

# EUREKA STREET

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—Peter Pierce

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# The fearful prospect

ON HOLY THURSDAY, John Howard called on the race election we did not have to have. At Easter he congratulated the brokers of the Irish peace accord for their vision and determination in making the compromises needed for a principled and fair outcome. Having just rejected a modest compromise on native title for his own political advantage and to disguise his own political weakness, Howard knew what he was talking about.

In January, the Howard Government had circulated a document entitled 'Fairness and Balance'. It identified four sticking points which made unacceptable the Christmas compromise on Wik put forward in the Senate. On two, the threshold test and the sunset clause, there was movement over the summer. Lawyers and government officials had settled on acceptable formulae that allowed all parties to save face while producing law within the ballpark of workability, certainty and fairness. The remaining sticking points were the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) and the right to negotiate with mining companies on pastoral leases.

The Labor Party had played some cheap politics on the RDA at the party's national conference in January, resolving that 'Labor will continue to support amendments which ensure that the Act is subject to the provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act'. As in 1993, the Democrats and Greens proposed amendments which would have achieved that effect. Labor, in Opposition as when in Government, and like the Coalition parties, could not countenance any law which truly subjected the Native Title Act to the RDA. This would have rendered complex provisions of the Act uncertain until they could be tested in the courts. The Senate supported an uncertain Labor amendment on the RDA. But it was a bargaining chip to be traded if agreement could be reached on the crunch sticking point—the right to negotiate.

Because the Senate wanted to hold firm on maintaining the right to negotiate for all native title holders, whether their land was vacant crown land or subject to pastoral lease, the Government took the line that the Senate 'continues to treat farmers as second-class citizens'.

It was doing no such thing. On the Wednesday evening before Easter, the stand-off between the Howard Government and the Senate came down to one issue: the right of native title holders to be heard by an independent tribunal before mining proceeded on pastoral leases subject to native title.

The Commonwealth Parliament has limited power and only one responsibility in this area—to set a decent bottom line for the protection of native title rights. For the Senate, the bottom line was deciding what was fair for native title holders. There would be no fairness or equity in saying Aborigines would lose all say over mining on their land simply because 50 years ago, without their consent, a pastoral lease was granted over land where they still lived.

The Commonwealth has no power to make laws about the rights of pastoralists with state titles, relating to mining companies with state permits. That is a state matter. If states wanted to give pastoralists the same rights against mining companies as those enjoyed by native title holders, good luck to them. But the Senate, and Senator Brian Harradine in particular, was not swayed by specious equity arguments.

As in December 1997, the Democrats and Greens were uncompromising, putting the case of the National Indigenous Working Group, while Brian Harradine played his enigmatic role. He had set his bottom line with a modest set of 18 amendments to a 364-page bill. He created the space and maintained the pressure for a government compromise by agreeing to most government proposals. Before lunch on the last day, he gave the Government their preferred threshold test and sunset clause. His lawyers had constructive discussions with Government about the RDA. All attention was focused on the right to negotiate.

Over lunch, the indigenous leaders pulled the plug, Lois O'Donoghue declaring, 'I've given up on this process. They're just playing Russian roulette with our lives. At the end of the day, we've got our people out there to face. Their perception is that we're in here negotiating away our native title rights.'

Harradine was still prepared to cut a deal in the national interest, being anxious to avoid a race election and wanting to obtain the bare minimum he thought achievable for Aborigines.

Instead of a right to negotiate with mining companies on pastoral leases, native title holders were to be given a right to put their case to an independent state tribunal which would make a determination that could be overridden by the state minister for mines acting in the state interest.

**R**ICHARD COURT AND ROB BORBRIDGE refused to give Howard the green light. The most they would accept was their own tribunal having the power only to make recommendations to their mines ministers. Howard did not have the political muscle to impose his will for a final settlement on his state colleagues. So close and yet so far.

This remaining issue had nothing to do with the rights of the pastoralists. Were Wik resolved by Easter, Rob Borbidge would be finished as premier of Queensland. Wik is the only issue he has to run with. Without one last fear campaign, Labor's Peter Beattie was odds on to be the new Premier.

Though the larger mining companies concede the need to negotiate with any bona fide native title claimants whatever the legal status of their land, they prefer to do it without the monkey of the Native Title Act on their back. Smaller companies, especially in WA, do not even concede the need for negotiation or consultation with affected native title holders. The Court Government is anxious to minimise national standards for developers' dealings with native title holders.

Howard was hostage to Court and Borbidge because he had already compromised against the extinguishment of native title as far as his side of politics would permit. Given that the consultation and deliberation model could not be labelled a huge disincentive to mining investment, he needed another foil for his failure to take on Court and Borbidge. He insisted that Aborigines and farmers enjoy absolute equality under the law. He knew enough of the various state mining laws to know the argument would not survive scrutiny, but it had a superficial

appeal to see him through. With language designed to win back One Nation supporters, he told Parliament, 'It is fundamental to our kind of society that all Australians should be treated equally before the law. All Australians should be entitled to an equal dispensation of justice and all Australians should have equal responsibility before the law.'

Meanwhile, in the Senate, once the deal had fallen through, Harradine revisited earlier sticking points, doing legislative backflips and enacting his personal preferences. The moment for principled and fair compromise had passed.

It is now essential that the federal Liberal and National Parties keep the bush fooled. Pastoralists suffering further delay on permits for diversification are now on hold, but not so that the Government can deliver more to them. The Senate was agreeable to delivering the substance of all that the Howard Government promised to pastoralists. The only exception was on discriminatory provisions which would allow pastoralists to diversify more broadly than they could before Wik.

Wik legislation is not just an option: it is a necessity. But John Howard has foreclosed on any possibility of bringing his bill back to this Senate.

He will never have it so good again. Brian Harradine cannot compromise any further. By using the specious equality argument to cover his failure to win over Court and Borbidge, Howard cannot now do a backdown. He must be seen to be resolute. He must now run a race election. He has already tried to avoid responsibility for such an election, telling the Parliament:

I reject completely the description constantly used by many in the media that, if the Wik bill is the subject of a double dissolution, the next election will be a race election. There will be no race election as far as my Government is concerned. We will never embrace the politics of race. We will never seek to exploit a political issue or create a political argument based on race. We do not have in our ranks people who have used racist language. We do not have in our numbers people who have used racist language. It will not be a race election so far as my party is concerned. If those media commentators who continue to loosely and glibly describe it as such had any concern for the harmony of the Australian community, they would stop using such a ridiculous title.

But his senior Queensland National Party Senator, Ron Boswell, had discredited such a line seven hours earlier when, at 2am, he referred to Gareth Evans' remark about the Prime Minister's delight in 'bashing blackfellas'. Boswell warned:

If such a person finds the normal cut and thrust of politics too much, how will candidates new to politics in the heat of an election debate, with native title the big issue, be able to keep from making unhelpful comments? It is tempting to think that all debate in the public arena will be conducted as if it were in this chamber tonight during the committee stage. That debate was mostly restrained, careful and backed up by professional advice on complex issues. But come an election, the committee of the Senate will not be in charge.

After an election, any newly constituted Senate would be less in the Government's control than the existing Senate. The present Wik bill could only pass the Senate if the One Nation

Party rather than the Democrats held the balance of power. That is not likely. So Howard will have to run sufficiently hard on the Wik issue in the election to be able to claim a mandate forcing an unwilling Senate to comply. Otherwise there must be a double dissolution which will provide Howard with an even more hostile Senate. He will get his bill through a joint sitting, but at what price? John Howard has had to put the bush on hold, put us all through a race election, and throw away his Senate advantage just because he did not have the strength to bring Premiers Court and Borbidge into line on a technicality. Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern will have no cause to reciprocate John Howard's Easter wishes. Australia is the poorer.

COMMENT: 2

JOHN FERGIJSON

## Hard lines make hard times

**A**NYONE RECALLING the introduction of Work for the Dole last year will remember how the Coalition at the time resisted a reasoned and principled debate on the proposal. We were told the forces of 'common sense' were driving the Government's agenda. The media's self-acclaimed custodians of popular opinion peddled well-worn myths of division which ultimately gave the scheme a higher poll rating than the issues of Wik and a GST combined.

Those relying on the misinformation of the time could be forgiven for believing Work for the Dole offered *the* solution to a supposed rash of 'dole bludging' and that the scheme would instil a work ethic among the indolent masses, if not cure the problem of youth unemployment.

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. But in the ratings game, silence is consent. The mean-spirited offerings of Work for the Dole were given the commonsense ring of being a credible solution to the plight of young people. It was the poll-driven nature of the exercise that short-circuited informed debate and allowed the premature introduction of the scheme.

In his recent 'state of the federation' address, Mr Howard once again bypassed a promised evaluation of the scheme and extended Work for the Dole to an additional 25,000 young unemployed Australians. Under his so-called 'mutual obligation', any unemployed person on benefits for longer than six months can be forced to undertake virtually any activity that the Government sees fit. Is it fair to enforce labour under threat of losing meagre benefits? Is it reasonable to conscript people who are in need of a job? Is it right for a government to renege on its promise to provide real jobs by bundling increasing numbers into cheap, ineffective and short-term schemes?

Mr Howard says his demand that the unemployed put something back into the community through this scheme is fair and reasonable. He was not as eager to mention how these people are already compelled to seek work in return for 'the dole'. Nor that our economy benefits from the low inflation that high unemployment helps to sustain. The community already owes a debt to the unemployed, not the other way around. Despite the barrage of ridicule the Coalition levels at *Working Nation*, its strategy recognised that it was fair and reasonable for 'clients' to be required to fulfil more than their

Now it will be a case of the winner taking all at an election. Brian Harradine, who bent over backwards to find a principled compromise, has put us all on notice: 'Any election on this bill would mean the Government allowed political ideology to triumph over the national good and national reconciliation. It is a fearful prospect.'

Political ideology, weak leadership, and cant are an explosive mixture when race is added. And it was all so unnecessary. ■

**Frank Brennan** SJ is Director of Uniya, the Jesuit Social Research Centre, Sydney.

job-searching obligations only after adequate education, training or subsidised jobs were made available to them.

Since taking office, the Howard Government has done little to address seriously what it has called 'the greatest single issue facing Australia'. It has mouthed a concern for the unemployed—promising 'real' jobs, employment programs and heralding small business as the saviour. Meanwhile, large corporations continue to downsize, and demand from small business has been unimpressive overall. The effect on the youth and broader labour market is obvious. The expansion of the Work for the Dole scheme and the elevation of 'mutual obligation' as a central theme seems to reveal the Howard Government's reluctance to deliver real jobs as promised. The punitive rhetoric, the paltry funding and the lack of training reveal the short-sightedness of the current social agenda.

But that is only part of the picture. The downward pressure that a mobilised surplus of labour can place on wages is invaluable to a government whose true priority is low inflation growth. Unemployed young people can be conscripted as very useful allies in the campaign to devalue labour as a spur to increase growth. Of course, the success of this overarching agenda in delivering adequately paid jobs is doubtful. In the low-inflation growth strategy, the unemployed are an afterthought and, for people at the fringes of the labour market, jobs are uncertain in a climate of lower wages and severely reduced social security and welfare support. And there's nothing very mutual about all that.

**Y**OUNG DISADVANTAGED AUSTRALIANS who are the victims of technology, recession and economic restructuring are searching harder than ever for work and living lives according to a dole diary. Meanwhile, our Prime Minister has returned to the polls to exploit the 'dole bludger' vs 'honest tax-paying citizen' division to justify a massive expansion of his scheme. The entitlement to income support, education, training and the prospects of a real job have just been made more conditional and less secure than ever before. Yet another violation of our prized ethos of 'a fair go'. ■

**John Ferguson** is Senior Research Officer at the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission.



## Coming on strong

SIX MONTHS or so ago, John Howard had been largely written off by sections of the Australian political élite. Even those who conceded that he might well struggle past the post at the next

election had almost given up thinking that he had much will or creative energy left. The will had been there in the first year of government, with cuts in government spending, industrial relations changes, even some opportunism in responding to events, as with the gun debate. But there had seemed nothing much to go on with, not even much of a central idea to which government could return whenever it was in trouble or needed inspiration.

It looks different now—not necessarily because the commentators had it wrong then but because Howard is a fighter who has eventually come out of his doldrums. From the beginning of the year he has been putting in place a high-risk, but also potentially high-gain, strategy designed not only to secure him the election but to hobble Labor in the way Keating did the Liberals to such effect earlier in the decade.

It's high risk, all right. If the Liberal Party has not learnt by now that a tax reform package, particularly one with a goods and services tax, needs more than plaudits from the money markets and could be easy to misrepresent and very difficult to sell, it has never learnt anything. The problem is the more difficult because Howard allowed his Government to lose most of its sheen: he and Treasurer Peter Costello have to persuade an electorate now as cynical about them as about the other side that the great benefit of the tax reform package is that the 'battlers' will pay less tax, and most of the Howard Cabinet will have to pay more.

The proposed sale of the remaining parts of Telstra is also not without its problems. If, in some parts of Howard's constituencies, the part sale was a great success, there are still large sections of the population, especially away from Sydney and Melbourne, who are far from convinced that the public interest will be best served by purely private operators controlled only by competition. In 'battler' territory as well, the merits of massive reductions in government debt, or, for that matter, of budget surpluses, are not always as self-evident as they are when outlined by a money-market jockey.

THE GOVERNMENT'S close collaboration with the de-unionisation of the waterfront plays big in some galleries—not least in the boardrooms where the problem of the wharfies is not so much the notion that they increase costs of transport as that they have, for a century, used their power over a strategic choke-point of the economy to frustrate conservative governments. The Government has invested much in selling the image of wharfies as well-paid but idle skivers, manipulated and misused by a power-crazed leadership. The threat to the Government lies not so much in the outpouring of sympathy and solidarity, as in the capacity of Labor to ask whether the breaking down of perks and working conditions in well-organised work sites leaves every workplace likewise up for grabs.

But that is not the only risk. There is the question of whether the Government's own close involvement, and its willing connivance at legal loopholing to deprive the workers of straightforward legal comebacks, will come to haunt it. Out among the 'battlers', there is probably some concern about the way mining companies at Woodlawn and Cobar manipulated company structures to walk away from operations, leaving workers without their pay. That government, which made some ritual protests and promises to change the rules, is up to its neck in a similar scam invites some cynicism. And finally, of course, there is the difficulty of choreographing any drama in which many of the leading players operate independently, have great resources and not a little sense of strategy of their own. Strikes and confrontations do not always hurt Labor at the polls. John Howard should know that, if only because the last government he was in was defeated by the abrasiveness of its industrial policies.

TYING THINGS TOGETHER is this month's Budget, the preparation of which has moved steadily ahead while much of the media has been distracted by the republic and Wik. It has generally been assumed that the stage was set for an election budget, with lots of give-aways, and some self-satisfied congratulation that the pain of the past few years' housekeeping had produced a dividend. It may well make better strategy for Howard to pronounce grimly that, as things stand, there can be only more pain, more cuts, and more hard work. Sure, he could say, the retrenchment of 1996 had produced the goods: the result had been that Australia had steered its way out of the Asian economic crisis, yet that very crisis and uncertainties about Japan required a marked cut-back of optimistic projections, and more work to keep the budget above the line.

How does this help him in an election which could be on us by August? Well, a part of the unveiling is a tax reform package, with some goodies and the proceeds of the Telstra sale, to take place soon after the Coalition wins the election. That, he can say, funds a program of tax cuts, increased spending in some key areas, and even some 'visionary' infrastructure, probably focused around a Sydney-Canberra-Melbourne very fast train. But the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Howard will solemnly declare, has forsworn both a goods and services tax and a Telstra sale, and, under his charter of budget honesty, will have to show how he will fund his promises. Kim Beazley could be endplayed with a sophisticated variation of 'where's the money coming from?'

It's cute, and it could work. If, that is, the election is about economics and economic management. It might be different if it were about competing ideas of where Australia was going, about different images of social policy and public interest and about some landmarks for the 21st century. The problem for Labor, however, is that if Howard has shown himself vulnerable in this area, no-one seems to know where Labor stands. It won't win even this argument by default. ■

Jack Waterford is editor of the *Canberra Times*.

## They also serve

From Brent Howard

Two-and-a-half cheers for Damien Broderick and David Glanz (*Eureka Street*, March 1998).

Unemployment means the demand for jobs exceeds the supply. Part of the solution is obviously to reduce the demand for jobs by making life without a job more attractive than employment. This can be achieved by: making income available to those prepared to withdraw from the labour market in return for a modest stipend; and by lowering net wages, via, for example, raising income tax rates.

Sadly, conservative politicians show no interest in this program to enhance the employment prospects for those most desperately seeking work, preferring to hound those with a weaker appetite for income and employment into ever greater job-search feats.

Considering their approach to the unemployed, via work-for-the-dole in particular, one could be forgiven for thinking that the Federal Government has embraced a Marxist principle: that people should not live off the labour of others if they are able-bodied. The problem is that the Coalition is refusing to implement its 'Marxist' principle in a consistent fashion and is entirely ignoring other central socialist principles.

If people should have to justify their income by labour (if fit to work) this principle must be applied to the capitalist class as well as to the unemployed. When Dr Kemp starts requiring that Kerry Packer work 1000 hours a week or lose his net property income, we should start taking his work-for-the-dole proposal seriously. Moreover, the Coalition appears not to understand that looking for a job is itself a job.

Second, as Mr Broderick points out, everyone is entitled to something for nothing as their share of the earth's natural resources and the labours of people now dead. This inheritance is currently shared around in a grossly unequal fashion. Now that Mr Howard and Co. have discovered socialist ideas, they should introduce

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confiscatory taxes on inheritances and non-trivial gifts and redistribute the proceeds as a guaranteed income for all, irrespective of work inclination.

Third, under socialist principles of justice, those seeking work who cannot find it are entitled to far more than a base benefit of 25 per cent of full-time male average weekly earnings (MAWE). This point applies with even greater force to the sick and disabled who are probably entitled to around 100 per cent of MAWE, once compensation for suffering as well as income replacement is considered. The Government speaks of the obligations of the unemployed but comprehensively fails to meet its obligations to those in unfortunate situations who would work if able to. Note that payment for job searching has been, or soon will be, abolished for many young people.

Fourth, those who do not wish to look for paid work are not the exploiters they are so often made out to be. The more work that is done the more environmental damage that occurs. There is no way people in the third world will ever achieve first world affluence at all, let alone on a sustainable basis, while economic growth continues unchecked in the first world.

Finally, not only are environmental resources scarce, so are jobs. By declining to use up a scarce job resource, those voluntarily not working are increasing the employment opportunities of others. They are entitled to compensation for foregoing use of a socially desired resource they have a legitimate claim on.

The leading contemporary philosophical advocate of an unconditional guaranteed minimum income of significant proportions is Philippe van Parijs. In his recommended article 'Why Surfers Should Be Fed' (*Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 2), he writes: '[T]hose who take an unfair share of society's resources are not those who opt for ... a low-production, low-consumption lifestyle. They are people like myself ... who, thanks to the attractive job they were given, appropriate a huge employment rent.' Someone really ought to tell the Government.

Brent Howard  
Rydalmerc, NSW

## Electoral surgery

From C.J. Dean

For many years now I have been concerned about what seems to me to be an inequity in our method of electing politicians to the lower houses of both state and federal parliaments.

During my seventy-odd years I have lived in several different electorates and voted at numerous elections, but never once, in any of those various electorates, have I been represented by the candidate for whom I voted. I have been represented always by the 'enemy'. My vote, cast many times, has never done anything for me. I might as well not have voted. There must be many more like me throughout

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This month, the writer of each letter we publish will receive a pack of postcards featuring cartoons and graphics, by *Eureka Street* regulars, Dean Moore, Siobhan Jackson and Tim Metherall.

Australia, on both sides, who might consider themselves similarly misrepresented or unrepresented.

Some years ago when Bob Hawke was Prime Minister, I wrote to him about it and proposed a solution. Mick Young replied to inform me: (a) yes, he sympathised but things are rarely perfect; (b) our electoral system was the most democratic and has served us well; and (c) if I had need to speak to a politician of my own flavour I should approach a Senator or Member of the House of Representatives. No matter, I suppose, that I have never seen either a Senator or an MHR in the flesh, nor would I bother to approach either of them!

The solution, outlined below, would produce the following results:

- A more democratic parliament.
- Nearly all electors represented by a politician of their own political persuasion.
- Politicians encouraged to co-operate more for the benefit of their electorates.
- Misreporting and dishonesty discouraged.

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- The possibility of the development of a new, more constructive parliamentary philosophy or ethos.

For the sake of this argument, let us assume we are dealing with the lower house of a state parliament. We have decided there will be 100 MLAs in 50 electorates. After an election the candidate with the majority is declared the Senior Member for his electorate. Then the candidate coming next in the poll is declared the Junior Member. In the House, when voting takes place, the Senior Member's vote will be loaded higher than that of the Junior Member's, say 60-40 or 3-2 or whatever might be determined. In other words, the majority of the winning party is respected and maintained.

With two members per electorate nearly all voters would be represented by someone for whom they cast a vote. They would feel more comfortable about approaching one of their members about a problem or petition.

With two members per electorate, each is sure to keep a close eye on the other. It will be much more difficult for either of them to misreport, misinform or dissemble. On a more positive note, the two members would be strongly encouraged to co-operate on some matters concerning their particular electorates, sometimes in conflict with party principles. That in turn might lead to more co-operative, less vicious, less time-wasting, more honest practices in parliament generally.

Our electoral system has seen little if any change since Federation nearly 100 years ago. Like the Monarchy and the Constitution, it has served us well. But there might be better ways of doing things.

**C.J. Dean**  
Sandy Beach, NSW

## Je ne regrette rien

*From Betty Searle*

David Glanz's letter 'Ragging the Reds' is spot on (*Eureka Street*, January-February 1998). My experience as a long-time Party member is that many of those who now bemoan their membership and time spent in the Communist Party, feeling they have wasted their lives, were the biggest Stalinists of all.

Thank you David Glanz for your well-argued letter.

**Betty Searle**  
O'Connor, ACT



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# THE MONTH'S TRAFFIC



## Hard cell

**T**HE GATES of Pentridge Prison in Melbourne have been unlocked for the last three months and every week about 10,000 people have been taking an educational tour.

Each Sunday I have welcomed more than 6000 people, in groups of about 50 at a time. I ask each group to think about the \$50,000 it costs the taxpayer to keep every single person in custody for a year. Do they think we are getting value for money?

Why is it, I ask the curious prison visitors, that we routinely call for accountability from our educational and our health services, for example, but fail to demand the same from our so-called 'correctional' services?

We look into the Pentridge prison cells in the three-tier cell block which, until November of last year, held more than 400 men, and boys, on remand. Some were as young as 17 years old. They were charged with an offence certainly, but had not yet had their charges examined in court.

The cells are only six feet by eight feet: small for one person. For the last 12 years they held two inmates instead of one, and were locked up at 4pm and opened the next morning. That makes 16 hours overnight with a complete stranger, who may be twice the age of his companion, and who could have been in and out of prison for the last ten or 20 years.

People on remand are technically innocent. Some may have been charged with serious violent offences and had bail refused by the magistrate, perhaps because they were seen to be a threat to the wider society, or likely to interfere with witnesses. Many others on remand throughout Australia are charged with only minor property offences, and yet, if they have no permanent place to live, they can be refused bail as a way of ensuring that they can be contacted and will appear in court for their hearing.

So, in some states of Australia people as young as 17, and in other states 18, are remanded in custody not because of their criminality, but because of their homelessness.

Pentridge ceased operating as a prison last November, and has been replaced by two 600-bed private prisons, one in Sale, in country Victoria, and the other in Laverton, about 20 km from the city. This second facility, Port Phillip, has been repeatedly in the news recently because of the number of deaths that have occurred there since its opening only six months ago.

Three prisoners have taken their own lives; others have died as a result of drug overdoses, and questions are already being asked about the effectiveness of the prison management, Group 4 Securitas, a private prison business enterprise originally founded in the United Kingdom.

It has been interesting to contrast the media's close scrutiny of the three private prisons now operating in Victoria with the lack of interest in, and attention to, Pentridge Prison's operations during the last few decades. When I worked at Pentridge as a chaplain from 1985 until 1992, death by suicide was a frequent occurrence, but it rarely rated a mention in a newspaper, far less a major television report.

What has *not* been highlighted in recent weeks, as the Port Phillip Prison has been closely monitored, has been the nature of

its prison population. They are mostly remanded prisoners, still awaiting trial. Characteristically they are a group of inmates with a higher than average risk of taking their own lives.

Group 4 Securitas resisted the demands of the prison officers' association that a greater number of custodial staff be employed. Prisoners were locked in the cells for 23 hours a day during the industrial dispute that ensued. Eventually, 15 additional staff were flown in from the United Kingdom—significantly not local reinforcements—who most likely will not be replaced on their return home when this industrial dispute and prison management crisis is resolved.

Private prison operators are interested in making profits from the management of prisons on behalf of the government authorities. Their arrival has challenged the publicly operated prisons throughout Australia to show that they can provide a competitive service while fulfilling their statutory responsibilities. It was the resistance to reforming the prison service and frequent rotting of the system by the prison officers' unions that opened the door to the private prison business in Australia in the first place. Now the extent of privatisation—especially in Victoria where almost half of the state's prison beds are privatised—threatens the power base of the once powerful unions that in the past effectively held governments to ransom for fear of prison riots and escapes.

The scope of the Victorian privatisation program is unprecedented anywhere in the world. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the social experiment. But now is the time for monitoring the performance of both the public and private sectors in the provision of 'correctional services'.

In the end, I am sure there will be no dramatic difference in the operating costs of the private and public systems, when all aspects of the administration of the prison system are taken into account. But the real question to be addressed is: what happens when the prisoner walks out through the prison gate, after six weeks, or six months, or six years? Is the person any better off or less likely to commit further crime? Is the victim really any better off for the offender having been locked away? Is the prisoner's family any better off? And are we, the



*Remand cells in Pentridge, measuring six by eight feet, were shared by two people.*

community, any safer, more secure, or more law-abiding as a result of our spiralling prison populations?

The question that needs to be asked by more than the private prison operators is this: are we getting social justice or value for money from a system that appears to ignore the major underlying causes of incarceration today—drug addiction, mental illness, youth unemployment, poverty and inequality of opportunity?

—Peter Norden

## Wik: blow by blow

ON THURSDAY, 9 April, John Howard stood behind his presidential lectern in his prime ministerial courtyard to explain why he would take the nation to its first election on race.

'We were always ready to embrace a different way of achieving the objectives we wanted, particularly in the four critical areas [threshold test, sunset clause, right to negotiate, Racial Discrimination Act],' he said. 'I had a number of discussions with Senator Harradine, and it must be said that, in the final analysis, he wasn't in a very compromising mood. Because at one stage we actually had what we wanted in relation to the sunset clause and we also had what we wanted in relation to the registration test. And, I guess, for a few fleeting hours it may have appeared that there was a willingness on his part to change and so forth ...'

'Despite the amiability and the cordiality of the discussions that took place between myself and Senator Harradine, perhaps it was never on.'

Perception and reality. The Wik debate's dénouement in the early hours of Thursday came with a Senate refusal to budge in protecting Aboriginal interests on the four sticking points left after Harradine threw the Government everything else it wanted in December's Wik debate to encourage a handshake. But it veiled intense, grinding negotiations between the key players' lawyers which came excruciatingly close to forging a national consensus, and avoiding the trauma of a race election.

The key was Harradine—a deeply conservative man of unquestioned integrity in seeking reconciliation and answerable to no-one but his conscience. With everyone else frozen in their public positions for fear of splitting their constituencies. Harradine became, for a time, the de facto Prime Minister. A legal negotiator said later: 'His office became the rag and bone market, the

market place of exchange for all the groups, where a deal could be done, provided he took the bullet.'

Labor was wracked with internal division, yet had pledged to hold the line for the sake of the nation's reputation and its soul. Howard, under extraordinary pressure from the Nationals and the mining industry, as well as a hard core within his own party who wanted to defy Wik and extinguish all native title on pastoral leases, had locked himself in way too early; in May last year he promised Longreach pastoralists he would never compromise.

Harradine saw his task as finding a way to save face for Howard, and that meant delivering him the symbolism imbedded in the four sticking points, while keeping their substance, so that Aborigines maintained a foothold on pastoral leases, rather than risk losing all at a joint sitting after the election. His lawyers, John McCarthy QC and Jeff Kildea, and the indigenous working group/Labor lawyers Ron Castan QC and John Bastan QC, all working free of charge, toiled this year with Government lawyers Philippa Horner and Robert Orr. They could see a way to settle, but could the legal solution translate into the political arena, with all its symbolism and emotion? Could what Harradine dubs the 'totems' and others the 'mantras' of the debate be deconstructed sufficiently to give Howard enough slack to settle his troops? As one legal negotiator mused after it was all over, this was the 'Derrida debate—the text was everything'.

By the beginning of the Senate debate, Labor, Harradine and the Government had agreed, on a 'wink and a nod' basis, on most points.

On Monday, April 6, the Senate stood firm behind a finessed Racial Discrimination Act clause, after the Government held off a deal in the belief that Frank Brennan's critique would see Harradine back down. The Native Title Act would be read and construed subject to the RDA with a clause note reinforcing that it was an interpretative aid only, if there was ambiguity in the text. Harradine's lawyers distributed legal advice showing this fact, while Labor continued to claim publicly that the clause was effective in ending racial discrimination in the bill.

After the vote, the Government immediately offered him a compromise—they would vote against, but still accept, in the end, his clause, provided the clause note was lifted up into the amendment proper. Harradine agreed.

On the same day, the deal on the threshold test collapsed, resulting in a huge Government win. In a series of carefully ordered amendments, the Greens and Democrats voted for Labor's clause, which retained the Senate's December decision that 'spiritual connection' with the land could qualify native title claimants to register.

Harradine's vote knocked that over and, as agreed, Harradine and Labor then voted for the Government's strict 'physical connection test', which banned a claim unless a tribe member had been physically on the land. Labor then voted for Harradine's addition—that physical connection would be deemed to have occurred if a parent of a tribe member had been on the land. This allowed victims of the stolen generation, and of pastoralist 'lock-outs' to claim. But the Greens and Democrats, smelling a sell-out (and being told by the non-pragmatists in the indigenous working group to hold the line), voted with the Government to strike down Harradine's amendment, leaving the Government's strict test intact.

Harradine decided to let the Government keep its windfall, unless the Greens and Democrats backed down. He believed this would force a compromise on the right to negotiate. Pastoralists now had everything they were promised, and miners, surely, would see that, with claims now so restricted, the importance to them of abolishing the right to negotiate was greatly diminished.

Tuesday saw the Senate bogged down in technical matters, and Harradine locked in talks with Howard on the Right to Negotiate. Labor and Harradine had presented an alternative some time before. The idea was to strip the symbolism of the right by rebadging it as 'the non-exclusive area impact procedure'. The States would oversee a procedure of notification and mediation with native title claimants. As a last resort, an independent panel would decide the issue, subject to override by the State Government if it was in the 'State interest'.

On Tuesday morning Howard, for the first time, put down a compromise of his own, rather than sitting back demanding that his opponents find a way out for him. At a meeting in the office of the Special Minister of State, Nick Minchin, and attended by Howard's native title adviser, Catherine Murphy, he proposed a much more restrictive State-based procedural regime, and a substantive change—the panel could make only 'recommendations' to the State mining minister.

Harradine was outraged. Besides simply not being a credible proposal, it did not even make the Aboriginal Affairs Minister or the Premier responsible, but blatantly advertised his one-sided commitment to miners' rights over blacks'.

On Wednesday morning, the lawyers met Minchin with a check list of differences between the two plans. Harradine agreed to every one of Howard's procedural points, but not the 'recommendatory' demand. Then, the intricate threads of Harradine's plan began unravelling. The six-year sunset clause, a meaningless symbolic sop to the National Party (claims can always be made under common law when the sunset clause chops off claims under the Act) was always privately on the Government's table to give away, despite Queensland National Party members' desire to sell the clause as cutting off claims after six years.

Harradine and Labor proposed a 'Clayton's sunset clause', confident the Government would accept it provided all other bases were covered. The clause would only come into effect if both Houses of Parliament approved it on the recommendation of the minister. Again the Greens and Democrats cried foul, voting with the Government to maintain the clause without a rider.

Harradine was appalled, and during the lunch break, promised to recommit the vote and vote against the sunset clause. Unknown to him, the Aboriginal negotiators had already publicly walked out, many in tears. For them, the endless give-aways of their rights had made their credibility with their own constituency intolerable. Harradine was now on his own.

Despite the demise of the sunset clause, Howard asked Harradine to meet him at 3.30pm, for the fourth time in two days. He promised to do what he could to approve the final right to negotiate clause. He was looking for a symbolic win—so long as he could call it something else, he was 'in'. Howard also told Harradine the Government would live with ten other minor sticking points, dubbed the 'Harradine ten point plan'.

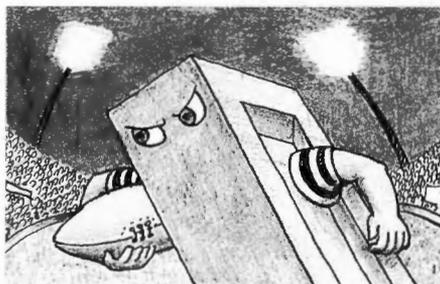
At 7pm, Harradine again visited Howard. Howard's answer was no. Queensland and Western Australia had vetoed the Harradine solution. Close colleagues said Harradine was incensed that Howard would hand over his responsibility for the national interest to the States. With a solution lost, Harradine recommitted the threshold test vote, and voted with his heart to restore the 'spiritual connection' threshold test.

Speaking in the early hours of Thursday morning, Harradine, crushed by tiredness and disappointment, broke down and had to sit down before he'd finished. Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Herron yelled out: 'You've lost the plot, you've lost the plot.' Herron never heard the conclusion in Harradine's written text. It said: 'Any election on this bill would mean the Government allowed political ideology to triumph over the national good and national reconciliation. It is a fearful prospect. Australians both indigenous and non-indigenous deserve better.'

—Margo Kingston

## Storming homes

THERE WAS CONFUSION on Friday, 3 April, when Melbourne Storm, Victoria's new team in the National Rugby League, played their first game at home. If there's no Aussie Rules, Melbourne people usually spend Friday night kicking fenders at Jupp Motor Auctions. Jupps is the one place in town that looks and feels a bit like the MCG carpark in the last quarter of a one-sided game when people are trying to extricate heavily made-up vehicles from absurd positions.



A night with no football was crying out to heaven and part of Melbourne Storm's artful marketing strategy has been to avoid scheduling clashes with AFL fixtures. Strange that rugby league, of all games, should seek to avoid head-to-head conflict. But not even the most optimistic Storm promoters had anticipated the crowd that would turn up for the first game on southern soil.

Possibly people misunderstood what was meant by 'playing at home'. These days, Melbourne homes are filled with the feeble furniture sold by Swedish chain stores. If Storm, led by Glenn Lazarus ('the brick with eyes'), were playing at home, then Melbourne knew enough about rugby league to conclude that home was no safe place to remain. Lazarus is his real name, although his fame rests on his ability to rise from deadily tackles. He weighs 120kg. John

Howard once compared himself to the man. Melbourne got out of the house.

Many found their way to Olympic Park, hoping to see a few greyhounds or perhaps some late-running events from the '56 games. Instead they found a revamped venue, its latest development being the acquisition of a million-dollar facility to keep advertisements rolling automatically along the sideline. They also found the ticketing in chaos.

Having won the first three games of the season playing away, Storm had underestimated the level of interest it had generated. In the confusion, some patrons missed the three tries Storm scored early in the first half. When North Sydney scored a return try, the ground was so quiet that you could have been at North Sydney oval. (North Sydney hasn't won a premiership since the '20s. Its fans don't get too excited too soon. Not even when David Hill was in charge did we expect miracles. And indeed, other than the end of tobacco sponsorship, none were forthcoming.)

There was confusion even inside the ground. One patron near us thought that the North Sydney Bears were the Brisbane Bears, the former name of the AFL's Brisbane Lions who used to be the Fitzroy Lions in the days when the North Sydney Lions sold fruitcakes for charity.

'Brisbane Poofers!' the patron yelled.

People nearby took offence.

'Sydney Poofers!' he soon corrected.

There was even worse confusion about the game itself. The very choice of the name 'Storm' indicates that the code is imported: Melbourne Drizzle or even Occasional Melbourne Shower would have shown better local knowledge, as when the Newtown Bluebags became the Newtown Jets to honour the air traffic under which they trained. Sadly, Newtown fell out of the league soon after winning a minor premiership. It was a pity, as the changing sexual politics of King Street were beginning to create the likelihood of a female team in the competition. In an attempt to educate the crowd at Olympic Park, the rules of the game were explained over the PA. Whenever anything much happened, the Storm King did a few gyrations in the in-goal area, and music, not unlike the soundtrack of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, was played to fuel the excitement. The fake hype was irritating. The crowd wanted the game to speak for itself.

It was better in the quiet periods when you could listen to the comforting sound of jack-hammers on the other side of Batman

Avenue. They were working into the night to complete the Kennett Government's pride and joy, an underground freeway to link all Melbourne's sporting venues, from Waverley to Windy Hill. In a way, the jackhammers were a more fitting backdrop to the on-field activity.

Storm won the game easily, 24-16. Only a tearaway try in the last seconds of the game made it look respectable for Norths. But the real score was the 21,000 who turned up. In 1994, 87,000 came to a State of Origin game at the MCG. Last year, during the bitter feud between Super League and the Australian Rugby League, only 28,000 came to the same event. Storm is trying to create a reliable week-by-week supporter base. They need the crowds to come even when the team is losing. In Melbourne, that's the difference between hype and real life.

—Michael McGirr

## Asia specific

ON THE EVE of the 1995 defence pact with Indonesia, Paul Keating was to be found happily reciting a list of his achievements.

'Then there was Asia and APEC,' Keating told his biographer, the economist John Edwards. 'Through the leaders' meetings and the trade liberalisation agreements we have contributed to setting up the Asia Pacific in a way that suits us.'

'In a way that suits us': the definition of national power. Australia was no longer a colony, a plodder without initiative, a mediocre state relying on imperial states like the US. Instead, after some good early years for APEC, Keating was saying we could claim an increment of independent status.

But the Howard Government's response to the financial crisis in Indonesia shows our ability at power politics to be other than independent. Far from being a player in Asia, we looked first to Washington for help and let the American team at the IMF do all the running.

Whether you see Australia's national interest furthered by Suharto's absence or his presence, the Government's actions seem a little dependent. Many were whispering that the Americans and the IMF wanted to remove Suharto and that his original usefulness as a 'man-eating shark' against the communists had ended.

If the Americans and the IMF wanted to weaken Suharto's regime so that some type of democratic alternative could be put in place, then we did not push hard enough for

an overthrow. An activist democratic government would have done so.

But there was a sort of grim inevitability to our support for Suharto. Our small size denies us a way to control the region with an equivalent of America's Monroe Doctrine. Failing a removal of the dictatorship, Australia's interest was to mitigate the economic crisis and its impact on the average Indonesian. However, if the IMF's medicine was going to worsen the crisis in Indonesia and land us with a major foreign policy problem, then we did not resist the stringent details of the package enough, or push a role for the only group we helped create in Asia, namely APEC.

Walter Lippmann, the distinguished American columnist, used to say that the prime problem in international affairs was to identify what the crisis actually is. It took a generation of Americans, for example, to understand the implications of the rise of German power and the need for a permanent US presence in Europe.

The problems in Indonesia were typical of really serious crises. Who could have predicted that Suharto would have put on such an act? The situation was opaque, unpredictable and dangerous.

Despite Australia's having the greatest concentration of Indonesian specialists in the world, the Government nevertheless seriously miscalculated about Suharto, the motives of the US, and the IMF. When the currency crisis hit Indonesia last year, no government was more strident than ours in its demands that President Suharto buckle under to the IMF program.

After the IMF's intervention in Thailand, Treasurer Peter Costello seemed to view intervention in Indonesia as just another legal brief to be settled matter-of-factly. Australia contributed to the IMF's package but the details were left to the fund's technocrats and the behind-the-scenes influence of the Clinton Administration.

In both the October and January agreements with Suharto, the Howard Government supported the IMF's line on structural reform, though the Opposition was getting a little uneasy. Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, went to Jakarta to offer moral support. So did the Chief of the Defence Force, General John Baker. Prime Minister John Howard even phoned Suharto to press for the IMF reforms.

Even Suharto's remarkable defiance of the first IMF package in November failed to dent the Government's confidence. But, beginning in January, a shift in the Government's attitude had begun to take

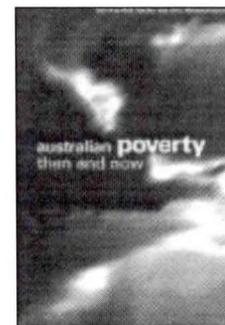
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place: the IMF and Suharto were moving apart and the rupiah was still falling.

One senior official, knowledgeable about the regime in Jakarta, said that there has been a transition period in Howard Government opinion. At the beginning, the official line was that the crisis offered an opportunity for business. It took a while to understand that the IMF was focused on the right things, but at the wrong time.

The new view was that to end the crisis, the rupiah needed to be stabilised more than Indonesia's corrupt political and economic system needed to be reformed. This represented a break in the international consensus. The Prime Minister told Parliament that the IMF package must be implemented with 'care and sensitivity' for the average Indonesian, particularly regarding the supply of food.

The Reserve Bank's dramatic intervention in the foreign policy debate encapsulated the new state of play. The bank's governor, Ian MacFarlane, told a business audience in New York that, contrary to IMF prescription, ridding Indonesia of financial sector corruption would not have an immediate effect on the rupiah. At the same time, the bank's leading economic thinker, deputy governor Stephen Grenville, remarked that Suharto's economic record could be compared favourably to that of former Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos.

What was the rationale for the shift in policy? The prospect of hyper-inflation in Indonesia and the dissolution of our strategic defence policy certainly moved Canberra's policy elite. As Australia's 1997 strategic defence review explained, Indonesia is seen by defence planners as a crucial archipelago for our defence. The modernisation of its armed forces, so dependent on its now precarious growth rate, is also factored into our defence planning. Indonesia was also a big trading partner and there were fears the crisis could spread to our own currency.

This has a related point. Our strenuous support for the IMF was almost a direct affront to Suharto—something unlikely to enhance Jakarta's respect or trust for Australia in the future. A deeper reason for the shift was the growing criticism of the IMF by such leading American economists as Harvard University's Martin Feldstein and Jeffrey Sachs. These were conservatives to whom the Reserve Bank listened closely.

Alexander Downer returned recently from a trip to Washington brimming with enthusiasm about how Australia had helped soften the IMF line and how the CIA, the

Pentagon and the IMF were pleased to hear our view. Indeed, the latest IMF package, Indonesia's third, seems to offer some concessions to Suharto. But the problem was that Washington was not pleased at the break in the diplomatic front: they wanted everyone to read the same lines.

The crisis was a near miss for the Howard Government. In its first serious challenge in foreign affairs, the most important in a generation, the Government was caught plodding. Only when it was really pushed did it show signs of independent thinking and action.

—Lincoln Wright

## Jesus of the suburbs

RECENTLY, Michael Morwood's book, *Tomorrow's Catholic*, was subjected to strong official criticism in the Melbourne Catholic church.

To understand the conflict over the book, it is important to remember that Morwood is a member of a missionary congregation and lives in Melbourne's West. This is a country for missionaries. Most Catholics come from immigrant families in which faith has been embedded in national culture. Their faith is often expressed in an attachment to devotions, in a strong sense of sin and personal unworthiness, and in a distant sense of God. While the parish life is often very rich, younger Catholics easily dismiss their parents' faith as part of an irrelevant culture. Belief either in God or in human worth does not come easily. This is the world that teachers and parents must deal with when they wish to commend faith to the young.

Morwood addresses this culture in lectures. In order to create space for faith, he argues against the approach to faith adopted by parents and grandparents, and already rejected by the young. It represents a God who is outside the world, a humanity whose beginnings can be described only in myth, a Jesus Christ whose humanity is unrecognisable, and a spirituality which fails to acknowledge the goodness of the world.

He opposes to this view of the world the understanding that human beings form a tiny and very recent part of the story of the universe. He emphasises the ways in which God is within the world, and discusses Jesus Christ's divinity in terms of his complete humanity. He tells his human story as one of complete openness and trust in God, which led to his death. From this understanding of Christian faith follows the need

to recognise the presence of God in other religious traditions. Morwood appeals to contemporary biblical, historical and theological scholarship to buttress his position.

The strategy behind the book is to deflect resistance to Christian faith by affirming the conventional 'scientific' view of origins shared by his audience. By affirming the value of human beings, Morwood hopes to draw attention to God within the human world and to arouse interest in Jesus Christ.

But such an account of Christian faith will properly raise questions of identity, particularly among Bishops and of theologians. In the Catholic church, it is the bishops' job to ensure that the proclamation of faith is in continuity with the faith of the church. To explore the tradition in order to find old light apt for new questions is also the stock-in-trade of theologians. Both theologians and bishops work habitually with believers of some shape, and speak comfortably in the language of the tradition. Inevitably, then, when 'missionaries' try to find words to commend faith to those who have rejected this language, the question of the identity with the faith of the church will be raised.

If I were part of that conversation, I would question whether Morwood's relatively flat account of Christian faith does adequate justice to the high tension of the Gospel. He ties God into the world, and identifies Jesus Christ's divinity with the fullness of his humanity. His story of God and Jesus Christ therefore appears to remain locked into our world. In contrast, the Christian Gospel begins with a God who freely chooses to enter our world and share its miseries. As a result, the life and death of Jesus Christ brings together the story of God involved in the world and the story of a human life delivered to abandonment. It can cope with maintaining hope in the face of the things that make for despair.

Morwood would be entitled to ask me whether my account of the Gospel could be heard, let alone accepted, by most young Australians today. He might also ask whether my version of the Gospel does not represent a later reading of the original message for another culture, and one which makes it impossible to imagine Jesus Christ as really human.

Again, such questions do not conclude the conversation. I would argue that the heart of the Gospel, God's involvement in Jesus Christ, has always been as difficult to hear as it is powerful. It suggests, moreover, that the heart of being human is the desire for God, and that Jesus' humanity is



therefore enhanced and not removed by his divinity.

And so the conversation would continue, leading to a larger understanding on both sides and the recognition of distortions. The conversation began when the church moved from the Jewish to the Roman world, and has been conducted ever since. Indeed it is unavoidable in any church concerned to speak, not only to those socialised into faith, but also to those on its boundaries.

Such conversation, however, demands a great deal of trust and respect on both sides. It is always tempting, particularly for a church grown defensive, to short-circuit the conversation. A contemporary way of doing this is to appeal to the Catechism as a decisive criterion of what can be said about any disputed point.

The reason why this is lazy and self-regarding is that the Catechism, by definition, is written for those at home within the Catholic tradition. Furthermore, the positions and language used in the Catechism represent those of the formative debates about the topics handled there. In the treatment of Jesus Christ, the language, explanations and the spirituality reflect the debates of the fifth century. The positions arrived at in the great Councils then, of course, are definitive, but the explanations given of them are usually not so. Certainly, to use earlier definitions, in order to judge twentieth century writing directed ultimately to a non-Christian audience is a delicate, if necessary, task. But to use the theologies and spiritualities associated in the Catechism with these definitions as a decisive criterion for judgment is methodologically and religiously crude.

If conversation about how to present Christian faith to those disinclined to accept it is important, the controversy about Michael Morwood's book is healthy. That he is open to it is shown by his repeated insistence in his book that he does not wish to deny Christ's divinity. That the Australian church is ready for it is shown by the continuing demand for his ministry throughout the country.

Conversations about identity and relevance are often painful, particularly to those who articulate their theologies. No doubt much of this pain could have been avoided if Morwood's writing had been preceded and followed by quiet conversation. But his willingness to endure indicates that the call to preach the Gospel beyond the places where socialisation into church is easy has been taken seriously.

—Andrew Hamilton

## Tying in research

**R**ESearchers in the School of Engineering and Technology at Deakin University are getting down to the brass tacks of industry. In fact, they are studying the manufacture of fasteners at every level, from the choice of steel to the optimisation of the manufacturing process.

It's a serious research program, involving several other universities and a heavy commitment of resources from the industry itself. This degree of collaboration with industry is something very new in Australian research, and has a lot in common with the practical research, development and teaching links that have distinguished technologically advanced countries such as the US, Japan and Germany.

Industry has donated more than \$1.5 million worth of equipment to Deakin's Waurm Ponds Campus on the outskirts of Geelong. Kaal Australia, which operates aluminium rolling mills, has provided a laboratory-size version of its mill technology; then there is a bolt-making machine from Ajax Fasteners; and a hot torsion machine for studying metal bending, from BHP Research.

Ajax Fasteners has become even more closely involved with the university. Having just opened a \$50 million manufacturing facility at Braeside in Melbourne's south-east, the company has shifted its entire R&D operation to a Technology Centre on Deakin's Toorak Campus.

And this traffic is two-way. Two Masters students are working at the Ajax Technology Centre and at Braeside, researching the manufacture of nuts and bolts. Two more students at Waurm Ponds are looking at ways to make the process more efficient and flexible. These research students are part of a team of nine, including three academics, working on fasteners at Deakin. They are collaborating with colleagues from Monash, Swinburne and RMIT.

This is only one of several research projects at Deakin's engineering school where postgraduate students are working hand-in-glove with industry. Deakin and the Australian National University, for instance, last year established a research laboratory inside Ford Australia's metal stamping plant at North Geelong. The students there not only have access to data direct from the production line, but they are in high-speed computer contact with the Waurm Ponds Campus, to a supercomputer at the ANU, and also to research computers at Ford's world headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan.

With its emphasis on distance education, Deakin University has long been used to taking learning to where students are, rather than have students come to it. 'We want to develop that approach in research as well,' said Peter Hodgson, the Professor of Engineering.

Having come through an era where manufacturing was seen as antediluvian and people talked about rust-bucket economies, Hodgson says it is now time to unleash the latest 'smart' technologies. 'We need to innovate, reorganise, and redesign manufacturing.'

He talks about applying new technology to break down the artificial barriers of the past—the barriers between manufacturers, for instance, each of which made a component or assembled part of a finished product. Hodgson argues that by treating manufacturing as a system of interrelated activities—from digging ore out of the ground to the production of a finished car or truck—we may be able to achieve greater efficiency.

For example, a car manufacturer may well be willing to pay for a more expensive fastener if it were part of a system that was easier to install. The greater expense in manufacturing the fastener itself would be more than offset by the efficiency of using it.

The Deakin researchers are also approaching production processes as a system. Activities that in the past have been separate, such as the annealing and rolling of metal, could be combined into a single process, where metal is treated and shaped at the same time. And manufacturers at different parts of the product cycle, such as metal producers and metal users, could collaborate so that metal with particular properties could be more easily specified and produced for particular products.

It's a brave new world of innovation, says Hodgson, where known technologies are combined in a new way. In the process, the nuts and bolts approach may fasten Australian universities and industry securely together. ■

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## Closed books

Keep up appearances; there lies the test;  
The world will give thee credit for the rest.  
Outward be fair, however foul within;  
Sin if thou wilt, but then in secret sin.

—Charles Churchill, 1731–64

The desire of governments to be able to sin in secret, to avoid embarrassing scrutiny, is as old as social organisation. But just lately, the wolf has found a new sheepskin to hide under: the language and legal structures of commerce are being used to hide more and more of what was once the public sector from public scrutiny.

Earlier this year, the Communications Law Centre released the first Victorian Information Audit, a survey of the public information performance of more than 50 important institutions in Victoria. Each organisation was assessed against simple objective criteria. Do you produce an annual report? If so, do you charge for it? Do you have a library which is open to the public? And so on. Against these basic criteria, the results were mostly satisfactory. The public information performance of most government departments and statutory authorities was good (it should be stressed that the information was not assessed for its quality). However, the audit did reveal a major area of concern: privatised government business enterprises consistently rated worst in information performance.

Several of the companies which run recently privatised power services—including United Energy, Citipower, Powercor and the Loy Yang B power station—are not producing annual reports for the people of Victoria. Because they are wholly owned by overseas companies, they are covered by the annual reports of their parent companies in the US or Europe. Often, the whole Australian operation rates only a paragraph. Citipower, for example, is mentioned in only one paragraph of the annual report published by Energy, a US-based corporation. United Energy gets two or three brief mentions in the annual report of a company called UtiliCorp United.

From this year, the operations of Loy Yang A power station will be covered in the annual report of the parent company. Hazelwood/Energy Brix Australia will also become a line item in the annual reports of its parent organisations. The Heatane Division of GFCV has been sold to Australian Gaslight Company, and British

Oxygen Corporation. Details of its operations are available only from the stock exchange. Other privatised services, including the Ports of Geelong and Portland, do not produce annual reports at all.

According to a community sector submission to a recent parliamentary committee inquiry into commercial confidentiality, the Victorian Office of Corrections, until the end of 1992, produced an annual report more than 100 pages long. It included statistics, information on policy, critical incidents, and the operations of individual prisons and specific units. Now the corrections system is included in the annual report of the Justice Department, and is dealt with in just seven pages.

Public sphere debate supports and sustains democracy. And the quality of that debate depends to a large extent on what information individuals can access, how readily they can gain that access, and at what cost. Traditionally, the various arms of government were important sources of public sphere information. This is still true, but the involvement of government has been reduced.

The metaphor used by government to describe itself is increasingly that of a successful business. In recent years the Victorian State Government has produced a document called *Enterprise Victoria*, distributed free to households. It is essentially old-fashioned puffery, but its presentation, which is a mock 'annual report to shareholders', is significant. The obligations of a large and solid company to its shareholders are much more limited—to money, basically—than those of a government to its citizens.

This 'business model' of government carries notions of commercial confidentiality which are often at odds with providing information for the public sphere. For example, the *State Owned Enterprises Act 1992* excludes such organisations from the operation of both the Freedom of Information Act and the Ombudsman Act.

Further, the rhetoric of commerce chips away at the idea of citizenship. Citizenship envisages that individuals participate and are empowered. Citizens not only have rights, but exercise them, and can influence events. Their interests extend beyond the personal to the communal. Citizens have a right to information regardless of their ability to pay. Information is an inexhaustible resource whose value may be enhanced when it is available without restriction.

But as government is modelled more on business, the individual comes to be seen

more as a consumer. The consumer's role is limited to that of purchaser; he or she has choice, but little power. The consumer's concerns are private or personal rather than communal, and he or she does not have a say in decision-making.

Under the consumer model, information is just another commodity to be bought and sold (or withheld), rather than something that has special qualities and social functions. Information which was once regarded as public property comes to be treated as a trade secret: a local example is internal documentation used in private prisons. The Federation of Community Legal Centres and others have complained that information such as prison operating manuals, critical incident data and monitoring reports, which were previously on the public record, are now regarded as commercially sensitive and inaccessible.



Information as property can be fenced in, with access restricted to those who can pay.

One of the disturbing incidental findings of the Centre's research was that a significant number of Victorian statutory authorities charge for their annual reports—among them, the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Office of the Public Advocate and the Ombudsman.

It is important to break the nexus between efficient government and secret government. It is perfectly possible for government enterprises to be business-like, and even privatised, without removing the rights of citizens to information.

To this end, the Communications Law Centre has recommended that private enterprises which have purchased a government business enterprise delivering basic services to the community be required to publish annual reports giving detailed information about the delivery of the service. That annual report should be available under the trading name with which the public is familiar. We have also recommended that the State Government extend the operation of the Freedom of

Information Act to cover privatised utilities.

'But such disclosure is impossible,' the cry goes up, 'because of commercial confidentiality.'

This is nonsense. The German sociologist Max Weber once observed that 'the concept of the "official secret" is [the bureaucracy's] specific invention'. Commercial confidentiality is equally the invention of the privatised bureaucracy. Both concepts have occasional and limited legitimacy; but both are abused by those in power, becoming a one-size-fits-all excuse for concealment.

Commercial confidentiality is a legitimate reason for secrecy only when the consumers of a company's products and services have a wide choice in a genuinely competitive market.

The problem is that the old definition of government—as those organisations which are created by statute and use public money—is no longer adequate.

Now that private enterprise is being entrusted with many vital functions in society—from running prisons, to public transport, to the power supply—a new definition of government is needed. This definition should be based not on an organisation's legal structure but on its function.

What matters is the citizen's perspective. That control of the water supply, for example, has shifted, from a public enterprise governed by statute to a privately owned company, matters not a whit to ordinary people. Their needs and interests—in a clean, affordable and environmentally responsible water supply—have not changed. Their rights to information should not change either.

Any company that operates a service which is basic to the life of the community, and which constitutes a monopoly or near-monopoly, has many of the characteristics of government. It therefore has many of the same responsibilities, including providing the public with the information it can legitimately demand.

—Vic Marles

## Attitude at altitude

ONE OF THE GREAT CONS of the 20th century has been the duping of so many into parting with so much for so little—'24 hours from Burwood to Kathmandu? Not a problem, sir.' Riding in a battery-hen farm 30,000 feet in the sky conditions the

traveller better than Pavlov could his mongrel.

The safety instructions get the ball rolling: a video with people looking extremely composed while donning oxygen masks and life jackets, intended to neutralise the fears of the nervous flyer by showing ways of protecting oneself while the plane is on fire and hurtling out of control towards a mountain range.

The next stage is the handing-out of a little gift to make us feel special; a toothbrush and a tube filled with surplus toothpaste from the Korean War.

After you feel safe and special you are then made to think you have taste: the in-flight menu arrives, in copperplate that wouldn't look out of place at Chez Pierre's. But in the end it is still the same choice as roast night at the local—'chicken or the beef, love?'

Then they take over with the lights, turning them off to let you know that it is night and you should sleep now; turning them on two hours later to tell you it is morning and you should eat now. After that you sweat and clench every muscle until the toilet light blinks on and you can lunge down the aisle scattering small children and complimentary pillows.

But king of all the devices and techniques that confuse and pacify the hapless passenger is entertainment: the in-flight movie, the music channels, the child staring at you from the seat in front ... And herein may also lie the answer to conditioned dependence.

Recently I took a flight with an airline that has revolutionised air travel entertainment. Instead of the one central video channel, every seat is equipped with its own screen. There are some 20 films to choose from as well as comedy shows, news and information. You can even make a telephone call with the handset that controls the screen. This was what I had been waiting for.

I started with *As Good as it Gets*, but soon grew weary of people getting away with being obnoxious just because they can give their character faults a name. I moved onto a sitcom. That grew tedious too, so I resorted to a perusal of the flight information. After that it was the news and then the same thing all over again with the audio channels thrown in. But by dinner time I had discovered the video games.

Given my antipathy towards aircraft, it was not surprising that I gravitated to a game called Super Punch-Out. In Super Punch-Out opponents are brought before

you and you must hit without being hit until a light flashes telling you it's time to knock them out. Simple enough really. The first of the computer contestants moved around the ring with all manoeuvrability of a Valiant. He was dispatched quickly.

The second guy, however, was to become my nightmare—an enormous creature with the delightful sobriquet 'Bear-Hugger'. When he wasn't hashing my little man to a pulp, he was gesticulating at his voluminous gut and poking out his tongue. All through dinner I tried to knock him down but he kept hugging me to death. People began to nod off to sleep around me and he was still hitting me with his stomach. All through the night I played this stupid game, even passing up the opportunity to sleep stretched out over the two free seats next to me—manna from heaven in cattle class.

As we flew over the western plains on our way to Sydney I finally managed to knock him down. Bleary-eyed and with RSI in my button finger, I punched the air in celebration and let out a jubilant yelp. An attentive air hostess promptly arrived to enquire after my state of mind but I ignored her to take on the next challenger.

Fifteen seconds later my little man was knocked out.

I left the plane emotionally shattered and physically drained. My fellow-passengers, who had observed the safety instructions closely, had taken great care over their choice of meal, and watched the one film before they slept were in far better shape. I buoyed myself by comparing them to sheep. I, by contrast, had exercised my right to arrive looking as though I'd just had three straight rides on the Rotor at the Easter Show.

A customs official did not recognise the intellectual clarity of my position and gave himself a guided tour through my tattered duffle bag while the sheep walked through the gates into an azure autumn morning. Aeroplanes are evil things.

—Jon Greenaway

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# Legends of the lost

**I**N NINETEENTH-CENTURY AUSTRALIA, stories of children lost in the bush were easy to understand, however terrible for the families whose sons or daughters might, or as likely might not, be recovered alive. The bush swallowed errant children indifferently, not malevolently. Bush creatures seldom harmed these innocent wanderers. Their stories could end tragically, or happily. Either they died of exposure, of hunger, thirst and cold; or else, miraculously it seemed, and often with the intervention of black trackers, the lost children might be found just in time, at that cusp where their exhausted sleep was about to become eternal. These are the alternative conclusions of most lost child stories.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, they were retold and pictured in magazine engravings of actual events and in paintings by Frederick McCubbin, in pantomimes and waxwork exhibitions, in verse and prose by some of the most celebrated Australian writers of the period: Henry Kingsley and Henry Lawson, Marcus Clarke and Rosa Praed, Barcroft Boake, 'Banjo' Paterson and Joseph Furphy. In the process of the regular communal retelling of lost child stories, other meanings—occluded, but more unsettling—emerged. The figure of the lost child, so frequently recalled from folk memory as a cautionary

tale for infants, pointed to the anxieties of European-Australian adults, and in particular their sense of being aliens in the outback of the country where they settled. The lost child is a surrogate for the insecurities of his or her parents—a sacrifice who determines, perversely, that they must stay in the Australian place to which they have come.

When, near the end of the colonial period, 11-year-old Clara Crosbie went missing in the bush outside Lilydale, black trackers were called upon to find her. The skills of other trackers had been employed five years before during the last hunt for the Kelly gang. On that occasion their efforts were not needed, this time they were to no avail. The child was found by chance, in time. Lilydale is now an outer eastern suburb of Melbourne, overlaid by the Melway's grid. Now, too, psychics and psychologists, social workers and police would all perhaps be enlisted for a search whose participants would probably fear in advance that it was doomed. For, more than a century after Clara Crosbie was lost and found, the figure of the lost child still haunts the Australian imagination. Many novels, stories, plays and films since the 1950s are preoccupied with terrible transformations of that figure—abandoned, aborted, abducted, or murdered. This is tragic material for writers as seemingly



unengaged with, or unimpressed by, each others' work, as Patrick White and Frank Moorhouse, Kate Grenville and Tom Keneally, Ray Lawler and Carmel Bird. The lost child is also the subject of the films that came of books: *Walkabout*, *Fortress*, *Manganinnie*, *Evil Angels*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Veritable children—lost forever—were the victims of notorious crimes and misadventures in post-war Australia. In 1960 at a Bondi bus stop, Graham Thorne became the first Australian to be kidnapped for ransom. He was murdered soon afterwards. The three Beaumont children vanished from Glenelg Beach in Adelaide on Australia Day 1966 and—wild rumours aside—have not been seen since. Seven girls, or young women, were abducted and killed in South Australia between December 1976 and February of the following year. Most of the bodies were buried near Truro. Azaria Chamberlain disappeared at Ayers Rock in August 1980. The metaphor of the 'lost child', which applies to so many real events in Australia, becomes frighteningly elastic. To speak of the Aboriginal 'stolen generation', for instance, is to draw on the potency of that metaphor in ways that are politically charged, as the phrase summons up the suffering in thousands of childhoods 'lost' when boys and girls were removed from their natural parents and fostered into the households of European Australians.

A study of the many and troubling manifestations of the 'lost child' might conclude that it represents a primary anxiety of contemporary as well as colonial Australia.

In two recent Victorian cases, lost infant boys, their lives shockingly and brutally abridged, were the victims, but they may not have been the only lost children in their stories. In 1993, 32-year-old Paul Aiton was convicted in Melbourne for the systematic bashing and eventual murder of the infant Daniel Valerio. In her account of the trial and the events that led up to it, Helen Garner asked: 'What sort of a man would beat a two-year-old boy to death?' Garner's coverage of the story for *The Age* won her a Walkley Award. Aiton, de facto husband of Daniel's mother Cheryl Butcher, was—Garner writes—'a very big man' yet in the dock 'he looked oddly like a child himself':

On his heavily muscled body, with its overhanging belly and meaty hands, sat the round, hot-cheeked face of a body who'd been sprung, who was in serious trouble, but who glared back at the world with eyes that sometimes threatened to pop out of his head with indignation and defiance.

Something about Aiton, Garner judges, 'persistently called to mind the word infantile'. But what baffles her even more than his behaviour is that of Daniel's mother. On the night after Daniel died, she agreed to marry the man who, as events would prove, and as she must at least have suspected, had killed him. Daniel was not the first child Cheryl Butcher had lost. Two others, Candice and Benjamin, seven and four respectively at the time of the trial, had been 'taken from her and given into the custody of her previous de facto, Michael Valerio [Daniel's father]'.

Garner relates the failure of all the many people who had 'noticed the boy's afflictions'—'neighbours, tradesmen, social workers, teachers, family friends, doctors, nurses, police, a photographer'—and who did not intervene in time to prevent his death. The hideous injuries that Aiton had inflicted, for months and evidently with pleasure (he boasted of what he had

done to workmates), make this failure all the more strange and lamentable. For 'the boy was adrift. The people with the power to save him strolled, fumbled and tripped; and Aiton got there first.' Strangest of all, for Garner, is Cheryl Butcher's fabrication of reasons for the child's injuries:

What deal did she make with herself to allow her child to suffer the brutality of her boyfriend Aiton in exchange for his company, his pay packet—for the simple fact of not being manless?

Finally she judges that the killing of Daniel 'stirs up deep fears about ourselves, and makes us frightened and ashamed'.

It is not possible to comprehend the meaning of Daniel's story 'without acknowledging the existence of evil'.

**T**HREE YEARS AFTER AITON'S TRIAL, another infant was lost. At first it seemed that the disappearance of 14-month-old Jaidyn Leskie in June 1997 from a house in Moe where he was being minded by his mother's boyfriend, would remain a mystery. The 20-day search mounted for this lost boy was on a scale not seen in Victoria since the Prime Minister, Harold Holt, went missing in the sea off Portsea in December 1967. Despite Chinese submarine theories and other crack-brained surmises, the open coronial verdict on Holt was 'presumed drowned'. For weeks it appeared that similar uncertainty would attend the fate of Jaidyn Leskie. Had he been abducted, and if so, by whom? Had he been murdered, and if so why and by whom and where was the body? The search, which involved the partial draining of Lake Narracan, revealed nothing.

The adult principals, his mother Bilynda Murphy (22), her partner Greg Domaszewicz (28), and the child's father, Brett Leskie (25), together with their companions, seemed to be children themselves—desperate, uneducated, without resources, irresponsible, occasionally violent, and heedless of the consequences of their actions. However, their stories lack the terrible outcome of Jaidyn's, whose body was at last found on 1 January 1998 in the Blue Rock Dam 20 kilometres north of Moe. Some months earlier, Domaszewicz had been charged with Jaidyn's murder. But the childhoods and young adult lives of those involved with Jaidyn mark them not so much as lost or stolen, but as an abandoned generation, consigned to a kind of internal exile in Gippsland, without much hope of employment, or the will to find it, indeed with scant hope for anything.

The metropolitan press, and in particular *The Age* and *The Sunday Age* in Melbourne, developed and appeared to relish the picture of a deprived social and regional group that the loss of Jaidyn Leskie had brought to national attention. The relations between the main characters and the course of their daily lives were set forth carefully, more perhaps for titillation than to move readers to sympathy. Thus we learned that Brett Leskie had been married in October 1992 to Kadee (formerly Katie) Murphy with whom he had a daughter Shannan, who was subsequently diagnosed as suffering from leukaemia. Kadee already had one child, and would later have another by a third man. This was several years after Brett had left her, in the middle of 1993, for her younger sister Bilynda. Evidently Kadee waited patiently for the chance of revenge on Brett, rather than Bilynda. The means which she found was the unemployed motor mechanic Greg Domaszewicz, with whom Leskie had once

worked. She told *Sunday Age* reporter Greg Rule that 'I stoged Brett with his best mate'. When Domaszewicz's and Bilynda Murphy's affair became public, Leskie left Moe to work in Kalgoorlie. Thus, when Bilynda and Kadee went for a night's partying and drinking at a private house and then a pub in Traralgon, 30 kilometres from Moe, Jaidyn was left in the care of Domaszewicz. Just before two o'clock in the morning of Sunday 15 June, Domaszewicz drove to Traralgon to pick up Bilynda after having received a phone call from her. Either then, or during an earlier call, he told her that Jaidyn had been burned and was in hospital. She did not believe him, and asked to be driven to her sister Kadee's house, where her other child, Brehanna, was staying. By her subsequent admission, Bilynda was very drunk. At 5am, Domaszewicz returned to Kadee's house with a different story. Jaidyn was missing. Soon afterwards, the Moe police were informed.

This modern lost child narrative looked to be the first episode in a grisly abduction tale. Yet already perplexing extra pieces of evidence complicated the story. While Domaszewicz drove to Traralgon, his home was vandalised. Windows were smashed and a pig's head was thrown on to the lawn. For a blessedly brief period—until the unconnectedness of this event to the disappearance of Jaidyn was proved—it seemed as though cults, sects and witchcraft might be part of the little boy's story. Indeed Domaszewicz was reported to be obsessed with the possibility of abduction by aliens. As it turned out, the vandals were local rather than extra-terrestrial: Kerry Penfold ('known to police') and his sister Yvonne. Theirs was another act of sexual revenge, for Domaszewicz had dumped Yvonne for Bilynda Murphy, and allegedly had damaged Yvonne's car. Seeking an appropriate symbolic embellishment of the window-breaking, Penfold butchered his small black and white pig Darren (named in honour of the Collingwood footballer Darren Millane who had been killed in a car accident several years before). The pig's body went into the freezer for later consumption. Its head went over Domaszewicz's fence.

**T**HIS STRAND OF JAIDYN'S STORY has already had several sordid and sentimental sequels. Bilynda Murphy was fined \$1500 on 28 January 1998 for assault and harassment of Yvonne Penfold. She had written in lipstick, 'Yvonne where the fuck were you fucking slut' on Penfold's workplace window, purportedly in response to Yvonne's taunting question, 'Where is Jaidyn?' (At his committal hearing, Domaszewicz would accuse Penfold of kidnapping the child.) Domaszewicz apparently coached Murphy with the prose, although two weeks before she had written a poem of her own as a funeral tribute for her son. Other poems have followed, as Murphy—who is under contract to a women's magazine and TV network—completes a book of verse to be called 'My Story'. On 5 April, the *Sunday Herald-Sun* 'broke' the news (which has not been confirmed) that Domaszewicz and Murphy were engaged. A \$3000 ring was brought into prison by Domaszewicz's mother. She was banned from visiting for three months after a warder saw the exchange.

For several weeks, the loss of Jaidyn was treated as a disappearance, rather than as a murder. Police interrogated Domaszewicz extensively, but he was not charged until 16 July, a month after Jaidyn went missing. It would be another five

and a half months, New Year's Day 1998, before a Tasmanian picnicker, 13-year-old Sam Payne, came across a body in the Blue Rock Lake. A few days later it was identified as Jaidyn's on the basis of a lock of ginger hair which Domaszewicz had shaved from the top of the boy's head, to give the infant the semblance of his own bald spot. Next day police found a two-metre-long crowbar, a bottle, bib and baby's boots near the site where the body had been discovered. The autopsy revealed that Jaidyn had suffered a broken arm and severe head injuries. 'Mystery turns to tragedy', *The Age* proclaimed on 3 January.

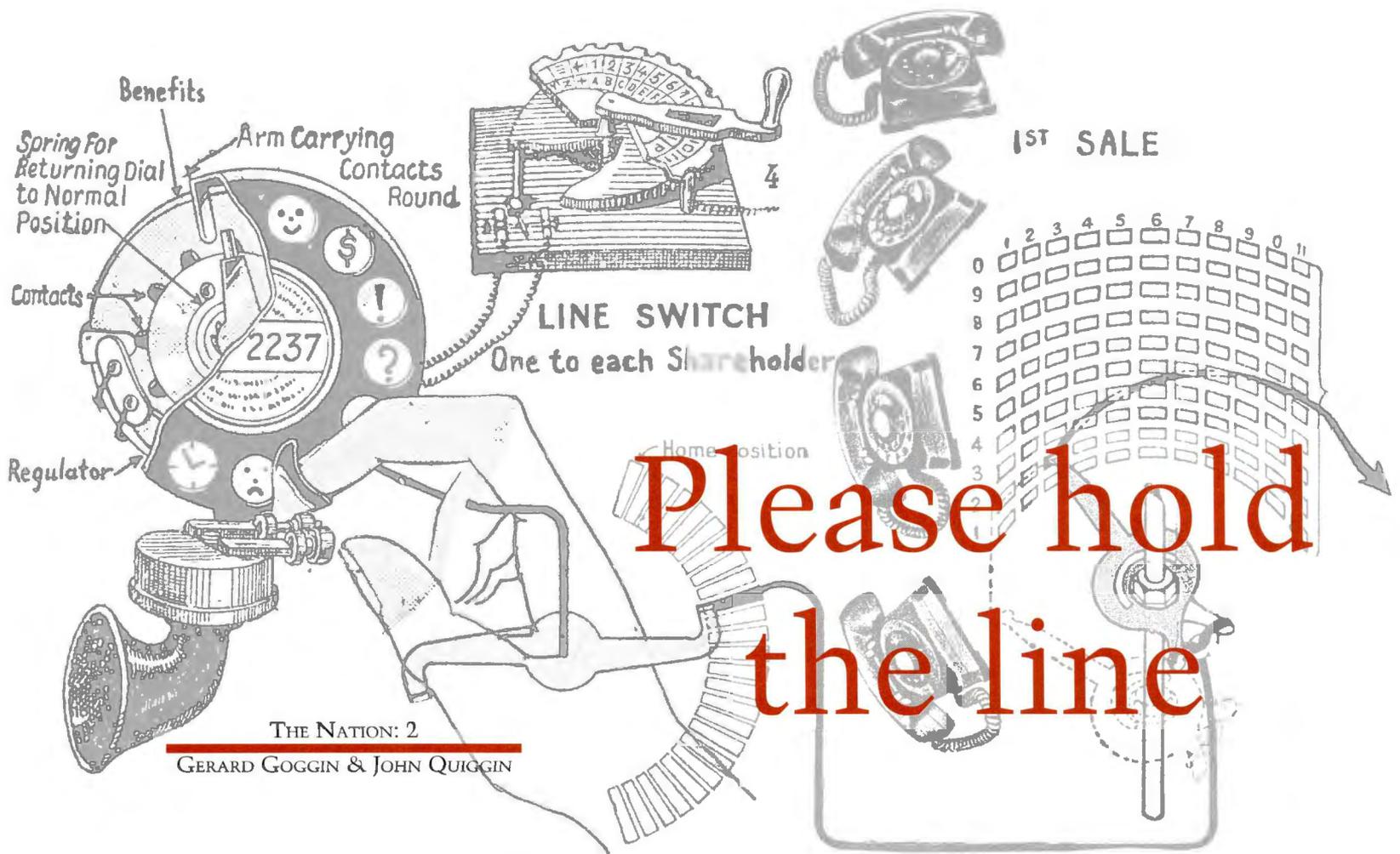
In fact this lost child story had run to its most predictable, frightful conclusion.

**I**N THEIR COVERAGES of the disappearance a week after the event, *The Age* (21 June) and *The Sunday Age* (22 June) set the tone of their articles with a single, resonant adjective. For *The Age*, Jaidyn Leskie was 'a little boy lost in a lost town', while the feature in *The Sunday Age* was boldly titled 'Lost Girls of the Valley'. The girls in question were not just the women in Jaidyn's story, but others of their age, living in poverty and anger in the La Trobe Valley. The privatisation of the State Electricity Commission had led to heavy job losses and to consequent long-term unemployment in Gippsland. *The Age* report quoted the opinion of Nina Burke, of the organisation People Together, that the Victorian Government had a deliberate policy of dumping single mothers in Moe because of its abundance of cheap housing. The existence of such a policy is not likely to be confirmed, but newspaper photographs gave plenty of glimpses of the style of life in Moe, of its housing and clothing. Moe, it seemed, was a town where the moccasin reigned. Newspaper and magazine stories evoked a ghetto of the abandoned, of young people without work or prospects, culturally and economically deprived. Members of the fabled under-class that economic rationalism had created in Australia, they belonged to a lost white generation, which was now rawly exposed for a predominantly middle-class readership whose own insecurities might thus temporarily be assuaged.

Helen Garner contended that Daniel Valerio's story could only be comprehended by acknowledging the existence of evil. Yes. But for the Leskie case at least, such an assertion pre-empts the necessary inquiry into the social dimensions and causes of the tragedy.

The lost and murdered Jaidyn was the child of parents who were themselves lost children. The second meaning of 'lost' that the Oxford English Dictionary records, bears on the physical condition of being lost, and speaks more specifically of nineteenth-century narratives of lost children: '2. Of which someone has been deprived; not retained in possession; no longer to be found. Also, of a person or animal: Having gone astray, having lost his or its way.' The sense of the word given first place defines a yet more desolating abandonment, and applies more directly to the Murphys, Leskies, Penfolds and Domaszewicz whose behaviour appeared to be beyond their powers to amend. The primary sense of 'lost' has it this way: '1. That has perished or been destroyed; ruined, especially morally or spiritually; (of the soul) damned.'

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**T**HE TELECOMMUNICATIONS industry doesn't immediately spring to mind as the arts-end of Australian cultural life. But 1 July 1997 was a very special day: the beginning of 'full' telecommunications competition in Australia—the fast road to the information superhighway.

Big business lobby group, Australian Telecommunications Users Group (ATUG), appreciated the full symbolic import of the moment and drew without reserve on their gift for dramaturgy. Their celebration dinner on the eve of the great day featured the unveiling of fake walls all around the conference dinner venue emblazoned with the word REGULATION. At midnight, the walls tumbled down to reveal the word BENEFITS. A little allegory of the triumph of competition: Berlin 1989 all over again.

The Minister for Communications, the Information Economy and the Arts, Richard Alston, had presided over the passage of the *Telecommunications Act 1997*, which opened the industry to greater competition and put a greater emphasis on industry self-regulation rather than state intervention. The right of competitors to each other's networks in the service of the competitive ideal was unequivocally

affirmed; the right of citizens to access and equity was tacked on as an afterthought.

Some useful initiatives were taken: the extension of universal service (or access) finally to include people with disabilities; provision for funding of consumer advocacy, representation and research; customer service guarantees (a safeguard of the first Telstra sale); some limited consumer protection; rebates for remote customers in lieu of untimed local calls. But in general, the Coalition embraced the form of competition promoted by previous Labor governments and hoped for since the Davidson report of the early 1980s.

Almost one year on, what have citizens and consumers gained from the tilt to competition? Have the walls of non-competitive markets been razed? Has the buzzword BENEFITS really replaced the boo-word REGULATION?

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is preparing a report on price movements since mid-1997 (which will be made available to the Government in May 1998), so firm evidence on price movements is not yet available. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that, in the absence of local call competition,

price reductions have been confined to discount plans in long-distance calls and mobiles—a phenomenon confirmed in a report on 1996 prices, and emphasised in Alston's 23 February 1998 speech to the Australian Communications Industry Forum, on the benefits of competition.

This suggests that there is vigorous competition in the market for long-distance calls, though much of this is based on service providers buying capacity from network providers Telstra, Optus and AAPT, and then reselling the service to consumers. Few companies have installed their own lines or switching equipment.

The real test of competition, however, is in the connection and local call markets. With the anniversary of full competition approaching there is virtually no competition in the 'last mile' of the telephone network: Telstra still reigns supreme, despite more than a dozen new carriers being licensed.

Senator Alston stepped in to ensure that local call portability would be available sooner than Telstra wished, but this hasn't yet helped Optus. Australia's number two carrier is finally offering connection and local calls from its hybrid fibre-coaxial

pay TV network, but has reportedly only 45,000–50,000 customers to date. Nor have promised 'micro-carriers' emerged to service regional areas. Northgate Communications in Ballarat is the only one so far even to offer local calls and connection, making it a favoured example for extollers of the virtues of competition. But if fact Northgate no longer offers local calls and connection, choosing to focus instead on intercapital and international long distance calls with an 'untimed rate'.

**W**HEN THE LACK of local call competition is pointed out, industry boosters quickly point over the horizon to the panoply of new technologies that offer local call competition: wireless access, satellites, mobile telephony.

Wireless access involves the use of radiocommunications to provide the expensive last few kilometres of network to the residence (the 'local loop'). This possibility, of course, relies on spectrum—the air, or at least airwaves—which is unfortunately not free. At present spectrum that could be used for wireless local loop access is being auctioned around the country—but at prices that put it out of the reach of the not-for-profit community organisation or even small 'micro-carrier', as communications expert Ian Peters has pointed out.

Connecting homes via satellites is possible but the cost of calls is still too expensive for most householders to consider. Competition is also coming from utility companies which already own a network of lines (or ducts) connected to most homes. Power companies in Victoria and NSW are developing plans to compete

in the telephony and internet markets, something being implemented by overseas companies such as Nortel.

Quality of service does not seem to have significantly improved for most residential consumers despite the much-vaunted Customer Service Guarantee scheme which took effect at the beginning of 1998. The December 1997 report from the industry regulator, the Australian Communications Authority, if fact shows that Telstra's performance has declined significantly, particularly in country areas.

A report from the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman has been even more damning. As the effective carrier of last resort, Telstra is forced to carry far more unprofitable customers than other carriers that can skim lucrative areas of the market without having to worry about building networks in regional and remote areas, or serving all residential customers. Nonetheless, there are some worrying signs. Telstra's national fault clearance performance, for instance, has steadily worsened over the past five years.

Hegel remarks somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).

One year on, competition appears to have only a weak purchase on Australian communications. Telstra, on the other hand, is firmly fixed. While it remained—even two-thirds—in the public hands, this may not have been a problem at all. After all, if every citizen and voter in the nation owns Telstra, everyone potentially has a

say in its future. But given the way things stand in the middle of 1998, Telstra has a near monopoly on much of telecommunication, and that monopoly is on its way to becoming a private fiefdom.

History repeats itself. The first Telstra sale formed the centrepiece of the 1996 Federal election. Now we have Telstra sale part two: the firesale farce to underwrite the Wik election. Emboldened by the 'success' of the first sale, the Prime Minister has gone for broke. Having reinforced the cracks in the edifice of old media capital with its digital television giveaway, the Government appears to want to cement Telstra's chances in the new media stakes too. But the second Telstra sale raises even more questions than the first.

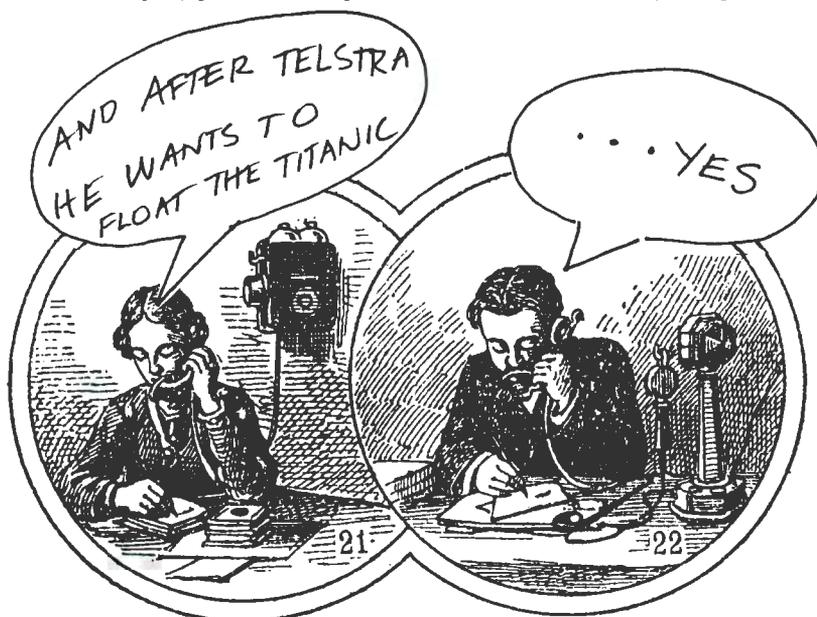
The Government will maintain essentially the same safeguards on 'foreign' ownership that were in place for the first sale. Assuming this protection is effective, there is still the question of which domestic interests will own the corporation.

The Government has made much of the glories of the 'democratisation of share ownership in Australia'. And the Telstra share has been presented (in the mainstream press particularly) as a boon for the 'little' shareholder. Feature articles highlight small investors who have nearly doubled their outlay. Little attention has been given to the fact that the sale is a wholesale redistribution of wealth on a Thatcherite scale: Telstra has gone from being owned by all citizens to being owned by a minority. The second sale, then, would be the *coup de grâce*: \$40 billion of public wealth being bestowed on shareholders at an even more heavily discounted price.

And the 'ordinary shareholder' will soon be eclipsed by large commercial interests adept at concentrating ownership and control in their own hands. This has been the fate of former state-owned enterprises elsewhere in the world.

This raises some very worrying prospects—particularly in relation to the control of Australia's media and information flows. Telecommunications offers a potential route out of Australia's highly concentrated media cul-de-sac. It could, provide an infrastructure that would deliver diversity. But you might well ask how this can occur if Telstra is owned by the same media interests which have already demonstrated their *modus operandi* in relation to pay TV networks and online media services? Telstra's joint-venture arrangements with Rupert Murdoch's

... continued on page 25



# Competition hang-ups

**T**HE PROCESS OF telecommunications 'reform' introduced by the Labor Government in the *Telecommunications Act 1991* was completed in June 1997. It is now clear that the reforms were fundamentally misconceived and have failed to deliver the promised benefits.

The basic idea of the reform was to replace the public telecommunications monopoly with a competitive market. Reform was to proceed in two stages. The first was to create a full-scale competitor for Telecom Australia (renamed Telstra) through the sale of the ill-starred satellite network Aussat.

The competitor, which took the name Optus, was expected to compete with Telstra across the full spectrum of local, national and international phone services. A third firm, Vodafone, was encouraged to enter the digital mobile telephone market with a promise that the analog phone network, owned by Telstra but shared with Optus, would be phased out by the year 2000. (The oddity of compulsorily closing down one segment of the industry to promote competition in another escaped notice.)

Optus was given five years in which to establish itself as a viable alternative to Telstra. During this period, a special regulator, Austel, was established to control the telecommunications industry.

The second stage of the reform was to develop a fully competitive market. Initially, the Government contemplated retaining some control through the issue of new telecommunications licences in 1997. However, this relic of interventionism was abandoned, with a decision to allow unrestricted entry from 1997 and to replace Austel with general regulation through the Australian Competition and Consumer Council (ACCC) and the Australian Communications Authority.

In the short term, Telstra was subjected to price caps ensuring that the steady annual decline of five per cent per year in real telecommunications prices, achieved under the old public monopoly, would be maintained. However, it was expected that, by 1997 at the latest, the pressure of competition would eliminate the need for such regulation. Privatisation was not part

of the policy but it was implicit in its design. Why should a government which had sold off airlines and banks own an enterprise in a competitive telecommunications industry?

The Coalition Government made privatisation an explicit rather than an implicit part of the policy, but otherwise made only marginal adjustments. Although rural voters were already furious about the prospect of losing the analog mobile service, with no digital replacement in view, the new telecommunications minister, Richard Alston, argued that the need to keep faith with Optus and Vodafone was paramount. The government that invented the idea of 'non-core' promises to electors could not afford to break its promises to big business.

In 1998, it has become clear that the policy of telecommunications competition has failed to deliver the benefits claimed for it.

For most people, competition is little more than a slogan. Telstra still dominates nearly all components of the telecommunications market. Optus has gained around 20 per cent of the market for long-distance services, and a little more in the international and mobile markets, but has failed completely in its attempts to enter the local call market. Despite some brave rhetoric, Optus has settled into the role of junior partner in a comfortable duopoly. Vodafone has done poorly in the digital mobile market and has failed elsewhere. The post-1997 entrants have been even less impressive, collectively accounting for less than ten per cent of the market.

As a result, Telstra was able to report to its public and private shareholders in 1998 that 'the pressure of competition has been considerably less than expected'. The only real constraint on Telstra has been the maintenance of price caps through regulation. Price cap regulation ensures that, on average, customers are no worse off under competition than they would have been under a continued public monopoly. This average conceals, however, wide variation.

Under public monopoly, prices declined steadily across the board. Under price cap regulation, there has been very little reduction in 'standard' prices for residential

users. Telstra has met its price cap by offering discounts designed to appeal to those customers considered most likely to switch to Optus. Customers in the bush, and others in whom Optus showed no interest, got nothing. Although this process of 'rebalancing' is in part a response to competition, it is also the policy that would maximise Telstra's monopoly profits even in the absence of competition.

The most obvious failure of competition has arisen through the duplication (and in the case of digital networks, triplication) of infrastructure. As part of the thrust towards 'network competition', Telstra and Optus raced to roll out parallel pay TV networks consisting of a hybrid of coaxial cables and optic fibres. While the streets of Sydney and Melbourne suburbs were disfigured by Optus cables running side by side with Telstra's underground network, the smaller state capitals, and the bush, got no service at all. Meanwhile, Telstra, Optus and Vodafone erected three digital mobile phone networks with towers overlooking schools and homes, while offering no digital service in rural areas.

**A**PAY TV NETWORK is only as good as its content, and duplication was the rule here as well. With the commodification of sport, the emergence of duplicate rugby league competitions, financed by the rival pay TV networks, was scarcely a surprise. The creation of Murdoch's Super League competition required abrogation of contracts on a large scale, but thanks to competition policy, this was no problem. The Federal Court ruled that, because they prevented the emergence of a rival to the existing Australian Rugby League, such contracts were anti-competitive and therefore unenforceable.

The rush to duplication ended abruptly with the introduction of unrestricted competition in June 1997. The cable roll-outs stopped, the rival rugby leagues negotiated a truce, and the expansion of the digital networks slowed to a crawl. Telstra and Optus were willing to waste billions of dollars on technically unnecessary facilities in order to secure their strategic position for the period of deregulation.

The failure of network competition reflects the fact that most telecommunications networks are natural monopolies. That is, the services concerned are most efficiently provided by a unified network with a single owner. It is very difficult to achieve competitive market outcomes in industries with a large component of natural monopoly. It is for this reason that telecommunications and similar services have historically been provided by government in most countries. Where, as in the United States, there are ideological objections to public provision, private monopoly providers have been tightly regulated.

**T**HE ADVOCATES of competitive reform rely on arguments suggesting that, thanks to technological change, the concept of natural monopoly has become obsolete. Such arguments generally reflect wishful thinking rather than objective analysis. Some aspects of telecommunications, such as long-distance telephony, have indeed become more competitive as a result of technical change, but the convergence of pay TV, telephony and computing has the potential to create monopolies on an unprecedented scale. The expensive manoeuvring being undertaken by global players like Rupert Murdoch and Bill Gates, as well as by telecommunications firms with dominant positions in national markets, reflects the rich rewards that will be reaped by those who emerge with control over these monopolies. If technology is not simply to enrich a few monopolists, continued regulation will be necessary.

The failure of competition undermines the central economic argument for privatisation—that it is inappropriate for government to own one firm in a competitive industry. Telstra will remain a dominant firm with its profits being determined primarily by government regulation rather than by competitive forces. In this situation, control is better exercised directly through public ownership than indirectly through regulation.

There remains the claim that privatisation yields a fiscal 'pot of gold' for governments. The metaphor is more appropriate than many of its users realise. The apparent financial benefits derived from privatisation are exactly like the 'fairy gold' that is said to crumble away overnight.

Tricks of accounting can make it appear, in the short term, that governments benefit from privatisation. But the long-term effects have been unfavourable in almost every case. The first major privatisation undertaken in Australia, that of the Commonwealth Bank, illustrates this point.

Between 1991 and 1996, the Government sold its shares in the Commonwealth Bank prices between \$5.40 and \$10.00 per share, yielding sale proceeds of approximately \$6.5 billion. Assuming all of this money had been used to reduce debt, the interest saved in 1997 would have been about \$400 million, and some of that would have been recouped in income tax. In the same year, the shareholders of the Bank received fully franked dividends in excess of \$800 million, without taking account of retained earnings of around \$400 million.

*Under public monopoly, prices declined steadily across the board. Under price cap regulation, there has been very little reduction in 'standard' prices for residential users. Telstra has met its price cap by offering discounts designed to appeal to those customers considered most likely to switch to Optus.*

The loss to taxpayers associated with privatisation was well over \$600 million in 1997 alone. There has been no year since privatisation commenced when interest savings exceeded the profits foregone, and the loss seems likely to grow even greater in the future.

The situation of Telstra is, at least superficially, more complicated since a higher proportion of Telstra's profit is reinvested. This implies a smaller flow of dividends to government in the short run, but more rapid growth in the long run. In reality, the choice of whether to pay dividends or to reinvest earnings is largely a matter of accounting convenience. To assess whether the sale of Telstra is a good deal for the Government, it is necessary to compare the savings in interest on public debt that can be realised through privatisation.

Assuming a sale price of \$45 billion, the Government could reduce its interest payments by about \$2.5 billion per year this year (and every year into the future) by selling Telstra and using the proceeds to repay debt. The Government would lose its claim to two thirds of Telstra's earnings. This year, the value of this claim would be \$2 billion and the Government would be ahead by \$500 million. But Telstra's profits

have been growing rapidly and the market obviously expects that this growth will continue, whether or not Telstra is fully privatised. A conservative assumption is that Telstra's profits will grow in line with nominal GDP, that is by around five per cent per year. On this assumption, the short-term net benefit to the Government would disappear within five years, to be replaced by a steadily increasing stream of losses. This would be consistent with past experience—there has not been one major privatisation in Australia where the government has made a profit, relative to the alternative of retaining ownership.

There remains the question of whether privatisation will increase Telstra's efficiency and profitability. In many respects, Telstra is already acting like a private corporation. For example, whereas

public sector employees were formerly seen as being immune from dismissal, Telstra has shown itself to be willing to retrench staff whenever this would increase profit, or simply to match arbitrary 'benchmarks' applied by investors in telecommunications

enterprises. In other areas, such as the abandonment of service to rural areas, Telstra will cut services unless it is prevented by regulation from doing so. The main effect of privatisation would be to strengthen the forces pushing for more cuts in services.

**T**HE VISION of the future held out by the advocates of telecommunications reform has not materialised. A more realistic forecast is that users of telecommunications will be divided into three classes. Business users with the capacity to switch between telecommunications suppliers will receive services at their marginal cost of provision (almost nothing). Urban residential users will be a captive market, forced to pay all the fixed costs of the telecommunications network through higher connection fees. The poor and those in remote areas will be cut off. Meanwhile, profits that once flowed to the public as a whole will flow to those, predominantly in the top 20 per cent of the income distribution, who can afford to buy shares. ■

**John Quiggin** is ARC Senior Fellow in Economics, James Cook University, Townsville.

News Limited have already been the subject of much comment. If the second Telstra sale takes place, will Telstra be pressed further into the service of the few such companies with the huge fortunes needed to buy the networks Telstra built using public money?

The contradiction between the policy instruments of competition and privatisation will only intensify with the proposed sale. Even ATUG has concerns, pointing out that the 1997 competition rules were not designed with a fully privatised Telstra in mind. In election mode, the Coalition has been insistent that it would safeguard consumers, especially those in sensitive rural electorates. But as it is unable to point to the existence of real competition, the Government has had to resort to regulation. Price controls will be maintained, untimed local calls enshrined, quality of service safeguarded and the needs of the bush put to the front of the queue. But when it comes to guarantees, the Government is prepared to do little more than restate the inadequate safeguards it grudgingly offered in the 1997 legislation.

More price controls have been promised but have not yet been spelled out. The controls should apply for at least the next four years, and incorporate specific 'caps' on local call and connection charges, to ensure that Telstra lowers rather than raises prices for these services.

Price controls for the last decade have ensured that windfall profits have at least in part been returned to consumers rather than being retained by the corporation. However, if all Telstra's shareholders are private individuals, there will be even greater pressure to retain profits for distribution to shareholders in the form of dividends—instead of giving consumers (citizens) lower phone prices.

Finance Minister John Fahey has said that the Government 'places a very high priority on the need to maintain and improve quality of service'. But it is yet to spell out how selling the rest of Telstra will bring this about. The corporation itself appears intent on directing its budget towards the high-spending corporate customer, who may be assured of first-class and timely service. Residential customers are regarded as less important (their bills are smaller) and are therefore expected to wait longer for repairs, maintenance and resolution of complaints. The potential parallel between Telstra and another formerly owned government business—the Commonwealth

Bank—is clear. In the Bank, branches and depots have been closed, there is less face-to-face service, less profitable customers are regarded as incurring the corporation costs rather than generating profits.

Maybe there is some small consolation in the fact that Senator Alston has made changes to the customer service guarantee scheme which would allow the industry regulator to force recalcitrant carriers to correct systemic problems, rather than just dole out rebates.

In rural and remote areas, quality of telecommunications service is poor, prices still high, and country dwellers are the last to receive new technologies. People living in most areas of Sydney or Melbourne can sign up for Telstra's overpriced lightning-fast data service, delivering internet access at hundreds of times the speed of the ailing rural network. At the same time, Optus and Telstra have stated that they will not roll out their pay TV and fast data networks to rural areas. And the marvellous world of satellites is not yet filling the gap.

The Government is so concerned about rural access to fast data services that it has mandated a 'digital data capability' as part of its 1997 legislation. Telstra must make available the equivalent of an Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) service to at least 96 per cent of the population by the end of 1998. The Minister will then be informed by a review as to whether the service should be extended throughout Australia (if the benefits outweigh the costs).

But at the very minimum, digital data capability should be extended to all Australians if the next Telstra sale is to proceed.

**I**N ADDITION TO BOOSTING the stakes of Tasmanian telephony, the last Telstra sale led to the creation of a Rural Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, with \$250 million to spend over five years on improving regional communications. This has been very welcome and led to some innovative local community and regional projects being funded (as well as the mobile towers provided as a matter of course in cities). But more systemic investment is required. Telstra has shown itself as unwilling to invest in high-cost rural network upgrades, preferring to keep its windfall profits, to pay rising executive

salaries or to help the company compete for lucrative metropolitan customers.

Telecommunications networks are becoming central to late-twentieth-century acts of communications, at least in richer countries: they are to *fin-de-siècle* society and commerce what the railways were to the nineteenth century and roads to the middle of the twentieth century. But what is Australia doing to advance its telecom-

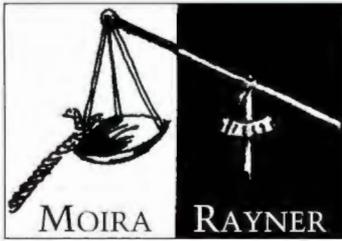
*If every citizen and voter in the nation owns Telstra, everyone potentially has a say in its future. But given the way things stand in the middle of 1998, Telstra has a near monopoly on much of telecommunications, and that monopoly is on its way to becoming a private fiefdom.*

munications culture and prospects? Are we intelligently engaging with globalisation, and forging democratic prospects for the next century?

In March 1998, we were treated to the spectacle of Microsoft proprietor Bill Gates being accorded an accolade usually reserved for visiting heads of state: the right to address Federal Cabinet. This tableau echoed Paul Keating's 1994 cultural policy launch when Murdoch's 20th Century Fox studio in Sydney got the director's chair in *Creative Nation*. *Mutatis mutandis*, the symbolism is the same: the state deferentially taking its cue on communications from (new) media barons. *Citizen Kane* never looked so good.

It should come as no surprise then, given its *pas de deux* with Gates, that the Coalition has slavishly adopted pro-'competitive' policies on telecommunications—policies more honoured in the breach—and has added dated policies on privatisation, in the hope that this will keep Australia in the same league as the bigger OECD countries. Keeping faith with the new face of capital, however, seems likely to exacerbate the growing divisions between the rich and the poor in Australia, with only a trickle-down effect to help us better communicate. ■

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# Newspeak welfare

**J**OAN MARTIN is a survivor. A big, prematurely-aged Aboriginal woman, her fight for her family shows in her grim expression. She doesn't photograph well. She won't weep, or wilt. She will not play the victim. But if you were to believe the Perth media, Joan Martin runs the 'family from hell'.

She does nothing of the kind. Joan Martin was in a dreadful position. She had lived in Karrinyup for decades, including 17 happy years in a house in nearby Pascoe Street, as a Homeswest tenant. In June 1994, Homeswest made her move, 'temporarily', to Paris Way, while it renovated the old place. Then it wouldn't let her move back. It had received a petition, it said, complaining about the family's conduct in Paris Way.

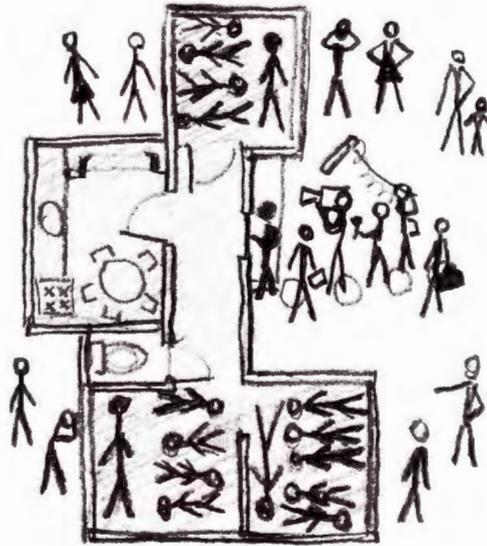
Shortly after her 'temporary' shift, life for Joan got really hard. She was ill—she has had two heart attacks. Her son was a sick man, deeply dependent on Mum: when he was evicted from his Homeswest home in November 1995, he came to her. She took him in. Her daughter, Nicola, mother of three, was evicted by Homeswest as well. Mum took them in. Another daughter, Jennifer, with five children and suffering from post-natal depression, came. Of course, she took them in. As she told the tribunal, it was culturally required of her, as their kin. So it was that three adults and 14 children came to live in her three-bedroom house in Paris Way. Overcrowding, mental illness, a bit of swearing and squabbling, kids throwing stones—and forthrightly racist neighbours in nearby streets—made a recipe for disaster.

Last July, Joan Martin was ordered to get out, with nowhere to go. She fought the eviction, and lost. Then she went to the Equal Opportunity Commission, complaining of race discrimination.

She lost again. June Williams, Equal Opportunity Commissioner, quickly declined her complaint. Then Homeswest actually evicted her, and withdrew its only offer, to house the families in Gwelup, near medical services, on condition that they pay debts which they could not immediately meet. It offered, instead, to place the family in a distant settlement, Cullacabardee, a long way from medical care and a predominantly Nyoongar suburb. The

Martins are Yamatji people. They refused. No other offer was made. Joan Martin then made another complaint: that she had been victimised. June Williams declined that complaint, too.

The WA media began to pillory the family. Television crews cruised her street,



on one occasion just hours before the family was to attend her son's funeral. They complained to police when a stone was thrown at a camera by an unbalanced visitor.

Joan Martin took her complaints to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal last July. She lost again. The Tribunal decided that she was evicted because she had breached her tenancy agreement; that she was under no cultural obligation to house her children; that she had responded as a mother, not as an Aboriginal, and that there was no evidence of direct or indirect race discrimination. So she appealed.

On the 18th of March 1998, Joan Martin finally won. Supreme Court justice Henry Wallwork found she was indirectly discriminated against because of her race, and awarded her damages of \$20,000.

It seems a little case, and it is being appealed. But it has implications for the Howard-preferred 'welfare' approach to Aboriginal problems. The welfare approach failed this family, because the family was Aboriginal. If they had not been able to use the legal system to claim their rights under

anti-discrimination law, there would have been no redress.

State housing is provided for low-income, special needs tenants and buyers. In WA, 18 per cent of Homeswest tenants are Aboriginal, though they make up just 2.7 per cent of the state's population. About 83 per cent of the West's Aboriginal population rely on some kind of Homeswest help.

Basically, Homeswest said they were entitled to throw this family out, because Joan Martin had breached her tenancy agreement, and the overcrowding prohibition was reasonable. No-one denied that there had been problems, though only in Paris Way. Nobody—neither Homeswest nor neighbours—had done anything constructive about the overcrowding.

Mr Justice Wallwork, in the Supreme Court, said that the proper question was, first, whether there was evidence of a cultural obligation, as Mrs Martin alleged. There was: Dr John Stanton, a social anthropologist, said that if Joan had turned away homeless 'kin' she would have felt, and they would have been, 'shamed'. Wallwork saw no reason not to accept this. Second, he said that the proper test of the reasonableness of the 'no overcrowding' tenancy condition was whether it was reasonable, *in all the circumstances that had arisen*. This included Homeswest's actions, and their consequences. Evictions had caused Joan Martin's family's descent upon her. Homeswest's failure to alleviate the overcrowding, by imposing unreasonable conditions, had caused the nuisance. Homeswest evicted three families, including 14 children, then made no substantial efforts, over ten months, to rehouse them.

This family has suffered. After the eviction battle began, the family received racist hate mail, bomb threats (resulting in a conviction) and hostile media attention. A woman in a nearby street, described in Homeswest evidence as the 'unofficial co-ordinator' of what was found to be an anti-Martin crusade, told the ABC that 'as far as housing goes the answer is definitely not to integrate Aborigines into white areas'.

Mrs Martin's son died of a heart attack, shortly after hearing they were being evicted. One of her daughters entered a psychiatric hospital, and stayed there. After it was over, Joan Martin's family was



# SUMMA theologiae

## Balthasar feasting

shattered and scattered. Joan was living bravely in a shed. *The West Australian* newspaper pontificated that 'cries of racism do not exonerate people from anti-social behaviour'.

Mrs Martin could not, at first, get legal aid to appeal. The law firm, Dwyer Durack, acted pro bono; I provided an opinion that there were grounds, and a law lecturer drafted the first notice of appeal. When it was served on them, Homeswest was astonished: the case, surely, was open and shut!

Well, it wasn't. Joan Martin's win, however, re-opened the floodgates of racist attacks, including vilification of the judge. It is incomprehensible, it seems, to some people in the West that this family's problems were not self-inflicted; or that it is wrong to visit the problems of Joan Martin's children upon her grandchildren, or that it is the state housing authority's responsibility to alleviate the problems of overcrowding that it had helped to create.

The lesson? 'Welfare' is not enough, with attitudes like these. ■

**Moira Rayner** is a lawyer and freelance journalist. (MoiraRayner@compuserve.com).

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**S**OME THEOLOGIANS attract the love and loathing ordinarily reserved for mean footballers. Hans Urs von Balthasar is one of them. Indeed, it is said that in some polarised academies, different groups of students hiss and applaud whenever his name is mentioned.

Groupies are more notable for passion than for understanding. In Balthasar's case this is a pity, because he is a more considerable and complex thinker than instant dismissal or adulation would suggest. Many writers in this month's collection of journals grapple with his thought.

Balthasar's theology is best understood by studying him in his historical context. He was a man of high culture—a gifted pianist and voracious reader—who strongly opposed the positivism that prevailed in contemporary philosophy and scholastic theology. In his article in *Gregorianum* (1987, no.4), Giovanni Marchesi describes the seminal influence of Henri de Lubac who shared his distaste for rationalist thought, and encouraged him to read the fathers of the early church, who freely explored the symbolic possibilities of faith.

In *The Way* (January, 1998), Ben Quash brings out the holistic character of Balthasar's theology. He turned his back on theologies that worked deductively, because he believed that truth cannot be found except through engagement with the textured world of our experience. He was captivated by the beauty of the world, and saw human engagement with it as inherently dramatic. Predictably, he found the form of God to be revealed in the particular human shape of Jesus Christ, and human life in its richness to be lived within the church. There we are shaped into the form of Christ.

In an article in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* (October, 1997), V. Holzer mentions the influence Goethe had on Balthasar. Indeed, in his theology Balthasar is a Romantic, concerned with the sweep and large patterns of Christian truth. He is impatient with approaches that analyse the detail without concern to its place in the whole.

His emphasis on symbol, drama, and wholeness of vision—informed by an impressive breadth of European cultural reference—makes him a powerful spiritual writer. For all the sweep and complexity of his thought, I would judge this to be his greatest strength. In the January edition of *The Way*, Dermot Power develops his reflections on Holy Saturday, the nothing day of the Easter triduum. Balthasar sees symbolised in it Jesus' entry into the abandonment and isolation at the heart of death. This finds expression in the cry of abandonment of the cross. Balthasar recognises human tragedy, and refuses to evade the pain of God's silence that lies at the heart of suffering.

Balthasar's view that Christian truth is to be seen as a whole is an admirable corrective to scholastic and other forms of rationalism. But it is open to the objection that can be made against any intuitive view—that the patterns come from the viewer and not from the material viewed. Balthasar defends his certainty that currently controversial positions are integral to Christian truth.

In one of his most contested views, he identifies the feminine principle in human beings with receptivity, the proper attitude of all human beings to God. From this position flows his scorn for women's desire for ordination and for ministerial authority in the church. To seek these essentially masculine roles is to abandon the richer calling of women for something less valuable. It also violates the symbolic pattern of revelation through Jesus Christ.

Tina Beattie in *New Blackfriars* (February, 1998) deals trenchantly with Balthasar's treatment of gender difference, tracing his theory back to the singularity of his own personality and experience, and, in particular, to his relationship with the mystic, Adrienne von Speyr. Beattie believes that Balthasar serves up 'the same old story of the same old sameness, fetchingly disguised in the masking of femininity and not averse to the occasional bit of cross-dressing.'

Balthasar is a more considerable and quirky writer than his devotees and detractors often allow. He offers a holistic theology which draws richly on European culture and is attentive to its symbolic construction. The riches and limitations of that culture, however, are often ignored by disciples and critics who are interested only in his conclusions and not in the ruminative mind at work in them. ■

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# Landscape of ideas

New Worlds From Old, 19th Century Australian & American Landscapes  
National Gallery of Australia

**1857** IS EASY TO IGNORE, it has no resonance. In the catalogue to *New Worlds from Old* it slips by as a year of no particular significance for either American or Australian painting. Yet 1857 was the year when Frederic Church painted *Niagara Falls* and Eugene von Guérard *Ferntree Gully in the Dandenong Ranges*. If any two pictures define the relationship between landscape painting on the two continents, these do.

The similarities between the two paintings are manifest. Both are big canvases which express awe at the land. They are the work of the two great mid-century landscape painters on opposite sides of the Pacific. Both pictures transformed their artists' reputation. Yet the environments in which these works were painted were just as different as their contemporary impact. What was generally difficult for Church was easy for von Guérard and *vice versa*.

When Church painted *Niagara*, no-one needed convincing that the Falls was a subject worth painting. It was not just a major tourist attraction, visited by thousands of people a year since the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, but already a site of world interest. After visiting J.M.W. Turner in London in 1847, the American photographer J.J.E. Mayall recorded: 'He told me he should like to see Niagara, as it was the greatest wonder in Nature; he never tired of my description of it.'

Yet competition to paint the most sublime view of the falls was intense. In her book about *Niagara*, Elizabeth McKinsey notes that nearly every significant American landscape painter depicted the Falls in the 1850s. All struggled to present it in a novel way. Some tried moonlight. Others used the Falls' icicles, icecones and frozen spray in winter to convey its 'magical sublimity'. Still others looked for new viewpoints—often little realising that they had been anticipated by one or more of the hundreds of European artists who had depicted the Falls since the late seventeenth century.

The challenge for Church was to rise above this ruck by producing a painting even more spectacular. His solution was to eschew novel times of day or times of year. His viewpoint of the Horseshoe Falls from the Canadian side of the border was one painted by many earlier artists. But his treatment of the water was nothing if not flash and his composition was radical: he cut the land out of his foreground, taking the viewer to the brink of the Falls.

Church's confidence in his work was manifest: together with the New York printmakers Williams, Stevens and Williams, he turned *Niagara Falls* into his first 'Great Picture', exhibited as an entertainment in itself. Its first venue was New York, for four weeks. Then it went to London. In 1858 it toured from London to Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool before returning to New York and then travelling south to Baltimore, Washington, Richmond and New Orleans.

Church's choice of subject was integral to his success. Had he painted a waterfall of only local significance, his picture would not have become famous, however brilliant its conception and paintwork. Because it came to be regarded as 'the *chef d'œuvre* of Niagaras upon any canvas', Church's painting became a sensation. One American reviewer declared it 'incontestably the finest oil picture ever painted on this side of the Atlantic'. When John Ruskin hurried to see it in London, he was amazed. The *Art Journal*—one of 16 newspapers and magazines to review its first British showing—reckoned that no landscape painting had 'ever been so successful'.

The rewards for Church were immense. Williams, Stevens and Williams paid \$4500 for his canvas, but the transformation of Church's reputation was even more significant. Before *Niagara*, he was known as one of America's leading landscape painters. After *Niagara*, he was as not just the greatest American artist but was internationally renowned. As critics showered him with ever higher praise, Church was dubbed the greatest living landscapist, the heir to Turner, allowing him to command even higher prices.

**E**UGENE VON GUÉRARD'S one advantage over Church was that he had almost no competition as a landscape painter in Australia. Because Nicholas Chevalier persisted in painting European subjects in his first year in Melbourne, von Guérard had no rivals when painting Victorian landscapes during the 1850s. Because Conrad Martens struggled whenever he tried oil paint, von Guérard had no counterparts when he visited New South Wales. Knud Bull and Henry Gritten were no challenge to him in Tasmania. Equally, he had no rivals when he visited South Australia.

Yet von Guérard was in a more difficult position when it came to selecting subjects, since Victoria, unlike the United States, had no established painting grounds for artists. Whereas Church generally had at least some predecessors wherever he painted in the United States, von Guérard was first almost everywhere he went. As a result, his paintings had the attraction of novelty. But he still had to convince even his colonial audience that places many of them had never heard of were worth painting—no easy task when, for example, the fern gullies of the Dandenongs were distinguished from countless other such gullies only by their proximity to Melbourne.

Von Guérard was also in a very different position from Church's when it came to exhibiting his work. While the occasional picture from England toured Australia as a 'Great Picture' from the mid-1860s, no artists working in Australia in the mid-nineteenth century had the gumption to see if one of their paintings could command a paying audience on its own. When he finished *Ferntree Gully*, von Guérard probably felt fortunate that the new Victorian Society of Fine Arts had organised an exhibition in which he could show his work and that, unusually for Australia, the Society sought to limit it to contemporary works executed in Australia rather than European pictures. *Ferntree Gully* was recognised not just as *the* picture of the 1857 exhibition but also as 'perhaps superior to any previous work of our greatest landscape painter'. While von Guérard's contemporaries delighted in his evocation of the quiet of Nature at the base of the Gully, they applauded his celebration of the giant tree ferns which, as one colonist had put it a few years before, dwarfed the 'little microscopic varieties' which 'fern-mad' Englishmen nursed 'with vast anxiety and expense'. By one account, *Ferntree Gully* would 'strike those ... unacquainted with our inland ranges like a new revelation'.

The sharpest indication of the impact of von Guérard's painting is that it literally put *Ferntree Gully* on the map. Until the 1857 exhibition, the spot he depicted was known as 'Dobson's Gully' after a local timber-getter. After the exhibition, colonists saw the Gully in von Guérard's terms. As



Above: *Ferntree Gully* in the Dandenong Ranges, 1857, by Eugene von Guérard.

Above left: *Niagara Falls*, 1857, by Frederic Edwin Church.



Kauterskill Clove,  
1862 (detail), by  
Sanford Robinson  
Gifford.

a local history of the Dandenongs noted in the 1880s, von Guérard 'was pleased to call the painting Fern Tree Gully, on account of the handsome fern trees, and that name has clung to the place ever since'.

Yet could von Guérard's painting be claimed as 'Australian' or 'colonial' art? Admirers of Church did not have to consider this issue because he was born in Hartford, Connecticut, and trained in New York by Thomas Cole, but Australian critics had good reason to dwell on it because von Guérard was born in Vienna and studied in Rome and Düsseldorf. Had it not been for gold he would never have left for Victoria in 1852, aged 40. Had he been luckier on the Ballarat diggings, he might not have reverted to painting in Australia. Had he decided to quit Düsseldorf three years earlier, he would probably have gone to California.

When the Sydney *Empire* discussed the Victorian exhibition, it was sceptical, and not just because rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney was already strong. The *Empire* argued: 'To be *bona fide* colonial the drawings and paintings produced should have been executed by artists born or bred in one of the colonies of this hemisphere, which would have afforded us a somewhat definite idea of the nature of their skill and taste—the promise which they could hold out to us of the artistic advancement of the native mind'.

James Smith—the only Melbourne writer on art with serious pretensions to be a critic—did not share these doubts. To him, *Ferntree Gully* combined the best of colonial Culture and Nature. But Smith manifested his profound colonialism when the best he could think of for von Guérard's painting was that it be presented to Queen Victoria. By the end of December eight admirers of von Guérard's picture, led by Smith, had started a subscription to buy it for Her Majesty.

Other colonists recognised that Smith's scheme would waste von Guérard's '*chef d'œuvre*'. One reckoned that *Ferntree Gully* 'might as well be bound in the Pyramids as being in some out-of-the-way corner in one of the palaces'. Another argued that this 'native gem' should be bought for Melbourne's Public Library, University, Museum or Legislative Assembly so that in time it could become the centre of Victoria's own National Gallery. Whereas Church's local gallery, the Wadsworth Athenaeum, had bought his *Hooker and Company* for \$130 soon after he painted as a precocious 20-year-old in 1846, there was still no public collection of paintings in Victoria in 1857.

Perhaps because of the criticism of Smith's plan, it came to nothing. Although von Guérard wanted just £210 for his painting (one thirtieth of the sum received by Church for his *Niagara*) Smith's subscription to present *Ferntree Gully* to the Queen raised only £60. When Smith tried instead to buy it as the basis for a National Gallery of Victoria, he was no more successful. Meanwhile *Ferntree Gully* languished in the window of a music shop in Collins Street, Melbourne—a far cry from the galleries where *Niagara* was displayed as it toured Britain and the United States.

*Ferntree Gully* made its way to England only when von Guérard finally sold it privately to Frederick Dalgety, founder of the pastoral company, who lent it to the Victorian Court at the London International Exhibition of 1862. There it appeared not as a major work of art but as a cultural embellishment to Victoria's trade display. Although an unidentified 'eminent artist', quoted by the Victorian press, declared it 'a grateful relief' to look at *Ferntree Gully* after visiting the 'feverish' Turner Gallery with its 'chrome yellow sunsets' and 'dingy azures', the English press ignored it.

**D**ESPITE THE INTEREST OF THIS TYPE OF COMPARISON, one reason for juxtaposing American and Australian painting in *New Worlds from Old* is pragmatic. As noted by Patrick McCaughey, the former Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, who played a key role in organising the exhibition when he was Director of the Wadsworth Athenaeum, 'it would be difficult both imaginatively and organisationally to interest a major American art museum in an exhibition solely of nineteenth or twentieth-century Australian art'. An exhibition confined to nineteenth-century American landscape painting would probably be hardly more welcome in Australia because even the finest American artists, such as Church, are almost unknown outside North America.

Yet bringing these pictures together is also an opportunity to explore the many similarities between nineteenth-century American and Australian landscape painting which are due as much to the status of both countries as settler societies as to the international spread of particular styles of painting. In the first decades of the century, the seventeenth-century masters, Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa, inspired artists in both the Old World and the New to focus on what seemed picturesque and sublime, while the work of the Dutch master, Jakob van Ruisdael, encouraged a greater naturalism. Towards the end of the century artists in both hemispheres devoted increasing attention to commonplace subjects as they developed regional variants of the Barbizon School and Impressionism.

The differences between American and Australian painting are at least as interesting. One factor is the distinctive physical environment of the two continents. While colonial landscape

painters in Australia had to learn to capture the distinctive forms of the gum tree—and did so with much greater accomplishment than is often credited—American artists struggled with the extraordinary colours of fall in the north-eastern United States. But as the comparison between Church's *Niagara* and von Guérard's *Ferntree Gully* suggests, the different age and size of the European societies on the two continents were at least as significant. One started in the late sixteenth century, won its independence in 1776 and had a population of over five million by 1800; the other started with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, had a population of 6000 in 1800 and remained colonial through the nineteenth century.

**S**INCE THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA began promoting *New Worlds from Old* in 1997, it has made large claims for the exhibition—as well it might after a genesis of almost ten years, including five years of sustained work. The Gallery's Assistant Director, Andrew Sayers (who curated the exhibition with Elizabeth Johns of the Art History Department of the University of Pennsylvania and Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser of the Wadsworth Athenaeum) has presented *New Worlds* as an 'intellectual product'. According to Sayers, it is an exhibition of 'new ideas', 'a landscape of ideas'.

These claims have reached a new pitch over the last few months, not just because of the opening of the exhibition, but also because of Betty Churcher's replacement by Brian Kennedy as the Gallery's Director. Although organised long before Kennedy came to Canberra from the National Gallery of Ireland, he has been presenting *New Worlds* as the exemplar of a new type of exhibition. In an interview in March, Kennedy declared that the 'blockbuster' exhibitions organised by the Gallery under Betty Churcher were 'a victory of style over content ... just not what an art exhibition is supposed to be about'. According to Kennedy, the Gallery would in future stage 'major exhibitions' only so long as they have 'a greater sense of content and intelligence'.

While one can only applaud this ambition, Kennedy's view of what happened under Churcher is just one expression of the cavalier condemnation of the past which is all too common at times of changes in management. Several of the blockbusters at the Gallery (including *Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Ireland*) lacked the intelligence which Kennedy now calls for. Others, like *Surrealism: Revolution by Night* and *Turner*, did not.

How does *New Worlds from Old* live up to the claims which the National Gallery has made for it? The answer turns primarily on the curators' success in creating a framework which reveals not only how landscape painting in the United States and Australia changed over the course of the century but also key similarities and differences. Their solution is thematic. The thesis of both the exhibition and the main catalogue essay by Elizabeth Johns is that the connections are expressed in five common subjects: 'Meeting the Land', 'Claiming the Land', 'In Awe of the Land', 'A Landscape of Contemplation' and 'The Figure defines the Landscape'.

While 'Meeting the Land' is hardly a category of much intellectual substance, it is unproblematic on the Australian side because the arrival of the First Fleet was so recent. When the Australian paintings are not by the explorer-artists, William Westall and Ludwig Becker, they show places first visited by Europeans just ten or 20 years before. But the American side makes little sense because almost all the places depicted are in the north-eastern United States where Europeans were well established. As the catalogue acknowledges, such popular painting grounds as Niagara Falls, the Catskills and the Natural Bridge in Virginia were not just major tourist attractions but already 'historic sites'.

'Claiming the Land' is a sharper concept which works better for both continents, embracing the American and Australian pictures which celebrate the rise of houses, farms and cities. But it does not readily extend to the many pictures populated by either Native Americans or Aborigines, which the curators have also categorised in this way. Because Andrew Sayers implicitly recognises as much in the exhibition catalogue when he treats Australian pictures of this type as exemplifying 'A Landscape of Dispossession', it is hard to understand why the curators failed to establish a separate category devoted to these Australian paintings and their American counterparts, such as Thomas Cole's *Scene from 'The Last of the Mohicans'* and George Catlin's *The Pipestone Quarry*.

'In Awe of the Land' should be devoid of such problems. There is a wealth of landscapes from both sides of the Pacific devoted to the sublime. Consequently, it beggars belief why the curators included William Trost Richards' *In the Woods* and Jasper Cropsey's panorama of Sidney Plains as



Near Fernshaw, 1873 (detail),  
by Louis Buvelot.



Down on his Luck,  
1889 (detail),  
by Frederick McCubbin.

Below right: Fight for  
the Water Hole,  
c.1903 (detail),  
by Frederic Remington.

American instances of such painting. While Richards' painting is an American attempt at microscopism of the type practised by von Guérard in *Ferntree Gully*, it is so inept that it conveys no sense of awe. As described by Betsy Kornhauser in the catalogue, Cropsey's painting is 'an inventory of a landscape that had been transformed from wilderness to one replete with signs of modern technology'. Telegraph poles cut the foreground, sheep fill the middleground, a train smokes in the background of a landscape infused with the colours of fall. It is a railway promoter's painting less to do with awe than with autumn.

'A Landscape of Contemplation' is a novel conception for Australian if not American painting, which neatly identifies the many quiet landscapes which artists on both sides of the Pacific began painting in the 1860s. But once again the paintings categorised under this label do not always fit. Because Sanford Gifford's *Kauterskill Close* transforms 'a striking combination of light and air ... into a breathtaking vista', as Elizabeth Johns acknowledges, it is hard to understand why it was not exhibited as an example of awe, while Louis Buvelot's *Near Fernshaw* is too high-pitched a picture to be considered contemplative.

The last category, 'The Figure defines the Landscape', is the most disturbing because it involves a marked departure from landscape, otherwise the subject of the exhibition. The explanation proffered by Elizabeth Johns is that 'with few exceptions, nature as an autonomous power' receded in American and Australian landscapes painted in the 1880s and 1890s. She argues that 'artists depicted figures actively at work, so prominent in the picture that they make nature the accessory, even just the backdrop to their self-definition.'

As so often, *New Worlds from Old* does not bear out this generalisation. The exhibition includes a number of paintings dominated by figures such as Frederic Remington's *Fight for the Water Hole* and Frederick McCubbin's *Down on his Luck*, it also includes many American and Australian paintings from the 1880s and 1890s in which the figures are either not as significant or absent. Rather than muddling *New Worlds from Old* by including narrative paintings, the curators would have done better sticking to landscape.

THESE FLAWS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF *NEW WORLDS FROM OLD* have been underlined in Canberra by the exhibition's departures from the categories developed in its catalogue. Why on the American side at the start of the exhibition is Thomas Cole's *Notch of the White Mountains* catalogued as 'Claiming the Land' but exhibited as 'Meeting the Land', while George Catlin's *Buffaloes in the Salt Meadows, Upper Missouri* is catalogued as 'Meeting the Land' but exhibited as 'Claiming the Land'. Why is John Glover's *Corrobory of Natives in Van Diemen's Land* catalogued as an instance of 'Meeting the Land' but exhibited as 'Claiming the Land'?

The answer in part is aesthetic. By exhibiting Glover's *Corrobory of Natives in Van Diemen's Land* within 'Claiming the Land', Andrew Sayers was able to bring together all three corroboree pictures in the exhibition with great effect. Equally, he was able to make something of the two very modest paintings by Catlin; hung separately they would probably have had so little impact that they would have diminished the exhibition. Yet the success of these groupings and the manifest similarity of the three corroboree subjects suggests that the curators erred to begin with when they placed these pictures in different categories in the exhibition catalogue.

The gaps between catalogue and exhibition are at least as significant at the end of the exhibition in the undermining the intellectual claims of *New Worlds from Old*. While W.C. Piquenit's *Lake St Clair* and *The Flood in the Darling* are both catalogued as landscapes of contemplation, they are hung as landscapes of awe. David Davies' *Moonrise*, Walter Withers' *Tranquil Winter* and Arthur Streeton's *Purple Noon's Transparent Might* are catalogued as landscapes of contemplation yet they are shown as part of the 'The Figure defines the Landscape'.

The most obvious result is that the paintings by Davies, Withers and Streeton are exhibited as landscapes defined by figures even though they are unpopulated. But this switch also deprives 'A Landscape of Contemplation' of its stylistic balance because there are no Australian impressionist paintings to match the American impressionist landscapes by the likes of George Inness and John Twachtman. It also means that the exhibition reinforces the cliché that Piquenit was simply a successor to von Guérard and Chevalier, who happened to paint many of his best pictures in the



late 1880s and 1890s, whereas the catalogue appropriately sets Piguénit against Streeton who was his main rival in Sydney in the 1890s.

The curators' selection of works on paper is at least as problematic. While oil paintings are both the grand tradition of landscape in art and the works best able to withstand long periods of public exhibition, watercolours, drawings, lithographs, engravings and photographs all have very different things to say about landscape with no loss of aesthetic quality. Prints were significant in defining the American and Australian landscape in the first half of the nineteenth century; photographs were probably even more important in the second half.

The curators of *New Worlds from Old* have opted for an awkward mixture. The exhibition is dominated by 53 Australian and 49 American oil paintings but it also includes six watercolours, four prints, three illustrated books and one drawing, but no photographs. Because these works on paper are so few—and the reasons for their selection appear more or less arbitrary—the exhibition would have been more coherent had they been excluded. Alternatively, the curators should have included more works on paper, particularly by women artists, whose best landscapes in the nineteenth century were generally either drawings or watercolours. As it is, the only work by a woman in the exhibition is Clara Southern's *An Old Bee Farm*.

These flaws make *New Worlds from Old* unsatisfying as an 'intellectual product'. While individual paintings can be seen as 'landscapes of ideas', the exhibition as a whole cannot. The curators would have done better by dividing the exhibition into smaller, more revealing categories and then been more rigorous about them. Otherwise they could have turned to chronology—the simplest but often best organising device. Had the exhibition been divided into blocks of a decade, it would have retained the key comparisons between artists such as Cole, Glover,

Church and von Guérard. It also would have better articulated how landscape painting changed and differed across the century on both sides of the Pacific.

**Y**ET THE EXHIBITION'S VERY VULNERABILITY TO CRITICISM is a consequence of its ambition in trying to conceptualise a large, complex subject. For all its structural flaws, *New Worlds from Old* is much more stimulating and rewarding than most exhibitions shown in Australia. Even if one has read and thought at length about both American and Australian nineteenth-century painting and looked at collections in both countries, there is nothing like having so many of the finest landscapes from both the United States and Australia in the same rooms at the same time.

One of the exhibition's strengths is that, along with *Niagara* and *Ferntree Gully*, it is rich in more or less obvious pairings which bring out the parallel traditions of art in the United States and Australia. For example, von Guérard's garish piece of spectacular coastal geology, *Castle Rock, Cape Schanck* is in one room; Church's even more lurid *Coast Scene, Mount Desert* is in the next. *The Land of Evangeline*, Joseph Meeker's swamp scene in the Louisiana Bayou, hangs almost opposite *Evening Shadows*, H.J. Johnstone's exercise in still water and reflections depicting a backwater of the Murray.

The differences highlighted by such pairings are equally illuminating. While Meeker took his subject from Longfellow's poem, 'Evangeline', just as Thomas Cole based *Scene from 'The Last of the Mohicans'* on James Fenimore Cooper's novel of the same title, the most that can be said for Johnstone's painting is that there is a parallel between *Evening Shadows* and Marcus Clarke's concept of 'weird melancholy'. More generally, no Australian landscape painting in the exhibition takes its subject from either Australian poetry or Australian prose. While Arthur Streeton pinned Walt Whitman's line 'Muscle and pluck forever!' to his painting, *The Selector's Hut*, no American landscape painter was inspired by Australian verse.

The stimulus of *New Worlds from Old* is also not just comparative because the exhibition has great moments within both its American and its Australian components. The best is probably the pairing of John Glover's *My Harvest Home* and *Cawood* from 1835 on their own screen. While these paintings have both been in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart for more than 60 years, and on more or less permanent display for much of the last 20, they have never been conjoined in this way. They have never looked so good.

What makes these landscapes is not just Glover's unsurpassed handling of the gum trees on the hills but also the brilliant golden light. These are ecstatic paintings—expressing profound joy



Buffaloes in the Salt Meadows, Upper Missouri, c.1851-52 (detail), by George Catlin.



My Harvest Home, 1835  
(detail), by John Glover.

Below right: West Rock,  
New Haven, 1849 (detail),  
by Frederic Edwin Church.

in a new landscape, whether on Glover's own farm in *My Harvest Home* or that of another colonist in *Cawood*. For an artist of any age, they would be remarkable paintings. For someone who landed in Tasmania in 1831 on his 64th birthday, when most painters are struggling to emulate the achievements of their youth, they are extraordinary.

Two of the most compelling paintings on the American side of the exhibition also show hay-making—a recurrent subject in American art partly because it symbolised how Nature's bounty awaited the industrious in the New World. Frederic Church's *West Rock, New Haven*—hung neatly just one picture away from Glover's *My Harvest Home*—is painted with a breathtaking command of detail that not even von Guérard could match. Martin Johnson Heade's *View of Marshfield* is almost as compelling. The only shame is that the curators did not include at least one if not two more of these haystack paintings by Heade to convey his obsessive concern with particular subjects, which has no counterpart in nineteenth-century Australian painting.

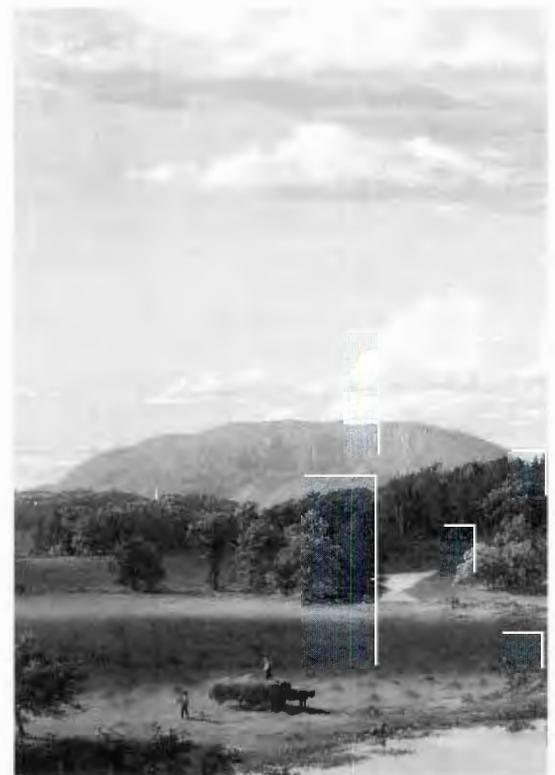
*New Worlds from Old* also provides an unprecedented opportunity to dwell on the quality of American and Australian painting, even though one of its curators has denied any interest in this question. While Elizabeth Kornhauser has revealed how she and the other American and Australian curators of the exhibition became a 'little competitive' in their search for the best paintings from their own countries she has also declared, 'There's this macho issue of quality, which we haven't addressed because we're assuming that both traditions are ... equal'.

Yet the question of relative strength of the two cultures is not only immediately provoked by *New Worlds from Old* but also has a long history. When the exhibition of the Victorian Society of Fine Arts opened in Melbourne in 1857, James Smith began his review in the *Argus* by comparing it to a Californian State Fair held a few months before. Because the San Francisco exhibition included just a few photographs, drawings, and lithographs, Smith instructed his fellow colonists to take particular satisfaction in how their exhibition demonstrated 'the attainment by this colony of a higher stage of intellectual and social development than that which has been reached by the only other great gold-producing country, which is peopled by the Anglo-Saxon race, and has sprung at a bound, like Victoria, from a condition of comparative obscurity into the possession of wealth, population, and a world-wide renown'.

ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY YEARS LATER, *New Worlds from Old* suggests that Smith's pride in the attainments of local artists was well-founded—and not just when Victoria is set against California but also when Australia is judged against the United States. There is no manifest qualitative difference in the first two sections of the exhibition, but Australian landscape painting appears stronger and more exciting than its American counterpart from the middle section, 'In Awe of the Land'. How could this be when, compared with the United States, European society in Australia was so new and small?

One factor is the curators' decision to elevate Glover to unprecedented significance. Whereas von Guérard and Church are both represented by six works—an appropriate expression of their parallel position—Glover is represented by seven. The reason, at least in part, is not that Glover is a better or more interesting artist but that the curators were confronted by a relative array of fine American landscape painters and dearth of Australian ones. Had they not included so many of Glover's paintings, the Australian walls of the exhibition's opening rooms would look parlously thin.

This reliance on Glover is part of the curators' larger decision to represent fewer artists in the Australian component of the exhibition and then stretch their work much further. While there are 23 artists on the Australian side, there are 37 on the American. Had there also been 37 artists selected on the Australian side it might have looked no better, if not worse, than its American counterpart. Had just 23 artists been chosen on



the American side, it would have come much closer to rivalling the Australian exhibit.

Not all the curators' decisions benefit Australian art however, particularly their treatment of the late nineteenth century. As Patrick McCaughey recognised, in an interview in *Art Monthly* in 1990, 'what happens in Australian painting between ... 1885, Roberts' return, to Streeton's departure in 1896 ... is really not paralleled in American art'. In his introductory essay to *New Worlds from Old*, McCaughey elaborates: 'The decade of the Heidelberg School stands as one of the most profound and moving episodes of a local school far from the centre in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Australian movement is so sharply focused. American impressionism, by contrast, is a loose baggy monster. Numerous centres, a complex relationship between America and France, luminous expatriates and plodding provincial schools ...'

**T**HE CURATORS HAVE RESPONDED by compressing the Heidelberg School. While *New Worlds from Old* appropriately expresses the major reassessment of Australian colonial artists in general, and Glover and von Guérard in particular, which has occurred over the last 30 years, it does Arthur Streeton a disservice. Not only is Streeton represented by just five of his paintings but they are primarily his larger, duller canvases rather than the brilliant, small, japoniste panels of Sydney Harbour which are such a strength of the National Gallery of Australia's own collection.

The superiority of Australian painting should also not be altogether surprising, because the wealth and size of American culture was not a simple benefit for its artists. Frederic Church provides an illustration. His *West Rock, New Haven* from 1849 is a marvel of quiet realism—as beautiful as any picture in the exhibition. His much grander *Niagara* teeters on the brink of chocolate box. His even bigger 'Great Picture' from 1859, *The Heart of the Andes* now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, yielded Church more than \$7000 just from the admission fees during its first two years of public exhibition, but the quality of his work collapsed.

Yet before *New Worlds from Old* becomes too much of a cause of nationalistic pride, it is worth remembering that, at least in the terms of the *Sydney Empire* and the Victorian Society of Fine Arts in 1857, the American component of *New Worlds from Old* is much more deeply American than the Australian component is Australian. Whereas 30 of the 37 artists on the American side of the exhibition were born in the United States, just five of the 23 Australian artists were born in Australia. All the landscapes on the American side of the exhibition were produced by artists resident in the United States; several of the paintings of Australian scenery were done in England.

The national characterisation of many of the paintings on the Australian side of *New Worlds from Old* is consequently far from self-evident, as demonstrated by H.J. Johnstone's *Evening Shadows* of 1880. One possibility is to think of *Evening Shadows* as Australian because of its subject, Johnstone's long residence in Victoria from 1853 until 1876 and his manifest indebtedness to Louis Buvelot. Or we might think of it as English because Johnstone was not only born and studied in Birmingham but also painted *Evening Shadows* following his return to London in 1879.

Alternatively we might think of *Evening Shadows* as American because Johnstone worked in San Francisco between 1876 and 1879 and, according to James Smith, learned much from the experience. Already in 1878, Smith observe that Johnstone had 'benefited by the opportunities ... of studying the works of American artists, of observing other than Australian scenery and foliage, and of ascertaining his own defects and shortcomings by comparing his productions with those of more experienced and better instructed painters'.

The origins of many of the other paintings on the Australian side of *New Worlds from Old* are at least as complex. Much more than its American counterpart, what we now think of as nineteenth century Australian art was an accident of emigration. Had Glover not had such an extraordinary old age and von Guérard enjoyed better luck on the diggings, there might be no *New Worlds from Old*. ■

**Tim Bonyhady** is a member of the ANU's Urban Research Program. He first wrote about landscape in *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting 1801–1890*, an Oxford University Press paperback.

*New Worlds from Old* is on exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia until 17 May 1998 and thereafter at the National Gallery of Victoria from 3 June to 10 August 1998; and in the United States at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, from 12 September 1998 to 4 January 1999, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, from 26 January 1998 to 18 April 1999.



Coast Scene, Mount Desert, 1863 (detail), by Frederic Edwin Church.

Below: Castle Rock, Cape Schanck, 1865 (detail), by Eugene von Guérard.



# The novel director

*Richard Flanagan's film, The Sound of One Hand Clapping, has just been released, a few months after his novel of the same name. Peter Malone asked him about the double act—directing and writing—and about Tasmania, hope, Hollywood, migration and other matters.*

**R**ICHARD FLANAGAN: It's very difficult to explain to people that *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* is neither a film of the book nor a book of the film, because they arose more or less simultaneously. I did start writing the screenplay first, but as prose notes which I then translated back into a screenplay, because I understood prose; I didn't really understand screenplays. When I finished the screenplay, I had a basis for a novel.

People liked the screenplay but they thought it was too difficult a project and would cost too much money. It was that period when Australia was enjoying great success with all those quirky comedies,—*Strictly Ballroom*, *Muriel's Wedding*, *Priscilla*—so mine wasn't a project that found favour with financiers. Also, it wasn't like any film that had been done in Australia. Investors like being able to say that this is a cross between *Priscilla* and *The Terminator*! But nobody could précis it in those terms. I wasn't too fussed because I'd learnt a different form of the craft of writing, and that had interested me.

Then I thought, well, I like the story and I want to take it further, so I spent about the next two-and-a-half years of my life writing it as a novel. But what I thought would be relatively simple, seeing I had all the characters and plotting worked out, was actually more difficult than writing a novel anew because a film, structurally, is a cross between a short story and a poem, whereas a novel is an entire cosmology. It's difficult to turn a short story into a novel; you have to turn the thing upside down and start again.

I finished the novel about two days before the film news—sent it off to my agent on a Wednesday and on the Friday they rang me and said they'd got the money for the movie. Then we were helter-skelter into making the movie. In the editing of it, I rewrote the entire novel.

It was good because I never attempted to turn the film into a novel. Perhaps if I had just written the script and not the novel, I would have had novelistic aspirations which, I think, destroy a lot of films. Films are a very taut form of storytelling. They are unsteady and frail edifices and if you introduce too many characters, too many themes, they're easily broken.

*Peter Malone: You then wrote for television? I was asked to do a treatment for a TV drama*



*Richard Flanagan*

series, which I did, but really disliked because it's very directive. You get told, 'We want this element and that, because German television is buying that at the moment.' I don't think it ever does to be snobbish—you are always learning something—but I would never go back into TV. As Kieszkowski said, there is nothing wrong with television as a medium. It's just that the way it's run is even worse than film, because every creative decision is made by executives.

*You still enjoy writing?*

I do. The thing about writing is that all I've got to do is try to make it the best possible work that I can. I don't have to make ten phone calls each day just to keep the last sentence I wrote. I don't have someone standing over me quoting Pam Ayres and asking me to write the next chapter in her style. With film you have an industry that wants to produce product, as they so ingloriously call it, in the manner that Walkmans and McDonalds hamburgers are made. It frustrates them enormously that you can't make things that might mean something to other people in that way. It's infinitely mysterious and difficult.

They have an idea of art that if we can just eliminate all the weaknesses—that's the whole idea of test screenings—then we have something good. But I have an opposite idea: somewhere between your ambition and your failure is your achievement and, somehow, in what is weak in what you do and what is flawed, lies the kernel of what actually moves people and might mean something to them. You can carefully fillet every weakness out of something, but then what are you left with?

*What prompted your decision to direct The Sound of One Hand Clapping?*

I asked Rolf de Heer if he would direct it—I didn't know him—and he read the script and very generously said that he felt he couldn't, that there was a very singular voice in the script and that the only person who could direct it was me, but that if I would direct it, he would produce it.

I've got no background in film-making whatsoever—my wife takes the family snaps. But as Carlos Fuentes once wrote, 'you cannot act without the horizon of failure constantly in view'.

What I loved was the process of film-making. When you do have those great

collaborations with people—with my composer and people like Kerry Fox and John Scott—to me that's joyous because my work is largely solitary as a writer.

The bad side of film-making, the extraordinarily ugly side, is the politics. More than half your energy each day goes into fighting for the right to continue to



Kristof Kaczmarek as Bojan Buloh

make the film. That's utterly destructive and stupid. With film it's a totalitarian society in which the tyrant is money, so a lot of people, who in other situations are good and decent people, behave quite badly. I admire people who make good films in spite of it and I now understand why most films are so compromised.

*What about the location work, finding the locations, the logistics of getting everything and everyone there?*

I loved all that. It's like the circus coming to town and you're allowed to play with it. You summon this cyclone into existence and then you exist in the eye of the cyclone. The process of shooting—it's like that description of war that gets quoted: long moments of boredom interspersed with the occasional moment of terror and exhilaration. I can see why people are seduced by that, why they spend years and years for that short time on the set.

*The style of the film is very 'European', reminiscent of The Tale of Ruby Rose, with its rugged wintry mountain locations and isolation. But many of the characters—Julie Forsyth's neighbour and family—had such an Australian accent and tone that it was a strong combination of what the*

*migrants to Tasmania experienced: the European background, the new place, a homely Vegemite kind of culture.*

I'm glad you liked that because, for me, there was a moment in my childhood when I realised there was a meeting of Old Europe and Old Australia. Both worlds had a certain grace and neither world exists any longer. There was something about them that I have a great affection for and both of them met strangely.

*Your Tasmanian experience and your Tasmanian perspective! It's very strong in your early writing and your interest in the wilderness and the Greens. Did I hear trees being chopped down during the final credits of the film?*

The point about Tasmania—obviously I have deep feelings about the place—is this: in essence I grew up in a world that I knew to be profoundly different. I think Tasmania is a different country; Australia is composed of a number of different countries. This is no argument for secession. It's not a political argument, it's just an acknowledgment of a cultural fact. I mean, blackfellas don't have a problem knowing that to grow up in the Kimberley is a different experience from growing up in south-west Tasmania. I grew up in this world and I have always found it quite magical.

I came out of an Australian Irish Catholic peasantry, really, all convict people who kept on marrying each other. They had a very rich oral culture. But then, as I got a bit older, I realised that we were despised. If you wanted to write or paint or do any of those things, then you were expected to leave. Our experience was forever the most marginal and we were the most marginal of people.

What attracted me to writing was that I realised the history of great writing is the history of people of regional culture—Joyce writing about Dublin in Trieste, Marquez writing about little towns on the coast of Colombia and Mexico City, Flaubert writing about Madame Bovary in Normandy.

So I wanted to honour that world. As Faulkner, whom I love, once wrote, when he was asked why he wrote only about Mississippi: 'Well, I have all these books I want to write and I have only one lifetime to write them, and I don't have another lifetime to know another country.' I don't understand anywhere else at all, so this is the field I suppose I'm condemned to plough, but it's not a bad field.

*You've brought post-war migrants with their world into this Tasmanian world that*

*your family had lived in for such a long time.*

At the end of my first novel, *Death of a River Guide*, you realise that everybody's related to one another. That's the point, everybody's related. I always feel that there is an intense connection with people. I hate politics or art that tries, like European culture for all its great brilliance does, to posit a position of utter despair—that we are alone. I don't believe that, that we are alone in life or at death. The fundamental feeling and experience I have is that we are inescapably connected to each other and to the earth, and that's our answer to European culture. That is the answer to Australian experience, and that's what I've wanted to represent most fundamentally in my work.

So the experience of migrants coming here was, to me, not much different. It's the same experience my own people would have had. My great-grandfather lived through the famine and came out here as a convict. His experience must have been the same.

**W**ITH SONJA'S father and mother, you show the dislocation. I wondered what this says about that post-war generation coming to Tasmania and seeming unable to be part of it.

It always struck me as extraordinary that you would meet people in a place like this, so often dismissed as the end of the world. Impressed upon their souls were the great epic movements of our age: the experience of fascism, bolshevism, total war, the loss of languages, countries, homes, families. And they'd ended up living here. They might



Kerry Fox as Sonja Buloh

be living across the road from you. And it still goes on.

I was living just a few streets away a couple of years ago when a Vietnamese family moved in. They had little children who were about four or five years old. The father said, 'G'day, mate', and they started telling me about being on the boat and the people who'd got washed off and were never seen again. And that's Australia. It seemed to me to be almost unbearable that people live with such horror and try to find meaning in their lives. So what I wanted the film to be about in the end was the redemptive power of love. This is very unfashionable because the idea of love itself is profoundly unfashionable, and the idea that love can redeem people is seen as both naïve and ridiculous.

*Not hard-hitting enough?*

Yes. I get annoyed because I think too much art these days deals in the shadows of existence, sex and violence. There's a place for that. But for me there are only three great stories: birth, love and death. They are the only stories that have ever mattered and people are terrified of them because they're so hard to deal with in a way that is neither pathetic nor comic. I knew when I made the film that it would run the risk of being melodramatic or even comic.

*You've made it moving. What you've actually given us is death, then love and birth.*

That's right, it does end with the birth. It's very odd when you think about it. Everyone used to despise the Hollywood happy ending because it became such a cliché, but we have the Hollywood unhappy ending now, which is equally a cliché. I would hope that the film finishes on a tentative note. There is, for people who have known only despair and anguish, simply hope. It's an ambiguous hope, but there's hope. That's as much as you can ask for in life, I think, and it's a very powerful and good thing.

*Religious themes? You gave Sonja's father strong dialogue about God and belief in God. Sonja reacted to that in a puzzled kind of way, wanting her First Communion dress and the Rosary. Then the strictness of the women, that old-style Catholicism.*

There were a number of influences there. I don't carry a great candle for organised religion, but I do believe that what afflicts us at the moment is a profound spiritual crisis. As we've become ever more

materially prosperous, there is an equivalent spiritual yearning that is not answered. I think a lot of our art, unfortunately, is also frightened of addressing spiritual issues. It's difficult country to traverse, but we must set out through it.

Parts of my family were that very old-style church, sitting around doing the decades of the rosary, and it made no sense to me. So I grew up in an ultra-orthodox church and I also grew up in a very heterodox church, which was much more the religion of my mother and father, which would have had them burnt at the stake some centuries back. It is much more a religion about love and openness and that I admire greatly.

There have always been two types of European migrants to Australia: those who are fiercely of the faith and those who are fiercely anticlerical, which of course is the



Melita Jurisic as Maria Boloh

other great peasant tradition since the eighteenth century in Europe. And the church's record in the occupied countries was very bad. But I think you have to clear some of that away and then address things more fundamentally and say, well, that's the nonsense and clutter that can accrue, but that's not what genuine spiritual belief is about.

I'm that most hopeless of fallen Catholics, the Catholic agnostic. Irredeemably Catholic. You can't grow up in the world I grew up in and lose it. I always disagree with people who say, 'I'm no longer Catholic', because culturally you are, forever. I'm always interested in reading secular Islamic writers because they're

more profoundly Islamic than the fundamentalist Islamic writers. Somehow, by getting rid of the clutter, they see how much Islam has actually shaped them. And they have time-honoured ways of trying to understand the human condition. These things are difficult and mysterious, aren't they?

**T**HE TITLE ITSELF, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, where did it come from? What were you highlighting? Or were you leaving it for us to ponder on?

It's very funny. At a certain point the film had to have a title, and I'd come across that phrase when I was at Oxford, in an essay about the history of the influence of early feminism on the British co-operative movement. Nothing else of that essay remains in my mind except that one phrase, and I thought it seemed right.

There are always things that are enigmatic; art, in essence, is always a journey into things you don't really fully comprehend. And I never worry. It's when I do comprehend them that I think it's becoming too obvious. It had to have a title and it seemed right. So that was it.

I liked it simply because I think there is a lie that has taken almost universal hold within the mentality of our age, that salvation lies within us individually, that if there is any hope for us, it lies within us individually. This lie takes all forms of madness, from step aerobics to self-help books to the liver-cleansing diet to psychiatry. But the idea is that somehow we are all afflicted with a certain anguish and we think that somehow we can answer it ourselves. But I think that if there is any answer, any meaning, it lies with other people. It doesn't lie with us. We don't exist as individuals, we exist socially.

Modern capitalism encourages us only to be individuals. It is no wonder that the spiritual reflex of that has been to search for this individual salvation. But it's a lie. The hard truth is that it's very difficult to try to find what meaning there is in other people, because other people, like us, are flawed and difficult. Our family, our friends—they have as many faults as we do. But that's where it exists for me. The film and the book were both purposefully constructed with that idea in mind: that you have two people whose lives are actually deaths until the point at which they both recognise that, without each other, they are the sound of one hand clapping. ■

Peter Malone msc is a freelance film critic.

# Asylum policy at sea

*Australia hasn't caught up with the new forms and circumstances of national displacement. Received migration policies do not meet the needs of modern asylum seekers, argues Glenn Nicholls.*

**M**OVING BACKWARDS and forwards between countries of residence has become a common feature of the contemporary world. Temporary residents, whether the mercantile élite, students, live-in domestic workers or the displaced, are increasingly recognised by the taxation, health and social security systems.

The classical model of permanent migration (which recent commentators assert always overstated the decisiveness of the break with the former homeland) is increasingly being accompanied in our picture of the world by this emerging model of regular mobility, underwritten by orderly temporary residence arrangements.

It is anomalous, then, that this model has not yet been adequately recognised in Australia's policies of immigration. And even more anomalous when we consider the plight of asylum seekers in Australia and the confusion that surrounds their reception and treatment.

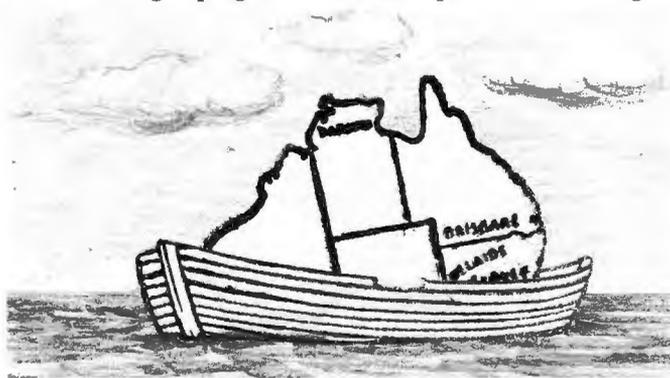
Asylum seekers have become a significant part of migration to Australia. In the 1990s, the number of applications for asylum stabilised at around 5000 annually—ten times more than in the 1980s. Successive governments have, however, failed to come to terms with the demands presented by asylum seekers.

Legislation has been short-lived and frequently amended, sometimes retrospectively; policy initiatives like the Asylum Seekers Assistance scheme and freedom from application fees have been curtailed or repudiated soon after being introduced; and injustices have been rectified, if at all, only in a roundabout way (for example, by offering permanent residence to long-detained Cambodian boat people provided they first return to Cambodia).

The root of the problem is that policy makers have simply continued to apply the established model of the permanent resettlement of immigrants and refugees to

asylum seekers, rather than developing a new approach suited to their situation.

Australian governments have prided themselves on the long-standing and successful refugee resettlement program. Repeatedly in 1992 and 1994, the Commonwealth Parliament's Migration Committee quoted the statement of the 1991 *Refugee Review* that Australia was 'a generous country of resettlement'. But the refugee program does not cope well with



asylum seekers. To policy makers adhering to the model of permanent migration, asylum seekers are a disruptive and troublesome element.

Before the 1990s, the refugee resettlement and humanitarian program was exemplary in both policy and planning. In line with increasingly tight government management, the program was strictly controlled and pegged at around 10,000 places. Although this represented a reduction in places from the previous decade, the make-up of the program was more diverse. It was therefore able to respond both to submissions from Australian ethnic communities and to humanitarian crises worldwide. In short, it delivered good humanitarian outcomes efficiently.

The increase in asylum seekers from 1989 undid this tight management. The number of asylum seekers can neither be capped nor estimated. Tourists, overseas students or traders can unexpectedly apply for asylum; boat people elude controls altogether. The government is obliged to

consider claims from asylum seekers and to take in the imperilled, regardless of quotas or costs. It has little choice but to meet its international obligations, as the Department of Immigration perfunctorily states each year in its Annual Report.

Refugees are selected with their Australian connections and assurance of support in mind. Asylum seekers, however, cannot be selected on the basis of having good settlement prospects; their applications must be assessed exclusively against the international standard set out in the 1951 Geneva Convention. This has the effect of breaking the nexus between selection and settlement, which lies at the heart of immigration planning (and defined by Australian governments as the 'connection and commitment to Australia'). This link provides the rationale for resettled refugees' access to citizenship after just two years' residence

(because they have been chosen as citizens) and to social welfare benefits immediately on arrival (the 'debt' so accumulated being repayable through long residence, as the reasoning goes).

Eighty per cent of asylum seekers are ultimately rejected and are thereby unable to repay any 'debt'; even asylum seekers who are accepted do not necessarily have any local connections that may enhance their integration and immediate ability to earn. In addition, asylum can involve the government in expensive (and embarrassing) court proceedings. The rejection of an asylum application under the internationally accepted definition is more open to dispute than is declining an offshore applicant under a program designed and defined by government. Rejected asylum seekers have more opportunity to pursue such a dispute because they are in the jurisdiction, have access to legal advice and are not in danger.

The present government is striking out with punitive measures. The Minister, Philip Ruddock, has already withdrawn the

Asylum Seeker Assistance allowance for applicants pursuing a review of an adverse decision, and has now introduced penalties of \$1000 for applicants whose claims are unsuccessful. He has also offset the number of accepted asylum seekers by reducing the number of places for refugees seeking resettlement.

**I**N AN INTERVIEW with the ABC (25 June 1996), Ruddock contrasted asylum seekers with the people 'in refugee camps in some of the most deprived situations in the world', whom traditionally Australia has 'resettled and tried to help'. Those who hold firm to this traditional picture are inclined to regard asylum seekers—who have sufficient funds and freedom to avoid camps and come directly by air or boat—as queue jumpers and not genuinely in need.

No sooner do boat people land than it seems that someone seeking votes repeats the error made by Prime Minister Hawke in 1989 when he characterised groups of Cambodian arrivals as economic migrants jumping the immigration queue. As the court action in that case showed, such comments can prejudice applications for asylum and make their resolution immeasurably more difficult. But equally, such comments can also have the opposite effect to that intended: media coverage of

politicians' statements can give applicants a political profile they otherwise lack, and thereby increase their chances of success in an asylum claim.

In reality, people's mode of arrival is not a reliable guide to the merits of their asylum claim. Nor is the queue an appropriate arrangement for asylum; asylum by definition involves direct flight to the receiving country. Insisting on traditional images and arrangements at the expense of asylum seekers leads only to improper consideration of claims and extended litigation.

Adherence to the permanent resettlement of refugees model also means that more creative solutions and outcomes can be missed. By remaining within the framework of the permanent resettlement model, asylum determinations effectively become immigration decisions, with the associated economic implications.

There are, however, alternative solutions which together cover the spectrum of ineligible, unsuccessful and successful applicants. Certain countries stream some applicants out of the asylum determination process, not to deny them residency altogether, but in order to grant it temporarily on the grounds that the applicants have been displaced not by the specific grounds set out in the 1951 Geneva Convention, but amid general upheaval or civil war.

Other systems also allow outcomes other than the granting or withholding of refugee status under the Convention. The Swedish and Danish systems, for example, each allow temporary residence to people who do not qualify for refugee status but who are in dire humanitarian need. Some systems give temporary rather than permanent residence permits to successful asylum seekers. In the United States, for example, applicants found to have genuine claims are granted a one-year permit; if still eligible after a year they may apply for a place in the permanent residence program, which has an annual ceiling, currently standing at 10,000 places.

**A**USTRALIA HAS or has had elements of each of these schemes. We allow the extension of visas of visitors from states in upheaval or civil war; we grant some unsuccessful asylum applicants the benefit of the Minister's humanitarian discretion; and in 1992 we introduced a scheme that granted successful asylum seekers temporary entry permits; at the expiry of the permit they were eligible for a permanent resettlement place, subject to annual intake levels.

These arrangements have not, however, led to a more flexible and expeditious asylum system. Most obviously, the temporary permit scheme did not work. Australia set the period at four years, which meant that applicants were uncertain of their status for an unreasonably long period, were unattractive to employers because of this, and had already established new lives by the time the temporary period expired. Similarly, the other two arrangements do not complement the asylum determination system. The Minister's humanitarian discretion is at loggerheads with the system in two important ways: he can re-examine cases already finalised in the asylum determination system, and unsuccessful applicants can embark on appeals against asylum determinations simply in order to attract his humanitarian attention. The Minister is repeatedly angered that asylum decision-makers widen the definition of refugee status to include people in humanitarian need. But as James Hathaway noted in 1991, in *The Law of*

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*Refugee Status*, the Minister's complaint is inevitable where the decision-maker has no alternative but to grant or withhold refugee status under the Convention. 'In Australia, no distinction exists in law between Convention and other refugees, as a result of which persons displaced by serious disturbances of public order may benefit from asylum.'

In Australia, the alternative arrangements, therefore, have been at cross purposes with established ones. The reason for this is that the established framework has stood firm and made little allowance for the new situation. What each of the alternative arrangements overseas acknowledge is that the asylum situation has changed significantly since 1989. The 1951 Convention arose from the irreconcilable divide between Western and Eastern bloc ideologies. It envisioned refugees who had fled the Eastern bloc primarily for ideological reasons and invariably forever. The crime of *Republikflucht* in itself meant they could not return safely; the impossibility of a change of government further ruled it out.

Since the end of the Cold War, the map of conflict has altered. Instead of a stand off, shadowed by the prospect of total conflagration, now we have spot fires. People caught in them require urgent, but not necessarily permanent, refuge; they can return if the conflict is localised or resolved. Furthermore, unchanging regimes are becoming rarer. In an increasing number of states, governments which once left citizens with no choice but to flee have been unseated. Indeed, post-military governments in South America and reformist governments like the Peoples' Alliance in Sri Lanka have made a point of improving observance of human rights standards in order to reverse the outflow of citizenry (instead of using the crude measure of embargoing assets).

Australia has not yet responded adequately to the new patterns of displacement. But the pressures are on, many now coming from commerce. It is significant that the loudest criticism of existing immigration mechanisms comes from groups committed to quick and temporary movement, namely the tourism and trading industries.

The economic pressure that these groups exert on the Government is beginning to bite and might indirectly benefit asylum policies. Liberalising arrangements for temporary residence may result in more

responsive arrangements for asylum seekers and could lead to a system of asylum that complements the refugee resettlement program.

**F**INALLY, here is how such a system might work. Its functions would be as follows:

- Screening out groups of applicants unqualified for asylum because they have been stranded or displaced by general disruption or uncertainty rather than one of the grounds specifically set out in the 1951 Convention. Instead of being assessed for asylum, such people would be permitted to reside for one year, or thereafter until the situation has ameliorated; if it deteriorated, they would be required to apply for asylum. Into this category would fit Karachi-ites fearing the civil chaos which was widespread

*No sooner do boat people land than it seems that someone seeking votes repeats the error made by Prime Minister Hawke in 1989 when he characterised groups of Cambodian arrivals as economic migrants jumping the immigration queue.*

in 1995–96 but is more fitful now, and Fijians leaving at the time of the military coups, whose applications for asylum were almost entirely unsuccessful because the situation subsequently improved.

- Distributing one-year residence permits to asylum seekers found to have genuine claims, and arranging treatment for applicants found to have been tortured or traumatised. Unsuccessful asylum seekers would be required to depart on the expiry of their visas.

- Allowing temporary residence for individual applicants who have been displaced or stranded by dire humanitarian situations without meeting the definition of refugee status, such as elderly people rendered homeless by civil war.

- Deciding whether temporary visas should become permanent visas after their expiry. In cases of torture or trauma this should be automatic, the prospect of repatriation being itself traumatic. In other cases the decision would not be made by (re-)examining the genuineness of applicants' claims, but by assessing the situation prevailing in their homeland. In some instances there would be a prospect of safe return which did not exist previously—for example, the stabilised

situation in India's Punjab province following the suppression of the insurgency there. In others, such as those of Burmese dissidents, there would be no prospect of governmental change or safe return. It would be only these latter cases, along with the above-mentioned torture or trauma cases, which would be passed on to the Department of Immigration for permanent residence processing.

These types of measures would not only significantly reduce the backlog of applications for asylum and minimise the re-examination of cases outside the determination system. They would also change the way that asylum policy is approached and ensure that the determination system is prepared for greater mobility and political change. While this might appear incongruous given the tenacity of totalitarian regimes in our region, the local asylum situation is nonetheless becoming more fluid in several ways. Applications are being received from mobile people who have already been granted refugee status or temporary residence elsewhere (at the moment only some former residents of Vietnam are disqualified on this ground). Applications have also been received, and in exceptional cases granted, from unexpected sources like

Western democracies. (Similar instances have occurred elsewhere and been reported in the international press, for example: 'Canada Takes Sex Abuse Boy Britain "Did Not Protect"', *The Guardian Weekly*, 27 April 1997). Finally, an increasing number of applications involve variations on the traditional categories set out in the Convention, citing persecution based on social marginalisation, new evangelist activities or sexual identity or gender. Violence against women is now recognised by the United Nations as being the most widespread human rights violation.

The traditional model of permanent refugee resettlement is not well-suited to this new situation. It needs alongside it a specific framework and institution of asylum. Many countries have changed their approach to refugees—former Eastern bloc countries like Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia have become major receiving countries. Australia, too, needs to redefine itself. Faced with an increasing number of asylum seekers, Australia needs to seek and adopt a model of asylum. ■

**Glenn Nicholls** is a researcher in refugee and health policy.

# The fabulist

*Paradise*, Toni Morrison, Chatto and Windus, 1998, ISBN 0 7011 6041 1, RRP \$35.00

IT WOULD BE WRONG to say that Toni Morrison had everything going for her, that being black and female and American had made her such a good bet for the Nobel Prize that now all her prophecies are fulfilling themselves. This is not fair, even though it is true that the trumpets which have been blown for her would well and truly bring Jericho down. They began for me (and for many) when Carmen Callil wrote to every editor in the world saying that *Beloved* was the best book she had ever published.

And indeed *Beloved* seemed to justify the ballyhoo. Here was a novelist writing out of a tradition which included William Faulkner as a patent influence, a novelist whose burning sense of the injury done to her people and to her gender was in no way separate from her sense of how language had been shaped and slapped around by the more strenuous modern experimenters.

In that sense, if in no other, Toni Morrison was a postmodernist because she was so clearly a black American writer who had modernised herself and who was not content with the proposition that to write about what has been done to you is necessarily to accept, passively, the principles of realism. And if Morrison didn't seem to have much in common with the pallid ghosts of postmodern theory, she clearly, as a writer, belonged to that group of tigers burning through the nightlands of the novel who consciously built on modernism in order to inject it with a narrative vitamin—to toss off stories which were at once louche and grand within the overarching form of the novel, to compound 'trash' and 'poetry' in order to write a variety of literary fiction which was both artful and comic strip. Toni Morrison was clearly a literary bedfellow of Gabriel Garcia Márquez and Salman Rushdie, and it seemed appropriate somehow that the last of the magical realists whose banner should be

borne high, the last cartoon Homer of postcolonialism, should come from the Land of the Free and that she should write out of a sense of dual enchainment.

There is a sense in which *Beloved* and *Jazz* are among the most consciously ambitious novels ever to be written by a woman or a black American. These books whisper out of the nightmares of history; their ghosts and wraiths of love and hate take human form in stories that interfuse love and atrocity. At the time of the books' publication, the language burned so bright, there was such an authority of rhetoric, that it seemed churlish even to begin to question the authority—almost Plath-like, almost funereal—which went along with this, so much and so plangently was it what the doctor ordered.

If I am suggesting that there has always been an aspect of smoke and mirrors to the high art of the Nobel Prize-winning Morrison, I do not mean to imply that the work itself is other than fine. Nor do I want to reduce Toni Morrison to the status of the Great Black American Feminist Writer we had to have, a kind of Oprah Winfrey meets *Gone With the Wind*. Toni Morrison is not reducible to black chic or literary chicanery. Not the least of her achievements has been to recover a lost women's history, to render tribal and epic the horrors of female experience. By linking it inevitably and indissolubly with the

history of African America (this *is* her history), she has made her stories at once archetypal and exotic. They are as intimate and distant as a blues song, a part of our language which is invincibly fashionable—despite all those kids on Death Row—but



Toni Morrison

which comes with a genealogy of oppression. The America that's inside all of us is in love with the image of the black people it lashed, lynched, raped and cast aside.

One of the great American parables of modernity, Mark Twain's *Puddenhead Wilson*, involves two white twins, one of

whom—patrician lord of the manor—turns out to be the son of a black woman and finds himself sold down the river.

Toni Morrison is a creator of black magic and the realism which she has made part of the mix comes from a sedulous study of European and American masters. If she can command the formulae of the abracadabra innovators, she also has the precedent of the most confused and Gothic, the most smoky and self-reflexive of self-taught American modernists to write in and of the South or anywhere else, William Faulkner. And the tricks she has learnt from Faulkner have carried her a long way. Never to fear a long-breathed rhetoric, because it may serve in the novel as the substitute for a dramatic poetry. Never to fear confusion and obscurity, because they will deepen the sense of mystery and add to the complexity of the design. Never to fear sentiment and melodrama or very bold strokes, because violence and melodrama are the argot of the day and may be the only way a mechanised world has of expressing the pity of it all. And so one might go on indefinitely about the achievements and question marks that criss-cross Toni Morrison, that make her inscrutable and undecidable, glamorous and tricky.

They are prompted in this instance by the publication of *Paradise*, Morrison's first novel since the Nobel Prize and a book whose very title—so oracular in its obliviousness to Dante—suggests the sweep and shadow of most high ambition.

*Paradise* is the kind of novel that a lot of people, I suspect, will want to see as a masterpiece. It's a book studded with dramatic vehemence and beauties of expression, it has the kind of affecting quality of an ancient tumultuous newsreel, unfocused and jerky yet absolutely atmospheric. But as a piece of writing it strikes me as stammering, unco-ordinated and confused, a book without characters or design except as a schematic extrusion of the writer's will.

Of course failures of this order haunt the mind like love affairs one wishes one had had. Toni Morrison is a nerve-rackingly good writer and the flaws in her book sting the sense more than the felicities of a hundred other writers.

*Paradise* is the story, fragmented like a slivered mirror, of an all-black town called Ruby, concocted out of a desire for purity and separateness, which adjoins a convent in which an old nun and then the woman who was devoted to her, minister to a group of women who have been torn by life.

*Paradise* begins with a bloody flamelit scene in which the men of the town go to the wayward convent to kill the women. It then diverges to tell the stories of how these refugees were driven to their haven, of how the women and men of the town wrestled with each other and with their fears and how they came together, carnally or in hatred, with the convent women.

In the way it manages to fuse a dream-like licence of form with a realism as palpable as energised flesh, *Paradise* is a marvel of a book. It presents a set of actions—frequently unclear as a narrative—with a vividness that usurps the conventions of narrative coherence. Morrison is regal in the way she burns away notions of improbability and compels the reader to believe in the details of these stories because they are, blow by blow, so exactly imagined.

**T**HE EFFECT IS at the same time deeply odd and disconcerting, because Morrison seems interested in these characters primarily as figures in a carpet; none of them is allowed much in the way of sympathetic weight or freedom—they are vividly glimpsed 'flat' characters (to use E.M. Forster's formula) to whom a set of interiorities are ascribed by novelistic fiat but whose life is essentially choral and collective. Their features are blank and their histories are nearly mute.

*Paradise* is a kind of group of tales in which each winding road becomes part of the general signposted catastrophe. But there is, at the same time, something willed and insolent about the way in which the subset of actions is yoked together and the book can feel, for moments, like less than the sum of its parts.

If it is seen as part of the tradition Morrison has placed herself in, *Paradise* probably has most in common, at least generically, with Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, with the distinction that the stories that make up *Paradise* are coerced into relation by a writer who has not done enough to establish them, or who believes, à la Faulkner, that the reader has enough patience to sift the information which is secreted elsewhere in the narrative.

There is strong magic, as well as rough, in Morrison's brew. The townsfolk of Ruby have a historic collective Oven which defines them and over the epigraph to which they ponder emendations and interpretations. It's a central device with some symbolic potency, but Morrison has the disadvantage that although she has, like

Faulkner, lots of narrative verve, she is not as strong on architecture, so that her action can come across as fragmented. So the Gothic elements in *Paradise* (which have reminded some people of Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*) lack a sense of line or perspective. One consequence of this is that it allows Morrison to keep a close-up, realistic focus without having to execute the kind of *tour de force* of setting her own romantic elements into a kind of sequence that can be judged as a story. If this obviously cuts both ways and allows her to escape the more obvious risks of magical realism, it also means that she doesn't offer the thrills of fiction as a wild horse, just in or out of the writer's control.

What escapes her—sometimes—is more fundamental than this: it's the relationship between characterisation and sequence, the way in which a figure must be sufficiently distinct if it is meant to be made out in the carpet.

For many readers this may not matter. This terrible, stormlit vision of black folk life, in the vicinity of an ambiguous citadel, will seem like a rock in the sands of fiction. It is in any case a book of great vehemence, full of visionary sequences and images, that exhilarates even as it flabbergasts expectation.

*Paradise* doesn't seem to me to come within cooee of the best contemporary fiction. It has nothing like the architecture of De Lillo's *Underworld*, nothing like the massive parodistic design of *Mason & Dixon*, its political vision is muddy and undramatised compared with Bernhard Schlink's in *The Reader*. But it is nonetheless a book of colossal verve and energy. Even with every imaginable drawback, a page of Toni Morrison is more vivid than a page of most fiction writers, however on top of it they may be. ■

Peter Craven writes a column for *The Australian*.

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# A tract for the winter of discontent

**One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism,**  
William Greider, Penguin: Allen Lane, 1997.  
ISBN 0 713 99211 5, RRP \$45

**W**ILLIAM GREIDER, the National Editor of *Rolling Stone*, has written a large and important book on the international economic system, and the widespread political, social and ecological damage flowing from the latest Western ventures into modernising and globalising the peoples and communities of the world.

Like Karl Marx, Greider is happy to compliment the capitalist system for its unique ability to generate very nearly continuous growth, and its virtual creation, in the search for profits, of an enormous and self-sustaining process of scientific and technological invention, which appears to have no limits, no natural stopping place. But, like Marx, he foresees perhaps insuperable problems emerging for the existing structures of Finanz Capital and the system of sovereign states. He could be described as neo-Marxist, in the sense that he believes that too many goods, and now services, are being generated for the world, as constituted, to absorb, so that more and more unsold and soon unsaleable surpluses are piling up. They are triggering the failure of increasing numbers of firms, large and small, despite their shoring up by banks and credit institutions—until the whole thing comes down. As it has been coming down in Asia, and, just before, in Mexico.

But Greider could also be described as a follower of the English Liberal J.A. Hobson: the 'problem', as he sees it, is under-consumption—not over-production—because too many people (formerly those in the developing but now also in the developed world) can no longer afford to absorb all the things produced. The credit revolution had enabled consumers to live beyond their means, and now the whole society is in

hock. It delayed the appearance of major surpluses for some time, but can no longer. Still worse, rising unemployment, falling real wages and the casualisation of labour are factors driving down consumption, at the very time the market needs more, not less consumption. One only has to observe the grotesque and socially perverse contortions of the advertisers, in their attempts to get blood out of a stone.

There have been many reasons why rich countries have been investing more and more overseas, but the declining pickings in their own countries is one. The theory and practice of relying on exports to lift economic growth, the belief that more and more international trade means greater prosperity, has been the received wisdom since Bretton Woods.

Implicit in this philosophy was the desirability of free trade and the dismantling of all national impediments to that trade. Self-contained national economies, even regional trade blocs, got in the way of the free flow of trade and capital, loans, investments, etcetera. And subsidising of exports should, ideally, disappear. Breathing spaces were to be allowed for countries with underdeveloped economic and financial institutions (by Western standards), to stop their succumbing to mass-produced, low-cost imports from the rich countries. But the meter was on—there should not be unlimited time to reach that level playing field.

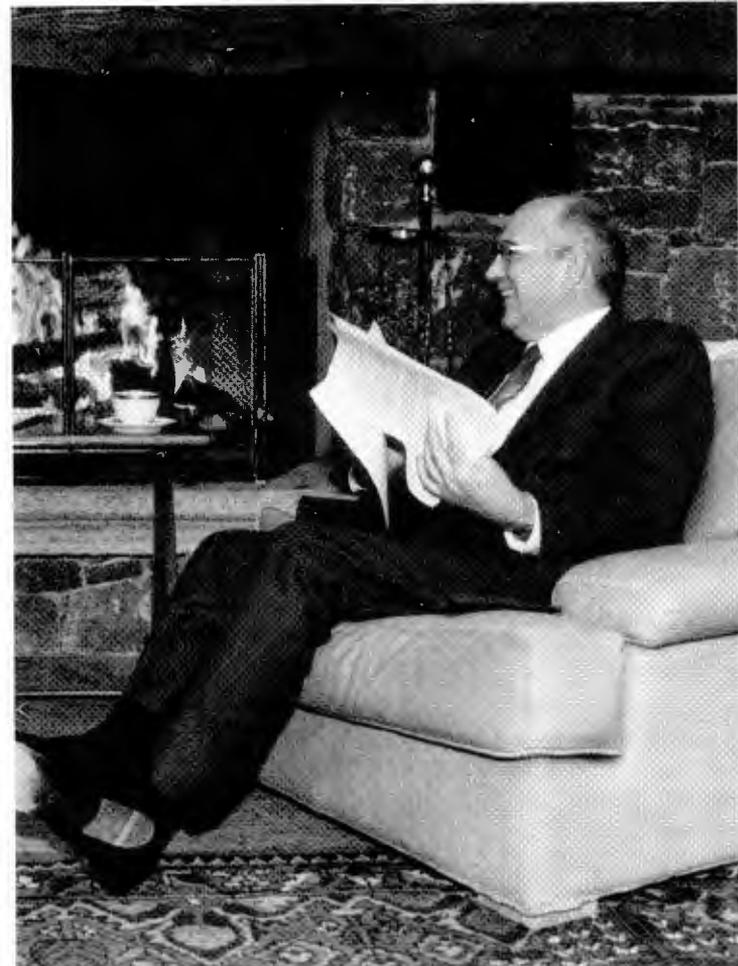
Various sops and sweeteners were offered to the poorer and less globally oriented countries. Western firms, capital and technology could build them the industrial and infrastructural preconditions for



*One world, but not yet: Ronald Reagan and Photograph from Russia, A Histor*

modernity, in return for the taking over of their now handicapped countries. Recolonise the decolonised. (And at the same time save trouble with GATT and its successors, and, of course, the IMF backers—the 50 great banks who finance, and therefore run, world commerce, and the 200 multinationals. Incidentally, although the IMF is funded mainly by Western taxpayers and depositors, it takes its economic philosophy and order of battle from the aforesaid great private institutions. Probably the best term for the One World which is emerging would be a Global Plutocracy.)

**A** SECOND DEVICE for bringing poor and underdeveloped nations kicking and screaming into the marketplace was to offer loans and tied aid to their governments and business communities. They have been encouraged to run up enormous debt—incapable of being repaid, or in some cases serviced—the 'debt trap' so often written about. When the prodigal society has reached, or is reaching, the point of declaring a moratorium on repayments—a way of announcing bankruptcy—the IMF and the rich countries step in to 'rescue' it and 'bail it out', all the while chiding it for its profligacy. We are watching this surgical intervention at the moment in Thailand,



Mikhail Gorbachev's fireside chat in 1985. y, Oxford University Press, 1997.

South Korea and Indonesia, with Mexico a recent 'success story'. Mexican wages dropped by half—to ten per cent of American. Russia is shaping up as another candidate for bail out. The price of Western intervention is the opening up of markets to Western goods and services without hindrance, allowing outsiders to acquire businesses, banks, public utilities, insurance companies—indeed, any profitable local activity, at bargain basement prices.

As a consequence of such strategies a whole new world has arisen, along with the new problems which Greider considers so daunting.

Richer Western states are now affected. After decades of brisk growth and rising exports, a structure of high wages, a unionised workforce, and generous welfare and educational entitlements had become *de rigueur* in Western European nations. Over-full employment produced strong, indeed irresistible, demands for migrants and guest workers. But now, these economies are having to contend with competitors who pay low wages, whose unions are weakened, who have surplus labour, and whose tax regimes maximise profits for investors.

Western unions demand that wages and conditions be held (and this extends to junior wage rates) while welfare lobbies exert pressure to preserve existing

entitlements, and lobbying governments to move into new areas of social care. European governments seem unwilling to take on these lobbies. One striking exception was Thatcher, whose efforts meant that British labour costs fell to about half those of West Germany.

In response to the rigidity of their socio-economic systems, European plants and capital have gone offshore, first to Asia (as did American and then Japanese) and now into Russia and Eastern Europe. Unemployment in France and Germany is hitting 13 per cent, with a far higher rate for youth and the East Germans. Many other European countries locked into big welfare spending, high taxes, and resistant unions are in similar situations.

By contrast, the Americans, in 'freeing up' the labour market, and creating millions of five-dollars-an-hour jobs, reduced unemployment figures drastically. They have a patchwork

quilt of part-time and casual labour (one section of the working poor), plus those still with full-time work. American leaders say it is better for their people to have work—even poorly paid and episodic—than none at all, and have to live perhaps indefinitely on relief. I think that they have a point—especially with regard to unemployed youth, many of whom are now poorly educated and unmotivated. Often it is a brave employer who takes them on, but anything, almost anything, which offers them work is worth trying. But the US advocacy is a basically defeatist, even doleful, ploy.

They are saying that capitalism can no longer provide gainful or meaningful work for more and more citizens—especially the young—and is unlikely ever to do so. And that the gulf between rich and poor is widening, and is bound to widen even more. This is a very serious indictment of an economic system.

But worse, if all trade barriers go, according to plan, and the cheap labour countries keep aggressively exporting, and meeting Western/Japanese imports with cheaper versions of the same, produced by themselves, then the pressure on old-style Western economies is going to increase. Wages may have to be lowered even more in Europe and the West—a slippery slide (this

is the fear of Western unions). As if to add insult to injury, the US Federal Reserve Bank, which influences growth rates and interest rates elsewhere, is running a deflationary regime, which is deliberately keeping Western growth down to two-and-a-half to three per cent. All in the interest of fighting inflation, it says. There is little present evidence for its professed fears of inflation, but its regime does ensure that unemployment doesn't fall and domestic saving rates are difficult to lift. A reserve army of unemployment inhibits all sides of industrial or political radicalism, but it also creates greater strains on domestic budgets—lower growth generates less taxation revenue, sizeable unemployment adds considerably to social security costs.

**T**HE WEALTHY and powerful of the West are demanding and getting progressively lower wage rates, inroads into the welfare state and the de facto right of corporations and the rich to avoid paying taxes. Rupert Murdoch, for example, by some calculations pays only six cents in the dollar. But Murdoch is by no means alone. The pressure to raise indirect taxes on the poor and the middle classes and to move away from income and corporate tax, is continuous, and slowly succeeding.

Democratic governments can either accept this regressive tax philosophy, and cut and cut their spending—remember that welfare is a major part of modern budgetary outlays—or they can go into budget deficitting, which sooner or later raises the ire of the world's bankers, who helped force them into this situation. But provided that the country keeps its debt within manageable proportions—while running a reserve army of unemployed, a contracting welfare system, and a tariff-free economy—it will be in the good books of the IMF. After all, debt servicing is the *raison d'être* of banking—if no-one borrowed, they'd go broke. So Australia pays A\$13–14 billion per annum (which keeps expanding), a similar amount in remitting dividends and rent to overseas investors and, as tariffs fall, a rising import bill. And people wonder why every Australian government now finds itself running a current account deficit of, say, \$30 billion in a difficult trading time such as now.

We could tax corporations and the rich—who by statistical evidence are getting richer—very quickly. But neither party is game—and few in the media speak of this black hole in our social accounting. *Verboten*.

Greider's analysis finds itself in several serious dilemmas. First, Greider is a Green: he deplores the total emphasis on growth and the ecological and social effects which flow—malignantly, he concludes. But he has earlier called for more growth in the West, and thinks that the poor world should not be denied a similar right to grow and grow. Equity is thereby satisfied, no matter what the consequences. But what remains of his Green position? He suggests essentially cosmetic changes, to square the circle.

And he bemoans the maldistribution of access to credit—the already rich, with collateral (theirs or someone else's) can borrow freely, even imprudently, and at cheaper rates than those as yet without collateral. So the rich get richer on cheap easy credit; the remainder of us tread water. So, he concludes, credit should be generally and equally available, for it does wonders for growth. Greider, for all his distaste for the acquisitive society and the capitalist ethic, thinks capitalism is the only option open to us. Socialism had been tried and has failed. Our task is to domesticate capitalism, and humanise it. Part Four is taken up with this. I'll just say that I found this the weakest part of the book.

**G**REIDER VISITED a number of countries of importance for the development of his analysis, including Thailand, Indonesia, India, Japan and China. He also writes most knowledgeably about Eastern Europe and the West proper. What he observes makes for depressing reading, although it's pretty much what we know. The dependence on child labour and sweated non-union workers, paid wages below subsistence, is

generally accepted in all these countries (except Japan, where things are very different). It is not only widespread, but conducted under a regime of intimidation and total lack of legal protection and redress.

Foreign multinationals are in the thick of it, and in a sense have shown the local rich the way. Thus Nike is deeply involved in local production centres in Indonesia. It advertises status symbol footwear worn by sports stars such as Michael Jordan. In 1992, Jordan was reported as earning US\$20 million from Nike (*Forbes*, 23 November 1992). The 25,000 Indonesian workers involved each earn US\$400–500 a year at most—about US\$12.5 million in total.

But, as Greider says, General Motors, Boeing, General Electric and many other major US manufacturers, and all the Japanese, German, Korean and Taiwanese producers, collude with the corrupt repressive governments of Asia, in keeping down wages, prices and living standards—so that foreigners and the local political and military élites can profit enormously. The recently announced intention of the IMF to clean up corruption and undemocratic practices in, for example, Indonesia, will not remove Western actors, but simply give them a chance to gobble up local entrepreneurs. The bottom line is exploitation and extortion backed, where necessary, by force.

One interesting fact is that until this last Asian meltdown, American capital was being needed less and less—the local rich were profiting at such a rate as to supply most of their capital needs. The great Western rentiers have been making more and more by lending to their own

governments—now deeply in debt. In the US, interest costs have gone from US\$52.5 billion in 1980 to US\$184 billion in 1990. By 1996, debt payments reached US\$250 billion. This equalled expenditure on Defence, or Medicare and Medicaid combined. As I said earlier, bankers are ambivalent about governments that start balancing budgets, and retiring debt, as Victoria and our Commonwealth are doing at the moment. Indeed, Greider describes the overall economic system as a Rentiers Regime, rather than a making and doing milieu (see chapter thirteen).

It is clear, he thinks, that things like cars, planes, ships, computers and an ever-increasing number of items being made or services offered are in surplus; and every device from mass advertising, suicidal lending practices, dumping, subsidising, to blocking competitors on political grounds (for example, Libya, Iraq and—the US would hope—Iran) are in season. But production for exports keeps rising, new actors join the cast, farmers are rendered redundant and head for the cities. The downward pressure on wages and conditions is most unlikely to ease, hence it is also quite unlikely that political repression will start to disappear. But the export trade in democratic political façades—made in the US or Geneva—is not going to lack customers.

Greider's *One World* is no quick read: it has masses of startling and relevant statistics in the endnotes, even more telling than his arguments. I suggest it for the coming winter nights, for that is its season. ■

**Max Teichmann** is a freelance political analyst and reviewer.

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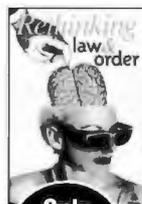
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# The inward muse

**A** Navel Gazing: Essays, Half-truths and Mystery Flights, Peter Goldsworthy, Penguin, 1998. ISBN 0 14 027455 3, RRP \$16.95

ALL WRITING, according to a fashionably sceptical contemporary theory (it's called 'intertextuality'), is an exercise in recycling. Texts are made of other texts, and of no book is this more true than a collection of essays. For the last little while, Australian writers have been furiously gathering up their ephemerally published essays and articles to make into books and sell a second time. The poet, novelist and GP, Peter Goldsworthy, here has sixteen of his 'pieces' (his preferred term) presented as a Penguin.

Most essay collections tend to be a sort of accessory to an established writer's main work, but Goldsworthy's pieces are far more explicitly tied up with his stories and poems, the business of writing, and various aspects of 'being a writer'. Hence, perhaps, the title—wry, but apt given that the unity of any collection of literary miscellanea derives from the personality and voice of the writer.

The voice that we hear in this collection is clear, chatty, smart, unpretentious. Despite a clear delight in memorable and well-shaped sentences, Goldsworthy, in his preface, professes some discomfort with the seeming preciousness and schoolishness of the crafted essay, so the reader of his collected pieces has to live with a fair bit of overlap—like instalments in a conversation in which Goldsworthy (like all of us) keeps revisiting his main preoccupations.

Naturally enough, he has things to say about literary fashions and practices; in particular he is intrigued by the processes to which his own work has been subjected: being translated, studied in school, turned into films—there is an insightful piece on each of these. Some writers would keep their distance, just let these things happen and the royalties accrue, but Goldsworthy is unaffectedly amused and curious. Far from being protective of his work, he is modestly open to the visions and versions of others, prepared to learn both their insights and confusions.

The boot is on the other foot when he is commissioned to turn Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* into an opera libretto, and his account of this is one of

two pieces about the relationship of literature to music, which readers of *Maestro* will recognise as a theme that preoccupies him. Or which they will think they recognise: his piece about literary fame (such as it is), 'Narcissism and its Mirrors', chronicles the often amusing misapprehensions his readers and commentators exhibit. (But can we believe that he has more than once signed a copy of Goldsworthy's *The Forsythe Saga*?) Music is in fact a deep love, although he contrasts its 'beautiful, sweeping simplicities' with 'the moral power of ... words', yet readers ought not imagine him to be an accomplished pianist himself.



It seems that magazine editors often ask him to write about the themes that he explores in his stories. (He is a great believer in 'stories' rather than essays, but certainly rather than 'fictions'—a pretentious term which he believes insufficiently acknowledges the human need for literary experiences that are memorable and carefully shaped. This is expounded in the longest, best and most original piece in the book, 'The Biology of Literature'.) On the basis of *Honk If You Are Jesus* he is asked to write about literature and science, of *Maestro*, about literature and history (and music), of *Wish*, about the nature of consciousness, and animal intelligence. .

He doesn't pretend to be a profound theorist of these matters, but is well-read, speculative and whimsical.

Despite his roving intelligence, he strikes the reader as ordinary and approachable, open-minded. Not strictly an 'ideas man', himself, although he knows a good idea when he sees one.

In these pieces he is a natural teacher. He's a populist in the very best sense, unpacking philosophical and scientific ideas in his novels—and in his poetry. In his latest collection of verse, *If, Then* (1996), there are series of poems about chemistry, the spectrum, numbers and seven philosophical problems. He finds such things interesting, but with a detachment which seems to me consistent with his other calling, medicine. The relation between writing and medical practice is the subject of another piece, 'Death and the Comedian'.

Most writers (with a family and reputation to support) are compelled to spend a fair amount of time traipsing around doing signings, conferences, launches, interviews and residencies: talking about their books, talking about writing their books, and talking about doing signings, conferences, launches, interviews and residencies. Goldsworthy is enmeshed in all this activity, and regards it with a wry patience. His medical other life stops him from taking it all too seriously.

What with death, consciousness, cloning, a piece about pop-cultural paranormality, Goldsworthy is often on the verge of religion, but religiosity seems not to be part of his sensibility. He seems particularly attracted to topics which lead in metaphysical directions, but never make it and he is curious about, even interested in, religion as a phenomenon.

Of blurbs, Goldsworthy tells us that 'authors usually write, or at least authorise, their own'. His describes him as 'funny, wise, idiosyncratic and original', which—even allowing for overstatement—seems to be in about the right ball park. ■

Paul Tankard teaches writing courses, reads and writes essays, and is doing a doctorate.

# FLASH IN THE PAN



## Big Ben

*Ben Hur*, dir. William Wyler, 1959 (Astor Theatre, Melbourne). The Astor managed an astute blend of religion and commerce by releasing this new 70mm version of the 40-year-old, 11-Academy-Awards-winning epic on Good Friday—just in time to give *Titanic* a tilt.

But *Ben Hur* retains grandeur enough to allay cynicism. With a cast and resources a modern director can only envy (51,000 extras—think of the employment!) Wyler uses primal technology—muscle and horse power to make digital whizzbangery look merely inventive. These humans and horses are stretched beyond endurance but in ways we both comprehend and desire. Perhaps that is one explanation of the film's enduring appeal (and our perennial fascination with Olympic Games or mountain climbing).

Then there is the script. General Lew Wallace's *Tale of the Christ* has had many hands on it, including an uncredited Gore Vidal and some out-of-copyright gospel authors. So the material is rich, if unrealised—Hollywood is nervy around the numinous; Wyler's efforts at it shuttle between the literal and the portentous. But the stark Christian narrative that threads through the film's heroics remains a strange and irreducible ground against which all the posturing and power play is measured, so Wyler clearly understood something.

The two grand action scenes—the sea

battle with drums and expendable galley slaves, and the extraordinary, 20-minute chariot race—are rightly celebrated. And so are some of the performances. Jack Hawkins (as Arius) gives action gravitas; Charlton Heston (Ben Hur) has a surer command of horses than dialogue, but physique, in this film, speaks volumes. Stephen Boyd, as Marcella, Ben Hur's sometime friend and unregenerate Roman, dies well. He also makes credible—well almost—the film's homo-erotic ordeals,

while Heston plays along, all unwitting. Frank Thring has the time of his life as Pontius Pilate.

Miklós Rózsa's score is movie music in the grand manner, and the Astor's new sound system does it justice. It's not subtle—nothing about *Ben Hur* is subtle. But then, how can you resist a film with an overture?

—Morag Fraser

## Not wild about Harry

*Deconstructing Harry*, dir. Woody Allen (general release). Unlike a cinematic namesake, the trouble with this Harry is not that he's dead, but that his real-life relationships add up to a total mess.

A successful writer, Harry (Woody Allen) has left behind him a trail of weary wives, loathing lovers, resentful relatives and frustrated friends. When his old school, which kicked him out, invites him back to bestow an honour on him, he is faced with the problem of finding someone who cares enough about him to accompany him to the ceremony.

At the time of the invitation, Harry is more unpopular than usual as he has just published a novel based on thinly disguised fact in which he had spread the dirt about his friends and relatives. 'Converting misery into gold', as one victim puts it.

After an hilarious sex scene which features 'Grandma interruptus', the rest of the surprisingly complex movie continues

to be very entertaining. It is also uneven, but the number of 'cameo' appearances make it difficult to imagine its being otherwise.

Told by flashbacks and fantasy, interwoven with tortured reality, Allen plays the neurotic character with whom we are perhaps too familiar. The other 18 featured players make what they can of the lines allotted to them (and a few of their own!) in the 95 minutes available. Mariel Hemingway fares worst with an estimated 17 words, while Judy Davis gives the impression that the director has gone to lunch and that she has just learned about a new category for Over Acting at the Academy Awards. Among the well-known cast, Robin Williams (as the out-of-focus man), Kirstie Alley (as an ex-wife) and Hazelle Goodman (as the hooker) are great fun.

The writer Allen has come up with some sparking lines and gags, but Allen the self-indulgent director has let himself down by permitting some humour that exceeds bad taste and is just plain cruel. Perhaps the time has come for Allen to engage another director to give discipline to his movies and for him to concentrate on what he does best—writing the wittiest dialogue in the business.

—Gordon Lewis

## Retro blues

*Blues Brothers 2000*, dir. John Landis (general release). The saving grace, I have to say from the outset, is the music, and the makers knew this. The beginning is clouded by the reminder that John Belushi, John Candy and Cab Calloway are dead. Elwood (Dan Aykroyd) is released from an 18-year jail sentence alone, and waits, with trademark savvy restraint, on the bleak highway for 24 hours until he is rescued by the girlfriend of an old associate. During this, the cinema resounds with 'John the Revelator' sung a cappella with total authenticity, reminding us where the motherlode of all this music is. The progenitor is *echt* blues, and its offspring (R&B, soul and gospel) are given an airing while its bastard grandchildren (sequenced techno bites, plastic hiphop and 'soulless mushy ballads') are attacked in an enjoyable rant which gets the band onside with Elwood and the audience onside with the film. It's a pity the plot didn't let it happen sooner, but the music takes over and, with a dash of magical realism courtesy of a Louisiana Witch Queen (Erykah Badu—fabulous voice), the film finds itself.

Yes, the story is paper-thin, and afflicted with sequelitis to a perilous degree: Elwood gets out of jail and needs a car so he can get the old band going again. There is a very talented child, Buster (J. Evan Bonifant) who will draw in the younger kids if their parents don't mind them hearing the word *sheeit* a fair bit, or seeing the bouncy numbers in the strip joint. Along the way, Elwood teams up with John Goodman, and they encounter the legends of their art, including Aretha Franklin, James Brown and Wilson Pickett.

There is very little violence except for some machine-gunning from Russian gangsters, but this is a movie where the gunmen always miss. Multitudes of cars roll, spin, and crash, but the occupants always crawl out with nothing broken but their watches. But the final scenes are the best, as the boys elude police, white supremacists and the Russian mafia to take part in a battle of the bands that includes a dreamteam jam session: Jeff Baxter, Eric Clapton, Bo Diddley, B.B. King, Travis Tritt, Jimmie Vaughan on guitar; Isaac Hayes, Lou Rawls, Koko Taylor, Steve Winwood on vocals; Dr. John, Paul Shaffer (piano); Clarence Clemons (sax); Jacques de Johnette (drums); Charlie Musselwhite (harmonica); Billy Preston (organ); and many more. It has you foot-tapping and wishing the cinema had aisles wide enough to dance in.

—Juliette Hughes

## Bill's faction

*Primary Colors*, dir. Mike Nichols (general release). The hype surrounding *Primary Colors*, that it is an exercise in 'faction', detailing the scandals attendant on Bill Clinton's successful bid for the presidency—with only the names changed—is untrue. While certain of the events and people depicted bear superficial resemblances to the historical record, others—the trash-talking dust-buster Libby Holden (superbly played by Kathy Bates), the quixotic campaign of Freddy Picker (Larry Hagman)—have no 'real-lifestyle' parallels whatsoever, nor does the course of Jack Stanton's campaign bear much resemblance to Clinton's. This film is fiction, and should be treated as such.

That said, *Primary Colors* is the best film about contemporary American political culture to come our way for years. Elaine May has produced an entertaining and literate screenplay from Herbert Klein's 'anonymous' novel. Mike Nichols' direction is secure, and the camera work is stunning.

But the real strength is in the acting. The leads—John Travolta as candidate Governor Jack Stanton, and Emma Thompson as his tough-minded wife Susan—head a superb ensemble cast, of which Bates and *Sling Blade's* Billy Bob Thornton, as a manic spin-doctor, are quite outstanding. Black comedy as it is, the film does engage seriously with the big issues of American political culture, indeed the question of the ends justifying the means is a universal one.

*Primary Colors* is also a film about the New South, the post-civil-rights Democratic South, and its people. This is the South where blacks and whites eat barbecue together, hug each other and cry about their dead mothers together ('momathons' the snippy and non-Southern Susan calls them), sing choruses of 'You Are My Sunshine' together. This South remains as regionally distinctive, and as incomprehensible to outsiders, as it has always been, and the film captures this beautifully.



There is, however, one connection between the fictional Jack Stanton and the real candidate Clinton, and that has to do with their political message. In this sense, Stanton speaks Clinton's lines, and does it so well that it not only explains why, against the odds, Clinton beat a strong incumbent, but also why he remains wildly popular, despite all the sleaze and scandal. In 1992, he touched the lives of ordinary people, he helped them believe in a better future, and he does so still. That is why they forgive him his many trespasses, something the Kenneth Starrs of this world will never comprehend.

—John Salmond

## This blasted corn

*A Thousand Acres*, dir. Jocelyn Moorhouse (Hoyts). When Larry Cook (Jason Robards) decides to divide his sprawling and elegant mid-western American farm between his three daughters, Rose (Michelle Pfeiffer), Ginny (Jessica Lange) and Caroline (Jennifer

Jason Leigh), you begin to wonder if there isn't more than a suggestion of *King Lear* in this film. The girls just happen to share the initials of Regan, Goneril and Cordelia. Rose and Ginny accept Cook's offer immediately; Caroline hesitates and her father slams the door in her face. But before too long, this once-great figure, a farmer who would be sought out by the entire district for his advice, is caught in a storm with nowhere to go and nowhere to belong. His plight divides the community. Neighbours make it known that the old man has been poorly treated. The older daughters are cast as fiends and Caroline re-enters the story on the side of her father.

Nevertheless, *King Lear* is just the germ of the film and, I presume, of the Pulitzer Prize winning novel by Jane Smiley on which it is based. The story does have a life of its own, mainly because it sees things from the point of view of the two older sisters. Rose is suffering from breast cancer, the illness that killed her mother, and her husband, Peter (Kevin Anderson) has trouble coping with her physical disfigurement. Rose and Ginny, it turns out, have also been abused as teenagers by their father. Eventually, Larry and Caroline go through the courts in a futile attempt to win back the farm. The local county court may not be quite the image of justice explored in *King Lear*, but the issue soon becomes not how the two women can hold onto the farm but how they can liberate themselves from it. Looking back on her life, Rose declares that one of her few real attainments has been that she never forgave the unforgivable. Their father has never shown the least understanding. He is his own fool.

—Michael McGirr sj

## Junk in orbit

*Lost in Space*, dir. Stephen Hopkins (Village). The TV precursor was kitsch; the film is dross.

The 1990s Robinson family is brattish and maladjusted. To remake them into a Ronald Reagan happy family, Hopkins sends them all into hyperspace, soots animated coathangers onto them, explodes a galaxy or two, and bingo, they bond in adversity. Even the robot gets a heart. In the process Hopkins turns a hapless William Hurt (Prof Robinson) into Kevin Costner, wastes Gary Oldman (who plays Dr Smith as Iago) and plunders (homage, phooey!) every trick since H.G. Wells' *Time Machine*. But who cares? Listen to the dull thud of the dollar.

—Morag Fraser



## Autocue blues

**M**Y DOG TAKES sporadic interest in what's happening on the box. Any program with a four-footed element gets her attention right away. Sometimes music has her crooning along: she is very sensitive to sounds. But most of the time she lolls like a dead horse on the floor or the sofa, incomprehending of our

inexplicable preference for flashes of light that have no smell, no taste and no feel.

The other night during a particularly corrosive screening of *Parliament Question Time* she gave a whingey sort of sigh, hauled her bulk off the floor and exited to the back yard to get better entertainment looking for buried bones. Peter Reith was in full nag at the time, in that peculiar braying tenor of his, fulminating and jeering at something or other—I can't quite remember what. But the impression of ceaseless cataracts of negativity and gloating remained to spoil a peaceful night.

It wasn't what anyone might call entertainment, and the presentation of the material swamped its content for this viewer. But perhaps it was informative (though certainly not infotainment) and perhaps that is a good thing. In future times, when historians want to know about the hands that steered this country's policies, they'll want the videos of Parliament, if only to get a look at what really happened before Hansard polished up parliamentarians' prose, and corrected gross factual errors (as was done with Pauline Hanson's maiden speech, for instance).

So *Parliament Question Time* is an example of television's relevance to history, something close to a real document of an occurrence rather than a product from the current affairs machines with their various agendas. You see the flavour of parliamentary life in the ritualised sparring set against the bored or angry faces of our representatives. The insults and childishness, the terrier-like persistence with a point of order or with an argument, make you very sorry for the families of some politicians. And sorer still for those whose lives will be affected by the decisions they make.

It's not easy viewing, but then neither are *Today Tonight*, *A Current Affair* or *McFeast Live*, for me at any rate. They want to *make* history, of a sort. (If you say 'posterity' on these programs they'll probably assume you're saying something about bottoms.) The turning of events into history or hype is an exercise in emphasis, after all. Some would claim that all is in fact history, that our popular culture is the message, that there are no independent observers, so it's all a matter of competing viewpoints. That holds true for me for as long as it takes to realise that the result of this will be that whoever controls the flow of information can do what they damn well want with it.

We only have to look at *Media Watch* (honourably resurrected under Richard Ackland) to see how the hard men of the media pursue their interests by feeding the populace what they want it to want. Ackland's interview with Peter Manning, late of the ABC and now in charge of current affairs at Channel Seven, was an illuminating experience. Yes, Mr Manning thought that the ABC had much to offer, but 'we [the commercial current affairs producers] tend to come in at the *pointy*

end', he said, adding that the ABC's approach was more 'systemic'. He defended the idea of going after unemployed surfies 'because we were responding to community concern' which had been expressed, it turns out, by the time-honoured method of the neighbourhood dobber ringing up the program. The danger of course, is that people will not make the connection from the 'pointy end' of an unemployed youth's reasons for being on the dole to the 'systemic' fact that our economy owes its present state of low inflation and low interest rates to high rates of unemployment. It's there to be read in the financial pages, or to be commented on by the *7.30 Report*, but I doubt that you'd find *A Current Affair* or *Today Tonight* making that connection for their viewers as long as their network bosses adhere to political and economic doctrines that want to make the country's workforce scared, overworked, and de-unionised.

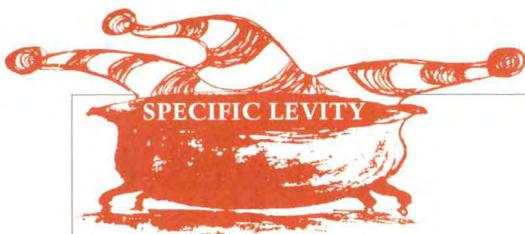
That's partly why Roy and H.G.'s new show was such a delight. *The Channel Nine Show* on April 4 was a ruthless satire on Nine's very essence, taking apart its ads, its promos, its *modus operandi*. John Doyle and Greig Pickhaver are geniuses. They managed to make Ray Martin display the intellectual and moral vacuity of his program, (right down to allowing that fronting was so very easy because the work is all done for him, and that the sententious scribbling at the end is about nothing) without once putting him on his guard. The attacks were genially expressed, but Martin walked over the hot coals, oblivious to the smell of roasting sole. Next guest Kate Fischer knew ('I saw what you did to Ray...'). She may be dyslexic ('Which kind?' asked Doyle, sharply but quite genuinely), but James Packer had better marry her because she is far more on the ball than some of his employees. She was funny, intelligent and interesting. Channel Nine loved it, however, and TV critic Ross

Warneke wondered how long Roy and H.G. could survive just hanging onto Channel Nine's creative flow...

**L**ISBETH GORR'S WELCOME FOR HARD MEN of all creeds and creds is a warm and glowing one (she has hugged Peter Reith after all), although I feared at first she had bitten off more than she could chew with Mark Read. But no: she led him like a bull to the ring and played him ruthlessly until she had finished enjoying herself. I wanted the interview (the show?) to end at the point where Chopper stated that he was too drunk to do himself justice, but perhaps Gorr imagined she was up there in the same league as the Michael Aspel program on that famous occasion when Oliver Reed embarrassed everybody until Clive James took him to task for it.

My teenage son and his mates loved the Read humiliation, and that is because they also like violent movies and listen to Wu Tang and Nine Inch Nails. The media love Chopper because he is a Colourful Character. They don't care about him any more than Mike Munro cared about the Paxtons when he was destroying their characters and that frail bubble, their reputation, serving the desire of the big media men to put *unpaid* to the victims of the economic policies that serve their avarice. We all lose in that game, unless 'we' happen to be a politician with a portfolio. Of shares. ■

Juliette Hughes is a freelance writer and critic.



## Eureka Street Cryptic Crossword no. 63, May 1998

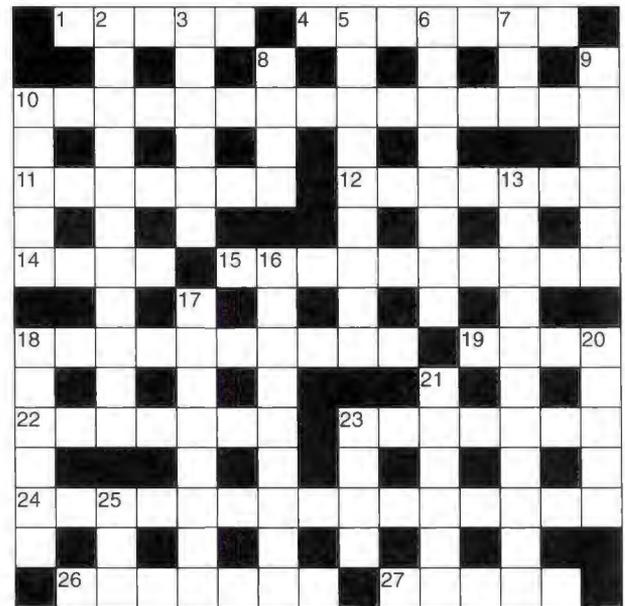
Devised by Joan Nowotny IBVM

**ACROSS**

1. It sounds like a bit of fruit bestowed as a gift on the first 24-across ... (5)
4. ... as well as a gift of love, though wary about it. (7)
10. Not as cold as 2-across is reputed to be—the type of suit journalist brings to the promontory, providing warmth. (4-11)
11. Starts on and somehow breaks my first venture. (7)
12. Ancient civilisation before the Common Era? Could refer to later languages. (7)
14. Those who are agin 'us' in common parlance? (4)
15. The task set is to come to an agreement about the broken china. (10)
18. In the gospel described as great, but cropped by weird earth thieves without, that is, a labourer in sight. (3,7)
19. Dad in this cries 'ouch'. (4)
22. Specialist has fall trying to board coach. (7)
23. One of four Cardinals, simply in charge of English inauguration. Should be related to 4-across. (7)
24. Checked energy price on day for getting a tan. Time for gifts and fruits! (9,6)
- 26 & 27. Those who inherit the kingdom could be so described but not, we hear, felon involved with cat. (5,2,5)

**DOWN**

2. Being raised to a higher dignity, earls, for example, found inter-net (tangled). (11)
3. Firm, at this point, should hold together. (6)
5. Haphazard clash with alternative maiden. (3,2,4)
6. The cost of the smallest piglet is about 10 cents. That's a mere beginning! (8)
7. As a basic digit indicating success, scientists are seeking a Theory of Everything. (3)
8. A weighty service! (4)
9. Sounds like a sure thing that you confidently declare. (6)
10. Nell heard timer beginning to sound and made her obeisance. (5)
13. It could be said of politicians, acting like boisterous children, that they ... (4,1,6)
16. After a late nap, strangely, smokes a slender Spanish cigar—sold in America. (8)
18. Alternately, its weed rope's for the silly dopes! (6)
20. Cockney might deny 'e was poor. (5)
21. Appropriate surmise! (6)
23. Member of old Germanic tribe who had a project to reach the English coast. (4)
25. Nothing to declare in Victorian town! (3)



Solution to Crossword no. 62, April 1998



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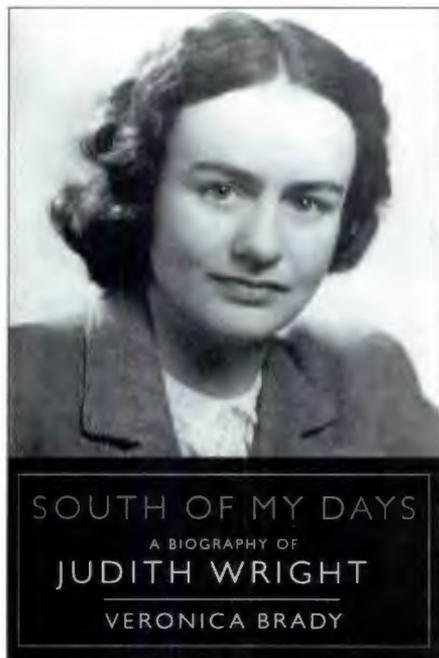
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