.351.
14. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution Vol II: The Politics of Social Classes*, Monthly Review Press, 1978, p.293.
15. Michael Pusey, *The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Reform*, CUP, Cambridge, 2003, p.61. This point about the petit-bourgeois origins of Hanson and Hansonism is made also by Scalmer, 'The Battlers Versus the Elites', pp.10–11.
16. *Herald-Sun*, 3 January 1991.
17. Andrew Milner, 'Radical Intellectuals: An Unacknowledged Legislature?', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *Constructing a Culture: A People's History of Australia Since 1788*, McPhee Gribble, Fitzroy, 1988, p.281.
18. See Alex Callinicos, 'The "New Middle Class" and Socialist Politics' in Alex Callinicos and Chris Harman, *The Changing Working Class: Essays on Class Structure Today*, Bookmarks, 1987.
19. Consider, for instance, *The Retreat from Tolerance* (ABC Books), a 1997 collection edited by Phillip Adams as a response to the Hanson phenomenon. While the populists rallied their supporters to fight for home, nation and race, Adams could urge only the wearing of yellow ribbons against bigotry and the contemplation of one's own inner prejudice.
20. Thomas Frank traces the New Right's culture wars (or "backlash") to the 1968 federal election campaign of Nixon. See *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy*, (2000), Vintage, London, 2002, p.25. On the culture wars and wedge politics in Australia see David Bennett, 'PC Panic, the Press and the Academy', *Meanjin* 52, 1993, pp.435–446; Jenny Lee, 'Honest John: A Memoir', *Overland* 149, 1997, pp.3–9; Mark Davis, *Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism* (second ed.), Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999; and Davis, 'Towards Cultural Renewal', *Overland* 163, 2001, pp.4–14.
21. Frank, *One Market Under God*.
22. Paul Sheehan, *The Electronic Whorehouse*, Pan Macmillan, 2003, pp.2, 49.
23. Sheehan, p.48
24. Sheehan, p.180.
25. Sheehan, p.168.
26. Sheehan, p.20.
27. Sheehan, p.57.
28. Sheehan, p.66.
29. Recall William Randolph Hearst's famous 1898 telegraph to a correspondent: "You furnish pictures. I will furnish war."
30. Sheehan, p.65.
31. Sheehan, p.219.
32. *Australian*, 6 November 2003.
33. *Australian*, 22 November 2003.
34. *Australian*, 27 December 2003.

Jeff Sparrow is Overland's reviews editor. He would like to thank Nathan Hollier for reading and commenting on a version of this article.

While the Billy doesn't boil yet

by Lofo



STEPFORD WIVES, HOWARD STYLE

The media and *The End of Equality*

Anne Summers: *The End of Equality: Work, Babies and Women's Choices in 21st Century Australia* (Random House, $29.95)

IN THE PAST YEAR, almost half a million Australian women were subject to violent assault, often domestic. Meanwhile, around 465 000 cars were stolen. Funding cuts have left us with no information about assaulted women, but the budget for a national database on stolen vehicles, updated four times daily, is not under threat. "We live in a country that cares more about stolen cars than it does about bashed and violated women," writes Anne Summers in her damning polemic, *The End of Equality.*

The statistics she presents belie John Howard's dismissive claim that Australia is in "the post-feminist stage of the debate". They also unseat the quixotic 'pipeline' theory about women rising through the ranks in due course. Thirty years after the second wave of feminism, when women felt the wind of history at their backs, equality between the sexes—measured by wages, access to work, the burden of domestic labour and representation in positions of power—is declining, while violence against women is increasing. Expectations placed on women have mounted, yet on almost every front women are worse off than they were in the 1980s and nineties—largely worse off than those in other developed countries—and Summers lays the blame squarely at the feet of the Coalition government and a compliant Opposition, media and union movement. "I don't think even the most pessimistic of feminists could have envisaged the full catastrophe that John Howard had in mind for the women of Australia."

The status of women is no longer on the public agenda ("for vast numbers of women their economic suffering is a shameful, private thing"), being replaced by a focus on families, women's roles as baby-makers, and the status of men and boys—with regular statements from the Prime Minister on such matters as "the overwhelming number of teachers being female" and "far too many young boys [being] without proper male role models". (Opposition Leader Mark Latham has echoed the latter concern since this book's release.) Organisations devoted to equity and affirmative action—including the Women's Statistics Unit, the Women's Bureau and the Women's Electoral Lobby—have had their funding withdrawn, and the powers of statutory bodies dealing with discrimination and the *Sexual Discrimination Act* have been eroded.

All this has happened with little protest, writes Summers, because the women's movement has been effectively silenced and fragmented. There is no longer a co-ordinated national group working towards women's interests. The few organisations that remain (poorly) funded must now sign contracts preventing them from commenting publicly on women's matters without first getting the written permission of the Prime Minister or the incapacitated Office of the Status of Women, which has become more of a lap-dog than a watch-dog. Silencing progressive organisations with threats of funding cuts or loss of tax breaks has become a familiar Howard stratagem,[1] while women, unaware of discriminatory Coalition policies, make up a large percentage of its loyal supporters.

It comes as a surprise, then, to learn that women's representation in organised politics has risen. Participants in Summers' survey of women from across eastern Australia were "astonished to learn

that women made up more than one-quarter of the members of the federal parliament". Even those who follow politics "are rightly puzzled because the impressive statistic is not matched by a corresponding increased visibility of women politicians—or a public focus on fighting for women's rights". Of the fifty-seven women in federal Parliament, only six could be named by the surveyed women (Bronwyn Bishop, Amanda Vanstone, Jackie Kelly, Carmen Lawrence, Natasha Stott Despoja and Cheryl Kernot, who is no longer in politics). This is in part because women are given less important portfolios and treated less seriously by their colleagues in politics and the media, and even by female parliamentarians themselves. Jenny Macklin, the first woman to be appointed deputy leader of the ALP, declined to take on the position's traditional role of shadow treasurer on the grounds that the country's future and wellbeing lay not in treasury, but in a 'super portfolio' of education, employment, training and science. While Moira Rayner has contended (elsewhere) that female politicians must "use their power in a different way", Summers doesn't subscribe to this idea. "The trouble is," she writes, "the treasury is where the economic and political power is". It was interesting to note the absence of media comment about what would seem a conspicuous oversight of Macklin as a contender in the ALP leadership battle which took place shortly after this book's release. That this anomaly occurred without comment supports Summers' contention that sexism is not the sole preserve of the Coalition.

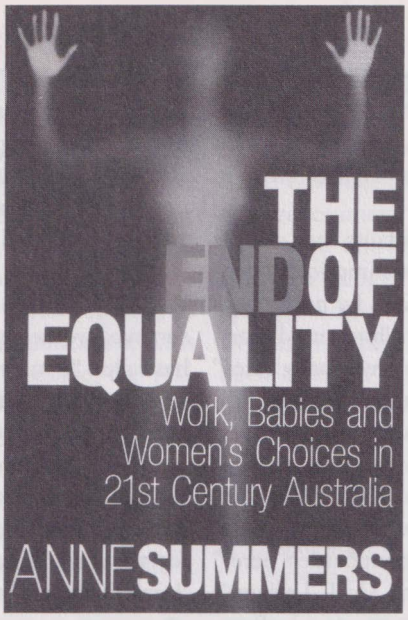
Contrary to second-wave feminist predictions, a greater number of women in Canberra has had little impact on the downward trajectory of the women's movement in Australia. While the number of female MPs surged, "so did the legislation that eroded many of the rights and entitlements that had been hard-won a decade earlier". Female politicians from both major parties have been compliant in or silent about the failure of the government to appoint women to political and judicial positions, and also about dramatic cuts in funding for childcare and tax policies that financially disadvantage mothers who choose to work.

This is where Summers' argument gathers momentum, and where it also starts to show cracks. She mounts a frightening and convincing body of evidence that Howard has embarked on a "breeding creed" which she likens to the plot in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The creed involves policies designed to keep women at home, deny them economic independence, limit their work and career opportunities, silence them outside the domestic sphere and relegate them to a breeding role, supposedly made necessary by the nation's 'ageing population crisis'. Much of the media's current obsession with the 'crisis' or 'problem' of a declining birthrate has more to do with politics than reason. But while Summers clearly demonstrates this, she doesn't mount an alternative economic argument or point out how the GST has made taxpayers out of pensioners and discounted the importance of the birthrate for a future tax-base.

She does offer strong evidence that Howard is limiting mothers' opportunities to re-enter the workforce, including enraging examples of policies that favour wealthy single-income families over poorer dual-income families and single mothers (who, unlike their married or de facto counterparts, are encouraged to get back to work and place their children in institutionalised childcare):

> Figures released in 2002 by Senator Amanda Vanstone, the [then] Minister for Family and Community Services . . . demonstrate that the single income family [on $70 000] is considerably better off than the couple where it takes two people to bring home that amount . . . once the costs of working are factored in, including the costs of childcare . . . the double income family is $2400 a year *worse off* than the single income family.

Yet the narrowness of Summers' focus will provide ammunition for the squad of arch-conservative, 'post-feminist' media commentators who have already misrepresented her views. Among these are Miranda Devine, Janet Albrechtson and Angela Shanahan (who branded Summers a "Jurassic" woman who has failed to "come to terms with the post-feminist world" of "realist women"). It seems ironic that these daughters of Thatcher are arguing against equality of opportunity on the grounds that it is based on 'individualism' and that its economistic view of family life devalues humanity. Unfortunately Summers makes herself easy prey to these lines of argument. In its reductionist, equality-equals-sameness approach, *The End of Equality* does fail to map out the complexities and contradictions of the rela-



tionship between familial values and domestic economic life. Summers discusses children solely in terms of being an interruption to a woman's career; reducing their value to an economic "inconvenience" and "work expense" for which mothers should be "compensated". Such inflated proclamations as "Women are no longer prepared to sacrifice themselves on the altar of maternity" express attitudes toward motherhood not supported by any cited studies and not reflected in the comments made by mothers in the focus groups Summers arranged for this book (a sample of "around 90" women), nor in other surveyed working mothers,[2] and a couple of times I wondered whether their quoted statements led or followed the route of her argument.

Her focus on the 'right' of economically disadvantaged mothers of preschoolers to get back into the grind of the full-time job-market and to outsource childcare to an institution suggests the latter. As Germaine Greer has written: "We must not simply assume that what mothers in poverty want to be freed from is motherhood itself".[3] Although Summers argues for freedom of choice, describing how "what was supposed to be a smorgasbord of choice is fast forcing women into an agony of indecision, with none of the options ideal for most women", *The End of Equality* doesn't make a consistent and clear distinction between the plight of those who wish to go back to work and those who believe they must. Instead it threads comments made by the focus-group women, from a range of socioeconomic sectors, into an argument concerned more with the barriers to career advancement than with the complexities of power and needs in the paid/domestic work mix. In its discussion of equality rather than liberation (that is, freedom from social pressures to conform in ways that are inconsistent with individual needs) it ignores the discordant voices within the women's movement—a surprising omission, given that Summers was once editor of the broad-ranging *Ms* magazine. The cultural and ideological reasons that mothers of preschoolers are seeking paid work, and the reasons that traditional role ideals nonetheless continue, are nodded at but left unexamined; as is a society so fragmented that childcare outside the workplace or family is the commonplace option—one considered the woman's concern.

In Australia, where 'family values' is a term tinged with fundamentalism and conservatism, public discussion of women's rights alongside those of the infant (its right, for example, to optimum health and development through breastfeeding, made impossible by a mother's early return to work) has come to be the preserve of midwifery journals, anti-feminist columnists and supermarket magazines. While Moira Rayner and Catharine Lumby have occasionally trod this terrain in mainstream newspaper commentary, overseas, popular feminists like Naomi Wolf and Germaine Greer have managed to enter even more dangerous territory, discussing the ideals of liberation within the bounds of biological determinism, gender/familial relations and the value of life. Summers' argument would have been strengthened had it broadened in this way. Sitting uncomfortably with some of her assumptions are the statistics she presents, suggesting that the majority of mothers of very young children *want* to stay at home and believe this is the best option for preschoolers:

> The great majority of mothers of young children in the 1990s think that young children should be with their mothers . . . 69 per cent of Australians (women and men) believed mothers of preschoolers should be stay-at-home housewives. The International Social Science Surveys found only 3 per cent support for mothers of young children working full-time, and even when children were of school age 73 per cent believed they should work only part-time.

Whether this represents sexism, conservatism or respect for the work of motherhood (or parenthood) and the needs of early childhood remains unexplored by Summers, but it is not a peculiarly Australian trend. In the UK, both men and women

believe that women's family responsibilities where very young children are concerned should come before work, and few men or women believe that women would be happier if they went to work in this situation.[4]

Why, then, do families with infants seek double incomes in Australia? Summers' assumption of economic necessity is a sticky one, and by not engaging in a class analysis is occasionally contradictory. While Summers claims that "in a great many cases" women who work part-time would rather have full-time jobs, statistics cited later in the book suggest that under 5 per cent of those working part-time seek full-time work.[5] "Who can afford the luxury of a single income family these days?" she asks, adding that "We are not talking about battlers here." For whom is she speaking? For Mark Latham's 'aspirational class'? Many of the women in Summers' focus groups say they re-entered the workforce because of a perceived loss of identity, or because they had friends who "viewed me as boring and dull because I don't go out to work, and useless, because I don't work". One says she can't face the prospect of "contributing nothing financially". Again, Summers doesn't broaden her analysis to critically examine a society in which identity, social interaction and self-worth are defined by participation in the paid labour market. While she advocates choice, this is undermined by an outright rejection of the Howard government's flirtation with the idea of a homemaker's allowance, a "salary paid to the mother (or any other parent) who stays at home to care for children without using public day care nurseries". Whatever the motives for this (and it most certainly fits into Summers' 'breeding creed' analysis), such a policy would give mothers in all socioeconomic brackets the choice of economic independence without being forced to re-enter the work force and a sense of being valued for the important (and often fulfilling) work of raising preschoolers. It may even give the stay-at-home parent the freedom to engage in (unpaid) work or study out of interest rather than necessity, or to employ help for domestic childcare or housework. These ideas are off Summers' radar; instead, the proposed policy is seen as a regressive dependency-model, and as "a clear bias towards stay-at-home mothers", despite the package being proposed to support *either* parent. Its architect, Dr Catherine Hakim of the London School of Economics, is "this so-called feminist", rather than someone who understands that many women who combine motherhood and employment are, as Summers acknowledges, "run ragged", "exhausted all of the time" and "almost going crazy from the pressure and the workload".

WHILE SUMMERS' FOCUS is on work, that of her surveyed women is often on leisure, something Greer has called "a masculine privilege". "I would love to sit on my own and have a cup of coffee in the morning." "You have no time for yourself, you are thinking of all the things you want to do . . . but you can't." "If you take time out for yourself, you should be doing the housework or washing or something for the kids." That working mothers spend their 'leisure' time on housework and very little of their incomes on recreation has been well-documented, and had the issues of leisure-time and identity been incorporated in a structural analysis, *The End of Equality* would provide a rounded and groundbreaking framework. That it doesn't is not entirely Summers' fault: as she herself points out, analysing women's wellbeing and making connections between policy, work and livelihood becomes difficult when the very institutions that gather information on women's status have been silenced or had their funding withdrawn. That she had to commission her own 'market research' to find out how women are faring is telling.

A tendency to take this research at face value led *The End of Equality* into contradictions that Summers acknowledges but doesn't scrutinise. A considered survey of the media's shameful objectification of female high-rollers doesn't sit easily with Summers' uncritical receipt of young respondents' ideas about 'girl-power' liberation. Summers writes: "There are ubiquitous (albeit media-generated) images of powerful women such as Lara Croft and Charlie's Angels, or real life achievers such as Madonna or Jennifer Lopez—all of which makes [sic] young girls especially feel good about themselves and their sex." A small part of the book, but revealing in its uncritical engagement with a feminism that confuses power with consumption, and liberation solely with participation in economic activity.

Despite these contradictions, *The End of Equality* is invaluable in the connections it suggests between the increasing violence against women and

the growing inequalities they suffer. It is a landmark resource of hard-hitting facts and pithy observations that will comfort those women who see their predicaments as personal failings rather than the socially engineered situations they are. While the Stepford Wives dominating newspaper discussion about gender misrepresented and ridiculed Summers' assertions even before the book's release, its importance and potential for real political impact is already evident. Shortly before its release, the *Bulletin* asked the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to comment on Summers' contentions, referring the Office to "an obscure website" that carried a transcript of a speech made by her several months earlier. The PMO contacted the *Bulletin* to ask when *The End of Equality* would be released, but it didn't comment on the speech. An "odd coincidence" then occurred, according to the *Bulletin*. "A week after our request, right-wing newspaper columnist Miranda Devine wrote an opinion piece attacking Summers and some of her contentions [taken] from that speech which Summers made in March, when it had gone unremarked." It's great to see some gender balance in Howard's culture wars.

Another 'odd coincidence': in timing with *The End of Equality*'s widespread media attention, the Howard government issued a media statement that could have been written by Summers herself. The very government that dismissed the idea of maternity leave and slashed $850 million from the childcare budget announced a "multiple choice" package which will give "flexibility and choice" to working mothers and help them "in the transition back to work". It may not be a core promise, though, so we needn't hold our breath.

1. See 'Policing the do-gooders' by Tim Thornton in *Overland* 173 and 'The discompassion industry' by Philip Mendes in *Overland* 170.
2. See, for example, 'What do women want from union representation?' by Anne Forest in *Hecate* 26:2, 2000.
3. Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, Random House, 2000.
4. Ibid.
5. On p.161 Summers states that "around 22 per cent of women working part-time said they would prefer to work more hours with one fifth of these women wanting full-time work." Thus only 4.4 per cent of those working part-time seek full-time employment.

Katherine Wilson is a mother and Overland*'s co-editor.*

EVIDENCE & OPINION

Debating history

Stuart Macintyre & Anna Clark: *The History Wars* (MUP, $29.95)
Robert Manne (ed.): *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Black Inc., $29.95)

NOT SO LONG AGO it might have been difficult to imagine Robert Manne and Stuart Macintyre converging on any matter of contemporary political interest, much less on the dangers of right-wing historical revisionism. But here's the proof—two books released contemporaneously, each intervening in the ongoing debate over the legitimacy of Keith Windschuttle's scholarship, and its place within a larger movement to discredit theories of Aboriginal dispossession. The scope differs slightly; Manne has assembled an impressive arsenal of big-name talent to demolish the Windschuttle text brick by brick, whereas Macintyre and Clark have opted to canvass the culture wars writ large and assess the place of History within them. Both make important contributions to understanding the context in which a book like *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* can be published and even successful.

From the title to the choice of contributors, it is clear that *Whitewash* is addressed to Keith. All his old sparring partners are present, including Henry and Lyndall who are both on their best behaviour. Other seasoned campaigners include Marilyn Lake, Cassandra Pybus and Neville Green. There are exciting contributions from some rising talents such as James Boyce, who invalidates most of Windschuttle's claims about Tasmania with some exhaustive archival research, and Cathie Clement, who tackles head-on Windschuttle's irresponsible use of her work—and Peggy Patrick's words—in his attack on William Deane. A. Dirk Moses, who just might have produced the best essay of the collection, offers a revealing comparative study of the international trend towards right-wing revisionist history. He reminds us that the use of the word 'fabrication' is a standard semiological trope, designed for maximum damage from minimum proof, and cites examples such as *The Fabrication of the 'Nanking Massacre'* and *Fabricating Israeli History: The 'New Historians'*, the latter of which takes Edward Said as a primary target, as did Windschuttle in a *New Criterion* article of 1998. Mark Finnane's essay, 'Counting the Cost of the "Nun's Picnic"', refers to Claudio Veliz's description of European contact at the launch of *Fabrication*, and is also a standout—it had to be good to live up to such a fantastic title.

I found *The History Wars* slightly less satisfying. Although it skillfully contextualises the role of history in political discourse and public life, *Whitewash* is such hand-to-hand combat that Macintyre and Clark seem a little distant in a book proclaiming itself "an unashamedly engaged account". I understand that the Geoffrey Blainey/Manning Clark dichotomy is essential background information for anyone following this debate (Manne makes no mention of the demonisation of Manning Clark in his introductory essay—I can't think why) but it seems less urgent to revisit old wounds when Windschuttle is slashing his way through academia, with the help of a complicit mass media and the unending gratitude of a government that needed Keith as badly as it needed Pauline. I also noticed that in an entire chapter devoted to the Windschuttle debate, and the media attention it generated, the Evans and Thorpe essay ('Indigenocide and the Massacre of Australian History', *Overland* 163) is overlooked, despite being the first serious engagement with the Windschuttle claims to be published anywhere.

Reading these two books filled me with equal parts hope and despair. I was buoyed to see such a

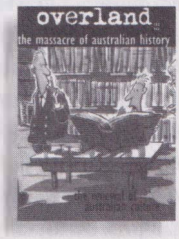
The media lacks any kind of mechanism for analysing the difference between scholarship and opinion. Despite the sheer weight of evidence mobilised against the central theses of *Fabrication*, the media has continued to report the debate as a difference of opinion, with no respect for academic conventions of disclosure and peer review.

diverse cross-section of accomplished scholars with their gloves off, producing powerful, cogent arguments against the substance and tenor of Windschuttle's work. But I couldn't help feeling horrified that it had come to this. *Fabrication* is such a toxic book; riddled as it is with factual inaccuracies, relying as it does on wholly discredited theories of racial typology and primitivism, and betraying the ideological agenda of its author on almost every page; it should have attracted little more than ridicule. Instead, it has consumed the energies of some of our best minds, consolidated support for the New Right as the culture wars continue, and perhaps most disturbingly, translated into policy redirection as in the case of the National Museum.

Enough time has lapsed since the publication of these two books to comment on their respective receptions. As ever, the gulf between critical and popular accounts looms large, but the bottom line remains—if Windschuttle publishes a book, we get widespread media coverage of Windschuttle and his book. If Robert Manne or Stuart Macintyre publishes a book, we get widespread media coverage of Windschuttle and his book. As this debate progresses, it becomes clear that the media lacks any kind of mechanism for analysing the difference between scholarship and opinion. The sum total of the academic response to this work has comprehensively destroyed the empirical foundations on which it is predicated, and simultaneously struggled for the right (and the opportunity) to convey these critiques. This information is disseminated, only to be neutralised by its own lack of currency in the public sphere.

Despite the sheer weight of evidence mobilised against the central theses of *Fabrication*, the media has continued to report the debate as a difference of opinion, thereby illustrating the difficulty of conducting a scholarly discussion in a forum that has minimal respect for academic conventions of disclosure, peer review and professional development. As some commentators have noted (Catharine Lumby attracted a defamation writ for her trouble), this debate is largely about the credibility of academics in the public sphere, particularly the right of humanities scholars to claim themselves as uniquely qualified to address these questions of meaning and identity in the production of history. That Evans and Thorpe presented a heavily empirical, systematically proven, 12 000-word view of the frontier, alternative to the one posited by Windschuttle in his *Quadrant* articles, should have been enough to spare us the existence of *Fabrication*, just as *The History Wars* and *Whitewash* should make the publication of further volumes untenable for Keith's publishers. Oh yeah, that's right . . .

Karen Pickering wrote an Honours thesis at USQ on Windschuttle's Fabrication. *Her PhD, currently being undertaken at the University of Melbourne, will examine the cultural politics of the New Right.*



Pictured: *Overland 163*, containing the 12 000-word essay by Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe.

FRONTING THE PAST, RELUCTANTLY

Bain Attwood and S.G. Foster (eds): *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience* (National Museum of Australia, $39.95)

FOR TWO DAYS in December 2001, the recently opened National Museum of Australia hosted a conference titled, 'Frontier conflict: The Australian experience'. Its major aim was to explore the debate surrounding the 'history of conflict between Aboriginals and Europeans on the Australian frontier'. A number of prominent academics and intellectuals—mainly historians—were invited to present papers and contributions. Altogether twenty-seven people featured at the forum itself, which included a panel discussion at the last session on day two, recorded for ABC Radio National but not published. I attended the conference and what follows are some of my impressions, as well as the more usual book review.

About half of the contributors made it into the final version of the book, namely Dawn Casey, the Museum's Director; Geoffrey Bolton, Jan Critchett, Raymond Evans, Henry Reynolds, Deborah Bird Rose, Richard Broome, John Mulvaney, David Roberts, Tom Griffiths, Keith Windschuttle, Lyndall Ryan, Alan Atkinson, Bain Attwood, and Graeme Davison. Ann Curthoys was invited to the forum but she was unable to come because of another engagement. Nevertheless her paper, 'Constructing national histories', was included in the collection.

Not being privy to the editorial process or any other decisions, and with due respect to all the authors, I was disappointed not to see in print contributions from other presenters, such as Tony Birch, David Millikan and Jeannette Hope. Birch, a Koori academic, gave a scintillating talk on the politics of non-Indigenous memory, and told of a story which celebrated the efforts of finding a lost white girl but which had overlooked the contribution of two Aboriginal men to this rescue. Millikan, a journalist, spoke about the 1928 Coniston massacre and his persistence in tracing and confronting one of the still-living perpetrators of that massacre, who adamantly refused to 'come clean'. Hope, an archaeologist, gave a painstaking account of the difficulties surrounding the identification and enumeration of Aboriginal remains at significant massacre sites.

This disjuncture between what ended up as *Frontier Conflict* and what happened at the forum itself is not so great as to render the collection unrepresentative. To a considerable degree, Attwood and Foster's introduction covers some of the gaps and captures some of the tensions that surfaced in sessions when the odd Aboriginal person spoke up, and when Keith Windschuttle, in typically belligerent fashion, tried to rubbish Lyndall Ryan's, Henry Reynolds', and Raymond Evans' historical accounts. Nonetheless, readers need to be aware that *Frontier Conflict*, like any other publication of a conference, is not the whole story.

A major reason for the forum in the first place, partly explored in Graeme Davison's piece and the editors' introduction, was the bother which Windschuttle made about the Museum's 'Contested Frontiers' exhibit. Davison deals firmly, fairly and without being defensive, with Windschuttle's now familiar refrain that exhibits like these, and the histories they are based on, are 'fabrications'. Personally, I can't understand what the fuss was or is about. In the first place, the display's contents and themes cover only a fraction of the ubiquity of clashes, massacres and battles in every Australian colony. Secondly, readers who haven't seen the Contested

This is not a debate between more or less equal contenders conducted under some idealised, gentlemanly, liberal rules of 'fair play'. Rather it is a situation where one side (Windschuttle's) is both dominant and hegemonic in government, economy, the mass media and the general public.

Frontiers exhibit might think that it dominates the Museum's Indigenous sections. In fact it is hardly bigger than a lounge room. The lighting is subdued (at least when I was there), and the display is positioned to one side and is not immediately obvious; indeed a visitor could miss it all together. I would go so far as to suggest that those responsible for this exhibit were trying to *downplay* its presence. I realise this is probably gratuitous and unfair, not least because various publics and interests are involved both within and outside the museum itself, as Davison points out. From my point of view, however, 'Contested Frontiers' should have greater prominence and space, not only to reflect the Australia-wide frontier experience, but also to support the themes, evidence and material that appear in *Frontier Conflict* itself.

Frontier Conflict has four parts, which the forum asked its presenters to address in the following order: 'What happened?', 'How do we know?', 'How do we remember?' and 'How do we tell?'. In part one, Lyndall Ryan revisited the Waterloo Creek massacre of 1838, where between sixty and seventy Aboriginal people were killed in two encounters with mounted police. Her account revolves around Windschuttle's reinterpretation of this event as a "legitimate police action" which resulted in only several Aboriginal deaths. After showing that Windschuttle based his version on only two official reports, Ryan argues that there is more corroborative evidence to suggest that the second encounter "was an act of mass revenge by the mounted police in retaliation for the wounding of one of their comrades". Mulvaney, likewise, takes issue with Windschuttle's dismissal of Aboriginal oral testimony regarding frontier conflict in the Northern Territory, notably at the Barrow Creek telegraph station, which Aboriginal warriors attacked in 1874. While making a case for the validity of such testimony, Mulvaney draws on a range of written and published sources from anthropologists and others to demonstrate that various white "punitive forays" had wiped out some Aboriginal groups almost to extinction. Critchett's paper updates her major work, *A Distant Field of Murder*, a detailed account of Victoria's Western District frontiers, first published in 1990. Here, in a careful review of the available evidence, she concludes that "the number of Aborigines killed in conflict with Europeans was . . . far larger than my previous estimate". Evans' brief was to provide an overview of the Queensland frontier experience—a vast subject which began with Dutch forays into Wik lands in Cape York in 1606 and ended in 1910 in much the same region. The disturbing picture Evans offers is of a place arguably the most violent in Australia's race relations history because more belligerents were involved; fights over resources covered several 'frontiers'—"penal, pastoral, agricultural, maritime and mining"; Native Police forces were larger and more lethal than in any other colony; and Queensland governments actively or passively supported settlers' genocidal acts.

In part two Henry Reynolds leads off, describing in detail some of the "literally thousands of accounts", from the official to the personal, that are available to assess the impact of frontier conflicts in a number of places across Australia. His survey conveys how much spadework and scholarship lies behind his own work and that of other historians in this field. He concludes, in an oblique sideswipe at Windschuttle, that those who deny this vast and convincing written evidence are indulging "in an affectation of ignorance". Richard Broome's contribution is along similar lines but focuses more closely on one colony, Victoria, to compile statistics which as closely as possible measure the death-toll on both sides of the frontier. In the process, he points out that the historians whom Windschuttle attacks are generally careful and do not 'collude' in some conspiracy when making such estimates and

interpretations. Windschuttle himself is far less circumspect. Basically he tries to show how frontier conflict historians have "doctored evidence and invented incidents". But these historians, notably Ryan, Reynolds and Evans, are merely part of his overall fault-finding which includes the museum's design, a former Governor-General, and the worthlessness of Aboriginal oral testimony. In a very different and thoughtful tone, Atkinson explores some of the moral dimensions of an Australian past "full of deep shifts in an ocean of feelings about race"—a sensibility Atkinson claims is lacking in the so-called revisionists like Windschuttle. In the final paper in this section, Rose reaffirms this ethical dimension to history and historical remembering in her support for Aboriginal oral evidence. Such evidence is not merely 'legend', as Windschuttle contends, but often the only kind we have in the absence of written documentation. More importantly, Aboriginal people can distinguish 'faithful accounts' from 'bullshit' as well as anyone else; and their willingness to tell us their stories rests on a belief that "we are people who are capable of understanding and responding".

In part three there are two contributions by Griffiths and Roberts. Griffiths is interested mainly in the complex and subtle ways the past is remembered and suppressed, and argues for an historical method which is able to account for such complexities, and cross-cultural frontier relations more generally. Griffiths can write with some authority here, not only because of his own standing as an historian but also because he was employed for over five years as a field officer for the State Library of Victoria, with the job of acquiring Australian material for the library's research collections. Griffiths responds critically to Windschuttle's version of history, but uses him more as a point of departure to discuss, among other things, Reynolds' argument for the "forgotten Aboriginal dead" to be included "with the revered fallen warriors of Australia's overseas wars". Roberts examines the Bells Falls massacre and oral tradition. The problem with this event, like others, is that there is no empirical or corroborative evidence to show that a massacre had occurred, rather there is a powerful settler memory which is widely accepted in the district as being true. Indeed the locals objected to Roberts calling it 'legend' or 'myth'. The important point is that this local knowledge preserved a wider history of white frontier violence that was missing from the national histories.

The final section in *Frontier Conflict* has contributions from Bolton, Attwood and Curthoys. Bolton makes a plea for a comparative perspective, pointing out that such an approach is overdue because other countries' histories (including those of New Zealand, Britain and the United States), have documented similar experiences and issues to those of 'Australian frontier history'. Attwood's piece is a long rebuttal of Windschuttle's simplistic and "essentially irrelevant" reading of Australian frontier historiography and Reynolds' key role in its development. Rather, the field has been the subject of considerable revision and debate among historians, which includes critiques of Reynolds' work itself, as well as significant shifts in historical interpretations over the past thirty years. Curthoys' essay in some respects echoes Atkinson's concerns with the moral dimensions of history, but is refracted here through an analysis of settler histories, and the rise of previously unheard, unsettling Aboriginal voices that challenge the 'foundational white narrative'. One consequence is the recent appearance and adoption of 'genocide' to explain what happened to Australia's Aboriginal people undergoing colonisation. This in turn has aroused a defensive reaction on the part of non-Aboriginal Australians who increasingly see themselves as losing their sense of 'home'.

Overall, the papers published here are exemplary expressions of the current state of play about frontier conflict in Australia's past, although, as the editors point out, "the historians at the forum", provoked by Windschuttle's criticisms, "have found it necessary to recapitulate their work on frontier conflict, much of it undertaken 20 or more years ago". They note also that "the debate has been forced back onto well-trodden paths *with no discernible benefits*" (my emphasis), a point I shall turn to presently. The forum itself was a most rewarding and stimulating experience, where most of the major scholars of race relations, colonial history and frontier historiography in Australia showed themselves to advantage and where, for the most part, the ideal of informed and even dignified debate held sway.

Lastly, some observations and comments. I chose the title for this review because there was a sense, from some of the presenters themselves, the editors, and what I can only describe as 'atmosphere', that most of the participants would have rather been doing something else than revisiting and

Windschuttle's performance at the forum left me in no doubt that Lyndall Ryan was a marked woman, which has been confirmed more recently with pro-Windschuttle journalists calling for her university to sack her from her current position. It reminds me of the Nazi offensive against 'intellectualism'.

defending the idea and the reality of frontier conflict. Hence the reason I have italicised the editors' remarks above. The editors underline this reluctance when they quote at length Gillian Cowlishaw's impressions of the debate at Bob Gould's bookshop in Sydney between Reynolds and Windschuttle in 2001. Cowlishaw's main point was that both sides of the debate (excepting Reynolds) were as bad as each other and those who opposed Windschuttle were unhelpful to the Aboriginal cause.

While I have some sympathy for this apparently sensible and balanced position, there are a number of problems with it. Firstly, the worst episodes of conflict, massacre and genocide may be 'over' in a western historical sense but the colonial legacies of this racist, brutal past are alive and well. Some recent and current examples include: the rejection of the Yorta Yorta people's land claims in 2002, which in effect returned Australian common law and native title to *terra nullius*; powerful economic and political interests (or should we say *classes*) pressing on with insensitive schemes which ignore Aboriginal rights and heritage (for example the Hindmarsh Island bridge development in South Australia); and Aboriginal rates of imprisonment, still among the highest of any group in the world, let alone Australia.

Secondly, as discussed above, a major justification for the forum and *Frontier Conflict* was to counter an intense, concerted, combative, ongoing, right-wing ideological campaign, whose proponents (who include our current Prime Minister) want to discredit the historians and others who were at the forum, and return us to 'the great Australian silence', and the 'history of indifference' (to use Stanner's phrase) to matters Aboriginal.

This is not a debate between more or less equal contenders conducted under some idealised, gentlemanly, liberal rules of 'fair play' as much as we might hope, along with Cowlishaw, that this should be so. Rather it is a situation where one side (Windschuttle's) is both dominant and hegemonic (to invoke Gramsci for a moment) in government, economy, the mass media and the general public. Windschuttle's performance at the forum left me in no doubt that Lyndall Ryan was a marked woman, which has been confirmed more recently with pro-Windschuttle journalists calling for her university to sack her from her current position. It reminds me of the Nazi offensive against 'intellectualism'. I hope that *Frontier Conflict* receives the attention and media exposure it deserves but I'm not holding my breath in the current climate.

Bill Thorpe is a visiting fellow and adjunct senior lecturer at Flinders University. He is author of Colonial Queensland, *UQP, 1996.*

art | **ANNA HAEBICH**

CHARMED CIRCLES

Fact, fantasy and fraud on Australian frontiers

There is something tawdry about all of this. It reflects an unwillingness to grapple seriously with the issues, a gullible self-centredness, a preference for romantic play-acting that lends itself to fraud.

—Stephen Gray[1]

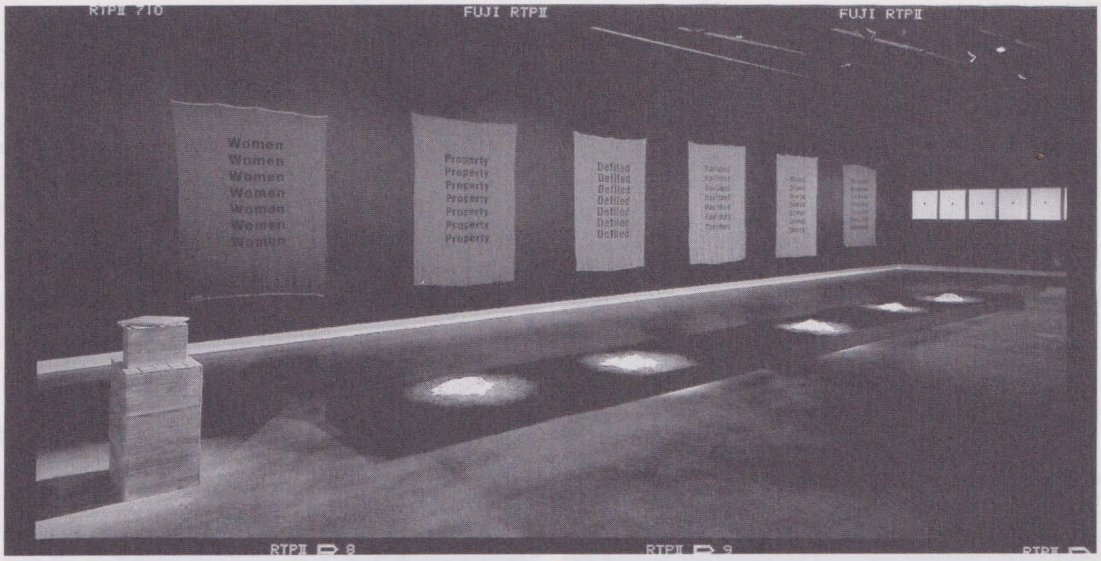
THE AUSTRALIAN FRONTIER is in the news. It has re-emerged as a metaphorical site of bitter contestation and division between narratives of Indigenous violence and death constructed by the 'experts' and voices of dissent advocating more celebratory accounts of our past. It is a curious phenomenon, that the cumulative effect of these verbal stoushes has been to render the 'truth' ever more elusive and intangible. However, this should not surprise us since fact, fantasy and fraud are old travelling companions along all frontiers of human interaction.

These, Stephen Gray tells us, were the principal components of the accounts of 'white blackfellows' and Europeans 'going native' so enjoyed by white audiences in colonial Australia in which lived experiences of shipwreck or escape and rescue by Aboriginal people were mixed creatively with invented tales of "cannibal orgy, sexual abandon and outlandish custom".[2] Designed to excite and titillate, attract and repel, these nineteenth-century 'media events' also encouraged contemplation of questions about civilisation—was civilisation "innate, a whiteness that could not wash away; or could a European, in a savage environment, revert to a primitive state?" The public performances of the shipwrecked Eliza Fraser are a quintessential example of these imaginings. In the new millennium, Gray asserts, there is a fascination with narratives about individuals who voluntarily enter Aboriginal worlds, usually on a "spiritual quest, in search of something more 'real'". These accounts emphasise the "nobility of Aboriginal spiritual life" and reflect European anxieties that "in the process of becoming civilised we have lost something noble, some essential connectedness with the land".[3] Marlo Morgan's fraudulent publication *Mutant Message Down Under* is a recent controversial example of these narratives.

Fiona Foley's exhibition *Red Ochre Me* provides a challenging Indigenous corrective to such white imaginings about connections on the frontiers of our shared worlds.[4] In her Eliza Fraser series Foley countered accepted narratives about white women on the frontier with oral histories from the *Badjalung* custodians of Fraser Island. Now, in this installation, Foley shifts her critical gaze to imaginings about white masculinity on the frontier, with a potent mix of works evoking physical violence and murder, brutal sexuality and abandonment of women and children, the crushing of Aboriginal culture and spiritual theft. Laced with ambiguities, tragedies, foibles and vulnerabilities, these works generate uncomfortable historical narratives that offer no easy answers but compel us to ask ever more questions.

DEATH AND DENIAL

In the exhibition's central floor installation Foley lays out for our contemplation the archetypal signifiers of massacre. Despite generations of silence they remain chilling and compelling. Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose describes this forensic evidence of the violence of armed, mounted parties of white men *in situ* in her account of a massacre at Pine Creek in the Northern Territory in 1906:



> the huge pile of ashes, the bloodstains, and the items removed from the ashes while they were still warm, among them fragments of burnt bones, charred beads, pieces of buttons, a spent bullet, some burnt pieces of cloth and a pipe.[5]

Twenty years later eyewitness reports of a similar funereal pile of ashes, burnt bones and spent cartridges in the West Kimberley exposed one of the most infamous and contested massacres in Australian history. White settlers closed ranks in a conspiracy of silence, however the aging Superintendent of Forrest River Mission, Reverend Ernest Gribble, forced the appointment in 1927 of a Royal Commission of Inquiry which found that a police party had killed eleven people and burned their bodies. Two police officers charged with wilful murder were subsequently exonerated on the grounds of insufficient evidence and were returned to duties. The fallout for Gribble was less auspicious: a combination of "derision and angry loathing"[6] on the part of local whites, his alarming mismanagement of the mission and personal and psychological problems forced his resignation in 1928.

Seventy years later, Perth journalist Rod Moran has accused Gribble of concocting the entire massacre story as a smokescreen to conceal his alleged sexual misconduct at the mission. Although not endorsed by Gribble's biographer Christine Halse,[7] Moran's allegations have provided handy ammunition for denialists in the 'frontier wars' and their assertion that massacre histories are generally "poorly founded . . . seriously mistaken . . . [or] outright fabrication".[8]

In the midst of the delusion and hysteria that haunts these allegations and counter-allegations, Foley's installation stands as a silent and shattering testimony, a bare statement of fact and a call to accountability endorsed by Rose's conclusions regarding the Pine Creek massacre: "*Although **nobody*** was convicted, it is clear people were shot and their bodies were burnt. Somebody did it".[9]

UNSAFE SEX

The welfare blankets issued to Aboriginal people by Australian governments have their own meanings in colonial history and within Foley's evolving *oeuvre*. Onto these blank, grey, rectangular screens we project imaginings of neglectful charity, patronage and control; disease, death and ghostly tallies of declining Aboriginal populations; furtive sexual couplings; and distorted exchanges of blankets for land, resources and women.[10] In colonial Western Australia, this blank field was emblazoned with the Imperial crown in regal colours—a declaration of government ownership intended to halt illegal blanket sales by police officers.

The text stamped on Foley's latest installation of blankets also speaks of ownership and exploitation—in this case of Aboriginal women's bodies by white men. The deprecatory title 'Stud Gins' encapsulates proprietorial attitudes to Aboriginal women on

colonial frontiers, while the text is a terrible, composite narrative of the life trajectories of many of the women. Such abusive treatment is normally associated with the nightmare of white men invading 'unprotected' Aboriginal camps on pastoral stations, in the bush or on the fringes of towns. Missions and government settlements are considered to have been refuges where women and girls could find protection and respect. However, even these environments were not always safe.

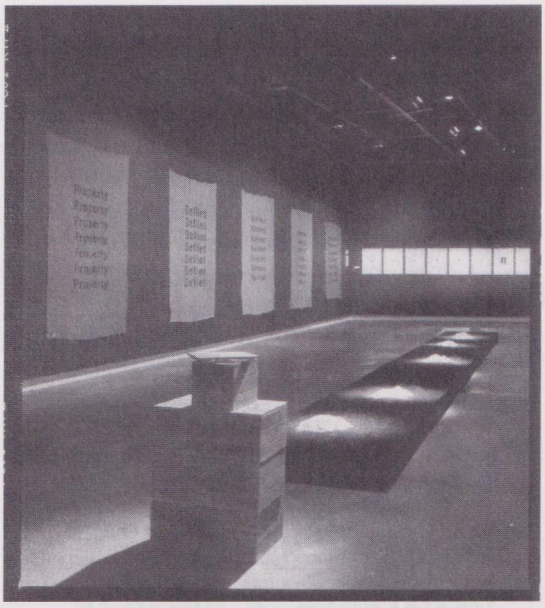
Yarrabah Anglican Mission in North Queensland in the early 1900s was one such place. As Superintendent of the Mission from 1897 to 1913, Reverend Ernest Gribble ran a tight moral ship for girls forcibly housed in mission dormitories to be cleansed of "lust and licentiousness" through a "long catalogue" of deprivations, harsh rules, punishments and public humiliations.[11] This was hardly the promised, respectful world of Christian womanhood. Nor were the girls safe from sexual exploitation by mission staff, including Gribble's own family—in 1897 his married younger brother was forced out of Yarrabah after he allegedly raped a 15-year-old girl, leaving her pregnant. Ten years later Gribble, in the throes of a failed marriage, broke his own strict moral standards when he fell deeply in love with one of his charges. His efforts to staunch his feelings by forcing the girl into an unwanted marriage failed and in 1908 she bore him a daughter. This sexual encounter across white and Aboriginal frontiers, Halse writes, "transgressed the very foundation of the faith and moral codes on which [Gribble] had built his life".[12] Already psychologically unstable and subject to bouts of suicidal depression, Gribble broke down and had to be hospitalised. His anxieties escalated as rumours of his sexual misconduct spread amongst the residents of nearby Cairns, who were incensed at his hypocrisy in committing the very sins that he had so ardently condemned. As the mission spiralled into chaos and neglect Gribble's staff threatened to resign *en masse* if he was not sacked. Finally, in 1910 the new Primate and Archbishop of Sydney endorsed Gribble's removal and the Australian Board of Missions announced that he had resigned due to ill health. The family left Yarrabah for good, leaving behind only their unacknowledged Aboriginal offspring.[13]

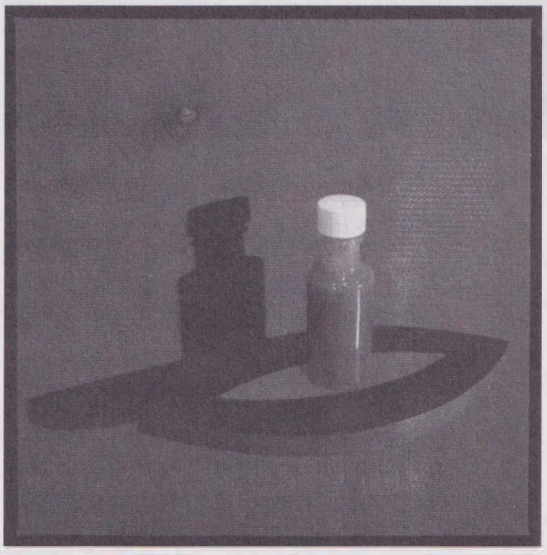
Within three years the disgraced missionary was back in the field, having been summonsed by Bishop Gerard Trower to pioneer the Forrest River Mission in the West Kimberly, despite the scandal surrounding his forced resignation and the Archbishop of Sydney having banned him from ever working in his diocese. Halse provides no explanation for this injudicious appointment. Perhaps there was simply no other experienced missionary willing to take on the post, or church authorities may have been inclined to excuse misconduct in such a complex frontier of human relationships. On the other hand, such decisions appear to fit with Anglican practice in handling cases of sexual misconduct by clergy, highlighted in the forced resignation of Governor General Peter Hollingworth in 2003 following allegations of repeated failure to deal with reported incidents of child sexual abuse while he was Archbishop of Brisbane. In the case of Gribble, the eventual result was, as we have seen, the export of chaos and scandal to a new clime and a further traumatic conclusion to his mission endeavours. Astoundingly, Gribble's 1928 resignation was again only a temporary stay and in 1930 the Bishop of North Queensland, John Feetham, impressed by Gribble's stand on the Forrest River massacre, appointed him Anglican chaplain at Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement off the Townsville coast. Ironically, Gribble's arrival was delayed by the shocking news that the Superintendent of Palm Island had gone on a demented rampage, shooting at people and dynamiting and setting fire to buildings, resulting in the deaths of his son and stepdaughter and the wounding of two of his staff.

SPIRITUAL COPYRIGHT AND SEX

Issues of cultural appropriation are also tackled in Foley's installation—in this instance, matters of Indigenous spirituality and its transformation into a 'palatable commodity' for the New Age market. Foley also critiques claims by individuals to have entered into a form of white Indigeneity based on imparted spiritual initiation and knowledge and their self-seeking manipulations to satisfy their own drive for power and sexual gratification. Foley takes a savage serve at the powerful sexual charge that infuses these fields of penetration of the Other, while at the same time reasserting, with her biting wit, the sexual power of Indigenous women.

The works that explore these issues, 'Anal Tantric Sex' and 'Sacred Cunt Juice', were inspired in part by an article entitled 'Once were Emus' in the *Sydney Morning Herald*—a damning and often hilarious account by journalist John Van Tiggelen of his

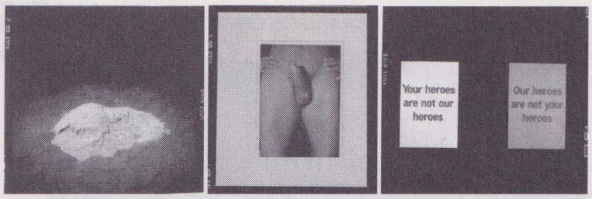




experiences on a ten-day Course of Advanced Shamanic training in *Pitjantjara* lands which climaxed with his initiation into the *Wanampi* Dreaming of Uluru.[14] This example of 'shamanic tourism' is truly the stuff of New Age dreams and shameless eclecticism. The head shaman had self-avowedly "rooted" his way into the New Age via "some mind-blowing tantric sex in 1974" and realised his vocation as a shaman when he was possessed by "the Dreaming bodies of Uluru" during a visit to Alice Springs in 1989.[15] In addition to initiating "wannabe" shamans he led courses in Melbourne on the "joys of tantric anal sex". Indeed, sex seemed to be a powerful motivation for shamanic training; one apprentice told Van Tiggelen, "you should see all the girls that come to our workshops. And all the girls want to root the shaman".[16] Foley's provocative photographs are a wry jab at this jumble of appropriated beliefs and raw male sexual yearnings.

The actual "shamanic journey", as described by Van Tiggelen, was more chaste—an invented jumble of anthropology, Carlos Castaneda without the drugs, appropriated spiritual techniques and group therapy. The usual requirement of being chosen for the shamanic quest was obviated by payment of a $2000 fee. Led by three self-styled white male shamans or *ngankari*,[17] the course included scraps of shamanic teaching, yoga practice, deprivations, belittling tasks and ritual humiliations and group confessionals in camp fire circles prompting outpourings of personal grief and some male bonding. In all, the party spent three nights with *Pitjantjara* families playing, gathering food and dancing. The men also visited what the shamans claimed was a sacred women's site—an "ancestral vulva"—where they did weeding, rearranged the rockery and bottled some water. The journey climaxed on day eight with the initiation ceremony at a camp near Uluru. While a shaman channelled *Wanampi*, another wound a ball of red wool around the men and raised "to the sky" a bowl of "sacred cunt juice"—the water bottled at the women's site. After everyone had drunk from the bowl the shaman then sprayed the remaining fluid over the assembled men. On the final day of their journey the men were welcomed back to the world of Alice Springs by women friends of the shamans singing and "bearing fruit on platters", in the way of Aboriginal initiates returning to camp.

These male incursions into Aboriginal women's sacred ritual and ceremony were the source of Foley's 'Sacred Cunt Juice', a nuanced assemblage of thirty corked bottles of red ochre suspended in fluid. The presence of red ochre suggests the celebration of spiritual life through ancient ceremonies and rituals invoking the Dreaming ancestors and asserting the fecundity and power of Aboriginal women's sexuality. However, sealed off in bottles, the ochre is removed from its natural world of the earth, bodies, wood and stone and trapped in an alien world of science and surveillance.



While Van Tiggelen concluded that the party emerged "better for the experience", he was left with nagging doubts about whether the men had truly experienced *something* or whether they were simply a bunch of whites "led by idiots".[18] He also referred to the autocratic way in which the leaders appropriated Aboriginal ritual and belief:

> In the past the self-appointed priestly caste of the New Age movement at least paid lip service to Aboriginal intermediaries before siphoning off their spirituality and blending it into a palatable commodity. But with successive generations imploding, the Dreaming is falling between the cracks, and alternative gurus are picking up the pieces and running with them.[19]

Staking a "commercial claim on the Dreaming", Van Tiggelen concluded, was "below the belt", and there was the skewed distribution of profits: of the total $28,000 paid by the initiates, it seems that Aboriginal participants received only $1,500.[20]

Van Tiggelen could have also raised the matter of the apparent disturbance of a women's sacred site, revelations of their secret business and knowledge and the enactment of apparently invented rituals expressing voyeuristic confabulations of 'primitive' sexuality. There was also the issue of the diluted, polyglot 'spiritual experience' marketed as 'Aboriginal' and 'shamanic' but which was little more than a mishmash of dreams and yearnings of lost souls from the west and the New Age movement and a denigration of the Indigenous shamanic vision.

This shamanic tourist venture did not survive Van Tiggelen's disclosures. Having operated for ten years from 1993 it has been disbanded and the shamans have left. The Pitjantjara people are still there.

Fact, fantasy and fraud sit easily together in white imaginings about Indigenous Australians. Within these 'charmed circles' of mutually reinforcing illusion and delusion are created and recreated various comforting and familiar imaginings about Indigeneity and non-Indigeneity that are surprisingly resilient to challenge and change. They act to maintain the Narcissistic thrall that feeds white paternalism and feelings of superiority and they shield white Australians from the pressing need to resolve the tragic legacies of past injustices such as the violence and abuse perpetrated against Aboriginal people, the tragedy of the Stolen Generations and the nation's fraudulent claims to rights of ownership of the Australian continent. Foley's installation slices through these charmed circles; her works dissect and expose the facts, fantasies and frauds, they force us to look into the abyss of our imaginings; and, finally, they thrust us out into expanding frontiers of human relationship where we encounter ever more uncertainties and unanswered questions.

1. Stephen Gray, 'Going Native: disguise, forgery, imagination and the "European Aboriginal"', *Overland* 170, 2003, p.34.
2. Gray, 'Going Native', p.34. See also I. McLean, *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.
3. A letter in the *Weekend Australian Magazine* (31 May–1 June 2003, p.8) commenting on an article about an Aboriginal shaman from the Western Desert expressed it this way: "So many white Australians have chosen lifestyles that separate them from nature and wild spirit and then search for something that will somehow compensate for this real loss. This psychic capacity is something precious."
4. Launched at Queensland College of Art Gallery on 14 September 2003.
5. D. Bird Rose, 'Oral Histories and Knowledge', in B. Attwood and S.G. Foster (eds), *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p.128.
6. C. Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002, p.133.
7. R. Moran, *Massacre Myth: an investigation into allegations concerning the mass murder of Aborigines at Forrest River, 1926*, Access Press, Bassendean, p.218.
8. K. Windschuttle, 'Doctored Evidence and Invented Incidents', in Attwood and Foster, *Frontier Conflict*, p.107.
9. Rose, 'Oral Histories', p.128.
10. M. Thomas, 'Chequered Histories: recent works by Fiona Foley', in *MERIDIAN: Focus on Contemporary Australian Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2002.
11. Halse, *A Terribly Wild Man*, chapter 4.
12. Halse, p.87.
13. Halse, pp.86–7.
14. J. Van Tiggelen, 'Once were Emus', *Good Weekend Magazine, Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 February 2002, pp.14–18.
15. Van Tiggelen, 'Once were Emus'.
16. Van Tiggelen.
17. In Pitjantjara culture, *ngankarare* are elders who can take novices into ceremonial law and through initiation.
18. Van Tiggelen, p.18.
19. Van Tiggelen, p.15.
20. Van Tiggelen, p.15.

Anna Haebich is Director of the Centre for Public Culture and Ideas at Griffith University. *She would like to thank Simon Wright, Director of Griffith University Artworks, for his comments on this paper.*

biography | **JANE GRANT**

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLIGHT AND DESTRUCTION

The life and death of Cynthia Nolan

AT THE END of *Paradise and Yet*, Cynthia Nolan's fifth and final book on her travels with her artist husband, the Nolans fly back from Papua New Guinea over Fraser Island. It was there on the island, Cynthia tells her reader, that Sidney Nolan painted: "The notable crawling nude, the first *Mrs Fraser*, a painting terrifying in its implications of intimacy without love".[1] On a whim, the Nolans decide to visit Fraser Island and other places from Sidney's 1947 journey to Queensland. Returning is a depressing experience. The *first* Mrs Fraser casts her shadow over these final scenes. Sidney's continued fascination with the shipwrecked Eliza Fraser, her rescue by the convict David Bracewell, and her desertion of him on the outskirts of Brisbane, is emphasised: "Sidney had been greatly moved by this story of betrayal. Over the years, he had done paintings and drawings around the theme." Eliza Fraser is also a recurrent image in Cynthia's books on their travels. Yet the biographical detail that it was after the break-up of Sidney's seven-year affair with Cynthia's sister-in-law, Sunday Reed, that he painted *Mrs Fraser*, is never mentioned. Sidney would paint four series on Eliza Fraser between 1947 and 1977. It was a period of time that also contained the Nolans' marriage.

Leaving Melbourne in July 1947, Sidney spent the next six months travelling through Queensland. It is apparent from letters he wrote to John Reed during this period that he was deeply confused and uncertain about his future. At the age of 30, Sidney had cut himself free, not only from an increasingly complicated and painful love affair with Sunday Reed, but also from an environment that had nurtured him as an artist. Although Sidney was determined not to return to the life he had shared with the Reeds at Heide, he was unequivocal about his continuing love for Sunday. His love for her was "final".[2]

It was in this confused state of mind that he arrived in Sydney in the New Year. In January, Sidney wrote to John Reed about his "strange action"[3] in visiting John's sister, Cynthia, who was living in the outer-northern suburb of Wahroonga with her young daughter. In 1948 Cynthia, a published novelist, was approaching 40.[4] Three months later, Cynthia and Sidney married. Within weeks of their marriage, the Nolans travelled down to Heide. This last visit was a disaster.[5] The ramifications of the recriminations that passed between them were bitter and immutable. Over the years, John Reed's repeated attempts to reconcile were met by the Nolans with stony silence. Towards the end of his life, Sidney would reveal of himself: "Once something has gone too far, or people have done something, that's it. And it costs me a great deal to keep it up. It really does, but I can keep it up forever, I just won't have any reconciliation after a certain point has passed".[6]

Sidney left behind him at Heide the paintings and drawings he had done during his involvement with the Reeds. Although some of this work would be the cause of further disputes with the Reeds, the first Kelly series was his farewell present to Sunday. In 1989 Sidney spoke about Sunday and the Kelly paintings: "She was quite something—bewitching, demonic, an extraordinary woman—and I painted all the paintings when I was very close to her. She had a big effect on me and I probably wouldn't have done it without her".[7] In April 1948, one

month after the Nolans' marriage, the Reeds exhibited the Kelly series for the first time at the Velasquez Gallery in Melbourne.

The Reeds had not only lost Sidney from their lives, but also Cynthia. For many years, Cynthia, John and Sunday were very close. After Cynthia's suicide in 1976, John wrote to their sister Margaret: "For our own part, Sunday and I cannot forget the beautiful girl we knew so lovingly so long ago, and with whom we intimately shared so much, both in happiness and in suffering" and who was Sunday's "very best friend".[8]

In early 1935, Cynthia left Melbourne for Sydney. Her life at this point was marked by a restless questing for some form of creative expression. In Melbourne she had tried her hand at promoting modern design and art through her shop 'Cynthia Reed's modern furnishings'. The shop had showcased the fashionable modern furniture lines of Fred Ward and the hand-printed fabric of Michael O'Connell. Between 1932 and 1934 she had also exhibited the work of Thea Proctor, Margaret Preston, Ian Fairweather, and the young painter Sam Atyeo. Now in Sydney, she had hopes of becoming an actress and was also studying modern dance.

Despite the intimacy of Cynthia's letters to Sunday, there are undercurrents which occasionally surge to the surface in open recognition that she felt overshadowed by her sister-in-law: "When I am near you, you become too strong for me and I try to live from your point of view, and it doesn't work for me and makes me a pose".[9] Shortly after writing this letter, Cynthia left Australia. Her departure signalled a radical change in her ambitions. She would spend five years training and working as a nurse in Chicago, London, Paris and New York, until pregnancy brought her back to Melbourne in 1940.

After Cynthia's marriage to Sidney in 1948, she wrote five books based on their travels: *Outback* (1962), *One Traveller's Africa* (1965), *Open Negative: An American Memoir* (1967), *A Sight of China* (1969), and *Paradise and Yet* (1971). Covering the period from the late 1940s to the mid 1960s, Cynthia's books are informed by the postwar Australian artistic exodus and the expanding imaginative horizons this generated. Her work can be read as biography. These books contain illuminating insights into Sidney's creative processes as Cynthia records the thinking and inspiration that lay behind many of his paintings and series from the late 1940s until the mid 1960s: *The Outback Paintings*, *The African Journey*, *Riverbend*, *Leda and the Swan*, and *Inferno*. If Cynthia's role evolved into the biographer, initially at least she had a different conception of her work.

Although *Outback* was written at the time of the Nolans' 1948 journey into Australia's interior, it would take many years for Cynthia to find a publisher. In 1961 Russell and Maisie Drysdale were in London for the Whitechapel exhibition of contemporary art. At dinner one night, Cynthia complained to the Drysdales that her publisher was insisting that reproductions of Sidney's paintings be included in *Outback*. She wanted the book to stand on its own merits.[10] In the end, Sidney's painting, *Agricultural Hotel*, was used on the dust jacket and a number of drawings and photographs were included.

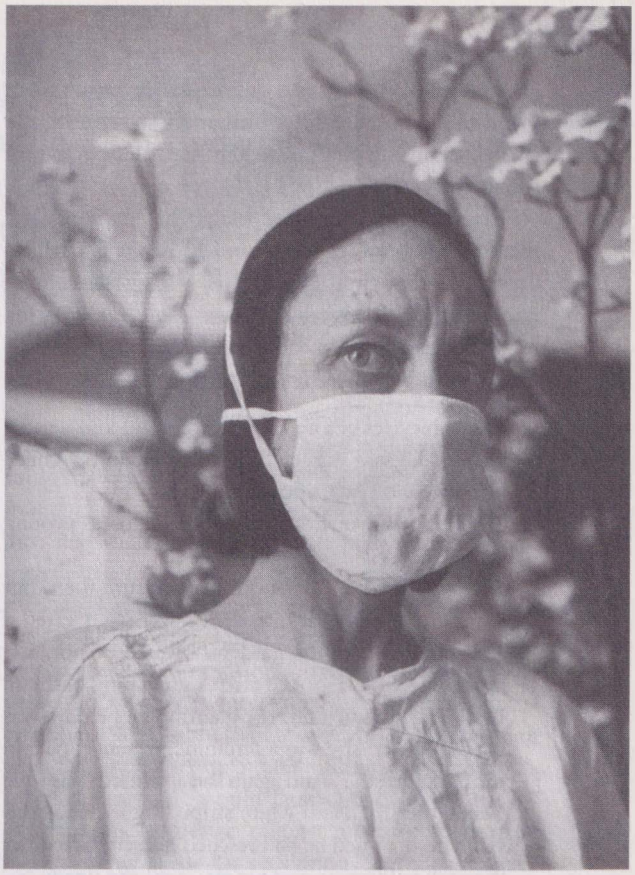
Evidently, Cynthia's publisher, Methuen, saw her marriage to Sidney as the book's selling point. The fact that Sidney becomes the central focus of the following book, *One Traveller's Africa*, may reflect her resignation to this view of herself as conduit to her husband. A number of paintings from his 1963 African series illustrate the text. In her second book on their travels, Cynthia constructs her most sustained study of the artist's influences and vision. She was not alone in thinking Sidney a fascinating personality on which to base her portrait of an artist. Both George Johnston and Patrick White used aspects of his personality for their artist characters in *Clean Straw for Nothing* and *The Vivisector*.[11] And yet the portrait of Sidney that develops in Cynthia's books from *One Traveller's Africa* onwards is counterbalanced by an increasing display of her own frustrated creative impulses.

The reality of Cynthia's secondary status was sometimes brutally pointed out in reviews of her books. *The Times Literary Supplement* noted the interlude between *Outback*'s 1948 setting and its publication in 1962: "The delay is doubly unfortunate because in 1962 (although not in 1948) Mrs Cynthia Nolan is bound to be thought of as 'Sidney Nolan's wife' and this work may even be construed by some to be cashing in on her husband's fame".[12] In reviewing *One Traveller's Africa*, David McNicholl was more dismissive: "It is perhaps natural that Cynthia Nolan should be overshadowed by her husband. Her admiration for him is boundless and it is apparent that many of her impressions are

through his eyes, his flashbacks, and his imagery".[13] Lorna Curtin's review of *A Sight of China* took a facetious swipe at the biographer: "Cynthia Nolan must have had her pencil and notebook continually at the ready for her role as the efficient Boswell recording the utterances of the good Doctor Nolan".[14] None of these reviews appears to observe the ironies of Cynthia's representation of her husband, nor how her own self-portraits expose the frustrations of her secondary status, and how this often combative relationship forges a complex, fascinating and at times disturbing narrative of a creative marriage.

In public, Cynthia's response to this view of her talents as secondary to her husband's was darkly and disconcertingly humorous. She seemed to actively deflect attention away from her writing onto her husband. In 1965 the Nolans were back in Sydney for the premiere of the documentary on Sidney, *A Toehold in History*. During this visit to Australia, Cynthia was also in the process of proofreading the manuscript for *One Traveller's Africa*. Under the headline 'Author reluctant to be in Limelight', the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: "Mrs Nolan was reluctant to talk about herself or her new book and met most questions with 'ask Sidney'—even ones about how long since she had last been in Sydney and where they intended to stay".[15] The following year, Cynthia made the curious declaration to the press: "I write like other women knit".[16] This mocking self-effacement, so often a source of unease for the reader, was also a feature of her published work.

Cynthia's third book on their travels, *Open Negative: An American Memoir*, was not published until 1967, but was based on the Nolans' journey to America in the late 1950s. In 1958 Sidney was awarded the prestigious Harkness Fellowship which enabled the Nolans to spend two years in the United States. *Open Negative* is broken into two parts. The first part pursues the now familiar pattern of her books as the Nolans drive across the country seeking inspiration for his painting. The second part of the book is set in the New York hospital where Cynthia spent six months in 1959 recovering from tuberculosis. Although Cynthia's experience of consumption is made literal by her disease, consumption also becomes a key metaphor in this work. Shortly before she is admitted to hospital, Sidney tells her that he will not be able to paint while she is away. He then persuades his now critically ill wife to visit the zoo:



CYNTHIA NOLAN, PHOTOGRAPH: SIDNEY NOLAN

> After the first few hours I remember nothing but exhaustion, nothing but his energy, his pleasure in being in the world, and of it, combined with fierce pains that gripped as though with pliers, every nerve in my back. I had no tears to shed. There was only a completely wrung out, useless carcass, a failed piece of ectoplasm propelled along, the mockery of a dim moon under the spell of some sun.[17]

Her illness is the immediate cause of exhaustion and pain, yet there is also a sense in which Cynthia is using consumption to explore her relationship with her artist husband. His dependence on her, in order to paint, has become a burden. 'Energy' is repeatedly used by Cynthia in *Open Negative* to define Sidney and against which her own exhaustion is delineated. Here, his 'energy' and her reduction to a 'wrung out carcass' are more than a contrast. There is a causal link. It might still be her role to orbit him, but he is merely 'some sun', a parodic representation that makes it clear that her feelings for her husband are far from the blind admiration McNicholl accuses her of in his review of *One Trav-*

eller's Africa. If there is a degree of vengefulness in Cynthia's exposure of her husband's selfishness, she is also recording the rarely glimpsed perspective of the artist's wife.

In a book about the Nolans that explores the relationship between artist and muse, it is perhaps inevitable that Sunday Reed is a suggestive presence. In the first part of *Open Negative* Cynthia records a conversation between herself and her husband as she watches him paint flowers:

> "I saw bicycles before I saw flowers so I know them better," he said vaguely. "The flowers in my childhood were often artificial and vulgar."
>
> "But when you lived with those friends, as a young man?"
>
> "Yes, I heard a lot about horticulture then, but the attitude was a bit intense. I never really cared if all those plants in the garden flowered or not. Except some pinks I looked after, I grew fond of them. Look!" Unpredictably, the painting he held up was of Mrs Fraser; she was a feminine presence, pale in the dark forest . . . And again she appeared, this time beside the black and white striped figure, the convict who dreamed he had rescued her, cherished her through wilderness and jungle, until she finally betrayed him.

Never named, these 'intense' friends are clearly the Reeds. As Cynthia questions Sidney about this period of his life, he "unpredictably" produces paintings of Eliza Fraser and Bracewell. Here, she is observing in his creative processes what Andrew Sayers has called Sidney's "almost automatic or unconscious visitations from the past".[18] To the extent that these paintings are autobiographical, the convict figure Bracewell perhaps expresses Sidney's feelings of entrapment in this continuing relationship with his former muse. Yet in Cynthia's record of the conversation, it is she who is leading Sidney from the flowers to the Reeds. And what she records leaves little doubt about her intent. Sidney's dismissive attitude to Heide conveys a clear message. In 1958 his feelings towards Sunday were bitter.

In 1958 when the book is set Sidney had reason for resurrecting hostilities with the Reeds. His first retrospective was held at Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1957. Bryan Robertson, the curator, had written to Sunday Reed asking her to include the pre-1948 work. Although the Reeds did not refuse, prevarications meant that these paintings and drawings were not included.[19] Despite Robertson's acknowledgement that the Kelly series were Sunday's, the claim that the other work had been lent to them incensed the Reeds. On January 29 John Reed wrote directly to Sidney, detailing his objections:

> But of course the position in regards to your early paintings and drawings cannot be resolved in terms of 'loans'—they most certainly were never borrowed—and some more sensitive realisation will have to be reached with Sun at some time or other, and this can only be done by yourselves.
>
> I know it is difficult because of some change in yourself to accept that for Sun there is no change, and that your paintings are just the same in relation to herself as they ever were. There are perhaps two truths, which somehow must be reconciled—or at least acknowledged.[20]

Although the Reeds were deeply hurt by Sidney's refusal to communicate directly with them, the withholding of important work from an exhibition that strove to document an artist's evolution was equal cause for resentment. The failure to include this work compromised the exhibition's claim to be a retrospective. It was perhaps as a response to this that the catalogue, *The Search for Myth in Australian Painting*, had no mention of the Reeds. John saw this as an attempt to excise him and Sunday from Sidney's history, and was provoked to write to Colin McInnes, whose essay was included in the catalogue, informing him of his "own association with Nolan".[21]

John's desire that his and Sunday's vital role in Sidney's early career be acknowledged is understandable, yet his quest for acknowledgement would take on an obsessive dimension. In response to an article written by Charles Osborne in 1964,[22] which failed to mention the Reeds, John angrily accuses Sidney of being his "executioner", and of conducting a campaign against the Reeds, of "silence, refusal to communicate, denial by implication, innuendo, and the ostracism of mutual friends".[23] In justification against the implication that the Reeds had 'stolen' the paintings, John wrote:

> These paintings became in their own way as much a part of the total life we lived together as Sunday's cooking, as the trees we planted, as the library, and a hundred other things we contributed. It may be some confirmation of this that you said all your paint-

Cynthia complained to the Drysdales that her publisher was insisting that reproductions of Sidney's paintings be included in *Outback*. She wanted the book to stand on its own merits. In the end, Sidney's *Agricultural Hotel* was used on the dust jacket and a number of drawings and photographs were included.

> ings were for Sunday, and I am quite sure you did not think of them otherwise. They were created with her in a sense which is most literal and it is certain that without your life at Heide a great many of them would not have been painted.[24]

Open Negative was not published until 1967. Perhaps one reason for the attack on Heide in *Open Negative* is this letter in which John weights equally Sidney's paintings with "Sunday's cooking" and the "trees we planted". John's claim that Sunday's role as muse be recognised was a different matter and finds ironic voice in Cynthia's own writing.

It is through Cynthia's veiled reference to Sunday Reed at the end of *Open Negative* that she most powerfully reveals her own insecurities. In the six months Cynthia had been in hospital Sidney had been unable to paint. The day she returns from hospital is the day he picks up his brushes. Yet it is not simply her presence in the studio which inspires him but his fury at a letter that arrives:

> He ripped off his shirt. "Energy, that letter has given me so much energy it's killing me. I'll paint for months on this. For years I painted upon Uncle Freddy refusing to give me twenty-five quid so I could have my first exhibition—lousy, jumped up, stinking Uncle Freddy. I painted and knew while I painted he was on the way out. Then that woman who said I'll never have the *joie de vivre* to paint away from her. I painted for years on that."

This time the series of paintings he produces is *Leda and the Swan*: "Sometimes the woman was bloody, the swan was savage. Often the figure was ambiguous, unidentified, the swan was not." Despite his denial of dependency, in revealing the way in which Sidney's bitter feelings for Sunday fuel his creativity, Cynthia is again asserting Sunday's continuing role of muse.

The image of the rapist and victim in the *Leda and the Swan* paintings is an interesting parallel to Cynthia's own self-construction in the book as the consumed and her construction of Sidney as the consumer, and the interface between the artist and the muse that the text explores. The interrelated imagery may suggest a degree of insight on the part of Sidney into his wife's feelings of entrapment and into his own destructiveness within the marriage. It is, though, the "unidentified" representation of the Leda figure that is disturbing. Sunday and Cynthia appear to merge in this "ambiguous" representation of the muse. In Cynthia's interpretations of these paintings there is possibly the echo of the young woman who felt herself to be a pale imitation of Sunday.

Sidney himself would later acknowledge the simultaneous influence of past and contemporary muses on his work: "It's a curious and rather secret thing that all the paintings don't necessarily relate to the woman you are with at the time. Sometimes there is a crossover through memory and sometimes you are triggered when something comes back from your past".[25] The ambiguous nature of the muse figure in Cynthia's writing also casts doubt on her own permanence. Sunday is a continual reminder to Cynthia that she, too, can be replaced.

Recalling a visitor in hospital, Cynthia expresses the irony of her survival:

> "Poor dear," she had said. "I know exactly what you must be thinking. You must feel the same way I felt last year when I had a major operation. 'If only', I thought, 'I could die, then dear Thomas would be free to marry someone younger and more suitable'." Sidney had gone bright red with suppressed glee. As soon as she had gone . . . he burst out laughing, then laughed again until he had to sit down. I had been amused too, but wryly, and when I thought of death her words came back to me and produced a twisted smile.

Nine years after the publication of *Open Negative* Cynthia would commit suicide and fifteen months

after her death Sidney would marry again. Although she could not have known about his remarriage, she is imaginatively entertaining its possibility. None of the issues that dominate *Open Negative*, her anxiety about ageing, her creative subjugation to his art, their mutual entrapment within the roles of artist and artist's wife, would be resolved by her recovery from tuberculosis in 1958 or by the publication of the book in 1967.

In 1971 both Sidney's book of poems *Paradise Gardens* and Cynthia's final work *Paradise and Yet* were published. His poems include some vicious attacks on the Reeds, including these lines from the poem 'Love Manqué':

> *Steeled by a noon whisky*
> *I entered her old plumbing*[26]

The title *Paradise and Yet* echoes Sidney's poetic title. Cynthia's interpretation of Sidney's painting, *Mrs Fraser*, as "terrifying" in its expression of "intimacy without love" finds its counterpart in these lines. Disappointment also resonates in Cynthia's title. Although the presence of Sidney's painting in *Paradise and Yet* provides further insight into the power of acrimony to fuel Sidney's creativity, her last work also conveys the despair of living with such bitterness. And yet the powerful memories of pain and bitterness signified by Cynthia's allusion to *Mrs Fraser* were not his exclusive domain. The characters in his story of betrayed love were, after all, members of her family. It is her feelings of futility and disappointment that so memorably dominate these last pages of the book: "Suddenly I lost interest. Everything seemed to be an anticlimax." In the place of Sidney's youthful paradise, the Nolans encounter a seedy island resort. The weather is "melancholy" and the food is "dismal". Describing their walk along the beach in "the windy rain" she writes: "The whole grey scene was sad, oppressive". This contraction to an island off the coast of Australia concludes Cynthia's ironic record of their travels. Her work suggests the ways in which both she and Sidney were trapped together in a state of psychological flight from scenes and events from which they never recovered, and which steadily destroyed her.

1. Cynthia Nolan, *Paradise and Yet*, Macmillan, London, 1971, p.150.
2. Letter from Sidney Nolan to John Reed, dated 25 September 1947, Reed Papers, La Trobe Library, Melbourne.
3. Letter from Sidney Nolan to John Reed, dated 14 January 1948, Reed Papers, La Trobe Library, Melbourne.
4. Cynthia Reed, *Daddy Sowed A Wind!*, Reed and Harris, Melbourne, 1944; and *Lucky Alphonse!*, Shakespeare Head, Sydney, 1947.
5. For more detailed accounts of this last visit see Brian Adams, *Such is Life: A Biography of Sidney Nolan*, Random House, Sydney, 1992; and Janine Burke's 'Introduction' to *Dear Sun: The Letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed*, William Heinemann Australia, Port Melbourne, 1995.
6. Heather Brown, 'Nolan's Journey to Paradise', *The Weekend Australian*, 21–22 October 1989, p.13.
7. Ibid., p.18.
8. Letter from John Reed to Dr Margaret Reed, dated 8 December 1976, Reed Papers, La Trobe Library, Melbourne.
9. Undated letter from Cynthia Reed to Sunday Reed, Reed Papers, La Trobe Library, Melbourne.
10. Interview with Lady Drysdale by Jane Grant, 7 March 1996.
11. See Garry Kinnane, *George Johnston: A Biography*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1986, p.160. The claim that Sidney Nolan was the basis for Hurtle Duffield is more contentious. In *Patrick White: A Life* (Random House, Sydney, 1991) David Marr claims that although Nolan believed himself to be the basis for Hurtle Duffield, White denied it. (p.473). *The Vivisector* was dedicated to both the Nolans. In December 1967 White wrote to the Nolans about his work in progress: "I should like you to read it to see how close or remote I am from the workings of a painter's mind". David Marr, ed., *Patrick White Letters*, p.321. There are certainly many points of contact between Hurtle Duffield and Cynthia's characterisation of Sidney, not the least of them being a shared insight into their destructive relationships with women.
12. *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 September 1963.
13. *Bulletin*, 12 June 1965.
14. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December 1969.
15. *SMH*, 9 March 1965.
16. *Sun*, 27 April 1966.
17. Cynthia Nolan, *Open Negative: An American Memoir*, Macmillan, London, 1967, p.112.
18. Andrew Sayers paper, 'Likeness and Biography' seminar, College of Fine Arts, 2001.
19. See Nancy Underhill's account of this letter in *Letters of John Reed: Defining Australian Cultural Life 1920–1981*, Barrett Reid and Nancy Underhill (eds), Viking, Ringwood, 2001, pp.515–6.
20. Letter from John Reed to Sidney Nolan, 29 January 1957, ibid., p.515.
21. Letter from John Reed to Colin McInnes, 24 October 1957, ibid., p.518.
22. *Qantas Airways Australia* 30:5, May 1964.
23. Letter from John Reed to Sidney Nolan, 21 October 1964, *Letters of John Reed*, p.617.
24. Ibid.
25. Heather Brown interview, p.23.
26. Sidney Nolan, *Paradise Gardens: Paintings, Drawings and Poems* (introduction by Robert Melville), Alister McAlpine Publishing, London, 1971, p.97.

Jane Grant's PhD on Cynthia Nolan was conferred last October by the University of Sydney.

literature | **MICHAEL ACKLAND**

'THE ARGUMENT OF THE BROKEN PANE'

Henry Handel Richardson's response to the suffragette movement

THANKS TO A COMBINATION of reticence and Flaubert-like, authorial detachment, Henry Handel Richardson's feminist sympathies are not as well-known as they deserve to be. The participation of her sister Lillian in suffragette demonstrations is noted in most standard commentaries, but her own attitude is often left a matter for speculation. Dorothy Green, for instance, in her monumental study of Richardson, mentions only Lil's involvement and quotes Sylvia Pankhurst's report of "a private meeting in the house of Mrs Lindsey Neustatter" (née Lillian Richardson) in Dresden, "who was afterwards fined because the meeting was less private than the police thought fit".[1] Similarly Axel Clark, in his two-volume biography, restricts himself to remarking that the sisters "shared an interest in [feminist] subjects of public debate . . . [and by 1910] had both become ardent suffragettes".[2] For details readers can turn to the glowing memoir written by Richardson's close companion of many years, Olga Roncoroni,[3] or to scattered letters penned during the decade preceding the First World War. The parts of this jigsaw, however, have not been put together into a coherent account of her personal engagement, and of its bearing on her writing—a shortfall which I intend to address here.

Richardson returned to England early in 1903, after more than a decade spent on the Continent, in the same year that the Pankhursts founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). In 1906 it relocated from Manchester to London and rapidly assumed political significance through deliberately confrontational tactics adopted, according to Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst, as a last resort:

> We had exhausted argument. Therefore, either we had to give up our agitation altogether, as the suffragists of the early eighties virtually had done, or else we must act, and go on acting, until the selfishness and obstinacy of the government was broken down, or the government themselves destroyed.[4]

The Liberal government was regarded as sympathetic but dilatory; the press and public adjudged apathetic. Militancy was intended to change this, as it had for unionists, as well as to attract supporters and financial aid. Women had no forum in which to air their grievances—the Pankhursts underlined this by establishing a Women's Parliament. Their followers disrupted sessions in the House of Commons, heckled its members and opposed sitting Liberals at elections, while controversy and imprisonment were courted to demonstrate the seriousness of their cause, the courage of women and their determination.

The Richardson sisters, given their family background and education, were strongly predisposed to applaud the program promoted by the charismatic Mrs Pankhurst. Their mother Mary's life had shown them the ills attendant on female dependence, and Mary's efforts had been aimed at equipping her daughters to avoid destitution if suddenly deprived of a male breadwinner.[5] In the 1880s the Richardson girls attended the Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC), a first-class institution committed to providing girls with training commensurate with that available at exclusive boys' schools. There a feminist leaven was pronounced. Pupils were expected to equal or surpass the results of their male peers and issues of female education, voting and

personal development were often canvassed in school clubs and publications. Following hard upon their introduction to reformist ideas at PLC, Henry and Lil encountered challenging expressions of the gender debate on the Continent, penned by authors of the stature of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen and Strindberg: all of whom Richardson read with attention. Schopenhauer, for instance, in 'Über die Weiber' ('About Women') rehearsed all the familiar clichés, spiced with venomous personal observations. The whole being of women, according to him, was directed towards propagation. "The very sight of a woman demonstrates that she is intended for neither great intellectual nor physical achievements". Cunning and disguise were her natural weapons, abetted by male blindness fostered by sexual desire, while the annals of history showed "that the most eminent minds of the whole sex have never produced a single, truly great, genuine and original achievement, whether in art, literature or science".[6] A contrary, pro-feminist vision was presented in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and *Hedda Gabler*, works dominated by a single woman's struggle against gender constraints which attracted Henry and Lil.

Initially Richardson made her mark as a translator, choosing in Jens Peter Jacobsen and Björnstjerne Björnson authors who had made incisive contributions to the controversy about sexual roles. This was particularly true of Björnson's dramas, of which *En Hanske* (*A Gauntlet*), with its portrayal of sexual double standards, had created a major rift among Scandinavian intellectuals.[7] Also seldom remarked is the importance of Jacobsen to Richardson as an acute depicter of female predicaments. She singled out his *Fru Marie Grubbe* as providing not only an example of what Goethe called a "problematic nature" but, more specifically, a penetrating case study of a woman who "spends her life in a vain search after an ideal". Similarly, Richardson described the subject matter of *Niels Lyhne*, the novel that rekindled her dream of becoming a writer, as a "'sentimental education' . . . unfolded [through] . . . an analysis of the temporary relations in which he [Lyhne] stands to various women".[8] In it searching portraits of female questers are complemented by provocative interrogations of the status quo and gender clichés, like the notion of inherent female purity:

> "You mean—just let me tell you, you don't mean anything, for this is more of that meaningless delicacy. A woman *cannot* be pure, she is not meant to be—how could she? How unnatural! Did her Creator intend her to be pure? Answer me!—No, and ten thousand times no! It is utterly absurd! Why will you exalt us to the stars with one hand when, with the other, you must drag us down? Can you not let us walk side by side with you on earth as fellow-mortals and nothing else? It is absolutely impossible for us to step out confidently on prose, when you blind us with your will-o'-the-wisps of poetry. Let us alone, for God's sake, let us alone!" She sat down and wept.[9]

Tellingly, too, *Maurice Guest*, Richardson's first novel, was written, as she underscored, at a time of feminist agitation and by inference was influenced by it—a comment which holds true for her next two novels. But her initial book is distinguished from them by its debt to specifically Continental debate. Its sexually ambivalent protagonist, Krafft, paraphrases the notorious adage derived from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which quickly passed into the common culture: "*Wenn du zu den Frauen gehst, vergiss die Peitsche nicht*" ("When you have dealings with women, don't forget the whip"). Frank Wedekind's distinctive portrayal of the *femme fatale* as Lulu is recalled by its heroine Louise, and her lover, Schilsky, composes a work inspired by the Austrian misogynist Otto Weininger.[10] Richardson's familiarity with the standard arguments and portrayals of warfare between the sexes is, then, beyond doubt, and in her fictional firstling she dramatised the life-choices awaiting her sex, as a brief working note confirms:

> The sexual woman = Louise.
> The instinctive = Madeleine. No, the brave, strong motherly woman.
> Now I ought to do the intellectual.[11]

She was also defensive of her female protagonists. Criticism of flighty, immature Ephie Cayhill drew a mild reproof: "Are you not a little hard on my little Ephie? I had quite warm feelings towards her; &, where you say, '*un enfant gâtée* [sic] *curieux de sensations, vaniteux*' etc, I say simply, 'a (or the) young girl'".[12] Similarly, she constantly sprang to Louise's defence. When her brother-in-law, Otto Neustatter, in preparing a German translation of her novel, started to cheapen and coarsen the hero-

She was defensive of her female protagonists. She had a comprehensive sympathy for women in all walks of life and states of development which accorded well with basic doctrines of the women's movement.

ine, Richardson pulled him up sharply, and her French translator's negative assessment of her heroine was quickly corrected: "Louise is *always sincere.* Where she fails, & makes the impression of being insincere, it is only because she does not understand herself, or what she wants".[13] Although Richardson was at pains to avoid a partisan public position, these comments, together with further galleries of female types in her later novels, testify to a comprehensive sympathy for women in all walks of life and states of development which accorded well with basic doctrines of the women's movement.

Her growing radicalism emerged first in occasional provocative gestures, then in unambiguous signs of commitment. On the Continent she embraced bicycles, a new mode of transport that spelled the end of voluminous dresses and chaperones, and cigarettes, which had long been associated with loose women. Also in her life, as in that of other notable suffragettes, it was probably only a small step from intense affection for dumb, suffering animals to more general sympathy with the downtrodden and undervalued. Certainly cruelty and "injustice of any kind" were anathema to Henry. She could throw herself into "heavy traffic, absolutely regardless of danger", to intercept a man who was "whipping his horse unmercifully", or order her domestic staff to scatter cinders on an icy road to assist a draught-horse keep its footing.[14] Nor was she blind to the repressed state of German women, as *Maurice Guest* and her late story, 'The Professor's Experiment', attest. Also from 1909 on she subscribed to *Votes for Women*, the weekly magazine issued by the WSPU and, after a split in its ranks in 1912, Henry added its new official organ, *The Suffragette*, to her regular subscriptions. Both offered commentary on a wide range of issues affecting women and portrayed events, in the words of one suffragette, "as they happened, not as they were supposed to happen".[15] Richardson forwarded the founding journal, with the motto 'Deeds, not Words', to Lillian in Dresden, apparently with the injunction to spread its message among like-minded acquaintances. Lil's response was enthusiastic: "I am most interested in 'Votes for Women' & wish I knew someone to send it on to but I don't so content myself with biassing [her son] Pip's mind against the modern statesmen. He is very interested in the matter & since he saw the forcible feeding picture, has held lectures in the kitchen to Frau Reiss & Hedwig".[16]

Forcible feeding signalled an escalation of the increasingly bitter struggle. Initial reluctance to imprison suffragettes had yielded to substantial sentences in Holloway prison where ladies were dealt with like felons. Their crinoline was set aside for coarse worsted clothing, their dainty bonnets and boots replaced by grim headpieces and footwear that was difficult to keep on, their comfortable lifestyles by substandard food and narrow, Spartan cells like "a kind of animal's den, and dimly lit and furnished only with a bare wooden bench running along the side of the wall, and terminating in a sanitary convenience".[17] Finding themselves incarcerated with common criminals rather than treated as political prisoners, suffragettes had gone on hunger strikes. The government, faced with the prospect of being forced either to release women, for health reasons, before the end of their sentence or to watch respectable ladies die by inches, resorted to brute force. The pictures produced by suffragette artists, for poster or magazine reproduction, of a woman being constrained by multiple hands were graphic, as were eyewitness accounts:

> Presently I heard footsteps approaching, collecting outside my cell. I was strangled with fear . . . There were six of them [wardresses], all much bigger and stronger than I. They flung me on my back on the bed, and held me down firmly by shoulders and wrists, hips, knees and ankles. Then the doctors came stealing in. Someone seized me by the head . . . A steel instrument pressed my gums, cutting into the

> flesh. I braced myself to resist . . . a stab of sharp, intolerable agony . . . Then something gradually forced my jaws apart as a screw was turned; the pain was like having the teeth drawn. They were trying to get the tube down my throat, I was struggling madly to stiffen my muscles and close my throat. They got it down . . . and I vomited as the tube came up. They left me on the bed exhausted, gasping for breath and sobbing convulsively.[18]

Forcible feeding trampled on a woman's dignity, subjected her to barbaric treatment, violated her body and denied her any right to self-determination. "One only needs to know thoroughly what is going on", Richardson stated, "to burn in the matter".[19]

In due course Lil received *The Suffragette* as well, and an additional catalyst to her growing militancy was the condition of women in Germany. There they were expressly excluded from political life and were regarded primarily as potential child-bearers and domestic providers.[20] What this meant in practice was brought home to Lillian through marriage to a German and rearing her son Walter. "German baby life", she opinioned, "belongs to the time of the Inquisition"; young German women she found ludicrously prim and vacuous, while early in 1903 she joined a Karlsruhe association for reforming female clothing.[21] An alternative to, and haven from, the existence demanded of a *Hausfrau* was provided by Henry, first at her home in Harrow then at Regent's Park Road, which left Lillian, on returning to Otto, longing "still for my quiet evenings, after a hard suffrage day, round your fire".[22] By 1911 Lil's dissatisfaction with Germany and her identification with a radical suffragette perspective had coalesced. She began to "spread the gospel" in Dresden "and entertained Sylvia Pankhurst and other sympathizers in her home".[23] *Votes for Women* was then adjudged too hollow and discreet and males, like a recent German acquaintance, were measured by their mobilisation in the cause: "We got on splendidly found him even an advocate of Woman's Suffrage an enlightened & intelligent man of excellent breeding & polish. Rare over here!!!". Thanks to German obduracy, even its famed *Gemütlichkeit* (cosiness) had evaporated for Lil: "Your [Henry's] home has something so restful in it & really is like a home where mine is like a German Wohnung [flat]". And Walter, by whatever nickname, afforded a faithful mirror of his mother's moods: "Pip speaks a great deal of you all & England. He only wants to return & live there altogether. What our fate will be I often wonder". Otto and she were sharing a roof but rarely saw or spoke to each other, and the letter closed with an ominous request for "a cheap copy of Marriage & Divorce".[24]

In England Henry moved from observation to limited participation, but in general she stopped short of direct acts of civil disobedience. Even in outlying Harrow, where she lived from 1904 to March 1910, Richardson was brought face to face with dramatic local manifestations of the suffragette struggle. In July, 1908 Mrs H.L. Mosen of South Harrow returned after thirty-one days in Holloway prison, vowing "no quarter" to the government and maintaining firmly "that every great cause has had and must have its martyrs".[25] Her own martyrdom involved solitary confinement, coupled with a regime of silence, "bread and milk", punctuated by sunstroke in the exercise yard. "Everything in prison life is calculated to humiliate and degrade" she reported, "eating with one's fingers, wearing horrible clothing . . . being called only by one's number, and many other things about which one cannot speak". Richardson, scanning this testimony in the Harrow *Gazette* or the national press, could hardly have anticipated that Lil would share the same fate four years later. Soon the street corners of Harrow afforded scenes of violent confrontation. Suffragettes spoke out for their cause, to be answered with jeers, rotten eggs and flour bombs, as if they were "fair game for any kind of assault".[26] Breakfasts were later organised in Harrow to fete hunger-strikers, as they were in inner London, and from 90 Regent's Park Road Richardson was able to visit a number of nearby WSPU shops, and she "marched in all the big processions to the rallies held in Hyde Park", such as the Women's Coronation Procession (June 1911) and the Women's Pilgrimage (July 1913).[27] Suffragettes also helped depose the sitting Liberal MP for South St Pancras in the general elections of 1910, and Henry actively sought to make converts among her acquaintance.[28] George apparently attended meetings at the Men's Society for Women's Rights, or the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, which numbered among its members E.M. Forster, Thomas Hardy, John Masefield and H.G. Wells.[29] Both were located close to his

office at the University of London. Presumably, too, he joined his wife and sister-in-law in supporting the great public spectacles organised by the WSPU and advertised in their neighbourhood by banner or board-carrying acolytes and brass bands.

In 1912 the suffragette campaign crossed a new threshold of audacity. For much of 1910 the Pankhursts had restrained their own and their followers' militancy. Pinning their hopes on a proposed Conciliation Bill, which would deliver the vote to approximately a million English women, they had relied on peaceful mass demonstrations to keep the issue of female suffrage in the public spotlight. The frustrating tardiness of parliamentary committees was, however, eclipsed late in 1911 by what seemed a Machiavellian manoeuvre, when Asquith announced a Reform Bill to enfranchise the rest of the male population, but which contained no specific provision for women to receive the vote. This and a proposed Home Rule Bill for Ireland were the major pieces of legislation foreshadowed for 1912. The Liberal leader's duplicity brought an angry response: "The argument of the broken pane is the most valuable argument in modern politics".[30] Stones, of course, had earlier broken windows; what Mrs Pankhurst had in mind was a concerted assault on property. Early in March hundreds of well-dressed women produced hammers from parcels and handbags to smash thousands of pounds worth of shop windows in a few minutes. Mass arrests followed and a month later Richardson reported:

> Many of England's finest women are undergoing imprisonment today—and some of her most beautiful, too—from the Earl of Lytton's sister downwards. My own sister happens to be among them.[31]

Nor were the Richardsons alone in their fervour. Henry noted with pleasure that her former schoolmate, Constance Cochran, then living in London, and her sisters, were ardent suffragettes, and she set about converting faraway antipodean friends, like Mary Kernot, to whom she forwarded bundles of *The Suffragette*.

As with child-bearing, Richardson shared in the new phase of violence vicariously through her sister, who had shaken herself free from effective male tutelage. Longing to be in the thick of the fray, Lil had written to Henry from Germany in 1912: "It seems as if there might be a chance of success now if we could only hold on & go at it hard & fast".[32] Within months her words were translated into deeds. In London Lillian and two other women made a premeditated attack on a post office in Fulham Road. A cracked pane of glass earned them two months' imprisonment and garments bearing the broad arrow, so abhorred in colonial Australia. Then first-hand she witnessed the "evil honey" produced at Holloway prison, that blackening "factory for potting human souls", as well as the spirited resistance coordinated there by Emmeline Pankhurst and Ethel Smythe. Pankhurst's mighty spirit in a frail frame reportedly awed authorities and inspired respect, while Smythe, composer of 'The March of Women', conducted this suffragette anthem with a toothbrush through the bars of her cell window, till the prison rang "like a parrot-house".[33] Henry, forbidden militant action by George on account of her health, gave her fantasy free rein:

> Food could be sent to the prison, and the prisoners' dirty linen collected and washed at home. So, at No. 90, a cake would be made, and a section carefully cut out of the top of this to admit a written letter, after which the section was replaced and the cake iced over. The second idea was to unsew the name-tape on a garment, insert a note written in tiny script on a small piece of paper, and re-sew the tape over this.[34]

Despite smacking of Tom-Sawyer-like trivia, these events support Roncoroni's contention that Richardson "was a born rebel", though usually she, like her protagonist Annemarie in 'The Professor's Experiment', preferred to hatch her seditious thoughts in the safety of home.

The next two years saw suffragette violence and government repression spiral beyond the constraints of civilised behaviour. Enraged women went on the rampage against public property. The contents of mail-boxes were incinerated, slogans were painted on seats and cut into golf courses. Even Henry "(unknown to J.G.) once dropped an envelope full of ink into a letter-box to burst and spread its contents within".[35] Famous artworks were vandalised, notable venues torched. Of an orchid house in the Kew Gardens only twisted metal struts remained, while Richardson from her home could have watched the refreshment pavilion of Regent's Park go up in flames. Stones and an iron bar were thrown through carriage windows at Cabinet Ministers, Lloyd

George's half-finished house in Surrey was reduced to a smoking shell by a suffragette bomb. This orgy of arson and defiance was answered by the honed malice of the Prisoner's Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Act in 1913. Quickly dubbed the Cat and Mouse Act, it provided for the release of hunger-strikers and their repeated reincarceration until the original sentence was served. Through these provisions a brief gaol term, like that of Mrs Mosen, could be converted into a sentence of almost indefinitely prolonged torture, and key suffragettes could be snatched away from WSPU gatherings whenever the authorities chose to disrupt them. Mrs Pankhurst, reimprisoned without warning, was replaced in one procession by an empty carriage; her daughter Sylvia chose exile in Paris. Although the Richardson sisters seem not to have participated in these extreme events, they arguably did so by proxy. For one of the most confrontational suffragettes bore their mother's name, and it must have been a curious sensation to read of Mary Richardson's ordeals in prison, or of her exploits as an arsonist and eventually as the notorious virago who took a meat cleaver to the Rockerby Venus, a masterpiece by Velasquez, which the National Gallery had recently acquired for £14 000.

Whereas extremist measures that amounted to urban terrorism began to alienate the general public from the suffragette movement, Richardson's commitment strengthened. With Lillian in gaol she barked defiance: "Of course, I am a feminist—I should be a black sheep among the younger, more progressive writers of England today, were I not". Weak-willed and fair-weather followers quailed at the no-holds-barred struggle—but not Richardson: "Women have come out into the open now, & can never be driven wholly in again. And every broken window & burnt house takes them a few steps further from the harem & the veil—I am certain of that".[36] Although the single-minded, at times dictatorial attitudes of the Pankhursts led to seven splits and offshoots from the WSPU within a decade, Henry maintained unwaveringly the official line. "The way they [the government] are treating the women of the country just now is even worse—& it is the general opinion that they will have to go over it". Similarly, she echoed concern for Mrs Pankhurst's delicate health in prison, attended rallies to hear her and praised their leader's outspokenness. In short, the novelist's admiration for the suffragette movement was unqualified:

> I do wish you could hear or see some of our leaders here.—In default of that, try & get hold of Sylvia Pankhurst's book: 'The Suffragette'. And do you know: 'Women & Economics' by Mrs Gelman Stetson or (Stetson Gelman.) or Olive Schreiner's 'Women & Labour'? They are all worth reading.[37]

In her own unostentatious fashion Richardson, too, was furthering the feminist cause. The characteristics enshrined in the bourgeois ideal of womanhood were, as she recognised, a hindrance to most independent callings, including her own: "And goodness, too: goodness is a lively attribute to a woman, but it does not engender talent—these kind & motherly souls . . . do not make writers".[38] As a novelist she was demonstrating the ability of women to be creative and intellectually innovative, to pursue a highly skilled profession, and to carve out a sphere for themselves unrelated to domestic and maternal categories—though this achievement was masked behind a male pseudonym. At the same time she was testing in Maurice Guest the belief that writing was innately and recognisably gendered. "No one, positively no reviewer", Henry noted with relish, "spotted it as 'just a woman's work'".[39] *The Getting of Wisdom* continued this tilting at male prejudice:

> [It was,] so to speak, ten fingers held to my nose—in a most impolite attitude—in the direction of my reviewers. These insisted, or the majority of them did, that 'M.G.' could be nothing else than the personal confession of some misguided youth, who now put his sorrows on paper, & this diverted me so much that I determined to mystify them entirely & give them something to think about.[40]

Also, in keeping with the issues raised by the suffrage crisis, her second novel challenged established notions of female education and gender stereotypes, probing the myth of innocent young womanhood and filling this clichéd cipher with complex psychological and sociological meaning. Ideological differences were, however, put aside with the outbreak of the Great War, which would create conditions favourable for an eventual extension of the franchise to British woman. Postwar Lillian divorced Otto and redirected her energies into assisting A.S. Neill to realise his radical vision for educational reform at Summerhill, while Richardson continued to reshape the Australian novel and to

refract in fiction her feminist convictions—but always covertly—being, as she recognised herself, "most emphatically not cut out to be a martyr!"[41]

1. *Henry Handel Richardson & Her Fiction*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p.360.
2. Axel Clark, *Finding Herself in Fiction: Henry Handel Richardson 1896–1910*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2001, p.101.
3. Edna Purdie and Olga Roncoroni (eds), *Henry Handel Richardson: Some Personal Impressions*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1957, pp.78–81; hereafter *Impressions*.
4. *My Own Story*, Eveleigh Nash, London, 1914, p.116.
5. This had been Mary's fate when her husband died unexpectedly of tertiary syphilis and she was forced hurriedly to acquire the skills of a postmistress.
6. From *Parerga und Paralipomena*, in Wolfgangvon Löhneysen, ed., *Arthur Schopenhauer: Sämtliche Werke*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1965, V, pp.720, 726–7.
7. The controversy lasted five years and "divided Scandinavian writers into two antagonistic camps—the 'moralists' and 'immoralists'". R.E. Paulson, *Women's Suffrage and Politics: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control*, Scott, Foresman and Co., Glenview, 1973, p.104.
8. 'A Danish Poet', *Cosmopolis* (1897), rpt. in *Southerly* 23, 1963, pp.43, 47.
9. *Niels Lyhne*, edited by Clive Probyn and Bruce Steele, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2003, p.143.
10. See Michael Ackland, *Henry Handel Richardson*, OUP, Melbourne, 1996, pp.16–28.
11. Undated note, quoted in Green, *Henry Handel Richardson & Her Fiction*, p.587. Johanna Cayhill was presumably the result of this resolution although, as the mid-sentence reappraisal of Madeleine suggests, these categories were fluid and subject to revision.
12. Letter to Solanges, 23 April 1911, *Henry Handel Richardson: The Letters*, I, edited by Probyn and Steele, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2000, p.132.
13. Letters to Solanges of respectively 28 December 1912 and 28 November 1911, *Letters*, I, pp.425, 263.
14. Roncoroni, *Impressions*, p.79.
15. Constance Lytton and Jane Warton, *Prisons & Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences* (1914), rpt. Virago, London, 1988, p.14.
16. Letter to Richardson, n.d., NL [National Library] MS 133/2/502.
17. *Prisons & Prisoners*, p.25.
18. E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (1931) rpt. Virago, London, 1977, pp.443–4.
19. Letter to Mary Kernot, 6 October 1913, Letters, I, p.543.
20. Until 1908 women were banned in Prussia, Bavaria and Saxony from membership of political parties, and from attending their public meetings. See Nancy F. Cott, 'Early-Twentieth-Century Feminism in Political Context: A Comparative Look at Germany and the United States', in Caroline Dale and Melanie Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1994, p.236.
21. Letters to Richardson, n.d., NL MS 133/2/449 and 510, and Richardson diary entry, 11–17 January 1903, cited in Clark, *Fiction in the Making*, p.41.
22. Letter to Richardson, Easter Monday 1911, NL MS 133/2/504–5.
23. M.A. Clutton-Brock, 'Mrs Lins: Sister of Henry Handel Richardson', *Southerly* 27, 1967, p.51.
24. Letter to Richardson, Easter Monday 1911, NL MS 133/2/505.
25. The source of these and subsequent quotations is 'Harrow's Suffragette', *Gazette*, 14 August 1908, p.5.
26. Jim Golland, 'The Milk-White Lamb or Votes for Pinner Women!', *The Pinn* 12, 1991, p.36.
27. Impressions, p.79. The shops were located, for instance, at High Road, Kilburn, Heath Street, Hampstead and Finchley Road according to Yvonne Melnick, 'The Women's Suffrage Movement in and around Camden', *Camden History Review* 24, 2000, p.44. On the processions see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1987, pp.73–148.
28. "Have you converted Mrs Prichard?", Lil asked Henry in correspondence, n.d. [1910?], NL MS 133/2/436.
29. Melnick, 'The Woman's Suffrage Movement', p.43.
30. From a speech of Emmeline Pankhurst on 16 February 1912, quoted in S. Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, p.372.
31. Letter to Solanges, 16 April 1912, *Letters*, I, p.346.
32. My dating is conjectural, NL MS 133/2/522.
33. *Prison & Prisoners*, p.189 and *Impressions*, p.80.
34. *Impressions*, pp.80–81.
35. *Impressions*, p.79.
36. Respectively letter to Solanges, 16 April 1912 and letter to Kernot, 6 April 1913, *Letters*, I, pp.346, 483.
37. Respectively letter to Solanges, 13 March 1912, where the comparison drawn is with their mishandling of striking miners, and letter to Mary Kernot, 6 April 1913. *Letters*, I, pp.328, 483.
38. Letter to Solanges, 8 October 1911, *Letters*, I, p.226.
39. NL (National Library) MS 133/9/495.
40. Letter to Mary Kernot, 27 August 1911, *Letters*, I, p.205.
41. In context she is referring to her spiritualist belief, letter to Kernot, 22 May 1934, *Letters*, III, p.36.

Michael Ackland is a Reader in English at Monash University. His Henry Handel Richardson: A Life *will appear later this year with Cambridge University Press.*

history | **JOANNE WATSON**

'BRISBANE'S LITTLE CHELSEA'

The cultural legacy of the Barjai and Miya groups

THERE IS A WIDESPREAD misconception that Brisbane during the war years was a cultural desert, only rescued from complete artistic sterility with the arrival in 1953 of modernist painter John Molvig, from Sydney. The fact that Molvig spent his first few days here in Boggo Road gaol, imprisoned for failure to pay his train fare, does say something of the political climate of Queensland at that time. Yet a full decade before the advent of Molvig, a lively and vocal group of cultural radicals had made their presence known with the publication of a magazine called *Barjai*—an Aboriginal word for 'meeting place'. By 1944 the Barjai group was holding fortnightly meetings at the Lyceum Club rooms in the Australasian Catholic Assurance building, next door to the Royal Hotel and opposite Brisbane's GPO at 261 Queen Street. The absence of the building today equates with the erasure of the little known Barjai group from all but a few of Brisbane's cultural and historical records.

Meeting on the second floor of the building were the writers Thea Astley, Barrett Reid, Laurence Collinson, Barbara Patterson (later known as Blackman), Vida Smith (later known as Horn) and my mother, Pat O'Rourke. Joining them were the artists Joy Roggenkamp, Pamela Seeman and Laurence Hope. Meetings were also attended by associate writers Judith Wright, Jack McKinney, Val Vallis and James Devaney. Charles Osborne offered his knowledge of music, literature and radio work; Cecil Knopke his expertise in theatre, ballet and alternative education programs, particularly the Summerhill school. Reid and Collinson had mutual interests in socialism, communism, literature, psychoanalytic theory and philosophy. Laurence Hope's *Literary Circle* (1945) represents the Barjai group engaged in these activities.

Hope had arrived from Sydney in 1944, and spent his first night in Brisbane sleeping on the park bench outside Barnes Auto, near the Victoria Bridge. Later Barrie Reid found him bedding down at the tramway shed in Roma Street, from where he took him home to Chermside. There Reid's father, a widower and member of Brisbane's Rationalist Club, ran a shop at the corner of Gympie and Rode Roads, while supervising his three children. Hope painted at Chermside, his images of Brisbane's homeless and dispossessed piling up in the garage outside. He would later cross the Victoria Bridge into the segregated community of Afro-American troops in South Brisbane, where he was greatly influenced by the frenetic atmosphere inside the Black jazz clubs.

Brisbane's wartime population swelled enormously, with the visit of more than two million allied troops from the end of 1941. From July 1942, Brisbane became the operational front line of the Pacific war. General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the south-west Pacific, took up residence in Lennon's Hotel and stationed his headquarters in the AMP building at the corner of Queen and Edward Streets—the site now known as MacArthur Chambers. The war brought brownouts and rationing and—in what has become a familiar pattern in Australian history—thousands of displaced refugees, who escaped the horrors of their home countries, only to face a hostile reception upon arrival here.

In March 1938 Germany annexed Austria and Vienna's Jews were stripped of their citizenship and the right to work. As the Nazis began arrests, send-

ing people to Dachau and Buchenwald, Drs Gertrude and Karl Langer fled Vienna, arriving in Brisbane in 1939. Like Gino Nibbi in Melbourne, a refugee from Mussolini's Italy, Gertrude Langer sought to break down Brisbane's isolation, offering exposure to modernist European influences for Brisbane's artists and intellectuals. Where Gino Nibbi's Leonardo's Bookshop provided cultural sustenance to Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan, and others associated with Heide's artistic community, Gertrude Langer opened her home on Coronation Drive, a few doors down from Toowong train station. It was here that she offered support and encouragement to the Barjai group. An art critic and historian, Langer conducted a series of talks which exposed Barjai members—then starved of the kind of rich cultural heritage she had to offer—to the influences of Asian arts, Cubism, Surrealism, Egyptian and Persian art and the philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism.

Laurence Hope's *Literary Circle* (1945), depicting the Barjai group, courtesy of the University of Queensland Art Museum

Barjai had originated at Brisbane's State High School, on the corner of Vulture and Ernest Streets, next to Musgrave Park at South Brisbane. It was here that students Barrett Reid, Laurence Collinson and Cecil Knopke took over the task of editing *Senior Tabloid*, earning the ire of the school Headmaster, when they renamed the publication *Barjai* and gave its contents a more dissident flavour. When Headmaster Waddle (nicknamed 'the Duck') banned the publication from the school, Reid sold copies on the footpath outside.

Barjai writers courageously insisted upon the rights of young people to 'have their say' in a period when adolescent deference to parental authority was still held as sacrosanct. Headmaster Waddle's efforts at intimidation—stripping Barbara Patterson of her position as Head Girl and ensuring Cecil Knopke was dismissed from his radio work at the ABC—did not dampen their efforts. "The policy of *Barjai*", wrote the editors, "is to allow youth to express itself. The potentialities of youth have never been fully realised; youth has been thrust back, sneered at by the elders of the community . . . Youth needs encouragement in striving for a nobler world, and *Barjai* is here to give that encouragement".

Barjai was critical of an "archaic education system" with a "narrow curriculum" and "army-like discipline". Both Reid and Collinson were vehemently anti-war. "I refuse to be led to the cannon by future warmongers," wrote Reid. "The young peoples of this world, by their wrath, by their concerted and individual efforts, can stop future murders." *Barjai* promoted experimental art and literature, and its writers shared a desire to focus upon Australian settings and icons, environments and people, which had long been submerged by British domination. In issue 21 of 1946, the editors reviewed the positions taken by the magazine since its inception in 1943:

> In the early issues we stated our policy: who wants life to continue in its normal path, the path of hypocrisy and war? Certainly not youth . . . Then . . . we took a stand for internationalism . . . and the role of the artist as discoverer . . . And so . . . we came to our two propositions: first, the minor proposal of a belief in the aims of Communism and secondly the major proposal which was a plea for a revolution in the way of looking at the world . . . in Judith Wright's significant phrase we wanted to become "emotionally intelligent".

Judith Wright read her first collection of unpub-

Gertrude Langer expressed to my grandmother her anxiety that the Barjai-Miya group seemed to have little experience or understanding of "the midnight knock upon the door". Her words were prophetic, for this group of cultural radicals would face increasing police harassment by the end of the decade.

lished poems at the Lyceum Club, while working as a research officer at the University of Queensland, in George Street, and helping the writer Clem Christesen to publish the magazine *Meanjin* from his home in Rawnsley Street, Dutton Park. With a circulation of 4000 by 1943, *Meanjin* sought to explore and define Australian culture and the role of the artist, to examine Aboriginal art and to counter Australia's isolationism. Barjai members were influenced by *Meanjin*, visited Christesen's home and accessed his library. Both magazines enjoyed the patronage of Professor J.V. Duhig, an academic in pathology at the university. But *Barjai* became more closely modelled on *Angry Penguins*, published by Max Harris of Adelaide University and John Reed of Melbourne and the Heide school. Both magazines were influenced by the writings of British anarchist, Herbert Read. Barrie Reid was the youngest contributor to *Angry Penguins* and Max Harris attributed the indecency charges against the magazine, in 1944, to moral outrage over the poetry of Laurence Collinson.

At its peak, *Barjai* had a readership of close to three hundred and over the years 1943 to its closure in 1947, more than fifty young people—including some from other states and New Zealand—had contributed poetry, stories, essays and artwork. Reid and Collinson toured the east coast seeking support and Barjai groups spread nationally, fostered by contributions from Reid, Collinson and Grace Perry to the ABC broadcasts of 'New Australian Voices'. In Adelaide Brian Medlin initiated a group, in Melbourne Shirley Reynolds and in Sydney Grace Perry helped to arrange meetings in the top room of the old Edwards and Shaw building in Sussex Street.

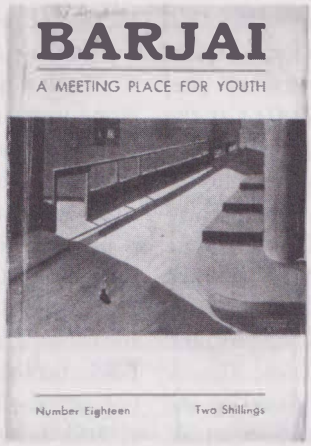
In 1945 *Barjai* began to appear as a forty-page quarterly and included a section for reproductions of contemporary art. At the same time, Barjai members extended their efforts to build the Miya Studio—a cooperative of visual artists with a jointly rented studio space. The impetus for Miya's formation had been provided by the group's dissatisfaction with the Royal Queensland Art Society. Under its auspices, Laurence Collinson, Joy Roggenkamp, Laurence Hope, Cecil Knopke and Pamela Seeman had, in 1945, formed the Younger Artists' Group for those no older than 25.

In the catalogue forward to YAG's first exhibition at the Canberra Hotel in November 1945, Laurence Collinson attacked the Queensland art establishment for its "antiquated teaching methods", "sterility" and "complete lack of sound . . . criticism". The parent body responded, condemning the comments as "in extremely bad taste". The rift was formalised in December, when the younger group held its first exhibition as the Miya group, at the School of Arts building in Ann Street. In 1946 the Miya group established a studio space in the doctors' building, Alexandra, at 204 Wickham Terrace, opposite the Trades Hall. Here Miya members developed their art to the sounds of Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Stravinsky and early gospel. For most of 1947 to 1948, they settled in the attic of the School of Arts building, in Ann Street. Barbara Blackman has recalled:

> We were young and charged with vision. We loved our city. In high bravado we leapt down and bounded up those long [Jacob's Ladder] steps . . . We believed in one another . . . encouraged one another . . . We were high on the prospects of a new world being made.

Outdoor sketching parties were held at Bribie Island. Annual exhibitions drew mixed receptions. The modernists were explicit about emotions and sexuality, and they presented stark commentary on the horror and senselessness of war, on urban alienation, poverty and dispossession at a time of widespread conservatism. A 1946 Miya exhibition, at the Canberra Hotel Gallery, hosted 416 visitors and saw the sale of one-third of the paintings. Yet Brisbane's critics were dismissive. An exhibition at

Finney's Gallery (upstairs in the David Jones Store at 194 Queen Street) the following year was derided by the *Courier-Mail* as representing the work of "Brisbane's Little Chelsea" and "its cult of ugliness". In 1948 an exhibition by Laurence Hope at Finney's Gallery was described by the same newspaper as a presentation of "dim, dark horrors"; while visiting artist Sidney Nolan, exhibiting in the same year at the Moreton Galleries in the basement of the AMP building, was condemned by the paper's art critic for having wasted "so much useful and hard to come by building material" with his "blatant extremism". Nolan's work, declared another writer to the *Courier-Mail*, was "just a lot of rubbish which should not be exhibited".



As Pamela Seeman has noted, "Most Modern art was regarded by the art establishment as an unlovely aberration that would go away if ignored." Her nude study, alongside Laurence Collinson's anti-war painting drew police attention at Finney's Gallery in 1948. It was in this period that Gertrude Langer expressed to my grandmother her anxiety that the Barjai-Miya group, for all of their political awareness, seemed to have little experience or understanding of "the midnight knock upon the door". Her words were prophetic, for this group of cultural radicals would face increasing police harassment by the end of the decade.

In 1947 Barrie Reid and Charles Osborne—then a pair of 20-year-olds—set up the Ballad Bookshop on the first floor of Bowman House, on the corner of Adelaide and Edward Streets. As an alternative meeting place for artists and intellectuals, and a point of exhibition and sale for modernist artwork, the bookshop filled a space that had been left by the closure of *Barjai* magazine, following Duhig's financial demise. It was here that Sidney Nolan set up home in 1947, before venturing north to develop his Fraser Island paintings. Other cross-pollinations with artists from interstate helped to sustain the Barjai-Miya group. Reid and Hope visited the Heide community in Victoria—probably the most influential school of Australian art since Heidelberg in the 1890s—and its patrons, John and Sunday Reed visited Reid and his colleagues in Brisbane. Charles Blackman arrived from Sydney in 1947 and formed a lasting and mutually inspiring friendship with Laurence Hope, and married Barbara Patterson.

Members of Barjai-Miya also frequented the Pink Elephant Café, postwar Brisbane's only late-night coffee shop, opposite Customs House, at the Bight end of town. Opened by entrepreneur Frank Mitchell, the Pink Elephant soon gained a reputation in mainstream Brisbane as a hub for 'unwholesome characters' and police raids on suspicions of sly grog trading were not uncommon. Betty Birskys, then a young aspiring writer, has recalled that "patrons entered through a narrow door and down a long dark passageway", into a "dim interior". Here Laurence Collinson could often be found, "looming about the tables, Byronesque and brooding", while the librarian Vida Smith "metamorphosed into *the poet*, floating in drapes and jangling beads."

It was at the Pink Elephant that Lillian Roxon connected with the Barjai-Miya crowd. Although Roxon's enrolment at State High was not until after the Barjai students had graduated, at 16 she attended readings at the Lyceum Club and socialised with Brisbane's bohemian, gay and lesbian circles in the candle-lit basement venue. Robert Milliken's recent biography, *Lillian Roxon: Mother of Rock*, notes that the Barjai-Miya crowd provided the 'kick start' to her later enthusiasm for popular culture in the 1960s and seventies. Roxon became the world's first pop journalist and her *Rock Encyclopedia* earned her the title of "the unchallenged queen of the New York rock scene." Milliken writes that the Pink Elephant "became the first of her salons, a teenage version of the more intense bohemian and counterculture cauldrons at the Lincoln Inn coffee shop in Sydney and Max's Kansas City nightclub in New York."

The Pink Elephant also attracted members of Brisbane's theatre circles, to whom Barjai-Miya members became increasingly connected. Leon Black, an ex-serviceman from the USA, had participated in a Barjai-Miya series of forums at the Lyceum Club in 1946, speaking on Modern American Theatre. Later in the decade he opened Black's Guild Café Theatre at 104 Adelaide Street—previ-

ously the site of the Old Coconut Grove Dancehall and now the setting of the King George Square carpark. In June 1947 Barjai-Miya members performed George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* at the Guild Café, a performance managed and produced by Charles Osborne. Barjai members were also involved with Twelfth Night Players and Unity Theatre, the latter a forerunner to the New Theatre Club.

By the middle of 1949 Miya's artists had merged with New Theatre, gaining studio space in exchange for artwork and the painting of stage scenery, and becoming the Artists' Group of the New Theatre Club. New Theatre stood for 'Peace, Freedom and Cultural Progress', principles which, with the emergence of a growing Cold War hysteria, became equated with being 'an enemy of the State'. Judith Wright has noted that suspected communists were spat upon in Brisbane's streets in this period. Barjai-Miya members had participated in the march to support the Railway Workers' Strike on St Patrick's Day in 1948 and had witnessed the arrests of their barrister friends, Max Julius and Fred Paterson. Paterson sustained serious brain damage when he was bashed from behind by a policeman wielding a baton. In the late 1940s my mother's family was advised by a friend in the police force that their phone was tapped and Barjai-Miya members experienced increasing police harassment under accusations of loitering, homosexuality and the promotion of communism.

By the early 1950s, Barjai members had begun to disperse from Brisbane, in search of more supportive environments. Some fled to other states, some to Europe. An extraordinary number of their members developed distinguished careers in the arts, many achieving their first success overseas. Barrie Reid and Laurence Collinson—warned by State High's Headmaster Waddle that if they continued to publish *Barjai*, they would "wreck their careers" and "be men of no esteem in public life"—both moved to Melbourne, where Reid became a founder and chair of the second series of *Australian Book Review*, and a Senior Librarian. He held a variety of senior posts on literature and arts boards, in 1983 was made a member of the Order of Australia and in 1995 a Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, at the University of Melbourne. Collinson published four collections of poetry, five plays, six television plays, two radio plays and a novel, as well as numerous articles in gay and literary journals. He made the first moves to campaign for gay law reform in Melbourne, before moving to London where he built a career as a psychotherapist.

Charles and Barbara Blackman and Laurence Hope were instrumental in reviving Melbourne's Contemporary Arts Society. By the early 1960s, encouraged by the positive reception of Australian art in London, all three had moved there. Blackman is now represented in major galleries and was awarded an OBE in 1997. Hope's paintings now fetch up to $30 000 and he is regarded as a major contributor to figurative expressionism. Barbara Blackman lost her award as headgirl at State High, but won the Premier's Award for *My Life With Joey* (1995), became an oral historian for the National Library and recently published her biography, *Glass After Glass* (1997).

Joy Roggenkamp is now recognised as one of Australia's outstanding watercolour artists. She took out the Pring Prize in both 1966 and 1967 and received an OAM for services to art in 1997. Thea Astley is a four-time winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award, as well as seven other distinguished awards, and she received an OAM in 1992. Charles Osborne established a successful career as a writer and critic and became editor of the *London Magazine*. In 1986 he published his memoirs, *Giving It All Away*. My mother, Pat O'Rourke, studied acting and in London joined Clan Productions as Assistant Stage Manager. She performed in theatre and BBC television and became stage manager for Noel Coward, before returning to Brisbane to immerse herself, alongside Pamela Seeman, in Brisbane's New Theatre.

The Barjai group had, as young people, established a cross-disciplinary artists' collective that was community based and controlled, while also achieving professional standards of accomplishment. It was a formative time for many of Australia's outstanding creative talents. The history of postwar modernism has so often been documented as 'a tale of two cities'—Sydney and Melbourne. Yet 'Brisbane's Little Chelsea' forged many of Australia's cultural icons and literary masterpieces that now draw enormous acclaim.

Joanne Watson is researching a biography of her mother, Patricia O'Rourke, who was a member of the Barjai group and the New Theatre. A version of this article will appear in Raymond Evans, Carole Ferrier and Jeff Rickertt (eds), Radical Brisbane *(Vulgar), to be published in May 2004.*

MY FIFTY YEARS WITH *OVERLAND*

I HAVE NO DOUBT what my answer would be if an angel, descending, granted me the choice of bringing back to life one long-gone friend. Though Andrew Fabinyi, Frank Dalby Davison, Alan Marshall, Clive Turnbull, Shirley McLaren, Max Harris, Frank Hardy, Vance Palmer, Nancy Keesing, Lloyd O'Neil, Noel Counihan, Ian Turner, John Morrison, Geoffrey Serle, Ken Gott, David Martin, Geoffrey Dutton, Clifton Pugh, Ambrose Dyson, Emile Mercier, Hal Missingham, Alan McCulloch, Fred Williams, Lloyd Rees and Mungo MacCallum make a fretful choice, it would of course be my dear friend Stephen Murray-Smith.

I first met Stephen on the University of Melbourne campus during 1947, when I was commissioned to design the cover and inside illustrations for the student annual Melbourne University Magazine: *MUM*. Stephen, after serving with the Fifth Commando Company in New Guinea, became one of the many ex-servicemen completing studies interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. Our ongoing collaboration and affectionate friendship had their origins shortly after my return from London in 1954, when we met again at the launch of the literary magazine *Overland*.

During the national-identity revolution of the 1950s, without question a highly important cultural event was the conception of *Overland*. Murray-Smith perceived a need during the euphoric post-war period for a journal reflecting the cultural character and needs of the Australian community. Through its fifty years and 174 issues *Overland* has carried the motto 'Temper democratic, bias Australian'.

During his thirty-four years as *Overland* editor, Stephen Murray-Smith experienced a number of publishing triumphs. These included the Walt Whitman–Bernard Cronin correspondence; the ABC radio transcript of 'Bill Harney's War'; and being one of the first to publish the work of Peter Carey and Dorothy Hewett.

My association with *Overland* commenced with the second number, when Stephen asked me to be the magazine's 'art editor'. The inclusion of bright layout or experimental typography was initially extremely difficult—the printers had their own ideas and set ways about page presentation. Gradually we made the packed, grey pages tidy, introducing graphic material and typographical styles when we discovered Bob Cugley and his National Press. The magazine became, if not an optical joy, then a mighty improvement on the *Richmond Chronicle* printers. Stephen was a joy to work with. Being expert himself, he recognised not only promise but experience and talent in others and openly encouraged them without trying to interfere.

Some years ago I received a long letter from Dal Stivens, the then President of the Australian Society of Authors. I felt awkwardly flattered, for Dal was inviting me to join the Society. I did not join for I had never considered myself a writer, but it was Stephen who published my first scribblings. Indeed he encouraged me to not only write features and book reviews for publication in *Overland*, but when a reader in book publishing he steered through the editorial division of Heinemann the concept of my first book: *The Inked-in Image: A Social and Historical Survey of Australian Comic Art* (1970). Nine years later Liz Douglas, as publisher for Hutchinson Australia, accepted my suggestion for an updated edition of this title. A further paperback edition sold well. Since then I have had a further eight titles published, the result of the initial encouragement I had from Stephen.

Overland was steadily progressing both in circulation and editorial policy in the early issues, publishing Arthur Phillips, Dymphna Cusack, Eric Lambert, John Manifold, Vance Palmer, David Martin, John Morrison, Brian Fitzpatrick, Russel Ward and Dame Mary Gilmore, among many others.

Those working close to Stephen knew the pressures and responsibilities he laboured under. His concerns were with late entries, or the non-arrival of book reviews and commissioned feature articles, and have we enough fiction, or money for the printer?

Then, after *Overland* 14, Autumn 1959, these concerns seemed trifling compared with the unwelcome, unjustified and slanderous attack on our magazine, its editor Stephen Murray-Smith and four of its contributors. The bitter assault, published in the Communist Party newspaper *Tribune*, had been written by a Party journalist Rex Chiplin. This article was in no sense a serious piece of literary criticism, merely an attack, no doubt ordered by the Party hierarchy.

Stephen Murray-Smith announced to the *Overland* board and to our readers also:

> We have always said that a broad program like ours could be supported by Liberal or Labor, Christian or Atheist. As long as we don't lose sight of our working-class roots, we must welcome the success of our struggle, the fact that our leading role is winning recognition. From that point of view, therefore, it would be sectarian and pointless to answer Chiplin in Marxist terms in *Overland*. *Overland* is not, and never was intended to be a Marxist or even a socialist magazine—a point which some of its critics apparently fail to appreciate.

Part of the reason for the bitter attack on *Overland* and its editor would appear to be that Murray-Smith had, as had one hundred thousand others, resigned from the Communist Party after the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. "We'll pick up every ounce of shit we can and throw it all over you!", Judah Waten had shouted at Murray-Smith in a Melbourne street. The *Tribune* headline to the Chiplin attack read '*Overland*—where's it being taken?' If vindication was needed we could answer "Currently into the twenty-first century!", adding "where, forty-four years on, is the *Tribune*?"

However, the Chiplin–*Tribune* affair became in time the least of our concerns. A major worry was discrimination by the Literature Board. A particularly anxious period was during 1986, when our grant remained at the same level while those to *Meanjin* and *Scripsi* increased.

Partly as a response to the wishes of the Literature Board that the ownership of *Overland* be clarified, Stephen responded: "It is not clear who, legally, owns *Overland*. This is largely a historical matter going back to the time when [sic] the struggle to wrest the magazine from the Australian Communist Party." The situation had been a satisfactory one for thirty-two years. In that time the issue had not actually arisen. Arising now from this query from the Literature Board was the suggestion that it may be desirable to incorporate the magazine as a company limited by guarantee.

In my view Stephen was the owner of a magazine he named *Overland*. It was he who bore the burden of political and economic setbacks in an unwelcoming atmosphere when, in the minds of many, Australia was a cultural desert. It has become a far easier path for the editors of *Overland* who succeeded Stephen. This is not to say it has been 'roses'.

In 1990 *Overland* became a public company.

After Stephen's death in 1988, Dorothy Hewett wrote: "To have pioneered, produced, fought for and maintained a radical literary journal in Australia is an achievement which cannot be matched by any other journal or editor."

During 1973 Stephen initiated what became an annual event for the following fifteen years: a lavish dinner for *Overland* voluntary editorial workers held in the Victorian Room of University House, University of Melbourne. At the first of these, eleven of us were seated around a circular table at a multi-candle-lit silver service with the first of our interstate guests, Patrick White.

For the most part the evening was sedate, polite, and respectful, for some of us one of awe—we were aware that Patrick had won the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was obviously happy to be among us on this particular night where he could not be pestered by newspaper reporters, television cameras and the like. He signed our books, listened to our conversation and responded readily to our questions. Patrick was majestic, impressive. Were he casually to say that a green strawberry is not ripe, then it was like god creating by command a botanical truth for all time. There were, however, a few

tense moments, described in David Marr's *Patrick White: A Life* (Random House, 1991). When White remarked that:

> "Lindsay Anderson's film *O Lucky Man* was a work of genius, indeed as good as any novel of the last ten years," Barrett Reid replied: "Come off it."
>
> White was suddenly gripped by a paroxysm of invective: "I said it and I meant it!" Reid was an intimate of Cynthia Nolan's old adversary Sunday Reed, the last survivor of the old disciples at Heide. White knew this. "You," he thundered, "would be the one person in Australia I would disagree with everything about."
>
> The critic and historian Ian Turner tried to calm things down. Had White, he asked, ever published in John and Sunday's magazine *Angry Penguins* in the early days?
>
> "Certainly not. But I would like to write a novel about her."
>
> "About Sunday?" Reid asked. "Have you ever met her?"
>
> "That woman! That woman! I don't need to meet her to write about her."
>
> Reid invited him to come to Heide and have tea with John and Sunday Reed. He refused point blank.
>
> "Well in that case your novel will be based on muddled mythology like your other novels."

At the conclusion of the evening my wife Marcia and I drove Patrick home to an address in Beaconsfield Parade, South Melbourne, overlooking Hobsons Bay. On the trip home he was quiet, uninterested in Melbourne landmarks pointed out to him.

That a heated quarrel would eventuate could be expected in any company that included Reid. I worked closely with him at Heide when he was editing *Overland* and I quickly learned that Barrett brazenly lied to me, and to others, was deceitful and overbearing. And there were occasions when *Overland* board meetings were disrupted by his personal outbursts—Barrett did little to earn my respect. To be charitable, this behaviour could perhaps have been a result of his fight with a long-term cancer.

Our guest for the following 1974 dinner was the affable, witty, erudite Max Harris. Affectation, rather than eccentricity, best fits dear Max, with assured bearing and silver-topped walking stick. One felt that he just stopped short of affecting lace sleeve cuffs and cravat and a kerchief to match.

Our guest at the last dinner, in 1988, before Stephen's death put an end to these events, was Peter Carey. Others included Nancy Keesing, whom I was later to work with on a special *Bulletin* Centenary Issue of *Overland*, then Christina Stead, the poet David Campbell, Donald Horne, Gwen Harwood, Frank Moorhouse, Eric Westbrook, Manning and Dymphna Clark, Morris West, Fay Zwicky, an iron-lady if ever there was one, and Rosemary Dobson. Also joining us over the years were the artist Rick Amor, the historians Ian Turner and Stuart Macintyre, Dorothy Hewett, Peter Mathers, the gentle, ex-navy sailor and poet Robert Harris, playwright Joanna Murray-Smith, Desmond O'Grady, educator and ABC television producer Robert Newton, and John McLaren, who was to become the third editor of *Overland*.

Among Stephen's wide interests were the history of the Bass Straight islands, the preservation of lighthouses, collecting the published journals of Australian coastal discovery and exploration, and watching and playing cricket. Although we no longer experience Stephen's urbane company at his home or the *Overland* annual dinners, one other of his endearing customs survives.

During March 1959 Stephen organised a cricket match between the literary magazines *Overland* and *Meanjin*. This was and continues to be played for the Emu Ashes, a much wounded-looking, patched-up emu egg, engraved with the Australian Arms in relief, presented for many years by the late Gordon Bryant MHR of the Federal Labor Party to the captain of the winning team. These matches became popular picnic events mostly enjoyed on grounds around the Mornington Peninsular with entertainment from Roger Bell's traditional jazz band attracting around a hundred writers, poets, artists, and loyal subscribers to one or the other, or both, magazines.

Played in earnest and with passion, some players' skills had distinction, some a distinct lack of it. In his younger days David Martin was a regular team member, despite very poor eyesight. I have a fond memory of the match when David was next man in to bat and to partner me. He had fastened his right pad securely to his leg but had rather hastily buckled his male protector in position. He faced the bowler and smacked the ball for two runs. Halfway down the pitch something that looked like a strangely shaped rat or small dog or some creature was snapping at his ankle. As he ran his protector had become loose, trailed down his trouser leg and

the elastic expanded and retracted with every pace, looking for all the world as if he were being chased by a frenzied, savage creature. David enjoyed risible situations and told often of the occasion he stooped to pick up two pine cones—and they flew away. We all have our treasured memories of David. He gave his mates some wonderful yesterdays.

We at *Overland* would like to boast that we discovered David. In truth David discovered us, becoming a most valuable supporter, contributor and friend for just forty-two years. David wrote long analytical letters, critical and constructive, after every issue of *Overland* from the first number for Spring 1954, encouraging Stephen. His last comments were written in 1996. *Overland* never had such a devoted and committed supporter.

Was it the writer-journalist Ken Gott, batting for *Overland*, who was able to add an extra four runs when the novelist and *Age* critic Laurie Clancy fielded the ball, turned and with a powerful throw missed the stumps by half the length of the pitch? From the picnic crowd a well-versed *Overland* wit shouted "Well done, Clancy of the overthrow!"

A highlight of the 1980 *Overland–Meanjin* cricket match was a visit from 'Colonel Pewter', or rather the creator-delineator of that hugely popular *Age* newspaper comic strip, Arthur Horner, recently returned from England. I had suggested to Stephen we ask Arthur to join our editorial team to lunch at the University of Melbourne where Stephen was a Reader in Education. To Stephen's enormous delight Arthur accepted, obliging with autographed drawings of the Colonel, his great grandnephew Martin and Chloe the cat.

It seemed appropriate that Arthur Horner witnessed our 'bush cricket' for, at the time, he had brought Colonel Pewter to Australia to play for 'The Pukka Ashes', a brilliantly funny satire contrasting our legendary attitudes, behaviour and speech mannerisms with those of the English.

Over the past fifty years those artists who have been regularly published in our pages include Noel Counihan, who illustrated our first cover for the Spring issue in 1954: Rod Shaw; Ron Edwards; Clem Millward; Herbert McClintock; Arthur Boyd; Geoff La Gerche; Gus McLaren; Jiri Tibor Novak; David Armfield; Rolf (Lofo) Heimann and Rick Amor, all of whom have offered their time and work free of charge.

I suspect most academics, artists, writers, poets and suchlike are in some degree eccentric. I found Stephen innocently so—constantly lighting the dead dottle in his pipe—he didn't smoke tobacco, he smoked matches. And his unconcern when visiting me with *Overland* galley-proofs, wearily lumbering from his car, stopping on my lawn to pee on the letter-box, before opening his portable office: a scuffed leather case crammed with books, letters to be posted, correspondence and manuscripts to be read, notebooks, pens, pencils, paperclips, copies of the current issue of *Overland*, and of course galley-proofs.

Stephen's many-sided character was serious and responsible. On his return from a Writers' Festival in Adelaide, Stephen stopped his car in South Melbourne and, reaching for a scraping tool he had purchased in Adelaide, proceeded to obliterate a racist slogan that he had evidently seen painted on a wall when he was leaving Melbourne a week earlier.

I would be proud to have a plaque on my letter-box reading 'A truly wonderful man passed here'.

Stephen's successors as editor of *Overland* were indeed chalk and cheese in personalities. Barrett Reid, senior State Librarian, was an urbane poet. John McLaren, in the words of Stephen, was "a radical social-democrat and a welcome breath of fresh air." As with Stephen, John allowed people their way of expression without interference and was a person I found to be 'straight down the middle' in matters of honour. McLaren's replacement—the dour, dynamic Ian Syson—expanded the editorial board, changed the presentation of the magazine, and with determination widened our readership and circulation. The affairs of *Overland* were becoming such that they needed full-time administration. Ian's position at Victoria University required more of his time, but good fortune sent us our present editors Nathan Hollier and Katherine Wilson, young warriors with that rare quality of respect, and praise, for tribal elders.

Chalk and cheese, chess and cherries—and a tribal elder. While my role has been more aesthetic than literary, I feel distinguished to have been, for just half a century, a part of *Overland's* considerable contribution to the nation's sense of itself.

Vane Lindesay hopes to soon have his biography of Ruby Lind published.

fiction | **STEPHEN MOLINE**

NEW YEAR'S EVE

THE GIRL IS NOT surprised when her parents, in the heat of their row and the commotion of the other nine children, slam metal doors and make the engine screech, leaving Emily behind on the roadside. Leaning against a sandstone wall, among dry curled leaves, the disagreeable prickle weeds and the awful loud absence of a vehicle, she thinks, So this can happen. So face it. You just walk. Soon they will realise. Don't show you have weak tears. OK then, just walk.

Nothing here helps, the heat, the intimacy of tiny flies, the trees undressing in long strings, the wavering crest of the road, the scuffle of her sneakers on the sticky bitumen. If that's a car sound then they've noticed and it's all over; a little moment is all it was. But that's not the van, it's red and fast and has already passed. The road drops down a shallow valley, curls and speeds up the following basalt hill again.

IN THE MINIVAN three families: nine children, two adults. They must make Oberon by evening when the other parents will arrive. There's bickering among the children and rivalry between the man and woman in the front. The children have all jumbled back in different seats.

EMILY'S BLUNT SHADOW hangs close to her. She must walk not on the road but on the part beside it, rough and pebbly. She should have had more of that drink they handed round back there when she was in with them. Past this top she'll see the van backing up. It will be this joke: nearly got left behind! That tree has oozed a hard blood like glass. She is on the ridge crest now, so Emily can look down the next shallow valley and its ribbon of road. There is a parked truck by the roadside, but it's not the minivan, it's much too big; no other vehicles at all. Cicadas are beating a long unison. The noon sun compresses her shadow into a squat mark just like on a map. In the labyrinth a princess must hold tight to her grey string.

There are no towns or even single houses here; only the sandy heath and some small trees with broken crowns to let the daylight in. Walking is tiring. She does not stand in the road and call for help. Too dangerous, they say. That's a crow with the slow sarcastic voice. Nor could she walk the whole way; ridiculous. Should she have said more in the van? They would remember her now, looking round. Two semis are shaking down the hill. She is a small animal: road is danger, bush is safety.

"OH MY GOD, Emily!" Geraldine catches her perfection in the long glass door: how must this look? All this time, not noticing. And Emily, on that road. The police: should she notify them at once, set off a public circumstance, track the girl down with microphones, cameras? Or drive alone (or with Lex perhaps?) all that way and half the afternoon (now almost night) back there? And then to miss her? Asleep, back from the road (what can she think of me?) in some clearing, out of sight of headlights, searchlights?

"Oh Christ, a man stops and picks her up. It's so probable. Fifteen last week, pretty, tall, and he takes her with him: Lex, think, what do we phone, go on then, no wait, how do we explain it? That we just forgot her, for hours? It could be made to look—not good. Don't get anyone involved. Well, not just yet. Her mobile! It's in her bag, though. Think how they will angle this, the look they'll give it, or give us, not to mention what the other papers, Channel Nine, they'll all be there, what a story, perfect for them, but it's happening to us. Great copy. It's so unfair: they know us, too (well, me at least). Why aren't the others here yet? Get the bags out, I'm going back, what do you think, Lex? Don't say a word. You're staying here. Oh shit, if this gets out."

The children stand about, looking at her. A journalist afraid of news. "Don't stare at me! Unpack the van."

IT'S A PLACE without markers of any kind once you leave the road, as Emily is doing. Thirsty, she wants a creek to be down there. This place has no words, and yet the map was full of them. She was map-exploring in the minivan: Thunder, Dismal, Labyrinth, Mistake, Skeleton. But now this running water she has found is nameless and glassy, not a bit like those wriggling lines, impossibly bluer than water, that happen only in maps. Were all those place names fictions, making up for all that maps leave out? The last town would be ten K from here, yet no person will come, perhaps no person has come exactly here before.

She is a reader, will read everything, adventure, fantasy, even science, poems, maps; but she reads facts as fantasies and maps as narratives. So in the minivan she scanned her chart for stories and stared out the window, since this was a document that hinted to her of labyrinthine or thundering ravines, peaks resembling camels and skeletal rocks. Mountains could be Heads attached to Walls or buried to their eyelids and called Charles or George, punished tyrants imprisoned in the sandstone. Every feature wore its neat black name which she spoke inside her head: Luminous Creek (eerie), Carmarthen Gorge (delicious).

But here she finds no names nor any other proof that someone has passed through. Is that creek Luminous enough, and will this valley Thunder? Which is the rock face that stands for a camel, a rainbow, an anvil? She will walk in deeper where no sword grass or huntsman can wound her; no dragon is more fierce than she is here. So giant Emily enters the forest. She is told in stories every circumstance is brought in for a purpose that is revealed later; so in her labyrinth there will be no loose threads. She can walk through danger knowing that she is its hero. Narrative will protect her. Tall for her age, thin and quick, good at running but otherwise quiet, she trusts that we may yet be tamed by her optimism.

Here, for example, is the dragon, all four inches of him, in his diamond-patterned suit, dragging a yellow cricket he has been devouring. Then pauses, his skinny elbow angled on a stone. He observes her footwear and nervously he tastes the air. When the girl notices, the reptile already has her in his sidelong eye. Where has this fiction come from, if not some all-arranging storyteller who has just authored a new event for her? Answer me my riddles three. Can't go round it, must go through with it. But when she looks again the dragon's flickered off, along with his tortured lunch. Each lizard, she remembers reading, is born parentless. Once it tears its leather egg it is alert, hungry, self-reliant and alone.

LEX MUST STAY and mind the children. If pressed he mournfully confesses he is not good at this. He steps around the kitchen like a mantis in its box, seeks the remotest corner to stretch out or rock and sway in, wishes only for an hour's renaissance in his headphones, a thickish book, a pen and notepad. His long sliding-forward hair and sharp disputatious jaw attempt to get to grips before him. A forever-student in his forties, his discursive phrase of choice is 'at the end of the day' which he fears has just arrived for him in the bungalow's dying light. So many half-assembled thoughts converging to reply they lie tipped up and trapped at the opening of his stuttered speech. If only Geraldine could reach across the table and strike his head correctly,

just to loosen and let fall the whole of Lex's piecemeal good advice; it would be a relief to all his listeners. After the effort and delay, to pick up and separately piece together his not quite broken thoughts, he seems to say (to have discovered) so little new for those who have like Geraldine (impressed at first) persisted with him: twenty years in law school to learn every disingenuous ingenuity in the lexicon; and now what good is left?

The children are more surefooted on the steep hillside, tree branches or polished kitchen floor where they have left him, having helped themselves to all the fluorescent foods and liquids they could prey upon. They leave the weather-beaten bungalow to Lex and his law of torts, in which class actions may be brought upon class enemies and he will make the corporate directors write down all our wrongs.

GERALDINE STEPS ON the gasoline, negotiates the perils of the Darling Causeway between her sisters' families and her Emily. Being tall, she must crouch into the windscreen. Her imagination drives her forward, now 130, now 140. There would be another hour of good light remaining. Now, where exactly did she stop to let the children run about, does she have that clear? Remember the sudden twist and dip in the road; but there were any number of similar kinks in the ribbon after that, so what else can she recall? A flat rock (she feels sure), something like a bookcase (she now thinks), or was that later, and will it seem the same now, in now's light, as it may have looked back then?

Passing the Bell turnoff and knowing she must be near, Gerry is less sure than when she left: always supposing Emily is still walking along this road. She could have walked ten K by now, if she had chosen to. But! Might she have kept on walking towards Bell, failing to take the turn that Geraldine just made? (Am I speeding in the wrong direction now? Or is she walking back, towards 'home' and Sydney?) Geraldine, who knows how to assemble, piece into piece, an inevitable good story, dislikes this crowding-in of possibilities. She enjoys the author's potency; but here, she addresses the windscreen, she's just the luckless sucker stuck inside another's story, not even hers but Emily's.

Then notices she has shrunk inward: her driving foot has eased off and the van rolls almost to a standstill in the soft shoulder of the road. Finds herself weeping, too sudden to be suppressed: she might have struck a tree, she has no idea what she is doing! Of where to look, to start; forward or reverse, or should she just wander through those straggling bushes over there, where that child (her daughter) may be sleeping, may be worse, how could she be so stupid, *stupid*, pinching in rage her arms (still firm), tensing to make suffer her long runner's hamstrings (still taut); who will straighten this sharp corner she is in and walk her out of this, clean away? Finds that she is rocking rapidly side to side on a hard front seat, driver's window down, as if rain will stream in to punish her, for what? But no such judgement comes. It's left to Geraldine to judge. Rational, she has to weigh each way, must lift her forehead from this tough wrist, must do it now. So she straightens to sit up, breathes in, out, asserts detachment.

And what was the subject of that fierce if quiet-spoken row between Lex and Geraldine that so obsessed them in the van? This is the least memorable part. Chiefly she recalls him grinding off each of Gerry's 'points'. War by siege and starvation for the joy of besieging and starving and of holding out and holing up behind her weakening walls, god he was wearying at the end of the day; and all for occupying her barren territory he did it. Started with the sweetest "Surely—?" and ended in his most disheartening certainty, not a tree, man, hope standing, only us two in a landscape blasted by his logic.

IF SHE WERE still a little child, this would be some forbidden garden. Emily steps across an edge of blackness on the sand, beyond which most things have been either scorched or deleted. The fire that almost wrecked their Christmas must have come through here. She walks across a new, dead world of ash in which heat-twisted stick-trees, leaning together, are possibly conferring. Bent to improbable yet right angles, hoops or hooks, wire anchors, even spirals, they might be wood or metal, all linear-geometrical but to Emily also sinister-enchanted-animal. Her approaching fear is turned aside for now

by a light, high laughter. Whose clever son, youngest foolish brother or third half-sister may stand transformed before her, may even have summoned her by means of their strong silence? Welcome, starveling-earthling-changeling. Or whatever. The ropy or mineral or extruded sapling bows down its twisting and strange glistening for her.

All plants possess their story which she judges she can mediate simply with a kind communicating welcome. This broad pod, for instance, is opened like a child's pocket diary, its pages turned again to wood. Its seeds, now dropped, were held in these grooved lines which Emily attempts to read; she must be quick to register what's in each message stick. She can unscramble their cryptograms to her plain text, as follows. Fire clarifies the bush. Now you see our true shapes. Only wood survives a fire.

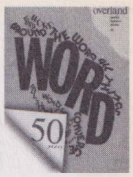
HER MOTHER, after a comfortless night in the van, endures the public search next morning, accompanied by cold-correct questions from reporters (some of whom she knows), having arrived in their assertive helicopters. Slow-moving rows of men, like mowers in the heath, all eyes down, must be willing some torn scrap of clothing to appear. Incurious photographers are on their knees before her.

She gets a shock-whispered call of one-third sympathy, two-thirds suspicion from her mother ("No, I can't explain it either") and has to crouch down in a stand of hakeas, turning away, and away again, while a black suit fingering his audio equipment circles at a distance.

Later in this slow afternoon Gerry is making notes into her organiser, having phoned her editor, for the personal piece. Boyish in her jeans and ginger hair, she plays back her tinny headphone words. She's not used to doing intimate stuff. She rubs the nicotine inner finger at the writer's callus. All friends, companions, colleagues will be reading this. So she keys it recklessly; later she abandons it.

THE GIRL KNOWS she can turn back from that dead place. She steps through the green heath whose sharp spines will protect her, now night is almost here. Emily is equal to the world she meets. No harm can reach her lucid inexperience. Last night's bed was a scraped-together pile of sharp-scented leaves, beside a ledge that could have been a shelter if rain had come. She felt gravely welcomed by its shade. Emily couldn't make a fire, is still unsure if she should eat anything here, remains hungry but patient. She can find the road and its people, if not this first afternoon of her new year, she will tomorrow; what difference is a day? The road will come back to her with a little wandering. If she is so very thirsty she can scramble to her stream before the dark returns. This ledge is more a comfort at this moment than her mother's warnings, anxieties, reproaches, beseechings. Emily pauses, but still can't hear the road, which must be up the slope. The van was travelling always on the ridgeline, always from the window she was looking down. Tomorrow morning will be soon enough; her cool heart knows just where to head.

Near the ridge top the girl climbs a tree to survey her strange position. There is a helicopter, but why should that have anything to do with Emily? No sign of a road. Through the scribbled leaves she does now see two people in yellow jackets. She imagines calling out, but hesitates; instead she has a strong hallucination of unfurling white sheets to discover hot and greasy battered fish, the unpeeling skin sticking to her fingers with a lemon-acid taste. Staring down at those jackets moving closer now, she also regrets, what is it she regrets? She does not move, raise an arm, cry out, jump confidently to the ground. She watches from her high place. Tells herself: must call out now. But doesn't. Feels tears of exhaustion. Must she really do this thing? The yellow ones have reached a rock ledge and will drop from sight. A wind arrives to disturb her leaves. She could remain here always. Those two may no longer hear her in this rising wind. So she is afraid, calls, calls louder, leaps, runs, now everything is dangerous, bitter, urgent, and she is hungry, hot, dissatisfied.



Designer Babyware Party (Genetically Modified)
Ultimate Consumer Specials

I'd like a boy
a strong silent joy
with big blue eyes
and broad shoulders

I want a girl
a pretty faced pearl
to dress up
in delicate laced silk

I want a fit son
who can run
like the wind
into the Olympics

I want a daughter
not much shorter
than a model
to become such a star

I want a calm child
not one that's wild
who'll sit still
mildly on weekends

I want a clever kid
oh heaven forbid
not one who's stupid
or too slow

Talking of bright
could I have one who might
just go on to win
the Nobel Prize?

I need a happy bub
a resourceful cub
to amuse itself
when I'm busy

I'd love offspring
who don't bring
health problems
or extra worry

The infant I need
will be loving indeed
to look after me
when I'm old

I'll have children
who perform when
there's pressure
or high expectation

To order just sign
on the dotted line
payment due
in nine months*

*On delivery—no guarantee,
No watertight warranty,
no exchange, refund
Nor disposal.

HELEN CERNE

fiction | **NICOLA HAYWOOD**

FAITHLESS STREET

BEING BACK IN Memphis after a week in New York was like going back in time and getting stuck in quick-drying cement. The first person I saw as I was pulling into the Piggly Wiggly for the necessary restocking of the cheap red was Chris. He reached into his car and brought out a shotgun and started waving it at me. I almost went down with a heart attack. I know, I should have floored my heap of shit, but I just about shit myself instead. My heart was swelling and banging, the arteries hardening in super double dooper time. And then I realised it was a broom-handle he was waving. Could have been a sawn-off ChristAlmightyBigBoy, though. I threw my racing green pile of shit into reverse and hightailed it out of there, forgetting the red, just thanking god I was alive. I mean, I was about to become a big star. I had no intentions of checking out in the Piggly Wiggly parking lot due to some hopped-up love-crazed loser.

I was still shaking when I roared into the Shed's parking lot, though, and wishing like crazy that I was still in the Big Apple. New York was a blast. Whatever Scott's problem with it was, I couldn't fathom it. Listening to him, you'd be excused if you thought it was Gehenna or some other place of nameless torture and torment. But it wasn't like that. People couldn't have been nicer to me. And the 'family' at Clone, as Johnny like to call them, couldn't have been more helpful. I was a bit apprehensive at first, thought I might need Buffy with me to deal with all the psychic vampires and daemons Scott kept referring to, but I never met anybody like that. Everybody was so excited to meet me. Johnny kept slapping Sam, the A&R man who brought me to Clone's attention, on the back and saying, "We've got someone special here. Gold all the way." He was blown away by the strength of my writing. Everybody was laughing. Champagne was flowing. It was like a party. And then Sam and me hit the clubs. Man, I never saw anything like it. I thought I'd died and gone to the upper echelon of Porn Disneyland. You'd never believe how brazenly sleazy those elite are in all those back rooms all the exclusive clubs have. I was like "Gimme Gimme," I mean, I'm sorry but I'm only human, with needs and desires that demand to be fed. I'd been keeping a low profile in Memphis since the whole unfortunate Chris incident, and I needed some relief, baby. I needed it bad. And the girls, man, they made the Memphis talent look like transvestites having a bad day. The only girl's face I could remember clearly was Isabelle's and that wasn't so much her face as her mouth as she hurled all over me. I couldn't believe it, though, when Sam handed me the phone and I got an earful of Marissa Rydell. Marissa was my all-time favourite actress at the time. I'd seen nearly all of her movies and thought she was just so hot and cute and sexy. And she was just my type. All dark and sultry looking. So, ok, at 30 her career was on go-slow, now that she was trying to hit the mainstream, not like when she was younger and in all those indie flicks. But she was still huge in my estimation. I never had anybody famous ringing for me before, unless you counted Scott. And, you know I wasn't interested in dating him, and most of America wasn't aware of him, anyway. Yeah, I could

easily have stayed in New York. No looking back, no problem. But, I had commitments. I had club gigs lined up from months ago that I still had to honour. I had my lease on my house. These things had to be dealt with. I can be responsible, you know.

So, there I was back. Stuck in the mire. Still having to dodge Chris. My face had improved a lot, though, thanks to the doctors in New York. They gave me stuff for the inflammation and injections for the pain. It was wonderful; I just floated on clouds the whole time I was there. I got to bring home cream for the welts and the bruising and a shitload of pills.

Dodging Chris was like playing space invaders with only one rocketship left, though. If he'd been the mayor of Memphis he couldn't have had a bigger profile or been more beloved. Christ, he was only an intern at the Methodist Hospital, having come late to medicine because he couldn't cut it as a lawyer and his parents were damn sure that if their boy was going to be large physically, then he was also going to make something 'decent' of his life. He spent the Sundays he wasn't on call ministering to the lost and the lonely in his role of Deacon at the adjoining Methodist Church and in any spare nights he had, he played banjo with the Silver Ballardeers. Really, he should have been *thanking* me for administering to his wife cos he sure as hell had no time for her. But, people, right? They never see things the way they are.

So anyway, even after the gun thing turned out to be a broom, I was still pretty shaken up about it. The sooner I could wrap things up and get the hell out of Dodge, the better. Scott was welcome to it.

One thing I wanted, I realised as I switched off the heap's motor in the Shed's parking lot, was my jeans and shirt. I hadn't seen Isabelle since the whole vomit/Shangri-la thing. What a freak, right? Bad enough she yaks all over me, but then she wigs out like fright night at Shangri-la's. I thought a record store would be a safe place to hide out and kill a bit of time before taking her sorry ass back to Scott. But no such luck for Ryan. I'm innocently checking out my old band's paltry indie catalogue when she starts screaming about some "busdriver". I tried to hide behind the zine stand and ride it out there until she calmed down, but she decides to take matters into her own hands. Screaming about him being over at the bargain basement bins, of all things, and that someone should grab him, she comes barrelling past me, knocking me into the zines. The whole stand goes crashing to the floor with me on top of it. She catches her foot around the New Releases and the whole lot comes down, whacking me in the family jewels. The whole scene was like something out of the B-grade funnies—cheap laughs galore folks. Needless to say, nobody in Shangri-la was laughing.

Of course, in the mallee this busdriver guy if there even was such a person gets away. George, the sales guy on duty that day, some Elvis nut, is running around, going, "Who's going to clean up this mess?" No guesses who got the job, cos Isabelle decided she had to hurl again, so George rushed her to the back bog. I never did so much grunt work in my life, even when I was a busboy at Richie's All You Could Eat, back when I was 15 years old.

Afterwards when I asked her if the 'busdriver' was some lover or other she looked at me with these eyes that could've burned a hole through me, heart and soul, even if I was a million light years away.

"No," she said. "I hate him."

I couldn't help it, there must be something amiss inside of me, but I thought, phew a girl with that much destruction inside of her must be a real firecracker in between the sheets.

Still, she was Scott's stepsister. I didn't want to be avoiding him as well. And she wasn't really my type, anyway. So I just deposited her back with Scott. I told him about the vomiting and the busdriver thing, but he didn't seem unduly worried, so I figured it must've been a family trait—even though she wasn't technically related to him in the biblical sense. Scott didn't offer to reimburse me for the café mess or apologise for the hurling or the madness, but I'll say this, without their help at the Shed

that night I never would've gotten my week in New York or got signed so lucratively by Clone. So, debt well paid, I suppose.

Scott told me she played in her boyfriend's band back in Adelaide, Australia and it showed. She was made for the stage. It was miraculous the way such a washed-out, wan little doll-sized midget could transform into a hard-rocking angel with a guitar in her hands. We only had an hour to rehearse my songs before the bigwigs arrived and she wasn't familiar with any of them. But she just picked them up and ran with them, just melted into them completely. Just like a snowflake into a glass of water. When we did 'Lover, don't leave' it just blew me away—the emotion, the depth and musical knowledge she brought to it. I thought, shit I should be so good! Her voice was just so expressive for one so young. You just can't explain something like that. I mean, I could spin out all kinds of metaphors and stuff, but nothing will do justice to the way her voice soared and dived and broke in all the right places. It was straight from hell that voice. Broke your heart into a million trillion pieces to listen to it.

And then set the devil on your tail, because god help you, you wanted more. I was thinking all these things as I rehearsed with her. I seriously thought about asking her to join my band. Christ knows as what because I already had a guitarist and I play the guitar, too, and obviously I'm the singer, but she just had that quality that you knew you'd just kick yourself if you passed on it. In the end, I didn't ask her. I mean, she was a total nightmare with the vomiting and the wigging. I mean, there had to be something seriously wrong with somebody like that. Really, I should've just taken care of my Memphis business and gone, but they were really comfortable jeans. I rang Scott. It was 4:15pm so I knew he'd be working on his songs and wouldn't come to the phone. This guy is a real piece of work. I don't know. He was signed years ago, puts out one really great record, tours in fits and starts then can't get it together enough for the second one. Ok, so he had a lot to deal with. What with his background coming out to haunt him the way it did. Who could know that would happen? Everyone freaking out about his late father, who he never even knew, and how much he looked and sounded like him. Anyone would hate that. Even if they loved their father and grew up with him, the way I did. Everyone in Memphis tried to be real careful about not mentioning his father, they knew he just wanted to break free from all of that and tried to be considerate of his feelings. I liked Scott as much as anyone did, you know, but sometimes the whole thing of him just irritated the hell out of me.

Anyway, I figured I'd just ring and leave a message concerning the return of my jeans.

"Hey Scott," I said, as the machine clicked on. "I'm back. Umm . . . I'm just ringing about my jeans . . . you know, the ones Isabelle came home wearing that day after the whole sightseeing thing . . . " Isabelle picked up, just as I was about to hang up.

"Ryan," she said. I could hear Scott behind her going over and over a really cool chord sequence. Her voice sounded so young. After all the New York Babes, it put me in mind of nursery school, I mean, in New York everyone sounds so sultry and experienced. All she said was "Ryan," but I could imagine her crying for her bottle.

"So, New York was good, then?" she said into the dead air.

"Oh. Yeah. Yeah, it was ok."

"You signed with Clone, then?"

"Yep. Yeah, I did."

"I'm sorry," she said.

"I'm sorry?" Because I signed with Clone, because New York was good and I was leaving and she would miss me? I lit myself a cigarette and inhaled deep and hard to rid myself of my stupid, unwanted thoughts. She wasn't even my type.

"For spitting up all over you and wigging out that day before you went away."

"Oh. Forget it," I said, as if I had already.

fiction | **CLINT GREAGEN**

ON THE HORIZON

JIMMY WOKE UP to the sound of his mother starting the washing machine. He got dressed as quickly as he could and ran out to put on his gumboots. His mother was hanging out the clothes she'd washed the night before.

"I've got a job for you Jimmy," she said. "One of the hens is laying, so we've gotta look after her."

"Which one?" Jimmy asked, running to the basket and handing her a pair of his father's overalls.

"The one that's been clucky lately. One of the other chooks is harassing her."

Jimmy nodded and held up the legs as his mother pegged the straps to the line. "You know the big chook? She's been trying to get to the eggs. You've got to check in every now and then to make sure she's not getting in there and pecking at them. Can you do that for me?"

Jimmy looked in the direction of the far paddock. He could hear his father in the tractor, dropping hay to the cattle.

"Can you do that for me?" she asked again. "Just check in every now and then."

He nodded, watched the legs of the overalls whip in the breeze and headed out to the chook shed.

UP TO THAT POINT, Jimmy had only ever known of his father hitting his mother twice and he was too young at that stage to consider that it had happened more than that. What he did see often was his father's temper. The first time he'd raised his hand to hit Ellen was following the day Jimmy had first gone out to watch his father and a labourer carting hay. He'd spent most of the day sitting high in the trailer of the tractor watching his father take it in turns with the other man. One would drive as the other would stack the hay. When they got to the hay shed, they would both get out and one would throw the hay from the trailer to the stack while the other packed it in place.

At the end of the day, just as it was getting dark, Barry's labourer accidentally backed the trailer into the stack. First, only a few bales had fallen down but as he pulled the trailer away, almost half of the bales they'd been stacking that day fell into piles on the ground.

Jimmy knew that his father would be angry. He watched him swearing and yelling out instructions. He watched his face change colour and his forearms stiffen his fingers into large fists. On the way back home through the paddocks, Jimmy stayed as quiet as he could.

When they got back, the smell of roast chicken was hanging heavily in the kitchen. Jimmy's mother was over the sink washing dishes and keeping an eye on the gravy on the stove. His father threw his hat at the wall, opened the fridge and took a drink from it. When he closed it, everything on top rattled and moved. When Ellen asked him what was wrong he started again with the yelling and swearing. She asked him to watch his language in front of Jimmy and that's when he lifted his hand and smacked her hard enough that she spun around and landed against the sink.

After that Jimmy watched his father sit down at the table as his mother stood up straight and started dishing up their dinner with her lips pursed together on one side.

WHEN ELLEN WALKED OUT just before noon, she saw across the paddock that Jimmy was heading towards her. His head was hanging down, lolling with each footstep and under his left arm he was carrying something white and round. As they approached each other, Ellen could see that it was a

chicken, its neck bent just before its wings at an unhealthy angle.

"What'd you do Jimmy?" she asked, bringing her hand to her brow.

Jimmy stood before her, his head still down, his chin pressed into his chest. "It wouldn't stop getting at the eggs," he said.

For a moment Ellen said nothing. The chicken was obviously dead, but she couldn't imagine how a 6-year-old boy had come to the decision that it was better to end a life than disobey her instructions.

When he finally looked up, it was with tears in his eyes and an expression that seemed to be searching for her frame of mind, like a dog with its legs bent to the ground in the expectation that it might be kicked.

"How did you do it?" she asked.

Jimmy shrugged.

"How did you get it to stay still? How did you pick up the axe?"

Jimmy shrugged again.

Ellen saw him looking past her towards the house. She turned around to see Barry walking towards them.

"What happened to the chook?" he asked.

Jimmy took a step back. "It wouldn't stop getting at the eggs."

Barry took the chicken and held it in front of his face, up towards the sun like it was an x-ray. He turned it to a better angle to see the cut that went halfway through its neck. A smile spread across his face and he looked at Ellen with a delight in his eyes that she hadn't seen since they'd watched one midget after the other hop out of the tiny car at the visiting circus. He dropped the chicken to the ground and bent over with his hands on his knees and started laughing. It was a laughter that took up so much energy his whole body seemed like it would have to shut down to sustain it. Every outward breath was expelled with so much force that only a fading wheezing sound could be heard before his next intake of air.

Jimmy knelt down and poked the chicken in the stomach with his finger. In an attempt to stop himself from crying, his face was looking as choked up and as red as his father's.

Ellen knelt down with him. "How did you lift the axe?" she asked. She placed a hand under his chin and directed his gaze to hers. "How did you get it to lie still?"

Barry regained some composure and rustled Jimmy's hair. "He's a real farmer this one," he laughed. "You killed the one for the many. Good boy," he said, and then started laughing again.

THE SECOND TIME Jimmy had known of his father hitting his mother was during the dry spell that they'd had the year before. Barry had spent two weeks looking at the sky. It was nearly always blue. Sometimes it did cloud over but it always managed to pass on without delivering a drop. Jimmy would follow him out into the paddocks and watch him tackle the day's chores. He was always looking up. Every few minutes, he'd look up towards the sky, take off his hat and rub the sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt. Then both hands would go to his hips, he'd shake his head, put his hat back on and keep working.

Jimmy prayed for rain that summer. He worried about what would happen if his father didn't get what he wanted. Every time he stopped and took off his hat, Jimmy would find himself looking up to the sky with him, locking his eyes on any wisp of cloud he could find, or if there were no clouds—the horizon.

That evening they found several more sheep that had died from dehydration behind the row of pine trees in the far paddock. They were bloated and stiff. Their mouths had peeled open and stuck tight over dried gums and the crows had already taken their eyes. Jimmy watched his father kick the ground. Then he watched him kick it again. He had tested the earth, as he'd done all summer, and all it had offered was dust. Jimmy didn't see his father hit his mother that night. He saw the hand come back but he turned away to register nothing but a loud crack.

Later, in front of the television, Jimmy heard the weather reporter predict rain as his mother folded the washing. For a moment, he watched his father as he slept on the couch, noting how the skin had relaxed, stretching away from any expression, the mouth wide open, the eyes shut.

JIMMY RUBBED his hand over the part of the chicken that hadn't been stained by blood and whispered something.

"Did he say sorry?" Barry asked.

Ellen tried to look him in the eyes again. "It's okay Jimmy. You did your best. It's just a silly old chook."

Jimmy stood, straightened his arms out by his side and said, "No."

"A silly old chook," Ellen said again. "You've seen your father kill lots of them."

Jimmy started running towards the chook shed. He pulled the gate open and ran inside. Ellen put her hand to her chest and Barry stopped laughing. "What's he doing?" Ellen asked.

Barry ran as quickly as he could to the shed and pushed the gate open. Jimmy had lifted the lid on the chicken coop and was trying to push the laying chook out of the way. It kept pecking at his hand and he had to cry louder to rouse the courage to push on. Finally it clucked and exited the coop, leaving the eggs exposed to Jimmy's hand.

"What're you doing Jimmy?" Barry asked, taking the few steps into the pen.

Jimmy lifted an egg in his hand and held it towards his father. "They made me kill her," he yelled out.

"He's going to smash it, Barry," Ellen said, twisting the ring on her finger.

Barry made a swipe at Jimmy's hand to save the egg, but there was only a small space from Jimmy's arm to the ground below and before there was any chance to stop him he had smashed it down as hard as he could.

"Jimmy!" Barry yelled.

"He'll try to get another one Barry," Ellen said.

Jimmy reached inside the coop but Barry picked him up by the waist just as his fingers were bearing down on another egg. "Get out with ya," he yelled, dropping him outside the pen. "Get on inside the house."

Barry closed the lid and walked outside the pen. He stood with Ellen and watched as Jimmy disappeared through the fence into the back yard of the house. Then it struck him again and he was laughing, just as hard as before.

That night, Jimmy and Barry were sitting at the table, eating dessert. Ellen stood over the sink, plucking the rest of the feathers that Barry had missed, from the recently slaughtered chicken. "I still can't work it out, you know," she said.

"What's that?" Barry asked.

Ellen stopped for a minute and looked out at the clothesline. "How he got the chicken to stay still and how he raised the axe."

"Chooks'll do that Ellen," he said. "When they're clucky, if you lay them down and touch their back, they'll just stay there."

Ellen nodded to herself and looked briefly at Jimmy who was poking his ice-cream with the side of his spoon. "Well how'd he . . . "

"I'd say he raised the axe with both hands and let it fall of its own weight," Barry chuckled. "That's why he only got halfway through it." He finished his dessert and dropped the spoon into the bowl. Ellen walked over and took it to the sink. Barry sat back in his chair. "Chooks'll do that sometimes Ellen," he said. "Sometimes, they'll just lay there and . . . " He brought the edge of his hand down onto his palm, causing a loud slapping sound that made Jimmy look up at Ellen with a jolt. She was nodding to herself. The chicken was looking clean, plucked and gutted beside her.

As Jimmy watched, she turned the tap on so that the water trickled slowly over her hands, dripping the last of the stubborn feathers from her fingers into the sink.

UP TO THAT POINT, Jimmy had only ever known of his father hitting his mother twice and he was too young at that stage to consider that it had happened more than that. A week after he'd killed his first chicken, Jimmy followed his father as he carried a chopping block made from a tree stump out to the chook pen. Jimmy carried one of his father's smaller axes.

The chicks had hatched and Jimmy was receiving a lot of praise for his role in looking after the eggs. Soon they would have several more laying chickens and this meant they could kill a few for dinner in the coming weeks.

Barry placed the block of wood in the middle of the pen and asked Jimmy to grab one of the chickens and bring it over. As Jimmy pushed a group of them towards the corner they clucked and flapped their wings hysterically. Feathers flew everywhere as they fought each other to avoid Jimmy's grasp. When Jimmy brought a chicken back, his father placed it on the block and held it steady.

"Pick up the axe Jimmy," he said.

Jimmy did as he was told and looked at the chicken that had suddenly become more docile.

"Now place one hand a little higher than the other. Line the axe over her neck about here."

Jimmy made sure he paid close attention to where his father was pointing.

"Bring it up slowly, just about up to your shoulders and when you bring it down, sink your knees a little. You have to make sure you get through it in one chop."

Jimmy stood over the chicken, the axe poised above it. It was lighter than the other one but still heavy enough to make his arms shake slightly. He looked at his father's smiling face, then back at the chicken's neck and gritted his teeth. Then he brought the axe down, following his father's instructions as best as he possibly could.

Demographic Manifesto

for David Prater

embryo—12 years

You will look out from behind steel fences when you are, a) dwelling in your nation of origin; or, b) applying for the sun to shine on you from a different direction. Subset 'a' will be permitted to go home at 6.00 pm.

12—30

You will be responsible for making hamburgers and/or increasing the gross in the national or multinational product. You will purchase coloured sunglasses and (while grossing fast foods or other products) you will flip them onto your forehead. You will set your sights lower for the weekend when you will fry your brains on designer genes.

30—50

You will key a set of numbers of your choice into the company of your choice, chosen from a closed list of companies owned by subsets of companies in the list who will also provide the aforementioned numbers. You will not be required to make hamburgers, but you will be responsible for making the requirement for hamburgers and/or coloured sunglasses.

Alternatively, you can choose to be alternative. You'll be permitted to enjoy the nation's gross products, but will be also allowed to wonder whether you are. This will fry your brain—despite designer genes.

50—70

You will tow caravans at slow speeds on all available roads. You must not apply for a number beyond the numbers you have accumulated during 30—50. Any hats thrown into the ring must be left to collect dust until after 6.00 pm. You must be seen only in warm climates wearing large shorts.

70+

You must lie in bed and press red buttons if still alive. If not, the pressing will be conducted on your behalf. Your need for assistance with breathing and other rudimentary tasks will place strain on the gross nationals. However, they must accept you as a product. Take any complaints the gross nationals make about your alleged non-production to the alternatives.

You will look out from behind brick fences while only the finest quality clouds drift past your view. Speaking will not be permitted, however grunting will be optional.

PAUL MITCHELL

fiction | **MICHAEL WILDING**

AMAZING THINGS

WINTER IN SYDNEY can be a time of clear skies, crisp air, gentle warming sun, the skies a cloudless blue, the air free of the humidity of summer, the sun no longer savage and scorching. Much like an English summer. But it can also be rainy, wind-swept, grey and chill, a cloud cover blanking out the sun and sky, blanking out distances to an omni-present grey, rain-sodden haze. Again, much like an English summer. And because no one admitted that winters could be cold and wet and long, provision was not made for them. Indeed, such provisions that had once been made had been rejected. Fireplaces had been boarded over, chimney stacks demolished, doors removed from their hinges—whether for some ramshackle open-plan, high summer living, desperately to get the heavy air to circulate, or to burn for barbecues in the backyard, how would you ever know? The shops offered little help. "Melbourne is the place for good winter clothes, stylish overcoats, swish raincoats," people would say, the sort of people who affected to know, young ladies in publishing or public relations. But who would fly to Melbourne just to buy an overcoat or raincoat? "Next time you're on leave in England bring me back a Marks and Spencers' sweater." Here was the land of merino wool, of wool bales and wool stores and wool surplus and we sent back to England for woollen sweaters. While shivering through the winter, unsweatered, uncoated, wet without raincoats. It was just such a winter with Valda. Rain foaming down gutters and bursting back out of manhole covers, rain breaking up the surface of the roads, collecting in puddles in the backyards, dripping through the broken gutterings, breaking through the iron roof and trickling down the walls and through the ceilings.

I realise now that this is why my tweed jacket featured so much in her diatribes. To me it was just something I still fortunately preserved and wore in an attempt to keep warm. But to Valda it was a symbol, a portmanteau representation of everything that she resisted. It stood for class and authority and conservatism and repression and masculinity and colonial oppression and English superiority and solicitors and clergymen and doctors and private-school masters and publishers and pipe-smoking intellectuals and cosiness and warmth and privilege and security and wealth and middle-class suburbs and golf courses and afternoon teas and Agatha Christie detective stories and cricket matches and confidence and assurance, an immense thesaurus of the enemy. Later it would feature largely in the things she wrote: or it seemed to, in the things she from time to time showed me, amidst the Indian bedspreads and Indonesian batiks, sudden staccato diatribes stabbed out in a burst of machine-gun fire from her Olivetti portable typewriter. And the leather patches to preserve its poor worn elbows, worn through with leaning on Bodley's desks, days and evenings in the upper reading room as the Oxford rain drizzled down over the stones and spires of privilege and the encrusted past, the patches I had found a migrant cobbler to sew on to extend the jacket's life, these particularly provoked her wrath. It was not my fault that in Melbourne they sold new jackets with leather patches already attached. If that

was the world of the poet Prickett and other such self-satisfiedly self-proclaimed superior souls, it was no more loved or respected by me than by her. If it was an image from bad British movies, it was not one I had ever seen, my proletarian childhood being one in which going to the pictures was prohibited, and if that was the sort of thing she saw when sneaking off with boys to matinees, then that was her choice and her problem, not mine. But it became mine, as my poor old jacket attracted the rage of her heat-seeking missiles, along with socks the refusal of whose washing she loudly proclaimed, sock-washing, or rather its refusal, becoming another major icon in the catalogue of invective alongside the tweed jacket in the things she poured out. While the rain poured down, beating on the iron roof of the flimsy cottage, dripping ominously down the chimney behind the boarded-up fireplace. "A house without a fire is like a body without a soul," Kim would say. Tramping along the rainswept beaches with him collecting driftwood to dry out and burn, the sea as leaden a grey as the sky, the line of their merger with each other indeterminate, imperceptible. "Why do you mess around with people like that, you can do better than that, surely?" he would say. He was like Joe on the lack of feminine beauty in our world. Was it a matter of concern, of aesthetics, of class, you deserve a higher class of partner, richer and more beautiful? Or was it a disgust with womankind altogether, why do you mess around with such, why do you need women? The answer, in part, of course, was class. It was all there in her rage at the tweed jacket, though monstrously distorted and confused. But it was a matter of class identification. That was what I thought we shared. Or what I projected.

And so we come to class, the English disease. And though obscured in Australia, it was nonetheless present. Not strident. The democratic veneer was such that you did not feel endlessly judged in every restaurant, at every bar, with every purchase. No doubt judging went on, but it was more covert. It was not like the offensiveness and insolence of England where every phoneme of your accent, every thread of your garment was being pored over, microscopic examination of education, region, blood line, family, connections.

But to believe that this brave new world was free of all that was to be deeply in error. The girls whose alleged lack of beauty so distressed Joe down at the pub had for the most part all been to expensive private schools. I hesitate to write 'the best schools' because that would be to surrender to their value system, but that was how they saw it. Bohemia, as ever, recruited from the privileged bourgeois. The girls especially. It was their rebellion, their seeking out of rough trade. Valda was acutely aware of this. She stood to one side in disdain, sniffing sardonically at their slumming. She could drape her room in shawls and batiks, but those were all cheap, found at stray stalls in the markets, at opportunity shops, amidst the secondhand discards sold at St Vincent de Paul's. Whereas the strapping private-school girls wore their worn and threadbare slumming clothes with all the confidence of their expensive labels, bought their rounds like a man because they could always go back to mummy or daddy and get cashed up again.

So though she might be drinking down at the Forth and Clyde on a Saturday afternoon, standing out on the pavement across from the old, disused dry dock, she would more likely be talking to one of the bikies who drank there, or one of the daughters of one of the unemployed dock-workers still in the suburb. From the libertarians she felt excluded. And was. And this was the sense of exclusion I was drawn to, something known and lived with for a lifetime. Nurtured even. That in the end was the danger, it was your familiar so you fed it, it became the rationale of your everyday behaviour, your style, your ideology. By coming to Australia I had given myself a choice, a new possibility. Here, unknown, without background, unplaced except for that comfortable, privileged job, I could live as if the world were mine, or at least open to me. I did not have to cultivate exclusion. I could slip into it readily enough. It was always available in the dark hours, waking up hung-over, dehydrated, depressed, and surveying

the wasteland of it all; how have I got to this hopeless point, by ostracism, by exclusion, by my fate as a proletarian? And waking to cold, wet, English-style mornings could readily encourage the mood. But in practice it was optional. It was an indulgence to slide back into, and a sunny day and a clear sky and an acceptance by a literary quarterly could disperse all that, so easily. But for Valda it became less an option, it became a recurrent condition.

THEN, THOUGH, in those early years, that windy, watery winter, it was a position I could latch onto. It was what we had in common. Literary ambitions, sexual adventures, shared joints, everybody had that, offered that, participated in that. Occasionally movie-making rather than literary ambitions, less often painting or music in the world we knew, sometimes just sensitive connoisseurship or docile groupiedom. But class resentment, that was not part of the notation, that was what we could uniquely share.

So I would take off the tweed jacket, this is not me, here is the real me, shivering in my sweater before the inadequate single bar of the electric radiator.

"So get into bed if you're cold."

So we would get into bed and shiver between the sheets as the rain poured through the rusted guttering and slid down the walls and drip drip dripped down the blocked drain pipes. And I would try to excavate the details of her life, layer upon layer, prizing out the shards and shattered fragments; for wasn't that what all these encounters and engagements, these couplings and conjunctions were about, vicariously experiencing other lives, the frissons of fear and fascination, discovery and disbelief, the pursuit of the mystery of how to be, what else there was, what you had missed, what the other had known, until it all became too painful?

It all, or a lot of it, depends on point of view. To Valda I was initially, if not always, a representative of the other with that tweed jacket and a university lectureship. For a while she was working in a bookshop in town, not just any bookshop but the shop that at that moment was the foremost literary bookshop, run by a former ship's captain and his wife. The captain used to run cargoes of cane down the Queensland coast, sugar cane, not the beating sort, and his shop was stacked with similarly enticing allurements, recent remainders from the Americas, direct imports from the United Kingdom of the rarer literary titles. It was a cargo culture in those days, perhaps still is though less explicitly so, now there is less variety of cargo anywhere but it has all penetrated everywhere, the same ten publishing conglomerates, the same five car manufacturers, the same three basic food suppliers. Amidst the inadequate sameness of the old colonial bookstores, Abbeys was a place of excitement and discovery. It attracted the poets like wasps to a sugar press, not something the coastal captain always appreciated. One time he rang up the books editor of the old daily paper, flagship of a fading provincial empire, to complain that one of their reviewers had been stealing books and had run out of the shop when they tried to apprehend him. That was Martin, in dispute with his publisher, stealing copies of his own book of poems to present to friends, or maybe to supply to reviewers. Had Valda been working there that day without doubt she would have encouraged him. "Hey, Martin, here, take these too, stick them up your jumper, go on." Maybe she was, maybe she did. But when some wretched academic approached her and asked did they give a discount on purchases to university teachers, she fixed him with a contemptuous eye and a scathing tongue. "I think lecturers get away with enough already without giving them discounts as well," she snarled. Maybe it was the sea captain's policy, no discounts, though at that time most shops offered this privilege, this enticement.

But it was just such privileges that she resented and rejected. I came in for a lot of resentment and rejection. For Joe, privilege had always been an attraction. He found it endlessly fascinating, noted it with an anthropological enthusiasm and approved it without any worries about lack of academic objectivity. After all, he was not an academic, and his

anthropologicalism was something he had acquired less from disinterested study than for the targeting of privilege and status. There was never any need with Joe to justify my job, its lack of defined hours, its lack of defined objectives, its generous and trusting provision of time and facilities in which to think and write, features of an age now passed. But with Valda, as she left on an early morning bus to go and sell stupid romances and idiotic thrillers to stupid and idiotic people, I was ever on the defensive. And when she announced, "I reckon you've got it easy," I had difficulty in succinct denial before she had left, all sniffs and tight lips.

And to say, I too am a child of the proletariat, I knew deprivation, I have experienced struggle, I suffered exclusions, found no responsive warmth in her. Who likes to be labelled a proletarian anyway? It is something one may admit to grandly, when free of it. But to have someone insisting that they like you are the lowest of the low, the oppressed of the earth, the underprivileged, rejected and despised of humankind, does not warm you to them. She was not responsive to these appeals of class solidarity. She had only contempt for the political. She took no sides on any of the issues. To her they were all a vast irrelevance, the unappetising cold porridge served up by the daily press, the Sydney Morning Sickness as she called it, and not worth consideration. She had no wish to fly a banner of proletarian art, she found all that stuff, insofar as it could ever be found in those Cold War years, uninteresting. She had no commitment to a world of solid, stolid workers. She had slipped through that, found it unimaginative, unexciting, and had run off to a lumpen world of bikies and causeless rebels, down and out musicians, junkies, prostitutes, pimps, dealers. Or so her stories proclaimed.

The stories were of course less stories than things, they had that indeterminacy of things, they floated there with an undoubted specificity but unanchored in consequence or cause, never located that minutely in time or space as a realist treatment might have required. I could read the mood but the detail, the why, how did it happen, was it true, what did you do next, none of this was provided. Nor was it in any later inquiries. Inquisitions. "What's this then, an inquisition?" she would say, sitting on the bed, painting her toenails, while the rain crashed down on the iron roof and sheet lightning illuminated the sodden yard. And realism, after all, was something we had all given up; Joe on political grounds because of its distasteful association with the left rather than from any especial attraction to the new, the avant-garde, the experimental that had seduced me. And Valda, Valda had never been at all interested in it. Her things were expressions of emotions, of states of mind, and if they touched on the materials and settings of the realist tradition, that was simply because that had been a life she had lived, not an aesthetic or political choice.

But what had she lived? The rape by bikies, was that felt life or empathetic evocation? The pimp with his feet up sharing a joint with his girl before sending her out onto the street, was that drawn from the life, and from a life lived, or observed? The cocaine dealer in his chill, white, high-rise apartment, the girl he has picked up for a week, was that the girl I spent my nights with? It could have seemed archetypically literary, one of those English novels of exotica, the sensitive literary young chap, posted abroad, falling in love with some girl from a seedy cabaret, or seen on her evening beat round the red-light district, memories of old Berlin or Athens or Alexandria or Shanghai. But that had already been written, written over and over again. And that was not a world I was lovingly in pursuit of, avidly recording in notebooks of the time, savouring to write up in the convenient cottage of some further exile. It might have appealed more to Joe, whose ideology of all transactions as cash transactions had encouraged, or rationalised, exploration of the local brothels. But I wanted none of it. "If you want some squeaky clean virgin fresh off the shelf, why don't you go out and buy one?" Valda would say. "She'll wash your socks for you. She'll sew your leather patches on. Go on, piss off, don't hang around here asking me all those stupid questions, go out and buy yourself one."

And the things would be packed away in their worn and battered cardboard suitcase and stuffed back beneath the bed, ticking away all too audibly, in syncopation with the dripping down-pipes and broken guttering, waiting through the cold black night for their next detonation.

"You want to get out there and live. How're you ever going to write anything if you don't live? Look at you, what do you know? Nothing but books. Books isn't what it's about. You've got to get down there in the gutter and experience things."

"The gutter isn't the only place to experience things."

"You reckon? You reckon that? Is that what you reckon?"

"Yes."

"We'll see then, won't we? Or perhaps we won't. Perhaps we won't ever see anything at all, will we?"

"Perhaps not."

"Perhaps not," he says. "Perhaps not. They ought to put that on your tombstone. That would be perfect. That would say it all. Perhaps not."

IT WAS NOT ALL rain and recrimination. There were good times. How easy it is to forget them in recollecting the others. But there were sunny days when we ventured out, stood on the pavement outside the Forth and Clyde and sunned ourselves. We would live. I would live. Real life, a life of literature. Enough of this mouldering away in the academy, enough of these laborious studies, enough of criticism and analysis, enough of history and the past, we would live now in the present, throw in the job and go to South America. I had always wanted to go to South America. Ozzie Cambridge, our man of letters, was horrified. He came up to me as I went to order more drinks, and took me aside to a darkened corner. "You're not really going to do that?" he asked. "Live," I said, "live, I'm going to live." "But you need something to live on. You're not going to give up the university? Are you?" "Why not?" I asked. Did I hear a note of eagerness in his question? He probably had intimations of his own imminent and involuntary departure. Not long after the university gave him up and he was out there if not on the street certainly grubbing a living in Grub Street. The issue may have been sensitive to him, he may have begun to suspect that three years on a research scholarship and not a word of research to show for it might have brought him to the end of a good thing. There was no doubt he saw it as a good thing. His concern at my talking of giving it up was genuine. Joe likewise never suggested it was something to give up, though Joe might have believed or hoped it was damaging to the creative imagination. But neither of them believed that institutions were to be rejected: they always valued them as one of the means to survival.

Survival was not one of Valda's terms. Survival sounded like calculation and calculation like compromise and compromise like defeat and defeat was the death of the spirit. For her life was the grand gesture of rejection, refuse life before it refused you.

THERE WERE OTHER grand gestures, likewise unfulfilled.

"I nearly came by the other night," said Joe. He was on his own. The bars were all shut. His women had all rejected him. His boys too.

"I put a bottle of bourbon in my pocket and set off to beat on your door."

"You should have," I said, always one for company.

"I thought I might not have been welcome."

"You'd have been welcome."

"Oh," he said.

"That makes it less appealing?"

"In a way," he agreed. "I was not looking for welcome. I was in a state of rejection."

"We could have rejected you."

"I wanted to beat on your door and demand you come out and drink with me."

"In the gutter?"

"I had other places than the gutter in mind. I felt your new friend already had you in the gutter. I wanted to retrieve you from it."

"But in the end you decided to leave me there."

"As it turned out I didn't know where your

house was."

"It's not my house."

"That could be why I didn't know where it was."

I suppose I could have given him the address then, but didn't. There were already enough blows beating against our fragile walls, from within as much as without.

"Some other time," I suggested.

"There is only ever one time," he said sententiously. "And if we miss that time we miss it forever."

"So that's why you didn't come?"

"I felt the drunken writer beating on the door was too much a literary cliché."

"That's never stopped you before," I said. "Certainly not in your writing."

I cannot recall his reply. Perhaps there was no reply. Perhaps I did not say that. Already too much had been said between Valda and me. Perhaps I was learning discretion. Though I doubt that.

As for Joe's projected visit, I was rather saddened he had not come. It might have cheered up a winter evening, diverted us momentarily from our destructive dissections of each other. Or was that idiocy?

Wouldn't Joe's presence only have added to the tensions? Almost certainly yes. But in absence, in its fortunate unfulfilment, I regretted his non-arrival. I would have liked that mark of his interest, an incident for our memoirs, an incident, indeed, for our fictions. Well, nothing to stop you writing it, he would no doubt say. But it is not only a matter of truth, a matter of not commemorating what never occurred. It is also a matter of judgement, of discrimination. As Joe himself saw in aborting the incident, it belonged too much to literary cliché. So he left us undisturbed to wallow in our no less over-familiar clichés of fear and suspicion and jealousies and resentments, of life and what it was and what it wasn't and what one knew or never could know about what it really was.

ONE MEMORY of the tortures we inflicted on each other will suffice as representative. Nothing is to be gained from a loving, languid, leisured recollection of them all. And they were perhaps not consciously designed as tortures. Who knows what we intended, who knows what drove us on? Desires supposedly, but desires for what? "We walk over the same ground again and again until it speaks to us," said Joe. He claimed to have been reading Freud. Perhaps.

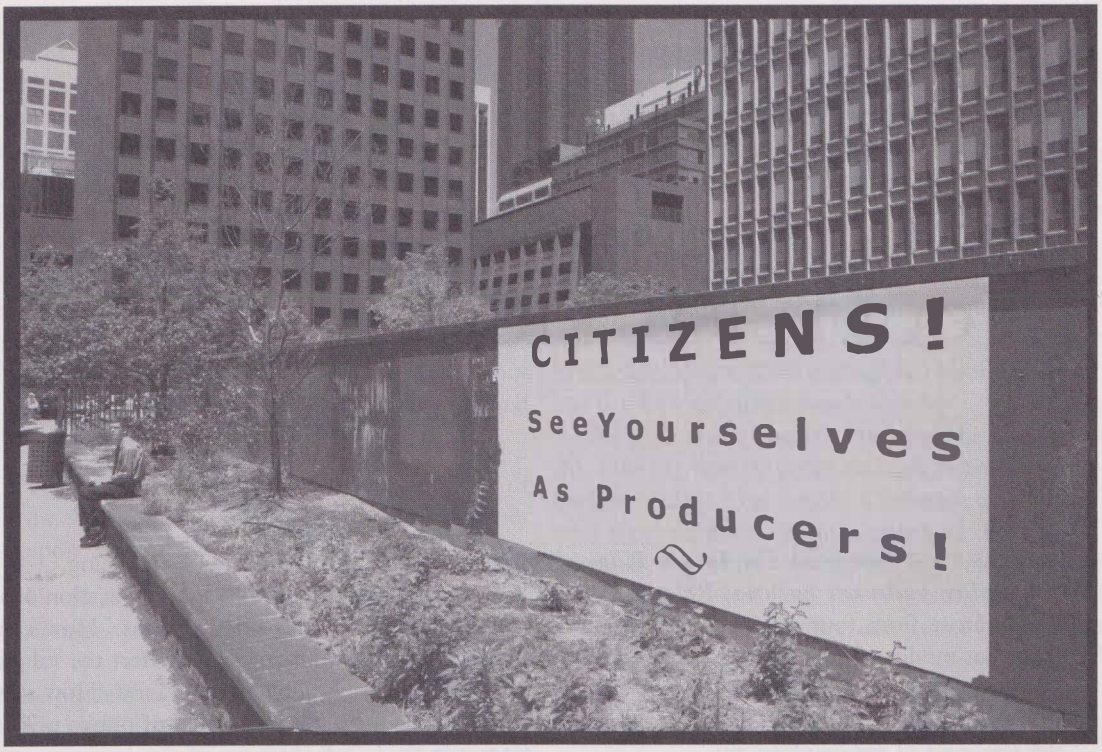
As well as the Maltese rooming house and the rickety smugglers' cottage, there was another place, single storied, set back in a block somewhere in Balmain, constructed of some man-made substance, some carcinogenic asbestos compound or some by-product of sugar-cane, masonite or some such. It was cold and it tilted and when I went round Balmain to indicate the literary associations of streets and houses to Kirkpatrick the antiquary, not so long ago, it had gone. I could not remember precisely where it had been, its site now buried beneath post-modern mews' and millennial townhouses. It is this cold, unfeeling house I remember, in its sea of clay and puddles and unkempt grass, and one of the football-jersey-wearing heavies she shared it with meeting me outside. Valda wasn't there. She might have been in the bookshop, she might have stormed off. "We had a bit of trouble last night," he said. She had gone down to the Mandarin club, a gambling joint in Chinatown. Gambling was not characteristic of her. Money had never been a goal. She had learned to get by, with infinite complaints, and never showed any desire to acquire great riches. That was all part of those worlds she despised. But the Mandarin club, with whatever tawdry exoticism it might have been associated, offered the lure of some seedy exploration. And I, where had I been, off somewhere with some well-bred young lady in publishing, screwing in some expensive apartment on one of the smarter reaches of the harbour? This was reprisal time, clearly, and who began it, what began it, when it began I do not remember. Such a blank might suggest my own responsibility. But then responsibility was something Valda despised, wasn't it, all that middle-class moralising business? Had I taken her at her word? I think not, I think I knew enough not to believe her word. Was I, for all my proletarian bonding, one-sided as it was, register-

ing a chill fear of the gutter, was I reaching out to check the competing demands of wealth and status and privilege?

And was I so immersed in such a cocoon of questions, was that the literary appeal, that indecision and qualification and minute dissection of motive learned from the world of George Eliot and Henry James that had once seemed so central, so necessary, so absolute? The one surety, or near surety, is that Valda had no such preoccupations. She went down to the Mandarin club and picked up someone who turned out to be trouble. "He wouldn't leave. Couldn't take a hint. We had to see him off. Fortunately there were a few of us having a drink out the back. Playing cards. After the pub." We sat in the kitchen and drank instant coffee. No-one had any dope. The sun tried a few feeble yellow rays across the trampled grass and treacherous slides of clay. And Valda, Valda, Valda was not there, nor did I know where to go to look for her. Like a cat she had her secret hiding places that she never revealed to anyone.

WE HAD NO word for the sort of writing we were producing in those days. We did not call ourselves postmodern because the term had yet to become current. In the end we were categorised as 'new' writers. Like Valda's use of 'things', there was a certain lack of imaginative creativity in the categorising. But if asked we would probably have said the creativity went into the writing, not the labelling. And did we, anyway, want to be labelled together, Valda and Joe and Sam and Martin and myself? Did we have anything in common beyond being contemporaries? Valda would have been suspicious of any such grouping, of any attempt at self-aggrandisement by the formation of a school. Neither she nor Joe nor Sam were of a co-operative nature, though only Joe was explicitly to celebrate American individualism and the market economy.

But though unlabelled, without manifestoes, the spirit of the times had imposed certain aesthetic preferences on us. We were not much into plot. We stood aside from the ravellings and unravellings of genre fiction. We were less concerned with narrative than with lack of narrative. Metaphor, maybe, or setting, image, mood, the encapsulation of character and moment. Some self-consciousness of formal strategies, some self-reflexive moments in which the fiction demonstrated an awareness of its own structuring. The fag end of a dying modernism still offered an intermittent beacon. So we tended to avoid simple progression. And that after all was concomitant with our lives. This was a summer playground, even if a rainy one. We had escaped from childhood and were now enjoying ourselves. Careers would be made from our talents, not from any further laborious years of training and strategy. Joe may have had a strategy. But the only world view I heard him utter in those days was his advocacy of *volupté*. We lacked *volupté*, he would announce. He would pursue *volupté*. Other times he would go bushwalking. From my perspective, as I no doubt announced to him, it was all an indulgence. There was no sense of heading anywhere. We were where we wanted to be. Bushwalking was not something you did in those days for a destination. The exploring had been done, the route across the Blue Mountains discovered over a century earlier. Bushwalking was a matter of going into the bush and back again, maybe going round in a circle. Working off the hangovers of a heady *volupté*. So progress, development, linear narrative was absent. Things just were and then they ended. And that's how it was with Valda and me. Undoubtedly there were recriminations, resentments. But I have no recollection of things working up to a climax, I have no recollection of the slow, or rapid, unravellings of plot. Probably the ending was already implicit in the beginning. Our sense of inevitability may have led to our comparative lack of concern, or expertise, with narrative. I don't remember. It is tempting to write that it was just one of those things, and to succumb to the temptation in no way undercuts the painfulness of it all. Those things were often very painful.



LOUIS PORTER

THE IDEAS COLLECTED on the following pages are developed from papers and discussions at the Beyond Cultural Policy symposium, hosted by the City of Port Phillip and the Cultural Development Network in July 2003. The symposium explored the potential for governments and organisations to incorporate cultural vitality at the foundations of public policy.

Because it believes that success as an elected council is measured by the richness of the lives of its people, the City of Port Phillip has adopted cultural vitality as one of the four pillars that informs all decision-making. This is a unique and innovative policy position. Planning for the community no longer considers the 'bottom lines' of social, environmental and financial 'sustainability' alone. Instead it is recognised that all issues, from gentrification to street prostitution, public works to public health, have an essential cultural element.

The Cultural Development Network has played a critical role in developing the four-pillars approach to public policy. The Network commissioned Jon Hawkes to write *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning*, a work that informed Port Phillip's four-pillars approach.

The Network is committed to promoting a sustained discussion about the capacity that creative expression of community values has to influence and nurture the resilience, health and well-being of communities. By linking cultural vitality with the engines of public policy the City of Port Phillip and the Cultural Development Network envisage strong, respectful communities that are allowed to achieve their inherent creative and democratic potential.

The following articles include extracts from the Beyond Cultural Policy symposium. For full transcripts and other papers, as well as information about Cultural Vitality visit: <www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/cultural_vitality.html>.

Jon Hawkes's *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* is published by the Cultural Development Network Inc. and Common Ground. Orders to: <www.theHumanities.com>.

The Cultural Development Network will host a national conference in Melbourne on cultural vitality and local government called the 'Fourth Pillar Conference' on 29 & 30 November 2004. See the advertisement opposite or contact the Network on 03 9658 8850 or <judspo@melbourne.vic.gov.au>.

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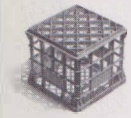


FROM CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE TO CULTURAL RIGHTS

THE IDEAS THAT informed *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* arose from four areas of dissatisfaction with current modes of public policy development:

- the continuing alienation of ordinary people from the processes of public planning;
- the inadequacy of the triangular methodology (economic/environmental/social) currently used as an evaluation tool;
- the confused and counterproductive thinking surrounding 'art and culture';
- the growing popularity, and inappropriateness, of 'cultural policy' development.

These disparate frustrations jelled into the realisation that, if the concept of 'culture' were to be applied in the public policy field in the way that it has been used in the social sciences for at least the past fifty years, then many of the current inadequacies might be overcome. What was needed was to convince decision-makers in local government that active community engagement in cultural development was a key to—indeed the basis of—effective community development. *The Four Pillars* was written to begin addressing this need.

When culture is understood to denote the social production and transmission of values, meaning and purpose and it is recognised that the expression of social goals and aspirations is at the heart of the public planning process, the connection between culture and planning becomes clear. So does the potential for the use of culture as a core element in the mechanisms that facilitate effective public planning.

It is only through the conscious application of a cultural perspective that the questions: 'How can community values find voice, and affect the values of those that make public policy?' and 'How can the values held by the instigators of public policy more effectively reflect those of the communities they serve?' can be effectively answered.

The concept of culture is an invaluable tool that has been largely ignored in attempts to reconfigure how governments plan the future and evaluate the past.

Partly this results from the confusion around definitions of 'culture'. One definition (increasingly recognised as a critical aspect of social and human development) focuses on culture as the community creation of values, meaning and purpose in life. As yet, the public sphere has devised no way of recognising this process within its systems. The alternative view is culture as simply arts and heritage. The tacit acceptance of this definition has marginalised the concept of culture and denied theorists and practitioners an extremely effective tool.

Culture is both integral to and unacknowledged by the new paradigms of public planning, in particular those that emphasise sustainability and well-being as key goals. Without a foundation that expressly includes culture, the new frameworks are bereft of the means of comprehending, let alone implementing, the changes they promote. Culture has to be a separate and 'distinct' reference point. Rather than continuing to focus on the development of a discrete 'cultural policy', a completely new approach needs to be taken.

The emerging focus on issues such as sustainability, wellbeing, community building and civic engagement needs a clear cultural perspective as a basis for successful implementation. I argue for the development of a 'cultural framework' to stand alongside similar social, environmental and economic instruments and to be used to evaluate *all* public policy. Such a framework would address three basic questions:

> What has been the quality of community input into the development of the actual and proposed activities under review?
>
> To what extent are these activities reflective of the values and ways of life of the communities upon which they (will) impact?
>
> Do these activities improve the capacity of communities to act and interact?

I also argue that no policy can be effective unless it is grounded in systems and institutions able to facilitate its implementation. I suggest that the structure of government departments be redesigned to ensure that the primary areas of cultural generation are integrated and coordinated in recognition of their key role in expressing the meaning, identity and purpose of our society and its citizens.

The new governance paradigms and views of what constitutes a healthy and sustainable society would be more effective if cultural vitality were to be included as one of the basic requirements, main conceptual tenets and overriding evaluation streams.

But why choose 'vitality' as the key rather than, for example, authenticity or virtue or diversity? Because no matter how commendable the values of a society may be, they amount to nothing if the society lacks life, vitality, dynamism and democratic public discourse.

Culture springs, first and foremost, from human interaction—the tangible products of these interactions, no matter how wonderful, are ultimately secondary to the daily exchanges between people.

Making culture is a daily public event—not just in schools, in the media, in the 'culture houses', but also in the streets, shops, trains and cafes. By our behaviour are we known—this never-ending public process is a society's signature.

Which is to say that a healthy society has a healthy culture and health is meaningless in the absence of life. Culture is not a pile of artefacts—it is us; the living, breathing sum of us. A sustainable society depends upon a sustainable culture. If a society's culture disintegrates, so will everything else. Vitality is the single most important characteristic of a sustainable culture.

In a vital society, the meaning we make of our lives is something we do together and continually, not an activity to be left to others, no matter how skilled, or representative, they may claim to be. Hiring experts is OK for getting the plumbing fixed, but not for establishing one's identity.

Politicians have begun to bemoan the apathy of the citizenry and to promote ways of re-engaging the body politic. This rhetoric will remain exactly that until they recognise that in an engaged democracy, the ideas they claim to want actually emerge from community debate; from the constant, often fractious and difficult contestation of meaning at the base. A society that lacks forums for the democratic debate of values, meaning and purpose cannot be active, engaged and vital. Understanding the function of culture in our society is the first step towards achieving the liveliness we say we are striving for.

The rhetoric of public life is increasingly spiced with notions of energy—participation, engagement, vitality, vibrancy, activity, innovation and creativity. It is very tempting to be cynical: to believe that all this talk of energy, of voluntarism, of social capital, of community capacity, is merely a plot to reduce government expenditure, to turn public service into private profit. This potential certainly exists, and there are definitely influential individuals and interests that have exactly this goal. But, despite this dark underbelly, I have to believe that we can seize the initiative; that, as the paucity, unfairness and destructiveness of economic rationalism becomes increasingly obvious, we can turn the rhetoric of community building to democratic advantage.

But the citizenry will not re-engage with the business of governance, with politics, unless they believe that this engagement will have an effect; that their contribution will be meaningful. That is, until they feel empowered.

Which is why the notion of rights is so important. I am not naïve enough to believe that saying it makes it real, but I do believe that saying it gives one something to strive for, something by which actions can be called to account, something around which people can gather.

The sort of long-term sustainable social change that is really needed can *only* be achieved through the widespread application of participatory arts activities. Why? Because collaborative creativity is at the foundation of forging identity and purpose. And without these, everything else is spin.

At the very least, if there were to be a formal declaration of cultural rights, we would be able to argue forcefully for an engaged cultural practice at the community level.

We need a formal statement of cultural rights:

as an expression of the fundamental role that culture plays in the existence and maintenance of human society and the right of every human to contribute to and engage with that role;

as a confirmation of culture's unique and essential function in helping us to understand and describe human behaviour, experience and aspirations;

as an underpinning of the cultural perspective;

as the validation of cultural impact to at least an equivalent level of importance as environmental, social and economic impacts;

as the basis for accepting the exercise of creativity as a basic aspect of human life above and beyond its instrumental value in achieving secondary objectives (whether they be economic prosperity or social cohesion).

In 1996, UNESCO declared six rights. These are the right to:

cultural identity and heritage;
identify with a cultural community;
participate in cultural life;
education and training;
information;
participate in cultural policies.

Donald Horne has got it down to three, and has spent years talking them up. The rights he identifies are to:

engage with human cultural heritage;
take part in new intellectual and artistic production;
find one's own forms of expression.

I've reduced it to one. The right to actively participate in the social production of the values and aspirations that inform one's society.

The genuine acceptance and application of this right within the structures of governance, and by those in positions that allow them to influence the methodologies of these structures, would be a positive move towards a democracy that embraces and engages its citizens, their children and those who have come to our land in search of a better life.

The sort of long-term sustainable social change that is really needed can *only* be achieved through the widespread application of participatory arts activities. Why? Because collaborative creativity is at the foundation of forging identity and purpose. And without these, everything else is spin.

The source of this creativity is in the most abundant and fruitful—indeed infinite—resource we have. It's our imaginations. We all have imaginations and the right and responsibility to exercise them. Economic rationalism cannot guarantee a sustainable and healthy world, but we can imagine such a world and our combined creativities will help us to find our way there.

An acceptance of this broad notion of culture will have very real consequences. It will mean:

abandoning a command culture;
applying a cultural perspective to all policy;
declaring and exercising cultural rights;
recognising that creativity is both a universal right and a universal resource;
ensuring that culture is not subsumed by other strategic imperatives.

The conditions in which these necessities can be-

It is very tempting to be cynical: to believe that all this talk of energy, of voluntarism, of social capital, of community capacity, is merely a plot to reduce government expenditure, to turn public service into private profit. But we can seize the initiative; that, as the paucity, unfairness and destructiveness of economic rationalism becomes increasingly obvious, we can turn the rhetoric of community building to democratic advantage.

come reality lie in the mind and in the will. Unless attitudes change, nothing else will. Unless the agents of governance are able to trust in the creative capacity of communities, tangibly commit to democracy, be prepared to devolve control, and go beyond a service delivery model, we will continue to spin in unproductive, and ultimately unsustainable, circles.

Finally, a brief look at some of the obstacles that stand in our way.

LIP SERVICE, TOP-DOWN

Talking the talk is relatively easy; walking the walk is far more difficult. To recognise that all humans have the capacity and the right to make sense; to make their own culture; to engage in navigating their futures is one thing. To act on the basis of this recognition is quite another.

This is particularly so in a society in which we are constantly bombarded with slogans promoting atomised consumerism, political quietism, individualised choice, strong leadership and banalities about what is 'Australian'.

Trusting our fellows is scary, confidence-building is difficult, developing engagement can be thankless, irritating, frustrating and often dangerous. It's easy to understand why politicians and bureaucrats would shy away from rampant democracy. Leadership that fosters engagement rather than acquiescence is hugely challenging.

CONFUSION BETWEEN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONCERNS

Traditionally, cultural affairs have been viewed as a relatively minor part of the social bailiwick. To suggest otherwise is to appear to threaten immense silos of influence and control. In fact, it doesn't. Indeed, it assists in being able to uncover what should be the key concerns of social policy: issues of governance and power relations.

MARGINALISATION OF ART

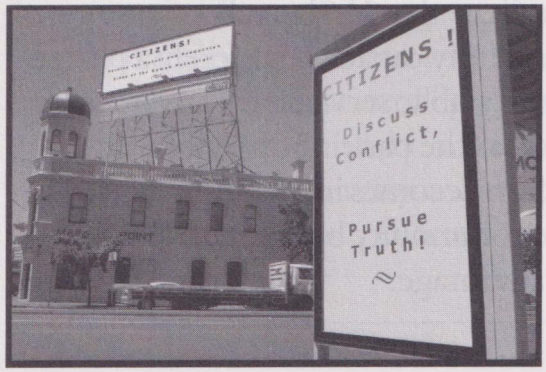
If culture is (far) more than just art, where does that leave the arts? One of the most interesting things that has emerged from the cultural framework debate has been the fear that, if culture embraces all the ways in which we make sense of our place in the world, the arts may be relegated to an even more minor place in the policy pyramid. Not so. As I've said in *The Fourth Pillar*:

A society makes (or discovers) meaning through its arts. In our pursuit of a democracy that really does engage all citizens, that facilitates active participation from the entire spectrum of the body politic, the democratisation of arts practice has to be at the forefront of our strategies.

How can a community develop a conscious, symbolic and effective expression of its own values, meanings and aspirations (that is, culture) without having developed its own creative capacities (that is, arts skills)?

No longer can we be content to leave the creation of meaning to the 'experts'. Yes, it is wonderful to live in a society in which those who choose to devote their entire lives to art are cherished and respected. But this should not diminish our own confidence in making meaning. It should not allow us to become lazy, embarrassed, passive witnesses, silent consumers, mere customers. The new rhetoric is 'engagement'—the first engagement we should have is with arts practice.

Jon Hawkes is author of The Four Pillars of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning, *published by the Cultural Development Network of Victoria and Common Ground Publishing, 2001.*



LOUIS PORTER

cultural vitality | **DONALD HORNE**

BROADENING THE IDEA

Talking about culture without talking about 'culture'

ALTHOUGH THIS SYMPOSIUM is concerned with cultural vitality in local government areas, I'm not going to begin by defining culture. Instead, I'll flash back briefly to the late 1930s when I was a high-school boy in Sydney. I want to show how life in Australia now is more openly vivacious, varied and gregarious than could, back then, have been believed possible.

If you had wanted to cultivate a sense of *curiosity* and *wonder* back then (and I see these as two constituents of cultural vitality) you had to find it for yourself. In my last year at high school, in 1938, I found my main chance in fortnightly forty-minute pilgrimages each way by train to the Sydney Municipal Library, when I would take in one armful of books and exchange it for a fresh armful to take back home. The Municipal Library was the only worthwhile public lending library in all of Sydney. (And, incidentally, there wasn't anyone around when I was a schoolboy with whom I could discuss what I was reading.) When it came to imagining the future, in 1936–7, I found hope in devotional reading of *The Daily Telegraph*—then Sydney's loudest voice of liberal-humanism. Was it really true, I would wonder with the *Telegraph*, that one day there would be no more censorship? no more prejudices holding back science? no more scandalous treatment of the Aborigines? Was it possible that some day prudery on the beaches might go? That there might be films for schools? or a symphony orchestra? or a forty-hour week? or respect for modern art? Might it even become legal to serve light wines with meals in restaurants? Was it imaginable that some day we might have something like 'the Continental Sunday', with shops, hotels and sportsgrounds open on the Sabbath? Would slums be abolished? Would there really be music concerts for children? or training for unskilled workers? or an opening-out of art to the people?

Now for some other good words and phrases lying around that can resonate better if you're talking about cultural vitality. I've already mentioned 'curiosity' and 'wonder'. I'll suggest two more, both out of my own past: *liberal humanism* and *a pluralist society*.

When I was choosing books from all over the shelves at the Sydney Municipal Library, I was *engaged*—amazed is a better word—by all the new things and new perspectives. What I was finding out, looking back on it, were the first tracings of a liberal-humanist perspective. This was 'liberal' in the sense of freedom-loving, of taking pleasure in variety and of pursuing things for their own sake. A liberalism that can, today, seem an act of treason when what matters most is loyal service to national growth figures and when even arts policy is put into pseudo-economist—not to mention ridiculous—terms, as in this comment from the Australia Council at the time *Creative Nation* came out: "Art in this big new conception" they said, "has shucked off its layabout tag and become not just respectable but a *fin de siecle* engine of economic growth. Artists have been elevated to the high table of economic policy." We should realise that to pursue things for their own sake can be one of the most creative parts of human beings. The extent to which enterprise is spread throughout a society is one of the most important measures of its freedom. How

can we make pursuing things for their own sake one of the pointers to cultural vitality? Imagine it as a theme in a poster campaign: CITIZENS! PURSUE THINGS FOR THEIR OWN SAKE!

And using the word 'humanist' does not assume that everything about human beings is good—a lot of it can be vile. (Two of my favourite authors, borrowed from the library, were Ben Jonson and Thomas Hardy.) But humanism can mean proclaiming the mutual and productive sides of human potential, whether individually or collectively. It can mean proclaiming that we can be more than consumers, that we can be producers and citizens. And it can mean imagining that a sense of humanity makes a much better measure of all things than the GDP figures. Another theme for a poster campaign: CITIZENS! DEVELOP THE MUTUAL AND PRODUCTIVE SIDES OF HUMAN POTENTIAL!

As to a 'pluralist society', I'm using the term in the sense handed down in the philosophy room at Sydney University sixty or so years ago where John Anderson, the professor, was the charismatic nucleus of a microscopic intellectual universe. It's a phrase that provides a challenge to one of the less culturally vital features of the way we live now. That feature is that we should all obediently float in what the prime minister, in his role as ayatollah of the Australian national character and principal cultural diagnostician, calls "the mainstream". We Andersonians, as we called ourselves, understood that all societies are pluralist, even the most repressive, to the extent that they are made up of different and often conflicting manners and sorts of people. People divided by class, by locality, by lifestyle, by age, sex, sexuality and education; people with all kinds of institutional loyalties, or few loyalties at all; people who live in all kinds of families, or not in families at all; people of many faiths, both secular and religious; people of many ethnic backgrounds, people with many different conventional wisdoms and with many different ways of making sense of their lives and of filling in their time.

You might note that I haven't used the word 'community', and certainly would not in the sense of 'all Australia'. 'All Australia' is far too big for the idea of community—a word that works most realistically when defined more narrowly. The idea of all Australians as one 'community' is simply part of what I described in my book *The Public Culture* as the myth of an apparently shared and visible public culture, a kind of mirage of an imagined national life. What 'holds Australia together' is not some kind of communal ethnic cosiness. Although they don't all realise it, what holds Australians together is not, in the prime minister's words during the 2001 centennial celebrations, "a gift of the air we breathe . . . a gift of the land we share . . . " It is not an air-and-soil achievement; it is a human achievement. It is Australia's comparative success as a *state*—a liberal democratic state—with a developed civil society in which the citizenship oath is:

> I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people,
> whose democratic beliefs I share,
> whose rights and liberties I respect,
> whose laws I will uphold and obey.

(In other words, a civic definition of Australia, not an ethnic definition, even less an air-and-soil definition.)

Now, imagine you are peering out from the perspective of the broad, social anthropological approach to culture. What are you looking for? Discrete groups of people defined by certain social and cultural relations, sometimes strongly, sometimes only very loosely, that you might care to think of as 'communities'? If that's what you're doing, you may be disappointed. These perceived communities can appear or dissolve, they can metamorphose or they can cross over—and they seem to leave out a lot of people altogether. All the members of a community may not necessarily live in the same neighbourhood. They don't necessarily all know each other. Some of their social relations might be fleeting. Even when a community is an enclave or a ghetto there may be a number of 'communities' within it.

What may be a more useful, if less heart-warming, approach is that of the German sociologist, Georg Simmel. Simmel presented a modern society as one in which most people, in a week, pass through, in varying degrees, what he called a "web" of "group affiliations". Not unusually, people can pass in and out of a number of these affiliations even in one day, in some of them perhaps uncomfortably. As they pass from one to the other they can become somewhat different people, re-accommodating themselves to each other in passing. Some of these group affiliations may be usefully thought of as 'communities', with some sense of a common link. Others may not see themselves like that. 'Community' sounds comforting, but it can be a rather

evanescent idea—now you see it, now you don't. If the idea of 'community' in this sense enters policy discussion, precision at times could be misleading, because it's hard to be precise. And imprecision could muck up plans. But the idea must be there, even if it will sometimes break down. And it's a reminder of the presence of 'the people'. It should never, however, be a replacement for them.

'Pluralist' is a good, hard word. Something of a political word, which is to the point because when we are talking pluralism we are often talking conflict, not merely difference. How can we handle this? We can recognise that while we can't all love each other, nor all respect each other, what we can do is respect the right of others to be different (so long as the difference is lawful and doesn't harass or intimidate). In other words, we need a workable code of tolerance that goes beyond gush and good intentions. A workable code of tolerance also provides the only healthy basis for the harmony of a society. As John Anderson used to say: "A variety of organisations is a condition of social life". Or, even better, as Benedict Spinoza—the conceptualiser of tolerance—used to say three hundred years before John Anderson came from Glasgow University to Sydney University in the 1920s: "Since it is impossible to coerce thought, the way to sustain social harmony is to discuss conflict and pursue truth". It is not enforced uniformity that produces a harmonious society, it is the acceptance of *difference*. Anything else is, at its worst, harsh and discordant and, at its least, shallow. So how about CITIZENS! DISCUSS CONFLICT, PURSUE TRUTH! as another poster proclaiming the foundations of cultural vitality?

And now, as an instructive example of sheer silliness, why is it that we still have to put up with claptrap about national identity, about what it really means to be an Australian? (A debate that, if anything, produces not cultural vitality but cultural vapidity.) That there is not one approved model for being an Australian might be rule number one for encouraging cultural vitality.

Take two events from last year's Queen's Birthday weekend—bringing together the Australian Republican Movement and our prime minister, in his role as ayatollah of the Australian character and national cultural diagnostician.

Speaking from his private vision, the prime minister said: "We know what an Australian has *always been* and what an Australian *will always be*".

This statement, that Australians in the past have always been exactly the same as they are now and that Australians will always in the future be exactly the same as they are now, may have been the single-most fatuous statement ever made about Australia by an Australian prime minister.

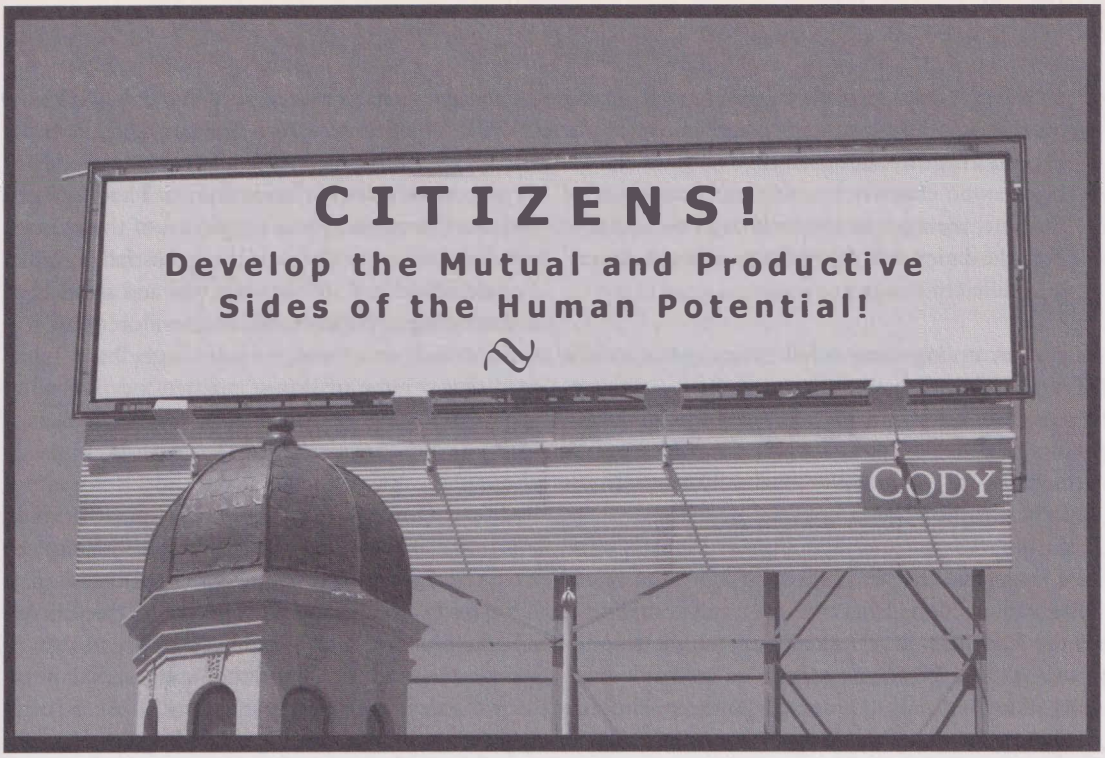
On the same day, another piece of impertinence came from six people I shall call the Poets of the Preamble. It came when the Australian Republican Movement released six proposed preambles to our constitution.

As it happened, they weren't preambles. They were prose poems and they came in two flavours: one banal plain, the other banal purple (as in: "We pledge our allegiance to the land, the sea, the sky". This is the soil-and-air-plus-water definition of Australians.) None of the preambles was related to the kinds of words appropriate to a constitution—a document that lays down some ground rules for political existence. They were intended "to tell us the story of who we are". Just imagine it. There's the constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia up there in all its glory and *it's going to tell its citizens who they are.* What kind of basis for a liberal electoral democracy is it for a constitution to tell its citizens who they are? Surely it is for the *citizens* to say who they are? An absolute basis for any policy for cultural vitality is to say to your citizens: '*You* tell *us* who you are'.

In fact, you might try it out in another poster campaign: CITIZENS! TELL US WHO YOU ARE! This would be when the idea of 'community' lights up, as if by magic; when, as Jon Hawkes has put it, it 'describes a sensation—the sensation of sharing, of belonging, of connectedness, of common cause'. This sensation of common cause can be a great moment of cultural vitality—when a group wish to explain themselves to themselves, and to the world. Perhaps, as a freshener, the organisers of every cultural development plan in Australia should run a campaign under the slogan: CITIZENS! TELL US WHO YOU ARE! What that might mean and how it might be done should be a continuing part of any discussion on cultural vitality.

CULTURE IN THE BROAD SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL SENSE

Having suggested there are a lot of good words around as well as 'culture', I should now have a go at suggesting what to say if people ask 'what's all this culture?'



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This is 'culture' in the broad, social anthropological sense. We're not talking culture as an add-on. We're talking human basics. How do you persuade people about it? You might try telling them that humans are the cultural animal. If that seems a bit fancy, you might try saying that everything humans do has a cultural perspective. Then you can summon up the world as if you were opening out a pack of cards. Instead of saying 'pick any card', say: 'pick any group of people' . . . The people who live in the City of Port Phillip? . . . The people who live in Iraq? . . . It doesn't matter . . . Pick any group of people, look at them, see their differences, then take a few notes. What are their various institutions and social movements? What are their characteristic techniques for doing things—in their workplaces, in their homes, in how they do politics or sport, in all their varying ways of handling this and that. What are their varying conventions of knowledge? What are their varying faiths (both secular and religious)? What of their values and, in general, the meanings they give to existence? Then come up a bit closer. What are their varying ways of life? How and what do they eat? How do they relax? How do they crack jokes? If they have backyard fences, how do they talk to each other over their backyard fences? (Or ignore each other over their backyard fences?) If you've been taking good notes, you've been getting down on paper what you might call, despite the difficulties, their 'cultures'.

Now, and this is very important, consider one thing 'culture' is not. A culture is not a group of people. The use of culture as describing a group applies to artificially developed micro-organisms. A human culture describes how people of various kinds perform in various situations. A 'culture' is a sort of list—as I put it in *The Public Culture,* a list of the habits of thinking and doing that give meaning to existence among a group of people. Not all of those people will do everything on the list, but the list gives you a fair idea of what they might do.

Is 'list' too dull a word? Perhaps it is, in any case, too comprehensive. Perhaps a more useful idea is that there are varieties of *cultural repertoires*—ways of thinking and acting, and of seeing the world, that give particular meanings to existence, or, if you like, ways of being human. In one day, people can play many parts, often parts in quite different cultural repertoires. Peter Berger caught it very well in *Invitation to Sociology* when he said:

> Stage, theatre, circus and even carnival—here we have the imagery of our dramatic model, with a conception of society as precarious, uncertain, often unpredictable. The institutions of society, while they do, in fact, constrain and coerce us, appear at the same

time as dramatic conventions, even fictions. Acting out the social drama, we act as if there is no other way of being a man, a political subject, a religious devotee or one who exercises a certain profession—yet, at the time, the thought passes through the minds of even the dimmest among us that we could do very, very different things.

This view, among many other things, gives an idea of the charismatic bases of some of the social movements—the environmental or the women's movements, for example. In these, countless public dramas—big and small—gradually, sometimes quickly, changed how things seemed. Incidentally, I'm using 'charismatic' here in Max Weber's sense of a leadership that invites new and previously unimaginable action. However, I'm not confining it to the leadership of a person, but to leadership towards an idea. No single person led to the destruction of the Berlin Wall. It came from the swelling-up of the realisation of decades of lies and murder. It took place as a kind of festival, became one of the great charismatic scenes, one of the acts of public drama of the twentieth century, deeply rooted in the imaginations of tens of millions of people. Unlike, say, the contrived destruction of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad, which had all the sincerity of a PR photo opportunity.

I'll go back now to a small personal example—again, I'm afraid, of me when young. When I was a high-school boy making fortnightly pilgrimages to the Sydney Municipal Library or was at my daily devotions with *The Daily Telegraph,* I had begun a kind of quick cultural oil-change. Out went the wisdoms within which I had done my growing up, in a country town, and then in several Sydney suburbs. I was being offered new possibilities of being human.

By the end of my first twelve months as a university student, which ended in a busy long vacation, I had discovered the tedium of 1930s suburban Sydney in the poems of Jules Laforgue about nineteenth-century Paris; I had discovered authenticity in the blues, and in Cockney songs and United States anarchist songs, and in conversations with my most working-class uncle, an electrical fitter at the railway workshops at Chullora. For sociability, I had discovered keg parties, coffee shops, pubs and long conversations in the university quadrangle outside the philosophy room. For horror, I had read some Jacobean tragedy; for scepticism, Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*; for New York wryness, Dorothy Parker. I was the only member of my extended family who wore a double-breasted suit. I had watched the Marx brothers. I was convinced of the second-ratedness of practically everything Australian. When I could afford it, I ate out—for two and sixpence—a three-course Italian meal in the Florentino restaurant and, otherwise, in hamburger bars. I had read one volume of Proust, written a dozen or so symbolist poems and seen three foreign movies. I was, of course, now also familiar with how to talk about the work of Freud, Joyce and Dostoevsky. I had read Dos Passos's *USA* and imagined I could imagine a whole society. I was an anti-Stalinist, an ex-Trotskyist (without ever having been a Trotskyist), a philosophical 'realist', a freethinker, a social pluralist, and I knew five different ways of being an anarchist. (My father suggested I put a brown paper cover on these radical books if I read them in trains.) I went again and again to an art exhibition of two hundred late-impressionist and post-impressionist paintings that had descended miraculously on Australia as a great spectacle in what were, for me, twelve months of marvels. When I finally settled down, a few years later, it was in a block of flats in Kings Cross, where the only married couple were the janitor and his wife, Jessie. The point I want to make is that 'cultural vitality' can mean cultural disruption—an almost complete change of repertoire. Time for two more posters: SEEK NEW WAYS OF ENLARGING OUR LIVES! LEARN CONTRASTING WAYS OF BEING HUMAN!

WHAT DO THESE VIEWS OF CULTURE MEAN IN PRACTICE?

The basic point of this approach—the hard-headed stuff that applies to anything—is that, if you want something done, there is nothing more practical than taking cultural perspectives (*viz* the ways of life and views of existence of actual human beings) into account. Whether you use the word 'culture' or not, if you're trying to get something done, you're engaged in simultaneously applying social and cultural perspectives (and often political and economic perspectives as well).* When you are trying to get some people to do something, or adjust to some change, whether you're considering putting in a new development into the City of Port Phillip or putting democracy into Iraq, it is always a good

practical approach to take cultural perspectives into account. What I mean is that you have to deal with people's ways of life, their ways of doing things and their ways of seeing things. Any organisation is incompetent that forgets that policies will work or won't work through actual people, with all their peculiar potentials and peculiar intractabilities.

Now, I knew that there were seven pillars of wisdom but I don't think I knew there were 'three pillars of sustainability'—environmental and social, as well as economic—let alone four and, from the point of view of analysis of human situations, I must say it's a thoroughly misleading idea. It suggests these are somehow separate, whereas they are merely different perspectives on one situation.

An altruistic meaning, as Jon Hawkes has put it so well in *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability*, is that the idea of a 'triple bottom line' should be extended to include *cultural* sustainability. This means taking into account the variety of people's existing ways of life and their aspirations. It also involves their perceptions of the areas where their homes are, where they work and, in general terms, follow their interests. It involves, overall, their general sense of locality, and any sense they have of the past of that locality. It also means taking into account their perceptions of the people and groups who play a part in their lives, their opportunities for sociability and dialogue, their wishes, if any, to extend those opportunities and the physical facilities there are for coming together—for dialogue, as well as entertainment, recreation, conviviality. It can also involve consideration of the opportunities they have for being *citizens*. Not necessarily as 'joiners', and certainly not simply as people who fill in boxes on ballot papers at election time. It is being citizens in the sense I described in *Looking for Leadership*:

> At home, at work and at leisure, ordinary citizens, if they feel like it, can provide a kind of social yeast that breaks down public issues as they are presented to them and perhaps re-forms them into something that might work. Most ordinary citizens may not follow all the ins and outs of the party political game. But they know what interests them—if it comes up, and they hear about it—and if it does interest them, they talk about it. In a sense it is all these private talks that make up 'public debate' in our kind of country. This is the yeast that helps make much of Australia work or, if the yeast doesn't rise, it is this that mucks things up. Pericles, famously, once told the Athenians: "We do not say that people who take no interest in politics are people who mind their own business. We say they have no business here at all". You might translate that more sensibly into Australian as "Citizens should at least occasionally take an intelligent interest in some of their country's affairs".

As a way of putting all this into administrative practice, Jon Hawkes has suggested a general 'cultural framework' approach. This is a phrase to which he has given practical significance by wisely injecting it into the bureaucratic phraseology of 'sustainable' and 'bottom line', as practical-sounding words, since, if you're adding some new ideas, it's shrewd to link them up in existing language (provided you don't lose your non-specialist audience).

So how do we get something of human benefit out of adding cultural sustainability to the bottom line? The cultural framework approach, as I understand it, adds up to asking of an existing program, or a new proposal: 'Let's find out what impact this proposal has, or will have, on the ways of life and the general views of existence of the people affected by this decision'. Then, one might also ask: 'Can it be extended? Does it give us a chance, at little extra cost, of adding a bit of enrichment to those ways of life or the practice of those general views?' Of course, this then involves 'community consultation', a process whose very language, I have been told, can put people off. Perhaps we could encourage some cultural vitality in finding new techniques (including new words and phrases) for trying to capture people's serious attention in their council's policy.

Consultation about the cultural effects of existing or proposed plans for an activity is only one way of doing it. If one is speaking, as the City of Port Phillip Plan does, of enjoying tolerance and a variety of values, beliefs and aspirations, and of being a better place to live and get around in, of providing a more lively feeling of locality, perhaps (as has been suggested) the council should also be out there, looking for new moods, articulating possibilities in advance of popular perception, or—to use another bureaucratic phrase—be 'proactive'.

There are limits. One could talk forever about the variety of ways of life and how people see the world. But it's worth noting that we have to draw boundaries. The City of Port Phillip is not likely to have a policy of sustaining the ancient culture and

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crafts of criminal gangs (although that, of course, is what some local councils have done in the past), nor that of the traditional culture of wife-bashers, nor the in-built culture of playground bullying. Culture isn't always cosy—the Nazi SS had a mature and confident culture based on a binding community spirit and an impelling sense of history; its monument is to be found in the ruins of Auschwitz. Another proviso is that we must respect the right of people *not* to be culturally vital. Indeed, an attitude of indifference can itself be a vital policy. And we should never think solely in terms of communities. If we do, we'll miss a lot of people. Community is a possibility, but not always realisable.

For example, one of the greatest changes since I was a high-school boy, one that has affected everybody, is that governments have, on so many issues, simply stopped interfering with people's ways of life. *The Daily Telegraph*'s dreams came true: we can drink with meals, we have pavement cafes, the opportunities for sociability have themselves transformed Australia. And I recommend that anyone who sees no connection between cultural vitality and having a good lunch should seek counselling.

In any concern with cultural vitality, I would also put in a bit of preaching: people should have a greater chance to create things for themselves. This could provide a re-run, incidentally, of another Anderson belief. Anderson had drawn on a distinction made at the beginning of the twentieth century by the French anarchist, Georges Sorel—a distinction between 'the ethic of the consumer' and 'the ethic of the producer'. Sorel saw the creative, productive life as cooperative and self-reliant and he saw the consumer's ethic (now one of the definers of our 'consumer society') as something that could burn away the creative spirit of the producer's ethic. Another poster, this time: CITIZENS! SEE YOURSELVES AS PRODUCERS!

Thirty years ago there began, among some people, a period of hopeful prophecy, when talk began about the shift from economies that were fundamentally concerned with producing *goods* to economies whose main dynamic was providing *services*. This would mean manufacturing would cease to be the central employment dynamo. And it could mean there could be an enormous spread in approaches to work, and more time for cultural and recreational pursuits—which could, incidentally, become new dynamos of economic growth.

Thirty years later, labour markets in the prosperous societies have gone through the greatest changes since the industrial revolution. In many industries the idea of the 'career', one of the cultural underpinnings of the age, has been weakened, or gone. Full-time employment has diminished; part-time employment has produced, at one end, 'creative' opportunities and, at the other end, junk jobs. Some people have more spare time, others have less. Unemployment is digging deep down among the age groups. We still have young dropouts, but we now also have middle-aged 'downshifters' who are ready to swap some of their income for what they see as a better way of life. And, overall, one way or the other, there are many more opportunities for creating things for oneself. Out of all of this, if it is ever analysed for opportunities as well as problems, there must be a basis for many policies that might facilitate more vital cultures.

EXTENDING RICHNESS OF EXPERIENCE

At the time Barry Jones was pushed out of the presidency of the ALP, he said:

> My main preoccupation in public life has been the promotion of the 'abundant life'—the conviction that the overwhelming majority of people are capable of responding to a far greater richness of experience than is commonly recognised . . . I was always impressed by an English radical pamphlet dating from 1821, which said, "The first indication of real wealth and prosperity is that people can work less. Wealth is liberty—liberty to seek recreation, liberty to enjoy life, liberty to improve the mind. It is *disposable time*, and nothing more."

So how would this go as a poster? WEALTH IS LIBERTY: LIBERTY TO SEEK RECREATION! LIBERTY TO ENJOY LIFE! LIBERTY TO IMPROVE THE MIND!

Well, back in the poster workshop, they would probably down tools if they were asked to make a poster like that. Although to an English radical in 1821 the idea of improving the mind would have seemed as natural as the idea of improving the body does now. In 2003 it can seem a rather restrictive, authoritarian, judgemental idea. I have a suggestion. It's a bit long, but it might make people think.

It is that the last line of the poster should be replaced with: LIBERTY TO ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD OF THE INTELLECT AND THE ARTS!

There simply isn't a single word that will do the job. The word used to be culture with a big C. But now that the social anthropological values-and-ways-of-life approach is also established as culture (with a small c), merely to put the 'c' up into capitals is both confusing and derogatory. And one can't simply put an adjective in front of it. There is no adjective that does it. But what do a few extra words matter? 'The world of the intellect and the arts' isn't all that hard to say and, after a first use, it can be reduced to 'intellectual and artistic activities' or some such. These activities, at their best, represent what is most ambitious in the human imagination. They are from the world of curiosity and wonder, of knowledge and engagement, and also, as the Andersonians used to put it, 'the spirit of inquiry' and 'the spirit of criticism'. The mere fact that the old 'big C' culture use of the word clashed with the social anthropological 'little c' culture use of the word is no reason for not having a policy about intellectual and artistic activities and recognising their distinctiveness. We just have to distinguish between the one and the other. It's fairly simple: the worlds of the intellect and the arts are one aspect of the wider sense of culture, but that doesn't mean that there are to be no specific policies for them. When you consider their reach, which I'll do in a moment, that would, I hope, be beyond belief. In writing policy for them, you can even put them within a cultural framework.

What should such a policy be about? In *The Public Culture* I suggested a list of three 'cultural rights'. I'll now reword that and say that, when we talk that kind of policy, we are talking about:

> the engagement of citizens with the heritage of past intellectual and artistic activity;
>
> the engagement of citizens with new intellectual and artistic activity;
>
> the engagement of citizens in their own forms of intellectual and artistic activity.

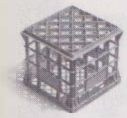
Anyone who suggests we don't need policies about those three engagements—and that they are a special concern—has a hard case to defend. The aspects of engagement I believe to be useful to this discussion are not specific to local government. It's up to local government and their constituencies to decide which, out of these engagements, they might do best.

Four final points I'd like to make:

Firstly, it's not just 'the arts', it's 'the imagination'. That means policy can also be related to history, autobiography, philosophy, essays, criticism of the arts, general cultural critique, social, political and economic inquiry and popularisations of specialist stuff (including the physical sciences and natural sciences) and, more generally, with public intellectual life. And all of these can have as high an imaginative potential as 'the arts'. Being imaginative is serious (even when it is also seen as entertaining). The very shaping and ordering that is often seen as giving art its special authority can go beyond the specialist idea of 'Art': it can be extended to philosophy, history, and all other intellectual activities. Existence doesn't spell out meanings for us. We create them. When Jon Hawkes, in his address to this symposium, spoke of shocks of lateral connection, conceptual leaps, lightning strikes at illumination, he could equally well have been speaking of the intellectual as the artistic life. In both cases 'something is being made out of nothing'.

This means that, on a local level, as well as any arts activity, we're talking about local libraries, local history museums, local heritage societies, local history societies, local built heritage, local community-based media, local book groups, local further education services, local forums, cultural tourism, internet access, design and so on, and also, of course, both contemporary and traditional local indigenous cultural artefacts and activities. Nationally, we're talking the whole intellectual infrastructure of learning, higher education and school education, certain sections of publishing, broadcasting, film-making, the performing-, visual- and design-arts, art, history and science museums and, for that matter, botanic gardens, national parks, heritage sites, zoos and wilderness areas.

Secondly, 'the past' is worth engaging with. For one thing, dealing with past intellectual and artistic activity gives people a chance to escape from a shallow contemporaneity and the provincialisms of place and time. For another, it offers them a rich variety of approaches to discovering ways of being human and pondering their own criticism of existence. For a third: if they are engaging in intellectual and art activities, among stuff from the past there are ideas they can use in their own work. But it's essential to recognise that people don't have to learn off past



intellectual and arts activity as if they are going to pass an exam in it, and they don't have to give scores to individual works as if they are marking exam papers. We can use works of the intellectual and artistic imagination for our own ends in making up our own views of existence.

Thirdly, don't go on with Hansonist raving about elites. One can imagine the intellectual and artistic modes as special (and self-conscious) concerns focusing on serious criticism of existence, of seeking meanings, removed from the world in which intellectual life becomes "a vast arena for show business", as Neil Postman put it in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. It is usually within the intellectual and artistic life that this serious criticism of existence is pursued at any length. It might be thought of as a forum for the interpretation of how things are. So far as intellectual activity is concerned, we should remember that many of those who participate in it have enlarged their lives by having access to whole ranges of knowledge and experience, including access to various techniques—abstract thought, critical analysis, etc.—that most people don't know about. Perhaps one should add: why shouldn't we expect members of the intellectual world to give more people a chance to think knowledgeably and seriously about themselves and their common existence by presenting what they have to say better than they do? In the run-up to Keating's *Creative Nation* I thought I had caught his roving eye with a proposal for a humanities foundation to assist individuals and organisations to produce material and activities intended for a general rather than a specialist audience and that would help Australians engage in the speculative and imaginative enterprises of the humanities. That didn't last long. It got lost in the high-arts glitz and low-brain technocracy of *Creative Nation*. But the need is still there.

Fourthly, 'engagement' doesn't just mean doing something yourself. It also means acts of imaginative engagement with what is presented to you by others. Real engagement of this kind is itself an act of imagination. It doesn't mean 'I like this, I don't like that'. Even less does it mean 'I must express my deconstructionist talents for showing what a smart-arse I am'. It means, in what might be described in the good old sense, *appreciating* it: seeing if there's anything you can get out of it. This can be in itself a participatory and creative act. But it is one in which people may need some encouragement. There was a great response to the Big Screen project in 2001 that not only toured twenty-three regions with Australian movies—from silent movies to the present day—but also sent out with them film-makers and actors to discuss them with the audience. I still remember how Dance North, bumping along up there from one bush town to the next, always insisted on entering into a dialogue with their audiences as well as dancing for them. It is possible to turn art galleries and museums into places where people get experience at looking at things, with the prospect of wonder, of an exalted attention that can come from regarding a thing in itself, and of curiosity, the desire to know a bit more. An art gallery does not have to be a lesson in art history. (Not that there is anything wrong with art history.) By juxtapositions on theme and subject in works coming from all over the place, for example, it can help us to look at the pictures as pictures. Museum exhibitions need not 'tell us stories', they can be 'arranged in disorder', creating powerful images.

And now here is a final message from someone who, under the shower, still occasionally sings 'Who's afraid of the big, bad wolf?'—one of the cheer-up songs he learned in the years of the 1930s Depression. Turn your thoughts away from some passing prime minister's passing claim to know what an Australian has *always been* and what an Australian *will always be*. Think instead about the variety, the 'inclusiveness', the splendid idealisation of Australian potential (of a new kind that came in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games)—a readiness to find new meanings in the past and the possibility of new things in the future, founded in a background of complex intellectual and artistic activity and put on by communities from all over Australia made up of people who knew who they were and who were doing things for their own sake.

* *Social* in the sense of established interactions between people; *cultural* in the sense that these interactions are coloured with meaning by habits of thought and action; *economic* in the narrow sense that they are concerned with the production and distribution of goods and services, and *political* in the sense that they involve conflict. Of course, all these get mixed up. At present, the economic has blown out so wide that a phrase has been invented—'the economisation of culture'—to describe an enthusiasm for expressing values mainly in terms of relevance to the figures of economic growth.

Donald Horne is an author and former Chair of the Australia Council (1985–1990).

TRIBAL GATHERING

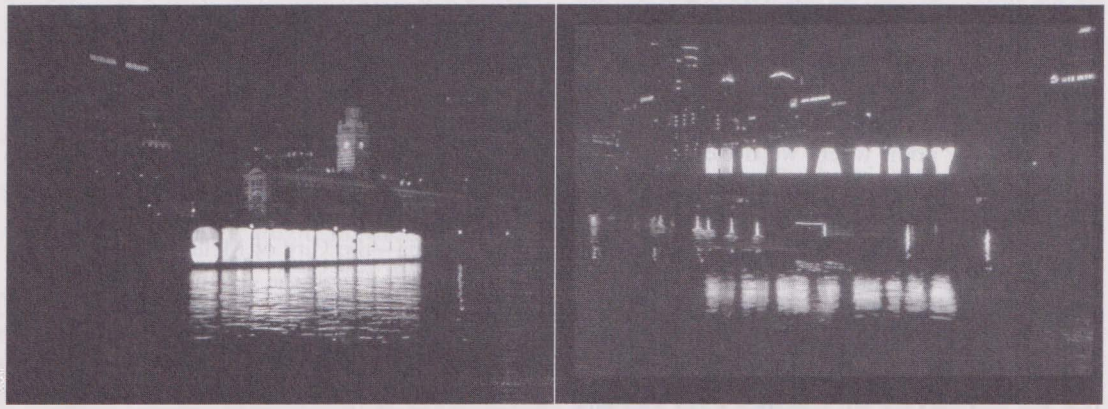
. . . IT WAS A RELATIVELY simple process that we started and it was built on this respect and recognition principle. What happened was that some of the senior managers or some of the staff in the City of Melbourne approached some of the traditional owners and we started a process some six months ago. We got to the point where we decided to have a cultural gathering on 28 May at the City of Melbourne—first time Aboriginal people have met in the Town Hall with the Lord Mayor. It was another plus because it was the first time the Lord Mayor wore his robes and he also got a possum-skin cloak out of it, so he done alright that day I think. That's for sure. You might have read there was a report in the *Age* that said we kill something like one hundred possums for each cloak. Well, that is a fallacy because you would have to be twenty feet tall; there are only about twenty-eight in each one. These possums came from either New Zealand or Tasmania. We didn't kill none in Victoria because it is illegal, although we probably could have tried to exert our Native Title rights and interests. That may have worked but we probably would have got charged anyway. So it was a bloody good day and we had the elders there and we had something like seventeen of the twenty traditional groups from around the state. The thing was it wasn't just about the Wurundjeri or the Boonerwrung groups that are in Melbourne. It was also about the rest of the groups around the state sitting down with the biggest council in Victoria—the City of Melbourne—and starting a process off with the ceremony, the exchange of gifts, a bit of talking . . .

Gary Murray is a traditional owner from the Yorta Yorta, Djudhoroa, Barapa Barapa, Wamba Wamba, Dja Dja Wurrung, Yupagalk and Wotjobaluk. He is Chair of the North West Region Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Board and Deputy Chair of the North West Nations Aboriginal Corporation. This extract from a presentation at 'Beyond cultural policy: a cultural vitality symposium', July 2003, is available in full at <www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/cultural_vitality.html>.

LOUIS PORTER

Patricia Ockwell of the Wurundjeri (left) and Carolyn Briggs of the Boonerwrung accompany Lord mayor John So towards the council chamber to formalise a relationship between the city and Indigenous groups from throughout Victoria.

A YOUNG ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE



DAVID TATNALL

In 2001, the youth arts program Visionary Images was invited to develop ideas for a project to be included in the 2002 Next Wave Youth Arts Festival. This initiative culminated in 'The Glow Show', a set of two large illuminated inflatables exhibited on Southbank and Sandridge Bridge.

My participation in Visionary Images over many years has seen me involved with some thrilling projects, with 'The Glow Show' being no exception. Our collaboration with Next Wave gave us a chance to explore fresh and exciting possibilities in public art.

Taking up Next Wave's suggestion of using inflatables as a medium for expression, Visionary Images moulded this idea to express the theme of collective humanity. I remember the discussions I had with the other young people and artists sitting around the table at Visionary Images, exploring concepts that we felt were worthy and important to show in the public arena. Eventually we settled on the idea that text would be the most appropriate form to work with. Although SHIPWRECKED and HUMANITY are relatively simple words, the discussions revealed that these represented what was most important to the people in the group at the time. For example, 'shipwrecked' echoed the effects of the political situation of that year. The fact that these reflective and powerful words were displayed so prominently—directly presenting a collective human theme to a large audience—would add another layer of meaning to the artwork, thereby reinforcing their purpose.

For me, one of the most exhilarating aspects of this project was the large-scale outcome, which was a first for Visionary Images. Working on a pontoon on the scenic Yarra River, and witnessing and participating in the intricate collaboration of so many technically skilled people was very exciting and personally rewarding.

There is nothing quite like the sense of pride and achievement at seeing a completed work. I certainly felt this when we finally finished the two pieces and I was able to view them from afar. I had a keen awareness that we had made a piece for the public eye that gave our group a voice and esteem and, in turn, had helped strengthen my own. We had made a work that was intelligent, challenging and, most of all, easy for the public to engage with. This allowed an unconditional sharing experience for the enrichment of all those who viewed it. Perhaps this reason alone is why I am most proud to have participated on this project.

SELLING SECRET LIVES

Subcultures and cultural vitality

THE CONCEPT OF subculture allows us to reassess familiar features of the cultural policy terrain. We can return to defining notions in modernist and late-modernist culture—the friction between bohemians and the bourgeoisie, the merits of pluralism—and, in the light of the current status of subcultures, ask whether such notions continue to drive cultural vitality as they once did.

The classical model of subculture, forged in the 1970s, focused on localised forms of resistance to parent culture. With the local giving way to the global, the focus is now on the commodification and dissemination of subcultural activities. Somewhere along the path between subculture as bohemian rebellion and subculture as commodified lifestyle lies local government cultural policy, simultaneously nurturing, managing and capitalising on subculture.

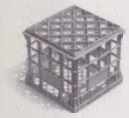
What we now call subcultural theory grew out of the 'sociology of deviance', which typically examined the linguistic, behavioural and social difference of subcultural groups from parent or dominant culture. Empirical and observational sociology was used to map forms of aberrance, suggesting that naming subcultures was about naming social problems. While some observers revealed a certain fascination with the vitality of the deviant groups they studied, their empirical emphasis tended towards definitions of a social category rather than reflection on the means of engendering cultural inventiveness.

Something of this tradition lives on in the Bohemian Index, an exercise in social analysis emerging worldwide in recent years. Richard Florida, of the Carnegie Mellon University, ranked American cities on a numerical scale in terms of their bohemianness. The presence of arts professionals such as authors, designers, musicians, actors, painters, sculptors, photographers, dancers and other performers earned a city points. A local version by Dr Peter Brain (National Institute of Economic and Industry Research) leaned more towards subculture, including sexuality and inner-urban location in its analysis. Quantitative studies such as these are a reminder of the lingering desire within cultural policy to map, manage and predict cultural vitality.

An important shift in subcultural theory arose in the 1970s, in the formation of the discipline we now call Cultural Studies. One of the key texts was Dick Hebdige's book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Methuen, London, 1979). Exploring the symbolic practices of youth culture, this model focused not on deviance but on the 'internal' meanings of a subculture. Members of a subculture were not seen as rank outsiders but as self-conscious participants in a process that negotiated the meaning and value of activity, often in border skirmishes with a parent culture.

Hebdige saw subcultures as oppositional, as a refusal of orthodoxy through which "the consensus could be fractured, challenged and overruled". Coming from a background in art history, I recognise there my old friend, the avant-garde. Subcultures are innovative, experimental, challenging and devoted to the overthrow of orthodoxies, just as the modernist artists of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were.

The search for symbolic inventiveness and energetic refusals of parent culture led proponents of



Because subcultures are not so much beyond the pale as camped on the very border, symbolic meanings are formed in the passage of items back and forward across frontiers—the safety pins of the punks, the sharp suits of the mods, the fetishised athletic wear of hip-hop.

Hebdige's model of subculture to punk rock. In such musical undergrounds—perennially inventive yet always susceptible to commodification—we find a continuing challenge. When we speak of cultural vitality, do we mean sheer energy—the surface symptom of a deeper, oppositional avant-garde—or do we mean something more systematic and purposeful—the birth and consolidation of relatively stable cultural structure? And what, then, are we to make of cultural policies premised on the co-existence of both; that is, spontaneity and structure, refusal and affirmation?

Hebdige's model of subculture identified points of tension that still emerge in current discussion. Because subcultures are not so much beyond the pale as camped on the very border, symbolic meanings are formed in the passage of items back and forward across frontiers—the safety pins of the punks, the sharp suits of the mods, the fetishised athletic wear of hip-hop. Meaning emerges out of cross-border tension, but purloined symbols can be reclaimed, converted into commodities, disseminated and normalised. Managing subcultures defuses their challenge. Finding a place for subcultures in a policy seeking cultural vitality means somehow bringing them into the fold without diluting their bohemian *frisson*.

Within the classic subcultural model, the dissemination and popularisation of symbolic resistance is the beginning of the end. The impact of a subculture rests on its almost alchemical ability to transmute dumb matter into something affronting, resistant and rebellious. Hebdige identified the most effective forms of subcultural resistance in what he called "a genuinely secret subculture of working class youngsters". Today, it seems almost impossible to keep any kind of cultural activity secret. More to the point, we now anticipate, if not demand, even at a policy level, such forms of inventive aberrance. Here, subcultural theory encounters a hurdle that the art world debated in the 1960s; how can you maintain the 'shock of the new' when the new is itself a norm? The cultural vitality you expected, or planned, isn't the vitality you wanted. Put another way, the constant affirmation of avant-garde values puts paid to the avant-garde . . . or reduces cultural vitality to staying one step ahead in the game of innovation and recuperation.

Does a subculture's entry into the broader cultural domain really destroy it, or does subcultural theory make too much of specialisation and secrecy? Cultural policy has to negotiate a position between quarantining and mass-marketing subcultural activities. We need to focus less on the moment of a subculture's original 'purity' and more on the ways its secret life goes public.

Subcultural theory, too, has to negotiate new positions for itself. Hebdige's model emphasised youth subculture, in the early era of the rise of the teenager and the development of youth as a key market in a growing leisure economy. Now the global leisure-consumption economy specifically researches and targets youth—indeed the child—as its key market. Rather than reflecting on youth maturing into culture, we must now recognise that children are embedded in forms of culture—specifically commodity culture—from the earliest age. Do pluralism and symbolic exchange still mean the same thing? Contemporary culture traffics in infinitely mutable symbols and meanings; pluralism appears to be a rather limp kind of diversity in the face of the inflationary symbolic capacity of contemporary media.

We need to remind ourselves of one of the key lessons of subcultural theory—the idea of a subculture is of limited use when it is understood as an absolute or determined position; it is far more useful when it stresses the mobile and negotiated aspect of subcultural meaning. Putting a subculture

Every such subcultural success story is matched with a failure—the almost-instant commodification of the subcultures of snowboarding and skateboarding, for example. Now, dissemination and popularisation of symbolic resistance need to be reflected upon as key components of a new form of subculture that in some ways happily understands itself as a negotiated position rather than a position of resistance.

centre-stage is not such a problem if the performers are able to negotiate a new position in the process. It's not the dissemination of subculture as such that is the problem, it's the stage-management of it. In simple terms, the lesson for cultural vitality here is that facilitation of subcultural activity, rather than ownership and management, drives renewal.

A recent example can be found in the story of the emergence of third-generation punk rock in the San Francisco Bay Area, told in Gina Arnold's book, *Kiss This: Punk in the Present Tense* (St Martins, New York, 1997). Arnold described a subculture centred around cooperatively managed, grass-roots music venues open to all ages. The values and activities of participants were a hybrid of disseminated subculture (UK punk of the 1970s), inherited counterculture (the Haight-Ashbury hippies of the 1960s), and local cultural politics (gentrification, lack of recreational facilities and commodification of the counterculture). The co-op became a very successful live music venue, catering to community needs and establishing a platform for very effective lobbying on local planning issues. At the same time, some bands—who put in time organising venues, not just playing at them—became so successful they were ex-communicated from the subculture because they were going mainstream.

This simplistic attitude obscures something significant in this particular subculture: it didn't shy away from the commodification of youth culture; instead it sought to reclaim some sense of agency in youth leisure. Participants managed their own subcultural turf, even if ultimately they weren't able to manage their eventual popularity. For me, the cultural vitality of subcultures is best managed by the players themselves. Local government cultural policy has a place if it facilitates self-management and allows, even encourages, subcultures to have a short lifecycle. This is not a culture of boom and bust, nor of a constant search for the next big thing, but rather of reinvention in the face of contained dissemination.

Every such subcultural success story is matched with a failure—the almost-instant commodification of the subcultures of snowboarding and skateboarding, for example. Hebdige spoke of the struggle for the possession of the sign: who owns the symbols of a subculture—the originator or the commodifier? Now, dissemination and popularisation of symbolic resistance need to be reflected upon as key components of a new form of subculture that in some ways happily understands itself as a negotiated position rather than a position of resistance. In my research into popular music and artistic subcultures, I've found that participants emphasise places and moments: a gig, a venue, a season. There's an implicit understanding that, given a stage, a subculture can shape and enact its identity. And if that stage gains wider attention and a wider audience, a new one will be found.

In the twenty-five years since Hebdige characterised subculture as a series of border skirmishes, the players have become ever-more adept at playing ever-more complex margins. Short-lived, opportunistic and nomadic, subcultures are a little too slippery for cultural policy based on infrastructure and five-year plans. For me, the paradox of cultural vitality—at least as I see it emerging out of subcultures—is that it can be predicted but not managed. A blank wall will attract graffiti, a dedicated graffiti wall may not. Any paved gradient will attract a skateboarder, a skate park may not. It's not a paradox that worries me. Efforts to short-circuit the paradox—putting venues on life-support out of respect for their glory days, using arts funding to enforce policy objectives—do.

Dr Chris McAuliffe is Director, Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne.

cultural vitality | **CHRIS DEW**

CHRIS DEW

MATERIAL CULTURE—MIGRATION LANDSCAPE—MERRI CREEK

LAND IS FUNDAMENTAL. It is the fundament in and upon which human and most other lives that we know of are lived. Land is variously occupied, annexed, managed, exploited, tilled, exchanged, accumulated, fought over, fought with and fiercely loved. It is the material from which we shape our lives and, thus, our cultures. Land is the material of cultures.

In Australia, as in so many other nations, negotiations over land explain many (if not all) of the events of its history and much of its present. This history is written onto, inscribed into, the landscape. Material culture writes itself first and foremost onto the land that we occupy in so many different ways. It tells of our presence, absence, neglect or respect: of what we did or did not do as we passed through. From the foundational custodial relations of Aboriginal peoples, to the imagined unoccupied and empty space described by *terra nullius*, to the imprinting onto the landscape, both deliberate and accidental, of various waves of immigrants' vision of their 'new' home—these different ways of seeing a land coexist, collide, compete and cohabit in material manifestations of place.

Landscapes are museums of our being there; they carry the traces of what we 'make' of a place. Out of this material, which both delimits and enables our cultural possibilities, we produce the artefacts more conventionally understood as material culture: the ways of providing for our physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs that produce our art, architecture, industry, agriculture, and social and political institutions. Landscapes are made and re-made in interactions between nature and culture.

Landscapes are not only the pastoral or wilderness vistas targeted for landscape painting or agricultural interventions: landscapes are what we make around us wherever we are. In an urban landscape, nature and culture interact, only it may seem to many that here it is 'culture' that has the upper hand. But is there only one way to see what happens in an urban environment, and does the land not carry both its history and ours? Urban landscapes are the materialisation of history, and history lacks 'good form'; it is the possibility of taking form as well as its destruction. We make and remake histories as we interpret our presents and imagine our futures. History is an interaction between past, present and future, and the landscape is made and re-made in interactions between humans and nature in all their pasts, presents and futures.

Urban landscapes speak to us of colonisation, migration and nation-building in the most everyday of artefacts. They are both a microcosm of a nation's history and unique to their specific locality. For Australia, whose history as a nation is one of colonisation and therefore of migration (there was no 'nation' prior to these events), urban landscapes carry the material made out of our vision, our memory and its erasures, our aspirations, regrets, values and desires, our art, social organisation and understandings of the environment. Urban landscapes also tell us how the land has responded to all these different visions. When we choose to focus intensely upon a small locality, we can explore the minutiae of the materialisation of history in its various permutations and combinations, rather than having to paint with broad brushstrokes of cultural

difference 'writ large'. We can see how many different 'cultures' are made in, and make use of, our public spaces.

So let us go for a short stroll along the Merri Creek path, a 'green' corridor in inner Melbourne, where 'history' is being made even as we speak.

MERRI CREEK

Day after day you round some bend in the path and, each time, it takes you by surprise. Like each new dawn, the day dawns upon you there. Each time it is both the same and stunningly, surprisingly different. Each day, something different, but that you have seen a thousand times before, admired a thousand times before—jumps out at you, crowing its singularity, strutting a newness you have never yet seen.

Today, the symmetry in the stormwater drain's angles reflects in the creek's still waters. Yesterday, lime-green moss on dark, wet bark arrested your attention and the waters rocketed by, swollen with rain, red-capped bottles spinning as they sped their way to the bay.

The day before, it had been windy and wattle baubles were corralled into Andy Goldsworthy-like[1] configurations on the water's edge—triangles and trapezoids of entrapped gold enclosed by the twigs that trace their strange geometries.

One day, silver flies off the torrent pouring into the creek from the stormwater outlet and sunlight blinds the hole it comes from. Another day, in the cool of shadowless light, this same blind hole is a musty tunnel of substance that beckons with its depth. The bark on a tree changes colour each day—pinks to oranges, green to mauve. Now, it's all browns and greys, stripping and shredding and shedding a skirt of ribbons and rags around its base.

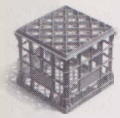
You are impressed every time by the richness of these scenes: by their every-day, every-moment uniqueness; by the way the trip back reveals completely new scenes to the trip up; by how the time of day, the season, the weather, the light, makes this same place and these same 'things' so different from themselves; by the ephemeral appearance of even the most permanent-seeming things—rivers, rocks, concrete, very large and old trees.

And then there is how differently your eye witnesses this same scene, how it is caught each day by something new, and how you feel differently in each moment. Touched by moss in a crevice when you are open to such a delicate fragility, by powerlines tracing grids across the sky when you are looking for the patterns in things. In the rise and fall and shadows on a path, your journeys and quests are suggested. You contemplate the water when its movement suits your mood: calm, reflective surfaces that always suggest what you can't see—the depths[2]—or a rushing-by of volume and substance so rapid you can only catch the excitement of its speed. A world to dream into.

But you don't make these clunky associations as you dream. Rather, it seems that you might have seen what helped you to think without thinking; food for thought that might come later. And, just as often, it is the world that tells you your mood: the racing water cannot be ignored, electricity in the air after heavy rain commands attention, you feel the parched stillness when it has been dry for too long.

The rubbish, weeds and graffiti touch you. The discarded evidence of human occupation is not repellent—you even feel indulgently warm toward it (at times)— telling as it does of a meeting, albeit a little clumsy, between 'nature' and 'culture' here at the creek. Beds of bottles, styrofoam, twigs and leaves lie where willows meet the water and where ducks seem to congregate, using the litter for protection, or to trap food perhaps? The two-toned flowering fennel—another weed—is pretty-as-a-picture in sweeps of colour of which Edna Walling[3] would approve. There are soft new leaves on the gums and the creek-bed sweeps and falls as it dances with the water. A corrugated-iron fence sits up high with its back firmly to the creek. New developments, all on high, have windows greedy for this now 'valuable' view. The houses have turned around, literally, as the creek has been cleaned up.

There is a 'nothingness' to the North Fitzroy section, an embracing of the creek and of difference that happens when you cross into Brunswick. Here, the environmental park, CERES, has community gardens, farm animals, cross-cultural awareness training and alternative-energy generation. The luminous domes of the Russian Orthodox church rise golden above the trees. The subtle architecture of the building that houses the Aboriginal Community Elders Service quietly blends into its leafy surrounds. There is the dizzying ellipsis of a velodrome. New developments everywhere crane to see the little creek.



In North Fitzroy, things are more low-key and tell, perhaps, of an older attitude to the creek—when it was thought of as a 'drain' rather than prime real estate. There is a bench here and there, a bridge to a school and some playing fields, a soccer ground and several outlets for the stormwater drains of the area. Graffiti is everywhere. There are ducks that people feed too much bread, schoolboys who smoke and shower the ducks with rubble, trains thundering across the overpasses, and powerlines tracing the creek's course like oversized garden stakes.

What should you make of what you find there? How should you 'see' this ever-changing vista? How do other eyes see this place?

A good friend, irritable with giving up smoking, sees only the rubbish. In her state of withdrawal there is nothing else to see, and it makes her furious. But *you* want to photograph the rubbish because you find it strangely beautiful—hanging, ghostly, from the trees. Another friend attends clean-up days, picking plastic from the branches. Her partner, another photographer, jokes with you that her community service denies you your aesthetic project. Can you get the pictures before they clean it all up?

A certain kind of environmentalist might find the place to be full of weeds and plan their eradication. An Italian couple collect the 'weeds'—delicious, they tell you, cooked in olive oil and accompanied by a nice bottle of red. An animal liberationist may worry over the sickly animals whose diet consists of mountains of white bread. But, for at least two people you see there regularly, and whom you have gotten to know a little, feeding the ducks is a ritual that centres an otherwise-uncertain and frightening world. You tut-tut in horror as large rabbits graze placidly on summer grass, but, as you absently gaze (slowed by the very same sun), you begin to see the warm eye of a child's pet where you just saw the 'vermin' eating. An amateur historian points out a little spot near the railway station where Batman signed the treaty, although others have disagreed that this is the site, or even that this ever happened. Bike-riders are annoyed by the way pedestrians wander all over; pedestrians resent their reveries disturbed by clanging bells and the expectation that they should move aside. For some women, the creek may well be considered a place of danger, a place you shouldn't walk alone. Other people set up camp here, for a night or a few weeks, and sleep in the shelter of railway bridges in the long cold of winter. Graffiti artists work at night. Evidence of parties can also be found, especially around the towering cypress whose white branches reach for the moon in a deep-blue autumn sky. The creek is also a dog toilet and exercise yard. And it no doubt has very different meanings again for Aboriginal people, some of which you might easily guess at, others of which may be more opaque.

There are many ways of seeing this little strip of land where the powerlines and the stormwater battle for space with the creek and the shared pathway. And, despite all the cleaning-up that goes on and the official histories that are told to us here, is it not likely that the uncelebrated powerlines and stormwater outlets are the real reason there is any 'unoccupied' land here at all?

This area is in transition between at least two states and two very different meanings, and these have to do with perceptions, with the way the area is *seen*. The first sees stormwater drains, rubbish, powerlines, weeds, vermin and graffiti. The second, a narrative of progress perhaps, celebrates native plantings, the return of native birds, recycled sculptures, paved bicycle and walking tracks, litter traps and solar lights. There is also some official 'history' here: signs about an old quarry, another depicting the history of the creek in terms of its four-stage progress—from an open drain filled with factory effluent, through the developmental stages of community action and protest, to clean-up and replanting. It is interesting to think about where this story begins as it tells its own version of history: 'In the beginning there were factories'? In the last triumphant cell of the panel that depicts this story, native plants, neat lawns and cemented paths host a young woman on her bicycle waving to an older Asian man across the water. A multicultural Garden of Eden is the outcome of all this cleaning, perhaps?

Council signs announce the planned removal of willow from the creek's banks, but you can't help thinking there is something a little dishonest about the make-over job. The unofficial history, evidenced in the drains, graffiti, weeds, vermin and powerlines, seems a little more honest, and perhaps a little more representative of the places that these inner suburbs are and have been. More representative, perhaps, of histories of colonisation and migration, of class, ethnicity and the changing fortunes of suburbs and their occupants. An Eden-like

CHRIS DEW

multiculturalism does seem a nice vision for the future, but why link multiculturalism to a botanical monoculture?

You wonder about the desire to clean it all up.

Is this cleaning-up a kind of revisionism, a way to erase the evidence of a complicated interrelationship between peoples and places, and between 'natures' and 'cultures'? Does the removal of a messy, many-faced amalgam of things in favour of a reproduction of the Garden of Eden express a fantasy that we can get back what was 'originally' here and erase the things we did in between? Do we confuse landscape gardening with reconciliation? Do we mistake weeds for unwanted refugees or migrants who refuse to assimilate? Do we welcome the migrants but loathe the weeds instead? How interestingly suggestive are our attitudes to landscape. Are they the material upon which we play out our fears, anxieties and desires for the future? over which we try and rewrite the past?

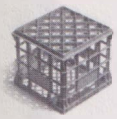
This Merri Creek story is a story of something very 'everyday'. The urges to clean it up, you suppose, are to make us feel that we have a different 'everyday' to the one we had before—one that is a bit 'nicer'. This is what we do when we clean up our houses and our yards. Cleaning can mean many things: getting rid of what you do not want, protecting yourself from invasion by threatening elements (germs, dirt and pollutants), creating order out of chaos, tending to your life and your spaces with diligent affection in an act of loving maintenance, or simply maintaining or increasing the monetary value of your property. Cleaning can also be creative, as Mary Douglas[4] reminds us: an action through which we make new spaces, new meanings; in which we recreate our world—a world that is no longer as ugly as drains, sewers, powerlines, graffiti, a soccer field, a footbridge, fences, rubbish, hodge-podge seating, native and non-native trees battling it out on the banks, the successful migration of things they call 'weeds'.

But does this nicer 'everyday' eradicate the flawed humanity of the place? ignore the cheerful exuberance of the landscape—racing water, misty mornings, the busyness of the ducks—despite its heavy load of rubbish, stormwater, human and other traffic? Does it favour instead a fantasy of an undisturbed, original bushland that can be retrieved by careful gardening and the cementing-over of walking tracks? Is the new 'everyday' about new ways to live, or about removing the material that reminds us of what we don't want to know about how we continue to live? Whose version of 'nice' should this place emulate, and what happens to the evidence of the human/nature interaction to which the graffiti, weeds and powerlines attest? Which kind of cleaning-up is going on here?

Why don't we want to know that we generate power in order to live our urban lives? Why do weeds offend us if they tell of our own history (for the vast majority) as migrants? Why do we not want to know that young artists spend their nights painting in the dark?

And what of the relationships between nature and culture, where 'nature' is associated with the re-introduced 'native' and 'culture' is the evil of colonisation by willow and capeweed? Why are the values of 'good' and 'bad' so easily applied to non-sentient beings when we talk about landscapes? Why do we attack weeds with such vigour? Are we angry at the weeds or angry with ourselves? (For caring for our country so poorly, for talking with it so rarely, for resolving our social conflicts so unsuccessfully?)

This is not to suggest, at all, that there are not good environmental and ecological reasons why we might want to reduce or eradicate some weeds, or be concerned for the health of our ecosystems. It is, rather, to question the passion and vehemence that often accompanies assignations of 'native' and 'introduced', 'indigenous' and 'weed', especially given the 'introduced' status of most of those mak-



ing the claims. Do we hate 'weeds' for colonising our landscape because we so hate successful migrants? because we ourselves (the vast majority) are migrants and sit uncomfortable and anxious in this position, desperate to feel that we belong? If we remove all the weeds, will that make us natives? Do we atone for the past through gardening, or do we simply rewrite it?

And what of the distinction between beautiful and ugly, where 'ugly' is the towering powerlines and 'beautiful' is the faux nineteenth-century streetlight with a solar panel sticking out its side? Is there no majesty at all in the wonder of a power grid, nor even any aesthetic qualities of line and form? Is it ugly because it is ugly or because we no longer want to know that this is how we generate the electricity we nevertheless want to use? Solar panels are a wondrous harnesser of a much gentler energy, but surely no more beautiful? Are there just too many messy and unfortunate elements of our lives to want to have to face them on our morning walk?

What happens to ideas of 'clean' and 'dirty' when the bright colours of graffiti art lift bridges out of the gloom that dank, lifeless soil seems to hold their feet in? There is another kind of cleaning that is cosmetic only. It offers the appearance of having attended to something, but the motives aren't genuine, and under the carpet and jammed in the cupboards are all the things you simply want out of view.

How should this place be seen and how should it be tended? Which, of all these multiple visions, is the real one?

MAKING HISTORY

In the simple and everyday artefacts along the Merri Creek path, we see how history is made, what our history has made of us, how we negotiate to rewrite it and, in so doing, to rewrite ourselves—to change the course of history, as they say. But, with so many eyes and so many visions, and so many possible revisions, what kind of history will we make? The 'Friends of the Merri Creek' have been tending to this site lovingly, easing the burden of rubbish and effluent and reintroducing 'native' plants. They are making a new kind of relationship with the land, one that has been instrumental in the shift from drain back to creek, that now sees property values rise, probably well above the level that the original 'friends' could ever have afforded. Councils have assumed more responsibility for the creek, minimising danger and maintaining amenity: removing graffiti, paving and maintaining pathways, keeping grass mown. Melbourne Water has introduced litter traps at stormwater outlets. It is here that the 'local' is so obviously connected to the 'national'—the litter traps have to do with the creek's part in the national story of our waterways. The waters of our little creek flow into the Yarra River, Port Phillip Bay and on to become part of the vast Southern Ocean.

Many people express fury at the rubbish and graffiti—one and the same thing, I think they would say. All are seen as evidence of disrespect for public property, for a lack of care about our public spaces and shared resources. Here the cleaning-up will engender respect, maintain property values, remove threatening elements, get rid of pesky teenagers, create order out of chaos. But will it recreate our social order or simply sweep things under the carpet? It will take more than housework to change the ways we live: the structural inequality that produces unemployment; the consumption that requires so much energy and so many plastic bags; the history of migration that brought so many 'weeds' to our shores; the history of colonisation that attempted, so thoroughly, to eradicate what was indigenous—and so much more than just the plants.

The material artefacts of the Merri Creek path speak eloquently of the state we are in. They speak of many visions: new and old; some hopeful for the future, some a little more self-serving; some, perhaps, quite deluded; others not so much visions as refusals to see. The material of the Merri Creek shows us how complex our society is—so many different 'stakeholders' and many different needs. This landscape speaks to us, both joyfully and a little embattled, of those histories, and tells us how much we can bear. The exuberance of the creek, despite its burden of rubbish and grateful for its loving ministrations, also tells us about a messy, at times awkward, but also perhaps not entirely despairing, cohabitation of nature and culture, and of many different kinds of cultures.

If there is a metaphor in that for thinking about our society, and for our pasts, presents and futures, might it not be at least as helpful as the one that says we must all assimilate to a monoculture, and under those conditions alone we will tolerate small differences—graffiti in approved spaces, introduced plants in vegetable gardens, human traffic confined to the paths? The funny, messy, diverse industrial

wasteland that is also becoming a native garden speaks a both-at-once, a both-at-once that says: 'Culture is messy, nature is dynamic and responsive, the fundament is alive with what we have made of it'. Our diversity is expressed therein. What matters is as much that things take shape as that they are undone, that our cleaning is both creative and destructive. But please let our cleaning not be just the sweeping of things under the carpet! And let us be a little clearer about our actions and motivations and what they really can create—what we *are* creating as we recreate our public spaces.

MAKING ART

> Successful art rediscovers beauty for us. It reveals things we've experienced but not paid adequate attention to.
>
> Robert Adams, *Beauty in Photography*

On the Merri Creek path we see, or don't see, many different things, and we respond, usually, according to 'common' sense. Beautiful, Ugly, Good, Bad, we exclaim. But, to some, that weed is a vegetable, that plastic visually compelling. Those ducks are a lifeline. That graffiti is art elevating everyday objects (power poles, benches, fences) above their use value—and for free. Aesthetics tell us much more about our values than they do about the truth or beauty of a thing. The graffitist makes uncommissioned art in public places, but we do not see it as such. The *act* is identified as vandalism—destruction rather than creation—and the destruction of the graffiti artist is seen in opposition to the creativity of the 'artist'. But graffiti artists persist in raising the question of whom this public space belongs to—the landowners or the disenfranchised? And they challenge our ways of seeing, drawing our eyes, as do the weeds, rubbish and powerlines, to the things we do not want to see, the things we experience but do not pay adequate attention to.

There are many ways of seeing on the Merri path: what is there, what we envision for the future, how we look back at our past. The way we see is an outcome of an interaction between knowing, being, doing and relating; an amalgam of our history, our aspirations, our understandings of ourselves, our relationships with others. The land evokes us, too: we respond to its call.[5] We are called by those others who make up our human environment and by the 'things' in our ecosystems; we have responsibilities to them. How will we respond? Out of what motivation will we act? What vision will move us? Can we loosen-up the fixed positions from which we take our point of view?

Perhaps we can begin to see how we confuse plants, animals and our human neighbours, and unravel the values that are embedded in our aesthetic assignations. Perhaps we can see the material of our cultures in less than totalitarian terms. Perhaps there is room for all of us—indigenes, weeds and vandals—if only we can accept a little mess now and then, if only we can find some beauty in what our society is, as well as in envisioning brighter futures. Perhaps then we can move beyond asking our councils to attend to the cosmetics of gentrification alone or to engage in botanical cleansing on our behalf. What we don't want to see or know about may well tell us more about ourselves than what we approve of, or find beautiful. Perhaps if we learn to see otherwise, we won't have to be so full of loathing. Perhaps we can enjoy our morning walks again; eyes wide open to what we are, have been and want to become.

1. Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral sculptures are created with natural materials (twigs, leaves, stones, snow and ice) found in the environment. See, for example, his 'Iris leaves and rowan berries' at Hamline University Graduate School Centre for Global Environmental Education, www.cgee.hamline.edu/see/goldsworthy/see.an.andy.html.
2. "It is impossible to dream beside a stretch of water without formulating a dialectics of depth and reflection." Gaston Bachelard, 'Water Lillies, or Surprises of a Summer's Dawn' in *The Right to Dream*, trans. J.A. Underwood, the Bachelard translations, The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, Dallas, 1988, p.5.
3. Edna Walling was one of Australia's most influential and well-regarded landscape designers as well as a writer and photographer. Her design principles emphasised unity between house and garden and the sympathetic use of exisiting features of the landscape. See, for example, Peter Watts, *Edna Walling and her Gardens* (second ed.) Florilegium, Balmain, NSW, 1991.
4. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, pp.161–2.
5. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Time and the Other', in Sean Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader: Emmanuel Levinas*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge Mass., 1989, p.54. Levinas writes of relations between humans, in which the self is called into being by the difference and demands of the other. In an expanded understanding of human relations, it is necessary to understand that non-human 'things' also call upon us to respond. This recognition of responsibility to land, for example, is assumed by many Aboriginal cultures. See, for example, Deborah Bird Rose, *Dingo Makes us Human: Life and Land in an Aboriginal Australian Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1992.

Dr Chris Dew is Senior Lecturer in the Women's Studies Program at La Trobe University.

cultural vitality | **GRAHAM PITTS**
and the **VOICES of ATHERTON GARDENS**

HIGH RISE HARMONIES

The following are the words of a piece both spoken and sung. Some parts are voiced by different individuals, others as a chorus. The italicised parts are those of the chorus.

YOU SEE WITH ME, and soon you will hear with me, some people I'm proud to call my friends. There's about forty of us, as you can see, and none of us are spring chickens. The majority are Mandarin speakers, but we also include people who speak Cantonese, Filipino, Persian, Egyptian, Urdu, Malay, Cambodian and English. We're connected through the English as a Second Language classes at the Atherton Gardens Housing Estate in Fitzroy.

I could say a lot more but I won't. Because I'm a professional playwright and I've learnt things about performance. For a start, there's no such thing as a piece of theatre that's too short. Furthermore, show, don't tell. Especially when my friends are more than capable of speaking, and singing about themselves. So then, ladies and gentlemen, The Voices of Atherton Gardens:

Good afternoon.
Good afternoon.
Welcome one and all.
Welcome one and all.
We are the voices of Atherton Gardens.
We are the voices of Atherton Gardens.
And we often speak together.
And we often speak together.
We practice this especially in our English classes.
We practice this especially in our English classes.
We do almost everything together.
We do almost everything together.
(Sneezes) Ah-choo!
(Sneezes) Ah-choo!
God bless you.
God bless you.
Thank you.
Thank you.
No, no. Do you mind not repeating everything I say?
No, no. Do you mind not repeating everything I say?
Not everything.
Not everything.
Please don't repeat everything I say.
Please don't repeat everything I say.
Please stop it.
Please stop it.
Stop it.
Stop it.
I think I'm going insane.
(Everyone nods their heads.)

We first started meeting last year, at the Atherton Gardens Housing Estate. Every week, for classes in English as a Second Language. Residents from all over the world.

We come from countries all over the planet. From China, where dragons breathe fire. From Vietnam, where grasshoppers sing. From Pakistan, Asia, Africa, Europe, everywhere.

We have come further than most people dare.
We have come further than most people dare.

And this is a song about our journeys, the journey of all, 'Strength for the Journey':

Ocean and sky
Ocean and sky
Far over land and sea
My journey carries me.

LOUIS PORTER

I need courage and strength
For my boat is so small
And the ocean is so wide.
Home is the heart
There must I start
I lay my head to rest
With those I love the best.

I need courage and strength
For my boat is so small
And the ocean is so wide.

All rivers flow
Flow to the sea
There are no separate waves
On the ocean deep.

I have courage and strength
Though my boat is so small
And the ocean is so wide.

I have courage and strength
Though my boat is so small
And the ocean is so wide.

Ocean and sky
Ocean and sky
And the ocean is so wide.

The classes were also preparing people to be part of the community theatre play *Such Lives*. The play was in October last year. The lessons began with only a few people. But they quickly grew in numbers. They continue to grow, with support from the Office of Housing. However, we are always interested in further sponsors. If any of you have money, and a kind heart, we would like to help you.

There are now three classes each week. More than a hundred people come to the classes. We would like to do another play later this year.

There have always been short-term and long-term benefits. In the short-term, we improve our English. That is why we came together, before we were in the play called *Such Lives*. A play seemed a long way in the future. But, with the classes, we could regularly meet together and talk about many things.

In the long term, we have stayed together and many more people have joined us. But before we talk about the things we do, we'd like to tell you a story. It's one of the stories from *Such Lives*.

I will practice this story in English. It is a story about a chipped blue bowl.

A bowl with a chip on one side.

A bowl with a chip on one side.

I found the bowl when I moved into my new flat. The flat was very empty when I moved in. I arrived with furniture, friends and relatives to help me move in. We came with a kitchen table.

Kitchen chairs.

Kitchen chairs.

Beds.

Beds.

Cupboards.

Cupboards.

Lounge chairs and a dining-room table.

Lounge chairs and a dining-room table.

More furniture than you can poke a stick at.

More furniture than you can poke a stick at.

That's slang. Were very proud of learning Aussie slang.

We learn more Aussie slang than you can poke a stick at.

We learn more Aussie slang than you can poke a stick at.

When I moved into the housing estate, my relatives and friends helped me move into the flat. We put a lot of the furniture into the lift.

And then we moved it out again.

More furniture than you can poke a stick at.

Because the lift was broken down.

So we had to carry everything up the stairs.

Everything up the stairs.

Everything up the stairs.

Up and up and up.

Up and up and up.

Everyone was wonderful.

I wasn't wonderful. I gave up and went home.

But finally we moved all the furniture into the flat. And yet the flat felt very strange. As if no-one had ever lived there before. I felt strange. I felt very lonely. And then I found this. A chipped blue bowl. It had a note with it. A letter for me, from the person who had lived in the flat before. "Dear New Person," it said . . .

"Dear New Person. This is a small gift for you. This bowl was here in the flat when I moved in, and now I leave it here for you when you move in. It is to remind you that people have lived here before, and been happy. Every person who ever lives here leaves it for the next New Person. Enjoy living here. There will be trouble and difficulties, but happiness also. That is the meaning of this chipped blue bowl."

A bowl with a chip on one side.

A bowl with a chip on one side.

This is a poem by the Chinese poet Li Bai. He wrote about a goodbye to home:

At Yellow Crane Tower in the west
My old friend says goodbye.
(In Mandarin) *GU REN XI CI HUANG HE LOU.*
In the mist and flowers of spring
He goes down to Yangzhou.
YAN HUA SAN YUE XIA YANG ZHOU.
Lonely sail, distant shadow
Vanish in blue emptiness.
GU FAN YUAN YING BI KONG JIN.
All I see is the great river
Flowing into the far horizon.
WEI JIAN CHANG JIANG TIAN JI LIU.

We continue to learn and to practice English as a Second Language. We also go on excursions and discuss many things. Sometimes we have visitors from the Office of Housing, or the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence, or the Jesuit Social Service. They come to tell us things and we ask them many questions.

We ask our visitors questions like: 'Are you married?' 'Are you happy, or lucky in love?' 'Do you like your job?' 'What is your opinion of Mr John Howard?' And many other questions like that.

Sometimes they get embarrassed. But it is very good for our English communication. Our visitors come to tell us about important new things on the

LOUIS PORTER

estate. So we ask them, too, about *very* important things.

We ask questions like: 'Are you truly in love with your wife?' And 'Do you really, truly, like your job?' Or 'Are you sure Mr John Howard is as bad as that?' And many other questions like that.

It's always very interesting. They share our lives with us and we share our lives with them. And with you. This, we believe, is called 'community'. The sharing of our lives, our memories, worries, wishes and dreams.

This we call community. We share, with our community, an experience, a worry, a wish or a dream. And from this we get much vitality. A lot of people think our vitality comes from Chinese herbs, or our age. But it also comes from sharing our dreams.

Vitality is what brings us together. Community is what holds us together. Community is our shared wishes, dreams, worries and memories. Also, our future, and our present lives.

We would like to finish with another song: 'Sweet bird'. Thank you.

(In English and Mandarin)

When you go back home, take my song with you
But you never take your smile away.
When you go back home, take my song with you
But you never take your smile away.
Tomorrow this song will be heard
In every corner of the world.
Tomorrow this smile will become blossom
In the spring-time,
Blossom in the spring-time.

Written by the Voices of Atherton Gardens in collaboration with Graham Pitts, playwright and Artistic Director of 'Voices of Atherton Gardens'.
Acknowledgements to: Ruth Schoenheimer, musical conductor and composer for the choir, Office of Housing (Victorian Department of Human Services), the Jesuit Social Service.

FROM PROPERTY TO PEOPLE TO 'KPI's

Fremantle's experience managing culture

WHEREAS THE GOLD rush at the end of the nineteenth century drove the development of the beautiful facades of Fremantle's West End, the iron-ore boom of the 1960s passed Fremantle by. The local economy was largely based on port activity and the local fishing industry, which was predominantly made up of migrant fishermen. Fremantle was a staunchly working-class community. Many of its heritage buildings were, by the sixties, run-down or almost derelict.

The local councillors despaired for the backwater it had become and developed a Town Planning Scheme that was intended to modernise Fremantle and equip it to meet the tastes and interests of a 1960s economy and thereby attract investment to the community. This was in the mould of Perth's approach—demolishing old buildings and erecting tall brick cubes.

As part of this process, council sponsored a major retail development that involved an architect called Rob Campbell, who began talking to council management about the value of Fremantle's historic buildings and the potential attraction they could create if preserved.

Council senior management at that time was a curious mix of personalities, and modern and conservative thinkers, held together by the leadership of Town Clerk, Stan Parks. Although they listened to Rob Campbell, there was considerable scepticism. However, a study-tour of Europe helped Murray Edmonds, the ambitious young Assistant Town Clerk, grasp the idea and, on his return, he got the group together to pursue the issue. They produced a watershed document called *Preservation and Change*, which argued for the value of retaining key heritage sites for contemporary use. The same year, with support from community preservationists, council embarked on the ambitious restoration of the former 'lunatic asylum' to create a branch of the West Australian Museum and the Fremantle Arts Centre. Apart from the commitment to preservation of heritage, this was the council's first step into funding and direct involvement in the arts.

Although today it seems obvious that the beautiful built environment was a key aspect of Fremantle's distinctiveness, the decision to go with preservation was not made lightly. The fear was that Fremantle would be left behind. But the council took the risk. They also articulated, as part of this process, the relationship between physical preservation and preserving a sense of community.

This was strengthened as they headed into the 1970s and held a forward-planning seminar of elected members and senior staff, out of which they established the council's priorities and overall aim:

> The prime objective of the council of the City of Fremantle is to promote the health, welfare and prosperity of the citizens of Fremantle and to help all citizens realise their full potential as human beings.
>
> First-level objectives: personal safety, health, intellectual development, environment, economic satisfaction, leisuretime opportunities, communication.

This signalled a conscious move from being a *property-servicing* agency to being a *people-servicing* agency. It was a significant and radical shift at the time, and one that put Fremantle at the forefront of change in local government in Australia.

Every time methods of consultation or public participation were introduced by council, those methods were quickly harnessed by the politically savvy. In the face of this, and in keeping with the rise of corporatisation globally, the council's response was to set in place processes that demonstrated its accountability and to promote its worth at every opportunity.

Other major changes were afoot at that time. The first container ship docked at the wharf in 1969, signalling the demise of the lumpers (wharfies), their proud labour history and associated culture. Containerisation also led to the vacating of extensive warehouses throughout the city. These were huge issues for Fremantle and all other port communities around the world.

Soon the vacant warehouses spawned artists' studios and exhibition spaces, rough-and-ready performance or rehearsal spaces for local bands, circus artists and the like. In the late seventies, the establishment of Murdoch University attracted academics and students to Fremantle and an influx of Rajneeshees set up the largest 'orange' community outside Pune, India.

By 1980, Fremantle was home to Fremantle Arts Centre and the Fremantle Arts Centre Press, The Perth Institute of Film & Television, FreVideo, at least six theatre companies, Praxis (the forerunner to the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art) and a number of other artist-run initiatives. The local high school was a performing-arts specialist school, local bands were performing original music at pubs around Fremantle and artists' work was exhibited in the cafés.

However, most of this extensive arts activity was generated from the community, with general support from council in, for example, providing the Town Hall at reduced rates, finding premises for groups and organisations, and facilitating street closures and parades. Into this vibrant eighties environment came the America's Cup—the thing that many now like to tell us 'put Fremantle on the map'. The impact of the Cup is a thesis in itself, but for the purposes of this discussion, the important legacies were that:

> Fremantle was 'discovered' by local and international visitors alike, and tourism became a major thrust in economic development;
>
> property development, which boomed pre-Cup, continued as a major underpinning of the town's economy, fuelled in the nineties and up to the present day by the conversion of warehouse spaces to luxury apartments.

Such changes are enough to impact substantially on the culture of any community but, in my view, the impact to Fremantle was further exacerbated by council losing its distinctive approach to local governance through the 1990s. Prior to that, 'the culture of Fremantle' (by which I mean the way of life unique to people living in that place, the particular attitudes, behaviours and demonstrated values that had been developed over years) was the bedrock of community planning. However, through the nineties, council's general approach to planning shifted and culture was increasingly identified as 'the arts' and treated as a separate area of concern to be managed, developed and planned by staff working under the Cultural Development Coordinator in the Community Services Division.

There were a number of reasons for this shift. The process of gentrification was speeding up and the community make-up changing with it. Changing work patterns and greater volatility meant that council staff were less likely to be residents or have a long-standing association with Fremantle, and this weakened the 'inherent' understanding of the community within the organisation.

The 'gentrified' population had a strong sense of individual rights and a capacity to work the political system. Every time methods of consultation or public participation were introduced by council, those methods were quickly harnessed by the politically savvy. In the face of this, and in keeping with the rise of corporatisation globally, the council's response was to set in place processes that demonstrated its accountability and to promote its worth at every opportunity.

It's complete lunacy to me that the production of a report can now be regarded as an outcome. Who are we kidding? We produce so many reports they are barely read and, if they are, we fall asleep because we already know how the jargon strings together.

I think there is an inherent defensiveness in this approach that bespeaks a fear of the community. I don't think Fremantle Council is alone in this—I think we are experiencing the politics of fear in all spheres of government, with politicians constantly trying to second-guess the electorate to ensure they stay in power, rather than governing according to strongly held and clearly articulated values.

The snowballing of these changes has had some pretty serious side effects. From my observation and experience, council now spends significant energy on consultation processes, feasibility studies, consultancies and endless reports before any decisions are made. These different processes become ends in themselves and more staff time goes into process than action. As an indicator, the City of Fremantle has its City Plan on its website. This document includes a Strategic Plan, a Corporate Plan and points to twenty-two other 'major strategic documents' that, ostensibly, inform the council's decision-making.

It's complete lunacy to me that the production of a report can now be regarded as an outcome. Who are we kidding? It's not like the days when a report such as *Preservation and Change* could radically alter the direction of a community because it offered ideas that were so different and fresh but, at the same time, captured and articulated the first glimmer of a powerful shift in the community. Now we produce so many reports they are barely read and, if they are, we fall asleep because we already know how the jargon strings together. In this environment, the completion of a cultural plan potentially achieves little more than ticking another box in the organisation's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Recently I read a report by psychiatrist Dr Julie Stone, who at the time was working at a senior level in the West Australian health system:

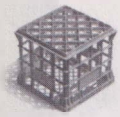
> It seems to me that people everywhere are so overburdened and overwhelmed that, within the systems in which we work, massive, intellectual defences are being erected against distress—our own and then, necessarily, the distress of our patients. What is psychiatry, or psychological medicine, or medicine generally, if it does not firstly and resolutely seek to heal the suffering in people's lives?

I think this pattern is being repeated in many different areas of public policy. To what extent is it easier or less painful to write reports, develop policies and engage in internal processes than it is to address the needs and, in many cases, the pain of people in our communities? And given that we often feel inadequate in responding to the complexity of present-day circumstances, to what extent are we shielding ourselves with our strategic plans and watertight policies?

This is what I see happening in Fremantle and I believe it is contributing to a diminished sense of connection between people and appreciation of the culture of this unique community.

So . . . what's to learn from the Fremantle experience?

> Culture is the bedrock of all community planning:
>
> We don't invent it, we intervene in it—it is something that exists beyond us.
>
> We don't get anywhere by treating it as an optional extra that gets dealt with by hiring a consultant or corralling it in the Community Services Division.
>
> We mustn't confuse it with planning for arts infrastructure, arts activity or for maximising opportunities for creative industry development. They are different things that deserve attention, but . . .
>
> Culture is the 'stuff' of life and we can't build communities without immersing ourselves in it.



I think there is an inherent defensiveness in this approach that bespeaks a fear of the community. I don't think Fremantle Council is alone in this—I think we are experiencing the politics of fear in all spheres of government, with politicians constantly trying to second-guess the electorate to ensure they stay in power, rather than governing according to strongly held and clearly articulated values.

Given that culture is the bedrock of community planning, we need to be very well informed about the culture of our communities:

> What matters most to the citizens in our community?
>
> What has enduring meaning in our community?
>
> What changes in our community are having an impact on the habits, attitudes and experiences of our citizens?
>
> What are the effects of these changes and what do our citizens think about them?

Which citizens are we listening to? We need to critically assess the participation mechanisms that are in place and be bold about how we might better engage a cross-section of the community.

We need courage to do things the way that works best in each of our communities. This is a hard one because we live in a world governed by the politics of fear, because there are so many pressures for us to comply with the policies and operating procedures of our organisations, which have become so risk-averse, and because there are so many demands on us to predetermine outcomes and then work towards those—whether it's internal KPIs we're striving to meet or requirements of the funding we need to tap.

It's very difficult to find the space to experiment, take risks and forge new and better ways of doing things. This pressure is, of course, antithetical to the receptivity, patience and creativity that is required to stay in touch with and responsive to the culture of our communities.

I think it gets back to courage. Doing what is useful and meaningful rather than doing things for show—being sensible in a not-very-sensible world. Obviously, effective planning is essential. It was revolutionary when Fremantle Council did that first forward-planning session in 1971, and the material that flowed from that genuinely informed the decisions made by council in the ensuing years. What's more, as one who lived there, the felt sense of the community at that time matched the rhetoric.

And this is another key point for me—I long for authentic communication. I don't want to hear or speak hollow jargon and hype. If a decision is complex and challenging and takes time, let's say so and take the time needed to arrive at the best decision. If we're working in grey areas, let's stop talking about them as if they're black and white. And if we make a brave decision and the outcome is less than ideal, let's acknowledge that that's what has happened and learn from it. Let's get some reality into our processes and into the way we talk about them.

As policy makers and cultural workers, our task is to listen, think, feel, plan, take action. Listen, think, feel, plan, take action . . . and to do this with as much wisdom, courage and heart as each of us can muster. The complexity won't go away, but our chance of negotiating the complexity and achieving some meaningful results with and for the citizens of our communities will be far greater.

June Moorhouse is an arts consultant who has lived and worked in Fremantle for more than twenty-five years. These ideas were developed through a Fellowship awarded by the Australia Council's Community Cultural Development Board.

little hearts—Composite lines of Barrett Reid 2

lines from 25 of his poems

She's found a shadow in this well-lit dive
he answered to nothing but Johnnymydear
a long look, with its hint of endlessness
moving slow as history, fast as light

sharp eyes, hard and fast thinking
Going to crash, no doubt of that
Part of this tense, forgetful city
a wave of laughter far and low

We are relying tonight on strangers
touch the girl lying to the hard wild boy
their faces like little hearts
when moonlight enters across the floor

the lovers at midnight are lighter and gentler
Where are you when you are falling down
making a voice inhuman now and strange
and murder wear your face and turn to call you

a rider whose ways are now familiar
close by his side as we burnt in the light
moving in the morning before the day began
the game seems up that would declare

that lovers make wounds with their kisses
(the) girl and boy, snowcold and feverbright
will fly again tomorrow for tomorrow's child
moving slow as history, fast as light

but don't pretend you're not part of the game
As we burn together we will calmly hold
and murder wear your face and turn to call you
asleep in bed or in a nightmare walking

Sometimes, sure, you'll look back and remember
Swift and wry bush creature, hard lines across my brow
Bristling chin and wild red eye
Find me where the crowds are thickest or none at all

nothing ever ends in that neighbourhood
our shadows grown so dark upon the sky
with the imagined and the found horizon
Moving slow as history, fast as light

ASHLLEY MORGAN-SHAE

Permission to use lines from the following Barrett Reid poems granted by Dr Richard Haese: 'Koorie Girl, Fitzroy', 'The Desert Lair', 'A Long Look Out', 'The Mosque of Sheik Lutfullah', 'The Absent Heart', 'Going to Crash', 'Hard Lines', 'Mermaids', 'Luna Park', 'Songs of Innocence', 'Moonlight', 'Little Prince', 'Seatime', 'Message', 'The Other Rider', 'Where was I?', 'Gethe', 'Roar', 'Homage to Picasso', 'At Gournea','Regarding You', 'Sailing', 'Sometimes', 'The Golden Rose', 'Painter'.

Wathaurong Ceremony

The Koorie clans who dwelt in the Barwon Heads region belonged to the Wathaurong language group. A large stone-paved area beside the Barwon Heads bridge honours them and configures the surrounding land forms and seascape.

Summer and autumn have mingled, gone their
separate ways. On a chill Sunday morning
we gaze at black, ochre and red stonework
spit and estuary in miniature
a swirl of whale, eel and mulloway
over the floor of this gathering place.

Far, it seems, from incalculable harm,
we sit on planed eucalypt to hear these words:
The earth is our mother, the river heals us.
Some prayers, Marcia gives us a song;
the children are still, with dreaming eyes.
In this small town, a beginning . . . Along
the tide-edge, jagged strips of cloud vanish
into sand then are remade, mirror-clear.

DIANE FAHEY

Propaganda Prose Poem

When smashing monuments, save the pedestals—they always come in handy. Stanislaw J. Lec

When the
liberating
army finally
entered the
city, the
people were
overjoyed.
They poured
on to the
streets and,
in a
spontaneous
expression of
their relief
they toppled
a gigantic
statue of the
defeated
tyrant.
Shouting
with pent up
hatred, they
hammered
it, beat it,
kicked it
and, greatest
insult of all,
pelted it
with shoes.
Then
reversing the
oppression of
decades,
they dragged
the head
through the
streets,
sharing rides
on it in
jubilant triumph.

When the
victorious
army finally
entered the
city, the mob
was filled
with
unrestrained
emotion.
They poured
on to the
streets and,
in an
expression of
contempt at
the
unmasking
of the stern-
father figure
of their ex-
leader, they
toppled a
gigantic
statue of
him.
Displaying
childish
rage, they
hammered
it, beat it,
kicked it
and, greatest
insult of all,
pelted it
with shoes.
Then they
dragged the
head
through the
streets
jumping on
and off it,
in a
cathartic
orgy.

When the
invading
army finally
entered the
city, most
people
quickly
switched
their
allegiance.
Some
appeared on
the streets
and, in a
move
calculated to
assure their
new rulers
their cause
had been
just, worked
with them to
topple a
gigantic
statue of the
ex-president.
Drawing on
a long
tradition of
street
theatre, they
hammered
it, beat it,
kicked it
and, greatest
insult of all,
pelted it
with shoes.
Then they
dragged the
head
through the
streets,
taking turns
to ride upon
it for
the international
news.

When the
enemy army
finally
entered the
city, the
people, who
had endured
days of
heavy
shelling,
were filled
with
foreboding.
Some went
into hiding.
Some plotted
revenge.
Others, in
extravagant
gestures of
submission
helped
their new
masters
topple a
gigantic
statue of the
ex-president.
Histrionically,
they
hammered
it, beat it,
kicked it
and, most
desperate act
of all, pelted
it with shoes.
Images of
this scene
will be used
as evidence
by
historians.

SUE STANFORD

No Tomorrow

Deepen the wound
Dig up the scar
Scoop up the detritus
Brand, insinuate; Tar
with the broadest brush
Protect at all costs
Safeguard that which
is held dear; What?
Truth? Compassion?
Board out the world
to cement a mission, a Vision;
Close Everything:
Borders, Minds, Hearts
to all but the
narrowest
conceptions of What the World Is;
of Who is On Our Side,
For Us or Against
Upon pain of death, and woe betide

Believe that pigmentation
is cause for separation
The stain of birth, justification
for pain and segregation.
When did the National Interest
lose interest in the nations?
The bleak slogans of recent elections
drown out the sigh of our conscience?
To pick and choose our mates
According to their strength, their size
And what profit can be made
Is that the advice
To give a newborn?
The lesson to bring
to the playground?
That in the sand ring
the biggest fiends
with the biggest fists, the biggest boy
(and his friends)
can play with all the toys
Or else.
And like children,
Let us war like there is no tomorrow.

SHU SHIUNG LOW

American Might

Because I can. And there's nothing else to do.
Well, there's the corn to harvest. And Mary Lou's
graduation, web-cammed and cable networked.
And what about that long lonely coyote call
calling me skyward from the bucket seat of my tractor?

She might, too. She's at a loser's end.
Tired of rolling in pastry for apple pies,
too fat for porno, she waves a wooden pin
above her head in the ring—she's "Ma"
from the "Killer Crew", wrestling huckleberry jam.

We both might. So might many others.
The web poll says 95 percent and climbing.
The budget is expanding, the pipelines
are bursting, the underwater cables
pump live footage to the world.

We *might*. No, we probably will.
Because history is a sore loser, fighter jets
have pet names, God is a proud, proud father
and our movies are aircraft hangars
for favourite flying dreams.

PAUL MITCHELL

Priorities

Attuned to
slow rhythms
of mountains
there's no time
now for the
snarl hype
and warp
of repetitive
daily news

COLLEEN Z BURKE

A Language Where the Mouth Just Moves

We have everything
good government could possibly want now
but good government.

Tu Fu
712–770 A.D.

There has been so much justification
so much looking with closed eyes
so much interpretation in terms
that it seems the only things
that can be promised are those
for the next life.
Is this why souls that flock
to the auditoriums are noisy
with long arms and big hands?
God must know above a whisper
that everyone here was robbed
and cheated and in every face
a King or Queen of crumbs
looks out and demands a crown.
Nobody wants anything for nothing!
So why do the boys stand around
these days and ignore the work
in stone and wood and steel?
Nothing niggles them.
The men with pain in their backs
collected that pain bending
to an earth which they knew
was warm but they are growing
cold here waiting for a house
that will not be built.
No matter!
We all know the circle's small.
We all know to lead is to leave.
A body bent a certain way
can heat its frozen feet
in the fire of another's heart.
As if they were fish
there are women with bellies
full of eggs so why not
go fishing and slap them on the river-
bank where they can be slit
from end to end and emptied.
There is a concept of more
though the truth is it's a lie
unless of course the dust of stars
keeps falling beyond any ability
to imagine it.
There are a few optimistic scientists:
utopias in every hill and things
better than before they said it.
There are ministers who can pour
water into a row of bottles
and forget about the sea.
It seems even stories can be
sucked back towards the lips
and described as just a tide.
And yes . . . And no . . .
How could such misery endured
ever be retold?
Mouths move around this like boats
in a wind that will eventually
sink them.
There's no shame in being unable
to withstand such execrable weather!
As if there's a responsibility
for squalls and snow like this
which tires the mind:
You could write forever
the pain of loss.
You could just as well
not begin writing.
Imagine if someone told you
the President would live forever.
The circle not a circle but a line.
Autumn always has the same effect.
Nothing born.
Nothing dies.
What is it about bulls and men
and experiments that flaunt
both life and death
as if they were badges of honour?
Most are pretending to live
by dressing in the explanations
of why they had to do
what they have done.
They speak a language
where the mouth just moves
and where the voice deepens
as soon as it takes charge.
This is speech for those so afraid
of what could be said
that their hearts have run

from their lips.
Their lips are like soldiers
marching and marking time.
The crowd watches silently.
Even their cheers are silent.
There are dimensions in which
there is no listening.
There are wars of the tongue.
We are they. They are we.
A bridge of silence joining us
as the battle tries to leave
both shores where
hand-to-hand with the earth
we have stopped noticing how
things shatter inside their wholeness
when they come into contact
with the human.
What do they say?
We are *only human*?
Smiling down a dirt road
our leaders talk as if we could make
a new truth from words.

MTC CRONIN

Night Spring

mountains white, an occasional bird calling
stones cold, frost about to creep over
the flowing spring, stained with moonlight
turns into a creek of snow

YUAN ZHONGDAO (1570–1623)
(TRANSLATED BY OUYANG YU)

Slow Cinema

I drag a box from under the bed
pull out what's left of an album
and turn the pages
pasted with snapshots
slipping from corners
my childhood coming unstuck

to read my mother's writing scratched in ink
Christmas '59
my father's scrawl slanting to the left
Happy Days
and I can see my mum spitting on a rag
rubbing dirt off my face
the old man hunched over a brownie box
peering into the viewfinder
lifting an eye then pausing
his voice calling *Smile*
the shutter clicking
the light failing
his hand cranking the handle
as if turning back the years

and memories flicker
figures come alive
dead relatives run towards the camera
hamming it up
striking poses rehearsing forever
faces whited-out by lens flare
my brother riding his bike no hands
holding a moment
my sister cart-wheeling across the lens
then standing side-on drinking from the hose
and me
hanging back
lost in the crowd
in a shapeless dress hand-tinted
colour bleeding from my face

and it's as if the past has come for me
as if forever's given up
and there's no escape
from bringing back the child I was
a long way off
but closer than I thought

PAULA GREEN

Howard Watches the Oscars and Weeps with Joy

"And the Oscar™ . . . "
Lipstick and rouge. Double-sided tape. Cynicism.
"goes to . . . "
Cash. Narcissism.
"George Bush Junior,
Saddam Hussein, and
Tony Blair . . . "
Smiles. Close-ups of pregnant actresses.
"for Best Screenplay in an Animated
Documentary."
Gushing. Producers thanked.
Cocaine.

DAMON YOUNG

Humming,
my neighbour swaps
the hemmer foot on her Singer
for a zipper piece.
She locks the presser bar:
her hands skip
on the fabric as she sews
the gold and green logos
on the zipper.
Done, I
say for her.
She hands me
a slim silk shirt
with a watch
pocket--embroidered . au.
Good for you, she says.
Strong seams.
You not tell dem 'spectors.

DOMINIQUE HECQ

The Doges' Palace

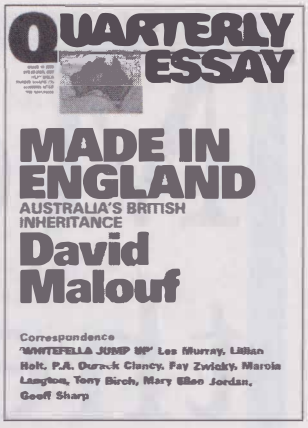
I cannot say that this was the heart
of the city—where is the core
of a city which for its consort
embraced the sea, whose ruler yearly
wedded the sea in symbol? Yet if the heart
is the place of welcome, this was it . . .
a pink and white palace, set over arched
colonnades which, at first seeing, steal
your breath. Facing its bride, the water,
and flanking the gathering place, the broad
piazza, the columns parade, the arches
point their spearheads. Remembered,
these can never be unremembered.

I have seen such arches elsewhere.
Fabricated in furnaces and rolling mills,
they stood for a while where the great towers
were levelled, a web of laced steel,
airy, torn dreadfully. Each time
I see the photographs which people style
Ground Zero 9/11, I think of Venice,
the tracery of the Doges' Palace.
Yet in the far interior of the Palace
is the State Inquisitors' Room, the torture
chamber, the passage to the Bridge of Sighs
and the prison across the shadowed waterway.
The city of the winged lion consumed
its own, as well as enemies
from elsewhere.

What should one say of the city
of the steel arches, the great towers?
None could truly support the rough wounding,
the grievous losses, but do the city and
the state conceal, beyond their wisdom
and attainment, past all the steel addressed
to touch the heavens, their own inquisitors' room,
their bridge of sighs? We have believed, some say,
too casually in the right of greatness
to rule, to stand across the lesser . . .
Turn back now, bathe injuries in humility;
pride draws sharp wounds and seas' reclaiming
tides lap at Venetian doors.

JOHN BRIGGS

MADE IN ENGLAND, PLAYED IN AUSTRALIA



DAVID CARTER

David Malouf: *Made in England: Australia's British Inheritance* (*Quarterly Essay* no.12, 2003, Black Inc., $12.95)

What is it with the current 'back to England' fashion? There've been recent conferences, books and journal issues; the ageing expats have become house authors at *ABR*. While there's a mix of literary nostalgia, cultural confidence and 'post-nationalism' behind it all, we can take it as a sure sign that Britain has all but disappeared as a contemporary reference point for culture or ideas in Australia. We can return to it now as somewhere other. England is a foreign place and they do things differently there.

I've been waiting for an occasion to argue that David Malouf is a better essayist than novelist. I've often felt that Malouf turns off some of his wide and sharp-edged intelligence in the novels (with a few exceptions, such as the underrated *The Great World*—how much more complex a novel than the formulaic *An Imaginary Life*); his powers of evocation—of land, home and memory—are sometimes just too seductive. I'm not sure, though, that *Made in England* is the best platform on which to make my case. The essay has all the qualities we'd expect from its author—sensuous memory, intelligence, elegance and a bit of Shakespeherian rag. But the suspensions of disbelief it requires sometimes stretch to breaking point. What the writerly essay form does well—moving between personal memory and public history through the language of an inhabited past—this essay does well. One is grateful for its grace. But the form also encourages a kind of innocence.

Malouf's concern here is with "Australia's British inheritance" in its institutions, but above all its language and "habit of mind". It is a reflection, too, on empires and colonies. The essay begins in the Folger Library, Washington DC, where Malouf is shown the Shakespeariana. In the context of noting Washington's departure from British models (and *that* in the context of the 'Coalition of the Willing'), the point of the anecdote is the embodiment, in the Shakespeare texts, of "the spirit of the language we share". (Malouf is alert to the irony of having to voyage to the heart of the new empire to find it, though he lets the irony pass.) The conclusion is pure Malouf: "Finally it is language we come home to, and nowhere seems more like home than here."

The anecdote sets the themes: the distinctive Australian inheritance within the broader British frame, and the "habit of mind", embodied in the language, that comes with that inheritance. This is triangulated with the American presence, as it must be (incidentally, what's disturbing about 'Americanisation' now is not pop culture but the local emergence of the American rhetoric of "evangelical individualism and hostility to government" that Malouf notes).

Malouf returns to the question of language throughout the essay. But along the way he takes extended excursions into the histories and cultures of Britain and its empire, not least as that lived out in mid-twentieth century Brisbane (on familiar Malouf territory). The relationship is always seen as two-way—the British view of Australia is as much a part of the equation as its reverse. As Malouf writes, from the British point of view Australia would always be "an off-shoot and re-creation" (it's always

surprising to discover how much this is still the case). But in recent decades the relationship has reversed—now Australia looks, to the British, like a version of what they might have become, "another and less disappointing history". I like that. But perhaps the essay doesn't quite express or explain the extent of the separation that has now occurred such that the regard of the British, for the most part, scarcely matters to Australians. It's the British who make a TV program about British immigrants in Australia—who else cares? (And to paraphrase the PM—do we really want people like that here?) Malouf does mention that styles which have continued in Britain are likely to be "entirely foreign" to young people, though I suspect the generational divide arrived earlier, between Malouf's generation and my own.

Malouf evokes his own memories of the homogenous "middlebrow" culture of mid-century Australia: largely English, Irish and Scots in origin, but thoroughly Australian, he wants to claim, because it couldn't have been anything else. This is the kind of 'derivative' culture that it became fashionable to dismiss—and *Johnno* suggests that Malouf, as much as anyone, felt its inhibiting and de-creative power as it resurfaced in postwar Australia. But he's right, here, to insist that it had its own complexity, that it was not necessarily the opposite of Australian originality. He also wants to claim that it had space for "the non-conformist and dissenting" because part of the ethos—"so deeply British as to be essentially Australian"—was that "you did not interfere". He doesn't, though, explore the *limits* of that tolerance. Race, class, religion, politics, sexuality—Malouf is aware of the faultlines but they're largely outside the culture he's evoking. What that culture didn't see he largely chooses not to see in this essay.

The second thread is the British inheritance through a larger historical sweep and the distinctive nature of Australia as a colony due, first, to the nature of Britain at the time of its "founding" (cf. America) and, second, to the Britishness of its people (cf. India). Here the work is an unacknowledged tribute (the essay has no references) to the sophistication of recent Australian histories which have placed Australian settlement in a broader 'international' history of empire and culture. There are suggestive arguments about eighteenth-century Britain—"not yet an imperial power"; the *provincial* rather than colonial nature of the dominions; and the significance of the absence of slavery in Australia.

But the essay goes further, dangerously close to an argument for 'benevolent settlement'. Countering this is a sense of the 'accident' of British settlement, but the emphasis of the essay is on the "privilege" that Australia received in the British inheritance. I happened to be reading the essay just after reading early twentieth-century Australian editorials about the 'genius of the Anglo-Saxon race'. Malouf's language is often strikingly similar. Although he reminds us of the downside—British philistinism and "drunkenness" (!)—there are some rich passages evoking the qualities of the English or Anglo-Saxon "habit of mind" that wouldn't be out of place in the earlier documents (or in John Howard's sense of inheritance): this is the "habit of mind that created the Common Law, devised the British parliamentary system . . . and was vital, here in Australia, to the capacity of the early settlers to abandon whatever expectations they had arrived with and adapt."

There's a sort of truth here but probably not one that can be explained far through a concept like "habit of mind" (what other habits of mind did the British develop over the same period?). At best this might make the link between, say, institutions and daily 'customs and manners', but it is always in danger of turning into some version of the 'spirit of the race'—or the language. It enables the essay—despite everything that we know Malouf knows—to 'forget' the violence of colonisation (not just a characteristic of slavery) and the toxic process of dispossession through which this habit of mind came to inhabit the continent. British pragmatism and good humour were efficient colonisers. The 'innocence' of Malouf's essay is thrown into striking contrast by the Correspondence which this issue of the *Quarterly Essay* contains, that provoked by Germaine Greer's *Whitefella Jump Up*. Again Malouf 'knows' this but sets it aside.

Malouf is right, I think, to redeem a complex history of Britain in Australia: the saturation of Englishness in Australian life was multi-layered; imperialism carried with it an enabling form of 'cosmopolitanism' and modernity for (some) Australians. Perhaps it was only in the 1950s and 1960s that Anglophilia became simply parochial. But the question of who could and couldn't benefit from the British inheritance isn't raised.

The essay depends upon a willing suspension of disbelief towards its recurrent phrases—"*our* lan-

guage", "*our* culture", "*our* consciousness"—and upon our willingness to identify as a certain kind of reader with a certain cultural inheritance. But what of those who experienced the English language as the instrument of oppression? What if we read the homogeneity of the culture from the outside rather than the inside? What about those who were never granted access to that 'consciousness'? In whose consciousness was "Australia—the land itself—fully alive at last" after the war? The essay depends upon a suspension of disbelief about *other* Australian histories and other kinds of readers (probably not readers of the *Quarterly Essay* series) for whom the collectivities the essay invokes are not only foreign but actually alienating.

Thus the kind of Australian identity Malouf invokes in the essay's conclusion—a kind of provisional, experimental 'identity *lite*' that he also traces back to the British inheritance—while deeply attractive, lacks much historical conviction. It's strangely innocent about the deeply racialised identities of Britishness and Englishness over the past two centuries (and of Shakespeare's racialisation in the process). It's not that we can't perform this identity—there *is* a sense in which Australians are especially good at it—but who's the 'we' that can perform it? What kind of class, colour and culture credentials are required? Cosmopolitanism, like 'belonging', is a virtue, but one profoundly unequally distributed across this society.

David Carter is Director of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland.

Words Kill

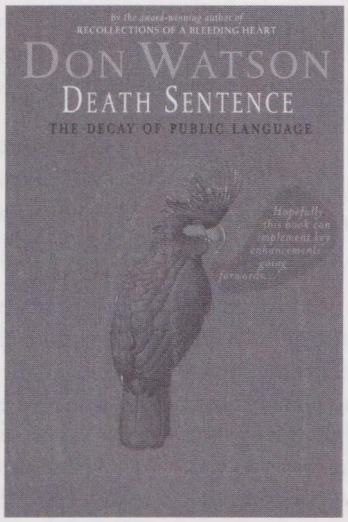
JOHN McLAREN

Don Watson: *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language* (Knopf, $29.95)

Language may not make our world, but it makes the way we see it, and the way we see our place in it. We use it to learn, to think, to express our feelings, to talk to others about ourselves and our lives, to change the way others behave. At its most intimate, language establishes, confirms and continues our personal relationships. In its public mode, it shapes the way we conduct our public affairs, including business, education, government and politics. In a very real way, language determines history, for it is through language that we understand the physical, social and moral causes that lead to particular events. Historians may later argue about the significance of different factors in leading to a particular outcome, and politicians may lie at the time about their reasons for taking particular action, but they all rely on language to convince their readers or listeners that they are right. It is therefore vital that we should maintain public language as a vehicle for the most precise and comprehensive expression of thought, perception and feeling.

Don Watson's book, in the tradition of Orwell, is a denunciation of the carelessness that is destroying the effectiveness of English in fulfilling this function. He claims that language for him is neither a passion nor an obsession, but he has written a passionate book. Its passion is the same that underlay his memoir of his time as chief speechwriter for Paul Keating—a passion for democracy. The loss of an effective public language does not merely impoverish our daily lives, it makes it impossible to make a society that will allow its members to realise their individual humanity. English, which has grown in flexibility for a thousand years, is now, despite the continuing growth of its vocabulary, losing its capacity to speak life.

Death Sentence has been criticised for being based on a single idea, for being too long and repetitious, and for lacking a coherent argument. Although there is truth in these criticisms, made most extensively by Paul Monk in the *Financial Review*, they miss the point of the book. In fact, Monk, by complaining that the book fails to provide a literary and historical survey, a clear thesis with an explanation of causes, and a remedy for the state of affairs it diagnoses, demonstrates the book's major contention that public language has fallen into a single instrumental mode. Watson is not offering a thesis, but a complaint, a meditation on a state of affairs that he finds both deplorable and dangerous. His method of argument is a literary equivalent of the anthro-



pologists' "thick description". In this it resembles Robert Manne's writings on the stolen generation of Aborigines, convincing the reader by the sheer force and abundance of example. His book adds to the work of earlier authors in this tradition, like George Orwell, not only by placing it in an Australian context, but by identifying the cause as a pervading acceptance of managerial thought and practice. This distinguishes him also from American commentators like Alan Bloom, who see in the decay of language a symptom of the decay of civilised standards. Watson shows the decay is a clear consequence of the capture of economic and political power by a particular class.

Yet the essay has its own inner logic and organisation. After a brief introductory discussion of the nature of public language, Watson deals in turn with the way the language of managerialism, and particularly of marketing, has infected all spheres of public life, and then, after a brief excursion into the history of rhetoric in Australia, with the particular effects of management-speak on political language. The following section traces the way this linguistic decay has affected public commentary generally, particularly on sport, and infected the schools and universities that should stand firm against it. A final suggestion considers, without great hope, how the individual might resist this plague that has spread into every part of our culture.

Watson's writing is always lucid and witty, and his book can be read through as a whole, or dipped into as the reader seeks joy or dreadful example. He uses italics to highlight the words that have come to replace thought in our public culture, and counterpoints his description of the plague with a comprehensive anthology of gobbets that illustrate both the heights that language can achieve and the depths to which it so often plunges. These alone make the book a resource of painful delight. Observers of the current Prime Minister will relish the examples of his use of language to avoid truth, but he is not the only culprit. Bob Hawke is identified as one who sacrificed meaning, as are the bureaucrats his colleague John Dawkins loosed on education. Nor do the Labor strongholds in the states fare any better. "There are states," Watson writes, "governed by people of such little apparent personality or belief, they seem to exist only to fulfil the basic requirement of democracy that the media and the people have someone to judge." In his bleak but well-substantiated view, we can look to neither major party in either states or commonwealth for politicians "whose words spring directly from conviction, or in whom power obviously lives."

Monk complains that Watson attributes too great an importance to language in human affairs. The decay of language, he argues, is accompanied by a renewed appreciation of the power of visual images, which in any case precede language in human evolution by some 300,000 years. The latter assertion rests on the claim that hominids used pictures but not words. But there is a clear argument that it is the use of words that distinguishes humans from hominids. In any case the power of the visual is complementary, not antithetical, to the spoken. Pictures can reveal truths that cannot be otherwise expressed, but they can also tell lies, and can conceal their authors as effectively as can words. Language alone has the potential to support the complexities of analytic thought, and combine the nuances of thought and feeling. Nowhere in Monk's review does he attempt to show that Watson's examples of managerial language retain this potential.

There are parts of Watson's rhetoric that the reader might wish to challenge. I would take issue with his suggestion that marketing seeks to convert *needs* into *wants*: the reverse is surely true. He rides a few hobbyhorses of his own, like his dislike of postmodernism, and of area studies in the academy, when his true target is those academics who fail in their duty to communicate the novelty, truth or excitement of their studies. Yet even these idiosyncrasies serve to remind the reader that behind the words there is a living, suffering, feeling human being. It is difficult to think of much public language that has done the same in Australia in recent years.

John McLaren is an Overland consulting editor.

The Culture Debate

GRAHAM PITTS

Jon Hawkes: *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* (Cultural Development Network, $25)

This book and its author remind me that early in the marijuanic mist of the 1970s an International Anarchist Conference was held in a former stately church in Glebe, Sydney. It ran for five days. The agenda was naturally ignored. The first three and a half days were instead devoted to the question of 'whether anarchists should or should not have a Chairperson'.

Memories stir not because *The Fourth Pillar of Responsibility* is waffle. (Anyway, the anarchist conference debate was brilliant.) It's because Jon Hawkes is brave enough to raise the question of 'culture' in the context of community cultural development. This is an area into which Hawkes does not, in this book, enter. But he knows far more about it than most people as he was the Director of the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council between 1982 and 1987. However arguments about what constitutes 'culture' and attempts to actually define the term have been banned one hopes by all mature people from any conferences. Life is short and debates about what constitutes 'culture' can be very, very long.

Instead *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* is a comparatively brief thirty-eight page paper accompanied by thirty pages of appendices. Aimed at government policy-makers and planners, especially those in local government, it argues that culture for the purpose of cultural planning encompasses values and aspirations; the processes and mediums through which we develop, receive and transmit these values and aspirations; and the tangible or intangible manifestations of these values and aspirations.

Hawkes contends there are seven areas of social interaction in which "culture is the prime energiser". He imagines, apparently without difficulty, a single Government Cultural Affairs Division with responsibilities for education and training, communication and public affairs, the constructed environment and public facilities, arts, history and heritage, recreation and leisure, and sport. Those who might suggest this constitutes responsibility for almost everything which keeps us decently human would, I suspect, be greeted with a nod from Hawkes. That's his very point: "The question is no longer what is culture, but what isn't?"

An anarchist, even a former anarchist, might well shudder at the idea of such a Ministry for Being Human. However some years ago in New Zealand there was a Cultural Department remarkably similar. It was also responsible for cemeteries. From the cradle to the grave, indeed, culture overarches and underpins everything.

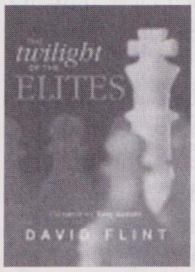
The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability interweaves a number of big-picture themes and borrows extensively, with full acknowledgement, from ecological and environmental thought. Indeed, the title and most central theme come from *Resetting the Compass: Australia's journey towards sustainability*, by geo-environmentalists David Yencken and Debra Wilkinson; viz., "Sustainability, as it has become formally adopted around the world, has not one but three pillars: ecological sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability. Some would argue that there should be four pillars and that cultural sustainability should always be included. We agree with this view."

In essence Hawkes has written a passionate but carefully planned step-by-step polemic which has already helped to persuade a number of people in government, especially local government, that culture should be the fourth pillar of their planning. Humans all live by values, and culture is about those values just as cultural action is about how we examine and use those values. A society without human values is dead. Community, culture, arts and sustainability have been battered but not beaten by the overwhelming consumerism of unchecked global capitalism. It is naïve to think they can be supported and regenerated by anything less than a far-ranging rethinking of policy plus governmental action. It would somehow be both ironic and apposite if it is on the cultural battlefront that governments now made their stand against the 'economic rational' corporate invasion of all human values.

Finally, it is worth noting that this well-researched book includes an eight-page bibliography containing many gold nuggets for anybody interested in community cultural development, arts and culture—irrespective, dear reader, of your own arguments about what constitutes 'culture'. It is also notable that Hawkes' grammar is occasionally idiosyncratic if not downright eccentric. However, this is a small quibble in what is a very good book and an extremely valuable, useable and many-layered addition to the cultural debate in Australia, should we have one.

Graham Pitts is a playwright and community arts worker.

Dawn of Hypocrisy



PATRICIA ANDERSON

David Flint: *The Twilight of the Elites* (Freedom Publishing, $29.95)

David Flint's book, launched by federal MHR Tony Abbott (excerpted in the *Australian*, which also published an excerpt of the book's 'Foreword', by Abbott), reviewed in the Fairfax *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* and discussed on the ABC 'PM' program as well as on *newsweekly.com*, joins a list of publications with a similar apocalyptic twist: *Twilight of Sailing Ships*, *Twilight of the Generals*, *Twilight of the Truth*, *Twilight of the Wise*. But surely, as Gerard Henderson has noted, Flint is a member of the elites. Does he see the sun setting on himself?

His template is Christopher Lasch's 1995 publication, *Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*—itself an echo of Jose Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* published in the early 1930s. A shaky palimpsest indeed.

To propose the idea that a group of people in Australia have attempted to seize the reins of public debate is one thing. To announce it as an irrevocable fact, and proceed serenely on that basis, is another.

Those who haven't seized the reins, the silent happy fraternity in a million suburban streets sweeping the leaves, going to ballroom-dancing classes and playing bingo, would be pleased to know that Flint thought of them as sensible Australians. Likewise the chaps in their back sheds, the stamp collectors, the bird watchers, the rock climbers, the telly devotees, and the obituary readers. But the reality is: very few of them will ever know of Flint's confidence in them.

Your average Australian, consumed by the day-to-day struggle, forfeits the luxury of being consumed by politics (election day excepted). They're fretting at the supermarket check-out, puzzling over the dent in the hub-cap, visiting Uncle George in the emergency ward and collecting the children from sporting ovals in inconvenient suburbs.

Oddly enough, journalists do all of the above as well. So perhaps they too qualify as ordinary Australians—except when they're examining the encroachment of the political machine on our day-to-day dilemmas.

Journalists have been especially singled out by Flint as prominent members of 'the elite'. This must make them smile. Many are of a generation who remember that elite meant the 'establishment', which referred unequivocally to that product of the Protestant private school and the Melbourne Club, who filled the ranks of the banking and big business fraternities and owned the media.

The elites in our society today are, as ever, the actual power-holders. And while their views (privately or publicly) might confirm, and confound, Flint's perspective, the reality remains. While the topsoil flies about, the bedrock remains undisturbed.

In some countries you belong to the elite if you wear a military uniform; in another if you occupy a government desk with a nameplate you can swivel in unison with a regime's tumble-turns. But if Australians think about 'elite' they are more likely to think of rugby heroes or someone in a speedo and flippers.

Flint's elites are poorly defined. The short sharp promotion on the book's back cover serves as an introduction to the tenor of the whole:

> Australia's media and legal elites wanted us to vote for a republic in 1999. *We didn't.* They wanted us to change the flag. *We wouldn't* . . . They wanted the Prime Minister to say 'sorry'. *He wouldn't* . . . They

> wanted us to support unlimited illegal immigration. *We didn't.* But [they] still live in hope that they can get around Australia's system of democratic checks and balances, to impose their own agendas—secularism, hard multiculturalism, judicial activism, an end to individual responsibility, Big Government.

If Flint thinks that his 'elites' have usurped the role of speaking for Australians, where does he place John Howard, who more than any politician since Menzies claims to intuit what Mr (and Mrs) Average most require of this life? Where, along the elitist spectrum, do you place those who are dismayed at Howard's consummate political skills when they are employed in the service of anticipating—even contributing—to the coarsening of public debate? We have only to recall his reticence when Pauline Hanson was in full flight or his unfortunate occupation of the fence when a rabid parliamentarian attempted to discredit Justice Michael Kirby. More recently, there with his nod of approval in the direction of the Death penalty—a real finger up to the wind with this one—and surely the bottom of the beer can.

Is it elitist to be equivocal about our relations with America; relieved that we can take shelter under her skirts while acknowledging that Graham Greene's *Quiet American* continues to be a work of astonishing prescience? It was Mark Twain who first commented that foreign nations who have been defeated by American power found it easier to forgive her than countries she saved.

Flint has turned his attention to virtually every corner of Australian life, and where he casts his net, he finds his 'elitists' snagging it. Journalists with opinions, judges with opinions, educators with opinions. Oh, where will it all end? Their views on border control, illegal immigration, the Kyoto agreement, crime and punishment, and the Republican debate all concern him with their wrongheadedness. The Republican issue is dismissed thus:

> It is a sobering fact to recall that this elite agenda would have been no more than the stuff of Eastern Suburbs dinner parties, but for the elevation of one Paul Keating to the Prime Ministership of the Commonwealth.

Other issues requiring the cool head of a lawyer—Flint's cool head, that is—are postmodern theory and cultural studies. Here he is definitely onto something when he suggests that some university departments have been waylaid by the novel methods of analysing written texts—some French chaps were to blame—which all but paralysed clear thinking, and may have contributed to a generation of woolly thinkers and equivocal writers.

One of the ironies of Australian and American political life is that while conservative regimes hold office, they think and behave like an embattled and overwhelmed minority playing a desperate rearguard battle. Flint himself was educated in London and Paris on his way to becoming a professor of law. Since 1997, when he was given the appointment by the Howard Government, he has been chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority. There is much indignation and metaphorical sabre-rattling. This is also expressed with depressing regularity at *Quadrant* dinners where a number of chaps have shanghaied some delicate issues; less, one suspects because they care about them than because it allows them to point-score, grind a few axes and discharge some lingering animosities. The shells that are fired across the bows might have 'left' or 'right' etched on their casings, but that's merely a reflex.

In the flesh, Flint possesses the accoutrements of the diplomat. He is serene, detached, gracious and rational; but these qualities do not render his polemic any less wrong-headed.

Patricia Anderson is the Sydney art critic for the Australian. Her Art in Australia: Debates, Dollars & Delusions will be published by Pandora Press in 2004.

Muslim Appearances, Western Gaze

SUSSAN KHADEM

Hanifa Deen: *Caravanserai: A Journey Among Australian Muslims* (FACP, $24.95)

The religious and moral values of Australian Muslims can feel like a heavy burden to carry in a secular Western society. Searching for answers to the questions of identity for ethnic Australians means attempting to consolidate the clashes of different cultures and trying to find a set of life guidelines that are correct for each individual. For Australian Muslims the pressure comes from struggling to meet the expectations of the cultures and the religion. Some families have been able to migrate and adapt to the cultural changes with relative ease, while others were 'left behind'. Now, with Islam being the focal point of Western media, Hanifa Deen's book *Caravanserai: A Journey Among Australian Muslims* comes as a direct reply to recent misrepresentations and prejudices portrayed in the Western media.

On 13 September 2001, Alan Jones of Radio 2UE put to his audience the following questions:

> Are the Muslim rapes of Australian women in the Bankstown area the first signs of an Islamic hatred towards the community that welcomed them here years ago? Have we now, because of multiculturalism, created an Islamic community that's more aligned with Islam than Australia?

This line of questioning leaves little room for debate or education. It provokes racism and further violence. While acknowledging that the crimes committed and the behaviour of the attackers were unforgivable, Deen comments: "What the moral soothsayers ignored was that these boys, according to community insiders and youth workers, did not personally identify with either Islam or their culture, in spite of their 'I'm a Leb' poses. They were misfits who identified with each other and their outsider status which they gloried in." The 'us' against 'them' questioning points the finger at Islam rather than the actual perpetrators of the crimes and actually creates a damaging divide between East and West.

Deen also addresses the issues of female genital mutilation, the hijab and the supposed role the Muslim religion plays in women's oppression. I couldn't help but notice that once again, research on Islam is conducted under watching Western eyes, when Deen writes: "Female genital mutilation. For weeks I had been procrastinating, but finally I wrote down the three words, and as they stared back at me I wondered how to proceed from here." At times I felt that Deen had succumbed to defending Western perceptions of Islam, rather than advancing its status. Rather than highlighting the high moral values of education, fidelity, filial piety and respect for the differences between men and women, Deen adopts a defensive mode: "Neither the Qur'an nor the Haidith contains any mention of—or justification for—the practice of female 'circumcision'. It seems essential to repeat this, *ad nauseam* if necessary, as it continues to be wrongly identified with Islam." It is unfortunate that these practices need to be mentioned in a book on Muslims in Australia.

Without excusing extremist attitudes, Deen, a Pakistani Australian Muslim, takes on senstive issues in compiling a collection of interviews with Muslims of diverse racial backgrounds. She writes insightful and engaging accounts and blurs the line between observer and participant. Perhaps the most interesting case is that of Denise, who sought faith in Islam after turning away from a life of prostitution. Islam as a new way of living acts as Denise's salvation: "I could understand Denise's self-imposed *purdah* and her urge to wear *nikab* as elements of a ritual purification—one which must bring enormous psychological relief. Symbolically, Denise's *nikab* represented an important rite of passage, a kind of rebirth." The religion portrayed in the Western media as a tool used to keep women oppressed is transformed into a tool of liberation.

Deen has a gift for telling stories in a poetic and descriptive way. *Caravanserai: A Journey Among Australian Muslims* is an important contribution to literature and should be read not as an attempt to consume the Other but as a window into a part of Australia which makes the country what it is today.

Sussan Khadem is studying Arts at Victoria University.

A Lasting Impression

CERIDWEN SPARK

Sue Abbey and Sandra Phillips (eds): *Fresh Cuttings* (UQP, $25)
Michele Grossman (ed.): *Blacklines* (MUP, $34.95)

When *My Place* was published in 1987, Indigenous authors were virtually unheard of. The genre has since taken off and even books once considered 'confronting'—for instance Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988)—have found their way onto school reading lists.

The University of Queensland Press (UQP) has played a major role in this development. Its Black Writing Series helped to launch the literary careers of Doris Pilkington Garimara, Melissa Lucashenko and Alexis Wright. UQP's recently released collection, *Fresh Cuttings*, brings together some of the best writing in this series. In their brief introduction, editors Sue Abbey and Sandra Phillips claim that these "'cuttings' offer the thrill of first discovery" to those who do not know them and "fresh interpretations" to those who do.

Certainly, the volume speaks powerfully as a whole. By carefully placing texts in apposition, the editors have endowed them with new force. In Lucashenko's story, for instance, a young woman wonders whether being belted is "part of being Murri". This disturbingly masochistic rumination is soon turned on its head by Lisa Bellear, whose bold poem, 'Break the Cycle', resonates with Lucashenko's, while simultaneously asserting shared Aboriginality as the reason why domestic violence between 'brothers' and 'sisters' should end.

Some 'cuttings' stand out more than others. Samuel Wagan Watson's poetry, for instance, is pithy and warm, while also conveying a sense of loneliness. In contrast, Graeme Dixon's poems lack rhythm and punch, despite his willingness to wear his politics on his sleeve. And while the fluid sadness of Larissa Behrendt's 'Home' is palpable, Doris Pilkington Garimara's 'Caprice' is distinctly unengaging. Nevertheless, the collection's shared themes—notably identity, suffering and white oppression—serve as a potent reminder that deep ties bind these divergent writers.

Something new also comes about as a consequence of the bringing together that occurs in *Blacklines*,

the premier collection of contemporary critical writing by Indigenous Australians. Edited by Michele Grossman, a "non-Indigenous academic and citizen", this truly groundbreaking work belies the temptation to dismiss compilations on the ground that they merely rehash already published work.

For a start, and as Grossman notes in her intelligent introduction, most readers think of Aboriginal writing as 'creative', rather than scholarly or theoretical. This idea is related to the long-held racist assumption that Indigenous people are "more sensual but less cerebral, more interesting . . . but less intellectual" (Huggins in Moreton-Robinson, 2003:77). *Blacklines* not only challenges this misconception: it sends it packing, via the nuanced and fiercely intellectual discussion contained in these pages. Much of this material has been 'gathered' rather than 'commissioned', confirming that while Indigenous critical writing is not new, broad recognition of it is.

Many structural aspects of the collection give it credence and force and Grossman should be commended for these. In addition to her own well-conceived introduction, *Blacklines* contains three 'sub' introductions, all of which are written by well-known Aboriginal academics and commentators: Ian Anderson, Marcia Langton and Aileen Moreton-Robinson. As well as serving to introduce the book's three parts, these separate introductions ensure an Aboriginal take on the included essays. Consequently, they reinforce its emphasis on *Indigenous* critical thinking. The afterword by Melbourne University academic Phillip Morrissey, performs the same function, while preventing the kind of white enclosing that might have resulted if Grossman had had the final word. In these and other more subtle ways, *Blacklines* comes across as politically theorised and true.

As with *Fresh Cuttings*, some pieces are more compelling than others. In particular, Marcia Langton's essay in the second section on 'Imaging Indigeneity' is a *tour de force*. Originally published in 1994, 'Aboriginal Art and Film: the politics of representation' contains so many pithy lines that Langton herself refers to its oft-quotedness in her introduction to the section. Overall, however, this second section is perhaps less memorable than the other two.

Part one, which deals with 'Critical discourses' is perhaps the most cogent of the three. Introduced by Ian Anderson and containing a moving essay by him and a remarkable one by Mick Dodson, it quickly establishes the book's profound dialogism.

Part three, entitled 'Knowledge in action: politics, policies, practices' is comparatively patchy. In essays dating back to 1994, Martin Nakata and Fabienne Bayet-Charlton make important and original points through a productive use of the personal. Contrastingly, many of the arguments made in Sonja Kurtzer's essay are easily disputed, as are some of Aileen Moreton-Robinson's more simplistic contentions. Moreton-Robinson appears to claim for instance that white historians—no matter what their contribution to scholarship—are always limited because they can only see things through the "filter of their white gaze". Such abstract condemnations seem rather meaningless and risk dismissing all interracial alignments as inherently inferior to Indigenous ones.

Ultimately, however, *Blacklines* creates a lasting impression of complex, politically engaged debate and dialogue. The interrelationships between pieces convey a whole rich world of Indigenous theorising. Indeed, the book constitutes a resounding declaration: namely that Indigenous writers think and write critically about issues that affect us all. *Blacklines* deserves to herald a 'turning point' in the reading public's understanding of Aboriginality.

Ceridwen Spark is a research associate in the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University.

Yearning for Difference

KEN GELDER

Emily Ballou: *Father Lands* (Picador, $30)
Gail Jones: *Black Mirror* (Picador, $22)
Wendell Steavenson: *Stories I Stole from Georgia* (Text, $23)

Even women are drawn to dark continents, perhaps especially so if they're white. And sometimes they go there, if not in reality then certainly through their imaginations. These three books—two novels written in Australia and one work of American political journalism which is also a romance—make that journey in different ways, with different degrees of success. What they do show is the capacity of women writers to yearn for difference, although when they get it they may not always know what to do with it.

By far the worst of these books is Emily Ballou's *Father Lands*, which confirms my doubtless skewed view that the editors at Picador barely seem to know what they're doing when it comes to publishing new fiction. Ballou now lives in the Blue Mountains, but she is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which provides the setting for her first novel about Cherry Laurel, a young white girl growing up in the 1970s. Some of it is in the vein of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, an attempt to create an atmospheric gothic fable that has something to say about race. Cherry, for example, is "a night baby, born when she should have been sleeping and therefore was always tired"—an opening piece of portentousness that the novel seems to forget altogether, since Cherry in fact becomes a fairly lively child. Milwaukee is supposed to be haunted (it isn't clear why), and an Old Grey Woman lives next door, although to little effect. In the meantime, Cherry is sent to a mixed-race school named after Martin Luther King and there she meets a black American boy, Hugo.

This novel is full of cute, clipped sentences ("Small perfect teeth. Long toes, always stubbed") and twee, pointless descriptions, although it keeps its occasional pomposities pretty much unadulterated ("Her very being was burdened with symbolic overload"). Even so, it babbles rather than unfolds, losing all sense of direction as it meanders from micro-event to micro-event ("A picnic was planned in Lake Park the next day"). There are various random tragedies (a neighbour falls over) and a lot of chat, but the novel doesn't *curve* on anything: the only things that drive it along are the changing seasons and a few important celebrations (birthdays, Thanksgiving, a wedding).

Ballou's novel had meant to talk about race, perhaps historically since it is set back in the 1970s. Cherry watches *Roots* and feels bad about being white—just for a moment. Her mixed-race school discusses Thomas Jefferson and his black slave lover. Hugo dreams about slavery, again just for a moment. But nothing happens to seriously trouble racial harmony in this novel. And in fact race is soon pretty much shunted to one side as a topic, because the novel has something that it wants to write about far more obsessively: families and their fathers, or lack of them.

Bettina Arndt might be proud of a book like this, which yearns for a good father to stay home and help raise the children. It has a sequence of italicised passages about a father on his own, communing with nature: lonely in exile, "a brave pioneer" but always incomplete. Cherry's father Jackson leaves his family, and Hugo's father is also never there. Fathers-in-exile seem to preoccupy the novel to an unhealthy degree: it yearns for them, wishing they would return to the family fold. This is a novel that looked as if it might have something to say about race and racial difference: being white in an increasingly politicised black America, for example. Instead, its own dark continent is both closer to home and, it seems, constantly away from it.

Gail Jones's *Black Mirror* has little to say about fathers, since its object of yearning is instead an older woman. Anna Griffin, from Perth, is commissioned to write the biography of Victoria Morrell, a once-wild Parisian artist and surrealist, also originally from Perth but now living as an elderly recluse in London. This is a compelling novel in some ways, recalling Drusilla Modjeska and perhaps Elizabeth Jolley in its sympathetic and occasionally sentimentalised presentation of ageing female eccentricity. But it also compares to something like Frank Moorhouse's *Grand Days*; that is, an Australian literary novel about a rather naive young woman in Europe, enthusiastically learning all about decadence and art and (to a much lesser degree) politics.

The novel returns to a high modernist world it clearly relishes, giving a rich account of Anglo-French bohemian life that contrasts to the washed-out world of Perth and the mines around it where Anna grows up. Perhaps the cultural cringe is alive and well in new Australian literary fiction—and this novel was actually put together in Paris in the apartment rented out to local writers by the Australia Council. But Anna discovers another kind of dark continent in London, even as she builds her life around Victoria. She takes a lover, Winston, a Jamaican graduate student who is writing a thesis about Shakespeare. He literally satisfies her yearnings for difference: "She longed for something far-fetched, for something foreign, for anything at all that might awaken and enliven her". You might think from this passage that Anna isn't very fussy about foreigners. But the novel gives her just enough black exotica to keep her happy—and to keep her artsy pretensions satisfied. Winston is her "new found land". The Jamaican, however, won't always be romanticised in quite this way: "I will not be your dark fucking continent," he tells her, a little too heavy-handedly.

The younger Victoria also has a boyfriend, Jules, a French-Jewish photographer. Both women are hopelessly in love with their men, each of whom is transient and ultimately unattainable. I wondered about the passive role of the two women in this novel which renders their femininity almost masochistic in its yearnings for heterosexual love-with-a-difference. The novel is at its dreamiest in London, which seems "remote and not quite real", just as unattainable as the men these women love and lose. Australia, by contrast, is disenchanting and in fact downright barbarous, still a frontier measured by "brute wealth".

This sustaining contrast between Australia/nature and Europe/culture gives the novel its cultural cringe identity, although it's one that many artistic people still surely have some sympathy for. The novel also enacts a belated romantic postcolonial critique on Australia, creating a bond between Victoria as a younger woman and Lily-white, an Aboriginal servant abused by Victoria's father and brother. This may be the novel's greatest act of yearning: to draw a structural connection between white bohemia and the colonised indigenes. The novel up to this point has mostly been about the need to produce a biography of Victoria. It ends, however, with an empathetic account of Lily-white's fate, as if this has now become more important: a minor character supplanting the major one, but also standing for her. The novel's own dark continent is an Aboriginal woman.

Wendell Steavenson has lived in New York and London and has written for *Time Magazine*. Her much-praised book, *Stories I Stole from Georgia*, was first published last year and is now republished in Australia by Text—although it has nothing to do with Australia at all. It is, in fact, a work of political journalism, an account of Steavenson's time in post-USSR Georgia. This is a wonderfully detailed work, rigorous in its historical method (it is impeccably researched) and beautifully written. I'm tempted to say that it's better than a novel, which it is—except that it knows all about narrative technique, 'stealing stories' from the Georgians in a framework of deep sympathy on the one hand and inevitable western exploitation on the other.

Steavenson lived in Georgia for two years, usually on her own. Her book reminded me of other

frankly written anthropological works by women travellers in strange, politically fraught and often downright scary lands: Katherine Dunham's *Island Possessed* (1968), for example, which charts her cultural, political and amorous experiences in Haiti. Steavenson often goes cold and hungry; she drinks a lot, especially whisky, wine and vodka when she can get them; she sometimes runs out of money. But her account of Georgia is all the more engaged as a result. She sees through the "monumental crap" of propaganda about the "end of the Soviet empire". Her 'Ethnic Cleansing' chapter is excellent. She writes about the tribal barbarity of Georgian life, the violence and brutality of a place abandoned by government. There are clans and patriarchs, friends and enemies. In spite of their poverty, however, Georgians are wonderfully generous: in between moments of hunger there are long lists of the foods laid out for her and others in Georgian homes, often for no other reason than that someone new has come to stay. Nevertheless, Steavenson finds herself perplexed by a place that never really seems to progress. She offers no overall picture of events (perhaps less than even a novelist might), admitting that often she simply "can't figure it out". But she also likes the machismo manliness of Georgian men: her femininity builds itself compulsively around them.

In the midst of its political and historical journalism—all of which is fascinating—*Stories I Stole* is also about love. Steavenson is actually rather prim: she meets a lot of Georgian men, as well as a number of western journalist colleagues, but there is no sex in this book. Instead, rather like Victoria in Gail Jones's novel, she falls deeply in love with a photographer who is mostly away from her on assignments. Their relationship is unusually chaste, even though Thomas is a sexy "bastard". Later on, he leaves her for another woman. Devastated, Steavenson goes to Cairo and tries to lose herself in "distractions". (Her political journalism doesn't stretch to the Middle East.) The love affair consumes her and she cries incessantly. She realises that she loves Thomas because he is "deeper" than her—a realisation that only intensifies her abjection, her sense of femininity as something that is necessarily, even naturally, vulnerable. To be feminine here, as in Jones's novel, is to be in an almost constant state of melancholy: investing everything in men who don't stay with you, wanting what you simply cannot have.

It all changes at the end when Thomas sends her a thousand red roses, getting them together (in a place desperately short of organic produce) by visiting every flower shop he can find. This is the book's climax; in the meantime, it more or less abandons its account of Georgian political and social life, returning to its insistence that nothing changes—which now sounds like nothing more than a cliché. The final sentence advises us simply to "respect our family, love our friends, open a bottle of wine, drink it, and then open another one". This is both a humanist ending and a gesture of despair, perhaps the result of the love affair itself which seems finally to close the book down rather than enliven it. Georgia has been Steavenson's own particular dark continent, a primitive place that therefore utterly fascinates this liberal political journalist from the West. But Thomas the photographer is her *private* dark continent, imbuing her book with melancholy and distracting her (because women are so easily distracted . . .) from the work at hand. He takes the photograph of her that is on the back cover of *Stories I Stole*, showing a pretty young woman who, even after those one thousand red roses, still looks vulnerable and rather sad.

Ken Gelder teaches English at the University of Melbourne.

The Santamaria Vision

VAL NOONE

Ross Fitzgerald with the assistance of Adam Carr and William J. Dealy: *The Pope's Battalions: Santamaria, Catholicism and the Labor Split* (UQP, $35)

Bob Corcoran, a staunch ALP member and an opponent of the Santamaria Movement since before the split, told me that he was enjoying reading Ross Fitzgerald's book on the Movement because, among other things, it was well researched (and not just because it quotes himself) and because it shows how often Santamaria deceived people about his goals and methods.

Tom Rigg, who had been president of the Victorian branch of the DLP when it voted to dissolve in 1978, said the book on the Movement is good to read because it fairly represents the point of view of Santamaria and his supporters; and that he was learn-

ing a lot of new things about the whole business from reading Fitzgerald.

Both had more to say but the point here is that *The Pope's Battalions* is proving informative and readable to people with a range of political views. Indeed, though it is rushed and in places muddled, this book makes a detailed and important contribution to our understanding of the Santamaria Movement.

Overall, Fitzgerald, Carr and Dealy rely a good deal on Santamaria for evidence for their views, or they quote Andrew Campbell who, in turn, is relying on Santamaria; and that is a central weakness in the book. Santamaria is in places "disingenuous", "secretive and conspiratorial", "prone to exaggeration", although they do not call him "a liar". But if he is as they describe him, why do they rely on him at key points such as the founding of the Movement?

On a related point, Fitzgerald seems not to have come to grips with the fact that, though Santamaria said he was opposing communists (which he did), he and the Movement spent a lot of their energy opposing reforming anti-communist social democrats like Jim Ormonde, Arthur Calwell and Bert Evatt.

The first chapter covers B.A. Santamaria's childhood and youth, early twentieth-century politics and related trends in Catholicism. The authors portray Santamaria as an idealist in love with Aeolian peasant ways and influenced by redistributive economic policies, who started out opposed to capitalism and, because of Stalin's atheism and totalitarianism, moved to give his life to stop communism.

Taking the Spanish Civil War as a turning point, the book then traces the development of Catholic anti-communism and Catholic Action, and discusses the related question about the strength of the Communist Party of Australia in the trade-union movement.

There is considerable detail from several states about conflict within the ALP over the industrial groups, and about the details of the split of 1954–55. Santamaria is shown as ambitious to control the ALP. They quote from Janet McCalman's *Struggletown* but have ignored Norm Saffin's *Left and Right in Bendigo and Shepparton 1947–51*. On the split, they rely a lot on that knowledgeable Cold Warrior, Robert Murray.

While tracing the emergence of the ALP (Anti-Communist), the Queensland Labor Party and the DLP, the authors also point to a Vatican ruling against the bishops giving the Movement direct support; a ruling ignored by Archbishop Daniel Mannix and some others. The authors treat the death of Mannix as a turning point which ironically left Santamaria better off because he gained from Frank Packer a mainstream weekly television spot that lasted twenty years.

The book's discussion of the Movement and the Vietnam War is weak. For Fitzgerald and his helpers, moral condemnation of the Vietnam War is "debatable" and he asks, "Are the Vietnamese people better off today after twenty-eight years of Communism than they would have been had the United States and its allies won the Vietnam War?" Oh dear. So much for the right of nations to self-determination. I note too that the authors have ignored my 333-page book, *Disturbing the War: Melbourne Catholics and Vietnam*, which documents and analyses Santamaria's leading role as a propagandist for the war.

Their conclusion includes a pious disclaimer about not being competent in theology but that did not stop them from giving us the odd authoritative-sounding paragraph on "integralism", Vatican II and "protestantisation".

This book often concentrates on what Santamaria said. In politics, as in everyday life, one takes note of what a person says but one gets a better idea of a person's beliefs by studying what that person does.

The authors judge that by 1975 Santamaria's role in politics "had dwindled to that of a rather irrelevant and often unprescient commentator". His role in pushing the Australian Catholic bishops to scuttle the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, and the joint churches' educational body, Action for World Development, suggest otherwise.

A strength of the book is that the story of Santamaria's Movement is woven into Australian labour history. Moreover, the authors have brought together for the first time many diverse and interesting sources on their topic.

There is need for a more careful and anti-imperialist study than this. For the present, however, all who wish to understand Australian politics in the second half of the twentieth century will benefit from a critical reading of this book.

Dr Val Noone is editor of Táin, *the magazine of the Australian Irish Network.*

Australian Political Cartoons

ROLF HEIMANN

Selected by Russ Radcliffe: *Best Australian Political Cartoons* (Scribe Publications, $30)

When I met with cartoonists of the *China Daily* in Beijing recently, they were curious as to how much Western cartoonists got paid. I told them that the biggest Melbourne morning paper paid me $400 when I did some Saturday cartoons years ago, so by now it ought to be at least $600 per cartoon. Such an enormous sum, by Chinese standards, caused my friends to repeat the question, lest they had misunderstood the interpreter. In an industry where much work is done for nothing or for a pittance, was such an outrageously high remuneration not an incentive to forsake one's integrity? I agreed that there was some truth in the suggestion.

On this point the book *Best Australian Political Cartoons 2003* certainly puts me on the defensive. These guys can't be leashed.

But rather than defend, I will attack: newspaper barons must be so damn greedy that they are willing to sacrifice their own principles and publish cartoons which couldn't possibly be to their liking. Strong cartoons sell newspapers.

Occasionally we see editors (more so in other countries) going out of their way to promote some lap-dog talent, and they never gain many fans. None of the cartoonists in this book falls under that category. I was especially pleased to see David Pope (aka. Hinze) finally accepted in the circle of Australia's fifteen greatest. He is not only a superb draftsman but has the wit and the insights, and above all the passion and the skill to communicate. And he seems a rock-solid Leftie.

I was disappointed to see some deserving cartoonists omitted, while others were represented by no less than twenty samples of their work, and not all of them their best. No Tandberg, no Golding, no Emmerson, no Kneebone, no Matterson, no Zanetti. Maybe I should not have started mentioning names, as doing so makes one automatically guilty of omission as well.

The year 2003 was a good one for cartoonists, as it supplied us with the fertile topic of the Iraq war. Interestingly enough only one cartoonist was pro-war: John Spooner. Yet he is hardly a jingoistic redneck or running dog of imperialism; knowing him to be always thoughtful and well informed, we look twice. Has he got a point? Were we pacifists, blocking our ears to the cries of Saddam's victims? Don Watson, in an incisive and witty foreword, also stumbles on Spooner and calls his "moral logic all but unanswerable". Personally I don't think there were many pacifists among the anti-war protesters; after all, we wanted to see the bastard Saddam stopped. It was the deceptions and hidden agendas that enraged us, and the usual cavalier manner of dismissing 'collateral damage'. If we were especially appalled about our own Man of Steel (who will surely be remembered as one of Australia's most atrocious Prime Ministers), there are many cartoons to warm our hearts. I appreciated that Russ Radcliffe included a Leunig cartoon that had not been previously published. (I wonder why not?)

There are other issues of 2003 that are covered: the Middle East, the Governor-General, Pauline Hanson, Medibank, gay Christians, ATSIC, Simon Crean's troubles. As such the book sums up the year 2003 as a concise and entertaining historical record. Cartoon books are always fun to produce but seldom profitable, and Scribe Publications is to be congratulated for taking the risk. If it continues this venture year for year as a series, it cannot fail to create a unique institution and an end-of-year tradition. If the book were cheaper I'd have bought thirty copies on the spot to give away whenever I visit overseas cartoonists. Our friends in China for instance would learn what cartooning is all about, when free reign is given!

Experience tells me that books like this can be picked up cheaper once their 'best by' date has passed. I'll buy a few more copies then—but I will surely put my name in one of them and not even lend it to a best friend. Buy your own!

Rolf Heimann (Lofo) is an occasional contributor to Overland *and Gold Stanley Winner of 2003 (Cartoonist of the Year). His latest book is* Life's like a Crocodile *(Little Hare).*

reportage | **ROWAN CAHILL**

FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE

Shipping industry patriotism

WOLLONGONG, 19 JUNE 2002

A Chinese seaman bled to death after his leg was severed from his hip whilst working aloft. It was after sunset, lighting was inadequate, and he was not attached to his safety harness. He was attempting repairs to a crane on a Panamanian flagged bulk carrier when he became entangled in wires. His blood pooled at the base of the crane in front of horrified workmates. In the five years to the end of 2002, eleven seafarers were killed and nineteen seriously injured in Australian waters, all but three of them on board Flag of Convenience (FOC) vessels.

Ships plying the world's sea routes have to be registered with a national authority (a flag state); standards and responsibility are meant to be involved. But these can be circumvented by registering ships with national governments that do not effectively administer agreed international standards regarding seaworthiness, safety, health, officer and crew competencies, and employment conditions.

For the governments concerned, allowing your nation to become a FOC is an easy way to make money. Registration comes at the price of turning a blind eye to maritime responsibility, decency and common sense. The classic FOC has little to do legitimately with the sea and seafaring, and everything to do with tax havens and shell companies. There are twenty-eight players in the scam with Panama (6245 ships) and Liberia (1566 ships) hosting the largest fleets. Globally the FOC fleet accounts for over 50 per cent of the world's shipping tonnage, including most of the big bulk carriers and oil tankers.

As for the owners of FOC ships, often hidden in corporate mazes and having little otherwise to do with the registering authority, the scam is a way of increasing profit margins or turning quick profits by avoiding human responsibility generally, and trade unionism, taxes, and maintenance costs. Capital reinvestment programs go out the window because the FOC scam enables ships to be used well past their intended use-by date. Through modern high-tech sleight of hand international investment and accounting practices, it is possible some 'shipowners' do not even realise they are in fact shipowners.

The worst FOC vessels are rust buckets, vermin ridden, unsanitary, with untrained crews working as virtual slave labour. Eighteen per cent of personnel shipping out in the world today are untrained; forged certification for all levels of maritime expertise is freely available on international black markets.

Overall, FOC shipping accounts for more than half of the ships lost worldwide, and is responsible for the majority of major collisions. FOC vessels are notorious for running aground, being involved in collisions, sinking, catching on fire, featuring in insurance scams and in ecological disasters. In the FOC world it is no big drama when a vessel comes to grief. Replacements are cheaply available on international second-hand markets, and from ship breakers; paint, canvas, timber and cosmetic welding can hide a multitude of sins. Cargoes are covered by insurance; the loss of an oil cargo is particularly profitable. As for crews, usually desperate and frightened non-unionised Third World workers, if they are injured or drowned they can be replaced from the huge pool of similar workers struggling to earn a pittance. Minimal wages are the name of the game, and it is not uncommon for wages to be promised as voyage-end lump sums that end up not being paid at all.

Nemesis of the FOC system is the powerful International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), a global federation of transport trade unions formed in London in 1896. For fifty-four years it has hounded FOC shipping, using international and national laws

to enforce basic pay and seaworthiness standards, and responding to the desperate appeals of non-unionised workers; an expensive, time-consuming business, virtually done on a voyage by voyage, ship by ship basis. During 2002 the ITF managed to secure $US31 million in pay and benefits owed to seafarers by scrooge FOC shipowners.

The FOC phenomenon had its origins prior to the Second World War when American shipowners moved offshore to Panama and Honduras to escape maritime trade unionism and negotiated work agreements. By 1939 just over 1 per cent of the world's gross registered tonnage of shipping was under FOCs. After the war the process escalated due primarily to complete freedom from taxation on profits, and the involvement of American oil, banking and insurance interests. Economic rationalist philosophies kicked in from the 1960s onwards and the process mushroomed.

In Australia, the advent of the Howard government in 1996 heralded the abolition of existing maritime tax concessions, and the onslaught of maritime policies based on the free-market mantras of privatisation, deregulation, increased productivity, and international competitiveness. A loophole in the Navigation Act (1912) has been exploited, enabling foreign owned, foreign crewed ships, including Flag of Convenience vessels, to increasingly operate on the Australian coast. The Act limits the conveyance of domestic cargoes to Australian crewed, Australian registered shipping; however foreign crewed vessels can do the job under a permit if an Australian crewed vessel is not available. The fewer Australian ships and seafarers there are, the more the task goes to offshore shipping interests and manning agents. By flooding the market with permits, the Howard government white-ants the seafaring industry. In 1994 there were seventy-eight Australian flagged ships; now there are forty-seven. During 2002 the government issued seven hundred permits to enable foreign flagged shipping and cut-rate guest crews to work off the Australian coast.

As the national fleet shrinks, so does the number of seafaring jobs on offer to Australians; seafaring as an Australian occupation threatens to join the Dodo. All of which strikes at the seagoing membership base of the small, powerful and influential Robin Hood union, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), which is probably one of the intended outcomes, given the anti-unionism of the Howard government.

DECEMBER 2000

The South Pacific archipelago Kingdom of Tonga, population 106 137, joined the FOC club. Described officially as an hereditary constitutional monarchy, the monarchy constitutes the government. Octogenarian King Tupou IV has been described as a cross between Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria and a sumo wrestler. He appoints the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister (for life), Cabinet, and the Supreme Court judges. There are no political parties; the free press is curtailed by harassment and criminal charges. With a Sydney University law degree behind him and background as a lay preacher in the Free Wesleyan Church, King Tupou fancies himself a financial whiz; he generated millions during the 1980s selling Tongan passports, with Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos among eager customers; investigated the feasibility of taking a share of the world's problematic used-tyre stockpiles and incinerating them for profit in Tonga; appointed a Californian magnetic health products salesman to the position of Court Jester cum financial adviser, who then lost the $A43 million he was entrusted with and disappeared.

The fledgling maritime nation wasted no time making its mark upon the world; Tongan flagged ships hit the headlines, beginning in October 2001 when the dry cargo ship *Tavake Oma* cracked a fuel line and leaked oil into Sydney Harbour. In January the following year, Israeli authorities seized the freighter *Karine A* carrying fifty tons of contraband weaponry and munitions destined for Gaza, while elsewhere the US Navy and the Maltese government detained and unsuccessfully searched two other Tongan flagged vessels for similar cargoes. In August, Sicilian police arrested fifteen Pakistani al-Qaida suspects on a Tongan registered cargo ship. In December the *Washington Post* reported at length on the use by al-Qaida of the FOC system, and the involvement of the Nova company, incorporated in the US and Romania, with a track record in people smuggling, suspected of using Tongan flagged vessels in terrorist related activity. In February 2003 the anti-crime International Maritime Bureau warned that a Lebanon-based crime syndicate was using the Tongan flag in a multi-million-dollar cargo theft and fraud operation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

NEWCASTLE, AUGUST 2002

The Australian flagged bulk carrier *Wallarah* was sold offshore to a one-pound, one-share UK com-

pany, renamed and registered in Tonga as the *Ikuna*. For sixteen years the ship had worked out of Newcastle manned by Australians. While the going had been tough in the former steel city, the vessel was regarded as a community asset and crews had done some wage sacrificing to keep the ship going. The *Wallarah* was the last of a port-based fleet that once plied the coastal and river routes of NSW. Even as late as a decade ago, the port was still home to some one hundred seafarers.

After dry docking and a refit the *Ikuna*, managed by an Australian registered corporation Intercontinental Ship Management, sailed to Port Kembla in the hands of an imported replacement crew of Tongans. On Tuesday, 24 September the vessel arrived at Port Kembla Grain Terminal. While loading it developed a dramatic and dangerous thirty-degree list, nearly injuring two Graincorp workers. Next day the *Illawarra Mercury* headline said it all: WORKERS CHEAT DEATH AS CARGO SHIP LURCHES.

Later voyages saw local maritime unionists, the South Coast Labour Council, and community activists mount protests when the vessel used Port Kembla. Preferably an Australian crew should be working the ship, they argued. And if not, then the foreign crew should be paid a fair wage. Information indicated the Tongans were receiving less than a tenth the monthly earnings of their Australian counterparts. The protests generated considerable media attention.

FEBRUARY 2003

The tailored corporate heartland of Sydney's North Shore: landscaped snatches of garden; tinted office windows; designer decor; hired indoor greenery, pampered and waxed and manicured to exude the illusion of perfection, where nothing wilts or dies; a neighbourhood of aromatic coffee shops and languid eateries; a photogenic air-conditioned world that insulates and cocoons corporate decision makers and their managers from the realities of their bottom-line *weltanschauung*.

Lunchtime, and fifty maritime workers, members of the MUA, and supporters rally outside the offices of Intercontinental Ship Management, protesting the company's use of Tongan registered ships on the Australian coast employing foreign crews at substandard rates.

The protesters are the worm in the bud. Their attitude is 'we know where you live'. With their lunchtime presence, placards, speeches, deputation, and accompanying national and international media attention, they aim to challenge the corporate comfort zone; maybe engender a bit of embarrassment for those who would prefer to feature in an adulatory glossy trade or business journal than be linked in the public mind with the world of sweat, toil, exploitation, and opportunism.

Among the protesters are some old faces, men in their mid-to-late 70s, early 80s. They are a constant at these sorts of protests; retirees with fire in their bellies, not yet spirited away to nursing-home limbo. They are part of a national community of former trade-union militants, seamen, wharfies, miners, currently formalising a national trade-union solidarity organisation; their motto, 'Retired from work, but not from the struggle'.

During the 1998 War on the Waterfront old timers like these played a key logistical role supporting the union picket lines that formed nationally, manning phone lines, answering queries, doing any number of humdrum chores that freed up union resources: churning out leaflets, organising food supplies, arranging toilet facilities, carrying messages deemed too sensitive to leave electronic or paper trails.

Two days later, one of those present at the lunchtime protest, the Ancient Mariner, has just turned 80. As many guests as he is old gather at a celebratory birthday function in a Western Sydney Workers' Club; most of those present are well into their 70s. A simple, friendly affair; three-course meal, some speeches, a few drinks, and lots of stories about the old days. The Ancient Mariner began his working life in England, saw North Atlantic convoy action during the Second World War, ran the deadly gauntlet on merchant ships to Murmansk, fronted up in the Army on the beaches of Normandy in 1944, then, back in the merchant marine, came on to the Australian coast during the Cold War, and stayed. A meticulous seaman, he proudly sees himself as part of a seafaring tradition and craft reaching back across centuries. And always proud to be a trade unionist.

MARCH–AUGUST 2003

March: a Canadian investigative television team is in Sydney gathering material on the Australian activities of Canada Steamship Lines (CSL). The company bought two Australian coastal freighters following the scuttling of the Australian National Line by the Keating government in the early 1990s.

LANGOULANT AND WALLY PRITCHARD

Cartoon from 2002 MUA Australian Shipping campaign pamphlet, courtesy of MUA

These were eventually reflagged in the Bahamas, the Australian crews fired and replaced with Ukrainians on wages and conditions well below Australian standards. Recently CSL hit the Canadian headlines. Last year the multimillion-dollar international company, which mostly uses FOC vessels, was heavily fined after one of its ships dumped oil in Canadian waters. More recently its head, Paul Martin, former Canadian Finance Minister [sworn in as Prime Minister in December 2003---eds], has been variously accused of tax avoidance and conflicts of interest as a shipowner and politician. There are also controversial allegations that Martin has had financial dealings with the family of the corrupt former Indonesian dictator Suharto. Among Australian seafarers, his name is mud.

During May 2003 while the Cypriot FOC bulk carrier *Stone Gemini* was in Newcastle port, desperate crew members called it quits, went on strike and sought outside help. They came from Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Ukraine and Russia. Living conditions on board were squalid; the ship was well past its use-by date. Toilets would not operate, the food supply was almost exhausted and they were down to half a can of baked beans and the scrapings of a margarine container. Some had paid manning agents back home for the chance of a job, and a deposit system operated whereby money was forfeited if anyone complained to reputable maritime authorities about working conditions. Back pay to the tune of $US100 000 was owed. Word got out to the local ITF official based in Sydney, and matters were eventually resolved in favour of the seafarers.

On 7 August 2003 the Full Bench of the High Court unanimously ruled that the Australian Industrial Relations Commission has jurisdiction over foreign ships and crew carrying Australian domestic cargoes on the Australian Coast. This followed a lengthy legal battle between Australian maritime unions and CSL, the latter supported by the Howard government hell-bent on keeping its piratical maritime policies free from the jurisdiction of Australian industrial law. The decision is a well-aimed torpedo at the advantages FOC traders currently enjoy under Howard's patronage---cheap labour and non-compliance with domestic rules and regulations. It is also a win for human decency.

IT IS A WARM midwinter day with the feel of Spring about it. The Ancient Mariner and I are having a

couple of beers in what used to be a maritime worker pub; now given over to the mobile-phone-away-from-the-office set, long power-dressed lunches, and a bit of Trades Hall number crunching. The Mariner was giving me one of his talks. He jokes about being a university graduate; a Graduate from the University of Life, mate. But he's not anti-intellectual, and over the years he's sent me wads of photocopied material on maritime matters he thinks I should read, most recently a slab from Marcus Rediker's Marxist study of the eighteenth-century Anglo-American maritime world, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1987).

He held forth, angry in a quiet-voiced way: the Howard government's maritime policies are undermining national security. The Australian merchant marine and the national fleet were central to the nation's survival during the Second World War, an integral part of defence strategy, with the Australian merchant marine suffering a casualty rate of around 12 per cent. Once you get rid of your national fleet you also savage your shipbuilding and ship-repair capacities, and your access to highly trained seafarers so important to an island nation dependent on the sea for most of its imports and exports. What sort of national independence and room for independent political and economic manoeuvre does that leave Australia with generally, let alone in time of crisis?

As for the FOC system, that is a microcosm of globalisation and the free-market system, a brew of corruption, opportunism, greed, untrammelled exploitation of labour, with social responsibility thrown out the window, shell companies, tax avoidance, fraud, deception, criminality, death, injury, human suffering, the rich getting richer and money being shovelled up to a few at the top, and it all dressed up as modern business, free enterprise, pure market forces.

Here the Ancient Mariner paused and reached inside his jacket on the chair next to him. From his wallet he took a folded piece of paper, and pushed it across the table. I unfolded it, recognising the photocopied page and piece; thirty years ago he told me to read the book it is from, *The Death Ship* by B. Traven, a politically charged novel about the maritime underbelly, as relevant today as it was when first published in 1926. A small paragraph near the end of Chapter One was marked: "I have learned that it is not the mountains that make destiny, but the grains of sand and the little pebbles. Sounds philosophic, but it is the truth". He looked at me and grinned.

Rowan Cahill is a labour movement historian and journalist.

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CONTACT: Judy Spokes CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK
GPO Box1603M Melbourne 3001 >P 03 9658 8850 > E judspo@melbourne.vic.gov.au

Graffiti, Merri Creek North Fitzroy
ARTIST: *dunit* PHOTO: Chris Dew

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