

Reviews

DOMINANT CULTURE STUPIDITIES

Susan Hawthorne, *Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation and Bio/diversity*, Spinifex Press, 2003

Susan Hawthorne's *Wild Politics* is an effective and convincing critique of the major aspects of globalisation in the contemporary world. It offers an interdisciplinary, synthetic approach, impressively summing up a broad range of relevant international literature in the area of economics, law, politics and culture, with emphasis on an indigenous and ecofeminist point of view.

In Hawthorne's understanding, the cultural logic of our time is disconnected from everyday reality, its 'one-size-fits-all' approach creates uniformity and sameness: standardised products for allegedly standardised populations. This disengaged 'dominant culture ideology' is appropriative, homogenising, and ultimately destructive. Globalisation can be compared to a military operation encroaching on economic, social and cultural structures in order to

take shortcuts towards financial profit. There is no room for disagreement or discussion; the methods used to oppress others for gain depend on coercion or outright violence and institutionalised theft through economic organisations under a system of laws which serve only the interests of the dominant party.

This results not only in 'systemic irresponsibility' and complete disregard of local customs and circumstances, but also in a syndrome the author calls 'Dominant Culture Stupidities'. Dominant culture (white, male, heterosexual, middle class, mobile)—twenty per cent of the world's population controls eighty per cent of its resources—blinded by the search for golden fleece is unable to perceive reality from a perspective other than its own, considering it the only valid option. The consequences of the ensuing actions tend not to be considered beyond the short-term financial objectives, the side effects of which include disrespect for indigenous knowledge and loss of cultural heritage. Among the

outcomes of this logic, the author pinpoints such examples as the concept of *terra nullius*, which erases thousands of years of human history and experience in Australia and Africa; the idea of feeding meat to herbivores, resulting in BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) and other diseases and the subsequent slaughter of sick animals; and the construction of a military base on the Mokapu peninsula, Hawaii's sacred site, which is equated with locating a military base in the Vatican. As a result of globalisation local communities start producing goods for export and local resources are exploited for the profit of corporations. Native traditions lose currency and a way of life which provided balance for a community and its land is lost as a result. Hawthorne highlights silences in the dominating discourse; for example, the fact that the USA did not enter various international treaties related to patenting rights resulted in absurdities such as the granting of a patent on basmati rice to a company located in Texas as recently as 1997, which led to a protest by Indian farmers.

The solution to these problems, as advocated by Hawthorne, consists of the decolonisation of economics—a

concentrated effort on sustaining life versus the exploitation of it, which can be achieved by substituting the profit motive with the biodiversity motive. Biodiversity consists of 'wild types', marginalised groups like women, the poor, the disabled, sexual dissidents, migrants and refugees. The author emphasises the creative element of unpredictability in diversity, keeping in mind the interdependence of all the constituents in the worldwide ecosystem.

The advantage associated with the position of the marginal groups is their broader, 'multiversalist' perspective, the familiarity with both their own, localised way of being and with the ways of the dominant system. Hawthorne cites indigenous methods of maintaining a symbiotic, nurturing relationship with local environment based on respect, responsibility and interconnectedness as an example to follow. Taking into account such 'marginal knowledges' and experiences might offer new, more constructive answers to modern dilemmas.

The book is composed of carefully assembled examples of gaps and silences in the dominant discourse, issues of importance

for ecological balance and the future of the planet as we know it. Most of these remain unaddressed by the those in positions of power because of lack of short-term financial gain involved in such discussions, and the need for the maintenance of control and status quo required to sustain such positions.

In her engaged, personalised research Hawthorne successfully depicts the relationships between power nations and their designated 'Third World'. The unrecognised work and knowledge of women, indigenous people and other marginal groups contributes largely to the profit achieved by the current economy, but remain unrewarded. Hawthorne advocates moral economy in which there are no extremes, neither starvation nor 'multibillionaires'. However, it would be difficult to convince corporate giants to forsake their basic capitalist right to get rich *ad infinitum*. The plea to stop ignoring two-thirds of the world's population because of their lower economic status is commendable, but not feasible according to the dominant logic: it is that inferior status which constitutes the basis of the superiority and prosperity of the dominant group. Capitalist apologists could argue that the 'wild types' are weak in

evolutionary terms, that survival of the strongest is the rule in the natural world. But are globalist practices truly aiding evolution or simply driving on an autopilot set on self-destruct? The general overexploitation of natural resources and rapid exhaustion of ecosystems appear to indicate the latter. This is not a new argument—in following the short-term profit strategies without considering the consequences, we are pointing the knife in the direction of our own gut in the long term.

Wild Politics offers an overall perspective on globalist practices, including their historical and philosophical backgrounds in some cases, and their effects spanning across economics, politics, forestry and farming, patent laws and genetic engineering. The possible alternatives are represented by the customs of marginal groups they came to replace. The major achievement of the book is its multidisciplinary approach, the 'multiversalist' understanding of the world we live in, its drives and their upshots. However, it offers rather a bleak vision for the future. The author herself exhibits pessimism regarding the instant gratification philosophy of capitalism and anticipates further conflicts between corporate

globalisation and the protesting parties. Reading this thorough account of exclusively negative outcomes of corporate globalisation has a depressing effect. The somewhat idealistic conclusion of the author, implausible in the face of her own research, subtitled 'Wild Politics: A Vision for the next 40,000 years', makes one wonder if it will not take at least 40,000 years and an ecological catastrophe to change the 'neoliberal capitalist' mindset and to shift its focus from short-term profit to anything else. Raising awareness on the matter is of course a worthy goal in itself.

The last, hopeful words of the book are part of a graffito on a wall, photographed in black and white: 'don't return to normal'. 'Normal', that is normative, dominant, colonised modes of thinking and acting in the world, to compliance. The author advocates that it is essential to move away and beyond the patriarchal, capitalistic way of thinking, the only goal of which is the achievement of profit. There is a pressing need to evolve culturally and ideologically beyond this model.

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MARXISM TODAY

Mike Wayne, *Marxism and Media Studies: Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends*, Pluto Press, 2003

Mark Twain's complaint that reports of his death were greatly exaggerated could be applied with equal measure to Marxist analysis. In *Marxism and Media Studies* Mike Wayne is largely successful in demonstrating not only that this mode of thinking is alive and kicking, but that it offers a coherent framework for moving beyond the postmodernist impasse. What 'it' is precisely makes an interesting question, and the parameters Wayne seeks to establish for his project appear rather fluid in some places, while in others he seeks to distance Marxism from writers relied upon earlier to support his thesis.

The difficulties of presenting a materialist analysis in the current intellectual climate, let alone one which is explicitly situated in the tradition of classical Marxism, make Wayne's foremost task one of establishing the ongoing theoretical relevance of Marxist perspectives. To this end Wayne reconnects Marxism to the rich appropriations and developments of this tradition in the work of

such influential cultural theorists as Jameson, Žižek and Habermas. The book is well worth reading as an introduction to the conceptual frames of reference that gave birth to cultural studies, but which have since been largely sublimated in the dematerialising linguistic turn of this movement.

Marxism and Media Studies is a timely reminder of the exploitative social relations that underpin and necessitate the distorted subjectivities, symbolic displacements and commodity fetishism which characterise media production and consumption under capitalism. Frequently used terms like ‘hegemony’, ‘alienation’ and ‘fetishism’ emerged from materialist analysis, and Wayne shows how they are impoverished by appropriations which wrench social and economic relations away from critiques of ideology and culture.

More than a journey re-situating Marxist ideas within current media theory, *Marxism and Media Studies* is an original contribution to the analysis of contemporary media trends and formations. The dot.com boom, ‘Big Brother’, Napster, New Labour and Hollywood are all discussed. While many examples are drawn from Britain and the

US, the globalisation of capital—and hence media—form a particular focus. The book’s attention to the social relations of media production, technological development and economic dynamics are a strong point, and provide space to engage with political economy approaches to the media. In this regard Wayne develops the concept of ‘mode of development’, situated with the mode of production, to analyse the disturbances and re-appropriations of capital online.

Later in the book, in the most challenging but rewarding section, Wayne engages with psychoanalytic approaches to theories of subject and object knowledge. Drawing on Lukács and Adorno, he develops their dialectical understandings of the subject to look beyond the structures of meaning (the focus of most contemporary media studies) to the meaning of those structures. The engagement with high theory is heavy-going, but well worthwhile, particularly given the importance of Lacanian-inspired psychoanalysis for cinema studies and Habermas for communication studies.

The cinematic examples evoked in these latter stages of the *Marxism and Media Studies* are often by way of analogy: *Dark City*

is brilliantly mobilised to demonstrate the implications of the relationship between capital and labour for the reification of social relations. On the other hand, the opening sections of the book devote more space to practical instances of media formations, such as the tabloid press, which provide models for Marxist analysis.

The gradual shift in focus towards theoretical discussion makes it hard to categorise the book as merely an introductory text, which it is clearly intended to be on one level. Certainly, the book offers a systematic presentation of the potentials of Marxist thought for media students unfamiliar with Marxism, but it also refines Marxist ideas in the light of ‘new times’ and alternative perspectives. The introductory sections draw freely on contemporary writers who present ideas grounded in materialist and dialectical thinking, before analysing their divergences through a two-way critique of Marxism and other writing connecting with Marxism from a position firmly within the former pole.

Notably absent from this critique are sociologists of culture such as Bourdieu, whose work is not only increasingly influential

but is also grounded in a class analysis of society. The phenomenological tradition, with its attention to practice and the body, is also largely ignored. Consequently, criticisms of sociological conceptions of class and conflict in chapter one are underdeveloped and lack force.

Another underdeveloped aspect is the presentation of a Marxist methodology for media studies. Interpretative tools and the locations of meaning are outlined, but the implications for research methods are not seriously debated, although it is perhaps unfair to expect too much of such a broad-ranging text. Readers may find more help in this regard from the comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography, which includes a number of contemporary Marxist writers whose work has not yet been widely used.

This book is at its best when it draws on these writers to grapple with the new social realities of an ascendant US hegemony, increasingly mobile and concentrated capital, and an academic community inadequately equipped to grasp the situation. The book presents a sustained and coherent thesis, linking each section to previous discussions. One drawback of such an integrated flow is that

readers hoping to dip in and get an idea of one or two concepts may struggle without the context of previously established cases and arguments, and may find they have to read around a bit to get what they are after (dipping is made easier, however, by the inclusion of an index).

While the flow of ideas is relatively smooth, *Marxism and Media Studies* is stylistically uneven. 'Once upon a time scarcity afflicted human kind because nature imposed certain limitations and visited certain cruelties upon us' (2) Wayne announces in his thankfully short introduction. The tone does pick up, although traces of the overblown style of Marx himself do the book no favours. Nowhere does the book reach the wit and lightness of Terry Eagleton, perhaps the most able exponent of Marxist aesthetics writing today, and whose *After Theory* provides a more entertaining, albeit narrower, introduction to Marxism and the academy.

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CYBORG FUTURE?

Morus, Iwan Rhys (ed.),
Bodies/Machines, Berg Press,
2002

We live in a world of the post-human, where artificial intelligence, prosthetics, cybernetics and the proliferation of intrusive surveillance technologies have rendered Enlightenment notions of the unified body obsolete. The boundaries that separate the human from the non-human, the corporeal from the virtual have never been so uncertain—so the story goes. But as an increasing number of historians have begun to assert, the body has always been a site of contestation, and recent attempts to rethink the cultural construction of corporeality should be taken as part of a discursive genealogy that predates the discipline of cultural studies by more than a few years.

The seven contributors to *Bodies/Machines* are united by a common interest in revisiting a crucial period in the formation of contemporary attitudes towards the body. Specifically, the writers represented here seek to open up our understanding of the physicians, philosophers and theorists upon whose shoulders are laid the responsibility of three centuries of mechanical, dualist

thinking whereby the body is seen as nothing more than a (somewhat faulty) machine. The body-as-machine metaphor is not the real target of this collection—instead, it is the extent to which this metaphor was representative of thinking amongst the early moderns that is questioned.

'For decades,' writes Elizabeth Green Musselman, 'historians mistakenly sketched the Romantic, vitalist or spiritualist as the exceptional spoilsport for mechanized, industry-minded science' (67). Like most of the contributions to this ambitious collection, Green Musselman's essay seeks to address the historical divide between what C P Snow dubbed 'the two cultures' of science and the humanities. Like most of the essays, too, it does so with mixed success.

Editor Iwan Rhys Morus sets out the goal of *Bodies/Machines* in an introduction that establishes some weighty expectations: to examine the diverse and complex ways in which bodies and machines have been imagined and articulated since the eighteenth century. As it turns out, however, the collection's focus is more specific—each essay examines a specific emergence of the body-machine metaphor in the history of nineteenth-century thought, and

then complicates this by demonstrating how such an emergence was never an untroubled birth.

Michael Hawkins' essay 'A Great and Difficult Thing' is an odd way to open the collection: analysing the various ways in which philosophers of Restoration England attempted to theorise a physical location for the immaterial soul, there is very little sense in which notions of the machine are brought into play. The difficulties inherent in reconciling mechanical philosophy with metaphysical thinking are well described, but the discussion is limited to the writings of only two Restoration physicians (Thomas Willis and Walter Charleton), merely hinting at the broader ethical, cultural and historical implications of this dilemma.

'England and the Machinery of Reason 1780–1830' makes a more sustained effort at addressing the various ways in which the proliferation of mechanistic philosophies enabled new and potentially troubling refigurations of the human body. William J Ashworth draws together the very public debates over the meanings represented by machinery and relates these to deeper concerns over the emerging shape of England as a nation. The

convergence of the body-machine metaphor with notions of the nation-as-body are highlighted in intriguing ways that bear witness to the more subtle ramifications of mechanistic thinking.

Elizabeth Green Musselman's 'The Governor and the Telegraph' takes as its central concern a more engaging and original topic: the actual bodies of the thinkers engaged in developing new forms of scientific practice. This is one of the collection's more engaging pieces, presenting an entertaining portrait of important minds in fallible bodies, before going on to elaborate the development of a concept of mental management which united nervous physiology with abstract philosophy.

The central work of *Bodies/Machines*, both literally and thematically, is editor Iwan Rhys Morus' own 'A Grand and Universal Panacea: Death, Resurrection and the Electric Chair'. Charting the forms of discourse that clustered around the notion of electricity during the nineteenth century, Morus reveals how fear and desire both played a part in popular imagination. Electricity was seen as a life-giving and death-dealing force, both immanent and immaterial, almost transcendent in origin yet most visible in its effects on the human body. Richard Noakes'

'Instruments to Lay Hold of Spirits' takes an equally novel topic—attempts to develop a method of scientifically verifying the claims of spiritualists by measuring ghostly manifestations. Both Morus and Noakes provide enjoyable anecdotal detail, but refrain from theorising far beyond the particulars of their respective subjects.

'Spotwatching, Bodily Postures and the "Practiced Eye"' by Graeme Gooday is built upon more solid theoretical foundations, with an original thesis which suggests that the practice of 'reading' technical instruments has always been rooted in complex notions of bodily integrity and ability. The social dimensions of this argument are well explored: for Gooday, conflicts as to what kind of body could best read a meter or gauge were in fact symptomatic of more general constructions as to the 'proper' body of the social subject.

The collection concludes with Jon Agar's 'Bodies, Machines and Noise', an end-piece that commences well but, like the essays of Noakes and Morus, soon loses itself in historical specificity. The focus is on notions of industrial noise and the appeal of silence as they emerged at the

beginning of the twentieth century, but restricts most of its explication to an examination of several Anti-Noise movements in wartime Britain. The essay presents a series of dualisms constructed by these movements (country vs city, tradition vs progress) but does not follow through on the promises of its opening statements.

Where *Bodies/Machines* succeeds is in its efforts to complicate common misconceptions as to the centrality and scope of the mechanistic view of the human body as it has evolved over the past three centuries. Green Musselman describes especially well the ways in which scientists most often charged with reducing human experience to a basic, materialist level frequently undermined these same assertions by reserving for themselves positions of transcendent genius or social superiority. As an overall work, though, the breadth of investigation is limited and fails to mount a sustained or coherent argument linking the various essays.

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GENDER & THE GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS

Rosalind Pollack Petchesky,
Global Prescriptions: Gendering Health and Human Rights, Zed Books, 2003

Rosalind Pollack Petchesky highlights the indivisibility of health, human rights and economic justice in her most recent book, *Global Prescriptions: Gendering Health and Human Rights*. As a highly acclaimed political theorist and feminist scholar, Petchesky endorses the indispensability of rights in feminist claims for political equality. While her work has primarily focused on reproductive rights, specifically abortion, Petchesky elucidates these ideas in the larger framework of globalisation and issues of social justice in her typically unfettered and exacting approach to the intricacies of feminist struggles.

Petchesky began her career as an activist fighting for 'rights' such as safe abortion, and has changed her tune as scholar and analyst in attempting to unpack the ways in which issues of development, public policy and social justice have prevented rights and access to health care, and what human rights mean in an 'era overwhelmed by global capitalism and global terrorism'.

Global Prescriptions explores the ways in which the cogency of the North American movement for gender equality of the 1960s and 1970s has transpired into a global movement with more diverse themes and actors.

The notion of the indivisibility of rights is a recurring theme in a feminist re-visioning of health care for the future. In light of feminist theoretical practice, indivisibility is paramount in enabling women socially and politically to realise their human rights. This is an idea that follows from the transnationalisation in the last two decades of the twentieth century whereby the AIDS/HIV pandemic, increasing poverty levels and the rise of fundamentalist and seemingly anti-feminist regimes have caused women's health movements to expand and encompass more than reproductive and sexual health rights.

Global Prescriptions begins with a nod to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, whose Plan of Action was one of the first documents to embody the central tenets of feminist health care so passionately advocated by women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The idea

of 'health' as a human right would appear to be a conventional inclusion in international legislation—however, a gender perspective has been glaringly omitted from legislation previous to Cairo. Petchesky acknowledges the barriers created by poverty in the developing world and mass consumer capitalism in the developed world for women in accessing health care. But it is not her aim to promote a Western feminist vision of 'universal' women's rights. She underscores the conflicts within global women's health movements to show that, like feminism, these movements are not homogenous. In contrast, the gendered nature of health is an issue of representation which must account for gender, race and class.

These indicators of diversity among women add a distinct and forceful dimension to the concept of reproductive rights. Petchesky writes that instead of being a 'Western import', 'ideas are not the property of any one nation or culture; they "travel", take on new meaning in diverse circumstances, and indeed may be used creatively to oppose the very (colonial or post-colonial) powers that once bred those ideas' (3). This sentiment encapsulates the tone of *Global Prescriptions* in exploring how non-Western

women have created their own dialogues about health, reproductive rights, and gender equality instead of the stereotypical picture of 'Third World women' acting as passive recipients of Western cultural and political ideology.

In order to promote the linkage between international conferences and the reality of the implementation of comprehensive reproductive health approaches, Petchesky examines United Nations conferences as a site of struggle for the feminist agenda. She cites that even though provisions have been made to support gender equality and economic justice, the implementation of these provisions is impaired by the various structures of power underlying global governance. Petchesky uses the Vatican as an example of an organisation that has enormous lobbying power as a religious group even though it is not a state under international law and technically should not have sway in UN accords. She argues that feminist health and human rights NGOs operate under a structure created for them by the United Nations and are limited in setting their own agenda. In this sense, Petchesky advocates for an alternative means of arriving at social justice. Women's NGOs

must work inside and outside institutionalised power in order to address the realities of women's health struggles. She also highlights the conflicts within feminist NGOs in the sense that non-Western NGOs are often struggling against the more dominant Northern NGOs which possess key resources and information on the international scale. Petchesky believes the non-Western feminist NGOs should be given more recognition and resources.

Global Prescriptions is a tremendous and impeccably researched piece of work which is most powerful in its documentation of the AIDS/HIV crisis as a site of contention over access to relevant medications and the political dynamics of 'technological protectionism' (77). Petchesky explores the production of anti-retroviral drugs in Asia, whose appearance in the pharmaceutical market is much to the chagrin of the United States which has claimed supremacy in the biotech industry. Not only profits and copyright are at stake but the claim to specialised knowledge, dripping with capitalist hypocrisy. The dire implications associated with patent protection are almost a form of institutionalised racism.

Petchesky cites alarming

statistics to support her argument. For instance, while developing countries comprise seventy-two per cent of the world's population they account for only thirteen per cent of the drug market (79). She deplores that patented medicine favours profits not people, and in subsequent chapters she contextualises the issue of AIDS/HIV by using case studies of countries which have asserted public health over corporate profit. For example, the Brazilian government's manufacture and distribution of generic anti-retroviral drugs free of charge to the population has stabilised the state of public health. The Brazilian movement to challenge profit-seeking corporate conglomerates is a model for the developing world.

Ultimately, Petchesky questions what can be done to promote a feminist vision of health for the future that encompasses human rights and social justice. The involvement of grassroots women's NGOs are critical in challenging and creating international provisions for reproductive rights. However, at a time when the 'war on terrorism' occupies permanent priority for the UN and US foreign policy, the notion of human dignity is lost. The feminist vision of a non-

violent, multilateral approach to human rights is stunted in the face of the 'unrivalled imperial might' of the world's military spending (250). Has optimism faded? What can be done?

Petchesky, the political theorist, pushes for democratisation as an ongoing process, and calls for accountability on the part of government agencies and international forums.

Her latest book inspires a movement for the enforcement of basic human rights with universal access and equality. It may not sound like a revolutionary idea. Yet the linkage between economic justice and a gendered vision of social change converges with the notions of bodies and health within the broader political and economic framework. This book has a distinct vision of the world, not only regarding health as a human right but in terms of the gendered divisions of civil society. Petchesky paints a brilliant and frightening portrait of a world gone mad; a story that will never end without mobilisation of political will and feminist re-visioning.

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WALKING THE WORK/LIFE TIGHTROPE

Barbara Pocock, *The Work/Life Collision: What Work is Doing to Australians and What to do About It*, The Federation Press, 2003

Barbara Pocock's *The Work/Life Collision*, makes an original and valuable contribution to the examination of work/life issues in Australian society today. It offers a new vision of the real experiences of Australian households and identifies key questions around the existing 'work/care' regime, highlighting the causes and effects of the work/life collision. Pocock proposes ways in which a new work/care regime can be built to enhance the quality of life for Australians. Drawing upon her already substantial body of published work on labour studies, work and family and women's issues, this book reveals that there are clear lessons and questions for Australia regarding the combination of work and family and this is what makes it at once a compelling and motivating read. Upon first reading its title and looking over the introduction, I realised that this was definitely the book I needed to read to enhance my understanding of the current state of play of work/family issues in Australia for my doctoral research.

The Work/Life Collision is grounded in a body of feminist work in sociology, including reference to Arlie Russell Hochschild and Joan Williams, among others, as well as data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the 'Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia' survey, and from Pocock's own qualitative research. The book sets out to open up questions on, and present an argument about, the 'collision' or conflict between work and care and its consequences for life in Australia. It is about the interaction between spheres of work, gender relations, consumption, community and family—issues which affect economic, demographic and social trends.

Pocock begins by defining the work/life collision through highlighting the 'changed' and 'unchanged'—a juxtaposition that currently exists between dynamic changes in work/family patterns and unchanging labour market institutions, culture and practice (2). Here she points out the fallacies or 'cover stories' which obscure the truth about work/care, including 'how domestic work is shared', 'that paid work has meant liberation and equality for women', 'family-friendly workplaces help smooth

the way for parents', and that 'flexible work practices now facilitate flexible parents' (6). Other chapters cover the collision between the labour market and mothering, love and intimacy, long and short working hours and family friendliness/unfriendliness, decision-making around work hours and care, and future goals around modifying the work and care regime.

Pocock is clearly a supporter of a new vision for how we organise work (market and family) and care in Australia. She draws on feminism's goals and legacies, including gender equity issues across women's reproductive decisions, motherhood, and the paid workforce. Gender is used predominantly in relation to the struggle experienced between women and men which is heightened by the squeeze of work on households and care. Pocock identifies the consequences or 'fallout' of the work/life collision that are commonly experienced by men and women, such as a dramatic decrease in the number of hours available to spend on homes, communities and care, declining birth rates, a culture of longer working hours (where overwork is good work), insecure jobs, evolving parental leave conditions, child care and cultural

ideas about being a 'good' or 'proper' mother (2).

Pocock identifies some very important work/life conflict issues across the domains of work, family, relationships, community and care. Of no surprise, but of particular relevance to current policy debates, is the gender analysis of work and life that points to the 'mother wars' occurring in the current Australian experience: 'The Work/Life collision is nowhere better illustrated than in relation to motherhood. Increasingly Australian mothers are workers with care responsibilities' (72). For readers interested in the current conflicting debates around the paid work and care decisions or choices of mothers, this is where the value and importance of Pocock's arguments lie. Pocock teases out debates and experiences around the strong cultural ideas of being 'a proper mother' or a 'good mother', a 'super mother', and the 'cross-criticism' that occurs between women with paid jobs who are working mums and women without paid jobs who are full-time carers—hence the 'mother wars'. Pocock points out that 'there is not a parallel debate about "good" fathers alongside the discussion of "good"

mothering ... many mothers are very aware of the contradictory messages that abound about motherhood and the clash between the economic self-interest that dominates society and the under-valuation of the care they provide' (80). This is a key issue where Pocock's qualitative data underpins her arguments and emphasises the 'pressure' experienced by women from the gender contract that women are socialised to accept.

The attention Pocock pays to debates about 'intensive mothering' will interest a wide range of readers. There are some really useful accounts of experiences concerning the ways in which many women walk a tightrope with regard to balancing work and family: "There is more pressure to be a super-mum". A retired woman who now does voluntary work argued that women "brought this upon themselves" and that they need to build clearer boundaries around mothering, so that its demands are less intensive, more shared, and less debilitating for women' (82).

This book is highly recommended and should be influential given its timely regard of men's and women's experiences of work/family issues in Australia today. It will be of

particular interest to gender, work and family students and scholars looking for a sophisticated and thoroughly accessible read on a wide array of work/life issues that affect us all. Perhaps the most significant message for the family-friendly feminist reader is that we need to look towards a new vision of work and care—one that will support both men and women in all the various roles on the work/life continuum, and that will contribute to current debates about issues important to parents and their families.

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VIEWING IMAGES OF WAR & PAIN

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Hamish Hamilton (Penguin Books), 2003

When you remember, is it a story or an image that you recall? Given the ubiquity of images, Susan Sontag claims that it is hardly surprising that, for many people, a photo, picture, painting or film clip is what resides in the forefront of their minds. For such a small book, Sontag's scope is broad. She incorporates

observations and musings on a variety of themes and topics, drawing on a wide variety of sources (such as images associated with World War I, the Holocaust, conflicts in Israel and Bosnia, and the New York terrorist attacks).

Regarding the Pain of Others is not only an examination of how we regard and view images of pain, death, suffering and war, but it is also an investigation of the implications of such observations. It is a book primarily about war, but it is grounded in discussions of photographs that depict pain. One of Sontag's central concerns is whether it is possible to look at images of war, pain and suffering and move beyond pity to understanding. Her book is a timely reflection on the imagery of war and pain, especially since it is set in a context of recent wars and horror: 11 September, the Middle East and Iraq.

The horrific image on the front cover from Goya's *Disasters of War* (created between 1810 and 1820) depicts a man with a broken neck, hanging from a tree. The most disturbing aspect of the image is the illustration in the foreground of a soldier observing the execution. Both his posture and facial expression convey relaxation and indifference. This

image seems to embody the series of questions which Sontag then raises. How do onlookers or viewers of other people's pain absorb, confront, or resist? What is the effect of our exposure to images of war and pain? What are the purposes of war images and what meanings do they convey? Can photographs be neutral and show rather than evoke?

Similar questions also appear in her earlier collection of essays *On Photography* (1977). Twenty-six years later, *Regarding the Pain of Others* stems from an Amnesty lecture that she gave in February 2001. Sontag engages in a dialogue with herself, reflecting, revisiting and even revising some of the arguments made in *On Photography*.

Sontag points out that she is revisiting a theme that has also been considered by many writers before her (36). She explores the issues surrounding people's apparent fascination with the misery and pain of others. But, on the other hand, given that images of war and suffering are pervasive, does this not dull the potential effects? Sontag argues that the potential for photographs to function as 'shock therapy' (13) does not have to diminish with time, or have 'term limits' (73). However, she cautions against the potential for slippage from

memory and commemoration to a sense of false understanding. While photographs may be powerful tools for ensuring that atrocities remain fresh and alive, commemorating the historical suffering of others (in museums, for example) does not guarantee an understanding of their pain.

To illustrate her point, Sontag contrasts the understandings of war among people who have not experienced it with people who have been close to such catastrophe. She contends that for those people removed from the war's location, their understanding of pain and suffering is a 'product of the impact of the images' (19). By contrast, for people in the war zone, the experience can often feel 'unreal, surreal, like a movie' (19). Sontag concludes with final thoughts on the distinction between the experience of war as opposed to the experience of war imagery.

Having experienced three wars herself (Vietnam, Israel, Sarajevo) Sontag stresses the distinction between 'reality' and 'representation'. She points to the limitations of spectators to understand what the pain of war must be like without having experienced it in 'reality'. I, too, have lived in a war zone in Israel. After many attempts to explain to

people on the other side of the world who have no experience of living in such an environment, I am sympathetic to Sontag's argument that many people have difficulty moving beyond a 'camera mediated knowledge of war' (21). And yet this is somewhat understandable, because how can an image of the aftermath of a suicide bombing replace, reproduce and/or explain the effect of dragging loved ones from shattered buses and removing pieces of metal from bloodied bodies? The limitations of moral indignation and compassion are highlighted but, at the same time, Sontag points out that it is worth engaging seriously with the images.

The distinction between 'reality' and 'representation' is also illustrated by Sontag's argument that photographs are not a transparent account of reality (72). Rather than being the 'eye of history' (46), the camera is able to produce staged photographs. Furthermore, Sontag provides examples of how different people can use a single photograph for divergent purposes. For example, during the Balkans war the same photograph of slain children was passed around the fighting communities (Serbs and Croats) in order to illustrate the suffering

inflicted upon their people (9). How, then, asks Sontag, is it possible to revere photographs as incontrovertible evidence, capable of ‘showing’ rather than ‘evoking’ (42)?

Sontag knows her subject well. She is comfortable with a broad range of topics from the history of photography and painting to analysis of the media. The tone of *Regarding the Pain of Others* is not didactic but suggestive, raising questions for readers to reflect upon. Sontag provides interesting anecdotes and raises important questions, but she tends to leave the reader hanging. At times the book reads more like stream-of-consciousness rather than a text with a central and logically developed argument. However, the absence of a clear argument could either be construed as a weakness or strength of the book. After all, one of Sontag’s main aims is an attempt to compel viewers of war images to think seriously for themselves about the process of ‘regarding the pain of others’. To aid this process, it would have been helpful to be able to regard (view) the actual images to which Sontag refers. With the exception of the front cover, not a single image is included in the book. If you are interested in viewing some of the photographs referred to in

Regarding the Pain of Others visit www.onpointradio.org/shows/2003.

Sontag’s book would appeal to both a general and academic readership interested in the representation of and meanings associated with war. It is recommended for those who wish to reflect on thorny—and often painful—questions about our responses (and responsibilities?) to war and its images.

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PROSTITUTION DEBATES

David Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution and the “American Plan,” 1900–1930*, Greenwood Press, 2002

For theorists investigating the history of sexuality in the United States, David Pivar’s latest work is long overdue. A successive volume to Pivar’s study of the late nineteenth-century purity crusade (1973), *Purity and Hygiene* traces

the history of a utopian vision gone awry. During the early twentieth century feminists and social purity advocates were engaged in challenging efforts to introduce neo-regulation, a modified form of state regulation prostitution. Their spectacle—one based on the idea that men should, like women, aspire to chastity—was one of the driving forces of an abolitionist campaign that sought to undermine the demand for prostitution by challenging the idea that men needed sexual intercourse. However, as Pivar has explored in detail in this work, an increasingly influential group of physicians began to contest for authority over how prostitution was controlled, and given the climate of fear pertaining to venereal disease and national ‘decline’, they were not particularly sympathetic to the purity cause. Backed by a government that was preoccupied with professionalism as well as scientific inquiry into all aspects of social welfare, the emergence of social hygiene was marked by a departure from the aim of social reconstruction in favour of more conservative measures that would serve the ‘greater good’. Pivar raises some other related issues—eugenics, sex education, censorship and white slavery—to map out how these concerns were

drawn into the social purity/social hygiene debates to become sites for contesting influence.

Unfortunately, in addition to being vague and undeveloped in some very dense and poorly written chapters, the thesis itself is unsophisticated. Firstly, the argument that situates feminists and social purity advocates against an emerging and intellectually vibrant group of physicians and hygienists is not new, and particularly antiquated given the considerable work undertaken on prostitution in North American history. Beyond lacking originality, however, the argument also lacks subtlety. The work of some of the significant political figures featured in the book appears to contradict the way in which they are represented by the author; a theoretical quandary arising from the considerable ideological overlap that existed between the two political movements, although Pivar neglected to acknowledge this.

Anna Garlin Spencer, for example, is upheld quite favourably by the author as one of the early pioneers of the purity movement dedicated to abolishing the double standard inherent in male promiscuity. In subsequent decades, however, Spencer came to share with

physicians and neo-regulationists support for the compulsory examination of women deemed 'diseased'—a conservative measure fiercely criticised by large numbers of feminists and social purity campaigners. The author also draws an equally arbitrary delineation between more radical eugenic policies such as sterilisation, and those advocated by environmentalists. Interestingly, while there has been considerable scholarly work undertaken on the eugenics movement in the United States, hereditarianism and environmentalism have not been investigated as complementary ideas stemming from one unifying vision. In *Purity and Hygiene*, environmentalist ideologies of nineteenth and early twentieth-century reforms are distinguished from eugenics altogether (see xv in the Introduction), which requires one to dismiss the considerable support segregation policy advocates enjoyed amongst feminist and women's circles.

Other fundamental problems emerge from the author's methodological approach to the discipline of history. In the absence of any contextual historical background, the book expects the reader to possess considerable knowledge of the

history of sexuality in the United States. While this may have been a purposeful tactic in order to engage with what is, essentially, a complex historical problem with a wide philosophical scope—one that is perhaps, arguably, too large for this book to sustain credibly—it fails to explain to novice students the reasons why prostitution was perceived as such an acute social problem at the beginning of the century. Thus, what is omitted here is the movement's broader relationship to the early twentieth-century progressive impulse and, more particularly, how concerns over immorality fused with other fears over rising immigration, criminality, conditions in city slums, and the ability of mothers to fulfil their 'national duty' in spite of these seemingly unmanageable social problems.

A contributing factor to this problem is the worrying lack of engagement with other historical theorists or with the questions they raise in relation to attitudes towards race, class and sexual activity at the turn of the century. While the (albeit short) introduction offers an outline of the contemporary work in the field, in which Pivar identifies some of the conflicting propositions offered by historians, the ensuing chapters

rarely return to these debates at all. In fact, other than quoting from this secondary material, Pivar rarely makes reference to it: the argument presented to the reader is linear and devoid of any of the controversies that have preoccupied historians in this field; for example, the question of whether white slavery was a symbolic propaganda campaign or tangible criminal calamity. Given that the majority of historical interpretations of prostitution in the United States were undertaken during the late Eighties and early Nineties, *Purity and Hygiene* otherwise would have been poised for an exciting review of this literature, particularly in light of recent developments in using gender as a conceptual tool for analysis.

While *Purity and Hygiene* focuses on an engaging topic and historical period, it will no doubt require the most committed readers to read through to the end. Unsophisticated and at times too detailed to sustain a coherent argument, Pivar's book, unfortunately, does not make a notable contribution to the scholarly field.

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THE INTERNET'S NEXT STEP
Geert Lovink, *My First Recession: Critical Internet Culture in Transition*, V2_Publishing/Nai Publishers, 2003

Although the Internet's unfilled promise of a 'digital revolution' makes it a fertile wasteland for both broken dreams and told-you-so posturing, the pragmatic kind of Internet criticism that Geert Lovink advocates must overcome the threat of insignificance. In *My First Recession* he warns of what was unthinkable only a short time ago: just when 'everything is up for grabs', artists, activists, academics and critics won't even log on. Their failure to (re)assemble online in the aftermath of dotcom mania energises his aim to raise the status of a critical Internet culture that does not resonate with the cynical oscillation between technological fetishism and utopian dreams gone bust. In this sense Lovink is an optimist—although the current round of faster, more intelligent technologies fails to generate the euphoria which once guaranteed Internet critics an audience, he insists that a turn away from the Internet ignores a unique window of opportunity.

My First Recession starts with a theoretical moment in an overview of three key texts in contemporary academic Internet discourse—Hubert L Dreyfus’s *On the Internet*, Manuel Castells’ *The Internet Galaxy* and Lawrence Lessig’s *The Future of Ideas*. It may surprise some readers, though, that Lovink does not proceed with a detailed critique of the issues raised in each theorist’s recent work. Indeed, he condenses his analyses into one short chapter. However, the significance of this book as an addition to the field of academic Internet discourse is the critique implicit in its methodology. For example, instead of discussing Castells’ work on the importance of the Internet for the creation of new forms of democratic institutions, Lovink wants to account for the actual experiences—with current Internet applications and practices—of users who pursue actively just such goals. As a result, the bulk of Lovink’s work comprises empirical case studies of Internet-based social networks. Nevertheless, and again with respect to *The Internet Galaxy*, the overview also allows each case study to operate on its own terms as a compelling critique of Castells’ authority as a neutral observer of the Internet in a parallel world, ‘out there’.

Following the theoretical overview, *My First Recession* also provides an overview of popular literature, in particular the genre of writing personal accounts of the demise of dotcoms. The blatant greed that the dotcom saga has come to represent makes it a period in the history of the Internet that many readers may prefer to ignore. Nonetheless, in his analysis Lovink is intent on capturing the significance of the demise of the dotcoms for a critical Internet culture. In these stories, in which industry insiders and one-time entrepreneurs reflect on what went wrong, Lovink discerns a notable lack of regard for their own responsibility in failing to build a sustainable Internet. He is acutely aware of the need for Internet critics to address the tough questions about sustainability and come up with suitable frameworks that do not simply default to a gift economy. This is perhaps a lofty aspiration, but for Lovink the retreat of capital in the wake of dotcom mania creates a space for the ‘new’ and is precisely the condition that flags a critical Internet culture in transition.

Subsequent chapters are case studies of some of the Internet’s live zones, including mailing lists, email exchanges and web-logs. Unlike the culture of consensus

that the Internet’s pioneers operate within, Lovink understands Internet-based social networks as zones of contestation. He is comfortable with the competing agendas of participants in such networks, and tries to reshape the inevitable conflicts as lessons to be learned about how to understand and influence collaborative online practices. For example, one case study retrieves a history of the social bonds within the Syndicate mailing list community. It shows that the bonds were tenuous and fragile. In particular, it reveals how late-comers to the community manipulated existing members’ belief in the mailing list as an ideal public sphere to polarise them within exhausting debates about free speech, moderation and filtering. Although Lovink accepts that the debate was necessary, he also shows that its repetition had stark consequences. Social bonds built up between Syndicate’s members in online and face-to-face collaboration between 1996 and 2001 disintegrated after they failed to enculturate an acceptable approach to moderation and filtering. The case study highlights the specific knowledge about filtering and moderating discussions that Internet-based social networks must acquire to manage open, online

collaboration successfully. It also illustrates the value of a critical Internet culture that aims to generate such knowledge from the rich archives of already one decade of practical online experiences.

Lovink’s close involvement with the networks he studies, and his impressive array of private (email) contacts, give his brand of Internet criticism an authoritative quality. The insight he brings to *My First Recession* from experiences embedded as participant, moderator and co-founder in Internet-based cultural networks like *Nettime*, or *Fibreculture* in Australia, allows him to set a compelling agenda for future Internet studies. Although this is undoubtedly the book’s strength, it is important to note that it raises more questions than it provides answers. There are no quick fixes for a project that aims to properly socialise the Internet. In this case some readers, especially those who identify with the methodological implications of Lovink’s work, may find *My First Recession* lacking in its form as a book. It makes considerable progress towards isolating relevant issues but it can only speculate about the way such issues will either be resolved or become further entrenched in the latest round of social software

applications, such as web-logs. On the other hand, *My First Recession's* intended audience is precisely those artists, activists, academics and critics that it also warns are turning away from the Internet. Its success depends largely on the valence of empirical case studies and issues-based analyses to counter the emerging backlash, and to reinvigorate an audience that might otherwise recognise its colours in a critical Internet culture.

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SEEKING THE BODY BEAUTIFUL

Julianne Schultz (ed.), *Griffith Review 4: Making Perfect Bodies*
ABC Books, 2004

*To explore the womb, or tomb,
or dreams; all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and
features of the press:
... curiosity searches past and
future
And clings to that dimension.*
TS Eliot 'Four Quartets'

Travelling from conception to death, the body is our vehicle, its form ever-changing, integral in

sense of self. *Griffith Review 4* (Winter 2004) explores Western society's Ahab-like pursuit of a 'white whale' (if a pun, awful): perfecting the body. Balanced by a range of interpretative mediums, the review includes photography, poems and fiction amongst the core essays, reports and memoirs.

As Eliot eloquently portrays, time and space fascinate most writers. Our physical senses attend the dimensions, recognising patterns and perceiving these in novel individual ways. Humans are physical, cognitive and social beings—the first being an efficient magistrate assessing other people. 'Who are they?' an observer contemplates. Physiognomy, the visual clue from face and body form, offers instant value.

Broadening our experiential scope, visual media parade human images past eyes (like a cattle run), glimpses of the perfect inviting a tantalising second look. To be noticed and desired is a fundamental human need. Is striving for physical perfection a merited road to attain a sense of belonging?

The human genetic code is now mapped. Until recently such a bold statement appeared more Huxley's *Brave New World* than *New Scientist*. The complex

potentials and perils of this groundbreaking research create moral and ethical dilemmas. Eugenics is the science of improving the qualities of the human race by facilitating healthier offspring. As hoped in an article by Natalie Corban, eugenics may rid the world of the autistic disorder suffered by her son. Controversially, Sam Tormey considers the idea of deaf parents being able to select deaf babies. More mainstream views ponder the optimal selection of babies for beauty and intelligence through prenatal testing. The argument against eugenics can be highly emotional (try uttering 'Nazi scientists'), yet some see that eugenics can be found simply in how we choose a mate, or don't. Francis Fukuyama is quoted by a few writers in the review. Famous for his 'end of history' thesis, he opposes eugenics as it lessens human diversity, homogenising us away from culture, history and, to a measure, identity.

Science is further ahead in medical surgery. In a recent episode of 'The Simpsons', a voiceover during a hospital advertisement states: 'We can take ten years off your face and put it in your breasts.' Echoing this sentiment in a more sober light, Meera Atkinson recalls her adolescent rebellion against the

beauty obsession within her family. Through many therapy sessions as an adult, Meera interpreted the cosmetic surgery operations undergone by her mother and grandmother as being masks to conceal sadness and loss.

Octogenarian author Donald Horne ponders on mind, body and age. The notion of pursuing body perfection, he infers, applies a superficial and mechanical schema to human meaning.

Paul Chadwick urges the genetic policy makers to not confuse identity with authentication as 'you are not the sum of your data'. Dignity and privacy need to be safeguarded under law in order to preserve identity—the individual collage of who and why?

Nature versus nurture is an ongoing debate within the scientific community. In a wonderful essay by Charles Watson, 'Sculpting Your Own Brain', he postulates that we are the juxtaposition of both genetic makeup and our environmental experience. The basic units of our brain (neurons) are switches: some are fixed at birth and others develop over time. Many neurons, for example within the cerebral cortex, change moment by moment according to our perceptions and choices. In

concluding, he states: 'The pattern of synapses we have helped shape during our life becomes our personality, our motivations and perhaps even our soul.' Theologian William May (quoted in the book's introduction) explores this theme in questioning the mastery of science: where is our 'openness to the unbidden', the mystery of faith, the abstract belief that to be human means a certain measure of incompleteness?

If we agree that a person is mind, body and soul (avoiding a metaphysical debate), any analysis of one requires inspection of the others. This *Griffith Review* has numerous contributions from academics and professionals, mainly from medical, legal and artistic fields. All worthy articles, yet I purport that input from psychologists and spiritual leaders may have illuminated the discussion somewhat.

Permit me some philosophical leverage in closing (I almost typed cloning!). Assuming a soul, perhaps we are drawn closer to wholeness in our physical imperfections. Within those scars, wounds or diseases may paradoxically be the path to a better us. After Ash Wednesday in 1983 I remember how the forest reclaimed even more beauty in the months after the ravaging fire.

A natural metaphor: accept frailties and foibles, genes and vicissitudes in space and time. Choose to view life as a gift, whatever the packaging. Welcoming defeat is valuable at times; growth follows from a place where we were not. We may not be making a perfect body—we could just be developing character.

In order to possess what you do not possess

You must go the way of dispossession

In order to arrive at what you are not

You must go through the way in which you are not

TS Eliot 'Four Quartets'

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CLONE WARS

Cathie Dunsford, *Ao Toa: Earth Warriors*, Spinifex Press, 2004

Ao Toa, described on the cover as 'A modern fictional equivalent of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*', is a novel set in 2001 in New Zealand, at the time of the Royal Commission into Genetic Engineering. Although national

politics and global environmentalism are continuous themes, the book centres on the attempt of local Maori eco-activists to thwart an illegal animal-chimera cloning experiment from being conducted secretly on a farm in their community.

With GE crops and food being a contentious issue at present, I had hoped that this book would present a balanced and informed assessment of the debate; unfortunately, *Ao Toa* is a novel based on extreme stereotypes and simple mis-information. In this ultra-politically-correct world, the antagonists are men who feed Babe-the-pig to their children and consider ripping the flesh from her bones a test of character, call the Maoris 'niggers' or 'brownies' and graphically copulate like animals with their wives. In contrast, the heroines are vegetarian Maori lesbian organic farmer activists. There are few shades of grey to be found in this novel.

The science in *Ao Toa* fares little better, and is often presented in an atmosphere of almost hysterical paranoia. From the first—and several times throughout the book—genetic engineering is equated with the outcomes of nuclear testing (and described as being dangerous to both animal and human health).

The scientists involved in the creation of GE food are simply described as Nazis. Beyond such extreme statements there is little, if any, argument given as to why GE food should be such an inherently bad thing. There are indeed a number of legitimate concerns with GE food—such as the spreading of anti-insect toxins (and/or herbicide resistance) from crops to weeds, the reduction in local animal biodiversity and the prospect of insect populations rapidly evolving natural resistance (thus rendering the GE modifications useless)—but these very valid problems are never mentioned amidst the hyperbole. Rather, this is a world of extremes: the secret GE experiment that forms the focus of the book is almost parody—a laughable combination of unspecified human cloning with the creation of a hideously deformed creature that is a cross between a sheep and a pig—and, not content with simply having created such a monstrosity, insult is added to injury with the experiments being conducted in local Maori burial caves.

Curiously, a major secondary theme in *Ao Toa* is the danger to human health of wide-scale pesticide use. Considering that one major aim in the creation of

GE crops is reduced pesticide usage, one would have expected the author to see at least some potential benefit to using GE crops in the future (should the aforementioned concerns be overcome). Such possibilities are never considered. Rather, the naive utopian ideal put forward by the book is one of local organic farming communities: a return, in essence, to small decentralised villages and a barter economy.

If there is a better side to this novel, it is to be found in the minor characters and their human relationships, coupled with the rich descriptions of Maori life and culture. Set aside from the heroines and villains, the characters of teenagers Maata and Waka present a more realistic and well-balanced contrast. For me, the most powerful and dramatic writing in *Ao Toa* comes not from the politics, activists or madscientists but from the simple human dramas of a small community. It is a great shame that the author could not bring the sensitivity with which she approached these minor scenes to the science and politics which form the focus of the book.

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