

Malaysia solution is not there yet <i>Frank Brennan</i>	<u>1</u>
Studying the health needs of refugees <i>Peter Kirkwood</i>	<u>4</u>
Aboriginal voices silence Vietnamese war stories <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	<u>6</u>
Bashing Queensland's revolting gay panic laws <i>Moiray Rayner</i>	<u>8</u>
Robert Hughes, the Australian exile who never left <i>Binoy Kampmark</i>	<u>10</u>
Farewell to the concierge of Pitt Street <i>Kerry Murphy</i>	<u>12</u>
Why Fair Work works well <i>Luke Williams</i>	<u>14</u>
Olympics silver whining <i>Various</i>	<u>17</u>
Perils of the Greens' moral vanity <i>John Warhurst</i>	<u>20</u>
Australia and other arms rogues <i>Binoy Kampmark</i>	<u>22</u>
The Olympics and business world need to grow up <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	<u>25</u>
Cultural snobbery and Wayne Swan's Springsteen mania <i>Ellena Savage</i>	<u>27</u>
Hope beyond disability support flip-flopping <i>Moiray Byrne Garton</i>	<u>29</u>
Why I'm still a Catholic <i>Kristina Keneally</i>	<u>31</u>
Confidentiality in the confessional and psychiatrist's rooms <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	<u>34</u>
Drowning rats of Wall Street <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	<u>36</u>
What's the point of the Olympics? <i>Fatima Measham</i>	<u>38</u>
The opposite of Australian swimming hubris <i>John Honner</i>	<u>40</u>
Canary in a nursing home <i>Louise McKenna</i>	<u>42</u>
Hope for haemorrhaging Zimbabwe <i>Chris Chatteris</i>	<u>45</u>
On media and massacres <i>Lyn Bender</i>	<u>48</u>
Olympic torch should shine on athletes not nations <i>Michael Mullins</i>	<u>50</u>



Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned.

Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

©2012 EurekaStreet.com.au

©2012 EurekaStreet.com.au

Malaysia solution is not there yet

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



Next week Parliament reconvenes for a fortnight, and meanwhile the boats keep coming. Minister Chris Bowen will be armed with a report from the expert panel which has been travelling the country hearing from a broad cross section of the Australian community.

Even John Menadue, a strong refugee advocate and previous secretary for the Department of Immigration, thinks it is time to [give the Malaysia solution a go](#) . I remain opposed, favouring onshore processing only. If Parliament's preconditions for offshore processing are to be relaxed, the Malaysia solution will need to be improved and it will need to be augmented with a Nauru-type solution.

All Australian political parties say they remain committed to the key obligations of the Refugee Convention. Since 2001, the Parliament has provided governments with additional latitude in discharging these obligations. Instead of processing claims in Australia and providing residence for successful applicants who have arrived in Australia or on our Indian Ocean possessions, Parliament has authorised government to engage in offshore processing in the hope that some of the successful applicants will be resettled in countries other than Australia.

This first happened with Nauru in 2001. The Howard-Ruddock package of measures did deter people from getting in leaky boats and heading for Australia. However most successful applicants taken to Nauru ended up here or New Zealand. Having relaxed the policy, the Labor Government has seen a need to tighten things again.

One of the 2001 measures (s.198A Migration Act) allowed the Minister for Immigration to declare that another country could be used for offshore processing. The Minister was required to declare that the specified country:

- 1.provides access, for persons seeking asylum, to effective procedures for assessing their need for protection;
- 2.provides protection for persons seeking asylum, pending determination of their refugee status;
- 3.provides protection to persons who are given refugee status, pending their voluntary repatriation to their country of origin or resettlement in another country; and
- 4.meets relevant human rights standards in providing that protection.

Rightly convinced that Nauru would no longer work as a deterrent, Bowen

declared Malaysia to be a suitable offshore processing country. This time, Australia would not retain responsibility for accommodating and processing the asylum seekers, and successful claimants would not be guaranteed resettlement in Australia or New Zealand. Rather, the persons taken to Malaysia would be placed at the end of a queue 100,000 long.

Eventually they might be processed. Eventually they might find a country prepared to accept them as refugees. Then again, they might not. And why would you pay a people smuggler \$20,000 for such an uncertain outcome?

Nauru was offshore processing; Malaysia would be offshore dumping, with no guarantee of humane accommodation (including health care and child education), transparent, timely processing and prompt resettlement.

A year ago the High Court stymied the Gillard government's attempt to institute the Malaysia solution. The Court performed a routine judicial task, interpreting s.198A Migration Act, and determining that Bowen did not have the legal power to declare Malaysia a suitable offshore processing country.

Many lawyers, myself included, thought the High Court would not want to travel far down the path of scrutinising the protections provided by foreign governments to asylum seekers. But the court had no trouble in finding that the issue was one of mixed law and fact. The court would always be happy to look at the law, though it might defer to government when assessing facts.

The court needed first to determine if the Malaysia solution provided a legal framework for protection. If so, there would then be a need to determine whether in fact such protection was provided. Without some legal framework, there could in fact be no guaranteed protection. With a legal framework, there would be a need to ensure that it was in fact workable, and not just a sham.

Four of the High Court judges compared Nauru in 2001 and Malaysia in 2011 and said, 'The arrangements made with Nauru were very different from those that are now in issue. Not least is that so because Australia, not Nauru as the receiving country, was to provide or secure the provision of the assessment and other steps that had to be taken, as well as the maintenance in the meantime of those who claimed to be seeking protection. Thus it was Australia, not the receiving country, that was to provide the access and protections in question.'

Last September, Erika Feller, Australia's most senior person in UNHCR in Geneva said the Malaysia deal was workable provided certain preconditions were fulfilled. She told ABC Radio that the deal 'was predicated on very, very careful pre-transfer arrangements, so that particular vulnerabilities of individuals who might be subject to the deal were assessed prior to transfer and that proper arrangements were made for those who shouldn't be transferred because of their vulnerabilities'. Unaccompanied children come to mind.

In June 2012, she told *The Age*, 'We said we could work with it and we stand by

that — subject to certain things happening, and they haven't yet happened.' She said that UNHCR would require a detailed explanation of 'pre-transfer arrangements' before it would be satisfied with the arrangement. Almost a year on, nothing has changed. We are still awaiting an answer about the kids. Until an answer is provided, no one in good conscience could give Malaysia the tick. If you send unaccompanied minors to Malaysia, the arrangement is immoral; if you keep them in Australia, it is unworkable, because the next boat will be full of kids.

Feller says UNHCR wants more detail on the resettlement prospects of those sent to Malaysia and proved to be refugees: 'There is no point in having an arrangement predicated on refugee status determination which has no solutions at the end of it.' Vulnerable people like unaccompanied children, if removed from Australia before determination of their claims, should be processed in a place where Australia maintains supervision and responsibility. That could be Nauru. Others should be taken to Malaysia only if they are to be guaranteed transparent processing and prompt resettlement.

Regardless of legal niceties about which countries are signatories to the Refugee Convention or the Bali process, our Parliament should not authorise government to remove asylum seekers offshore unless the removal arrangement guarantees processing rather than dumping. Parliament remains the custodian of our obligations under the Refugee Convention.

Studying the health needs of refugees

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Hardly a day passes without a story in our press about Australia's very messy handling of the fraught issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers. This week there were headlines about police investigations into small businesses here allegedly channeling money overseas to fund people smuggling, and requests from the Gillard government for legal advice on whether the Australian Navy can tow boats back to Indonesia.

The constant media attention often highlights government policy that panders to the fears and prejudices of the electorate. But it also reflects general disquiet in the community over the lack of a humane response.

The interviewee featured here has devoted much of her academic career to the issues of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly their health needs.

Deborah Zion, a senior lecturer at the [International Public Health Unit](#), Monash University in Melbourne, is scathing about our failure to deal well with those claiming asylum here. She focuses on what should be the values and principles underlying our dealings with these desperate people.

The video also contains excerpts from a talk she gave at a special forum on refugees and asylum seekers held earlier this year in Sydney, by the Australian Catholic University as part of its [ACU Voice](#) series of forums.

Zion's interest in the area began with her own family. Many of her relatives — Jews from Poland — sought and found refuge in Australia both before and after the Second World War. Their stories formed the background of her childhood, and motivated her as an adult to become engaged in this field.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts with Honours and a Master of Arts from Melbourne University, and a PhD from the [Centre for Human Bioethics](#) at Monash. She has lectured in Japan, Vietnam and Malaysia as well as Australia.

For more than 20 years Zion has conducted research on ethical issues concerning vulnerable populations. Her most recent major project, conducted with fellow academics Linda Briskman and Bebe Loff, was a study funded by the Australian Research Council entitled 'Caring for Asylum Seekers in Australia: Human Rights and Bioethics'.

The study involved interviewing professionals who had provided health care for asylum seekers in detention. It focused on the dilemmas these workers faced in trying to practise healthcare with a clientele who were deprived of human rights. The study was subsequently published in a number of professional journals.

Zion has published many articles in a range of journals, and has contributed

chapters to three books: *Globalization and Health: Challenges for Health Law and Bioethics*; *Measuring Effectiveness in Humanitarian and Development Aid*; and *Asylum Seekers: International Perspectives on Interdiction and Deterrence*.

Aboriginal voices silence Vietnamese war stories

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Sapphires* (PG). Director: Wayne Blair. Starring: Chris O’Dowd, Deborah Mailman, Jessica Mauboy, Shari Sebbens. Miranda Tapsell. 99 minutes**

The anti-American rhetoric is direct and effective, the phrase AMERICAN WAR OF AGGRESSION a recurring, pulsating slur.

Yet who would deny it? Certainly not me, as I stand in the museum and face this photographic account of Vietnamese suffering. Images of the dead women and children of massacred [My Lai](#) . Of American soldiers mooning over decapitated Viet Cong, or holding up a savagely disembodied limb like a trophy. Of the bearers of generational birth defects, yet to be compensated for the hereditary effects of American chemical warfare.

There is an American expat in our tour group, and I ask her how the rhetoric makes her feel. It does irk her — ‘But who could blame them?’

Who indeed. Just days previous we stood at the Citadel in Hue, within which lies the bones of the majestic [Imperial City](#) that was all but obliterated by US bombs following a Communist takeover of the city. Likewise the ruined temples of [My Son](#) , near Hoi An, where only a small portion of the centuries old Hindu domes of the Champa kingdom survived the bombing assault of an overzealous US military trying to flush out elusive Viet Cong.

The museum in Ho Chi Minh City (still Saigon to the locals) is now known rather euphemistically as the War Remnants Museum. Its previous name, the Museum of American War Crimes, was less politic, but more suited to the resentful mood inside. Under the circumstances, who could begrudge the Vietnamese their resentment?

There are at least two versions of any war, depending which side of the ideological line you sit. This is their version. It’s a compelling one.

This is a somewhat heavy way for me to introduce this reflection on what is really a very light film. But it is pertinent. *The Sapphires* takes place during the Vietnam War, and in large part within Vietnam itself. Yet it doesn’t contain a single Vietnamese character or for the most part represent the Vietnamese perspective.

This is a problem of many war films, which tend to marginalise ‘the enemy’ in order to wed your sympathy to the main (familiar) characters. But it is a particular problem for *The Sapphires*, in which the transcending of social margins by oppressed groups is a key theme.

The film follows a group of Aboriginal women who become entertainers for

African American troops in Vietnam. They abandon the 'white' country and western music on which they have been weaned, and instead embrace 'black' soul music. They come of age as they more fully embody their 'blackness'.

Its treatment of this theme is multi-pronged. It lampoons racism in rural Australia when, early in the film, three of the girls (Mailman, Tapsell and Mauboy) compete in a country pub talent quest against a gaggle of ruthlessly caricatured, talentless hicks.

In a more biting piece of satire (with a nod, perhaps, to John Waters) it reduces Australia's 1960s white urban culture — a world in which their fourth, fair-skinned friend Kay (Sebbens) has found herself — to little more than a Tupperware party; Kay escapes this plastic world by re-embracing her Aboriginal roots.

There is a tonal unevenness to all of this. The film's hammy comedy, show-stopping musical numbers and more earnest aspects just don't quite gel. O'Dowd (AKA that Irish guy from *Bridesmaids*) puts his trademark goofycute shtick to good effect as the alcoholic band-manager with a heart of gold, but the film's dramatisation of the Stolen Generations doesn't quite come off.

Its juxtaposition of the experiences of Aboriginal Australians with the civil rights movement in the US, on the other hand, is more poignant; aligning the plights of these different 'black' peoples.

It is unfortunate and more than a little bit ironic that amid all of this the Vietnamese themselves are all but sidelined. Even more so as the film progresses and the girls' proximity to military activity becomes increasingly dangerous. The Vietnamese here are merely the invisible enemy responsible for the bomb blasts and bullets that threaten the wellbeing of our heroes. They are 'other', and they are silent.

True, this is not their story. And it must be acknowledged that the museum in Saigon could be said to marginalise US voices in the same way. But for western visitors, the museum both shames and illuminates. *The Sapphires* seeks mainly to entertain, and in so doing it largely loses sight of its larger cultural responsibilities.

I say largely, because *The Sapphires* does offer one bravura nod to the Vietnamese story. Driving across country to their next gig, the girls are stopped by a troop of Viet Cong. Terrified, they plead for their lives, but are silenced by a yell. Then, in a moment of insight, Kay addresses the soldiers in language. She identifies her Aboriginal heritage and asks if, respectfully, she and her friends may pass across their land. It works: they are allowed to pass. It is a moment of profound solidarity between one invaded people and another.

It is vitally important, but all too fleeting. Once the girls pass, the Vietnamese soldiers dissolve back into the shadowy jungle from which they appeared.

Bashing Queensland's revolting gay panic laws

POLITICS

Moira Rayner

My dad had just picked me up from night studies in the law library when we heard the screams. A chunky boy raced past, shirt tail flying, crying. I held out my arms but he pushed past and ran through. Then I heard shouting, yelping and laughing, and three young men flew past in pursuit. My dad just said, come on, and I said, what was that, and he said, we're going to the police.

I didn't know then what a beat was until we got to the station, a couple of blocks away, nor why, when I told the sergeant what we had just seen and that I thought someone might get killed, he didn't get excited or even out of his chair: until, that is, my dad said, aren't you going to do anything? And he said, drily, I've made a note.

This was my first experience of gay-bashing, and of the unofficial law-enforcement view of it.

Homosexuality was illegal then, but murder was, too.

In 1997 a Queensland man successfully defeated wilful murder charges after a 'touch' from a gay man supposedly 'provoked' him into ramming his head into a pulp, then stabbing him. 'Yeah, I killed the guy,' he told police, 'but what he did to me was worse.'

When John Rusk was beaten to death in a Maryborough Catholic church's grounds in 2008 the men charged with his murder successfully pleaded that they had been provoked into it, because the victim (a drinking companion) made a homosexual suggestion. They were convicted of manslaughter rather than murder.

On 12 January this year the then Queensland Attorney General said he would change the law so 'gay panic' couldn't be raised again in like circumstances, as an expert committee recommended. A week ago, the new Attorney General Jarrod Bleijie said that his (Campbell Newman) government wouldn't be changing it after all.

Homosexual men and women perceive, as do law reform bodies around the world, that legitimating a specific form of sexual-advance as 'provocation' creates a social climate in which 73 per cent of gay and lesbian Queenslanders say they have been subjected to physical violence and verbal abuse because of their sexuality.

This 'gay panic' defence is one particularly revolting aspect of how the law works in those few states which have not abolished this loophole in the law protecting the sanctity of life.

Provocation is a component of the criminal codes of both Queensland

(Maryborough) and Western Australia (where I was studying law in 1967, and first encountered the aforementioned homophobia wearing a policeman's hat). Provocation is a complete defence to assault, and a partial defence to a wilful murder or murder charge, reducing conviction to manslaughter or involuntary killing.

The idea is that the victim has done something that a 'reasonable man' can accept was likely to have the effect of either a momentary loss of control, or a temporary incapacity to control your own actions or appreciate the wrongness of an act, short of full legal insanity.

When the codes were created in the late 19th century homosexuality was a crime and homophobia sanctioned even by Christians (though Jesus was never recorded as speaking in favour of any rejection other than of self-righteous and sanctimonious religious leaders). Now a Catholic priest, Paul Kelly, whose church grounds were the scene of Rusk's slaughter, has revived a petition to have this defence legally excised from the Code.

Back in the 1960s, that thrashing I witnessed in the grounds of my law school, and its condonation by the cop who had once charged me with buying a beer under-age, left me in no doubt that law is not justice.

A couple of years after it, an Anglican office-holder in Perth who had been charged with (consensual) homosexual sodomy and committed to the Supreme Court killed himself the night before the trial.

More than ten years later, homosexuality was decriminalised: now even Tasmania, the last state to do that, proposes to be the first state to legitimise gay unions.

Yet a man can legally seek to persuade a jury that he lost the power to make rational judgements if he felt sexually propositioned by another man. A woman on the other hand usually can't persuade a court that she was provoked into killing a man who beat and raped her as a matter of domestic habit.

This, of course, is the much 'lesser' defence of the 'battered wife', who apparently should be used to it and therefore is more likely to be a cold-blooded killer.

And the law makers of Queensland walk backwards to Christmas, like Katter (who promised to so back up his claim that 'there are no homosexuals' in his electorate), because the hateful habits of old are a good enough basis for law regulating the permissible levels of inter-personal violence in the new.

Robert Hughes, the Australian exile who never left

EULOGY

Binoy Kampmark

'Life goes on despite theory, and so does art.' —Robert Hughes

They do seem to be falling like flies — critics and practitioners of history of various persuasion, interest and intensity. Gore Vidal, Alexander Cockburn, John Keegan and now, wrenched from the art world, Robert Hughes, dead in a New York hospital.

He was part of the Push, a group of Australian artists and intellectuals that bristled with talent and verve — Germaine Greer and Clive James among them — and with wanderlust, fled with them to Europe in the 1960s, where their minds were sharpened and nourished.

The usual accolades will pick up the stunners — *The Shock of the New* that first aired on the BBC in 1980, engendered a broader interest in contemporary art and made Hughes a conspicuous commentator. It could do no other — it lowered the tone on theory while keeping the volume on insight high and mighty. His *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (1997) was expansive and produced a nervous breakdown.

His art criticism always shone with courageous pugnacity, and a good portion of it can be found in the collected volume *Nothing if Not Critical*, featuring the brightest essays for such publications as *Time Magazine*, a publication that sought, with foresight, to recruit him in 1970. America-bound, he left his Old World abode of steeped culture and freelance indigence to find New World vitality.

His commentary proved dismissive at times. Jean-Michel Basquiat, who died from a heroine overdose in 1988, was a pop tart, an epiphenomenon — in fact, a 'featherweight'. Celebrity did not demand drawing skills, merely vacuous icons — 'a perch in the pantheon of the '80s does not necessarily depend on merit.'

His cultural criticism was also supreme. Sharp as a tack, he could equally confront a culture in decay (as he did in *The Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*) and theorists he found unnecessarily obtuse. Political correctness was always given a good dressing down. Obsessions are targeted — the cult of victimhood, the adoration of television, the aversion to public funding of art.

He issued, memorably, an assured spank to Jean Baudrillard in 1989, the French cultural theorist who famously dismissed the technological deceptions of the 1991 Gulf War as fantasy, as CNN's war, and, in fact, the 'war that did not take place'.

When Baudrillard chose to ponder America in a daft meditation, Hughes jumped on it in the *New York Review of Books*. America, land without truth, with polished white teeth, with no identity, cultural bearing — at least for Baudrillard. Such

assumptions, for Hughes, were the 'sumptuous poppycock in the French manner, de haut en bas.' Confine the theorist to the flames of indifference — art and life go on.

Then there was history, which he finessed into something that was not merely readable but sweetly digestible. He cut mammoth sways in terms of cities (Barcelona in 1992 and Rome in 2011), and Australia's then neglected convict history (*The Fatal Shore* from 1987). The latter's creation was very much an encouragement from popular historian Alan Moorehead, and began as archival research in the public records office.

He wrote of Clio with respect and for the public with conviction. In *American Visions*, he speaks of his audience warmly — 'that creature who American academics often profess to believe no longer exists: the general intelligent reader.'

Then came his relationship with Australia, ever distant, yet tinged with proximity. His first book, *The Art of Australia* (1966) was framed as a farewell and a message. Leave Australia, and grow up, or, to quote the exact words from an anonymous painter Hughes cites, 'you can't begin to grow up until you've left the place'.

In *Things I Didn't Know*, Hughes' 2006 autobiography, he longed for the maternal bosom of Europe, yet was unable to escape the antipodean orbit he found arid and constricting. Australian reference points followed his pen with nagging persistence, a permanent shadowing. The exile, in truth, never leaves.

As Peter Conrad, himself an Australian expatriate of cerebral clout and imagination, noted of Hughes, 'Escape into the larger, older, more knowing hemisphere does not bring freedom or forgetfulness: each place visited is appraised in relation to what has been left behind — experienced as an alternative to Australia, or as a startling reminiscence of it' (*The Monthly*, July 2011).

Hence, in his magisterial historical account of Barcelona Hughes sees fried eels and barnacles sampled with relish as a reminder of that 'populist paradise ... the Bondi Beach I had left behind in Sydney in 1964'.

Always controversial (attacked by a parochial press after his near fatal crash in 1999), but always rich — that was Hughes. He wrote, as Michael McNay of the *Guardian* claimed, the English of Shakespeare, Milton, Macaulay and Dame Edna Everage. Nothing, it seems, if not rare.

Farewell to the concierge of Pitt Street

EULOGY

Kerry Murphy

Yassin was quietly spoken and gentle. We saw him every day when we came to work. He was often outside the building, or more recently across the road outside the Uniting Church.

Yassin made sure the bins were out for the garbage collectors, and that people had parking tickets on their cars in case the rangers passed by. He looked after the area so well that we nicknamed him 'the concierge'. Yassin had been in the area for about ten years.

I occasionally tried to engage him in conversation but he did not seem to want to talk, though he was happy to say 'hello', 'thank you' and 'God bless'. Some of us would give him papers and magazines, as he seemed to enjoy having something to read. Yassin liked *The Guardian*, and the *Herald*. Someone said they saw him with a Qur'an, and occasionally he read *El Telegraph* (a Sydney Arabic newspaper).

Others ensured he had his cigarettes and food. I only recently learned his name was 'Yassin'. Others knew him as Matt, or Michael. Yassin had a shopping trolley with bags tied to it and all his worldly possessions inside.

Ian from the church tells me Yassin would help teach basic living skills to the 'new boys' in the area. On occasion we saw him speaking with others living in the streets nearby. Some of the other men in the area would visit him and chat. Sometimes we saw him with his washing hanging out — he was always tidy and looked after himself.

Last Tuesday I did not see him. I thought maybe he was elsewhere, and only later learned what had happened.

Apparently someone took his trolley and he became very upset. Then late on Monday evening one of the security guards from the Defence Department nearby found him lying unconscious and without a pulse.

Within days, there was a photo of him and some flowers outside the church where he would often sit and sleep.

Yassin died on Monday 30 July, in his home — Pitt Street. The spontaneity of the flowers, chalked comments, photos, and a painting from people who live and work around Pitt Street showed me Yassin had friends.

Ian held a memorial service on the front steps of the church, which he described as Yassin's 'lounge and bedroom'. More than 50 people who work nearby came and we were invited to contribute memories. One sang a 'spiritual' in Yassin's honour, others spoke fondly of his friendliness and dignity. One of his mates from

the street spoke about him in a compassionate way and gave us some more insight into Yassin's life.

There will be no state funeral, but this memorial on the steps of the church where he lived was comforting.

It can be easy to look past those living on the streets, when you pass them regularly. But 'the concierge' drew our attention, in his own quiet and dignified way. We will miss him.

Allahyamuhu, rest in peace, Yassin 'the concierge'.

Why Fair Work works well

POLITICS

Luke Williams

A major review into the Fair Work Act (FWA) says the nation's workplace laws are 'working well'. Industry response has been predictable, uncompromising and perhaps even dishonest. Their critique produces more heat than light — a few good sound-bites heavy on rhetoric and light on substance.



The 'Towards More Productive and Equitable Workplaces' report by Professor Ron McCallum, the Hon. Michael Moore and Dr John Edwards and initiated by the Minister for Workplace Relations Bill Shorten says:

Industrial disputes are uncommon, overall wages growth has remained consistent with low consumer price inflation while wages growth between industries and regions is responding to supply and demand, unemployment has steadily declined while participation in the workforce has increased, wages after inflation have markedly improved, and at the same time the profit share of incomes has increased. These are considerable achievements, not to be put at risk lightly.

The 294 page report has made 53 relatively minor recommendations — my analysis suggests 21 of the 53 are neutral (they either cut both ways or are technical/procedural in nature), 15 favour employees and 17 favour employers (although they fall dramatically short of what employers actually called for in their submissions).

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has described the review as 'disappointing' and a 'missed opportunity' with 'alarming indifference' to productivity, competitiveness and unemployment.

The Business Council of Australia responded by saying 'Every day in Australia, jobs are lost, businesses are shutting ... We're just missing the point.'

What is clear is that industry has developed a definitive media strategy; piggyback broad economic concerns with calls for workplace deregulation. The business sector is yet to produce any real evidence that Australia's industrial relations laws are having an adverse impact on the economy.

By contrast, the review concludes:

Since the FWA came into force important outcomes such as wages growth, industrial disputation, the responsiveness of wages to supply and demand, the rate of employment growth have been favourable to Australia's continuing prosperity. The exception has been productivity growth, which has been disappointing in the FWA framework and in the two preceding frameworks over the last decade.

Many agree that the nation's productivity problems may well be related to our industrial relations system. However, diminishing productivity is a multi-faceted issue and the exact link with IR laws is genuinely unknown. There is also no avoiding the fact that lower productivity actually started during the Workchoices years.

What is missing is evidence of clear cause and effect. While some of the most productive countries in the world like Norway and Sweden have highly regulated industrial relations regimes, many other highly productive nations like the United States have among the most deregulated workforces in the world.

Simplistically conflating neoliberal reform of the workplace with productivity gains is a disingenuous, at worst insidious proposition that scapegoats Australian workers for the failings of our economy. In industry submissions to the review, many of the suggestions were aimed at increasing profits, not necessarily enhancing productivity.

If workers are to concede that industrial relations may have some causal relationship with flailing productivity, business also needs to take some responsibility. Poor management practices, a reluctance to innovate, group-think, workplace bullying, a lack of investment in skills, and 'old boys clubs' — where insiders are hired and promoted based on their position within a self-interested network — may contribute to the overall lull.

Red tape needs to be reduced, especially for small business — this has little to do with employment conditions. Tax reform as well as investment in technology, infrastructure and education will do far more to improve productivity than stripping back worker pay and conditions.

It is also a great shame that the efficacy of industrial relations should be framed in pure economic terms, whereby wage rises for instance would be evidence of a poorly performing industrial relations system — rather than one that is delivering important and equitable outcomes for Australian workers.

The same might be said for the rise in unfair employment termination rates; do they necessarily indicate our IR system is in chaos or do they merely suggest more unjustly terminated workers are now able to find justice?

Perhaps the question we should really be asking is: do the majority of Australians (not just bosses) think we have a fair, harmonious system which rewards hard work and productivity? The majority of working Australians work in small business, are not members of unions, do not have access to the media and are certainly not represented by the business elite — it's these voices we really need to hear.

The FWA may well have the balance right. It was in many ways a simple rebranding of the pro-employer Workchoices provisions with some important differences. While there is much talk of a spike in industrial disputes, levels are

still far lower than pre-Workchoices days. Meanwhile wages growth has been lower and the growth rate of labour productivity has been higher in the FWA period than under Work Choices.

So why exactly do we need to reform our industrial relations system? If there is a case for change, it is yet to be properly made.

Olympics silver whining

POETRY

Various

Olympics 2012

Our species believes it progresses without limitation

Offer coaches more money

We shout when a swimmer wins silver *that's no inspiration*

Our consumption of carbon turns climate to high agitation
It's too hot and sunny

We complain as we gobble more fuel without limitation

We want it all faster we scream at computerisation

This program's not funny

We shout as we wait modem struggling without inspiration

Long essays aren't worthy of effort in their compilation

Twitter leaps like a bunny

We'll get there before we can start without limitation

We'll leave this poor planet too messy for our habitation

Our toast needs more honey

New fields are required for our plunder and fresh inspiration

Our species might pause but *no worries* there'll be good mutation

Waste goes down the dunny

As humans pound forward no *burden of care* limitation

We deserve only winners our species the sole inspiration

Jill Sutton

At the Olympics

At the Sydney Olympics we sat and watched the crowd.

At one final down thirty rows in front and to the right of us there was
a young woman, who was dressed as a cheerleader
with two great big green and gold pom poms,

and whenever the music started
she would stand up and do some
elaborately rehearsed routine, waving the pom poms about
in front of the people in front of her.
She would look up at the big video screen
and if she wasn't on it she would stop dancing and sit down.
Now, of course, I know what she went to the Olympics to see,
and what we saw at the Olympics.

Mark Carkeet

Sun rituals

Surging, thudding,
blood-in-head alchemy;
dreams are thoughts.
Stale, yellowing actions?
Best intended evasions?
Half-life memories.
Pounding, rolling waves
of foam lubricate skin,
blades sever follicles.
Streaming, pulsing on skin,
bone, sudsoaps
cleanse the shell;
distant kettles sound.
China, tectonic, shifts.
Hydrogenated oxygen spills
cascading, revelling in
caffeinated sludge.
Kind cups guard the
sleepdrivers' odyssey.
Cards flash, portals acquiese,

machines print, copy,
hold us, baying,
fingers claw at words
passed, past and recalled.
Electrons dance. Flee.
Communing with nature's
bastard children; faces
of long ago, spaces claimed.
Cyberdunked into connections
lacking soul. Light. Touch
bereft of human ichor.
Medea's enchanting revenge
gains fresh blood. Poisoned gifts
intimate satiation's lure:
fulfillment, hope, unity.
We're left grasping.
Barry Gittins

Perils of the Greens' moral vanity

POLITICS

John Warhurst



The veteran political scientist Malcolm Mackerras, now based in the Public Policy Institute of the Australian Catholic University, recently accused the Greens of what he called moral vanity, predicting it would cause the demise of the party. This is quite different to the claim that the weakness of the Greens is their alleged extremism, an idea Mackerras rejects.

He doesn't define moral vanity, but I take it to mean self-righteousness leading to unwillingness to compromise. This opens up the important question of the balance between steadfastness and flexibility in political life.

If the Greens have peaked because of inflexibility, it makes a contrast with the demise of their predecessor minor party, the Australian Democrats, who did a deal with the Howard Government after the 1998 federal election over the introduction of the GST. They could have refused to support it like Independent Brian Harradine. Led by Meg Lees they tried to improve the tax reform to make it fairer and more environmentally friendly.

There was more to it than that, but it was the beginning of the end. The party's supporters were outraged and the general public believed that instead of keeping the bastards honest they had become one.

The allegation of moral vanity against the Greens relates to the party's general approach to parliamentary politics. A longstanding criticism, recently revived following the failure of federal Parliament to resolve the asylum seeker processing issue, has been that the Greens are inflexible and unwilling to compromise.

Often the contrast has been made with the Democrats, who, it was often said, were willing to negotiate with government to improve policy outcomes. But look where that got the Democrats in the end.

Mackerras' frustration with the Greens has boiled over because they failed to support the Oakeshott-Labor asylum seeker compromise bill. He also accuses the Coalition parties of hypocrisy on that issue. Much earlier the Greens crucially failed to support the final global warming compromise offered by the Rudd government.

But on other matters the federal Greens under Bob Brown have compromised, including on the Gillard mining tax which it thought was pitched far too low.

The question should be whether the Greens have compromised or not at the right moments and on the right issues. It is ironic that the most inflexible party in the current parliament has been the Coalition, led by Tony Abbott. It was Abbott rather than Brown who earned the nickname Mr No. If the Coalition had

compromised with Labor over asylum seeker processing the question of the Greens' stance would have been quickly forgotten.

Politics is not just about the art of compromise but about the combination of compromise and standing firm. As a community we value both attributes. In fact in the recent past high praise has been given to so-called conviction politicians compared with others who flip flop or seemingly don't have firm values.

John Howard was one who like Brown was singled out for having that attribute. Whereas Howard actually had both and was willing to deal, as he did with the Democrats, or shift positions as he did when challenged by Mark Latham on parliamentary superannuation. He even tried, too little and too late, to compromise on Work Choices, the policy that brought him down.

The saying that 'Politics is the art of the possible' should not be interpreted as always valuing compromise over steadfastness. All parties, not just the Greens, face such choices. The Greens should certainly search their souls on getting this balance right. But, getting the balance right between flexibility and maintaining what you stand for is an important lesson for Labor and the Coalition too.

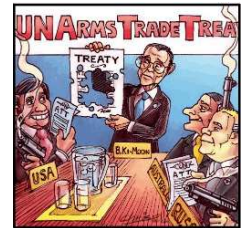
Australia and other arms rogues

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark

The history of arms control is sketchy, marked by various triumphs and sprinkled with spectacular failures.

The first international gathering to address arms control as a serious issue was the Hague Convention of 1899. International lawyers are particularly keen to point out the strides made at this conference, not least of all the banning of asphyxiating gases and the use of dum dum bullets.



Sadly, none of these injunctions were to hold when World War I broke out in 1914.

Arms control, in truth, brings out the greatest vicissitudes of international diplomacy. A ban tends to be followed by a qualification. An injunction tends to keep company with a violation.

The Geneva Protocol of 1925, still current with 130 parties, targeted poisonous gases and bacteriological weapons in international conflicts with one notable caveat: civil and internal wars were exempt, allowing colonial powers to experiment on subject peoples in the name of police actions.

Nation states — notably the ones most keen on touting the rhetoric of anti-aggression — tend to be the great stonewallers when it comes to negotiating treaties on the subject. The Cold War was typified by a power arrangement that extolled the slogans of world peace even as nuclear weapons were being stockpiled in the name of Mutually Assured Destruction. The arms control advocates of one day were the appeasers of the next.

In the arms control industry, image is everything.

For the past month, the United Nations has been attempting to come to some sort of agreement over a potential treaty controlling the flow of illicit conventional weapons. The treaty was intended to incorporate firmly established rules of international human rights and humanitarian law. This would have been called the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), but the document has failed to materialise.

The failure is apparently one of [timing](#) — negotiations were, as the Control Arms coalition claimed, 'procedurally blocked by the United States, Russia, DPRK, Cuba and Venezuela who all asked for more time'.

'I am disappointed', [stated](#) the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, 'that the Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty concluded its four-week-long session without agreement on a treaty text that would have set common standards to regulate the international trade in conventional arms.'

The United States, one of the draft text's chief opponents, 'took a principled stand throughout these negotiations that international trade in conventional arms is a legitimate enterprise that is and should remain regulated by the individual nations themselves, and we continue to believe that any Arms Trade Treaty should require states to develop their own national regulations and controls and strengthen the rule of law regarding arms sales.'

The press statement by the US State Department articulates a long-standing principle: regulation of such matters is an internal matter, the prerogative of individual states to develop appropriate frameworks of laws that net undesirable 'dealers'. There are regimes that deserve lethal weapons to use appropriately, and there are those that should be kept off the lists. Weapons should not be 'transferred to people who would abuse them'.

The difficulty is that who is or is not a desirable dealer is often an open question. The answer, sadly, tends to lie in strategic preferences — yesterday, it was Saddam Hussein; today, it might be the Syrian regime.

That one is dealing in an industry of death to begin with suggests a broader ethical problem that is simply not being asked. Within the rhetoric of arms control is a purported legitimacy of the trade to begin with. Arms will be made and arms will be purchased.

More to the point — as happened notably in South Africa when the country elected Nelson Mandela in 1994 — those in the arms industry will hoist themselves upon institutions in the name of some fictitious necessity.

Australia, sadly, adds to that contradiction. On one hand, activists [protested](#) outside the US Consulate in Sydney pressuring Washington to change their tune on the treaty. Senator Bob Carr took a [strong stance](#) favouring the ATT: 'We're seeking a comprehensive agreement on arms control — enforceable through public reporting to the UN — and aimed at reducing the continued flow of conventional weapons to rogue groups and terrorists.'

What the Senator failed to mention is that Australia has its own arms producers, its own exporters, who deal heavily in the death industry. Late last month, voluntary administrators were called in to sort out the \$115 million in losses incurred by the Brisbane weapons maker [Metal Storm](#) .

Australian 'know-how' here, under the stewardship of CEO Lee Finnear, has been put to particularly sinister use — the creation, among other things, of an electronic gun capable of firing a million bullets a minute. Fine, presumably, if the recipient of such weapons is not 'rogue'.

Even the language of the Secretary General is disconcerting. There are no prospects for abolishing such an illicit trade — we can only ever hope to keep it above board, the subject of regulations and legal fiat.

A group of over 90 states claimed in a collective statement that, while

disappointed, they were 'not discouraged'. But it is axiomatic that international trade will have, as a chief component, the shipment and transport of arms. Till that connection is abolished, talk about treaties of regulation seem not merely futile but disingenuous.

The Olympics and business world need to grow up

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

A couple of random news stories struck a chord. 'Coach defends Aussie swimmers' for winning only one gold medal, and 'Business criticises Fair Work Review'. Both stories assumed that sport and business are for winners. Both were out of touch with the Australian community, which puts a higher value on learning to lose graciously.

Of course the Australian community sports many attitudes to the Olympic Games. Some, mainly sports journalists and children, see only gold and Australia's credit rising and falling with each medal won or lost. Some see only a waste of public money spent on promoting chauvinism. A larger number see a gathering of nice young people with large dreams, and wonder which ones they would like to bring home to meet their nephews and nieces.

When we see the Olympic Games in this last way we begin to understand what they are all about. We notice that there are many thousands of mainly young athletes from all around the world competing for a hundred or so medals. So we realise that the point of the exercise can't be to win. It is to lose. Or rather the Games are a school for learning how to lose, and so for becoming people that any family would like to invite home.

Athletes, children, journalists and nations all ideally learn by failure. Having failed they reflect on their response to failure, ask themselves what really matters, review their response in the light of what they see to be important. Then they come slowly to see themselves wryly as companions and fellow travelers of their fellow athletes and the rest of the human race, notwithstanding the fact that they have momentarily been competitors. They have then grown in humanity.

We journalists do not usually believe in schools, which are all about process. We suffer from attention deficit and so prefer events. But for those who have any eye for education there have been some very good examples of it in the London Games.

James Magnussen (pictured), who was hailed as a winner, had the media puffing him up and hanging off the hot air balloon they had created, became trapped by the inflated expectations put upon him, lost his first race, was devastated by his failure and responded accordingly. But as a second defeat followed the first, he became reflective, learned to lose graciously and accepted the solidarity offered him by Nathan Adrian, his victor.

Ordinary human beings instinctively see this learning to become more deeply human through losing as more important than winning not simply in sport but in all the various activities in which human beings engage. It is certainly so in business and politics.

Business groups and financial journalists are exceptional in believing that the point of work is to win at others' expense and that the nation will gain by arranging the playing field so that the winners can enrich themselves at the expense of losers.

For ordinary people work is about learning from one's failures to be a winner at others' expense, about reflecting on what really matters, and about building solidarity with their companions in the workplace. They would like to work in a place where people cooperate in finding a balance between work and home life, find encouragement in innovating to make their enterprise more productive, and are willing to forego short term profits in the longer term interests of the enterprise, its workers, shareholders and clients.

Like the Games, businesses are schools for learning from failure. All schools are occasionally disruptive because students need to learn to discipline their desires and learn from their mistakes. That is part of growing up. It is certainly a pity that the Olympic Games are built around flags and nations — children's business. Maybe one day they and businesses will grow up and offer medals to the Best Losers.

Cultural snobbery and Wayne Swan's Springsteen mania

MUSIC

Ellena Savage

The other night, I went to a local restaurant where I'd heard there would be some interesting music playing. I didn't ask what would be played, trusting that whatever it was, I'd enjoy it.

I had set myself up for disappointment. I was confronted with a monotonous set of noise music; three guitarists improvised a 40-minute electro-acoustic work without any discernable sense of structure, melody or rhythm. There were some interesting harmonics, but no patterns emerged in the sound to cling on to or understand.

The composition, as a noise piece, no doubt had a place in the context of its own history. Without a grasp on that history, the experience for me was one of boredom and mild disdain. While the noise droned on, I used my phone to look up where I might be able to play darts later.

It is impossible for me to say whether it was a successful composition. But I doubt anyone else in the room — mostly serious-looking white men in their late 20s with beards and scruffy hair — could say, either. I don't believe any of the audience members truly enjoyed the performance aesthetically, whatever they might pretend.

There's no reason why any kind of art should be pretty, or pleasing, or easy to understand. Even boring and impenetrable work is legitimate. Anyway, questioning what is or isn't art is not interesting, and institutional opinions on the matter never actually interfere with artwork being produced.

But asking what it is that makes something valued by a particular social group, even if it seems monotonous or inane, is an interesting question.

In Australia, land of the cultural cringe, sociological research presents us with findings that the 'social elite', at least those selected by *Who's Who*, mainly consume middle- and low-brow culture. Mainstream cinema, books that are on best-seller lists, and Bruce Springsteen, for example.

The pride taken in consuming 'low' culture, celebrated by Wayne Swan's Springsteen mania, is positive in its belief in the legitimacy of mainstream taste, which is dictated more democratically than highbrow taste. But it is negative in its inherent dismissal of cultural codes which engage the intellect in a more challenging way. Swan's political justification for Springsteen's music sidelines the art itself.

Paul Keating, with his public love of Mahler, can only be seen as an anomaly in the Australian context. For the Australian elite, artworks are primarily for entertainment, and any intellectual connections made are peripheral. Noise music,

then, is not endured by the Australian elite.

There is a popular theory about cultural consumption, first argued by Pierre Bourdieu, that cultural taste is linked to class and power structures: high social groups exercise sophisticated and inaccessible cultural tastes in order to prevent access to power by lower social classes. This engendering of cultural tastes renders 'lower' cultural forms disgusting. If lower classes wish to gain access to the elite, they do it by mimicking their cultural habits.

This theory was originally applied in France, where opera and ballet have a history of belonging to the affluent classes. In Australia, where the elite prefer Steven Spielberg films and going to the footy, middle- and working-class participation in elite cultural forms would seem misguided, if the point were simply social mobility.

So it's probably not that the bearded noise aficionados actually want to be in *Who's Who*. They participate in an unprecedented highbrow cultural form to construct their own elite identity, marked as different and, by default, superior, to the mainstream.

The tropes of elitism here are connoisseur habits (appreciating musical works intellectually by framing them in a historical context) and fashions (all those beards) in order to distinguish their belonging to a group that is impenetrable by outsiders. Initiation is granted through education in, and appreciation of, the field.

For me, noise music is boring, but no more so than test cricket. My intolerance of both is a result of my not being indoctrinated into either community of appreciators. The differences between the two are arbitrary because in either case, there has to be an intellectual interaction between the viewer and the game/work in order for the viewer to not be bored witless. But noise is deemed highbrow, and cricket is lowbrow.

We all belong to the mainstream until we display communicable differences, marked sometimes by race or disability, by exceptional talent, or by sexual or religious difference. When 'sameness' like this is celebrated, it's no wonder people who have the means choose to differentiate themselves culturally.

I suspect that when regular folks start participating in traditionally highbrow culture, there is an element of doing it because of the perceived social mobility attached to it. I disdain this because it reinforces the marginalising idea that power really does belong to an exclusive social group.

But the other reason, that differentiating oneself from the mainstream when the mainstream itself is hostile to difference, well, I don't think that's so shallow after all.

Hope beyond disability support flip-flopping

POLITICS

Moira Byrne Garton



Amid last week's politicking on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Queensland Premier Campbell Newman revisited a previous proposal for funding the NDIS — a dedicated charge to the taxpayer, akin to the Medicare levy. While this strategy was a reasonable possibility when ongoing disability care and support first rose in public debate, the Productivity Commission recommended it as a second-best option for funding an NDIS.

There are good reasons why federal governments from both sides of politics avoid budget strategies which tie revenue to funding for almost all public policies in the long term.

Many forms of government revenue fund various expenses and public 'goods', and revenue received rarely matches the associated costs. Instead, revenue in the form of taxes and levies is based on citizens' and companies' obligations or market-driven willingness to pay. Likewise, expenditure is based on governments' responsibilities, political will and ability to pay.

Mechanisms for revenue-raising and budgeted expenditure reveal a government's policy priorities and values. Tying revenue to a particular expenditure purpose limits flexibility in delivering policy outcomes, and by implication, restricts its ability to reflect community values in a timely manner. General purpose revenue and expenditure can have a redistributive effect.

In the Productivity Commission's Disability Care and Support Inquiry Report, in which it first proposed the NDIS, the Commission [argued](#) that the scheme should be funded from consolidated revenue on the basis that it was a core function of government akin to Medicare.

Currently, levels of disability funding wax and wane according to governments' budget resources, providing no certainty for those affected. A levy to fund disability support has similar potential to be viewed as discretionary, elective or temporary by successive governments or the community.

While it is heartening that there is general consensus between political parties on the NDIS, it is unfortunate that some state premiers' bickering over funding fuelled distress of affected people. In the last year, people with disabilities and caregivers have experienced many ups and downs.

After the report's release, the Liberal and National parties committed to supporting the NDIS at their respective Federal Council and National Conferences in the middle of last year. Labor announced its support and funding of \$10 million to begin policy work on the scheme, along with a COAG Select Council to oversee

the reform.

Then in December, shadow disabilities spokesman Mitch Fifield expressed [reservations](#) over funding. Various subsequent reports left readers to wonder whether the Coalition was as committed to the scheme as Labor.

Still, the prospect of reform raised hopes, which were partly realised by the Labor Government budgeting for scheme start-up costs in 2012—13 (though no extra funding for disability support was allocated in the short term). These hopes were again dashed when the Liberal Party [equivocated](#) on its support for the scheme in May.

Shadow Treasurer Joe Hockey stated in a National Press Club address that he 'cannot make commitments to promises and I will not make commitments to promises that we cannot fund ... we're not going to raise false hope for people out there'. Tellingly, he was willing to commit to 'a surplus in our first year in office and ... for every year of the first term'.

Although these statements [conflicted](#) with Tony Abbott's stated support, a formal commitment to the scheme by the Coalition has yet to be made.

On a more positive note, both major parties at the federal level insist that disability reform should be funded from consolidated general revenue rather than from a [hypothecated](#) levy, contrary to Premier Newman's suggestion. This signals the priority they have placed on disability reform.

Disability policy is no longer a short-term issue for political point-scoring, nor is it a second-tier funding issue where budgets can be trimmed on a whim according to available resources. Rather, disability reform is placed in the middle of the public policy sphere. It deserves this space.

Like health, disability is unpredictable. Anyone can become disabled through accident, illness or birth. While disability support itself is described as a [lottery](#), life too is a lottery, and there's a [chance](#) that, like illness or injury, disability can happen to anyone.

Federal politicians' determination to fund the NDIS from general revenue at least signals to the community that should anything go wrong, the government is committed to ensuring that citizens receive the necessary resources for their disability support.

Why I'm still a Catholic

RELIGION

Geraldine Doogue

Why am I still a Catholic? How should I answer this important question? In truth, sometimes I'm not sure why.

Yet I know the Church frames my identity, as basic as that. It's the source of consolation without peer. I can't slough it off: it's too embedded in the way I see the world and myself. I take it for granted in some respects, one of the products of being formed in post-WW2 Australian Catholicism, with its strong Irish inheritance.

It has been one of the most rewarding venues of growth and stimulation of any in my life. I believe that if you do hang in there, Christ's great offering from St Matthew's gospel comes true, in ways impossible to imagine: 'I have come to give you life and give it in abundance.' Abundant life: such a precious booty, not available at will.

So no, I'm not about to step aside from this easily.

But the unfolding headlines of late, together with what I've forced myself to look at square in the face, have tested these verities.

Maybe I've been through something of an epiphany, that wonderful biblical word from catechism classes which I once barely grasped. I think that deep down, I've come to believe that the world beyond the institutional church is kinder, gentler, full of more conscientious ethics, values and care for others, than the institutional Church.

That is, the much-criticised secular world in which lay people explicitly live is probably more functional and more ready to conscience-examine than the institutional Church. What an extraordinary thing! This was something of an epic realisation for me which again prompted further reflection: why then am I still a Catholic?

I suspect Vatican II's central idea of a Pilgrim Church definitely influenced my thinking as a young 20-something believer. It raised my expectations. It stretched my idea of faith. But it was a slow-burn, nothing hasty. Only gradually did my Catholic identity shift.

Despite remaining a pretty faithful adherent overall, I've sought out broader Church experiences via groups like [Catalyst For Renewal](#), by the occasional retreat, by good reading including *The London Tablet* and by participating in Ignatian reading groups, up to the present day.

So, without the sense that the ordained officials of the Church had so powerfully lost their way, would I be speaking to you like this today, with any ambivalence? If

I hadn't drawn the awful conclusion that key parts of the institutional Church essentially ditched the role of Good Shepherd; if they hadn't decided that the priestly caste had to be protected above all, rather than the most vulnerable, would I be feeling like this?

I doubt it. I would much prefer not to be suffering any collateral shame, as I do feel with these constantly emerging stories.

But even a pretty compliant person like me would feel foolish at best and cowardly at worst if I didn't have the guts to look this crisis in the eye and see devastating dysfunction at a systemic not individual level, in an institution so close to my own values-centre. It demands my own self-audit. I must say, surely: what next? Or do I simply retreat into something small and extremely private, in the comfort of people who feel exactly as I do?

Until now, I've seen my duty and vocation as pursuing my personal journey, always guided by the wonders of our great tradition, knowing how much it could both humble and stretch me. I have tried to introduce my children to a Pilgrim Church's offerings (though I am not sure how successful I've been ... as one *Eureka Street* correspondent replied to an Andrew Hamilton article recently 'they don't want our Catholicity').

And I would have been alive to requests from ordained ministers and religious to serve the Church. I would have happily left the bulk of it to them: the job of ritual, of teaching and administration and I would have respected them for fulfilling that role.

Whereas now I feel naïve and, yes, angry. I am struck by some unpalatable truths about some key Church officials' priorities ... amid them warning about the perils of the secular world!

So why do I still bother? Partly because I'd feel so much poorer without my faith. It anchors me. It introduces me to the whole notion of a journey in life, such an inviting metaphor.

It brings a great capacity for rapture, beauty, sensuality, joy, alongside the capacity for acute vices because emotion is not mortgaged in the scheme of offerings made to us, that's the majesty of it all. Risks are invited within our faith. 'Ours is a faith of possibilities' was a wonderful phrase included in a Redemptorist pamphlet distributed in my home parish in South Perth back in the 1970s. It influenced me to my core, then and now.

So, I treasure the sheer tradition of our faith. I seek it out. It helps me fulfil the natural human urge to make meaning; as the British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks insists: 'We are meaning-seeking animals.'

My conviction is that our children and grandchildren will be immensely the poorer for not growing up with a Catholic sensibility, without access to the rich armoury of belief, consolation, glimpse of the divine, the whole notion of

commitments, of artistry, of abundant life.

So somehow, we, lay people especially, have to ask ourselves some big questions. How much are we prepared to commit ourselves to refreshing this Church of ours? How much do we value it in our lives? How much have we sought to replace it with other elements (because meaning is offered in various parts of our society — it's a more contested space than before)?

How much have we dodged evaluating its impact on ours and on community lives? How much have we left it to the officials; abandoned them and left them unreformed, when all about us we're experiencing considerable institutional reform in our daily working lives? I've been through about three big restructures in my media life and more could be coming. This rarely proceeds at a pace that we choose. It dislocates, often profoundly.

Did we seriously delude ourselves that the Church could escape all that? One can rarely prophecy the exact manner of acute challenge. Otherwise it wouldn't be a crisis, just a big problem. But truly to see the Church 'crucified' on the cross of something as awful as sexual abuse and cover-up, is very hard to bear. Who would have thought this would be the vector? But it is.

In the words of respected Vatican reporter John Allen, from his book *The Future Church*: 'The real question ... is not whether the bishops are up to the challenges of the 21st century. The question is whether the rest of us are?'

Again, why do I bother? Because somehow I can't just stand back from it all. I'm not sure what is asked of us individually. I don't even know my talents for any new roles.

But then again, I am haunted by a bold statement from St Edmund Campion, before returning from safe France to England in Elizabethan times, and to almost certain martyrdom: 'The expense is reckoned, the enterprise is begun, it is of God, it cannot be withstood: so the faith was planted; so it must be restored.'

The setting may be different. But some of his courage and surrender rings a bell. How many of us are up to it?

Confidentiality in the confessional and psychiatrist's rooms

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The news that [Aurora accused](#) James Holmes had sought psychiatric help may broaden the Australian discussion of the secrecy of confession.



This debate has generally focused on whether priests can be exempted on religious grounds from the duty of disclosing to the authorities crimes revealed in confession. The inclusion of psychiatrists raises a larger and more important question: can the exemption of certain privileged conversations from the duty of disclosure be justified on the grounds of the public good?

Most arguments made for compelling disclosure do not address this question. They generally appeal to the consequences of the failure to disclose the crimes of, say, a recidivist abuser. The possibility that several more children may be abused, with all the lasting harm caused to them as well as to their families and friends, is simply assumed to outweigh the harm caused by the breach of confidentiality.

That this assumption is not self-evident can be seen if we consider the similarly shaped argument that has been made for torturing terrorist suspects. Some have argued that the lives that might be saved by extracting information about planned bombings would outweigh the suffering of the person tortured, and so justify its use.

Critics of this position argue, correctly in my view, that the use of torture harms more than the person tortured. It also damages those who apply and approve it, and weakens the respect for human dignity that is fundamental to any decent society. So it should be rejected on the grounds of the public good.

I believe it is also in the public good to offer legal protection for the confidentiality of confession and some other conversations. The public benefit arises from the importance of the intimately personal space in which we consider our lives, reflect on our desires and the fractures in our lives, and deliberate how we feel called to live.

This space of self-reflectiveness is cultivated by many religions and philosophies. It is a space of freedom both in the sense that we give ourselves freely to ideas, to ways of living and to people, and in the sense that it must be free from constraint if our humanity is to flourish.

It is in the public interest to recognise and protect this intimately personal space. Respect for other people, critical for a healthy society, depends on the recognition that others are like us in having a moral centre.

Its importance for society is recognised in the concern for the transmission of

values in education and in the importance given to political and religious freedom. It may also be reflected in uneasiness about attempts to manipulate personal attitudes through subliminal advertising, genetic modification or chemicals.

The public importance of the personal space can also be seen in the way we characterise a totalitarian state as one that regards it as its business to discover and penalise wrong thoughts. Humane regimes value the freedom to hold divergent opinions and penalises their expression only when this causes clear harm.

All this suggests that it is important for society that the space in which citizens reflect on their lives and choose how to live should be free from forced disclosure.

I argue finally that some conversations are so inextricably connected with people's intimate personal space that they also require the same protection from forced disclosure. Although confidentiality is a high value in all conversations, most are not absolutely protected. In most conversations we intend to make public our inner selves and measure our communication to the trust we have in our hearers.

But some conversations have a public structure that makes it clear that in them we are articulating our inner selves with the other person there simply as a catalyst. The conversation between priest and penitent is so structured. Both parties agree that it is an inner conversation between the penitent and God in which the priest is simply a channel. The conversation between psychiatrist and patient seems to have a similar character.

My argument is that conversations of this kind — and there may be more of them — should be given the same respect as a person's inner conversation. They should be exempt from compelled disclosure.

The freedom of the personal space of our lives is so central to the good of society that it outweighs the consequences of the failure to disclose.

Drowning rats of Wall Street

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Cosmopolis* (MA). Director: David Cronenberg. Starring: Robert Pattinson, Juliette Binoche, Sarah Gadon, Kevin Durand, Samantha Morton, Paul Giamatti, Patricia McKenzie. 109 minutes**

The opening title sequence features the time-lapse apparition of a Pollock-esque splatter painting. Curlicues of gloomy colour fleck the screen, layer upon layer, forming a dense and convoluted labyrinth. A Pollock painting proffers a randomness and abstractness that only with time and reflection might suggest meaning. This is the kind of attention Canadian provocateur Cronenberg asks you to pay to *Cosmopolis* — be warned.

Eric Packer (Pattinson) is a Wall Street billionaire who sets off across town for the mundane purpose of getting a haircut. His transport is a modified limousine-cum-moveable office, sound- and bullet-proof and decked out with television and computer screens. But this is no mere luxurious cross-town drive. Traffic is at a virtual standstill, due to the coincidence of a presidential visit, the funeral of a Sufi hip-hop artist, and an anti-capitalist rally.

This purgatorial traffic jam hints at Packer's own encroaching hell. A bad investment has sent his vast fortune plummeting. It dwindles as the interminable road journey progresses, plunging Packer into a veritable existential funk. A drive to get a haircut evolves into a search for meaning in a life that's been dedicated to vacuous wealth.

En route Packer exchanges fluids and philosophical tete-a-tetes with a succession of advisors and colleagues. These exchanges are frequently cold and abstract, yet for the viewer are utterly compelling, as the actors emit authentic human feeling even as the dialogue consists of heady riddles and abstractions.

Try, for one, to take your eyes off Pattinson. He may have cemented himself in the minds and libidos of many an adolescent girl with his portrayal of a certain sulky vampire; here he is an altogether different beast. Packer is like a rancid egg; hard and beautiful exterior churning beneath with unglimped horrors and instability. He grows more complex with each twistedly comic or absurdly earnest, illuminating or incomprehensible encounter.

Packer's Virgil on his journey is his chief of security Torval (Durand), who speaks to him with the authority of 'The Complex', presumably the financial monolith to which Packer is bound and with which he shares a symbiotic relationship. Soon they learn that an assassin has made a credible threat on Packer's life. This worries Torval, but Packer is apathetic; he gradually becomes less interested in self-discovery, and more in self-destruction.

To pick apart the 'Blue Poles' of Cronenberg's nightmare vision of post-GFC New York (based, in turn, upon the vision proffered by Don DeLillo in his 2003 novel of the same name) is a difficult but rewarding exercise.

Packer may stand for the stock market players who decimated the global economy. One associate muses about the convergence of finance and data, which may be gained and lost with equal ease. Packer in turn reflects on the Zbigniew Herbert poem 'Report from the Besieged City', in which 'a rat became the unit of currency', and makes a sickly joke of it. Money corrupts, and for Packer, in his plight, this is a matter for sadomasochistic glee.

He is also, pointedly, 'the one per cent', who stoically discusses economics and politics with his chief advisor (Morton) even as the anti-capitalist protest broils outside; Occupy reimagined as animal anarchy, with protestors yielding cans of spray-paint and dead rats; 'the 99 per cent' of the besieged city raging to reassert their worth.

But Packer is also the IT generation cruelly satirised, traversing the globe within the hermetically sealed bubble of his limousine, connected to the outside world via his myriad screens, and by the series of advisors who visit his sphere as if from another planet. He is the isolated centre of the universe created by his wealth and position, disconnected despite the prevalence of 'connections'.

Though altogether too oblique to be entirely successful, Cronenberg's film culminates in a rivetting encounter between Packer and his would-be assassin (Giamatti), a former employee suffering a raft of social disorders. Their exchange of ideas comes close to providing a Rosetta stone to solve the puzzles that have come before; certainly it forces both men to deeper self-reflection than either has been accustomed to.

It is enough to demand a second viewing, though it seems unlikely that many viewers will be eager to visit *Cosmopolis* more than once.

What's the point of the Olympics?

SPORT

Fatima Measham



Medal-counting continues to drive London 2012 coverage, leaving us lost once again in fevered expectation. As a proxy for political, economic and cultural rivalries, the Olympics is perhaps the only time when we can be effusively parochial without slipping into bogantry.

Yet only last weekend, the Games of the XXX Olympiad began with a different spirit. It is difficult to come up with a similar event that is as intensely imbued with internationalist symbol as the opening ceremony.

One need only reflect on the significance of the torch relay, the lighting of the cauldron and the parade of athletes. The latter can be quite moving for no more reason than that each of the 205 participating nations gets to have a place in the procession regardless of size, location, wealth and age.

It is also escapist spectacle, where the flags of Iran, Palestine and Syria flutter — seemingly without irony — on the same hillock as those of the United States, Israel and Turkey. Meanwhile, delegates from Spain and Greece wave at the crowd as if their fractured economies have not rendered the Eurozone unstable.

On the one hand, it is tempting to argue that such escapism is precisely what the world needs: a diversion from the inevitable tensions and crises that arise from occupying the same planet. After all, the truce that lies at the heart of the modern Olympics borrows largely from its ancient origin.

But the dissonance between the games and reality has become incredibly difficult to ignore in a world of simultaneity — where we find out that army tanks are heading toward Aleppo as we watch Mr Bean daydreaming about *Chariots of Fire*.

There are further disconnections. Even as the IOC president pointed out that every participating country had sent a woman to compete for the first time, some of these female athletes flew to Europe [in coach](#) while their male counterparts were booked into first class. Boxing and badminton officials considered making female competitors wear skirts before being forced to ditch the idea.

Gender equality is not always available in athletes' home countries. Saudi Arabia may have sent female competitors for the first time, but it was rated last month by experts as the [second-worst](#) country to be a woman (after India, whose female competitors form only a third of its total delegation).

The notion of sport as a great equaliser unravels further when we consider which nations have the most summer Olympic [gold medals](#) in history (excluding former Soviet Union countries and East Germany): Japan, Australia, Sweden,

Hungary, China, France, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, and the United States.

The list mirrors the dynamics of power in other parts of the international arena, where the likelihood of success is not only correlated to GDP (or more precisely, the level of state funding for sport); it also fosters triumphalism and a sense of entitlement among lead nations.

In other words, the Olympics has become a circle-jerk attended by the sports elite, avidly filmed by the media.

It is a state of things far removed from the philosophy of the founder of the modern Olympics. Pierre de Coubertin envisioned an athletic competition where amateurs from different nations could compete as equals, promoting intercultural understanding and peace.

'Wars break out because nations misunderstand each other,' he said. 'We shall not have peace until the prejudices which now separate the different races shall have been outlived. To attain this end, what better means than to bring the youth of all countries periodically together for amicable trials of muscular strength and agility?'

As a pedagogue, Coubertin knew the value of experience in transformative learning.

But will our athletes bring home more than medals and become ambassadors for peace? Will the goodwill fostered among representatives from over 200 hundred nations make way for concrete action to address global inequity? Will the funds generated from broadcasting rights ensure that poorer nations are able to develop national sports programs that benefit all and not just Olympians?

If the answer to these questions is 'no', then what is now the point of the Olympics?

The opposite of Australian swimming hubris

SPORT

John Honner

Travelling by road in Sydney from the city to the beachside suburb of Manly, after you have passed through Neutral Bay and Cremorne and Spit Junction, the road winds its way down to a sparkling Middle Harbour and the Spit Bridge.

If it was 1956, just after the Melbourne Olympics, and if you stopped at the bottom of the hill, where the trams disappear up Parriwi Road, and if you turned right and walked under the dark and putrescent Moreton Bay Figs, you would see ahead the flaking weatherboard sheds of the Spit Baths.

You would see children in their swimmers and sandals, with zinc cream on their noses and towels curled on their heads like Beau Geste, dawdling along.

At the entrance to the baths you put a penny into a turn-style and lean your skinny body against the cold steel gate to push your way in. And suddenly you are back in the dazzling light of the morning sun.

Your first thoughts are of food, because you can smell the fantales and cobbers, freckles, liquorices and other sweets (two a penny) set out in a latticework of wooden containers on the kiosk counter, beside the turn-styles.

You can run your hands through the sweets. Nobody is watching. The kiosk is unattended. And as you look at the sweets you notice something shining, golden, among them; and something shining silver.

There are at least four gold medals there, and at least one silver, and more. You can pick them up, feel their weight. Smell them. You could walk off with them if you wanted to. There are no signs, no fanfares. It's not a big deal. No security guard, no advertising, no stardom, no rip off.

These are the medals that our Spit Swimming Club members won at the Melbourne Olympics. It helps that two of our members are Murray Rose (pictured) and John Devitt, who are coached by the manager of the Baths, Sam Herford. But we are all coached by Sam Herford. He taught us to swim. Not that there are very many of us.

The Spit Baths consist of two swimming areas bounded by boardwalks built on piles sunk into Middle Harbour. During the summer king tides, the water rises above the level of the decking. At low tide, however, there is barely enough water to swim in.

You can see John Devitt doing time trials in just a few feet of water. There is no black line on a sterile tiled floor here, just sand and seaweed. Starts and turns are made off crudely raised and lowered wooden frames.

Half way down the pool a wooden set of steps intrudes into the only viable

swimming lane, and you hold your breath as John Devitt swims past, for he does a lap without breathing, and you wonder if he can see where he is and if he might break his hand against the steps and never swim again.

We swim laps, do jelly rolls and bombs and horse dives off the diving board, and lie in the sun on the boardwalk, smelling of salt. We buy freshly scooped ice-cream in a cone, dipped in hundreds and thousands, and walk our long slow way back up the hill to Seaforth with the ice-cream smelling of vanilla and melting down our hands.

I was ten. It was just another day.

Canary in a nursing home

POETRY

Louise McKenna

Canary in a nursing home

Suddenly, as if he had dropped
from the stave
of a tree,
this bright
mellifluous note
now balances on a scale
of perches. He is a blithe
untameable thing,
this thing he cannot name,
dancing
at the back of his mind
like narcissi
or flitting
like the arrhythmia
of his heart.
At times the music
holds him still
and a jonquil light
beams through two pinholes
in his brain
singing
of a caged soul.

The white room

The room she gives me
is at the top of a rickety stair
and an arthritic floorboard away

from her own.
I must not sleep with her son,
not under this roof.
My fiance has his childhood room
while I am entombed
inside these white walls
where a former girlfriend
asphyxiated in her sleep
on her own vomit.
Is this my penance
for marrying her son?
I must not show her my tears.
I must arrange my face,
smile as I say my goodnights
even as I need the haemal warmth
of his skin, the thrum of his heart
in my ear.
When the door closes
it seals me off as completely
as an air-lock in a prison wing.
Sleep is a gentle mistake
that I make without knowing.
I dream of my mother
resting on the foot of my bed
before I am wrenched from sleep.
In a heartbeat the light
reveals the print
of someone
on my quilt
and a flicker in the curtain

like a heart's missed beats:
the moth frantic, netted
between two worlds.

Reality

Imagine day
and night
the sky inverted,
its dome pushed out
and the Southern Cross
frosting the earth.
Our heaven would be
green as this sea,
our moon
the dangling filament
of an angler fish,
our sun
a lost cargo
of bullion.
And treading
on angels,
the stars in our hair,
we would still
pump shit
into our air.

Hope for haemorrhaging Zimbabwe

POLITICS

Chris Chatteris

'Loss of nationhood, the disintegration of our society ... the forming of degenerate militias': these were some of the stark warnings which the Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe voiced in 2011 and which they repeat in their [recent pastoral letter](#) addressed to 'Zimbabweans in the diaspora'.



In this measured but powerful document, which is obviously also meant to be read by the government, the bishops speak about the 'decimation' of the Zimbabwean population through the haemorrhaging, not only of the professional classes, but also of less educated Zimbabweans who have fled and continue to flee the country in large numbers. This latter group they call the 'southern diaspora' (read 'South African').

'Decimation' is about right — at least one in ten has been lost. In South Africa that would mean 5 million people.

The concern underlying this prophetic assessment is that Zimbabwe's plight could get worse; it could become a failed state degenerating ever further into violent anarchy like Somalia or eastern Congo.

But the bishops' pastoral concern is to speak a word of encouragement and acknowledgement to the diaspora. 'We understand your plight. We know why you left. You are not to blame,' they tell Zimbabweans abroad. This will be a welcome message for a group which has suffered separation from hearth and homeland, plus bureaucratic indifference, harassment, exploitation and violent xenophobia, most notably in South Africa.

The letter documents one particularly appalling incident in which a group, having braved the Limpopo, were attacked by the *gumaguma*, the thugs that prey on them in South Africa. Five women were raped and two infants were torn off their mother's backs and thrown into the river to drown.

The commentary on this incident is a powerful indictment of the indifference of Zimbabwean politicians of all stripes. 'No national leaders came to console these mothers who were raped. There were no state funerals for their children. These human beings were not seen as national heroes; they are part of a nameless mass.'

The Bishops also ask whether any politicians have visited those members of the diaspora who huddle wretchedly in the border areas. They note that at election time diplomats and military abroad are able to cast their votes, but the diaspora is disenfranchised. 'The vast majority of those who leave are seen as politically insignificant and expendable. Their only 'merit' is the remittances sent home to

prop up a severely depressed economy!’

What motivates this letter and why now? Repentance for past neglect comes through. The bishops confess: ‘As Church leaders and as members of society, we acknowledge, with a sense of humility and shame, that so many of our citizens no longer felt welcomed at home, and had to take flight.’

They look to the future too, with anxiety and some hope. Clearly Zimbabwe cannot be rebuilt without the future aid of the diaspora. The bishops’ appeal is realistic and uncensorious. ‘While we wish you grace and blessing in your new land, we hope that one day you will consider coming home.’

There is also what is probably a final appeal to Robert Mugabe and his party to look to their legacy and the judgement of history as his era closes with his ebbing life. ‘When the history of Zimbabwe is being written in a future, reconciled society, how will its authors look back and view the phenomenon of a displaced people?’

The bishops warn that the shameful phenomenon of the diaspora could become a central theme of that historical memory: it ‘cannot be treated as a footnote to recent historical experience. It is an effect of the core failure within Zimbabwe to move beyond a narrow ideological mindset to a more inclusive view of life.’

With elections on the horizon, the bishops makes one more call for an inclusive political dispensation that ceases to apportion power exclusively to the hierarchy and stops excommunicating and exiling its political opponents.

But what pervades the text above all is a simple concern to assert that these people, who have been so brutally and contemptuously made to disappear from sight and mind, do still count.

‘We wish to affirm that those in the diaspora are Godly human beings, made in his image and likeness. They are not a number or a statistic on some foreign shore. They are not a stateless people. They belong to the state of Zimbabwe. They are our concern. We embrace them as one of us. They must not be forgotten.’

For the international community, including Australia, which has received members of the Zimbabwean diaspora and recently hosted key Mugabe opponent Morgan Tsvangirai (pictured) in Canberra, it is devilishly difficult to find the most helpful stance to take with regard to the present regime. It is naive, however, to simply assume that things will come right once Mugabe has died.

The fact is that things could get worse once he is off the scene. The members of the junta behind Mugabe could turn out to be worse than him. These are ruthless characters some of whom would be good candidates for arraignment at The Hague and so have everything to lose by losing power.

What keeps them in funds and in power are the diamond fields at Marange in the Manicaland district. The international community has, unwisely, gradually been

giving these fields access to the international market on the grounds that conditions on the fields have improved now that international companies have moved in.

I'm sure many Zimbabweans in the diaspora would still say, with a Zimbabwean I know in Johannesburg, that the diamonds of Marange are 'dirty diamonds'. They enable Mugabe and his henchmen to do their dirty work.

At the very least the international community should be saying licences to sell on the global diamond market could be rescinded in the event of a coup after Mugabe's death. The same threat should be made in the case of another round of violence at the upcoming constitutional referendum and the presidential elections in 2013.

On media and massacres

MEDIA

Lyn Bender



A frenzied media and a disturbed angry lone assassin in search of massive attention have coalesced in a [Colorado cinema](#) like a perfect storm.

This is not the first, nor will it be the last time unfortunately. The [ghastly details](#) of the tragic slayings in Colorado are now common knowledge. Yet many experts [agree](#) that dramatic, hysterical publicising of the perpetrator and his crime can feed the so called copycat compulsion.

So how do we reconcile the legitimate need to know, respond and inform with the potential for inciting further violence from other vulnerable, disturbed individuals 'out there'? Furthermore, with so much information instantly available on the internet, is any kind of containment and control possible?

Significantly the Aurora tragedy occurred almost upon the anniversary of the [Breivik killings](#) in Norway. Jonus Gahr Store, the Norwegian Minister of foreign affairs has written in *The New York Times* of remaining [open and democratic](#) about this event. Legal proceedings were in an open court.

Some have criticised this as possibly inciting more violence. But the approach was unique and seems to have been calming. There was genuine bipartisanship — the issue did not become a major political flag waving opportunity — and the Norwegian people have responded with reflection, honesty and open grief.

There has not been an emphasis on revenge. Instead the goal has been to reduce the likelihood of reprisals, by open grieving and unsensational reporting.

In sharp contrast the media and politicians have maintained a [reactive rather than reflective](#) response to the Aurora mass shooting. There has been a shrill focus on gun laws. The [consensus](#) has been, 'You can't have a genuine debate on gun reform in an election year'.

Media and lone protagonists who commit very public mass murder have traits in common. They seek to dramatise, enthrall, send a message, tell a story and to rise above the pack. Selling the news can cross the line that separates reporting and informing from the intent to seduce and shock.

The media's business model is not conducive to the [straight factual, low-key reporting](#) recommended by forensic Psychiatrist Park Dietz. Dietz recommends that reporting should remain localised to the community in which the event occurred, and that other news outlets should make its reporting as boring (yes, boring) as possible.

But the news media, like people such as the Aurora shooter James Holmes, are out to gain mass attention.

Dietz recommends that the horror of the event does not become part of a 24/7 news cycle, that body counts are not featured and that the perpetrator is not pictured and described as some kind of anti hero (i.e. evil genius).

So how can the media attain its goal of mass interest without itself engendering the next horrific news story?

Even so called 'factual' straight reporting can mislead if used to embellish a histrionic narrative

When Arlene Holmes was phoned by journalist Mathew Mosk regarding the shootings in Aurora, she was said to be 'unsurprised', saying 'you've got the right person'. America's ABC News came out with [guns blazing](#) , running the headline: 'Aurora Suspect James Holmes Mother: "You have the Right Person".'

Holmes [claims](#) she was quoted out of context: 'I was awakened by a call from a reporter about 5:45 in the morning. I did not know anything about a shooting in Aurora at that time. He asked if I was Arlene Holmes and if my son was James Holmes who lives in Aurora, Colorado. I answered yes, you have the right person.'

One answer to the horror of Aurora may lie in a spirit of non opportunistic, deep engagement with the grief and tragedy by the public media and political leaders. Perhaps then it will be possible to comfort the bereaved including the family of the perpetrator.

This could lead us to have honest open discussion that includes how to best prevent further occurrences of tragedies such as the Aurora massacre.

Olympic torch should shine on athletes not nations

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Guor Marial is a South Sudanese refugee who has [won](#) a battle to compete in the Olympic marathon as an independent athlete.

He cannot represent the United States — where he lives — because he is not a citizen. He says competing for Sudan would amount to betraying fellow South Sudanese who died for their freedom. He is unable to compete for South Sudan because it has not yet set up an Olympic committee.



He had to fight for the right to compete as an independent, yet attention to the individual's natural ability and performance — rather than nationality — is consistent with the spirit of both the ancient and modern Olympics.

Nationalism is the scourge of the modern Olympics. We've become more interested in the performances of nations than those of great athletes. Our eyes are on the medal tally because it proves we are better than Great Britain or some other nation. We slide too easily from speaking of 'how our athletes are doing' to 'how we are doing'.

The Australian Government is complicit. The feeling of national shame following our inability to win a single gold medal at the 1976 Montreal Games prompted the Government to establish the Australian Institute of Sport and put large amounts of public money into training athletes. It worked. We can once again count ourselves among the greatest sporting nations on earth, even if in truth we are one of the greatest per capita sports funding nations on earth.

Nationalism in the Olympics is just as strong among nations competing to host the event. Many of us recall with pride the words of IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch — 'The winner is Sydney' — when Australia won the rights to host the 2000 Games. And his declaration after the event that it had been 'the best Games ever'.

The most chilling and frequently quoted example of the manipulation of the Olympic Games for the purpose of promoting one nation's pretence to greatness was the 1936 'Nazi' Olympics in Berlin.

What are we to make of the many nations that lack the wealth to host the Olympics? Are they not great?

There are ways of curing the Olympics of nationalism. These might include discontinuing the playing of national anthems when medals are awarded, and discouraging the publication of medal tallies.

More radical would be the establishment of a fixed host city for the Olympic

Games, such as Olympia in Greece. It would likely introduce more problems than it solves, but we might even conceive of Olympia as a city state like the Vatican, and the Olympic Movement as a body capable of standing up to nationalism. Guor Marial and other stateless athletes would be treated as equals.