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No.1 Vol. 1 March 1991

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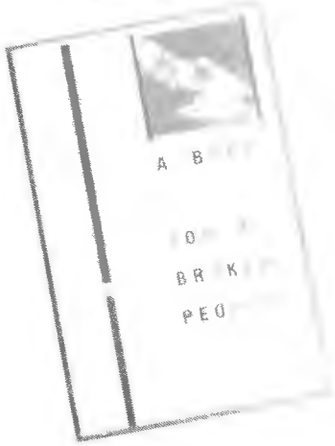

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EUREKA STREET Magazine ISSN 1036-1758
is an Australia Post registered publication
published eleven times a year
by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd,
300 Victoria Street, Richmond, Victoria 3121.
Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by
Michael Kelly, 300 Victoria Street, Richmond.
Printed by Doran Printing, 4 Commercial Road,
Highett, Victoria 3190.

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Volume 1 Number 1 • March 1991

Cover illustration by John Spooner
(see interview, p. 24)

Graphics by Siobhan Jackson, Tim Metherall and Dean Moore

SUBSCRIPTIONS

To begin a subscription or notify an address alteration, please write to **EUREKA STREET** Magazine, PO Box 553, Richmond, Victoria 3121, or telephone (03) 427 7311. If changing address, enclose a label from your postal wrapper. Subscribers should allow four weeks for changes to take effect.

MANUSCRIPTS AND REPRINTS

The editors welcome letters and unsolicited manuscripts, including poetry. Manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Requests for permission to reprint material from the magazine should be addressed in writing to: The editor, **EUREKA STREET** Magazine, PO Box 553, Richmond, Victoria 3121.

From the editors

WELCOME TO THIS FIRST ISSUE OF *Eureka Street*. The magazine's birth sees Australia truly at a crossroads, looking for new roads to explore and new directions.

Our name, *Eureka Street*, suggests 'Discovery Road'. It is also a profoundly Australian name, with overtones of diggers, a quest for liberty and the sheer joy of making discoveries in a land whose cultural lodes are rich. Geographically speaking, our publishing house adjoins Eureka Street; a few doors away is the Eureka Hotel, so named by the family of Peter Lalor.

But why launch a new publication at a time of recession and international conflict? We believe that with the mass media now in fewer hands than they have been for decades, the range of perspectives offered to Australian readers is too few. And the right questions—the questions behind the questions—are not being pursued vigorously enough. *Eureka Street* aims to pinpoint issues of importance to Australia, in the context of the region and the wider world. We are enlisting writers who report accurately, analyse perceptively and who are capable of making their own contribution to the questions at hand.

What else is distinctive about *Eureka Street*? The magazine's publishing base is fourfold—it is initiated by the Jesuits (Society of Jesus) together with the Sisters of Mercy, the Loreto Sisters and the De La Salle Brothers. These religious institutes within the Catholic Church are represented on the editorial board. The majority of board members, however, are lay people possessing a broad range of expertise and experience in public life. Interstate and overseas correspondents will help keep our perspectives broad.

The scope of *Eureka Street's* interests is indicated by the range of articles in our first issue. We look at:

- The problematics of the press in Australia (beyond the entrepreneurs and overpricing).
- A proposal by the Commonwealth to swap powers with the states.
- Background to the resurgence of Islam.
- What leads an artist like John Spooner to draw covers like ours.
- *The Aboriginal Art and Spirituality* exhibition, which is scheduled to tour nationally.
- Regional issues in Papua New Guinea and Burma.
- Likely tensions at the forthcoming meeting of Europe's Catholic bishops.
- Robert Hughes' view of 1990s culture examined through the art scene.
- Reviews of two new books on China after Tien'anmen, and a critical examination of Australia's ad hoc theatre funding.

And much more.

In *Eureka Street* we aim to demonstrate (in an unselfconscious way) Christianity's continuing vigour — and the resources of wisdom it makes available to anyone making important decisions, public or private. Issues that present as primarily religious or churchly always turn out to have counterparts elsewhere. In any case, Christianity and other religions have been, and continue to be, formative factors in Australia.

Above all, we want *Eureka Street* to be 'a good read' for thoughtful people. We hope you find it so. ■

Law and peace: too brief a tale

ONE SMALL BUT CHILLING tableau stands as preface to the Gulf war: Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz and US secretary of state James Baker sitting for six hours not listening to one another. Or rather, each appears to have waited in vain only to hear the other capitulate—that and nothing else. Scarcely the art of listening at its best: less a scenario of human communication than a pantomime of mutual incomprehension.

Each day leading to the Gulf war uncovered more differences of worldview—not just differences of political agenda—between the major players. Between the ruthlessness of the Iraqi leaders and the pride of US leadership lay profound differences of culture, incompatible notions of what constitutes an ideal society, and diverse conceptions of God and divine intentions. [See 'The culture gulf', p. 13.]

The two nations appeared to lack any point of contact except of the most confrontational kind: conflicting oil interests, left-over grievances and fearsome weaponry. This, surely, is a tragedy for civilisation as a whole and for both cultures.

And what will be the aftermath? Peace, or the seeds of later conflicts?

The world has witnessed again the potency of nations to make war—and their apparent impotence to work the miracle of peace. Military arts and sciences appear grotesquely well developed compared with their pacific counterparts.

No one can pretend that peace-making—or even peace-keeping—will be easy in what *Age* correspondent Tony Walker describes as 'the cruel bazaar of Middle East politics'. But without a new respect for international law no peace appears likely to hold. Well-judged law, agreed resolutions based on justice, and a recognition of the authority of both, must form the cornerstone of any lasting peace. No balance of forces will suffice. Peace-keeping strategies built on that premise have proved bankrupt in the Middle East and elsewhere.

International laws—and their near neighbours, United Nations resolutions—have had to yield to expediency (or selective deafness) too often over the past 25 years. The result is a weak sense of international law and of the international justice it seeks to embody. Each time a law or resolution came to be ignored (particularly since there is no powerful body to enforce it but only the fragile consensus of nations) the likelihood of future conflicts rose a level and the possibility of settling disputes securely declined.

Recent instances of the law becoming a dead letter run from the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1968 to the mining of Nicaraguan ports (declared illegal by the International Court of Justice), and on to Soviet armed incursions from Hungary to the Baltics. Each of these violations tore another piece from the fabric of international law, leaving it a little more threadbare to deal with Middle East grievances in 1990–91.

What is being argued is not that conclusions reached by the International Court or the UN Security Council will always be correct, or even timely. But they must be listened to, held in respect and worked towards.

The Gulf crisis is a prime instance of our need to study more closely than ever before the arts of peace-negotiation, peace-restoration and peace-maintenance.

Deciding the balance of right and wrong in a situation, even if this can be done with clarity, is no more than the first step in resolving conflict. In the case of Kuwait, the United Nations decided overwhelmingly that Iraq's occupation was illegal. The nations then chose a blockade by land and sea to underline their conviction, deny Iraq the fruits of its aggression and express their hope that its leaders would, under duress, come to their senses.

Quite separate in principle is the further issue of the UN permission to roll back the Kuwait invasion by military means. Whatever else may be said of it, this was not a direction by the UN but a permission. It could be seen as showing a lack of confidence in the power of non-military means—including international law—to bring an oppressor to heel. Certainly in the judgment of Pope John Paul, a leader with considerable experience of international conflict, a 'military solution' was no way to go.

The task now at hand for us all is to study peace and peace-making.

While Iraq's belated claim to have invaded Kuwait as a gesture of support for the Palestinian people was widely perceived as specious, Saddam's one positive achievement may have been to put the Palestinian issue back on the international agenda—inescapably. The issue of a homeland for the Palestinians, a just cause, has been addressed often but never successfully during the past 40 years. Even Israeli prime minister Shamir conceded, at least briefly, that it is a linchpin for any lasting peace in the region.

During this century, many of the best brains, as well as massive technological resources, have been co-opted to serve the arts of war. Peace institutes developing hard-headed strategies for bringing about justice peaceably should be encouraged in all practical ways. They should be called on to show that international disputes *can* be resolved, and how. Still, the literature of peace studies emphasises how much is still to be learnt, and can only be learnt in practice.

The costs of our failing to resolve international disputes and resorting to military means cannot be adequately measured, since we cannot put a price on human lives, or hunger among Third Word peoples whose patrimony is squandered on war machines, or even the value of the work-hours wasted on war.

To date (we are writing early in the Gulf war), the machinery of peace—symbolised in the person of the UN secretary general—appears intimidated and resourceless. Lacking are sufficient experiences of successful peace-making in our new and shifting international scene, and a body of international law and precedent that commands respect.

A major cause of the Gulf war was non-communication. Urgently needed now is much greater understanding, especially across the Islamic–Christian gap.

These days the machines of war more and more resemble a rampaging tyrannosaurus rex. We should prepare for the era after its extinction. ■

MARGARET SIMONS

Inside the press gang

Restrictive defamation laws and concentration of media ownership make it hard for journalists to report without fear or favour. But do their own attitudes also undermine journalistic standards?

JOURNALISTS ARE IN MANY WAYS like the police. Neither side will welcome the comparison, but the many faults in the way journalism is practised in Australia can in part be explained by the similarities. Why is it that the fourth estate in Australia so rarely succeeds in detecting wrong-doing, and in uncovering the corruption and cronyism that undoubtedly proliferates? More importantly, why does the media so rarely succeed in enriching public debate?

The question is part of a larger issue. Public life in Australia is impoverished. For example, a few years ago discussion of the economy was only one aspect of politics. It was seen as a means to an end. What that end should be—what sort of society we want to live in — was the main topic of political debate. Now that debate is almost entirely about economics, and the media merely reports it, with little critical analysis.

Last year's debate over private ownership of telecommunications was not reported as a battle between principles, but as a battle between personalities (Beazley versus Keating). Certain public policies were in fashion, and that fashion was reflected in the columns of political commentators. To my knowledge, only one journalist went against the tide—Kenneth Davidson in *The Age*. He was bitterly attacked by Paul Keating.

Until recently, there was virtually no media analysis or public debate on whether Victoria's State Bank really needed to be sold. When the debate did occur, it was because the media had reported the views of an academic. It then reported the views of the politicians concerned, but at no stage did it attempt any independent scrutiny of the deal, or even treat the issue as one for legitimate debate. This poverty of public discussion in the media is both a symptom and a cause of the poverty of public life in Australia. But it also has to do with the way journalists do their jobs, and with the culture of newsrooms.

That brings us back to journalists and the police. Both professions involve regular contact with the unpleasant side of life, long hours, hard work under pressure, and sometimes danger. Both groups are either feared, despised or fawned upon by much of the public. Recruits to both professions are usually young, often ill-educated, and until recently most were male. Neither journalists nor police receive much grounding in ethics, or in the subtleties of dealing with the public. In fact, most journalists are not really trained at all in anything but the crudest mechanics of their task.

Both police and journalists are inducted by a system of cadetship. The vast majority of recruits come straight from school and absorb attitudes to their work by exposure to the more experienced, and often more cynical, people working around them. The old methods become the new, with little opportunity or encouragement for fresh ideas to penetrate. An air of anti-intellectualism pervades both police stations and newsrooms. Thinking is not encouraged and, in any case, there is hardly time for it. (That is, unless you are lucky enough to become a columnist, by which time you may have lost the knack.) Youth, arrogance, bravado and cynicism are common in both newsrooms and police stations. It is hard to be a good journalist, or a good cop, in this climate. Cynicism, of course, is frequently self-fulfilling.

How genuine then, is the media's appeal to high ideals, and to the role of a fourth estate? The media should by rights be among the main inhibitors of institutionalized misconduct and corruption in our public life. In fact it is doubtful whether the media do fulfill this role. Some of the reasons for this, including restrictive defamation and contempt laws, are well known and are at present the subject of heated, but ill-reported, debate. Concentration of media ownership is another threat. At the time of writing, the Fairfax newspaper empire is in receivership and its newspapers are likely

to be sold off to the highest bidder. The television industry is in a similar state of ill health.

These problems should not be minimised, but nor should they be used to excuse all the media's faults. Institutional culture is a powerful thing, and the culture of journalism probably has more effect on what does and does not appear in the media than do legal restrictions. The evidence suggests that even if legal restrictions were swept away overnight, the malaise would not necessarily be cured. In 1982, for example, there was a revolution in the laws affecting the public's access to information held by government. Freedom of information [FoI] laws came into force in Victoria and the Commonwealth, giving journalists and the public a legally enforceable right to information, and to the power that goes with it.

In America, FoI is one of the journalist's most frequently used tools. Yet in Australia, at a time when the media is constantly, and justly, protesting about legal restrictions, few journalists bother to learn about or use FoI. Scrutiny of government is therefore poorer. The arguments journalists raise against using FoI are an illustration of the unquestioning acceptance of old priorities and methods. It is said to be too slow, too legalistic and too difficult. Some reporters are affronted by the inference that their contacts are not good enough to 'leak' them everything they need. The tacit obligations such leaks entail are, of course, exempt from examination.

THE MEDIA ARE NOT IMMUNE from that common attribute of institutions, the tendency to appeal to legitimate considerations for self-interested or ignoble motives. Freedom of the media, which of course is vitally important, is used as a justification for a wide range of behaviour and is trotted out every time someone questions the wisdom and taste of, or the motive for, particular published or broadcast material. 'Freedom of the media' becomes little more than a slogan. Sometimes it means no more than the freedom to practise bad journalism while feeling smug.

The other slogan journalists use to justify what they do is 'objectivity'. During the Fitzgerald inquiry into police corruption, Queensland Newspapers justified its publication of blatant propaganda from police by saying that it had an obligation to report both sides, and that it had already published the statements of Mr Tony Fitzgerald QC and written editorials in his support. The fact that some of the stories from 'police sources' turned out to be patently false did not abash the reporters. It was their job to report, they said, not to apply value judgments, and certainly not to censor.

There are at least two problems with this. First, it is a very naïve approach. It ignores the simple fact that any journalist, and any media organisation, constantly imposes judgments by selecting material for publication. This is meant to be done on the basis of 'newsworthiness', and independently of political or or other sectional bias. Many academic studies have tried to define 'newsworthiness' as understood by journalists. It involves, of course, a judgment influenced by traditional methods of doing things, traditional (and largely unexamined) priorities, the seniority of the journalist who has written the story, and a complex network of relationships, including those between the journalists and their sources and journalists and their superiors in the newsroom hierarchy.

The Canberra press gallery provides the most obvious examples of the problematic nature of news judgments in Australia. I have already mentioned the debate on telecommunications, but the identity card controversy is another good example. Although it was the issue that formally triggered the 1987 federal election, the ID card proposal was barely discussed during the campaign. After the election had been won, a group of prominent Australians campaigned on the issue, got significant media attention, and the ID card idea was dropped in favour of the tax-file number. The number, it was said, would only be used to crack down on tax avoidance. But this proposal was changed by the last federal budget, which announced that the number would also be used to combat social security and other fraud on the public purse. The privacy commissioner, Mr Kevin O'Connor, has said on several occasions that the new plans are in effect the original ID card proposal back again. He has received scarcely any media coverage, and there is certainly no suggestion that the proposals will be dropped.

The media in Australia has helped contribute to a climate in which corruption has flourished

If O'Connor is correct, all the media kerfuffle after the election succeeded in doing was to delay the introduction of a scheme. It did not succeed in promoting public debate on the merits of the scheme, nor did it act as much of a curb on government use of power and information. Although the media may have been objective in that it did not push one side or the other, the 'newsworthiness' judgments were a matter of trends, relationships with politicians, and fashion within the Canberra press gallery. At no stage were the fundamentals of those relationships questioned. The *Courier-Mail* in Queensland was in many ways no worse, it is just that its faults became acutely obvious because the established social order was being overturned. The *Courier-Mail*, like the police force, was unable to adjust and simply went on publishing what people said, with little examination of why they might be saying it. Canberra has yet to go through a similar upheaval, so the power relationships remain unquestioned.

The second problem with the catch-cry 'objectivity' is that the word is used in an impoverished fashion. For many journalists, it seems to mean little more than an excuse for not thinking about the issues reported. So long as propaganda from both sides is given equal space, the newspaper can claim to be doing its job. And news-

papers become filled with story after story quoting people from different sides of the political debate, saying precisely what one would expect them to say. This impoverished understanding of the reporter's job is new, and I suspect particularly strong in Australia. In Europe, newspapers see nothing wrong in pitching to particular audiences. Everyone knows, for example, that in England *The Guardian* is to the left of the *The Times.* Yet both report 'facts'.

It is true that the media in Australia have played a part in exposing public scandals in Australian life. Unfortunately it is also true, as the Fitzgerald report said, that the media have helped contribute to a climate in which corruption, mateship and venal public policy have flourished. Institutionalised corruption does not simply pass powerful institutions by. For widespread corruption to exist, the powerful must either participate, acquiesce or be extraordinarily naïve. Acquiescence can be the easiest path, since fitting in with the system can bring considerable benefits. A journalist receiving information from a well-placed contact is less inclined to publish material likely to adversely affect the contact.

The most frequently quoted example of the role journalists can play in keeping public life vigorous and clean is the Watergate scandal in America. But even here, the effectiveness of the media in causing real reform, or real critical analysis of public life, is in doubt. In 1986, the American sociologist Andrew Szasz published a comparison of two scandals reported by the media, to see what effect the reporting had had on public policy and mass attitudes. The scandals were Watergate, and allegations made in 1983 of corruption in the US Environmental Protection Agency, or 'Sewergate'.

In both cases, Szasz found that there had been remarkably few policy changes, although leading figures involved in the scandals had been removed from positions of power and some had been prosecuted. What is more, public faith in the political process had ultimately been confirmed rather than undermined. Media coverage of the scandals had reinforced faith in the status quo. It gave the public a feeling of being involved in the political process, which is usually remote and uninteresting. The scandal became akin to a wrestling match in which 'political bodies fly through the air, mete out incredible punishments and crash noisily to the canvas'.

Faith in the system was confirmed because individuals were removed from office and punished. 'The participants in Watergate treated ... the crisis as the political analogue of a medieval passion play — the Passion of St Democracy. Mass faith in the political process is shaken only to be more deeply reaffirmed, because the political process walks through the Valley of Death and is not found wanting ... The regime of discredited men is driven from office and belief in the fundamental justness of the political system is symbolically affirmed.'

Journalists who believe in their role as guardians of the public good might be depressed that this role, in sociological terms, is so predictable and so limited. But perhaps the effect of having a free media scrutinising

public life is best seen not in terms of grand scandals but rather, as a colleague put it to me, like background noise on a tape. It is part of the climate that prevents totalitarianism and the abuse of power, and its continual contribution to this climate is more important than its role in any particular scandal. This argument can cut both ways. I was involved in the Fitzgerald inquiry as a reporter for *The Age* and later, in a small way, as an employee of the Fitzgerald commission. As already stated, Fitzgerald found that the media had contributed to the climate in which corruption had flourished. If the role of the media is to be 'background noise', part of the general climate of public life, then it is responsible for what is bad in that life as well as what is good.

It is probably too soon to tell whether the Fitzgerald inquiry has been another Passion of St Democracy or an agent of real change. The political bodies have flown through the air and hit the canvas, but, while prominent figures face charges, it is particularly important to remember that their guilt or innocence should not be made the measure of the inquiry's success. Fitzgerald's report emphasised the need for new systems and checks and balances in public life, not the guilt or innocence of individuals. He put it thus: 'The most important thing about the evidence ... is not the truth or falsity of particular allegations, but the pattern, nature and scope of the misconduct which has occurred. The main object of this report and its recommendations is to bring about improved structures and systems. The past misdeeds of individuals are of less concern, except as a basis for learning for the future.'

Youth, arrogance, bravado and cynicism are common in both newsrooms and police stations

It should be pointed out that although he criticised the media, Fitzgerald also recognised its importance. He took special pains to provide facilities for the media to cover his inquiry and his report. Perhaps because he did not trust the reporting, he also made sure the report itself was cheap and easy to read. Fitzgerald made it clear that he believed the inquiry would not have succeeded if it had been closed to the media. The momentum of public scandal, whether or not it proves constructive in the final analysis, was what buttressed the Fitzgerald inquiry against political attack in its early days.

Sadly, the evidence is that the media in Queensland has not improved much as a result of the Fitzgerald experience. The *Courier-Mail*, for example, has assigned reporters to 'cover' the new institutions set up in the wake of the inquiry, but the coverage is little more than reporting of lobby groups. For example, moves to introduce freedom of information legislation have been reported mainly as a threat to various sectional interests—business, it is claimed, will not be able to communicate frankly with government, and public servants will not be able to give candid opinions.

The answers to improving the media's role in our public life are not, in all ways, dissimilar from improving the role of the police. We need better training, and more injection of fresh ideas into the institutions that put out news. We need better recruitment and better management of staff. And we need more critical self-examination. We journalists need to re-examine our role, and this means accepting the fact that objectivity is a complex and possibly barren ideal. We all report, and our sources all speak, from a particular point of view. The trick is to make sure that it is an intelligent one.

The great journalists of history, Defoe and Dickens for example, wrote factual reports of what they saw. They also thought about it, and that thought is what makes their reports so compelling. More recently, the American communist John Reed, in *Ten Days that Shook the World*, wrote what A.J.P. Taylor described in his introduction to the Penguin edition as 'not only the best account of the Bolshevik revolution, it comes near to being the best account of any revolution'. However, as Taylor goes on to say, Reed's account is certainly not that of an uninvolved observer. He even got some of his facts wrong. Taylor says: '[Reed] was too good a journalist to write propaganda, but he made no secret of where his sympathies lay.' His account, Taylor says, is not 'history written in detachment' but 'a contribution to history'.

A contribution to history is the most that journalism can ever be, but it is a fine thing. We should not be frightened to set our own topics rather than to let others with vested interests do it for us. Nor should we hesitate to be as critical of ourselves as we are of others. Of course journalists must report facts and not write propaganda; yet an impoverished understanding of objectivity leads not to unbiased news but to unexamined bias. That is boring, and dangerous. ■

Margaret Simons is a freelance journalist living in South Australia. She was formerly on the staff of *The Age*.

JACK WATERFORD

Trading away welfare

Altering Australia's constitution is generally a Herculean task. Yet an exchange of powers between the Commonwealth and the states may soon occur simply by the leaders' agreement.

THE COMMONWEALTH is close to agreement with the states on one of the most significant exchanges of powers since federation. The deal? Canberra would hand control of most of its community service programs to the states in exchange for their industrial relations powers. First cabs off the rank are likely to be the $480 million Housing and Community Care Programs and the $130 million Supported Accommodation Assistance Plan. But eventually Commonwealth spending on hospitals (about $4.7 billion), nursing homes ($1.9 billion), primary and secondary education ($2.4 billion), disability and rehabilitation services ($300 million) and child care ($250 million) would be placed in the hands of the states, without direct controls.

On the block is about nine per cent of Commonwealth budget outlays. The question is not whether the money will continue to be spent—it will be, either by the states or through agencies funded by them. But the Commonwealth is considering getting out of any direct involvement in such services, and removing many of the strings it has previously attached to money given to the states.

To be fair, the Commonwealth is not proposing simply to abdicate its responsibilities. Agreement on policy objectives would be a precondition for handing over existing Commonwealth functions to the states, and there would be some supervisory machinery to ensure that objectives were achieved. Nonetheless, the move marks a significant retreat by the Commonwealth from involvement in welfare programs. And the kind of supervision envisaged, viewed alongside the Commonwealth's lamentable record in supervising money given to the states, suggests that it really wants to get out of the game.

The Commonwealth's idea of supervision involves upgrading the role of bodies such as the Australian Institute of Health and the Bureau of Statistics. It would continue to gather information about needs, and, to a limited extent, about how they are being addressed. But detailed information about the efficiency and effectiveness of welfare programs may scarcely be available at all.

Given that the states have a much poorer record than the Commonwealth in developing imaginative programs for specially disadvantaged groups, such as Aborigines, migrants and the disabled, and in sponsoring programs controlled by client groups, the quality and extent of these services are at risk. The winners may be those institutional and church welfare programs that are often favoured by the states, but which are not renowned for picking up hard cases, for innovative programs, or for giving welfare clients a say in what is done for them.

There is also a profound risk of the states moving in different directions. Standards of service and eligibility for services already differ markedly around the country, and some states—Queensland, for example—have a poor record in spending on community services. The Commonwealth has often had to target programs in particular states in an effort to get some uniformity of rights and entitlements. Where there are marked differences of approach, it is usually those at the margins who suffer.

Economic pressures have hitherto moved towards making Australia one nation, dismantling the straitjacket of separate state and territorial rules that make a single market impossible. The Commonwealth's push for the states to hand over their industrial-relations powers is a good example. But if Australia ought to be one nation with one economy, why should it have eight separate welfare systems? Of course, no one can be completely happy with the system in place at the moment. The Commonwealth, and the taxpayer, can have little confidence that they are getting proper value for the money given to the states under supposedly strict conditions. The truth is that the Commonwealth has had very little control over this money.

Late last year, Parliament heard from the Commonwealth Auditor-General that he was unable to account for nearly half of the $12.6 billion given to the states in tied grants during 1989–90. There was no certification from state auditors that the money had been spent for the purposes for which it had been given—the absolute minimum in accountability. Commonwealth departments are supposed to monitor the type of spending and often require considerable information from the states about what is going on. Yet the Commonwealth auditor reported bluntly that many programs even lacked clear objectives. The result is evident from the many national surveys of welfare programs.

A NATIONAL INQUIRY by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission reported in 1989 that in welfare services for homeless children there was:

- A lack of clear demarcation of responsibility among federal, state and local governments.
- A lack of agreed policy objectives.
- A failure of planning and co-ordination.
- A low standard of service provision and monitoring.
- Inadequate support to service providers.
- Inadequate training and conditions for workers.

'There has been no comprehensive national assessment of the needs of homeless children and young people', the report stated. 'There has been no overall planning of the allocation of either Commonwealth or state welfare funds appropriated for the establishment, development and maintenance of welfare services or for research and planning in relation to those services, and no investigation of the training needs of those responsible for the delivery of such services. There has been no nationwide evaluation of programs.'

Much the same could be said of any area of welfare policy. And this is not a new problem. In 1976, the Coombs royal commission spoke of the difficulties of some welfare programs where responsibility for planning and management was 'dispersed between federal, state and local levels of government and innumerable voluntary groups, and, with the various levels of government, between departments, commissions and other agencies'.

One of the chief problems for the Commonwealth is that its difficulties in enforcing agreements with the states are political, not legal. To snatch money back from the states, even money granted on strict conditions that have not been honoured, is practically impossible. Any refusal to continue funding, even when there is clear evidence that funding is being misused or used ineffectively, is also impossible.

The question is whether such problems are best dealt with by a transfer of responsibility to the states, with only a residual role for the Commonwealth. The principle for which the Commonwealth will argue is that it should sit down with state ministers, collectively or individually, and agree on objectives for specific welfare programs. Only after agreement was reached would they discuss who should exercise specific welfare functions.

Such agreements are certainly not impossible. Already, for example, the states have agreed with the Commonwealth that the latter is best left in charge of employment services for people with disabilities, because of the Commonwealth's general responsibility for employment and the links with social security transfer payments. On the other hand, the Commonwealth has already agreed with the states that, *prima facie*, accommodation services ought to belong to them.

The working papers for the last Premiers' conference speak of agreements being drawn up specifying policy goals, the scope for diversity of approach between states, which level of government should carry out what functions, and details of effective accountability mechanisms and ways to determine the systems's effectiveness and efficiency. In practice, however, the states have every reason to play it tough. First, they know that the Commonwealth, particularly the Prime Minister's Department, is anxious to unload most of the welfare area. And they know that the Commonwealth's proposals for auditing and accountability controls are, to put it bluntly, pathetic.

It is worthwhile remembering why the Commonwealth first became involved in such areas. Its massive direct role in community services—and its finger in the state pie through tied grants—came about because the states were manifestly failing to deliver services in just these areas. In many cases, it was not simply a matter of a lack of funds but of complete indifference to maintaining a broad national equity in social services. Some of this indifference, particularly in more conservative states such as Queensland and Western Australia (both, ironically, under Labor governments), persists in the bureaucracy and in the ministry. It is pronounced in relation to Aboriginal Affairs, but extends to services for women, migrants and the disabled. Nice, safe charities will probably be fine if what is proposed eventuates, but the worst-off citizens may not be so happy. ■

Jack Waterford is deputy editor of *The Canberra Times*.

Prodigal II

It's time for parsimony and circumspection.
I told you before. We're going through
inhuman times. Even the banks will feel the pinch
and already many merchants scour
their dusty books for long-forgotten debts.
This is no time for borrowing.
Manage as best you can. On the margins
of insomnia and the boundaries of sleep
lurk dubious shapes and shadows, and if you cup
your ears and eavesdrop
at the doorcracks of night, you'll hear deadly
whisperings. Mark my words.
Take your children and head for the bush.
The years of squandering are over.

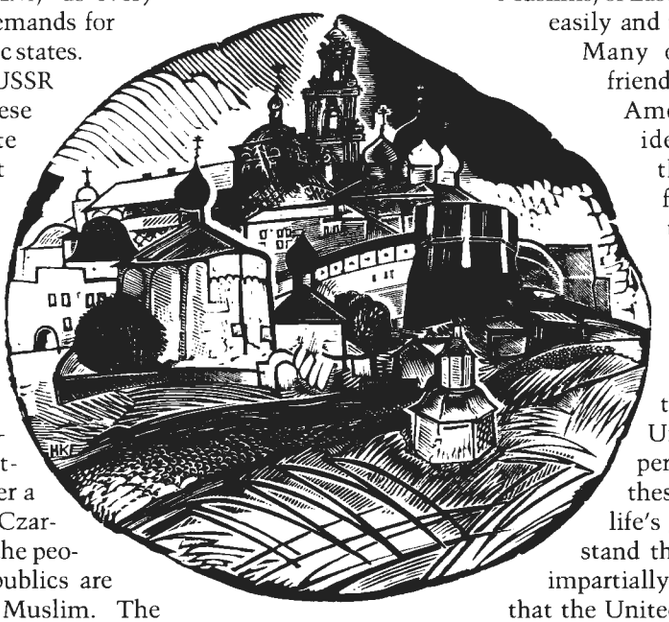
Dimitris Tsaloumas

from **The Observatory**, University of Queensland Press, 1983.

The culture gulf

It has taken a war to alert many to the deep sense of grievance felt by Muslims. The West has spent three centuries learning to be impervious to Islamic culture.Now, it is counting the cost.

THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT, as everyone knows, is resisting demands for independence from the Baltic states. It resists not because the USSR fails to recognise that these countries have a legitimate claim to independence, but because it is afraid of setting a precedent for its volatile Muslim republics.



There are about 60 million Muslims in the USSR, 20 per cent of the population and the fastest growing group there. In thirty years—one generation—Muslims will outnumber the Russians. After a century of repression, first Czarist and then Communist, the peoples of six of the Soviet Republics are still actively and proudly Muslim. The leaders of the Soviet Union wonder whether it is even possible for these Muslims to live under a non-Muslim Government. One may add that these peoples of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and the Kirghiz Republic wonder that too.

Forty years ago, I spent my sophomore year of college at the American University in the then-beautiful city of Beirut. Since then Lebanon has become a synonym for all we fear and dread most in the modern world: unlimited urban violence, complete social collapse, the war of all against all. But Lebanon then was a different place. I made friends with young people from Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Cyprus, Jordan and Iran. They were Muslims, or Eastern Christians who lived easily and tolerantly among them. Many of them are still my friends. I came to realise that Americans had simply no idea of what motivated these people, why they felt reproachful towards the United States, and what their past had been at the crossroads of three continents.

I became convinced that because of the ignorance of the United States it was imperative to for me to study these people, to make it my life's goal to to try to understand them and interpret them impartially. It seemed clear to me that the United States would want interpreters for this vital area, very soon. I would dedicate myself to studying languages and literatures, religion, art, history, hopes and fears, because only a tiny handful of Americans knew anything about them, and these few would not suffice for the job in hand.

What I learned after spending the next eight years doing these things was that America did not want to know. It was very convenient to ignore these people and to see all our interests in that area in terms of world power conflicts. The United States did not want to look at the Middle Eastern peoples themselves or do the hard work necessary to understand their languages and cultures. America was fat and intellectually complacent.

For a long time, the United States didn't even want to teach in its universities what was motivating Muslims, because 'it might be controversial'. My career for years became to teach Muslims outside the United States—seven years in Canada and twelve years in Egypt—about their history, art and culture. They needed to know and they were interested.

Imitation of the West seemed only the road to destruction

Today the world is beginning to understand a few basic facts. Muslims number nearly one billion, they sit astride strategic areas, they control most of the reserves of vital resources. Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States, and Muslims are the fastest growing group in the USSR. Muslims have produced one of the world's greatest civilisations, and their religion, culture and art are worthy of our deep respect. If we do not want their friendship, we should at least be aware that they make formidable enemies.

One of the astonishing political, cultural and religious facts of our time is that Islam has revived and is a cultural force again in the last quarter of the 20th century. Islam is a religion, but it is also a polity—that is, a community that requires government—and a civilisation: three things, all of which have a history, and all of which need to be understood. The 250 years' sleep of the Islamic world may suggest a Rip van Winkle figure. It would be equally apt to talk about the 200 years' sleep of the United States, in its cozy isolation, buffered by great oceans from the world our ancestors in Europe, Asia and Africa knew.

The 17th century, when the US was colonised, certainly knew something about Islam. In 1658, Muslims had invaded Hungary from Turkish-controlled Transylvania. In 1669 they conquered Crete. In 1672, they invaded Poland. By 1678, Muslims had defeated the Russian Empire and conquered part of the Ukraine. Islam was continuing to spread deep into Asia and Africa. In the 17th century, the Black Sea was still, as it had been for centuries, a Muslim lake. And in 1683 a Muslim army once again marched to the gates of Vienna and laid siege to the capital of the Hapsburg Empire. Western civilisation once again trembled at what Muslims might do.

Europe had grown up deeply aware of Muslim civilisation, from the time before Charlemagne when armies of Muslims led by Arabs had conquered Spain. Their descendants remained in Spain for 780 years. Islam was the great challenger. Europeans were always having to compete with Muslims, and for nearly a millennium the Muslims managed to give a good account of themselves, and often to win. In terms of sea power, productivity and organisation, trade and gracious living, science and intellectual accomplishments, Islam usually exercised an easy superiority over the West. Only at the very end of the 17th century did the Europeans begin to demonstrate a growing technological and organisational edge over the Muslims. The Muslims were aware that some things had happened, to their disadvantage, but 980 years had given them an ingrained habit of superiority. They were confident that they would regain their old advantages, up until 1798. That was the fateful year, because in July, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt and conquered it. For the first time the Western world displayed its will and its ability to invade, conquer and exploit old Muslim lands, their resources and their populations. The French were driven out by the Turks in alliance with the British, but by 1882 the British had invaded Egypt again, to do what Napoleon could not do.

In the meantime, one old Muslim country after another had been coming under European control and by the end of World War I the process seemed nearly complete. Every Muslim country except Turkey and what is now Saudi Arabia was under the direct or indirect control of a European country—often Britain or France—but sometimes Russia, or even the Netherlands.

After World War I, Britain accepted a mandate over Palestine from the League of Nations to prepare the inhabitants for self-government, and then, in accordance with the Balfour Declaration, continued to allow Jewish migration from Europe. Britain never resolved the tension created by the conflict between the terms of the declaration and promises it had made to the indigenous Arab population.

During this period the Muslims became convinced that the secret of success must be to imitate the West, to introduce secular law, parliamentary systems, Western dress, architecture and institutions. After World War II this imitation was varied occasionally, with imitation of Eastern European socialist states.

That era came to an end in the 1967 War, in which Israel, backed morally by the West and materially by the United States, quickly and decisively defeated its Arab neighbours. Jerusalem, a holy city for Muslims as well as Jews and Christians, was lost, along with the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. The Sinai Peninsula—one seventh of Egypt's landmass—was occupied until the Camp David accords of 1978.

THE WEST GENERALLY EXULTED at these victories and often jeered at the losers, something that all Muslims felt keenly. For them, something was terribly wrong, something that called for a critical reordering of national and individual life. Imitation of the West now seemed only the road to destruction; perhaps inspiration must be sought in their own distinctive heritage.

That year, 1967, was when disillusionment with imitating the West or Marxism began. It picked up speed, particularly in the 1970s. One of the events that gave the Muslim world a sense of new hope was the Yom Kippur War of 1973, in which Egypt demonstrated the ability of a Muslim nation to wage a modern war. It didn't win, because the United States gave massive aid to the Israelis, and Israel had one of the best armies in

the world in any case. But the war at least demonstrated that Muslims could fight a war with modern weapons. It was something that the world, and not least the Muslim world, needed to learn. Along with this went the success of the 1970s oil embargo, when Arab states managed to deny a critical part of their oil resources to the industrialised world, After the war, they managed to hold out for better prices for their product. This too suggested new power, new hope.

The second major event was the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, a man widely regarded by the Iranian people as a cruel tyrant. The Shah was backed by the American President, backed by the CIA, backed by the US military establishment. Against the Shah and his well-armed military and police, civilians demonstrated chanting the ancient war-cry of the Muslims, *'Allahu Akbar!'* [God is Great]. In the end the Shah was forced to abdicate, and a revolutionary government came into power. Regardless of whether we like what happened to that revolutionary government afterwards, whether we approved of Khomeini or not, the fact remains that here was a historic Muslim people that had grasped its ancient Muslim identity. So we have a period of 175 to 180 years, from 1798 to 1973 or 1978, a period in which Islam was in eclipse and the only way to succeed seemed to be to borrow from the West. We now have a new situation: Islam today is vibrant and revitalised. This must have political consequences.

Muslims have much to be proud of, much to regret and many questions to answer. Among the most important of these, for them and us, are:

- How can the ancient law of Islam best function in the modern world?
- What form of government is best suited to the Muslim polity today?
- Can Muslims participate legally and meaningfully in a state where they are in the minority? This is a burning question for the Muslims of Britain, France, the USSR, India, the Philippines, and China, where they are ten per cent of the population.
- Finally, the world is waiting to see what sort of citizenship non-Muslims can look forward to in states where Muslims are the majority. Will they only be tolerated as second-class citizens? How will Muslims operate in the pluralistic world of the 20th century, where everyone is in some sort of minority?

The time has come for the feast of Abraham, father of Muslims, Jews and Christians. It is time to sit down at one table. ■

— from *America* magazine

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DAMIEN SIMONIS

Counting the divisions

The collapse of the old order in Eastern Europe has prompted the Pope to call a synod of all European bishops for later this year. But it may not be quite the triumphal progress he is expecting.

'HOW MANY DIVISIONS has the Pope?', Stalin once sneered. Last year, while the political and social order Stalin had imposed on Eastern Europe was disintegrating, a Polish pontiff felt able to declare: 'It is God who has triumphed in the East'. At the end of his visit to Czechoslovakia on April 21–22, Pope John Paul II announced that he would convoke a special Synod of Bishops of Europe, from the Urals to the Atlantic, to be held before the end of 1991, the first year of 'the Decade of Evangelisation'. With communism defeated, he said at Velehrad, the time had come to map out the path to a united and Christian Europe. Velehrad is the burial place of St Methodius, who, with his brother with St Cyril, evangelised the Balkans in the ninth century. Early in his reign, the Pope had declared these two co-patrons of Europe, together with St Benedict.)

During his first tour of a Warsaw Pact country outside Poland, the Pope emphasised the need to 'strengthen mutual solidarity and effective co-operation' in Europe. He will be looking for just that solidarity at the special synod, which will probably take place in November. A sign of the symbolic importance being attached to the event, and to the upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe that are its inspiration, are the increasingly strong rumours that a central European capital, probably Vienna or Prague, will be chosen ahead of Rome to host the Synod.

Wherever it is held, this will be the first meeting of its kind in the Church's modern history, and certainly since the permanent Synod of Bishops was established by Pope Paul VI in 1965 to continue the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Ordinary general synods are held every three years, extraordinary synods at short notice on matters of urgency, and special synods on matters of urgency in a particular region. Next year's meeting falls in to the last category and will follow a similar conference on Africa. The synod has no deliberative function, though decisions can be taken with papal consent. The convocation, and indeed cancellation or postponement of the synod, is decided by the Pope alone.

John Paul hopes to hammer out, in practical and policy terms, his vision of a united Europe. A three-day preparatory meeting of the presidents of Europe's twenty-five episcopal conferences was held last June, organised by the secretary-general of the Synod Council in Rome, Archbishop Jan Schotte. At this gathering, the Pope asked, 'What are the special gifts which churches on the other side of the iron curtain can bring to the West, and vice-versa?'.

It is clear from much the Pope has said that he envisages the most special of these gifts transferring from an East whose mettle has been sorely tried (if not always proved) to a West he sees as prey to consumerism and materialism. In his view, the Western churches, weakened by a secularisation arising from their economic well-being, could be strengthened by contact with the lean and disciplined churches (particularly in Poland) that have often had to battle violent suppression to survive.

FOR THE POPE, the second great theme of the meeting will be the way this 'exchange of gifts' should be applied to the Church's mission in Europe 'for the evangelisation of the continent on the eve of the third millenium'. In the words of Peter Hebblethwaite, a veteran Vatican watcher, the Pope has a 'sacred map of Europe that he superimposes on that of modern Europe, and on which he sees Lourdes, Czestochowa ...'. He has consistently refuted the logic of Yalta and the inevitability of a divided Europe. It appears that, to reunite what he has called 'the two lungs' of Christian Europe, and to restore a medieval vision of Europe as Christendom, the Pope aims to further strengthen the conservative arm of the

Winners are grinners, but will they still be smiling in '92?

Church. In the demise of the iron curtain he sees an opportunity, albeit one not without risk, to continue down that path.

Already we have seen examples of methods by which the pontiff seeks to stiffen the backbone of the Church in the West. The controversial appointment of the conservative Joachim Cardinal Meisner (of the former East Berlin) as Archbishop of Cologne in December 1988, in defiance of that city's wishes, was a case in point. Over the past years, Polish priests have been sent to Germany with a similar mission, though many have apparently returned home disillusioned. Both moves are illustrative of what might be expected of the synod, and of the problems the Pope and his allies may face.

It is believed that the bulk of the meeting's efforts will be devoted to 'practical pastoral matters', which means, above all else, organising material and financial aid for the East. There is also the suggestion, following the precedent set by sending Polish priests into Germany, of an exchange of material for manpower. Similar ideas were in fact floated at the general synod on the training of priests, which ended last October in Rome. Archbishop Stephen Sulyk, a Ukrainian metropolitan living in United States, argued that the West has the books and material desperately needed for the formation of priests in the East, while Western seminaries, starved of recruits, could be opened to the East.

Father Serge Kelleher, of England's Keston College, an ecumenical institute for the study of Christian affairs in Eastern Europe, believes that evangelisation in an East starved of religious education will be the dominant issue at the Synod. Topics would include not only provision of much needed material, but also the 'hows' of renewing catechesis in countries where people, though generally more favourably disposed to the Church than in Western industrialised nations, had no formal religious education for more than forty years. 'How do we speak to people brought up under communism?'

Still, the move to a European-wide Christian restoration along the Pope's chosen traditionalist path will not be easy. John Paul will not win universal acceptance for the uncompromising 'anti-Western' stance he adopted in an address to the European Parliament in Strasburg in September 1988, where he declared that 'an ethic based only on social consensus and individual liberty'—with no place for God—would lead to another Auschwitz or Gulag Archipelago.

ANY OUTRIGHT CONDEMNATION of the secularised West, even were it supported by such papal allies as France's Archbishop Jean-Marie Lustiger, will be firmly rejected by other Western Church leaders. England's Cardinal Hume noted last September at the Ampleforth Abbey conference on changes in Europe, an event seen by some as a trial run for the synod, that neither the West nor the East had a 'monopoly on charism, courage and wisdom'. There have been numerous calls in the Western Catholic press for 'a balanced approach'.

Nevertheless, the Pope has indicated that he considers the newly free Eastern churches to be exposed to a strong threat from the undesirable aspects of Western society. In Prague on 21April last year, he told the assembled Czech and Slovak bishops, 'It falls to you to prepare for the churches entrusted to your care suitable immunising defences against certain viruses such as secularism, indifferentism, hedonistic consumerism. practical materialism and also formal atheism.' As Czech Bishop Jan Korec was heard to say a few weeks earlier, 'Liberty is always a risk'.

Just how far the churches and the general populations of former Eastern bloc nations will want to keep out the opulence of the West (if indeed they even are given such a choice) remains to be seen. The Pope himself noted in Czechoslovakia that 'apparently everything started with the collapse of the economies'. And as one observer in London remarked, 'Now the East wants a slice of that consumerism, and who can blame them?'.

Still, difficulties facing the churches of Eastern Europe will not come from the West alone. The Pope has repeated on several occasions that the former Eastern bloc nations, too, are prey to secularism. Rebuilding effective catechesis in those countries is tied to other questions of equal importance. Now that sections of the Church that opposed regimes through forty-five years no longer stand on the barricades, what will be their

role? Can the Church in Poland, whose credibility is strongest, successfully accommodate pluralism? And in those countries where elements of the Church either submitted to, or to varying degrees collaborated with, the communist rulers, how will reconciliation, let alone restoration, take place?

For one London commentator, the crux of the matter for the entire Church — one unlikely to be resolved at the synod — is the question of its 'attitude to modernity'. For the Polish Church, or for the Eastern-rite Catholic Church in the Ukraine—only now emerging from the catacombs after being swallowed up by the Russian Orthodox in 1946—as well as for the Church as a whole, decisions must be made about how to deal with a new environment 'on the eve of the third millenium'. It is a question over which liberals and conservatives continue to fight, particularly in the industrialised West.

In June 1990, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Holy Office) released a document signed by its head, Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, in which the scope for theologians to dissent from the congregation's pronouncements was curbed. 'Standards of conduct appropriate to civil society or the workings of a democracy cannot be purely and simply applied to the Church ... Appealing to the obligation to follow one's conscience cannot legitimate dissent.' To some, perhaps first among them the dissident German theologian Hans Küng, Rome is trying to exert authoritarian control, the disappearance of which it has so heartily welcomed in the political and social life of the former communist countries. While they remained in chains, their resistance provided the pontiff with an example to the West. But their newly won freedom opens the way for dissent, as the Vatican understands the term, to take root.

The promotion of ecumenism has long been high on the Pope's agenda, and he was at pains, during the preparatory meeting in June, to welcome other denominations to participate in the synod, 'for they too share the same experience and the same tasks connected with the service of the Gospel'. But here, too, it is unlikely that the Vatican will see its hopes fully realised. The bitter tug-of-war between the Russian Orthodox and the Ukrainian Catholics (or 'Uniates') will almost certainly ensure that the Orthodox stay away. Although the Vatican has attempted to mediate between the two, conflict regarding recognition for the Uniates and over their former property is far from resolved.

Much speculation about the Synod and about directions to be taken by the Vatican in the new Europe may well be overtaken by events. As Father Serge Kelleher remarked, the Soviet Union 'could disintegrate at any minute'. The collapse of the USSR would overshadow anything that has happened so far, and leave far behind all attempts to deal with the new and fragile freedoms in Central and Eastern Europe. ■

Damien Simonis is *Eureka Street's* European correspondent.

A question of timing

JANUARY SAW THE RELEASE of a draft version of the long-awaited Catholic bishops' statement on the distribution of wealth in Australia. *Common Wealth and Common Good* is to form the basis for further community discussion prior to formulation of a final statement.

The draft is long, more a book than a statement, running to 122 pages. Commissioned in 1987, it has taken a considerable time even to reach this penultimate state. Submissions were received and consultations held, in the main, through 1988.

The bishops are to be commended on several accounts. First, they chose to take a public stand in a contentious area. Second, they adopted a method of consultation that drew on a range of technical expertise and an array of people and interests. The process itself aims at developing moral leadership suited to a pluralist community.

Many doubted, after the closing of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, that the bishops would risk controversy or come to trust lay expertise again so soon. On the evidence of this document, these doubts were misplaced. All the same, danger and uncertainty attend public intervention. To be effective, statements must be timely. When the bishops' inquiry began in 1987, Australia was in a vastly different mood and a different economic predicament. Corporate high-fliers and swashbuckling entrepreneurs had replaced politicians and film stars as the daily meat of the media. It was boom time, and a boom that seemed to have no limit.

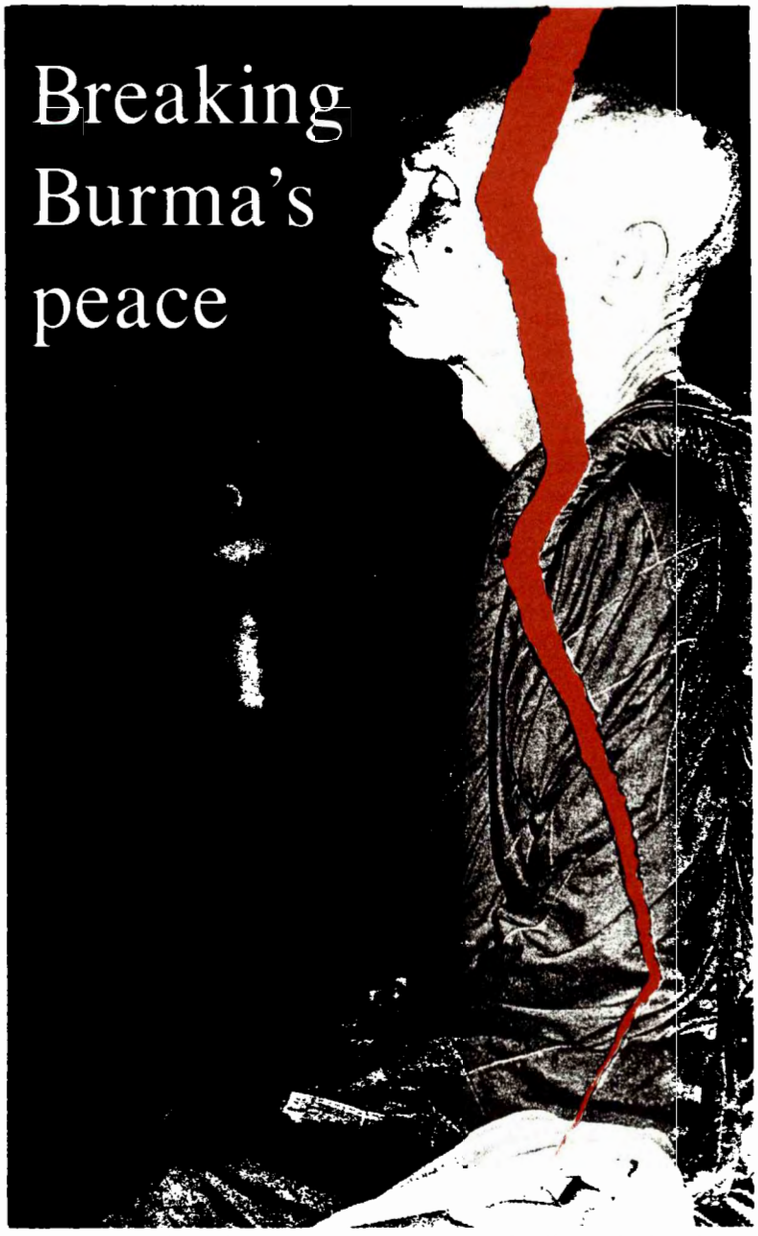
Today, some of the boomers are behind bars, others are facing charges, and the country is in a recession. In addition, the fruits of a Labor Government's steadfast commitment to free trade and deregulation are beginning to bite with poisonous effect. It is not so much the creation and distribution of wealth that is on most Australian minds. It is sheer survival.

We have yet to see what the bishops bind themselves to following the final round of consultations. But one thing is clear: timing is vital. A process begun in 1987 cannot expect, four years later, to have topical impact. Should the final document in fact prove timely, this may be due more to providence than to human expertise.

— Michael Kelly SJ

ANDREW HAMILTON

Breaking Burma's peace



DURING 1990, THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT of Burma carried on a virtual war against the country's citizens. Especially significant were the Buddhist monks' anti-government protests around Mandalay last September. Their protest took symbolic form. Individual monks prostrated themselves before the soldiers. Meanwhile abbots of many monasteries excluded the military from temples and religious ceremonies. Some instructed their monks to turn over their begging bowls when soldiers offered food.

This protest was significant for the place of Buddhism in Burmese society as well as for the country's political future. (One notes parallels between the way Buddhism relates to the state in Burma and the way liberation theology operates in Latin America—where the relationship between church and state is often complex.)

The government's response to the monks' action was characteristic. Abbots had to sign declarations that they would exclude no one from their ritual, and protests were officially declared to be political rather than religious. Hence monks who protested were 'not really' monks, and were therefore liable to capital punishment for subversion. In the short term these measures quelled dissent. In the longer term the challenge to the government's legitimacy remains.

Unrest and repression have existed in Burma since 1987. Ne Win's government, in power since 1962, centralised power and in the process impoverished a richly endowed country. Economic mismanagement culminated in an arbitrary decision to declare valueless all high-denomination banknotes.

When student protests became general, Ne Win resigned, to be replaced by leaders notable only for their loyalty to him. Demonstrations and other demands for democracy increased. Finally, in 1988, in a bloody revolution that preserved the power of the rulers, the army under Saw Maung replaced the civil administration. Government is now exercised by the State Law and Order Restoration Council [SLORC], composed of people who owe their positions to Ne Win.

In May 1990, SLORC held general elections, but under conditions that made it impossible for opposition parties to campaign effectively. Nevertheless, the opposition National League for Democracy shocked SLORC by winning a massive majority. But their elected representatives never took office. The handover of power was delayed indefinitely until a new constitution could be drafted. Members of the previous opposition were gaoled and intimidated. Finally, they were offered a choice between imprisonment and renouncing their own right to govern, until they accepted SLORC's 'right' to rule while a new constitution was drawn up.

Opponents of the regime were imprisoned, tortured, executed or sent as porters for the army. Many fled to Thailand, where they are subject to periodic arrest and repatriation to an uncertain fate. Despite such repression, Burmese critics continue to attack SLORC's legitimacy—and to these protests the monks in Mandalay have lent powerful moral support.

The power of the monks' action derives from the place of Buddhism, in Burmese society. The Buddhist philosophy has been welded to a religious vision of the world in which the structure of civil society aims to reflect the harmonious order of the cosmos. Within this marriage, Buddhism lends legitimacy to the government and in return receives patronage.

Buddhist societies value highly the *sangha* or monastic order. At latest count there were some 300,000 monks in Burma. Their voluntary poverty embodies the Buddhist way to salvation. Moreover, to give alms to the monks is to participate in their merit and to gain merit for oneself.

Usually the monks are considered apolitical, and are presumed to support in a general way the government in power. But the relationship can turn stormy. Where Buddhism legitimates the government, the monks are well placed to become resistance leaders. And in a Buddhist country a colonial government, or one dominated by foreign interests, may come to be viewed by the monks as illegitimate.

In Burma, the monks' leadership benefited from the fact that men can become monks for a short time. So monasteries offer a temporary place of refuge for critics of the government in difficult times. The respect with which monks are regarded can extend to the political movements that even temporary monks represent. The tradition that the Buddha himself renounced his princely family's wealth and power can itself be used powerfully.

These two themes, protest against foreign influence and the desire for a more just society, came together in the activities by many monks in Indochina before the communist victory. Monks were active in the struggle against British colonial administration in the 1930s. Partly as a result, the political movements that came to power after independence espoused a mildly socialist ideology. Socialism as practised under Ne Win, however, had more to do with xenophobia and central control than with equality.

Against this background, the monks' gestures of prostrating before the military and refusing alms struck at the heart of the government's claims to legitimacy. Their action declared any claim based on Burmese Buddhist traditions to have been lost, and exposed the rulers' arbitrary use of power. Consequently, it is impossible to belong to such a regime and gain merit. So the monks' gestures amounted to excommunication.

The present Burmese government has never been content simply to respect the prestige and power of the monks. In 1980, for example, Ne Win's government was stung by a monastic protest. To deprive their critics of sanctuary, the government forced the monks to register and to carry a certificate of ordination. The latest pattern of protests, followed by repression, is part of a continuing struggle. Burma's struggles are enlightening for anyone reflecting on the relationship between religion and the state.

In any society, Christian-based or Buddhist, there is a 'natural' religious view of the world according to which the prevailing religion gives legitimacy to the state and in return is protected by it. The majority of the population and the religious leadership operate on this basis.

The great religions are grafted on to 'natural' religions of this kind, but add a second strand—a tradition that allows criticism of the way governments conduct their affairs. Both strands are represented in Burma. Many Buddhists disagree with the monks' action in overturning their rice bowls (just as many Catholics, including the Roman authorities, disagreed with the use of interdict against civil authorities in Latin America). They see Buddhism as non-political and construe its relationship to the state in abstract terms. For them, the natural relationship between religion and government takes precedence over the radical implications of the tradition.

It was to the second strand that the protesting monks appealed in criticising injustice. They were convinced that the demands of discipleship exercise a higher claim that those of an abstract harmony between religion and society. While it is impossible to predict the future of Burma, the people as a whole, who have resisted cruelty with such gallantry, have also been blessed by the actions of their monks. Their prophetic actions hold out hope for a more just world. ■

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The road to repression

1962: General Ne Win seizes power in a coup.

1988: Student-led protests bring down Ne Win's government after 28 years of rule. A military junta takes over. Protests are crushed, with at least 5000 deaths.

1989: Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is placed under house arrest. Her National League for Democracy prepares to contest national elections.

May 1990: The League is victorious in elections, but is then barred from taking office.

December 1990: Twenty League members of parliament hold talks with representatives from 21 ethnic, student and armed opposition forces and declare a provisional government. Prospect of civil war.

Westminster at Waigani

Observers who carp at Papua New Guinea's fragile democracy ignore the history of parliamentary government elsewhere as well as the social realities in PNG.

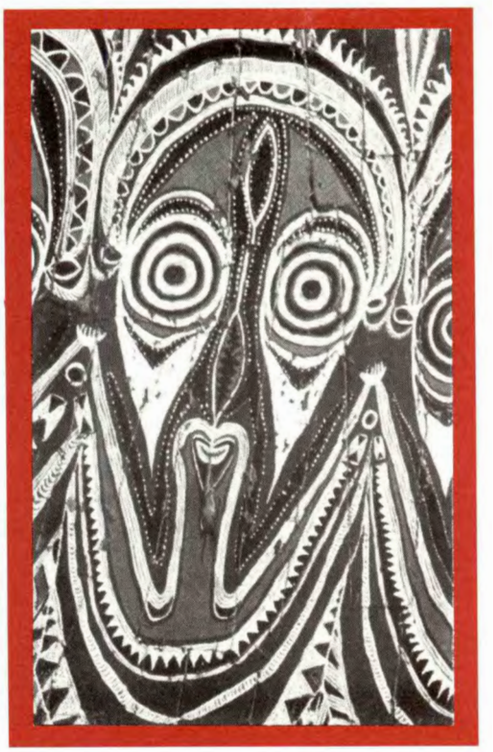
Whatever's good for me, sir,
I never will oppose,
And when my ayes are sold out,
Well. then I'll sell my noes.

The Merry Ploughboy
(18th Century English song)

THE UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA closed down on 27 July last year, as national academic staff and student leaders directed a protest rally against political corruption. Parliament had risen the day before at its noble and picturesque structure in Waigani (Port Moresby), just in time to avoid corporate responsibility. Prudent business houses boarded up. There was backing from youth groups and squatter settlements and *raskols* were there to aggravate and profit from violence. The trade unions did not strike but sent moral support.

It had not been a good year for the police (or army), and violence seemed likely. The security forces had been withdrawn from the North Solomons leaving the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) in charge. And, at a wassail on the night of 20 March (two days later) their humiliated and inebriated commander, the commissioner of police, had (allegedly) ordered the arrest of government leaders—in a happening dubbed by Rowan Callick 'the Bar-B-Coup'. The commissioner was not obeyed and was placed on a treason charge.

The occasion for the rally was the tabling of letters by opposition leader Paias Wingti on 18 July. According to these, prime minister Namaliu appeared to be paying more than 400,000 kina under 'blackmail and threats' to four former Pangu Pati ministers who had recently stood down—not too willingly, it appeared—to give four comrades a turn at ministerial patronage. The university expected better of one who had been among its first alumni, as well as its first postgraduate (in Canada) and its first national lecturer (in history). He was considered a man of integrity. In fact respect for Namaliu may have been an element in the restraint of UPNG leaders (complemented by police). All the same, a follow-up headline claimed that morning that a further 2.5 million kina had been dispersed to 73 MPs. This was a bare two-thirds majority of the 109 member House—and the exact fraction needed to get through crucial constitutional reforms that might eliminate some of the corruption. But that was probably a coincidence.



Namaliu denied that there had been 'threats', said that the importunities of the MPs were related to their established 'slush fund', and referred the question to the ombudsman. The latter had acted strongly both in the past and recently, but appeared to be having problems dealing with the recommendations of Mr Justice Barnett's forestry inquiry and in particular with legal actions to be taken against deputy prime minister (formerly Brigadier-General) Ted Diro.

Namaliu projected the abolition of the slush fund and his prime ministerial discretionary fund. The rally was mollified, though not satisfied. Attempts by provocateurs failed to generate serious violence. However, the rally would reconvene, said its leaders, on 7 November (during the examination period) to see what had been done.

Back in academe, one or two foreign pundits asked: without a slush fund, how will anyone sustain a simple majority, let alone one of two-thirds, to achieve reform? PNG is a surprising country; all sorts of putatively vol-

atile people show unusual restraint, even magnanimity, at times. But a self-denying ordinance by MPs? In any case, why should they? Is the problem simply one of venality or is it both cultural and systematic?

Come 7 November, there were exams and no rally. But there was intense lobbying for the fifth attempt in little more than two years at a no-confidence vote against Namaliu. (Constitutionally, such votes may be held every six months until a year before an election.) Namaliu was assumed to have the numbers but then came the surprise: the budget's three readings were steamrolled through without discussion before 4.10 PM and parliament was adjourned until 16 July this year.

The Opposition had barely taken up fielding positions. It cried 'unconstitutional', but some experts said it wasn't. (In any case, in April 1988 Wingti–Chan had aborted a session in two and a half hours, in a gesture worthy of Bjelke-Petersen.) And 16 July would be just less than a year before the 1992 elections. If this move was constitutional, Namaliu would complete his innings. But would he have enough time to force a change in the rules? To what purpose?

The answer to the second question is: to try to encourage a genuine party system without which Westminster cannot guarantee that any prime minister can carry his bat, or put anything but spasmodic runs on the board, as MPs continually change sides.

A British Tradition

SIR ROBERT WALPOLE, generally presented as Britain's first prime minister, has been described by Dorothy Marshall as 'efficient and ruthless' in his use of patronage, which he conferred only on 'friends, relations and those who serve him'—and he 'accumulated a considerable fortune' [*Eighteenth Century England*, p. 156]. A popular rhyme described Walpole in these terms:

> *Bob of Lynn during forty years,*
> *Directed, perplex'd and*
> *mismanaged Affairs;*
> *A Whig out of Place [i.e. office],*
> *and a Tory when in:*
> *And a very good Trimmer*
> *was Bob of Lynn.*

The 'great commoner', Pitt the Elder, represented Old Sarum, the rottenest of boroughs, purchased through his progenitor, 'Diamond' Pitt, despoiler of nabobs. The most eloquent and virtue-conscious of 'Whigs', Edmund Burke, had to palaver his patron, the Marquis of Rockingham, for preferment. Edward Gibbon MP was 'a silent member and leisured pensioner of the benevolent Board of Trade' [P. Quennell, *Four Portraits*, p. 118], thanks to Lord North PM, in between volumes of Decline and Fall.

Students of British history will recall that the Westminster system was a result of gradual change, and that today's mutant emerged from that old whore, the 18th century bicameral parliament. Moralising historians in the past deplored her version of 'slush funds' in terms like 'bribery and corruption', and thought that terms like Whig and Tory signified 'parties'. However, a head-counting sophisticate, Sir Lewis Namier, reminded us more than sixty years ago that the competition was really between 'ins' and 'outs'. He created a less opprobrious outlook on 'patronage'—and the Pelhams. Without it the Westminster system could hardly have evolved for Britain, Australia or Papua New Guinea. Would Westminster and the constitutional monarchy have gone down with those disreputables George IV and William IV in favour of Washington? Washminster? Westington? Wellington, even?

I am not, I hope, saying that corruption should be allowed to thrive. But I think its function should be addressed before passing judgment on the moral character of parliamentarians and their fitness to run an independent state. One would imagine from some Australian commentators that the problems of governance in PNG derive from imputed racial characteristics or from the indigenous population's allegedly recent 'descent from the trees'.

THE CHIEF OMBUDSMAN IS INVESTIGATING up to 90 of the 109 MPs for abuse of slush funds and the Community Education Fee Subsidy scheme. Because of these funds, MPs are seen personally distributing money to schools in their electorates. Shortfalls in supervision and accountability create overriding temptations—especially when highly paid expatriates can enjoy a lifestyle unsustainable on an MP's salary, and when an MP's family has not passed on inheritable modern sector wealth.

In 1978, one issue that might have differentiated the commodities offered by Government and Opposition concerned the leadership code. The more radical members of Pangu, supported by the so-called 'Gang of Four' (Namaliu, Siaguru, Morauta and Lepani), all key public servants, induced Somare to propose restrictions on the financial activities of ministers, senior public servants and heads of statutory corporations. This move was spurred on by the Bougainville regional MP, Fr John Momis, and his co-'constitution father', John Kaputin. Ministers were to be obliged to withdraw from business, their family assets were to be placed in a 'blind trust', and they were not to acquire further assets while holding national office. The leader of the opposition also came to be included. Political parties that had generated 'business arms' to sustain themselves were to be legislated out of commerce, and some more equitable basis for support was foreshadowed.

Sir Julius Chan, a wealthy entrepreneur, objected that people of ability would be deterred from entering politics, while Sir Iambakey Okuk said that these measures would cut across the Highlanders' 'big man' tradition of leadership through personal wealth. Somare

proclaimed that 'support for his proposal ... [was] a fundamental question of confidence in his leadership'. But he was unable to muster the two-thirds majority needed for constitutional change.

It was a crucial vote and one that, catalysed by other issues, led to Somare's defeat in a no-confidence motion in March 1980. This brought to government a ramshackle and less virtuous ministry—one led by Chan and Okuk, but also including Momis and Kaputin.

Somare, though resenting the usurpation of what he saw as his rightful place, seemed content to let this happen. Meanwhile his lieutenants organised a brilliant 'razzamataz' campaign for the 1982 election and, with the advantage of a recession, won for Pangu 51 seats out of 109.

Only four independents were elected, though independents comprised 41 per cent of the candidates and polled 21 per cent of the votes. Although Somare's Pangu spokesmen before the elections fulminated against changing parties and wanted to legislate against it, they naturally enough accepted turncoats. Pangu had 61 ostensible supporters within two months. Truly, the optimists felt, rule by *party* had arrived.

What was overlooked, however, was that elections in PNG are not about discrimination between the policies on offer. Voters ask, in the main, which candidate is likely to bring 'development' to their group in their area—that is, schools, aid posts, roads, cash flow, consumer goods, marketing. Politics is an acknowledged path to wealth and prestige. So a candidate, even when endorsed, does not flaunt overmuch his/her party banner but relies more on personality and affiliations to kin, clan, religious group, local associations or personal success in business and education. Certainly party policies are framed, but they are grist for élites and for the media.

A three-way split in Pangu in 1985 and the replacement, late in the year, of Somare by Highlander Paias Wingti was only a symptom of the amorphous electoral process. In 1987, only 37 per cent of candidates had endorsement. This was in spite of the imaginative attempt by the electoral commissioner to stimulate party voting by placing photos of party leaders on the ballot papers next to those of endorsees. Of course the number of candidates has something to do with this: in 1977, 879 candidates contested the 109 seats and in 1987 there were 1515.

Papua New Guinea certainly has a sort of participatory democracy. Candidates and party leaders simply shop around for each other at election time; candidates cannot emerge selectively from party ranks. A major party will look for a sympathetic and able candidate to whom financial and logistic support might be offered, as well as to candidates with a clear claim on loyalty. Unofficial and even multiple endorsements are not unknown.

As winners emerge, party functionaries lobby them vigorously to join their faction (a more likely word than 'party'!) and MPs try to get access to office to replenish money spent on winning the election. Loyalties and obligations wither rapidly and politicians change sides uninhibitedly.

For a prime minister the result is an extravagant preoccupation with the 'numbers game', with politicking rather than with policy. The constitutional provision for a no-confidence vote each six months gives every MP a chance to bargain for a portfolio or some other turn at the pork barrel. Hence the origin of the 'slush fund' in 1979, when Somare was being challenged by Okuk and decided to allow MPs to control the dispersal in their electorates of the Village Economic Development Fund.

Under Chan–Okuk this was transformed into sectoral programs in health, transport and rural development. A further stimulus to allowing direct patronage was the onset of provincial government (1977–78) when a second tier of politicians came between the MP and his/her electorate. So 'corruption' in PNG is not just cupidity but a matter of culture and survival—as it was also in 18th century England.

It is unusual for a Third World people to have accepted the rules of Westminster succession so amiably: there have been four prime ministers in the 1980s without any manifest violence when a government has fallen. A change to a Washington system has been suggested, but would, I believe, raise the problem of a regional hegemony. An entrenched Highlands president, for example, would be perceived as such in Papua and the Islands, and with that could come more agitation for separatism and ethnic strife.

Westminster offers the greater flexibility. But even with a genuine party system, as Australian states know too well, corruption easily occurs. Without such a system it is inevitable. Conversely we must ask whether, in a polity without broad ideological divisions, 'parties' (in the current PNG sense) can, without 'corruption', stabilise at all. ■

Postscript: In January this year the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court ruled that, constitutionally, parliament had to be summoned twice before 16 July. There is a testing time ahead for all.

James Griffin is a former professor of history at the University of Papua New Guinea. He has recently returned to Australia.

The subversive

For this first in a series of articles on Australian cartoonists, Ray Cassin and Morag Fraser talked to ***John Spooner***

AUSTRALIAN CARTOON ART is so consistently extraordinary that we take it for granted, like salt, or lemons. There it is on the table every morning, bracing, eccentric—the maverick edge of Australian journalism—yet also an indispensable part of our *lingua franca* . We treat Ron Tanberg's forensic pocket windows on our national life like a birthright. Which came first, our perception of the futility of espionage or Bruce Petty's banal spooks? Who inscribed bulimic techno-bureaucracies on our consciousness decades before Dawkins or *Yes Minister*? Bruce Petty. Who, on the morning war broke out in the Gulf, fingered the hype of 'Operation Desert Storm' by drawing it as a black, apocalyptic fury? Les Tanner of course. Prophets in their own country...

Modern martyrdom ...

A prophet is possibly the last thing John Spooner would claim to be. Widely recognised as one of Australia's best illustrators, winner of many awards, including the Walkley, he is a scrupulous deflector of praise. Maybe he knows too much to risk taking it seriously. You get a clue to Spooner's reticence from one of his own etchings, 'Fame' (in the 1989 collection, *Bodies and Souls*) in which a vacant ceremonial chair, carried aloft by four sinister flunkies, is embossed with the demonic leer of Mephistopheles. And if that isn't clue enough, go to his 'Naked Emperor' and ponder there the gross folly of self display.

So it is an interesting exercise, fitting together the powerful social commentary of Spooner's drawings, the savagery of some of his caricatures with their intimations of evil, and the quiet man who (discounting his jeans) looks for all the world like the proper lawyer he once was, or the doctor he might have been if his maths had been up to it.

Spooner says he has always drawn 'for my own pleasure', but it was not until the late '60s that he became interested in political art. In those high times for radical politics, cartooning was fashionable, new magazines sprouted like mung beans, and Leunig was starting at *Nation Review*. Threatened with the Vietnam war ballot, Spooner thought, 'P'raps I'd better be interested!'.

His interest in political art expanded into a study of art history, and led, finally, to a professional switch from law to art. But Spooner retained many of the law's preoccupations. Some of his strongest drawings are indictments of hypocrisy, injustice, or institutionalised brutality. As political art they are plumb in the line of Daumier in Europe, Noel Counihan in Australia. Not

Gadfly

that Spooner himself would make such a claim. He acknowledges debt, a 'standing on the shoulders of past artists', then detours into discussing how he uses his illustrious sources.

'To start with, you are insignificant—like an essayist who quotes Tolstoy. I feel it's a legitimate tradition to use art in newspaper drawing because you are not passing yourself off as anything more than a carrier of a message. Also, in newspaper art you are dealing

... Modern miracles

Picture by HENRY JOLLES

with metaphors that are common currency in people's lives, and famous works of art are part of that common currency.' Spooner's experiments with the 'common currency' of art have considerable shock potential. They wrench famous images into new contexts, and not everyone appreciates the integrity of Spooner's intentions, as he has discovered.

'I'll give you an occasion: I was using Leonardo's *Annunciation* in a drawing on IVF. Now all I was trying to do, in the course of this highly technical, scientific, ethical debate, was to recapture the idea of miracle in the IVF process. Instead of a lily the angel holds a test tube. Anyway, I got a very savage letter from a monsignor. Now I think there *is* a good argument to suggest that I trivialised the image, but when I did it I actually didn't feel like that. My heart was pure.'

Leonardo's *Annunciation* and an artist's purity of heart seem a world away from the grind of daily journalism. Yet the graphic range and moral nous of the cartoons and drawings that appear in *The Age*, day after day, suggest something very unusual and interesting is going on. There is great talent in other states, and on other newspapers, but there is no equivalent concentration.

Nor is there the metaphysical bent. Spooner explains this in two ways: 'In Melbourne, at *The Age*, we

Fame *Etching and aquatint*

have been well paid. Ranald McDonald started it and they have never quibbled. The other thing is the presence of Leunig. Leunig is restless about his art and he has had an enormous effect on all of us in his exploration of the boundaries of what newspapers can publish. Leunig is extraordinary, but so are the others, as Spooner is quick to acknowledge: 'There are people like Bruce Petty, who's got a wonderful mind for politics and economics. Then there's Tandberg's wit. He talks like his cartoons. Imagine being around someone like that. And Les Tanner, who has travelled extensively all over Europe, who can sculpt, who can also write. There is a kind of restless thing up there and it is a very powerful ingredient.'

Spooner expands on the 'restless thing up there' with a story about his colleague Peter Nicholson (of the caustic, knobbly cartoons and *Rubbery Figures*). In 1979 Nicholson sold his car, rented his house and took the entire family to Italy, just to study art. Spooner was there himself, on a similar quest. 'I'll never forget the day. I was sitting, lonely as hell, in Florence, so lonely I was talking to people I'd never normally talk to. Then suddenly: "G'day Spoons." I look up and there is Peter with a stack of postcards in his hands. He launches into a quiz on what painting is what and who did it. So I spent the next five days travelling around with him in a wonderful guided tour of galleries I didn't even know existed. Now there is another person who is always trying to push out boundaries.'

Spooner is a superb draughtsman, but technique alone doesn't account for the shock of revelation which his portraits yield. In them he too is pushing out boundaries, often into spiritually dark territory: 'I think that in all portraiture there is an element of self-portraiture; we all have a side to our nature which is abominable. That is why we have ethical systems, because we know the danger that is in ourselves. And when you are drawing a person you are trying to identify the part of that person that is in you. I'm not saying that I see Hitler when I do Hitler, but I am saying that the capacity for evil acts is comparable to our capacity to imagine evil.'

Sometimes what Spooner taps is not evil but ambiguity, the confusion that is in us: 'It is a cliché of facial analysis to say that the face is uneven, but it's true. Often people disguise their true selves in the way they habitually arrange their facial expression.' If you look at the asymmetrical halves of a Spooner portrait you can see what he means. The face will express quite conflicting moods and impulses. Sometimes the contradiction between one side and the other suggests guile, sometimes tragedy.

This ability to unmask, to reveal the spots under the television makeup, to strip away 'image', makes Spooner a formidable political cartoonist. In his sights at the moment are the economic policies of both Liberal and Labor parties, of which he is a passionate critic. A drawing of John Hewson presented him as a wolf in sheep's clothing: 'That's because in the way events have unfolded Hewson has come out as this easy-track, modern nice guy. I think he is unbelievably hazardous—a rampant, radical liberal. He wants to change society. He would obliterate the manufacturing sector.' Paul Keating comes in for similar treatment and, incidentally, forces from Spooner a definition of the role to be played by artists and print journalists in a world dominated by electronic media. 'Maybe artists can undermine a lot of this. Television can do things we in the press can't do, but against a practitioner like Keating, who is a master salesman, television is helpless. It hasn't got time to tackle him, and if it ever did ask the right question he would swamp you with so many red herrings that you would smell like a fish market for the rest of the week. But we (I mean the press) can act in this little subversive gadfly role.'

That seems like a serious enough agenda for the people Spooner describes as 'the restless souls, the wandering minds, the citizens' of the cartoonists' room. ■

Next month: Michael Leunig.

Naked Emperor

The aftermyth of war

AUSTRALIA HAS NO PUBLIC SQUARES, only public houses. There are, of course, open spaces in our cities that ape the *platzen* and *piazze* of the Old World: Sydney has its Martin Plaza, Adelaide its Rundle Mall and Perth its Forrest Place. In Melbourne, there is even a concrete arena of dull monumentality that bureaucratic literalness has dubbed the City Square. And true, the City Square and Forrest Place attract political meetings, and Martin Plaza and Rundle Mall have buskers. But no one is fooled. The life of a city is to be found in places where people meet to talk, to carouse and to argue, whether about things trivial or things terrible. They must be places where people can contentedly admit to having *killed* some time, without feeling bound to confess that they *wasted* time. And in Australia, there has only ever been one candidate for such a place: the pub.

As a true national institution, the pub is being celebrated in its decline. It has found champions, though not many, at a time when it is being eclipsed by cafes with tediously postmodern décor and frigidly postmodernist clientele. The cafe is outpacing the pub as prime purveyor of a slice of the national life, but the slices are now served paper-thin beneath a vanilla-cream facade. In the inner city, if pubs survive at all they too are in danger of being overwhelmed by an excess of good taste. Restorers strive to repaint them in heritage colours, ripping up beer-rotted carpets and burnishing gilt bar mirrors to a lustre too bright for mere mortal drinkers. Presumably, restoration is meant to reveal the pub as its first customers saw it. But, unfortunately, restorers rarely reveal a pub as its first customers *used* it. Drinking in a restored pub is like drinking in an Edwardian parlour, full of spittoons that everyone is too polite or too squeamish to use.

Where but in the remaining unrestored pubs, the sweaty, grotty, rocking pubs, could you witness a scene such as that which I now recount? It is a hot night in the week before Christmas. If this were a scene concocted from the movies, there would be a drunk old Irishman sitting in the corner of the bar, maudlin with thoughts of home. But since this is a true story, there is in fact a beautiful young woman sitting in the corner of the bar. She merely happens to be Irish, maudlin with thoughts of home and wanting to tell me about them. The other drinkers complete the range of public-bar stereotypes: punks and bikers, competing for juke box and pool table with workers from the foundry across the road. But one drinker is different. He is a Maori, and he is in uniform. It is a full dress army uniform, with gleaming buttons, trousers sharply creased and the ribbons of service medals above the jacket pocket. At first glance, all the details are correct: this is no op-shop warrior.

A punk perched two bar stools away from the Maori asks him why he is in uniform. The Maori replies that he served in the New Zealand army in Korea and Vietnam, and he looks old enough for this to be true. But he says that he is still on the active service list, which could not be true. He claims to be a colonel, yet the epaulettes on his shoulders indicate a captain's rank. And he has another surprise: 'We're gonna go to Iraq next Wednesday', he says. 'We're gonna invade 'em.'

The incongruities in the Maori's story have not made the punk suspicious. Well, if you are encased in metal-studded black leather but think it odd that someone else is in uniform, incongruities probably wouldn't worry you, would they? Instead of just noting that the Maori appears to be another sad victim of the aftermyth of war, the punk decides to debate the merits of mixing it with Saddam Hussein. This makes the Maori angry, and the whole bar becomes involved. The foundry workers, the bikers and the punk's own friends rail against this gilded youth who is making life hard for the fantasy soldier. 'How can you sit there and talk like that,' they chant, 'when this brave man could be going to his death next week?'

They rush to buy the Maori drinks, slapping him on the back and wishing him good fortune. The punk, shunned by all, cowers by the bar. In a mood to play mediator, I try to explain to him that he should not take the Maori's story too seriously. I say that the man obviously has his invasion deadline wrong, his rank wrong, a uniform that is too good to be true, and that there are no New Zealand ground forces in the Gulf anyway. Of course, I am foolish to intervene. 'Ah, shuddup,' screams the punk, sweeping his glass and several others from the bar. 'How would you know?' Thus rebuffed, and resigned now to an evening of unreality, I return to my beer. But there is some compensation. For the first time that night, the beautiful Irishwoman is smiling.

Ray Cassin is production editor of *Eureka Street*.

FORUM

Balancing Acts

Decisions, decisions — no one makes them in a vacuum or according to some abstract model of rationality. Human beings make their choices against a background of beliefs, personal and cultural, that define their world.

***Adrian Lyons** and **Kate Lindsey** asked three Australians and an Indonesian how they chart the course of their lives.*

The Indonesian Way

Francis Wahono *is an Indonesian Jesuit undertaking postgraduate studies in economics in Australia.*

FRANCIS WAHONO is well equipped to compare Eastern and Western approaches to decision-making, given his earlier experience of Australia as a theological student, a return to Indonesia, and now a further year in Australia. Sometimes he fears losing his native culture and its holistic sense of things.

'Asian people attend to the inner side of things first. This is central to our ways of making decisions. For an Indonesian, the principle of harmony is very strong. This implies living at peace not only with oneself, or even with all that is human, but with the macrocosm as well —with the whole of nature and with the Superbeing, God. Within this cosmic context all decisions, even the smallest, are worked out.

'There is a second key to understanding our ways of choosing. Ours is a shame culture rather than a guilt one. At all costs one must avoid embarrassing another person, especially anyone senior. But respect for juniors is also part of proper behaviour.'

And reasoning, finding good arguments to support one's proposed course of action—is that highly valued among Indonesians? Francis pauses momentarily. 'The Javanese way has more to do with feelings, with being aware of one's inner spirit, getting in touch with what makes us peaceful and what leaves us uneasy. That kind of awareness we value ahead of reason. For us, it is more important to be "wise" and find ways of maintaining harmony than it is to be "correct".'

In practice, he explains, a person commands very little respect if he or she goes around confronting others, or shouting and embarrassing others. Of course, arriving at a restrained manner of action and speech requires discipline. 'Just like Westerners, we Indonesians experience turbulent emotions which could be mistaken for that underlying stream of feelings we strive to listen to. The Hindu and Buddhist traditions, both close to our own, teach that maturity depends on how well one controls one's own body and senses.'

Are there persons in Indonesian society who embody wisdom, and who are available to assist with decision-making? Francis' face becomes more animated and his voice rises. 'Oh yes, like other peoples in the East, we give an important place to the guru. Not that the guru has high social status—that is a common misunderstanding—but at moments of difficulty or perplexity people turn to someone recognised as having spiritual power and wisdom. In Javanese village society, the informal leaders are very important. Especially in times of difficulty or threat, people approach them for help. Their profile must include honesty, generosity and being known to pose no risk of causing harm. To children they are sacred figures, revered but not feared.'

In Francis Wahono's view, these informal leaders approximate to the role that Christian and Muslim clergy should exercise in Indonesian society. 'Of course', he adds significantly, 'the government would like to co-opt these informal leaders, especially the Muslim ones, since they can become rallying-points for discontent, and sometimes a focus for protests.'

Given that Indonesian society is so oriented towards achieving harmony, can an individual or group express strong dissent and work for change without violating cultural norms? 'Yes, of course, but not through channels that you Westerners would expect. That is one reason why problems recur between the Australian press and Indonesian leaders. You people want to criticise the Indonesian government concerning the take-over of East Timor, or over human rights questions, or to criticise the family businesses of some of our military men. You do it directly. That is not our way.

'In earlier times, if peasants were discontented, say about the loss of their land, they would come and sit on the grass outside the royal palace. Seeing them there in the sun, the ruler would know that all was not harmonious in the kingdom. And the peasants would expect a wise king to see them and listen, though this would be done indirectly, through an official sent to hear their grievances.'

IN THE PAST, Indonesian practice resembled that of Thailand, where the king was expected to be wisest of all and responsive to any sign of disharmony. Such ways of acting rest on lofty notions of authority, surely? Francis agrees. 'Harmony Indonesian-style is definitely hierarchical. Authority, generally conferred through democratic elections (which are customary even at village level), is believed to be held from God. So in criticising a leader, especially the president, one must always distinguish between the person and his sacredness. Upsetting the prevailing harmony between microcosm and macrocosm cannot be tolerated.'

Then what of the press? Can it exercise a role even remotely similar to the one expected of it in a Western democracy? 'The Indonesian press has learnt how to be quite effective within these cultural con-

straints. It has mastered the art of criticising without hurting. 'Although the major sections of a newspaper's front pages may expound government policy, towards the bottom of each page one notices feature articles outlining injustices to be addressed or hinting at signs of unrest. A wise ruler—and any informed reader—knows exactly how to read these pages'.

And within the family, how does Indonesian-style decision-making function? By way of response Francis tells a story. His own younger brother was clearly unhappy during his first two years of university study, in trouble for street-fighting and generally unable to settle down. His father could not understand such distress and co-opted an uncle to speak with the boy. After all, as a good father he had invited the boy to prepare for marriage and had promised financial support for any career he might choose.

The boy was honest with his uncle in a manner virtually impossible for a father and son at odds. It emerged that the boy wanted to be a priest. At first his father was dismayed—one in the family was enough. But two years of severe distress indicated clearly that harmony was not being achieved. (There were even fears about the boy's mental balance.) So the uncle was authorised to approve a change of career plans. Then, and only then, could father and son to speak face to face.

Whether such culturally conditioned ways continue long in Indonesia is open to doubt. In church circles, superiors once sent officials to engage in circuitous conversations with individuals about to be affected by their decisions (and tried to see that decisions became effective while they themselves were away). That way, face was saved and conflict avoided. But such customs are changing.

Young Indonesians in general are becoming more individualistic in their choices. 'They certainly have more money than we did, but also more responsibility', Francis notes. 'When I was young I had one pair of shoes, two pairs of trousers and three shirts—and rode a bicycle. Now young people go to the movies, wear trendy fashions and ride motor-bikes. Their expectations are certainly high. They are much influenced by the society around them. Probably the power of the family has lessened.'

Living within two cultures, sometimes feeling suspended between the two, Francis Wahono values the wisdom each offers. He is also sensitive to their pitfalls. Putting one's feelings first can end in devaluing logic or the direct articulation of one's reasons. Diplomatically, he underlines the clarity of Western reasoning.

But what if a friend were to challenge a decision of his, one made according to 'feeling'? He pauses, then frowns slightly. 'In that case I would check my decision and perhaps seek more information. Then I might feel better about it—and go ahead with my original decision.' ■

The Counsellor

***Helene** works as a counsellor in private practice and for a welfare agency.*

HELENE is a great listener. That, she explains, is the essence of her job. 'I believe people should be responsibly autonomous in their thinking and decision-making. And counselling can be a big help in that process.'

'Helene' (her real name is withheld for professional reasons) sees her role as that of a facilitator rather than an actor in others' decision-making dramas. Outcomes concern her less than do the processes and routes by which people reach major decisions.

Do some people in fact come seeking confirmation of choices that they have already made? Helene agrees this is the case with some, but even these come seeking a supportive relationship within which they can become strong enough to act on their decision.

'And sometimes people are simply defensive or use defence mechanisms. Frequently they intellectualise. So at the beginning of our time together I try to discover where this individual is as a whole person, rather than what ideas (or even vision) come readily to mind. I want to know what is going on underneath.'

Thus far, Helene's approach sounds familiar. One expects a psychologist to go probing below surfaces. But her next move is less predictable. 'I always want to know, and want the person concerned to consider: who knows about the proposed decision? Who is it going to affect? Are there children involved? Are there parents? Are there friends? Is it work-related? What is going to happen to each of these relationships if you make this decision?'

This line of questioning is social and contextual. Its purpose is to 'place' the person within a network of relationships, and to prompt reflection on the likely effects of any change on relationships—all the while identifying likely allies and likely opponents.

Helene's approach matches Carol Gilligan's in her controversy with Lawrence Kohlberg; there Kohlberg stood accused of underestimating the centrality of relationships and the person's whole environment in decision-making. [See Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, Harvard University Press, 1982.]

Helene also attends closely to her own developing relationship with a client, asking questions of clarification, checking that each party truly understands the other —and themselves. 'Often we know something without knowing how important it is.'

Many times a person presents with 'a problem' rather seeing the need for a decision. Discussion and reflection may bring such a person to admit, inwardly and to the counsellor, that what is needed is a move, a change—whether this concerns a marriage, a divorce or a career change. 'I try to help individuals clarify what they're looking for and then look carefully at the options. I suggest "sitting with" each option—perhaps writing it down—and then picturing the likely outcome five or ten years later.'

Helene opts for the long road to considered choices, examining all consequences before approaching a final decision. Some would say that her process of moving from thought about externals to an internal 'feel' about the options—all the time weighing the pros and cons—is distinctly female (and 'holistic') in character. Since final decisions usually demand sacrifices, identifying the likely losses (as well as likely gains) is integral to the process. Once all of this is accomplished, actually carrying out the decision generally seems to Helene's clients less burdensome than when they came to her. The ultimate goal is happiness. Honesty with oneself and thoroughness are the routes she teaches.

And what of religion? (Helene herself is a committed Catholic with a profound concern for justice issues.) From her own observation, does religion generally simplify decision-making or complicate it? Helene is impressed by the analysis in James Fowler's *Stages of Faith* [Harper & Row, 1981]. If a person is still at the 'good girl' or 'good boy' stage, a religious background can be a real problem. 'Such a person is still trying to please whoever is the authority figure within their faith, be it mother, father or God (whoever God is for them). The authority figure does not have to be alive. An adult can continue living in a parent's shadows years after that parent has died.'

Helene sees the priest in Denys Arcand's film *Jesus of Montreal* as such a figure. Castigated by the Church for his part in the Passion play, he 'crucifies' the contemporary play, demanding that the actors return to his own safe, conservative, predictable version. In such cases, Helene says, guilt remains a strong factor, distorting the person's efforts to make good decisions.

How then does she work with people entrapped by their own guilt or other left-over emotions? 'I try to help a person discover what really is their greatest desire, the truth of themselves.'

Helene is confident that there is much in Scripture to reinforce that concept. Challenged about the portrait of Jesus as one 'who does his Father's will', she rejects any reading of such texts that would lock a Christian into submissiveness. 'Jesus also spoke about being the Truth—and about living the truth. The will of the Father is the truth of the person. I do not see the Father as coming from "outside", telling me what to do or how to be.'

Helene pauses briefly before revealing that she, too, once needed to 'get out from under' her own authority figures. Her inner strength now is obvious—honed by such testing experiences and personal dilemmas. Does she draw on her own life story in the course of her work? Her first response is indirect. She speaks of tapping into peacefulness, of owning a feeling rightness at critical moments, and of drawing on these in the course of an interview. For her, moments of quiet are essential to the rhythm of life.

'I strongly believe that when someone is dying, or some *thing* is dying, it's important to look for the new life beyond the dying.' Here the overtones of hope are recognisably Christian. The Easter experience and the hope it offers form, in Helene's eyes, a profound and practical context for choices.

She also believes that picturing the future positively can be of great assistance. To young adults she suggests, 'Rehearse future scenarios in your imagination and be confident about your power to make better ones happen. See which you feel right about—deep down. Then remember: the peace you're seeking includes an ability to live with adverse reactions.' ■

The Student

***Ian Clark** is studying psychology. Unlike Helene, he is not a religious believer.*

CENTURIES AGO, surnames were frequently a good guide to a person's occupation. So Ian Clark's forebears may have applauded his beginning as a clerk in a hardware firm. 'Actually I thought of it as a fill-in job after dropping out of university', he grins. 'Then I was conscripted, went to Vietnam, came back and stayed with the hardware company for another ten years. I did well, reaching the level of buyer. It all felt like falling uphill.' The nonchalant way he mentions Vietnam is arresting.

'In the last five years I've made some choices. I resigned my job at another hardware company and started a full-time BA.' Ian highlights the element of risk involved in that new beginning. 'I was scared the boss might give me half an hour to clean out my desk—which happens in some companies'. Instead, Ian still continues as a part-time consultant with the firm, and the pay packet is important for his full-time study. That gamble turned out well. 'To me', he adds, 'risk-taking has become a way of life.'

Ian is not a religious believer (he has seen the damage religion can do) so his use of language can be surprising. 'I have a sense of purpose and vocation now; whether I turn out to be a psychologist doesn't really matter. I experience an element of "calling"—not of *someone* calling but rather discovering my own inner calling.'

And what prompted a change of direction? Was it dissatisfaction or burn-out? 'I guess there was a lack of congruence in my life. My values were becoming less materialistic while my job stayed attached to the profit ethic. I didn't particularly like the world of "things" and was coming to prefer the world of ideas.'

That realisation surfaced one day when the manager's secretary showed him a book of quotations. The one Ian opened at was: 'To love what you do and feel that it matters: how can anything be more fun?'. He recognised at once how little love he had for what he was doing. Now it offends him that many people cannot find intrinsic value in the work they do.

Ian is quick to name the main influences on his life choices. 'I was fortunate to be a student at Dandenong High School when Barry Jones was teaching history there. Barry opened up the world of ideas and taught history as life. For him, the Renaissance and Reformation were not just facts. Teaching them meant showing the art, playing the music and allowing us to discover Leonardo and Lorenzo the Magnificent and Michelangelo as actors in the real world. Barry Jones gave me a sense of the liveliness of life, of what it could be.

'A guy called John Menadue introduced me to music in a way I'm eternally grateful for, because music has become a huge central part of my life.' (Our present conversation is audible over a baroque concerto.) 'And a physical education teacher called Ziggy Martini taught me a lot about willpower and perseverance.'

'Carl Jung was an influence of another kind, especially about the inner journey at mid-life. I heard Jungian therapist Peter O'Connor interviewed on the ABC about mid-life crises. What I heard from him (and then read in Jung's own writing) was a promise that the disruption I was experiencing could turn out to be purposeful. Chaos could signal a new orientation.

'Speaking of role models, there was also Don Dunstan, someone who challenged the social construction of what it means to be a man, a state premier and a person in society. Don showed by his own idiosyncratic behaviour that there was more to life than conforming to others' social patterns.'

In Ian Clark one senses a man possessed of inner sureness. If he has it, he explains carefully, it is very much a 'feeling' thing. 'More often than not I have to wait for a long time to find out if my choices do represent a move forward.

'If I've made a decision that's not quite right I generally experience a feeling of moral anxiety. I won't quite know its cause but may wake at three or four in the morning, and then, in a dream or in a waking realisation, suddenly have a sense of what it is that's wrong. But for me, decisions usually come easily because they are largely instinctive.'

Still, often enough Ian's choices require fine-tuning. 'There's a process after making a

decision that may amount to an internal rationalisation, or some other processing I don't really understand. The core of my decision is right but some part of it isn't. It takes time to realise which that is.'

The instances Ian cites come mostly from his activity as a student. 'Starting a project, I'll begin gathering evidence to support my own views and, in the process, uncover some uncomfortable facts. As a good Jungian, I react strongly against them, or try to suppress them. But even at that moment, there is a sense of discomfort and I know I need to modify my position.'

What does a non-believer think about decision-making in a religious context? Ian pauses thoughtfully. 'I would separate two elements. Religious dogma or ideology gets in the way. If, for example, people are taught that a relationship not blessed by God is wrong, this can get in the way of one's feelings for another human being. But religion in the sense of a search of meaning or a sense of spirituality, I don't believe that can cause problems.'

Ian conducts adult education courses, including 'Living successfully as a single person'. These courses, he says, are all about empowerment. 'Each group has its own dynamic, so you have to take risks and leave it open for them to set the agenda.' In these groups Ian has encountered people damaged by 'their internalisation of some religious dogma at an age when they didn't have the intellectual capacity to differentiate'.

And what of Ian's own beliefs and their impact on his choices? 'The sense of religiousness is a big difficulty in my life because I convinced myself that there is no God. It seemed strange that our Western culture should "own" God, and other cultures "own" their God. Either there is one God seen through many eyes, or no God at all: we create gods to explain our life.' He pauses. 'But at that point one has a sense of throwing the baby out with the bath water. We human beings do need meaning. I try now to focus not on searching for the meaning *of* life, but on looking for the meaning *in* life.'

Ian is sure that this quest involves spiritual ideas. 'I don't kid myself that my own sense of meaning is universal, but it does have to be genuine. It must have intellectual rigour and be the result of working things out. Otherwise it is superficial.'

Again Jung's thought enters the conversation, this time via the notion of 'synchronicity'— very like serendipity. 'The same event is for one person only a coincidence, and for another a gift delivered just at the right moment from some external Force. It's awfully difficult to interpret happenings of that kind. If you believe there is someone up there watching our every move and saying, "I'll put this in Ian's path and see how he reacts", that seems too difficult to understand. But there is also a wonderful sense that when we are in tune with possibilities, a breakthrough is more likely. A fool can stumble over a nugget of gold and think it's a stone. Someone who is looking for meaning is predisposed to find it.'

Ian's advice to others (and, one suspects, to the still-developing person within himself) is, 'Don't be afraid to fail. Too often we are first channelled into areas that really are not "us". So trust your instincts, trust yourself. Seek advice and seek out ways to achieve what you want to, but have a go!' This, Ian admits, is not a way he has articulated matters before. His own advice appears to leave him surprised. ■

The Teacher

***Geni Sexton** is a teacher-librarian in a Catholic primary school.*

To Geni Sexton, a primary school library is above all an arena for exercising choice. It is also an domain in which to learn about the importance of choosing freely—not least if one is a parent.

Those parents who venture in, requesting that their own child be given a particular kind of book, are likely to be reminded that 'library is a time and place where children choose their own books—whether they can read them yet or not'. Geni is prepared to believe that if a child picks out a particular item there is something in it for him or her, perhaps some feature to touch or feel or just look at. So she places no barrier in the way of beginners borrowing books that seem well beyond them.

'We adults have far too definite an idea of what children need to learn. Children are always being told what they can and can't do. That's sometimes appropriate, of course. But the library offers a different learning experience, the chance to select what they think they need. I'd rather have them do that, and if I have doubts spend time later talking to them about their choice.'

As for her own career choices, Geni Sexton in adamant that the important ones were arrived at by active decision on her part, not by drifting or allowing others to decide for her. 'As a youngster I had three dreams: to be a missionary, to become a teacher or to join the police force. I settled for the middle one. In any case I was

sure I needed to be with people.' And the path to library teaching? Geni explains that she was employed by a new school as a classroom teacher, but before she took up her position the librarian resigned. Geni agreed to substitute partly because of previous experience but mainly because 'the librarian has the chance to come to know all of the children in the school — all six hundred or so at that time.'

Her great reward, as it turned out, has been introducing children to literature. 'Really and truly, that is the high point. Seeing the joy in their eyes.'

Teaching about the operation of the library itself, about the order in which books are shelved and so on, is a necessary evil. If Geni omits to read to the youngsters (even up to Year 4) she finds they lose interest in all the rest. They reproach her with 'You haven't read to us today'. She believes they recognise in their own way the power of literature to touch them interiorly.

Her own love of literature, including childrens' literature, is lively and longstanding. 'My reading has become part of me. It introduces me to people of courage—just as my contacts with parents and library volunteers does. People generally manage to appear to be in control, but books and conversations both reveal a combination of inner hurts and remarkable qualities.'

Then what of courage and spontaneity: does Geni admire risk-taking? She responds with a story from that very day at school. A former student, away from the school for three years, returned to request some information about theatre games. She and Geni began discussing the last six months, quite a horrendous time for the teenager, encompassing her father's death in tragic circumstances and her mother's remarriage.

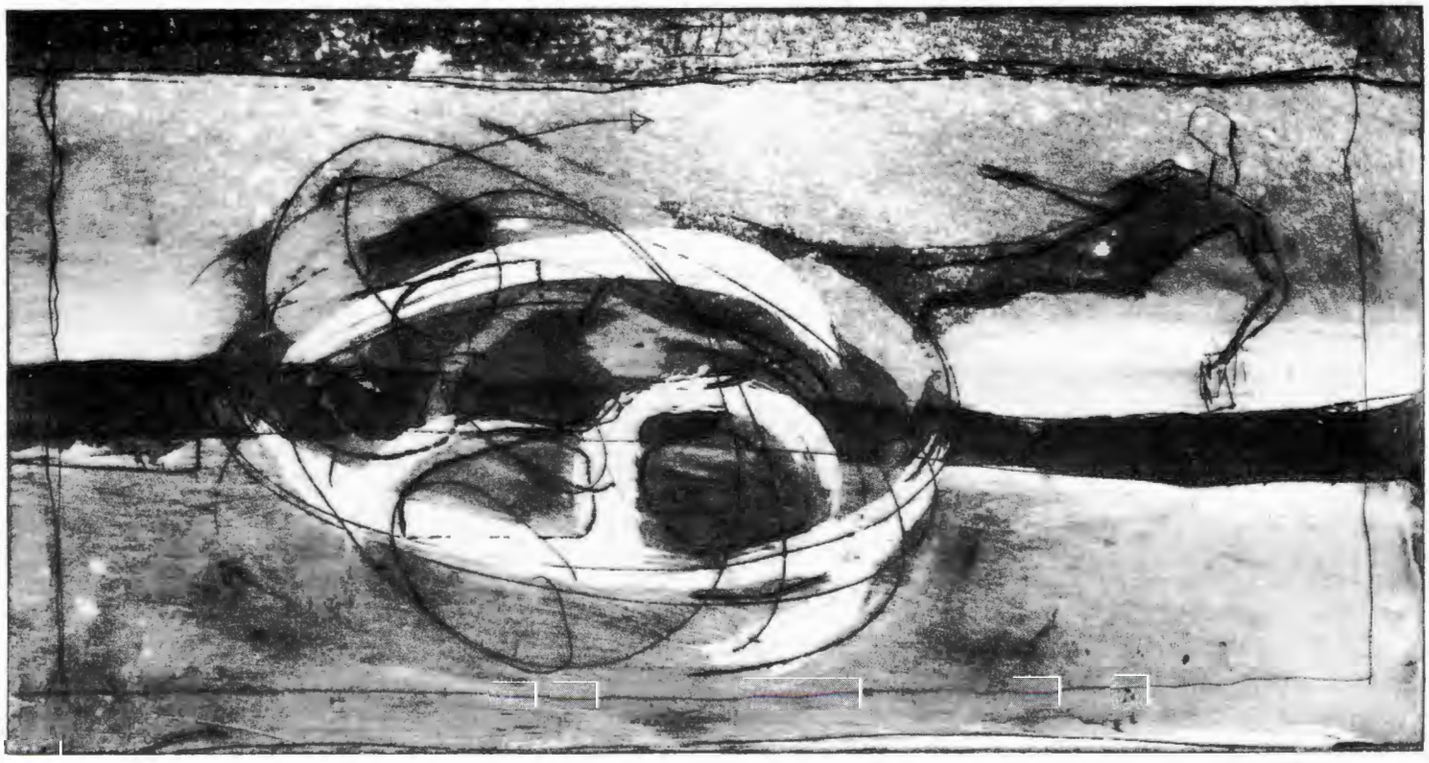
Geni found herself asking this girl ('fourteen going on twenty') who she has to help her cope with such stress. 'I think I'm helping mother more than anything' was the response. 'We spontaneously gave one another a hug', adds Geni. 'It was a risk, especially in this day of doubts about touching. It was spontaneous and right, though I wouldn't say courageous.'

As for her own future, Geni acknowledges that some major decisions are not far off, not least about when to retire and what activities to take up in her semi-retirement. She feels strongly drawn to assist people who are illiterate, and to some kind of volunteer work, for instance typing for Amnesty International.

Beyond retirement lie even harder questions: how long to stay in her own home, even where to be buried. For Geni these are not morbid questions, just practical ones ('like getting around to doing one's income tax').

And a final word of wisdom about decision-making? 'It's important to do the best you can at the time. And if a person is troubled by guilt at some later date to go back in memory and imagination to the circumstances of that earlier time. 'Generally you see quickly that you made as good a decision as you were capable of right then.'

Which is exactly what she hopes even tiny children will learn to do, and become conscious of doing in her library. ■



Spirit in story

'Aboriginal Art and Spirituality: An Exhibition of Aboriginal Art', opened at the High Court in February to coincide with the World Council of Churches Assembly. ***Rosemary Crumlin****, one of the curators, describes how and why the collection was brought together, and what makes it different.*

Picture: Henry Jolles

Sculpture *George Mung, Turkey Creek*

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED in curating an exhibition of Aborginal Christian art at the High Court? The question came from Frank Brennan, director of Uniya (the Jesuit research and social action agency). Frank was keen that Aboriginal people should have a presence at the World Council of Churces Assembly, and he believed that the best way for this to be achieved was through Aboriginal art.

My first instinct was to say, 'Hmm, no, I don't think so', because all the Aboriginal Christian art I had seen was kitsch—very bad—and I didn't want to be involved in that. So I delayed, talked to friends, including directors of Aboriginal art galleries. One, Gabrielle Pizzi, offered the crucial encouragement: 'I think you should do it, and do it really tightly. That could be a great service to Aboriginal people.' By 'tightly' she meant 'professionally', not accepting anything that wasn't first rate.

So I negotiated with Frank. My co-curator for the exhibition was Anthony Waldegrave-Knight, a friend and a long-time collector of Aboriginal art. Anthony and I proposed that the exhibition should comprise traditional spiritual works. If we found anything good enough that was also Christian—re-thought Christianity rather than cloned—we would include that as well. As curators we agreed on three criteria. First, we said that the works should be able to stand alongside the best in world art. That was a very controversial criterion to set up in this context. The second thing we insisted on was that the pieces would have to communicate an immediacy of spirituality, touching something deep. Finally, we would

omit paintings that had already been shown frequently. That wasn't a severe restriction because there is just so much work available, mostly dating from the 1970s, and we had access to the best collections throughout the country, including the Holmes à Court collection of recent urban works.

Salman Rushdie said he couldn't imagine a world without story. I feel that very strongly ... Those who do not understand story will never understand Aboriginal art.

Our first journey into the outback was full of adventure, incredible 49-degree heat, and quite a lot of disillusion. You see, part of the process involved visiting remote Aboriginal communities to see whether we could discover any art that gave evidence that people were re-thinking Christianity in their own symbolic system. And what Christian art we did find was often as bad as I'd expected.

But at Balgo, in the Central Desert, we came across some huge wall-hangings and panels rolled up in the church the people there use for liturgies. I knew we were at the edge of something. But the heat was terrible and Anthony and I and even Frank (who looks like God, walking around in his hat) thought we'd had enough. It wouldn't have taken much to persuade us to omit Turkey Creek from our itinerary.

I rang Sister Clare Ahern at Turkey Creek, admitting to some hesitation. Her reaction was unambiguous: 'I think you should have come here first'. So we caught the little mail plane to Turkey Creek and arrived at the Merilingki Centre.

There, on the walls, was what we had been looking for. Startling! It was just like being bombed right out of your mind—absolutely knockout works from the people of the Warmun Community. But particularly astonishing were those of Hector Sundaloo, George Mung and Paddy Williams. These three had been Christians from way back, and now, in their late fifties or early sixties, which is quite old for Aboriginal people, they are the unmistakable community leaders. Hector is regarded as a *ngapuny* man, a man of God.

There were many paintings we might have taken from Turkey Creek, all of them done not as an artist would paint in a studio but as part of liturgy, done for use.

George Mung had carved a statue out of a piece of tree, a work of extraordinary beauty. Here it was, sitting on top of a hot-water system. About a metre high, it is an Aboriginal woman, a Madonna, pregnant with a manchild who stands in a shield just below her heart, his feet extended and his hands tipping the edges of the shield. It's almost like the image you get in the Leonardo drawing, but also like a Russian icon (which George Mung could never have seen). The woman's body is painted with the paint reserved to young Aboriginal women before they have children. Accompanying her is a carved wooden bird, because Aboriginal people in this area believed in the holy spirit long before Christianity came. They believe that each person is accompanied through life by a holy spirit, male for male an female for female.

This work of George's would take its place, I believe, beside the great sculptures in the history of art. It is as moving as the carvings at Chartres, as great as the Germaine Richier crucifix in the church at Assy or the great Lipschitz sculpture at Iona. It is incredibly moving.

This image alone raises major questions, as did the whole Turkey Creek experience. The art would be worth millions of dollars to a collector. It is not well-known as yet. I wondered, what if we take a sculpture like George's and show it to the world? What happens to the community? We spoke of this together with the people, backwards and forwards. Our argument was that this work of theirs no longer belonged just in that little group. The world is entitled to its greatness. Not that the people expressed it like that themselves. George Mung said simply (of his sculpture), 'You take it. You take it. I'll do another one.' Never was it so clear how different was his sense of time, value and ego from that of European Australians.

So that is how the exhibition got started. I think it will be one of the most important exhibitions of Aboriginal art ever. It will break stereotypes. A lot of people think Aboriginal art is about dots and circles on canvas. In that they are really just thinking of the Central Desert and what has happened with Central Desert art. In fact, Aboriginal art differs in each part of the country and has its own local tradition.

What you have are people with a highly developed sense of vision, and because their languages have not been written down until now, their eyesight and sense of story—their visual and oral traditions—are enormously well developed. That will change, of course; the young people's eyesight will not be as finely tuned as the elders', nor their psyche as captivated by story.

Two of the Turkey Creek paintings exemplify that outer and inner vision. When I asked Hector, the painter, about one, he explained in a softish voice (he's a big tall man): 'This is the young Joseph and the young Mary before they came together'. Since, in the tradition of that area, they would not be able to speak to each other, each is seen to have a holy spirit, and so their spirits can commune. It is a marvellous image.

On my return to Turkey Creek to collect the paintings, the people invited me to an adult baptism. Though a priest spoke the words, it was in fact Hector, regarded by the community as their own *ngapuny* man, together with the elders and the community itself, who performed the ceremony. We discovered something from that: the second criterion Anthony and I had set ourselves—a sense of immediate spirituality—meant

Picture: Henry Jolles

The Battle *Paddy Williams, Turkey Creek*

that the paintings in the exhibition have all been done by an older man or an older woman, since it is they who have the law. For Aboriginal people, art is valid and good if it truthfully tells a story, and if the story is told by someone with the required authority.

I was struck by something Salman Rushdie said in an interview shown last November. Rushdie claimed that he couldn't imagine a world without story. I feel that very strongly myself. It reminded me that those who do not understand story or its importance will never understand Aboriginal art. Nor can anyone who undervalues symbol find a way into the art.

This exhibition presents connections rather than depictions—which is appropriate since art's role is not to describe or define but to explore and communicate. Because the work is symbolic, each person viewing it will see differently. Nor does the exhibition provide a definitive understanding of Aboriginal spirituality. Spiritualities vary among Aboriginal people of different areas and the diversity and complexity will be quickly apparent.

The exhibition will not be uncontroversial. There are many who argue that we shouldn't bring in Christian imagery. But the reality is that it is there. We haven't forced it. We have used art which is Christian because the historical reality is that a many Aboriginal people are Christian and manage to live comfortably in both worlds . It is also true that many live in discomfort and that the churches have been very oppressive. They are more enlightened now. The other reality is that this is great art, and that is our reaon for showing it.

I hope people will go out from the exhibition thinking how wonderful Aboriginal art is, that it can speak across boundaries. But I would also hope that people who see this art in Canberra or in another capital city will return after a first visit to sit in front of one or other particular work and see what happens to them in the face of it. The exhibition is too rich for one sitting. For visitors, as for the curators, it could be the beginning of a journey of discovery.

There has been so much uncertainty on the way through. So much work. But I think it has all been worthwhile. Time will tell.

Rosemary Crumlin RSM is the author of *Images of Religion in Australian Art,* and curated an exhibition of the same name at the National Gallery of Victoria.

GERARD WINDSOR

Laying it on thick

Robert Hughes: **Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists**, Collins Harvill, London, 1990.
ISBN 0 00 272057 2. RRP $39.99.

THE FIRST SLICE of Robert Hughes' prose that I recall reading was his recollection of his Sydney schooldays. It was published at a safe distance, in the *London Magazine*, but it still inspired a frothing of old boys, tempted to get up a party to go to London to 'punch that fellow Hughes on the nose'.

The article was trivial in many ways and full of more spectacular inaccuracies than his claim in *Nothing If Not Critical* that the Whitlam government fell in 1973, but it demonstrated the particular Hughes linguistic genius. I have no copy, but I find that phrases stayed with me. A shark in the Lane Cove River, for example, once managed to snap up 'a pail of garbage and the left leg and scrotum of a Mudgee grazier's son'. Nothing if not precise and circumstantial. *Impasto*, I think, is the word Hughes himself would use.

It is a truism to remark that, distinctively among critics and commentators on the arts, Hughes is a writer. But his subject matter has gone far to form his writing style. He works from a palette. Mere ink, to say nothing of the electronic cockpit he swivels around in on this dustwrapper, lacks the sensateness, the grime, the plasticity of paint. Hughes is as Antaeus-like a writer as Yeats could have wished.

I want to speculate about this bent. I know nothing of the Hughes family childhood, but I shared the Hughes progression of schools, albeit some years later. Strikingly the *London Magazine* account makes no mention of any artistic exercises for the secondary school boy. There were none. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, art at Riverview was represented by a hole-and-corner board, where about half-a-dozen pallid postcards of assorted glories of Western art clutched their patch of hessian.

What Hughes does recall, however, is the literary activity. He gives us a sonnet he wrote on the 1953 ascent of Everest, and an altogether too neat account of being chastised by one Jesuit for having in his possession *The Essential James Joyce*—put there by another Jesuit, the rector. And the first piece of Hughesiana I ever read was a 1955 ballad in the school paper celebrating a priest who shot a stray cow.

The critic: 'an intellectual to his bluces'.

If this literary opportunity and occasional encouragement was the cultural draught he took at Riverview, he got a strikingly richer diet at Campion Hall, the Riverview preparatory school. This short-lived (1946–1954) entity was the offspring of a transient Jesuit infatuation with the eastern suburbs of Sydney, and it was presided over for most of its short life by Fr Michael Scott. Scott was one of the foundational judges of the Blake Prize for religious art. His headmaster's room at school was not just a gallery for contemporary Australian art but a storage and transport centre as well. Small boys who'd forgotten their lunch or wet their pants manoeuvred for their comfort past Justin O'Brien triptychs or less indiscreet Donald Friends. In addition Michael Scott hired the painter John Ogburn as art master, kept a permanent room as a studio and entered the students' art in competitions.

It was an early fix of colour, and having no fine art outlet in Hughes' later schooling, it was released as words. There is no

need to repeat here how imaginative, witty, and (to use one of his own preferred words) delectable Hughes' style is. Why doesn't The Macquarie *Dictionary of Australian Quotations* have pages of him?

Hughes doesn't need my further plaudits. Instead I want to comment on one central strain in his work that both encourages me and leaves me uneasy. Is there slightly too dismissive an edge to his polemic that will hobble the contribution he can make to discussion of artistic and wider cultural issues? His *bête noire* is postmodernism. He remarks of Goya that you can make a protomodernist out of him, 'but you cannot make Goya into a proto-postmodernist. He is never trivial enough for that. It is the wholeness of his fiction, its unremitting earnestness, its desire to know and tell the truth, that our art has lost'.

There are two things about this passage: the literary terms in which Hughes describes a painter and etcher, and the high-minded morality. A similar attitude shows in a peroration about the German contemporary Anselm Kiefer:

'His work is a ringing and deeply engaged rebuke ... to the ingrained limitations of its time. It sets its face against the sterile irony, the despair of saying anything authentic about history or memory in paint, and the general sense of trivial pursuit that infest our culture. It affirms the moral imagination.'

For Hughes the two qualities are allied. Words—even in their plastic/visual form—are of the world and for mucking about doing something in and for the world. Anything that becomes abstracted or mediated looks meretricious. His analysis of the 1980s postmodernist malaise is trenchant:

'Nature is dead, culture is all, everything is mediated to the point where nothing can be seen in its true quality, representation determines all meaning, and the only way that "so-called high art" can engage with general perception is to step out of its old "élitist" traditions and follow the Yellow Brick Road of the "cutting edge" that leads through Deconstruction Flats and the Forest of Signs to Jeff Koon's porcelain pigs.'

The artist: our art has lost Goya's desire 'to know and tell the truth'.

Entertaining as this polemic is, it is also too readily alienating. His following paragraph presents a far more disturbing critique:

'This trip turns out not to be worth taking. It has produced a clever novelty art of diminishing returns; far from affording artists continuous inspiration, mass-media sources for art have become a dead end. They have combined with the abstractness of institutional art teaching to produce a fine-arts culture given over to information and not experience.'

For Hughes there is a real betrayal by the intellectuals here. This kind of theory and practice nosing one other along is as much to blame as Reaganism or Counihanesque capitalists for the speculative blowout in the art market and all its attendant damage to museum policies. Hughes sums up the commercial usefulness of the French theoretician, Jean Baudrillard:

'One can see why Baudrillard's efforts to reconcile the fetishism of high price with the phantom of radicalism have made him so popular — the art dealer's intellectual, as it were. His efforts to collapse all cultural meaning into mere simulacra lends credibility to the underlying assumption of the market, that art no longer has any real purpose beyond its own promotion.'

An artistic environment in which notions of hierarchy or value are systematically assaulted can have only one commercial outcome: anything can be marked up as a masterpiece and no small person will be able to cry sham. If the market pops (as to some extent it has done recently in Australia) it will be due entirely to economic factors, while critical connoisseurship will remain in disgrace, unable to offer anything in the new turmoil. Hughes lists many of the subsequent features of centrifugality if not chaos in the current art world, but one that he might well have added for Australia was that of art publishing. Oxford University Press's

new two volume *catalogue raisonné* of John Brack has been long in the pipeline and is the last gasp of a whole species. Scholarly monographs of this kind are no longer commercially viable: the cost of production, the midget market, the protracted sales period, are handicaps no publisher will take on.

The only hope for remotely serious books on the visual arts is subsidies. These will come—and are already coming—from the obvious if hardly disinterested sources, the artists themselves or their galleries. The organic tendency towards blandness and self-puffery, and towards promotion of what the market has already found to be the most commercial kind of product, is obvious. Whether the connoisseurs and critics have abandoned any aspiration towards evaluative judgment, whether they have been increasingly marginalised by dominant postmodernists in the art academies, or whether the art trade is just running freer than ever, the result is the same. Art is no longer a matter of moral sensibility.

Hughes will not accept that. One of the finest filletings of the book is done on Baudrillard and all his works. But one could see Hughes' face steaming up while Baudrillard was yet a long way off: the Gallic linguistic caste is not to his taste. It must give Hughes extreme pain to have to quote Baudrillard's prose:

' "It is no longer a question of the false representation or reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. The Disneyland imaginary [sic] is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real".'

This linguistic abuse is the utter antithesis of Hughes's sense-riddled language. Earlier Hughes cuts loose on a book by Julian Schnabel, probably the greatest luminary in his demonology of current artistic frauds. 'Schnabel's style of discourse has points of resemblance with his painting: a stew of mixed metaphors and rhetorical hiccups.' When he comes to Baudrillard's prose, Hughes is no more reticent:

'As "France's leading philosopher of postmodernism" [Baudrillard] has the badge of a distinctive jargon. Jargon, native or imported, is always with us; and in America, both academe and the art world prefer the French kind, a thick prophylactic against understanding.... To write direct prose, lucid and open to comprehension, using common language, is to lose face. You do not make your mark unless you add something to the lake of jargon, to whose marshy verge the bleating flocksof poststructuralists go each night to drink.' Used in such a way,

'Language does not clarify; it intimidates.'

CONVINCING AS I FIND this passage, I doubt whether it will build bridges. The analysis is disturbing, but the parable of the sheep is not going to bring home anyone with postmodernist sympathies. Yet the issue is vital. In *Meanjin* late in 1990 the Australian cultural commentator Meaghan Morris took to task reviewers and intellectuals who 'keep doddering on about "obscure language" (meaning "obscure" to them) in complete confidence that whatever they themselves find ordinary and straightforward must naturally be so for the rest of the reading population.' Behind this Morris sees an amount of xenophobia and lazy inattention to thirty years of intellectual effort. Further, she claims that all print media are nowadays equally esoteric; there are languages for all purposes, journals to suit all the languages, and the only rational response is to take up multilingualism.

Now it seems to me there is a logic to this but it is also specious. Certainly all disciplines have their jargon and any would-be entrant has to take on board the rules, but the disciplines must first suggest they're interesting or necessary, and the jargon must be the only appropriate language for the set of activities. Whereas in too many cases a good slash of Occam's razor is what will really open the disciplines up. I find it a giveaway that Morris, an invigorating critic, entitled her last book *The Pirate's Fiancée*. Only when this imaginative, tangible phrase was out could she add her subtitle *Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*. Nothing in the intellect unless it's first in the senses, as Aquinas noted.

But with Morris this is a ploy. For Hughes it is a reflexive bent. He is himself the proof that a *lingua franca* can be applied to the discussion of art, that it can be insightful, if oppositional, can contribute to international debate and can be accessible to the untold readers of *Time*. In the words he claims he read with a torch under the dormitory bedclothes, his way is 'to express, to press out again, from the gross earth or what it brings forth, from sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of our soul, an image of the beauty we have come to understand—that is art.' (Though of course, Hughes would repeat Stephen Dedalus' 'slight blush' as he gave the speech.)

If I were this man's manager I would get him to retire from his 1200-word essays for *Time* (never less than good though these are) and just have him write the longer pieces and books. Hughes has never worked within art schools or fine-art academies, yet his massive audience is assured, and the burden of his passion is that art-scene postmodernism is so much more than just a brouhaha about jargon or style. He is needed to address, in his practical way, the theoretical issues, and to force an increasingly monopolistic art scene to take notice. That Hughes cast of style, without being laconic or understated or dry, is uniquely Australian. An intellectual to his braces, he's not going to suffer the pretentious, the evasive and the obscure to marginalise and corrupt an enterprise he salutes. ■

Gerard Windsor's most recent book was *Family Lore*. He is working on a collection of literary and cultural essays.

PAUL RULE

The past in China's present

Jonathan D. Spence, **The Search for Modern China** , W.W.Norton, New York/ London 1990. ISBN 0–3930270982. [No RRP listed for Australia] Julia Ching, **Probing China's Soul: Religion, Politics, and Protest in the People's Republic** , Harper and Row, San Francisco 1990. RRP $29.99 ISBN 0–62501399

Future leader: Deng Xiaoping, aged 16, in France, 1920

BOTH JONATHAN SPENCE AND JULIA CHING are well known to China scholars in Australia, not just through their writings but as former graduate students and occasional academics at the Australian National University. In their recent books they provide complementary variations on the theme of the past in China's present.

Spence's *The Search for Modern China* is a lengthy and fascinating history of China from the Late Ming, around 1600, to the Tien'anmen massacres of mid 1989. Although the section discussing Tien'anmen was clearly a late addition, Spence, without strain, presents the terrible events of June 3–4 as a kind of logical culmination of the past four centuries. He highlights the dilemma of a fundamentally authoritarian and arbitrary state system, one with great physical force at its disposal but little legitimacy and power at the local level, attempting to deal with change and an ever growing, unruly population.

Julia Ching, in *Probing China's Soul,* works backwards from the June events in a sustained reflection on China's cultural history, attempting to make sense of the senseless. 'Is the culture to blame?', she asks; and 'Will democracy come to China?' Her answer to both questions is a qualified 'yes'.

Both authors write China-centred history. Neither tells a story of a passive China stirred into activity only from outside. It is China's own 'ongoing search' for appropriate forms of government and society that is their theme, and both write very committed history, in which individual people hold

centre stage. While both writers are meticulous scholars with a fine track record in their respective fields of sinology, neither work smells of the library (in fact Spences's should smell of pizza; he claims in his acknowledgments that half the book was written in the Naples Pizza on Wall Street, New Haven).

The Search for Modern China brings in the multi-faceted human element by constant use of literary and artistic sources, some of them comparatively unknown in the West, in addition to standard documentary sources. The great and eccentric artist descendant of the Ming rulers, Bada Shanren, who escaped political suspicion by feigning dumbness, and whose marvellous landscapes are among the undervalued treasures of Melbourne's National Gallery, serves to illustrate the problems of loyalty in a changing world. And Li Ruzhen's early 19th century novel, *Flowers in the Mirror*, in which the hero wandering in the Land of Women has his ears pierced, feet bound, and is made up for the delectation of his female captors, is used both to emphasise the condition of Chinese women, and to demonstrate a concern for social reform among intellectuals.

The political history of modern China is sketched by Spence but in an overall cultural and intellectual framework. He attempts to present the world and the events through Chinese eyes. There is no direct evidence that the Emperor Qianlong reflected on the *I Jing* passage about the king being like the sun at midday, at his zenith but already beginning the inevitable decline into oblivion. Yet Spence is surely right in attributing such thoughts, commonplace to 'any educated Chinese', to this most educated (some would say over-educated) of emperors.

The Search for Modern China is, in addition to its virtues as history, a fine example of the editor's and publisher's art. The illustrations, colour and black and white, are well chosen and mostly unfamiliar. The book is adorned with fine calligraphy by Liang Minwei. There are useful sketch maps, full notes and references, and excellent brief summaries to each section. It would make a good textbook or reference work but is also, at least in parts, compulsive reading.

Julia Ching's *Probing China's Soul* is, in contrast to Spence's work, which must be the product

OBITUARY: FENG YOULAN, 1895-1990

Wrestling with culture

Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan died in Beijing on 26 November 1990. His death, together with that of the historian Qian Mu in Taiwan last year, marks the passing of two nonagenarians who spent their lives wrestling with the issue of Chinese culture, past and future.

Qian Mu believed fully in the *Geist* of tradition. Feng Youlan took Chinese culture as a 'fact' that had to submit to the analysis of modern philosophy.. He proceeded to explain that Chinese culture was not unique; it was woven of the same cloth as other cultures in the premodern world.

Likewise, he insisted, modernisation is not 'westernisation'. It is a universal process that follows its own laws, and China will be no exception. There, as elsewhere, mechanisation will transform the old family-based economy into the industrial society, and traditional values will give way to those of the modern state. In the end, Chinese society will function on the same universal principles as, say, England. 'Chinese characteristics' will remain. But they will be no more decisive than 'English characteristics' are in Britain.

Feng's views did not serve well the culturalist-minded Nationalist government in the forties. He even emphasised that the Communists were not bandits, but the forerunners of modernisation. In December, 1990, the *People's Daily* was prompt to recall that in 1949 Feng had not joined other intellectuals aboard the government-chartered plane bound for Taiwan.

Yet Feng favoured no more than a socialist regime for China. He had little time for the 'historical necessity' of communism. He also foresaw that nationalist feeling would soon abort the 'proletarian brotherhood' with the USSR. Thus, reading between the lines of propaganda, Feng concluded in 1947: 'If the proletarian society is to come, I can subsequently participate in it and I will still remain myself.'

This statement and his various 'confessions' later drew indignant criticisms from the self-exiled Confucianists around Qian Mu and, for years, they reiterated the criticism that Feng did not display 'the moral vigour of the literati'.

Indeed Feng had to 'participate' more than he anticipated. He even penned a few pieces for the Gang of Four (not mentioned in the *People's Daily* obituary). Yet at the end of those forty years who will claim that China-bound Feng exhibited less moral rigour than his self-righteous critics in exile? Clearly enough, Feng had underestimated the folly of politics; even so, his philosophy remains a most impressive statement on the future of culture and tradition in China.

From *China News Analysis*
— Michael Masson SJ

of decades of research and teaching, avowedly a quickly written response to the Tian'anmen events. 'I did not expect to write this book', she says in her opening lines. Like many Western China scholars who had grown accustomed to prolonged stays in the country and accepted as normal what now appears an anomolous period, she was both shocked and dismayed by the massacres. Further, as one born in China of a very distinguished scholarly family (see her brother Frank's recent *Ancestors: 900 Years in the Life of a Chinese Family*) she shared the anguish of the students and intellectuals.

Ching writes with heat and urgency, asking questions which are left wide open. 'What now?' is the title of her last chapter, and her very last word: 'The lesson of 1989 is that hope can conquer fear'. Both hope and fear are based on China's historical experience, and Ching selects incidents from China's past to demonstrate aspirations for justice and freedom constantly frustrated by the system which one might call, in its modern guise, a Marxized Confucianism.

'Flying in the Rain' by Gao Jianfu, 1932. Gao tried to fuse the best of China's past techniques with Western realism.

There is, however, in *Probing China's Soul* some excellent documentary history, both of the May–June events and earlier student-led protest movements (May Fourth 1919 and the earlier Tien'anmen incident of 1976 shortly after the death of Zhou Enlai) There is a selection of translated documents at the end, ranging from the brave declaration of the University Students' Autonomous'Alliance of Beijing on the morning of June 4 to Deng Xiaoping's chilling speech of congratulation to the troops five days later. 'This was a test', he said, 'and we passed'.

But in whose eyes? Certainly not Julia Ching's.

There are still many mysteries about April–June 1989 in Beijing. Were the events master-minded by a conspiratorial group? A brief meeting with some of the leaders who escaped, when they visited Melbourne in December 1989 suggested otherwise. They were politically naïve, 'quixotic' to use Julia Ching's description, and apparently oblivious of historical precedents. They are the generation of *The River Elegy*, the controversial television series, now blamed for triggering events by its anarchism and cynicism. Chinese history, its authors argued, is like the great Yellow River, a recurrent and untameable disaster. China suffers, in the view of many young Chinese, from too much history. What is needed is a fresh start.

Julia Ching and Jonathan Spence propose another moral. More understanding of history, not less, may be the answer.

Of course, in China history, like all other intellectual disciplines, has been besmirched by party dogmatism and double-think. But the ardent young reformers of 1989 are in as much danger as their predecessors seventy years before from iconoclasm and inverse dogmatism. The Goddess of Democracy may have presided over their demonstrations and hunger strike but there was more than a little of the old arrogance of the intellectual élite. And will American-style capitalism solve the renewed problems of social inequality generated by the economic experiments of the post-Mao era?

There is a sense in which no nation has a collective soul, and especially not a nation of well over a billion very diverse people. But the answers to China's future, as both Jonathan Spence and Julia Ching remind us, is in the soul; in values not economics; in history rather than technology. This is what the great anti-Christ of the modern Chinese apocalypse, Mao Zedong, meant by his aphorism: 'Let the past serve the present'. And *The Search for Modern China* and *Probing China's Soul* are fine exemplars of what he meant. ■

Paul Rule is head of the department of religious studies at La Trobe University, Victoria. He is the author of *K'ung-tzu as Confucius: The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* and *Mao Zedong*.

BRUCE WILLIAMS

On the magic carpet slide

ON A HOT OCTOBER NIGHT last year, I went to see the marathon three-part adaptation of *The Thousand and One Nights* by a young Melbourne company, Whistling in the Theatre. The situation in the Middle East was critical. Television was showing those clips of Saddam Hussein patting the heads of little 'guests' while half a million troops gathered in the desert. It was difficult to resist the growing swell of anti-Arab feeling. More difficult, because most of us hear an Arab point of view, if we hear it at all, only when there is a major crisis. In our Western literary inheritance, as Edward Said shows in *Orientalism*, the Arab is the Other. For those of us privileged to see the theatrical version of *The Thousand and One Nights*, this could no longer be so. Rarely, if ever, have I so strongly felt the civilising power of the theatre.

It was a day and night of uproarious running gags, of a delicate poetic sensuality, of wild fantasy and strange, elusive overtones and undertones. It was, when it chose to be, an austere production, too. One tale told of a wondrously beautiful and learned slave whose master is forced by poverty to sell her to the Caliph. For ten minutes or more of stage time, she displayed her learning, while, thanks to careful placing and preparation, we drank in the details of Islamic faith in older times—times much closer, of course, for the devout in the Middle East. There were many tales, folded and nested inside one another, spiralling around one another, tales for pleasure, for instruction, for consolation, tales of the *djinn* in the underworld and everyday tales of the streets. What we met, in the words of Mia Gerhardt, an authority on the cycle, was 'a polite, leisurely, uncluttered civilisation with an enviably true sense of values'.

This is a production that ought to be seen in every state. The local press agreed that, some technical callowness and a few residual editing problems aside, it was consistently excellent theatre. Its director, Robert Draffin, believes the production has plenty of room for growth. With a small cast and minimal sets, it would be easy to tour. It won't. There can be no thought of it. In fact, after the cuts made to the company's subsidies for this year, there is some doubt that Whistling in the Theatre [WIT] will even survive 1991. How can a company responsible for such an achievement have had its funds reduced?

WIT is not the only company around Australia to suffer from capricious funding. Other Victorian examples include the Melbourne Writers' Theatre, which managed to do eight productions of new Australian plays in 1989 for seed-money, now removed, of $15,000. Anthill, one of the country's leading experimental groups, well-known for its renovations of the classics, had its grant removed in 1989. True, it was (in my view) artistically played-out. But after offering exactly similar fare for another season (on project grants) the company's grant has been restored.

Let's consider some of the basics of the subsidy game. The leading players are the theatre companies, the Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council and various state arts ministries. Subsidy can be on a recurrent basis or given for particular proposals ('project grants'). Even recurrent grants are subject to annual review, and can be removed at short notice. And that, in its first year on recurrent funding, happened to WIT.

A DISTURBING ASPECT of the case is what it reveals about the monitoring system used by the Australia Council. The decision to cut WIT's funds was based on an adverse response to another of their productions earlier in the year. *The Thousand and One Nights*, which occupied the company's best energies for over twelve months, came too late in the season to be taken

into consideration. (Moral, for companies still 'on trial': come with the goods by winter or else.) In any case, to downgrade a company six months into its first annual grant, having formally inspected just one of its four offerings for the year, is an absurdity of which the Australia Council should be thoroughly ashamed.

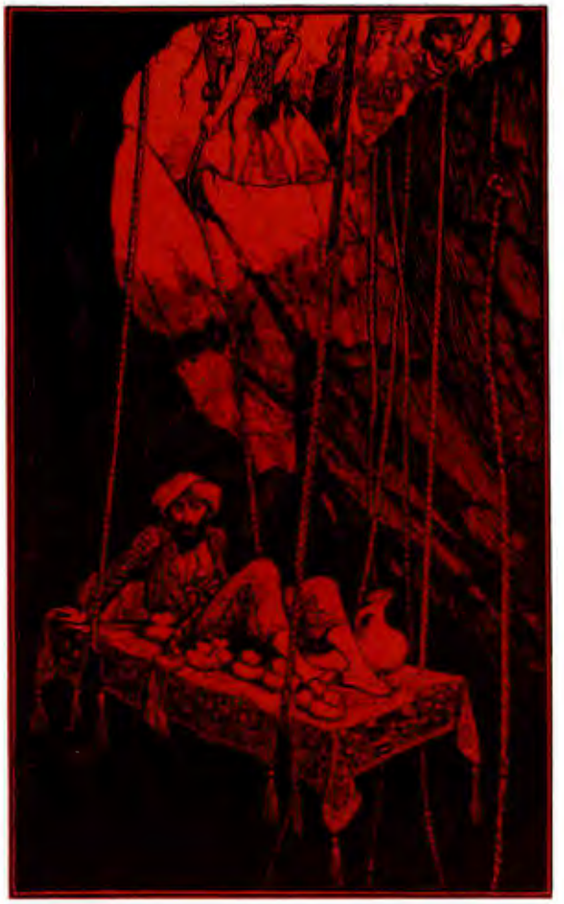
But it is an absurdity built on the absurdity of annual funding itself. What a theatre company needs, above all else, is sufficient stability to plan ahead and to allow time for artistic projects to mature. (*The Thousand and One Nights* case is a quixotic demonstration.) Under our present system, all companies except the largest are competing in a frenzied atmosphere of nail-biting and grant-writing (itself a time-consuming burden). One 'failure' can undo a company—yet creativity and 'failure' are inseparable twins.

Intermittent funding produces a cycle of boom and slump, which produces, in its turn, a bad cycle for individual actors: manic periods of work followed by long depressive bouts of unemployment. It is an unhealthy theatre culture.

The Australia Council, however, works under great difficulties, and its task is unenviably complex. It, too, would like to avoid stop-go disruptiveness. In 1980, one of its own program reviews recommended triennial funding.

The council itself has reduced staff from an all-time high of 172 in 1975 to its present 114. In a move fraught with symbolism, it has shifted premises from North Sydney to Redfern.

Over the years, the task of administering drama programs (only one of its many responsibilities) has grown in size and complexity. The number of companies on general grants has grown; children's theatre, theatre-in-education, community theatre have emerged to rival conventional drama. Puppetry, in which Australia is now a world leader, wants its share of the cake. A plethora of 'ethnic' groups is struggling to break the dominance of Anglo-Celtic interests. (In Melbourne alone there are five different Greek-speaking theatre companies.) All this, with a shrinking arts dollar, and now a recession. The board's chairman, Donald Horne, remarks in the 1989–90 annual report: '...the Council is not there primarily to serve artists, but, by serving artists, to serve the people who use the things and the activities that artists produce'. An impeccable statement of principle. However, there is another principle, a shibboleth to the Australian artist. That is the principle of 'peer-review' by which, in the Council's words, '...decisions on policy, priorities and grant selections are made by professional peers of the applicants.' Only an artist can judge the work of a fellow artist. This was not the way the founders of the Council saw the matter, opting instead for a mixture of artists with experienced administrators and representatives of the community.

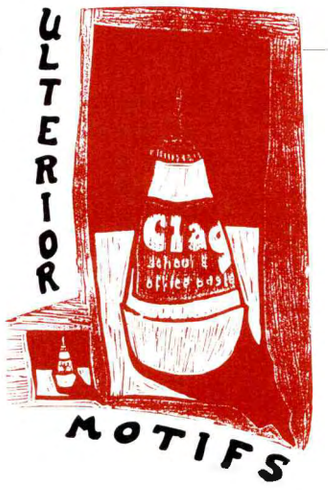


When the House of Representatives Macleay Report (1986) proposed to restore such a mixture, Australian artists, with painful memories of their disenfranchised days, made Macleay public philistine number one. In 1991 there are too many companies chasing too few dollars. The present policy of a little for everybody and not really enough for anybody is exactly the sort of thing you would expect from committees of artists. Would you prefer to sack a colleague or to reduce her salary?

If the present economic situation worsens, the Council faces some very tough decisions. In my view, it should begin by looking to its monitoring system, and phasing in the longer-term funding on which artistic maturity depends.

We are, in many ways, a frantic society, with a malign reverence for change and 'innovation'. We are also a splintered society, having lost heart for the task of creating and defining our social values. Our arts policies increasingly repeat these characteristics. In the hard times ahead, perhaps we should try to learn again the virtues of stability, patience and perseverance. Meanwhile, stay away from the theatre in spring. ■

Bruce Williams is senior lecturer in drama at La Trobe Universiy, Victoria.



Giving the message
THE PEOPLE OF LAJAMANU, 900 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, comprise one of the most remote communities in the world. Late in 1990 Aussat arrived with a telephone system, complete with a satellite dish mounted on a trailer. An Aussat spokesman confirmed that one of the first calls made was to a New York art gallery to discuss the sale of Aboriginal art works.

Artificial intelligence
PROFESSOR HAROLD ABELSON of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has been involved in the development of two artificial intelligence computer languages, 'Logo' and 'Scheme'. Both are understood to be closely related to one of the main languages in the field, 'Lisp'.

Through a glass darkly
A THEOLOGY STUDENT from Nigeria was asked recently, 'How do Christians of different denominations in Africa regard the long history of sharp denominational differences in the West?'. 'Oh, quite simply', he said. 'We see them as the white man's tribal wars.'

Not irreformable
'CRITICISM OF PAPAL PRONOUNCEMENTS will be possible and even necessary, to the degree that they lack support in Scripture and the Creed, that is, in the faith of the whole Church. When neither the consensus of the whole Church is had, nor clear evidence from the sources is available, a definitive decision is not possible. Were one formally to take place while conditions for such an act were lacking, the question would have to be raised concerning its legitimacy.' (Josef Ratzinger in 1969, before he became Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.)

The excluded middle
'THERE IS AN AGED and now somewhat infirm joke to the effect that the United States has passed from barbarism to decadence without an intervening period of civilisation. A parallel and possibly more accurate statement might be made of Canada: that it has passed from a prenational to a postnational phase without ever having become a nation' [Northrop Frye, *Divisions on a Ground*]. And Australia?

Sign of the times
'THE VICTORIAN RENAISSANCE CONTINUES', proclaimed the hoarding on an uncompleted construction on Victoria Parade in Collingwood, Victoria. After Christmas, the sign came down. Now a reduced version hides on the lower front of the building. Bill posters have almost obscured the word 'Renaissance'.

Unrequited love
A MAN ONCE COMPLAINED to the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, about his son. The youth had turned completely away from religion, a great blow to his father.
'What shall I do, Rebbe?' asked the distraught man.
'Do you love your son?'
'Of course I do,' the man replied.
'Then love him even more.'

Noble rot
THE 'TOP TEN' in this year's Australia Day honours list raised some eyebrows. Of the ten awarded the highest honour, Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), three are close personal friends or colleagues of the Prime Minister.

Top of the list is Sir Peter Abeles. Whatever Sir Peter's merits, the fact that he has been honoured this year, in a period when he was noted for a strongman approach to the pilots' dispute, may well confirm the cynicism that surrounds the giving of 'gongs', particularly since questions remain about the extent to which the Hawke–Abeles friendship was a factor in the Federal Government's strong support for the airlines during the dispute. The former deputy prime minister, Lionel Bowen, and the head of Mr Hawke's own department, Mr Michael Codd, were the next two on the list.

It may seem churlish to comment on those who receive 'gongs'. Many so honoured richly deserve their reward. For many in the lower ranks of the list, an award is the only recognition they will receive for a lifetime of selflessness. But it is the way of these things that some are more rewarded than others.

Ulterior Motifs welcomes small, interesting items from readers. Address to: The editor, *Eureka Street*, PO Box 553, Richmond 3121.

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