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Colombian clues to reconciliation

HUMAN RIGHTS

Leonel Narvaez



In the last 30 years, Colombia has often been in the news because of its violent socio-political conflict.

Thanks to the Law of Justice and Peace passed by the Colombian Congress in 2005, thousands of leftist and rightist rebels were demobilised. The law included a substantial reduction in sentences if the rebels would hand over their arms, confess fully to their crimes, and relinquish property and money so that through a specially created Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation, the government could provide restoration to victims.

By October 2009, over 54,000 insurgents had accepted the offer to walk down this new road to reconciliation and peace. But how to reconcile with them after so many crimes?

It is commonly agreed that reconciliation demands at least three basic requirements: truth, justice/reparation and pacts of 'never again'. With the law of Justice and Peace, legislators in Colombia decided that truth would have priority over punitive justice.

However, the number of cases to be heard in the courts was of such magnitude that it would take nearly 100 years to complete it! In such situation neither truth nor justice could get a fair treatment. What to do?

In the last six years, a cultural alternative — very controversial and totally different to the judicial approach — has been promoted by a growing number of organisations: the culture of forgiveness and reconciliation. Although at first, both words ignited passionate discussions, gradually people have seen their coherence and their strength.

Forgiveness is being presented as a virtue that serves to break the irreversibility of the past and allow offenders to enter again into the community. It is offered as a personal process of catharsis, of memory transformation and of construction of new narratives. Forgiveness is not about forgetting and less, it is not about refusing to apply the law to offenders. Thus, forgiveness becomes an indispensable condition for reconciliation and facilitates the environment that will achieve it.

On the way to reconciliation, there are a few lessons learnt in the 30 years of conflict in Colombia. First of all, sustainable reconciliation demands at least three major realms of action: interpersonal, community and the political elite. The three of them must be acted upon simultaneously.

There is a level of interpersonal reconciliation which is not necessarily linked with political

violence but nevertheless builds complex bridges with it: abuse in the family, violent resolution of conflicts, abuse in schools and other forms of violence. These require an interpersonal reconciliation processes. Otherwise, the victims may take revenge against the wider society.

Second, although reparation is a fundamental issue to guarantee reconciliation, it is essential that a culture of self-restoration and restoration of others have a place in the minds and hearts of victims, offenders, and citizens in general. Self-restoration is the process by which human beings can heal themselves from traumas. It provides victims with strength to regain self-confidence and to reinforce their political participation.

In many cases, even if justice, truth and restoration have been guaranteed, victims remain chained by their anger and hatred. In such environment, violence can restart at any moment.

Hetero-restoration, the restoration of others, is the process by which citizens and communities understand the need for the full reintegration of victims and offenders into civil life, and actively support it. Restoration cannot be left to government officials alone.

Third, the reconciliation process in Colombia has led to some profound insights. We have come to understand that a poor person with anger is twice poor; that although resentment is a negative way to demand self-respect and dignity, revenge is the unwise abuse of resentment; that reconciliation without forgiveness is very fragile; that forgiveness is a powerful way of transforming ungrateful memories into new languages; that although governments may grant amnesties and make concessions, forgiveness is the victims' inalienable right; that in the face of irrational violence, victims and citizens must offer the irrationality of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Fourth: reconciliation becomes easier when victims and perpetrators see a new future. Reconciliation demands charismatic leaders who are able to inspire people to see the new future, translate it into strong political agreements and act quickly on them.

The political culture of forgiveness and reconciliation offers victims and perpetrators new meaning in their lives. It helps people regain a sense of trust and security and it facilitates new forms of community. As Nobel Prize winner Desmond Tutu continues to say, without forgiveness (and reconciliation) there is no future.

Death of fanaticism

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Last night the largest interreligious gathering ever held in Australia opened in Melbourne. The Parliament of the World's Religions brings together some 6000 people from every continent, and from all the major religious and spiritual traditions. It will continue into next week, concluding on Wednesday evening.

The no-frills video featured here from the Parliament website explains its history. The initial Parliament of the World's Religions, touted as the beginning of the modern interreligious movement, was held as part of Columbus World Fair in Chicago in 1893. It was the first major international gathering of scholars and leaders from all the major faiths.

The next Parliament was held 100 years later in 1993, again in Chicago, to mark the centenary of the first Parliament, and since then they've been held every five years: in 1999 in Cape Town, 2004 in Barcelona, and now in Melbourne.

The video begins with the solemn chiming of bells. This represents America's New Liberty Bell that was rung ten times to open the 1893 Parliament, the ten chimes standing for the world's ten major religious traditions. Indian Hindu Swami Vivekenanda spoke as part of the opening, and he referred to the tolling of the bell:

'Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation, and sent whole nations to despair ... I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism.'

Unfortunately religious bigotry, fanaticism, and associated violence are still very much with us, and this highlights the need for ongoing efforts — both large gatherings like this Parliament, and small grassroots organisations — at forging good relations and understanding between different faith groups.

A criticism often leveled at the interreligious movement by other believers is that it aims to meld and homogenise all the religions into one overarching super faith. But a central ethos of the Parliament is to honour, preserve and seek to understand the particularities of different faiths rather than try to make them all the same.

As Dirk Ficca, Executive Director of the Parliament has said:

'The paradox is that I'm a more deeply committed Christian because of my interaction with people of other traditions, and this is the paradox of the interreligious movement.'

Interreligious dialogue does not blur, or make fuzzy or lukewarm one's own religious identity. While giving a person a greater appreciation of other traditions, it also sharpens and deepens one's own sense of one's own religious commitment.'

The Dalai Lama is in Australia to take part in the Parliament, and he will give the closing address next Wednesday. In his Nobel Peace Prize lecture back in 1989 he spoke of the urgent need for dialogue:

'Because we all share this small planet earth, we have to learn to live in harmony and peace with each other and with nature. This is not just a dream, but a necessity. We are dependent on each other in so many ways that we can no longer live in isolated communities and ignore what is happening outside these communities ... As interdependent, therefore, we have no other choice than to develop what I call a sense of universal responsibility. Today, we are truly a global family.'

The Melbourne Parliament will be another link in the web of cohesion that might ameliorate the bigotry, fanaticism and violence deplored by Swami Vivekenanda over 100 years ago. Hopefully it will promote the trust, harmony and universal responsibility sorely needed in today's divided and troubled world.

An almost true story about corporate crime

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Informant!* (M). Running time: 108 minutes. Director: Steven Soderbergh. Starring: Matt Damon, Scott Bakula, Joel McHale**

The Informant! tells a true story — sort of. In the early 1990s Mark Whitacre, an executive at American agricultural powerhouse Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), became an informant for an FBI investigation into an ADM price-fixing scheme. His story was published in 2000 in a non-fiction book by *New York Times* investigative journalist Kurt Eichenwald.



It's a story for our times. Indeed, Soderbergh's film adaptation is a blackly comic satire of corporate crime. It's no po-faced critique: a disclaimer notes that the film contains fictional dialogue and amalgamated characters — 'So there'. This, along with the cheesy '70s style score and the exclamation point in the title banner, helps to set the playful tone of the film. Playful, but sharp as a boning knife, and *The Informant!* fervently slashes the culture of corporate greed.

Whitacre, as portrayed by a tubby, jovial and bad-mustachioed Damon, is by all outward appearances a clean-cut family man, whose generally sunny and naïve outlook is revealed by his cheery internal monologues.

The FBI come on to the scene to investigate allegations (by Whitacre) of extortion against a rival company. But Whitacre sees the possibility of a confidant, even a friend, in the earnest features of Special Agent Brian Shepherd (Bakula). Whitacre lets Shepherd in on a few details about ADM's shady dealings with its overseas counterparts.

Whitacre is enlisted to spy on his bosses and colleagues. At first, he is enamoured of this covert new role (watch his eyes light up when they ask him to wear a wire). He takes to it with aplomb — perhaps too much. But the glamour of living a 'Crichton novel' wears off. Whitacre becomes reticent. You have to wonder if something is up.

Obviously, the real-life Whitacre's story is on the public record, but if you're not familiar with it, don't spoil it for yourself. This film banks on its seemingly endless bag of nifty surprises. The less you know going in, the more you will enjoy it. Suffice it to say that Whitacre is not the self-professed 'white hat' he claims to be.

Whitacre's internal monologues reveal how frequently he becomes preoccupied. Even during dramatic moments his mind wanders to hilarious observations of mundane details, from neckties to sushi ('Raw fish. Who was the first to go there? The man without a grill'). It's a clever device. Usually voiceover narration is used for exposition; here it is used for

misdirection. We know only what Whitacre tells those around him. And not all of it is true.

Whitacre's relationship with Shepherd is key. Shepherd and his partner Special Agent Bob Herndon (McHale) carry a photo of Whitacre, his wife and son, to remind them continually of the risk that their informant — a flesh and blood human being — is taking. This shields them from becoming inhumane in their pursuit of justice. Ironically, it also blinds them to Whitacre's duplicity. The blurring of professional boundaries leads to betrayal.

Throughout, Whitacre seems detached from the moment. The gradual revelation of just how detached becomes a running gag, with a sinister and sympathetic edge. After all, the monsters in Whitacre's corporate world are not always easy to identify. Neither are the guilty parties in a company culture where greed is just part of the job.

Parliament as conversation that gets things done

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



The Parliament of the World's Religions begins tonight in Melbourne to the sound of clashing symbols.

The Parliament itself is an odd sort of parliament. The Christian season of Advent with which it coincides is an odd sort of advent. And the Great Exhibition which in 1893 gave birth to the Parliament is an odd bedfellow for religion. But when you examine the symbols more closely, they line up pretty well. The Parliament of the World's Religions makes a lot of sense.

The job of parliaments, as we know them, is to pass legislation after debating its merits. They get things done. The Parliament of Religions is confined to conversation on public issues like discrimination, poverty, indigenous welfare and care for the environment. It offers a variety of religious perspectives on these issues, and encourages people to meet in order to work more effectively.

It is much less powerful than the institutions into which parliaments have evolved. But it is not dissimilar to earlier parliaments which brought together ecclesiastical and landholding notables to offer advice to the king, and to temper tyranny.

In the Western Christian tradition, Advent is a period of preparation and waiting that concludes with Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ. For Christians in the Roman Empire, the image of advent was concrete and vivid. They associated it with the ceremonial arrival of the Emperor into a town.

The advent was presented as the theatre of power: a stern and unmoving Emperor was borne into town in a display of military might and implacability. The advent was preceded by anxious expectation. It could be followed by the examination of books, officials, by the judging of serious crimes, by exemplary punishments.

This top-down image of the coming of the emperor, who had everything to decree and nothing to hear, has little to do with the messy, conversational reality of the Parliament of Religions.

But neither is it consistent with the images of Christ's birth in the Christian Scriptures. Luke's Gospel story subverts the image of the omnipotent Lord. He tells of the 'hard coming' of a rural couple to an overcrowded town. It leads to the birth of their baby in a cow stall with shepherds, those conventional figures of anarchy, the only representatives of the civil order.

This is the High King slumming it, learning to see things from underneath. The engagement

of the Son of God with humanity begins with baby talk and modulates into conversation.

This version of the advent of the king sits easily with the variety, democracy and informality of the exchanges that make up the Parliament of Religions. The imperial image of Advent suggests a king who decrees, and his ministers who rule with an iron rod and brook not other voices. Advents are about edicts and the cult of a single power. Other kings are either vassals or rivals.

But the image of the animal shelter suggests that on the ground the business of kings and their chosen ministers is to speak and listen. They serve the High King by attending together to the world for which he cares.

The Parliament of the World's Religions retains its connections with Exhibitions. At the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the inaugural World Parliament of Religions was only one, admittedly the largest, of many parliaments and congresses. It continues to bring together a multitude of conversation, performances, lectures and public events.

All this bustle and variety may seem to have little to do with religion. They are associated with commerce, buying and selling, advertising, competition and self-promoting, not with the silence, the ceremonial, the spiritual and the internality that conventionally belong to religion.

But this exclusive emphasis on interiority is recent. The busyness of the Exhibition seems to match the place of the churches in the ancient world, where religion was a public affair, and was commended through gossip in the bazaars where Paul worked as a tentmaker. Religions are communal affairs, and have a message about daily living that needs to be stated in common words.

The relationship between Exhibition and Parliament matches the place of religions on modern societies. Their visions of the world are some of many competing visions, all of which need to be commended by comparison with others.

Although it may seem an eccentric throwback, the Parliament of the World's Religions is thoroughly modern. It is worth attending to.

Tony Abbott's Machiavellian machinations

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

I had tipped Turnbull to win.

Hockey's decision that he would only stand as a candidate who offered a free conscience vote on the ETS bills precipitated a defiant decision by Abbott on Monday afternoon that he would stand as a third, anti-ETS candidate. I wrongly tipped that Abbott would be eliminated in the first round, and that the final contest would be between Turnbull and Hockey — in either case, the ETS bills would have become law.



It seems the Liberal party room disliked Hockey's challenge of a conscience vote on the ETS: perhaps because most of them are not ready to acknowledge that climate change is a conscience issue (though the climate security of our children is surely a conscience issue?) as well as an economic policy issue. They seemed to prefer the shelter of a clear how-to-vote direction on the ETS, to be held to personal account.

After Hockey's elimination on the first round, Abbott beat Turnbull in the final round by just one vote (42—41).

Abbott then shrewdly called an immediate secret ballot on whether the party should first seek the referral of the ETS bills to a committee, failing which the Opposition senators should vote the bills down this week. Abbott cemented this policy by a decisive vote (55—29).

He will argue, rightly, that these numbers give him a clear mandate to lead a new Coalition policy on the ETS and climate change. If Rudd should now — as he must be tempted to do — call a double dissolution election on the rejected ETS bills, Abbott is defiantly ready.

But as his victory press conference made clear, Abbott will have to deal with some major contradictions in framing an electorally attractive policy on the rejected ETS and climate change. Abbott is on record as saying the climate science is 'crap'. He said yesterday this was 'a bit of hyperbole. It is not my considered position.'

He said, 'I think that climate change is real and that man does make a contribution ... We do want to reduce our emissions and those targets [the emission reduction targets proposed by the Rudd Government of 5—25 per cent by 2020] stand ... We will have a strong and effective climate change policy, it just won't be this ETS.'

Abbott's stated opposition to the ETS is that it is a massive tax transfer from households to big industry, with no emissions reduction effect.

It was clear from the press conference that for Abbott and his strategists, their best hope of

the Coalition winning the next election, or at least holding on to a number of hard-conservative seats, is to frame the key issues as being about high tax and wasteful government spending rather than about climate change.

This will now be a ruthless, dog-whistle election, whenever it comes. Abbott will have the climate change deniers and the rich and powerful coal lobby solidly behind his party's new position. He will present a 'respectable' policy, of believing the climate change science, supporting the agreed Copenhagen targets, and disagreeing with the Government only on its high-tax, coercive ETS.

But, just as Howard profited from Pauline Hanson's racism while professing to disavow it, Abbott's campaign will derive covert energy from climate change deniers and coal lobbyists. They knew he was their man, and he has now — by one vote — brought the entire Liberal Party with him. It was a successful Machiavellian strategy.

There is tragedy here. Turnbull and Hockey cancelled each other out. Turnbull was earning belated respect for his courage against the odds. Had Hockey withdrawn his candidacy and put his support behind Turnbull, on the grounds that there was now a clear ETS choice before the party, it might have gone the other way.

Labor would be unwise to underestimate Abbott's power to attract votes in a double-dissolution election. The ETS bills are so compromised now in the public eye (many see them as a big polluters' feeding trough) that Abbott, a tough populist street fighter, could make heavy inroads into the Government's support.

Abbott's triumph changes the climate change policy chessboard in ways that will take time for the Government to analyse. Rather than triggering a double dissolution on this ETS, Rudd could decide to take policy back to the drawing board.

Rudd might be tempted by a simpler, more understandable, full public-dividend carbon tax, as advocated by environmentalist James Hansen and by market economists like Alan Carmody.

He might also look at greater resort to direct regulatory action to move Australia away from its 93 per cent reliance on coal-burning for its electricity. He might want to think about more direct Keynesian public-spending solutions to this massively entrenched market failure.

For Turnbull and Hockey, the personal dilemmas are now great. Could they in good conscience stand as Liberals in the next election, which they will know was provoked by the machinations of climate change denialists and carbon lobbyists whose views now control the Liberal Party?

Yesterday's outcome changes the character of the Australian Liberal Party, and may yet destroy it as a serious alternative government. Whatever Abbott's latest protestations, the outcome will polarise Australian politics around the issue of man-made climate change and

what to do about it.

I see this as a sad result. It would have been in the national interest now to go forward with a consensus strategy on climate change, however flawed the execution of that strategy. Now, we are back to square one.

People are the answer, not the problem

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

Ruth Limkin



Green is the new black. Drive a hybrid car, participate in Earth Hour and offset your lifestyle by the conspicuous consumption of carbon credits and you are counted among the fashion forward. This turn of public opinion has given earnest environmentalists cause to celebrate, albeit in an eco-friendly manner.

However, as the global chatter continues to bring us reports of plummeting stock prices, toxic debt, government bailouts and growing deficits, there is grave concern that the public resolve to conserve, recycle, cap and offset may evaporate. Our new environmental morality is in danger of become a passing trend, quicker than you can say, 'You're not still wearing that old thing are you?'

And so, the question has been raised as to whether we can afford to save the planet, in respect to climate change and the global financial crisis.

In order to explore whether we can indeed afford to save the planet, we will look at three areas. Firstly, we will consider what we are not saving the planet from. Secondly, we will consider what it truly is that we are saving the planet from, and finally, we will consider the impact of the global financial crisis and what effect it may have in this endeavour.

Let us turn our attention to the first question, 'What are we saving the planet from?' One answer to that, according to many people, is, well, people.

This is an idea first popularised in the 1800s by Rev. Thomas Malthus. Writing extensively on this matter, he said, 'The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.' Two centuries later, population control still bubbles up to the surface of conversation, and not just at the extreme edges of social commentary.

At the end of 2007, in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Professor Barry Walters put forward the idea of charging a carbon tax on babies. As an Associate Professor of obstetric medicine at the University of Western Australia, Doctor Walters said that any family who chose to have in excess of a 'defined number of children' should pay a carbon tax per child. Being logically consistent, he also advanced the notion of carbon credits being granted to those who bought condoms or who underwent sterilisation.

It is a set of notions that Doctor Garry Egger, adjunct Professor of Health Sciences at Southern Cross University, agrees with. Speaking to ABC television, Dr Egger said, 'Population control seems to have gone off the rails in the last 30 years. It's almost forbidden to talk about it these days. It's almost like smoking — you have to go out in the alleys to talk

about it ... And we're ignoring the fact that the downside of that is the pollution and the carbon footprint that's created by increasing the population.'

There is an eerie lack of conversation though, at least publically, as to who decides what an acceptable 'defined number of children' is. Doctor Egger suggests that it would be two people per couple, due to the fact that this is essentially 'replacement value'. So China's one child policy could become Australia's two child policy. Perhaps more troubling though is the notion of how such a policy would be enforced.

Australia is not alone in hosting conversations about limiting the number of children born. Speaking in February 2009 with the UK *Telegraph*, Sir Jonathon Porritt voiced similar suggestions. Porritt, the chairman of the British Government's Sustainable Development Commission, said that, in relation to people's environmental footprint, 'we will work our way towards a position that says that having more than two children is irresponsible'.

Indeed, the suggestions that humanity itself is what we need to save the planet from are humming along. While these suggestions correctly acknowledge the need for drastic action, there is another point of view.

Some suggest that those who are, first and foremost, philosophically beholden to the idea of population control, have simply hijacked the current climate conversation to serve their purposes. For instance, Dominic Lawson, writing in the UK, said that population control is 'an idea in search of an argument' and that it has commandeered the current environmental cause. Lawson writes:

'Down the years the anti-humans have always been skilful in adapting the fashionable concern of the day to their own peculiar obsession.

'In the 1960s they based their campaign on the notion that there would be mass starvation in Africa and the subcontinent unless those countries learnt to cut back the size of their families; or, worse, they would invade the developed world in their quest for food.

'The World Population Emergency Campaign ran advertisements in the United States showing a photograph of Africans with grasping hands, with the payoff line 'People will not passively starve. They will fight to live'. The idea of the campaign was not to feed them but to make them disappear.'

Interestingly, the World Population Emergency Campaign was a private organisation of the International Planned Parenthood Foundation. It was set up to alert Americans to the danger, as they told it, of the world population explosion, as well as raise money for international birth control programs.

Their business model would, no doubt, have conveniently benefited from their campaign line regarding population growth: 'Not just another cause, but the problem of our time'.

Perhaps what is most concerning though, is that the dialogue from population control advocates, both then and now, leaves little room for the recognition of the dignity of each person. Further, their discourse stifles the pursuit of creative ways to feed and care for those without food, or to manage and reduce any harmful impacts of human activity on the planet.

After all, the 1960s 'prophesies' of mass starvation in the sub-continent were averted by the creativity and initiative of individuals discovering agricultural breakthrough. This led to increased yields and supplies of food, with India now being a net exporter for food.

Herein lies the paradox with the approach that people are an intrinsic problem for the planet. It is people, and only people, who can discover creative solutions to the scientific and environmental dilemmas we face. While breathing may produce CO₂, it also means that these living breathing people possess the creativity and initiative to discover ways to mitigate or reverse any negative environmental impacts they generate.

It only takes one person's creative idea, innovation or scientific breakthrough to allow us to solve what currently seems unsolvable. The problem becomes the solution.

Perhaps then, it is the attitude of people, rather than the existence of people, that we may need to save the world from.

In his essay, 'Attitude and Gratitude', Theodore Dalrymple writes:

'After a little reflection, I came to the conclusion that my dislike of waste arises from a whole approach to life that seems to me crude and wretched. For unthinking waste — and waste on our scale must be unthinking — implies a taking-for-granted, a failure to appreciate: not so much a disenchantment with the world as a failure to be enchanted by it in the first place.

'To consume without appreciation (which is what waste means) is analogous to the fault of which Sherlock Holmes accused Doctor Watson, in *A Scandal in Bohemia*: You see, but you do not observe.'

Herein we discover a fundamental issue which, when addressed, would help to solve a mismatch in our relationship to the earth in which we live and for which we are to care for.

We do not need to establish a quasi-religious view of the earth in order to love and care for it, as the earth was not designed to be worshipped, but to be stewarded. Careful, responsible use of the earth and the natural resources are not evil, nor are they to be unthinkingly avoided. Rather it is unthinking waste, and consuming without appreciation, that leads to a crude way of viewing the earth. It is this mindset that should be avoided and resisted.

As Dalrymple suggests, this type of waste, and the whole approach to life that this springs from, is about seeing, but not observing. It sees the parts of the earth that we may use, but fails to observe the true beauty and wonder of the world in totality, perfectly positioned in the

universe so that we do not boil or freeze.

The current financial crisis, precipitated fundamentally by greed, reminds us once again of the falsehood of the 'greed is good' mentality, which was popularised by Hollywood yet was in existence long before it hit the silver screen. Similarly, approaching our natural environment with a sense of unthinking greed and entitlement has led to many of the climate concerns we see today.

However, in an interesting reversal of fortunes, it may be that the global financial crisis could be a boon for environmental advocacy and practise. With less 'fat in the budget' and much tighter profit margins, corporations and individuals are, and will be, looking where they can trim operations, all of which is good news for the planet.

In June 2009 the following effects of the global financial crisis were reported:

AIRLINES, desperate to cut costs, have gone to the extraordinary lengths of reducing the size of spoons to make planes lighter to save fuel.

According to the International Air Transport Association, Northwest Airlines in the US has excluded spoons from its cutlery pack if the in-flight meal does not need one.

JAL, Japan's national carrier, has also looked to shave off any extra weight, *The Daily Telegraph* reports.

The carrier took everything it loads on a 747 and laid it out on a school gym floor to find, and strip, any extra weight.

JAL then shaved a fraction of a centimetre from all its cutlery.

IATA director of environment Paul Steele said the seemingly minor cuts did make a difference.

'When you are talking about a jumbo jet with 400 people on board, being served two to three meals, this can save a few kilos,' he said.

'You work out how much fuel that consumes over a year, and you can be talking about a considerable amount of money.'

It will indeed save a considerable amount of money, which is good for companies trying to survive the global financial crisis. But significantly, it reduces the amount of fuel used. And perhaps what has been a culture of unthinking waste is turning into a culture of thinking conservation. If people use less, and waste less, then we are being more careful stewards of the world in which we live.

Additionally, as households feel the bite of the global financial crisis, they too will start to implement cost-saving measures, which in more cases than not, are also waste-saving measures. The problem of the bottom line produces the imperative to change, and

implementing environmental concepts such as reduce, reuse and recycle becomes a way of life, rather than a passing trend.

Can we afford to save the planet? While it seems cliché to say that we can't afford not to save the planet, it's true. It is our home and we need it. However, the first step to implementing real change is realising what we are saving the planet from. Secondly, for social change to stick, it must become more than a passing trend.

Perhaps history will reveal to us that the global financial crisis ended up as the 'crisis the environmental movement had to have'. Fundamental shifts in the way we see and exploit natural resources could lead to a reformation of global proportions as environmental stewardship and responsibility enters the psyche of the everyman.

Two men marooned in a cab

POETRY

Peter Rose

After rain

Rain tonight —
forgotten accompaniment
oiled in its livery,
never maxim
but languid advice,
portent of seasons
or dank separation,
iridescence of stone
after sleeplessness.

Wallpaper

At my parents' home,
stripping wallpaper in my old bedroom
(the fake leopard skin
I thought so sophisticated)
I sponge countless bloodstains
where my grandmother,
a later, surprisingly agile guest,
lay in bed swatting mosquitoes,
earplugged to her midnight Tartuffe.

Traffic

Late morning, traffic foul.

Two men marooned in a cab,
late for a meeting,
late for a volley of meetings.
Not much conversation.
Same haircut, suits —
even boots, a rustic touch.
Each using his own phone,
gesturing at the driver's bored head.
It's all about margins
one snaps over the traffic.
Worried looks. Meeting targets.
Living up to expectations,
mission statements.
The older man is lethal.
*I can make things hard for you,
much harder than you can for me.*
Something vaguely hysterical
in his voice.
Like death?

The Good Iago

Finally, if you please
(no protests now, no sophistries),
time to let it all slip away,
time to absolve old menace
as a robe is unpeeled
from shoulders of a comeliness
and marmoreal effect.

Noiseless and permissive surrender
barely noticed in the boudoir
with its fragrance of roses
and shabby chinoiserie.
Belated let it fall,
diaphanous and beyond provocation.
It has its own cramped life now,
its own sorry principle —
no longer part of you,
the outcast in the moral wardrobe.
Catch yourself — yes, catch yourself
(ever the great self-picturer)
kneeling at her feet
amid the rowdies and magnificoes,
beguiled by wafts of normalcy,
enslaved to nuance.

Future dim for splintered Liberals

POLITICS

John Warhurst

The modern Liberal Party now contains deeper and wider ideological divisions than the Labor Party. This will be true regardless of who emerges as leader today. This is a relatively new development but it has been building for two or three decades at least.



That is the prime cause of the current party troubles. There are other factors too. There is a question mark over Malcolm Turnbull's leadership qualities and people skills. There is disagreement about the merits of climate change science. There is an element of harking back to the good old days in government. There is strategic thinking about the electoral consequences of amending or opposing the Rudd government's ETS legislation.

But the rancour and hostility with which the internal debate has been conducted suggests that more is involved than these other factors. Some Liberal MPs have called the ructions a battle for the ideological soul of the Liberal Party. That sort of thinking is unhealthy for the party.

Traditionally Labor has been the more ideologically splintered of the major parties, combining, for instance, secular socialists and religious believers working side by side. It has had a tradition of strong discipline, based on a pledge signed by all party candidates to submit to the majority will of Caucus; partly to reflect the collective ethos and partly to hold together highly fractious factions. Even so Federal Labor has suffered three major splits, the last in the 1950s.

The Liberals on the other hand have always played down party discipline and emphasised the individuality and conscience of its parliamentarians. They have long boasted of a tradition of tolerating dissent to a greater extent than Labor. Statistics on crossing the floor in parliament collated by the Parliamentary Library support this view.

But an unspoken premise of Liberal internal operations has always been that the ideological divisions within the party, even between conservatives and liberals, were not as divisive as those found within Labor. Rather the public image that the Liberals have liked to project since Menzies has been one of practical men and women approaching each issue on its merits regardless of ideological presuppositions.

Both parties have been smug about their respective beliefs and the differences between them. Labor boasts about solidarity and the Liberals boast about individual conscience.

Lack of discipline and deep ideological differences are really testing the Liberals at the moment. While ideological differences are declining within Labor they are growing among the

federal Liberals. It is not that Labor MPs don't fight bitterly among themselves; of course they do. But the fights these days are more about ambition and personality conflicts than pure ideology. The factions are now less ideological. Left and Right Labor factions unite over policies and even over leaders.

Perhaps the Liberals have always been more ideological and divided than public appearances suggest. However the trend since the battles between the Wets and the Dries in the 1970s and 1980s suggests not. The competing ideological positions within the party are now more deeply ingrained.

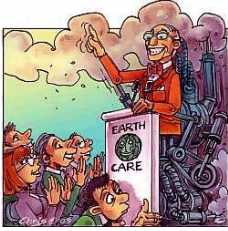
The next year will be a critical test of the organisation and ethos of the party. The question is whether the party and the leadership, whoever that is, can survive such deep differences of philosophy without fragmenting. A broad church must always have respect for every shade of opinion.

The Liberals will be judged by the electorate not just on their position on an emissions trading scheme, but on how they resolve issues and work together within the parliamentary party. One traditional political maxim is disunity is death. Another is that if you can't manage yourselves then you can't manage the country. If these maxims hold true then the Liberals will pay a substantial price for their disunity at the next federal election.

The perverse skills of climate change deniers

ENVIRONMENT

Charles Rue



In April 2007 Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, held a meeting at the Vatican 'to gather data' on climate change. The 80 invited participants were evenly divided between climate change sceptics and those looking for a credible church response. It was a mixed group of politicians, scientists, Catholic bishops, lobbyists, lay and church agency people, missionaries and leaders of other churches.

It turned out to be an unhappy squabbling event. US based Baptist minister Dr Calvin Beisner interpreted Scripture to say that the world is evil and that burning fossil fuels is a way to purge it. Catholic Archbishop Patrick Kelly and Anglican Bishop James Jones from the UK were aghast at this interpretation.

At the same meeting, former US lobbyist for the tobacco industry Professor Fred Singer made several interventions on the present and future benefits brought by the oil industry. He was supported by US Catholic layman Dr Craig Idso of the Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change, partially funded by Exxon Mobil. Both of them state publicly that they work to influence the energy and agricultural policies of governments.

Beisner, Singer and Idso are part of a cluster of names which keep popping up in the literature of climate change denying scientists and religious leaders. Their primary concern is to attack the proposition that human activity is a major cause of climate change. They work to maintain current fossil fuel based economic systems, and promise that the world will not have to change its patterns of using fossil fuels.

These US sources are often quoted in Australia along with local names like Bill Kininmonth, Bob Carter, Ian Plimer, David Archibald, Don Aitkin and David Evans.

It is crucial to recognise that climate change sceptics have placed themselves outside the normal scientific community. They pile up so called 'evidence' with which to browbeat people.

For example, they misuse temperature trends and conflate readings from different spheres surrounding the earth. They focus on minor contributors to climate change, such as the earth's 100,000-year-long orbit of the sun, or cry 'sun spots'. They deride models of climate change as inaccurate because the models cannot predict short term weather patterns, or are refined as more data is gathered.

But the basic physics of climate change is simple — a rising percentage of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere warms the planet. These percentages have risen during 200 years of

industrial expansion and industrial agriculture as humanity has used increasing amounts of fossil fuels.

The Christians among climate change deniers have developed tenuous ties with the teaching of the Christian communion. Concern about climate change was the theme of the Australian Catholic Bishops' [Position Paper](#) in 2005. That Cardinal George Pell allows himself to be aligned with climate change deniers is very sad. The credibility of church mission to serve humanity is compromised. What is more, many of the faithful are scandalised and their following of church leaders sorely tested.

Climate sceptics use tried and proven lobbying techniques to propagate distractions. These are designed to confuse people and delay political action. Jesus praised the unjust steward; so also must the perverse skills of climate change deniers be recognised as effective. They have honed their slogans, stayed on target with their message and achieved their desired end – paralysis on urgent action to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to defend carbon intensive industries.

A well orchestrated campaign by the fossil fuel industry has fed denial of climate change. Its PR machine has dozens of lobbyists employed full time even in Australia. The Marshall Institute and Heartland Foundation in the United States are two think tanks used by Australian carbon lobby groups such as the Lavoisier Society.

Magazines like *AD2000* pass on the pre-packaged denial messages, often with a semi-religious tone supplied by the US based Acton Institute. An introduction to its website describes it as 'an ecumenical think-tank dedicated to the study of free-market economics informed by religious faith and moral absolutes'.

Climate change denying organisations need to be exposed. Whether from ignorance or malevolence, they are hindering constructive debate and blocking urgent action. Informed public debate is needed on the comparative effectiveness of a direct carbon tax or carbon trading, as well as on the comparative speed with which they can reduce greenhouse gases.

Our Murray-Darling experience of water trading has salutary lessons. Banks and corporations were the major beneficiaries of moving around make-believe water. They hope to do very well by moving around carbon credits.

Making a Catholic Response to Climate Change is [opening](#) a new chapter in the Christian story. This will emerge in dialogue with the scientific, business and political communities, and the lived experience of people. It will draw on Catholic teachings about the structures of sin, and compassion for this and future generations.

In this story, humanity will relearn its intimate connection with earth systems and experience God the Creator in new ways. Our positive responses could become an exciting chapter.

Recalling Cardinal Henry Newman's writings on the development of dogma, Cardinal Martino at the end of the Climate Change Meeting in Rome said the 'Gospel is always new and changes as it is applied within historical changes'. Pope Benedict recently returned to his theses on history to ponder on how human history might be entering a new stage. He also called for a re-integration of the theologies of Creation and Redemption.

These calls give urgency to our task of identifying the best sources to help that re-integration. These good sources will not come from the climate change deniers.

Mental illness is the enemy, not its sufferers

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Anthony Waterlow was arrested in bushland near Sydney on Friday. He was the 42 year old son of art curator Nick Waterlow, and sister of Chloe Waterlow. They were both violently killed at Randwick three weeks ago. Anthony Waterlow allegedly carried out the killing.

Anthony lives with a mental illness, and the killings are thought to be a consequence of this. The tragic circumstances, and how they are reflected to the community, invite reflection.

Father Steve Sinn related the following in his [homily](#) at the funeral of Nick Waterlow:

“I was a child of the Sixties,” Nick wrote in his diary, “the first generation not to be conscripted, and the first generation not to go to war.”

‘Nick spent the last twenty years of his life fighting a different kind of enemy. An elusive enemy that menaced him and his family. It was hidden and it had captured Anthony. It was frightening and violent. Nick tried every avenue for peace. He prayed, he sought advice; he never gave up on Anthony being freed. He hoped that his love and acceptance would deliver his son from the powerful forces that at times controlled him.

‘He has been defeated. He underestimated his enemy.’

In an ideal world, we would hope that the media would frame mental illness and its consequences in a similar manner to Father Sinn. But few members of the public get to hear such a matter of fact description of what can only be described as a very sad set of circumstances.

It is the media that are the most influential agents in the construction of our attitudes to mental illness and its victims. Happily some media outlets are becoming more responsible in the way they report events related to mental illness.

The [coverage](#) of Anthony Waterlow’s arrest in Saturday’s Sydney newspapers was comparatively responsible. It provides a contrast with the *Herald-Sun*’s shameful handling of the events that occurred early this month at the Thomas Embling Hospital at Fairfield in Melbourne, where an argument among residents led to two fatal stabbings.

The *Herald-Sun* [reported](#) that ‘killers, rapists and other criminally insane patients are walking the streets of Melbourne on outings to the movies, fishing and shopping’. In its web poll, the paper asked: ‘Should violent mentally ill offenders be allowed day leave?’



Barbara Hocking of SANE Australia [points out](#) that 'research suggests that those receiving effective treatment for mental health problems are no more violent than anyone else'.

A more socially responsible web poll question for the Herald-Sun would be whether governments should provide more resources for effective treatment of mental illness. Governments in various states are also culpable, as they have provided limited funds, and often treated mental illness as a criminal justice matter rather than a health issue.

In a further front page article headed 'This is madness', the *Herald-Sun* [expressed outrage](#) that Thomas Embling Hospital residents were being treated with dignity and not punished for suffering mental illness. In the *Herald-Sun's* mind, it was a scandal that they were being offered 'sushi meals, Wii fit classes and chill-out rooms with massage chairs'.

The *Herald-Sun* and other media have an excellent resource at their disposal in the mental illness reporting guidelines provided by the [Mindframe National Media Initiative](#). These offer [leads](#) to documented evidence that people living with mental illness are more likely to be the victims of violence rather than the perpetrators:

'It has been calculated that the lifetime risk of someone with an illness such as schizophrenia seriously harming or killing another person is just .005%, while the risk of that person harming themselves is nearly 10%.'

It's time for the *Herald-Sun* to take note.

***New Moon* and other dumb films for women**

FILMS

Ruby Hamad



Love it or loathe it, there is one thing everyone can agree on: *New Moon* has surpassed all expectations. Personally, I detest this film and all it stands for. Its popularity, not only with teenage girls but with grown women in their 20s and beyond, has me scratching my head like no other movie I've seen in recent memory.

By now we're familiar with criticisms that slam the *Twilight* series as abstinence-promoting Mormon propaganda, and deplore the low Rotten Tomatoes score of both the [original](#) and its [sequel](#). The legitimate feminist gripes with both the films and the book series that spawned them are also well known. They claim that Bella (a teenage girl, played by Kristen Stewart) is a subservient drip, and that Edward (the vampire she loves, played by Robert Pattinson), is a stalking patriarch.

But, even if it isn't good for anything else, the *Twilight* sequel is useful for this: in a male-dominated industry, ticket sales have exploded for a film aimed at women.

In the US, early online ticket sales broke box office records set by *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* films. Thousands of screenings sold out in advance. It [grossed](#) \$140.7 million on its opening weekend, ranking it third behind *Spider-man 3* and *The Dark Knight*. In Australia, it nabbed the number-one spot, earning \$16.1 million.

And lest you think this is just a tween phenomenon, according to [Salon.com](#), 27 per cent of the ticket buyers were women aged 25–34. With an 87 per cent female audience, it is already one of the top money earners of all time despite being in release for a little over a week. As Melissa Silverstein writes on [Women and Hollywood](#):

'This movie could potentially be 'guy proof' meaning they won't need guys to see it for it to kick some box office butt. Whereas the other franchises NEED women to make their numbers.'

If one thing is clear by the light of the *New Moon*, it is that women really do go to the movies. Why then, does Hollywood repay them by serving up such bland offerings?

The last female-targeted film to generate anything close to this sort of hysteria was *Sex and the City*. The TV version was brilliantly written and pushed all the right boundaries, allowing its female protagonists to be sexually active without judging them for it. It is also one of the few series that ended on a high note rather than plodding along until it had [jumped the dreaded shark](#).

Unfortunately, it saved that for the movie — although 'jumped the sashimi' may be more

accurate since the low moment of the entire franchise is arguably the scene where Sam (a vibrant, independent woman in the series who for some reason morphed into a bored, clingy housewife for the film), covers her naked body in raw fish and lies waiting for her breadwinner to come home and devour her.

Rather than bay for the filmmaker's blood, as I was wont to do, the loyal fans showed up in droves, earning it a total of \$408.7 million worldwide. Although the original was nothing short of [appalling](#), the sequel is currently in post-production.

Like *Sex and the City*, the original *Twilight* was a cynical attempt to bring a pre-loved story to the big screen. With poor acting (if Stewart is capable of any expression other than brooding will someone please alert the media?), poorer special effects and a laugh-out-loud script that was not intended to be a comedy, it reeked of lazy filmmaking that saw no need to do anything but the bare minimum, knowing it had an assured audience.

And the sequel is no better. In fact, by general critical consensus it is even worse.

Why are smart films for women in such short supply? The female market is hungry for a moving cinematic experience. The success of *Sex and the City* and films such as *Mamma Mia* and *Bridget Jones' Diary* has shown that the *Twilight* phenomenon is no fluke and that women can be just as fervent in their fandom as men.

Yet studio executives continue to treat these movies as exceptions. Instead of deciphering what makes female audiences tick, they are content to wait for the next runaway best seller to turn into a sure-fire film hit. *New Moon* could well go on to be the highest grossing film of all time. Surely this is a sign that it is time for Hollywood actively to engage its female audience.

As Silverstein says, 'Hopefully, this success will infiltrate the minds of Hollywood number crunchers and seek out products for the female audience ... If people start thinking and making more movies that star women and are women driven, it can only help women at all levels of the business.'

Maybe then Hollywood will offer up something that is actually worthy of its female audience's devotion. Not to mention their \$15.

Love and pastry

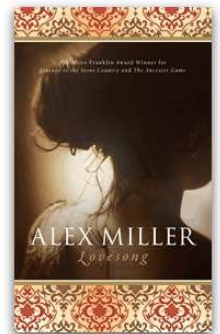
BOOKS

Andrew Hamilton

Alex Miller: *Lovesong*. Allen & Unwin, RP \$32.95. ISBN: 9781742371290. [Online](#)

Lovesong is a novel that explores its own wellsprings. The situations of its characters and its locations refract Alex Miller's own experience. Ken, the narrator is an ageing, widowed writer who listens to the story of a man whom he meets at a local pastry shop. The story rekindles his own desire to write another novel.

Such intense self-reference could produce a clever, hermetic novel. But *Lovesong* is simple and lucid, its complexities those that a humane eye will recognise in any human life.



The novel explores the variations on home, homelessness, homesickness, and not being at home. Its central figures, John and Sabiha, are both away from their homes in Australia and Tunis respectively.

They meet in a pastry shop near a Paris abattoir. For the immigrant workers, mainly Tunisian, the café is a home away from home. From its upstairs room can be seen the lights of the Eiffel tower. But this is a world away, and Sabiha never visits it. John and Sabiha meet, fall in love and run the shop for 16 years. They are held in Paris but drawn in their different ways to their own homelands and families.

The energy of the novel comes from Sabiha. The dramatic and tragic events that lead John, Sabiha and her little daughter Houria to establish a pastry shop in Melbourne arise from Sabiha's desperate desire for a child. The working out of her desire puts into play the idea of home for all those involved.

They include Ken, who lives in what was once home. His daughter has returned home after the breakdown of a relationship. Finding and making a home are not simple activities; the apparent tranquillity associated with home is the result of opposing forces held together under great tension.

This limpidity resulting from stress characterises Alex Miller's novels. It is perhaps illuminated by the distinction, popular in classical literary theory and revived by Nietzsche, between the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

In classical literature, the Dionysian is associated with the disruptive, spontaneous, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, often foreign, anarchic, liminal, ecstatic, and excessive. It is

often embodied in women.

The Apollonian is associated with the movement to form, order, moderation, with giving shape and marking boundaries. When they collide in Greek myth and drama the results are often tragic. Yet art may require both imaginative excess and discipline in shaping appropriate form.

The interplay between these polarities illuminates the world of Miller's novels, and also the relationship between his disciplined prose and his capacity to offer hospitality to the wildest conceits through which people come to life.

Sabiha is a Dionysian figure. Passionate, fearless in following her heart, ready to do anything to bring to life the child who will complete her life, she is the source of life and energy in the Chez Dom. She makes pastries that take people into a world that transcends their daily life in an alien city, and is central to the shop's hospitality.

She also draws others by her own vitality and exuberance. John Patterner, an Australian teacher travelling abroad chances on the shop and is immediately won by her. His name suggests his Apollonian role. He buys and fetches, shapes the structures that make space for Sabiha's magic, and draws life from her.

The tragedy of the story lies in the implacable strength of her desire to bear a child. Her effect on Bruno, an Italian butcher totally devoted to his wife and family, is destructive. It leads to his death and the destruction of all that connected people at the Chez Dom.

When John and she leave Paris and settle in Melbourne, Ken is first struck by the contrast between the sadness in her eyes and her gift for making people at home in the shop. He later draws life from her story, as he hears it from John. He can dream of writing another novel based on the story, and puts himself again into play in the unpromising world of his own home.

Like Vita McLelland in the author's previous novel, *Landcape of Farewell*, Sabiha is the source of the energy that generates the plot and the interactions between the players. Miller has a rare gift for representing strong women.

His larger gift is for hospitality. His eye is deeply humane, accepting the wildness and ultimate incommunicability of human beings, and recognising the consequences of driven behaviour. In his world a home is something that is never comfortable, never simply given. It is like a mobile, held in tension by the weight of the love and ultimate unknowableness of the people who form it.

Lovesong is like one of Sabiha's pastries — it takes you into a world that is beyond your experience, but encourages you to notice and be open to the ordinary world and people around you.

Gay yodellers' passionate politics

FILMS

Anthony Morris

***The Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls* (PG). Running time: 84 minutes. Director: Leanne Pooley. Starring: Jools Topp, Linda Topp**



For those not in the know, twin sisters Jools and Lynda Topp have been two of the biggest stars in New Zealand's comedy firmament for close to 20 years now. For openly gay yodelling country-and-western singers who've been firmly active on the left side of New Zealand politics since the start of their careers, it'd be easy to assume that mainstream success might have been a little difficult to come by.

If this enormously likeable documentary about the Twins is remotely accurate — and there's no reason to think it's not — the opposite was the case: warmly embraced by pretty much everyone thanks to their mix of toe-tapping music, passionate politics and country girl straight-shooting, the Topps hit the ground running with their busking career in the early 1980s and never looked back. It doesn't hurt that they sing like angels either.

This documentary is built around a cabaret performance by the Twins in front of a small audience. This gives them the opportunity to perform (often with people important to them, whether creative inspirations or political cohorts) and talk a bit about their past between the more traditional documentary segments.

It's an approach that works well, creating a cosy atmosphere and giving a real sense of just how important and much-loved the Twins are. Everyone from John Clarke to Billy Bragg talks up their impact on New Zealand.

Over the years the Topps have developed a number of comedy characters, from the controlling Camp Mother and Camp Leader to the extremely blokey 'ladies men' Ken and Ken. These characters make their own separate appearances from time to time to provide some more insights into the Topp Twins.

The Twins' personal life also gets a look in, from their childhoods down on the farm and their parents' no-nonsense acceptance of their homosexuality (not that the extremely unpretentious Twins would have given their parents a whole lot of choice there) to their current partners and Jools' recent battle with cancer.

This documentary gets across time and again that the Twins have mastered the difficult art of being very funny without excluding anyone from the joke. Part sing-along, part concert, part comedy show, their act covers all the bases.

More important, the girls themselves are so solid, straightforward and open-hearted they're all but impossible not to like. Whether they're performing at blues festivals and agricultural (or 'A&R') shows, having their own television series or crawling across rural New Zealand in a tractor-drawn gypsy caravan putting on shows at every town they pass, everyone seems to love them.

After watching this warm-hearted, moving and very funny documentary, chances are you will too.

Reinventing our gathering places

COMMUNITY

Deborah Singerman

The global financial crisis has strengthened the appeal of community as an antidote to crass individualism and material gain. And I mean flesh-and-blood community, whether relaxing at main street village cafes, fairs or festivals, creating vegetable gardens and attending farmers markets, or going to face-to-face meetings of people previously only communicated with via the internet on local or global campaigns.

This extra attention is rubbing off on a new breed of community centres too. Various named neighbourhood centres, community houses, development projects and so on, these centres have long been 'a soft entry point to the service system for many people who do not understand what is available, or are reluctant to engage', executive director of the Local Community Services Association (LCSA) Brian Smith says.

As such they have a crucial role in making people feel at home, but, says architect Larry Melocco, they suffer from a reputation for poorly maintained facilities, or for being overgrown scout huts in out-of-the-way places, and so underutilised.

His firm, Brewster Hjorth, recently won the Master Builders Australia construction award for public buildings up to \$10 million for the new multi-level library and community centre at Ingleburn in Sydney's south-west. It has study areas, outdoor seating, a sports area and playground.

Though not all councils are fortunate enough to have money to spare, where possible this new approach also emphasises the importance of an accessible location, natural light, good communication equipment and operable walls for different sized functions.

The highest profile transformation to date, the Surry Hills Library and Community Centre (SHLCC, pictured), is on the original site at 405 Crown Street in inner-city Sydney. Surry Hills, which editorial director of *Indesign* magazine, Paul McGillick, believes has 'the highest concentration of design-related businesses in Australia', is also a suburb of public housing estates, drug and alcohol-fuelled street violence and break-ins.

Sydney City Council and centre staff hope the SHLCC with its prominent street front and water and energy saving rainwater tank, photovoltaic array, plant-filtered, naturally cooled air, and recycled materials will attract a comprehensive mix of users.

Architect Richard Francis-Jones of Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp (fjmt) says his greatest joy was 'to see a building like this in use'. At its opening in June it attracted well over 1000 people, although only 100 were expected. Every time I have visited it, people of all ages and

backgrounds sit in the white couches, stools and desks and use the free Wi-Fi computers. The children's play area (separate from the upstairs childcare centre) is always busy.

Community centre manager, Kate Melhopt, says more people are looking around the centre and attending classes in a cross-fertilisation of different community strands under the one roof. Regular classes include Multicultural Cooking (there is a commercial standard kitchen) and English Conversation. This is still a core subject from the original 1950s centre, and helps migrants, especially women, feel less isolated, she says.

Sydney City Council chief executive officer, Monica Barone, is in no doubt that the \$19 million centre sends a strong, positive signal to those users 'that we're investing in you. We're committed to excellent public buildings that show we think the community is deserving of this, and the community has never let us down.'

Community consultation and respect were also important at Sydney's Cabravale. The swimming pool at the leisure centre is heated to 32 degrees Celsius, which the Vietnamese and Chinese population there requested, and Learn to Swim classes have really taken off, according to marketing coordinator Christopher Zaverdinos.

Outer Melbourne's Caroline Springs Civic Centre and Library deliver community services and activities, says Mark van den Enden, practice design manager for Suturs Prior Cheney Architects. His credo is to consult as widely as possible, with the unvocal voices, the 'ones least heard' and not just designated focus groups. 'Listen to them, and don't keep on saying "we can't do good work in the suburbs". We need to go out on that limb.'

Just as architecture can play an important role in community building, community building is important to the profession of architecture looking to 'break down silos of control' and develop as creative innovators. The Hippocratic oath of architecture, he says, would be, 'Above all else to do no harm'.

Through a partnership between the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Australian Local Government Association architects offer their services, initially pro bono, for the construction of community facilities worth more than \$1 billion.

In a further dovetailing of community and design the themes of next year's AIA conference – people, things, living, cities – will allow architects to show fresh ways of working, operating from the bottom up, 'rejecting the detached gaze, rolling their sleeves up and searching for useful solutions', says creative director Melanie Dodd.

Design is hard to measure; it is qualitative not quantitative and can strike one unexpectedly. The international award-winning Manchester Civil Justice Centre in the north of England, from Melbourne-based architects Denton Corker Marshall, for instance, was praised for its visible layering of public and court areas, its transparency symbolising the accessibility of the law. Whether you agree with that or not, the centre's openness is popular

with staff and members of appeals tribunals alike.

Equally design can only achieve so much. As the LCSA's Smith warns, 'It does not matter how attractive and modern the building is if the core funding for the services it can provide is not adequate.' Social inclusion requires the resources to make a building live and service its users — an argument for more funding to match the revitalisation that modern design can bring.

As the community comprises unemployed and underemployed, and consultants, freelancers, small business owners and others with transportable portfolios working flexible, irregular hours, there is every reason to believe these places in which the community can gather will be needed more than ever.

Lessons in Greek prejudice

MULTICULTURALISM

Gillian Bouras

'I never thought I'd go to Albania,' said a member of an Australian tourist group during the crossing from Corfu. I never thought I would, either, but while his reasons for doubt involved not being in the right place at the right time, mine were different, coming from transplanted race memories that meant little to me, but much to the Greek family into which I married.



My generation of Australians grew up with bigotry: the cordial loathing that existed between Catholics and Protestants has faded only recently. But when I began moving in a Greek world I discovered old prejudices that were, however, new to me. I took the Greek hatred of the Turks for granted, but the bitter and complicated antipathy for Albanians I had to learn about.

It came as a shock, for example, to realise that it is a deathly insult for a Greek to call another an Albanian. Albanians have been in Australia since the 1920s, but I was totally ignorant about them, and about Greek attitudes towards them.

Prejudice may well be hard-wired into our systems: certainly we tend to be automatically suspicious of difference. (As an immigrant myself, I learned this lesson very personally.)

And we dislike being in the power of others, especially when that power is used against us. The Greek War of Independence, which started in 1821, was not over in the Peloponnese, where I live, until 1828. In 1825, attempting to crush the revolution, Ibrahim Pasha invaded, bringing 20,000 Albanian mercenaries with him. They pillaged, killed and raped, devastated the land, and sold thousands of Greeks into slavery. Being Muslim, they also often tried to force the Orthodox to convert. Greeks have forgotten none of this.

In our time, the Albanian border was the scene of the gallant defence of Greece against the Italians in the harsh winter of 1940–41, events of great suffering commemorated every 28 October. When the Greek civil war ended eight years later, Albania was one of the destinations for the victims of the notorious *paidomazema* (the gathering of the children) in which retreating Communists kidnapped approximately 28,000 Greek children: they were taken to the countries of the Eastern bloc, with the hope that they would eventually form a new Liberation Army.

During the 50-year Communist control of Albania, the country was sealed off: rumours of bandit tribes and unremitting barbarity swirled about monotonously. And when Communism crumbled, poverty-stricken Albanians swarmed over the border into Greece, to the fear and

displeasure of most of the population.

Even my mother-in-law Aphrodite, widow of a Greek priest, had nothing good to say, though I doubted she ever met an Albanian in the flesh.

I have always had a long travel list, but for years Albania was out of bounds. Definitely.

Things have changed dramatically, of course. The first sign the tourist drawing close to Saranda sees now is the bright red Vodafone one, so common in Greece. Passport checks are free and easy, whereas in the past they were greatly to be feared, if one were so foolhardy as to want to visit the place. The roads are narrow and terrifying in their disrepair — I shut my eyes every time our bus met a truck — but work on infrastructure seems to be going on at a great rate.

The main focus of the excursion was a visit to Butrint, an archaeological site set in a forest, surrounded by stunning land and water-scapes, and with the usual Mediterranean layers of Hellenistic, Roman, Middle Ages and Modern, all surrounded by Cyclopean walls so solid that one feels they could have been built last year.

The excursion began to take on symbolic value, at least for me. There are magnificent mosaics throughout the site, our guide explained, but they are covered with sand, as you see, because they have to be protected. She scraped away the sand from a tiny portion, watered the surface, and there, suddenly, was an intricate and very lovely design of interlocking loops in ochre, black and white. One can never tell.

About anything. The guide herself was a charming woman with perfect English, bottle-blonde curls, a pink top and floaty leopard-skin print skirt, and the bow legs that are evidence of rickets, the malnutrition-caused bone-softening that I had often seen in older Greek women. I glanced at her name-tag. Aferdita. My black-clad, bescarved mother-in-law had been reincarnated as an educated, bareheaded free spirit in the land of her enemies.

And pottery from the Corinth of the eighth century BC has been discovered at Butrint.

'Depraved' videogames get serious

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Drew Taylor



Taking over from where rock music, movies and gangsta rap left off, video games have become the new poster child for moral decay in today's society.

In the last few weeks alone, the media has labelled games as 'murder simulators', linked them to depression and addiction, held them accountable for childhood obesity and quoted Australian politicians who believe games do little more than deliver 'depraved sex and extreme violence' to minors.

To be fair, not all games are about plumbers and princesses and I admit to having an issue with the level of content found in a number of games currently on the market. But what grieves me about these headlines is the way in which they ignore a whole other aspect of games.

Look beyond the sensationalism and stereotyping, and the world of gaming that I inhabit includes altruism and philanthropy. It's a place where individuals and companies are, to use a gaming term, 'collecting hearts' and changing lives.

One particular arena where games are making this impact is in physical and psychological rehabilitation and therapy.

'Wii-hab' (the use of the Wii console in rehabilitation) has seen success in stroke therapy, increasing coordination, has improved the quality of life of residents in nursing homes, and also produced 'striking results' with people suffering from Parkinson's Disease. In an eight-week study conducted by the Medical College of Georgia in the US, significant improvements in movement, fine motor skills and energy levels were experienced by all participants, and there was a decrease in their levels of depression.

Equally, 'old school' games such as *Space Invaders* have been repurposed to aid adolescents with anger issues. Last month, researchers at the Children's Hospital Boston incorporated the use of a heart monitor to increase difficulty in controlling the game as the patient's heart rate increases. Players are encouraged to manage their heart rate and calm themselves down, preparing them for dealing with stressful situations in real life.

Elsewhere, games such as *Earthquake in Zipland* have been developed to help children of divorce work through issues, controllers have been adapted to allow the physically disabled to engage in stimulated play, and MMOs (massively multiplayer online games) and virtual worlds, such as Brigadoon Island in *SecondLife*, have provided spaces for people suffering from Asperger's Syndrome and autism to find encouragement and understanding.

Being the father of three-year-old triplets, two of whom are autistic, the use of gaming technology to reach into their 'private' world offers yet another avenue of hope.

Then there are 'serious games' that extend into the area of pre-awareness and social education. Designed to make a difference in the lives and minds of its players, serious games have been developed to educate about work safety practices and the complexities of humanitarian aid, explore the negative effects of terrorism and counter-terrorism, and, with Australian web based game Reach Out Central, provide practical information and support services for troubled youth.

One of the most successful serious games is HopeLab's ReMission, a third person shooter that not only teaches young people about dealing with cancer, but has also helped with increasing the success of treatment.

Charity fundraising is another arena. Blizzard, the maker of MMO *World of Warcraft*, recently created exclusive in-game pets, and is currently donating 50 per cent of the proceeds towards the Make-A-Wish Foundation. While charity publisher OneBigGame has more than 15 games in development to raise funds for its charities, starting with *Zoe Mode*, a puzzler for the Xbox Live Arcade.

By way of community example, two gamers in the US founded Child's Play, a charity where 'gamers give back'. Set up in 2003, the charity is now supported by an array of international events and has raised in excess of five million dollars. Funds go towards improving the lives of children in over 60 hospitals worldwide, including the Sydney Children's Hospital and Brisbane Mater Children's Hospital.

Lastly, there's the educational component. Games such as *Drawn to Life* and *Beateratorare* being utilised by schools in the US and UK as tools to encourage greater interest in art and music. While, last week, tech-savvy Silverton Primary School in Melbourne was recognised by Microsoft's Worldwide Innovative Schools Program for its innovative use of technology, which included the use of Nintendo DS and Wii games consoles in the classroom.

Considered *en masse*, even the examples above bring a great deal of levity to the debate surrounding the role of video games in society, flipping the script on the media's notion that if games are such effective and compelling 'murder simulators' then their capability to be used for good is similarly exponential.

But what's most exciting is that the altruistic heart of gaming has only really begun to beat over the last few years. As gaming proliferates and continues to cross generations and mature as an industry, the number of gamers, such as myself, wishing to explore their relationship with games beyond the entertainment value is set to skyrocket.

Where that ultimately leads is yet to be seen. But I, for one, look forward to being part of that brave new expression.

Odd puzzles about sexual practice

POETRY

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Going nowhere

Some kinds of question bob up promptly
like, Is there a name for the inside elbow?
Who in fact was Bumpy Ingram?
Could there be parallel universes
and what does the question mean at all?
Are a dog's dreams really vivid?
With a hey-diddle-diddle
a nonny, nonny no.
Some kinds of issue offer themselves
like particles becoming waves,
where your elbows go in bed,
acceleration into a curve,
how to draw hands and especially feet,
or who was up there before God.
With a hey-diddle-diddle
a nonny, nonny no.
Sometimes I sprawl and ask myself
why we're on this particular planet,
whether wars have any causes,
why hair fades to grey, then white,
odd puzzles about sexual practice,
and why the blue sea's abob with fish.

Hey diddle-diddle then,
a nonny, nonny no.

The sharpener

Soft cedar turns against the blade
coming away in aromatic flakes.
The red of a Staedtler stains each edge
of these rising, falling petals
and instrumental black emerges
ready to limn a comic face
or mark a pine plank
for the careful carpenter's cut,
implication drawing to
the very point.
A tiny screw ensures how
the steel edge can snuggle down
into its yellow plastic bed.
There. Stop now. The pencil's done.

Stressed islands no longer pacific

ENVIRONMENT

Maryanne Loughry

Mindful of the forthcoming Copenhagen meeting on climate change, the Pacific islands of Kiribati and Tuvalu are calling upon all nations to reduce their carbon emissions so that they might be able to stay in their countries and not be forced to relocate elsewhere.



Over the past two years, Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, in collaboration with the University of NSW Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit, has been investigating the psychosocial effects of displacement resulting from climate and other ecological changes in Pacific Island nations.

When I visited Kiribati and Tuvalu in May 2009 I asked elders, policy makers and government workers about their five biggest personal fears for the future. Among the top concerns were prospects for their children and the economy, an uncertain future, cultural change and climate change.

The people of Kiribati and Tuvalu, though faced with possible future displacement because of climate change, are also dealing with complex global stressors that are impacting on their lives today. Climate change is viewed as a significant factor that compounds the effects of these other stressors and some describe it as a tipping factor, one that will eventually make the other stressors unmanageable. It is obvious that both populations are dealing with overcrowding, unemployment, poverty, pollution, and modernisation. Climate change is a driver for some of these stressors as well as a multiplier of their effects.

Significantly, people in both Kiribati and Tuvalu told me their concerns about climate change escalate when there is a severe climate event, a tsunami warning, a hurricane or a king tide in other vulnerable parts of the world. On Kiribati and Tuvalu there would simply be no place to run to. One has only to think of the devastation and fear caused by the recent tsunami in Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga to know that the people of the Pacific are grappling with a major global stressor over which they feel they have no influence.

Both nations have different political discourses about climate change and its future prospects for the population. What does seem to be clear from these responses, however, is that each nation is facing multiple challenges and climate change is only one among many. The adults who were interviewed were very concerned about the future of their children and the opportunities that they might have in the future. They also recognised that their culture is changing and that one of the consequences of climate change may be the need for people to migrate.

When Kiribati and Tuvalu students in Year 13 (the final year of secondary school) were asked to brainstorm and then rank the things that they worried about, their lists included rising sea-levels, unemployment, education, overcrowding, a change in culture, health concerns, development and an increase in the cost of food.

Clearly these adolescent sample groups were very aware of the impact of climate change on their country, among the other difficulties currently being faced. What was most apparent from this research, and the accompanying interviews conducted with government officials and other stakeholders, was that both these nations believe they have a major role to play in advocating for nations to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions as a matter of urgency. They believe that they are presently experiencing the effects of climate change, effects that could result in their own countries becoming unviable unless drastic actions are taken by the world's political leaders.

Protecting children from bullies and bureaucrats

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



A Wesley Mission [survey](#) of 1200 adults found that being bullied as children caused 70 per cent of them to suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of assertiveness later in life. They have failed to develop the sense of identity and belonging that is vital to human wellbeing.

The report is titled *Give kids a chance: No-one deserves to be left out*. Its release coincided with Friday's observance of the United Nations [Universal Children's Day](#). It is one of a number of reminders in the past week that children have suffered permanent damage because of bad policy and inappropriate treatment by adults or other children.

On Thursday, the children's rights group [Save the Children](#) led a demonstration on the lawns in front of Parliament House to urge the Federal Government to create a national children's commissioner. This was a promise of Labor in opposition in 2003.

They were also marking the 20th anniversary of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

Earlier in the week, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull apologised to the Forgotten Australians whose lives were devastated by their experience of living in care as children. Many Australians were shocked by the statistic that 500,000 of us grew up in such circumstances.

Meanwhile the director of Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, Father Sacha Bermudez-Goldman, [issued a call](#) on behalf of child refugees and asylum seekers after visiting Christmas Island.

He said that while some families are accommodated in the community on Christmas Island, others, including their children, are housed in detention-like conditions for periods of up to several months. He said this practice threatens to breach the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children should be detained as a last resort, and for the shortest possible period of time.

It's pleasing that the UN Convention has had successes over 20 years in helping to transform conditions for children globally through strategies to decrease child mortality, provide opportunities for education, and combat child exploitation. In Australia, the apology to the Forgotten Australians is a good first step. But it is only a beginning.

Federal Labor must explain what has become of its promise to appoint a children's commissioner. Hopefully the promise will be honoured and an appointee can singlemindedly work with the bureaucracy to address past injustices and also implement preventative strategies for the future. They can take practical responsibility for the [plan of action](#) outlined by the Prime Minister on Tuesday, and possibly assess the merit of inviting claims for compensation.

John Honner's *Eureka Street* [article](#) last Tuesday points to qualities that could be listed as selection criteria for such a person.

'It takes heart to be able to listen to a story of grief and abuse, to pass over into another person's life, to feel something of the hurt, and to be there in solidarity until reconciliation slowly builds. It takes truthfulness, too.'

If the injustices of the past are to be addressed through such reconciliation, there is a good chance many future injustices will be prevented.

Michelangelo and my kids will haunt me

ENVIRONMENT

Bronwyn Lay

As Copenhagen looms on the horizon like a giant apocalyptic festival I can't get Michelangelo and my kids out of my mind. When I read about climate change, about the experiences of those in the developing world who disproportionately face more than their fair share of its effects, the image of 'The Pieta', the mother holding her dead son, keeps appearing over the words. Michelangelo's masterpiece was more than a genius crafting flesh from cold stone.



I have given birth four times and each time was taken to the gates of hell to bring beauty into the world. Motherhood is no hallmark card. Everyday the skin of your inner self: of your precious identity, dreams and ideas are shaved away by a sharp knife until you face the world a naked, red, wobbling mess of flesh. Motherhood can take everything from you, but the strange thing: biological, primal, and magical, is that you would give your life to hold those babes to your chest and in the end, in the midst of the chaos of weetbix, cut knees, and sleepless nights, there are moments of pure wonder where the embeddness of the child to the mother extends to the whole darn universe. Ironically, despite these small things depending on you, most days, nothing really depends on you. For the power of the mother to control her environment, the safety of her children, depletes as soon as the child is born, diluted by the dangerous and inspiring 'us' outside the womb.

The mother's worst fear is to hold a dead child in her arms but all those who have loved know the same fear. The woman in 'The Pieta' didn't know that times would change. She didn't know that resurrection was possible; for in the fleshy world, all she saw was that everything she lived for lay in a dead heap over her live body. Her future was murdered. Taken from her by forces beyond her control. That's how I feel about climate change.

As far as we know we've only got one planet. It feels like its survival depends on us, yet at the same time we feel powerless to stop the carnage. This existential state is not limited to motherhood. The sense that the self is under threat because all that we love is being annihilated by forces beyond our control is common as muck. It is part of growing up, it is part of being human and that is why 'The Pieta' speaks to more than the literal mothers. The mother is not the earth. The mother is not the stoic breeder blessed with a special care gene. That the mother contributes to relationships and, all too often, is in charge of the 'caring', does not exclude anyone else from doing so. My experience of motherhood has confirmed many aspects of the metaphor, but it is not exclusively to breeders. Every male and female, atheist and believer, parents and non-breeders, tree, horse, and in between, is The Pieta. All creation is metaphorically lying across our lap. Is it dead yet?

If everyone at the Bella Center in Copenhagen in December was overwhelmed by the sorrow of 'The Pieta', the sorrow of the powerless, then the outcome would be brutal. Emissions would be cut by 100% the next day. We would be thrown into war-time mobilisation because everything we thought we had created would seem irrelevant compared to the pain millions of 'The Pieta's' were facing. Economies would go into transitional panic. Monies would be diverted to the developing nations at the coalface. Whole industries would collapse and geopolitics would be thrown into a spin. This will not happen because 'The Pieta' being inscribed in every mind at that table is too revolutionary a thought, too irrational, and too sentimental.

'The Pieta' is not only art that speaks to our times. Munch's 'The Scream' was partly inspired by the artist's anxiety at the 'infinite scream passing through nature.' The best selling novel 'The Road' by Cormac McCarthy sketches the existential horror of a father protecting his son from a post-apocalyptic landscape. Those in the arts are encouraged to distil the present and write the future. One can only hope that politicians feel a fraction of this sentiment and not relegate this vocation to the artists, the romantics, the storytellers, and the sorrowful mother hiding in many of us.

Some say after calamitous climate change the earth will go on. Once the fuss has died down the earth will take back its territory, perhaps in a different form, with different species and different foliage. For this thing lying across our lap is far bigger than the human and until I know that, if my small mind can ever really know that, Michelangelo and my kids will haunt me.