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New Media, Political Infantilisation and the Creativity Paradox

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A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prelude to a Farce or a Tragedy, or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance and a people who mean to be their own Governors must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.

James Madison (August 1822)

When *Sleepers, Wake!*: *Technology and the Future of Work* was published in 1982, my predictions about the potential impact of the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Revolution were regarded as wildly exaggerated and hence not taken seriously. Thirty years later they read like a statement of the blindingly obvious and could now be dismissed as, ‘Well, it was always inevitable, wasn’t it?’

In the 1980s I also expected an exponential increase in access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT), but I underestimated the speed of adoption of mobile telephony or the personal computer — and its spread right across the world. In 1982 I caused some controversy by predicting at a public meeting in Hobart that by the year 2000 Tasmania would have more computers than motor vehicles, a prospect judged to be so absurd by the *Hobart Mercury* that it suggested I had lost grasp of reality.

A perceptive Tasmanian put the *Mercury* cutting in his wallet so that if he chanced to meet me, he could take it out and check how the prediction was going. We met in 2000 and he rewarded my prophecy by giving me a crayfish.

I wrote in 1982:

The problem of control in an information society is largely unrecognised and undiscussed, and yet it raises the 'Who?/Whom?' question, which is described as the basis of all political debate: 'Who does what to whom?' Is access to information to be centralised and subject to monopolist or oligopolist control, or is it to be dispersed, decentralized and widely available?

Of course, James Madison was there long before me.

I had not expected how relentlessly personalised the use of new media would be. The development of the internet, with access to the World Wide Web (www), email, blogs ('web logs'), Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and a variety of other technologically dependent communication modes, far from expanding horizons and reaching towards the universal, has in practice become a limiting factor, reinforcing the need to satisfy immediate personal desires. The iPhone is gazed upon as a love object, the primary element in a social network, counteracting feelings of loneliness and isolation, reinforced by a capacity for immediate response. Inevitably, language becomes deformed and restricted ('R U OK?'). Blogs are often aimed not at the universal but at reinforcing an isolated view of existence: many are vicious, virulent or ignorant, emphasising opinion while rejecting, or trivialising, evidence. Tweets, typically, take longer to key in than the thought processes they express. A piece of malicious gossip can spread throughout the world in microseconds.

In 20 years time, most people will be wearing at least one article of clothing, vest, belt, shoes, with an inbuilt computer capable of transmitting information about the wearer's actions in real-time.

In Shakespeare's plays almost 20,000 words are used (although his audiences had very limited access to education), and the Authorised Version of the Bible uses 8,000 words. In 1982, a notable study by Francis and Kucera indicated that 89.9% of textbooks could be read with a vocabulary of 6,000 words, and this figure may well have declined even further since then.

The iconic role of iPhones as objects of devotion was demonstrated in 2011 by the astonishingly emotional reaction to the death of Apple's Steve Jobs — not a reaction that seemed to be shared by people who actually knew him.

Infantilisation of debate: evidence versus opinion, populism versus democracy, 'dumbing down'

Australia has undergone a serious decline in the quality of debate on public policy — and the same phenomenon has occurred in the United States, Canada and Europe.

The British journalist Robert Fisk has called this 'the infantilisation of debate'.

Debates on such issues as climate change, population, taxation, refugees, mandatory detention and offshore processing, plain packaging of cigarettes, limitations on problem gambling, and access to water have been deformed by both sides resorting to cherry-picking of evidence, denigration of opponents and mere sloganeering, leading to infantilisation of democracy, and treating citizens as if they were unable to grasp major issues.

Media — old and new — is partly to blame. Revolutionary changes in IT may be even more important, where we can communicate very rapidly, for example on Twitter, in ways that are shallow and non-reflective. Advocacy and analysis has largely dropped out of politics and been replaced by marketing and sloganeering. Politicians share the blame as well, as consenting adults.

For decades, politics has been reported as a subset of the entertainment industry, in which it is assumed that audiences look for instant responses and suffer from short-term memory loss. Politics is treated as a sporting contest, with its violence, personality clashes, tribalism and quick outcomes. An alternative model is politics as theatre or drama. The besetting fault of much media reporting is trivialisation, exaggerated stereotyping, playing off personalities, and a general ‘dumbing down’. This encourages the view that there is no point in raising serious issues months or years before an election, and it reinforces the status quo, irrespective of which party is in power and at whatever level, State or Federal.

The 2010 Federal election was by common consent the most dismal in living memory, without a single new or courageous idea (other than the National Broadband Network) being proposed on either side. After many discussions with people of all political persuasions (or none), I have yet to meet a dissenter to that view.

It is worth reflecting that just over 1,000,000 people (about 900,000 of them locals) are currently studying at Australian universities, both undergraduate and postgraduate. More than 1,000,000 already hold degrees. This is by far the best educated cohort in our history — on paper, anyway — but apparently lacking in courage, judgment, capacity to analyse, or even simple curiosity, except about immediate personal needs.

In the 2010 election, assertions that Australia’s public debt was getting out of control were largely unchallenged — although figures confirmed we had the lowest percentage in the OECD. Similarly, no politician points out that we run 46th in the number of refugees arriving unheralded on our shores. That Australia ranks No. 1 in the world for per capita spending on gambling, something that would have been very easy to confirm with the new media, was rarely mentioned in debate.

I see three major elements in our disturbing withdrawal from political analysis and engagement: the media, the politicians and community passivity. Lindsay Tanner in his *Sideshow: the Dumbing Down of Democracy* (2011) largely blamed the media for the debased level of debate, but politicians have been eager to exploit media relationships and often run scared in campaigns, refusing to argue for the long view. Some politicians relentlessly appeal to fear and insecurity — then repeat the material endlessly, strongly endorsed by most ‘talkback’ radio hosts. This is an age of ‘mantra politics’ where both sides, repeat the same catchphrases, endlessly. The word ‘because’, preceding a reasoned explanation, seems to have dropped from the political lexicon.

The largest factor in the three, I believe, is community withdrawal and disillusion. The tiny numbers of people in major parties (even though, with compulsory voting, we continue to vote for them) confirms this.

Australia is not alone in this situation.

In 1860, more than 150 years ago, in New York Abraham Lincoln began his campaign for the Presidency with a very complex speech about slavery at The Cooper Union, 7,500 words long, sophisticated and nuanced. All four New York newspapers published the full text, which was sent by telegraph across the nation, widely read and discussed. In 1860 the technology was primitive, but the ideas were profound. In 2012 technology is sophisticated but the ideas uttered by Presidential aspirants have been embarrassing in their banality, ignorance and naiveté. (Michelle Bachman thought that slavery had been abolished by the Founding Fathers in 1789.) No point of view other than the American needed to be considered; every candidate for the Republican nomination was a fervent Christian, or Mormon, so they said, and they all wanted taxes to be cut. Is it possible that sceptics, or Deists, such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Abraham Lincoln could secure nomination for high office in the United States in 2012?

It would be as unlikely as a non-factional person gaining pre-selection in the contemporary ALP.

It is instructive to compare the debate in the Victorian Parliament in 1872 on the *Education Act* and the debate in 2006 for the *Education and Training Reform Act*, a consolidation of legislation passed in the previous 134 years. Which debate was of higher quality? In 1872 MPs were discussing ideas — especially ‘free, secular and compulsory’ education, while in 2006 all the speeches were about management and training as a factor in job creation. In 2006 I suggested that it might be time to actually define ‘Education’, something omitted in the draft Bill, and to explore its role in personal and community life, but this was rejected as too ambitious.

In 1872 the Minister, J. Wilberforce Stephen, quoted the poet and educational reformer Matthew Arnold eight times in his speech and expressed the hope that the legislation would ‘set an example to our progenitors in England’. There was no comparable ambition in 2006. No ideas on education were mentioned, and it is doubtful how many MPs in 2006 would have recognised Arnold’s name, even as the author of *Dover Beach*.

As life seems to speed up in Australia, with individuals rarely at rest, there has developed a rejection of complexity itself, and a resort to ‘bumper sticker’ solutions. Television increasingly relies on over-simplified news reporting, especially of disasters, heavy emphasis on sport, cooking, reality/humiliation series. Much of the mass media reacts and does not reflect — because reflection depends on the capacity to withdraw and having time for consideration.

Our public discourse, such as it is, and our democratic ethos, rests on the assumption of a common memory, a common context, common knowledge, shared understanding and experience. Sometimes confidence in this can be shaken.

Australian history has become a battleground in which political partisans claim ownership of our past. Most history

debates have been crude and superficial (although far more sophisticated than equivalent debates in the United States), compounded by a shallow grasp of historical detail.

In 2005 the distinguished historian Geoffrey Bolton observed that to a 17-year-old, Paul Keating was medieval history, Bob Hawke was ancient history and Bob Menzies was pre-history. On that basis, John Curtin might well predate the Ice Age.

In mid-2007 I was talking to a group of 50 second-year drama students at a university in Melbourne. I tried to gauge their reaction to the ABC's then recent film on John Curtin, starring William McInnes. The reaction was blank because so few had seen it. So I tried another tack.

I said: 'We're not very good at recognising our great figures from the past. If we go back to the 19th century, there's really only one Australian name that leaps from the history books.' I was assuming, especially as I was talking to a Victorian audience, that everybody would identify Ned Kelly. I went on: 'We see him as our Robin Hood, an outlaw, the subject of iconic paintings by Sidney Nolan, and in films starring Mick Jagger and Heath Ledger.' I smiled ingratiatingly. 'I'm sure you all know whom I mean.' Two hands went up. The owner of the first hand ventured: 'Bob Hawke?' The second volunteered 'Captain Cook?'

Our democratic practice is based on the principle that every vote is of equal value. But is every opinion, on every subject, of equal value? The Welsh geneticist Steve Jones asks: 'If there is a division of scientific opinion, with 1,000 on one side, and one on the other, how should the debate be handled? Should the one dissenter be given 999 opportunities to speak?'

It is a serious issue.

Don Watson, writing in *The Monthly* (August 2011):

Most of what used to be theirs [i.e. the authority of leaders] is shared between the host [on television] and his audience, for whom pretty well any opinion is as

good as another. The politicians scramble for the residue.

The people are sovereign, [Tony Abbott] says. To hell with the sovereignty of scientific facts, popular opinion will determine if the Earth is warming and what to do about it, just as it determined the answer to polio and the movement of the planets.

The recent climate change controversy has been a disturbing example of the decline of rational debate in the age of new media and the Information Revolution.

With the Australian legislation in 2011 to impose a carbon price, debate was infantilised, with absurd over-emphasis on immediate person and local interests, with no global, long-term perspectives, or the development of new industries in a post-carbon world.

Sustained attacks on the mainstream scientific arguments for the need to take action to mitigate anthropogenic climate change have been from groups which could more accurately be described as ‘confusionists’, than ‘deniers’ or even ‘sceptics’. The opponents do not analyse the evidence and advance alternate hypotheses which are themselves testable: their main goal is to promote confusion. To confusionists, persuading citizens to conclude ‘I just don’t understand’ is a very satisfactory outcome.

Creationism versus evolution, the age of the earth (Genesis versus geology), smoking as a cause of lung cancer, the safety of vaccination and fluoridation, whether HIV-AIDS is transmitted by virus, ‘alternative medicine’, the authorship of Shakespeare’s plays, the Kennedy assassinations, the survival of Elvis, even the historical truth of the Holocaust, are all examples of recent controversies that promote a confusionist mindset, and earn some people more attention than they deserve.

Publications by climate change denialists/sceptics mostly fall into two categories: knockabout polemic (mostly ad hominem),

and objectors to a particular point of detail. The publications do not appear in refereed journals, which suggests sharply alternative explanations — (1) that the material is not credible, testable or evidence-based, or, (2) that there is a conspiracy by a scientific Mafia to suppress dissent. (Denialists are strongly drawn to the second alternative.)

Scientists are not immune from vanity, and some dissenters have been encouraged by being told: ‘The most important scientific factor in the climate change debate happens to be your area of expertise. Everyone else has it wrong. Only you are right.’

The essence of scientific method has four elements: observation, measurement, prediction and hypothesis.

Confusionists emphasise prediction and hypothesis (and discount or ignore observation and measurement).

In some quarters, there is an apparent rejection of an evidentiary base (despite easy access to powerful tools for analysis), with no need to apply reason/analysis/examination, and this suggests movement towards a post-science, post-evidence, post-Enlightenment mindset.

The illusion was created that scientists are corrupt, while lobbyists are pure (a line taken vociferously in the United States by former senator, Rick Santorum). One of the false assertions is that scientists who take the mainstream position are rewarded, while dissenters are punished (similar to Galileo and the Inquisition). Until 2007 in Australia and 2008 in the United States the contrary was true.

Scientists arguing for the mainstream view have been subjected to strong attack by denialists, who assert that the scientists are quasi-religious zealots who are missionaries for a green religion. In reality, it is the denialist/confusionist position to rely on faith and the conviction that there are a diversity of complex reasons for climate change, but only one that can be confidently rejected: the role of human activity.

Sir Gus Nossal sometimes quotes me as saying that Australia must be the only country in the world where the word ‘academic’ is treated as pejorative.

There has been a strong element of populism in the attacks: ‘There’s a group of these so-called “experts” trying to tell you what to do with your life’. Specialists/experts are defined as elitists. The attacks on ‘elites’ and the use of the term ‘political correctness’ are intriguing examples of terms coined by the Left which have now migrated to the Right. They are part of the highly paid repertoire of celebrity journalists (Andrew Bolt) and talk-back shock jocks (Alan Jones/Ray Hadley).

Public debate is dominated by the black art of ‘spin’, so that ‘framing’ the debate becomes central. Appeals to emotion, especially fear and gullibility, and to immediate economic or cultural self-interest (‘wedge politics’) are exploited cynically and ruthlessly. Establishing the truth of a complex proposition (evolution, stem cell research, climate change, threatening war with Iran, industrial relations changes) is less significant than how simple arguments — essentially propaganda — can be sold.

Frank Luntz, an American spin doctor, wrote the best-seller *Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say, It’s What People Hear* (2007). He was effective in persuading politicians to stop talking about ‘global warming’ (which sounds ominous — a threat, needing action) and instead use the term ‘climate change’ (which sounds innocuous, it happens all the time and needs no special action) instead. He argued that if the language was changed then the battle to prevent effective action being taken was half won. He has been a consultant for the Republican Party, Fox News and *The Australian*.

New media does not address these problems — and may actually exacerbate them by providing platforms and access to masses of untested data for people to disseminate their own delusions across the world.

It is ironic and depressing that the United States, with the world’s greatest universities and an unequalled record of scientific

achievement, should have an enormous anti-science constituency. Nearly 50% of Americans consider Genesis to be the final authority on the creation of the world, a significant minority are doubtful about a heliocentric universe, 40% believe that angels exist, and 75% reject Darwin's theory of evolution.

Managerialism

We live in the Information Age, but it is also the age of the cult of management.

Education (like Health, Sport, the Environment, Law, even Politics) is often treated as a subset of management, with appeals to naked self-interest and protecting the bottom line. At its most brutal the argument has been put that there are no health, education, transport, environment or media problems, only management problems: get the management right, and all the other problems will disappear. Coupled with the managerial dogma is the reluctance of senior officials to give what used to be called 'frank and fearless' advice, instead replacing it with what is now called 'a whole of government' approach. This is not telling ministers what they want to hear — it is actually far worse, a pernicious form of spin doctoring which says: 'Minister, there are matters on which it is better that you not be informed about, which enables you to engage in plausible deniability.'

Paradoxically, the age of the Information Revolution, which should have been an instrument of personal liberation and an explosion of creativity, has been characterised by domination of public policy by managerialism, replacement of 'the public good' by 'private benefit', the decline of sustained critical debate on issues leading to gross oversimplification, the relentless 'dumbing down' of mass media, linked with the cult of celebrity, substance abuse and retreat into the realm of the personal, and the rise of fundamentalism and an assault on reason. The Knowledge Revolution ought to have been a countervailing force; in practice it has been the vector of change.

The cult of management became a dominant factor in public life, exactly as James Burnham had predicted in *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), a book long ahead of its time. In Britain in the Thatcher era, and in Australia after 1983, there was a growing conviction that relying on specialist knowledge and experience might create serious distortions in policy-making, and that generic managers, usually accountants or economists, would provide a more detached view. As a result, expertise was fragmented, otherwise health specialists would push health issues, educators education, scientists science, and so on.

It is striking that of eight current Directors-General/CEOs of Education in Australia, judging from their *Who's Who in Australia* entries, only two (in the ACT and NT) admit to having had any teaching experience or qualifications.

Generic managers promoted the use of 'management-speak', a coded alternative to natural language, only understood by insiders, exactly as George Orwell had predicted. There was a sustained attack on professional (as distinct from managerial) expertise; witness the hollowing-out of expertise in agriculture, heritage, transport, education, research or the environment in Australian government departments.

The managerial revolution involves a covert attack on democratic processes because many important decisions are made without public debate, community knowledge or parliamentary scrutiny. The process of 'public private partnerships', known by the acronym 'PPP', has been widely adopted in the United Kingdom and Australia and involves a substantial impact on public policy, with a long-term cost to the community. However, the process is far from transparent.

Adopting economics as the dominant, perhaps the only, intellectual paradigm has some disturbing implications for non-material values, as if nothing else matters. Inevitably, as the public domain has contracted, education, health and childcare have been regarded as commodities to be traded rather than elements of the public good, universities have fallen into the

hands of accountants and auditors, research has been judged by its potential for economic return, and in the arts bestsellers have displaced the masterpiece. Language has become deformed. Citizens, passengers, patients, patrons, audiences, taxpayers, even students — all have become ‘customers’ or ‘clients’ (‘guests’ if you travel Virgin), as if the trading nexus was the most important defining element in life. Values have been commercialised, all with a dollar equivalent. Essentially, the ‘nation-state’ has been transformed into a ‘market-state’.

There is good reason to be concerned about the cumulative effect of serious changes in the political process in the period since the Information Revolution took off.

Reason seems to have been abandoned in high public policy, leadership has failed, political parties have given up even a pretence of commitment to principle, and the politics of greed has morally bankrupted our society. The political process has been deformed as parliaments have lost much of their moral authority, the public service has been increasingly politicised, most universities have become trading corporations, while the media is preoccupied with infotainment, and lobbying and use of consultants ensures that vested interests are far more influential than community interest.

The Creativity Paradox

In an era where knowledge and means of accessing it has increased exponentially at a sharply decreasing cost (‘Moore’s Law’) we ought to be experiencing an unprecedented explosion of creativity. There are few signs of it.

There is a fundamental confusion in public policy between Education and Training — usually treated as if they were synonymous, and the displacement of ‘Education’ by ‘Pedagogy’.

The central flaw in the misnamed Rudd–Gillard Education Revolution was its emphasis on buildings, equipment and processes and the failure to address the challenge of creativity.

‘Creativity’ is another word dropped from the political lexicon.

We fail to distinguish between ‘education’ as an open process of enquiry for lifelong learning and understanding the universe and our part in it (looking for the Higgs boson or God, or possibly both), and ‘training’, as preparation for the world of work that is less speculative, more applied, and more short term.

Degrees that try to explain the meaning of life are currently at a discount in many universities. They have less to spend proportionally for expanding knowledge, pushing back the frontiers of the unknown — the traditional areas of university concern. The survival of philosophy, history, geography, the classics, literature, music, physics, chemistry, mathematics, archaeology, anthropology, astronomy is under serious threat.

Law and medicine are expanding, but marketing, management and IT courses are doing best of all — answering the ‘How?’ questions, not the ‘Why?’

The distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘current’ models for universities goes back to the time of the ancient Athenians.

Education was divided into two categories: pedagogy (one of my least favourite words) and philosophy.

The pedagogue (*paidagōgus*) was the slave who escorted children to school. I encourage people addicted to the term to think about its origin next time they plan to use it. Pedagogy fits the model where a client (often, a state government, dominated by economic pressures) organises training, essentially to meet the needs of society and the economy. Obedience, conformity and controllability are among the desired goals. The outcomes are certain.

Philosophy, literally ‘love of learning’, was intended to encourage understanding of the universe and our role in it, and as a search for meaning. Inevitably, its goals are uncertain.

There must be room in our education for the abstract, the intangible, the spiritual, the aesthetic, the numinous, the pursuit

of truth, wisdom and self-discovery, irrespective of where they lead. Are medicine, education, politics, philosophy, sport, research, aesthetics, literature, religion, music, and art, even the goals of disseminating knowledge, all to be regarded as 'business activities'? Perhaps they are. Where do values come in?

In Australia in 2011, pedagogy is the overwhelmingly dominant model. In practice it leads to self-limitation.

There must be a national priority for more emphasis on creativity, especially music and the arts, in our intellectual life. Creativity enables individuals to maintain a sense of control and wellbeing, through a process of resolving difficulty rather than by disengaging from it. The importance of creative thinking in addressing social and environmental challenges facing local and global communities needs to be acknowledged and fostered. It is imperative that our education system identifies how to prepare young people for new roles and employment as emerging creative industries become mainstays in our society. Young people need to experience creativity in their teachers at schools, and outside them.

Because hard-working and generally underpaid teachers have been essentially conscripted to the managerial, pedagogic, school model, it is hardly surprising to find science teachers who can't keep up with the literature and don't conduct experiments, English teachers with little time for reading, writing or going to the theatre, maths teachers who don't get to conferences, music teachers who never attend concerts, art teachers who miss exhibitions, and foreign language teachers with nobody to talk to. Access to the new media does not free them from intellectual, social and economic restraints. Teachers may opt for being transmission agents for the status quo rather than agents of creativity themselves.

Innovation and creativity are sometimes defined as if they are synonymous. There are large areas of overlap but useful distinctions can be made:

Creativity

Personal
 Human
 Quantum Leaps
 Intangible
 Intuitive
 Values
 Subjective
 Unique/one off
 $e = mc^2$
 Non-cyclical
 Original
 Without components
 Understanding
 No rules
 Arts/Music/Literature
 Understanding existence
 Non economic
 Intellectual
 Hard to measure
 Hard to teach
 Partly innate
 Jesus, Shakespeare, Bach
 Culture
 Flexible
 Subconscious elements
 Joyful

Innovation

Process
 Systemic
 Linear
 Tangible
 Logical
 Utilitarian
 Objective
 Replicable
 Edison, Ford, Bell
 Cyclical
 Downstream
 Building on components
 Outcomes oriented
 Rules
 78>LP>CD>DVD
 Productivity
 Entrepreneurial
 Material
 Easy to measure
 Easy to teach
 Largely experiential
 Gutenberg, Wright, Marconi
 Economy
 Blueprint
 Conscious elements
 Aspirational

Creativity and Innovation have a profound and complex interaction, in which cause and effect are inextricably linked: touch a cause, and it changes the effect, which then changes the cause, and so on ...

I propose greater emphasis on:

- music and art, promoting creativity as central to human experience and self-discovery — encouraging left and right

brain activity from infancy — and emphasising the importance of design as a major tool of understanding

- using creativity and imagination to promote linkages between the earth-bound and normative with the exceptional/numinous/transcendental/divine
- education as a transforming and enhancing experience, including self-mastery, understanding and managing time, encouraging innovative thinking, learning to learn, recognising that the goal is trying to grasp complexity and possibilities (not aiming at certainty)
- recognising that most humans are capable of a far higher level of performance than we generally recognise.

We need to promote imagination, the act of linking:

- known and unknown
- seen and unseen
- heard and unheard
- past < now > future
- here < > not here
- familiar < > unfamiliar
- self < > not self
- language/ colour/ form/ design/ sound.

In the United Kingdom, Tony Blair appointed Sir Ken Robinson to chair the UK National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, which produced the report, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (1999).

The Committee had very impressive membership, including the scientists Sir Harold Kroto and Baroness Susan Greenfield, actor Dawn French, educational strategist Dame Tamsyn Imison, administrator Sir Claus Moser, and conductor Sir Simon Rattle.

The report was effectively pigeonholed by a Secretary of State for Education and Skills who resigned in 2002 because, in her own words, she ‘wasn’t up to it’. She also quailed at the prospect of having to virtually retrain so much of the teaching force so that they could be creative influences.

Ken Robinson argues that when children are born they are hardwired for creativity and individuality, but that the socialising process of much education encourages them to be cooperative and conformist, a form of institutionalised inhibition or homogeneity. Excitement and enthusiasm shown by pupils in primary education often tapers off into a sullen resentment in secondary.

Ken Robinson can be seen on the web, discussing ‘Do schools kill creativity?’ at www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_ and on YouTube.

One of his favourite stories is of a little girl at kindergarten beginning to draw a picture.

Her teacher asks what she is drawing. The little girl says: ‘It’s a picture of God.’

The teacher responds: ‘No one knows what God looks like.’

The child replies: ‘They will in a minute.’



We are never completely contemporaneous with our present. History advances in disguise; it appears on stage wearing the mask of the preceding scene, and we tend to lose the meaning of the play. Each time the curtain rises, continuity has to be re-established. The blame, of course, is not history’s, but lies in our vision, encumbered with memory and images learned in the past. We see the past superimposed on the present, even when the present is a revolution.

Revolution in the Revolution, Régis Debray, quoted by Prof. Lord May of Oxford at Australian Academy of Science Symposium on Population and Sustainability, Canberra, 6 May 2011.

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