

{ a novel of ideas }



excerpts from the SOOB virtual think tank

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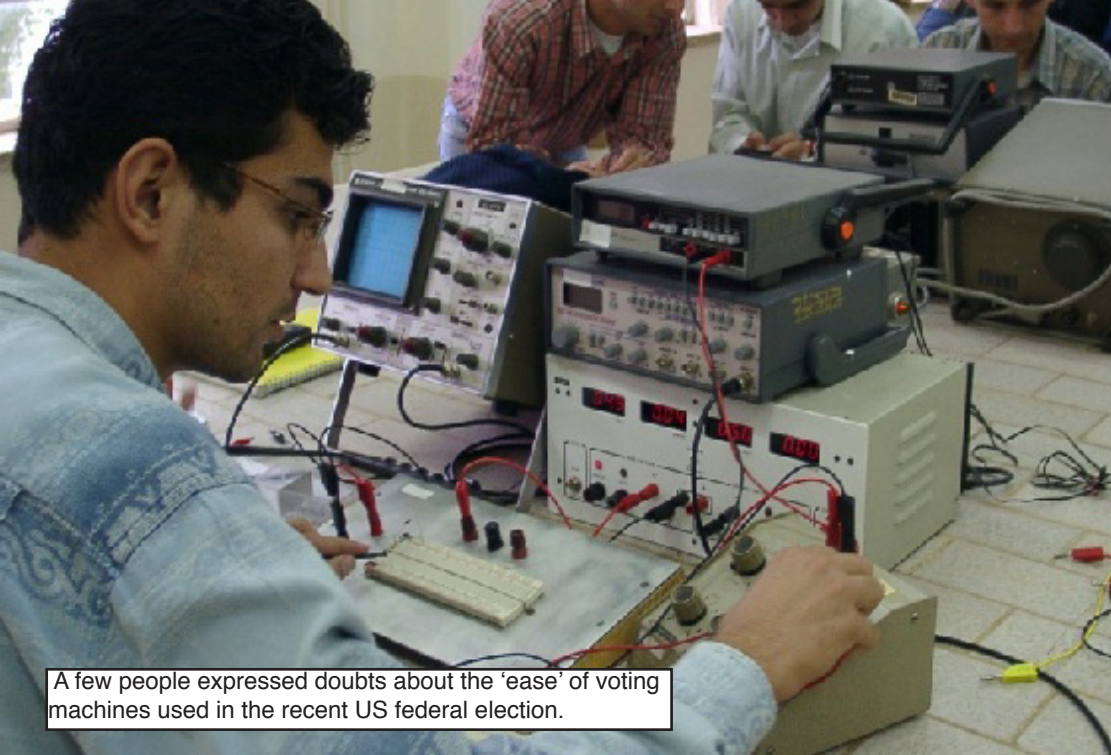


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For full transcripts of the think tank go to:  
<http://www.vibewire.net/soobideas/>

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layout and design by tim parish





A few people expressed doubts about the 'ease' of voting machines used in the recent US federal election.

## Can we open source democracy?

<e-democracy - revolution or redundancy?>

[mfallu](#)

...One could argue that the developed world with its greater access to technology and expertise owes it to itself and the rest of the world to conduct research and trials into electronic methods of community engagement, social capital building and participatory democracy. If we have developed excellent public engagement tools - they in the future they will be able to be used by developing countries just as well as we can use them. We owe it to ourselves and the world to find out what works and what doesn't.

Additionally - education and technology have allowed some parts of India to jumpstart their economy - Bangalore is the largest area of software development outside of the united states - providing growth, jobs and social capital that can be spent improving surrounding areas of the country.

Even in places where 99% of the population doesn't have access to technology and doesn't even have enough to

eat - technology can be appropriate and helpful. Video conferencing, satellite uplinks and remote diagnosticians can deliver high quality medical care and advice to remote villages that could never afford to have full time doctors.

[gsim6608](#)

...it is all well and good to design e-communities, but it flies in the face of the fact that only 10 per cent of the world's population has access to the internet.

No surprise that those who cannot access are mostly from developing countries. So now these people who lack democracy will also lack the tools for any replacement system.

[Koneko](#)

...if the current political systems fails to represent us as citizens, is it possible for an online system administered by the same government to work any better?

[mfallu](#)

In places like Brisbane up to 80% of the population has access to the internet. That is a higher percentage than the percentage that voted in the last city council elections.

It would be entirely possible for the Brisbane City Council to do things like put property development notifications online - let people register their thoughts online and promote both face to face and virtual meetings to discuss the pros and cons of the the applications.

[Graham Young](#)

...Well, in Brisbane a councillor has effectively done that. If you go to [www.janeprentice.org](http://www.janeprentice.org) and look at Jane's "Development Application's" page you will find links in chronological order to summaries of any applications in her ward. You can also view the complete application online - by going to a page on the BCC site where for a fee you can download it; or by going to Jane's office. She also has the facility to run petitions on any of these that are controversial. If you sign up for her regular newsletter you will receive email notifications of development proposals. I know a bit about this site because we built it. We're also building another two sites for politicians - one Liberal and one Labor - and they will be like Jane's in terms of offering information online.

[http://www.janeprentice.org/dev\\_apps.asp](http://www.janeprentice.org/dev_apps.asp)

<http://www.janeprentice.org/petitions.asp>

I'd also like to agree that governments are not very good at running eDemocracy sites, but that doesn't mean that sites

which are independent of government are any better. What they gain in excitement they may easily lose in terms of influence. What we are doing through our [National Forum](http://www.nationalforum.com.au/) site is providing a portal which is a joint venture between politicians, citizens and other broadly defined democratic organisations. The idea is to provide a forum wrapped in a news service, or perhaps a news service wrapped in a forum, where citizens and others can engage in an organised way but where they drive the agenda, not some other organisation. We're about halfway building the site.

One of the things that we've tried to ensure with our site is that we've engaged as wide a cross-section of stakeholders as possible, including the group we expect all the others to want to influence - politicians.

#### [mfallu](#)

I would like to talk about the BCC "development applications" online page: I know the people (internal to council) who developed that application. They spent six months building it - were two weeks away from releasing it to the public and were presenting it to a collection of senior council administrators and aldermen... They were pleased with the functionality etc - but, shocked to see that it had been intended to offer the service for free, and immediately ordered it to be refactored to include a fee for use.

Governments have to get away from a service mentality.

I can understand charging to see paper copies of development applications - they have to be stored, photocopied and a staff member has to retrieve them... etc etc. But the online system just taps into existing databases - the council needed the information for its own use in electronic form anyway.

Once the cost of building the web app has been paid - that's it - almost no more development / implementation costs. In charging for it - we possibly lose the opportunity for people to republish and distribute that information, and Council loses a fantastic opportunity to have informed discussion with its citizens about things in their local area that may affect them.

If governments moved to more of an organising model - where consumers become citizens and service themselves and their communities - I believe they could be much more efficient and effective. (In a servicing model efficiency and effectiveness tend to be mutually exclusive goals)

I am tired of seeing the following scenario playing itself out...

- developers make an application to clear land for some sort of development eg. a new shopping centre.
- no one notices
- the application is approved
- nothing happens for a long time
- clearing work starts and the implications are clear - people get angry and protest
- development work is stopped temporarily
- the public sees environmentalists / protesters / the left / etc (they don't really distinguish) as stopping / being bad for development.
- Invariably - the developer is allowed to continue (because after all they did the right thing and got permission)
- The protesters go away - sad that they failed but satisfied that at least they did something ( and maybe cost the developer a little more in wages / legal fees etc)

... I've participated in rallies like that - and I go away secretly worried that I've done the wrong thing, contributed to making things worse - contributed to a situation where vocal protest is automatically discounted and just blends into the background noise of society.

We need to be demanding the tools to empower ourselves... Say we had a free development applications online service - We could:

- set up our own database of developers
- keep track of development applications by developer
- assess their performance in terms of environmental impact etc.
- lodge complaints about developments based on the developer's past history
- inform locals about developments in their area by developers with a poor track record etc

We could even do that with the fee for service product if council would let us republish content...

## “Can I have that with source, please?” Tell us where your news comes from

### John Sutton

Skulking behind the media world is the veiled influence of the public relations industry (through the daily swarm of media releases and cash-for-comment deals) modern audiences are desperate for transparency and accountability, especially in news and current affairs information. We want to know where – and in what form - information comes from, so we can properly assess its credibility.

Of course, it suits the commercial interests of the information providers to maintain the veil: every first year PR student learns that publicity is better than advertising because it trades off the increased credibility that “news” has over paid space and time... Maintaining the veil also happens to suit many journalists, since the evidence suggests that they’re often very reluctant to admit just how reliant they are on PR sources. How often have you read (or heard) a news report say “A media release today from the Prime Minister said...”?

Some news outlets have made initial attempts to deal with this problem. For example, SMH journalists now generally don’t use anonymous sources, or quote nameless “spokespeople” (code for a PR contact). But they still don’t tell us when they’re using a media release.

...One of the key arguments they use (often disingenuously) at the moment is that declaring sources uses precious space (in newspapers) or time (in broadcast media) ...I am surprised that online news services - alternative and mainstream -

[SMH Code is at:  
<http://www.smh.com.au/ethicscode/index.html>]

aren’t exploiting a significant natural advantage they have over traditional media: the capacity to rigorously declare their sources of information.

### alexburnsdisinformat

...there are sites like the **Center For Media & Democracy**, **Danny Schechter’s MediaChannel** and **OneWorld** as exemplars. **Columbia Journalism Review**, **Online Journalism Review** and **Jim Romanesko’s Media News** are personal favourites of how the Fourth Estate polices itself. **FactCheck** did a great job during the 2004 US Presidential election.

[www.prwatch.org/](http://www.prwatch.org/)  
[www.mediachannel.org/](http://www.mediachannel.org/)  
[www.oneworld.net/](http://www.oneworld.net/)  
[www.cjr.org/](http://www.cjr.org/)  
[www.ojr.org/](http://www.ojr.org/)  
[www.poynter.org/medianews/](http://www.poynter.org/medianews/)  
[www.factcheck.org/](http://www.factcheck.org/)

### Simon

My favourite is **SpinSanity**, but while we media buffs get all worked up about this issue, i feel that the majority of the population don’t care.

<http://www.spinsanity.org/>

We’re in a state of information overload, and we’re generally looking for the most concise and brief way to get across the largest amount of information. Long link trails and precise statements about sources ... Everyone bar the media-obsessed will tune out in favour of less confronting information sources.

### Mim

My biased opinion is that PR is not a problem - unequal access to PR is. The arguments against big corporate donations to political parties are quite popularly accepted, because the logic is quite simple: companies exist to make profits. They would not make a financial investment in a political party unless they stood to gain from it financially. Individual citizens do not have the ability to make these kinds of investments, and therefore are at a competitive disadvantage vis a vis big companies when it comes to the representation of their financial interests...

Likewise with the PR industry. It must work, or people wouldn’t spend money on it. But the spending power of institutes with no legal obligation to act in the public interest (i.e. corporations, which if publicly listed in Australia are actually legally obliged not to do anything but maximise shareholder value) vastly outweighs the money spent by public-interest campaigners. So the influence over media & policy-making is wielded disproportionately by those who can afford it.

I’ve heard a couple of people mention the idea of ‘PR aid’ - run along the same lines as legal aid. Is this a crazy notion?

www.goodcompany.com.au/

### [saccharine

...the idea of 'PR aid' is a good one, and one that does seem to be starting to take off in the industry, through things like the **Good Company project**.]

### tomd

...individuals and "campaigners" have "no legal obligation to act in the public interest" anymore than companies do. but at least individuals are identifiable as responsible for their actions... no-one owns publicly-listed companies, they either "manage" them or they "invest" in them, neither of which carry the responsibilities and concerns of ownership...

### Neal Haslem

www.dearjohn.org

I agree that if an individual/NGO/activist group or whatever is going to act effectively in the current media environment they do need to put the right spin on what they are saying... this worked out pretty well for DearJohn.org

I was kind-of surprised how easy it was to generate a bit of an impact media-wise once we had the help of some media-savvy friends sending us how-to's for press releases and other suggestions...

### samsam

So, how does one create legitimacy?

I reckon it's through the branding of a medium rather than the individual... Creating a brand is not hard... and individuals (online contributors / writers) will naturally offer themselves to the medium or will be willing to contribute if they 'buy' in to what the brand represents.

How do we give something on the net legitimacy? I don't think that can be constructed like a brand can be.

It's like - creating an online space which is like a hair-dressing salon. Everything that's said inside is considered to have credibility. Of course, much of it might be gossip-related - but it's a space where new ideas could be seeded, news and information shared.

It's finding the type of content this audience will be primarily attracted and then putting in a couple of 'by the way, did you know....' pieces.

How do we create, with no or very little budget, a credible space

online for content?

### alexburnsdisinformat

I saw **Mark Pesce** in Sydney this past weekend. I infer he means to use Social Networking tools to make **the shift from 'tacit' to 'explicit' knowledge** about a site's content: the community as **fact-checker**. Regular visitors will internalise the editorial norms of a site...

Many sites have this in some form: **Steven Johnson** has a section in his book **Emergence** about **Slashdot's** recommendations engine. [I've pointed out before that this is very similar to **Herbert Gans'** idea of **Multiperspectival Journalism** (including 'othered' voices beyond the usual sources and institutions). My doppelganger **Axel Bruns** has also written about how **syndication and gatekeeping** changes online journalism.]

The popular image of the editor is one of command-and-control and top-down censorship. Yet effective editors and publishers have always had a network of people around them to act as their own quality filters. **21C Magazine** publisher/editor **Ashley Crawford** was notable for working with many big-name writers and still cultivating new writers and artists. Of course, blogging and online publishing blurs this editor/author distinction and accelerates the process.

['Legitimacy' becomes prioritised in the **agenda-setting model** of the media: **The New York Times** and **Washington Post** as the 'newspapers of record'. **Edward S. Herman** and **Noam Chomsky's** **propaganda model (60-minute video)** was one critique, in the agenda-setting frame, that influenced early dotcom activists.

E-commerce initiatives in banking and telecommunications have made trust a key issue for those industries. This work ranges from interface design and usability issues to **customer relationship management** and the current popularity of **emotional intelligence**. Strategic communications also deals with this (see my 1997 article **The Advertising Virus**).

There's also been an academic debate by sociologists about trust and communities. The British sociologist **Anthony Giddens** (**BBC 1999 Reith Lectures**) has done an influential analysis of how modernity has undermined traditional institutions and changed the 'social contract'. German sociologist **Ulrich Beck** contends that we now live in a **World Risk Society** in which institutions spread large scale risks and systemic risks throughout large populations (major disasters like the Challenger and Columbia

www.playfulworld.com/  
www.3-cities.com/~bonewman/T  
acit%20vs%20Explicit%20Trans-  
Navigational%20Ontologies.pdf  
www.factcheck.org/

www.stevenberlinjohnson.com/  
www.slashdot.org/

www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.  
mpl/ae/books/reviews/1950055

http://www.disinfo.com/archive/  
pages/article/id1193/pg1/

http://snurb.info/

www.21cmagazine.com/

http://upload.mcgill.ca/politi-  
calscience/264.pdf

http://www.chomsky.info/

http://www.informationclearing-  
house.info/article6435.htm

http://www.1to1.com/  
http://www.eiconsortium.org/

http://www.disinfo.com/archive/  
pages/article/id641/pg1/

http://www.lse.ac.uk/Giddens/  
http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/  
sociology/whoswho/beck.htm

http://www.disinfo.com/archive/  
images/linda/WorldRiskSociety.  
pdf

space shuttle explosions and the Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown). He also argues that progressive social movements ([subpolitics](#)) have become the vanguard for 'bottom-up' social change. [Zygmunt Bauman](#) believes that trust is closely linked with [our morality](#).]

[http://www.tasa.org.au/members/docs/2000\\_1/Wearing.pdf](http://www.tasa.org.au/members/docs/2000_1/Wearing.pdf)

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sociology/people/bauman.htm>

### Mim

Academic journals have a huge amount of legitimacy - the downside is that they are written in an inaccessible language & dominated by a culture of 'experts.'

But I think the system of references & referees is one that could be adopted online. You could have a website where every article was published with references - & then it was up to users to verify that those references were accurate & 'approve' it. You then trust the content which has been 'approved' by someone you trust...

just another of many possible models...

Of course this is all time-consuming & therefore restricted to a small group of users. As many people have pointed out on this forum - what's the point of all this information (however balanced & diverse & however ideal the production process), if it's not being accessed by a mass audience?

### alexburnsdisinformat

Academic journals are a different ball game. Institutional politics, discourse, 'name' authors, intergroup debates and the norms of particular fields come into play. There are often hierarchies of journals in these fields. The best have a [peer review](#) system that acts as a filter. In time this may become a [citation network](#) if the same group of authors reference each-other. For those outside this group, the 'network' becomes an [invisible college](#): a nexus of journalists and scholars who may have different individual viewpoints yet dominate a particular discourse or field (and who may keep new voices out). The blogosphere [fragments](#) these networks into new forms. My CRC research colleague Darren Sharp notes that [Reed's Law](#) is important as a 'power law': some people still become 'stars' who get the majority of attention, some voices still dominate online conversations.

<http://www.betaversion.org/~stefano/linotype/news/74/>

[http://www.scit.wlv.ac.uk/~cm1993/papers/Interpreting\\_SS-LAR.pdf](http://www.scit.wlv.ac.uk/~cm1993/papers/Interpreting_SS-LAR.pdf)

[http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2003/05/discussion\\_and\\_citation\\_in\\_the\\_blogosphere.shtml](http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2003/05/discussion_and_citation_in_the_blogosphere.shtml)

<http://www.reed.com/Papers/GFN/reedslaw.html>

### tomd

I'm already feeling overwhelmed by ideas and the need to follow about a hundred links to get more information so i can meaningfully participate... isn't this the disadvantage of the internet all over? the internet is significantly better at collating

diverse sources of information, facilitating collaborative platforms for discussion/information collation/shared learning, etc, but is this really what most people want? can people be bothered? do they simply not have the time? and if that's the case, how does alternative media get around that? i would think RSS feeds are certainly one answer, and google has certainly assisted also, but what comes next?

### saccharine

...I think that if you're looking for ways alternative media can get around the 'time factor', you really need to look at ways of facilitating interest - either through PR, through combining entertainment with whatever other goal you're trying to achieve, or by simply looking at what happens offline - since that's still where we live the majority of our lives.

I don't think the 'time factor' is particularly unique to the internet - I feel the same way every time I walk into a large bookstore.

### Simon

In my experience, we use... one or two key sources that have previously served us well. For me, it's [the Age](#), with the occasional foray into the land of wit with [The Onion](#) or [The Chaser](#).

<http://www.theage.com.au/>  
<http://www.theonion.com/>  
<http://www.thechaser.com.au/>

I feel that with our media abundance, as virtuous as it is, we run the risk of turning our lives inwards, focusing very specifically on information sources and views that support our own ideas. As different groups do this, reinforcing their assumptions and biases, we end up tearing democracy apart at the seams as the conversations fail to connect with one another.

### ScantyDan

[Has this 'turning inward' been happening for a long time anyway?](#)

One of my friends (Marcus Westbury of the [Nextwave Festival](#) proposed (or passed on?) to me an idea like this:

<http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol2/iss1/art6/>

<http://www.nextwave.org.au/>

So you want to have [verifiability, and trust, and mass-accessibility](#) in your news. How about this?

*You start up a franchise community newspaper (or television, or radio) kit, with the documentation of the legal, practical and financial issues involved in running a community newspaper. Printing is cheap these days, (cheaper than broadcasting, although there has been some [discussion of alternative broadcast networks on these forums](#)), and local advertising*

<http://about.reuters.com/media/> *is not so hard to find. One thing you can't afford though, is access to the big, (somewhat) verifiable and respected newswires, like [Reuters](#). So you include, as part of your franchise kit, some kind of alternative newswire, where other newspapers in your franchise exchange articles: thus building an alternative newswire that extends to everywhere that you have reporters on the ground.*

*You could potentially do this on a commercial basis (assuming there is a niche for locally-made papers), which would mean that you had the budget to ensure that reporters could follow-up, and that people had careers that were dependent upon their reputations as good reporters-> just like the press is supposed to operate in the old films about fearless investigative reporters before the age of concentration of ownership and reporter sackings.*

*The difference is, you are starting from the ground up as an alternative source, keep it collaborative all the way, but try to do it better.*

<http://www.communitybank.com.au/public/> this scheme parallels the famous [Bendigo Community Bank](#) program, but for media.

How about that for a starting point? Would that kind of scheme address some of the shortcomings in our current mediascape?

#### **mfallu**

That idea is in fact being run in regional Australia. But they are a website and wire service combination - they have a website for each geographic region.

They syndicate articles from local papers and put them online (so a local paper can have an online presence) They also allow readers / locals to submit / contribute articles. Local papers from other regions can reprint / adapt articles from the system. Advertisers have a single point to contact if they want to construct an ad campaign that covers multiple regions (the website has the rates for each local region and takes care of the payments.)

<http://www.ruralpress.com/>

[rural press](#) owns the service. There are a bunch of aspects to the service - check out [rural press interactive](#), but the bit most relevant to us is [www.yourguide.com.au](http://www.yourguide.com.au)

<http://www.rpinteractive.com.au/>

<http://www.yourguide.com.au/>

#### **Mim**

...at some point you would also have 'stringers' who worked only for the alternative wire service... and that wire service

would establish reciprocal relationships with similar networks in other countries...

This would not only improve the range & quality of the news that the community newspaper could access, it would also provide outlets for new generations of quality freelance investigative journo...

and ... perhaps the content syndicated on this newswire could be made available under one of those sharealike CC licenses that allow for-profit reproduction in developing countries...

#### **Tim Parish**

I guess everyone's asking the same questions: what can we do with all this information at our fingertips? How do we break into the strongholds of the existing media empires to broadcast our own truths? and when we have - will it have achieved something, or will it just be adding more noise?

In Italy, the [Telestreets](#) movement are pirate "street" television stations using fairly uncomplicated technologies (in that even electronics luddites like myself could possibly put one together) in order to build a small scale television station. They also use BitTorrent to share and distribute media which they then broadcast to the old skool tv sets and have essentially created their own rhizome media.

This seems both a radical and understandable response to the intense build up of media ownership in Italy under the Berlusconi mediastate, and a playful utilisation of recently available technologies.

However, if broadcast is on its way out all those suburban antennae might soon become obsolete sculptures,... but right now this isn't the case - so these seem like reasonable intermediary technologies in the meantime...

I ride the streets noticing more and more the sheer ubiquitousness of television aerals which decorate every house. If we are allowed to transmit on AM in Australia, what's to stop us from setting up our own little tv stations... and broadcasting funky little messages to the populace outside of the established media's highly conservative curatorial control?

Sometimes I like to think that 'truth' (whatever that might be) must have some hardwired virus which can make it spread like wildfires through the deadwood of the media ecology. Other times I realise that people are watering down their minds in advance, creating psychic burn off zones to protect themselves from information they have already decided is not to their liking.

If the information war is everywhere - how do we make peace?

[http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol\\_2/contributors3/blissettext3.html](http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors3/blissettext3.html)

### **samsam**

What's the audience you want to reach? I think it's important to first recognise that not everyone is in to what gets shown on community TV. Sure, technology enables you to become a station - but it's the stuff you broadcast that really matters. And not everyone is in to cut up video with a doof-doof soundtrack. When the diy tv people started broadcasting the football, a different audience came onboard. That's about programming!

### **alexburnsdisinformat**

Alternative Media:

'Alternative to what?' More importantly: 'what is the underlying vision, and how is it executed/manifested?' And: 'what is the scope for debate, discussion and dissent?' [Vibewire](http://www.vibewire.net/) and [ElectionTracker](http://www.electiontracker.net/et/) are very strong contributions to that. Unless you resolve those issues, or find editorial strategies to deal with them, 'alternative' media still risks fragmenting into ideological positions and groupthink.

<http://www.vibewire.net/>

<http://www.electiontracker.net/et/>

### **Mim**

I lived in East Timor from May 2003 to April 2004 working with a media training NGO, & then travelled for a few months through Indonesian & Malaysia hanging out with people involved in making independent & community media. Seemed like I couldn't turn my head without coming across another low-cost, grassroots media operation... The more restricted your media environment is, & the less accessible the alternatives, the more people will look to options like telestreet - and the more meaningful those options will be.

I spoke to Ibu Ida - a founder of the West Java 'Voice of farmers' radio network. There are over 250 small village-run community radio stations in West Java alone - started and maintained by the village, using one of those cheap micropower transmitters... The stations run on very low power - 100 watts and the broadcasting range is only 10 kilometres, but because of the high population density there are 3000-5000 z the transmission area. The radio is often the only accessible news source - literacy is low, and even when people can read it doesn't necessarily mean they can comprehend the language of newspapers. One village may be very different from the next - the language may be completely different - so the local radio station may be the only source of news in their mother tongue.

It's that sort of case that makes me think that this alternative media thing is not so irrelevant after all.



## Creative Commons

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### James Arvanitakis

A great deal of what we are seeing in copyright today is an enclosure of the commons - this is why the Creative Commons and other movements are so important

The commons were traditionally defined as the elements of the environment - forests, atmosphere, fisheries or grazing land - that we all share. These are the tangible and intangible aspects of the environment that no-one owns but everybody enjoys. But there are other conceptions of the commons. Today, the commons need to be understood within the cultural sphere as well. The commons within this sphere include literature, music, performing arts, visual arts, design, film, video, television, radio, community arts and sites of heritage.

The commons can also include the areas of human relationships such as the need for safety, trust, cooperation, shared intellect and so on. These are aspects of culture that our society shares and promotes a more functioning community. In the artistic community, the unlimited exchange of our ideas means that the community expands and develops. This does not mean that you have to give everything away, but we must be wary of enclosing or stopping art from appearing in the public sphere.

Today, life for the commons is precarious – they are rapidly being enclosed: privatised, copyrighted and abused. We are seeing Australia's commons being transformed into market resources - a private appropriation of collectively owned resources.

This is an 'enclosure' that has seen the market colonise untouched natural resources and public life - including the arts.

The implication that the 'market knows best' is that the community cannot manage communally based resources; 'human nature' means we are 'greedy' and, as such, we must be protected from ourselves or all resources will disappear.

The fear is the copyright will strangle both innovation but also stop dissent. This is a threat to our democracy and needs to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. This is one aim of the reclaim the commons movement...

### \_elliott.b

the issue of exclusive rights as a hindrance on creativity depends on how you view copyright. in one sense copyright is a doctrine premised on protection of creative works and as such could be viewed as a very positive thing. however, the reality is that the "no rights reserved" concept of copyright is not what all artists want, they want to be able to say "some rights reserved" in order to encourage some legal uses of their creative works.

**Creative Commons** is one way of doing this. it allows the creator retain copyright while placing a licence on their work that clearly defines what people can do with the work. for example, a writer who is trying to get their name out there may decide to make their latest article available under an attribution licence which gives people the right to reproduce the article as long as they clearly identify the original author. the licences can apply to anything that attracts a copyright including [music](#) , [photographs + images](#) , [writing](#) (including fiction, non-fiction and [educational](#) texts), and [film + video](#).

<http://www.creativecommons.org/>

the licences themselves encourage diverse use by offering a [suite](#) of more than twenty different licences all premised around different rights, namely:

[attribution](#) – as long as the copier acknowledges the licence holder as the original author;

[non-commercial](#) – ensuring others don't make;

[no derivatives](#) – maintaining the integrity of the original work by not allowing alteration of it in any way; and

[share alike](#) – allowing others to alter the original work as long as what they create from it is offered to others under

the same licence

each basic licence can be paired up with other protections to customise a licence that suits the needs of the creator. for example, the writer mentioned above may decide that they don't want to just make their work available to anyone to reproduce, and may choose to use an attribution-noncommercial-ndersivs licence which means that others can only reproduce the work as it is, and cannot make money nor not attribute the writer as the original creator.

if you want to offer your work with no restrictions you can offer it under a public domain licence.

on top of these basic licences are a range of creative industry specific licences that relate to certain kinds of activities. to illustrate, the mash up and sampling licences can be used for music.

what [Creative Commons](#) have done is taken the uncertain legal position of making creative works freely available away by offering a range of flexible and free licences that create a legal framework for expressing exactly what can and cannot be done with the original work. such a scheme rescues the "warm & fluffy creatures of intellectual capital" and proves that yes, you CAN keep your intellectual property rights & share them too!

for more info see  
The Commons Institute  
[http://www.mercury.org.au/  
tci%20info.htm](http://www.mercury.org.au/tci%20info.htm)

in Australia, [iCommons.au](#) is implementing the Creative Commons licences into our copyright system.

## i feel violated, copyright infringement art

### Tim Parish

On September 7, 2004, [Dr. Dre lost a landmark court case](#) concerning a two second Funkadelic sample he used for his NWA song '100 Miles and Running' over 10 years ago, even though George Clinton the composer of the music didn't have a problem with it! The problem is, he doesn't own the recording.. some jokers called Bridgeport Music and Westbound Records do!

[http://www.allhiphop.com/  
hiphopnews/?ID=3483](http://www.allhiphop.com/hiphopnews/?ID=3483)

"If you cannot pirate the whole sound recording, can you 'lift' or 'sample' something less than the whole? Our answer to that question is in the negative," the court said in a statement.

"Get a license or do not sample," the the court ruled. "We do not see this as stifling creativity in any significant way." (but what would Lawyers know about creativity?)

The case is a decision is important, especially for urban roots of hip hop music, which is arguably the first musical genre to evolve hand in hand with sampling technology and therefore an inherent ingredient in what is now one of the most popular musical genre in the world.

Considering the amount his work has been remixed, sampled and referenced in the last twenty years, I reckon the Creative Commons should make George Clinton their patron musical saint, or at least Funkadelic their official

theme tune. Way back in 1992, George Clinton actually released a record called "Sample Some of Dis, Sample Some of Dat" utilising his own personal recordings of riffs he created specifically for the purpose of distributing openly to the hip hop community. Perhaps this was the first Open Source record ever made?

#### QUOTE

Well, first of all, I suspect that the industry again is trying to do to rap what they tried to do to funk, and that's kill it because it's got too much information, and spreading of information," Clinton told the Houston Press in 1992. "So what we've done to keep them from all this stupidity, like trying to sue, or saying that I'm suing people, is to put out a record called "Sample Some of Disc and Sample Some of Dat" - just samples from a lot of the old songs, because I have some of the demos of those songs, which is not what the record company owns, so I can license those to be sampled. We have a pay schedule that's really easy to deal with - if they sell records, they pay, if they don't they can try again. We got to make sure that rap survives, because it's our only means of communication that gets past the gatekeepers."

I'm fascinated with the incursion by business into the natural collaborative nature of artists, which prevents them from even giving permission to use their work coz it's out of their ownership. How does Michael Jackson own all the Beatles songs (answer: he outbid Paul McCartney for them). It means more than the fact that a musician might have no say as to whether his music is used in an ad or not, it actually means that corporate culture is creating boundaries around the amorphous space that is 'legitimate culture' which is dictated by the sheer power of mass media to simply outnumber any underground effort, advertise it widely and let the vast majority not realise that anything else could exist.

The point is, the entire tradition of folk music as a shared cultural economy in which we are all inheritors is under threat from the rather ludicrous efforts of recording companies and their lawyers to control any and every use of song.

These walls have the effect of shaping and sculpting culture in the same way that a bonsai tree might be cultivated. It's about domestication of the cultural wilderness - which is not to say the wild does not exist, it's just sidelined, enclosed

and rare. The obvious effect is that our wider culture is greatly impoverished. The creative process of artists who want to share material ends up operating like plants growing through cracks in the pavement, busting through the bitumen regardless. We all know it won't stop, it just struggles when it could prosper.

Alternatively I suppose the burgeoning Creative Commons licensing could be akin to a permaculture community project in which artists self consciously create work which can be recycled, and added into the cultural compost.. eventually a much more sustainable culture will evolve from the humus.

Ahhh... i know permaculture and it's barriers are more complicated than this, but i do love those ecological metaphors..

#### Nancy Vaudeville

I'm interested in looking at the 'illegal' use of copyright protected imagery in video, particularly when used as social or political comment.

It seems to me an outrageous scenario to find ourselves in where meaning and 'truth' is endlessly projected for our own consumption yet there are no mechanisms for it to be critiqued or questioned actively. As film production has been (and still is) a prohibitively expensive media it effectively legitimates the truth of those who can afford to produce it. By taking these loaded images, such as news broadcasts or advertising, artists are able to rupture conventional or traditional perspectives and create new thinking. Not only should the use of copyright material be legal but a practice necessary in order to define our society as democratic. Copyright violators need respect!!!!

Working in the film industry I have had a few opportunities to show my own copyright infringement art to directors and producers who actually make these ads and commercial products. Very interesting. Their first comment is usually to point out how highly illegal the use of 'stolen' images is. The second being, Is this a little hobby of yours?. Ie...this should be kept confined to your bedroom. I think this reflects how the majority of society has come to see media. It's the stuff that the other people make. Information is the truth that

<it is interesting you bought this up tim, because you will not believe how many times i have had to correct people when they make the culture fax pa of "possession is 9/10ths of the law." the reality is this is not so, OWNERSHIP IS THE LAW. it is not about anything else but who owns the right, whether it be in relation to ip or any other kind of right for that matter (eg i recently did a piece outlining how investment property ownership calls into question the old property law theory of possession as the root of ownership. the tenant hardly owns the property. the same idea applies of copyright; it is about who owns the copyright.) -elliott>

experts deliver. Meaning is to be consumed not created.

ENOUGH!!!!!! This is clearly a massive malfunction in the organisation of our society and must be questioned. The legal precedence in this area has only just began to be set - seen in such cases as The Panel vrs Channel 9 ( i think..... would like to be corrected if wrong). It would be fantastic if anyone who has any knowledge on the legal status of use of copyright images to post what they know. It seems that much noise needs to be created now so that we can evolve the way we look at ownership of images released into the mediasphere.

### textaqueen

I'm Arlene "TextaQueen". I draw with 'textas' or felt-tip markers, and create "Textanudes", females drawn naked in their own habitat. I have been exhibiting under this name for over seven years, most recently at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), Western Australia. (<http://www.pica.org.au/art04/ArleneTextaQueen-04.html>)

Last friday 19th november, PICA received a fax from Andrew Fox, a lawyer with firm Griffith Hack in Sydney, representing Jasco Pty limited who are the owner of 8 Australian trade mark registrations comprising or including the word "Texta" (I'm paraphrasing from the fax). Jasco are "concerned about the potential infringement of its rights...by, in particular, the artist's use of the words 'TextaQueen' and 'Textanudes', together with the use of the domain name [www.textaqueen.com](http://www.textaqueen.com)"

PICA has been asked to provide my details to the lawyers, but I have instructed them not to. TextaQueen is not my legal name, and there are few ties to my real name, still, it is very possible that they will eventually track me down.

My understanding, on bits of legal advice I have gathered is that I do have a case that the word 'texta' has become part of common language, also that I am not selling a product the same as any that they produce, though they have trademarked 'texta' under stationery and artists requisites 'including...paper and paper articles'. Even if I do have a good case I don't think i have the funds to defend myself in court, but perhaps the energy for a clever campaign.

Any thoughts, inspiring anecdotes of defeating corporate standover tactics, contacts for Intellectual Property lawyers

willing to work for pro-bono or trade, etc?????

### Neal Haslem

I work as a Graphic/multimedia/web designer and teacher and have always found that once an actual legal perspective is called into a project or job, it kills it.

Generally the process is one of: someone saying "are we going to get sued for this?" - legal advice is sought, and then the project (or the content) is eventually pulled because it is all too difficult and problematic to continue.

I totally agree that the copyright laws are designed to protect corporate interests and as a result actually act against smaller groups and individuals (artists/students/ community groups). The copyright laws as they impact on my practice act more like they are a way of legislating the right to communication. They rely on having corporate levels of financial power in order to use the laws for protection - individuals can only GET sued, not do the suing.

Images/sounds/ideas that corporates push to embed into the public consciousness as fully as possible (a nike branded shirt) aren't legally allowed to be used as communicative tools by the public at all. So the common visual language of the street becomes based on components which are illegal to re-use in our work... this can become a means of muzzling non-mainstream media outlets and alterative viewpoints. It can, at it's extreme, put all the power for communication (and therefore culture production) into the hands of those with the financial clout to wield those © laws...(it bears resemblance to Monsanto giving out GM canola that is infertile, so we have to go back to the supplier in order to have a continued source).

As to copyright law v's a culture of sharing and development of new ideas and concepts that is a another issue...

..one step I can see might be taken is to push for an exclusion from copyright liability if the image/sound is used for educational use, this would at least allow students to develop their communication skills in a more open, non-commercially answerable environment.

## Nancy Vaudeville

### QUOTE

“Intellectual property is distinct from “real” property because it is not naturally scarce. If someone steals my car, I am left with no car. Yet if someone photocopies my book, I still have my book. The fundamental purpose of intellectual property law is create artificial scarcity”.....

from “Anarchist in the Library” by Siva Vaidhyanathan ‘s

ah.....that scarcity thing again.....the illusion that is the foundation of our economic system.

LET’S HAVE ABUNDANCE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

## Simon

I work in an area where the only products traded are ideas. Previously, i was always an ideas libertarian, wanting the ideas to roam freely on the plains, helping everyone live better lives.

But, at the age of 21, i’m now a little more skeptical.

For me to be paying the rent and putting food on the (card) table, I need to be making money. For me to make money, i need to supply a service to someone or something. As someone’s who’s full of ideas (some would say otherwise), i see selling ideas as my best way to make a cent.

Which is cool - but if some sneaky bastard comes and steals my ideas, that directly costs me money. Having had it happen to me a couple of times, it’s a rather painful and alienating experience. And so for me, copyright, for all its faults, is a viable protection for my ideas and way of making a living.

## narcissi

Copyright does not protect ideas, nor should it. It only protects your expression of them. This gives you incentives to go out and express your ideas while retaining them in the public domain for others to take up and express in a different and maybe better way.

This focus on proprietary rights and licences loses sight

of the fact that it benefits all of us to keep ideas in the public domain. Sure, we might lose some ideas to others (and I have) but most of our own ideas are formed from a collection of other people’s ideas if we were to be really honest about it.

Take recipe writers, for example. Recipes aren’t copyrightable, their expression is though. So I can’t copy and paste the full text of Nigella’s chocolate cheesecake and stick it on my website, but I can rewrite it and incorporate my changes to it. I actually think this is a good thing, because food (like culture) is so interlinked with its past and present. Nigella’s chocolate cheesecake has been derived from other chocolate cheesecakes, so as my cheesecake will take from hers. Why by adding a little more chocolate or vanilla should I have the copyright to this cheesecake? If I have a better way of explaining to people how to make that cheesecake then I own the expression of it, but not the facts of what is in the cheesecake and how it got there.

I don’t have to reinvent the cheesecake (or be banned from making anything that is substantially a cheesecake), but I can take what is in the public domain and make it better.

## mfallu

I guess that is the interesting thing about creative commons....

rather than a blanket ban on all uses of a piece of copyrighted material - it allows the “owner” to retain some rights but to relinquish others.

Simon - in your example - you might be upset by people profiting from your ideas, but completely ok with them being spread with attribution back to you - for non-commercial purposes.

There is still nothing here to stop people stealing from you - but at least there is an avenue for legitimate collaboration.

As things stand - copyright is an all or nothing scenario. You either retain all rights or relinquish them all. Not really the most flexible of arrangements.

## Mim

As I understand it - this creative commons thing isn't all about altruism. There's a few examples of authors releasing books online under CC licenses & finding that the online circulation of their work actually increased sales.

I think Elliott might be able to point us in the direction of some specific examples...

## elliott.b

We the Media: Grassroots journalism, by the people, for the people by Dan Gillmor is one example where such a situation occurred. and even Lawrence Lessig's own Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity had the same situation occur when it was released. by making it available under a CC license, Lessig actually increased the knowledge of the book and the formats in which it is available (see [free-culture.org](http://www.free-culture.org/) for more)

<http://www.free-culture.org/>

## ScantyDan

<http://www.squiz.net/>

What about hybrid models like Australia's own [Squiz](#) whose software is mostly open source, but who run a successful business on selling the skills to manage it? Those skills are very hard to "steal" regardless of who reads their sourcecode, and regardless of the presence or absence of any form of copyright. Perhaps your business model would have room for some kind of shift in emphasis to lease stealable models, Simon?

## elliott.b

CC help creators retain their copyright but gives them a legally sound framework to allow certain exceptions to it, upon certain conditions. the reality is that CC licenses rely on copyright for their enforcement -- just like the GNU General Public License.

QUOTE (mfallu @ Nov 18 2004, 05:00 PM)

Simon...you might be upset by people profiting from your ideas, but completely ok with them being spread with

attribution back to you - for non commercial purposes.

that's the point of the non-commercial license (and in this case the attribution-noncommercial license). what makes it so versatile is that it prohibits the use of your work by other people if they are making commercial gain from the original work, while also requiring the user to attribute you as the original creator. but you are not limited from making money from it at all.

QUOTE (Creative Commons site FAQ)

we designed the noncommercial license option to be a tool to help people make money from their work, by allowing them to maximize the distribution of their works while keeping control of the commercial aspects of their copyright.

Take this example: You license your photograph with a noncommercial license and post it on your website. An editor at Spectacle, a for-profit magazine, comes across your photo and wants to use it for the next issue's cover. Under the noncommercial term, the editor could copy your photograph and show it to her friends and co-workers, but she would have to strike a separate deal with you (for money, if you're smart) to use it for the magazine.

## steal my ideas!, <subvertising and the games of tactical media>

### Tim Parish

“Santa Clause is coming to town”

Imagine this scenario:

*I have an idea to make a wry music video take on a christmas carol mixing it with a coke jingle – because Im a cynical kinda guy - and I just read that cocacola invented the contemporary image of Santa Claus as a marketing project and I want to make people think about a modern post-religious icon which encourages consumerism, while also pointing out the bold philosophical hedonistic simplicity in the Coke’s ‘Enjoy’® slogan. I write a song where we sample equal measures the christmas song: Santa ‘Clause’ is coming to town.. and the ‘Coke Is It’ jingle – writing a completely new song in the process (depending on your perspective on law) then make a video where Santa is flying around (possibly high on coke), dropping Coca Cola into chimneys – as his sleigh takes off you notice it is actually sponsored by Coke – and he flies past a billboard with the ye olde classic Santa Claus Coke billboards..*

So I make the video... using some nifty animation technique.. It’s my final assessment for uni, and so I send it to a few festivals... I get some interesting reviews – someone says they found it a fascinating deconstruction of modern consumerist idols and the history of corporate branding. Most people just laugh a lot. Someone else tells me it’s just a glorified ad, and I can’t help but advertise them by even mentioning them, so I’m a corporate dupe. One guy in the audience works for a company called ‘Cocacola’ who decides to sue me for using their name, logo, slogan, and theme music to make an art piece. Basically, Im fucked. There is no way I can get permission to make a piece like this, but I decided to do it anyway. My only defence is I’ve made no money out of it.. So they just tell me I have to destroy all copies of it.. I decide to agree, but upload it to the data wilderness of the internet anonymously and claim that I am innocent – letting it free to have a life of it’s own, outside of my copy protection...

The only thing is - how many times did I just say Coke in this article? I don’t really care, coz I needed a brand to prove my point, but how much free advertising would a short film like this do for Coke, no matter how cynical. Sometimes I wonder if an upside down swoosh is actually doin much but reminding us that the swoosh is everywhere..

Know what I mean?

### mfallu

An upside down swoosh on the pavement - is a rightways up swoosh - depending on which way your walking.

But an upside down swoosh over the mouth of a photo of a child with a slogan saying “child slavery makes me unhappy” might be a “witty” subversion to some - thing is, who is primed and ready to get a subvertising campaign like this - most probably, not the people who are buying nike. Brands don’t exploit the third world - the people in charge of them do.

Sub-vertising / ad-busting - is all good and well. Hell if it makes you feel better - I say go for it. It’s better than sitting around bored. But I don’t think it is all that likely to change peoples attitudes. We spend so much time preaching to the converted - that sometimes I wonder if we would even recognise a message that has more universal appeal. How about an ad like this -

This is a photo of Phil Knight - he is worth \$4.2 billion, he has 2 children and he wouldn’t stand to see them exploited. He is OK about exploiting other kids though - like kids in Indonesian sweatshops making 50 cents a day and churning out Nike shoes for less than \$2 for materials and labor. Oh - and he is probably OK with exploiting your kids too - given that he is trying to sell them shoes for \$200.

Phil Knight can’t make a difference to your kids, he can’t make them cool and neither can his shoes, but you can.

Don’t let Phil Knight get away with exploiting kids -  
Don’t buy Nike

No subvertising - no in club message that you can decode - It’s simple and to the point... if you distributed it to parents at school sporting carnivals it might even make a difference.



I'm not against ad busting - it's fun and humorous to those in the know, and everyone needs a hobby - but if you are trying to change people's behaviour - then I think preaching to the converted might not be the best use of your time.

'Supersize Me' worked because it delivered a message that people could understand - If you continue to eat McDonalds - you will get fat, sick and you won't feel like sex. And it delivered the message in the most direct way possible - by showing what happens to an ordinary guy who eats nothing but McDonalds.

Sure - the movie may have made some people feel like a burger - but it also prompted a large change in the product lineup that McDonalds sell.

But lets face it - coming up with campaigns is the easy part - implementing them and motivating people to take part is the hard part.

I don't mean to hector and nag - but it is just that I don't think that the same tactics we have been using for the last 15 years are working and it might be time to try something a little more direct.

### ScantyDan

So, what *does* work for public engagement? What is mass communication for social change, and what is looking cool in front of your friends? Are there any tactics that people with social change agendas typically use that are simply out-of-date? What would be a better way of communicating your message than defacing billboards and remixing ads?

<http://203.41.215.172/>

I reckon subvertising has worked - check out the work of seminal billboardists [BUGA UP](#), whose campaign (against tobacco advertising) started 25 years ago. They used to get a *lot* of press. Not so much these days, although they are still around and active.

Maybe the problem is simply using the same tactic for too long? The media is used to billboard defacement now... Advertisers pre-deface their billboards... The people that you're trying to change move on, and so must you? So, then, what IS the next bunch of communications strategies to change the world?

### mfalu

Things like protest are so over done - they just blend into the background now. How many people who aren't actually at the protest pay any attention to it? Many? How many pay positive attention? - I suspect even less.

Sure there are fantastic protest like the reconciliation rallies and the large antiwar rallies that got 200 - 500 thousand depending on where you were in the country.

The thing is - where did all those people and energy go?

I supplied my contact details - phone, email address, postal address - on petitions etc. I was never contacted - I can only presume no one else was either.

We need to take a much more ORGANISING MODEL based approach - like the trade unions. This model seeks at every step to bring new people into the campaign. To give them small achievable goals to get them active in the campaign and give them a sense of ownership, and a pathway by which they can become more involved and become activists.

Every time someone signs a petition - get a contact and put them on a list as being interested in that issue - follow up with them about that issue.

We need to be more like a company that generates and follows up on sales leads - hell half of us have probably worked in telemarketing at some point in time.... why don't we take what we have learned and apply it to social change.

If we are constantly trying out these messages and strategies - we won't have to gamble it all once every four years to know what will work at election time. We will already have that information in terms of the response rates to our campaigns.

We could try heaps of things:

Take a petition on an issue: run it in the public domain

Generate a list of contacts from the petition.

divide the list into electronic and postal contacts.

break those contact lists into chunks of ten or twenty.

pick one person on each list - send them an update on the issue with info on how they can get involved - and ask them to make a copy of everything, pick another person on the list and send it on....

Ask the last person on the list to send it back.

Yes this is chain mail - yes the idea is at least 100 years old - but it is about establishing contacts between people in unexpected ways.

You could break the contacts down by geography and let people know that there are other people in their local area who feel the same way - set up a meeting and give them the opportunity to get together and work on projects in their local area.

The best thing is that all of these strategies can be mediated by technology if you so choose.

Hell - if you run a website - simply having a 'send an email to a friend' link at the bottom of every page and tracking who does what would be a great way of laying foundations for a campaign organising network.

If you identify someone who sends 5 email from your site - you want that person - you need them - they are a potentially passionate activist who will work their networks with your assistance.

None of this is rocket science - but we must all of us - be continuously on the lookout for ways to expand the circle our discussions, actions and engagements.

It is all very satisfying to stand shoulder to shoulder with people who passionately agree with your point of view - but if you never grow that group then you really unlikely to make an impact on the democratic process. (armed struggle is another thing entirely - but I'm not really down with that)

### **vicx**

I always thought that reality was the best defence against marketing.  
Reality dilutes branding. So we have to bring reality into view and point out the disparities.

Reality intrudes on the image making industries, and they are forced to adjust their techniques.

Perhaps the next message for the marketing industry to learn is that keeping it real is even better than saying "Keep it real" ironically.

If you've seen John Stewart and the Daily Show ... you might have seen his use of sincerity and honesty. It only works as humour in the presence of gross insincerity and dishonesty (there's plenty of that around atm) and he is very funny.

I think sincerity is the next wave and its already having an effect.

### **ScantyDan**

I'm not sure about "reality" being the answer

One thing about the world is that it is very complex.... This is very apparent in product purchase decisions. There is a particularly excellent book, [Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things](http://www.northwestwatch.org/publications/stuff.asp) which tries, and fails, to trace the social and environmental consequences of the consumption of the products involved in a simple trip to work. In something like 100 pages they only begin to scratch the surface of which fisheries, mines, forests, labour conditions, and human rights abuses are involved in the very ordinary set of products involved in a very ordinary morning.

<http://www.northwestwatch.org/publications/stuff.asp>

The simple fact is: products in our economies have enormously complex lifecycles, and even in the absence of any advertising, it's an enormous task to work out what to buy - we can't really get a good handle on reality, at least not as consumers. Things like environmental emissions involved in product manufacture aren't reflected in the price- they are *economic externalities*. Things like poor labour conditions actually make products *cheaper*. And the information about either of these factors is not available when you buy it.

One thing the anti-nike campaign obscures, for example, is how bad the labour conditions are throughout the footwear industry (and the global clothing trade in general).

But how do you decide which good causes *more* harm. So I need shoes: Is Nike even the worst manufacturer? How do you trade these things against one another?

## morgs

Subverting or Ad Busting is interesting but I do fail to see the effectiveness of it. It seems that it is an exercise in trying to bring something down. Not always, culture jamming can be positive at times.

The same amount of energy that goes into Ad Busting could be used to market the socially better products. If they are better they should sell themselves,, but marketing is funny. Beta was the better video but VHS was the better marketer. Now if this is true, then ad busting is a waste of time - the good guys need all the marketing they can get.

Maximize the positives and minimize the negatives. Marketing against war is not the same as marketing for peace. And what about world leaders. Much energy is put into marketing people like bush as bad guys, but if he is the only example put before you, what else will you have to choose from? It is like smacking a child for doing something the wrong way and never actually letting them know what the right way is. We need to be shown positive role models.

## Not just for artists: Copyright and IP also affects scientists

### mfallu

Copyright / Intellectual Property / patents - don't just effect artists and couch potatoes - scientists are affected too.

Much research is driven by the need to commercialise results - some of the basic tools of modern science (particularly in the bio-sciences) are patented and licensable with non disclosure agreements etc. etc.

Genes and whole genomes are patentable - some countries like America have limited funding for certain types of stem cell research and cant use stem cell lines from other countries because of intellectual property concerns...

But it is not all doom and gloom - recently the Australian Stem Cell Centre at Monash in Melbourne annouced that it was going to make certain stem cell lines available to researchers around the world without intellectual property obligations... great news for scientists and for people who will benefit from their research.

Other scientists are presuring scientific journals to remove the copyright restrictions on published journal articles - and if the journals refuse the scientists are voting with their feet and making their research available to publishers who have a more open attitude. Some scientists have even set up thier own online - peer reviewed - clearing houses where scientific articles are available without the restrictions of copyright - including the raw data of experiments / dna sequences / and the like.

Are you a scientist / or a student studying to become one - tell us your stories and

share your experiences of how intellectual property issues influence the way you do your work.

### ScantyDan

An organisation in Canberra ([CAMBIA](http://www.cambia.org/)) is trying to start an initiative called [BIOS](http://www.bios.net/) - biological innovation for an open society to facilitate open source gene-tech research, much as <http://sourceforge.net> has done for software. Much like the open source software movement, they make a good case for this tactic to bypass paptent barriers for research

<http://www.cambia.org/>  
<http://www.bios.net/>

And here's another intersting one: [the hypercar](http://www.rmi.org/sitepages/pid386.php) which is a project that designs hyperefficient plastic fuel-cell cars and releases them into the public domain (sometimes) or shares the results with selected corporations (others) - but either way, their concept is a strategic use of quasi-'open-sourcing' by releasing the hypercar deisgn for free, one of their goals was to break a perceived deadlock in the car industry whereby it was not cost-effective for anyone to invest in developing radical improvements in car efficiency if they knew their competitors were not going to, and thus cause the entire industry to move into the area (e.g. [the Toyota prius](http://www.toyota.com/prius/))

<http://www.rmi.org/sitepages/pid386.php>

Two related groups NOT emphasising the open source model is the [Factor of Ten project](http://www.naturaledgeproject.net/) and the [Natural Edge Project](http://www.naturaledgeproject.net/). They argue that a key factor hampering innovation (specifically: green business practices) is poor diffusion of ideas that are already in the public domain, even where it is in everyone's interest to adopt them - for example, energy efficient manufacturing is cheaper, so why are energy efficiency innovations slow to diffuse?

<http://www.toyota.com/prius/>

[www.naturaledgeproject.net/](http://www.naturaledgeproject.net/)

Open sourcing in this case can't address such issues- it's a more general question of knowledge diffusion. In fact, perhaps one could make a case that the plethora of high-maintenance trendy open-source knowledge projects, and cleverly sidestepping IP issues, is taking away from time that researches could spend keeping themselves up to speed with the things they could do with already publicly available knowledge. Hm. Anyone else want to ponder this with me?

### narcissi

The problem I have, well one of many ( ), is that quite a lot of what ends up being patented originally started with publicly funded research. Universities are pushed to take out patents on the research which they, on too many occasions,

sell quite cheaply to pharmaceutical companies. Or they are told to find private funding and the patent goes to the company that has put up the pitiful amount that is needed to pay a research assistant. Of course the pharmaceutical companies don't take that into account when determining pricing, the consumer after having partly paid for research through their tax dollars, is then forced to pay full price as if the product was developed through private research.

I think there's something wrong with the fact that it is a big thing that a research centre at Monash is allowing this research to be used freely. Isn't that what universities are supposed to do? Contribute to the great pool of public knowledge? Isn't that why we fund researchers in public universities so that they have incentives other than those that would come from exploiting their results?

You are now seeing more and more researchers take their research outside of the university to make profits from it. But how can you blame them as more and more universities try to exploit for profit the research that they produce?

I realise that it is a result of a push by government to make everything self funding but in the end it is inefficient because the more stuff which should be public domain knowledge is patented, the more it promotes monopolies, creates higher barriers to entry for newer companies, stifles innovation and consequently, the higher are the costs to consumers.

#### **mfallu**

I personally feel that "efficiency drives" tend to miss the point - it is the inefficiencies in a system that make it more adaptable and responsive - when an algal bloom happens at a time or place it hasn't happened before - government / university researchers are able to go and investigate right away. How - because there is a bit of spare capacity in a system that pays people to research this sort of phenomena.

If all of this research was outsourced to private companies and purchased on an as needs basis - it would be impossible for government / universities to be as responsive. Not to mention that all of the research information would be tied up in private companies.

Researchers need to be encouraged to prioritise their work and produce measurable outputs - but achieving self reliance through commercialisation is by no means the best and only benchmark.

#### **\_elliott.b**

... i started my law degree and wanted to cry because of how tragically irrelevant (and ironically relevant) it all was. i kept thinking to myself 'why am i doing this? there is nothing creative here.' but it was that very reason that pushes me through each semester.

because of my own conflict between law and creativity i quickly took up an interest in ip and copyright, which naturally stemmed to an interest in a better way of doing copyright. as a young freelance writer and journalist i knew i wanted to protect my writing and my other creative outlets but i didn't want to close them off to the world. exposure was important to me and the wider i could get my work the better. also i was writing about socially sticky ideas in a range of areas including sexuality, gender, alternative masculinities, the intersections of these concepts as well as culture and subculture, social movement and more, so i wanted to give people the opportunity to reply, to discuss, to engage with and to expand on my work.

that was how it came across [Creative Commons](#). What attracted me to the licences was the flexibility they provided (or at least were attempting to provide). i had found a way to have legal certainty while still giving away some right to my work.

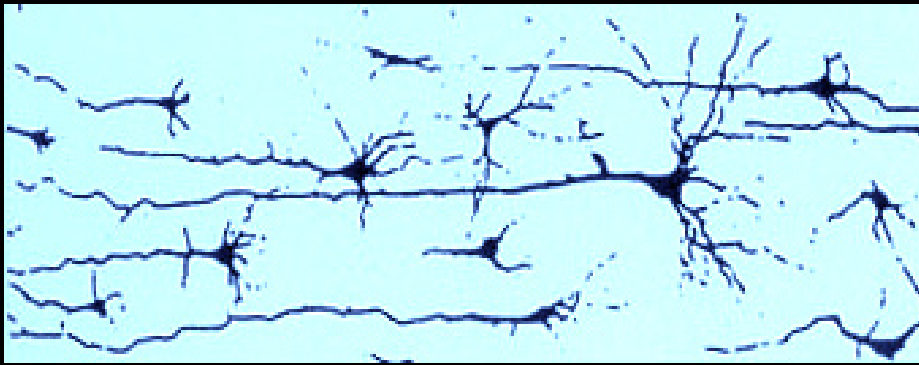
i actually made inquiries to the US Creative Commons organisation about an Australia version, which is why i am now involved with [iCommons.au](#), our very own organisation devoted to implement the CC licences into Australian copyright law.

i guess in a round about kind of way i am trying to illustrate that there are projects going on, and from within the law world itself, to make copyright more flexible and better reflect the desires of a large amount of creative people.

Under the [Copyright Act 1968 \(Cth\)](#) the entirety of Part VA—Copying and communication of broadcasts by educational and other institutions related to educational exceptions to copyright. the law does have some protections for educational breach of copyright. i am not trying to say that these provisions are adequate, or even go far enough to provide an open, non-commercially answerable environment for student as you would like (and i would also like), but like most things in law, the majority of people don't know that such provisions exist, let alone what they are.

<http://www.scaleplus.law.gov.au/cgi-bin/download.pl?/scale/data/pasteact/0/244>

At Birth



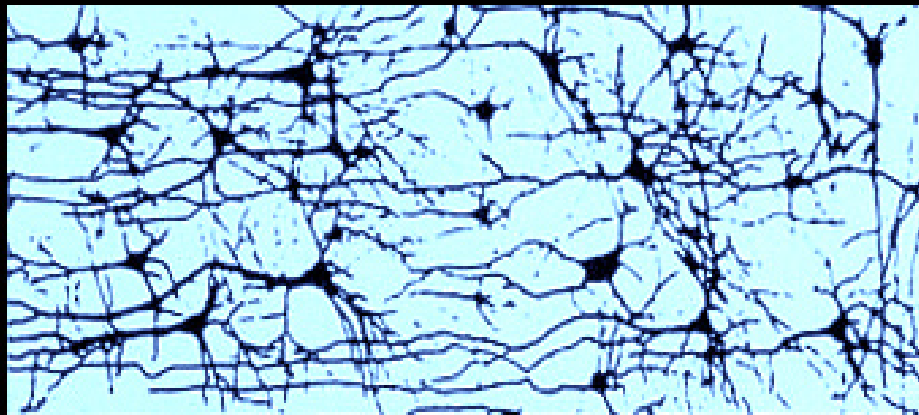
## What's on the Cards?

6 Years Old



## Future Agendas for Change

14 Years Old



### A 20 year plan for change: A need for progressive Australians to build unity

#### James Arvanitakis

Well if you are like me, you must be pretty depressed with the election results. I did not think that Latham would win, but there is no way I expected a swing against the ALP and the rise of the new religious Right! I am sure it could have got worse... but not by much. The elections promise at least 2 more terms and could drive the ALP further to the conservatism...

Essentially, I feel like we are losing our country and the longer we leave it, the worse it is getting. I am not sure who is to blame... we have all campaigned hard - but maybe we were not smart enough. Maybe we were too aggressive or not aggressive enough. Maybe we are too divided, or maybe we are stale. Maybe we should have taken Howard more seriously. Maybe we had too much faith in the electorate or maybe not enough... I have no idea.

So... the question is what are we going to do about it? Really, again I have no idea. But I have been reading a bunch of stuff about the rise of the far Right in the US, and how there was a 20 year plan.

I know we have other priorities at the moment... but we need to do something about it.

Yours in peace and friendship

### Mark D

... there's lots to learn about the way the US new right and their Oz cousins have been organising themselves since the 1960s. It's worth remembering that during the civil rights era conservatives felt as marginalised as the left does now... though today's conservatives have a few advantages when it comes to setting agendas. **First, they have a simple political message (which boils down to 'resist social movements and take personal responsibility'). Progressive messages are always, by their very nature, nuanced and complex, and are therefore difficult to make play. The other thing is they've managed to frame their message entirely in positive terms - their language, which they've spent two decades honing, is of opportunity and choices... Howard had an underlying message that said 'you don't need to feel bad about stuff', from Aborigines to asylum seekers... To vote otherwise is to face moral truths that many people aren't ready to face...**

### Simon

The neo-con movement emerged in the eighties as a spinoff to liberalism. It built on the economic neo-con agenda (started in the seventies by the Chicago Economics school professors like Milton Friedman, who in turn followed Hayek), and was never really driven with a "10 year plan" as such. The neo-cons were emboldened by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and they were one of the few groups to offer a post Cold War vision and strategy. This attracted people, especially ex-lefties (which is what most neo-cons are) and liberals who were disappointed with the vision being articulated there.

The current setup is driven largely by Rice, Cheney and Wolfowitz, who are all influential in Bush's cricle. Wolfowitz has been obsessed by Iraq for years, and it was his and Cheney's badgering that really brought it back onto the scene after Sept 11. Rice, as an ex-Politics Professor and realist jumped the fence about this time, seemingly taken by the pursuit of a values-driven foreign policy.

What's my point?

There was no specific plan. Rather, there seemed to be

coherent schools of thought that colour the world in a certain way, and as circumstances changed, different schools seemed to fit better. Ideas come and go, but political pragmatism is forever - and it just so happens that the current administration's biases are served well by neo-con thought.

### tomd

... there may have been no single overarching plan, but there have certainly been a set of long-term strategies by the american right (not just the neo-cons) to address what they felt was a liberal bias in the media. The networks of wealthy industrialists, think tanks, talking heads, administration officials and media outlets is well-established and was built, strategically, over time.

**... i am hopeful that some of these new media platforms we're building are, by their very nature, considerably more accessible than the existing media cliché's. irrespective of what is inevitably a close-knit network behind all these projects... if the projects themselves serve their functions directives then they create new opportunities for any who wish to take advantage of them.**

### mfallu

**it becomes a pretty interesting game to see how people will position themselves in opposition to your label...**

### pro-choice vs pro-life

**if we called ourselves thinkers - they would call themselves "do' ers" - we get things done, they think about it.**

**As much as I hate it - issue based politics might have to be the way forward.**

**Ignore labels for a while and focus on crafting the language we use to progress our cause around specific issues.**

**Over time as we a) regain the publics trust B) get them thinking about issues that are relevant to them - I believe we will see one of two things:**

**either a) new terms that we are comfortable with will emerge or B) old ones will be acceptable to be used again.**

### Mim

A great deal of semantic drift has happened to... words like 'choice', 'elite', 'freedom', and 'values'.

... The popularity of the word 'left' probably comes from the lack of other ready-to-wear labels. 'Progressive' is a little more flexible - as it has connotations of being forward-looking rather than backward-looking...

### Mark D

... The genius of the neo-cons is that they've found a way to make 'ordinary people' identify with traditional conservative ideas around the sanctity of private property and tolerance for inequality... But that, for me, leaves open an opportunity. It's about equating those ideas with the deep sense of unease that many people have about the way society is heading, and creating 'stories' that explain for people why things are the way they are, and how bad ideas have been sold. One of the great wonders of the Howard government is the way they create insecurity (by ongoing 'restructuring', erosion of traditional services, increased 'competition' at every level of society), then exploit it at the ballot box by offering bogies and quasi-solutions centred on the traditional notion of 'family', and 'national security'.

### Graham Young

**That's one reason why the left does as badly as it does. Its discourse excludes most Australians, whereas the discourse of the centre and right is much more inclusive. It assumes that at least half the population doesn't care about rights and injustice, when they do, they just care about it in different forms and ways. It brands a government that wins more than 50% of the vote in an electoral system which is fairer and better than most electoral systems in the world "undemocratic" because that government implements policies it doesn't agree with.**

... I suspect most Australians when they think about it, want to analyse these things from a much less judgmental and

much more empirical point of view than the left.

### Mark D

**... underneath it all, I think questions of fairness and social justice are still deeply important to most Australians; it's a matter of how those questions have been framed, and, for those of us who believe in mutuality, of learning new ways to speak to what I think are enduring concerns in the minds of most people.**

**From an electoral point of view, it's important to remember that just over half of voters voted for Howard, not everyone, and that of those who did vote for him, most probably don't support his agenda on all counts. Howard's success is founded in knowing what people worry about, not what they dream about.**

### Nancy Vaudeville

The Australian public is apathetic and why shouldn't they be?. They did vote Howard in on interest rates and I can totally understand why.

We're in a society that privileges wealth over all else. Our identities are defined by how we earn our paycheck, and the material possessions that we can accumulate. Tradition and religion is basically in its death throes and that whole messy 'meaning of life' thing is looking pretty hazy. VISA can pay for your dreams, and CLAIROL helps you to be you!!!! ... We all know politicians lie, we know corporations are looking out for themselves, and we know that we have to slave ourselves in order to pay for those moments where we actually live. We all know this.....but none of us believe it can change.

What we need is inspiration. We need to be shown the immense possibilities of existence...

The left is in a mess and it should be cos the answer for the evolution of society has to come from the recognition of difference. The right works cos its a dogma...

The left also has to get bold... we need to demand optimism. Cos if we don't up the stakes then fate will soon step in for us in the form of nuclear warfare, environmental disaster or the end of the oil age and force us to change. Is this what we are all waiting for????

## tomd

**... if a 20 year plan is going to work there also needs to be a real investment in it, and strong coordination of that investment. just like the neo-con plan in the states it requires new think tanks, the promotion of new thinkers, new media outlets and media stars.**

## Mim

... any kind of movement needs a crew of people who are skilled at public communication, and it does take a fair bit of practice to develop those skills. I wonder what it would take to get a new, diverse generation of not-politicians into the public eye... skilled spokespeople for alternative visions of democracy...

I think the key is to have multiple voices eloquently putting forward ideas from a whole range of different perspectives on a whole range of different social issues...but perhaps using some common language & referring to a few unifying ideas.

and these voices need to be grounded in community-based projects that demonstrate the practical advantages of the kind of ideas they are describing.

## morgs

...I really would like us to be building each other up. Giving some pride back to the human race... We need to be giving people good news about the human race... people need a media that 'makes hope possible, rather than despair convincing.'

... Society has arrived at this place because of competition. And yet many activists see themselves in a battle that they are trying to win. I believe that it was Einstein who said that: "You cannot solve a problem with the same thinking that created it."

## saskia

As a younger activist I was eternally intrigued by the... divide between the socialist and the green movements. It appeared to me that the division came down to, not so much

a different vision of ideals... but different versions of how to get there. Most of the socialist groups I came into contact with seemed to focus their energies toward a particular catalytic moment in history where the revolution would occur as an event and would change history so dramatically that the means would, in retrospect, be justified by the ends. The green movement, on the other hand, seemed much more concerned with perfect process. The process for them is part of a continuing revolution and therefore it does not make sense to compromise ideals to reach an end point.

... I'm interested to hear how people think we can learn to sit with or bring together the fragmentation of the left. What do people see as acceptable compromises along the road? How much can we use propaganda? How relevant is consensus? How aggressive is too aggressive? How much can we compromise and hide what we are actually about in order to achieve change?

I'm not asking for resolution so much as seeing how divergent opinions really are and potentially working out how to work better with heterogeneity.

## Mark D

Know what you mean about fragmentation. One of the really smart things leading neo-cons did in the states in the 1970s was work out ways of uniting various conservative factions under 'umbrella issues'. Civil rights was one, abortion another. It didn't matter where you came from on the conservative spectrum... what mattered was where you stood on specific issues... The same techniques have worked to a lesser degree in Oz — check out the CIS site, and their recent forums... This, it seems to me, is a way of creating unity and a movement that can attract broader public backing, without asking very different groups to compromise their various core ideals.

## saccharine

Julian Ninio, whom I interviewed for [Vibewire](#) a few months back, had some interesting ideas on the topic though - essentially arguing that we should try to strip it all back to some basic values, like equality and opportunity, and the other values you guys have listed above - progress, democracy and so on. The same way the conservatives do it, only linguistically associating these values with left wing policy.

## James Arvanitakis

**There is no doubt that the progressive elements of Australia... are deeply divided and there is a real element of mistrust - most often based on historical factors. But this does not mean that a shared vision is not possible. We can start on the broad things WE AGREE ON...**

**How many 'progressives' would argue against a fair taxation system, quality public health, transport and education, the need for real reconciliation, a robust democracy and Australia meeting its international obligations.**

Maybe we can start with simple 'yes'/'no' questions. Should Australia be a republic: Y/N. Should we humanely treat refugees: Y/N. Should we invade other nations: Y/N. Then build from there. The next challenge becomes one of selling this vision... the detail/policies are the final stage.

## mfallu

**... I share your frustration with the left. paper thin consensus politics veneers wrapped over internally inconsistent identity based politics... It makes it so hard to organise anything.**

**For me - electronic tools are the answer - not because in themselves they solve the problems of the world... but because they give a wider range of people access to organising opportunities. They can use these tools to organise campaigns in the offline world - to co-ordinate activities irrespective of time constraints and geography.**

**Most importantly - they are self selective / voluntary associations - people who get involved take ownership of themselves.**

## Graham Young

**I see one of the challenges for contemporary politics and governance to be dealing with heightened expectations of voters of what they should get from the system coupled with an increasing tendency for voters to be driven by interests, not personalities, group membership, or where they live. Electronic systems offer the possibility of brokering a more satisfying relationship around interest for all participants than current systems, but they have to be designed to do that, it won't happen by accident.**

## Graham Young

... The left appears to be much more active on the 'net than the right. It shows up in our surveys and it shows up in overseas research as well. I have a number of theories as to why it happens.

You're probably right that as the left is not happy with the status quo, then they have a greater reason overall for agitating, but then I'm an activist and I'm on the right, so that argument only takes you so far.

Inasmuch as politics is still class based, then those on the right, particularly males (who seem to dominate these online forums) are probably at their desks logging up billable hours while the rest of us are chatting.

**... From our qualitative survey research I'm starting to build up a psychological profile of voters on both sides. It's very provisional, but one of the themes that is coming through is that the left is more interested in words, while the right is more interested in actions. Latham says Howard lies i.e. "look at what he says"; but the public says, we can trust him because "look at what he does".**

At the same time, those on the left seem to be more concerned about the effect of policies on people, and those on the right more interested in systems. My tentative theory is that these different psychologies express themselves in different ways in a whole range of engagements, including the Internet.

**One of the risks for eDemocracy is that it will become identified more strongly with the left and will therefore be ignored by right of centre politicians.**

## mfallu

**I think one of the problems is that irrespective of whether we come from the left or right of the political spectrum is that Australians have been trained to be consumers of government - clients of government services.**

**The Australian political consumer, is a creature of entitlement, expecting instant satisfaction from somebody whenever something goes wrong. Even though they rarely get great customer service - political consumers feel entitled to nothing less than great customer service from government (all common sense and experience aside).**

## Spirit, Power and Politics, Towards a trans-rational policy

Sass

I received an interesting article on this topic, which I felt was fairly spot on in its analysis:

The Democrats Needed and Need a Religious/Spiritual Left  
November 3, 2004

For years the Democrats have been telling themselves “it’s the economy, stupid.” Yet consistently for dozens of years millions of middle income Americans have voted against their economic interests to support Republicans who have tapped a deeper set of needs.

**Tens of millions of Americans feel betrayed by a society that seems to place materialism and selfishness above moral values. They know that “looking out for number one” has become the common sense of our society, but they want a life that is about something more-a**

**framework of meaning and purpose to their lives that would transcend the grasping and narcissism that surrounds them... they want their lives to have meaning- and they respond to candidates who seem to care about values and some sense of transcendent purpose.**

**Many of these voters have found a “politics of meaning” in the political Right.** In the Right wing churches and synagogues these voters are presented with a coherent worldview that speaks to their “meaning needs.” Most of these churches and synagogues demonstrate a high level of caring for their members, even if the flip side is a willingness to demean those on the outside...

It’s easy to see how this hunger gets manipulated in ways that liberals find offensive and contradictory...

Yet liberals, trapped in a long-standing disdain for religion and tone-deaf to the spiritual needs that underlie the move to the Right, have been unable to engage these voters in a serious dialogue. Rightly angry at the way that some religious communities have been mired in authoritarianism, racism, sexism and homophobia, the liberal world has developed such a knee-jerk hostility to religion that it has both marginalized those many people on the Left who actually do have spiritual yearnings and simultaneously refused to acknowledge that many who move to the Right have legitimate complaints about the ethos of selfishness in American life.

Imagine if John Kerry had been able to counter George Bush by insisting that a serious religious person would never turn his back on the suffering of the poor, that the bible’s injunction to love one’s neighbor required us to provide health care for all, and that the New Testament’s command to “turn the other cheek” should give us a predisposition against responding to violence with violence.

If the Democrats were to foster a religions/spiritual Left, they would no longer pick candidates who support preemptive wars or who appease corporate power. They would reject the cynical realism that led them to pretend to be born-again militarists... Instead of assuming that most Americans are either stupid or reactionary, a religious Left would understand that many Americans who are on the Right actually share the same concern for a world based on love and generosity that underlies Left politics, even though lefties often hide their value attachments.

... It is this spiritual lesson-that our own well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet and on the well-being of the earth-a lesson rooted deeply in the spiritual wisdom of virtually every religion on the planet...

Yet to take that seriously, the Democrats are going to have to get over the false and demeaning perception that the Americans who voted for Bush could never be moved to care about the well being of anyone but themselves.

The last time Democrats had real social power was when they linked their legislative agenda with a spiritual politics articulated by Martin Luther King. We cannot wait for the reappearance of that kind of charismatic leader to begin the process of re-building a spiritual/religious Left.

In peace,  
Rabbi Michael Lerner  
Tikkun Magazine

### **Joseph\_Gelfer**

One aspect the Left would benefit from is a positioning of the sacred on its agenda. It is worth noting that indigenous people around the world seem to possess an ideological and inspirational power which is quite disproportionate to their 'real world' status. The main reason for this is that almost without exception these groups have a sacred understanding of their political cause, not just of their sacred connection to a particular land... but of their connection to reality in all its forms.

... Traditionally, political evolution tends to have a transactional element to it – I win at your expense. Manifestation of the sacred in the political always benefits everyone... as there is but one collective consciousness into which the sacred flows...

... adopting Ken Wilber's model, thought lacking in critical analysis such as evangelical Christianity or the New Age is stuck in the pre-rational; regular political thought is stuck in the rational; critical political analysis combined with the sacred is liberated in the trans-rational... The challenge is to rediscover or define for the first time the shape of our sacred

reality and to live fully through it.

### **saskia**

Whilst I think its important to reintroduce some of the considerations of religious teachings back into political discussions, I think we have to be realistic about the best and most inclusive ways in which to engage with these concepts.

Perhaps what we need to reintroduce in political discourse is, not so much some ethereal concept of spirituality; rather, the interest in debating how we can best support people's interest in life, their engagement with community and their own exploration of themselves. We should be asking how we can avoid normalising individualistic, isolating and selfish dialogues within our communities.

### **sass**

I certainly wouldn't advocate for a political alliance with any one monotheistic tradition.  
But what about a multi faith platform based around core ideas of peace, social justice, environmental care, etc?  
Do you think there is a place for a progressive alliance here?

### **witchita**

Yes, I guess it'd be from the point of view of what we currently know or generally understand about beliefs, culture, politics, science... we humans are capable of using our imaginations. When we do so in combination with firm rationales, that allow other people to engage with us, then we can develop understanding.

... in times where we've run the gamut of beliefs, and we know stand on the rim of possibly endless and very bloody wars inspired by religious intolerance and fanaticism, we need to be more cautious than ever about introducing new concepts/ways of speaking. Just in case we're replacing one tyranny with another.

## ScantyDan

... endless bloody wars aren't the only endpoint of faith. There's some good (scientific!) evidence that often 'irrational' beliefs are precisely what gets us through a world which is at times simply too complex to ever submit to rigorous analysis.

Dr Fikret Berkes has written a lot on this theme- a fair few of his published academic writings are available at his site for download, [Back to the future: Ecosystem dynamics and local knowledge](#) is provocative... check out the excellent parable about how traditional beliefs could regulate caribou hunting where market mechanisms couldn't... [[http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~berkes/berkes\\_2002b.pdf](http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~berkes/berkes_2002b.pdf)]

Is it coming at it arse-backwards to use such scientific research to justify the wisdom of adopting irrational belief?

That sword cuts both ways; I have had a born-again friend justify to me a christian worldview by pointing to the fact that historically those who have held such a worldview have been more successful at accumulating wealth by dominating the natural world and other peoples.

## mfallu

Our emotional intelligence may well outperform rational calculations in some circumstances... but it doesn't stop people from getting themselves into pretty disastrous situations... like people who stay with abusive partners...

**We have to make decisions with both our head and our hearts - the real trick is learning to use both at the same time.**

## Joseph\_Gelfer

... some people are into Gaia, others meditation, other psychedelics, some even fairies. What any of these things do is offer a way in to a world of living which shimmers with magic and the sacred. The further in you get the more obvious it becomes that there is little else of comparable importance. It's a world bursting with love and compassion, but many people pursue a compartmentalisation process where they keep this locked away from their 'real world'

experience for fear of ridicule. Bringing the sacred into politics is just one way of bringing the two worlds together.

## witchita

Yes, I see what you're saying here. What sustains each of us is a personal process of selection; what keeps us feeling things are still worthwhile doing in the face of a very depressing reality?

...To hold a belief that there is nothing beyond what our senses can decipher, is in itself an arrogance, esp. when one person claims that gives them a rigorous position from which to ridicule others who don't hold the same, and arguably narrow point of view.

That arrogance becomes explicit when... the person then engages in a vitriolic defence of their 'no faith' position. Not by agreeing to disagree, or any other acknowledgement that it might be purely a personal belief, but by continued responses that denigrate even the idea that rational people might hold differing beliefs in things, though not wholly verifiable or testable on a rational framework, but certainly reasonable when considered in the context of personal 'faiths'.

Even us non-theists are capable of seeing the light in other ways of thinking that also are compassionate and deeply respectful of other people, and of the world in general.

## Democracy in Brisbane

< A Plan to Democratise Brisbane >

### HamishAlcorn

This is a super-brief version of a plan for the grass-roots in Brisbane to take City Hall. For a full version of this paper, or to get into the loop, contact me - hamishalcorn@hotmail.com

1. Enrol to vote, if you haven't already.
2. Form ad-hoc cells of people according to which ward you are enrolled to vote in.

(Then, over to individual ward-groups)

3. Raise some money (not that much).
4. Agree on a draft constitution for a community assembly (draft available).
5. Build a web page and develop an advertising campaign.
6. Call a meeting for people of the ward - membership on the basis of enrolment to vote in the ward.
7. 1st Meeting - moot the constitution and encourage nominations for the executive.
8. Continue advertising and media and organise second meeting.
9. By passing the constitution and having the executive elected, give the meeting away to the community. Original cell no longer exists.
10. Develop policy, propose community initiatives, practice governance.
11. Elect a delegate to run for council election. This person is neither a party person (though she does have an organisation developing policy and mobilising for her election) nor an independent (though she is independent of the Party system). She is a delegate - a crucial figure in democratic theory who is presently absent from our political life. For the politically romantic, this is the opportunity to elect that impossible person - the one who has no ambition to lead, but is willing to accept the responsibilities bestowed by his or her fellow citizens.

At this stage we have plenty of people to proceed in Dutton Park ward, and probably in Central and East Brisbane as well. Kicking off the three inner-city wards' Assemblies simultaneously might well be achievable heading up to the 2008 local elections.

### tomd

i find this proposal really interesting hamish. anything which sparks increased citizen involvement in the political process, delivering the political process back into the hands of citizens, is a good thing. but i also find it a bit utopian, which is probably my cynicism showing:

- how will this not simply be a group of the "usual suspects"?
- even if it's not entirely usual suspects, how will you prevent the vast majority of people seeing it as such?
- does the delegate only represent the views of the ward group, or their own views? what if their views do not conform with the majority views of the group on a given issue?

### HamishAlcorn

Thanks for these excellent questions. I'll attempt to respond to each in turn.

Firstly, the entire strategic thrust of the project is directed at the middle. So far I have been successful in contacting people who I think are crucial to maintain a gravity in the centre of our society... many people who, regardless of how they vote, do not identify especially with the political spectrum at all... this is the first thing - recognising this possible pitfall and deliberately aiming for the centre.

The second part of my answer is more interesting. **The organisers of this project, explicitly, have no policy position. We are not... for peace, we are not for or against abortion, we are not for the environment or for or against the sale of Telstra or anything else. The only thing we are united about is the need for democratic institutions, that these and other issues can be thrashed out properly at the grass-roots.**

Any criticism at all of the Assembly can be faced off with the retort. "It's your assembly - come and contribute if you don't like the way it's going." Institutionally, constitutionally, everyone (who is enrolled to vote) is in it...

The idea is that the delegate represents the policies of the Assembly. The normal democratic procedure when a delegate has to operate in a discretionary way - ie without a specific mandate - is that the decision / action is subject to later endorsement / disendorsement by the Assembly...

They are obliged as a servant of the Assembly to represent

the Assembly's views. They may make public statements to the contrary, expressing their own views, and as a final recourse of conscience they may resign, but in the City Hall a delegate is obliged to speak and vote on behalf of their employer. In corporate life this separation of personal view and delegated responsibility is not only taken for granted, but the former is actively repressed. In political life this separation is crucial if we are to speak of a democratic system.

**HamishAlcorn**

**Mim**

How is that different from representative democracy?

**HamishAlcorn**

**... today the majority gets to vote for a representative, yes, but a. in a completely alienated way, and b. they simply never (or almost never) actually get to vote on policy...**

... When people are face to face, their very ignorance is challenged. How many times have you heard people say, "some of my best friends are (minority of choice) but . . ." Statistics show very clearly that the most racist areas are the areas where there is the least cultural diversity. The point of this is that democracy would be profoundly different if people had to actually deliberate with real human beings - that is even if no other factor were different.

**In short, direct democracy is where people (the majority from issue to issue) are sovereign. Representative democracy is where people (the majority) get to periodically give their sovereignty to a ruler....**

**Mim**

How do you convince people that this would be a worthwhile investment of their time? Many people don't even bother to vote in their council elections, let alone pay attention to what happens in between elections. How do you make something like this as participatory as possible while taking as little time as possible?

**HamishAlcorn**

Firstly, one object of the project is to encourage people to

give a bit more priority to social questions. People do still attend church once a week, others attend football games in the tens of thousands very regularly, or concerts or whatever. Hell, people work too hard. The minimum I'm suggesting for a permanent Assembly is twice a year, maybe on a Sunday afternoon. There would certainly be other meetings, and committee meetings, and there is no doubt that some people would find much more time than others. But the real mass participation, for the general meetings, twice a year. Hopefully it would encourage a bit more of a participatory culture.

**... secondly, if 1% of the population of Brisbane chose to get involved in this - and many more than that are currently involved in letter writing, community organisations, P&Cs, volunteer work, protests etcetera - it would be enormous and potentially very powerful... 1% would be bloody impressive, and it seems achievable to me.**

**I am arguing, that at a time when both traditional grass-roots activism and third-force parliamentary strategies are showing themselves (in themselves) inadequate to the task before us (in my honest opinion) it is time for a little imagination in our strategies, and yes, a little risk taking.**



## Newsflash: Virtual think-tank conquers the galaxy, <Does this think tank work?>

Mim

"This is not a Virtual think-tank - what would a real one look like?"

Real think-tanks come up with policy agendas, agree on how they will frame their arguments, work at getting their ideas into influential places - the right media, the right inboxes, the right conferences. They commission research to support their positions. They establish themselves as voices of authority. (There are some non-partisan think-tanks around of course - OzProspect, The Brisbane Institute - but few are entirely without agendas).

Real think-tanks are often seen as being a bit devious and unaccountable when they go about all of the above. I guess what interests me about the phrase 'virtual think-tank' is that the net does create the opportunity for greater fluidity, greater transparency, and (debatably) broader participation in the sort of things that think-tanks do.

How it would work in practice is anyone's guess - but I like the idea that you could have a virtual think-tank built around communities of interest, generating not only policy but also project ideas. Members could nominate themselves to become offline advocates for the policy ideas that inspire them,

or groups of members in one community could get together to implement a project idea which they found in the think-tank database. You could have academics dobbing themselves in to take on research projects that would check out the viability of a policy or project idea, or research that would back up the more general aims & objectives of one or more groups of think-tank members. Journalists (or anyone) could write op-eds in support of policy positions that they liked... politicians could mine the site for ideas...

This is probably quite similar to Simultaneous Policy, or to the Defending our Democracy site...

How would it connect with things like the alternative wire service idea, or Hamish Alcorn's Direct Council Democracy?

samsam

...the people who make the decisions that impact on our lives do so from physical rooms, using physical materials, letterheads, bound reports, one-to-many presentations. They do breakfast seminars, play golf and spend on yachts or at the casino with the people they want to influence...

If the virtual think-tank is forced to concentrate on a very specific topic and there's a good moderation - it could produce something useful. But what it produces will probably have to be taken to a real think-tank - which would provide the other important ingredient - branding.

But what's stopping people from setting up the soobTANK? You need a physical space, a net connection, a couple of phone lines. You'll need a couple of people to be actively involved with it. You could invite people to do thinking residencies, you could tap in to the whole 'intern' program stuff run out of universities. You can tap in to work for the dole programs. You could host special events, maybe an annual conference. It'll be hard work - but I reckon it won't be impossible to raise the \$150K to kick it off

ScantyDan

I think you can be even cheaper than that - was it the Centre for Independent Studies that was started by a school teacher in a bike shed? - but you'd want to find corporate sponsors pretty quickly. Of course they did, because they were representing ideas very beneficial to corporations, and corporations are their own ready-made representative bodies. If you want a think-tank to represent the diverse interests of individual Australians you are going to have to face

the usual nasty fundraising issues...

saskia

...I can't help but feel skeptical about whether or not the virtual world alone can foster a sense of trust strong enough to allow the gumption that is needed to follow discussion with action.

Sure we can get nostalgic about the anti-globalisation movement. but wasn't the internet just a promotion tool? ...Aren't the spaces provided for people to converge, the organisation of puppets and floats and speakers generally done through loosely associated networks of existing groups who actually physically reside or have resided in the same place?

I guess it comes down to trusting the people you're working with, real fleshy individuals whose golf swing perhaps says more about them than words ever can...

ScantyDan

All right, what world-changing schemes could you start with a \$100,000 loan?

mfallu

Hmmm - I would combine two organisations - online opinion and social change online.

This combined organisation would build a technology platform based on open source tools.

It would also have a services arm that would consult to both the public and private sector - new consultation and engagement tools that were developed for those clients would be rolled back into the open source technology platform. That would also be how it firstly paid back its loan and then later funded expansion.

The organisation would also have a volunteer arm - where individuals with skills could donate their time and services to social capital building projects - They could use the technology platform as a foundation for building these social capital projects.

Wherever the volunteers went they would introduce participatory online communities... - these projects would tend to be issue or interest based. i.e. your local - football club

/ volunteer firefighter / community hall / HIV aids workers / Police Citizens Youth Club / etc. etc. would love to be a content publisher...

Get letters of support from them to apply for a research grant to identify their needs in terms of publishing / online community solutions - (right from the beginning you have to steer people away from servicing models towards organising models - i.e. community site rather than newsletter publisher.)

The volunteers would be like Johnny Appleseed - introducing the technology and cultural practice of these online communities. At first, support will be done by volunteers in a peer to peer fashion: one community figures out a way to solve a problem - others can benefit from the experience. Organisation of this type/size/complexity - have needs best met by this collection of software... etc...

So on the one hand you are enabling these communities to do what they already do (engage with people) online - maybe they "only" organise their offline activities online - but they are still learning how to be an "activist" online (getting used to tools and techniques of online organising and community building)

Meanwhile - the combined organisation (online opinion / social change online hybrid) would be running strategic campaigns - these campaigns would be issues based and designed to bring members from both side of a debate and facilitate dialogue.

All sorts of facilitation would be enabled -

- \* online tools to organise offline meetings -
- \* media monitoring functions
- \* individual blogging tools - one to many communication
- \* web based email - one to one
- \* threaded discussion boards - many to many

the joint organisation would sponsor projects like:

- \* non partisan plain english analysis of legislation.
- \* fact checking and evidence collection to assist policy development.

Then it would make the results of those projects available in the public domain - both to online communities of interest and in the form of publicly accessible WIKIs.

All of this work around issues should be outcomes based  
- but outcomes that are generally acceptable, for example:  
\* Increasing regional literacy rates to a national benchmark  
\* Increasing the lifespan of indigenous Australians to that of non indigenous Australians.

In areas where those outcomes aren't commonly agreed to yet - that should be the first goal. e.g. Land and water management issues - let's identify the parameters.

...

All of these activities, whilst engaging with government  
- would be independent of government. A public opposition  
- not in the adversarial sense - but in terms of producing alternatives, and modifications to the status quo. Proposals that have the possibility of making Australia better.

At the same time you are implementing the public policy development platform ... when the "issues of the day" intersect with a community of interest - they are already primed and ready to go. They know how to communicate and organise online. They have a network of peers that they know and trust - and even if they don't always agree with each other - they are at least interested in the same things.

"Basically - a publicly funded think-tank and policy development platform - mediated by technology, but with its roots in grass roots engagement activities"

What will be interesting is to see who "wins" the colonisation race - will party politics types colonise the online communities - or will the community members colonise party politics?

# the usual suspects

(those who shared their thoughts)

**Alex Burns** is Senior Researcher with the Smart Internet Technology CRC and edits the Disinformation subculture site. He recently completed a Master's in Strategic Foresight at the Australian Foresight Institute, Swinburne University.

**Tim Parish** is the editor and art-director of Undergrowth digital magazine. Recent projects include the Oceania Indymedia Newsreal project and a short psychence fiction film called "The Oracle". He is just about to graduate from Media Arts at RMIT (hopefully).

**Damian Lewis** had a front row seat for the Dot Com boom that involved lots of work and zero share options. He is the webmaster of Generate - the Queensland Government's youth engagement website. When he isn't working on online youth engagement he performs with Brisbane's best psychedelic stadium rock outfit, Ponyloaf. He recently organized the "Quiet Riot" headphone gig to protest noise restrictions in the Valley.

**Sam da Silva** is part of the crowd. He is a video maker, media producer, website developer, publisher, advertising dude, anarchist, writer, (underground) stencil artist, corporate consultant, creative commons fan club member, geek and cooks authentic fusion cuisine. During his spare time, he builds sea kayaks and dreams of discovering the perfect audio visual intersection.

**John Sutton** is a lecturer in Communication at the University of Newcastle. His research interests include political communications, public affairs, green politics and political ecology.

**James Arvanitakis** is a former economist who, after working in the banking and finance industry for 7 years, had an epiphany and became a human rights activist. He is currently doing a PhD thesis titled "Re-designing the Global Economy". He is also Board member of AID/WATCH, and helps coordinate the Research Initiative on International Activism. James is the Convenor of The Commons Institute.

**Graham Young** is the Chief Editor of On Line Opinion which he first published on his laptop from his two-bedroom unit in Cooraparoo, Brisbane in 1999. The journal is published by The National Forum, a non-partisan and not-for-profit organisation which exists to increase the use of the net for democratic purposes. Graham is a former Vice-President and Campaign Chairman of the Queensland Liberal Party.

**Mark Davis** is a writer of popular non-fiction and has written for many major newspapers and magazines on youth issues, popular culture and the media. He also writes and commentates on the New Right and neo-conservatism, globalisation, and political populism. His book *Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism* was short-listed in the 1998 NSW Premiers Literary Awards.

**Hamish Alcorn**, has been an activist all his adult life, working along the way in an appropriately long list of low-status jobs. Most recently he has been helping his sister Margo Kingston on Not Happy John, which is being transformed into a media / activist network for middle Australia. He is also promoting an ambitious project to develop local Assemblies in each of Brisbane's 26 wards which can directly elect delegates to run for Council.

#### **Sarah-Jane Woulahan**

Sarah-Jane is an ex-QUT film nerd who established Squareyed Films in 1998 with Sean Gilligan, and developed a reputation for producing music videos (Silverchair, George, Missy Higgins, Living End, paulmac). Since 2002, Sarah-Jane has delved into the grey area and developed a passion for politics, activism and a good dose of the unconscious. She's currently working on a collection of video inspired adventures - Kill Your TV, the television series, is one part of the master plan.

#### **Elliott Bledsoe**

is more than a journalist and designer. He is like a Tamagotchi - feed him, clean up after him and play with him to keep his little hearts full! When he is not an electronic amusement item he writes on gender and sexuality issues and plays around with copyright with iCommons.au

**Mark Fallu:** I am a recovering student newspaper editor (Semper, twice, '97 and 2000). More recently I have been a media advisor to a State Minister (ALP, State Treasurer David Hamill), webmaster for a trade union (QIEU) and now I am currently building a platform for Online Community building and self publishing for the QLD State Gov. and QUT.

**Dan MacKinlay** has played around with Human Ecology, maths, the odd student media conference, the national young writers festival, bioregional green guides, How the Body Works zine, webmastering for the Newcastle's Octapod organisation, and organising of community electronic arts events, all as a means of procrastinating from his job, which he claims is New Media Arts, whatever that may be.

**Saskia Anderson** is the name on everyone's lips. This crazed young writer has a background in community organising around forestry issues, in secret ninja techniques for mind control, in the anthropology of mental illness and in running like a girl.

**Miriam Lyons** is a seasoned community and media organiser, and an originator of the SOOB virtual think tank. She has experience with community media projects as diverse as the Interface conferences at UNSW, journalism bodies in East Timor and Community broadcasting in Malaysia and Indonesia.

thanks also to the GVibewire subscribers who added to the discussions (toom many to name here)... xx

This zine is an edited transcript of the virtual think tank held in conjunction with the Striaght Out Of Brisbane Festival Ideas Program in November 2004. Bringing together media artists, activists and academics, the think tank explored three themes:

You Can't Govern a Nation by Google: The Future Of Ideas Online

Copyright - Copywrog

Whats on the Cards? : Long Term Agendas for Change.



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