The European Journal

ISSUE #1

New Direction

New Direction

Founded by Margaret Thatcher in 2009 as the intellectual hub of European Conservativism, New Direction has established academic networks across Europe and research partnerships throughout the world.

newdirection.online

@europeanreform

@europeanreform

The European Journal

NEW DECADE NEW WORLD

New Direction

TheEuropeanJournal.online

THE EUROPEAN JOURNAL
The European Journal is New Direction's opinion journal that gathers the thoughts of world-renowned experts, on the crucial issues facing Europe today.

DISCLAIMER
New Direction is registered in Belgium as a not-for-profit organisation and is partly funded by the European Parliament. The European Parliament and New Direction assume no responsibility for the opinions expressed in this publication. Sole responsibility lies with the individual authors.

EDITOR
Naweed Khan

MANAGING EDITOR
Emily Hill

PRODUCTION
Reaction Publishing (reaction.life)

ART DIRECTION & DESIGN
Davor Vidović / VIDEOR o.d. (videor.ba)

CONTACT
New Direction
Rue du Trone 4, Brussels 1000, Belgium
NewDirection.online
TheEuropeanJournal.online

© 2020 New Direction

Welcome to the first issue of The European Journal - a magazine devoted to fresh thinking on the big subjects by some of the finest writers at work today.

This is an exciting time to be involved in politics and ideas - in Europe and across the globe - not least because we are experiencing a renaissance in conservative ideas as conservative governments lead the way in re-connecting power to the people.

But in the battle of ideas, old ideologies reappear in new guises - this is not the time to be complacent. That is why our editorial team invited celebrated British journalist, Julie Burchill, to challenge "woke" culture and Margaret Thatcher's close confidante Robin Harris to explain why now is the perfect time to convert to conservatism (if you haven't already.) Co-founder of the Quilliam foundation, Ed Husain, explores the Prophet's surprising relationship with profit, and renowned Turkish author Elif Shafak offers her poignant thoughts for the year ahead.

It's not all about politics in The European Journal. French broadcaster Bénédicte Paviot provides a cut out and keep guide on how not to become a viral social media sensation while leading Spanish football expert Guillem Balague tackles technology in LaLiga.

We have exciting coverage of art, music, technology, media, economics, sport, travel and lifestyle.

On a personal note, we would like to dedicate this first issue to the conservative thinker and philosopher Sir Roger Scruton. When our team approached Sir Roger for his thoughts on conservatism and the environment, we had little idea that this would be the last piece he wrote. You can read it inside this issue. We hope to emulate his spirit now - and on into the future.

Happy reading!

Tomasz Poręba MEP
President

Naweed Khan
Executive Director

CONTRIBUTORS

Julie Burchill

Julie Burchill is a columnist for the *Daily Telegraph* and the author of twenty books. Her play *People Life Us* enjoyed a sold-out run on the London Fringe in 2018 and her musical *Hard Times on Easy Street* debuts in the Brighton Fringe Festival this May. Her hobbies include luncheon, philanthropy and spite.

Ed Husain

Ed Husain is the author of two bestselling books *The House of Islam: A Global History* and *The Islamist*. A co-founder of Quilliam, Britain's first counter-extremism think tank, last year the *Evening Standard* listed him as one of London's most influential figures for his role in countering Islamist extremism and advocating for a pluralist Islam.

Matt Ridley

Matt Ridley's books include *The Red Queen, Genome, The Rational Optimist* and *The Evolution of Everything*. To date, they have sold over a million copies, been translated into 31 languages and won several awards. He joined the House of Lords in February 2013 and is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Elif Shafak

Elif Shafak is the most widely read female author in Turkey and her work has been translated into 50 languages. Last year, her novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. She is an honorary fellow at St Anne's College, Oxford University and, in 2010, became a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.

Guillem Balague

Guillem Balague was a key fixture in Sky Sports' coverage of Spanish football for 20 years, appearing weekly on Revista de La Liga before moving to BBC Sport in 2018. He is a best-selling author and a biographer of Pep Guardiola. He has more than one million followers on Twitter.

Iain Martin

Iain Martin is the editor of *Reaction* - the free-market site providing commentary on politics, economics and culture. He writes a weekly column for *The Times* and is the author of an award-winning book on the financial crisis - *Making it Happen: Fred Goodwin, RBS and the Men Who Blew Up the British Economy*. He lives in London.

Bénédicte Paviot

Bénédicte Paviot is an Anglo-French TV and radio journalist based in London. She is the UK Correspondent for France 24 and reports for both their English and French 24-hour global TV News Channels on major events in the UK. She is also a regular contributor on the BBC, Sky News, LBC and ITN.

Alastair Benn

Alastair Benn is deputy editor of *Reaction*, editor of *Reaction Weekend*, and associate editor of *The European Journal*. His work has been published in *The Times*, *The Spectator* and *CapX*. He has a degree in Classics from Cambridge University and a Masters in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College, London.

Elif Shafak

2020 in 20/20

A leading author's view on the year ahead

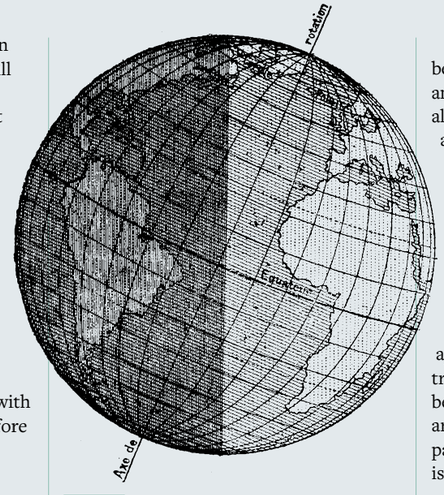
2020 will be the year when language was lost. We will still be using the same vocabulary, but we won't be referring to the same things anymore. Words will be emptied of their meanings, stripped of their universal and specific histories, and they will start floating in the air like helium balloons whose strings have been cut off.
We will enter a topsy-turvy world where traditional political language will be systematically distorted and destroyed. Concepts that used to be "progressive" will become associated with illiberal tendencies, and words heretofore identified with authoritarianism will be redefined, repackaged. The new extremists will call themselves "democrats". Meanwhile, more and more "liberals" will abandon the label like an old pair of shoes nobody wants to walk in anymore. Emboldened by each other, as much as by the international conjuncture, dictators across the world will stop working with their PR agencies, instead they will fully focus on new social media, and invest heavily in bots and trolls. 2020 will be the year of disinformation.

Many leading pundits will continue to fail in their predictions, but in a world where something unexpected is happening every week, and there is no time to digest the news, it won't really matter. Brexit won't have the international domino effect across Europe that people once thought it would have. Instead, Europe's populist parties will rewrite their manifestos, change their rhetoric, restructure their alliances, and postpone their "exit from the EU." 2020 will be the year of collective amnesia.

Here in the UK, elections will be over but the underlying divisions in our society will be with us to stay–in particular, generational, regional, and educational divisions. We will lose the ability to communicate across echo chambers. We will become more resentful towards "the other side" in the Brexit debate.

In 2020, there will be an abundance of information, but less knowledge, even less wisdom in the public space. We will see the rise of clever analysts with rich data and poor emotional intelligence. We will see lordly orators with no listening skills and zero empathy. Moderates on both sides of the ideological spectrum will feel intimidated by the hullabaloo. Those who are not angry enough will find themselves seized by apathy and fatigue. Slowly, they will retreat into their neighbourhoods, their houses, and then eventually, their back gardens. The public space will be dominated by hardliners, who will be ever more passionate and vociferous. Those who are angry will become more certain of their own truths, their own tribes, and the more certain they become the more they will be repeating themselves. Anger as a driving force is, and has always been, repetitive.

For every major political scandal and economic crisis, we will see the emergence of a new trend in daily life: from glittery manicure to glitzy parties. This is a pattern that has been observed in other parts of the world where there has been a rise in uncertainty, tension: social gatherings will become more important, family dinners more intense. People will party to forget.



Back in the early 2000s, there was such optimism a young Egyptian couple named their newborn daughter Facebook. Not long after a family in Israel named their third child, Like.

As the challenges facing the world become steadily more complicated, global and opaque, the need for "simplicity" will also become overwhelming. Demagogues and agitators will benefit from this paradox. At a time of massive global challenges (from climate change to the dark side of big tech), it will be the forces of nationalism and nativism and isolationism that will be on the rise.

Politics will become more pervasive, urgent, omnipresent. Civic spaces that were previously semi-political or apolitical will go through interesting transformations. Literary festivals will become more politicised. Even at fancy art galleries and art festivals there will be panels about contemporary, controversial issues. More artists will speak up.

Collectively we will become more anxious, less trusting people.

Not all will be so gloomy though. Alongside an inflation in anxiety levels, we will see an increase in civic participation and engagement, especially among younger citizens. The faster we consume information the deeper will be our longing for knowledge and wisdom. Despite fast consumption we will feel the need to slow down, go within, and we will read novels. Values such as kindness, compassion, humanism will prove themselves harder to erase. We will start talking in more detail and with more appreciation about seemingly minute things– flowers, hiking, food.

In 2020 we will know without a doubt that ours is the age of pessimism. It will be hard to remember that it wasn't so long ago when the world felt full of promise, East and West. Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s many celebrated the triumph of liberal democracy. Back then digital platforms promised to bring us democracy, connectivity. There was such optimism at the time that a young Egyptian couple named their newborn daughter Facebook. Not long after a family in Israel named their third child, Like.

Today, I think about those children often–Facebook in Egypt and Like in Israel. What are their lives like? We have transitioned from the age of optimism straight into the age of anger, fear, resentment and frustration.

2020 will be the year of emotions.

Iain Martin

The Boris Bonanza

Photo: Michael Tubi / Shutterstock.com

TheEuropeanJournal.online

The British Prime Minister's electoral success is another striking instance of a leader on the centre-right winning by surfing the populist wave and responding to the demands of anti-globalist voters who value the nation state. Delivering won't be easy though.

One of the iron laws of British politics is that the Tory party finds a way. Time and again throughout its existence it has survived defeat, reinvented itself and regained power when the odds suggested it was doomed. But even by the standards of a history that takes in the escapologist antics of Benjamin Disraeli and Winston Churchill, the recent successful reinvention under Boris Johnson must count as one of the more remarkable great electoral escapes in the fabled story of the world's oldest political party.

Just a year ago, the Tories looked ruined and destined to be the losers as Theresa May's government struggled to implement Brexit. May had made the most terrible mess of handling the negotiations with the European Union - overplaying her hand one moment before folding the following week. The British team was thoroughly outplayed by Brussels, and Westminster became locked in a cycle of despair.

"Theresa really landed us in it," says a former cabinet minister. "Not having voted for Brexit in the first place she then felt she had to out do the Brexiteers in her rhetoric to prove that a Remainer could be trusted to deliver Brexit. She talked too tough. There was no proper, public reckoning with the trade offs and hard choices required to deliver it. Once she lost her parliamentary majority she was a prisoner of a Remain parliament. She couldn't please anyone. It was hopeless and horrible to watch."

During this prolonged farce, from 2017 to mid-2019, the default national mood in the UK was long spells of depression, punctuated by increasingly fractious outbursts of fighting and hysteria on the part of the combatants on both sides of a bitter divide.

The fashionable view a year ago was that the very best the Tories could hope for was May's deal limping over the line in a parliamentary vote, with further concessions made to the EU and those in Britain trying to neuter Brexit. Having done that, it was widely expected that May would probably carry on for a while and then, when it came to time for the Tories to choose a new leader, the party would probably skip a generation and try to identify someone younger from its cadre of MPs who represented a break with the past. All in the desperate hope that it might woo back voters, and Leave voters in particular, who were in a state uproar over the lack of leadership from the Tories.

Last year, the forces of Remain, those who refused to accept the democratic result, spotted an opportunity and rallied to push for a rerun of the referendum.

Against that backdrop, and with the Tories starting to tank in the opinion polls, Nigel Farage intervened in early 2019.

To the horror of the Tory leadership the former leader launched the Brexit Party.

In his populist style, Farage began verbally assaulting the Tories for betraying Leave voters, who were looking for an outlet to kick the Tories.

May provided it when Britain participated in the elections held for the European Parliament in May.

The result was slaughter for the Conservatives. Humiliatingly, they scored just nine per cent - nine per cent! - in vote share in the European elections.

Yet a mere six months after this debacle the Conservatives under new leader Boris Johnson won a Commons majority of 80, smashing the Remainers and thrashing the Labour Party, led by the far left Jeremy Corbyn.

How on earth did they do it?

The Conservative party was aided by the peculiar workings of the British electoral system, of course. The first-past-the-post system means that a party wins clearly if it can score above 40 per cent of the national vote, and sometimes less, and it is distributed geographically in an advantageous fashion. If the Tory tribe stays broadly unified, runs a strong campaign, keeps up its vote and the opposition parties split the vote on the other side, then the effects of FPTP are amplified. This played a part in the victories of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and it happened again last December.

The quirks of the voting system alone cannot deliver victory for the Tories. Most of all the Tories owe Boris Johnson himself. The victory at the tail end of 2019 was his victory and a startling vindication of his claim that what was needed was a more robust, optimistic attitude to, in his phrase, getting Brexit done and moving the country on. His chief advisor Dominic Cummings - the ragged trousered strategist - played a critical role in the late summer and autumn by encouraging Johnson to be as provocative as possible to a Remain-dominated parliament, so that eventually they gave him the early election he needed. Johnson's opponents fell for it and were defeated heavily.

I recall an encounter with Boris a year or so ago at Westminster. A bunch of us, MPs and journalists, were discussing the latest phase of the May farce. Boris came over to say hello, looking like a man whose time had been and gone. It was awkward. Politics is cruel. The former Foreign Secretary, newspaper columnist and Churchill biographer seemed unlikely ever to make it to Number 10.

In the end, the hubristic hype in the anti-Brexit sections of the British media about a liberal realignment based on breakaway groupings in parliament, or tactical voting against the Tories, came to nothing. Liberal fantasy collided on election day with the brute reality that millions of voters had had enough of the preening and posturing by those unwilling to respect the result of the 2016 referendum.

Those pro-Brexit voters were, and are, far from being starry-eyed about Boris Johnson, a candidate whose shortcomings were mentioned endlessly by his critics. But in Johnson's pitch for power they found the perfect weapon with which to punish an elite that had treated them with contempt.

In the North of England there was another dimension. Many patriotic working class voters voted Tory because they were appalled by the Labour party running Jeremy Corbyn, a far left leader who does not like his country, as its candidate for Number 10.

The extent of the Boris comeback is all the more remarkable because early in 2019 Johnson had looked done for, like yesterday's man.

I recall an encounter with Boris a year or so ago at Westminster. A bunch of us, MPs and journalists, were discussing the latest phase of the May farce. Boris came over to say hello, looking like a man whose time had been and gone. It was awkward. Politics is cruel. The former Foreign Secretary, newspaper columnist and Churchill biographer seemed unlikely ever to make it to Number 10.

In the face of constant criticism it took an extraordinary act of will, of self-belief and ambition, to prove the doomsayers wrong, to stick with it and emerge as a Prime Minister with the first solid Conservative majority since Thatcher won a landslide in 1987.

It helped in the opening months of his premiership that he looked so damned cheerful. After the misery of the May era, there was a hunger for a little optimism and feel-good theatrics. Britain under May had become a supplicant, a defeated power tied to the whipping post. Boris promised to have a go at wrestling the British free. Millions of voters found it cheering. Optimism can be infectious.

Unlike more obvious and traditionalist populists, Johnson is not interested in claims that his country - or the West more widely - is doomed or "going to hell in a handcart." In terms of his sunny disposition, Johnson has more in common with Ronald Reagan than with Donald Trump.

Whereas Johnson sends out a series of merry messages on social media, sometimes featuring his dog, the President is a moody figure who delights in taunting his enemies on Twitter.

What both these leaders do share - as well as similar blond haystack hairstyles - is a gut understanding that in neglected parts of their respective countries there was a simmering fury at being lectured, overlooked and patronised by a sanctimonious middle class professional cadre that is dominant in the media, public service leadership, law, big business and the culture industry.

There is an irony in Johnson's case. Whereas Trump is from the isolationist, protectionist America first tradition, Boris's instincts are those of a liberal conservative. His attitudes on migration and trade are not remotely protectionist.

What does help connect Johnson with those aggrieved voters is his reputation as a disruptive, at times anarchic, figure who refuses to play the game of a mainstream media that is as distrusted as the political class.

For more than a decade parts of the press in Britain and the US have been playing a game of gotcha, applying a politically correct set of standards that inhibit open discussion. Johnson when confronted with such criticism - a liberal Twitter storm over one of his newspaper columns for example - ignores it, smiles and carries on. He may not use an aggressive Twitter persona in the manner of Trump, but the subliminal message to those voters from Boris is received loud and clear beyond the metropolitan areas: I'm with you; I'll say what I like, thank you very much; they think they're better than you, they're not; together we're going to show them that we will not play their game any more.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Photo: Frederic Legrand - COMEO / Shutterstock.com

Photo: Gil Corzo / Shutterstock.com

TheEuropeanJournal.online

In their different ways, Trump and Boris won power by confronting the arrogance of sanctimonious liberal elites.

Contrast this with what has happened in Germany, where a long-serving Chancellor Merkel is preparing to leave office with barely an achievement to her name and German conservatism in a miserable state. On her watch the far-right has grown. Last November, Alternative for Germany (AfD) won 23.5% of the vote in local elections, Thuringia up from 10.6% in 2014, and ahead of Merkel's party.

In France, President Macron's attempts at reform have been bedevilled from the start by his arrogant, hectoring top down approach to those below elite level.

Trump and Johnson are far better placed than either Merkel or Macron because they are swimming with the tide of opinion in the West. They emphasise the nation and direct their message at voters outside the entitled circle of liberal left opinion. It works.

It might not have have turned out like this. During the aftershocks of the financial meltdown of 2008 it seemed at one point as though it would push politics in the democratic West leftwards. Wouldn't voters demand punishment for the capitalists who were blamed for the calamity and seek new leadership from the left?

Something more interesting happened. The 2008 meltdown was followed by the crisis in the Eurozone and Europe's sudden migration surge. These represented an unravelling of liberal elite projects - of global finance, a transnational currency and open borders - and voters were hungry for a message that was more local, familial and national. The mantra of globalised finance has been globalisation, the abolition or blurring of borders, with economics and finance deemed to be taking place at a remote level above the old-fashioned and supposedly discredited nation state.

Only, it didn't work that way when it went wrong. When the bill landed for the rescue after the financial crisis, the Eurozone crisis, it was not handled at a level above the individual nation state. The bill landed on the the doormat of national taxpayers and was paid in the form of higher taxes, lower growth, and massive extra borrowing, which is just deferred taxation.

The rumbling and routing of the globalised elite was epitomised most obviously by what happened in the US. Clintonian arrogance and entitlement made possible the rise of Donald Trump, a Republican insurgent who mined a deep well of American scepticism about internationalism. Trump promised to put America first.

In Britain the backlash created the rebellious conditions for Brexit in 2016 and then for Boris in 2019. In parts of Eastern Europe the electorate had tilted in such a direction even earlier. Law and Justice won the 2015 election in Poland.

Even though these developments are heterogeneous, each with their own national characteristics, there is a common thread. A rejection of the liberal-left orthodoxy that elevated transnational institutions above the nation state and, too often, confused patriotism with nationalism and a pride in country with racism.

Ed Balls, the former Shadow Chancellor for Labour in Britain, now out of politics and making documentaries for the BBC, is one of the few figures on the left who has at least begun to process intelligently what has happened.

Balls said recently: "We are seeing the rise of right-wing populism in Europe, but many of the people who vote for these parties aren't racists or extremists... Voters are making choices in elections that they don't necessarily want to make, because they feel they are not being listened to or they are being dismissed. You can't do that to large portions of a country."

Winning by addressing the concerns of those voters is one thing. Delivering in office is another. And in that way a lot could go wrong with the Boris project.

Not only will the Brexit process take up considerable bandwidth. It will be tough to deliver on the promises he made to the North of England, to level up the economy and improve skills and education to power up Britain's lagging productivity. Announcing shiny, vast new infrastructure schemes is easy. Putting in place the reforms to schooling and training that raises opportunity in the "left behind" parts of Britain involves painstaking work taking many years.

If there is a crisis I suspect that Johnson and Trump's response will be thoroughly Keynesian, based on boosterism and the West borrowing its way out of trouble. In Britain this will alienate the free-marketeers in the Tory party who backed him for the leadership on the mistaken assumption that in economic terms he is a Thatcherite.

All this will have to be done against a global economic backdrop that is long overdue a shock or a downturn of some sort. In seeking to prop up growth, central banks have resorted to money-printing, or QE. What started as a temporary measure has become a permanent fixture. No major central bank seems to know how to stop or unwind it.

Serious risks have also been taken in the banking system, particularly in the US. A key part of the system - the repo market where banks exchange high quality securities for cash, to keep the money flowing - is so rickety and over-used that the US authorities have had to deploy more than $500 billion of assistance since September 2019 keeping the repo market alive.

At any point, one trigger or another - government indebtedness for example, or corporate reliance on cheap money, or a further slowdown in China hitting a Germany reliant on exports - could trigger the next crisis.

If there is a crisis I suspect that Johnson and Trump's response will be thoroughly Keynesian, based on boosterism and the West borrowing its way out of trouble. In Britain this will alienate the free-marketeers in the Tory party who backed him for the leadership on the mistaken assumption that in economic terms he is a Thatcherite. Boris is a Borisite, and very unlikely to return to the policy of austerity pursued by his predecessors David Cameron and George Cameron. It will be spend, spend, spend.

All that and more complication lies ahead. Nonetheless, it does not - yet - detract from the scale of Boris's achievement in securing such a thumping victory. In doing so he showed that listening to the concerns of voters and being optimistic about the nation state's future is a winning combination.

Illustration: Marina Lnchevska / Shutterstock.com

THE LAST OF Trump?

by ANDREW STUTTAFORD

With November now less than a year away, the Republicans' tragedy is that Donald Trump is still the closest they have come to answering the question that wicked Steve Bannon started posing half a decade ago. Their old winning formula, Ronald Reagan's "three-legged stool" of economic liberalism, a nod to social conservatism and a willingness to confront America's enemies abroad, no longer did the trick. But what would?

Straightforward adoption of Bannon's solution–a rough-edged nationalism aimed at winning over working class whites– would have led to electoral disaster. But Trump, helped along by the dubious magic of celebrity, represented enough to prevail in the primaries despite the best that the Republican establishment could throw at him. And then to just about everyone's surprise (except, some say, Mike Pence, then the governor of Indiana, who knew his Midwest) he won. The importance of white working class support has been exaggerated, but not in that part of the world. Trump lost the popular vote, but success in a handful of states, sometimes by minuscule margins, (11,000 in Michigan, 44,000 in Pennsylvania and, in Wisconsin, a state where Hillary Clinton failed to campaign, 23,000) was enough to hand him the job.

To have won in such a way–and against such a weak candidate– was not an ideal launch pad for the re-election bid to come. Under the circumstances, and with the benefit of a Republican majority in both House and Senate in his first two years, Trump might have been expected to govern in a manner designed to broaden his base. That's not what he did, in style or in substance, and the GOP paid the price in the midterms. While a president's first midterm elections are often a trial, 2018's were an unusually blunt warning of turbulence ahead.

Despite a respectably growing economy, the Republicans lost control of the House. More ominously still for the GOP, turnout jumped to over 50 per cent (about ten percentage points above the midterm norm). This surge was not confined to Democrats, but the dramatically increased participation by segments of the population opposed to Trump–notably Latinos and the young (70 per cent of both groups are estimated to have voted Democratic)– not known for showing up for midterms was striking. Trump's ability to stir up opposition, by word, by deed, by tweet and by being himself should worry Republicans. If the swing away from the GOP among suburban voters in the 2019 off-year elections in both Virginia and Kentucky is any guide, it's as potent as it ever was. Meanwhile, the fight over impeachment will only raise the temperature further.

Midterm losses in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin rubbed salt in Republican wounds, and Democrats won't repeat Clinton's sin of omission in Wisconsin this year. The Democratic convention will be held in Milwaukee, not only the state's biggest city, but one with a large African-American population. Black turnout there fell sharply in 2016 (as elsewhere: the absence of Barack Obama from the ticket took a toll). That's something the Democrats would like to reverse, although both the midterms and the 2019 elections suggest that the chance to vote against Trump counts for less with African-Americans than the opportunity to vote for Obama.


Photo: Evan El-Amin / Shutterstock.com

One explanation for the GOP losing the House in 2018 was the high number of Republican incumbents who bowed out ahead of the election, at least a few of them, presumably, unable to see a future in a party turning Trump at an astonishing pace. Compared with previous presidents, Trump's approval ratings have been dismal, often failing to break 40 per cent, yet with Republican voters, he has averaged scores in the eighties, a performance, as of December, largely unaffected by the impeachment hearings, a spectacle up to then viewed, on both sides, through a partisan lens. Republican stalwarts may not approve of all the acts in the Trump circus, but their more–what's the word–problematic aspects were not much of a secret in 2016 and they are not much of a secret now. Nevertheless, so long as Trump delivers enough of what they voted for (frequently little more than mood music), and so long as he can keep ahead of the investigators–his failings will be overlooked.

America's voters are less polarised than its elites, but a mounting perception (on both sides) of politics as a struggle between an irreproachable us and an irredeemable them will reinforce Republicans' determination to stand by their man - tweets and all. For some, Trump's repeated failure to conduct himself 'presidentially' may well bolster what is still his evident, if sometimes ersatz, insurgent appeal. Republicans in Washington are paying attention. Whatever their doubts, they are standing behind Trump. For his part, ego, and, probably, the fear of interminable legal harassment should he lose his job, means that Trump will not stand down. In the absence of cataclysm, he will be the nominee.

In the event of cataclysm, the party of Trump will fall with Trump. It will also be in trouble if Trump stands down even without scandal having shown him the door. The conundrum to which he was a stopgap solution remains unanswered. Until it is resolved–something that will take time, but will likely involve a significant shift leftwards in the GOP's economic policy– nobody, neither Mitt Romney, say, nor Florida senator Marco Rubio (currently doing his best to reinvent himself as a big thinker, no easy task) nor even Nikki Haley, the former ambassador to the UN and the most electable of the lot, will be able to ride to the rescue, unless, that is, the Democrats give voters no alternative.

And, whether their opponent is Trump or some last-minute substitute, they might. Many of those now battling for the Democratic nomination seemingly misunderstood Sanders' remarkable showing in 2016. They appear to have read his rise as, primarily, a product of millennial radicalism and shaped their 2020 campaigns accordingly. But there was rather more to it than that. An over-promoted, under-informed and disingenuous crank, Sanders peddles leftist nostrums discredited half a century or more ago. But what mattered more than their details was their symbolism: they represented a clean break with the existing economic consensus–and the appetite for that is not confined to millennials. Memories of the financial crisis have not faded, and nor have its consequences, but its political impact has been both compounded and complicated by a longer-term trend–the disappearance of well-paid American manufacturing jobs, a development widely (and not entirely inaccurately) blamed on globalisation. This boosted Sanders, but, by tipping the scales in the Midwest, it took Trump, a perennial critic of globalisation, to the White House.

Even though tariffs have hurt some of his supporters, pushing back against globalisation may work well for Trump again this year, but globalisation is an issue that may soon be dwarfed by automation. Indeed, automation's destructive effect on jobs (or concerns about it) may have contributed to Trump's mid-western victories in 2016. With no easy fix in the offing, however, few politicians want to talk too much about this topic. An exception is Andrew Yang, an ebullient entrepreneur and philanthropist, who is running one of the more interesting campaigns for the Democratic nomination. He sees a universal basic income as part of the solution. He may be right, he may be wrong, but the idea helped his outsider campaign attract attention, a small foretaste of the political upheaval that automation is fomenting.

Trump's ability to stir up opposition, by word, by deed, by tweet and by being himself should worry Republicans.

Sanders's intriguingly strong run in 2016 was damaged by his inability to gain enough traction with African-Americans. He has gone some way to remedying that this time around, but, at the time of writing, he (and all the other contenders) are still trailing Joe Biden with black voters, a key constituency both numerically (they ordinarily account for 25 per cent of the Democratic primary vote) and chronologically, as may be made very clear after the early (February 29) South Carolina primary and then Super Tuesday a few days later. Momentum matters. Biden may be a seventy-seven-year-old white man, but his eight years as Barack Obama's vice president counts. More importantly, many African-Americans favour his relative moderation, not only as a virtue in itself but also on pragmatic grounds: they think that a moderate candidate will have a better chance of beating Trump in November.

For all the noise on the left they could well be right. And they are not alone in thinking so. The effort to embarrass Biden over his son's business interests in Ukraine almost certainly reflects the Trump camp's conviction that "Sleepy Joe" would be their most dangerous opponent. Trump's advisers must know how narrow his base is, even without an economy that looks tired (or in the crucial Midwest distinctly sickly, thanks partly–and ironically–to the trade wars), messy impeachment hearings and the 24/7 threat of Trump being Trump.

After more than three years in office, it's hard to see where the President has added to his support and easy to spot where he has driven it away. There are indications that white working class women are drifting to the Democrats, making a bad gender gap worse, and strengthening the case for Democrats to choose Biden. A candidate drawn from the party's woke wing could push such voters back to Trump (Sanders, an old-style class warrior whose woke game is weak, could be a different story). Biden's biggest risk? It may seem harsh to single him out in a field where no fewer than four septuagenarians (Warren, Biden, Bloomberg and Sanders), one of whom (Sanders) recently suffered a heart attack, are competing to take on a fifth (Trump), but there have been times when Biden has appeared–how to put it–confused, and that's before his hours on the stump really start to pile up. Still, as I write, he continues to lead the pack.

The other marquee moderate is former New York mayor Mike Bloomberg. If nominated, he could be a formidable challenger with sufficient cross-party appeal to make up (despite some desperate pandering on his part) for, to put things mildly, a lack of enthusiasm among many core Democratic constituencies. But he's unlikely to fare well in a primary process in which left-leaning activists call the shots, something that will count more than ever this year, thanks to a change in the convention's voting rules. 'Super-Delegates', the typically more pragmatic party insiders who ensured Clinton's win over Sanders in 2016 will (except when it will make no difference) be barred from voting on the first ballot.

Biden's African-American following gives him some protection from the wild-eyed, but if he stumbles, the left's inbuilt advantage will mean that the most likely Democratic nominee will either be Sanders or, if primary voters want a newer brand of Kool Aid, Warren, a woke ("she/her") Marie Antoinette, whose adventures in identity politics are unlikely to prove an asset with the wider voting public. Neither can credibly pivot back to the centre in the way that a Pete Buttigieg might just be able to pull off, and, beyond their other disadvantages, both represent a threat to the wallet serious enough to antagonise some otherwise sympathetic voters. What's more, their plan to abolish the Electoral College is unlikely to endear them to Flyover Country, where so many of those Electoral College votes are to be found. In short, unlike Biden, they are opponents that Trump might welcome, which is not the same as saying that they would lose. Donald Trump, after all, could throw away an election in an afternoon.

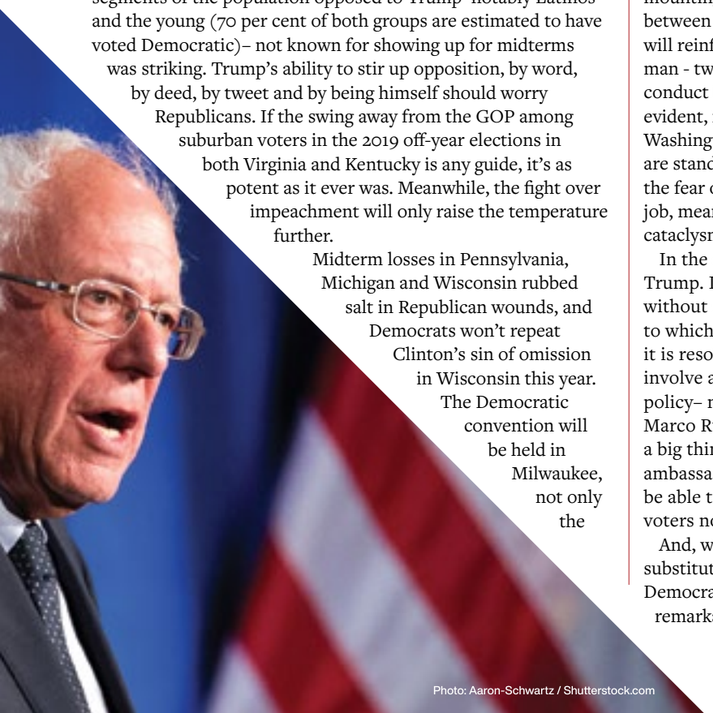


Photo: Aaron-Schwartz / Shutterstock.com

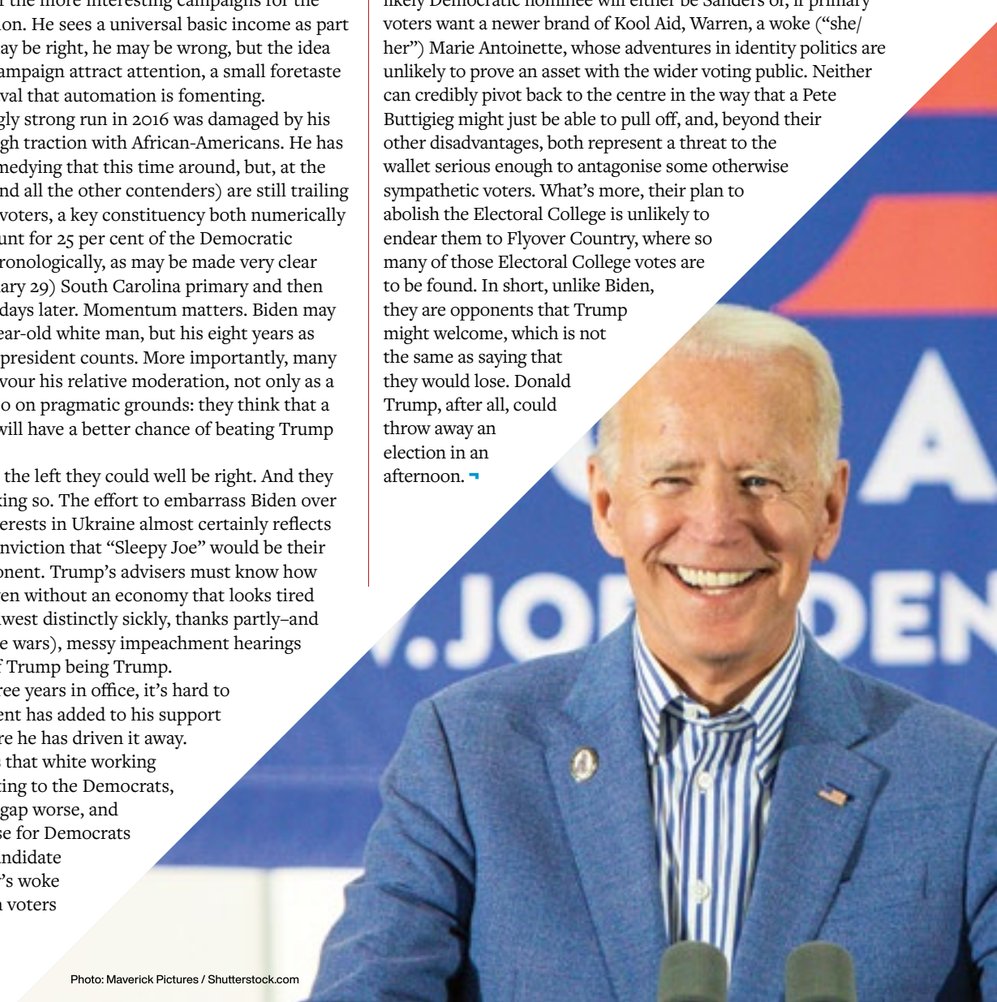


Photo: Maverick Pictures / Shutterstock.com

FREEZE-FRAME

Democracy

Portrait of an unidentified woman as she swims underwater with an American flag, a large portrait of Republican Presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower and a sign that reads 'Adlai's Fishy' (referring to Eisenhower's Democratic opponant in the 1952 US Presidential Election), Austin, Texas, 1952. Eisenhower won the '52 election, and defeated Stevenson a second time, in 1956. (Photo by John Dominis/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images)

When the great industrialist Henry Ford declared, "history is bunk," he was speaking for America as he found it in the early twentieth century – a young country, criss-crossed by highways, dotted with airy cities, replete with high mountains, vast plains and lush forests, a land that, as the great apostle of the American folk tradition Woody Guthrie once put it, seemed "made for you and me."

But as the 2020 Presidential race takes off, that great democratic jamboree of states, primaries, debates and campaigning, the most powerful country on earth will work out again what direction it should take...

America is no longer quite the young country it was a hundred years go – it has deep scars. Vietnam, 9/11 and long wars in the Middle East that followed, the 2008 crash, which brought existential crisis to the heart of the capitalist model, and partisan political rancour have all presented a picture of a country, as the miserabilists would have it, in terminal decline.

There is an alternative view – America could be about to enter into a new age of maturity. No longer quite so youthful with its optimism tempered by calamity and by loss, to visit America is still to find a country unlike any other, its face set towards the limitless horizon. The roots of American vitality are deep and in the long run it has been foolish to bet against its success.

Presidential elections hold up a mirror to this boisterous, magnificent country and this campaign will surely deliver more great images that will be added to this pantheon of the past. ¬

Democratic headquarters during Presidential campaign, Baltimore, Maryland, November 1944z (Photo by Thomas D Mcavoy/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images)

Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt, is shown as she addresses delegates to the 1956 Democratic National Convention. The 71-year-old Mrs. Roosevelt, a staunch supporter of Adlai Stevenson for the Presidential nomination, told the assembly it is "absolutely imperative" that the Democrats come back to power with the "right" leader. (Photo by Bettmann via Getty Images)

John F. Kennedy shaking hands of admirers during Presidential campaign. (Photo by Paul Schutzer/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images)

A group of young women at Los Angeles Airport wear matching red, white, and blue stripped dresses and hold placards that read 'A Time for Greatness: Kennedy for President' as they await the arrival of presidential hopeful Senator John Kennedy, in town for the Democratic National Convention, Los Angeles, California, July 1960. (Photo by Hank Walker/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images)

1968: Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon standing on stage with his back to the camera in front of an arena of supporters giving the victory 'V' sign with both hands. One prominent sign in the crowd reads, 'LBJ Lost the Way Nixon Will Save the Day' in reference to Nixon's opponent democratic president Lyndon Johnson. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Politics, Personalities, USA, pic: 1976, Democratic Presidential nominee Jimmy Carter wearing a sombrero at a Mexican Independence Day celebration in Michigan, Jimmy Carter (born 1924) became the 39th President of the United States 1977-1981 (Photo by Rolls Press/Popperfoto via Getty Images/Getty Images)

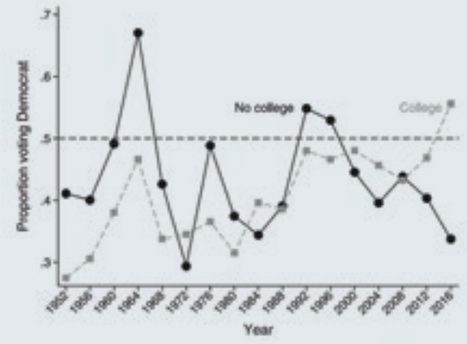
Presidential candidate Bill Clinton talks with reporters while campaigning in New Hampshire. Clinton would win the 1992 presidential election against incumbent George Bush, and be elected to a second term in 1996. (Photo by mark peterson/Corbis via Getty Images)

Presidential nominee George W. Bush (2L) and wife Laura (L) w. Vice-Presidential nominee Richard Cheney (2R) and wife Lynne (R) waving to crowd at conclusion of Republican convention. (Photo by Greg Mathieson/Mai/Mai/The LIFE Images Collection via Getty Images/Getty Images)

U.S. Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) supporters celebrate as his win of the presidential election is announced November 4, 2008 in Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham, along with Selma and Montgomery, were touchstones in the civil rights movement where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led massive protests which eventually led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ending voter disfranchisement against African-Americans. Boutwell Auditorium is the same the auditorium where Sen. Strom Thurmond launched his racist "Dixiecrat" presidential campaign in 1948 and where singer Nat King Cole was attacked onstage by Ku Klux Klansmen during a "whites only" concert performance in 1957.Americans voted in the first presidential election featuring an African-American candidate, Democratic contender Sen. Barack Obama, who ran against Republican Sen. John McCain. (Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

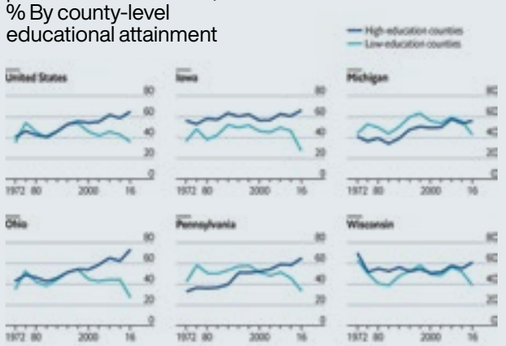
WORLD IN NUMBERS

Education and individual-level vote choice, 1952-2016



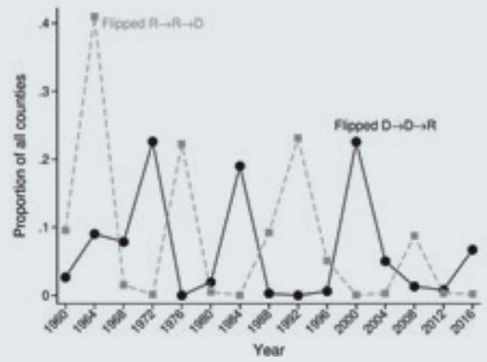
A matter of degrees

United States, Democratic presidential vote share, % By county-level educational attainment



Candidates are shown individually if they have at least 10 percent support in an average of national polls or if they've spent more than an estimated $1 million on TV ads since Jan. 1, 2019.

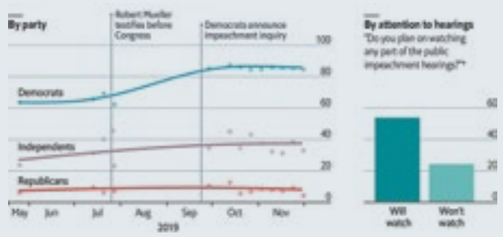
Flipping counties in presidential elections, 1960-2016.



Note: This figure plots the proportion of all US counties voting for the Democratic candidate in a given election, after having voter for the Republican candidate in the preceding two elections (gray boxes connected by dashed lines), and the proportion of counties voting for the Republican candidate, after having voted Democrat for two elections (black circles connected by solid lines

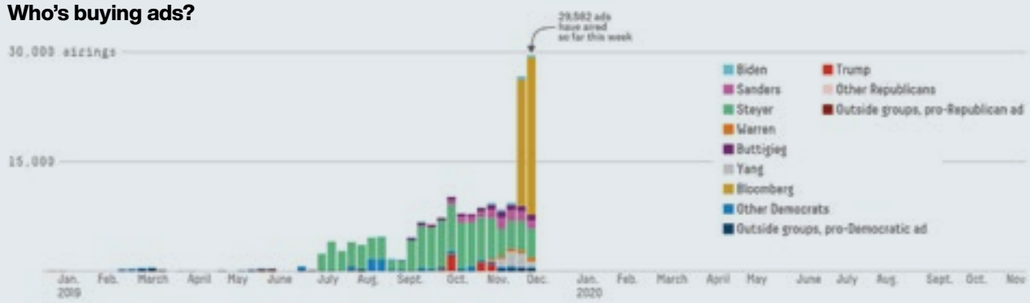
Impeaching to the converted

United States, support for impeachment, 2019, % of registered voters



Source: YouGov/The Economist *Surveyed December 1st to 3rd 2019

Who's buying ads?



Candidates are shown individually if they have at least 10 percent support in an average of national polls or if they've spent more than an estimated $1 million on TV ads since Jan. 1, 2019.

How Much U.S. Presidents Spent on Campaign

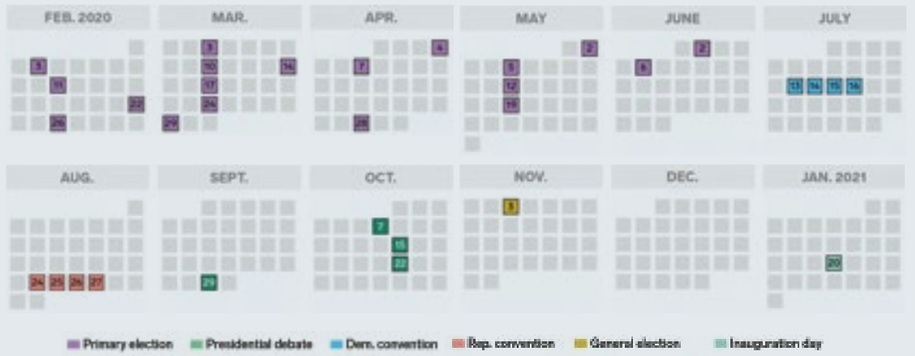
Total Campaign Expenditure by Party & Biggest Spender (In 2019 $)

YEAR		The Biggest Spender	Total Republican Expenditures	Total Democrat Expenditures	The Biggest Spender	
2020	Donald J. Trump*		$96M	$348M		Tom Steyer*
2016	Donald J. Trump		$708M	$884M		Hillary Clinton
2012	Mitt Romney		$694M	$858M		Barack Obama
2008	John S. Mccain		$739M	$1.3B		Barack Obama
2004	George W. Bush		$493M	$697M		John F. Kerry
2000	George W. Bush		$569M	$260M		Al Gore
1996	Robert J. Dole		$493M	$209M		Bill Clinton
1992	George H.W. Bush		$209M	$281M		Bill Clinton
1988	George H.W. Bush		$413M	$394M		Michael S. Dukakis
1984	Ronald Reagan		$189M	$366M		Walter F. Mondale
1980	Ronald Reagan		$347M	$181M		Jimmy Carter

* 2020 Data as of 11/21/2019 Article & Sources: https://howmuch.net/ https://fec.gov Bureau of Labor Statistics - https://bls.gov

2020 presidential election calendar

Source: Business Insider



Chinese New Century

中國新世紀

Is China now on course to replace America as the world's dominant superpower?

by MATTIE BRIGNAL

It's a safe bet that the 21st century will be China's. Its economy is expected to surpass that of the US by the 2030s and Beijing has made the credible claim that it will boast the most technologically advanced and well-trained military in the world by 2049.

As with every great power, China will want to rearrange the global order to its advantage. The crucial question for the West in the coming decades will be how to best manage China's ascendency while avoiding an all-out conflict. But the West's China policy is confused. A coherent and coordinated response is essential to prevent Xi Jinping's Communist Party from doing as it pleases.

The international fallout following recent revelations of human rights abuses in China has highlighted the difficulty of countering its web of global influence. The Chinese crackdown in Hong Kong has been well-documented. But quieter atrocities are taking place on the mainland, in the province of Xinjiang. Since 2016, an estimated one million Uighurs and Kazakhs - Muslim, Turkic-speaking minorities with deep historic roots in north-west China - have been coerced into internment camps or imprisoned without trial.

The government in Beijing sees Xinjiang's minorities as a threat to China's geopolitical ambitions and domestic uniformity. The province is strategically crucial for China. Running through the region are two major road routes out west towards Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent, crucial junctions which underpin its "Belt and Road Initiative" of global development. Beijing draws a direct link between the Uighur's cultural independence and Islamic faith, and violent extremism and separatism.

To combat the perceived threat, a process of aggressive "sinification" has been taking place in Xinjiang. Turkic literature and language have been suppressed. Mosques and churches have been forced to shut. Protesters and journalists have been thrown in jail. Prominent academics and religious leaders have disappeared without trace. The full might of China's surveillance state has been brought to bear harvesting personal data and screening Uighurs and Kazakhs to decide who to incarcerate.

Leaked documents have revealed the Orwellian nature of the camps or "re-education centres". The "ideological education" and "psychological correction" of the "students" involves political indoctrination in Mandarin. Each inmate is given a score which determines the rewards or punishments meted out to them and their family. The documents implicate China's highest-ranking party officials. Critics have labelled the treatment of the Uighur a "cultural genocide".

Despite these appalling revelations, the global response to China has been mixed. In July 2019, 22 nations, including the UK, Canada, Japan and Australia signed a letter to the UN Human Rights Council condemning China's actions and demanding that the camps be closed. But 38 nations, including Saudi Arabia, Russia and Pakistan, sent an opposing letter praising the regime's work in Xinjiang. The Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, said simply that "China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism and de-extremism work for its national security".

America's policy in response to the Chinese threat has been confused. There is no agreement among Washington's policy-makerson whether to simply temper America's economic reliance on China or launch a full-blown campaign of containment."

This diplomatic support is a stark reminder of China's global economic leverage. Over the past 20 years, China has sewn itself into the fabric of the world economy. Economic ties to Gulf states - reliant on China's investment and domestic energy market - have bought it influence in the region. It has poured trillions of dollars of investments and loans into Asia and Africa, building and operating railways, roads, bridges, airports and seaports. This debt-trap diplomacy has been felt especially severely in Sri Lanka and Kenya which are unlikely to ever repay Chinese loans.

Europe is the most recent recipient of Chinese capital. China spent an estimated €300 billion on acquiring companies in Europe (the EU plus Norway and Switzerland) between 2008 and 2018. In Italy, China has taken advantage of political instability and a struggling economy, signing infrastructure contracts expected to be worth up to €20 billion. The UK has approved plans to allow Chinese telecoms giant Huawei to install its 5G network.

This leverage has complicated efforts to devise a unified European response to China. Smaller states, in particular, are prioritising the economic advantages of deeper engagement with Beijing. Hungary and Greece, both major benefactors of Chinese investment, have previously vetoed statements by the EU denouncing human rights abuses in China. In Hungary, a €2 billion high-speed Belgrade-to-Budapest railway has been financed by Chinese cash. Cosco, the state-owned Chinese shipping and logistics conglomerate, now controls the Greek port of Piraeus as well as container ports in Valencia and Bilbao in Spain.

China is pitching its mercantile imperialism as a win-win, providing much needed investment in exchange for returns in the long-run. But there is a belated realisation that unrestricted Chinese investment is leaving countries strategically compromised. In March last year, responding to the influx of Chinese money into Italy, France's President, Emmanuel Macron, asserted that the "period of European naivety" towards China must end and that a "clear, unitary" policy was required.

The EU has introduced a new tool to screen foreign direct investment, a clear statement of intent that will allow it to scrutinise future Chinese takeovers. The UK faced pressure to ditch its Huawei venture from the US and Australia who are concerned about the national security threat it could pose to its Five Eyes intelligence partners. Critics of the Huawei deal rightly point to a history of Chinese cyber-attacks and intellectual property theft against the West. But more must be done. For instance, countries applying sanctions to China should adopt identical measures in order to ensure that it isn't given a reason to pick on smaller, more amenable states when exacting economic revenge.

Alongside its economic offensive, China has been flexing its military muscles over the last decade. Its military spending rose by 83% in real terms between 2009 and 2018. The People's Liberation Army is now the largest standing army in the world. And the deployment of precision missiles and the building of artificial islands in the South China Sea has challenged American supremacy in the Western Pacific.

However, America's policy in response to the Chinese threat has been confused. There is no agreement among Washington's policy-makers on whether to simply temper America's economic reliance on China or launch a full-blown campaign of containment. America's pressure campaign on Huawei has been so disjointed that the firm's sales rose by nearly a fifth in 2019 to an all-time high of $122 billion. The bitterly fought three-year US-China trade war has been a blunt attempt to exercise unilateral power to force China's hand and has yielded little. Instead, escalating tensions have left the world poorer and less secure.

European and US policy on China are also out of sync. In December 2019, the House of Representatives passed the Uighur Bill compelling President Trump to impose visa restrictions on officials and sanctions on 28 Chinese companies. But in Europe, strong words have not yet translated into concrete diplomatic and trade sanctions. Without transatlantic coordination, the US export bans on Chinese firms will simply prompt them to turn to the European market instead.

Principled resistance is essential to prevent China from acting with impunity at home and abroad. But America must realise that belligerence cannot prevent China's rise. Both nations have vast rewards to reap from continued cooperation. Europe, for its part, must wean itself off Chinese capital and start prioritising security and moral duty over short-term economic gains. If it acts as a united front, the West has formidable economic, political and diplomatic clout that can be used to keep China in line over the coming years. But further division and muddled thinking will only strengthen Beijing's hand.

Julie Burchill

Wake up to WOKE!

The “woke” movement is supposed to be progressive but it’s taking us backwards

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Photo: The Washington Post / Getty Images

It was all going so well in the West. Women, homosexuals and ethnic minorities seemed to be moving inevitably towards parity, from the last century seamlessly into the present one. A female British Prime Minister in 1979, a black American President in 2009, more gays than you could shake a rainbow-striped stick at on prime time TV - all of them pulling down the barriers one block at a time. Right-wing bigots defending the old order looked increasingly ludicrous and desperate.

And then woke came along and it all went wrong.

As progressive thinking somehow ate itself, a looking-glass world came into being where it was fine to demonise Jews, feminists and lesbians not interested in having sex with men in dresses - leading to the surreal situation, as we enter the third decade of the twentieth century, wherein censorship, misogyny, racism and homophobia now comes principally from the Left.

The term "woke" - meaning anything other than the opposite of being asleep - was probably first used in the 2008 Erykah Badu song *Master Teacher* with its repeated, somewhat wearisome insistence "I stay woke" after which it became a watchword among sections of the black American community. After the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, by police, woke became entwined with the Black Lives Matter movement; instead of just being a word that signalled awareness of injustice it signalled a refusal to put up with this state of affairs.

It must be said that even when used by such an obviously underprivileged people as black Americans, there is something creepy about the word. Compared to "I have a dream" it sounds curiously smug and inactive, indicating that one is somehow inherently better than other people without actually having to do anything to prove it.

But it wasn't till the smuggest, most inactive people on earth - privately-educated and over-protected students - got their hands on it that the true folly of woke was revealed in all its gory glory.

Students who might previously have marched against actual war and oppression were suddenly woke by the clammy kiss of identity politics, probably the most deranged force to hit public discourse since the Flat Earth Society. No longer up to analysing society from a no-nonsense economic Marxist standpoint - just another Dead White Male, after all - and though officially places of intellectual challenge, universities were soon refurbished as pity-party play-pens where feelings trumped facts, as they do for infants. When the veteran feminist Julie Bindel - feared and loathed by the woke for her insistence that men cannot be magicked into women - was de-platformed at a college in Texas the reason given was that it was a "safe space."

Students who might previously have marched against actual war and oppression were suddenly woke by the clammy kiss of identity politics, probably the most deranged force to hit public discourse since the Flat Earth Society.

Though the woke think of themselves as the most enlightened group in any society, both their beliefs and the way they express them hark back to a darker time. They are uniquely peevish and paranoid - a cross between *Just William*'s spoiled accomplice Violet Elizabeth Bott and the Stasi. Over-indulged by parents who told them they were special, they are terrified by the adult world of competition and thus rage against capitalism; cutting their wisdom teeth in the echo-chamber of social media, their pursuit of those who refuse to parrot their claims (men can be women, prostitution is work like any other) at times resembles every witch hunt from Salem to #MeToo. A recent survey by the think-tank Policy Exchange claimed that fewer than half of British university students support freedom of speech.

It's not just the style but the content of their arguments which make woke reactionary rather than revolutionary. It takes in activists who claim that lesbianism is "transphobic" and that sportswomen should accept second place to competitors who were born male, Fauxminists who believe that a permanent underclass of prostituted women is acceptable and that wearing a hijab is subversive, Antifa in America and Corbynite clowns who repeat ancient anti-Semitic tropes about the Jews - and princes who seem to believe in the divine right of kings when it comes to being criticised. Their analysis of class oppression is conspicuous in its absence, fitting for a group to whom only the personally experienced is political. Thus an unemployed middle-aged manual worker in the American Rust Belt has more "privilege" than Meghan Markle due to being a white male.

This is not politics; this is the roar of the entitled mediocre, desperate to hold centre stage and terrified by any challenge to their flimsy sense of self - a temper-tantrum with a socially concerned alibi. The woke are self-centred to the point where they care so much about "micro-aggressions" towards themselves that they don't seem to care about atrocities that happen to others in "faraway countries of which we know nothing" to quote Chamberlain on Czechoslovakia.

Hence:

Being called "Darlin'" by a bus-driver = Evil.

Female genital mutilation = It's Their Culture.

The old saw "youth is wasted on the young" has never been so true as it is of the woke. As well as being averse to rigorous thinking, they are the first generation to want *less* of everything - less sex, less booze, less travel - as opposed to the sexagenarians now pushing up the senior STD and cirrhosis rates. Also, less laughter - since this appears to be the first generation bred without a sense of humour.

The "non-binary," in particular, are a miserable lot. When I think back to my own adolescent adventures in sexuality – picked up from divinely mixed-up teenage idols from David Bowie to Patti Smith – I remember how mischievous we were, how thrilled when our dads enquired while watching *Top Of The Pops* if 'it' was a boy or a girl. We took such delight in pretending to be gay or coming out as actually gay, even though times weren't half so enlightened then. We had Lou Reed; the woke have the profoundly mediocre Sam Smith, who recently announced that he wishes to be addressed as "they." It's grimly predictable that Reed's *Walk On The Wild Side* has been denounced by Canadian students as "transphobic" - being both sexy and funny, it must be bad.

The way of me making change is to be as judgmental as possible... If I tweet or hashtag about how you didn't do something right... I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself - *man, you see how woke I was...*

The woke would be less objectionable if they lived up to their own pristine standards but they fall woefully short. In an inversion of Carl Jung's great saying "you are what you do, not what you say you'll do" once you have identified yourself as woke you can get away with anything. Thus the Sussexes feel free to lecture others on climate change while flying on private jets and Justin Trudeau seems as compulsively drawn to blacking up as his mother was to screwing pop stars. After the third example of him doing so was revealed this year, he admitted that he had actually lost count of the number of times he'd done it. Nevertheless, he was defended by minority spokesmen and liberal commentators.

But perhaps what I hate most about the woke is the way they have done the dirt on feminism. The irony of *The Handmaid's Tale* is that it is set under a right-wing American regime - with Canada, just across the border, portrayed as a sanctuary to which the handmaids hope to escape. But look at the state of Trudeau's Canada - where public funding has been removed from women's shelters which insist on protecting women-only spaces, crimes are no longer recorded by sex, rapists have been sent to female prisons and there's endless harassment of feminist activists, all in the name of woke.

The Handmaid's Tale is always used as a warning against the growth of right-wing ideology but look at the female politicians visiting Iran, all of them voluntarily wearing hijabs. The woke play dress-up to suck-up to the most oppressively patriarchal of religions while brave Muslim women all across the Middle East are persecuted for taking theirs off.

Misogyny has always been the poor relation of racism so it may well take people *feeling* that they are ethnically different from how they actually are which will show up woke as not just sinister - but silly. In November 2019 the University and College Union in London announced: "We have a long history of enabling members to self-identify, whether that is being black, disabled, LGBT or women." A year earlier a white theatre director claiming to be "African born again" won public funding intended to help ethnic minorities develop careers in the theatre. No wonder Trevor Phillips, former chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, said that allowing people to self-identify their race meant that ethnic minorities "lost out."

And now even that Santa Claus of the woke, that unimpeachably beautiful first black American President, Barack Obama, has critiqued his fractious fans: "This idea of purity and you're never compromised and you're always politically woke... you should get over that quickly. The world is messy. There are ambiguities... There is this sense sometimes of: 'The way of me making change is to be as judgmental as possible... If I tweet or hashtag about how you didn't do something right... I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself - *man, you see how woke I was...*' That's not activism. That's not bringing about change. If all you're doing is casting stones." As a new decade begins, the day we wake up from our sleepwalking can't come too soon.

Photo: Sundry Photography / Shutterstock.com

Photo: Shawn Goldberg / Shutterstock.com

Robin Harris

Convert to CONSERVATISM!

Populism reveals conservatism is in crisis - this is what must be done

Say what you like about it, conservatism has staying power. A philosophy whose central purpose, as the name suggests, is to conserve things ought surely to have been remaindered at least a century ago – so fast has life changed.

One reason why that has not happened is because conservatism is not a full-blown ideology. It does not offer an answer to all the problems of the universe. It is a philosophy of limits. In a paradox of Chestertonian proportions, conservatism is so general that its practitioners can concentrate on specifics.

We all want at different times and places to conserve different things. A conservative in the West is more likely to be worried about incursions of the state into private life than about cultural issues – though it is, of course, legitimate to be bothered about both. A conservative in a country that saw nationhood mocked and religion persecuted is going, very probably, to have a different set of priorities.

Conservatives must win over populists. It will require a different rhetoric - and in many cases a different type of politician.

The second reason for its longevity is that conservatism fits human nature like a glove, and human nature, despite ever more frenzied attempts to prove the opposite, does not change. As soon as they are organised in society, human beings usually want very much the same thing – known rules ("a rule of law"), personal security, settled family life, the opportunity to use talents and profit from them, a sense of inherited continuity and community, and finally a touch of the divine, a spark of something mysterious, an element of romance in their institutions. This is evidence of the ubiquity of conservative sensibilities. The first writer to acknowledge the importance of such things was that great eighteenth century Anglo-Irish politician Edmund Burke, and not for nothing is he acknowledged as the "father of conservatism".

Conservatism, as the role of Burke reminds us, is in its origins a manifestation of the Anglo-Saxon political tradition. Unlike authoritarian right wing movements originating on the continent of Europe, the Anglo-Saxon – the term is appropriate because it was first English, then British and then also American – brand of conservatism was fully compatible with parliamentary government, the rule of law, private property, free speech and freedom of thought. It is, indeed, the embodiment of a certain kind of classical liberalism.

Despite so much common ground, conservatives have always had tense relations with those liberals who wished to monopolise and radicalise the liberal tradition, most obviously on the matter of rights which liberals constantly wish to expand at the expense of duties. Liberals also have a big problem with identity. The liberal typically believes that we are whatever we want to be. The conservative knows that we are what nature and society and (if you believe in it) Providence have made us, and that we should accept it, rejoice in it and use it.

The other struggle that conservatives have waged is, of course, with socialists who seek to equate justice with equality of outcomes and want to pursue that objective through the working of an omnipotent state. Socialism is, historically speaking, an offshoot of liberalism. Its achievements, however, have proved more ephemeral. Its power to inspire is in inverse proportion to acquaintance with it. No electorate ever voted Communist twice in free elections.

After a period in which conservatism in politics had lost its way and was largely to be discovered lurking in abstruse cultural controversies, the 1980s saw it gloriously triumphant. Together conservatism and liberalism triumphed over communism in the Cold War. The two most convinced and effective anti-communist leaders were both conservatives and classical liberals – Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. They preached a conservative brand of freedom abroad and practised it at home, reviving their economies and defeating that "Evil Empire".

TheEuropeanJournal.online

The first writer to acknowledge the importance of such things was that great eighteenth century Anglo-Irish politician Edmund Burke, and not for nothing he is acknowledged as the "father of conservatism".

TheEuropeanJournal.online

A larger problem emerged from the Cold war, however, one which affected the West more than the East. This was that, with the Soviet system vanquished, the fault-lines in the ideological anti-communist alliance between conservatives and liberals first emerged as cracks, and then as a series of unbridgeable chasms. Looked at another way, liberalism showed its incoherence as soon as it was no longer anchored to the realities that the Cold War and conservative leadership had imposed.

While conservatives held firmly onto the old liberal principles of limited government, free enterprise, private property, and unrestricted competition, and felt at ease with both individualism and nationalism, many liberals headed leftwards. Liberalism nowadays, as a result, is far closer to socialism. The globalist liberal-left today is fiercely secularist (as opposed to just secular), committed to a revolutionary view of human nature, including of human sexuality, intolerant of dissent in even private fora, in favour of high taxes and regulation, committed to a climate change agenda which is not just incompatible with capitalism but incompatible with modern living, and, above all, hostile to the concept of national sovereignty and national democracy.

Conservative politicians were slow to respond. They initially tried to prove how pragmatically liberal they were. They sought to advance not impede the trend to supranational solutions. They thought that they could borrow slogans from the left about equality and progress without yielding the ground to their opponents' policies. They broke promises about keeping down taxes, put them up, and duly lost elections. On issue after issue they abandoned their base and in the end the base abandoned them.

One result was the development of what is disparagingly called populism. The main challenge that conservatives face today is to understand the roots of populist politics and claim back its supporters to the conservative cause. This is precisely what Boris Johnson and the British Conservative Party sought to do over Brexit – itself the embodiment of national populism, and despised as such by the elite.

Populism is not a distasteful phenomenon with which conservatives have to cope – holding their noses and waving their wallets. It offers a once-in-a-generation possibility of strengthening the conservative base. This is because it is, in essence, and despite conservative disdain, a rebellion against the Left and against globalist liberal elitism. The failure of socialists to care about, or even acknowledge, the social and economic disruption caused by mass immigration shattered working class faith in the traditional Left, whose poll ratings plummeted. At the same time, the willingness of the global elite to ride roughshod over national democracy and the often conflicting needs of different nation states has convinced millions who never had any particular interest in politics that the present system is weighed against them.

Populism is not a distasteful phenomenon with which conservatives have to cope – holding their noses and waving their wallets. It offers a once-in-a-generation possibility of strengthening the conservative base. This is because it is, in essence, and despite conservative disdain, a rebellion against the Left and against globalist liberal elitism.

The crucial question for conservatives now is how this engagement with populism should be undertaken in order to give conservatives the initiative once again in the world. Five priorities suggest themselves.

Firstly, conservatives must win over populists. This is a question of tone and often of class. It will require a different rhetoric - and in many cases a different type of politician.

Secondly, conservatives must educate populists about economics. That is fundamental to good government. Attacks on free trade, calls for government subsidies, the recycled error that government can pick industrial winners – pandering to these temptations will lead to economic failure, particularly in the event of a new recession. If the case for capitalism is lost, socialism always emerges as the alternative.

Thirdly, conservatives must agree respectfully to disagree. There have always been some who are more interested in liberty and economics and others more interested in religion and values. Neither can ultimately do without the other. Disintegrating societies cannot sustain strong economies. Failing economies do not generate social stability. But the interests and the practical needs of conservatives in different countries will also differ.

Fourthly, conservatives must try to reclaim philosophical liberalism from today's self-described liberals, who so abuse its principles. Liberalism and conservatism grew out of attitudes and institutions that have a common historic home. Conservatives are taking a risk if they abandon the whole of that tradition and prefer to place their faith in popular democracy. The absolute legitimacy of majoritarianism can never be accepted by anyone who believes in property, in rights and in absolute moral values, as conservatives must.

Lastly, one of the central beliefs of nineteenth century liberals was the primacy of the nation state. Nationalism, particularly but not exclusively in countries where nationhood was scorned by communism, is now conservative. Nationhood is nowadays the most important receptacle and public expression of other kinds of identity – individuals, families, neighbourhoods, even tribes all are increasingly national. The struggle between nations and the anti-national globalists is bound to be messy. There will always be some nationalists who are mad or bad, and many who are bores. There will also be struggles between nationalists. Nationalists from one country will be quite rude to one another in different languages. There is nothing new in that. But what the cause of national identity, national sovereignty and national democracy offers conservatives now is a way to make conservatism a globally dominant movement for the first time since the 1980s. Whether that opportunity will be grasped or not will determine political outcomes in the years ahead.

The Case for DEFENCE

by ROBERT FOX

Photo: VanderWolf Images / Shutterstock.com

TheEuropeanJournal.online

In 2020, the challenges to our security are manifold and multiplying

Europe is in a fragile state, and can, and should, do more for its own defence, according to President Emmanuel Macron of France. The alliance that has ensured peace for 70 years, Nato, is no longer quite fit for purpose, the French president seemed to say in a lengthy interview with the Economist magazine at the beginning of November 2019. "What we are currently experiencing," Macron said, "is the brain-death of Nato. You have no coordination whatsoever of strategic decision making between the United States and its allies."

Specifically, he was referring to the debacle following the infamous phone call on 6th October between Presidents Trump and Erdogan. Trump said he would pull the thin screen of US forces from the north east Syrian border. Erdogan took this as a green light for his plans for Turkey to invade Syria to thump the Kurdish YPG militia. Turkey would then carve out a buffer zone inside Syria in which to dump large numbers of the 3.6 million refugees now camped inside Turkey.

This seemingly local affair has huge ramifications for the defence of Europe, and the viability of the world's most durable military alliance – and its most potent, if measured in collective firepower alone. Neither the US nor Turkey saw fit to inform or even consult their Nato allies before their short-sighted deal over northern Syria. British, French and Canadian allies had forces in the area working with the US contingent, and to their command.

In Macron's mind, and not only his, the attitude of the presidents of the two biggest troop contributors of the Nato alliance, America and Turkey, raises serious doubts about how much they would follow its founding bond. Article five of the Atlantic treaty states that if one ally is attacked, the other 28 are bound to come to its help. Trump has indicated that America might not adhere to this in the case of aggression in Europe – because that is Europe's business, and anyway the 27 European allies don't spend enough on their own defence, and rely too much on America.

Now Erdogan's Turkey seems to be taking the same approach – picking its own fights and alliances at will, including arrangements with Putin's Russia. Macron himself has hinted that France might not support the Article five principle in all cases.

He wants European defence to be conducted primarily by the new European Defence Union, pointing clearly for it to be an eventual replacement for Nato altogether.

This has produced a row with Germany and Poland, who have been outspoken in rejecting Macon's French-driven project for European foreign and defence policy. Chancellor Merkel, and her successor as leader of the CDU and current defence minister of Germany Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, have said they want to strengthen European defence by supporting Nato. Any EU defence organisation must work with Nato and not replace it.

At the alliance's 70th anniversary summit in London, the agenda focused on retooling article five to cover the new dimensions of warfare, especially cyber and space. It looked at new applications for membership and common assets such as the need to update the fleet of alliance AWACS surveillance aircraft.

One of the more exotic areas of non-obvious warfare, as the jargon now calls it, are the possibilities of weaponising genetic modification. It might soon be possible to target, say, all redheads, or dark-eyed Celts.

Simmering in the background from the London meeting were issues about the future viability of the alliance, the semi-detached membership of the USA and Turkey, relations with Russia and China, and the informal wars and skirmishes in and around Europe and beyond. The essence of war and conflict is unchanging, but the way war and peace are managed are altering at an alarming rate. The deep tensions and disagreements in Nato provide a vital lens through which to frame the fundamental issues of security and defence from the local to the regional in continental in Europe, and beyond.

The Nato allies are now in an arms race with China and Russia, whose on-off approach to confrontation and cooperation make them the prime 'frenemies' of the West. All five nuclear powers that make up the core permanent membership of the UN Security Council are in the process of upgrading their nuclear weaponry – and at great expense.

In addition there is the challenge of new technologies, tactics and techniques – from the militarisation of space, already well under way, to technologies of particle beam, nano and quantum, and biological warfare. One of the more exotic areas of non-obvious warfare, as the jargon now calls it, are the possibilities of weaponising genetic modification. It might soon be possible to target, say, all redheads, or dark-eyed Celts.

Surveillance and information, the battleground of trolls, bots and fake news are now a constant catch-up game for the European allies.

Nato members are being urged to raise their expenditure on defence to two per cent of GDP. Surprisingly few actually spend

at this level, despite agreeing to do so at their last major summit in the UK back in 2014, as Donald Trump never ceases to tell the world. Angela Merkel thinks it will be another decade before Germany can afford to meet the two per cent target. Reaching that target will make Germany the third military power in the world – and totally dominant in any future EU European Defence Union, such as that envisaged by Macron.

Assuming the new expenditure levels are achieved, what would the money be spent on? The UK just about finds two per cent of GDP for its defence budget, though this includes military pensions and welfare compensation payments. As Britain prepares to leave the EU, it is faced with huge challenges in defence and foreign policy – and many of these are shared with other medium military powers like France or Japan. Some are crucial and unique. The UK intends to continue to deploy a submarine strategic nuclear force and deploy two operational fleet aircraft carriers. It also intends to contribute to forward security and reassurance forces to its eastern European and Baltic allies, as well as contributing to the European Rapid Intervention Force – with which it will continue after Brexit.

Britain cannot afford all it wants to do, explains Professor Mike Clarke of RUSI and King's College London in his new book *Tipping Point.* By about 2024, he says, the UK and many of its allies will reach a moment of "peak heavy metal" when most of current equipment schedules for army, navy and air force will be complete. Replacements will be required but because of the rapidly changing face of warfare, new solutions will be needed for new threats. The UK alone now needs to double or triple its defence and security research and development budget of just under €2 billion a year.

The conduct and methodologies of battle are changing too. New militias can be more potent than the reluctant soldiers of national armies. From the Donbas to Yemen, Libya and the sub-Sahara we are seeing novel militia wars – a 21st century version of the old bandit wars. Syria and Iraq have seen the "Hezbollah-fication," as I would put it, of conflict. These militias are part nationalist informal army, part political movement and part sophisticated criminal network trafficking in arms, drugs and, most profitably of all, humans.

Alongside the militias, bands of mercenaries – or private military contractors, PMCs, are active in conflicts across the world. Vladimir Putin's confidant Yevgeny Prigozhin has sent contract soldiers from his Wagner company to Syria, and they are now backing the insurgent forces of Khalifa Haftar in Libya. Soldiers for hire, heirs to the Condottieri of renaissance Italy, in the form of foreign legions are an obvious way that European armies can make up for the manpower shortages in their volunteer armies. The UK has been quietly expanding its recruitment of Gurkha soldiers, hired from Nepal – after nearly closing down the Gurkha regiment altogether a few years back.

The effectiveness of militias in Syria has given commanders of professional Nato forces working alongside them pause for thought. The Kurdish peoples militia, YPG, has been rated one of the most effective guerrilla corps in the world by the defence analysts Jane's International. Relying on light weaponry, highly disciplined sniper squads, manoeuvrability, and ground control targeting for allied air forces, they have held off, and defeated, superior Islamic State forces. The all-women's brigades of the YPJ nearly took the IS stronghold of Raqqa in the summer of 2017 singlehanded, according to one British Army chief.

The YPG have been expert at what is known as 'sub-sophisticated' warfare – where weapons and tactics operate below the 'threshold of sophistication' of the weapons systems and tactical culture of their enemies. The IS forces were also expert at this – holding up American backed and trained forces outside Mosul in 2017 for months by the use of mass attack by cheap drones and ingenious tunnelling lines of supply and communication.

This aspect is worth stressing because it is not just confined to south west Asia, Yemen and Africa. The new guerrillas will use a mix of ultra-modern and sub-sophisticated means in ragged confrontations around the borders of Europe. Mobile phones, false information by bots and trolls, will be employed alongside cheap hardware store drones and remote bombs in pipes and drains costing under 20 dollars apiece.

In September, a drone and cruise missile attack knocked out about a third of Saudi Aramco's oil pumping capacity in a few minutes in Saudi Arabia. The missiles got through almost completely undetected and certainly undeterred. US Patriot counter missile batteries were in the vicinity but were not effective. The mixed drone-cruise salvo got under the radar, in every sense. The attack was almost certainly devised by Iranian military and launched from ungoverned space in the Iraq desert. It was crude in its weaponry, brilliantly cunning, and the very essence of sub-sophisticated warfare.

Putin's Russia poses one of the biggest current and continuous challenges to European defence and security. After the successful non-obvious warfare campaign to seize Crimea in 2014, aggressive disruption tactics are being pursued on Nato's eastern borders, in the Baltic, and across the Black Sea and the Mediterranean - where Russia is pursuing 'area access denial,' or AAD. Fighting continues in the Donbas region. By deployment of shore based missiles, it has defanged the navies of Ukraine and the Nato allies Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Trump, as his allies have learned to their cost, doesn't do alliances or treaties. He just does deals, one-offs like the property magnate he is. He is constant in his inconstancy.

The greatest challenge from Russia is the burgeoning nuclear arms race. Both presidents Putin and Trump abandoned the intermediate nuclear force treaty of 1987, one of the most effective of its kind, with hardly a backward thought. It had managed to control theatre nuclear weapons for nearly 30 years. Now both Washington and Moscow are developing new medium range systems and warheads – which America wants stationed in Europe. Add to this the ongoing altercations about Nato's upgraded anti-ballistic missile system, Moscow seems unprepared for any serious negotiations. It is now feared, with strong evidence, that Trump and Putin will not seek to renew the strategic nuclear weapons treaty due to run out in 2021.

Emmanuel Macron has urged greater understanding and engagement with Russia. In this Macron has a point.

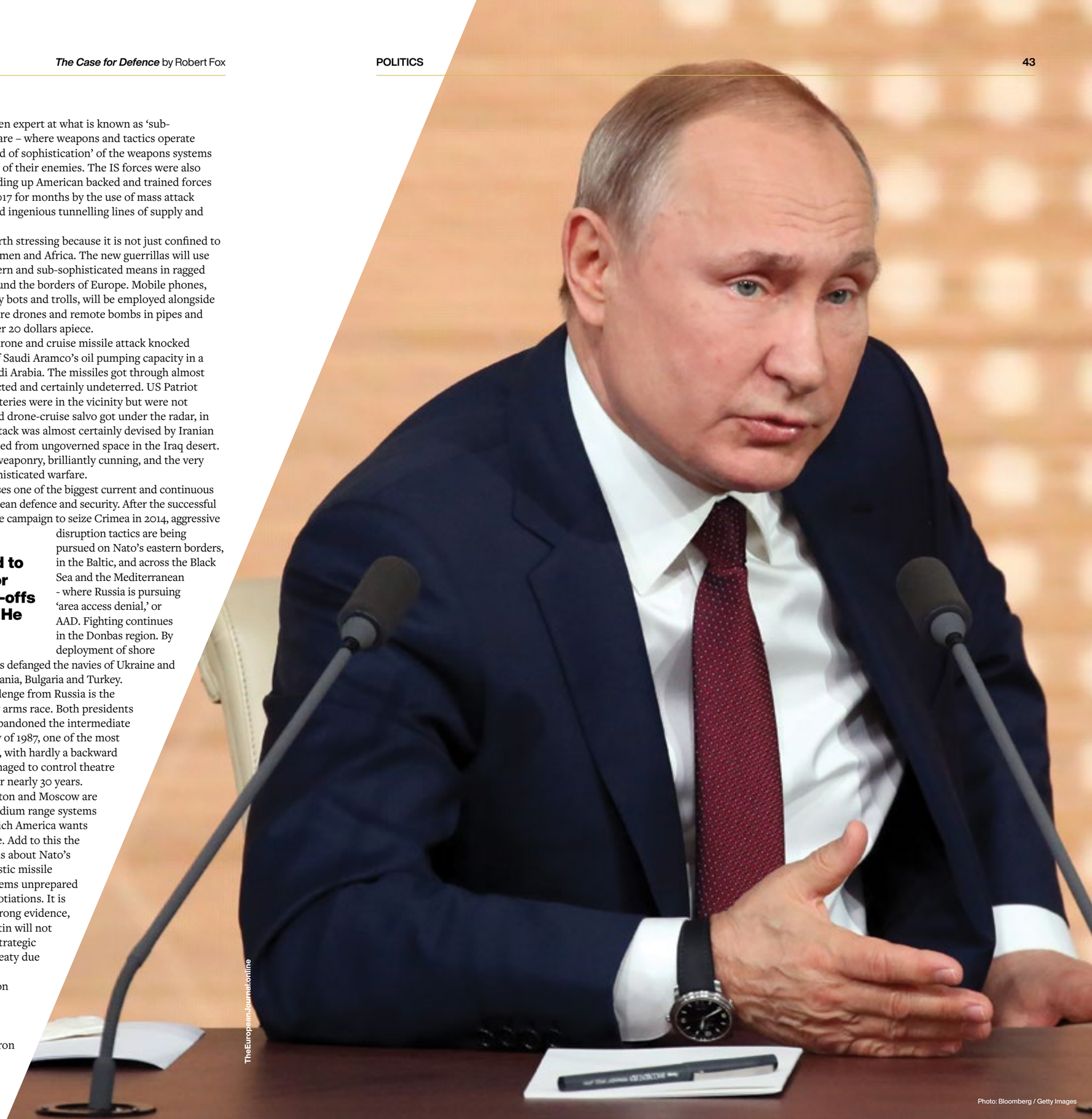


Photo: Bloomberg / Getty Images

Photo: Alex Wong / Getty Images

TheEuropeanJournal.online

The drift from engagement to confrontation since 1989 has been a big failure by all European allies. Nato-Russia cordiality received body blows from the Ossetia-Georgia war in 2008, and the Crimea-Ukraine crisis of 2014, which brought the imposition of sanctions. To seek an opening of European Nato and the EU to Russia in the terms outlined by Emmanuel Macron is to search for a unicorn. Given the pathology of Putin's Russia in its soft and hard warfare tactics, the Nato and EU allies of eastern Europe, the Visegrad group nations and the Baltics, are just not prepared to take the risk.

Quite why this has come about is brilliantly explained in *The Light that Failed: A Reckoning* by Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes. Published in the autumn of 2019, it is the outstanding essay on the European geopolitical landscape of our day. According to the authors, Putin's clique sees the eastern Europeans joining up Nato and the EU as a betrayal. And with it, team Moscow depicts the triumphalist capitalist liberalism of western Europe post-1989 as a hypocritical deception. Moscow is nostalgic for a regenerated 21st century Warsaw pact, it seems, though no one dares mentions this too publicly.

The guiding principle and tactics are disruption, which have become a strategy and end in themselves. Russia cannot afford outright conquest - it just wants to mess with the heads of its actual and potential foes.

Curiously, disruption is also the favourite modus operandi of Nato's senior political leader, Donald Trump. Trump, as his allies have learned to their cost, doesn't do alliances or treaties. He just does deals, one-offs like the property magnate he is. Trump is constant in his inconstancy - save for a solid record when it comes to the consistent protection of the reputation and standing of his fellow disrupter Vladimir Putin.

Disruption is also a favoured technique of Xi Jinping's China in approaching the nations of the West. In a way, Beijing has turned Clausewitz's most famous dictum on its head by employing commercial intrusion and disruption as war and conquest by other means. For Europe, China is a strategic challenge, impossible to overmatch in its own competitive terms. "China has been some time a nation with a powerful European presence and most European countries have taken a long time to realise this," says Lucio Caracciolo founder of the Limes think tank and review in Rome. The One Belt One Road project brings China directly into Europe, and with the acquisition of real estate assets like the port of Trieste, physically so. It is part of a grand neo-mercantilist project. For European allies the strong presence of China in the sectors software, cyber technology and communications, may mark a point of no return. For America, there is an additional physical and military aspect to China's current challenge – and it will affect the US relationship to Nato. Leading sinologists like Isabel Hilton of China Dialogue see ominous signs of a looming naval confrontation over Taiwan and the South China Sea. "Xi Jinping would like to see Taiwan returned to China before he steps down," she told Monocle radio recently. The strategic aim is to exclude the American naval presence from the China Sea region altogether.

The essence of successful defence and security in Europe, and almost anywhere else, is a blending of the old in the new. The European defence initiative advocated by Emmanuel Macron can succeed only by working with Nato and not against it. In his gallic vision of a non-Atlantic Europe he is pursuing the path of such diverse French radicals as Charles de Gaulle and Jean-Jacques Servan Schreiber in his 1967 anti-US tract *Le Défi Americain*. But that path leads into a cul-de-sac.

The European defence organisation has just launched a further 13 development projects, ranging from cyber to security training, bringing to 47 the programmes under the EU's PESCO permanent cooperation structure. The European defence fund has allocated €13 billion for research and development over the next three to five years. But the overall funding of European defence, including expected increases in national defence budgets, is nowhere deep enough to allow a European Defence Union to rival, let alone supplant, Nato.

In the discussion of the future defence and security landscape, in the trade of alphabet soups of acronyms and strategic concepts by government committees, think tanks, and security councils one crucial aspect is often underestimated or overlooked. This is the human dimension. How we defend ourselves and our communities, depends on the participation and trust of we the people. This is brought out in *Goliath: Why the West Doesn't Win Wars And What We Need to Do About It* by Sean McFate. This penetrating and wildly eccentric study suggests that we are all in danger of over engineering our strategic and defence thinking. Too much trust is placed in machines, platforms and geekery. In the end it is the foot soldiers, the PBI (poor bloody infantry), the defence groups, first responders, comforters, coastguards and rescuers that have to do the business.

Defence in its truest and most humane sense requires social cohesion and cooperation. This means working together through volunteer groups, at the basic community level, as well as between nations and alliances.

Our security and military services and their colleagues in formations like the Italian Civil Protection – world leaders in earthquake rescue – will be called on to do increasingly different and demanding tasks in the rapidly changing physical and social landscape. Western European militaries and ancillaries will need to recruit more. They will have to consider foreign legion soldiers on contract, and in many cases in Europe reconsider conscription for a broad range of public services. The challenges of rapid and dramatic environmental and climate change may present new stresses and security challenges. Distressed communities will need rescue and help from flood, possibly disease, and disruption. The prospect of catastrophic collapse of whole communities – the plight of the population of Gaza is a prime example – is both possible and likely.

Defence in its truest and most humane sense requires social cohesion and cooperation. This means working together through volunteer groups, at the basic community level, as well as between nations and alliances. For all the high abstraction of new strategic thinking, defence is about the maintenance of peace and harmony, and it will always have a human face.

An Unhappy Union

The EU is like an alcoholic: until it admits there is a problem – there will be no cure

by GERALD WARNER

Little more than a decade ago, any survey of the prospects for the future of the European Union and the wider continent would have been a relatively pedestrian exercise. It would have looked critically at the perennial failure of many of the economies of EU member states to realise their full potential and queried the growth of bureaucracy in Brussels. Overall, however, it would have been an optimistic review, reflecting a world in which technocrats wielded the levers of power, integration in its various forms was regarded as inevitable and only its pace was debatable, while there was a consensual view that the EU was a "good thing", its existence permanent and its expansion axiomatic.

No serious commentator would have predicted that by 2020 the European Union would be contracting rather than expanding, that potentially lethal fault-lines, both economic and cultural, would have opened up across its member states, that a massive immigration crisis would be destabilising Europe, that many EU electorates would be in mutinous confrontation with Brussels and that terrorism would be a major preoccupation. Nor would anyone have forecast the dramatic decline of the EU's financial motor – the mighty German economy – and economic interactions with China and the United States that would threaten further disruption.

Today the reality is that the Brussels nomenklatura is in the classic situation of the alcoholic: until it admits the problem – that the European Union is in a state of crisis – there is no hope of a cure. For an illustrative example of all that is wrong with the EU one need look no further than its appalling mishandling of Brexit. The EU is in the process not only of declining from 28 to 27 members, it is losing the fifth largest economy in the world, which also happens to be a nuclear power and the occupant of a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Yet to listen to the rhetoric, betraying the punitive mentality of many top officials in the various organs of EU governance over the past three years, one would have thought some problematic third-rate country was departing and being punished in the process.

In the vocabulary of Brussels, genuinely respecting democracy by implementing the will of the electorate, rather than paying lip-service while imposing the prejudices of the elites, is denounced as "populism". Brussels' unpersuasive propagandists should reflect upon the root of that word "populism".

Worse than that, the unacknowledged elephant in the room is the accumulation of abuses that impelled the United Kingdom to take its leave of an increasingly dysfunctional body and the complacency that dissuaded EU leaders from offering David Cameron the concessions that might have avoided Brexit. Now there is dissension over President Macron's vetoing of membership applications from Albania and North Macedonia. Regardless of whether that move was a geopolitical blunder, what does it say about a multinational confederation when it is losing Great Britain and hankering for Albania and North Macedonia? Translate that scenario into business terms: how would one rate a large corporation experiencing a comparable exchange of affiliates?

The European Union has no hope of survival if it continues on its current trajectory. Its main residual strength is that no other member state – yet – is inclined to follow Britain out of the door. But that is not a guarantee of permanent allegiance. Who, a decade ago, would have forecast Britain's departure? Nor does it mean that the Eurozone will not imitate the experience of the Union itself and begin to contract rather than expand. As so often in history, the panacea being proposed for EU troubles is precisely the response most guaranteed to blow the EU apart: Emmanuel Macron's obsessive drive for greater integration.

When someone is feeling faint, the usual prescription is to loosen the sufferer's clothing, not tighten it. The southern EU states cannot remain permanently in the straitjacket of the Eurocurrency. There is growing evidence that another financial crash may be on the way – in cyclical terms, one is inevitable. The ECB does not have the resources to bail out the Eurozone. Mario Draghi's last act as ECB president was to bring back quantitative easing "for as long as necessary". How long will his successor Christine Lagarde deem that necessity to be? Having pledged to do "whatever it takes" to save the Eurocurrency, Draghi pumped trillions of euros into the Eurozone and drove interest rates into the ground. How much longer can such extravagant measures be tolerated in support of a pseudo-currency that is a political icon rather than a product of fiscal reality?

The roots of the current crisis lie in the EU's remote origins. Its grandparent entity, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), despite its industrial-sounding name, was a political project. Beyond that, it was even a largely spiritual project. In 1950 the three most influential statesmen in Europe – Robert Schuman, the French foreign minister, Konrad Adenauer, chancellor of West Germany, and Alcide De Gasperi, prime minister of Italy – were all devout Catholics, at the height of the Christian Democrat political renaissance. Schuman has been declared a "servant of God" by the Church, the first stage on the path to canonisation. During his brief term as French prime minister in 1947-48 his government devised the project that became the ECSC and, ultimately, the EU.

The European project was a political concept from the beginning, but also an avowedly Christian initiative: the EU principle of "subsidiarity", for example, was taken from the social teaching of Pope Pius XI in his encyclical Quadragesimo anno, which declared it "a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organisations can do". That echo of Edmund Burke is in direct conflict with Emmanuel Macron's integrationist ambitions and all the centralising instincts of the Brussels bureaucracy. That is just one illustration of how far the EU has not only departed from its founding principles, but positively demonised them.

A posture of virtue-signalling political correctness produced the immigration crisis in Europe. In Germany 1.3 million asylum seekers entered the country in 2015 and 2016, rising to 1.7 million in 2017. Researchers project that around 50 per cent of recent arrivals will still be unemployed five years after entry and 25 per cent up to 14 years. One-third of those in employment are in temporary work, mostly in low-skilled occupations. The cost of the asylum influx to the German government totalled €62.5bn between 2016 and 2018. Angela Merkel has declared that the situation of 2015 "cannot, should not and must not be repeated" (some irresponsible idiot invited millions of migrants into Angela's country and apparently she is determined to find out who it was, if it's the last thing she does).

Compounding irresponsibility, Brussels has attempted to force member states to admit immigrants, provoking serious confrontation with countries such as Hungary, Poland and Italy.

Here is the kernel of the disconnection between the Brussels policymakers and member states. The cultural crisis is by far the most serious: if the EU falls apart during the next decade or so, the two principal sources of combustion will be the doomed euro and the culture war that Brussels has declared on member states that dare to aspire to preserve their identity. It is time to junk the disinformation flowing out of Brussels and relayed by lazy journalists regarding "concerns about the rule of law, democracy and rising authoritarianism in Poland and Hungary".

The so-called "independent judiciary" supposedly under threat in Poland was the hangover from General Jaruzelski's weasel "Round Table" pact which secured an indefinite monopoly by communist-era judges, in one instance passing the gavel from father to son, to a point where Poles despaired of gaining impartial justice. And while that regime was in place, sustained by the party of Donald Tusk, where were the fearless Brussels champions of justice? What sanctions did they threaten then?

As for fears for democracy, they are more justified around Brussels than in Budapest. The Hungarian government is so popular that Viktor Orbán has won three successive super-majorities at elections attested as free and fair by international observers. Between elections, all contentious issues are subjected to plebiscites. Any more democracy and the one justifiable fear is that Hungarians will become bored by prolific consultation.

But in the vocabulary of Brussels, genuinely respecting democracy by implementing the will of the electorate, rather than paying lip-service while imposing the prejudices of the elites, is denounced as "populism". Brussels' unpersuasive propagandists should reflect upon the root of that word "populism". Instead of yielding to Brussels' demands to dilute their culture with migrants, the Hungarian government has brought the family back to the centre of society – where the EU's founders intended it to be – and by pursuing family-friendly policies is repairing the demographic deficit by growing its own population.

Instead of following President Macron's discredited "more EU" approach to the Union's increasing turmoil, the leadership in Brussels should acknowledge that interesting and innovatory social policies are emerging in the eastern states, that the euro is the problem not the solution and that a looser-knit, multi-track EU model, with member states providing their own solutions to national problems, offers the best hope of avoiding implosion of the European project in the coming decade.

HOW TO SAVE Capitalism

The pursuit of profit may not be woke - but it is integral

by MAGGIE PAGANO

TheEuropeanJournal.online

On August 19th last year, America's business leaders made the most astonishing about-turn. The chief executives of 181 of the country's biggest corporations - ranging from Apple to Ford to Amazon - declared that they should no longer put the pursuit of profit above all else, and that from henceforth they would commit to lead their companies - not only for the benefit of shareholders but all stakeholders. Making money remained important, they declared, but they have an obligation to make the world a better place, protect the environment against the so-called climate emergency and promote diversity and inclusion in a new principle which "outlines a modern standard for corporate responsibility."

When trying to explain the reasoning behind this extraordinary change of direction, Jamie Dimon, chairman of this Business Roundtable and CEO of JP Morgan, America's biggest bank, said: "The American dream is alive, but fraying. Major employers are investing in their workers and communities because they know it is the only way to be successful over the long term." He went on: "These modernised principles reflect the business community's unwavering commitment to continue to push for an economy that serves all Americans."

Corporate titans have to start virtual signalling to ensure their own survival. After all, they are the ones who are the most responsible for having messed up capitalism.

Marc Benioff, chairman and founder of Salesforce, went further. He said: "Capitalism, as we know, it is dead. We're going to see a new kind of capitalism – and it won't be the Milton Friedman capitalism, that is just about making money. The new capitalism is that businesses are here to serve their shareholders, but also their stakeholders – employees, customers, public schools, homeless and the planet."

Alex Gorsky, chairman and CEO of Johnson & Johnson and chair of the Roundtable's corporate governance committee, said the new statement, "affirms the essential role corporations can play in improving our society when CEOs are truly committed to meeting the needs of all stakeholders." While Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, added: "This is tremendous news because it is more critical than ever that businesses in the 21st century are focused on generating long-term value for all stakeholders and addressing the challenges we face, which will result in shared prosperity and sustainability for both business and society."

In one fell swoop, these corporate titans were giving up on the philosophy of Friedman and his free-market disciples, a philosophy which has reigned supreme in the US and the Anglo-Saxon world over the last few decades. It was Professor Friedman who declared that "the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits."

But no more. America's bosses are now 'woke'.

What has woken them?

First, there was the rise of populism which led to the election of President Trump, fuelled by the despair felt by many American voters who have not enjoyed any wage growth - adjusted for inflation - since 1980. The US middle classes are shrinking while the poorer are stagnating. The wealth gap is at similar levels to that of the late 1930s. Two-thirds of the bottom 60 per cent of the population have no savings. It's estimated that nearly a fifth of children live in poverty. Add to this the fact that America's public-education system is among the worst in the developed world and you have a recipe for disquiet.

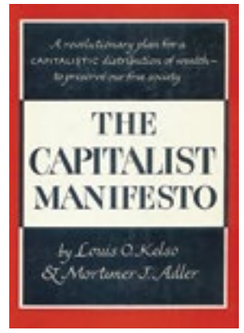
Second, Wall Street has taken fright. These Roundtable bosses sense the discontent about the way things are - from both right and left - and they are acting out of pure self-interest. They want to save their bacon, bacon that they have made, ironically, by following Friedman's pursuit of profit to excess. They are scared because they see Elizabeth Warren making solid ground in the Democrat race - threatening sky-high wealth taxes, the break-up of the giant tech companies like Facebook and Amazon - supported by many Republicans - and new curbs on the financial industry as part of her platform for "economic patriotism."

Warren, a bankruptcy law expert who made her name during the financial crash, wants a new "21st Century Glass-Steagall Act" which "rebuilds the wall between commercial banks and investment banks as well as tough compensation rules that punish bankers for failed risky investments." The private equity boys will also be punished. She doesn't mince her words: "The truth is that Washington has it backwards. For a long time now, Wall Street's success hasn't helped the broader economy – it's come at the expense of the rest of the economy. Wall Street is looting the economy and Washington is helping them do it." No wonder CEOs are sitting up and starting to twitch, and that Democrat donors have either stopped giving money or switched to supporting Trump.

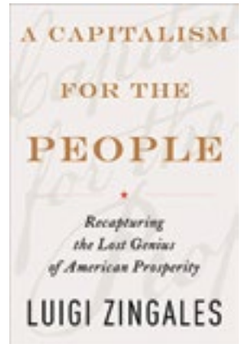
The third reason is more subtle - corporate titans have to start virtue signalling to ensure their own survival. After all, they are the ones who are the most responsible for having messed up capitalism. They hijacked capitalism for their own ends, and they are now paying the price. It is risible to listen to bankers like Dimon talk about the need for less inequality and a more sustainable culture when he was paid a cool $31 million last year. He is, no doubt, a brilliant banker. He is also a billionaire - thanks to the share options, salary and bonus packages he has enjoyed since he joined the bank in 2004.


Photo: Misha Friedman / Getty Images

And here's the rub. Dimon is the manager of JP Morgan's business. He is not an entrepreneur, and has never risked his own capital. What businessmen like Dimon - and so many others running companies in the US and the UK have done - is not do what Friedman said and put shareholders first but prioritise management instead. They have been helped by an entire industry devoted to complex share options and benchmarked salaries.



This is why so many top US CEOs have earned eye-watering fortunes from their companies over the last 50 years - even when they have underperformed or, indeed, gone bust. We have also seen this phenomenon first hand in the UK over the last few decades. It was a culture imported to the City from the US via Wall Street after the Big Bang. The pay virus has now infected every other sector of industry.



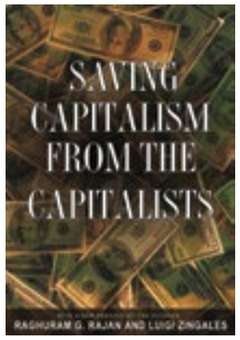
Take a look at the egregious bonus packages that executives like Jeff Fairbairn, the chief executive of house-builder, Persimmon, and his management cronies, have earned because of their outrageously complex share schemes. Or at Thomas Cook, where a series of hopeless bosses managed to squirrel away many millions of pounds each while they ran the company into the ground and piled up massive debts. Shareholder primacy requires responsible shareholders too. Unfortunately, institutional investors have not been up to the task.

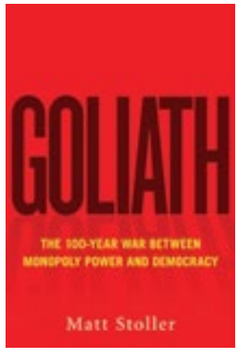
But why have shareholders been so loath to protest and vote against these pay packages? Is it because those same fund managers are also earning excessive pay packages, and so measure themselves against their corporate peers? Despite public outrage, the rate of pay for US and British CEOs has reached astonishingly high levels: the average pay for a FTSE 100 chief executive is now around £4m a year compared to around £100,000 in the 1980s. Some shareholder pressure groups have had a go at protesting but only for pay packages to be approved.

One of the UK's leading businessmen - someone who took out a mortgage to fund his first venture - and who has chaired several British FTSE 100 companies, claims capitalism has been hijacked by the management class. "Over the last few decades it has become possible to become seriously rich without taking any financial risk," he tells me. "These managers didn't have skin in the game. They didn't create the business and their rewards very often are not tied to performance but luck. Luck in the sense that if you start your tenure at the bottom of the cycle and exit at the top you hit the jackpot."

The former chairman of a British bank had this to say: "I have seen businesses where the shareholders took all the risk and eventually all the losses whilst traders, investment bankers and investment managers walked away with huge sums of money."

As Ray Dalio, the founder of Bridgewater Associates, one of the world's biggest hedge funds and a self-made billionaire, concludes: "The problem is that capitalists typically don't know how to divide the pie well and socialists typically don't know how to bake it." In fact, Dalio thinks the distribution of society's spoils is now so unequal in the US the government should declare a national emergency. As he wrote recently: "Capitalism is evolving in a way that is not working well for the majority of Americans because it's producing self-reinforcing spirals: up for the haves and down for the have-nots."





Dalio has formulated a five point plan to remedy the situation which includes bringing together government institutions to create a new fiscal and monetary policy.

Saving capitalism from capitalists is not a new phenomenon. In 1958, two American political philosophers, Louis O. Kelso - who became fascinated by politics after studying the Great Depression - and Mortimer J. Adler wrote *The Capitalist Manifesto* which argued that capitalism had not failed because it was inherently bad, but because of the unequal distribution of income.

As Kelso put it, the rich kept getting richer because they owned the capital, while the workers struggled because they derived income only from their labour. Government attempts at redistribution of wealth would always fail, he argued, because workers have no access to capital. He advocated leveraged buyouts and employee share ownership to spread the spoils to the many.

One modern crusader against crony capitalism is Professor Luigi Zingales, professor of finance at the University of Chicago, who argues for more competition, an end to subsidies and lobbying, freer markets and less privilege for the few.

His two books, *Saving Capitalism from the Capitalists* and *A Capitalism For The People: Recapturing the Lost Genius of American Prosperity,* are blistering critiques of how big business together with corrupt politicians and lobbyists are corroding American democracy.

With his first-hand experience of Italian cronyism, Zingales is better placed than most to argue that the US must curb the power of big corporations - and monopolies like Big Tech - if the country is to prosper and democracy to survive.

America has done it before, he says. In the late 19th century there was a similar movement against big business which led, eventually, to many of President Theodore Roosevelt's reforms – ranging from anti-trust to accounting transparency, anti-fraud and a less-concentrated financial system.

Zingales concludes: "That's what we need today; structural reforms that break the elites. Today our anti-trust laws cannot do

anything against these types of monopolies."

There is surprising agreement between free-market champions on the right and among left-wing commentators - on both sides of the Atlantic- that curbing financial fire-power and breaking up monopolies is the way forward.

Democrat activist, Matt Stoller, also argues in his new book, *Goliath: The 100-Year War Between Monopoly and Democracy*, that it is this concentration of wealth which has led to the return of authoritarianism and populism in American political life for the first time in eighty years. Stoller, who worked for Bernie Sanders on the Senate budget committee, is clear that tech giants such as Amazon, Google and Facebook are the new robber baron monopolies. Like Senator Warren, he argues that concentrated economic power threatens democracy.

For Stoller, antitrust policy is a vehicle for "preserving democracy within the commercial sphere, by keeping markets open". As the former associate Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis, wrote in the 1930s: "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." Nothing much has changed.

The reality is that corporations are owned by their shareholders so, of course, technically, shareholders must be put first. But this does not mean - and has never meant - that other stakeholders should not be treated equally and fairly.

If only corporate bosses had read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, by the father of economics, Adam Smith, first published in 1759.

In the opening paragraph, Smith wrote: "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it."

As experience has shown time and time again, the best companies are those that treat all of their communities well - ranging from employee-owned businesses such as the John Lewis Partnership in the UK and, according to Glassdoor, the In-N-Out burger chain in the US. Treating everyone with kindness is surely the essence of "good business" and, as Smith said, should be implicit.

There is no question that capitalism needs reforming, if not a complete shake-up from inside out and, specifically, from top to bottom. But is this trend towards a "stakeholder capitalism" the way to go?

Indeed, some critics of stakeholder capitalism argue that corporate bosses would pay themselves even more if they could control the purpose and role of their companies whereas if the purpose is to serve shareholders, theoretically, executives have to deliver for them. If they don't, they are out, albeit with golden goodbyes.

While this should be what happens, we have seen that shareholders have been loath to wield power over their corporate managers and to say, enough is enough.

There's a real danger that if shareholders do not start flexing their muscles, governments may be tempted to do it for them - either by imposing wealth taxes or, as in the case of Warren, threatening to take away pay if executives are found to be at fault.

* * *

Most of those same business leaders who redefined the Roundtable manifesto in Washington last summer were in Switzerland earlier this year for the World Economic Forum at Davos.

This year was the 50th annual meeting, so there was even more champagne popping than usual for what has become the wokest of woke fests. And guests got their big moment: the meeting between a real-life prince and a green Nordic goddess, a brief chat between Prince Charles and Greta Thunberg on how they would save the planet.

All the glitterati in business were there for the Windsor-Thunberg pledge: JP Morgan's Jamie Dimon, BlackRock's Larry Fink, who has recently launched a new greener policy for investing, Facebook chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg and Uber's Dara Khosrowshah to name a few of the tycoons.

As well as the bubbly and the networking, they were ostensibly there to discuss the event's main topic: Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World. This was the theme chosen by Klaus Schwab, the WEF's chairman, whose Davos manifesto is for a "better kind of capitalism," one which follows the stakeholder model. Indeed, one of Schwab's ambitions is to help corporations define new methods for updating their key performance indicators to account for the shift in stated goals. He recommends a new "shared value creation" measure that should include "environmental, social, and governance" goals as a complement to standard financial metrics.

There is no question that capitalism needs reforming, if not a complete shake-up from inside out and, specifically, from top to bottom. But is this trend towards a "stakeholder capitalism" the way to go? And what does defining stakeholder capitalism even mean in practice? Should it be about banning the use of plastic cups? Is it how "diverse" they can make their executive boards? Is it about closing tax loopholes? Or cutting the pay of CEOs? Or is the debate too wrapped in with gesture politics than genuine action? Most of the guests arrived by private jet from around the globe. Yet while they were in Davos, they were offered snow grips so they could walk around instead of the usual chauffeur driven cars to save on energy. Even President Trump was spotted wearing snow grips. What is the world coming to? ¬

TRUMPCHINASANDERSIMF
MEGHANHARRYOBAMAEU
PUTINFACEBOOKFAKEBOOK
EUMACRONMERKELBREXITUK
REACTIONTAXPAYGOOGLEBORIS
INNOVATIONEXPROPRIATION
GROWTHCOMPETITIONOLYMPICS
CLIMATEAMAZONKREMLINXI
ARTAPPLEWOKEKSIDEASHOPE

MAKE SENSE

SUBSCRIBE WWW.REACTION.LIFE

GET LEADING WRITERS AND A DAILY BRIEFING DELIVERED FROM LONDON

Bank of Bust

by TUOMAS MALINEN

Brace yourselves - the crash is coming...

The consensus seems to be that in 2020 the world economy will experience a mild recession or escape one completely. Actually, it's likely something much more sinister is brewing. My firm has been warning of impending collapse since March 2017 and after analysing the underlying weaknesses in the global economy we've concluded these negative trends will most likely come to a head in the next twelve months.

The simple truth is the global economy never recovered from the financial crash of 2008. After the collapse of Lehman Brothers that September, the financial crisis threatened to become systemic so global leaders did everything possible to stop the banks from failing: deposits were guaranteed, banks were bailed-out and stupendous sums of money were pumped into the markets. The world banking sector could not be allowed to crash - that's obvious - but the rescue measures were to great, overwhelming necessary corrections and permitting undead, "zombie" banks to linger on, especially in Europe.

Thanks to the exceptional bailout measures enacted in Japan after the Japanese economy crashed in the early Nineties, we know that if ailing banks are left intact, they continue to finance weak corporations in an effort to avoid further losses, inhibiting new, more competitive enterprises from rising up and creating jobs. When capital remains locked in unproductive uses it leads to prolonged economic stagnation.

The problem of so-called "zombie banks" has been aggravated by the imposition of extremely low or even negative rates. Easy money keeps both unprofitable firms in operation through cheap financing and crushes the profitability of banks whose main source of income is the difference between "lending long" and "borrowing short." When interest rates are very low, this "net interest margin" diminishes, and when rates turn negative, inverts entirely. Despite these obvious facts, this has been the policy promulgated by the European Central Bank since June 2014.

Following the crash of 2008, central banks took a more dominant role in the capital markets. They started to buy assets, mostly bonds, in the secondary markets in an effort to push long-term interest rates down and to stimulate investment - a process known as Quantitative Easing. But instead of producing a robust economic recovery, this created an unprecedented global asset market bubble.

In the Eurozone, the liquidity that flowed from QE-programmes pushed sovereign bond rates unnaturally low, while the QE of the Fed led to widespread capital flows across the globe in a desperate search for yield. These QE-programmes essentially destroyed price discovery and, consequently, risk-pricing in the capital markets, irreversibly.

Meanwhile, in China, massive infrastructure investment programs pushed banks to increase lending. This led to a relentless growth in debt, and the decreasing productivity of investment, but it also stimulated the global economy into recovery. Since 2009, China has accounted for over 60 percent of all new money created globally. Chinese leaders tried to stop this "debt-bonanza" in 2014, but their efforts led to a sudden and drastic deterioration in their housing market, which had become the backbone of the Chinese economy. The government took fright and enacted a record-breaking debt stimulus, this time through the "shadow-banking" sector - which tripled in the year 2016.

In late 2017, Chinese authorities started to rein-in this reckless lending, and the global economy started to slow. The U.S. and other world economies got a reprieve as a result of the tax stimulus enacted by President Trump, but this effect was only temporary.

Starting in December 2018 and continuing into early 2019, Chinese authorities and the Fed panicked again. By late 2018, asset markets were in an almost-uncontrollable slide and China's banking sector was showing worrying signs of stress. The People's Bank of China started to increase system liquidity aggressively in mid-December 2018 and shortly thereafter the Fed pivoted dramatically from its earlier predictions of sequential rate increases to a much more dovish stance. Markets rebounded.

In September of this year, the ECB launched a new QE-program while China initiated a record-breaking stimulus program to keep its economy from sinking prior to the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China. Even so, the growth rate of China fell to a 27 year low.

True to its pledge, the Fed had already cut interest rates three times, and in early October it started to buy U.S. Treasury bills in a move it described as "not QE". In practice, it was exactly that. The Fed also supported the repurchase market by several tens of billions of dollars daily.

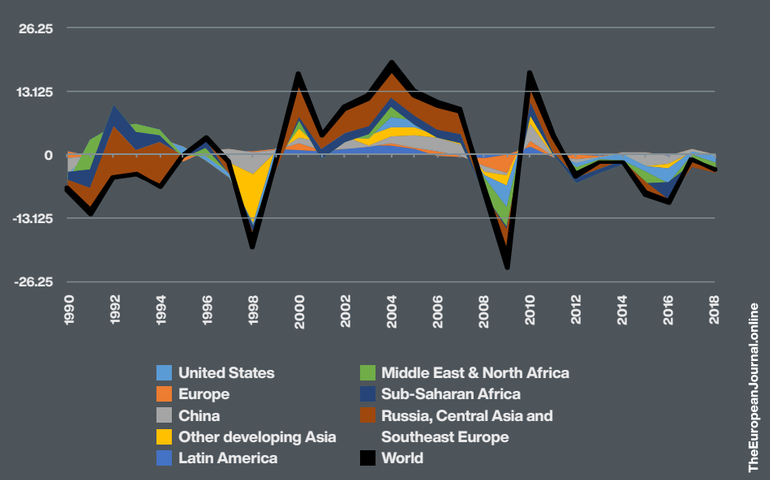
Central bankers have made every conceivable effort to keep the asset markets from falling, but now their bag of tricks is empty. This means there will be no effective way for central banks to resuscitate a global economy deeply submerged in a profound recession and bear market. There's no other outcome than a global collapse. All the signs indicate it will start in 2020. Brace for impact.

Central bankers have made every conceivable effort to keep the asset markets from falling, but now their bag of tricks is empty.

Photo: cap / Shutterstock.com

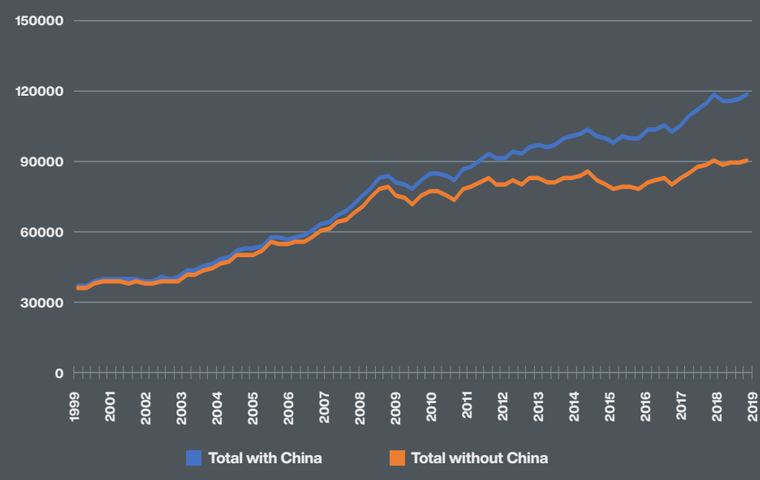
Global and regional TFP growth (%)

Figure 1. Regional and global growth rates of total factor productivity (TFP) in percentage points. Source: GnS Economics, Conference Board



Global private non-financial debt, Q1 1999 - Q1 2019

Figure 2. Non-financial debt of the private sector in 44 major countries with and without China. In billions US dollars. Sources: GnS Economics, BI

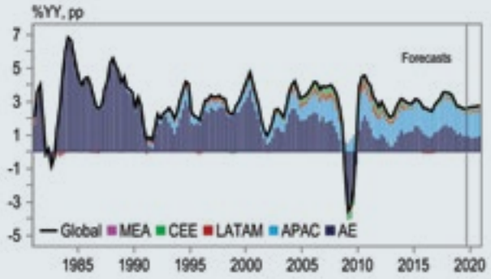


WORLD IN NUMBERS

Data for October 2019 show that China's exports to, and imports from, the United States remained well below previous highs

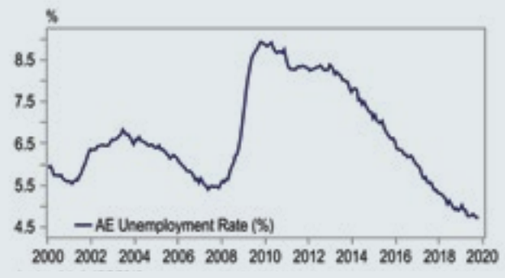
Source: Macrobond, Macquarie Macro Strategy

Select Economies Contribution to Global Real GDP Growth



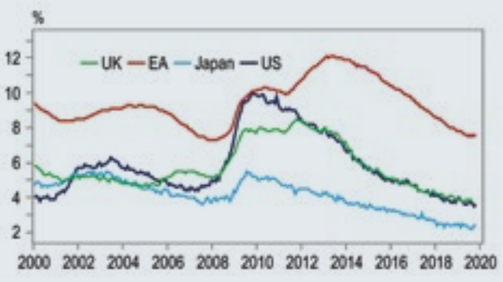
Last updated: 11/19/2019 Data through: 2019 Q3 Source: National Statistical Sources and Citi Research

Advanced Economies Unemployment Rate (0/o), 2000-2019 Oct



Last updated: 12/3/2019 Data through: October 2019

Unemployment Rate (0/o), 2000-2019 Oct



Last updated: 12/3/2019 Data through: October 2019

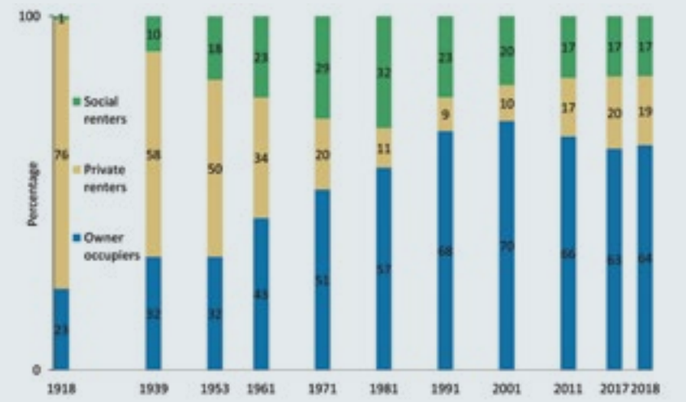
Selected Economies Wage Growth (0/o YY), 2010-2019 Q3

Last updated: 12/3/2019 Data through: 2019 03 Note: Euro area: Comp per emp, Japan: Contractual wages, UK: Avg Weekly Earnings, US: Avg Hourly Earnings. Euro area data is until Q2-2019.
Source: National Statistical Sources, Citi Research

UK and London house price growth

Source: Company data, Morgan Stanley Research

English households, trends in tenure



Note: Euro area: Comp per emp, Japan: Contractual wages, UK: Avg Weekly Earnings, US: Avg Hourly Earnings. Euro area data is until Q2-2019.
Source: National Statistical Sources, Citi Research

English households, trends in tenure

Source: 1918: estimates by Alan Holmans of Cambridge University Department of Land economy. 1939 to 1971: "Housing policy in Britain", Alan Holmans. 1981 onwards: English housing survey, UK Government

Tax and Spend on ROBOTS

Workers shouldn't be afraid of AI - if only we liberate the tax system

by DANIEL DALTON

TheEuropeanJournal.online

It has become fashionable to believe that automation, the process by which some human jobs are replaced by machines, will mean that workers, in particular low-skilled workers, will be unable to find employment, that the gap between rich and poor will grow as a result and that eventually we will descend into a soulless society which has a chasm at its heart.

But in truth these fears are as unfounded today as they have been in the past. For the last two hundred years, every time technology has advanced, people have fretted that they will be left powerless in the face technological advancement. The English textile workers in the 1800s - known as the Luddites - are the most famous example of this but panic has erupted periodically ever since, even though we have at no stage seen fewer jobs in the economy. Rather, technological breakthrough has led to more employment, greater productivity and enhanced living standards.

There has been disruption. Existing jobs have been replaced - and that is always traumatic - but on each occasion the time saved and productivity gained thanks to new machinery has opened up possibilities for humans to do new types of job, in new areas and new industries. When it comes to AI, there is nothing to suggest that this time things will be any different.

AI technologies, at least for the foreseeable future, will not be able to think for themselves or mimic human creativeness, emotions or reactions. As a result they will remain our servants. They will, however, move into jobs that are routine, predictable and normally done by humans and even some skilled jobs. However, just as was the case in previous industrial revolutions, AI will create many more jobs than it destroys. They will reduce the cost of entry into many industries, increasing competition and allowing room for new and innovative industries to spring up. The AI revolution is not fundamentally different in this sense to any previous industrial revolution.

The most effective approach to dealing with the challenge of automation is to reduce the cost of hiring human workers.

It is not AI which presents the biggest threat to jobs but our own governments and particularly their approach to taxation. If an employer needs a job done and has the choice of hiring a human or using a machine to do it, the main consideration will be cost. Machines are expensive but they are getting cheaper by the day. Humans on the other hand are not getting cheaper, mainly because of the taxes that governments charge companies to hire them.

To put the equivalent of €100 in a worker's pocket, a company will have to pay substantially more. In addition to income tax levied on the employee, the company also pays an employer contribution. European countries are the worst offenders in this respect. In some countries this can amount to more than double the cost of employing someone. In Belgium, in 2013, it cost a company €252 to put €100 in a worker's pocket. Belgium has one of the highest tax wedges in the Western world, but many other European countries are not far behind. In France, the cost is €230, in Germany €213. For the UK, the cost is still substantial, at €157.

These taxes make human workers uncompetitive against machines and will worsen the potential disruption caused by automation. As governments will lose this tax revenue anyway if the direst predictions about job losses are proven to be accurate, it may not prove to be a sustainable long-term source of government funding. Governments would be better advised to preempt this threat and drastically reduce, if not eliminate, taxation on income and on hiring workers, particularly at lower income levels. To compensate, governments can look to focus more on consumption taxes and on capital. The most effective approach to dealing with the challenge of automation is to reduce the cost of hiring human workers, while ensuring more of the money a company pays to employ a worker actually gets to the employee.

The future of work in a digital world will not just be about full time work. The advent of the sharing economy, video conferencing, and the smartphone have shown that in future people will have to be more flexible, will move jobs more frequently or work for more than one company at the same time and perhaps maintain multiple sources of income. They are also likely to work at different times of the day. The internet has effectively enabled everyone to become an independent contractor. The future development of AI suggests this trend will only increase, and substantially in the years to come. In the UK, self-employed workers already made up over 15% of the workforce in 2017.

This has many benefits. It increases autonomy and independence as well as an individual's earning potential. It also means that it will be easier for many more people to join the workforce as the current nature of work - based around the nine to five, five days a week - doesn't work for many people, including those with young children.

However, governments need to recognise this and use the tax system to preempt these changes. This should focus firstly on ensuring that tax systems are better suited and tailored towards the self-employed and those with multiple sources of income. The UK made a positive step in this direction in 2017 when it introduced a £1000 tax free threshold for income generated from the sharing economy. However, many countries, the UK included, penalise the self-employed and those with second jobs through the tax system. This is based on the outdated but still widely followed doctrine that full time employment with a single employer is what matters, as it is easily identifiable, stable and therefore easily taxed.

The future world of work will not be as simple, jobs will be fluid, people will use their skills in a variety of ways to earn a variety of incomes at the same time. This will happen regardless of what governments do, so they should encourage and promote it, and create effective systems to facilitate it.

AI will enhance the world of work, it will make us far more productive and will open up new industries and new jobs in areas that we haven't even thought of yet. Automation will replace many low skilled and routine or predictable jobs, but it will not challenge the many jobs which require human qualities. By reducing the need for us to spend time on routine tasks, it will increase productivity and allow for the creation of new industries. Ultimately, this will increase, not reduce employment.

But to ensure that humans can compete with machines, governments will have to have to be nimble in taxation. If they do this, the AI revolution should allow us all the potential to be more productive, more flexible and earn more money - whilst giving us more free time to enjoy the fruits of our labour. Fear is not a rational response to a future such as this - we should be open to it, hopeful and excited.

Matt Ridley

THE END OF THE WORLD ISN'T NIGH

In the future, the only thing we have to fear is doomsday fear itself

Climate change is a real problem that we must tackle but not an emergency requiring the dismantling of civilisation.

The world is a terrible place getting rapidly worse. That is what most young people are told by most journalists, many scientists and plenty of politicians. "I am talking about the slaughter, death and starvation of six billion people this century–that's what the science predicts," says the founder of Extinction Rebellion, Roger Hallam. His line, and Greta Thunberg's that we have stolen her future, may be a little more extreme than the average view, but they are in tune with the general pessimism of the age.

Those of us who take the opposite view - that things have been getting better for most people in most places at an unprecedented rate, and are likely to continue to do so - face not just disbelief but cynicism about our motives and suspicion that we do not care.

Here are six reasons that you should shake free of the prevailing gloom and join the optimists...

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Photo: QQ7 / Shutterstock.com

1

There is nothing new about pessimism. When I was young, the grown-ups were just as gloomy about the future as they are today. They told us that the population explosion would accelerate and resources would run out, resulting in mass famine, while pollution was going to shorten our lifespan through an epidemic of cancer. The deserts were advancing and the forests vanishing. Acid rain, the hole in the ozone layer and falling sperm counts would add to our woes. Nuclear wars were getting ever more likely and with them would come devastating multi-year winters. Here's a typical quotation from a best-selling book by an economist, Robert Heilbroner, writing in 1970: "The outlook for man, I believe, is painful, difficult, perhaps desperate, and the hope that can be held out for his future prospects seem to be very slim indeed."

And pessimism was not new then. Fifty years before that, the deterioration of the human race was the universal obsession of intellectuals; anybody who thought eugenics was a bad idea was regarded as irresponsible. A century before that, the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, exasperated by the gloom of fellow intellectuals, asked "on what principle is it that with nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us?" Go right back to 700BC and you will find the poet Hesiod lamenting the coming of the Iron Age: the Bronze Age was better.

Most young people are unaware of this history.

2

Human living standards have improved dramatically. Over the past half century, the income of the average person in the world has trebled in real terms, average lifespan has increased at the rate of about five hours per day, and child mortality – the greatest measure of misery I can think of - has fallen by more than two-thirds. The number of people living in extreme poverty, on less than about two dollars a day, has gone from over 60 per cent to less than ten per cent, a wholly unprecedented change that nobody forecast would happen. Yet these facts are almost unknown: in one poll, only five per cent of British people think that the percentage of people in extreme poverty has halved in 20 years; 65 per cent think it has doubled. The five per cent are right.

Even these numbers understate what has happened. The cost of most goods has fallen steeply while the quality has improved. It takes less than half a second on the average wage to earn enough money to switch on a lamp for an hour. In 1880, it would have taken 15 minutes of work on the average wage to afford that much light from an oil lamp. It is neither as common nor as acceptable to discriminate against women, gay people, people of colour or people with disabilities as it once was.

Material progress is not everything. But it is something.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Material progress is not everything. But it is something.

3

The problems we worried about in the past have mostly faded or been solved. The rate of growth of the human population has halved since the 1960s as people plan smaller families, and even the absolute number of people added to the world each year has been falling for 30 years. The world population will probably start falling towards the end of this century (bringing a different set of problems). The number of people dying from famine has collapsed to very low levels never before seen in history. The chances that anybody anywhere in the world will be killed by storm, flood or drought are 99 per cent smaller than they were in the 1920s. As countries become richer, so their inhabitants report that they are generally happier – it is a myth that the poor are happier than the rich.

Throughout the western world mortality from war and domestic violence has fallen to the lowest levels on record – despite these things still dominating the news. The age-adjusted death rate from heart disease, cancer, stroke and suicide is falling steadily. Infectious diseases are in full retreat. Smallpox is extinct, polio almost. Malaria mortality, which increased sharply in the 1980s and 1990s, has fallen steeply since. Deaths from HIV, once the cause of an incurable illness, are falling. Most resources, far from running out, are getting cheaper.

The amount of oil spilled in the ocean each year is 95 per cent less than it was in the 1960s. The hole in the ozone layer is healing. Acid rain is mostly a distant memory. There is more forest cover on the planet every year, a fact that most people find hard to believe: admittedly, this is because northern forests are expanding faster than tropical forests are shrinking, but even tropical deforestation is slowing down.

The number of humpback whales has increased from 5,000 in the 1960s to 80,000 today. Otters, beavers, lynx, wolves, deer and birds of prey have expanded their ranges and increased their numbers throughout Europe and North America. Tiger numbers in India are slowly increasing. Species are still dying out but at a declining rate: among the 529 species declared officially extinct by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the rate of loss peaked at about 50 per decade around 1900 and is now running at less than ten per decade – thanks to the efforts of conservationists and stricter rules about releasing invasive species on to islands, mainly.

Despite the continued increase in human numbers, the total footprint of agriculture is beginning to shrink, and the amount of land needed to produce a given quantity of food is 68 per cent less than it was in the 1960s, sparing land for nature.

The one thing we are running out of is reasons for pessimism.

4

The things that are getting worse are mostly the consequences of abundance and prosperity: first-world problems, we call them. We face more traffic congestion because more people have cars, growing obesity because food is cheap, an addiction to social media because social engagement no longer depends on distance, and an epidemic of allergies, because we are no longer infested with parasites such as worms. Housing has become far more expensive, relative to income because not enough houses are being built. We complain about the irritations of budget airlines, but forget that the average flight is now much cheaper, much safer and much less likely to be delayed (or hijacked) than in the past. Take safety: fatalities per trillion revenue-passenger-kilometre were 3,218 in 1970. In 2018: 59.

Human beings do seem to have a sort of mental thermostat for complaint. If you are not losing children to malaria, malnutrition and trampling by mammoths, you get just as upset by your broadband going on the blink for a few hours.

5

Climate change is happening but slower than expected. Greens get furious when you say this but it is true. In 1990, the first Intergovernmental Report on Climate Change predicted that the average temperature of the world would rise by about 0.3 degrees per decade. It might be as much as 0.5 degrees per decade, or as little as 0.2, but it would be in that range. Today, 30 years later, how fast has it risen? Based on satellite and ground-station data, the best guess is about 0.15 degrees per decade, or half as fast as forecast.

Hot days have become more frequent and cold days less frequent but apart from that, the predicted effects of warming have not shown up. There has been no increase in the frequency or strength of tropical cyclones (also known as hurricanes and typhoons depending on which ocean they are in). There has been no increase in the frequency or intensity of flooding. There has been a slight decrease in droughts. Tornadoes have not increased in frequency or strength. The area burned by wild fires is lower than in the 19th century. Arctic sea ice cover has retreated in late summer, though not as much as it used to do a few thousand years ago. The sea level is rising, as it did throughout the twentieth century, but not at an accelerating rate. The best guess is that it is rising at about 3.2 millimetres a year, or about a foot per century.

Climate change is a real problem that we must tackle, but not an emergency requiring the dismantling of civilisation.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

6

Innovation is about to deliver extraordinary opportunities. A century ago the car and the aeroplane were hopelessly dangerous, inefficient and expensive; today everybody uses them all the time in comfort and safety. Half a century ago, computers were the size of houses; today there is more power in your mobile phone. What glories of technology await us over the next century?

Nobody knows, by definition, but it is highly unlikely that innovation will cease, because it comes from the exchange and recombination of ideas, a process that is speeding up. Take biotechnology as an example. In 1950, we did not know what a gene was. In 1960 we did not know the genetic code. In 1970 we did not know how to alter a gene. Today we can precisely edit a sequence of DNA to remove a mutation that causes suffering, or to direct the immune system against a tumour, or to render a rice plant richer in vitamins. This technology is in its infancy, but already it is transforming medicine and agriculture for the better, while worries about its down-sides, from designer babies to biological warfare, have generally proven exaggerated.

Meanwhile artificial intelligence has arrived, even though we often don't call it that. If you don't believe me, explain how it is that your mobile phone can tell you not only that there is a traffic jam ahead, but that you would be better turning right at the next junction to avoid it. From defeating the world champion at the game of Go without ever having been taught by a human being how to play, to delineating a tumour on a CT scan, learning algorithms are starting to do things that are indistinguishable from intelligence – albeit without our consciousness or imagination. All the evidence suggests that this is not going to displace human beings but augment them.

From vaping to LED lighting, from insecticide-treated bed-nets to combat malaria to nuclear fusion, the technologies under development today promise utterly to transform the human experience for the better. They won't cause unemployment (innovation never does), but they might make us so much more productive that we do not have to work so hard to enjoy a rewarding lifestyle.

Teaching the young that cataclysm is inevitable is a counsel of despair. Telling them that the world has got better and can get better still if we all try to make it so is more likely to inspire them. It also happens to be true.

Teaching the young that cataclysm is inevitable is a counsel of despair. Telling them that the world has got better and can get better still if we all try to make it so is more likely to inspire them. It also happens to be true.

TECH 2020

Is this the decade in which big tech comes to influence our future more than politics can do?

by CHARLOTTE HENRY

When the century began, a screeching modem would still inform most people that they were connecting to the internet. Facebook was just a twinkle in Mark Zuckerberg's eye, only launching in 2004. It took another three years for the first iPhone to arrive. Given how ubiquitous these technologies are now, remembering a time before them feels akin to looking back into the dark ages. The pace of change has been staggering.

As we begin the next decade, we must expect the rate of technological progress to be just as rapid. Fields such as virtual and augmented reality are going to become more and more commonplace.

The widespread introduction of 5G connectivity will put rocket boosters under how many of us communicate.

But one thing that could stifle this progress is overregulation.

The growing dominance of certain tech firms has already attracted the attention of regulators around the world. From EU commissioner Margrethe Vestager to the US Democrat presidential hopeful Elizabeth Warren, lawmakers want to crackdown on what they see as overreach from Silicon Valley. This is only like to increase in the next 12 months.

In the EU, the directives come right from the very top. Incoming EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has backed Vestager's tough stance. In her pitch for the role, von der Leyen pledged: "We will jointly define standards for this new generation of technologies that will become the global norm." She and colleagues have also spoken of "technological sovereignty" in Europe, fearing that too much of its technological capacity comes from beyond the continent. We can expect more language like this in the year ahead as von der Leyen and a new team of commissioners finally take office.

Across the Atlantic, Elizabeth Warren is not the only prominent Democrat taking aim at big tech. In a blog post last March, she wrote: "Today's big tech companies have too much power – too much power over our economy, our society, and our democracy. They've bulldozed competition, used our private information for profit, and tilted the playing field against everyone else. And in the process, they have hurt small businesses and stifled innovation."

Warren, and others who think the same, may have a point - a strengthening of monopolies will certainly not help consumers. She's also correct to note that technological innovation has always thrived on exciting newcomers having the space to rise, instead of simply being drowned out by big existing players in the market. Established firms stifling this innovation and creativity helps nobody.

However, these politicians will also have to find a way of balancing their tougher stance with the rights of consumers. For instance, some recent moves have indicated that in the near future politicians might be prepared to threaten users' privacy in the name of antitrust. There are, for instance, new provisions in the most recent

Photo: Justin Sullivan / Getty Images

From Apple to Zuckerberg

Disinformation has permeated parts of society for centuries. Social media and collapsing public trust in institutions has changed things substantially – and politicians across the globe are looking to exploit this.

iPhone operating that limit the automatic tracking third-party apps can do. Apple says this is to protect users' privacy, but some lawmakers think it is simply a way of making apps that rival Apple's own services less effective.

As Warren's Democratic colleague David Cicilline said in November: "There is a growing risk that without a strong privacy law in the United States, platforms will exploit their role as de facto private regulators by placing a thumb on the scale in their own favour."

Perhaps 2020 will see more privacy laws introduced, laws that genuinely help protect users' data. It is though unclear how many senior US figures will want to pursue the issue in the run-up to an already fractious election. Attacking big tech for being anti-competitive is a more popular, and populist, approach.

The streaming wars officially commenced in 2019 but will really heat up in 2020. Disney's offering, Disney+, had 10 million subscriptions in the first 24 hours it was available. Having originally launched in the US, Canada, and the Netherlands, quickly followed by Australia and New Zealand, it will expand into other parts of Europe in March. There, it will join Apple TV+, launched a few days before Disney's service, along with more established players Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. In the US, even more services, such as Comcast NBCUniversal's Peacock and HBO's Max service are set to join the battle for subscribers' eyeballs.

It is great that TV lovers have increasing choice and the ability to watch what they want when they want it. There is though a risk that we will all get subscription fatigue. There is surely a limit to how many monthly payments a user will make. According to a survey by Deloitte, on average, subscribers are willing to pay for three services. We are likely to find out if that figure holds as ever more services go live.

That same Deloitte report found that 47 per cent of US consumers were frustrated by the increasing number of subscriptions and the corresponding number of services required in order to be able to watch everything they want. As more and more services emerge, popular content is spread ever more thinly. Companies want to take their own content exclusively to their own platform, and this does not necessarily benefit consumers who want a simple way to binge-watch their favourite boxsets.

5G connectivity is going to be a major step forward and is expected to become more widespread in 2020. Already we've seen it rollout in some specific parts of the UK – EE launched its service in 16 cities in 2019 and even supplied 5G connectivity to the Glastonbury festival. Vodafone has also been rolling-out its super-fast connection. However, users need the right kind of device to make use of such a network.

Samsung and some other manufacturers have already started to produce such products. Apple is, crucially, expected to enter the fray with its 2020 iPhone. Such a device is likely to prove hugely popular. Indeed, rumours from the company's Taiwanese supply chain say that Apple is preparing to sell 100

Photo: Aaron-Schwartz / Shutterstock.com

million 5G iPhones, compared to between 70 and 80 million iPhone 11s.

Talk of even faster networks and compatible phones will mean streaming will become seamless and downloads instant. Some people may even be able to replace home broadband with 5G.

The ongoing trade war between the US and China dominated 2019. It shows few signs of abating in 2020. At the centre of the row between two superpowers has been Chinese firm Huawei. The company's finance chief Meng Wanzhou, who also happens to be the chairman's daughter, was arrested in Canada at the end of 2018 as the US sought her extradition. She has been detained in Vancouver ever since, despite Chinese protestations, and continues to fight extradition. Given Huawei's closeness to the Chinese state, Meng is undoubtedly a pawn in the chess game being played by Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping. Interestingly, the firm is still set to provide key elements of the UK's forthcoming 5G network, despite the protestations of some politicians.

The threat of anti-free trade tit-for-tat tariffs is only making things harder for companies and will ultimately drive up prices for consumers. The issue is hugely relevant for tech firms, with many key elements of the supply chain, as well as billions of potential customers, found in China. The country has four times the number of mobile users than the US, and firms such as Alibaba and Tencent are starting to make their mark on the global stage, competing with US giants.

Ultimately, it all comes down to politics. China often demands US tech firms provide certain functionality or apps, or block certain information, in order to grant them access to their giant market. There is growing evidence that the likes of Google are happy to create China-approved versions of their key products. Doing so would no doubt provide a big boost to a firm's bottom line, but it may make customers and, indeed staff, question their morals.

In all of this, Apple CEO Tim Cook has proven himself more adept than most business leaders at managing President Trump. Interim tariffs were not applied to some of his company's products. Cook also announced a major new site in Texas for the development of the high-end Mac Pro computer that the US President paid a visit to too. Cook may have to redouble his diplomatic efforts in the coming months.

In 2016, the Oxford English dictionary named "post-truth" its word of the year. The term has only become more relevant ever since. As I highlighted in my book, *Not Buying It: The Facts Behind Fake News*, the issue is not new. Disinformation has permeated parts of society for centuries. However, social media and collapsing public trust in institutions have obviously changed things substantially – and politicians across the globe are looking to exploit this.

There is increasing pressure on Twitter and Facebook to deal with the scale of misinformation spread on their networks. A key element to this is micro-targeting – campaigns honing an online advert for a very specific, small section of the electorate based on the plethora of data available. This has led to a number of concerns about the kinds of misleading and polarising information certain groups are seeing.

Last October, Twitter responded to the pressure over online political advertising by saying it would no longer accept paid political adverts. The company is though a tiny part of the online advertising market. Google, the biggest player in that space, changed its policy a few weeks later. It said that although it had "never offered granular micro-targeting of election ads, we believe there's more we can do to further promote increased visibility of election ads." While it still allowed some targeting for election adverts, it limited the categories campaigners could target to age, gender, and general location at postal code level - a not insignificant change.


Photo: Hindustan Times / Getty Images

There is increasing pressure on Twitter and Facebook to deal with the scale of misinformation spread on their networks. A key element to this is micro-targeting – campaigns honing an online advert for a very specific, small section of the electorate based on the plethora of data available.

Facebook took no such stance. Not only is the social network, which challenges Google for dominance in the online advertising market, going to continue to take paid-for political ads, it is not going to fact check them in the way it does other content. The company has tried to portray this as a bid to protect free speech, but it has been widely criticised. Following a very public speech from CEO Mark Zuckerberg on the subject, a spokesperson for Joe Biden's presidential campaign was highly sceptical - saying Zuckerberg had "attempted to use the Constitution as a shield for his company's bottom line, and his choice to cloak Facebook's policy in a feigned concern for free expression demonstrates how unprepared his company is for this unique moment in our history and how little it has learned over the past few years." This is a view shared by many others.

The Biden campaign's thinly veiled reference to the election of President Trump underlines that many of the President's opponents still blame his ascension to the Oval Office on social media. The spotlight on Facebook, and Zuckerberg in particular, is only going to get brighter as the President's re-election bid gets into full swing.

As we start a new decade, we can look forward to both iteration and innovation in technology. Some of our favourite services and gadgets will get even better. Innovation in a variety of fields will take us to places we can only dream of now. Instead of hitting CTL-ALT-DELETE, technologists will undoubtedly use 2020 to keep progressing relentlessly. In some ways the titans of Silicon Valley and other tech hubs in London and Tel Aviv will influence our future far more than any politician. The potential consequences their products might have for business, media and society at large must not be underestimated.

THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD IN Genomic Medicine

Of all the reasons to be optimistic, medical advances with the human genome could prove awe-inspiring

by SANDY STARR

Sandy Starr is deputy director of the Progress Educational Trust.

In the early years of this millennium, our species made an unprecedented step. We became able to read more or less the entirety of our genetic code.

With the completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003, we had the first (nearly) complete human genome sequence – a string of billions of letters, representing the composition of the DNA molecules that are replicated throughout the trillions of cells in our bodies.

Since then, we've built on this achievement in remarkable ways. We've been able to make the human genome sequence even more 'complete', sequencing obscurer portions of DNA that had to be omitted the first time around because our technology wasn't sufficiently advanced.

We've also made whole genome sequencing far more affordable and efficient. It originally took an international consortium more than a decade and billions of dollars of funding to sequence a whole human genome. The same thing can now be achieved by a single laboratory within a single day, at a cost of mere thousands of dollars (and falling).

And that's not the half of it. In tandem with this increasing ability to read our genetic code, we've also been developing the ability to *edit* this code – to make precise and intentional changes to our DNA, as well as to the DNA of animals, plants and micro-organisms.

Genome editing – the deliberate alteration of selected DNA sequences in living cells – was first achieved in mammalian cells in the mid-1980s. Different approaches to genome editing were developed in subsequent decades, and these made it easier to achieve desired DNA edits more reliably. But the field has been drastically transformed during the past decade, with the advent of CRISPR.

CRISPR is a phenomenon that was originally discovered in the 1980s in prokaryotes – single-celled organisms, whose DNA is arranged in circular chromosomes. There, CRISPR acts as a defence mechanism against invading viruses. But in 2012, researchers discovered a way to adapt this phenomenon for use in eukaryotes – multi-celled organisms such as humans, whose DNA is arranged in linear chromosomes. In this new context, CRISPR became an extremely powerful approach to genome editing.

It originally took an international consortium more than a decade and billions of dollars of funding to sequence a whole human genome. The same thing can now be achieved by a single laboratory within a single day.

CRISPR genome editing involves introducing components into cells that break and alter specified portions of DNA, but then enlist the cells' own natural repair mechanisms to join the broken DNA back together. Effectively, we took two natural phenomena – prokaryotic defence mechanisms and eukaryotic repair mechanisms – and juxtaposed them to our own advantage. This is a juxtaposition that nature herself never achieved, in the three billion years since prokaryotes and eukaryotes first diverged down different evolutionary paths.

How does this help humanity? To begin with, genome editing is an enormous boon to basic research. CRISPR genome editing is so practical and affordable that researchers around the world now use it routinely – indeed, there are now whole areas of life sciences research where CRISPR genome editing is all but ubiquitous.

This technology also has far-reaching potential for use in medicine. This was illustrated dramatically in 2015, when doctors at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London successfully used genome editing (not CRISPR but an older approach) to reverse advanced leukaemia in two infants, thereby saving their lives.

Perhaps the most contentious use of this technology is to edit the genomes of human embryos. This is permitted in a research context in countries including the UK, where it provides precious opportunities to understand the biology of early human development. But using genome-edited embryos to establish a pregnancy is a very different proposition, and at present would be illegal in many countries.

In 2018, we saw the first children (twin girls) ever to be born with edited genomes, after Chinese scientist Dr He Jiankui established a pregnancy with embryos on which he had used CRISPR genome editing. Unfortunately, Dr He did his work secretively and in breach of numerous scientific and ethical standards. His actions therefore prompted an understandable international outcry.

Fortunately, there are now two important initiatives – one conducted by the World Health Organisation, one conducted jointly by the USA's National Academies and the UK's Royal Society – which will be working throughout 2020 to establish international standards in this area. This work will clarify the criteria that need to be met before the clinical use of genome-edited human embryos is scientifically and ethically justified, thereby setting out a safer and more responsible path than the one embarked on by Dr He.

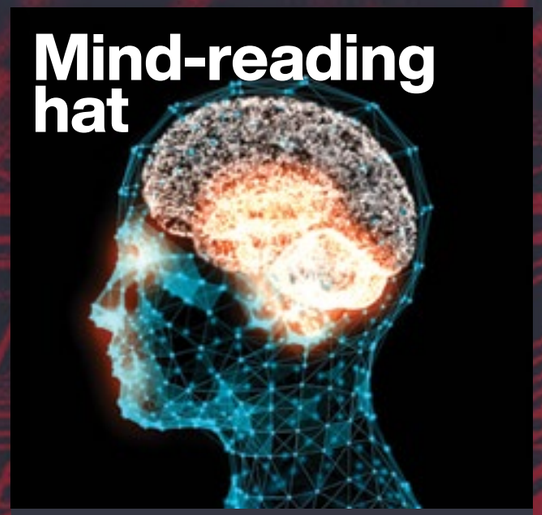
Meanwhile, exciting new variations and elaborations of genome editing – such as 'base editing' and 'prime editing' – are now emerging, and could add further to the advantages of the CRISPR approach.

Humanity's ability to understand and intervene in its own DNA continues to expand steadily. The benefit that this technology has brought to us – and the greater benefit it could yet bring to us, if our science is rigorous and if our policies are sound – is awe-inspiring.

Even smarter smartphones

A global 5G network, offering more reliable internet connections and blisteringly fast download speeds, is drawing nearer. With the arrival of 5G comes the next generation of 5G-compatible smartphones such as Samsung's Galaxy S10 5G and Apple's iPhone 12. The S10 boasts 3D facial scanning and cutting-edge multimedia editing technology. The latest iPhone iteration will see the usual bells and whistles given a nip and tuck with greater memory, a triple-lens camera and an organic light-emitted diode (OLED) screen among the improvements.

Mind-reading hat



Neuro-technology start-up, NextMind, is releasing a wearable sensor that will allow users to control devices with the power of thought alone. The lightweight, "non-invasive" device sits on the back of the head and scans neural signals passing across the wearer's visual cortex. Machine learning algorithms then decode the information and translate it into commands. It's being released as part of a package geared towards video gaming but this revolutionary brain-computer interface offers the prospect of real-time, gesture-free interaction with any device connected to the Internet of Things.

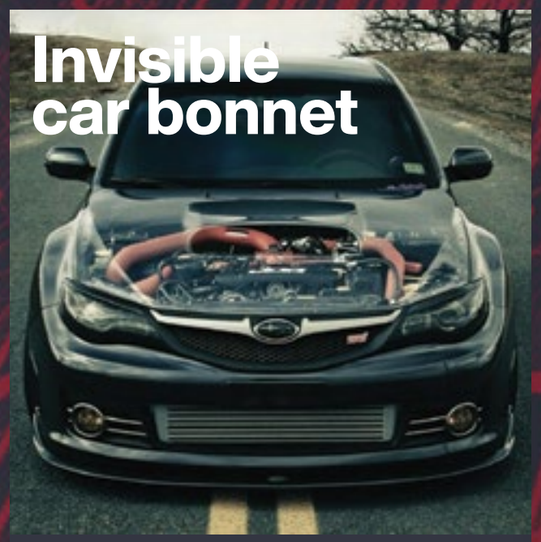
Laser-guided cars

Chinese firm, RoboSense, is pioneering LiDAR technology which underpins the navigation of self-driving cars. The company is set to release a 'Smart LiDAR Sensor' which uses pulsed lasers rather than radio waves to build a 360-degree virtual map of a vehicle's surroundings. This will allow vehicles to better detect and interpret hazards as they come into view. German competitor Blickfeld is releasing two new smaller, simpler LiDAR devices which will be easier for car manufacturers to integrate into new models. Costs are reducing all the time, making it likely that these devices will soon be incorporated into intelligent vehicles as standard.

3D cameras

Apple's new iPad Pro will feature a rear-facing, 3D-sensing camera working in tandem with two front-facing wide-angle lenses. The camera employs a "time-of-flight" system which measures the time it takes for light to bounce off objects in order to digitally reconstruct buildings, rooms and people. This will allow for changes to be made to focal depth and the angles of light sources as you're taking the photo. The innovation will further reduce the narrowing quality gap between smartphone and professional photography. The release is part of the firm's big push into augmented reality products with AR glasses and a virtual reality headset just around the corner.

Invisible car bonnet



Continental has developed a "Transparent Hood" system which gives drivers a clear view of the ground directly in front of and below their vehicle. Images from four cameras are digitally stitched together to form a coherent picture which gives the impression of the car bonnet being see-through. When the vehicle slows down, the on-board screen displays this projection. It will allow drivers to navigate rugged terrain more safely and avoid damage to their vehicle when parking or negotiating high curbs.

Ultra HD TV

Samsung, Sony and LG are all preparing to unveil the latest in ultra-high definition TV screens with a resolution width of 8000 pixels, twice the number of current models. A sea of minuscule dots will provide sumptuous detail and depth, ushering in a new visual standard for TV viewing. One drawback is the current lack of 8K content. Until broadcasters catch up, the screens will use deep-learning artificial intelligence to upscale 4K and HD images to the higher resolution. Expect exquisite definition and eye-watering price tags.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Intelligent lock

A new smart lock from PassiveBolt will go on sale in the next few months. The "Shepherd Lock" has won an industry innovation award and promises to revolutionise home security. Instead of employing less reliable fingerprint technology, the lock uses an electronic key that can take the form of a physical fob or be digitally stored on a phone. The smart lock self-monitors 24/7. When lock-picking or tampering is detected the door is automatically dead-bolted. The homeowner is immediately informed through a secure mobile app which can also be used to monitor who has gone in and out of the property and at what time.

Next generation watches

A flagship smartwatch release from Google will mark its latest foray into the burgeoning wearable tech market. The Pixel Watch is rumoured to incorporate a cutting-edge, ultra-low power chip produced by the semiconductor giant Qualcomm, which will significantly improve connectivity and battery life. It will be like having a smartphone on your wrist, with wearers able to make payments, use Google Maps, monitor their fitness and check their diaries without reaching into their pocket. Microsoft, which has struggled to break into the wearables market, is also thought to be testing a prototype of a business-oriented, highly durable smartwatch.

A young person explains what innovations to expect in 2020

The Confused Older Person's GUIDE TO TECH

by MATTIE BRIGNAL

When it comes to tech, it's hard not to feel sorry for the oldies – that is, anyone born in the 1900s. In an age of self-driving cars and AI deep-fakes the VHS-Betamax format war is an event as ancient and mythical as the fall of Troy. Moore's Law, which, as everyone knows, holds that a newly introduced item of tech will be redundant by the time you've got to grips with it, suggests that the blistering pace of technological change over the past few decades is set to continue. Unfortunately for those of us who still occasionally watch DVDs and don't enjoy talking to household objects, 2020 is set to be another year of intriguing (and terrifying) tech advances.

It's likely that the year ahead will see the much hyped blockchain come into its own. A blockchain is a decentralised digital ledger storing encrypted records of information that can't be altered. The technology, which already underpins cryptocurrencies, allows for easy digital identification, and frictionless, secure transactions. Blockchains are increasingly being used to bypass traditional financial systems, allowing for micro-loans to those without access to conventional banking. The immutability of the ledger guards against fraud and corruption, storing legal contracts, housing deeds and electoral registers without the need for third parties. Perhaps most importantly, dating apps have started to harness the blockchain. New entrants Ponder and Luna use it to prevent cat-fishing while protecting personal data. The technology allows the apps to repeatedly verify users' personal information while never outwardly revealing it.

There's bad news for those who have just mastered that soon-to-be-antique - the screen. One prediction doing the rounds in Silicon Valley is that the role of smartphones is set to diminish over the coming years with screen-less, wearable tech playing an increasingly important role in our daily lives. In the next few months, Apple will release a pair of augmented reality glasses that project images directly onto the wearer's retinas. The burgeoning e-textiles industry is already weaving electronics into clothes so that garments can regulate body temperature, play music and gather data on vital signs and athletic performance. Flexible electronic skin patches to monitor diabetes and cardiovascular disease are also starting to be rolled out.

But the ultimate in wearable tech is due to be released by the end of the year. After 17 years of development and $175 million of investment, US firm Sarcos is releasing a full body exoskeleton. Its creators promise that the suit, resembling a stripped-down Iron Man costume, will protect the health and improve the efficiency of physical labourers by making loads feel 20 times lighter. Its industrial applications are expected to spill over into the everyday, with exoskeletons being used to improve the mobility of the physically impaired.

Wearable tech is part of what is being heralded as a transformative, multi trillion-dollar industry tipped for massive growth over the next few years: the ominously vague Internet of Things (IoT). Many of us are now used to barking commands at Siri or Alexa. But the IoT promises a comprehensive global network of everyday objects constantly communicating without human interference. The number of devices connected to the internet is expected to increase from around 7 billion today to as many as 75 billion by 2025. Vehicles, food packaging, hairbrushes, parking spaces, dog collars and shipping containers will all join this 3-D web.

You may ask: "Why would I want my toast to talk to my toaster?"

"Why would I want my toast to talk to my toaster?" you may ask. Well, the IoT offers the prospect of vast efficiency improvements through self-regulating systems. Vending machines will manage their own stock levels and automatically order refills. Agricultural smart sensors will monitor chemical levels in soil and control irrigation. Data fed back from ingestible sensors will allow doctors to check that patients have taken medicine correctly. But for all its benefits, the IoT also raises the intriguing possibility of your pacemaker being hacked.

If this all sounds worryingly futuristic then it's worth remembering that the seminal sci-fi classic *Blade Runner*, based on a 1968 Philip K. Dick novel, was set in 2019. The future - long-anticipated - has finally arrived. In one of Dick's other novels, *Ubik*, the protagonist, Joe Chip, gets into an argument with a door in his rented apartment that refuses to open until he pays it five cents. Unable to pay, Joe starts unscrewing the door which threatens to sue him. But Dick's far future sketch could soon be a serious reality. The IoT would allow the door to alert the police, submit its legal claim and tell other doors to refuse the intruder access before the first screw hit the ground.

These dizzying developments are adding layers of complexity to an already confusing world. But the oldies should focus on the positives because there's no real alternative to surfing the tech wave. We're on the ride whether we like it or not and resistance is futile. You'll be arguing with doors before you know it.

Photo: VTT Studio / Shutterstock.com

HOW TO PAY WITH YOUR FACE

In some ways China is stuck in the past. In all others it's hurtling towards the future.

by YUAN REN

Nowhere on earth does the temperature seem to change quicker than in Beijing. Seasons are stark and we northerners eyeball the sky anxiously. Some years, there is no spring or autumn – winter simply switches straight to summer. The worst time to be here is the week before Chinese New Year, which falls on January 25th this year. That's when the temperature drops to its lowest and the skin on your hands gets so cracked it resembles a lizard's claw.

One thing I've yet to get used to in Europe is how warm it is in your homes no matter what the time of year - and how you complain of the cold while dancing about in just a t-shirt. In China, I have central heating – it's central as in turned on and off by somebody at boiler house headquarters and there's only one setting. Given that heat rises, on the coldest nights, my flat - built in the 80s - feels like an ice cellar.

Some years the chill lingers long after the central heating is turned off and we have nothing to do but shudder at the sight of snowflakes. But while our structural plumbing is failing fast - and there doesn't seem to be anything we can do about it unless we want to rip the whole thing out and start again - in all other senses technology is transforming our lives. This is played out across the whole country, and particularly in cities like Beijing and Shanghai - where you blink a couple of times and some new phenomenon captures your attention.

I remember in 2017, when I returned after three months abroad and found the streets populated by a new species: bikes. I've always ridden but the capital had long forfeited its trusty two-wheelers for speedier transportation. Scooters, fast cars, super-fast bullet trains, and drones symbolised the new China. But suddenly street corners were filled with MoBikes, Ofos and the young migrant men who sat on them because there were only so many park benches to go round. They didn't even pretend to peddle - even though each bike was equipped with an innovative GPS tracking system produced in a tech war worth billions.

The bike craze didn't last. Soon all that was left were disfigured frames that were strewn about almost everywhere. The bikes lived short lives and ended up as trash.

That was then and this is now. A year is a lifetime in Chinese technology. Last summer, the new vogue was for the self-driving vending machines which roam my local park. They are about four feet tall, move at tortoise pace and look like mini camper vans. You walk up to them and they stop. They're cashless of course - since coins are dying out. You have to get out your phone to scan a unique and ever-changing QR code that allows you to choose what you want, pay, and then instantly your Pepsi drops.

It's this code that truly opens doors in China. It's how you access the menu at restaurants, it's how you pay the taxi driver for taking you home. Since everyone has their own code it unlocks the business potential in everyone. What facilitates all this is WeChat - a mega app that combines all the social functions of WhatsApp, Facebook and ApplePay - and also allows you to book cinema tickets, order Nando's, book doctor's appointments and even pay your heating bills - all directly with the provider without having to download another app or register another account ever again.

You might think this sounds concerning but the Chinese aren't spooked. The country is modernising too fast for us to ask questions. In Guangzhou I wandered into a 7/11 convenience store where I had the option of paying with WeChat or using only my face.

Standing there, embarrassed, I just couldn't understand how it worked, and felt too scared to look directly into the camera. I kept asking the lady at the till what my face was being verified against. Hers said it all: why does it matter - if it works?

You might think this sounds concerning but the Chinese aren't spooked. The country is modernising too fast for us to ask questions.

In the West, Apple's latest phones now require facial ID but I hadn't registered my cheeks and eyebrows anywhere - so for days I was puzzled as to how I could pay for pork buns in this way.

I figured out that in China your mobile phone number is linked to your photo ID and bank accounts, which means your face is now effectively your wallet - should you choose to use it.

Back in Beijing, I went to a food hall selling everything from hotpot to bubble tea to dim sum, and every stall was equipped with these facial-scanners. While most customers still used the QR code, occasionally one of them would smile at their reflection leading to a ping and a tick that shows they paid the machine.

It's much like how the automatic passport facial scanner barriers work at airports, except in that case you're obliged by law to participate - in China you do so out of thirst and hunger. One day soon, the iPhone will be gone and everyone's face will have to be insured.

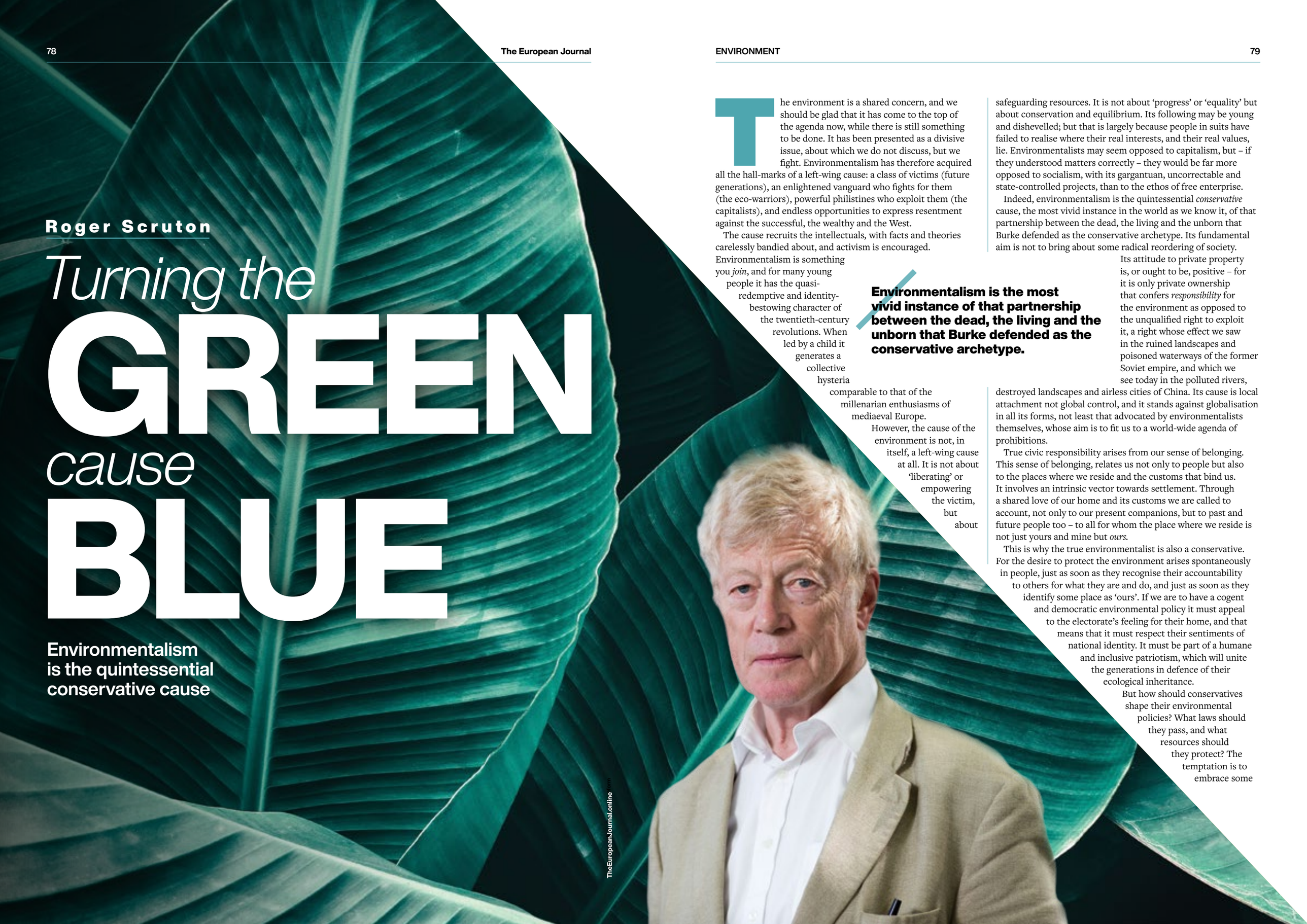
Scary? Yes. But is anything going to stop it? No. Payment by face will take off long before anyone sorts the heating out.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Roger Scruton

Turning the GREEN *cause* BLUE

Environmentalism is the quintessential conservative cause



TheEuropeanJournal.online

The environment is a shared concern, and we should be glad that it has come to the top of the agenda now, while there is still something to be done. It has been presented as a divisive issue, about which we do not discuss, but we fight. Environmentalism has therefore acquired all the hall-marks of a left-wing cause: a class of victims (future generations), an enlightened vanguard who fights for them (the eco-warriors), powerful philistines who exploit them (the capitalists), and endless opportunities to express resentment against the successful, the wealthy and the West.

The cause recruits the intellectuals, with facts and theories carelessly bandied about, and activism is encouraged. Environmentalism is something you *join*, and for many young people it has the quasi-redemptive and identity-bestowing character of the twentieth-century revolutions. When led by a child it generates a collective hysteria comparable to that of the millenarian enthusiasms of mediaeval Europe.

However, the cause of the environment is not, in itself, a left-wing cause at all. It is not about 'liberating' or empowering the victim, but about safeguarding resources. It is not about 'progress' or 'equality' but about conservation and equilibrium. Its following may be young and dishevelled; but that is largely because people in suits have failed to realise where their real interests, and their real values, lie. Environmentalists may seem opposed to capitalism, but – if they understood matters correctly – they would be far more opposed to socialism, with its gargantuan, uncorrectable and state-controlled projects, than to the ethos of free enterprise.

Indeed, environmentalism is the quintessential *conservative* cause, the most vivid instance in the world as we know it, of that partnership between the dead, the living and the unborn that Burke defended as the conservative archetype. Its fundamental aim is not to bring about some radical reordering of society. Its attitude to private property is, or ought to be, positive – for it is only private ownership that confers *responsibility* for the environment as opposed to the unqualified right to exploit it, a right whose effect we saw in the ruined landscapes and poisoned waterways of the former Soviet empire, and which we see today in the polluted rivers, destroyed landscapes and airless cities of China. Its cause is local attachment not global control, and it stands against globalisation in all its forms, not least that advocated by environmentalists themselves, whose aim is to fit us to a world-wide agenda of prohibitions.

Environmentalism is the most vivid instance of that partnership between the dead, the living and the unborn that Burke defended as the conservative archetype.

True civic responsibility arises from our sense of belonging. This sense of belonging, relates us not only to people but also to the places where we reside and the customs that bind us. It involves an intrinsic vector towards settlement. Through a shared love of our home and its customs we are called to account, not only to our present companions, but to past and future people too – to all for whom the place where we reside is not just yours and mine but *ours*.

This is why the true environmentalist is also a conservative. For the desire to protect the environment arises spontaneously in people, just as soon as they recognise their accountability to others for what they are and do, and just as soon as they identify some place as 'ours'. If we are to have a cogent and democratic environmental policy it must appeal to the electorate's feeling for their home, and that means that it must respect their sentiments of national identity. It must be part of a humane and inclusive patriotism, which will unite the generations in defence of their ecological inheritance.

But how should conservatives shape their environmental policies? What laws should they pass, and what resources should they protect? The temptation is to embrace some

comprehensive plan, like the plan for national parks – to protect some part of the environment in perpetuity, and meanwhile to control by law the use of the remainder. However, such statist solutions go against the grain for conservatives – they pose a threat not just to individual liberty but also to the process (of which the free market is the paradigm instance) whereby consensual solutions *emerge*. State solutions are imposed from above; they are often without corrective devices, and cannot easily be reversed on the proof of failure. Their inflexibility goes hand in hand with their planned and goal-directed nature, and when they fail the efforts of the state are directed not to changing them but to changing people's belief that they have failed.

The ruination of the Dutch and Danish coastal landscape by banks of wind farms is a case in point. They stand in looming white ranks on every horizon, waving white arms like disconsolate ghosts, blighting the landscape with their nightmare vision of judgement day. People put up with them because they have been told that they are the solution to depleted energy resources. Yet they produce only a small amount of power, will never be able to replace the coal or nuclear power stations (the latter located in France) that provide the bulk of the country's electricity, and have all kinds of negative environmental effects, not least on the populations of migrating birds. However, states don't easily admit to their mistakes; and the official propaganda continues to speak as though the wind farms were the lasting proof of environmental rectitude.

Another and more serious example is observable in America. The most important man-made environmental problem in that country is presented by the spread of the suburbs. Suburbanisation causes the increasing use of automobiles, and the dispersal of populations in ways that exponentially raise the consumption of energy and non-degradable packaging. Conservatives argue that this is a result of freedom and the market. People settle outside the towns because that is what they want. They are moving out in search of green fields, wooded gardens, tranquillity – in short, their own little patch of nature. But this is not so. They are not moving out in search of a natural environment, but in search of a suburban environment, and they are doing so because the suburban environment is massively subsidised by the state. The roads, the infrastructure and the schools – all are state investments, which entirely imbalance the natural economy of the town, and make it easier, safer and cheaper to live on the edge of it – an edge that is constantly moving further from the centre, so destroying the advantages offered to those who move to the suburbs just the year after they move.

The mechanism here is not a free market mechanism. Much of the expansion of the suburbs proceeds by the exercise of 'eminent domain' – that provision in American law which gives the official bodies powers of expropriation equal to, and sometimes exceeding, the powers exerted by the socialist governments of Europe. Roads are one obvious instance of this, and the mania for building them in order to maintain traffic flows at a level arbitrarily imposed by official bodies, is the most important cause of the reckless mobility of American society. The true market solution to the problem of traffic congestion – which is to get out of your car and walk – is not, in America, available, since there is no way that you could walk to your destination. Be it the shop, the church, the school or just your nearest friend, suburbanisation has put your goal beyond pedestrian reach.

Of course climate change is a major issue that we must address if we can. But it is a global issue that lies to a great extent beyond the reach of small nations and the communities that are protected by them.

But you cannot live in the centre of the cities any more, the suits complain: they're not safe. Downtown is for bums and drop-outs; the schools are appalling, the crime-rate soaring and the place rife with drugs, alcohol and prostitution. Well yes, that's exactly what happens, when the state subsidises the suburbs, imposes zoning laws that prevent proper mixed use in the towns, and engages in its own gargantuan housing projects which drive the middle classes out of the city centres. All this occurs in defiance of the market solution and, as Jane Jacobs pointed out in 1965, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, it deprives the city of its eyes and its ears, of its close communities and natural fellowship.

I mention this example not only because it illustrates how far environmental damage has advanced and how difficult it will be to rectify it, but also because it illustrates two rather more important points: first, the mistaken view that it is the market, and not the state, that has created the problem; and secondly the equally mistaken view that the environment can be discussed without raising questions of beauty. In my view the problems come precisely when we interrupt the normal ways in which people solve their problems by free interaction. In other words, the problems come from expropriating the paths of rational consensus – as they are expropriated by the state, whenever it uses its powers of eminent domain. And the solutions come when we allow our sense of beauty and place to take over, aiming at what looks right, what feels right, and what we can vindicate to the eyes and hearts of our neighbours.

American cities have decayed because vast tax-funded resources have been available for the building of roads and housing projects, for the purchase and demolition of otherwise habitable street-based neighbourhoods condemned as slums, for the horizontal spread of infrastructure, and for the imposition of crazy zoning laws which ensure that where you can buy things you cannot do things, and where you can do things you cannot live. And the solutions to these problems emerge when people, constrained by the natural limitations posed by the need to reach consensual solutions, and without the gargantuan schemes of officialdom, set about building a neighbourhood that looks right to those who live in it, and which is welcoming to those who buy and sell and work.

The changes that have put climate change at the top of the environmental agenda have also undermined the status of democracy: people complaining of planning blight and spoliation are dismissed out of hand as 'nimby's, and all projects can be swept aside for the sake of the 'climate emergency'.

Of course climate change is a major issue that we must address if we can. But it is a global issue that lies to a great extent beyond the reach of small nations and the communities that are protected by them. Far more important, surely, is to ensure that we settle on this earth in ways that do not damage it, and that harmonise the human community with its natural context. This is something that our current attitudes to development, infrastructure and architectural style too often fail to achieve, with projects like HS2 and the so-called Oxford-Cambridge arc, surrendering whole swathes of countryside to infrastructure, without the proven need for it, and arbitrarily abolishing the right of local communities to create the places that they want.

This top-down approach, which is neutralising the sense of stewardship that is, and ought to be, the heart of our planning law, is often justified on environmental grounds. But the grounds that are given invariably overlook the real environmental successes that our country can claim: the green belt, the adaptable vernacular architecture of our towns and villages, the concentration of each settlement around a high street, a market, or a public park or square. Those much-loved local solutions have no standing as 'superstructure' and are swept away by the high-speed railways and crowded motorways. The result is a loss of the real motive on which all democratic policy in this area depends, which is the motive to cherish a particular place as one's home, the somewhere to which one owes a duty of care, rather than the nowhere imposed by the state.

This points to a general problem with environmental politics, which is the clash between the top-down view of government and the bottom-up procedures of democratic choice. The changes that have put climate change at the top of the environmental agenda have also undermined the status of democracy: people complaining of planning blight and spoliation are dismissed out of hand as 'nimby's, and all projects can be swept aside for the sake of the 'climate emergency'. The use of the word 'emergency' is revealing here. In emergencies we surrender our powers to the common cause, and put the state in charge of it. That is what we are being invited to do in all matters relating to the environment, so that our real resources in dealing with those matters - most notably our sense of beauty and our love of place - can be discounted.

A portrait of Australia in crisis

This World is on Fire

by NICK JENSEN

Australia is a continent of drought and fire, of parched plains and searing heat. Now, in its deepest summer, we are reminded that while it is a place of unique beauty it is the setting for unspeakable terror.

The ancient Australians, who knew this paradox well, were great masters of fire. Practices in ritual burning lay at the very heart of ceremonial life and revealed a sophisticated knowledge of the land's natural ecology not possessed by their European colonisers. Bushfires, they understood, were as distinctive to Australia as salt is to the ocean. Even foreign audiences recognise this fact, as the scenery is familiar enough: an incinerated "ute" here, some mangled sheets of corrugated iron there, while a lone brick chimney stands defiantly above a wild frieze of gesticulating wood and rubble – the fragile centrepiece to a post-apocalyptic world.

In 1851, shortly before the first gold rushes, deadly bushfires torched much of New South Wales and the newly formed colony of Victoria. European onlookers gaped at its speed and ferocity. Never before had they encountered a conflagration of such magnitude. But the current bushfires blasting their way through much of coastal Australia seem to be of a different sort. Not simply a chain of flares, leaping from tree-top to canopy, but a vast breaker of spitting red heat, driven forward on screaming winds. The sun's glare does not pierce and bore as in usual summers. Instead it hangs mute behind a vast curtain of crimsoned cellophane, veiled in smoke and bleached in bloodied pastels.

From the rainforests of Queensland to the peaks of the Blue Mountains, bushfires have ravaged more than eleven million hectares of land. Altogether the flames now cover an area larger than that of Belgium, and the smoke plumes which swell above are said to be larger than Europe. According to NASA they will soon circle the globe. Footage captured by evacuees stranded on Mallacoota beach resemble scenes from Dresden or Tokyo during the fire bombings of 1945.

As it stands, the bushfires have claimed twenty-nine lives, as well as destroying countless homes, towns and livestock. Scientists predict that a billion animals have perished in the flames, with the probable extinction of species. The causes of the disaster are familiar yet various. Longer droughts and hotter temperatures have turned kiln-dry country into an immense powder keg, primed and ready to blow. Wild winds, lightning strikes and arsonists have also played their part.

A raw combination of disbelief and anger now grips the country. The tenor of discussion is bitter in some quarters, incensed in others. Serious blunders have been made. Where, many have asked, are the resources needed to combat such a disaster? Why weren't proper preparations made in prescribed burning and fuel regimes?

In press conferences, the country's leaders have looked gormless and inept, ready to crawl under the nearest rock until the whole thing washes over. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has come under intense scrutiny following an ill-timed holiday to Hawaii and a series of excruciating publicity stunts designed at recouping his ailing reputation. Attempts at damage control have quickly turned to farce.

But Morrison has made himself an easy target, as key voices in the Liberal-National Coalition have refused to acknowledge the direct influence of anthropogenic climate change on the bushfires. Predictably enough, this has enraged the green-left to an almost comic degree, with the novelist Richard Flanagan providing the headline act in his subtly titled New York Times piece, "Australia is Committing Climate Suicide."

However, the government's benighted response has also divided sensible, right-leaning liberals, who see their deflections as shameful in the face of such a crisis. After weeks of reproach, Morrison has yielded to a more precise rhetoric. While his 2019 election campaign skilfully neutralised Labour's climate preaching, he will no longer be able to avoid the subject so blithely. Indeed, if the government's commitment to greater emission reductions is to be taken seriously, it must be presented as a genuine priority. The vital question, then (so often broached, yet seldom attempted), must focus on how to execute a credible national energy-climate change policy which does not damage the country's economic prospects.

Of course, it will be a hard-fought and bloody battle. On the one hand there are the likes of Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack, who insists that self-exploding cow turds are just as much to blame for the bushfires as the effects of global warming. His portly chum George Christensen is little better, arguing that a malicious spate of incendiarism is the primary cause of the fires.

Then, at the other extreme, there are the serried ranks of Extinction Rebellion, whose sententious posturing has done little else but rile people against their cause. To criticise even the slightest proponent of their crusade is to court a modern-day auto-da-fé, in which accusations of unbelief and denialism are deliberately deployed to thwart rational debate. Equally, to oppose the total and immediate abolition of low-cost fossil-fuels is to be reviled as a wicked heretic, set on global destruction.

It is a strange experience to walk through bushland after it has succumbed to fire. Burnt trees stand out like skeletons in a landscape heaped in ash, and the stench of smoke stays in the nostrils. While the force of the blaze destroys much in its path, rarely does it flatten everything, for the peculiar genius of the bush lies in its ability to survive and transmute.

In Australia these grim polarities have combined to make a terrible situation considerably worse. They have allowed dogmatism and idiocy to get in the way of unity and understanding. From both sides, blind ideology and resentment have shattered any chance of striking common ground or, indeed, common sense.

It is a strange experience to walk through bushland after it has succumbed to fire. Burnt trees stand out like skeletons in a landscape heaped in ash, and the stench of smoke stays in the nostrils. While the force of the blaze destroys much in its path, rarely does it flatten everything, for the peculiar genius of the bush lies in its ability to survive and transmute.

Then, shortly after the fire, nature's hand intercedes: the regeneration begins. Fresh shooting eucalyptus leap from hidden apertures and dense thickets of scrub and banksia unfurl at the feet of tall redgums. Even without rain, the charred soil is blanketed in a haze of perennial greenness, as life erupts from the most improbable places. Right across its timbered ambulatories a melancholic beauty descends, declaiming a new period of hope and renewal. Soon the bush will be restored, and people will return to their towns to rebuild their lives.

In these difficult times politics must seem trivial, even nasty. While scattered rainfall has offered a brief moment of reprieve, the present clashes over the causes of the bushfires show no signs of abating. Indeed, it is clear they will carry on long after the last flames are extinguished.

Photo: M. W. Hunt / Shutterstock.com

BRING BACK Beavers!

Finally, depressed environmentalists have cause for celebration

by BEN GOLDSMITH

Native American tribes held the humble North American beaver (castor canadensis) in high esteem, referring to them as 'little people'. Alongside humans, no other animal is capable of such engineering feats as the beaver, adapting its environment perfectly to suit its own ends. It was believed that a great parallel beaver society existed alongside and in symbiosis with man. Then the Europeans came, and trappers fanned out across the great continent, working their way along rivers, streams, across wetlands, swamps and estuaries, searching for every last beaver, such was the value of their fur. And so, by the time the settlers arrived in their wake the beavers were long gone, wiped out across virtually the whole continent, and with them all trace of that parallel society.

Europe's own indigenous beavers (castor fiber) had suffered a similar fate centuries earlier, killed not only for their fur, but also for the yellowish oil, castoreum, that beavers exude from sacs beneath their tail. This oil was in such high demand for use in cosmetics that the value of a single beaver in medieval Britain was equal to an entire year's earnings for the average peasant. At the time of the First World War only tiny populations of European beavers remained in the remotest corners of Eastern Europe and Russia.

The value of a single beaver in medieval Britain was equal to an entire year's earnings for the average peasant. At the time of the First World War only tiny populations of European beavers remained in the remotest corners of Eastern Europe and Russia.

Only now are scientists beginning to grasp the immense impact that the wholesale removal of beavers must have had across the northern hemisphere, to the extent that our very conception of how our landscapes once were, and how they should be, turns out to be wrong.

Beavers are highly territorial. They occupy in single pairs with their young (known as kits, born in late spring in litters of two or three), along with an assortment of adolescent offspring who tend to hang around until their second or third year. Beavers use water as a means of escape - so whilst their food is to be found on land – the twigs, leaves and soft inner bark of deciduous trees that they fell with ease (aspen, birch and willow are particular favourites), as well as shrubs, bracken, nettles, and all manner of plants – beavers never travel far from water. Life is therefore pretty straightforward for beavers living on prized territories along broad stretches of river, or on the edge of lakes or estuaries where, being tree-gardeners from whom we learnt the art of coppicing, the only effect they have is to open up the water's edge to precious sunlight.

But when these high-quality areas are full, young beavers looking to establish a territory of their own must make their way upstream, into the tributaries and streams that flow down into the larger rivers. It is here that beavers really make an impact. Without deep water, they set about creating it, using rocks, branches, sticks and mud with almost unimaginable skill to construct first one and then a series of small dams along the stream, behind each of which they dig out a large pool that fills with water.

Soon after the arrival of a pair of beavers, a small seasonal stream begins to resemble the immaculately flooded steps of a terraced rice paddy. These new permanent pools quickly become havens for fish, aquatic insects, amphibians, kingfishers, ducks and wildfowl, storks and myriad other creatures that teem in a primeval beaver-made wetland in numbers that are unrecognisable to anyone used to a landscape without beavers. The range of plant species as habitats return to a wetland landscape - wildflowers, grasses and much needed scrub - are havens for nesting birds and small mammals.

Streams braided from top to bottom by successions of beaver pools are not only of huge benefit to wildlife, they also protect us from both flooding and seasonal drought. In the absence of beavers, winter rainfall brings a torrent of water that flashes downstream all at once, bursting the banks of straightened and dredged waterways across the floodplain. That in turn gives way to dry, lifeless gullies through the summer once the water has gone.

Beaver dams dramatically slow and regulate the flow of water, holding it back in great volume, giving nature time to cleanse it of sediment and impurities such as nitrates and phosphates from farming, and releasing it, clean, down the catchment through the year. The water passing slowly through these pools makes its way into the groundwater too, which raises the whole water table, swelling the size of aquifers in times of drought. Recent satellite imagery shows that the steady return of beavers to America's arid Western states after an absence of centuries is greening the desert with wetland fire-breaks in a way that begins to explain the reverence Native Americans once felt for this innocuous semi-aquatic rodent.

In each territory a 'lodge' can be found in which a beaver family finds refuge during the daytime: a large shield-shaped dome made of sticks, plastered with mud, and comprising a series of warm, dry inner chambers, built so that the entrance can be found on the underside, safely beneath the water. These great lodges provide a home for countless other species. Nesting birds, hibernating reptiles and amphibians, hedgehogs and small rodents all use beaver lodges for cover in this way.

Since the beginning of the last century beavers have been granted legal protection in a growing list of places whilst the value of their fur has diminished. Beavers are therefore staging a remarkable comeback. Carefully planned reintroductions have taken place across Europe, and in North America, and whilst numbers remain at a tiny fraction of their former level, there now exist perhaps a million in Europe and fifteen million in North America. In Britain, where the last beavers were extirpated before the reign of Henry VIII, there are small but viable and growing populations in Scotland and the South West of England. The growing realisation that beavers are the ultimate keystone species, critical for the healthy functioning of the hydrological system, for mitigating flooding and drought, for rebuilding broken, depleted ecosystems, has led to calls for the return and protection of beavers right across their former range.

Of course, there are places in which beavers do present a problem - to man-made canals, power station cooling systems, and particularly low-lying, high-grade arable farmland. In those places beavers must be managed. But for the most part opposition to the return of beavers arises from a lack of understanding. Many salmon fishers for example, presumably fans of *The Chronicles of Narnia* in which Mr and Mrs Beaver eat all the fish, don't realise that beavers are entirely herbivorous. Others worry that migratory fish such as salmon and trout will be unable to make it across beaver dams, forgetting that these fish co-evolved over millions of years with beavers, and whose young may even depend on the cool, stable pools and gravel spawning beds created by beavers.

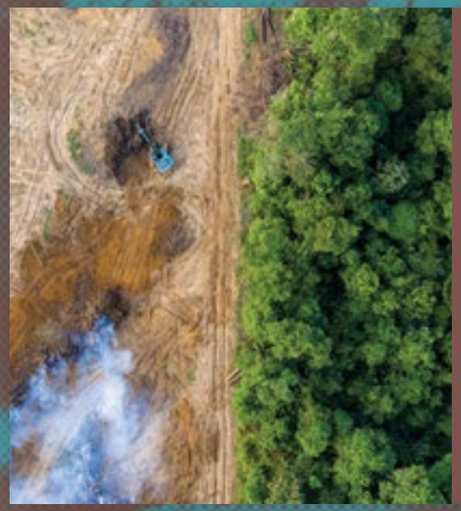
Indeed, new lawsuits in Oregon and California contend that the killing of beavers and the removal of their dams represents the destruction of critical salmon habitat, illegal therefore under the Endangered Species Act. Then there are the tidy-obsessives, the same people who demand that our road verges are regularly trimmed to perfection (at great expense), cleared of wild flowers and wild grasses. They object to the perceived untidiness created by beavers along the water's edge. But nature loves heterogeneity, otherwise known as untidiness, and considering that the vast majority of our land is cultivated, tidied and managed by us humans, surely we can allow nature a modicum of free rein along our watercourses? Farming right to the edge of the water is pure folly in any case, now prohibited in many countries.

The conservation movement has a tendency to flip that famous Martin Luther King line on its head telling us that it "has a nightmare" and can't take it. But here's a cause for celebration: the beaver is back, along with all of its magical effects on the landscape. If you don't yet have beavers in your area it's time to ask: Why not?

The beaver is back, along with all of its magical effects on the landscape. If you don't yet have beavers in your area it's time to ask: Why not?

TheEuropeanJournal.online

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES



Ocean plastic

The rate of deforestation is slowing but the world's rainforests are still overexploited. Trees continue to be felled for their valuable timber and to convert land for grazing livestock and planting crops. Deforestation reduces abundant reserves of biodiversity and accounts for 11 percent of man-made greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the revolutionary practice of vertical farming is gaining traction and would relieve the pressure on farmers to clear swathes of rainforest in order to expand production. Vertical farms cultivate crops in stacked layers in a controlled environment, drastically reducing the area of land required to grow crops to a fraction of current levels.

The indoor environment also allows for humidity, temperature and light to be tailored to the crop being produced, optimising growth and yields while reducing the need for pesticides and petrochemical fertilisers. The technology underpinning vertical farms is being refined and simplified, offering the prospect of adoption by small-scale farmers in poorer regions.

Air pollution

The world's oceans are full of discarded plastic which disrupts ecosystems and chokes and entangles millions of sea creatures each year. Plastic's low cost and incredible versatility has seen production increase exponentially from 2.3 million tons in 1950 to 448 million tons in 2015. The problem is that plastic fragments into ever-smaller pieces but takes hundreds of years to decompose.

To combat the problem, Ocean Cleanup, a Dutch non-profit, has patented a floating tube that skims the surface of the ocean to catch plastic debris, from giant fishing nets to shards of micro-plastic 1mm wide. The retrieved plastic is then transformed into sustainable products, with profits funding further cleanup operations.

Deforestation

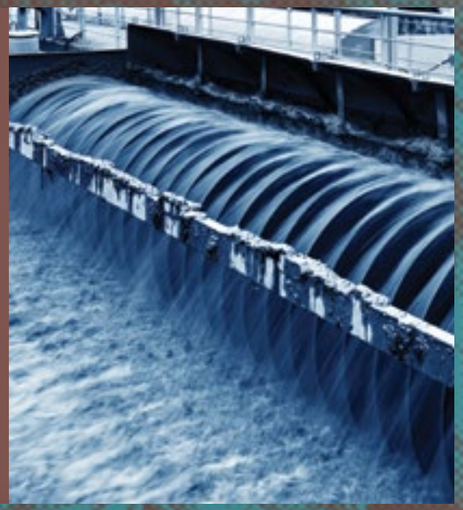
Worsening air pollution is a significant burden on global health, directly contributing to nine percent of worldwide deaths every year. China, Eastern Europe and the Indian subcontinent are disproportionately affected. Megacities like Delhi and Beijing have recorded concentrations of harmful particles three times higher than the threshold considered "hazardous" by the WHO.

But developers are looking into ways of cleaning air in urban environments. Dutch and Pakistani design companies have developed variants of a "smog-free tower" – an air purifying column which sucks in pollution and expels clean air. The first tower was installed in Rotterdam in 2015 and the concept is starting to be exported to other global cities. The Chinese have already installed a 100-metre tower in Beijing which has produced 10 million cubic meters of clean air a day and reduced the average concentration of harmful airborne particles by 15% during periods of high pollution. The regional government of India's northern Haryana state is on the verge of adopting the new technology.

Water insecurity

From the Congo River to the Mekong Delta, communities are experiencing shortages of uncontaminated water for domestic and agricultural use. Despite an apparent abundance, very little the Earth's water is both drinkable and accessible. Only two percent of all water is fresh. Of that two percent, only 30 percent is either groundwater or surface water, found in lakes, rivers and reservoirs.

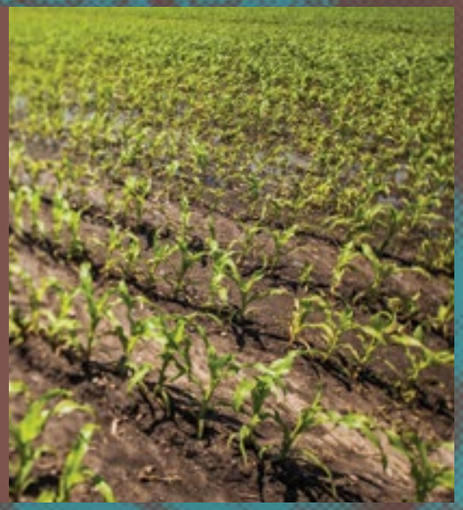
Emerging technologies such as big data, AI and the internet of things (IoT) are being used in conjunction to improve the efficiency of water recycling, desalination and redistribution. Firms like Geosyntec are starting to use smart sensors installed at critical junctures in water piping to alert managers when water levels are unusually high or low, so anomalies such as leaks or floods can be quickly identified and addressed. IoT sensors can detect chemicals in water, meaning unexpected or dangerous concentrations can be spotted and dealt with immediately. Data collected by these devices can be analysed by AI algorithms to predict when weather patterns are more likely to result in chemical spikes allowing for water supplies to be preemptively treated.



Food insecurity

One in nine people is currently undernourished. This number has halved since 1991 but the stability of food production underpinning this positive trend is under threat. Intensive farming methods and the overuse of agrochemicals have sapped nutrients required to sustain crops from the planet's soil and global food systems remain vulnerable to droughts and floods.

But a new generation of apps is helping farmers adapt to these challenges. Apps like iCow allow livestock farmers to track the gestation periods of their animals, find vets and monitor best practices. An app called Esoko sends information to farmers about market prices, weather forecasts and advisory services. FarmBee and AgriApp are peer-to-peer platforms for farmers to share crop data with one another. WeFarm offers a similar service but without the need for internet access. The proliferation of agricultural smart sensors connected to the IoT coupled with data analytics will continue to improve farmers' ability to use land more effectively, optimising crop yields and reducing the need for chemicals.



Mining pollution

Rare earth metals are in high demand for use in smartphones, wind turbines and hybrid cars. But extraction tends to involve intensive surface mining that radically alters the topography and drainage of land by stripping it of rocks and vegetation. Rainfall then leaches the toxic chemicals used in mining into the earth, contaminating soil and groundwater.

But innovative solutions are being provided by the burgeoning green mining market, set to grow by 40 percent by 2024. Methane capture and carbon storage techniques are increasingly being employed by mining giants like Rio Tinto. Ecosphere Mining is pioneering water treatment and recycling processes that cut pollution as well as waste and costs. A Chilean mining company, Mineria Activa, has developed a sustainable mining strategy that involves sifting earth by passing it through a tank of biodegradable chemicals rather than injecting the chemicals into the ground. The cleaned soil is then returned to the ground in which pine trees are planted to prevent erosion. Investment-driven technological improvements are making similar techniques increasingly cost effective.

Photo: Christopher Sharpe / Shutterstock.com

The Revolution may be VAGUE

by JOSEPH RACHMAN

Extinction Rebellion caused mass disruption last year but what do they have planned for the new decade? We send our reporter, Joseph Rachman, to find out...

In 2020 a small group beats the odds and manages to vault into Tokyo's Olympic stadium disrupting the athletics events, protesting against its sponsors, and exercising its anxieties about climate change. During elections across the world - from Germany to the United States - politicians are targeted by eco-zealots - not even the Green candidates are safe. In France, a new wave of protesters succeed the gilets jaunes to attack Macron's latest reform plans. In Hungary, anti-Orban protests take on an unexpected eco-edge. In Poland, protestors hope their struggle will be transformed into literature by their new Nobel laureate - and outspoken vegetarian - Olga Tokarczuk. Meanwhile, central London is once again occupied by drummers, people in octopus costumes, and "uncooperative crusties" intent on causing havoc for everyone else proving Extinction Rebellion, aka XR, is bigger than ever and up to its usual tricks.

Of course, all this remains hypothetical. No one knows exactly what XR will be doing this year because they do not know themselves. If you go on their English-language website and look up planned events there is very little information on what they have in store for us aside from an "XR Boycott Fashion" show starting on 1st May, "XR Befriend Svalbard" in August, and an XR patrol of the Barents Sea in September. No one specifies what action will take place nor is it clear what they hope to achieve - shutting down catwalks aside - beyond a rather chilly, Arctic holiday.

So I had to go out and try to ask the activists themselves to reveal the specifics. Fortunately, there were plenty of XR activists hanging about in the streets of London. But though they all seemed certain that they would still be involved in XR this year and that it will continue to expand, they were mainly focused on parroting their demands: "Tell the Truth", "Act Now" and "Beyond Politics" - their overall aim being to declare a state of public emergency, reach zero carbon emissions by 2025, and create a Citizens' Assembly to deal with "climate and ecological justice." They do not mention how they'll effect this and if they continue to dodge questions about it we might perhaps help them craft a fourth slogan: "Be Vague."

Ultimately, XR is an umbrella organisation which was founded in May 2018 and started gaining in support that October when a hundred academics signed a "call to action" letter which was published in the *Guardian*. Today it consists of many different groups which anyone can join providing they can proclaim their allegiance to XR's Three Demands and Ten Principles. Usually members have little sense of what is going on outside their own specific group let alone what might happen in future. Most activists I talked to seemed happy to continue much as they had done last year - insisting that they had helped push environmental issues up the agenda and pointing to polls which proved as much. During the 2019 UK general election campaign, I went to speak to some XR members who were on hunger strike outside Conservative Party headquarters in Westminster to try to investigate further and was told that one of the leaders of their movement was outside Labour Party HQ five minutes' walk away trying to buttonhole the then-Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell.

Dr Larch Maxey - to give him his full name - appeared gaunt after concluding a "seven day hunger strike" supposed to highlight risks to food security. Now slimmer than Gwyneth Paltrow, he was sat in a camp chair next to two policemen who looked slightly bored, and commenced an hour-long exposition of the XR line in an unrelenting wave:

The earth faces an ecological catastrophe that threatens to wipe mankind from the map. Radical action must be taken and XR's programme represents the best way forward. And so on and so on and so on.

Halfway through all the proselytising, a homeless man came over for a chat, and as Maxey turned his attention away I noticed the XR leader was wearing what appeared to be a Red Army coat. Later on, he opened up a suitcase containing various banners and I noticed a canvas Daunt's bag...

If the revolution comes it seems likely to be staunchly middle class.

But could Dr Maxey tell me what XR would do in 2020? Alas not, he explained because "I'm not in charge - no one is." However, he could fill me in on XR tactics which are all based on "the science of social change." Big protests, for instance, will take place in the spring and the autumn because the weather is mild and in summer and winter it's either too hot or too cold, and people prefer to go away on holiday.

XR's objective is to create a non-violent movement that manages to mobilise 3.5 percent of the population. This is based on a niche reading of the history of the Indian Independence and Civil Rights movement - the logic being that governments are unable to deal with the strain of mass civil disobedience among that proportion of the population and will accede to their demands. This is why they're so keen on getting arrested. But their political theory seems more Lenin than Ghandi thanks to a vanguardist belief that a disciplined minority can, and should, dictate the tenor of all our politics to come.

Never mind that a man in a bee costume glued to a bus proclaiming he's 'part of an active insurrection against the government' is absurd - it gets attention.

Photo: Kevin J. Frost / Shutterstock.com

Photo: Rupert Rivett / Shutterstock.com

It also means that XR is essentially a consciousness raising exercise which puts pressure on politicians and pulls in more recruits, maintaining just enough institutional presence to keep the movement together in between protests which take place when the weather is temperate. This is why so much of their "activism" consists in dressing up and forcibly attaching themselves to public transport. Never mind that a man in a bee costume glued to a bus proclaiming he's "part of an active insurrection against the government" is absurd - it gets attention.

Viral stunts are likely to be the movement's chief weapon during the US election campaign. Already the Sunrise Movement, which is linked to XR as well as the new insurgent left of the Democrats - are planning disruption and you wouldn't put it past them to don animal attire as they do so. Disruptions will be primarily aimed at driving clicks. Major sporting events are another likely target for protest - as a critical mass of cameras gives the potential to offer access to millions of viewers worldwide. In America, the Yale-Harvard American football game was interrupted in November last year by climate protesters. Protesters in the UK have so far steered clear of this, perhaps because the last protestor to try to disrupt the Oxford-Cambridge boat race, in 2012, came close to being deported.

One fears for their lives if they try getting in the way of England fans getting to Wembley during Euro 2020. XR made a spectacular misjudgement when trying to shut down the London Underground at Canning Town station last October. The sight of well-off middle class white men who could presumably afford to take the day off trying to prevent working class and ethnic minority commuters getting to work first provoked incredulity and swiftly rage. In one video of the incident a bystander can be heard shouting, "I have to get to work too – I have to feed my kids" before the crowd takes matters into its own hands by pulling the protestors off the roof. That clip was shared everywhere - with exactly the opposite of the desired effect. XR may have wanted to show they cared about the environment but only exhibited a tone-deaf disregard for the needs of ordinary Londoners trying to live their lives while using eco-friendly transportation.

XR seemed to prove itself middle class and out of touch - a charge which is now so pervasive, and potentially so damaging, the FAQ section of XR's official website includes suggested responses to the questions: "Aren't you just a group of middle-class left-wing activists?" and "Are you professional lifestyle activists?"

But while the backlash after Canning Town did serve as a shock to XR - and led to the immediate cancellation of similar protests - XR is unlikely to be able to prevent such massive miscalculations happening again because it has no central control over its affiliates, many of whom are utterly convinced of the righteousness of their cause. In 2019, they at least had novelty on their side. In 2020, their antics may soon seem monotonous.

Certainly as I listened to Dr Maxey drone on and on, I felt he had a point when he revealed his principal weapon to be "psychological disruption" or the art of pushing people to act by making them feel very uncomfortable mentally. It remains to be seen whether this will win XR a mass of converts or simply alienate the masses. In difficult economic times, Dr. Maxey threatens "economic disruption" may be "necessary" though what this might entail he was loath to say. For now vagueness heaped upon vagueness is the order of the day...

Ed Husain

Profiting from the Prophet

Modern conservatism and liberal Islam are far more closely aligned than you think...

TheEuropeanJournal.online

I was born in a household that supported the Labour party. For three years, I was a senior advisor to Britain's most successful Labour prime minister, Tony Blair. Capitalism was a dirty word in my social circles. Conservatism was seen as uncool and stuffy. Yet I knew I harboured an inner hypocrisy: my parents, as with so many British Muslims, bought their own home thanks to Margaret Thatcher's capitalist and conservative policies. With the passing of time, experience of travels, reading, reflections, and conversations with conservatives, my views have progressed to grasping why, for five reasons, modern conservatism and liberal Islam are more aligned than we know. And combined, can save Western civilisation from internal and external threats.

First, the prophet Mohamed, the founder of Islam, was a capitalist. In seventh-century Mecca, a city of trading and commerce for Arabia, he was a fund-manager for the Lady Khadijah. He represented her stocks and assets in the markets of Mecca, Damascus and others parts of the Levant. His success in increasing her profit margins with honesty and integrity led her to proposing marriage to Mohamed. Islam is the only religion, therefore, to be instituted by a businessman.

Mohamed struggled with the clamour and chaos of commercial Mecca. It was during his spiritual retreats in Mount Hira that the divine voice inspired the poetry and passages that became the Quran.

"Shall we teach you a more profitable and ever-lasting trade?" asks God in the Quran, again and again. The parables with trade are many. When in the year 622 Mohamed migrated to the city of Medina, the first action he took was to create a mosque for his community of believers. When the land was offered as charity, he refused and insisted on buying it as private property. Unlike Plato's *Republic*, Islam has always honoured property rights, a fundamental difference with Marxism or socialism. Mohamed then went to the market with his companions and they traded freely with others. When a famine hit Medina, some lobbied him to fix prices: he refused. Supply and demand should not be interrupted.

Second, Islam was and is an inherently conservative faith and civilisation. The Burkean adage that we must "change to conserve" has been the hallmark of Islam since its beginning. Wherever Muslims conquered, the governance and social structures were conserved. The Umayyad caliphs from Damascus and into Spain ruled as the Romans did with law, taxes, and imperial expansion. But with Muslims, Jewish people thrived as viziers and senior officials. Early Muslims protected the pyramids of Egypt as symbols of knowledge and civilisation. Euclid's principles informed the architecture of new mosques. The great Al-Farabi's tenth-century philosophy revived Plato and Aristotle, but al-Farabi was also a musician, botanist and mystic who deeply influenced the prodigious Rabbi Maimonides. In India, the Muslim Moghuls honoured Hinduism and initial emperors even included Hindus as "people of the book." Under the Ottomans, Constantinople remained a Christian-majority city until the nineteenth century. Islam did not seek destruction and revolution, it merely sought to inject the spirit of one God into existing ways.

Britain's pre-eminent conservative philosopher, Sir Roger Scruton, defines conservatism as an attitude, an inheritance, a respect for custom and convention, and love for freedom and civilisation. Muslim history and belief naturally reflects that vision. Granted, there were periods of hostility and imperialism, but we must never forget that in the ancient world the unwritten code was "conquer, or be conquered." In that ethos, Islam sought to conserve, rather than abolish.

Third, it was in that spirit of creating and conserving civilisations, Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century, penned his 1377 book *al-Muqaddimah* on history, sociology and economics. Ronald Reagan and Boris Johnson have both cited Ibn Khaldun. Mark Zuckerberg recommended Ibn Khaldun's book. He was the first thinker to analyse the workings of an economy, the role of technology, foreign trade and specialisation in economic surplus, and the role of government in the economy. Four centuries before Adam Smith, Ibn Khaldun argued that the division and specialisation of labour serves as the basis for any civilised society. The principles of modern capitalism were, arguably, pioneered by Ibn Khaldun with his writings on production, supply, cost, consumption, demand and utility. Muslims were a trading people: Mohamed's business ethics and charity, compassion, and giving to the travellers and orphans were in tandem with profit. Adam Smith's important first book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* went in conjunction with his *The Wealth of Nations*.

Only in the Marxist caricature and amoral cartels of corporatism is capitalism corrupted. At its core, for Ibn Khaldun and Adam Smith, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, ethics and enterprise went together.

Fourth, conservatism, as Scruton reminds us, was an outcome of the European Enlightenment and a bulwark against the excesses of liberal individualism. When the disciples of Rousseau and Voltaire overthrew the

French monarchy in 1789, and cast away religion and tradition, it was Edmund Burke who warned against the pursuit of unknown, untested, and unrealistic ideas in the abstract. He coined the term "terrorism" to predict rightly the disasters of the French revolution. This commitment to the natural order, to convention, custom, and preserving our inheritance mattered for conservatives. For Burke this was the "partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

The sharia, as taught by the earliest Muslim jurists such as the eleventh-century Imam al-Juwayni, and preserved and practised for ten centuries, has as its higher aims or *maqasid* to preserve life, provide security, allow for worship, protect the family, and fully uphold property laws. These *maqasid,* tried and tested, are fully aligned with natural law conservatism. Free from abstract ideology inspired by the French revolution, be it Marxism or political Islamism, we find a harmony in the forces of Islam and conservatism if understood historically.

Fifth, it is not an accident that these great ideas were pioneered and applied in Britain. A century before the French, the English beheaded King Charles I and then hastily re-instated the monarchy after learning the lesson of Oliver Cromwell's own attempts at a new dynasty. Neither is it an accident that the oldest political party in the world, the Conservative party in Britain, understands that Burkean balance of monarch, merchants, the masses and clerics. From this island, the English charter of liberties spread around the world. Absent of this understanding, in Turkey, Libya, Iran, Egypt and Iraq, monarchies have been destroyed and political disorder, extremism and economic imbalance reign supreme. There are deep and valid reasons why Britain stands as an attractive model of a constitutional monarchy for many Muslim nations today, including Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and others. American presidents cannot dispatch a "Prince of Wales" in the way Britain can and then command immense prestige for doing so. The soft power of conservatism still sways billions of people.

Islam is the only religion to be instituted by a businessman.

Conservatism as a body of thought, as an inheritance, is now at risk in Britain, its natural home. And if it withers here, it will elsewhere too. For us, for our children, for the future of civilisation, we must ensure that we ward off the growing threats to this great tradition. And Muslims at home and abroad should be our natural allies.

The danger to conservatism is internal and external. Many in the Conservative party and conservatism more broadly wish to parrot on about policies on roads, police, schools or housing. While these are important, without understanding the ideas underpinning society we risk becoming bureaucrats and apparatchiks. We are pruning the trees while the soil is being poisoned. What makes us unique is our thoughts and heritage, not budgets and bureaucracy. Worse, the arrogance of some from within the conservative tradition, when it comes to issues of class, sexism, racism, keeps at bay many millions of our natural allies among women and ethnic minorities as well as family and faith-loving conservatives. These traits – arrogance and ignorance – must go, or we risk negating our very essence.

Then there are several external threats. Across university campuses, there is the return of the 1970s alliance of the Red-Greens, the Islamist-Marxists in Iran. That alliance in Iran that toppled the Shah, only for the Greens to then eradicate the Reds. In Britain, for almost 25 years now, this Islamist-Marxist alliance has been wreaking havoc in northern towns, communities, campuses and civil society organisations. They both seek utopias: a caliphate for Islamists, and communism for Marxists, or socialism in the first instance. George Galloway can go from Tower Hamlets to Bradford because of this alliance. Labour can dismiss "the Jewish vote" and widespread fear of anti-Semitism because it knows it has the Islamist-Leftist bloc in over 30 constituencies at work. This same bloc intimidates Jewish students on campuses in more than 20 campuses. Our allies across the Middle East are threatened with revolutions and extremism by the very same Islamist-Leftist alliance of "resistance." Anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, and anti-Semitism are their hallmarks.

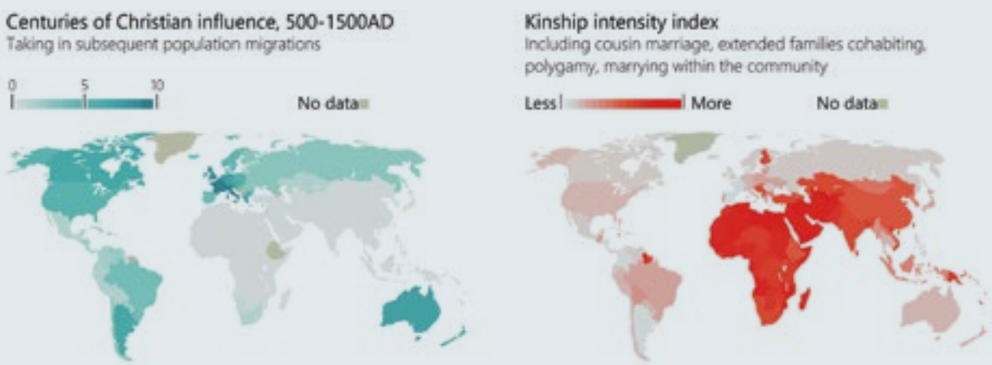
Along with politics, comes a culture of repudiation of the past. They roundly condemn every element of past slavery in the West, but will be silent on slavery in China, India or the Ottoman Empire. They dismiss Greek and Roman philosophers as "dead white men", they wish to uproot the "patriarchy", but are silent on south American dictators or Stalin's mass murders. Wilberforce led attempts to ban slavery; Victorians began to honour children with education and protection; Disraeli and other Tories extended the vote and established the first foundations of the modern welfare state. The West did nothing right in the past; all must be repudiated, and a new world of liberation created. And for that new moral framework, a culture war is underway.

Identity politics is the new culture war. Where Martin Luther King taught us to judge by the "content of our character," now a new generation seeks to hate all "white, middle class straight men" for their "privilege." Gay, female, transsexual, Muslim, black, non-binary and other characteristics are the central features of identity. And to make it all worse, there is a constant allegation that "white men" and "whiteness" are powerful, and all other groups are victims at an "intersection" where grievances merge. *The Madness of Crowds* by Douglas Murray masterfully unpacks the inner contradictions of this new craze. Their sworn enemy is anything remotely conservative, yet their entire provision to think freely, blaspheme, offend, rebel, subvert, and confront are all freedoms provided by the men and patriarchy they despise: Whigs, Liberals and Tories. Who will explain to this generation that they owe it to their future progeny to preserve the best of the West, and stop the behaviour of this self-destructive cultural suicide bomber?

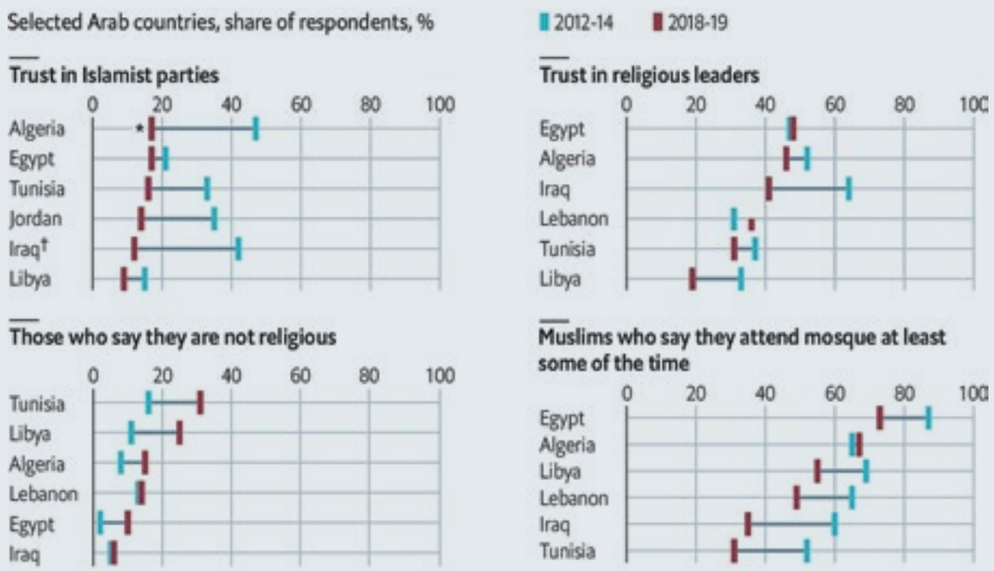
Unless conservatives understand our heritage, have the confidence to defend and advance it, cherish the best of the West then we allow the Islamist-Leftist alliance to grow and culture wars spread further. Conservatism is about much more than only winning elections. Love for our people, love for our country, love for our music, art, history, books, cuisine, landscape, architecture, churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, and monarchy. From love stems the greatest defence for all that is worth defending.

WORLD IN NUMBERS

Populations originating in areas that spent longer under medieval Catholicism are more trusting and less conformist



Faith, less



*2016 †2013 survey asked about Muslim Brotherhood and 2019 survey about the Iraqi Islamic Party Source: Arab Barometer **THE ECONOMIST**

TheEuropeanJournalonline

Young adults in Central and Eastern Europe largely oppose gay marriage

% of those ages 18 to 34 who say they oppose/strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally

Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details. "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues" **PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

Vast differences across Europe in public attitudes toward Muslims

% who say they would be willing to accept Muslims as members of their family

Note: This question was not asked of Muslims. Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details. "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues" **PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

Eastern Europeans are more likely to regard their culture as superior to others

% who say they completely/mostly agree with the statement, "Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others"

Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details. "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues" **PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

A Scorpio heads for the SYNAGOGUE

by ROSA HERXHEIMER

Photo: Mikhail Semenov / Shutterstock.com

A couple of weeks ago my friend and I decided with utter certainty that the following Friday, we were going to synagogue.

I am Jewish in the most "ish" of senses. My grandfather fled Nazi Germany in 1938, when he was twelve, but prior to Nazi rule, he did not know he was Jewish. My grandmother's mother was disinherited for not marrying a Jew. As a child, the only time I went to a synagogue was for a girl from school's Bat Mitzvah.

My bacon-worshipping grandmother's deepest delve into Judaism was a phase of Friday night dinners when I was at primary school. She would pick me up and we would make challah bread that was ready and glorious to eat by the time my parents finished work and my cousins arrived. In the last year, my mother has done similar, but without the challah. I like to think my mum's Friday night dinners came into being as a ploy to see me weekly, but I think they were actually an intervention - to quell my loneliness and Friday night FOMO as many of my friends disappeared into relationships or moved abroad. Or, less poignantly, she may have been inspired by the Channel Four sitcom, *Friday Night Dinner*.

Last year, we endured an election in which "anti-Semitism" was a defining issue but that's not why I'm exploring my own Jewishness. Most of my relatives have assimilated with such dedication they can't understand this urge. When my great-aunt heard her granddaughter was having a Bat Mitzvah, she was perplexed. "We aren't Jewish!" She scolded. "We are," said her son. "No we are not," she insisted. "Don't be so ridiculous." Like her brother (my late grandfather) she didn't know she was a Jew until she had to flee Berlin aged ten and the Jewish religion has never been part of her identity - so why do I feel it's part of mine?

My great-aunt didn't know she was a Jew until she had to flee Berlin aged ten. The Jewish religion has never been part of her identity - so why do I feel it's part of mine?

The easiest answer is that I'm a lost young thing - a snowflake that's drifted. It is not uncommon for my to-do lists to consist of "book tarot reading" and "look up crystal healer". I have not one but two astrology apps on my phone. At my most aimless I fill my phone with screenshots of potential Scorpio tattoos. Last month, I bought a book in a charity shop called *The Ladies' Oracle* (1857) because it had a cool name and a pretty cover. A few days later, my friends and I were poring over it for hours. The oracle has a hundred questions and a grid of symbols on the first page. It was complicated at first but once cracked, your fortune's told: "How many husbands shall I have?" I asked. "As many as you will have children," was the response. *Hand me a large glass of Pinot.*

It may seem crass to liken such activities to my desire to explore Judaism but its all derivative of very similar neuroses. The lapse between leaving full-time education and managing to earn enough to buy an M&S salad for lunch is a difficult, undecided time for those privileged enough to dwell on it and you only have to turn on the news to feel that society is splintering. Since I've reached peak confusion, my craving for spiritual support makes sense - to me, at least.

In part, what I've so far sought succour in has been about bonding and belonging. For instance, a couple of years ago I met a girl called Flora who guessed I was a Scorpio thanks to a very fleeting exchange. The moment she told me she was a Scorpio too, I felt like she was declaring we were on the same team. Now we've become friends I wonder if in aligning our star signs, she was saying she understood me. But other than such brief and often tongue-in-cheek exchanges I'm not sure the starry kind of spiritualism has helped me - more often I log onto horoscope.com when it's 2am and I'm too anxious to sleep.

Ultimately, perhaps, I'm turning to synagogue because London is lonesome. My friends and I are rarely awake at the same time let alone able to meet each other much - as we used to do at school and university. Sky-high rents mean we've no spare money and are scattered across the outer suburbs to the North East and South East with wretchedly bad transport links between us. In February last year, one friend suggested that - instead of us meeting in the pub - we each buy a bottle of wine and Skype each other from our respective homes. Eventually, we managed to drag her out to meet us face to face - where we bought drinks that cost us an hour's wages and sat on a street curb which was being marketed as a trendy bar.

I don't seem to have a community anymore: synagogue is a place to go, with actual people to chat to about simple things - such as how the week's gone. I also want to believe in something that means more than economics and Instagram.

As the pop-philosopher Alain de Botton states: "One of the good things about religion – Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism – is that they all start from a premise that life cannot be perfect, and it's by recognising the imperfectability of life on earth and human beings (Buddhism starts off with 'life is suffering'), you can then progress". Ignoring the fact that this seems like the sort of quote Khloe Kardashian might post, the notion that life is suffering, and flaws and failures are central to human existence provides a sort of refuge for me. As religious belief has declined the notion that we can perfect ourselves has increased - exponentially - as evidenced by the self-help trends of the 90s, the plastic surgery of the 00s, the wellness movement of the 10s, and the social media pressures of the present. None of this helps you grapple with the grim "who am I?' existential questions - religion might. I know that a place of worship isn't just a free, booze-less pub. I hope it will help me connect with something larger than myself and to my ancestors too.

My friend and I first decided to attend synagogue after a few beers - conversation time I usually reserve for ranting about why dating apps don't work until my drinking partner's eyes glaze over and they start muttering about what time it is. Might synagogue also present the prospect of love? Men on dating apps get away with all sorts of behaviour which would never be permitted if you had friends in common or had to see each other afterwards at work and since we're all essentially strangers there is no imposing any sort of social responsibility.

I need a place to meet someone *organically*. And so I've added "dating" to the Venn diagram I'm drawing up trying to work out why I'm so attracted to synagogue because what is more likely to foster respectful behaviour than a whole religious and familial community assessing your potential partner's every move? What young man would dare to mess me around underneath Tamsin Greig's eagle eye? Now, on Friday night, when I head out to attend, that old Elton John song gets stuck in my head - with lyrics slightly changed: "Because we're going to the synagogue/ And we're gonna to get ma-ma-married..." When it comes to my life, Judaism has so much to sort out, it feels like a very real leap of faith.

The Future Power of the PRESS

The media landscape is changing fast - in an era of dwindling public trust, how can journalism respond?

by MATTIAS HESSÉRUS

Journalism is often claimed to be the lifeblood of democracy and in the western world we can pride ourselves with living in societies in which journalism is neither controlled by the government nor to any large extent restricted by law. While journalists have the freedom to scrutinise politicians, sources and whistle-blowers benefit from extensive legal protection.

At the heart of this narrative is the independent, impartial and autonomous journalist, the Woodward and Bernstein type, who "seeks truth and reports it" and reveals the abuse of power by the rich and mighty. The "first loyalty" of this type of journalist "is to the citizens" and he or she serves "as an independent monitor of power", to quote Tom Rosenstiel's and Bill Kovach's modern classic *The Elements of Journalism*. The idea of the journalist as an impartial and autonomous observer has become a centre pillar of Western democratic thought and a widely accepted norm within media companies worldwide.

Paradoxically trust in journalism has diminished significantly. For example, in 1976, 72 percent of Americans said they trusted mass media, according to a Gallup poll. In 2019, that number was down to 41 percent.

The historical development of this ideal of autonomy is often described as an almost teleological process where the professionalisation of journalism has gone hand in hand with the advance of democracy and the modern welfare-state. However, in this story of gradually evolving press freedom one important figure tends to be absent: the media owner. Why have owners accepted autonomous journalists? It is an important question to ask since the media business might be the only type of enterprise where the employees' loyalty is supposed to be with someone other than the company.

Undeniably, there might be some media owners who fully believe in the ideal of a free and independent press and who therefore never would interfere with editorial decisions even if they themselves or their families were in the crosshairs of a damaging investigation. Yet, there are other franker explanations to why journalistic independence has been won – and why it today might be under threat.

The motives to own, for example, a newspaper are more compound than the motives for owning most other types of businesses. The explanation for this is that a newspaper owner can count his or her profit in two types of currency; money and/or political influence in society. Of course, many newspaper proprietors would probably like to gain both, but the fundamentals of newspaper economy have made that goal more unattainable than one would think. Yes, looking at the history of newspaper ownership there may even seem to be an exchange rate between money and direct influence of opinion.

To make a newspaper is expensive and the cost of the first copy of each produced newspaper is the highest. For every copy thereafter that is printed and sold, the cost goes down until it reaches a level where it starts to make a profit. In this respect a newspaper is similar to a mass-market product like an iPhone or an electrical toothbrush. To take home the initial cost of engineering and design you need to sell a lot of product.

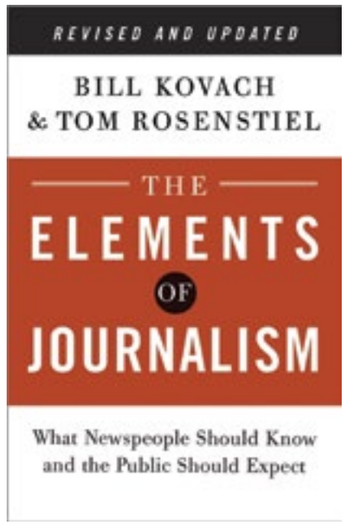
In order to simplify, one can say that the expensive newspaper has been financed through two different models: Funding by the many vs. Funding by the few. And one model seems to be of the past and one is of the future, which has implications for journalism as we know it.

The funding by the many model is what built the highly successful omnibus press of the 19th and 20th century with its wide mix of content. In simple terms the model is built on effective cost sharing between the parties who want something from the newspaper. The readers, who have different preferences, share the total cost of the product through buying a full newspaper. It doesn't matter if they only want to read the culture section, the commentaries or the sport pages, they still have to share the cost of the total product.

In turn, the readers are subsidised by advertisers who want their product seen by the readers. If the cost sharing between readers and advertisers is effective enough, the owner, who is the financial risk taker, can make a profit.

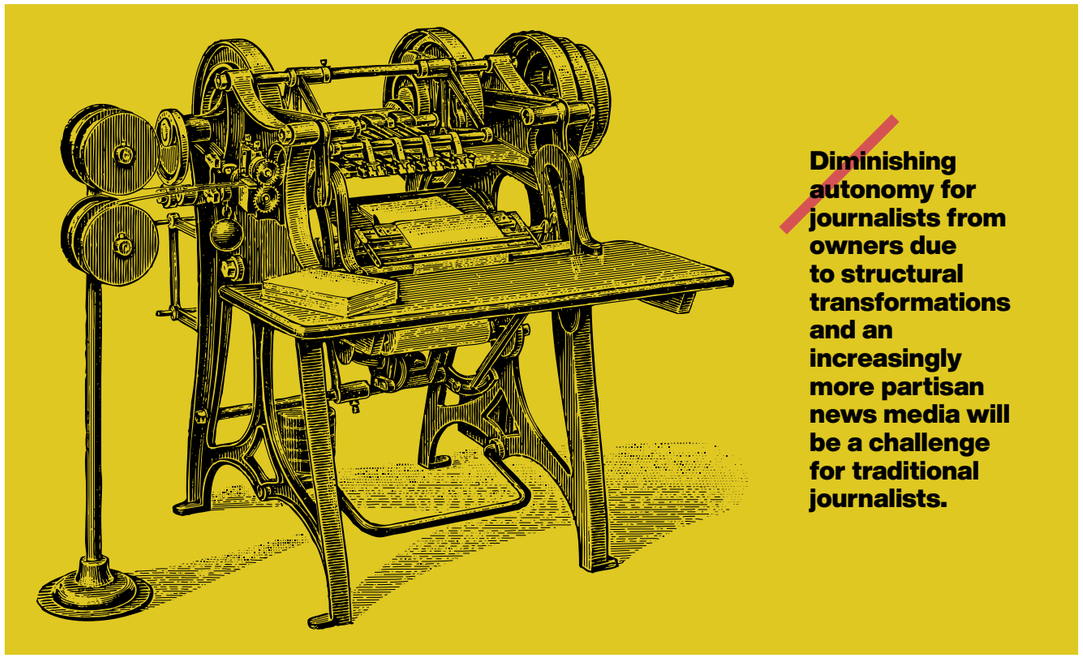
This funding model with its reliance on mass audience and advertising has over the years been heavily criticised by media scholars for leading to commercialisation and the dumbing down of the press. There might be some truth to the criticism, but it's also the model that to a large extent has granted journalists their autonomy and independence. The funding by many–model has in reality meant a separations-of-power system where no single actor can inflict their will on a newspaper because their contribution to the whole is too small. This even applies to the owner who even though he or she has the right to appoint editors and managers is still dependent on readers and advertisers to make a profit.

The funding by the few–model is the basis of a variety of ownership forms developed to sustain news outlets that fail to attract mass audiences. Political parties, unions, NGOs, trusts and non-profits have been prepared to cover the costs for companies that otherwise couldn't carry their costs in order to get a certain message out. The profit in this model is measured in influence and in setting the political agenda. For journalists this also means that they are expected to stay on message.



Undeniably, there might be some media owners who fully believe in the ideal of a free and independent press and who therefore never would interfere with editorial decisions even if they themselves or their families were in the crosshairs of a damaging investigation.

TheEuropeanJournal.online



Diminishing autonomy for journalists from owners due to structural transformations and an increasingly more partisan news media will be a challenge for traditional journalists.

It is easy to see by which funding model journalistic autonomy has thrived the most. In its healthy incarnations the funding-by-many-model lets media companies make respectable profits in providing a public good. Media owners were making enough money to give extensive liberties to their employees. They could afford to keep sound separation between their advertising divisions and editorial desks. They could let reporters waste time on projects that were often futile but sometimes gained them Pulitzers. They could afford to let journalists cultivate an idealised image of themselves as independent pillars of democracy. And perhaps more importantly, in guaranteeing journalistic independence, owners avoided draconian media concentration laws that enabled some of them to build vast media empires.

In the past two decades the media industry has grappled with the structural transformation caused by digitisation. This has been described as a crisis of media but should more accurately be defined as a crisis of a business model. The funding-by-many-model that created the newspaper industry that Warren Buffet once described "as easy a way to make huge returns as existed in America" has collapsed due to advertising going to companies like Google and Facebook. The sensitive balance of cost-sharing an expensive product can now only be sustained by the largest newspapers who benefit from the winner-takes-all logic of the digital media market.

The implications of this transition can in the short term look grim. When one type of profit for owners – money – is falling, the allure of the second type of profit rises: influence. For journalists this might mean that they have to realise that their independence was never more than a credit from their employers. The age of pure independence might be over.

Still, this new situation can also in the long term prove to be an opportunity for a more honest journalism and a revival of democratic conversation. The funding-by-many–model was pivotal in creating journalistic independence on a structural level. However, the argument from journalists for autonomy and independence was always that it was needed in order to ensure the public's trust - the first loyalty was to the citizens. Journalism as a profession has over the past forty years been increasingly professionalised and standardised through journalism programmes at universities. Studies also show that journalists, working in Western countries, perceive themselves as having high levels of autonomy in relation to employers and owners. Yet, paradoxically trust in journalism has diminished significantly. For example, in 1976, 72 percent of Americans said they trusted mass media, according to a Gallup poll. In 2019 that number was down to 41 percent.

Last year, when Ipsos Mori studied trust in the media globally a negative trend in trust across all types of news sources was apparent. Except for one: news from "people I know predominantly in person". Here trust had risen in all surveyed countries apart from Chile. Yes, 70 percent of consumers globally rated personal relationships as a good source at "providing relevant news and information", matching the trust in mass media in America in 1976.

So, what do these numbers tell us? Maybe more about ourselves than the quality of news today. We trust our friends because we know what they stand for and where they come from. They are part of our tribe and we are partisan. And as a group of psychologists - Cory J. Clark, Brittany S. Liu, Bo M. Winegard, Peter H. Ditto - showed in a recent paper "tribal bias is a natural and nearly ineradicable feature of human cognition, and that no group–not even one's own–is immune".

Diminishing autonomy for journalists from owners due to structural transformations and an increasingly more partisan news media will be a challenge for traditional journalists. The media situation they might face in the future can be summed up in the words of Bob Dylan: "You're gonna have to serve somebody, well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody". But strangely, standing for something, accepting that everyone is partisan, can prove to be the road back to trust in the media. An openly partisan, diverse and honest media might be a good recipe for better democracy.

THE TRUMP DIVIDE

America is as split as Brexit Britain

by WALTER ELLIS

Veterans of the Brexit debate could be forgiven for thinking that no other society has been as divided by a single issue as the UK was by the EU referendum of 2016. But they would be wrong. The United States – a nation of 325 million people – has been split into two bitterly feuding factions over the impeachment of President Donald J. Trump, whose hope of winning a second term in office is expected to hinge on the tone, if not the result, of the proceedings against him that opened at the beginning of this year.

The near-absolute nature of the split can be seen most clearly in the attitude of America's journalists, who, with few exceptions, have abandoned objectivity in favour of appealing exclusively to one side or the other over the central question: is the President a crook and a despot or is he a saviour, however flawed, committed to the well-being of his country and its citizens?

We should start with *The New York Times*, an American national treasure, dating back to 1851. Essentially liberal, and a champion of enlightened capitalism, it has stood behind every progressive administration since the time of Lincoln and the Civil War. But never, not even during the Watergate crisis, has it taken so aggressively against a sitting president as it has against Trump. To the *Times,* Trump is the devil incarnate and the paper has used its formidable investigative machine, backed by an impressive array of pundits, to reveal the full litany of his crimes.

True to its liberal calling, some measure of dissent is permitted, even encouraged. Thus, columnist David Brooks felt able recently to complain of the "decline of discourse in the anti-Trump echo chamber". Brooks, a Canadian, laments the fact that truth has become a black and white affair, so that those with whom liberals disagree are cast as menacing, to be feared and excoriated.

If this is worrying, the fact is that the *Times* has few real rivals. Most of the great city papers, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, are struggling to stay afloat. But there is one, the *Washington Post*, whose logo, "Democracy dies in darkness," conceals the fact that

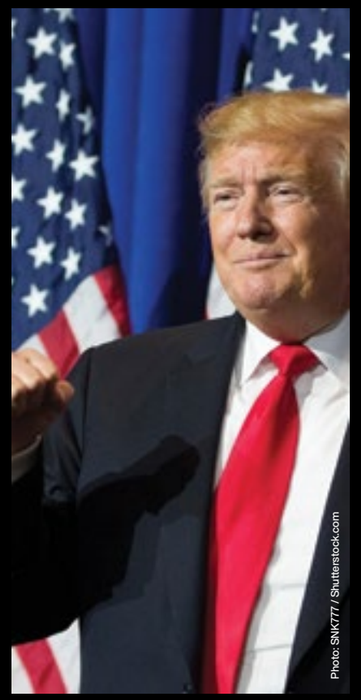


Photo: SNK777 / Shutterstock.com

At the centre of the confusion is the 45th President of the United States himself. Trump takes to Twitter each morning and evening in an ongoing parody of FDR's fireside chats. He says what he thinks at any given moment, even if he can't spell it.

the paper is now the plaything of Jeff Bezos, CEO and president of Amazon and one of the world's richest men. The *Post*, which famously, in the days when it was owned by the mere multi-millionaire Katharine Graham, vied with the *Times* to bring down Richard Nixon, now leads the charge against Trump, regularly coming up with stories that depict him as a criminally inclined narcissistic fool.

One imagines Bezos nodding in narcissistic agreement on the other side of the country even as he organises the next closure of a long-established retail chain.

On air, MSNBC, the cable arm of NBC, features a nightly prime time news show hosted by the Oxford-educated Rachel Maddow in which Trump is presented as a composite of Colonel Blimp and Colonel Sanders, with a dose of Major Misunderstanding thrown in. On rival CNN, Anderson Cooper, an heir to the Vanderbilt fortune, while posing as impartial, never fails to denounce the President as a self-obsessed buffoon. Maddow is unrelentingly forensic. It was she who first persuaded Lev Parnas, an associate of both Trump and his lawyer Rudy Giuliani, to rat on Trump over his dealings in Ukraine. By contrast, Cooper is an elegant destroyer, constantly amazed and disturbed that the occupant of the Oval Office should be such a deplorable wretch.

But the liberal left does not have it all its own way. Far from it. Fox News typically confines itself to defending the indefensible, arguing that Trump was elected by the American people and that any attempt to unseat him outside of the ballot box is tantamount to treason. The station hammers away at the theme that Trump is the one true guardian of American values, whose treatment by the Democrats brings to mind the crucifixion of Christ.

At the centre of the confusion is the 45th President of the United States himself. Trump takes to Twitter each morning and evening in an ongoing parody of FDR's fireside chats. He says what he thinks at any given moment, even if he can't spell it. Like a demented judge, he condemns all those who offend against his idea of himself and the constitution he claims to hold dear. The media then reproduces his tweets, either in agreement, as proof of his unique grasp of events, or as evidence that he is completely unhinged.

Will the impeachment hearings now underway in the Senate bring relief or understanding, or any sense that America is about to recover its bearings? I doubt it. But maybe it is time for the warring factions to Get Impeachment Done. For unless they do, we may all go mad.

Bénédicte Paviot

HOW NOT TO BECOME A VIRAL SENSATION

The President of the Foreign Press Association in London explains how - in the age of 24 hour news - politicians can avoid it all going so terribly wrong...

When I was a child, it seemed like tomorrow would never come. Now, our 24-hour non-stop media means tomorrow seems to happen today. As a French TV and radio journalist based in London reporting for international media, my job is to explain the ins and outs of what's going on. For years, I've stood outside Parliament or in Downing Street, come rain or shine, reporting what was going on.

Nowadays I have to be ready to jettison whatever was previously planned because some new event or statement has come crashing in because unpredictability and sensationalism are the new name of the game. Reporting is more complex, with almost every politician seemingly on the verge of saying or doing something that could make them a viral sensation - and so very possibly put an end to their career.

Right before I go on air - armed with the latest facts and quotes - I quickly scroll through my phone to check and see if I will have to change my report. A recent example is Jacob Rees-Mogg. As the then Leader of the House of Commons, he was caught during a headline-grabbing late-night debate on Brexit reclining and snoozing on the famous green benches in what some have described as "Madame Récamier style".

This pose turned him into a viral sensation with Rees-Mogg memes quickly springing up and trending. A surprise to all, including to the man dubbed the "Honourable Member for the 18th century". Days later, he grabbed news headlines again with even more dramatic coverage of unfeeling comments he made in a live radio interview about the terrible Grenfell fire. Public reaction was swift and unrelenting, deeming him to be an over-privileged snob completely out-of-touch with ordinary people.

During the following days, he was under the media spotlight and widely criticised for what many considered ill-advised remarks. In one fell swoop, he went from being one of the most trusted and ubiquitous performers of the new Johnson régime to being almost invisible during the General Election campaign that ensued for fear he could cost the Conservatives vital votes...

Chasing eyeballs, ears, clicks, subscriptions, in an ever-increasing competitive media market with shrinking financial budgets. The new reality is far more wide-reaching and therefore potentially more dangerous

And what happened to him is happening elsewhere. There was uproar in France last year over a video posted on Facebook. French student Marie Laguerre was walking home when she was violently assaulted outside a Paris café. After CCTV footage of the attack went viral, Laguerre used her platform to educate others on the unacceptable violence faced by women in France and worldwide.

The first viral sensation I remember was back in the General Election of April 2010. Gordon Brown's campaign was thrown into turmoil, indeed never recovered, after he was caught on mic calling a Labour supporter who had challenged him over the economy and immigration a "bigoted woman".

The changing nature of the media and of broadcasting - with the merging of TV, radio and print - means anyone and anything can go viral, national, indeed global in minutes. We are now driven towards creating content that sets social media alight. Chasing eyeballs, ears, clicks, subscriptions, in an ever-increasing competitive media market with shrinking financial budgets. The new reality is far more wide-reaching and therefore potentially more dangerous.

Where may this take us in future? Politicians will have more and more media training to deliver their message and pre-prepared lines to avoid gaffes. Their media handlers will increasingly restrict access to them and pick easier, softer interviews, avoiding tougher and more forensic media interrogators, calculating that it is safer to avoid them and take the hit, rather than the fall-out from the possibility of a car crash interview that could derail an election campaign.

Thus, despite the ever-growing plurality of media outlets, we will be less well-informed about the goals and objectives of our politicians and leaders. This will not help to rebuild much-needed trust and respect for them by voters.

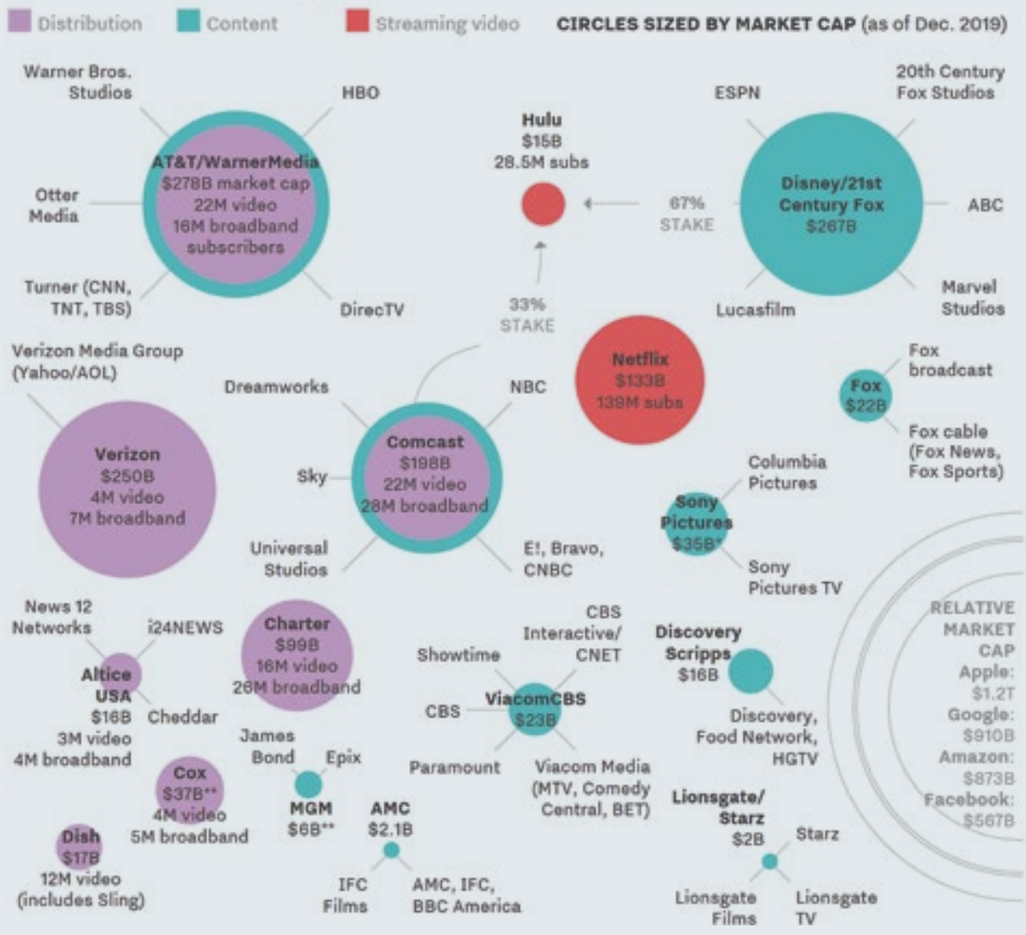
Ever since the publication of Tony Blair's dodgy dossier on the Iraq war and the alleged reasons for sending British troops to fight Saddam Hussein's regime to destroy "weapons of mass destruction," an increasing number of U.K. voters have accused politicians of all being liars. Many deplore that but appear to accept it as a fait accompli. Yet others cry out for a resurgence of honesty and integrity in politics. Who will prevail? Qui vivra, verra...

TOP TIPS

1. *When in doubt refrain from tweeting, instagramming, posting on Facebook...*
2. *Phone a trusted colleague who understands the possible fall-out and ramifications of what you are proposing to do and ask for advice.*
3. *If you become a viral sensation, despite all your best efforts, address the situation quickly: an apology plus a little self-deprecation are advisable. How you handle the exposure will be crucial.*

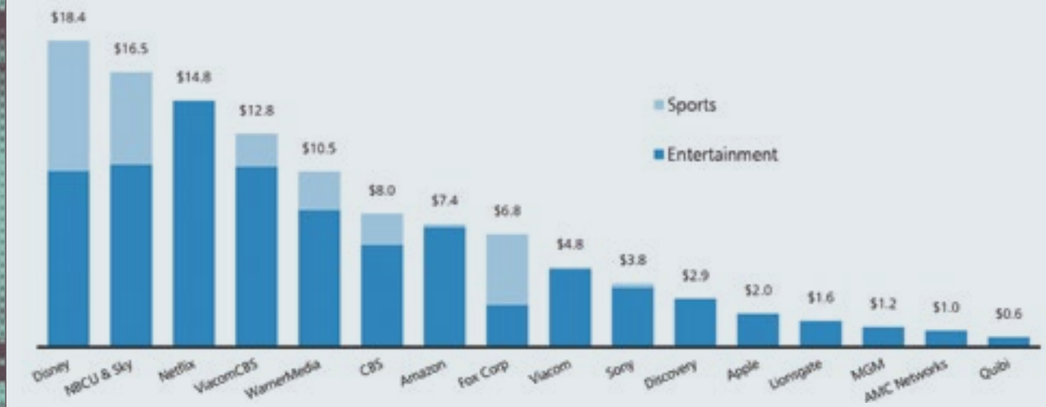
WORLD *in numbers*

Media landscape



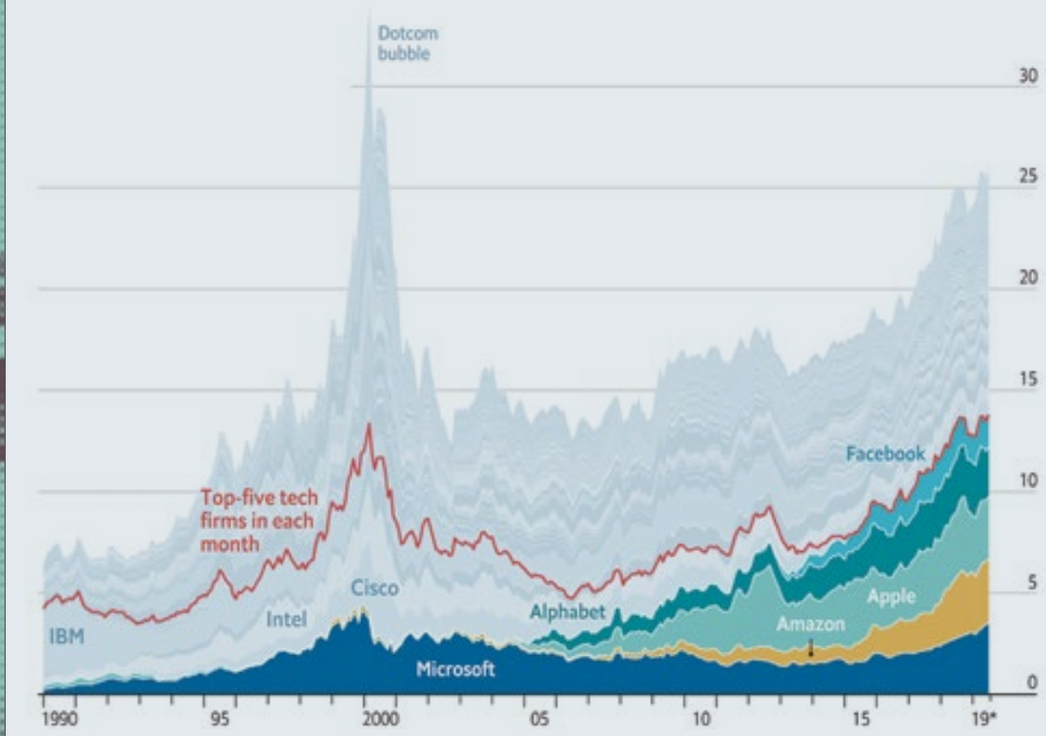
Note: * Assumes 3.8 revenue multiple ** Assumes 3.1 revenue multiple Source: the companies, news reports, Leichtman Research Group (cable/internet subs) **RECODE**

Cash content spend by company ('19E)



Source: UBS estimates, company data

US technology companies
Share of total US stockmarket value,%



* At July 31st

Was Tony Soprano relatable?

Do u get me?

On modern culture's a complicated relationship with relatability

by ALASTAIR BENN

Early on in the run-up to the UK general election in December, BBC journalist Naga Munchetty asked the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson: "Why are you relatable to families up and down and across the country? How can they relate to you?... You're privileged." After much umming and ahing, Johnson replied: "If you ask me why am I relatable, am I relatable? I haven't the faintest idea. It seems to me the most difficult psychological question that anyone has ever asked me." Johnson was confused – what does it mean to be relatable? And why have I just been asked about it on prime-time TV?

Relatability is very much a *mot du jour*. It's a cliché of daytime television: "It's the stories about living your life that makes you relatable to your audience," Rosie O'Donnell told viewers in her inaugural chat show in 1996. The book recommendation site Goodreads even has a category of its own devoted to "popular, relatable" reads.

Its origins are mysterious. The word derives from the Latin noun *relatio*. Deriving from the verb "refero" ("I bring back"), the Roman rhetorician Quintilian uses "relatio" to describe the process of moving his pen to and fro from the ink jar to the page. "Relatio" was used by Latin authors to mean all kinds of things. When a soldier sets down the action of battle in a military log book, it could be characterised as a "relatio", as could the act of setting down stories or poems. And that is the sense it retained in its English form – we relate the day's events to each other, or relate a folktale or the plot of a novel.

Relatability, as a full-fledged noun, appears for the first time in the 1965 OED as "that which can be related to; with which one can identify or empathise", rather than in its older sense, "able to be related". It seems to have originated in a paper on childhood psychology in the journal *Theory Into Practice*: "Boys saw teachers as more directive, while girls saw them as more 'relatable'".

If, in the Victorian and Edwardian era, teachers were expected to be wholly "directive" (Muriel Spark's terrifying Miss Jean Brodie comes to mind), then the modern notion of relatability seems to chime with a gentler view of the relationship between teacher and pupil, a more empathetic sort of connection. We no longer believe that a student should be beaten for misbehaviour, for example.

As a catch-all-term, relatability seems to have taken on a whole range of random notions that take in taste, personal disposition, even moral worth. In 2014, the American radio host Ira Glass tweeted, after seeing a production of King Lear: "Shakespeare: not good. No stakes, not relatable. I think I'm realising: Shakespeare sucks." He clarified: "Shakespeare is not relatable, unemotional." Glass didn't dislike King Lear on aesthetic grounds or because of poor staging; in fact, he liked the production more than he disliked it, and he later acknowledged that he had very much enjoyed Mark Rylance's Lear. His objection rested on a different claim: that Shakespeare had somehow failed to take into account his feelings, and had created art that was defective precisely because it didn't chime directly with his life experience.

There is nothing new, of course, in literature or art inspiring close personal identification with the characters that populate the page, the stage, or the silver screen. All of my friends' middle-aged dads love the nineties cult classic *Heat* starring Al Pacino as a neurotic but brilliant cop and Robert De Niro as a master criminal. Both men have complex personal lives (and stunningly beautiful girlfriends) while being at the top of their professional game. It's about wish fulfilment – wouldn't it be cool if I were more like him? In the early 19th century, vast numbers of young men took part in a form of "literary" suicide, in imitation of Goethe's creation Young Werther, who kills himself after an ill-conceived love affair. They were often found with a copy of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* and dressed in the same style, complete with a pistol of the type Werther used to end his life. The book was promptly banned in Leipzig to prevent further youths from imitating Werther's fate.

In encountering a text populated by characters penned from another's imagination, we come to know ourselves better and to learn to express hitherto dormant desires, fascinations, and fears in intelligible form. But nothing is quite as it seems.

Close identification with a character in a book is popularly regarded as an important function of literature. Gustave Flaubert was thought to have said: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!" In the film adaptation of Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys*, English teacher Hector tells one of his students, David – a nerdy literature obsessive – in an after-school poetry class: "The best moments in reading are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things – which you had thought special and particular to you. And now, here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out, and taken yours."

It's about wish fulfilment – wouldn't it be cool if I were more like him?

Photo: Hulton Archive / Stringer - Getty Images

His objection rested on a different claim: that Shakespeare had somehow failed to take into account his feelings, and had created art that was defective precisely because it didn't chime directly with his life experience.

In encountering a text populated by characters penned from another's imagination, we come to know ourselves better and to learn to express hitherto dormant desires, fascinations, and fears in intelligible form. But nothing is quite as it seems. Hector is simultaneously an archetypal "inspirational" teacher – who really does want to instil a lifelong love of the arts in his charges – and a lecherous, nastily abusive figure who preys on teenage naivety – the boys accept his fondling as just another of his amiable teacherly quirks. Literature can improve the imagination, yes, but Hector's championing of relatability is eventually exposed as bogus. And the quotation so often attributed to Flaubert is completely fictive. It was initially popularised by a literary critic called René Deschermes, who had it on hearsay.

"Sally Rooney gets in your head," wrote Lauren Collins in her New Yorker profile of the 28-year-old Irish novelist. Meaghan O'Connell, winner of the New York Times Editor's Choice Pick in 2018 for her novel *And Now We Have Everything*, described reading Rooney's Man Booker Prize nominated debut novel *Conversations With Friends* with "the slow burning dread of recognition". Rooney's second novel *Normal People* has sold well into the millions on both sides of the Atlantic. Both novels tell the stories of how affluent, literary types live in Dublin.

In February, the novelist Will Self described Rooney's novels as "very simple stuff with no literary ambition". On literary grounds, Self was right. Even though Rooney's characters are all self-consciously *literary* and her characters definitely see themselves as "book lovers", she writes in a decidedly anti-literary style: all fractured dialogue, and often simple transcripts of text conversations and emails between characters. The effect is rather fascinating – like the novelist, Ali Smith, it is impossible not to feel Rooney's words working "like [an] undercurrent in the blood". The effect is so immediate and honest – but crucially, makes no literary demands on the reader. Here you cannot look for patterns, linger over simile, or let your mind be drawn into imagery or be carried off on a metaphor, because these are stripped out of the text.

Rooney deliberately cultivates relatability, and it works. Self's comments were roundly criticised by Rooney's readers. Author Dana Schwartz wrote: "Very Serious writer Will Self is denigrating Sally Rooney for being young and selling well." One of the *New Statesman*'s columnists Megan Nolan commented on Twitter: "I don't think it's very surprising that about ten old men publicly dislike *Normal People* [her second novel]... Whu [sic.] cares tbh, let them be grumpy I'm sure S Rooney isn't crying." Young and selling well vs old, serious, grumpy old men.

Photo: Jeremy Chan / Getty Images

Rupi Kaur strips her poetry of suggestive allusive possibilities – instead, it is abrupt, direct and straightforward... This is precisely the thing I'm feeling, she seems to say, and nothing more.

artefacts of a literary culture that this new generation believes has long outlived its purpose. The pessimistic reader is quite justified in shrugging his shoulders and murmuring to himself, "sign of the times", and snapping the book shut. The demand that texts be read in a spirit of relatability does seem quite new. Relatability seems to suppose a deeper relationship between reader, the author and the words than Self's "literary ambition" might allow, where the vectors of criticism depend on structure, analysis and reference to allusions and correspondences with other texts. If directness, intimacy and personal connection are to be the predominant mode of artistic expression, then what does that mean for Western culture?

It could mean that the novel is effectively finished as a genuine "high culture" product. There are notable exceptions in the late 20th century, like the Latin American magical realists and the Czech writer Milan Kundera, who has used novelistic forms to distend reality – showing how the novel could stand "at the farthest frontier of the possible". But if the development of novelistic and poetic expression began in the 17th century, with Cervantes' fantastical *Don Quixote*, and peaked in the late 19th and early 20th – with the crazy, magnificent worlds of Stendhal or Balzac, in Baudelaire's starry imagination, Rimbaud's synaesthesia-driven experimentalism, and Djuna Barnes's super-baroque sensibility,

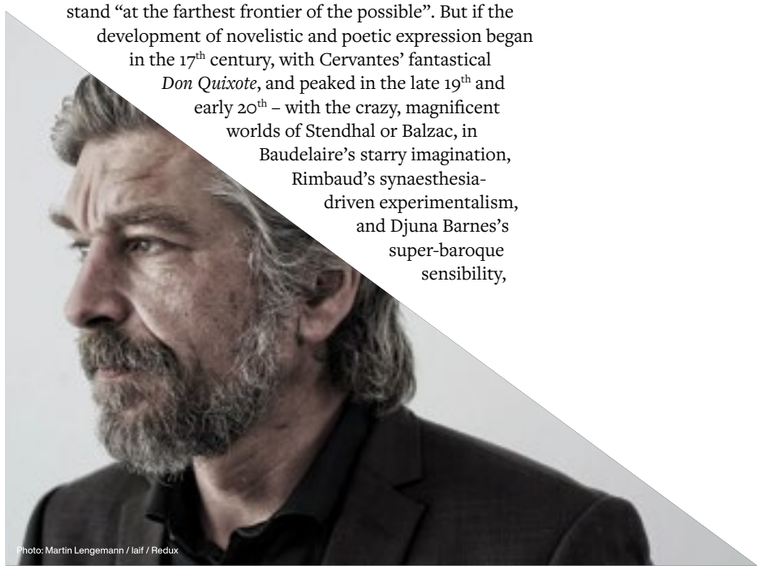


Photo: Martin Lengemann / laif / Redux

culminating in Proust's endless journeying into the interior self with its unique combination of metaphor, story, style and representation – then the 21st century has seen the novel being progressively stripped of its resources. Auto-fiction is now one of the most popular novelistic styles, with key exponents including the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard, who minutely details everything he does from shopping to sex in his massive series *My Struggle* and in the process has alienated most of his family because of his honesty. Auto-fiction is seen elsewhere in the work of Olivia Laing in the UK and Chris Kraus in America.

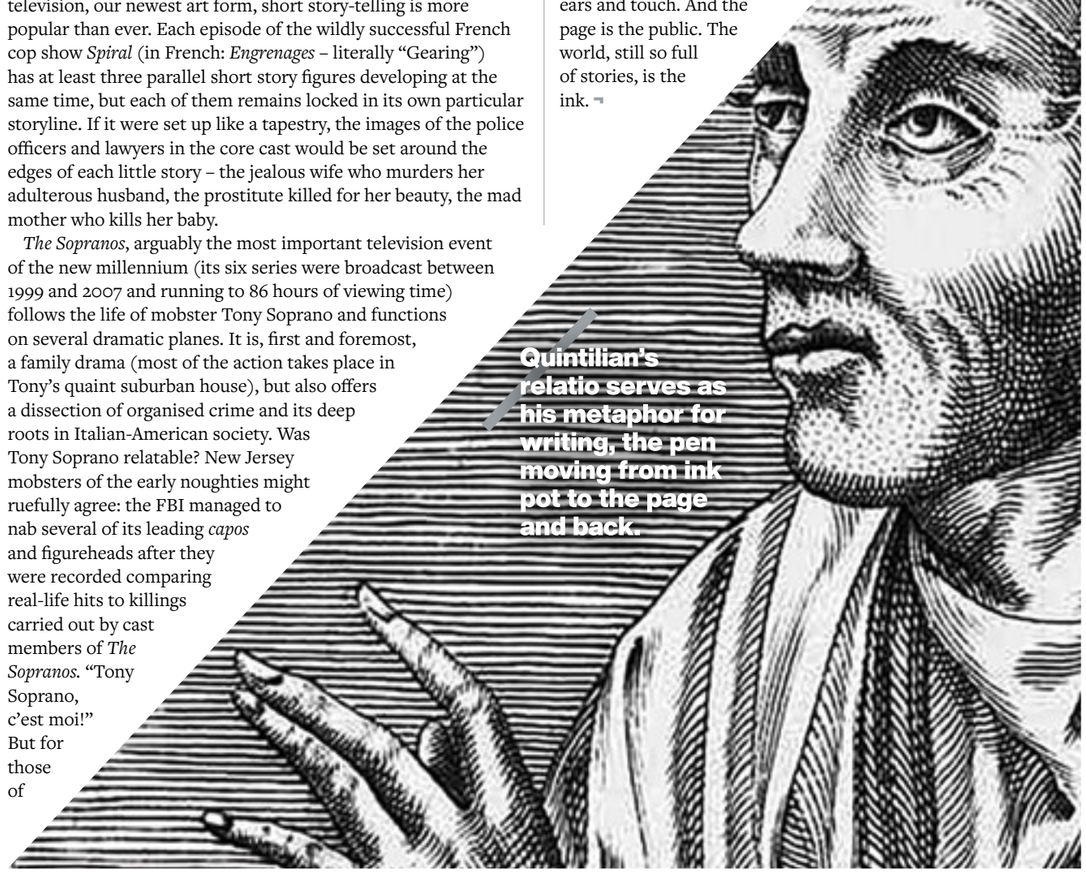
We should not despair however. The aesthetic values that gave weight and beauty to the history of the novel and poetry do endure in the present: indeed, they flourish. It's just that they have switched channel.

The aesthetic values that gave weight and beauty to the history of the novel and poetry do endure in the present: indeed, they flourish. It's just that they have switched channel.

Take the short story – very many of our greatest novelists wrote short stories either for serialisation (a serious money spinner), or because they regarded it as a worthwhile art form. Among countless others, Graham Greene wrote "penny thrillers" and often used them as inspirations for novels (*Brighton Rock*'s first third almost works as a short story on its own). There is almost no commercial appetite for short stories in literary form nowadays, but in television, our newest art form, short story-telling is more popular than ever. Each episode of the wildly successful French cop show *Spiral* (in French: *Engrenages* – literally "Gearing") has at least three parallel short story figures developing at the same time, but each of them remains locked in its own particular storyline. If it were set up like a tapestry, the images of the police officers and lawyers in the core cast would be set around the edges of each little story – the jealous wife who murders her adulterous husband, the prostitute killed for her beauty, the mad mother who kills her baby.

The Sopranos, arguably the most important television event of the new millennium (its six series were broadcast between 1999 and 2007 and running to 86 hours of viewing time) follows the life of mobster Tony Soprano and functions on several dramatic planes. It is, first and foremost, a family drama (most of the action takes place in Tony's quaint suburban house), but also offers a dissection of organised crime and its deep roots in Italian-American society. Was Tony Soprano relatable? New Jersey mobsters of the early noughties might ruefully agree: the FBI managed to nab several of its leading *capos* and figureheads after they were recorded comparing real-life hits to killings carried out by cast members of *The Sopranos*. "Tony Soprano, c'est moi!" But for those of us who might not have links to the mafia, *The Sopranos* was a triumph of novelistic story-telling on the small screen. For many of its key episodes, it relies on the novelist Marcel Proust's famous notion of involuntary memory – in encountering the *madeleine* (a small, tea-soaked sponge cake), Proust's narrator finds himself able to recollect the whole world of his childhood. For Tony, it's a leg of ham – and suddenly whole vistas of his past are available for the viewer to enjoy, and the origin and scope of his teenage traumas are beamed straight into our living rooms.

The question "is it relatable?", what Boris Johnson called the "most difficult psychological question", should be reclaimed in its simpler form, as something that can be told, spoken, sung about. If we accept that relatability as an aesthetic standard has fundamentally altered European high culture, the novel, the poem, then we should not do away with it all together, but rather work with the grain of its deeper resonances in Western civilisation. Quintilian's relatio serves as his metaphor for writing, the pen moving from ink pot to the page and back. The pen is the human senses – eyes, nose, ears and touch. And the page is the public. The world, still so full of stories, is the ink. ¬



Quintilian's relatio serves as his metaphor for writing, the pen moving from ink pot to the page and back.

Sod literary value, the argument runs, it's for old fogeys. What matters is that Rooney is "relatable" and she sells well.

Similarly, the acclaimed poet Rupi Kaur, whose debut collection *Milk and Honey* was released in 2014 and has sold 2.5 million copies worldwide, is a brilliant exponent of relatability. She writes only in lowercase and has no interest in poetic form or style. Her "poems" are made up of totally literal sentences and released directly on Instagram, accompanied with sketches drawn by herself: "fall in love with your solitude" reads the sum total of one her poems – in this way, she cultivates an immediacy, an intimacy even, with her readers.

She strips her poetry of suggestive allusive possibilities – instead, it is abrupt, direct and straightforward. In her poem *I don't need more friends*, she writes: "you ask if we can still be friends i explain how a honeybee does not dream of kissing the mouth of a flower and then settle for its leaves." The honeybee does not dream; it is a honeybee. The honeybee does not dream; and nor do I. Ergo, we can't be friends now because we aren't friends now. This is precisely the thing I'm feeling, Kaur seems to say, and nothing more.

The uncharitable conclusion to draw about the vogue for relatability is that it is nothing more than a function of millennial self-obsession and shortened attention spans, and that old-fashioned poetry and literature have become mere

Fear and Folly in South Korea

Parasite is the most commercially successful Palme d'Or winner ever

by JENNY McCARTNEY

In *Parasite* – Bong Joon-ho's blackly comic Korean satire on the intersecting lives of rich and poor – the nature of modern poverty announces itself with the words: "We're screwed – no more free wi-fi!" Frustratingly, the impoverished, energetic Kim family have been locked out of their neighbours' account with a password. The only way they can secure another stray connection is by crouching beside their grubby toilet while holding the phone up at an awkward angle.

Uncomfortable positions are clearly nothing new for the Kims, a family of four at the wrong end of a string of failed business ventures: a bust chicken shop, a clapped-out cake shop. The wi-fi matters so much because WhatsApp is the conduit to the precarious jobs that keep the family afloat, such as Mrs Kim's intermittent gig constructing pizza boxes, badly. In the "semi-basement" in which they live, with ground-level at eye-level, they are vulnerable to all forms of incursion: the "stink-bugs", the smoke from the street fumigation man who comes to spray the stink-bugs, the town drunk who regularly urinates outside their window. There is no refuge from the rest of the world.

But the Kims don't give up: atop their fast-fraying safety-net, they are constantly on the alert for opportunity – and one unexpectedly arrives for the son of the family, Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik) with a job as English tutor for the naïve daughter of a rich family, the Parks. Before



long, Ki-woo finds ways to shoehorn the entire family into the Parks' employ, after a few ruthless tricks to see off existing members of staff. Dad, Kim ki-taek (Song Kang-ho) becomes the chauffeur; Mum, Chung-sook (Jang Hyae-jin), the housekeeper; and Ki-woo's sister Ki-eong (Park So-dam) the "art therapist" to the Parks' bored and restless little boy.

The Kims don't ask for our pity: they're not victims but survivors, and we quickly come to understand that, in their world, scruples are just another luxury item. What unfolds thereafter combines elements of thriller and farce with a razor-sharp dissection of the layered dynamics between employer and employee, rich and poor.

In the Parks, the director skewers all the reflexes and follies of the wealthy: the respectful credulousness in the face of over-charging "experts", the unshakeable belief in the troubled genius of their own children, the helpless reliance on "staff" and the visceral revulsion at disease or poverty. The Kims pick up on all these things quickly and instinctively, and between them they start to play the rich folks like a violin.

Park So-dam's performance as the Kim daughter is a particular joy, masquerading as an "art therapist" while imperiously citing pseudo-psychology to justify "teaching" without parental scrutiny. So too is that of Song Kang-ho, a compellingly watchable star of Korean cinema, as the Kim patriarch, silkily hooking the Parks into hiring his wife with a yarn about a made-up "membership service" which supplies head-hunted "help" to a hand-picked elite clientele. There are shades of the Bernie Madoff investment scam, in which well-off clients were reassured by believing it was a towering privilege just to be admitted.

Parasite does for basements what Jane Eyre did for attics.

The Parks are being duped, but – as the film careers on – our sympathy for them dwindles rather than increases: their politeness veneers a kind of quietly steely selfishness. Although the immaculately groomed Mrs Park (Cho Yeo-jeong) is gently spoken, she moves in a bubble of anxious entitlement, and Mr Park (Lee Sun-kyun) is perpetually alert to the danger of an employee "crossing the line" into over-familiarity. He talks often, and queasily, of his chauffeur's smell, the aroma of a poor neighbourhood which becomes an olfactory offence in a rich man's house.

Bong Joon-ho proves a master of tension: the threat of the Kims' unmasking laces the action, but also the uneasy sense of a much greater social collision on its way. *Parasite* does for basements what Jane Eyre did for attics: both contain humiliated, highly combustible forces that cannot be suppressed indefinitely. The cinematographer Hong Kyung-pyo elegantly turns dwellings into metaphors, as the Kims' dimly-lit semi-basement – cramped, crowded and hung with drying socks – plays home to the constant struggle that society pushes out of sight. In contrast, the Parks' house – spacious, slick, flooded with light – has orderly good taste on permanent parade, but also contains its menacing secrets.

Parasite is tightly locally observed yet universally applicable. It could be set in many different societies and eras, and quite possibly will be, but any re-make will find it hard to live up to this glinting South Korean fusion of wit, pace, visual style and deep disturbance. Its biting satire leaves room for no more than a trace of pathos, but you don't really miss it: this film has a chilly little heart, but an unforgettably perceptive eye. And its title leaves one asking, just as it subtly intends – which family are truly the parasites?

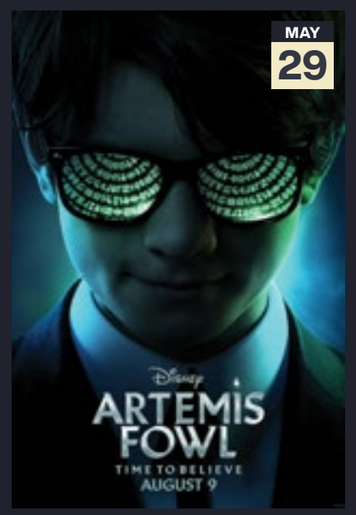



2020 Films

The Personal History of David Copperfield

Film 4 and FilmNation Entertainment, Directed by Armando Iannucci

"Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show." The opening lines of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* have been cherished by readers for generations. Now, director Armando Iannucci (*The Death of Stalin*) rises to the challenge of translating this classic for a contemporary audience. It looks like it will be charming, humorous, and deftly acted with Dev Patel in the lead role alongside Tilda Swinton as Betsey Trotwood, Peter Capaldi as Mr. Micawber, and Ben Whishaw as Uriah Heap.



Artemis Fowl

Marzano Films, Tribeca Productions, Walt Disney Pictures, Directed by Kenneth Branagh

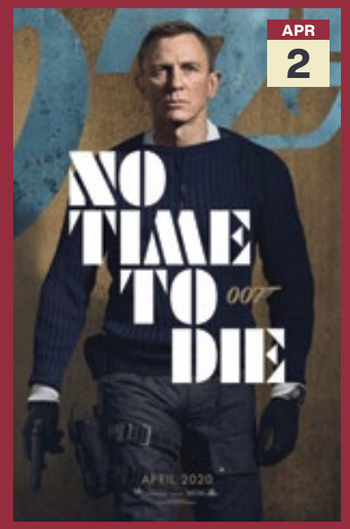
Renowned actor and director, Kenneth Branagh, adapts this popular children's book by Eoin Colfer. Artemis Fowl is a young Irish criminal mastermind who finds himself engaged in a battle of wits with a powerful, hidden race of fairies who may be behind his father's disappearance. The film will star Judi Dench and should offer entertainment for both adults and children - a fun fantasy with larger themes.

The King's Man

20th Century Fox Film Corporation, Directed by Matthew Vaughn

The King's Man acts as a prequel to the *Kingsman* film series which is about an elite group of gentlemen spies securing the safety of good old Blighty and the world. Set in the First World War, the tongue in cheek humour and stylised action is preserved as is the usual criminal conspiracy that must be uncovered and thwarted. Rhys Ifans takes the role of Rasputin, the mystic who became master manipulator at the court of Tsar Nicholas II. Other well-known thespians - including Charles Dance, Ralph Fiennes, and Gemma Arterton - complete the ensemble cast.

TheEuropeanJournal.online



No Time To Die

Pinewood Studios, Directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga

Bond is back once again, almost five years after the last release in the series, *Spectre,* came to the silver screen. In what is being billed as Daniel Craig's last outing as Bond it's bound to go off with a bang. Director Cary Joji Fukunaga takes over from Sam Mendes, who was responsible for *Skyfall* and *Spectre*. Expect to see more of a Bond who is weary and scarred by experience called upon to do his duty one final time.

1917

Amblin Partners and New Republic Pictures, Directed by Sam Mendes

Journey's End meets *Saving Private Ryan* in this war flick from director Sam Mendes (*Skyfall, Spectre, American Beauty*) starring Colin Firth and Benedict Cumberbatch. During a fateful year of the First World War, two young private soldiers are sent on a seemingly impossible mission. They must cross no man's land and venture through enemy territory to deliver a message that will prevent 1,600 men from walking into a deadly trap. Scenes of visceral trench warfare combined with high octane action...

Mr Jones

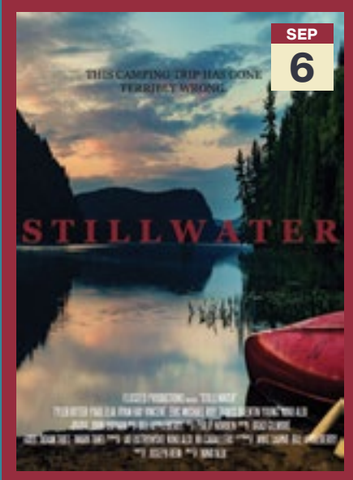
Film Produkcja, Crab Apple Films, Film.ua, Directed by Agnieszka Holland

Mr Jones tells the remarkable true story of the Welsh journalist, Gareth Jones, who travelled to the Soviet Union in 1933 to interview Joseph Stalin. While he was there, he came face to face with the famine created in the Soviet Union during the pursuit of the dictator's Five Year Plan. This promises to be a well-acted and authentic production that details a neglected part of recent history. George Orwell, played by Joseph Mawle, has a walk on part.

Tenet

Syncopy, Warner Brothers, Directed by Christopher Nolan

Christopher Nolan's latest project is a mysterious one – the plot is currently unknown, but the film is described as an action epic revolving around espionage, time travel, and evolution. That's quite the combination, but if anyone can pull it off, it will be the creator of *Inception*, *Interstellar*, and *Dunkirk*. Imagine a thriller with a philosophical edge, and a playful approach to the concept of time with John David Washington and Robert Pattinson in starring roles.



Stillwater

Amblin Partners, Directed by Tom McCarthy

Matt Damon stars as a father who travels from Oklahoma to France to help his daughter who has been arrested for a murder. Damon has had a relatively quiet few years on the acting front - could this bring Oscar glory for the Hollywood veteran?

Death on the Nile

The Estate of Agatha Christie, Twentieth Century Fox Films, Directed by Kenneth Branagh

Following the successful re-make of the Agatha Christie classic *Death on the Orient Express* in 2018, Kenneth Branagh will be reprising his role as famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, for this outing to Egypt. Michael Green, who is best known for writing the 2049 sequel to *Blade Runner* - adapts giving a fresh twist to an old sleuth.

Why are there so few conservative titles in bookshops?

Reading the Right books

by SAM LEITH

"Reality," Stephen Colbert famously pronounced, "has a well-known liberal bias." That apothegm Colbert being a liberal spoof of a Republican blowhard comes wrapped in layers of irony. But the question of how reality is represented in books - fictional and nonfictional is a subject where the irony falls away. Is the publishing industry biased against conservatives?

Many seem to think so. Not long ago the novelist and critic Alice O'Keeffe wrote about the difficulty she'd found, as literary programmer for the 2018 Brighton Festival, in trying 'to reach out beyond the cosy pro-Remain bubble.' She quoted one publisher saying that many bookshops would refuse to stock 'anything to the right of Tony Blair', and speculated that some sort of publishing bias had formed in reaction to the perceived right-wing bias in print media. Even if that's right, it's an odd way to serve a public that, at least in shorthand, is spilt 52-48 per cent: a newspaper worldview that all but ignores the 48 per cent, and a bookshop culture that all but ignores the 52.

Not long ago I took a call from a radio producer who was trying to put together some talks by writers about the political moment, and wanted to pick my brains. Could I think of any novelists who didn't take what seems to be the standard anti-Brexit, anti-Trump sort of position? I confess, in our subsequent conversation I struggled. We agreed that second-guessing or taking for granted anything Lionel Shriver thinks is a fool's errand, so I suggested she consult Lionel. We agreed that Freddie Forsyth was a pretty safe bet for a Brexiteer. But after that it was a bit of a shot in the dark.

There does, in other words, seem to be a prevalent liberal consensus of some sort in the world of fiction. Think: Jonathan Coe, Ali Smith, Olivia Laing, Howard Jacobson, Ian McEwan et al. Why is that? You could make the case, and I suspect that those writers would, that fiction itself has an inherent liberal bias. Most versions of right-wing politics particularly those nativist strands uppermost at the moment on both sides of the Atlantic ask you to pick sides: us or them. A certain amount of what the woke call 'othering' is part of the deal.

Fiction, in all but its most unsophisticated forms, asks you to do the opposite. It's about imagining what it might be like to be somebody else. That's why so many writers Lionel Shriver eminent among them have been so fierce in defending their prerogatives from attack on another front in the form of the strictures of the identitarian left. If it's 'cultural appropriation' to imagine yourself a different sex, a different race, a different class or what have you, novelists might as well fold their tents. Writing is to use the cliché - about crossing borders rather than putting up fences. Inasmuch as they can find instinctive common cause with ideologues of the right, it will be in the metaphorical territory of free trade rather than protectionism.

But, of course, that is a serious oversimplification. And those arguments don't apply at all in the nonfiction sphere where, still, we tend to see a distinct prevalence of arguments from the left. A handful of publishers the political publisher Biteback, founded by the Tory pundit Iain Dale, among them put out books from the right, but they have tended to be swamped by critiques from the left. For every Daniel Hannan or Rod Liddle, there is a Fintan O'Toole, a Danny Dorling, an Andrew Adonis or a Kevin O'Rourke.

In Europe the picture is a little different and, as you'd expect, more various. Certainly, there doesn't seem to be a comparable liberal groupthink. In Italy, with its largest publishing house owned by Silvio Berlusconi, there's obviously less of a problem with finding a home for voices from the Right. France has a long tradition of splenetic contrarians – with Eric Zemmour and Michel Houellebecq both being huge bestsellers. Holland's publishing scene has entertained a strong strand of anxiety about the threats to native Dutch culture from Islam and immigration. And – though no European country has yet experienced anything quite as straightforwardly polarising as Brexit or Trump - there's a growing interest in books that might help explain right populism. David Goodhart has recently been published to considerable fanfare in France, and Ivan Krastev's *The Light That Failed* has sold in Germany, where mainstream publishers are still "bewildered" by the AfD.

If it's 'cultural appropriation' to imagine yourself a different sex, a different race, a different class or what have you, novelists might as well fold their tents.

The US seems to have a wider spread. No question, gossipy books about chaos in the White House (Bob Woodward, Michael Lewis, Michael Wolff, Anonymous) remain big box office; and every day now seems to bring thumping onto the literary editor's desk a fresh set of thunderings about the case for impeachment or the progress of the Russian Collusion ding dong. But Donald Trump Jr's book *Triggered* (helped, admittedly, by a tweet or two from dad and $100,000 in advance orders from the Republican National Committee) went straight into the New York Times bestsellers chart at number one; and MAGA-friendly titles by Ann Coulter, Glenn Beck, Dinesh D'Souza, Bill O'Reilly and the like continue to publish prominently and sell well.

Why, then, is the Brexit-supporting British right so apparently ill-served by rigorous book-length arguments? There is a vested interest at work in that, by most accounts, any form of Brexit will hurt the publishing industry as businesses and the harder we Brexit the more it will hurt. So publishers may not be so receptive to the arguments in the first place. And if most publishers are, sociologically, metropolitan liberals of a Remainy cast of mind (my social experience, if nothing more scientific, suggests they are), they may tend not to believe those arguments exist. Like the man said: reality has a well-known liberal bias.

2020 Books

by JOSEPH RACHMAN

AUG 11

The Third Walpurgis Night
by Karl Kraus

Yale University Press

Karl Kraus' *The Third Walpurgis Night* will appear in English translation for the first time this year. The Austrian satirist wrote this book in 1933 in response to the Nazi takeover of Germany but it was not published until 1952 for fear it would spark anti-Jewish reprisals. In it, Kraus not only denounced violence against Jews but held those who remained silent about it complicit while exploring how the Nazis distorted language both in how they used it themselves and the struggle to describe them. In this age, where anti-Semitism seems on the rise once again, this translation could not be more timely.

JUL 14

I Live in the Slums
by Can Xue

Yale University Press

The upcoming translation of Can Xue's compilation of short stories, *I Live in the Slums,* promises to be another dizzying treat. One of the short stories already published by the forthcoming book's translators, *Story of the Slums*, is written from the perspective of a mouse giving a taste of what's to come. Expect it to be rich, heady and confusing.

JAN 21

A Long Petal of the Sea
by Isabel Allende

Bloomsbury Publishing

Isabel Allende's *A Long Petal of the Sea* will also appear in translation in 2020. Having made her name with the wonderful magical realist novel, *The House of the Spirits*, this time Allende draws inspiration from the true story of the Spanish Republicans who fled their country after Franco's forces triumphed, on a boat chartered by the poet and radical left-winger Pablo Neruda who went on to win the Nobel prize. The narrative centres on two refugees, Victor and Roser, who enter a marriage of convenience to allow Roser, who is carrying the child of Victor's dead brother, to join him on the ship so as to settle safely in Chile - only to find themselves in danger again decades later when Pinochet seizes power.

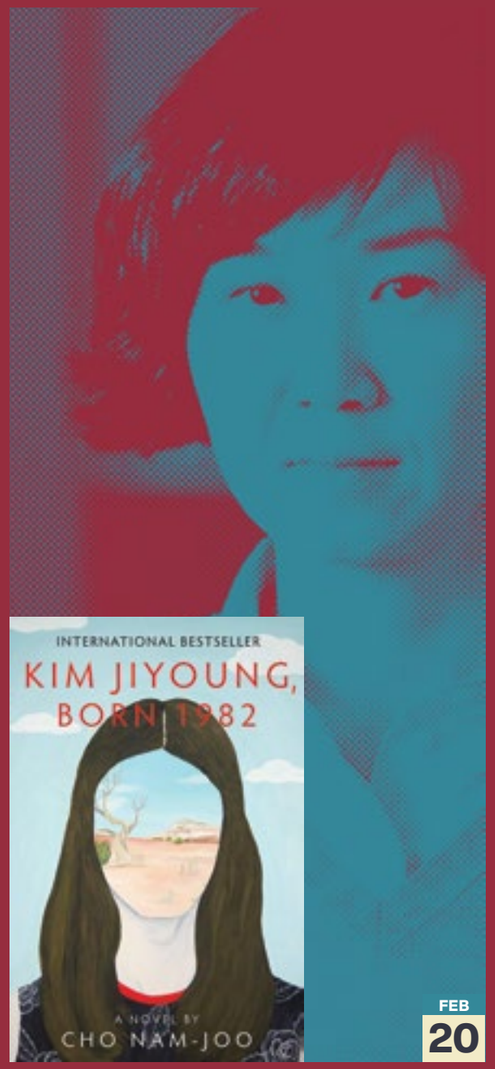
Here Allende is digging into her own experiences. Isabel Allende is the daughter of the President - Salvador Allende - who Pinochet overthrew, and she helped enemies of the Pinochet regime marked for death escape before being forced to flee herself. As such one can hope for the same rich, instinctive understanding of the material that gave *The House of the Spirits* - set in a thinly veiled version of Chile before and under Pinochet - such power and vitality.

Civilisations
by Laurent Binet

Publication: TBA

Translations of Laurent Binet's Grand Prix du Roman winner *Civilisations* should appear this year although specific dates are yet to be announced. The basic conceit is to reverse Europe's discovery of America as Atahualpa - in our world the last Incan emperor who was executed by strangulation after a show trial - comes to Europe and the continent is colonised by American civilisations. Setting this up and tracking the consequences lets Binet pastiche various literary styles and history itself. The novel runs on ironic reversals and references as we are given Binet's renderings of Icelandic sagas, Christopher Columbus' diary, and Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* in a Europe ruled by South Americans.

Binet's book speculates on history's motivating forces - provocatively portraying the instinct for empire building and colonisation as a universal human urge, a rebuttal to those who imagine these sins unique to the West. The new novel is also an interesting development on the part of Binet. His first novel *HHhH* - about the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich - was scrupulous when it came to historical accuracy. It not only recounted the assassination but carefully described Binet's own research process and when he was resorting to speculation or invention. In the context of the Holocaust and the assassin's heroism, Binet argued to do otherwise would be an insult. By contrast, his second book, *The 7th Function of Language*, - which reimagined the critic Roland Barthe's accidental death as an assassination - was joyously ahistorical and parodic. *Civilisations*' scrupulously well-researched parody seems a merging of the two styles. However, question marks linger over whether it is appropriate to turn history's victims into victimisers given the Spanish Conquistadors' ruthless genocide of native Americans and the views Binet expressed in *HHhH*. Ultimately readers will have to decide.



FEB
20

Kim Ji-young, Born 1982
by Cho Nam-joo

Scribner

Surveillance and women's experience are the key themes of the fiercely feminist book *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982* by Cho Nam-joo. The story centres on Ji-young - an ordinary South Korean woman juggling work and family whilst struggling against sexism in all its forms - from rigorously policed school uniforms and her male colleagues at work who plant cameras in the women's bathrooms (a very real social problem in South Korea). Published in 2016, it sold over a million copies, has been adapted into a movie and proved wildly controversial. In a society in which women suffer from the biggest gender pay gap of any developed country in the world, hundreds of thousands of women identified with the book's main character and message. It also caused a furious backlash from conservatives in South Korean society. As gender wars continue to hot up it will be interesting to see how the book is received in America and Europe.

MAY
5

Little Eyes
by Samanta Schweblin

Riverhead Books

The opportunities and anxieties engendered by modern technology are deftly explored in *Little Eyes* by the Argentinian author Samanta Schweblin, out in translation 5 May. Schweblin's *Mouthful of Birds*, which made the International Booker Prize long list, showcased her talent for depicting the unsettling and the downright horrifying. *Little Eyes* offers yet more. The central conceit consists of little robotic animals called "kentukis" which have spread across the world in a viral craze. Like a sinister update of Furbies these little gadgets can move about on wheels and have cameras for eyes all linked to a server. Apparently utterly inured to the notion of privacy, people take to these squeaking little pseudo-pets whilst knowing that others can voyeuristically watch them through their eyes. The concept is eerily plausible in an era when so many are perfectly content to publish and share so many details of their lives online. It also provides a neat device for Schweblin to dive into different stories based on those observed by the kentukis. In doing so she explores both how our interconnected digital world enables a wonderful opportunity for human connection whilst also creating the conditions for voyeurism, parasocial relationships - and horror. In an age in which we have - in an eerie Foucauldian twist - replaced government surveillance with surveilling ourselves this is a poignant book.

JUN
9

The Lying Life of Adults
by Elena Ferrante

Europa Editions

Translations of *The Lying Life of Adults* by Elena Ferrante will undoubtedly be Europe's biggest literary event in 2020. When it was released in Italy in November last year fans held vigils, queued through the night, and attended mass reading sessions. Similar scenes everywhere else seem likely as one of the foremost literary figures of our age has managed to accrue the sort of mass market appeal usually reserved for *Harry Potter* or *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Those who fell in love with the *My Brilliant Friend* quadrilogy should enjoy this new book - critical consensus seems to be that the novel is excellent even if it doesn't quite match the literary achievement of the series that catapulted Ferrante to stardom.

Intriguingly, this book may offer an intimate glimpse into the psyche of the famously private author, whose real identity was revealed in 2016 by an investigative journalist. The novel opens with the protagonist, Giovanna, overhearing her father commenting on how ugly she is. The devastating insult that propels the protagonist into adolescent rebellion is also a reference to *Madame Bovary* in which Flaubert's heroine wonders about the ugliness of her own child. In an essay Ferrante revealed this was one of the most "unbearable" sentences she had ever read and it left her plagued by the worry her own mother thought the same of her. Still, non-Italian speaking fans have a long wait ahead of them with the first translation into English coming out 9 June.

MAR
5

The Mirror and the Light
by Hilary Mantel

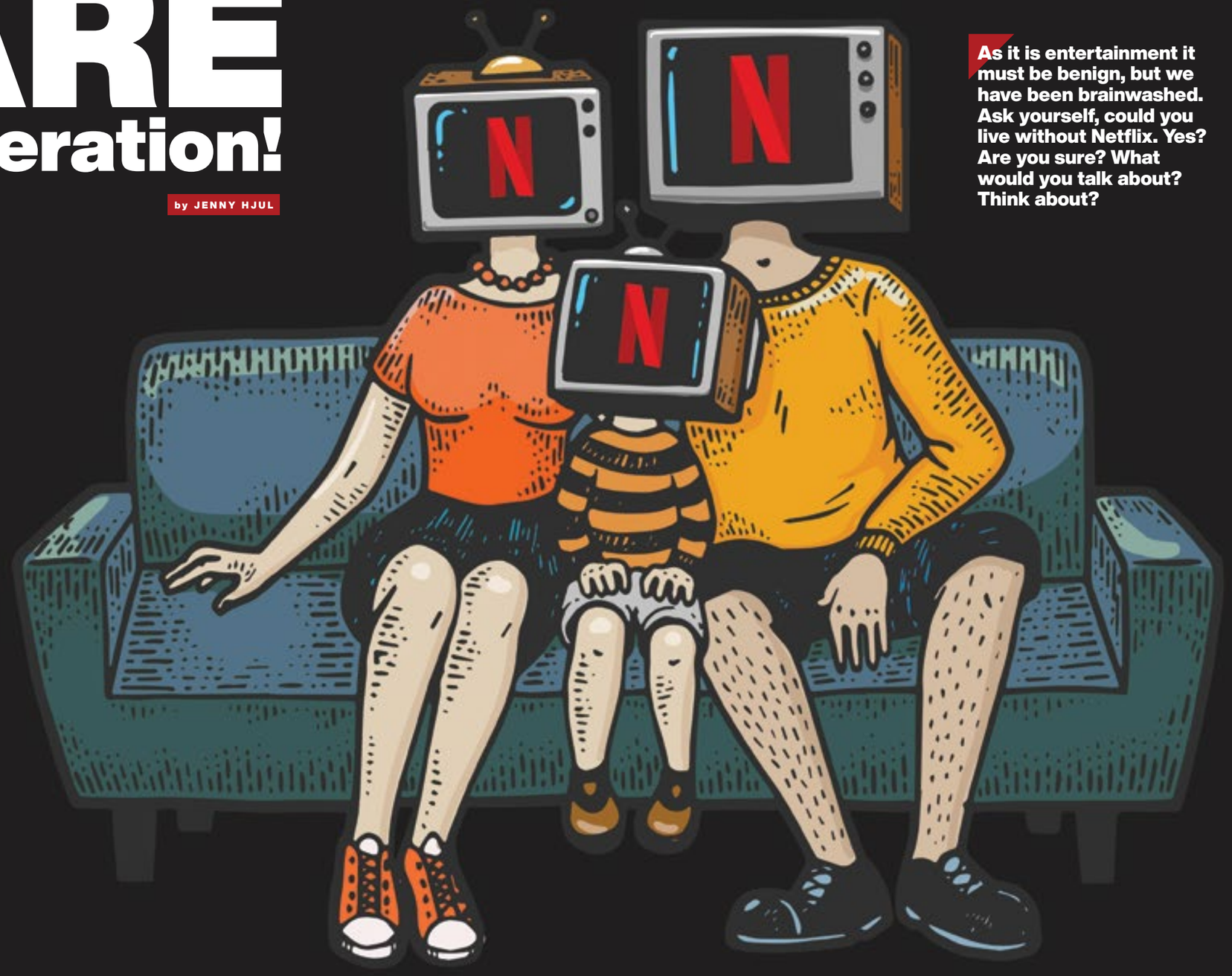
Fourth Estate

The last book in Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light*, promises to make a major mark when released. Given the worldwide fame of the six wives of Henry VIII and the endings of the previous two books, everyone knows how this new instalment will end, with the execution of the protagonist Thomas Cromwell. But this doesn't matter. Mantel's genius lies in not just portraying dramatic events but her ability to draw us into a world that is deeply alien to our own yet also recognisable. Human emotions - ambition, greed, fear, faith - are eternal and are used, here, to make the peculiar logics of the period accessible, rendering one of the most iconic periods of British history as a human drama. Mantel's rendering of Cromwell's reaction to finding himself subject to the same fate he had engineered for others will doubtless compel. It will also be interesting to see if the new novel will win the Booker Prize, which would put Mantel in the unique position of having won the prize three times, once for each book in this trilogy.

BEWARE the Netflix Generation!

Is binge-watching now a substitute for living?

by JENNY HJUL



As it is entertainment it must be benign, but we have been brainwashed. Ask yourself, could you live without Netflix. Yes? Are you sure? What would you talk about? Think about?

When I switched on Netflix to watch the third series of *The Crown* it popped up immediately, as if someone knew that's what I wanted.

This was days after the new show was released, so perhaps Netflix analytics calculated that most viewers (or users as they call us) would be searching for its highest profile programme.

But as the last series I watched on Netflix was *The Crown* (series two), back in December 2017, I suspect the clever streaming service was speaking to me personally. (This will only sound creepy to those of my age, who can remember the Test Card.)

Of course, Netflix won't know me as well as its regulars because it doesn't have much to go on; apart from *The Crown*, I've watched the odd film, but it would be hard to build up a profile of my preferences on that basis.

Still, even with so little data at its disposal Netflix thinks it gets me. When I scrolled down to see what it had lined up: *Call the Midwife* was top of the list, a programme I've never watched (or intend to watch).

With apologies to all *Midwife* fans, I was slightly affronted by Netflix's assumption about my TV tastes. What if someone else logged into my Netflix account (friends watching my television, for example)? Would they, too, assume I was a *Call the Midwife* kind of person based on Netflix's algorithms?

Netflix is about 20 years old so there are people, of my daughters' generation, who haven't lived without it. To them, the concept of television as a one-way medium is novel.

We might have talked to the set, even shook our fists at it, but it wasn't listening. Ratings were (still are) calculated on samples, so the BBC had an idea that, say, *Dad's Army* was a hit and ITV realised there was no audience for the relaunch of *Crossroads*.

Netflix is so much more sophisticated, able to make decisions on our behalf because its systems can track not just what we watch but when, how often we pause, fast forward and stop watching, and make recommendations accordingly.

With such comprehensive data about its users, Netflix commissions programmes that are massively popular – among its users.

This might produce corkers – *The Crown* for instance (though series three doesn't compare to one and two) – but it also results in lowest common denominator television.

The BBC guestimates that viewers want more of *Strictly Come Dancing* and less of the *Proms*, but Netflix knows what its customers are watching.

Its success is measured by number of users not quality of content, though it might argue there is a correlation.

There is no shame in admitting to the addiction. Netflix is normal - 158 million subscribers can't be wrong.

I wouldn't, but the race to bring more Netflix to more people is unstoppable and the battle is almost lost for high brow programming, if TV networks follow its lead, which they tend to do.

Netflix isn't just killing off the niche market, it is also homogenising human behaviour around customised content. Take the news. All households with televisions would once have absorbed some news in their daily viewing diet.

Today the percentage of the population tuning into broadcast news is dropping and the demographic is ageing fast. The rest are certainly not getting their current affairs from newspapers; likely, they're not getting the news at all, they're glued to 10-hour fixes of TV drama instead.

Reed Hastings, founder and CEO of Netflix, told a New York Times sponsored Dealbook conference in 2015 that he wasn't interested in doing an evening news show because "you don't want to invest in things that are dying."

Who needs to find out what's going on in the real world when the new instalment of *Line of Duty* is a click away. People's understanding of Netflix plot developments is in direct proportion to their ignorance about geopolitics.

Hastings also mocked the old habit of watching television at night after work, as if structured indulgence was bad.

He didn't introduce daytime TV but the binge culture of Netflix encourages viewing at all hours, viewing as a substitute for doing.

There are young adults in my office whose weekends revolve around Netflix, their weekday evenings too. As the new going out, it is a comfy slippers antidote to living, both inexpensive and risk free.

And there is no shame in admitting to the addiction. Netflix is normal, its 158 million (at the last count) subscribers can't be wrong.

Entertainment spending will continue to expand – with competitors like Amazon Prime getting in on the act – because there is no such thing as too much TV.

As it is entertainment it must be benign, but we have been brainwashed. Ask yourself, could you live without Netflix. Yes? Are you sure? What would you talk about? Think about?

You might not have seen it coming, but it has taken over your life. It will take over the world, in the next season, out soon.

Pop goes the AGITPROP

If you want to understand politics today, ask a playwright...

by TOM TEODORCZUK

Last October, on the same afternoon Boris Johnson's hopes of taking Britain out of the European Union were being derailed by the Letwin amendment in Parliament, a group of twenty-something actors were to be found smoking outside the stage door of the Rose Theatre in Kingston.

The young thespians were part of the cast for the revival of Laura Wade's 2010 play *Posh* which originated at the Royal Court before transferring to the West End. On the surface Wade's drama, depicting the outrageous antics in an elite student drinking den called The Riot Club - loosely based on Oxford University's Bullingdon Club -had nothing to do with Brexit.

Yet Wade powerfully uses the Riot Club trashing a gastropub as a metaphor for what elite posh boys are capable of and it seemed somehow apt to watch the play while the messy consequences of former Bullingdon Club member David Cameron's momentous decision to call a referendum over Britain's EU membership were being painfully played out in Westminster - with Remainers and Leavers all accusing each other of sabotage.

With her play serving as a damning indictment of the born-to-rule class, Wade is hardly something out of Conservative Central Office but she shies away from publicly weighing in on politics no matter how pertinent her plays prove to the political situation. And she is far from the only theatre writer of her generation to have penned stage drama that has wound up foreshadowing the news agenda...

Mike Bartlett's 2014 play *King Charles III* originated at the Almeida Theatre before transferring to the West End and Broadway. The play imagines what happens after the death of Queen Elizabeth II with Bartlett devising a plot-line in which King Charles III and his sons disagree over a bill proposing to restrict freedom of the press which the new monarch steadfastly opposes.

This plot twist struck some reviewers as implausible. Yet with Meghan, Duchess of Sussex currently suing the *Mail on Sunday* over stories published in the run-up to her wedding with Prince Harry, such a scenario now hardly seems outlandish.

Bartlett recently told the *Financial Times* that while he wants his work to chime with the times, he hates the idea of preaching to the converted. "The value of art is not to come out campaigning for a very specific politics," he said, adding while he draws inspiration from contemporary subjects, he has no desire for a "liberal theatre-going audience to celebrate the views we already hold".

James Graham, often described as the hottest political playwright, has written dramas about Edward Heath (*Tory Boyz*), Rupert Murdoch (*Ink*) and most notoriously his Brexit film for Channel 4. Matthew Byam Shaw, a theatre producer who also produces *The Crown* on Netflix, describes Graham as "more of a social historian than a playwright."

"I'm happy to go and see work where the author's voice yells at you and tells you what to think- it's just never going to be the thing I want to write myself," Graham told me earlier this year. "People think that's controversial but I would argue the most controversial thing you could do as a political playwright at the moment is seek unity and compassion rather than to provoke or galvanise about a single point of view."

This sentiment is echoed across the Atlantic. New York's ingrained liberal theatre bias is perhaps best epitomised by the cast of musical phenomenon Hamilton making a special Broadway political address to an audience that included vice president-elect Mike Pence in November 2018.

Yet for all its wokeness and leftism, American theatre has recently produced notable plays which have challenged PC thinking on education (Joshua Harmon's *Admissions*) and race (Bruce Graham's *White Guy on a Bus*).

Another recent American example was Eleanor Burgess's 2018 play *The Niceties* about a clash between an African-American student and her white professor over her college paper about slavery. In giving both sides of the academic divide its due (speaking of her Eastern European roots, the professor says, "Poland in the 1770s was being partitioned... it was being wiped off the map, and I read books about Catherine the Great, and I do not start weeping"), the play was too even-handed for some critics in New York and London.

Pop has gone the agitprop. It's all a far cry from the likes of late 20th century dramatic heavyweights Harold Pinter and David Hare who wore their art on their sleeve and considered it their duty to publicly loathe Margaret Thatcher.

"The new generation of playwrights are a throwback in that they want to scrutinise the issues of the day without going overboard on messaging," says one leading West End producer speaking on condition of anonymity. "It's partially driven by commercial realities - *Enron* and *Serious Money* flopped on Broadway and writers are encouraged by producers to write for audiences, not their left-wing mates. It's also driven by the fact that we live in such a binary political age, where centrism is off limits. So now you go to the theatre to get away from socialism."

In the 1990s films such as *Trainspotting*, *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* connected with the zeitgeist much more than anything on stage. Now in a Marvel-dominated movie landscape, it's the other way round and stage, not screen, is with the headlines.

Take the film version of Laura Wade's *Posh*, renamed *The Riot Club,* which flopped in 2014. Fittingly, since the play featured a pub getting vandalised, Wade- who wrote the film's script- ended up trashing her own play on celluloid. At least, true to form, she didn't publicly hold David Cameron responsible for *The Riot Club*'s underwhelming reception.

In the 1990s films such as *Trainspotting*, *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* connected with the zeitgeist much more than anything on stage. Now in a Marvel-dominated movie landscape, it's the other way round and stage, not screen, is with the headlines.

The new generation of playwrights are a throwback in that they want to scrutinise the issues of the day without going overboard on messaging.

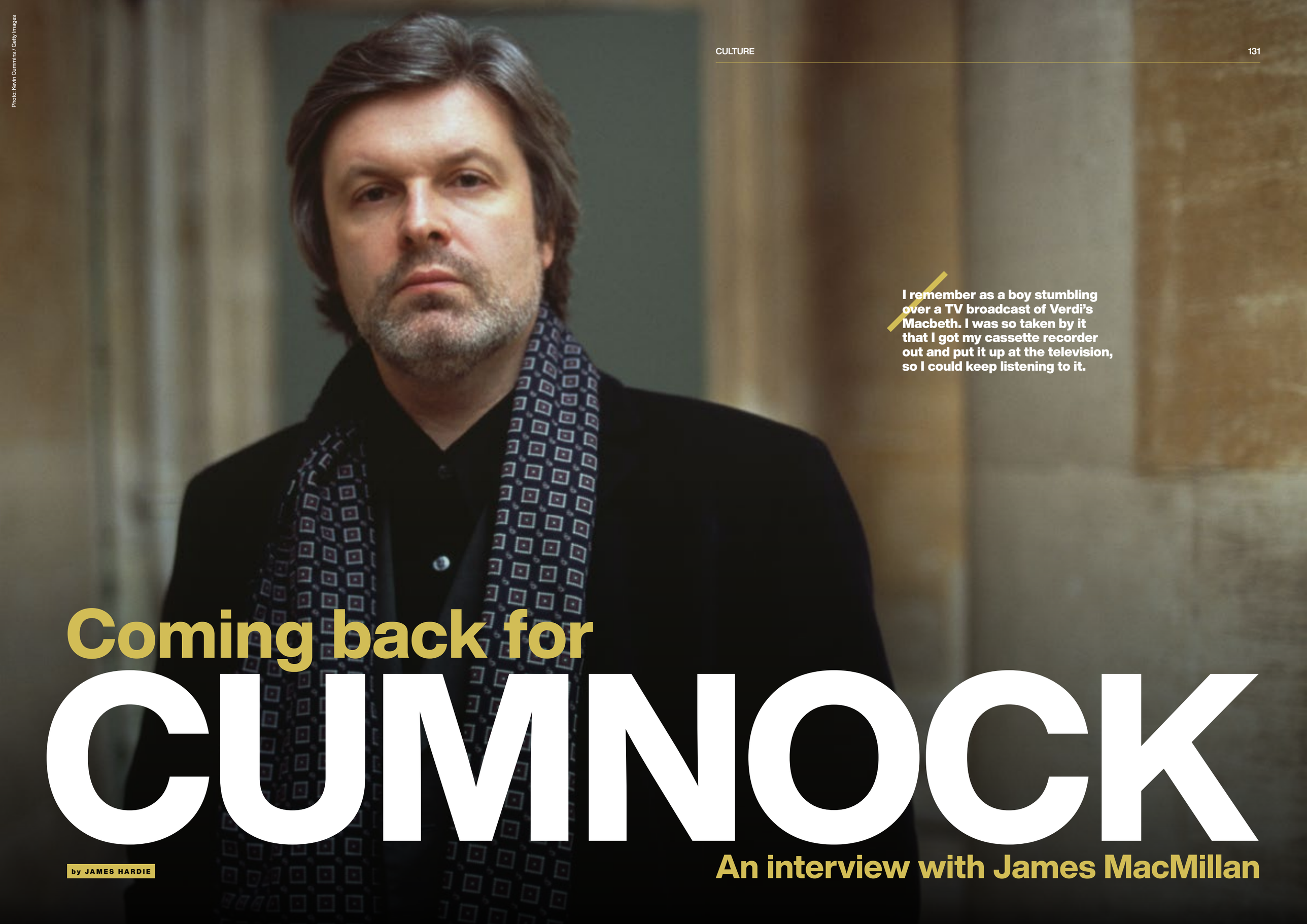


Photo: Kevin Cummins / Getty Images

I remember as a boy stumbling over a TV broadcast of Verdi's Macbeth. I was so taken by it that I got my cassette recorder out and put it up at the television, so I could keep listening to it.

Coming back for

CUMNOCK

An interview with James MacMillan

by JAMES HARDIE

As a child, I grew up singing a lot of music written by Sir James MacMillan. It's full of sparkle and vigour, distinctive harmonic turns, and is a complete joy to perform. So it surprised me a little on meeting MacMillan, first thing in the morning in the lobby of his London hotel, quite how formal, almost stilted, he was.

Last year MacMillan's 60th birthday was marked by a celebratory series at St John's Smith Square in London, performances including a world première at Edinburgh International Festival, two new books (the first study of his music by Phillip Cooke, and a collection of writings by MacMillan himself), two New York premières, and all this alongside a whole host of conducting engagements, and the release of countless recordings of his music. After I meet MacMillan, he'll be on his way to collect an Honorary Award from Trinity College London.

It's a pretty dizzying list of activity that leaves me wondering how on earth they'll be able to honour MacMillan for his 70th birthday, to which he chuckles, "it's been quite exhausting but very enjoyable. The pinnacle in many ways was the Edinburgh Festival focus, it was wonderful seeing a big public engaged in the music, especially for the première of the Fifth Symphony." Sub-titled "Le Grand Inconnu" it is a 50 minute work for orchestra, chamber choir, and chorus, that grapples with that most intangible of subjects, the Holy Spirit, explored through the three elements - wind, water, and fire - and while not a liturgical work, it is an investigation into the spiritual, which MacMillan feels there is more appetite for than might be supposed: "In this age of unbelief, there is nevertheless this very wide and quite serious engagement by people in matters of spirituality; and sometimes it's vague and it can be mocked for being designer spirituality. It is there and people talk about it a lot, and certainly in the world of music, you find a lot of people talking about music being a spiritual experience." The first performance was met with critical acclaim, and there was a real feeling that this was an important moment, a piece of work that had really lived up to its hype.

In this age of unbelief, there is nevertheless this very wide and quite serious engagement by people in matters of spirituality; and sometimes it's vague and it can be mocked for being designer spirituality. It is there and people talk about it a lot, and certainly in the world of music, you find a lot of people talking about music being a spiritual experience.

Born in 1959 in Kilwinning, North Ayrshire, James Loy MacMillan was born to Ellen (a teacher) and James (a carpenter). The family settled in nearby Cumnock, East Ayrshire, where MacMillan attended the local Roman Catholic school. His first musical instrument was a plastic recorder, and his grandfather, a coal miner, took him along to neighbouring Dalmellington to listen in on brass band rehearsals. It set him on a path of complete absorption: "I remember as a boy stumbling over a TV broadcast of Verdi's *Macbeth*. I was so taken by it that I got my cassette recorder out and put it up at the television, so I could keep listening to it."

Writing music quickly became MacMillan's "obsession", and after secondary school at Cumnock Academy (where he met his future wife, Lynne), he attended Edinburgh University to study music, where he had his first brushes with modernism in the form of Stravinsky and Messiaen. But it wasn't just music that he soaked up; his political outlook too was porous. Growing up in a Labour heartland (Keir Hardie is buried in Cumnock), he horrified his grandfather by joining the Young Communist League aged fifteen, which MacMillan has described as "the worst thing I have ever done in my life."

On leaving Edinburgh University, MacMillan pursued a doctorate at Durham and lectured in Manchester, before settling in Glasgow in 1988. His breakthrough came in 1990, when his work *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* was broadcast on television from the BBC Proms. "The day after it was televised, I went to a Celtic [versus] Aberdeen [football] game, and at half-time I was tapped on the shoulder by another fan who asked 'was that your première on the television last night?' That was when I realised something had changed."

Since then he's developed into one of the world's greatest and most prolific composers, having written music for Queen Elizabeth and Pope Benedict XVI. He is the first composer to have had a concert live-streamed from the Sistine Chapel. MacMillan's most-performed work, his percussion concerto Veni, Veni, Emmanuel (1992), has been performed almost 500 times.

In recent years, MacMillan has turned his focus back home to Cumnock, where his mother-in-law still lives. The town was decimated when its mines were shut in 1984 after a period of decline in output. MacMillan says, without wishing to denigrate the place, that it remains "very sad... there's a beaten, defeated feel about the area sometimes." In 2013 neighbouring village New Cumnock was named Scotland's "most dismal town" by the Scottish Architecture and Design magazine, Urban Realm.

In 2014, MacMillan founded his music festival, The Cumnock Tryst. "A lot of people said 'why Cumnock?' They couldn't imagine why." But there was no question: "I'm from there, and I'm a musician because of those early experiences working with teachers, friends, relatives, doing music with them, so I remember it as being a very musical place."

Only six years old, The Cumnock Tryst was awarded the Festivals Prize at 2019's Royal Philharmonic Society Awards, perhaps the most prestigious awards for classical music in the UK. Given special mention by the judges was MacMillan's own composition *All the Hills and Vales Along*, which was commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, and given its world première in Cumnock, by the combined forces of resident ensembles Edinburgh Quartet and Cumnock Festival Chorus, alongside Ian Bostridge, and Dalmellington Band. A string quartet and amateur chorus, with one of the world's finest and most-famed tenors, and one of Scotland's oldest and most decorated colliery bands? Well, why not?

These rather unlikely collaborations are what make The Cumnock Tryst so distinct. The intermingling of professional and amateur; the mix of community music-making and concert performance; high art and working-

People are either nervous or dismissive of tradition because they think it's reactionary. I certainly don't take that position.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Photo: Simone Padovani/Awakening / Getty Images

class rituals. But Beethoven and brass bands come together in Cumnock with seriousness and enthusiasm, and without a shred of tokenism: "I've seen tokenism and it's obvious, and people taking part know. With *All the Hills and Vales Along*, it was as important a piece to me as anything else I've done, and the participants all knew that."

The celebration of local brass brands, perhaps the only remaining evidence of East Ayrshire's mining days, is particularly interesting at a classical music festival. The musical ability of these miner-musicians is nothing to be sniffed at but the rituals and way of life that these bands represent, as they perform in their braided jackets and bow ties, feels like a throwback to a bygone era. It's a celebration of tradition that many would swerve, but not MacMillan.

"People are either nervous or dismissive of tradition because they think it's reactionary. I certainly don't take that position", says MacMillan. "The analogy I like to use is that of a river. A river that has its source in the past, but flows forward to the future, maybe into a huge estuary, but runs past you as you stand on the bank of the river, and that river irrigates human experience at any given point in history. And that is a life-giving force, that is a forward-moving thing. It's not a reactionary thing to value tradition, in fact to put a dam into that river causes its desiccation, and that's what many on the kind of modernist, quasi-Marxist side of the arts and other things have tried to do. A living tradition is to be celebrated."

MacMillan abandoned his communist tendencies around the time of the Falklands War, prompted by hard Left extremism, and he's since swung towards the right, becoming a vehement critic of nationalism in all its forms, with special antipathy reserved for the Scottish National Party (as a trawl through his once explosive Twitter feed confirms). While he's accepted the establishment plaudits that have accompanied his success (he's both a Knight and a CBE), he's never been one to shy away from criticism, and clearly feels a sense urgency when it comes to Scotland's poor education provision, citing the recently released PISA results which saw the country record its worst ever results in maths and science. "The so-called Curriculum for Excellence is not a knowledge-based curriculum anymore. It's patchy, based on experience and making them [pupils] feel good. You can see knowledge seeping out of the curriculum."

That's surely the case: a recent *Mail on Sunday* headline decried that "Three quarters of young Britons have never heard of Mozart." But what is the impact of this on music? Is knowledge of a dead white male relevant to its success? Not necessarily, according to MacMillan: "Okay, people don't know who Mozart is, but there are new ways of doing it. Going into a class of teenagers in East Ayrshire and getting them to write their own music from scratch is an amazing way of teaching them the principals of music, and they can find their way back to Mozart."

Throughout our conversation, MacMillan is utterly polite, and answers my occasionally rambling questions with grace and enthusiasm, but I can sense a little heat underneath these sentiments. MacMillan, the firebrand of yore who 20 years ago launched a controversial attack on anti-Catholic sentiment in Scotland at the Edinburgh International Festival, has cooled down a little it seems, but he still has the appetite to take aim at those who criticise the local music-making that defines places like Cumnock.

"If you read some of the people who write about music, who are some of the worst snobs, they're all from down here [London]. We work very hard to engage people and then they write this sneering, condescending rubbish. I'll always remember in my early days–they'll remain nameless–sneering comments made about Cumnock, as if no good can come of a place like this. 'He's from Cumnock, ha-ha-ha...' And it's still the same. I see some of these people on social media, I've had to block a few actually. If people are seeing this, this kind of sneering drivel week after week, they'll think it's just as bad as ever."

If you read some of the people who write about music, who are some of the worst snobs, they're all from down here [London]. We work very hard to engage people and then they write this sneering, condescending rubbish. I'll always remember in my early days–they'll remain nameless–sneering comments made about Cumnock, as if no good can come of a place like this. 'He's from Cumnock, ha-ha-ha...' And it's still the same.

Evidence would prove them wrong. The festival increasingly attracts audiences from across the West Coast of Scotland, as well as a big contingent of supporters from America (who also, MacMillan tells me, support with their wallets). Elsewhere in the region, efforts to spark regeneration are yielding positive results. Dumfries House, a 1750s Palladian House previously inhabited by the Bute Family, but purchased back in 2007 by a consortium led by Prince Charles, is now the second-biggest employer in the region.

Perhaps most excitingly, a new school is being built in Cumnock, which will include a 500-seater auditorium. The council took advice from MacMillan on the building materials, and despite a small budget, was persuaded to take advice from an acoustical designer. MacMillan is writing a work for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the ensemble that gave him his first professional work, to celebrate its opening next year.

So what does 2020 hold for James MacMillan? The first priority will be catching up on his compositions. While he was busy globe-trotting last year, it was still what MacMillan thought about "first thing in the morning, last thing at night, sometimes during the night." The current cause of his wakeful moments is a piece for baritone and orchestra, but he's also near completion of his Christmas Oratorio, which will get its first performance next year in London, before going on to Melbourne, Amsterdam, and New York in 2021.

"I've been a bit of a sponge all my life, just absorbing everything. I sang Palestrina at school, I was playing in brass bands when I was ten, went to university and started playing gamelan. But I think the absorption stage is over." That might be the case, but MacMillan, who has around 300 works to his name, is clearly now in a golden period of productivity and energy, and whilst he might now identify as a "grumpy old man" who "doesn't like too much noise", he's certainly showing no signs of slowing down.

OPERATION OPERA

From Beethoven in Manaus to Mozart in Muscat, opera festivals are taking over the world

by GERALD MALONE

Arrive at Manaus, jewel of late 19th century Brazil. Extract that Brooks Bros - wrinkle resistant tuxedo from the pack of 47 essential items on the jungle commuter website. Then, cool as Daniel Craig, stride towards the most unlikely opera house on the planet.

Welcome to *Festival Amazonas de Opera of Manaus*, (FAO), the best boondoggle of 2020. It's a mere 25 hour hop from Heathrow. The opera house was built between 1885 and 1892, during a "rubber boom" which briefly lent Manaus the distinction of being simultaneously the most remote and richest city in the world. The architecture's pure *Belle Epoque:* roof tiles from Alsace; furnishings from Paris; Carrara marble pillars from Italy; Murano glass chandeliers from Venice; steel structure from England. No expense spared.

The festival is the brainchild of Ópera Latino América (OLA) a non-profit organisation that brings together Ibero-American opera theatres, whose mission is to advance and promote lyric art in the Latin American region. Created in 2007, it is made up of institutions from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Spain, the United States, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay.

The 23rd FAO runs from April 18 to June 7. The programme is surprisingly innovative and varied: *Peter Grimes* - Benjamin Britten; *O Menino Maluquinho* - Ernani Aguiar, a 69 year old Brazilian composer; *Fidelio* - Ludwig van Beethoven; *Armide* - Jean Baptiste Lully; and *Attila* - Giuseppe Verdi. The 2020 festival is dedicated to the memory of Beethoven, celebrating his 250th anniversary.

Not all 2020 opera festivals come with challenges ranging from Piranhas to poisonous snakes. Readers likely will be familiar with the iconic regulars – Bayreuth, Glyndebourne, Spoleto Italy, Salzburg, Verona. There are other jewels worth unearthing next year, some more conveniently located than the middle of Central America.

But, not much more. To mark the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Expo 2020, Dubai has commissioned the first ever Emirati opera, *Al Wasl* (The Omnipresent). *Al Wasl* is also the name of the dome crowning the exhibition site. The composer is Mohammed Fairouz, internationally recognised for his orchestral works.

Photo: Tang Yan Song / Shutterstock.com

The librettist is Maha Gargash, a Dubai born author and cultural broadcaster. *Al Wasl* is, so far, short on plot disclosure – why do I get the feeling the ink on the score is not yet dry? – but will be about "cultural unity". Expo runs from October 2020 to April 2021.

Nearby, a mere 300 miles to the southeast, The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) presents – from now until March 2020 - a full programme. *Anna Bolena* – Donizetti; *Die Zauberflötte* – Mozart; *L'Inganno Felice* – Rossini; *L'Elisir d'Amore* – Donizetti; and *Tahr El Bahr – The Sea Treasures.*

Historic Norse instruments, mighty choral singing, the sounds of trees water, stones and fire – what on earth do stones sound like? – should make this unmissable.

Composed by award-winning Arab artist Monir Elweseimy, *Thar El Bahr* is a new production featuring young talent, enacting the life and adventures of a fisherman in a coastal Arab fishing community. Narration and songs convey the story through simple scenes and ballet sequences. The music played by the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra will include tonal recitals, arias and choral pieces.

Classical opera has always been fixated by middle eastern themes – mostly harems run by evil Turks – Mozart's *Seraglio*, for example. So, it is refreshing that Arab composers are writing modern scores, focused on indigenous culture, perhaps introducing some balance to the repertoire. I plan to see this premiere in the Spring.

In Bordeaux, France in January, Opera National Bordeaux is pushing the envelope with a new production of *The Demon* – Rimsky Korsakov.

Created in 1875 at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theater, *The Demon* was one of the most performed operas in Russia by the end of the 19th century and became one of the favourite works of the great Chaliapin. Composed by Anton Rubinstein (brother of the famous pianist Nicolai Rubinstein) and inspired by an oriental Lermontov tale, the opera is musically sumptuous.

It is a great choral work, to be performed for the first time in Bordeaux in a spectacular production with the choirs of

Glimmerglass Festival

TheEuropean.Journal.online

Glimmerglass Festival

the National Opera of Bordeaux and the Opera of Limoges. The conductor will be Paul Daniel, an English conductor who worked with English National Opera in the noughties, before his appointment as Music Director of the *Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine* in 2013. It will be interesting to see if he has settled better in Bordeaux than he did in London with the ENO. His tenure there was troubled by artistic hissy fits all round. I have booked my seat.

Later in the year, England boasts a cornucopia of summer country house festivals – *Glyndebourne*; May-August. *Garsington*; June – July. *Grange Park*; June – July. *The Grange Festival*; June – July. *Longborough Festival*; June – August. *Iford*; May – September. *Dorset Opera Festival*; July. *Bampton Classical Opera*; *West Green. House Opera*; July. And, my current favourite – *Nevill Holt.*

It is an overused cliché that opera is a dying artform. True, audiences may be greying, but there are vibrant new composers, librettists and producers to savour – and an extending geographic reach, even if the Amazon proves a river too far for most committed aficionados.

Nevill Holt, the house, is no grand country pile à la Downton. It's an enchanting, meandering structure, dating from the 13th century, perched on a rise in Medbourne Parish, set in the Leicestershire countryside. Built in mellow yellow, warm stone. It comfortably inhabits its setting, on approach emerging slowly from behind trees. There is no grand drive. Capability Brown contrived no vista. The manor has presided over the same unspoilt (relatively), gently undulating view for 700 years.

The 2020 Summer Festival runs through June and July. Announced, so far, are two new productions of *La Traviata* – Verdi; and *Don Giovanni* – Mozart. The intimate auditorium, 400 seats, makes any opera an immersive experience and the Nevill Holt Festival is a delightful throwback to the days of Glyndebourne before commercialisation went berserk.

In summer 2020, the medieval castle of Olavinlinna, on the shore of Lake Saima, Finland is the setting for a comprehensive array of operas. They include *King Roger*, by Polish composer, Karol Symanowski; *Carmen* – Bizet; *La Traviata* – Verdi; *The Barber of Seville* – Rossini; *Werther* – Massenet; *Giulio Cesare* – Handel; and *Wardruna* – not an opera, but a chart-topping Norwegian group "conjuring up Viking mysticism in the late August night". Nearly an opera, so I'm including it. "Historic Norse instruments, mighty choral singing, the sounds of trees water, stones and fire" – what on earth do stones sound like? – should make this unmissable.


Barber of Seville – Rossini


Le Songe d'une nuit d'été – Midsummer's Night Dream

Classical opera has always been fixated by middle eastern themes – mostly harems run by evil Turks.

TheEuropeanJournal.online


La Traviata – Verdi


Don Giovanni – Mozart

Across the Atlantic in late July and August, there is "Glimmerglass". The name of the opera festival held annually in Otsego county, upstate New York, near Cooperstown, sounds a siren call. It's not a real location, which only adds to the allure.

Glimmerglass was a term coined for Lake Otsego, near which the festival takes place, by early 19th century author James Fenimore Cooper in his novel "The Deerslayer". It's the "Oz" of opera festivals, an enchanted, isolated place accessed from Manhattan, not by a Yellow Brick Road, but by the more prosaic New York State Thruway, turn left at state capital Albany, and - passing through Schenectady – on for another 75 tortuous miles – on, to "Glimmerglass".

Amongst other festival activities, featured operas next season are; *Rinaldo* – Handel; the hardly ever performed *Die Feen* (The Fairies) – Wagner; *Don Giovanni* – Mozart; and *Cosi?* – an adaptation of the Mozart favourite by Eric Einhorn, an American producer with a wide-ranging portfolio, spanning Chicago Lyric Opera, Utah Opera and New York's Met. This is Mozart, with mischief afoot.

Autumn inevitably follows – and the unmissable Opera Festival of Wexford, Ireland. Wexford is an unlikely musical gem. Founded by Dr. Tom Walsh, a local GP, in 1951 - at the suggestion of Scottish author Compton Mackenzie - it has prospered for 68 years. It thwarts convention, its repertoire always challenging.

This year's programme will feature three main stage productions. For the first time the festival will be themed – Shakespeare. The operas are: *Ein Wintermärchen*, by Austrian composer, Karl Goldmark. Based on Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* and first performed in 1908 it has a quite well-known overture, but otherwise is a bit of a mystery. It is hardly ever performed.

Le Songe d'une nuit d'été – Midsummer's Night Dream - by Ambroise Thomas is a typical Wexford trompe l'oeil – as it isn't based on Shakespeare's play at all. It is a comic opera in which Shakespeare figures along with Queen Elizabeth I and Falstaff. The work was performed rarely and roundly criticised in England in 1852 as a perfidious Gallic attempt at dissing the bard. Thomas was lucky not to be impeached.

To push *Le Songe* right off the bizarre-o-meter scale, the work was revived in 1994 at the Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne, to celebrate the opening of the Channel Tunnel. Maybe it's being brought to Wexford in 2020 to celebrate Brexit. If so, it may have to be postponed.

Edmea, by Alfredo Catalani, first performed at La Scala, Milan in 1886, has nothing to do with Shakespeare whatsoever. The action takes place in Bohemia, in a castle on the banks of the Elbe, into which the heroine, Edmea, falls, emerging under the illusion that she is the fairy of the river, in search of a king who once loved her. A touch of Ophelia, perhaps? This is not taut, 19th century verismo. Perhaps the festival's new director, Rosetta Cucchi, will find a closer Shakespearean connection before next October.

It is an overused cliché that opera is a dying artform. True, audiences may be greying, but there are vibrant new composers, librettists and producers to savour – and an extending geographic reach, even if the Amazon proves a river too far for most committed aficionados.

In the iPhone of the BEHOLDER

Art exhibitions are more popular than ever but are we seeing things properly?

by JENNY HJUL

Isn't it great how crowded art galleries are these days? Especially when there is a blockbuster exhibition, and you have to pay to get in. Then it becomes a scramble to book a timed slot, like buying a hot theatre ticket. The image of a lone art lover seated on a bench before an old master in quiet contemplation is more often seen in an art film (possibly French) than in the flesh. If culture is measured in footfall at museums, we are cultured indeed. For all the hand wringing about the arts being elitist, it seems the public does find art, or at least paintings, accessible.

This is an international phenomenon, one that applies wherever there is famous art hanging. From London to Paris, New York to St Petersburg, there are long queues outside the landmark galleries, queues inside their cafes, for their cloakrooms and at their gift shop tills – just like other big tourist attractions.

And just like at other tourist attractions, in art galleries people take photographs on their phones. Although rules about photography were relaxed relatively recently – five years ago in the National Gallery, for instance – the practice is now commonplace. It is much more acceptable than, say, clapping between the movements of symphonies in the concert hall because art is light years ahead of classical music in terms of accessibility.

For all the hand wringing about the arts being elitist, it seems the public does find art, or at least paintings, accessible.

Photo: Lorena Huerta / Shutterstock.com

And this is good, isn't it? Art appreciation should, of course, be a mainstream activity in an advanced society and not the preserve of a scholarly minority. But why do people take pictures of the paintings? Visiting the *Degas at the Opera* exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay in November, I saw more people, of all nationalities, look at his dancers through the intermediary of a mobile than with the naked eye.

It was so normal it was catching. I've just checked my own phone and found two photographs from that day: *The Ballet Class*, depicting ballet master Jules Perrot and dancers after a rehearsal; and, from another room in the museum, Monet's *London, Houses of Parliament. The Sun Shining through the Fog.*

My sister was there too and she said she took photos of the little dancer sculpture and a couple of Van Goghs, the latter to show her daughter, though two weeks later she admitted she hadn't.

We are both lightweights. At the Hermitage two years ago, I was nearly knocked over by fellow tourists as they sprinted to snap the Impressionists and post-Impressionists in their entirety. Were they planning on speed viewing the whole Winter Palace, all 400 rooms and three million paintings of it? And were they capturing the images to show back home, as proof they were there? But then why so many?

Or were they taking photographs because they wanted to own the art, or own the experience?

There is scant evidence that this behaviour deepens insight or that increasing accessibility is accompanied by better understanding. Gallerists try hard to engage an audience that knows nothing at all, said Michael Savage, of the *Grumpy Art Historian* blog, harking back to previous generations when there was more 'connoisseurship' - the ability to tell which artist painted a painting, when they painted it, and how - among the general public. There is a growing divide between the professionals and the people on the street, he argues: "How do we talk to them, how do you go from one to the other without doing an art history degree? You can do some internet research... But I do think we have some duty to try and tell people a little bit more and let people develop a bit further.'

The art critic, Jonathan Jones, called the avoidance of unclothed Tahitians "an act of prudery – and even censorship" in a "nervous cop-out of a show.

Arguably, the connoisseurs still exist as they did before, but they don't reflect the mindset of the majority of the gallery-going population, who might know what they like even if they don't know what it means. However, there seems to be a consensus, within museum administrations anyway, that ignorance is a price worth paying for broadening access. Success is gauged by sales not sagacity.

Consuming the visual arts is less challenging than sitting through a two-hour recital or a play because fewer demands are made of the consumer. This helps get more people through the turnstiles but there is a risk. If we don't know anything about a painting we will interpret it literally. This may not be an impediment to enjoyment, but there is the danger that without historical context we will impose our own context on it.

What is lost is the capacity to see beyond the picture to what the artist saw; it is processed just as an image, and filed as an image, on the phone perhaps, along with the thousands of other images. Michael Savage says museums could be more helpful if they taught connoisseurship rather than "pushing political agendas."

The public, in all its art-devouring enthusiasm, is at the mercy of the gallery, which decides what we see. And alongside the imperative to promote art to a wider audience comes heightened awareness of the cultural climate, and acknowledgement of the curators' responsibility as custodians. Decisions are influenced by the loudest voices but these are not necessarily the best informed. Art scholars would never admit they are bullied into political choices when they hang their pictures, but recent events prove otherwise.

Feminist campaigns have long focused on the over-representation of female nudes as subject matter in art and the under representation of female artists in galleries. But constructive or not, this has not relegated our favourite masterpieces to storerooms – until now. Against the backdrop of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, the art world cannot escape the gaze that is forcing a re-evaluation of how women are treated across the arts - in film, television, music and theatre.

But getting people into the gallery is only the start of enlightenment. What we mustn't do now, or let galleries do in our name, is hide these works from view.

Jumping on the bandwagon, the Royal Academy introduced a gender quota in its Renaissance Nude exhibition, which displayed as many men as women when it opened earlier this year. At the Gauguin show, currently at the National Gallery, the famous naked Polynesian girls are mostly excluded in favour of those dressed in the high necked frocks that were supplied by the missionaries in Tahiti. The art critic, Jonathan Jones, called the avoidance of unclothed Tahitians "an act of prudery – and even censorship" in a "nervous cop-out of a show."

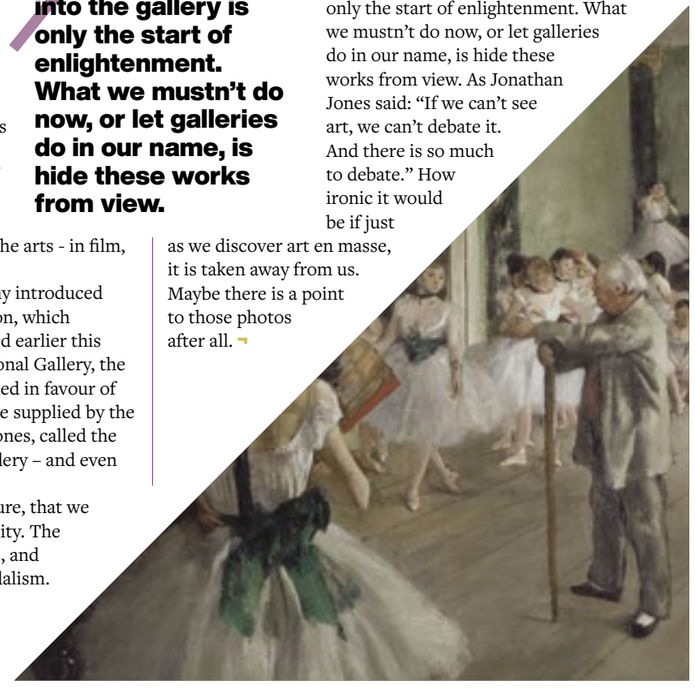
Our age is not the first to censor art, or literature, that we consider inappropriate to contemporary sensibility. The Victorians had their fig leaves and handkerchiefs, and other, less savoury, epochs have resorted to vandalism.

The Manchester Art Gallery has gone further than the Royal Academy, removing John William Waterhouse's painting Hylas and the Nymphs in 2018, because it was deemed "uncomfortable" viewing by the curator, portraying the female body as a passive decorative art form. Postcards of the painting were also banned from the shop. This decision, soon reversed after protests, was made for highly subjective not artistic reasons, but they were wrong-headed; as classicists pointed out, Hylas is the victim in the myth that inspired the picture, lured to his death by the predatory sirens. Naked they may be, powerless they're not.

Titian's Tarquin and Lucretia, which hangs in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, could be seen as presenting rape as a form of entertainment, said the gallery's director, Luke Syson. But this is a "deeply current issue" - in Game of Thrones, 50 female characters have been attacked in the course of the series. Context is crucial: Lucretia killed herself after the rape and became "one of the Renaissance's repertoire of virtuous women who put their chastity and virtue above their lives." Her death also kicked off the Roman republic and the overthrowing of the tyranny of Tarquin which everyone would have known when they saw the picture in the 16th century.

"Unless we think about how each of the three figures would have been viewed in terms of the gender politics of the day and the broader politics of the day," Syson adds. "we're not understanding what Titian was fighting to achieve." Can the modern punter be bothered to delve that deep? Ticking off a Titian on the "to do" list by storing it in your mobile's memory is one thing, reading up on the man and his milieu is another.

But getting people into the gallery is only the start of enlightenment. What we mustn't do now, or let galleries do in our name, is hide these works from view. As Jonathan Jones said: "If we can't see art, we can't debate it. And there is so much to debate." How ironic it would be if just as we discover art en masse, it is taken away from us. Maybe there is a point to those photos after all.

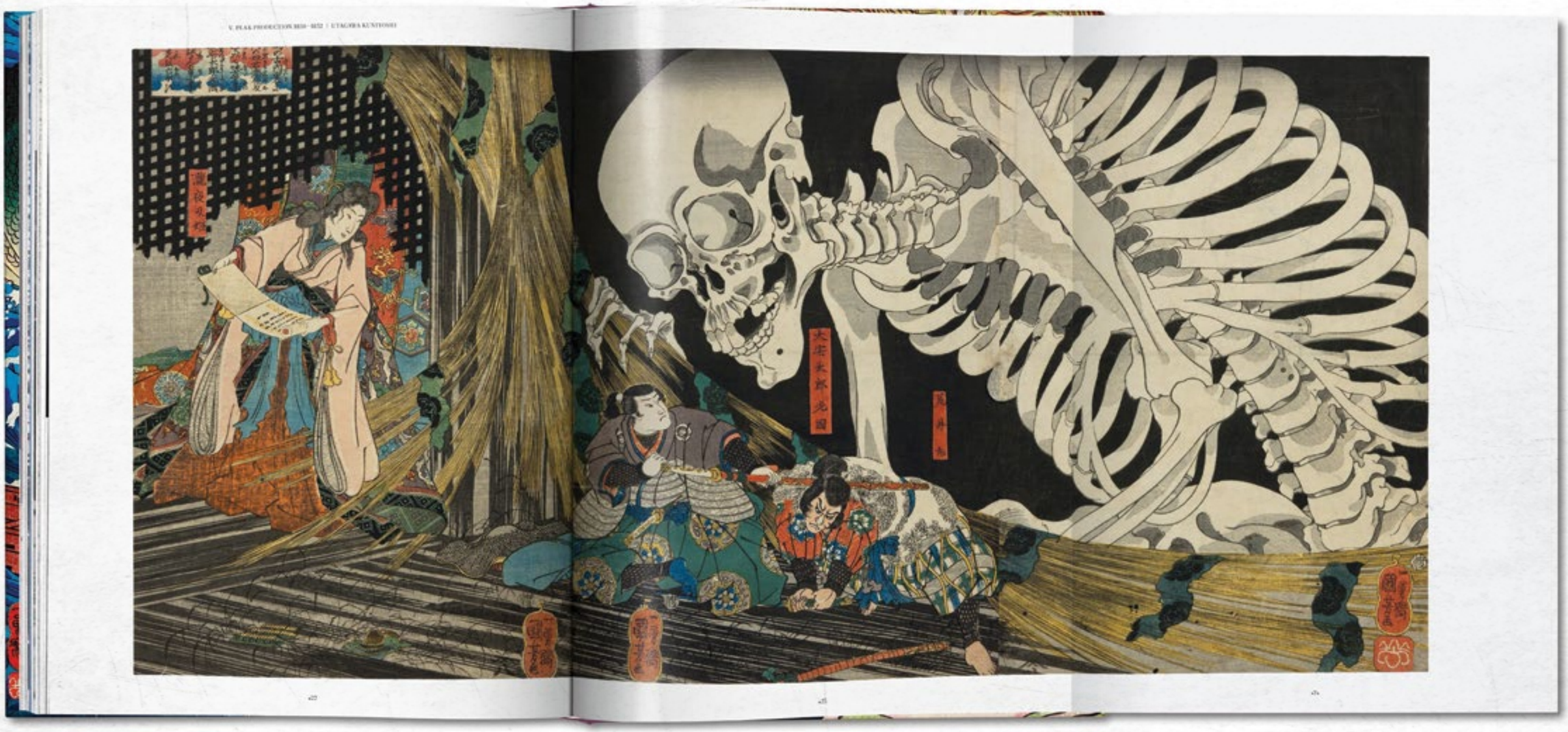


Past, Present, Paradise

by ALASTAIR BENN

It was the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso who once remarked: "To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present it must not be considered at all." Although Picasso was always greatly interested in distending form to its very limit and indeed produced his best work in the freedom he found by colliding hitherto distinct styles and registers, he would have surely recognised in the simple clarity of the woodblock and its plangent designs, work that could "live always in the present."

Japanese Woodblock Prints (1680–1938) | TASCHEN | £150



In the apocalyptic traditions of European culture, history is viewed not as a circle as the Greeks saw it, passing from Golden Age to dark ages to Golden Age and back again, but as a journey towards a paradisiacal future. Paradise was often portrayed as a state of equality between man, beast and flower – in Jewish Day of Judgement traditions humanity on its last day sits down at a rich banquet, but our heads are replaced by animal heads – our final divine form is human, bird, fish and ox altogether. The art of the woodblock transplants future bliss into the present day – man transforms into animal and back again, samurai warriors take on the powers of the gods and great monsters of the sea lie just offshore.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Japanese Woodblock Prints (1680–1938) | TASCHEN | £ 150

If in Europe, we had the Renaissance and the immense flowering of the visual arts that followed in its wake, finding expression on canvas, velum paper, even on the high vaults of our cathedrals; the East experienced a parallel revolution in culture in the late medieval period and one of its main features was the invention of the woodblock.

Woodblock printing techniques are remarkably simple. First a wannabe artist would sketch out a design. It would then be sent to a carver, who would translate the vision onto the woodblock. It would then be forwarded to printers, who could then use it a template for as many prints as the client or artist might require.

Japanese Woodblock Prints (1680–1938) | TASCHEN | £150

Like Gothenburg's invention of the printing press, which allowed ordinary people to engage for the first time in the project of high culture, in writing pamphlets and making posters, the woodblock has exerted a powerfully democratising force on Japanese life.

For the first time, the argot of everyday experience – men and women at work, washing, country life, sex, gossiping and cracking vulgar jokes – could be found alongside the great mythological themes of transformation, divine transcendence and superhuman strength. In delicate sketch work, vivid colours and bold lines, the woodblock artists animated the world into technicolour glory. ¬

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Japanese Woodblock Prints (1680–1938) | TASCHEN | £ 150

STOPPING TRAFFIC

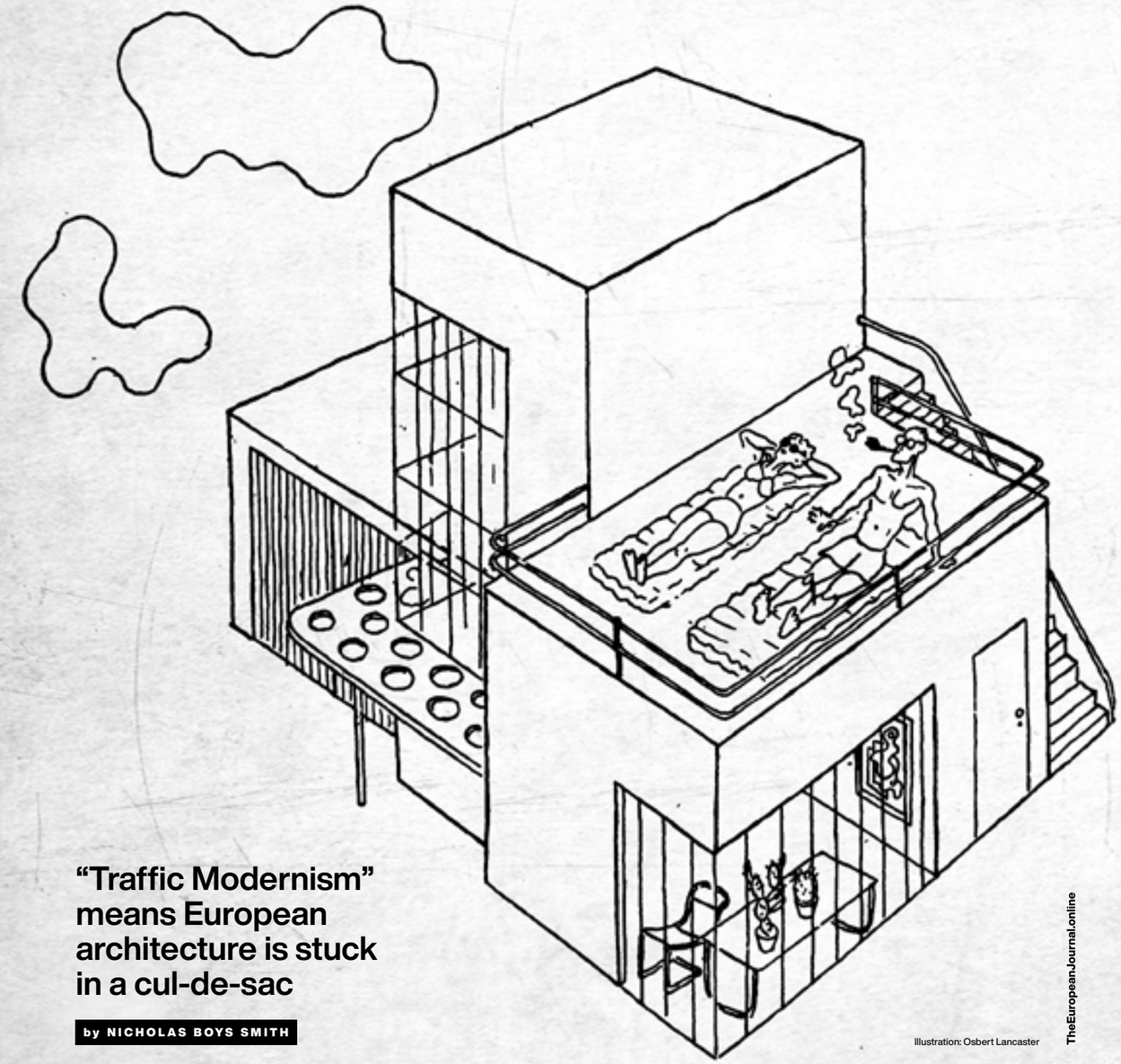


Illustration: Osbert Lancaster

TheEuropeanJournal.online

“Traffic Modernism” means European architecture is stuck in a cul-de-sac

by NICHOLAS BOYS SMITH

One hundred years ago, traumatised by war, fleeing the heavy burdens of the past and bedazzled by the opportunities of the new, European architects made a mistake of historic proportions.

You can hardly blame them. All around were smoke-begrimed cities, “seared with trade” and smeared with the filth of the age of coal. Smog hid the sun. Children coughed up the filth of sitting room fires or city-centre coal power stations. Thousands were ill-housed after the deprivations of World War I. Nor were modernism’s high priests well men. Like many in their generation, both Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe probably had post-traumatic stress disorder after military service in the German army. Gropius’s war was particularly unpleasant. He was seriously wounded and survived a plane flight in which the pilot was shot dead. Perhaps it is no surprise that when he came to design his own home 20 years later, he essentially designed a concrete pillbox on a hill with a commanding field of fire “complete with flat roof, hidden door and slit windows, the better to shoot from.” His personal office had a front window with a sill more than four feet off the floor. Like a trench, no one could see in and you could only see out when standing up.

Similarly, according to recent studies Le Corbusier was probably autistic. Biographers and psychiatrists have chronicled his impaired social communications, repetitive behaviours, abnormal fixations and apparent absence of interest in others and concluded: “His fervent faith in his own way of seeing blinded him to the wish of people to retain what they most cherish (including traditional buildings) in their everyday lives.” This matters because, as the American architect Ann Sussman has argued, people with autistic spectrum disorder “often struggle not only with social relations but with exhausting visual overload referred to as hyper-arousal.” He literally could not process or appreciate the rich diversity of facades and detail in historic streets. Most people find them pleasing, conducive to walking, talking, relaxing. He could not. “The street,” he wrote, “wears us out; it is altogether disgusting. Why, then, does it still exist?”

Le Corbusier and Gropius built little. Mies van der Rohe is only known for a handful of buildings. That they are no historic curiosity, a forgotten cul-de-sac in the complex diversity of global architecture, is due to the fact they were in the right place at the right time. In parallel with their rejection of all lived experience came two seismic technological changes. Firstly, it became possible to build huge featureless constructions very cheaply in a way that had simply not been technically possible before. The world’s first iron-framed building, Ditherington Flax Mill - “the grandfather of skyscrapers” - is an object of beauty. What amounts to a metal shed - whether Amazon processing plant or high architecture - is not.

We also invented the motor car and then, hypnotised by the joy of driving on empty 1930s roads, became fundamentally confused about the role that cars should play in towns and inner cities. Cars are great at getting from town to town but not for moving within them. The gospel of “traffic modernism” sought to replace urban streets and squares with flyovers, walkways and city centre motorways.

Java Island in Holland in which the purchasers of narrow plots were able to create their own designs within careful constraints of height, width and material. The result is excellent – like someone speaking a language you know in a strange accent.

However, it is hard to make for liveable neighbourhoods where people know and interact meaningfully with their fellow citizens if there are too many metal boxes hurtling past at fifty miles per hour. Several studies have shown that the more traffic on a street the fewer neighbours we know. And the air is filthy.

The consequence on what we have built for most of a century has been catastrophic. Houses as machines not homes. Streetscape as austere simplicity not a complex or ornamented pattern of walkability and meaning. “Outside” as an unenclosed space to nourish our solitude not a square or piazza in which to engage, meet and trade.

Mid-century functionality - the conception of a house as “une machine-à-habiter” as Osbert Lancaster put it - presupposes a barrenness of spirit to which, despite every indication of its ultimate achievement, we have not yet quite attained. If the virus of “traffic

modernism" started in Europe, it reached its nadir in America. Happily, the cure found its first physical expression in the US as well. Thirty years ago some brave thinkers started dreaming of a better way to create communities and argued for what they termed 'new urbanism', a network of coherent, walkable blocks, plots and streets in which human needs for shelter, work, education and play could be seamlessly mingled. The first "new urbanist" development was the new town of Seaside in Florida. It has beautiful walkable streets in vernacular American architecture. Pedestrians are prioritised over cars. It was initially widely derided but people love it so much that an apparent architectural eccentricity has turned into a runaway commercial success. Lots sold for $15,000 in 1982.

Money talks and Seaside's unarguable success has led to many imitations across America; beautiful walkable new towns which feel very much like beautiful walkable old towns. What chance of the revolution coming home to Europe?

Recently, a one-bedroom cottage sold for $1.5m. In fact, so great are Seaside prices that the development is now criticised for a lack of diversity which is due to its success and rarity. Seaside's founders took a long-term approach and have observed that they have done "much better overall than if we had sold the land earlier."

Money talks and Seaside's unarguable success has led to many imitations across America; beautiful walkable new towns which feel very much like beautiful walkable old towns. What chance of the revolution coming home to Europe?

A glance at most architectural criticism is not hopeful. It is inward-looking, disinterested in public opinion and typified by an incongruous interest in both elitist design and hard left-wing politics. However, on the ground the signs are gently more reassuring. Across Europe a growing number of local councils, landowners and architects are striving to create new neighbourhoods or manage existing towns so as to rediscover the ancient complexity of urban lives lived with a jumble of homes, offices, shops and schools muddled up into agreeable and walkable neighbourhoods rather than being zoned miles apart. Capital cities like Copenhagen, Paris or Ljubljana and seemingly every city in Holland have been revolutionising how people get about with streets increasingly prioritised for bicycles or trams. And the evidence is clear. People are healthier and happier in such places.

But it's not just a question of managing the beautiful streets of Amsterdam or the Île-de-France. What new settlements are we building? A growing number of developers and designers are risking the ignominy of their peers and creating traditional networks of streets and squares with front doors, symmetry, colour, variety in a pattern, conventional urban blocks and the coherent complexity of ornament and windows which, in every poll or pricing study, people prefer. A few of these are "modernist" in their conceit. The best is Java Island in Holland in which the purchasers of narrow plots were able to create their own designs within careful constraints of height, width and material. The result is excellent – like someone speaking a language you know in a strange accent.

Other developments that move from being "housing estates" full of "units" to becoming real places with homes are in what might be termed "polite modern vernacular" with similar forms and patterns to historic streets though simpler and less ornamented. The best of these, by far, is Roussillon Park in Chichester by Ben Pentreath. So popular was it that nearby housing developments delayed sales until Roussillon Park's sales were complete. They could not compete.

There are smaller similar creations of houses and blocks in "polite modern vernacular" in Marmalade Lane in Cambridge and Goldsmith Street in Norwich. Goldsmith Street, particularly, despite being nothing more than a street with front doors and small front gardens, has proved very popular with British Architects who awarded it their 2019 Stirling Prize. (It was the street's status as council housing built to high energy efficiency that most appealed.)

New urban developments which engage even more actively with vernacular traditions of architecture are popular with the public across Europe. Near Paris, some landowners have realised that they can make far more money by building traditional neighbourhoods not distended suburbia or dystopian banlieues. Le Plessis-Robinson and Val d'Europe are attractive networks of streets and squares largely in the French classical

Too many Europeans lead lives polluted by ugliness or in which it is more difficult than it should be to lead happy, meaningful and connected lives as part of a community.

vernacular with a major role played by non-French architects such as the Italian Pier Carlo Bontempi, American firms and the London-based architects Alireza Sagharchi and Demetri Porphyrios. One of the developers is Disney, experts at understanding what people like and owners of the neighbouring Disneyland Paris - a fact which has abetted architectural criticism of such aesthetic vulgarities. One critic called it "the stupidest project of the year." The public does not agree.

The best new urban extension in Holland is Brandevoort. The sales values of this traditional Dutch vernacular development of tall high terraced streets and canals has been extensively studied by academics. Carefully controlling for other factors, houses in Brandevoort sell at a 15 per cent premium.

Jakriborg in southern Sweden is an intricate web of alleys, streets and small squares with whimsy, colour and detail. Its small size seems to have made life hard for small businesses but it has real pride. Most new housing developments are so ashamed of themselves that they hide from the landscape. Not Jakriborg.

Other similar developments include Heulebrug in Belgium, Borgo Città Nuova in Italy, Pont Royal, Hardelot and Port Grimaud in France and both Poundbury and Nansledan in England – these last two both led by the Prince of Wales. In Germany the focus has been on trying to mend some of the enormous harm done to German cities in World War II. It has been an, at times, difficult debate with shades of German history unpleasantly infecting the discussion. Nevertheless, firms such as Patzschke & Partners have managed to do lovely work gently mending the streets destroyed by Allied bombs or by ill-conceived post-war construction.

To widespread popular acclaim there have been major successes in Berlin, Frankfurt, Potsdam and Dresden in recent years as streets, churches and squares begin, at last, to be reconstructed. The rebirth of the Frauenkirche in Dresden, arguably the finest baroque building north of the Alps, was funded by thousands of individual donors and is inspiring.

Too many Europeans lead lives polluted by ugliness or in which it is more difficult than it should be to lead happy, meaningful and connected lives as part of a community. There are many reasons for this. But one of them is that we have simply stopped creating the sorts of buildings and walkable places which are good for our bodies and good for our souls. That should change. ¬

From the Blitz *to* The Shard

What London has to teach about the cities of the past, present and future...

by JACK DICKENS

Cities are more than just an aggregation of buildings – they are an expression of human ingenuity. They are the ultimate sign of humankind's mastery over the natural environment. Throughout history, from the formation of early trading ports such as London to the vast industrial expanses created during the industrial revolution, cities have been the resting place of extraordinarily large populations living in close spaces.

© Historic England Archive. John Laing Photographic Collection.

Images from the John Laing Photographic Collection will be available to view on the Historic England website from Monday 13 January, with all 10,000 images added by Autumn 2020. www.historicengland.org.uk

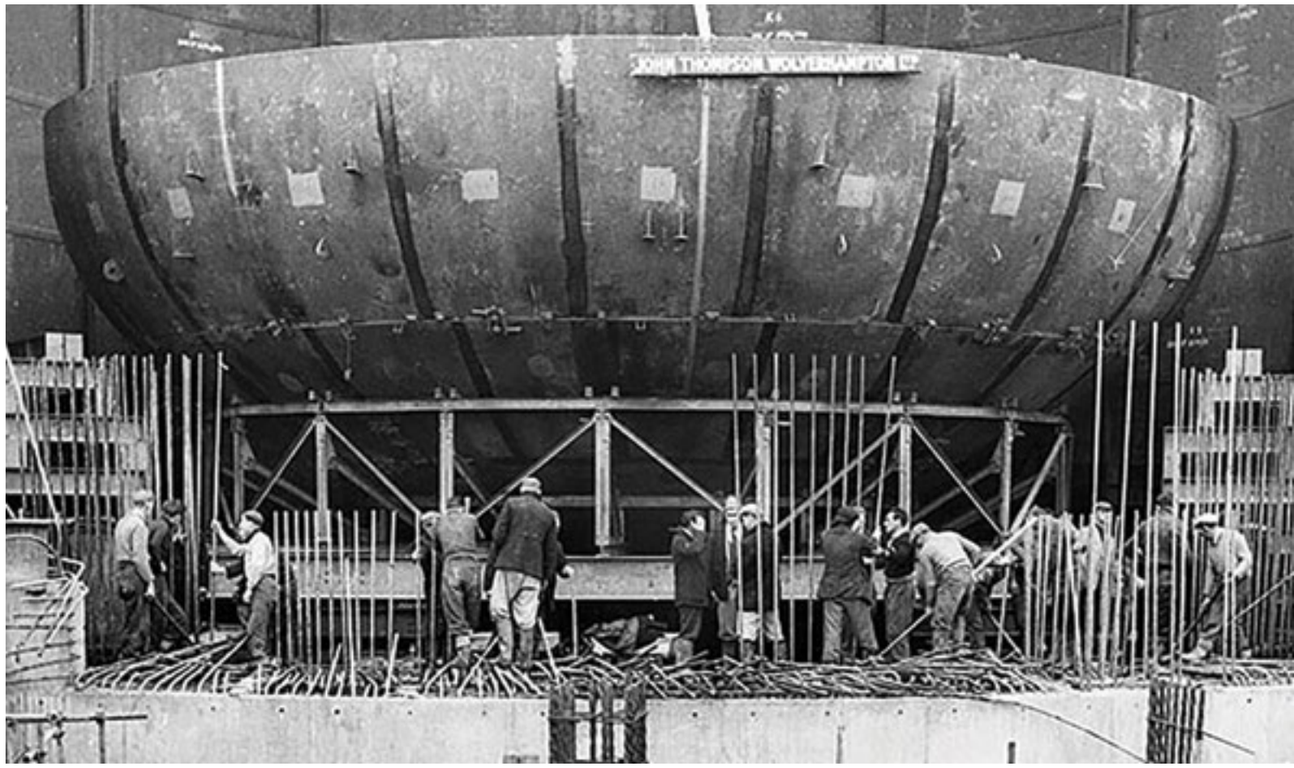
These spaces demand new infrastructure, like the steel beams of the Golden Gate bridge of San Francisco bay, and command new spaces in the imagination, such as the now-iconic sight of London's Shard. From the erratic growth of a 20th century cosmopolis such as New York to the engineered modernity of Dubai, cities are now being transformed in new ways and with innovative methods.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

© Historic England Archive. John Laing Photographic Collection.

These grand feats of human achievement do not emerge out of thin air, however – they are crafted by millions of hands over generations. They are the work of ordinary men and women whose little actions combine to build cities past, present, and future. For every skyscraper, there are countless thousands of people who have donned their flat caps or hard hats to construct them.

Images from the John Laing Photographic Collection will be available to view on the Historic England website from Monday 13 January, with all 10,000 images added by Autumn 2020. www.historicengland.org.uk



Now, for the first time, a new resource enables us to see and learn about those whose work has led to the creation of cities in the UK. The John Laing charitable trust has teamed up with Historic England to release 230,000 previously unseen images charting the work conducted by a major British building company over the last century. It is appropriate that, as we look to the global future of our modern cities, we also pause to look at their past. ¬

© Historic England Archive. John Laing Photographic Collection.

Images from the John Laing Photographic Collection will be available to view on the Historic England website from Monday 13 January, with all 10,000 images added by Autumn 2020. www.historicengland.org.uk

WORLD IN NUMBERS

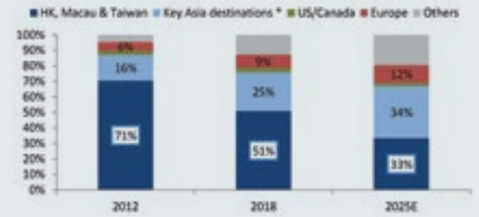
UK Online Clothing Penetration

Source: BRC

Online Apparel Penetration by Country

Source: J.P. Morgan estimates, comScore

Chinese outbound tourists by destination



Source: China Ministry of Culture and Tourism, HK Tourism Board, Macau Statistics and Census Service, Taiwan Tourism Bureau, Ministry of Transportation and Communications, Japan Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, CEIC, Morgan Stanley Research;* Key Asia destination: Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, Philippines, Sri Lanka; E= Morgan Stanley Research estimates

Total visitor arrivals to Hong Kong

Source: Deutsche Bank, HK Tourism Board

Domestic and overseas spending by tourists' origin (2018)

Source: Bain & Co estimates, Morgan Stanley Research

Chinese Luxury Spending (US$bn)

Source: Bain & Co estimates, Morgan Stanley Research

The great gig in the sky Newly-added albums as a share of total albums appearing in weekly music charts,%

Source: "Five decades of US, UK, German and Dutch music charts show that cu ltu ra l processes a re accelerating", by L. Schneider and C. Gros, 2019 **THE ECONOMIST**

Unbalanced diets Cuisine "net exports", 2017, $bn

Source: "Dining out as cultural trade" by Joel Waldfogel, Journal of Cultural Economics (2019) **THE ECONOMIST**

From COCAINE to CUISINE

by BRUCE PALLING

Colombia is transforming itself into a foodie's haven...

TheEuropeanJournal.online

It was fascinating to hear one of the farmers explain that while the raw material for cocaine production was obviously a far more lucrative crop, he switched to palm hearts because too many of his colleagues had been eliminated by rival cocaine consortiums.

What is Colombian Cuisine? Until now, the Latin American food scene has been dominated by Mexican and Peruvian but the Colombian Government and the Bogota Chamber of Commerce are keen to join the club. Their first move has been to sponsor Madrid Fusion, the leading avant-garde food festival, which put Modern Spanish Cuisine on the map, to hold an annual food festival in Bogota for the next five years. This culinary roadshow brought 20 of the world's leading chefs to Bogota for workshops and collaborations with the best local chefs and food historians. The roll call of chefs sounded like a list of participants in the Netflix *Chef's Table* series - Slovenia's Ana Roš, Peru's Virgilio Martínez, Sweden's Magnus Ek, Japan's Yoshihiro Narisawa and Spain's superstars Joan Roca and Quique Dacosta.

Last year, Latin America's 50 Best Restaurant awards were also held in Bogota, further evidence that it is gaining traction as a serious food destination.

Benjamin Lana, the vice president of Madrid Fusion and the organiser of the recent event in Bogota, has no doubt about the future popularity of Colombian cuisine. "Colombia is well known for its music and literature but not their food, so we have to help them promote it," he says. "These days, chefs are not just cooking products but also ideas. Fifteen years ago, it was molecular cuisine and science in the kitchen but that is now more or less over and instead, sustainability and the celebration of local products is paramount. On that score, there is hardly anywhere as diverse as Colombia, so this is only the beginning."

Javier Masias, a leading food commentator from Peru, suggests: "The reason why Madrid Fusion is a game changer is because it opens local chefs to new ideas – we tend to be blasé because we have seen these chefs either in their own restaurants or at other festival events, but it is ground breaking for local chefs."

Javier does have a word of caution though when it comes to the local produce: "One thing that has yet to have an impact is the quality of the local produce – there is room for improvement – I am talking about typical vegetables too, like carrots. It's curious, but a lot of the best local cuisine still doesn't get to Bogota. The capital is quite isolated from the remainder of the country partly because of the poor road network and the violence associated with the drug trade."

Photo: mehdi33300 / Shutterstock.com

Leading Colombian chef Harry Sasson has been instrumental in encouraging former coca farmers to switch to palm hearts both for domestic and overseas consumption. It was fascinating to hear one of the farmers explain that while the raw material for cocaine production was obviously a far more lucrative crop, he switched because too many of his colleagues had been eliminated by rival cocaine consortiums.

The sheer diversity of the country makes it impossible to talk of Colombian cuisine as a single entity – rather like India defies generic categorisation. In sheer dimensions, Colombia is big - the same size as France and Spain combined. There is the cuisine of the Andes, the Amazon, the Pacific and Caribbean as well as the land in between. A decade ago, the most renowned restaurants in Bogota were Italian, French and Japanese but now there are numerous establishments celebrating local produce.

Harry Sasson has 30 years experience as a chef and is the father of Colombian cuisine. From the outside, his establishment looks like a luxurious colonial villa but inside is far more contemporary with a wall of greenery and lattice work that makes you feel as if you are inside a geodesic dome. As well as championing the use of palm heart - which is like a rustic version of asparagus - his other exceptional dishes include fresh crab and avocado with herbs or steamed grouper with succulent roast potatoes and grilled sweet bananas.

The best place to discover the diversity of Colombian produce is Leo, a Bogota restaurant run by Leonor Espinosa and her daughter Laura. Known as the mother of Colombian cuisine, her menu displays 40 products unique to Colombia, including different species of edible ants, wild rodents and a giant freshwater fish called pirarucu, whose real delicacy is its tongue. To eat its 15-course dinner feels a bit like making an expedition to an edible rainforest – you are offered a local blackberry fermented drink along with Pacific clams and yuca leaves from the Amazonian jungle. What makes this so intriguing is to experience fruits and vegetables with completely different tastes to anything you have ever tried before. The waitress has an iPad with illustrations of all of the produce to assist anyone who needs to know more about what they are about to consume. Although there is a complete list of local drinks to accompany every dish, there are also the very best Latin American wines from Chile and Argentina along with those from Spain and France.

Last year, Latin America's 50 Best Restaurant awards were also held in Bogota, further evidence that it is gaining traction as a serious food destination.

The hippest destination in Bogota is Prudencia, located in Candelaria, the historic colonial centre of Bogota. Run by Mario Rosero and his American wife Meghan Flanigan, this stylish destination is only open for lunch and serves a range of ingredients, which are cooked over open flame or barbecue. There are three grills and smokers at the rear of the property plus a wood oven. Changing daily, the menu features bold dishes such as pork shoulder with monta chilli, cumin, porter and whiskey along with wood-grilled corn with burnt onion sauce. There is always a vegan option too, such as wood-grilled eggplant and zucchini with minty spinach. Meghan has noticed far more interest in local ingredients and techniques: "People are a lot more focussed on looking at Colombian produce or regional cuisine within the country – if you went to eastern Colombia a few years back, no one really cared about culinary traditions but now they are restoring them, thanks to the growing interest from Bogota." In order to expose customers to new produce, she said one prominent chef would actually smuggle new ingredients on the plate and not identify them to avoid people refusing to try them.

The other classic restaurant is El Chato, which has an entire wall devoted to dozens of jars of different spices and herbal combinations. Chef Alvaro Clavijo has worked in a number of major international restaurants, including Noma in Copenhagen, Per Se in New York and L'Epicure in Paris. Again, he focuses on local ingredients with a twist – chicken hearts with local potatoes, sour cream and egg yolk dust or squid ink infused rice crackers with crab and mango.

Mini Mal is another well-established local ingredient restaurant. The menu includes fascinating background on the dishes served. Their peanut and mute corn soup recipe was given to them by a grandmother from the Inga tribe called Mercedes Tisoy de Jacanamijoy – which is served at the festivities of the Sibundoy Valley and "supposed to fill the other's heart with one's breath." Or there is a rabbit and sweet chilli stew served with a plantain and eggplant tamale plus fresh greens.

Will Colombia emerge as the next must-go Latin American food destination? It is certainly heading in the right direction but it is a slow process.

Will Colombia emerge as the next must-go Latin American food destination? It is certainly heading in the right direction but it is a slow process. With increased international exposure, more people will become curious enough to give it a try, so in time it may rival the existing destinations of Mexico and Peru.

Looking Towards the LANGUEDOC

There's great quality wine to be found in an unexpected quarter

by GUY CHATFIELD

In the world of wine there are some names that are instantly recognisable - so evocative are they of affluence and status. Due to their role in the evolution of what we drink, I am talking - especially - of the wines of France. As ever, we flock to buy Chablis and Sancerre, revere the "poise" of Burgundy, the "elegance" of Bordeaux and the "muscularity" of the Rhone.

But while there are wines from those regions that are world class, others - as the old Stella Artois advertising strap line used to say - are just "reassuringly expensive" and that does not mean you are getting value for your hard earned money.

In the current climate, frittering away cash on what no longer justifies the price tag is insane. That said, the wines of France can offer you a huge amount of satisfaction, diversity and value if your curiosity allows you to venture beyond the biggest names of the well known regions. There is still a great deal else in this marvellous country that can beguile, mesmerise and delight, you just need to know where to look.

So, where should you venture in France for a wine that can deliver the proverbial bang-for-your-buck over the next twelve months? I would recommend heading for the south...

The southern half of France, even if you exclude the Bordeaux production areas around the Gironde and Dordogne rivers, has a rich history of viticulture and some seriously good winemakers. In the Languedoc, Greeks planted the first vines in France. Winemaking on a commercial scale was brought to the area by the Roman army.

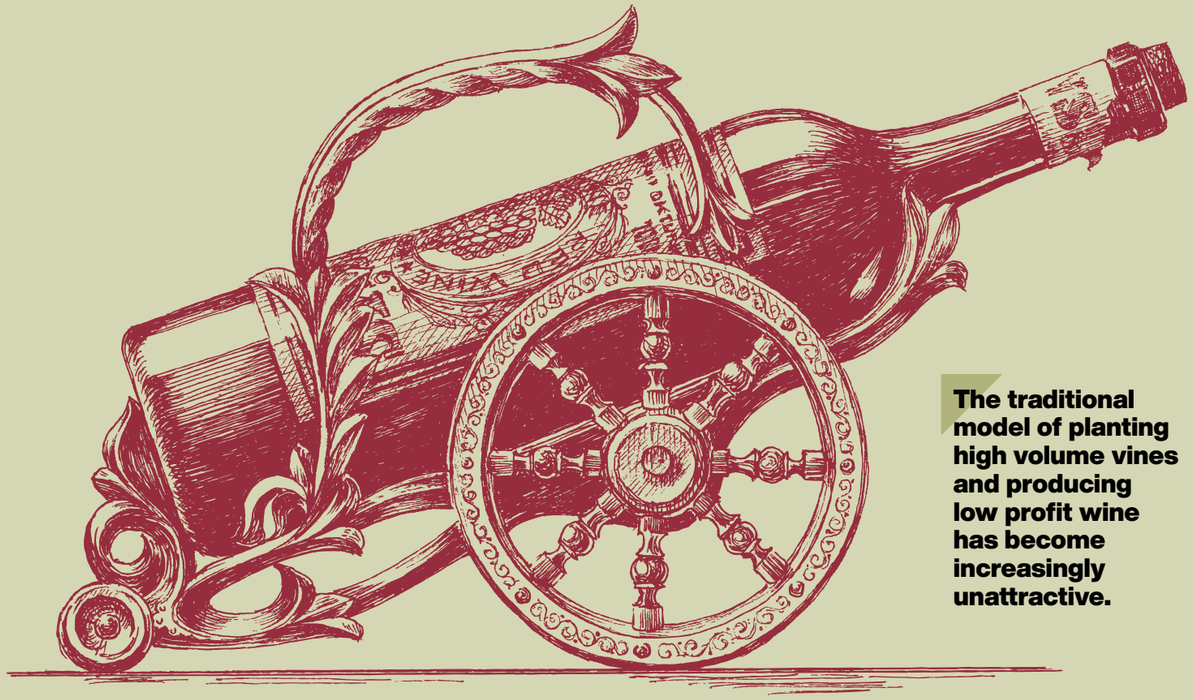
To give you some sense of scale, last year Languedoc-Roussillon produced more wine than the USA.

In the modern era, its reputation has been tarnished by the ubiquity of the wines of Languedoc-Roussillon at the cheaper end of the scale. Since the arrival of the railways, these regions regularly sacrificed quality to produce high quantities of light reds to satiate the thirst of the newly industrialised north.

To give you some sense of scale, last year Languedoc-Roussillon produced more wine than the USA.

Although the origin of winemaking in the region is demonstrably Roman, its outlook is much less traditional than its cohort of wine producing regions. This part of France has always had a much more laissez-faire attitude to the regulations than their northern neighbours and this rebellious approach has assisted their ability to innovate. The producers in Burgundy would be run out of town if they deviated in any way from planting Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, while in the Languedoc-Roussillon they have been able to experiment widely with the different strains of wine grapes. Here you will find grapes such as Marselan, a cross between Grenache and Cabernet Sauvignon that exist nowhere else; the fruits of experimentation that would not have been sanctioned anywhere else in France.

The winemakers of this area have also innovated on the production front in recent years. The traditional model of planting high volume vines and producing low profit wine has become increasingly unattractive. As in so many markets, French producers are under increased pressure from rising costs. This is a great thing in my view because it is changing the outlook and direction of Languedoc-Roussillon winemakers. They are hanging onto and developing better commercially viable grape varieties that still suit the region. Fresh and bright styles of whites like Picpoul de Pinet have grown in reputation as they satisfy the international desire for wines with zip to replace the omnipresent Sauvignon Blanc.



The traditional model of planting high volume vines and producing low profit wine has become increasingly unattractive.

Another exciting trend developing at pace is the focus on the marketing and international recognition for their sub-regions. In recent times the profile of areas such as Saint-Chinian, Corbières and Pic Saint-Loup have grown dramatically. Increasingly, sommeliers and wine lovers are investing the time to discover and promote these wines. When you next dine out I recommend seeking them out. Undoubtedly, they will prove superb value on the wine lists of reputable restaurants.

While the wines of the Languedoc-Roussillon may not yet be hitting the levels of recognition that their cousins to the north can command, there is nowhere else that offers the full card of styles at such reasonable prices – not only reds, whites and rosés but also the original French fizz in Blanquette de Limoux.

With a great selection of multiple styles and affordability, the south is rising and will continue to do so for a good while yet.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Photo: wjarek / Shutterstock.com

Nostalgia Trip

NEW YORK - US

Photo: VillPhotography / Shutterstock.com

The twenties are back, so why not begin them in roaring style with a trip to the city that inspired The Great Gatsby a hundred years ago this decade? You can get some kip in the city that never sleeps in the Sherry Netherland hotel, where the Italian renaissance meets the concrete jungle. Established in 1927, this is exactly the sort of location that you would expect to find in the pages of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel - antique charm, marble floors, and crystal chandeliers. Located in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, beside Central Park, it boasts stunning vistas of this iconic location. You may find yourself recalling certain lines from the book as you set about sightseeing in the Big Apple: "The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world..."

Photo: Roy Harris / Shutterstock.com

Photo: deepspace / Shutterstock.com

Culinary Adventure

ISTANBUL - TURKEY

The concept of the gastro pub is now well established, but could 2020 be the year of the gastro city - as travellers set out on voyages of culinary discovery? For food-filled adventure, Istanbul is now a prime destination fusing the gastronomic culture of Europe and Asia. Here, you can take cooking classes to master Turkish cuisine (see www.cookingalaturka.com), rolling up your sleeves to make classic local dishes with spices and ingredients from across the Middle East.

You can also take part in guided "food walks" around the city, dipping in and out of authentic local market stalls as well as exploring the city's many cafes and restaurants with an expert local guide. The Avicenna Hotel provides a convenient stopping off point - just 300 metres from the Blue Mosque and 500 metres from the Hagia Sophia, it combines classical Ottoman décor with minimalist design, complete with views of both the Aegean Sea and Istanbul itself.

Microcation

MARRAKECH - MOROCCO

Marrakech is an enchanting city on the doorstep of Europe. The fourth largest city in Morocco, it is a bustling town of bazaars and beautiful architecture in the heart of the Maghreb. The great British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, once declared that "Marrakech is simply the nicest place on Earth to spend an afternoon". He managed to take a three-day break there with Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1943, at the height of the Second World War – an inspiration to all those seeking a quick micro-cation.

This is an ideal winter escape, particularly thanks to the hammams - a Moroccan relative of the sauna - made up of warm steam rooms, cool plunge pools, and vigorous scrubbings. You can stay in any number of authentic "riads" - the traditional houses based around a tranquil, interior garden-courtyard. You need not pay a sultan's ransom to enjoy this Moroccan experience either - a stay of five nights at the Riad Adriana in the upmarket district of Bab Doukkala can be booked for EUR 429.00 while connecting flights are available from most major European cities.

Undertourism

KHIVA - UZBEKISTAN

If you have to travel in peak tourist season, why not avoid the hordes of tourists in Venice, Dubrovnik, or Paris and find somewhere that has not been taken over by smart phones and selfie sticks? Uzbekistan might not be the first place that you would imagine yourself jetting off to but the city of Khiva is also a UNESCO World Heritage site. From its founding in the 6th century AD, it was a stop along the Silk Road and it is now replete with beautiful palaces, mosques and courtyards plus bazaars and workshops, where you can find high quality silk rugs hand-woven in extraordinary patterns.

The Orient Star Hotel makes for a first-rate base: a former madrasa, built in 1853, it boasts rare Islamic architecture. Travelling here will take time - it's a 16-hour flight with Turkish Airlines, including transit through Istanbul and Tashkent - but when you touch down at Urgench airport it's only a half-hour drive. Patience will be rewarded - you get much more bang for your buck in the steppes and access to a truly magnificent centre of human culture.

Climate -Neutral Retreat

XIGERA LODGE - BOTSWANA

Voyages to the continent of Africa are another must this year as safaris have come surging back into fashion. There is a lot of excitement in Botswana surrounding the revamped Xigera Lodge in the Okavango Delta, in the heart of a region known locally as Paradise Island, which will be re-opening under new ownership in June 2020. Surrounded by the lush green of the long grass and flourishing wildlife, this resort is known for its stunning panoramas. The 12 suites of the Xigera Lodge are fully solar powered, providing an eco-friendly immersion in the calm rivers, islets, floodplains, and palm forests of the local terrain. It is situated on the western side of the Moremi Game Reserve, enabling guests to venture into the country on safari by day, and enjoy spa treatments and first-rate bush cuisine at night.

Photo: Luciano Mortula - LGM / Shutterstock.com

Olympic Games

TOKYO - JAPAN

In this Olympic year, we'll all be seeing a lot of Tokyo on the television – but for those who want to see it for real, this is the time to head to Japan. Take one of the super-fast bullet trains across the country. See for yourself the scale of the great volcanic peak of Mount Fuji wreathed in white snow, and experience the cherry blossoms made so famous by generations of Japanese artists. Take a pilgrimage to the serene suburbs of eastern Kyoto and to the Buddhist temple of Kiyomizu-dera, a UNESCO World Heritage site which has been used for religious worship since the year 778. While in Kyoto, you can also make the most of the Samurai and Ninja Museum, where visitors are not only able to view the collections, but take part in short interactive lessons teaching the sword-fighting technique of Japan's historic warrior class. Finally there's the modern metropolis, Tokyo, itself - famous for its quirky and fun hotels such as the Cya shitsu ryokan asakusa or the First Cabin - where guests sleep in (you guessed it) a compact cabin for the night.

Katie Glass

Train Reaction

I never intended to become a trainspotter. In all my fantasies of globe-trotting and journalism, I never aspired to be the next Michael Palin (as one editor sniggeringly called me) or establish myself in the world's least-sexy niche. I fell into rail travel out of sheer laziness - because I couldn't be bothered to take my driving test. So perhaps no-one was more shocked than me to discover I was ahead of a trend, when a trip I took on the Trans-Siberian Railway last winter went viral online. On Twitter, pictures I posted of my journey attracted 2.5 million viewers and 13.6 thousand 'likes'.

Perhaps the popularity of my thread was because I crossed Siberia in winter at -30°C, wearing 70s Moonboots. Perhaps because it was Christmas, people were bored. Or inspired by how much vodka I drank. Mostly I think people followed my journey because, like me, they've fallen for the romance of trains.

Now, as 2020 begins and I'm packing for my latest train trip (across Peru with Belmond) the often-derided geekiest mode of transport is having a "moment." Kate Moss has posted pictures of herself

Train travel leans into a trend. It suits lazy adventurers who like comfort. On my next train trip around Peru, our train has a spa, so I can enjoy a facial while climbing Machu Picchu.

on Instagram chugging to Venice wearing leopard print pyjamas aboard the Orient Express. Condé Nast have seen a surge in readers searching for stories of train trips. At the Trans-Siberian Travel Company, Chris (the man who organised my trip) tells me the route is now so busy he struggles to get tickets for high-season trips.

When I made my first epic rail journey in 2013, travelling Amtrak's Sunset Limited across the US, it certainly wasn't trendy. I travelled from New Orleans to L.A with students, ex-cons and cowboys – anyone who didn't have a license or preferred to drink. After two weeks gliding through the States - munching ribs as we crossed Louisiana's bayous,

Photo: Adwo / Shutterstock.com

Train trips are romantic. And sexy. I've never had so much action as on a long-distance ride. I've also never drunk or eaten so much.

drinking Lone Star beer watching Texas eat dust, traversing New Mexico to emerge at the sparkling Pacific Ocean - I was hooked.

It makes sense that now, in 2020, train travel's taken off – it draws together a host of contemporary threads. Of course, there's the Greta Thunberg effect. As eco-warriors bully us out of taking cheap-flights, train journeys provide a smug alternative – a way of seeing the world while still doing your bit for the planet.

The sheer inconvenience of train travel signals it's luxurious. Cars are ubiquitous, the hoi polloi take easyJet, only the truly spoilt can afford a mode of transport that takes twice as long and costs twice as much. (On no route is this truer than the outrageously-priced Caledonian Sleeper).

Trains are more appealing than faffing at airports. Who doesn't prefer taking the Eurostar to Paris? Or wouldn't opt for China's new high-speed bullet trains over a dull internal flight – the one running from Xian (Terracotta warriors) to Chengdu (Pandas), now only takes three hours vs a 90-minute flight.

Train travel leans into a trend for "slow travel." It's also great for Instagram. It suits lazy adventurers who like comfort, a theme I plan to take to extremes on my next train trip around Peru where our train has a spa, so I can enjoy a facial while climbing Machu Picchu.

Train trips are romantic. And sexy. I've never had so much action as on a long-distance ride. I've also never drunk or eaten so much. When I took the Trans-Siberian with my friend "Judge" Rob Rinder (a self-confessed body fascist) he worried so much about our over-indulgence he created a prison work-out to do in our cabin: pull-ups from the luggage rack, burpees between beds. When I followed the Silk Road through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, I found a yoga teacher doing downward dog every morning in the aisle of our carriage.

Ultimately, trains appeal because they feel like the last great voyages. No matter how luxurious, trains are never slick. The soup shakes at dinner, leaves stop the track, you lie in bed rattling over (ironically named) sleepers. For every posh Orient Express trip to Vienna, there's an extreme rail adventure to be had - like the Mauritania Iron Ore Train that crosses the Sahara, with passengers perched in open carriages on the goods. Later this year I'm taking a trip from Cape Town to Dar Es Salaam that cuts right through wild game reserves.

Now technology can render travelling impersonal, trains are still a human experience. You cannot share a cabin for a week with someone and not connect. In Siberia, I chatted to Russian soldiers smoking on the platform, wearing shorts at -26oC. In Texas, an ex-con offered me his moonshine in the viewing carriage. On the Silk Road, I drank wine over long dinners with the ladies from the next cabin, as if we were on a posh cruise.

There are so many train trips I still want to do. Vietnam's Reunification railway, Canada's Rocky Mountaineer, the Black Sea Express. The appeal of train journeys is that there are so many, each as different as the people you meet on them.

The Sporting Year

by ALLAN MASSIE

From the Olympics to the Open, 2020 is set to be a vintage year for sport...

TheEuropeanJournal.online

Photo: Victor Moussa / Shutterstock.com


Photo: Chaay_Tee / Shutterstock.com

Photo: Alfaguarilla / Shutterstock.com

It's a truism that time contracts as you get older - the gap between, for instance, one Olympic Games and the next shrinking, so that the four years pass in what seems little more than the blink of an eye. Conversely the past may quickly come to seem strangely remote. Is it really less than eight years since Boris Johnson as Mayor of London was welcoming the world to the London Olympics?

This year the games return to Tokyo where they were previously held in 1964. They were then declared open by the Emperor Hirohito, still a controversial figure as Japan's Head of State in World War II. They were the first games held in Asia and the first to be telecast live in the USA and Europe, also the last in which a cinder track was used for athletics. The games were held in October to avoid Japan's midsummer heat and the September typhoon season which came close to disrupting last year's Rugby World Cup. This year the Olympics will run from 24 July to 9 August. Let's hope it's not too hot.

In 1964, there were 163 events in 19 sports across 25 disciplines. This year there will be 339 events in 33 sports, encompassing 52 disciplines. Inflation is not only monetary. Still, one can't get away from money when it comes to sport today. Several events will be held at times less convenient for athletes and ticket-holders than for American television. The swimming finals, for instance, will take place in the morning to please NBC, though this decision is unpopular with the host country's broadcasters, swimming being very popular in Japan. British viewers: take heed. These will be the last Olympics for which primary rights are owned by the BBC.

There will be controversies because there always are. The suspicion of drug assistance casts a dark shadow over several sports, notably and sadly athletics and cycling. Not even the fear of discovery and disgrace will deter some coaches from seeking to gain a chemical advantage for their athletes who will naively obey instructions. It seems likely that Russia will be barred from fielding a team. Athletes trained by Mo Farah's former coach Alberto Salazar at the Nike Oregon Project may be equally unwelcome. The International Olympic Committee has asked the World Anti-Doping Agency to investigate all connected with Salazar and the NOP.

British Cycling, its reputation tarnished by scandal, may contribute less to Britain's medal haul than at the London and Rio games. Sadly, there will be competitors across the whole spectrum of sports who will fail drugs tests, some because they have been ill-advised (to put it mildly) by their coaches. The quest for glory may often invite corruption.

Nevertheless, nobody can reasonably doubt that the Olympics will not only be the great sporting event of 2020, but also a huge success. It is true that the games have become bloated, now including sports like tennis and golf which, one thinks, don't really belong there because winning an Olympic Gold carries less prestige than winning Wimbledon or Roland-Garros, the Masters at Augusta or the Open Championship. Even so, the huge popularity of golf in Japan and the rising popularity of tennis there mean that these events will attract big crowds.

We can be sure that these Olympics will be staged with exemplary efficiency (which has not always been the case) and for the millions of television viewers there is the added pleasure of suddenly becoming knowledgeable about sports that one previously knew nothing about and others one hadn't watched since the last Olympics. In an Olympic year sports that usually attract very little public notice have their days in the limelight and hitherto unknown competitors have their hour not only of glory but of an unusually wide-spread fame. Though for many people athletics continue to hold centre-stage, the attention given to what are usually considered minor sports is surely one of the merits of the whole endeavour.

Photo: Maxisport / Shutterstock.com

Photo: Picstaff / Shutterstock.com

Photo: Silvi Photo / Shutterstock.com

England have so often flattered only to deceive that even the tabloid press may hesitate to proclaim them winners of Euro 2020 in advance, only to turn savagely on manager and players when they fail to oblige. But I think England may do it this time if Southgate can get his best team on the field.

Photo: Mitch Gunn / Shutterstock.com

But what else can one look for this coming year?

First there is the UEFA European Championships - Euro 2020 – to be held over a month from June 12th. It's the sixtieth anniversary of the competition and unusually there isn't a single host nation. Instead, in what the former UEFA President - and one-time great player - Michel Platini, whose reputation is now sadly somewhat tarnished, described endearingly as "a romantic gesture," the Championship will be spread around with matches played in twelve cities in twelve countries before the semi-finals and final are staged at Wembley. Romantic or not, this seems rather a good idea, worth repeating; it spreads the interest and offers more opportunities for fans.

For England, there is the prospect of at last winning a major competition for the first time since Bobby Moore lifted the World Cup in 1966. Euro 2016 was unhappy for England, embarrassing and scarcely short of humiliating as they struggled against Iceland. But there will be no shortage of expectation this time, and not only because of the chance of playing the last two matches at Wembley. Gareth Southgate has been quietly forging an England team that plays in a style which is both coherent and attractive. There's an air of calmness about the England manager and an absence of entitlement in his manner and preparations. England have so often flattered only to deceive that even the tabloid press may hesitate to proclaim them winners in advance, only to turn savagely on manager and players when they fail to oblige. But I think England may do it this time if Southgate can get his best team on the field and if his players don't come to the tournament exhausted by the demands of the Premiership and Champions League.


Photo: David W. Leindecker / Shutterstock.com

In Rugby Union, England, having been deprived of the World Cup by South Africa's excellence in the final, will surely start as favourites for the Six Nations, partly on account of their demolition of New Zealand in the semi-final in Japan. Their rivals may hope that the troubles afflicting Saracens, the leading English club which contributed eight players to Eddie Jones's World Cup squad, may disrupt their preparation, but the hope is likely to be a vain one. Ireland and Wales have better Six Nations records in recent years, but both have new coaches this season and both have ageing teams in need of refreshment.

Wales, coming close to beating South Africa in the semi-final, had a very good World Cup, Ireland a disappointing one. Yet the vitality of the Irish provinces, very evident in the first two rounds of the European Rugby Champions Cup, suggests that Ireland have a strength in depth that Wales lack, and are therefore more capable of regenerating their squad quickly. Then, for the first time in too long, France look on the point of resurgence, with young players coming through from the team that won the World Rugby Under-20 Championship a couple of years ago. They too have a new coach, the former French scrum-half and captain Fabien Galthie and, perhaps more significantly, have recruited Shaun Edwards as defence coach. The French defence has been porous for years, but Edwards master-minded the Welsh defence that secured them a Grand Slam last Spring. Sadly, neither Scotland nor Italy is likely to challenge for the title, but England may not relish having to travel north for their match at Murrayfield.

In golf, it's a Ryder Cup year with the USA hoping, and quite probably expecting, to regain the trophy at Whistling Straits in Wisconsin. (I confess to knowing nothing about the course but the name sounds daunting.) Europe won convincingly at Le Golf National in 2018, but a third of that team are now a year or two either side of 40. It is therefore somewhat likely to be a less experienced European team this time, and playing the Ryder Cup in the USA is demanding for players without previous cup experience as, for instance, Danny Willett and Matt Fitzpatrick discovered in 2016. On the American side it's likely to be the first Ryder Cup team for ages without Phil Mickelson and perhaps Tiger Woods. Neither, one might add, distinguished himself at Le Golf National. It's tough to win in America and the home team are usually favourites, though over the past twenty years Europe has had more success in the USA than the Americans in Europe.

Before then The Open returns to Royal St George's, the only course in the south of England where it is played, also the first at which it was held outside Scotland, way back in 1894 when it was won by J. H. Taylor, one of the famous Victorian and Edwardian

triumvirate: Taylor, James Braid and Harry Vardon. Vardon also won there, twice, in 1899 and 1911, as have other great champions: Walter Hagen, Henry Cotton, Bobby Locke, Sandy Lyle and Greg Norman, as well as less well-remembered ones, Bill Rogers and Ben Curtis. The last winner there was Darren Clarke in 2011. No Englishman has won The Open anywhere since Nick Faldo in 1992. Time surely for another?

In tennis, Serena Williams, the greatest female player of the century, will be seeking her 24th singles title in the Grand Slam tournaments. This is already more than anyone has won in this era and would put her level with Margaret Smith Court whose career spanned the amateur and open years. Serena last won one of these titles, the Australian Open, in 2017. Since then she has lost the Wimbledon final twice and the US Open final twice also, in all four matches without winning a set. Nevertheless, if you are still reaching finals, you can still win a final - so perhaps...

There comes a time in all sports when champions hear a new generation knocking at the door. We've been waiting for this in men's tennis for a few years now. But the knocking has been little louder than a gentle tap and the triumvirate of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic has continued to rule. Apart from them, only Andy Murray and Stan Wawrinka have won more than a single slam title this century. Afflicted by injuries and having undergone surgery neither Murray nor Wawrinka seems likely to challenge again. Meanwhile, Federer next summer will enter his fortieth year, and though Nadal and Djokovic between them won all four Slams this year, the knocking on the door sounds for the first time threatening. Dominic Thiem, Daniil Medvedev and the twenty-one year old Stefanos Tsitsipas are ranked fourth, fifth and sixth. Thiem has reached slam finals in Paris and New York, and Tsitsipas in winning the tour finals in London beat Federer, Djokovic and Nadal. Time for a changing of the guard? Perhaps. But you'd be rash to bet against Djokovic in Melbourne or at Wimbledon and more than rash to bet against Nadal winning at Roland-Garros once again, unless you believe that going for a thirteenth title there is sure to be unlucky.

It will be a quieter summer in English cricket after this year's World Cup and Ashes, no matter how engaging test series against West Indies and Pakistan prove to be. It will however see the first coming of the ECB's darling child, The Hundred, which many of the most loyal and devoted, even obsessed, cricket fans pray will be a dreadful flop. Sadly there is so much money invested that the ECB will pronounce it a great success. As usual while giving lip service to the primacy of test cricket, the ECB will pursue its policy of pushing the County Championship to the margins. Meanwhile at the turn of the year England will be in South Africa seeking a rare series victory away from home. They may have a better chance than usual, South Africa being in the process of re-building and having themselves just suffered a heavy defeat in India. There's nothing remarkable about that of course. It is now at least as hard for a visiting team to win in India as it is in Australia.

One of the surprising features of this century so far has been the revival of interest in boxing, greatly helped by the proliferation of TV channels devoted to sport. This proliferation is mirrored by that of self-styled world title fights, promoted by the different boxing boards and made more numerous by the division and sub-division of weight categories. Where once there were eight weights and usually only eight recognised champions, there are now more champions than most of us can remember or even count. That said, the heavyweight division is more interesting than it has been for years, and, extraordinarily for anyone old enough to remember the days when British fighters in the top division were derided in the USA as "horizontal heavyweights," Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua have both held versions of the heavyweight crown and may do so again.

Still, the more things change, the more the best remains what it has always been, and this is true, not only in the lower leagues of football and rugby and in amateur sports in which players outnumber spectators but also in those sports where tradition is still respected, horse-racing being a notable example. Yet the most remarkable feature of recent years has been the growth of women's sport, notably in games once regarded as almost exclusively male, at least as far as public attention is concerned. Tennis, golf and athletics have long been exceptions to this generalisation but they have now been joined by women's football, rugby and cricket, all featured in the press and promoted on TV - boxing too, even though some of us oldies still dislike the idea – let alone the sight - of girls and women thumping each other.

Still, if one was to make any confident prediction, it would be that the advance of women's sport will continue and indeed accelerate. Equality of esteem is still some way off in football, rugby and cricket, but it is coming, and it will not be long before the girls and women who star in these sports are as much household names as tennis players like Serena Williams and athletes like Laura Muir are now. Hitherto for the most part women who attained sporting stardom have done so in individual sports – and indeed this goes back a very long way now to, for instance, Suzanne Lenglen in tennis after the First World War and the "Flying Dutchwoman" Fanny Blankers-Koen, the star of the 1948 London Olympics - but now we can see the same thing happening in team sports. It won't be long before the stars of women's football, cricket and rugby are as well-known and as much admired as their male counterparts. This is the most remarkable development of recent years and it's gathering pace.

Guillem Balague

The Future of the BEAUTIFUL GAME

Want to understand the changing face of football? Look to La Liga...

Photo: Gualter Fatia / Getty Images

Back in the day when I first began to report on football, by which I mean about 25 years ago, we all knew what the phrase "Over the Top" meant.

Now, as La Liga seems to be gradually converting itself into something more than a mere guardian and organiser of Spain's footballing top flight, suddenly the OTT terminology means much more than an overly robust tackle that could well see you receive your marching orders.

In its simplest form OTT is a streaming media service offered directly to viewers on the internet. By by-passing the traditional platforms such as terrestrial, satellite and cable, it retains ownership and total influence to do as it wishes over the distribution of its product.

The times they are most certainly a'changing with La Liga and its combative, "Marmite" leader, Javier Tebas at the forefront of a revolution that is rapidly changing the way we are watching football now and will continue to do so in the future. Effectively what Tebas and the La Liga organisation that he heads have decided is that if it is to fight against the rest to put its product out there around the world then it must effectively convert itself into a technology company responsible for the distribution of its product.

Tebas is a strange cove and certainly not everyone's cup of camomile. Up to now he and his extensive team have ploughed their own furrow and battled constantly to keep La Liga at the very top of the world's footballing hierarchy, something that has constantly pitted it against the Spanish Football federation that its members belong to.

Tebas and La Liga are going beyond the now. They imagine a future where virtual reality glasses, voice activated gadgets like Alexa or bigger live interactions with clubs will be part of the football experience and they are accumulating data to know as much as they can about their clientele.

The La Liga boss and Spanish FA chief Luis Rubiales have one major thing in common, namely a mutual detestation of each other. Fundamentally, they disagree on just two things; everything they say and everything they do. Think Tom and Jerry or Itchy and Scratchy in full flight and you get an inkling of the antipathy that exists between them.

They understand the future of football in different ways.

In fact, if the success of any large organisation can be gauged by the ability of all its different parts to row seamlessly in the same direction then it's nothing short of a miracle that the Spanish footballing boat has ever managed to get out of the harbour, never mind rise to the top of the sport's "greasy pole" for much of the 21st century.

Tebas is certainly the one with the bigger and more adventurous vision. To be fair to him, he has always been an avid technophile and in the constantly changing world of the screening of football all around the world the current La Liga initiative looks to be stealing a march on all of its competitors.

In his early professional days, he was the first one to have a mobile phone - the size of which Ryanair would not now allow you to bring as cabin luggage. He had the first fax machine in his town. Today's innovations include the collection and careful placement of viewer's data into a data lake which is charting the changing way we watch football.

"We use it to create a match schedule," Tebas has explained. "When we put the times of the matches, our artificial intelligence predicts how many people will to go to the stadiums, how many are going to watch on Spanish television, how many are going to watch in different, strategic countries around the world, and we have a margin of error of less than five per cent... Or put another way we can focus on whatever may be of interest to one club or another. The timings of the games we choose with a view to optimise maximum attendance at the stadium, maximum audience on Spanish television and maximum audience in different countries around the world."

He continued: "What we believe is that the millennial generation watch football a different way but still watch the 90 minutes. They need to interact, a second screen for more information and in fact we are working in the world of OTT with the possibility of watching football with a chat with your friends who are watching the game. They want to enjoy it a different way, in company, with more information, more experiences. The important thing is that we as owners of the content should understand that this is happening and we need to prepare for this transition."

The La Liga boss and the Spanish FA chief have one major thing in common - a mutual detestation of each other. Fundamentally, they disagree on just two things - everything they say and everything they do.

Tebas and La Liga are going beyond the now. They imagine a future where virtual reality glasses, voice activated gadgets like Alexa or bigger live interactions with clubs will be part of the football experience and they are accumulating data to know as much as they can about their clientele. They already have their own OTT, LaLigaSports TV in which they experiment with less popular sports preparing themselves for a future where TV channels or platforms will not be needed to exploit their broadcasting rights. LaLiga is imagining (and in that way starting to influence) how we will relate to the beautiful game.


Photo: Anton_Ivanov / Shutterstock.com


Photo: A.PAES / Shutterstock.com


Photo: kivnl / Shutterstock.com


Photo: Maxisport / Shutterstock.com


Photo: Leonard Zhukovsky / Shutterstock.com


Photo: mooinblack / Shutterstock.com

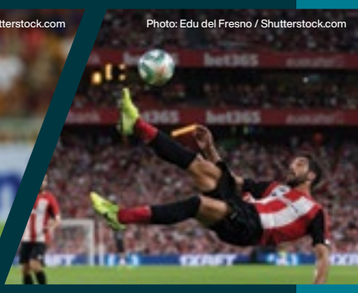


Photo: Edu del Fresno / Shutterstock.com

On the lessons Donald Trump learned in the wrestling ring

Fighting Talk

by LUKE COPPEN

On October 9, 2019, President Donald Trump wrote one of the strangest letters ever sent from one head of state to another. 'History will look upon you favourably if you get this done the right and humane way,' he told Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as they jostled over Syria. 'It will look upon you forever as the devil if good things don't happen. Don't be a tough guy. Don't be a fool!'

The letter was shocking because we expect world leaders to address each other in the stilted language of diplomacy. Yet Trump *was* speaking in a familiar register - familiar, at least, to fans of 'sports entertainment'.

Consider the following speech, delivered by professional wrestler Mr McMahon:

'I am the dream killer, the reaper of souls, the master puppeteer on the stage of fools. I am the only one who can see the big picture, the grand design ... I am the master of the house. I pull the strings around here. So I don't care who the hell you are - if you're in my way you will get taken out.'

Now read Trump's letter again, as if it were a wrestling promo. Imagine him with a tight singlet, veiny muscles and a shiny championship belt slung over his shoulder, jabbing a finger at the camera. It makes more sense that way, doesn't it?

Trump and McMahon have more in common than a rhetorical style. In 2007, Trump took on McMahon, the chairman of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), in a 'Battle of the Billionaires' at WrestleMania 23. In a scene that seems more surreal with each passing year, McMahon was arguing with a referee when Trump, dressed in suit and tie, flattened McMahon with a clothesline before pummelling him on the floor. After being declared the winner, Trump proceeded to shave off a screaming McMahon's hair in the centre of the ring.

The President's association with the WWE dates back to the 1980s, when Atlantic City's Trump Plaza hosted both WrestleMania IV and WrestleMania V, becoming the first venue to hold the 'Show of Shows' two years running. In 2013, Trump was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame.

Perhaps Trump's approach is suited to our outlandish times. As the director Werner Herzog recently put it: 'I was raised with Latin and Ancient Greek and poetry from Greek antiquity, but sometimes, just to see the world I live in, I watch WrestleMania.'

Is Trump's approach to geopolitics really inspired by professional wrestling? If so, perhaps such a foreign policy is suited to our outlandish times. As the director Werner Herzog recently put it: 'I was raised with Latin and Ancient Greek and poetry from Greek antiquity, but sometimes, just to see the world I live in, I watch WrestleMania.'

WWE is not the only sports empire allied to Trump. The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the world's top cage fighting promotion, credits the President with saving it from oblivion. In the late 1990s the organisation was struggling for survival as Senator John McCain led a campaign to ban what he called 'human cockfighting'. In 2000, Trump threw the sport a lifeline, hosting a fight card at the Trump Taj Mahal. The UFC's popularity later exploded and in 2016 the company was sold for $4 billion.

That same year UFC president Dana White endorsed Trump in a speech at the Republican National Convention. Two years later, the UFC released a documentary, *Combatant in Chief*, which paid lavish tribute to the President. Karim Zidan, a reporter who has exposed links between mixed martial arts (MMA) and authoritarian leaders worldwide, called the film 'a case study in political sportswashing'. The UFC, he argued, was allowing Trump to launder his reputation via one of the fastest-growing sports on Earth.

On November 3, 2019, Trump flew to New York to attend a UFC event at Madison Square Garden. Nate Diaz and Jorge Masvidal were fighting for the BMF belt. The title was hastily invented after 'West Coast gangster' Diaz challenged fellow 'gangster' Masvidal to a fight to decide who was the 'baddest motherfucker' in MMA.

Why did the Leader of the Free World want to spend an evening watching men, clad only in shorts and gloves, knocking each other senseless inside a cage?

Why did the Leader of the Free World want to spend an evening watching men, clad only in shorts and gloves, knocking each other senseless inside a cage? Maybe he sees the sport as a metaphor for his own bruising brand of politics. As international norms break down, it becomes ever more important to project strength. Trump may think of himself as a fighter standing up for America's interests against 'gangsters' such Erdoğan, Putin and Kim Jong-un. Perhaps by associating himself with the brutal ballet of MMA, he is symbolically proclaiming himself the world's BMF.

As it turned out, the BMF bout wasn't close. Masvidal stopped a bloodied Diaz in the third round. Shortly before the fight, a reporter had asked Masvidal what he thought of The Donald. "No matter what your views on Trump as a president,' he said, 'the guy's a bad motherfucker, man.' Naturally Trump retweeted that video.

TheEuropeanJournal.online

HOW EFFETE ARE OUR ELITES?

Populism has been brewing for longer than you think...

by JOHAN HAKELIUS

Having met him only in his writing, I guess you could call George Walden (pictured below), the former diplomat, Tory minister and PPS to Sir Keith Joseph, likeable.

I wouldn't, though.

I've nothing against snobs as such, but snobbery is like a startling hat: if you can make it play with the rest of your outfit it's great. If not, it's simply annoying. George Walden, undoubtedly a snob, has a hat-problem. Just when you've started to like him, the appearance of his hat shocks you and you have to begin all over again.

His memoirs *Lucky George*, said to be written by an "Anti-Politician", were first published in 1999, six years after Alan Clark's *Diaries.* There are similarities. It's not a coincidence that Penguin added a blurb from Matthew Parris, calling *Lucky George* "brilliant, the best since Alan Clark's *Diaries*", to the front of the paperback. Alas, Walden's short and condescending description of Clark in that same book is a perfect example of why Walden, at the end of the day, isn't likeable: Clark turned up at the BBC in loud country tweeds on a weekday in the metropolis - the sheer horror of it!

There's too much primness and not enough acerbic zest in Walden's cant. Nevertheless, Walden is nobody's fool and he's still at it, of sorts. His latest is an update of his 2006 book *Time to Emigrate?* The original was not very well liked by the *Guardian*-reading crowd. Walden professed not feeling at home in England anymore, partly but not exclusively because of immigration. That can still get you into trouble in neighbourhoods with posh postcodes. The update basically consists of a longish letter to his daughter, debating the need to emigrate after Brexit, and a foreword explaining why no one is fit to run the country.

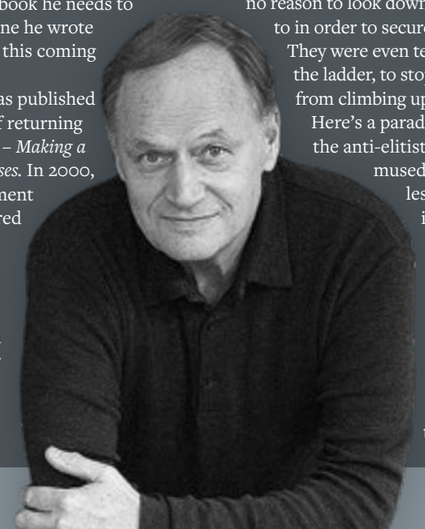
In 2000, the Blair government was still considered interesting and Peter Mandelson had only fallen from grace once... George Walden not only saw past that, he saw into the souls of the new political caste. It wasn't pretty.

It's a good, easy read, if not an encouraging one. Walden is a Remainer, but not of the silly kind. He explains his position to his daughter, the day after the referendum. She suspected that her father would vote to leave, because of his views on immigration. Walden recoils:

"Vote for Pantaloon? Of course I was a Remainer! That was the whole point of what I was saying about immigration! To warn that if we didn't listen to decent Brits on the rough side of it, then God help us. Well, we didn't, and He hasn't."

But I can't help but feel that George Walden should have made a little more of an effort. The book he needs to resurrect is the one he wrote twenty years ago this coming year.

Ever since it was published I've found myself returning to *The New Elites – Making a Career in the Masses.* In 2000, the Blair government was still considered interesting and Peter Mandelson had only fallen from grace once. It was – at least a few months after the millennium celebrations in London and at least for us foreigners – possible to use the catchphrase "Cool Britannia" without giving it an ironic twist.



George Walden not only saw past that, he saw into the souls of the new political caste. It wasn't pretty.

The gist of it was that a kind of inverted elite had taken over politics. It was in a way more of a cultural change than a political one, so no party was immune. The inverted nature of the new elite took the form of an unmitigated support for anti-elitism. What had grown out of the counter-culture in the 60s and what had at that time been a liberating force had now, argued Walden, become "constraining, a secular religion with its dogmas, its clergy, its cloudy hermeneutics".

Britain, Walden wrote, had fallen into the hands of a "select group of professional egalitarians". These egalitarians did nothing to raise popular aspirations or make people better themselves, instead they "exploit mass taste, mass gullibility, mass spending power for their own advantage".

Walden's book was timely. There was a tentative discussion that revived Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses.* Christopher Lasch's last work *The Revolt of the Elites: And the Betrayal of Democracy* was published just six years earlier. It's almost hard to imagine today, but there was an international debate on the relationship between governed and governors, between elites and the people, driven by honest curiosity. Words like "populism" and "elite" still had a descriptive meaning, not only a pejorative function.

Walden outlined a whole set of implications from his thesis. One of them was that the "New Elite" had no sense of "noblesse oblige". The anti-elitist elites were by definition meritocratic. So they truly believed that they were self-made. Once they had climbed the ladder they saw no reason to look down, unless they had to in order to secure their position. They were even tempted to raise the ladder, to stop the competition from climbing up high.

Here's a paradoxical twist: the anti-elitist elites, Walden mused, were probably less interested in and less in touch with "the common man" than the elitist elites they had supplanted.

Where would that take us?

And here we are, twenty years later.

MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD

SUBSCRIBE WWW.REACTION.LIFE

GET LEADING WRITERS AND A DAILY BRIEFING DELIVERED FROM LONDON