

David Williamson in the Dock: Paranoia, Propaganda and 'the People'

Brian Musgrove

On 8 September 2005, playwright David Williamson delivered the annual Rupert Hamer Lecture at Swinburne University; subsequently published in *The Bulletin* under its original title, 'Cruise Ship Australia', on 12 October. The furore that followed saw a national treasure recast by the right-wing commentariat as a pariah. *The Australian's* editorialists joined with Andrew Bolt, Gerard Henderson, Piers Akerman and others to vilify Williamson for his outrages: a media teeth-gnashing disproportionate to the occasionally sensible and often pedestrian things that Williamson had to say.

It's worth examining the raw nerves on the body politic's right-side that Williamson touched: worth arguing that the concerted, vituperative attack upon him was *really* motivated by the Australian media's general acceptance of its role as propagandist for market fundamentalism and the associated dogma of 'happiness'; and to suggest that the over-reaction to Williamson's work exposed a deep paranoia about the fragility of both free-market ideology and the neo-conservative reinvention of a myth of 'the people'. In this regard, the 'Cruise Ship Australia' affair sat in a variegated discursive field.

It's instructive to survey the personal politics of the playwright who was so variously reviled in the media – as anachronistic, alienated left-wing intellectual; as patronising lord-of-the-manor type; and as right-wing Modernist, re-enacting a tradition of lethal hatred for ordinary folk. In a companion essay to his 1995 play *Dead White Males*, Williamson outlined some core beliefs. The play itself dismissed the practice of studying literature as a discourse of power, and countered the attitude that "Liberal humanism ... is in fact the handmaiden of the patriarchal corporate state." The essay, 'Deconstructing Human Nature', revealed that the play was intended as "satire aimed at the political correctness enforced on society by the 'holy' ideologies of post-structuralism, radical feminism and multiculturalism"; and that *Dead White Males* affirmed "that heterosexual family life ... can still be one interesting and valid way to live, and males and females are still capable of needing and loving each other." Given these positions – familiar in Howard government rhetoric about everything from the national 'education crisis' to the return of 'family values', the spectre of gay union and the 'ethnic' besieging of Christmas – Williamson's party-political allegiances could easily be mistaken. But despite the scent of social conservatism in Williamson's work, the stink created by 'Cruise Ship Australia' saw him re-imagined as a radical anti-humanist ideologue. As Laurie Hergenhan reflected in a letter to *The Australian*, "David Williamson, hardly a leftist, becomes a scapegoat, not for his fine plays which have filled theatres for decades while ironically being critically disparaged as conservative, but for a recent piece of journalism."¹

Williamson's 'Cruise Ship Australia' recounted how he and his wife won a trip to Noumea at a charity auction and "convinced ourselves it was going to be great fun." It wasn't: "our fellow passengers gave us some misgivings ... and the adults didn't seem to be discussing Proust or George Eliot." What ensued was an eye-opening encounter with "John Howard's beloved 'aspirational Australians'", obsessively discussing "new cars ... kitchen refits ... private education for their children ... The one surefire topic of conversation that connected

erstwhile strangers was price comparisons.” These carefree inhabitants of an un-ironic Lucky Country indulged in organised ship-board entertainments: shuffleboard, bingo, trivia quizzes and – especially – American musical dance-floor shows, “feel-good” American movies, line-dancing and Stetson-clad boot-scooting tournaments. Consequently, Williamson had a nautical epiphany, but one in generic agreement with what occasional essayists do: extrapolating greater meanings from a specific experience. “It struck me” he conventionally wrote, “that this cruise ship was a kind of metaphor for Australia. Cruise Ship Australia, all alone in the south seas sailing to god knows where. And in fact, like Australia, many of the passengers didn’t care where we were headed.”²

Williamson juxtaposed this with an account of a previous British cruise he’d taken, visiting Vietnam, Cambodia and Singapore: “lecturers from Oxford” gave talks about the cultures of ports-of-call; dinner discussion “was a lively examination of what we’d seen”. But on Cruise Ship Australia “there was no inquiry into anything.”³

‘Cruise Ship Australia’ concluded with an essayistic bigger-picture: the fantasy of unlimited economic growth is unsustainable; it comes at considerable environmental cost; technology might not save us from future calamity; public figures, the much-reviled “elites”, should courageously avow “that intelligence and intellectual curiosity are not some kind of abhorrent anti-Australian behaviour, and that thinking seriously about the long-term future of our country and our planet is not some kind of cultural betrayal”; and Australians should no longer be gulled by the “obsessive focus on material acquisition, encouraged by governments who worship economic growth and little else”.⁴

There were problems in Williamson’s lecture-article: his Arnoldian sense of ‘Culture’ as beyond the reach of the market and distinct from popular pursuits like shuffleboard and movies; his reversion to the ‘cultural cringe’; his apparent acceptance of official cant about affluence; his unreflexive embrace of the notion of ‘aspiration’ and consequent blindness to substantial class analysis. As Sean Scalmer capably demonstrated in *Overland* 180, ‘aspiration’ complexly “appeals to the myth of classlessness” but as a label it merely confirms the persistence of class and requires innovative analytical tools. And the idea of affluence can be bucketed by a cursory reading of Wayne Swan’s *Postcode*, Elizabeth Wynhausen’s *Dirt Cheap* and – most devastatingly – Mark Peel’s *The Lowest Rung*.⁵

Likewise, Williamson’s view of hedonistic carelessness about the future could have been culled from Donald Horne – Australians “are a largely non-contemplative people” who cannot imagine the future in “detail”. His view of Australian identity as Americanised and thought-policed into mindless consumption echoed the work of Ian Turner and others in the 1950s and 60s, who wrestled with consumer-capitalism’s social transformations and the people’s depoliticisation: issues which Scalmer notes became “sociological cliché.”⁶ True to an extent; but these issues clearly remain sensitive and unresolved in the minds of right-wing commentators, as the response to Williamson showed.

The ‘Cruise Ship Australia’ affair unfolded with some intriguing twists and paranoias. Williamson gave the Hamer lecture, published an abbreviated text on 12 October, and there was silence: until the Prime Minister’s department contacted Williamson’s agent for a full transcript on 15 October – a highly unusual request on a Saturday. Williamson has a home at Noosa, on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast, and his local paper – *The Sunshine Coast Daily* – printed an account of this, reproduced in *The Australian*’s ‘Cut and Paste’ column: ‘John Howard’s hand in a vast right-wing conspiracy’. Williamson was “a man under attack”,

Frank Wilkie wrote: “And he suspects the office of the Prime Minister John Howard is behind it ... he is concerned the attacks came just hours after the PM’s office asked for copies of the article.” Later, Williamson disclosed that “an approach was made for the full transcript of my speech” by a government functionary “who would not declare who he was” – “My agent said the PM’s staff were pretty cagey when he asked what they wanted the article for”.⁷

Maybe they passed it to Piers Akerman, who launched the first torpedoes on 16 October in Sydney’s Murdoch-owned *Sunday Telegraph*: ‘Elitist sneer at the battlers’. A war-fleet of indignant critics followed, aiming to sink ‘Cruise Ship Australia’. On 18 October, Gerard Henderson’s riposte – ‘Seasick green on the good ship Australia’ – appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Gibing at the outset that Williamson was “wealthy ... with homes in Noosa and Sydney”, Henderson was particularly piqued by the playwright’s suggestion that the woes of ‘Cruise Ship Australia’ were “all the Prime Minister’s fault.” But he was more aggrieved by the accusation that he was doing the government’s bidding: “Williamson believes that that the Prime Minister’s Department was behind the fact that a number of commentators criticised his ‘Cruise Ship Australia’ ... count me out of this particular conspiracy.” Three days later, Henderson was still smarting: “I have never been fed any column idea from anyone in the PM’s Department” – he had merely stepped forward to nobly support aspirational Australia, to “defend Mr and Mrs Suburbia against Lord Noosa.”⁸

Williamson responded: “Gerard Henderson, perhaps a little bit paranoid yourself? ... I am reliably informed by someone who did work in the PM’s department that it’s a common practice ... to alert journalists to articles they may have missed that the Government wants rebutted. It doesn’t imply at all that the journalists are given instructions about what to write”.⁹

Indeed, as Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky valuably recognised in their vade mecum *Manufacturing Consent*, people like Henderson don’t need instructions. Their alacrity to conform to corporate-political mastery is second-nature. Herman and Chomsky’s vital “propaganda model” of media tracked the ways in which the ownership, structures and procedures of capitalist media function: how “money and power” can “marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public.” As a result of the “elite domination of the media”, even media employees “frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill are able to convince themselves” that they are free and objective. But this isn’t innocently so: the media is “indeed free”, but only for those who play by the rules and “adopt the principles required” for its “societal purpose”. It’s a resplendent instance of hegemony; the reflex absorption of ruling-class values and demands that is “pervasive, and expected ... freedom prevails ... for those who have internalized the required values and perspectives.”¹⁰ Upper-media and think-tank circles are a hot-house where personal capital is raised by deeply internalising an understanding of the world-view that political and media paymasters require, and acting upon it.

That’s why almost nobody – apart from newspaper letter-writers – came to Williamson’s aid. Rosemary Sorenson, arts editor of Brisbane’s *Courier-Mail* (a Murdoch daily broadsheet) seemed eccentric in at least proposing that although ‘Cruise Ship Australia’ wasn’t “thought-provoking” Williamson was “always worth listening to, even if you disagree with him.”¹¹

As the ‘Cruise Ship’ debate raged in *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Australian* and *Bulletin* letters pages, Williamson became an available whipping-boy for op-ed and feature writers. In an unrelated *Australian* review article, on bardolatry, Simon Caterson paused to snipe that *Dead*

White Males epitomised theatre “without any apparent sense of professional irony”; and Gerard Henderson devoted his 9 December Radio National slot to a general dismissal of Williamson’s plays. Former Victorian Liberal Party president Michael Kroger sneered at Williamson as the avatar of a doomed left-wing class: the “urban superlatives” which could not connect with the “flashy aspirationalists” of Howard’s new Australia. Opinionista Janet Albrechtsen intoned that the mention of racism as a factor in Sydney’s Cronulla riots was “the latest adaptation of the David Williamson school of thought that treats ordinary Australians with disdain. It’s a form of elitist self-loathing that gets us nowhere”. *The Australian*’s national political editor, Dennis Shanahan, minted the term ‘Williamson effect’ to describe the discrepancy between “the public’s views and public discourse”: “where ordinary people ... are scorned by commentators such as playwright David Williamson” and their values – “fidelity, family, work ethic” – receive “a sneering put-down.”¹²

None of Williamson’s detractor’s reacted to his arguments in a serious or reasoned way. Instead, they created a field of abuse; staying on message, organising their assaults around a series of popular shibboleths. Predictably, the first of these co-ordinates was Lord Noosa’s ‘elitism’.

It’s almost hackneyed to observe that the shibboleth ‘elitism’ masks real power; and that the discourse of ‘elitism’ is a populist appeal to the discomfited “mass of people living in suburban and regional Australia” whose lives are being often painfully transformed by the forces of “neo-liberal globalisation ... ardently promoted” by politicians and their media accomplices. To mislead ordinary people about the source of their pain and worry it’s “necessary to find a fifth-column ... Australian by citizenship but ‘un-Australian’ by inclination ... The people the right were calling elites” – university-educated, “living in the inner-urban areas of the capital cities, and a few other places such as Byron Bay” (or Noosa), working as academics, teachers, or in the arts – “fitted the bill nicely.” Looking for *real* elites, Guy Rundle writes, one finds the Australian media “choked” with them.¹³ Gerard Henderson, Piers Akerman and Andrew Bolt are prominent members of that privileged cabal. Henderson: B.A.Santamaria protégé, ministerial staffer under Malcolm Fraser, senior advisor to John Howard in the 1980s, founder of the business-funded Sydney Institute, newspaper columnist, weekly guest on ABC Radio National’s Breakfast. Akerman: senior journalist on News Ltd’s *Daily Telegraph*, close to the Murdoch family and SBS board-member. Bolt: editor on Australia’s biggest-selling daily, Melbourne’s *Herald Sun* (another Murdoch tabloid), whose columns are syndicated to Brisbane’s *Sunday Mail*. All three are fixtures on ABC television’s talk-fest *Insiders*. These are well-networked persons of concrete power and influence whose collective agenda is pretty much as Williamson described it: to propagandise market fundamentalism and to keep people stupid and shopping.

Williamson was prepared for a bagging: “Right-wing columnists and commentators have a habit of sneering at what they call ‘elites’” he wrote in ‘Cruise Ship’; and in a newspaper letter he said “I fully expected the kind of response I got ... All the usual right-wing heavies were wheeled out to pour scorn.”¹⁴ He certainly did not foresee the savagery of the attacks upon him. Nor could he have predicted the fruitiness of the second co-ordinate on the abuse-map: the imputation that he was a special brand of elite, a dangerous subversive, duplicitously concealing his inner impulses to murderous hate.

In the propaganda build-up to the current Iraq tragedy, pro-war governments and their compliant media outlets perfected “a delicate game of not-quite-lying insinuations.”¹⁵ Politicians and journalists repetitiously planted references to September 11, terrorism, Al

Qaeda and Iraq in the same speech or opinion piece, for example: not explicitly asserting a connection on the basis of fact, but rather implying it by including such material in a single utterance. This tactic was revived by Henderson, Akerman and Bolt in their vendetta against Williamson. Indeed, Williamson became a cultural tyrant, implicitly associated with the subversion of democracy and – surreally – genocide. The net-effect of this not-quite-lying insinuation game was hyperbolic high farce.

Henderson's *Sydney Morning Herald* 'Seasick green' piece proclaimed the playwright to be in "alienation mode." This alienation was both an historical and a very contemporary syndrome; and Henderson reminded readers of a recent article in the *Canberra Times* by the alienated Robin Gollan, who considered Australia "a country ... governed by lies and fear" and dubbed the Australian-American alliance "a militaristic plutocracy". But Gollan, Henderson knowingly confided, "was a member of the Communist Party from 1936 to 1957."¹⁶ The anomalous guilt-by-association insinuation was that the wealthy Lord Noosa belonged to a genealogy of dissent that was secretive, subversive, anti-democratic, anti-capitalist and un-Australian. (How strange that a wealthy beneficiary of the market and literary entrepreneurship should keep such disaffected company in Henderson's mind.)

The comic extremes of the insinuation game were re-inscribed by the News Ltd flagship, *The Australian*, in an editorial titled 'Titanic Conceit'. This editorial attempted to plant the seedling-idea that Williamson's psychology was shaped by frustration and tyranny: "the Australian Left has been repeatedly disappointed: by great charismatic leaders such as Lenin and Mao, who turned out to be nothing but vicious butchers". The editorial moved on to perform a dazzling conjuring trick, asserting that the contemporary Left (usually characterised in the paper as 'postmodern') shared the mind-set of the old Modernist Right: "the strangest thing", given Williamson's "political predispositions ... is the deeply anti-democratic impulse in the whole line of thinking: if only the stupid proletariat would listen to its intellectual betters ... Such anti democratic impulses are well recognised in the modernist writers of the 1920s, where they go hand in hand with an explicit attachment to fascism."¹⁷ The themes and connections were established; Andrew Bolt dutifully amplified them, following both *The Australian* and Piers Akerman's leads, raising the horrors of fascism, the concentration camp, the death-squad and genocide and exemplifying bathos – that literary mode in which writers seek the sublimity of truth but slide into preposterousness.

Akerman had tacked starboard, evading Williamson's central arguments but seizing on the playwright's visit to a Cambodian death-camp on his previous 'British' cruise. "Williamson didn't mention", Akerman wrote, that it was "Australia's self-described intellectuals ... who championed the Cambodian mass murderer Pol Pot and that earlier incarnation of evil Mao Tse Tung"¹⁸ – insinuating that Williamson was a self-described intellectual and fellow-travelling apologist for the slaughter: guilty, again, by association.

Remarkably, Andrew Bolt kept his powder dry for days after Akerman and Henderson opened fire, but his broadside was worth the wait. Bolt took line-honours, sailing into absurdity with his rejoinder 'Squalid line of contempt'. He mobilised his readers against Modernist artists who "see the public not as their audience, but their enemy – and rich government funding encourages their arrogance": an insinuation that Williamson was a rorter of taxpayer dollars. (Williamson is neither a Modernist nor in need of public subsidy: he is the most commercially successful writer in Australian theatre history, the author of popular middle-brow drama – not a Strindberg.) Nevertheless, Bolt continued to hammer the playwright's disdain for 'the people', looking on despairingly as "we see Noosa-based

Williamson strip suburban Australians of humanity, reducing them to a contemptible mass, dead to all but money.” But Williamson was “unoriginal” in this, and Bolt eagerly identified the long line of people-haters to which he belonged: in Australia, Donald Horne and Patrick White; on the international stage, “Ezra Pound, a lover of fascism, who said all but artists were ‘a mass of dolts’ ... And soon another accomplished artist, Adolf Hitler, also talked of ‘exterminable subhumans’ and ‘an inhibited bourgeois herd’.” Bolt’s conclusion matched disingenuousness with unrelieved distortion: “Williamson, of course, would be horrified by talk of killing the stupid” – a lovely concession – “but his artist’s contempt for the mass has a squalid lineage, with nasty consequences.”¹⁹

Once again, hysteria and deception of this order has parallels in the propaganda campaigns that preceded the invasion of Iraq – same method, different target. Just as the media and governments in the US, Britain and Australia circulated identical arguments, ‘intelligence’, misinformation and tales of perfidy, Henderson, Akerman, Bolt and the *Australian* editorialists engaged in a coherent, collective strategy to demolish Williamson. Refined at the highest level of international public relations, this tactic can obviously be applied to any local situation – as it was in the ‘Cruise Ship Australia’ affair. The main hatchet-men stayed on-message, cross-mapping dark suggestions about Williamson’s inherently despotic character.

The necessary illusion here is that everyone involved in concerted media processes is a fiercely independent actor, directed by no-one; the demonstrable reality is that this is an ideological bloc in action. It wasn’t autonomous media players who ganged-up to mug Lord Noosa: it was a political cohort – an elite, no less – parroting themes and recycling appalling insinuations; traducing Williamson’s past, his politics and personality. In the case of the *The Australian*, Akerman and Bolt this is unsurprising: the fact that News Ltd management locks down employee opinion and demands toes on the party line is hardly news. But even in the case of Fairfax (publishers of Henderson’s columns) Guy Rundle finds that “the liberal and pluralist spirit that governed its conduct in previous decades has largely gone.” Rundle attributes this to a broader syndrome: the vengeful “war on pluralism” and the need to crush dissenting voices, like Williamson. The convergence of government and media “intent is not simply to advance a right-wing message but to shift the entire public sphere rightwards”. Consequently, government and the media can co-operatively propagandise “a fairytale social conservatism” and radical free-market reformism; and mainstream media is dominant as never before, “cynical and monolithic”, becoming “an agent of social control, rather than a forum for liberal and open discourse.”²⁰ Pity the poor playwright who anticipated ducking rotten eggs but was run-down by a pantechnicon – and reconsider his conspiracy theory.

If the government-media coalition is more powerful than ever, why is it so critically sensitive, or paranoid, as the ‘Cruise Ship’ affair revealed? The simple answer is that there’s an abiding anxiety in ruling-class circles that the business of promoting market fundamentalism might be easily confounded by the slightest forms of public reflection – like the occasional essay.

In market fundamentalist scripture, Naomi Klein observes, the “role of good government ... is to create the optimal conditions for corporations to pursue their bottomless greed, so that they in turn can meet the needs of society.” The problem is that its acolytes “never get the chance to prove their sacred theory right”. John Gray identifies the foundation of market fundamentalism in misreadings of economic history and theory – and a perverse view of ‘human nature’. Consequently, the abiding irritation of market fundamentalists is that the world defies them. Their Utopian dreams remain unfilled, and they fear ‘the people’ might get stubborn or bolshie in the gap between promise and realisation: particularly when the

free-market's costs are so evident – “unemployment, destruction of traditional industries ... poverty” and environmental degradation, as Williamson said.²¹ Market fundamentalism is a callous corporate calculus that blights lives and communities: and it requires a constantly-enforced compact with ‘the people’ to sustain the faith that it’s in their interests, and they love it. To merely suggest that this isn’t so, as Williamson did, invites media vengeance.

On 21 October, Gerard Henderson continued the anti-Williamson offensive on his regular Friday morning Radio National Breakfast slot. He began with weary observations on cultural elitism, but veered into an apparently unconnected diatribe about satisfaction and happiness – with considerable effervescence. Henderson recounted survey-findings (later discussed in his *Sydney Morning Herald* column) to a bewildered ABC host Fran Kelly: “how satisfied are electors with democracy in Australia? ... 80 per cent are satisfied ... 72 per cent of Australians care a ‘good deal’”.²² Kelly protested: what’s this got to do with the topic of David Williamson? These things are related, Henderson revealingly insisted. But what about Williamson, Kelly probed – and the normally reasonable and modulated Henderson lost his composure. It’s about happiness, he ranted: go into any suburban shopping-centre any Saturday morning and tell me if people aren’t happy!

This was a direct response to a Williamson letter, printed in slightly different versions by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* the previous day: “We have tripled our real income since 1950, but surveys show we are no happier ... What’s the logic in eating up the Earth’s resources if the habit isn’t even making us happier?”²³ But Henderson’s radio outburst was also cued by a right-wing advertising campaign for ‘Happiness’ that was running at the time.

Happiness is the emergent Soma of market fundamentalism. It’s a chilling *Brave New World*-style drug-on-the-market: like the Soma of Aldous Huxley’s dystopian nightmare, Happiness is the co-ordinated, on-message brainwash designed to reconcile ‘the people’ to adjustments that come with the free-market: lives of uncertainty, diminished quality, communal deterioration and misery – but you can only get the Happiness-palliative if you shop. And it was no coincidence that Johan Norberg, the high-priest of Happiness, was in Australia to deliver the Centre for Independent Studies annual John Bonython Lecture, scheduled on 11 October 2005 – the eve of Williamson’s *Bulletin* piece.

Happiness and Norberg were widely advertised: on the CIS website and ABC radio; *The Australian Financial Review* and *The Australian* carried his articles and ran profile-pieces. All evangelical religions love a convert best, and a dashing former anarchist-environmentalist is a market-fundamentalist prize – and Norberg’s it. His ubiquitous diatribes on Happiness indicate why free-marketeers adore him: “For centuries, philosophers and poets have tried to understand what happiness is” but today “scientists have started to come up with the answers. Happiness is electrical activity in the left front part of the brain, and it comes from getting married, getting friends, getting rich, and avoiding communism.” Norberg fervently believes that technology will solve all human problems, and that the most profligate free-market delivers the most happiness. In his ‘Seasick green’ article, Henderson concurred: “the creation of the global economic institutions that played a key role in postwar prosperity” were the bedrock of contemporary Australia’s relaxation and comfort: “That’s why those on board Cruise Ship Australia seem happy” – and how dare Lord Noosa deny them the simple pleasures the market provides.²⁴

Williamson's cardinal sin was to suggest that this wasn't so. Despite allegations of misanthropy, Williamson never claimed that 'the people' were 'cultural dopes'. But he did argue that they could be doped, or duped, by the likes of Henderson and needed to hear alternatives: that market capitalism's uninterrupted governance of their work and leisure time wasn't spiritually uplifting; that consumer-cultism didn't empower or liberate and was not in their best interests – and that the abundant happiness on Cruise Ship Australia was delusional. It's worth reflecting on why these pedestrian propositions attracted such media venom.

What the principal actors in the 'Cruise Ship Australia' affair ultimately (and unwittingly) did was to provide the resources for a textbook case-study: of how contemporary propaganda works, and how a paranoid power-elite deals with those who speak back to it. It's also a classic exposé of how false consciousness is manufactured: and of how the struggle over what values genuinely represent 'the people' remains unresolved.

1. David Williamson, *Dead White Males* and 'Deconstructing Human Nature', in Russell Vandenbroucke (ed.), *Contemporary Australian Plays*, Methuen, London, 2001, pp.113, 109; Laurie Hergenhan, *The Australian*, 21 October 2005, p.15.
2. David Williamson, 'Cruise Ship Australia', *The Bulletin*, 12-18 October 2005, p.42.
3. Williamson, 'Cruise Ship Australia', p.44.
4. Williamson, 'Cruise Ship Australia', p.45.
5. Sean Scalmer, 'Searching for the Aspirationalists', *Overland* 180, p.8. See also Wayne Swan, *Postcode: the splintering of a nation*, Pluto Press, Melbourne, 2005; Elizabeth Wynhausen, *Dirt Cheap: Life at the wrong end of the job market*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2005; Mark Peel, *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 2003.
6. Scalmer, 'Searching for the Aspirationalists', p.7.
7. Frank Wilkie, 'John Howard's hand in a vast right-wing conspiracy', *The Australian*, 27 October 2005, p.13; David Williamson, 'One more thing Gerard', *The Australian*, 1 November 2005, p.13.
8. Gerard Henderson, 'Seasick green on the good ship Australia', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 2005, p.11; 'Conspiracy? Count me out', *The Australian*, 28 October 2005, p.15; 'Pure self-indulgence', *The Australian*, 31 October 2005, p.9.
9. David Williamson, 'David versus Gerard', *The Weekend Australian*, 29-30 October 2005, p.18.
10. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Vintage, London, 1994, pp.2, 304.
11. Rosemary Sorensen, 'Aussie humour not so shipshape', *The Courier-Mail*, 25 October 2005, p.15.
12. Simon Catterson, 'The true Australian idol', *The Australian*, 19 November 2005, p.9; Michael Kroger, 'Danger of misunderstanding the nature of aspiration', *The Australian*, 2 December 2005, p.16; Janet Albrechtsen, 'Racism is repulsive, but so is self-loathing', *The Australian*, 14 December 2005, p.12; Dennis Shanahan, 'Head in the clouds', *The Australian*, 12 November 2005, p.27.
13. Guy Rundle, 'The Rise of the Right', in Robert Manne (ed.), *Do Not Disturb: Is the Media Failing Australia?*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2005, pp.39-40.
14. Williamson, 'Cruise Ship Australia', p.43; *The Australian*, 30 October 2005, p.13.
15. See Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception: The uses of propaganda in Bush's war on Iraq*, Hodder, Sydney, 2003, p.93 and Chapter 3.
16. Henderson, 'Seasick green', p.11.
17. Editorial, 'Titanic Conceit', *The Australian*, 19 October 2005, p.15.

18. Piers Akerman, 'Elitist sneer at the battlers', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 16 October 2005, p.51.
19. Andrew Bolt, 'Squalid line of contempt', *The Sunday Mail*, 23 October 2005, p.60.
20. Rundle, 'Rise of the Right', pp.47, 49.
21. Naomi Klein, 'Baghdad Year Zero', in Naomi Klein & Others, *No War: America's Real Business in Iraq*, Gibson Square Books, London, 2005, pp8-9; John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, Granta Books, London, 1999, passim; Stuart Sim, *Fundamentalist World: The New Dark Age of Dogma*, Icon Books, London, 2004, p.104.
22. Gerard Henderson, 'Self-doubt lies at the heart of Labor's current decline', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October 2005, p.11.
23. David Williamson, 'Cruise Ship Australia is running out of fuel', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 2005, p.12.
24. Johan Norberg, 'The Scientist's Pursuit of Happiness', www.johannorberg.net; Henderson, 'Seasick green', p.11.

Brian Musgrove lectures in literature and cultural theory at the University of Southern Queensland and is a member of the Public Memory Research Centre.