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Guilt by association no way to judge politicians

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Guilt by association has a long history. Jesus Christ was put to death, ostensibly because he ate with sinners and tax collectors, and counted sex worker Mary Magdalene among his close friends.

Clinical psychologist Professor Gil Straker-Bryce wrote about it in the [last issue](#) of *Eureka Street*. Her point about its stranglehold on politics has since been illustrated in spectacular fashion by events in Federal and WA state politics, following revelations of politicians' meetings with 'disgraced former WA Premier' Brian Burke.

She said: "It is vital that we understand the psychological processes that may inform us as we come to judge not only parties and policies, but individual politicians too."

On Saturday, Federal Human Services Minister Ian Campbell was forced to resign after admitting he had allowed Mr Burke to meet him in his office last year. There was no evidence, nor even suggestion, that Senator Campbell had conducted himself in an improper manner during the fleeting encounter. That didn't matter. It was the meeting itself that did the damage.

It is now acknowledged that guilt by association is a *sine qua non* in politics. It's hard to know where they draw the line. If he'd been approached by Burke at a social function, or seated next to him at a dinner, would he be required to look the other way?

What makes it even more disturbing is the fact that the guilt by association was engineered. It did not arise from a chance occurrence, like Americans confusing Democratic presidential candidate Barak Obama with Osama Bin Laden. (Arguably that's worth a laugh, although it's not an excuse for them to superimpose the moral demeanour of Bin Laden on to the public persona of Obama).

The guilt by association with Brian Burke was personally concocted and prosecuted by John Howard and Peter Costello, two of the most powerful and responsible leaders in the country. Moreover Kevin Rudd is not merely victim, he is complicit. Instead of having the moral fortitude to repudiate the whole idea of guilt by association, he gave it credence by arguing that his contact with Burke was only incidental.



Nobody's saying that we should not judge the moral standing our politicians. Indeed that is what the political process is all about. What's missing is the acknowledgement that we need to exercise a sense of discernment in sorting out the good from the bad. For we can have good meetings with bad people, and bad meetings with good people. Being able to tell the difference is what reflects our own moral instinct.

Do freedom and spontaneity undermine liturgy?

COLUMNS

Summa Theologiae

Andrew Hamilton



When he was Cardinal, Pope Benedict XVI often criticised the contemporary emphasis on spontaneity and on creativity in liturgy. His criticism, however, stands in tension with the qualities that the liturgical texts require of priests and, implicitly, of the congregations they serve.

For Cardinal Ratzinger, spontaneity and creativity undermines the central reality of liturgy. Liturgy is a gift that we receive, and we participate in it by being receptive, not creative. We do not shape the liturgy, but liturgy shapes us. The Cardinal compared the rites of the Church to the Creeds, which may not be altered.

He does not give detailed examples of misplaced creativity. He focuses his criticism on an attitude he believes to be widespread. This approach holds that local congregations and priests can adapt the liturgy, changing texts and modifying ritual in order to speak to their own situations. Inherent in such an attitude is a theology that is essentially not Catholic: it gives priority to the congregation over the Church, and minimises the distinctive status of the priest.

Before the changes to ritual introduced through Vatican II, Cardinal Ratzinger's blanket opposition to creativity and spontaneity was more easily sustainable than it is today. Then sacramental rites were covered by black letter law that prescribed what should be done under every circumstance. But the new rites after Vatican II, as he has occasionally lamented, both imply and demand a degree of creativity and spontaneity on the part of the celebrant. Correlative to this creativity is the need to consult the community when shaping celebration.

This is evident, for example, in the instructions that introduce the marriage rite. The priest is instructed to go to the door of the church or, if more suitable, to the altar. There he greets the bride and bridegroom in a friendly manner. Where it is desirable that the rite of welcome be omitted, the celebration begins with the Mass. If there is a procession, the ministers go first, and according to local custom, the couple may be escorted by their parents etc. If incense is used, the priest incenses the altar.

These instructions require the celebrant to choose between options. In ordering the alternatives, he needs to show creativity. In greeting the bride and bridegroom, he is given no words, and will need to show spontaneity. Furthermore, in making decisions about which options to follow, wise celebrants will speak with the couple. Wise couples will consult their families who form the core of the congregation.



What is true of marriage is true also of the other revised Catholic rites.

They allow a choice between some prayers and readings, encourage celebrants to adapt instructions in their own words, and offer optional rituals. If celebrants are to allow the rites to speak powerfully, they will need to prepare the liturgy with their people. In the celebration, there will inevitably be elements of creativity and spontaneity.

It is less helpful, therefore, to ask whether spontaneity and creativity are appropriate, than to ask what kinds of spontaneity and creativity are appropriate.

Cardinal Ratzinger's general remarks about liturgy are helpful in answering this question. He rightly emphasises the integrity and the predictability of liturgy. This excludes arbitrary surgery that changes the sets of complex relationships that constitute liturgy. The freedom given within the rite, however, means that small variations generally do not change these sets of relationships.

Cardinal Ratzinger's also rightly insists that in the liturgy it is Christ who acts. In the Eucharist we are taken into the mystery of his life and death. This implies that the Eucharist is about life and death matters, and demands seriousness in celebration. Seriousness, however, encompasses moments of lightness as well as of solemnity.

Finally, he insists on the given part that the ordained ministry plays within the Church and within liturgy. This implies that in presiding at the liturgy and in gathering the congregation to plan the liturgy, the priest has a distinctive responsibility. It does not show, however, that he has the sole responsibility.

The liturgy is both stable and flexible. It may be less helpful to imagine it as a statue which is cast in a single mould, than as a mobile whose stability is given by the harmony between many sets of relationships.

Howard's blowtorch applied to Rudd's belly

COLUMNS

Capital letter

Jack Waterford



Kevin Rudd is not enjoying the experience of John Howard putting the blow-torch to his belly, to use Neville Wran's evocative phrase. But much more is involved, from Rudd's point of view, than whether the ordinary voter will adopt Howard's confected indignation or ultimately conclude that a sanctimonious prig has been shown to be a mortal, human, and very ambitious politician.

The public does not much know Rudd, though he has been having a dream run since taking the Labor leadership. Much of what they do know is about his mind, and quite a bit of that they seem to like. They also know that he is a Christian — something he tells them all the time — although they so far have little idea what this means for him. But they have little feeling for his heart, his instincts, his character, the broad drift of his ideas or how he responds to pressure, and many will want to know more before they commit themselves to him. By contrast they know a lot about Howard, and even when they dislike what he has done, they are reasonably comfortable with him.

It was events, and luck, and nothing directly of the Prime Minister's doing that made Rudd's relationship with disgraced Labor politician and lobbyist Brian Burke the character test, but it is not a bad one. John Howard, and Peter Costello have been completely over the top in their indignation — and in their assertion that merely meeting Burke was some sign of moral unfitness for office. That overreach was accentuated by the forced resignation of Human Services minister, Ian Campbell, after it emerged that he had had contact with Burke — like any number of other politicians on both sides — long after it was clear that he was politically toxic.

Burke is especially on the nose, but there are any number of old political hacks — Labor and Liberal — who hawk their friendships, and their intimate knowledge of how systems work and are working: among those doing it are a number of Howard's old ministers. For many, the mere seeking of such work has involved breaches of commonly accepted views about abuse of power; for others, the fact that lobbying income ultimately turns on success is a continuing invitation to abuse of power.

Burke has sought to continue to run a political machine, one plainly available for hire, to exercise power even as he has sought to influence it. He controls politicians, and not only (though particularly) Labor ones. If they do not do his bidding, they suffer — in pre-selections, in ballots and sometimes in other ways as well. One does not cross him with impunity, and many people, in politics and in business, do well to solicit his favour or his good opinion. They fear him more than party discipline or public dishonour.

The Burke machine is the western wing of the National Labor Right — long in bed with the NSW Right — and closely aligned with the Right factions in NSW and Queensland. These were the factions who propped up Kim Beazley — a man who retained his friendship and close association with Burke through all of Burke's scandals. It was Beazley's reliance on such people, and his consequent absolute dead hand on any party reform, which prompted me to write, about a year ago, that the moral guardianship of the Labor Party stood on the shoulders of Brian Burke, Joe Tripodi and Bill Ludwig.



Politics is in the real world, and even politicians who are essentially honest and decent — as I am sure Kevin Rudd is — soon learn that one must deal with practical realities.

There is nothing wrong with ambition or intense desire for office. Indeed, we often admire some politicians who are ruthless in their pursuit of power — Howard, say, or Paul Keating — and despise some who shrink from ruthlessness — Peter Costello, say.

But the image Rudd wants to project is not of a lack of scruples. That's why he has seemed so coy in being frank that he was wooing Western Australian Labor figures in his search for power, not least when a transfer of loyalty by Burke from Beazley to Rudd would have been, among other things, a personal as well as political treachery. The Burke and Beazley relationship goes back to their fathers and the Split of the 1950s. The image of Rudd, during his 40 days in the desert, succumbing to the blandishments of the Devil is hardly one with which he is comfortable. It shows him to be just another politician.

It ought to be uncomfortable from another perspective altogether. As we have all tut-tutted about the flagrancy of Burke's corruption of Western Australian Government, good old political corruption continues apace in the east. The NSW Party is but a creature of liquor, gambling and development interests, and any number of individuals in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania are obviously abusing power for personal gain.

Rudd projects himself as too pure and holy for all of that, but has hardly ever put his shoulder to the wheel of party reform. Though aloof from factions, he has

always known that this is where the favours come from. It is hard to think of any of his work in recreating a party which deserves to be trusted with federal power. Even those who hope that he might earn trust can only pray that he finds the present discomfort character-forming. If the party does not cleanse itself, the voters will do it.

Mahathir Mohamad embraces human rights?

INTERNATIONAL

Politics

Binoy Kampmark

Aljazeera.com

Dr Mahathir Mohamad

Aljazeera Magazine

Updated 18 December 2006

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad

is an international icon in the Islamic world, respected as a great modern Islamic leader who turned Malaysia from a rubber-

exporting country into a technological and regional economic powerhouse.

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's policies at home have won him much popular support and helped transform Malaysia into

access the Islamic world.



"We, the victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and such other crimes as contained in the relevant international laws and conventions do hereby petition (the commission) to act on our petition pertaining to the various injustices committed against us."

These were the words of a memorandum submitted to the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal on February 7. The petitioners (some accounts put the number at 17) were mainly from the Palestinian territories, Iraq and Lebanon. Among them, former Baghdad university lecturer Ali Shalah Qaissi, a victim of electric torture at Abu Ghraib and Walid Salah, a Palestinian doctor from the occupied territories. The accused: President George W. Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair, former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Prime Minister John Howard.

The present Malaysian government has been wrong-footed by the efforts of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to set up this tribunal, but not overly so. They are only too familiar with Mahathir's extra-curricular activities. Cunningly, Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar claimed the tribunal was an expression of democracy in action. In a statement which must have grated with some in the West, Mr Hamid called it "(An) independent tribunal. Let them take the initiative which is within their rights as citizens of Malaysia...| it is nice to see freedom being exercised."

No one can doubt that such tribunals have their place, even as haphazard legal instruments. Convened in public settings by non-government officials, these tribunals have the potential to sway public opinion and spur debate. They can do little else, having no legal authority or power to enforce penalties.

There are echoes of the Bertrand Russell Tribunal in this new War Crimes Tribunal, though Russell's Tribunal was unusual for its intellectual calibre, and criticised for its seemingly contradictory assembly of intellectuals. Convened in 1967 in Copenhagen and Stockholm by Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre, it was in equal parts praised and pilloried. Some saw it as an exposé of alleged American war crimes in Vietnam; others, such as then Secretary of State Dean Rusk saw it as a game played by "a 94-year-old English Professor."

Despite Rusk's nonchalance, the administration of then president Lyndon Johnson was privately worried by it. Swedish Prime Minister Erlander was told in Bonn by

Walt Rostow, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, on April 25, 1967, "The burden of newspaper stories on you at this time would be heavy and that, in fact, this kind of story helps prolong the [Vietnam] war."

The problem with this trial is that it is doing nothing that is not already taking place. The World Tribunal on Iraq, through a series of 20 hearings held in cities from Barcelona to Tunis, delivered its 'Declaration of Conscience' in Istanbul in June 2005. Mahathir, it seems, hopes to reinvent the wheel, and a rickety one at that. From Malaysia, he will be preaching to the converted, both within the country and through the Islamic world.

The unconverted, notably the non-Malays, will continue to remain unconvinced, perhaps even experiencing a sort-of *schadenfreude* over the invasion of an Islamic nation. Malaysia's racial fault-lines remain clear to anyone who cares to observe the different responses to the Coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003: Al-Jazeera and official government programming dominated Malay restaurants and shops; CNN and Fox stole the show in Chinese eating houses and Indian sari outlets.



Then there is the issue of legal propriety. During his long stint as Prime Minister, Mahathir was never troubled by such tedious concepts as the rule of law. Showing his inventiveness, he happily led the charge against Deputy Premier Anwar Ibrahim in 1997 on trumped up charges of sodomy and treason. Now Mahathir chairs the commission responsible for feeding the nine-member tribunal the cases.

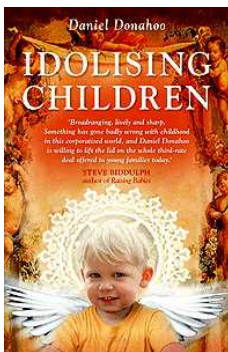
His rhetoric is admirable: "We of the commission look upon these (cases) as a human tragedy, not confined to any particular race, religion, creed or faith," he told an audience of a thousand on February 7th this year. He sees the tribunal as cathartic, one that will go some way towards "assuaging the pain that has been suffered by so many people in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and elsewhere".

Whatever the merits of this body, it is hardly likely to come close to the work of those who staffed the Russell tribunal. There are no equivalent Isaac Deutschers, nor Russells, nor Sartres. The tribunal is composed of largely unknown Malay legal experts, although the presence of Abdul Kadir Sulaiman, a former judge of Malaysia's High Court does give a veneer of respectability. Foreign appointees, it is promised, will enrich the tribunal, but it remains to be seen who will front up. The judgements, needless to say, will be predictable.

Children must be raised, not idolised

AUSTRALIA

Daniel Donahoo



In a recent UNICEF report that analysed the well-being of children in economically advanced nations there were some rather unsettling results for Australia and the United Kingdom. The governments of both countries have been putting children at top of their policy agenda. Both have invested in early childhood research and programs. A range of new bureaucratic structures has been created to support the development of children and young people. But despite 10 years of advocacy, new policy direction and increased investment the progress has not been all positive.

The UNICEF study, [Poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries](#), shows that when it comes to the overall health and well-being of children, Australia and Britain are near the middle and bottom of the list respectively. Peter Saunders from the Centre of Independent Studies argued in [The Australian](#) that being somewhere in the middle isn't too bad. Considering recent investment, it indicates a poor return.

Britain was ranked last in the final summary against six key indicators, including material well-being, health and educational well-being. Australia was not included on this final list due to insignificant data.

Dr. Fiona Stanley, former Australian of the Year and child advocate, pointed out in a Radio National interview that we should be concerned that Australia is not able to provide the data to be assessed against all six key indicators. She is right. It means we don't even have the data to assess some aspects of Australian children's well-being.

Though Australia is not in the final summary ranking, Britain's result is telling because the policy directions in both countries are similar. The policies being implemented are based, in part, on research by James Heckman, a Nobel Prize winning economist whose work on investment in intensive early childhood programs has shown significant results. Essentially, Heckman's argument is that for every dollar a government invests in programs for disadvantaged children, they will receive up to \$17 in future returns as that child finds employment, avoids crime and is generally a solid contributor to civil society. Heckman's research is good, but there are significant problems with the way it is being interpreted.

Heckman's research has been used to justify investments across a broad range

of policy ideas, and includes universal systems that support all children, like child health nurses, and targeted programs to aid disadvantaged young children.

The basis of the policies is the principle that supporting a child's development in the early years of their lives provides a strong foundation for later life. The problem is that Heckman's research focussed on very specific groups of disadvantaged children and was funding intensive. It provided tertiary-trained workers to support the children for 40 hours a week. No government program comes close to this type of activity. Thus, government investment is not effective in the areas where it is most needed.



The evidence from UNICEF supports this thesis. It recognises that Australia rates highly on the education well-being scale, but falls away when it comes to measures of child poverty. Despite ten years of policy change and improvement, the socially democratic Scandinavian countries continue to top the rankings. Despite our desire to emulate them, we still fall short. Perhaps the problem is that we are trying too hard, and not looking at the underlying reasons for our inability to improve the well-being of young Australians.

Countries like Australia and the United Kingdom have missed the importance of changing our collective images and ideas of childhood. Our children, despite good policy, can't thrive if policy is built around a culture of idolising children.

Our idolising of childhood and youth means we treat children like demi-gods, and in so doing fail to honour their humanity. We revere childhood, rather than respect it as a stage in life's journey. This is reflected even in our policy titles — names like 'Best Start' and 'Children First' send a message that parents and the community find intimidating. Ideas about childhood and youth that are simply not true are reinforced.

Policy has over-emphasised the importance of children and understated the need for strong familial and social support for children. Childhood development and well-being does not rely solely on programs for children, but on the strengthening of a civil society that can provide adequate health and community services that empower families and communities.

Not enough attention has been given to the idea that it takes a community to raise a child (or a village, as Hillary Clinton said in her book on the subject.) Many communities do this well, through church, sports and community groups. But our governments are not giving enough to communities where children are disadvantaged, nor are they building the infrastructure and basic services that will allow parents and adults the space to do the best they can for children.

A culture that respects, rather than reveres children and young people would not put them on a pedestal. It would not point the finger at parents and blame them for problems with their children. It would instead improve the ways to support those parents and acknowledge that the development of children into capable adults is all

our responsibility. The well-being of our children relies on us honouring their resilience, but also recognising that some children are not as well off as others — and that is where government need to focus their time and money.

To make call on Iraq war requires more than machismo

AUSTRALIA

Politics

David Corlett



As I listened to the debate between the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition about the war in Iraq, I was reminded of a quote I had seen many years ago. I couldn't remember it accurately, nor who had written it. What I did remember was that it referred to a balance between courage and wisdom. The former has figured prominently in the debate between the two leaders. The latter, not at all.

The debate between Howard and Rudd was, as is well known, sparked by Howard's condemnation of Democratic Presidential hopeful, Barack Obama, who has pledged the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq should he be elected President. Howard said that Senator Obama's position would give comfort to the terrorists — that the terrorists would be hoping that a Democrat would win the forthcoming Presidential election and will mark March 2008, the date by which Obama would withdraw troops, on their calendars. The election of a Democratic President would be a win for the terrorists, the Australian Prime Minister was suggested.

Rudd and his party were appalled, or so they said, that Howard had intervened in another country's domestic electoral process. Senator Obama challenged the Prime Minister. If he was serious about the need not to withdraw from Iraq, to increase Australia's presence there. After all, the US is increasing its troop numbers by 20,000.

The Prime Minister refused to back down — he had already made a gaffe on climate change the week before — and instead went on the offensive. He said that the opposition leader did not have the guts to stick it out in Iraq. He said that Rudd was gutless because he would not address the consequences of an early withdrawal from Iraq. In a moment of — as they say in sporting parlance — *deja vu* again, it was suggested that the Labor leader, like his predecessor, had no 'ticker'.

Rudd responded by challenging Howard to outline his strategy for winning the war in Iraq. It was Howard, and not Rudd, or so the opposition leader claimed, who lacked 'guts and courage.'

That there is something of a debate on Iraq is welcome. During the last Federal election campaign the Iraq war was the issue that no-one dared mention. Then Labor leader, Mark Latham, had promised, apparently without real thought or consultation, to bring Australian troops home from Iraq by Christmas. Given the foolishness of such a promise, Labor was keen that the issue be buried. Howard was

in no rush to raise Iraq during the campaign; anything to avoid confronting the absence of weapons of mass destruction and the continuing violence in the country.

Yet there is something troubling about the Howard versus Rudd debate on the Iraq war, and it is not just that an extremely complex and apparently intractable issue is being reduced to simplistic sloganeering. The debate has regressed, become a matter of machismo.

This is what reminded me of that long forgotten quote. So I dug out and dusted off an old journal and tracked it down. On the title page I found the quote. It was from Ammon Hennessy, a pacifist and radical Christian. Given his admiration of Diedrich Bonhoeffer, Kevin Rudd might have some sympathy with the sentiments expressed. "Love without Courage and Wisdom is sentimentality, as with the ordinary church member; Courage without Love and Wisdom is foolhardiness, as with the ordinary soldier; Wisdom without Love and Courage is cowardice, as with the ordinary intellectual. Therefore, one with Love, Courage and Wisdom is one in a million, who changes the world, as with Jesus, Buddha, and Gandhi."

Now I can concede that it might be unreasonable to expect our political leaders to be made of such exceptional stuff. I further confess that Love, as in Hennessy's formulation, is perhaps misplaced on the Australian political scene — though this may be because the concept has been sentimentalised and appropriated by flag-kissing Big Day Out attendees and the like. But these reservations aside, it seems that there is a real need to inject something like wisdom into the debate about Iraq. As it is, those debating look more foolish than courageous or wise.

Of course, it may be that any debate about Iraq will necessarily touch upon the foolhardy. The longer the war continues, the more the decision to invade Iraq looks to have been made on the basis of the sort of courage that lacks both love and wisdom.



OPPOSITION Leader Kevin Rudd has for the first time spelled out his preferred strategy for an American military withdrawal from Iraq, adding

World Youth Day's ecological conversion opportunity

AUSTRALIA

Faith

Stefan Gigacz



In Australia — especially in this time of drought — people are increasingly conscious of climate change. Not a day goes without a news headline highlighting some new initiative to reduce carbon emissions.

Despite the climate change sceptics, the upswing in environmental consciousness is a global phenomenon. It is not just first world elites who are taking notice, but all kinds of communities in the developing world as well, from Pacific islanders worried about rising sea levels and storm surges to Filipino rainforest dwellers concerned about typhoons.

Interestingly, the late Pope John Paul II was aware of and shared this environmental consciousness. In a remarkable and almost prophetic statement in 2001, he called on the Church to encourage and support the "ecological conversion (that) has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading".

"Man," he said, "is no longer the Creator's 'steward', but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss."

Picking up on increasing signs of this ecological consciousness, noted American commentator, John L. Allen, said "ecology and natural resources" are one of ten "megatrends" that he expects to shape global Catholicism in coming decades.

I've been thinking about these issues, particularly in the context of the forthcoming World Youth Day 2008 event, for which I am organizing a local program for a Melbourne parish.

Each time I look at the World Youth Day [website](#) the number of people expected to participate keeps rising. Half a million, 600,000, now 700,000 people are expected to come to Sydney for the final Mass with Pope Benedict on the 20th of July.

Many of the Australian participants will fly in to Sydney. More than 100,000 international visitors are also expected — nearly all of whom will fly for up to 25 hours.

According to figures available on climate change websites, a flight from Europe will generate seven to eight tonnes of carbon dioxide that will be emitted into the

atmosphere. Even a flight from Singapore will generate over three tonnes.

It is obvious then that, depending on exactly how many people come, and from where, the 'carbon cost' of hosting World Youth Day in Sydney could easily reach half a million to a million tonnes of CO2 equivalent.



That's five to ten times more than the 100,000 tonnes that FIFA estimated as the carbon cost of hosting last year's World Cup!

Significantly, though, FIFA committed itself to making the World Cup a 'carbon neutral' event. It did this by partnering with the United Nations Environmental Program, and by purchasing 100,000 tonnes of 'carbon credits' to compensate for the extra carbon dioxide generated by spectators attending matches.

This raises the question of how World Youth Day will ensure that it is an environmentally responsible event.

The German hosts of World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne recognized that it was beyond them to make the event carbon neutral. Nevertheless, they adopted a series of environmental guidelines which are still available on the WYD2005 [website](#)

So how will WYD2008 respond to the challenge?

If climate change and environmental destruction are really threats, is it enough to limit ourselves to simply issuing a series of guidelines? How seriously do the organisers take Pope John Paul II's call for "ecological conversion"?

If the organisers are serious, the answer is clear — at a minimum, they need to ensure that WYD2008 is 'carbon neutral'. Better still, why not work to make it a 'carbon positive' event?

Could World Youth Day 2008 be transformed from an environmentally expensive event into one that will call 700,000 people towards "ecological conversion"? It is worth also reflecting on recent words of Pope Benedict who will also be present at World Youth Day 2008. "The destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth's resources cause grievances, conflicts and wars, precisely because they are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development," he wrote in this year's World Day of Peace message, drawing a clear link between the concept of human development and environmental concern and protection.

Pope Benedict also chose the theme for next year's World Youth Day — Jesus' words in the Acts of the Apostles: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses." They are words worth reflecting on in the context of the challenge of "ecological conversion".

It is possible to make WYD2008 an environmentally responsible event — though

it will take a lot of work. The end result could be that WYD2008 will become a moment when people stepped back from the environmental abyss, and turned the spirit of St Francis of Assisi, patron Saint of the environment, into a modern megatrend.

Mexican wave ban reflects sponsor tyranny

OPINION

Colin Long



The Mexican wave will be banned when Australia takes on New Zealand at the MCG on Sunday, with plain-dressed police placed around the ground looking for any wave starters.

I was not sure what surprised me more, the agitated reaction of the public to the ban on the Mexican wave at the MCG, or the fact that the managers of the 'people's ground' thought it necessary. At first sight the issue seems trivial. Yet the whole incident tells us something revealing about contemporary sport watching in Australia, and perhaps something about contemporary Australian cities.

Of course, like violence at soccer games, the Mexican wave at the cricket may just be a symptom of crowd boredom. But there is also a sense in which contemporary stadium design encourages concerted crowd activity. In the old days, when smaller stadiums had large amounts of standing room (or even at the MCG, which once had substantial standing room areas) the idea of the Mexican wave was superfluous.

At the MCG the wave always represented a confirmation of what, or so we are told, Australian sport is supposed to be about — a good natured assertion of equality and rejection of the privileges of class. As the wave swept around the outer, the refusal of the members to participate was greeted with loud boos — a ritual demonstration of the stuffiness of those who think themselves above the mass, but also precisely exposing the falsity of the claims that sport is a social leveller.

It is highly unlikely that the manager of the MCG decided to ban the wave to protect the members from embarrassment. But what did motivate the decision? It seems to me that the answer lies in the transformation of contemporary sport into something that is no longer just sport, but rather entertainment. It also reflects current trends in urban space.

Given that, more than ever before, sports supporters are encouraged to participate in the entertainment, not just watch it, the decision to ban the wave seems to embody an egregious double standard. Cricket in particular has developed the concept of sport as entertainment. One could be excused for confusing 20-20 cricket for a cricket match in a disco. Horse racing, notwithstanding its always problematic status as a real spectator sport, has been deliberately transformed into a large-scale fashion show/B&S Ball. Even during the AFL football season television stations and advertisers continually run promotional gimmicks to involve crowd

members.

People are encouraged to see going to the football or cricket as a day out, an entertainment activity to rival going to the movies or shopping. Sports managers have painted themselves into this corner, telling us for years that sport has to compete with other entertainments.

Perhaps if management types accepted that sport isn't just another form of entertainment we would not have to make up some silly pretence that sport needs to be a complete entertainment experience. With this pretence, we wouldn't have to put up with continual noise, advertising and distractions. At half time we could talk to each other about the first half of the game, rather than being told to sms the name of the player we think most likely to kick the first goal of the second half, or be distracted by some roving buffoon trying to find a spectator drinking a particular soft drink in order to award him or her with a prize.



The *real* issue with the wave is about proprietary control over the entertainment taking place inside the stadium. Entertainment organised by the stadium managers, which they and their sponsors can make money from, is OK — but spontaneous entertainment, even something as tame as the Mexican wave, is forbidden.

The construction of new stadiums has been accompanied by increased surveillance and control over the spectacular space. The unruly, unstructured space of the old outer has been consigned to history, along with the old suburban football grounds. The result is the destruction of localised meaning. Stadiums are now named after corporations rather than places.

Contemporary sports stadiums reflect contemporary urban spaces — beneath the rhetoric of choice and variety there is an increasing homogenisation of space and place.

Each Melbourne suburban football ground once had a character of its own. Everyone except Collingwood supporters spoke of Victoria Park with a mixture of contempt and fear. Moorabbin had a strange, free-wheeling, sometimes mad, feel that was distinctly St Kilda. Now the MCG has junk food chain stores, while Telstra Dome seems like a shopping mall with a sports field in the middle.

I'm not just writing as a pathetic nostalgic. It is the lack of diversity, the corralling of us all into a public behaviour pattern determined by advertising executives in cahoots with stadium managers that really gets me. The low-tech unruly suburban grounds didn't allow for the tyranny of advertisers and ground managers. The best that could be managed was a half-time announcement of the cheer squad's winning raffle ticket over a scratchy PA. Now, with electronic score boards and booming sound systems we are captives to corporate messages from the moment we enter a ground.

Notable absence as a political tool

OPINION

Chloe Wilson



British author G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "White ... is not a mere absence of colour; it is a shining and affirmative thing, as fierce as red, as definite as black." Much the same thing could be said of absence itself, as it rarely adheres only to its literal meaning of 'to be away'. A person's absence is hardly ever neutral, as the place where they are expected, the empty chair, the unsigned letter, can be filled with questions about the reasons for and possible implications of their non-attendance.

This is especially true when a nation's leader is conspicuous by his or her absence. With every decision and every appearance under the microscope, any false step in terms of where a leader chooses to be can spell a public relations disaster. One need only think of Marie Antoinette pirouetting around Trianon while Paris burned; or, in an example burned into modern memory, the excruciating footage of George W. Bush continuing a visit to a primary school for several minutes after being informed of the 9/11 attacks.

We live in an age of spin, one in which blunders can be made into triumphs, non sequiturs become bold manifestos, and lies metamorphosise into truth and back again. It is hardly surprising, then, that a politics of absence seems to be emerging in this country, and elsewhere in the world. Rather than apologising for a notable absence, there is now a growing trend towards harnessing the power of absence. Not turning up to a public event has become a form of political comment.

A poignant example of this possibility emerges when comparing two military deaths that made front page news in Australia last year. Prime Minister John Howard attended the funeral of Jake Kovco, the first Australian casualty in Iraq. However, he did not attend that of Mark Bingley, a Blackhawk captain who died whilst on duty in Fiji.

This decision sparked anger in the community, particularly as the facts of the two cases are remarkably similar — both Kovco and Bingley were young men from small communities who left young families behind. So why presence at one funeral, and absence at another? Is there a suggestion in this choice that involvement in Iraq is a more serious business than military actions in our own region? Or was it simply, as the Prime Minister said, a case of being unable to attend due to a previous engagement at a science conference?

This is not the only time when the Prime Minister's absence has been questioned. His decision to not attend the funeral of Pope John Paul II — an event which brought together the largest gathering of heads of state in history, surpassing the funeral of Winston Churchill — raised eyebrows, as did his choice to not follow in the footsteps of other world leaders and agree to meet with U2 frontman Bono to discuss Australia's role in eradicating global poverty.

Certainly, these absences cannot be taken as clear and direct messages about the Prime Minister's priorities, but it is interesting to note that these absences are both related to Australia's relationship and responsibility to the rest of the world, to seeing ourselves as connected to the international community, and not simply those nations that are trade and strategic partners.



It would appear that notable absences are not limited to Australian politics. The sustained absence of George W. Bush from the funerals of American soldiers who have died serving in Iraq has reached a point where families, politicians and commentators are starting to ask questions. But again the power of silence and non-attendance shows itself; we may read into these decisions what we will, but there is no comment, no black and white evidence to prove what is implied, and to hold the non-attendee accountable.

This is at once why absence has the power to be such a useful political tool, and so corrosive to the values of truth, transparency and integrity that are supposed to be the foundation of our government. However, when looked at as a pattern, absence can create definable shapes; it is always possible to throw a sheet over the invisible man. White is never simply white, and absence must be read as closely as what is said and done.

The domestic space of gay men and lesbians

OPINION

Deborah Singerman



Australians still enjoy watching wannabe popstars humiliate themselves on television. But not as much as we do on four occasions as they try to

What is written between the lines in obituaries is often as important as the words staring you in the face. I always wonder about people who travel halfway around the world to be with a friend then set up home with that friend for no ostensible reason.

Which is why it was so refreshing to read the obituary of collector James Agapitos who died in January with its recognition of his relationship with partner Ray Wilson; they were 'married', as The *Sydney Morning Herald* put it, "by a matey ampersand, James & Ray".

I know many gay and lesbian couples attached by punctuation but such a public display is unusual — one of the most prominent I can think of is Waz & Gav, Warren Sonin and Gavin Atkins, the gay couple on the first series of Channel Nine's *The Block* whose popularity helped them launch their own design company. It also highlighted the boundaries of ...œacceptable mainstream images of gay men... , says geographer and archival researcher, Andrew Gorman-Murray (pictured below).

Gorman-Murray's PhD topic, [*Queering home or domesticating deviance?*](#) looks behind stereotypes to the meaning of home for gay men and women, stripping away the gloss to show the home's emotional and practical pulls.

"Queering the home was used against the normal idea of home to assert that we also need to look at home as not always being a heterosexual unit," he says. Domesticating deviance illustrates the tension between the nuclear family home and the design blood that is supposed to flow through all gay men.

Gorman-Murray interviewed 20 gay men and 17 lesbians, mainly but not all couples, aged from 19 to 68 though mostly of working age, living in Sydney primarily (and in all areas, not just the 'ghetto' of Darlinghurst) and in Melbourne, Newcastle, Wollongong and regional towns in New South Wales.

The sample was self-selected; the majority had no children and were tertiary educated managers or professionals. There was a mixture of owner-occupiers and renters and people living in houses and units, but the main findings of the research applied across the board.

"Design was important", says Gorman-Murray, "not for aesthetic reasons per se but for deeper reasons, for the self and relationships and well-being." It was the "materiality of home" that mattered, "the way it was designed to support and affirm

sexual identities and relationships.”

Going back to the 1930s or even the 1950s to 1970s, when homosexuality was essentially a criminal activity, gay men and women established and sustained their subcultures through their domestic spaces. House parties and dinner parties were very important as they are today but it is the private home that resonates most, ...especially when seen in a context where the expression of your sexual identity is inhibited in public spaces or in workplaces... , he says.

Home design demonstrates an investment of self. “In terms of establishing — and maintaining — relationships it is the bringing together of personally meaningful objects, and of making decisions over the way you would design, or paint or purchase furniture or other household items together, of making the home their home, using their favourite colours, combined.”

For some the combination of family objects and those representing their sexual identity was “a crucial way to legitimise that identity and reconcile it with the family identity”.

These findings were consistent regardless of whether interviewees were living in areas seen as being gay and lesbian friendly, where they might feel comfortable out and about in the streets, or in more traditional suburbs, where couples who fly rainbow flags in the front gardens “were making a statement that it’s OK to be a gay or lesbian person in a suburban location and we’re comfortable here and other people can be comfortable with that too.”

Gorman-Murray says that given the importance of home for gay and lesbian well-being, issues concerning accommodation are likely to have significant impact and need further research. With more low income and working class gay men and lesbians being forced to rent housing is becoming less affordable. Secondly there is evidence of discrimination on the basis of renters’ sexuality, and thirdly, with an ageing population, gay men and lesbians are keeping themselves closeted in nursing homes or with care at home.

And who knows how many ampersands might soon appear in obituaries when, as Gorman-Murray points out, “we are entering the first cohort where we have old gay men and lesbians”.



Knowledge that eludes the search engine

BOOK REVIEW

Philip Harvey

The Whispering Gallery : Art into Poetry, by Peter Steele. Macmillan Art Publishing, 2006. ISBN 1 876832 85 1, RRP \$88.00.



Peter Steele's poems are miniature essays, assemblies of words and ideas compacted into easeful lines with well-tempered rhythms. Steele is well-tempered, even when the subject is not. Aphoristic gambits, different sides of a paradox, colours occasionally nailed to the proverbial, the personal in play with the like-minded or other-minded, criss-cross paths of the argument — all good features of an essay — animate the Steele poem. He is insistent on the conjunction; we can sense the word 'but' about to turn a vignette about face. It makes us pay closer attention.

A lifetime of university teaching and marking has shaped his special form of address, though his poetry is blessedly free of the post-modern jargon some writers feel a necessity to use in poetry of ideas. He is old-fashioned enough to employ 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis' as though it were normal. Steele relishes the multiplicity of the world and the mind, while desiring to square things up in verse. If a poet is the line manager of his own language, then Steele is the model of sober good manners; words are taken on their merits, so we find nothing excessive or wildly eccentric, likewise nothing mean or tyrannical.

Steele may avoid the new jargon but not the old strays of English. 'Pond', his poem on Edward Haytley's *The Brockman Family at Beachborough*, purposefully contains 'abroach', 'ambages', 'sparkish', 'gasconading', 'brandling', 'routiers', and 'gudgeons', so some knowledge of 18th century British mores and a familiarisation with these words aids enjoyment. The poem itself shows us, in a mannerly way, why manners aren't everything.

This second collection of picture poems gives further access to his manner of talking. In *Plenty: Art into Poetry* (2003) Steele enthuses about ekphrastic poetry, his chosen practice, as a way "in which poems 'speak forth' real or imagined works of art." I hesitate to agree that this is the central thing going on in all of these poems, some do little more than prompt a broader response or force an issue into the open, but the richest are making new out of old. Not glosses, but glorifications.

What is Steele's pursuit? To make, in the same measured tones, educated observations of human dreams and human dilemmas. In 'In Memory of Anthony

Hecht' he asks that American poet to "look and rejoice at another country's beach ...| fashioned by God and man to discharge their fullness." The painting is of Sorrento back beach, as rendered in vivid swathes and dots, unmistakable John Perceval.

Poems about art objects are a prolific modern business. Today we thrill to the social comedy of Durcan's gallery excursions and survive the considerable canvases of Ashbery. But Steele is up to something different, one template being the most famous example of the genre, Auden's 'Musee des Beaux Arts'. Steele expects a vast range of reference from his readers, an impossibility that excludes many from the discussion.

The discussion is, after all, the reality of his own interactions with the painting, sculpture or other creation of his choice. Though Steele wears his learning lightly, the layered look can at times be overwhelming. Still, the presence of the excellent reproductions opposite each poem is a godsend, whereby we fall into an enjoyable view of the interlocutor's transferred thought processes. Whether some of these poems can stand separate from the images that inspired them is a question open to time.



Latter-day Steele is more perfected, both in voice and structure. Thankfully he keeps his alliterative tendencies in check these days. His adopted position of imperious certainty is a given. He starts at a high standard and more or less talks unwaveringly at that level for the remainder. This is something some readers find hard to take in Steele. Even when his themes are modesty, doubt and brokenness, it is all said at the same level of unquestioning certitude.

Personally, I find this the real test of the poems. Unrelieved high style is a heady place to be, but can we live there all the time? I'm sure Peter Steele would be the first person to say no, and this is the collection's limitation, and its glory. We all know a disquisition on the belly laugh is not the same as a belly laugh, but why not have both? Steele's poetry is not of the moment but of the true occasion.

There are at least two ways he achieves this grand style. First, the structured verse forms are diverse and their maintenance a fascination to the senses. Rhyme patterns serve subtle purposes, for example notice what is going on in the last verse of 'Magi':

Pomegranate and cherry
 Banner desire it seems
 In robe and caparison;
 In the golden vessels, myrrh
 Awaits the first-born son
 As heady incense gleams

For a prince, and all defer
To the one others will bury.

Second, and above all, any reader of Steele needs to be conditioned to the long, measured sentence. His sentences are a deep breath for a steady statement. His sentences are each large thoughts duly controlled. Within any one tailored sentence we may expect a haiku, a Continental trumpet call, a blithe shift of Augustan tones, a trenchant moral, and an unfussy analogy — all with the flow of the same Samuel Johnson.

Peter Steele once commented that Auden was “a walking civilization”, an image useful in describing Steele, solitary in gallery and study, walking from painting to sculpture to object and bringing to bear a combination of knowledge that cannot be produced by a search engine.

Crowded depiction of 1960s America

FILM REVIEW

Drama

Tim Kroenert

Bobby, 120 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Emilio Estevez. Starring: William H. Macy, Lindsay Lohan, Anthony Hopkins, Demi Moore. [Website](#) .



If it's true that "less is more", then somebody forgot to tell Emilio Estevez. The writer/director has squeezed so many big-name actors into this political ensemble drama that *Bobby* feels like a stroll through an Oscars after party.

Apart from the above-listed, there's also Helen Hunt, Martin Sheen, Ashton Kutcher, Laurence Fishburne, Joshua Jackson, Heather Graham, Christian Slater, Sharon Stone and Elijah Wood, as well as Estevez himself. They're crammed shoulder to shoulder in a film whose events unfold at the Ambassador Hotel in LA on 4 June 1968—the site and date of popular presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy's assassination.

Making full use of this vast cast, Estevez ambitiously, and not particularly successfully, structures the film around a wide array of subplots, which jostle for position on the overcrowded stage, while the impending, fateful visit of the title character hovers over the proceedings in mythic proportions.

A young woman (Lohan) weds a boy from her school to prevent him being sent to fight in Vietnam. An African-American chef (Fishburne) lectures a Latino kitchen hand about oppression. Two Kennedy campaigners (Shia Labeouf and Brian Geraghty) slack off and spend the day tripping with their drug dealer (Kutcher). A retired doorman (Hopkins) reflects on his reputable career, while spouting trite life metaphors over a game of chess with a fellow retiree (Harry Belafonte).

Clearly it's not just in the realm of casting that Estevez has favoured the "more is more" approach. Thematically, it seems, he's tried to cover every cultural and social issue facing America in the 1960s.

Apart from Vietnam, the rise of drug culture, and shifting racial relations (where the Mexican is the new 'Nigger'), the film references the changing role of women, the hollowness of consumerism, shifting sexual and relationship values, the nature of celebrity (Kennedy was killed the day after artist Andy Warhol's non-fatal shooting), all the while keeping a keen eye on one particular historical sporting event.

It's a lot of plates to have in the air and, to his credit, Estevez does a reasonable job of keeping them all spinning. He also draws textured, realistic performances from every member of the cast (although his own performance, as the neglected husband of Moore's alcoholic singer Virginia Fallon, is rather stilted).



But ultimately the lack of a coherent, unifying thesis proves to be to the film's detriment. Indeed it's only when the characters' lives ultimately converge around the tragic final events (recreated using clever camera angles intercut with historical news footage) that the film manages to attain some semblance of focus. But it's too little too late; in trying to say too much, Estevez ultimately says very little.

No more pumping petrol and stories at Lutton Motors

CREATIVE WRITING

Matthew Lamb



Helen's father Russell George Lutton, Rusty to his friends, started Lutton Motors, a little corner garage and petrol service station in Rockhampton, Central Queensland when he returned from war in 1946. His son-in-law, Phil Lamb closed the business in January, 2007 when the little service station that served three generations of a family well became another victim of technology and big corporations.

At first things looked good for Rusty. Lutton Motors serviced locals from Wandal and bushies from Alton Downs and beyond. Later came the business from the airport on the other side of the army barracks. He and Heffie and their three children lived around the corner from Lutton Motors. But in 1960 Heffie passed away, leaving Rusty to raise the children as well as run the shop. Even before this early loss he drank a lot and soon the youngest child, Helen, was frequently asked to 'mind the shop' while her father went to 'get a haircut'. Rusty sometimes didn't surface for three days after going on a bender. Helen was forced to run the business instead of attending school. Customers would tell her about seeing Rusty about town as she pumped petrol into their cars from the two bowsers on the footpath on Wandal Road. This kept up until the '70s when a few heart-attacks and a new life brought Rusty to his senses.

Meanwhile Helen and Phil married and moved into the house around the corner from the shop while Rusty moved out onto the converted veranda. The day Helen went into hospital to have her third child, Rusty was going in to surgery at another hospital down south for another bypass. He heard the news before going in and swore to himself to give up the grog if only he would come through the surgery. He did come through and he kept to his word until cancer took him in 1989.

Meanwhile, Phil bought Lutton Motors from Rusty and worked for ten hours a day, seven days a week, fixing cars and pumping petrol. Largely self-educated, Phil would take home twelve books a fortnight from the Council Library and read them down at the shop. He may be the only mechanic in Australia who read Epictetus between fixing engines, while smoking long cigars. When he'd read all the books in the South Rocky Library, he went over and read all the books in the North Rocky Library. To this day, almost all the books there, mainly the novels, bear the smudged grease and oil prints of Phil's fingers on their pages, and cigar ash in between the boards.

The kids wouldn't have seen much of their father if they hadn't spent a lot of time down the shop especially on school holidays when they carried around his morning tea or lunch and after school when their mother called in to see him on the way home. They would have their school shoes off by then and after ten minutes running around the greasy floor of the garage and workshop, their feet would be black. Phil picked them up and carried them to the workshop bench where he rubbed degreaser all over their feet (which tickled like mad), before wiping them clean and carrying them out, one at a time, to the car.

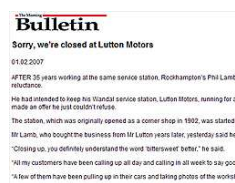
The 80s were good for Lutton Motors. Phil's long, hard hours had paid off. Helen ran the house, looked after the books, did the monthly accounts and looked after her ageing (then ailing) father, who lived with them at the time. And she looked after her husband.



The kids finally talked their father into taking Sundays off work (or so is their memory of the negotiations). And after several more years he started working only a half day on Saturday. But he still worked ten hours a day during the week. And when the kids were old enough, the business afforded them an education at Central Queensland University. Julie and Wendy are now accountants, working for multi-national firms and companies; Wendy even landed her first job with a major oil company by letting slip in the interview that her father was 'in the oil business, too'. Julie and Matthew both did their time, however, working down at the garage (Phil called it their 'hobby'); Matthew stayed on longer, so Wendy was spared.

A few years ago, to mark the 50th anniversary of Lutton Motors, Phil had his picture in the local newspaper, *The Morning Bulletin*. ...æWandal a big family... , the headline said. He added that the area had "a 1950s feel". "I've never actually thought of retiring," he said. "I think people are meant to work and are happier when they work. I'd miss talking to all the people who come through."

But, of course, it isn't the 1950s anymore. The big Mobil self-serve with lots of pumps selling three different types of fuel was built in town. Others like it opened around town and small family-owned old-time petrol stations closed down. Then Woolworths started selling petrol, and giving discount coupons. In hindsight, Phil didn't do himself any favours by resisting change. He refused to install Eftpos facilities, being strictly cash only, or for his regular customers, on account. He used an ancient cash register, which worked only if a secret lever was pressed to release the till drawer. The amounts, frozen in pounds sterling, on bits of painted metal, peered out through a dusty glass window. Figures were scrupulously worked out using almost lost art of 'mental arithmetic'.



Then petrol prices went above the dollar mark but the old bowsers at Lutton Motors could not. So Phil rigged a system in which if fuel was, say, \$1.20, the bowsers sold it at 60 cents, so if the customer wanted twenty dollars worth he would pump 'ten' dollars in. Again, 'mental arithmetic' would be required, this time on

the part of the customers, along with another almost lost art, trust.

Older customers who had been coming in for years either grew too old to drive or passed on, with few new customers taking their place. Accounts dwindled. More recently, however, young mothers, with a carload of kids or babies, started taking advantage of the full service and rediscovered some of the qualities of customer service which have since disappeared. But all too late. On January 31st 2007, the doors of Lutton Motors closed. The land has been sold and the old building will soon be demolished. The hard work and long hours no longer pay off. Everyone, including Rockhampton's librarians, is awaiting Phil's next move.

Reading the stars while the place goes to seed

POETRY

Various

Three Portraits

Missing you is an elephant

it's dark grey

and wrinkled

it fills my bedroom

blocks the door, the windows

the light from the hall

and the moon outside

it stills my bedroom

I can't move

it won't budge

I can't breathe

some nights I wake

with its behind in my face

the stench is unbearable

all I can do is lie

trembling with fear

that it will flatten me

Grace Yee

Cubby

your thoughts crawl in

to a packing case

nailed up a tree

sap bleeding into you
the smell of pine needles
spread across splinters
your shirt snagged on a nail
pulling threads from afternoons
from secret places
you watch yourself in a mirror
flashing signals on a horizon
shrunk to a clothesline
rain blowing in
weeks evaporating
nothing happens
in between
the years broken up
still in a box
clinging to the sea's edge
the password hidden within you
never coming down

Paula Green

Don't

Don't let me sit

mired in magazines, reading the stars
while the place goes to seed.

Don't let me spend

days strolling the malls, devote
myself to an over-cosseted dog,
neglect my friends.

Stop me if I start to say,

like she does, that the young have no manners,

the journalists no grammar,
that I'm turning into my mother.

Emma Rooksby