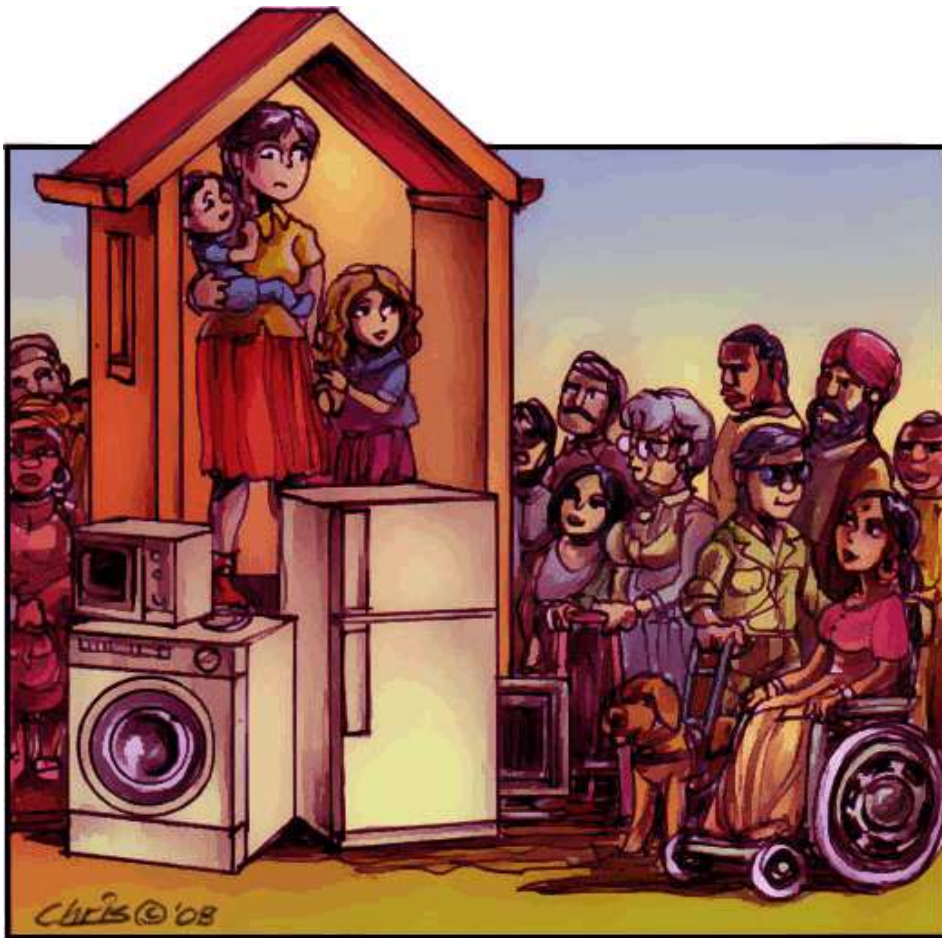


Comradely with Ginsberg <i>Philip Harvey</i>	1
Vatican over-indulgence with incentive pay <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	4
TPV holders stuck in Howard time warp <i>Kerry Murphy</i>	6
The dead walk among the living <i>Barry Gittins</i>	8
What it's like to be hit by a bullet <i>Brian Doyle</i>	10
Judging the quality of education <i>Fatima Measham</i>	12
A linguist's vision for multicultural Australia <i>Michael Clyne</i>	14
Two computer poems <i>Various</i>	16
Economic troubles will not ease climate pain <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	19
God hates fags and bankers <i>Michael Mullins</i>	22
The small world of lobbyists and the Rudd Government <i>John Warhurst</i>	24
More than Sex and Bloody Soccer <i>Paul Collins</i>	26
Australia's dubious common ground with India <i>Kimberley Layton</i>	28
The fear detective <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	30
Standing up for students' rites <i>Brian McCoy</i>	32
Obama's Dream at the Lincoln Memorial <i>Frank Brennan</i>	34
Familiar fiddler man <i>Max Richards</i>	37
The banker who'd played the gentleman's game <i>John Honner</i>	41
New Zealand's dim new world <i>Cecily McNeill</i>	43
Priceless overseas health professionals <i>Michael Mullins</i>	45



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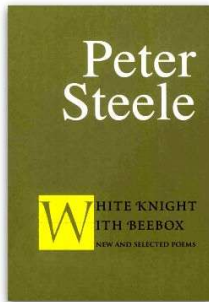
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Comradely with Ginsberg

BOOK FORUM

Philip Harvey



Steele, Peter, *White Knight with Beebox : New and Selected Poems*. John Leonard Press, 2008. RRP \$24.95. ISBN 978 0 9805269 0 5

It is always good to come back into the steady orbit of a Steele poem, what with so much dark energy and dodgy Plutos moving about. This selection shows what a consistent object the Steele poem is, and just as we view the universe backward in time from today, so the book starts with the most recent illuminations then works back to beginnings.

The Steele poem is like this. It generally never goes beyond a page, or needs to. Concentration of information sometimes obstructs, sometimes enables clarity, but even with the simplest poem we know we are on an endeavour. The main form is a series of artful, usually long, sentences that combined make a fortified argument of considerable persuasiveness. Prose though is about the last thing we have before us. It is Auden's 'vulnerable discourse' in portable form.

Although not a beat poem, it is comradely with Ginsberg's aesthetic of the poem as measure of breath. Breath in the Steele poem is commanding like an original lecture, enspiriting like a true sermon, propulsive like a perfect dinner conversation. No matter what the extent of the references or the shape of the wit in a Steele poem, we can always be assured of cogency. The effort is worth the time. It provides a classical education and reminds the reader of how accessible and enjoyable such an education can be. It expresses the challenge of an idea, but once think it is all intellect, you will be taken by surprise with emotional subtleties.

If a poem can be called transatlantic Melburnian, then this is it. It is a gift, the construction of an intricate argument with fewest words. It is like John Donne: the apposite yet unexpected use of image and phrase, always at the service of the argument. It has Donne's showiness, his complexity, as well as his reality checks.

Perhaps two examples of different types will explain things in another way.

The 'picture' poems of recent times, mostly responses to canvases, suit the poet's natural mode. In 'Canaletto' he analyses one of the artist's great Venetian vistas, opening,

A Venice of water and fire, of earth and air -
that, you'll agree, is the world he makes,

the four concerted as though to a private music.

The reader is invited to view the scene as would the observer in the foreground: 'all coheres' and 'happens to be as it must.' The view is recreated in words, while the poet's themes enter, mortality, change, emotional identification with the city and the world. The opening lines, with their poetic desire to universalise, are subverted by concern with the particular, the local, and personal concerns. 'We love to have it so in Venice,' he says, but the last verse further alters the perspective. The exuberance to make a poem of something, anything, ends in the Monteverdi-like voluntary 'I rejoice / to applaud this portraying of the Bacino'. Rejoice to applaud? How far can this go? Then, having made the words of praise, the poet withdraws, seeing in

the grey-coated gentleman hard by a column - myself
to the life as I see, in impeccable costume,
though I was never there.

And nor were we. Instead of the reader being the observer, the poet usurps that role. Instead of all of us being present at the scene, we abruptly recall that we are inside our own viewing of Canaletto (and Steele). Universalising tendencies must come down to this level of humility.

Peter Steele understands better than most that religiousness is a part of being human. 'A Mass for Anglesea' is his latest poem cycle, reminiscent in structure to Auden's *Horae Canonicae*. Like his hero, Steele takes an arranged ecclesiastical form, in this case the actions of the Mass, as the basis for personal and personalised meditation.

Father of each, as of all, remember those
Who are folded between our hills, in a little town
Still, so far (we are grateful) than Bethlehem.
(Kyrie Eleison)

Those to be remembered include 'keepers and pilers of cans in the supermarket', 'the moulder of surfboards', and 'the tigger at lolloping dogs'. We are definitely situated on the Victorian Surf Coast. Yet, in his retreat these are the parish, so he asks 'school us afresh, afresh, in the ways of mercy, / Who remember a little, and confess that we forget.' Prayer is a way of recollecting and where prayer meets poem, the recollections start close to home and close to the bone. By turns, comic, facetious, ruminative, annoyed, amused, reflective, peaceful, the cycle is an historical parade happening in the present moment, a literary extravaganza extolling honest modesty, a theological outing about quiet sharing. He is on retreat.

So now, scentbark fringing wattle,

I'm back at school for love of the quick and the dead,
touching their dish, and fingering their cup.

(Credo)

Peter Steele has been fortunate in having about the best poetry editor in Australia to arrange this book. John Leonard has chosen with a cheerful scrupulosity. A criteria for the 'picture' poems was that they require as little need for reference as possible to the surveyed work. Leonard allows us to appreciate the strengthening of the Steele mode through forty-plus years, especially its gradual relaxation of delivery and increased confidence with inclusivity. In retrospect we find that, in an age when free verse goes in all directions at once, where there are no endings, only closures, Peter Steele maintains firm metrics and a determined purpose that reproduce a unique voice. 'Even an autistic or a lone wolf / makes his debut with with a budget of tips to go by.' ('Help') But Steele has a full hand. He is prudently gregarious, meaning he has any number of characters at his intellectual feast, and we are also made to feel welcome.

Vatican over-indulgence with incentive pay

THEOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton

It was reported recently that the Vatican has brought its work practices up to date. Employees must now clock in, and will be offered incentive payments based on performance.

The news conjured a comic vision of cardinals in full regalia sweeping punctiliously to the time clock, and of a torrent of Papal Bulls, Encyclicals and Motibus Propriis flooding down the printing press. Pope John XXIII's reply to a visitor who asked how many people worked in the Vatican was again much quoted. 'About half', he said.



Schadenfreude, natural in response to big bureaucracies, but good humoured as you might expect. All of us would like to see bureaucracies, other than the tax office, work more efficiently. But the introduction of incentive payments raises questions, particularly at a time when we see that these devices, when used by the masters of the universe, have set fire to their creation.

At the top end of town, incentive payments have been monstrous and their consequences disastrous. They have encouraged executives to increase short-term profit by reducing expenditure on activities central to the firm's health and by taking on heavy debt. When the companies collapsed, the executives shamelessly kept the loot. Incentive payments have been an instrument of greed.

It would be wrong to argue that incentive payments inevitably lead to this spectacularly destructive form of greed. But they generally encourage greed by embodying a venal view of the relations involved in work. Incentive payments, for example, assume that our willingness to work hard will vary in direct proportion to the remuneration we receive. The more money we get, the harder we will work; the more money we offer, the better the workers we shall find. The honey of money alone attracts worker ants to leave their holes.

When financial reward is so exalted, the other significant rewards of work are downplayed. Yet these are as central to motivation of workers and to the health of the enterprise as is its level of profit. If we have pride in the organisation in which we work because it is honest and helpful in its relations with its suppliers and clients, because relations between workers are companionable, or because the services that it provides are helpful to society, we may find ourselves more strongly motivated by these blessings than by any promise of more payment. We may also be drawn to work hard because our workplace encourages us to use our mind and skills to solve problems and allows us to work elegantly and effectively. Fun, companionship and learning are effective bonuses.

Incentive payments do have the double-edged merit of allowing managers of companies to declare what matters to them. The targets they set usually suggest that things that can easily be counted and given dollar values are the things that matter. This focus conceals from view the less tangible relations that make enterprises healthy. If managers are offered incentives to cut costs, for example, they will naturally regard their employees and the conditions that build good working relationships solely as costs. People do not matter.

In such an environment workers soon notice the lack of respect with which they are treated. In turn they will treat the enterprise with the disrespect which it merits. The minimal mutual trust and esteem needed for the enterprise to function effectively will be eroded.

Such eulogies of the intangible blessings of work may be sceptically received if they are preached in churches. Churches have a name for regarding the intrinsic value of work as a substitute for fair remuneration. When you are paid badly, even incentive payment looks good.

If the way in which churches pay their employees reflects their view of work they must offer them fair pay and conditions. But churches also believe that work within them is more than an activity undertaken for reward. It is a calling. People work for the church because they believe in what it does. They believe that their work ultimately benefits human beings and makes the world a more humane place. They also see their employees as more than individuals. They are companions in the work of a community.

If churches hold this ideal of work, then it should be reflected in the ways in which they remunerate their employees. There is a place for rewarding particularly demanding and effective work, but bonuses of this kind should generally be shared within the workplace.

It is difficult to reconcile this ideal of work with a system of incentive payments. These devalue central aspects of work and represent it purely as a financial transaction. They banish from the workplace the blessings that come from God and leave workers to the self-defeating disciplines of Caesar.

TPV holders stuck in Howard time warp

COMMUNITY

Kerry Murphy



'Ali' and 'Hussein' are both Iraqi refugees in Australia. Ali arrived 3 months ago and applied for a protection visa which was granted last week. He was very relieved as now he has permanent residence in Australia and is now preparing to sponsor his wife and two children who are in Jordan. Hussein arrived two years ago and was granted a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV).

Hussein made an application for a further protection visa in March but he is still waiting for a decision. He depends totally on the money he earns driving taxis. Hussein is very worried for his wife and young children. He had to flee after receiving death threats from one of the militias and had no time to make plans for his family. He could only promise to send money and to sponsor them as soon as he could. The TPV holds him back.

The TPV was introduced in October 1999 by the Howard government. It affected mainly asylum seekers who arrived in Australia without a visa and were later granted refugee protection. Though TPV holders could work and live in Australia, they could not sponsor their spouse or dependent children to join them in Australia. Neither could they travel overseas to meet with family in a safe third country and then return to Australia. They had to wait until their further protection visa was decided. This could not be granted until 30 months had passed from the grant of their TPV.

When the Rudd government abolished the TPV on 9 August, refugees and their supporters were delighted. But Hussein and many others continue to suffer from the visa. By law, TPV holders whose application for a further protection visa was undecided by 9 August 2008 were automatically to be considered for the Resolution of Status Visa. They did not need to show again that they were refugees but only needed to pass the character requirements. Protection visa applications should be decided within 90 days by law — unless the applicant holds one of the old TPVs.

A number of people like Hussein still live in the TPV limbo. Even though they made applications for the permanent protection visa some time ago they still have a TPV. Many are still separated from their immediate family, some for more than three years. But a refugee like Hussein who holds a TPV has to wait longer to get the permanent protection they need to sponsor their family than do a new arrivals like Ali. They can make an application under the new faster system.

The security checks are being done very quickly For the cases that fall within the 90-day rule, security checks are done quickly. Most refugees receive their visas, mostly within the 90

days. That is a great blessing. But because the 90-day rule does not apply to the old TPV caseload, which includes Hussein, the Immigration Department and ASIO officers are under no pressure to finish them quickly. So Hussein and others wait long for these checks to be completed. Some cases are taking more than six or nine months. As a result refugees continue to be separated from their families who live in dangerous situations.

This is just one example of the harm caused by the TPV. Not only TPV holders suffer, but also their families who could have been sponsored if refugees were given permanent protection visas.

Although many were happy to see the end of the TPV, the changes were not complete. So Hussein and many like him are stuck in the old system. It is to be hoped that the government will complete the reform of the system that is needed to resolve such cases quickly. This can be done, as we see in the cases of new protection visa applicants such as Ali.

The dead walk among the living

FILM FORUM

Barry Gittins

***Fugitive Pieces*: 106 minutes. Rated: MA 15+. Director: Jeremy Podeswa. Starring: Robbie Kaye/Stephen Dillane, Rade Sherbedgia, Rosamund Pike, [website](#)**



There are no soothing words to truly quieten deep pain, but *Fugitive Pieces* shows redemption is a possibility, even in the face of undying memories.

We first meet Jakob Beer (Robbie Kaye) when the young Polish Jew bears mute witness to the murder of his parents and the abduction of his beloved big sister, Bella (Nina Dobrev), by Hitler's minions.

A veritable babe in the woods, Jakob is rescued by a Greek archaeologist, Athos (Rade Sherbedgia), who secretes the child in a sprawling mountain villa on his Ionian island home.

Living in fear until the liberation of Greece, Athos and Jakob duly immigrate to Toronto, Canada, to continue lives spent balancing grief's deficit with the coinage of hope. There, bereaved yet again by Athos' death, the grown man Jakob (Stephen Millane) falls in and out of love with the lion-hearted Alex (Rosamund Pike) and her 'shameless vitality'. His relationship, sadly, is poisoned by the same well that nurtures his blossoming as a writer and witness to the Holocaust.

Fugitive Pieces is a well-rendered description of Jakob's struggle to press the shards of his life back into one less than seamless whole. Athos' wisest of wise old Greek sayings, 'light a candle before night overtakes you', is embodied in Jakob's life work.

'When a man dies,' Jakob muses, 'his secrets bond like crystals'; the scar tissue of recollection makes him bleed at every attempt to move on. His state of 'living death', as he perceives it, comes from his deeply wounded 'love... | that closes its mouth before calling a name'.

Jakob declares 'memory undoes you' and haunted by Bella and loss, he longs for 'the loss of memory'. The unlikelihood of such a loss means Jakob may be forever entombed with the recollection of his family's erasure.

However, through the arrival of critical and financial success as an author, and new love with a Russian Jewish émigré, Jakob faces the prospect of emancipation from his emotionally and spiritually mute state.

Director/screenwriter Podeswa carries out a constant 'to and fro' shuffling of narrative and

geography, to great effect. The characterisation of several crucial supporting roles is pencilled in, as if the audience will infer Holocaust survivors' woes from shorthand strokes, something that later generations may not necessarily do. Cinematically, however, this works: less is more.

Adapted from poet Anne Michael's novel, this haunting, hopeful revelation reminds us that the dead walk among the living at our behest.

What it's like to be hit by a bullet

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle



Just for a moment this morning, between sips of coffee, before the dog wheedles a walk, let's poke through all the headlines about wars and shootouts and such, and tell you what it's like to be hit by a bullet.

We talk all the time about wars and conflicts and surges and police actions and international incursions and shootings and gunfire, but those are all just words for bullets hitting people, so this morning let's hear from a guy who got hit by a bullet.

My friend Donald is now a dignified silver-haired retired museum curator and former assistant principal who broke up race riots and had other interesting adventures like that during his career. In 1944 he was a skinny teenager fighting the Japanese all through the Pacific, mostly in New Guinea and the Philippines. He helped blow up Fort Drum in Manila Bay and was on Bataan, among other very difficult places to be.

Donald has many stories of hard and dark days and nights skippering his little two-man Army Boat Battalion landing craft — finding dead Japanese boy soldiers floating in the water, having a sniper shoot a huge coffee can under his arm ('boy, were we mad losing that coffee'), heading off on a raid and discovering the battalion drunk had drained the alcohol from every compass. But he told me a story the other day that says something simple and awful and powerful, and it was so blunt and direct about bullets that I think you should hear it too.

I was hit once by a bullet, he says, and when you get hit by a bullet you never ever forget what it feels like. It feels like you got hit with the biggest rock there ever was. We were going along in the boat and we went around a beach where there was a battle, and a slug hit me in the armpit and knocked me right over. The bullet was almost spent, it had travelled pretty far, but still it went into me a couple inches and it knocked me over like I was punched by Joe Louis. My buddy in the boat pulled the bullet out and poured sulfa in and the sulfa hurt worse than the bullet. Guys said later I should have put in for a Purple Heart but that'd be wrong. Listen, you hear a lot of talk about so-and-so getting shot but I am here to tell you that getting shot even with a bullet that's mostly spent, it hurts like hell. I was terrified. I'll never forget the feeling. We use all these words for bullets hitting people but we don't know what the hell we are saying. We are saying that whoever got hit feels like he got hit with the biggest rock there ever was, and that he was terrified. Anyway we just kept going that day, after my buddy pulled the bullet out. Most of what wars are is you just keep going. No, I didn't keep it. That kind of souvenir is for idiots and movies. I never got hit again, although the Japanese sure kept shooting at me. But I sure remember what it was like to get hit with a bullet. Sometimes I

wish anyone who says anything whatsoever positive about war has to pay for his remark by getting hit with a bullet that's almost spent. He wouldn't get hurt real bad but he'd be sore for a week and he sure would be careful with words about wars ever after, you know what I'm saying?

Judging the quality of education

COMMUNITY

Fatima Measham

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's education revolution continues to provoke critique, most recently from Professor Peter Mortimore, a former director of the London-based Institute of Education. Speaking at an Australian Education Union-sponsored event in Brisbane in October, he points out quite rightly that in education, there is often a distinction between achievement scores and real learning.



For example, students may very well get high marks in a test on World War I history, but if this achievement was due to an emphasis on studying exam questions and criteria rather than the content itself, then the exam cannot be a reliable measure of knowledge.

By the same token, compelling states and schools to produce information on performance will never be a reliable strategy for lifting numeracy and literacy, if this were indeed its purpose. It is simply the wrong philosophical framework for action, especially when learning is as much about taking risks and failing as it is about getting the answers right the first time. Granted that a results-oriented system can motivate teachers and students to excel, it only goes so far before it kills the spirit of the enterprise. All too easily, what you know becomes the standard rather than how you came by what you know.

It is important to make the distinction. Over the years, there have been many changes in the content that is taught in the classrooms. Far too often, teachers are told what to teach rather than how best to teach. It was not that long ago that former Education Minister Brendan Nelson insisted on highlighting Simpson and his donkey in the teaching of Australian history.

Rudd's education policy is no better in terms of encouraging educators to facilitate learning rather than regurgitation. It is especially demoralising because it ties performance to funding and employment. This move implies that teachers have complete and sole control over their students' performance. They do not. There are other variables, apart from the teacher, that impact on learning, such as the quality of the home environment, availability of resources, and students' own commitment to their schooling.

On the other hand, it is difficult to disagree that teachers must be held accountable. The education of our children is far too important for us to simply assume that every single teacher is trying their best and making a point of developing their craft. But Rudd's policy suggests that teachers and schools are currently not being held accountable to parents. This is not the case.

There are various mechanisms in all states for making schools transparent. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, for example, publishes an annual document that tables the VCE, VCAL and VET unit enrolments, certificate completion rates and study score data of all schools. There is also a well-entrenched structure for feedback to parents in the form of semester reports and end-of-term interviews. Parents who are already interested in their children's schooling know when teachers are doing their jobs well and they complain to principals when they believe otherwise.

In other words, it is not as if achievement in and by schools is a secret that can only be wrenched out by threatening cuts to funding. Even if it were the case that current performance indicators need to be refined, adverse reports ought to signal a need for greater support, not punishment. As long as the reverse holds true, it should not be a surprise when individuals and organisations fudge the figures in their favour. There have been cases in the health industry that illustrate this.

For example, a 2003 inquiry in England concluded that waiting list data at South Manchester University Hospitals was being manipulated to reflect closer adherence to government targets. A similar investigation was conducted that same year in New South Wales after allegations of misreporting of waiting lists at St George, Bankstown, St Vincent's, Prince of Wales, Sydney and the Sydney Eye Hospital.

It is of course reasonable, when apportioning public monies, to ask whether targets have been met, but we must also ask how they have been met. This inattention to process has been a feature in government number crunching for many years. It has led to an emphasis on the end figures without necessarily providing the procedural and environmental conditions that would make a positive outcome possible. The occasion for injustice thus becomes ripe when the burden of not meeting targets is placed on schools that have not been equipped to meet them in the first place.

A linguist's vision for multicultural Australia

COMMUNITY

Michael Clyne



Under the Howard government, a discourse of overt exclusion and division was rampant, manifested for instance in the demonisation of asylum seekers, attacks on multiculturalism, on Muslims and African refugees and the exclusionary debate on 'Australian values'.

The Rudd government has followed this by a discourse of covert exclusion through invisibility. The Prime Minister is not on public record using the term 'multicultural(ism)' or any synonym such as 'cultural diversity' when referring to Australian society. There is no minister for multicultural affairs, only a parliamentary secretary. The government gives priority to certain Asian languages in schools, describing them as 'foreign languages'. It disregards the substantial communities of Australian speakers of these languages, especially Mandarin. There was no section at the 2020 Summit dealing with Australia's cultural diversity and how it can be harnessed as a national asset.

Rudd does have a social inclusion policy, but so far it has not included a cultural component. It does not seem to have developed beyond socioeconomic inclusion. Not only refugees and migrants, but also the aged, disabled, deaf or blind, for instance, all of whom are likely to be socially excluded in some ways, appear to be covered on the agenda only if they are poor, unemployed or homeless.

Social inclusion ought to empower all sections of Australian society to fulfil their potential and to make their contribution to the nation from their background and experience. Social inclusion should entail enabling each person to be fully accepted. That means making the label 'Australian' broad enough to acknowledge diversity within 'Australian identity'. It carries an obligation for each section of the Australian population to represent others positively and fairly.

It is particularly important to consider those who are doubly excluded or marginalised, such as linguistic or religious minorities within a given ethnic group, and aged, deaf, blind or disabled migrants.

There are two other reasons why cultural inclusion must be part of the social inclusion policy.

The first is that multiculturalism has been marginalised by federal governments for several years despite being a demographic reality.

Also, past Australian policies of multiculturalism have been social inclusion policies. They have given all Australians the right to express their own culture and beliefs, equality of

treatment and opportunity, and the right to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia.

The term 'multiculturalism' has been ambiguous. Perhaps that is why it is sometimes misunderstood. Some misinterpretations reflect a monocultural mindset. The policy has sometimes been misinterpreted to mean giving 'minorities' special resources which should be shared equally across the community.

There are three meanings of multicultural(ism) which have to be recognised: the demographic reality of Australia; the nation as a cohesive entity, and a particular social policy.

In my opinion, it would be an impoverishment not to be able to use the words 'multiculturalism' and the adjective 'multicultural' for the first two meanings. There is no appropriate synonym.

The policy, however, could equally well be renamed 'cultural inclusion'. It is important to see multicultural policy within the Australian context and not to confuse it with discussions appropriate to other countries.

Australian multiculturalism has succeeded largely because integration has been a two-way process. But even that statement suggests simplistically that there have been a single majority and a single minority group. In reality there have been many interacting cultures.

Australia has done well to develop flexible multilingual frameworks such as SBS radio and TV, Year 12 exams in a multiplicity of languages, government schools of languages, and telephone interpreting.

As long as we see social exclusion mainly as socioeconomic exclusion, we focus on what is lacking. But it is both an act of social justice and good economic policy to recognise the potential contribution made by each individual. If we make cultural inclusion a dimension of social inclusion, it should foster the contribution that a bicultural or bilingual person can contribute to the nation, to creativity and to dynamism in workplaces.

The training of the mind afforded by bilingualism, for example, encourages more flexible means of problem solving. Such qualities go unnoticed in a society with a pervasive monolingual mindset. The value of multilingual resources and of grassroots experience in inter-cultural communication are also neglected, even though these things could give us a special role in our region.

Unless social inclusion policy can move beyond the socioeconomic dimension, it may further the social exclusion of significant sections of Australian society.

Two computer poems

POETRY

Various

The Web

It would have to be the world-wide web,
wouldn't it?

I mean since - say nuclear fission
or the genome thing.

But you wouldn't call it hubris, would you?
We're not deconstructing The Mystery here -
it's just information out there
and ego.

Still, we haven't ever known, have we -
if it's a Faustian deal we've got happening?

In the reconciliation of nuclear medicine
and nuclear arsenals
who pays?

Maybe, after all, it's just
more baggage, preventing our
passage on the narrow way.

But The Web seems so helpful -
and it's about how we use it, isn't it?

I mean something like the cyber-torch of Shi Tao
or literacy in the jungle -
there's no question, is there?

But then,
what of equity of access?

What of the dark under-side?

And, you know, what if

we're the fly?

— *Michelle O'Connor*

Access Denied

I don't know what our computer
is humming about.

Since he's gone, it seems to have its own agenda.

Strange, it does not blink as much,

And it no longer warms to my touch.

It would be silly, of course, to ask it whether

It's too soon to remove a dead person

From my email list

Or if his many folders preserve

His secret tryst.

I have tried, night after night, to unzip

His memories. Only the computer is his

Confidant. Stubborn, it lets no one

Know all snippets of his life. Not me,

Not even me, his wife.

My faith is strong, yet I want to prove

There's nothing in those folders

That I disapprove: no stranger's pictures,

No surprising bills.

I want to know: No one else bit his shoulders.

No one but I sucked his toes. Who knows

He was not someone else's hero?

Who knows what ones and zeroes
Can add up to?
This humming echoes my mourning.
Maybe the computer is mourning too.
But it is closer to him now,
While my access is denied.
— *Tammy Ho*

Economic troubles will not ease climate pain

ENVIRONMENT

Andrew Hamilton



In Australia economic troubles have made climate change a low priority. In the Maldives it has become a top priority. The low-lying nation will dedicate much of its tourism revenue to buy land elsewhere to resettle its people. Hard financial times will not make the ethical challenge of climate change go away

In a [previous article](#) I sketched a moral framework for thinking about climate change. I emphasised our solidarity with human beings of the present and the future and with the world. I also gave weight to responsibility. We must often act and lead when we have no certainty about the situation or the outcome of our action.

Our response must be based on the modelling that we see to be most probable. Although based on data that is certain, modelling cannot be more than probable. For that reason different responses to climate change can be offered in good faith, each appealing to its own assessment of the evidence.

Interpretations of the evidence, however, are not of equal weight. A strong majority, almost consensus, among scientists argues that climate change is real and is caused at least partially by human activity.

The strong majority view arguing that we face a serious threat to human welfare and to the natural environment makes it morally difficult for governments to ignore it in favour of a more comfortable view. If parents learned of a very persuasive threat to their children's welfare, responsibility would demand that they acted on it. Similarly with governments facing climate change. It is proper, though, to review the evidence.

Broadly speaking there are three possible approaches to climate change, each with its own moral consequences. The first approach argues that the evidence so far is explained better by normal climatic variation than by global warming. There is therefore no ethical imperative to reduce emissions.

The second approach argues that climate change is real, but that it cannot be mitigated by human intervention. Steps like reducing carbon emissions will be ineffective.

For the third approach climate change is substantially caused by human activity and can also be mitigated by human intervention. Most who adopt this approach argue that delay in reducing emissions will exacerbate climate change and the pain it brings with it.

To deny the reality of climate change is the most comfortable position because it does not demand costly change. For that reason its adherents need to scrutinise carefully their own motivation and their arguments. If this position amounts to nothing more than criticism of the opposed arguments it is not an ethical position. And given the nature of the issue, it could be ethically irresponsible.

If it is to be maintained with integrity, its proponents must address its exigent ethical corollaries. If normal climatic variations are responsible for the drought that affects so many in the world, our solidarity with all human beings makes us ask what steps affluent societies must take to help them now and ensure that they can pass to our descendants a world fit to live in. The plight of the Maldives concerns us.

If we believe that climate change is real but that nothing can be done to mitigate its effects, we have the same duty to ask how we should respond to those most badly affected by it. Responsibility would commit us to respond in solidarity, and to exercise leadership in pooling the resources of affluent societies to assist those whose lives are put at risk and to protect the world as a human environment. To confine our efforts to our own society would be ethically indefensible, regardless of changed economic conditions.

Most people, including the Australian Government, have accepted that global warming has been caused by human activity, and that it can and should be mitigated by prompt intervention. Given the damage to future generations caused by delay, it would be irresponsible to do nothing until the economy improves.

Those who share this view also need to be critical of their position, given that their position is based on the most probable interpretation of scientific data. But once they have made this judgement they may not postpone action until they have certainty. This needs emphasising, because it is so tempting to give intellectual assent but to find reasons to do nothing. In the case of climate change that would be as irresponsible as it would be to accept that someone was drowning and then ignore them.

If we are responsible, we shall also exercise what leadership we can give. As individuals our leadership will be through symbolic actions: communicating to others the seriousness of the predicament, encouraging action by governments, and taking small concrete steps to reduce our own emissions. Governments, particularly of developed nations, can show leadership by committing their nations to targets without waiting for every nation to agree. This is to accept the privileged position of being a heavy polluter and of a developed economy.

Solidarity demands that these actions be calibrated so that, both in societies and in the international community, burdens fall most heavily on those most able to bear them. This calculus may change in changed economic circumstances. It will certainly change as conditions deteriorate in nations like the Maldives.

This ethical framework allows conversation between people who disagree about the modelling of climate change. It measures their contribution by the extent to which they commit themselves to solidarity and responsibility. It also exposes the incoherence and cravenness of those who accept the scientific consensus on climate change but who declare that Australia should not act until all nations are signed up or until our economy has fully recovered.

God hates fags and bankers

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Senator John McCain's concession speech earlier this month was surely one of the most gracious of all time. It [recalled](#) an era when hate was the norm.

A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt's invitation of Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House was taken as an outrage in many quarters.

He went on to declare that Obama's election demonstrates 'America today is a world away from the cruel and frightful bigotry of that time'.

Despite the reality of an African American president-elect, McCain is undoubtedly overstating the distance we've travelled. Election day in the US also brought popular acceptance of California's Proposition 8, which effectively quashed a Supreme Court decision earlier this year that had legalised gay marriage in the state.

Arguably that result reflects continuing hostility towards homosexuals by a significant proportion of the population. It is also a reminder of acts of anti-gay violence that have occurred in the recent past.

One such incidence is the celebrated 1998 murder of Wyoming 21-year-old Matthew Shepherd, which is depicted in [The Laramie Project](#), which is being performed in Sydney this month.

The current production grew out of two previous university productions. The first, in 2004, received threats from [Westboro Baptist](#) Church in the US, which had picketed Matthew Shepard's funeral with 'God Hates Fags' placards.

Director Chris Hay [explains](#) in the program notes: 'We perform this show in 2008, the ten year anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death, in the hope that a significant change in attitude has occurred in the last several years.'

In fact attitudes can and do change. One that is perhaps as remarkable as the election of an African American president is the fall from grace of heavily remunerated CEOs, and wealthy players in the banking and finance sectors in the US. After the collapse of the economy of the western world, they are no longer envied and looked up to. Instead they are despised, and even hated, for the hardship their actions have brought to the lives of many people.

Australia's Prime Minister Kevin Rudd [told](#) the National Press Club last month:

As we contemplate the impact of this financial crisis on real economies, real people and real lives, it

must also galvanise us to act in the future that we never allow greed and lax regulation to put us in this position again.

It is certainly not a good thing if we have found another class of people to hate. And Kevin Rudd had a much more constructive and healing goal in mind, which he [alluded to](#) in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September:

Financial institutions need to have clear incentives to promote responsible behaviour rather than unrestrained greed.

Putting greedy bankers in their place represents a step towards the healing of division in society, and John McCain is hopefully right to suggest that hate is no longer the norm.

The small world of lobbyists and the Rudd Government

POLITICS

John Warhurst

The appointment of David Epstein, Kevin Rudd's chief of staff from July 2007 until last month, to the position of executive general manager government and corporate affairs for Qantas from 1 December demonstrates three things about how government works in this country.



The first is that Canberra is a very small world of intricate relationships and close networks. Within that small world an even smaller world of government lobbying operates. Epstein is only one example among many of the backwards-and-forwards movement of operatives between government, business and lobbying. His own career demonstrates this as do those of many others. Epstein has held a range of Labor positions in government and opposition since 1981 interspersed with periods in government relations with the Australian Telecommunications Industry Association and with Government Relations Australia, a commercial lobbying firm.

Earlier this week, for instance, the Secretary of the ACT Branch of the Labor Party, Matthew Cossey, resigned to join the multinational defence systems and hardware company, Raytheon. His new job is euphemistically described as helping Raytheon negotiate with the federal government. In fact, he will become a lobbyist. Hawker Britton, the lobbying firm with the strongest Labor connections, is now headed in Canberra by Simon Banks, formerly deputy chief of staff to Kevin Rudd and several other Labor Opposition leaders, whose CV looks very similar to that of Epstein. Canberra lobbyists and big corporations are loading up with Labor insiders just as Washington is now loading up with Democrat insiders. That is the way the lobbying world works.

Second, the distinction the Rudd government makes in the new Lobbying Code of Conduct and Register of Lobbyists between commercial lobbyists (Banks) and corporate government relations executives (Epstein), is untenable. What applies to one should apply to the other if the public are to have confidence in a relatively transparent level playing field in dealings with government. Under the regulatory scheme the activities of Banks are regulated yet those of Epstein will not be. Yet in terms of political function the distinction is immaterial. It shows that, like its predecessor during the Hawke and Keating years, the Rudd scheme is too narrow. This makes it essentially a public relations exercise because it cannot address satisfactorily the whole world of lobbying.

Third, the provisions of the Code of Conduct relating to post-government service of ministers, parliamentary secretaries and ministerial advisers certainly do apply to Epstein. These arrangements specify a 12-month cooling off period during which such persons shall

not engage in lobbying activities relating to any matter with which they had official dealings in their last 12 months of employment.

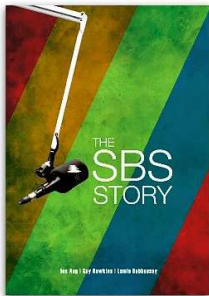
Epstein is certainly becoming a lobbyist once again after a year as Rudd's closest adviser. Senator John Faulkner, Special Minister of State, the minister responsible for all such matters has spoken to Epstein and reassured the House of Representatives that he will comply with these guidelines. However this is not enough. The perception of closed rather than open government is very important. Epstein will take an enormous amount of corporate memory and unofficial knowledge with him from the Prime Minister's office to Qantas, whatever his official dealings happen to have been.

The appointment breaches the spirit if not the letter of the Lobbying Code of Conduct and makes a mockery of the intentions of the scheme to calm popular concerns after the squalid Burke affair in Western Australia. It clearly allows a situation where big corporate money is allowed to buy special access to government. Epstein has not been offered this job because of his 'good looks' or even his undoubted generic skills and broad experience, but because he is an insider. He not only knows how the Rudd government works at the highest level but also how the levers of government can be pulled. The unfortunate consequence is to reinforce once again the widespread popular belief that Australian democracy is not played on a level field.

More than Sex and Bloody Soccer

BOOK FORUM

Paul Collins



Ien Ang, Gay Hawkins, Lamia Dabboussy, *The SBS Story. The Challenge of Cultural Diversity*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008. RRP \$39. ISBN 978 086840 839 2, [website](#).

SBS television has been called many things: the 'sexual broadcasting service' because of the risqu  foreign language films that it shows, the 'wog channel' and, in the words of Kerry Packer, 'sex and bloody soccer'. Others talk about a TV channel for 'ethnics' and 'eggheads'.

In fact, as *The SBS Story* points out, the aim is to bring the riches of world cultures to Australia. 'Foreign language television is not supposed to be a medium for cultural ethnic insularity ... | but to broaden the cultural horizons of all Australians beyond their own ethnocentric and monocultural comfort zones.'

SBS radio is somewhat different. Broadcasting in 68 languages, it is the ultimate melting pot, a symbol of an inclusive Australian multiculturalism in which different languages and cultures are respected. SBS Radio gives a voice to those who cannot participate in public discourse because they are not fluent in English. It is the only broadcaster in the world to cover so many languages within a single organisational framework.

The whole thing evolved out of ethnic radio which began in Sydney and Melbourne in 1975 set up by the Whitlam government. These stations were massively popular with 1.1 million listeners, so Malcolm Fraser set up the Special Broadcasting Service in 1978 to give them permanence and to extend them to all capital cities. SBS TV began in 1980.

This book is the story of this truly unique public broadcaster struggling through the passions and contradictions involved in moving from popular or ethnic multiculturalism to cosmopolitan multiculturalism. That involves bringing diverse, isolated and divided ethnic communities together in a way in which people 'with different roots ... | can co-exist and ... can learn from the image-banks of others', to quote Australian art critic, Robert Hughes. The ultimate aim is a genuine pluralism in which people could, in the words of former managing director, Malcolm Long, successfully 'navigate difference.'

At first the emphasis in radio was on the ethnic communities exercising a strong sense of ownership of their 'own' language program. Presentation was somewhat amateurish, but the service was professionalised from the mid-1980s onwards with the realisation that SBS was a public rather than a community broadcaster. Achieving this was no easy task.

The SBS Story is a fine book that examines the continuing conundrum of resolving these tensions. It examines them clearly and from a number of perspectives. It is best summed up in Malcolm Long's words as a debate between those who see SBS as 'an organisation which served the cultural and community needs of the separate communities in their own languages, versus those who saw SBS as a multicultural, open organisation designed to expose the riches of world cultures to all Australians.'

Precisely!

Australia's dubious common ground with India

MEDIA

Kimberley Layton

'Respected columnist', began the email. 'In view of the recent press gag and the subsequent developments of harassment and intimidation, you are requested to avoid anything that can complicate the problem for the newspaper. We will prefer these days some off beat and apolitical subjects till the crisis are over. Hope you co-operate.'



Just prior to this email I had, in true Gen Y style, lol'd (internet slang for laughing out loud) at my Indian-journalist-friend after reading that the Government of India had requested that all newspapers on their side of Kashmir 'refrain from the publication of objectionable and seditious material'. Watch your step, I had advised with all the wisdom of my 24 years, lol. Then came the email from the editor of the Kashmir-based English language daily he writes for. This was followed by a visit from local police to the Greater Kashmir printing press during which the inquisitive officers refused to reveal their names, the name of the police station they were from, or the purpose of their evening rendezvous. On 7 November, all copies of the newspaper and its Urdu sister publication, *Kashmir Uzma*, were seized from vendors in the state capital of Srinagar.

Having lived in Australia (this wide, brown, and of course, democratic land of ours) for most of my life, I had not previously been confronted by a press gag. As I hammered out university newspaper articles championing freedom from this, and justice for that, it did not occur to me to consider what I might do if the government suddenly told me to shut up, or else. Press freedom is something I have always taken for granted. I was, therefore, somewhat surprised to learn that Australia ranked only 28th in the 2008 annual Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [Press Freedom Index](#), behind New Zealand (7th), the UK (23rd) and Canada (13th). The report went so far as to describe sentences provided for under Australia's anti-terror laws as 'simply outrageous'; journalists interviewing a person suspected of terrorism risk up to five years in jail.

Recently there has been a lot of fuss made over the emergence of India as a major world power and what this means for Australia. A stronger partnership, increased economic ties, and a more dynamic and active relationship have been promoted on both sides of the Indian Ocean. It is not just cricket and a shared love of uranium that connects us, either; we are both democracies. India, that self-proclaimed bastion of this form of government, is very proud of the fact that it is one of the few Asian examples of a deeply rooted democratic system. Just ask them about it — they'll tell you. Australians too seem quietly smug about our liberal democratic status in a region filled with, well, other types of government. The significance of our shared political systems is relatively straight forward. As Walter Cronkite so succinctly

put it, 'freedom of the press is not just important to democracy; it is democracy'.

The Government of India has threatened to withdraw any newspaper that violates its latest behavioural recommendations from the list of approved publications for Government advertisements. This scenario should sound eerily familiar to Western Australians who, just this May, witnessed their state government's blackmailing of the management of *The West Australian* newspaper. The state's attorney general threatened to withdraw public advertising from the paper in response to its decidedly judgemental editorial position towards the local government. So it seems that India, which ranks a somewhat embarrassing 118th on RSF's report, behind the likes of Sierra Leone (114th) and Venezuela (113th), and ourselves here in Australia, have found something else that connects us.

An open media is one of the most powerful guardians of our rights and our freedom. As the Australian Journalists Association Code of Ethics asserts, 'respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself... | They inform and animate democracy'. Australia has no one to blame for our RSF ranking other than ourselves. We are one of a very small handful of states that do not have a legal instrument (either a constitutional or statutory bill of rights) that describes the extent of its citizens' freedoms, including freedom of speech, and we have failed to question our decidedly undemocratic media laws, particularly those related to anti-terrorism.

By being cognisant of, and remarking upon, India's recent conduct in Kashmir (just as Prime Minister Rudd has frequently admonished China for their poor human rights record), Australia might become more conscious of its own position regarding freedom of the press. Perhaps then next year our cricket-loving friend might crack the top 100, and we ourselves might make it to 27th — we can but hope.

The fear detective

TELEVISION

Andrew Hamilton



***A Well Founded Fear*. November Films. SBS Television, Wednesday 19 November, 8:30 pm, [website](#) .**

At the beginning of *A Well Founded Fear* we hear Mr Howard declaring after Tampa, 'We decide who will come to Australia and under what circumstances they will come'. His declaration is received with applause from his Liberal Party audience.

The cameras then leave Australia with Phil Glendenning, the Director of the Edmund Rice Centre. They dwell on his stay in Afghanistan and Syria to track down some of those whom Australia had decided would not come here. They show in the faces of simple people the costs in human life, opportunity and dignity of Australia's decision. They also show the brutal cajolery that was the Australian way of implementing Mr Howard's promise.

The narrative thread that holds the documentary together is the search in difficult places for the returned asylum seekers. Visually it is sometimes tests the viewers' credulity, emphasising the desire for secrecy of the people whom they seek, while at the same time filming conspicuous Westerners going in search of them. But the documentary is powerful because it allows ordinary people of extraordinary spirit to tell their stories. For the viewer their magnanimity in the face of barbarous treatment tempers into compassion the rage and shame that are the natural response to such stories.

The documentary is also blessed in Phil Glendenning. He is the ordinary gruff Australian bloke abroad, a Merv Hughes or an Ian Chappell, not naturally articulate but enduring and not to be fobbed off with smooth talk. He mostly listens. His silent listening is the moral centre of the documentary. His few comments on the significance for Australians of what he hears are the more telling for their sparseness.

The documentary does not pursue the way in which Mr Howard's declaration was translated into Australian law and its administration. It simply shows how human beings experienced these things and the cost to them of the arbitrary exercise of power. But the larger picture also bears reflection.

Those despatched to Syria were from a tribe persecuted in Kuwait and denied citizenship. They arrived with necessarily false passports before Tampa, were detained in Port Hedland, and their claim for protection was denied. The task of the Immigration Department was to cajole them to leave Australia. This was difficult because they were effectively stateless. It offered them the alternatives of living indefinitely in the harsh detention they had already

experienced or an opportunity to leave Australia. According to those interviewed in the documentary, Department officers tried to persuade them to leave on the false passports with which they had come. Others were given Australian travel documents that allowed them to enter Syria on a visa that expired on arrival. They were thus illegal and subject to arrest and beating if found without papers. They still live in that daily fear.

Those returned to Afghanistan arrived after Tampa and were detained on Nauru. Their claims were adjudicated by the Australian officials under an arbitrary and flawed process that was not reviewable by Australian courts. They were Hazaras, persecuted in Afghanistan. The interpreters supplied by the Department were from the ethnic group that persecuted them. Their claims were rejected.

Because the Government had decided that they would never be allowed to come to Australia, the Department officers were able to offer them the alternatives of perpetual detention on Nauru or a return to Afghanistan, then declared to be safe. Subject to such cajolery in an environment where they had no way of testing the veracity of those advising them, and where their psychological health was anyway under siege, they agreed to return to Afghanistan. Some were killed. So were members of their family, including young children. Others fled to Pakistan.

That is what it means in practice to decide who comes to your country and under what circumstances. The documentary is not finally about blaming people. It is about a well-founded fear. The refugees had a well-founded fear of persecution, but it was not recognised. Mr Howard exploited a badly-founded fear among Australians that they would be overrun by refugees. Both Australians and refugees, it is clear, were entitled to have a well-founded fear that the policies of the Australian Government and their administration by our public servants would be shamefully corrupted.

Standing up for students' rites

COMMUNITY

Brian McCoy

How does Western society assist a strong and healthy transition of its young men into adulthood? Recent media exposure of how some young men celebrated the end of their years at secondary school caught my attention. I was interested less because I knew the school than because of the critical issues that were raised.



Where are the rites of passage that help our young men become adults in our society?

Over a number of years I have witnessed and participated in initiation ceremonies for young Aboriginal men in the western desert. These are rituals that support the social transition from boyhood into adulthood and which publicly define and celebrate that process.

Our rituals in Western society are less clear. Getting a driving licence, being able to drink in a pub, having an 18th or 21st birthday are often important ingredients. One can also die for one's country at 18.

But where is that moment, experience or ritual when young men realise that adult responsibilities as well as privileges have come upon them? Where is the social celebration and process that helps a boy become a man?

I do not want to suggest that leaving school is a rite of initiation but, like many other important transitions of life in our western society, it is a 'rite of passage'.

The concept of 'rite of passage' can be helpful in explaining significant life transitions. In our society there are many. Leaving home, entering the workplace or university, getting married, can all be significant life transitions. There are also others, just as challenging, such as learning to live with chronic disease, facing retirement, and moving into a nursing home.

As rites of passage they offer a process, and the potential, for personal transformation because they take the individual into a new relational and social context and into the possibility of a deeper experience of oneself.

For such a transformation to occur, they require us to let go the security of a previously known and experienced world, and allow ourselves to be carefully inducted into a new one. Christian symbols and meanings around 'dying' and 'rising' apply here.

Sometimes we manage these transitions without the help of others; at other times their help can be critically valuable and important.

The transition of young people from their many years of life at school to life after school is a significant rite of passage. It is the formal end of the first part of their life and the beginning of a new journey into adulthood.

As with other significant life transitions it brings with it fear and excitement. Fear is associated with leaving behind what has become safe and familiar. Excitement is associated with the promise of the unknown and what lies ahead.

I believe we can learn from Aboriginal rituals and apply their wisdom to our various Western 'rites of passage'. Ancient rituals remind us that those experiencing transition cannot control the process by themselves. Nor can they manage it by relying on those who are sharing it with them. Those leaving school do not, nor can be expected to, know what to do at such a time.

Ironically, also, those who have taught them, including teachers and parents, cannot be expected to take responsibility for what lies ahead.

What is needed is a process of transition and the company and wisdom of those who have already made that transition. They know what it means to let go and to be inducted into a new social space and place. This can then become a transformative experience.

The change that occurs in any rite of passage is always personal and social. It promises to link the person with their community in a new and deeper way.

As a culture, Western society has much to discover about the challenges offered by its various rites of passage. It also has much to learn about how to help these rites become transformative experiences, not simply moments of fear and risk. Above all, it needs to discover how those who have made such transitions can assist those who are about to make them.

Obama's Dream at the Lincoln Memorial

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



The night after Barak Obama's election, I took a stroll to the Lincoln Memorial. I was contemplating that on 20 January 2009 Obama would probably be standing in the snow on the steps of the US Capitol down the east end of the Mall at his inauguration. I was kicking up the autumn leaves on my way to that marble step in front of the Lincoln Memorial. It is etched with the inscription:

I HAVE A DREAM

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

AUGUST 28, 1963

Marvelling at the Washington Monument shimmering in the Reflecting Pool and the lit Capitol in the distance, I made my way down the stairs. There I was surprised to meet Brett Solomon (pictured) who had done so much with the Get Up organisation in Australia raising public awareness about issues such as climate change, reconciliation, and the plight of boat people held in detention. Each of us wondered what the other was doing inside the Beltway at such an historic moment. Brett is now working out of New York with Avaaz, an organisation which describes itself as 'a community of global citizens who take action on the major issues facing the world today'. There in front of me was Brett's latest imaginative handiwork — a wooden, prefabricated wall in front of the Reflecting Pool. It carried a banner headline that echoed the refrain from Grant Park Chicago the previous night: 'Yes we can'.

Congratulations President Obama. Change Won't be Easy but...!

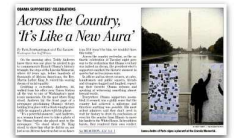
Together, As One World, Yes We Can

The wall had been up for a few hours only. Thousands of people had already signed it, attaching photos and messages. Now that night had fallen, Brett was on standby lest the police come and remove it. The central message on the wall read:

As citizens across the world, we congratulate you on your election, and celebrate your campaign commitments to sign a strong new global treaty on climate change, close Guantanamo prison and end torture, withdraw carefully from Iraq, and double aid to fight poverty. No one country or leader can

meet the world's most pressing challenges alone, but working together as one world in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, yes we can bring real and lasting change.

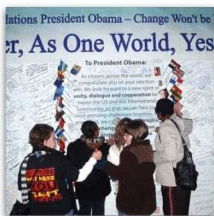
Next morning the spec built wall was the front page photo in the *Washington Post* (pictured).



The Obama rhetorical message of hope and change has been infectious these days, crossing national borders as well as the boundaries of race and creed. On election night, there were two gracious speeches from the candidates. Most Americans I have met this last week admit to having shed a tear that night. One African American woman told me that she had long lamented her mother bringing her to DC when she was a little girl during the civil rights riots: 'Now we are free. The Civil War is over. But we must remain humble.'

Another had taken a group of elderly African American women from a retirement home to the local church to vote: 'They walked into that Church as if the waters were parting. They were free at last.'

There is now a brief inter-regnum when people can relish the election of the first African American president who has pledged to govern for all Americans. Then the demands of the economic crisis and climate change as well as the challenges of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and North Korea will impact.



The weekend before the election, I went as an observer to the old Republican stronghold of Virginia. I joined friends who were canvassing households for Obama. We worked our way through the streets of a neighbourhood whose residents were drawn from India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Columbia. I met only two white Anglo-Saxon families. The majority had not yet finally decided how to vote. Those who were undecided were 2 to 1 for Obama. The nation of immigrants has seen this man with a white mother, Kenyan father and Indonesian step-father as one of them, and they have trusted him as the one best equipped to deal with the economic crisis.

Some Catholics and Evangelical Christians viewed the election as a re-run of earlier campaigns. They gave priority to the issues of abortion, stem cell research and same sex marriage. Three states including California carried referenda banning same sex marriage. But the three state referenda aimed at restricting or regulating abortion all failed. Some bishops remained adamant that no Catholic could vote for a candidate opposed to the criminalising of abortion. Obama was definitely such a candidate. But he attracted 7 per cent more of the Catholic vote than did the Catholic John Kerry in the 2004 election. Catholics backed Obama 52-45.

Peter Steinfels, the respected religion reporter for the New York Times, observed: 'Hispanic Catholics, a group the bishops often hail as representing the future of the church in the United

States, led the way. Latinos voted 67 per cent for Mr. Obama, 16 percentage points more than their vote for Mr. Kerry. Latino Catholics, usually more Democratic than Protestant Latinos, almost certainly voted for the Democratic nominee at an even higher rate.' Gone are the days of bishops telling Catholics which candidate they cannot vote for in a two-horse race, or even telling them which issues are to be given priority in the voting calculus.

The great orator Obama is yet to put real shape on his message of change and hope. Should he harness the good will he has evoked across traditional boundaries and be granted a second term, he will be able to mount those steps at the Lincoln Memorial on the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and proclaim to the world, 'Yes we can, because we have a dream.'

Familiar fiddler man

POETRY

Max Richards

Last Night in Lygon Street

Hear that fiddle, quavery
but singing a familiar tune?
'Greensleeves' - so evergreen.
To its wordless melody
phrases float up from
my imperfect memory.
She's jilted him, he's lilted on -
the other words, I've never quite
got them sorted out.
Keening through the dusk
above the traffic noise, it's
some busking violinist
under the Lygon Street
curving tin verandas
by the flower stall - look,
isn't the fiddler man
familiar too? -
old colleague, McCann
(philosophy, retired),
still with the sad face
and the gaberdine mac.
Pension (I might ask)
not enough? Neither's

mine - I ought to busk
myself, but lack the tools,
the nerve, the skills.
And there's not much in his hat -
how much could he earn?
Honestly, this smallish coin
is all I can spare him.
I sidle past unrecognised.
Could it be money's not
what he's after, but to test
some theory once sketched
in ethics class, when someone
objected: 'In the real world...'?
Or in aesthetics,
what if the less-skilled version
moves one more than the most?

The Projectionist

The primary school shares the same sky
as the railway workshops;
has concrete air raid shelters,
useless now, since we beat Japan;
a green football field, clay
where boys play marbles, in season;
girls skip; six bare classrooms,
lavatories nasty - better to hold on;
kids who are roughs or waifs;

all of us in cheap clothing;
some with runny noses and bare feet,
and Father as head-teacher.

It's 1946, this is
Randwick near Wellington. Out
of bounds, beyond the stop-bank,
the river's forcing its way past fast.
Here nothing happens, slowly, till
Father does some fundraising -
a projector comes, rare and fragile.
He learns how to make it work.

No one else is allowed near.
None of us young ones have ever
seen anything on any screen -
we're agog for Charlie Chaplin.

Children and parents come one night
to Father's classroom. From home
Mum's lent him a white sheet, he fixes
it up straight, I switch off the light,
whirring begins, the sheet brightens.
Flickering black and white humans
stalk the sheet. Something is happening.

A man climbs on a diving board,
trots out, dives, splashes, vanishes.
Father flicks a switch, time freezes; flicks
again, feet first the diver rises,
curves back up onto the board.

All of us squeal with pleasure.
The evening's films, all short,
are never better than when Father,
powerful and popular,
flicks that switch, the image freezes,
time halts, reverses, pauses,
moves forward again, taking us
all with it along, along.
Going home in Dad's Austin Seven,
dreaming new powers, camera
projector and screen, a rapt crowd,
the river pulsing under the night sky.
A log like a floating man sweeps past fast,
vanishes. My camera eye strains and fails.

The banker who'd played the gentleman's game

SPORT

John Honner

As the executive director of a small community service organisation, I recently received an invitation from a bank to attend a free seminar (in the city) to help me run my operations (in the outer suburbs) more efficiently. Hmm. I am already spending too much time thinking about banks and their efficiency.



My favourite banker was Peter May, graceful batsman and cautious captain of the English cricket team in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He once broke his umbrella on the way to work, playing an imaginary cover drive at an imaginary fast bowler. I assume he was a banker, though all he said was that he worked 'in the city', which is code for London's financial sector.

Peter May had a job and cricket was a game. Which brings me to reflect on the summer game here in a country town. Things were looking ominous for top-order batsmen this coming season. Maybe it wasn't enough that the town won the first and second grade district premierships last year.

My suspicions were aroused in mid-winter on an early morning walk with Maddie the dog before the sun was fully awake. We were wandering along the path by the creek at the edge of the local cricket ground, Maddie jumping in and out of the long grass and sniffing here and there for whatever it is that dogs sniff for, when I noticed the electrician's van parked beside the practice nets.

This was not entirely odd. You need to know that the junior electrician, his name is Luke, is also the town's opening bowler. Luke installed the new lights in our kitchen and garage. He's a handy height for an electrician: he doesn't need a ladder. He's also a handy height for a fast bowler. I went over to say hello, as you do in a country town.

On this particular winter morning, with sunlight just starting to spread across the pastures, there was Luke, head down, pegging some wooden formwork in the ground. He was, he explained, adding an extra metre to the practice wicket, which consisted of synthetic grass on concrete and was only half a pitch long. His activities looked very clandestine, but, as he explained it to me, he had been having trouble last year getting his bouncer to land on the practice wicket: "This should do the job," he said, wiping his hands with satisfaction.

Having once opened the batting, I felt pain. I didn't particularly like the idea of Luke bowling short of a length in the nets. But he was going to be a much more serious proposition on the centre square, which at the moment was gullied with rain and turreted with weeds.

A week later, and things looked even worse for batsmen. The local cricket ground is surrounded by trees and has unusually tall sight-screens: white painted trellis, with another white trellis on top of that, and then, as an afterthought, another white trellis on top of that. All the better to see Luke by, you would think, but at the same time it was self-evidently a very unstable structure.

On this particular morning both sight-screens lay on the ground like fallen soldiers, their top sections bent and broken. Maybe it was the August westerlies - strong enough to blow our wind-vane sideways - but the sight-screens faced north-south and therefore sideways to the westerlies. This was odd.

And then a few weeks later, would you believe it, I spied the light roller hidden and abandoned in the scrub by the creek. It was still winter. Luke's pre-season preparations seemed to be going too far. Maybe this wasn't cricket after all.

But now it's spring and I'm delighted to report that my suspicions were unfounded: the centre square has had a generous layer of black soil scattered over it; the sight-screens have been repaired and set back upright; and the practice wickets look pristine.

Luke and his mates have jobs. They attend to cricket matters in the early hours of the morning or as the sun sets in the evening. Not only that, they may have to miss a game or two this summer. As members of the local Rural Fire Service, they keep close to our big red fire engine. Summer is bushfire season.

I won't attend the bank seminar, but I hope to watch some real cricket this summer. If you close your eyes, there is even some resemblance between our cricket ground today and Fenner's in 1956, which was Peter May's favourite oval in Cambridge, a small country town in England.

New Zealand's dim new world

POLITICS

Cecily McNeill



As America looks forward to a bright future with its first black president Barack Obama at the helm, its tiny, South Pacific anti-nuclear challenger, New Zealand, reversed out of Obama's hope for a better life for all over the weekend and elected a centre-right government led by a political newcomer.

After just six years in parliament, John Key is New Zealand's new prime minister following the nine-year reign of Helen Clark, the country's first elected woman PM and her Labour-led coalition government (the first woman PM, Jenny Shipley, won the role in a leadership coup backlash against Jim Bolger's leadership of the National party in 1997).

The 47-year-old former merchant banker, John Key, made his millions trading in foreign currency.

Key campaigned on his ability to manage the economy, trading on his international experience on the money market.

But, in a bid to appeal to a wider voting pool, Key liked to talk about his beginnings in a government-owned state house where his widowed mother raised her three children in the '60s and '70s.

Key's other campaign plank has been tax cuts which translate into more money for the rich. On Saturday night he reaffirmed that legislation to enact these would be in place by Christmas along with a raft of reforms including a review of public service spending and resource management, a policy likely to buy a fight with the Greens who see it as allowing a charter for development without enough protection for the environment.

A strong law and order focus will see parole and bail laws toughened, a clamp down on gangs and DNA testing for everyone arrested for an imprisonable offence.

Meanwhile, outgoing prime minister, Helen Clark, has accepted responsibility for her party's election defeat and she and Labour's deputy leader, Michael Cullen, have stepped down.

Over three terms in office, Helen Clark has made her mark as a steady manager rather than a charismatic leader.

Economist Brian Easton says the Clark government saw as its job to reverse the extremism of Rogernomics instituted by the Labour finance minister in 1984. Roger Douglas's policies

included cutting agricultural subsidies and trade barriers, privatising public assets and the control of inflation through measures rooted in monetarism.

Rogernomics was seen by some Labourites as a betrayal of traditional Labour ideals.

'In a sense having done that, it was unable to offer anything other than a sense of competence,' said Easton.

'The public wanted a little bit more than steady-as-she-goes but it didn't know what. On the night, John Key gave it what it wanted.'

Easton had no sense that the public wanted a policy change.

'It's almost that the public decided that if we're going to have a conservative government it should be of the centre right rather than centre left.'

Whereas Obama's message that he stood for change on all fronts was crystal clear and American voters were left in no doubt what this meant, Key's proclamations of 'time for a change' led to no such clarity.

Commentators on televised leaders' debates over the past fortnight said they could find little difference between the policies of Clark and Key.

As polling in the runup to the weekend election showed National would claim up to half the electorate, an increasingly desperate Labour party adopted several campaign slogans — 'keep it Kiwi', and 'trust us' but with no attempt to show just how Key was untrustworthy.

Key walks a tightrope depending as he does on the right-leaning Act party for governing clout while holding to his promise of not working with Roger Douglas, the architect of Rogernomics and founder of Act. This is the strength of the mixed member proportional voting system which, in the end, can give the smaller parties some bargaining power.

Unlike the vast majority of their American cousins who are full of hope, New Zealanders may look back on the Clark administration with nostalgia when they realise that the new government is interested in pleasing only those blue-chip investors who voted for it. In no more than 100 days, many Kiwis with little bargaining power but their labour, may find themselves out of pocket and out in the cold.

Priceless overseas health professionals

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Yesterday's Sunday papers [reported](#) that a well regarded midwife recruited from the UK is being required to leave Australia because her child with Down syndrome is considered a burden on the taxpayer.



The woman works at Perth's Joondalup Hospital, where staff describe her as 'one of the hospital's best'. Her permanent residency application was rejected six years ago because the Federal Government saw her child as needing health or community services that would constitute a 'significant cost to the Australian community'. After a long succession of appeals, it is understood that the unnamed midwife has only weeks before she must leave Australia.

The reporting of her case follows community outrage [recently](#) when German doctor Bernhard Moeller, who works in rural Victoria, was denied permanent residence because his son Lukas has Down syndrome.

Dr Moeller had been hoping to live permanently in Horsham after serving the community for more than two years. However the Department of Immigration notified him recently that it had rejected his application for permanent residency.

A Department official assured *The Australian* that it is not a case of discrimination, but rather a weighing up of the costs and benefits to the Australian taxpayer.

'This is not discrimination. A disability in itself is not grounds for failing the health requirement — it is a question of the cost implications to the community.'

Other politicians weighed in on the argument, insisting that the service Dr Moeller was providing in Horsham represented value for money in the context of the rural health skills shortage. Premier John Brumby said Moeller was making a valuable contribution to the region. Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon said she would be talking to Immigration Minister Chris Evans about the case, as it is difficult to attract quality medical professionals to the bush.

The argument about the costs and benefits of allowing such individuals to remain in Australia appears to be narrowly focused on economics. The Immigration official applies a general principle that the dollar cost of admitting immigrants with Down syndrome makes it unjustified. The counter-arguments of Roxon and Brumby would be based on considerations such as the prohibitive monetary cost of transporting patients needing specialist attention to Melbourne.

Such decisions appear to embody the vices that led to the economic collapse — restricting prosperity to a matter of economic costs and benefits. Maintaining rigid economic criteria for immigration denies officials the power to exercise discretion to judge the contribution individuals are likely to make to a more broadly-based notion of community well-being.

What is more disturbing about the case of the Perth midwife is that she told the press that she did not wish to be named or interviewed, fearing retribution by the Government. The emergence of her case indicates that Dr Moeller's was not isolated. Moreover her fear of publicity suggests there could be many more we don't know about that are being judged on narrow economic criteria.