

INTRODUCTION: STUPID SUBJECTS

Steven Angelides

Just a month before this year's federal election, two of Australia's most prominent gay and lesbian newspapers published front-page articles describing an "apparent shift" in John Howard's "position on some gay and lesbian issues". Under the emblazoned headlines: "TURNAROUND: Howard Makes a Left Turn on Gay Issues", and "HOWARD COMES OUT: A New-Age Guy on Gay Issues?", Sydney *Capital Q* and *Melbourne Star Observer* ran cover stories curiously detailing Howard's newly acquired "softer stance", as revealed on a 2UE interview with John Laws. Howard, despite his party's pre-election *promise* to *never* support Democrat Sid Spindler's Sexual Discrimination Bill, was nonetheless comfortable in stating to John Law's that sexual preference is "something that should go unremarked and undiscriminated against". "I think I speak for mainstream Australia", suggested Howard, "in saying that the days of people feeling that homosexuals should be discriminated against are gone and I think that's good". However, when put to the test in relation to the issue of same-sex marriage, Howard was forced to qualify this statement, again invoking "mainstream Australia": "I don't support that because I think that it is out of step with mainstream Australian opinion".¹

In what was not reported by these newspapers, Howard attempted to rationalise this blatant contradiction in relation to sexual discrimination by deploying the erroneous, tiresome, and utterly anachronistic rhetoric of the sanctity of heterosexual marriage as *foundational* to Australian society. In contrast to *Capital Q* and *MSO, The Australian*, reporting on Howard's interview with Laws, managed to expose Howard's profound illogic through a more critical and balanced coverage of his comments; indeed, in a report only one-tenth the length of those of *MSO* and *Capital Q*. Realistically entitled, "Libs Draw Line on Gays", the extent of Howard's epistemic alliance with certain discourses of the conservative and religious right was revealed. "[T]here are certain institutions in our community that provide it with bulwarks and stability", declared Howard, "and marriage is one of them...attempts to give the same legal status to homosexual relations as marriage are not things I would support".²

Howard may claim, however dubiously, to be in touch with "mainstream Australian opinion", but it is certainly clear that he is profoundly out of touch with Australian (and in fact, Western) social and cultural trends. It is at best simplistic (and at worse untrue) to argue that marriage is an institution providing Australian society with stability. For marriage is one of *many* social arrangements that comprise an elaborate network of constantly shifting socio-political power relations which structure and *de/stabilise* Australian society. In other words, marriage is most definitely not a *stable* institution in the way Howard would like to claim. It is, like any institution or social relation, profoundly precarious; fractured at its core by instability. To deploy the phraseology of Judith Butler, the very coherence and *stability* of marriage itself (not to mention the socially stabilising effect it is mistakenly seen to produce) is necessarily dependent upon the *enforcible* reiteration of a set of social norms. That Australia is experiencing not only the lowest marriage rate since settlement, but as well, an increasing divorce rate,³ highlights what Butler would identify as the very failure of repetition, and thus the illusory *stability*, or coherence, of marriage itself.⁴ So insofar as Howard's notion of marriage is construed by him as a 'bulwark', it is nothing else but that: a "powerful defense"(*OED* definition) of the ideology of the 'traditional', yet diminishing and minoritarian concept of marriage.

The other institution to which Howard is implicitly referring is, of course, the metonymic counterpart of marriage, the 'bulwark' of the family; both of which are seen to exclude homosexuals *a priori*. That this exclusive presumption can only be the effect of biblically-derived decrees brings into sharp focus a rather disturbing union: John Howard and Fred Nile as bedfellows. What we have is a political coupling discursively aligned through a logic which in the last instance constructs "*same sex marriages*", as Fred Nile's Festival of Light *News Bulletin* states, as:

an abomination, immoral, unnatural, abnormal and blasphemous against God's Creative Purposes when God ordained the sacrament and ordinance of marriage between one male and one female in a loving, lasting life-long relationship before God and society.⁵

Or, as more succinctly suggested by Chris Miles, founding member of the pro-family organisation of Christian Coalition MPs, The Lyons Forum, "the family is the God-ordained fundamental unit of society, marriage is the union of a man and woman 'to the exclusion of all others'".⁶ And if you think I'm stretching to the limits of credulity this epistemological alliance between Howard and the extreme religious

right, let me inform you that the Lyons Forum once boasted Howard as one of its members.⁷ Within this fundamentalist discourse, homosexual marriage, to employ the words of Mike Gabbard, the Hawaiian founder of a group called "Stop Promoting Homosexuality in America", is nothing but "a bomb that will blow the traditional family to pieces".⁸

If the now clichéd designation of 'the lucky country' means anything, at the very least it points to a sense of comfort in the knowledge that unlike the United States, Australia has no comparable social base of fundamentalist religion; in that much, we are certainly very lucky. For example, it is highly improbable given the very different cultural contexts, that we would witness in Australia anything like the anti-gay initiatives that have sparked such violence in the US in states such as Colorado and Oregon. However, while the heteronormative logic driving such hate campaigns would presumably produce more substantially homophobic social effects than one would expect in Australia, its fundamental anatomy is the same. Like the US, heteronormativity is a palpable force constitutive of contemporary Australian public discourse. So when Howard suggests that heterosexual marriage, and the heteronormative family are "bulwarks", or stabilising institutions of our communities, he is effectively erecting these institutions against the destabilising and asocial figure of homosexuality. Marriage and the family are thus 'bulwarks' against homosexuality itself. We are left wondering just how far John Howard's discourse is from that of the homophobic extremist, Pat Buchanan. Howard seems to be engaged in a kind of discursive promiscuity, at once bedfellows with Nile, then with Buchanan, and back again. For just a little further to our *right* across the pacific, witness, in what appears to be the logical extension of Howard (il)logic, US Republican Senator Buchanan's remarks that:

Homosexuality is not a civil right. Its rise almost always is accompanied, as in the Weimar Republic, with a decay of society and a collapse of its basic cinder block, the family.⁹

Howard has no trouble in conceding the right of individuals to engage in private, consensual homosexual sex. After all, as he so generously points out, "in the 1990s for any part of Australia to treat homosexuality as an offence is ludicrous and unfair and wrong".¹⁰ Political rhetoric aside, this is a far cry from homosexuality as a civil right. Howard's claim to be against discrimination on the grounds of sexual preference is utterly vacuous. In his suggestion that sexuality "is something that should go unremarked and undiscriminated against" lies the more

4 critical inQueeries

insidious logic that homosexuality ought to stay in the closet, accepting a position of inferiority and inequality, in order to gain social 'tolerance'. "I think we often make the mistake", Howard condescendingly states, "of confusing toleration and endorsement".¹¹ This appeal to the neutrality of democratic liberalism is not only naive, but blatantly duplicitous. Heterosexuality is without doubt the *unmarked* master signifier of *all* public discourse. It is that which is endorsed above and against *all else*. Following feminist and lesbian theorists like Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich, this means that in Australian culture heterosexuality is a compulsory institution. That is to say, that it is a part of *all* mental and social categories that *all* individuals are forced to live and think under. Heterosexuality is not only rigorously endorsed and promoted, but *enforced*. Clearly, there is a world of difference in *being unmarked* and *going unremarked*.

The liberal concept of 'toleration' operates as a tool of hegemonic domination. Its disingenuous functioning in the service of democracy and equality masks a commitment to a politics of containment. To continue the example, homosexuality is to be *tolerated*, Howard implores, but only to a point. The stability of Australian society requires that homosexuality, and 'the homosexual agenda', be managed and controlled. I imagine that Howard would thus find little to dispute in Fred Nile's plea "to face the sin of homosexuality and its [social] consequences in a balanced, firm, loving, Biblical way".¹² Recognition and acceptance of private, consensual homosexuality is one thing, but recognition, acceptance and promotion of homosexuality as a public, or social form in its own right is quite another.

Once again we arrive at a parallel situation to the anti-gay initiatives in the United States. The logic is the same, the severity of effect different. Fundamentalist Christian groups and Republican organisations have waged a wholesale attack on the public representation of homosexuality as anything but immoral and unnatural. To counter lesbian and gay attempts at gaining basic civil rights protections enjoyed by heterosexuals, these right-wing groups have responded with two strategies: *No Promo Homo* and *No Special Rights*. As Lisa Duggan points out in "Queering the State", these campaigns "concede the privacy arguments advanced by lesbian/gay advocates. There is no attempt to police 'private' behaviour. Instead, there is an attempt to counter identity claims and antidiscrimination efforts based on those claims through the policing of speech, that is 'promotion' and 'advocacy'".¹³ Similarly, in Britain, Clause 28 of the Local Government Act was

introduced to stop the public promotion of homosexuality.

Arguments against 'special rights' for homosexuals and against the promotion of homosexuality are circulating in Australia, albeit often in somewhat of a muted form. Of course, Fred Nile's Festival of Light organisation has attempted to supplant the US right-wing strategy of 'special rights' directly onto Australian soil. In a petition entitled "No Homosexual Privileges", Nile & Co urge members of the Legislative Council of NSW to repeal the homosexual vilification amendment to the Anti-Discrimination Act, arguing that it "gives a small minority homosexual group special privileges and legal rights not afforded to other citizens".¹⁴ More surreptitious was the Liberal Party's recent strategy in the lead up to the Victorian state election. The state Liberal party preselected Eacham Curry, a 23 year old gay man, to run for the seat of Albert Park; a seat coincidentally held by open supporter of the gay and lesbian 'community', John Thwaites. When interviewed about the reason for his preselection, Curry denied the relevance of his sexuality, offering instead the predictable political cliché of merit: "I think what the Liberal Party was doing was preselecting the person who is best able to win the seat: whether or not I was gay didn't come into it".¹⁵ In fact, the Party's acceptance of his homosexuality, Curry suggested, underscores their attitude of broadmindedness and open tolerance.¹⁶

Employing a more palatable and watered down version of liberal special rights rhetoric, and in concert with John Howard's suggestion that sexuality "is something that should go unremarked", Curry revealed the uncritical heteronormative logic sustaining his position. "I don't want to single out any group because I'd rather see a representative who can represent everyone", he said. "Rather than having *special attention* put on them, I think gays and lesbians would rather be treated as anyone else would be".¹⁷ Unfortunately, gay men and lesbians, let alone the transgendered, are not "treated as anyone else would be" precisely because of the *special rights* and normative *endorsement, promotion* and *enforcement* of heterosexuality; precisely because they are not *represented by* the very system presumed to be in place to support them. The generic Australian citizen which forms the referent of liberal discourses of equality is not a neutral subject which all individuals have 'equal access' to, but rather, a subject which is always only coded as white, as male, and as heterosexual.¹⁸

The example of the Kennett Government's purported 'anti-discrimination' legislation regarding "lawful sexual activity" is a case in

point. The Equal Opportunity Bill introduced by the State government last year is aimed at preventing discrimination on the grounds of "lawful sexual activity". The Bill includes exemptions, however, applying to those with restrictive religious beliefs, and those working with small children: that is, as Wayne Morgan paraphrases the legislation, if "the employer *genuinely* believes that the discrimination is necessary to protect the physical, psychological or emotional well-being of the children". As Morgan points out in this issue of *critical inQueeries*, such anti-discrimination legislation "demonstrate[s] a sexual hierarchy firmly inscribed in the law". In other words, inscribed at the very heart of this 'anti-discrimination' legislation is a discriminatory clause; a clause which provides an avenue for unlawful dismissal of gay men and lesbians if a sufficiently *rational* basis can be established which demonstrates a potentially adverse affect on children under their care. Within a heterosexist and heteronormative culture— not to mention a heterosexist and heteronormative judicial system— such *rationale* is already sanctioned within legislation which prohibits gay men and lesbians from adopting children. Despite the obvious fact that "[h]omosexuality is not identified in the Bill", as Curry is quick to point out in its defense, it is not difficult to see the implicit equation of homosexuality with notions of predation and corruption. Any hint of the *endorsement* or *promotion* of homosexuality in a classroom would be more than enough to establish a case for potential damage to the emotional well-being of children so 'subjected'.¹⁹ In defense of the legislation, and in response to criticism from Gays and Lesbians Against Discrimination, Jeff Kennett's last words on the matter were clearly addressed to those 'real' heterosexual parents among us:

what we have clearly said is that in the interests of children and the care of children, their interests are paramount over everything else and therefore *you and I* do have a say in the *sorts* of people into whose care we entrust *our* children (my emphasis).²⁰

Equally as disturbing is the Coalition's stance on industrial relations. At present, the only area within which gay men and lesbians are protected against discrimination is that of industrial relations regulations at the federal level. Here, the adherence to international treaties provides provisions outlawing discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. Hoping to abolish the federal government's reliance on these treaties, however, John Howard aims instead to install an independent employment advocate, effectively removing any protection for gay men and lesbians discriminated in the workplace.²¹ And with an election promise *not* to support a bill unambiguously banning discrimination on the grounds of

sexuality, the only recourse queers will have is to a liberal legal system constituted to serve democratic heteronormativity.

It is against the backdrop of the current socio-political climate and the resultant change of government in recent months that we have chosen a black cover for the second issue of *critical inQueeries*. We in Australia are poised to experience a dramatic shift to the right in our cultural and political landscape. At the prime-ministerial helm we have a man who, by having publicly acknowledged the unacceptability of discrimination against homosexuals, has thereby purportedly undergone a very recent and positive shift on gay and lesbian issues. If this apparent "softer stance" is a positive *shift*, it would be rather frightening to see exactly *where* John Howard has *shifted from*. For the only thing he has said is that gay men and lesbians should not be discriminated against. Did he believe, prior to this *shift*, that these groups were in fact a worthy target of homophobic discrimination? And what if one of his sons were to be gay, how would that make him feel? Unhappy, he suggested. "It wouldn't alter my love for him but I think for me to say other than that would be dishonest".²² That "the possibility of turning into a queer (or turning out to be queer) is a perpetual present", as Cindy Patton so nicely puts it, I can only hope that one of Howard's sons *does* turn into or out to be a queer. Perhaps only then might we see a real *shift* on queer issues, and 'a new John Howard'.²³

Interestingly, and depressingly, however, this 'new' "softer stance" of Howard and his Coalition Party is not seen as a disingenuous vote-generating ploy, but seems to be accepted at face value by much of the gay press. In one striking example, the assertion made by Christopher Pearson (former Liberal MP and speech writer for John Howard) that homosexuality and conservatism is a false antithesis, is enthusiastically taken up by gay-press columnist, Martyn Goddard. In a recent *Outrage* article entitled, "Reality Sandwiches", Goddard endorses Pearson's suggestion in order to bolster claims that the Coalition has "finally realised" that "issues like gay and lesbian rights, feminism and the environment have become part of the national mainstream". I feel obliged to quote him at length:

Conservatism and gayness, Pearson asserts, are false polarities. Until very recently, gayness was so feared and despised by conservative politicians that such a statement could not have been taken seriously. But times change, and recently have changed in the most spectacular manner. The Coalition was elected on the most progressive social policy in its history. A necessary component of its claim for middle-ground support included a pitch on the very issues it had spurned only three years before, failing then to recognise how central they had become: the environment, women, aborigines and gay rights. The

radical turnaround has been rewarded by a thumping great parliamentary majority. Even the dimmest of knee-jerk reactionaries in the Coalition parties won't be permitted to ignore that. When the reality sandwiches are being handed round, everybody gets one.²⁴

When it comes to wooing voters, this false antithesis of which Pearson and Goddard speak strikes me as rather self-evident. But when it comes to the underlying ideological assumptions of current conservative politicians and legislators— assumptions which structure policy, legislation and the outcomes of initiatives for legislative reform— the false polarity argument collapses. The Liberal Party's 'realisation' is nothing but a vacuous strategy of political expediency. What Goddard fails to taste is the pungency of heteronormativity in the very "reality sandwiches...being handed round".

"The most dynamic recent change in Australian politics" is less a case of the Liberal Party's dawning 'realisation' of the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian (and feminist and environmentalist) issues, as Goddard would have us believe.²⁵ Rather, the most dynamic recent change in Australian politics is that some of the groups (and issues) in whose name the Liberal Party has only now begun to speak, actually believe that there is any substantive content to this 'realisation', or shift in position. I am not suggesting that conservatism is *necessarily* antithetical to homosexuality, but in the context of current ideological formations of 'conservatism' in Australian politics, this *is* certainly and glaringly the case.²⁶

Providing us with yet another exemplary case in point is the Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer. Here is a powerful politician, party leader, and 'representative of the people', whose skewed logic has led him to declare that the "extreme agenda of the gay lobby groups" would lead to "a non-reproductive society by default or stealth". "They are very cunning", he went on, "clever at elevating the gay and lesbian lifestyle to be something of the norm". Rejecting the call for the official recognition of gay and lesbian couples and an expansion of the definition of family, made by Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, Alistair Nicholson, Fischer responded with a warning: "I am going to fight them tooth and nail in taking these further steps and I serve notice of that because I warn that it will not be good for society as a whole".²⁷

Not only does the homophobic extremism of right-wing 'thought' rationalise discrimination against lesbians and gay men on account of the potentially corruptive threat they pose to children, but as well, on account of the threat they pose to society and to public health.

Homophobic discourses surrounding AIDS and Hepatitis A, for example, are quick to depict the popular and stereotypical association of such diseases with homosexuals and homosexuality.²⁸ The purity of 'normal', heterosexual society is seen to be at constant risk from such 'gay plagues'. Indeed, in the area of HIV/AIDS, the stealth figures of the bisexual and the intravenous drug user are particular targets for the projection of heteronormative fears of social contamination by an 'alien', and largely 'gay disease'.

Witness the recent and appalling panic surrounding the search for the female HIV-positive psychiatric patient from Perth who, upon reaching Melbourne, sparked what seemed to be a state-wide emergency. The woman was deemed a serious threat to society, posing "a potential risk of infection because of a history of unsafe sex".²⁹ That is, this woman constituted a threat to heterosexual society. In 'crisis' mode, Victorian Department of Health authorities launched not only a state-wide search for the woman, but a media campaign to warn 'unsuspecting victims'. The woman was constructed as a deadly, asocial predator, irresponsibly spreading the HIV virus. Yet nowhere in the entire media campaign was there any discussion of the 'responsibility' of the potential 'unsuspecting victims' in protecting themselves from sexually transmitted diseases. The notion of 'ir/responsibility' was placed squarely in the hands of the woman. Of course, to acknowledge otherwise would be to concede that HIV/AIDS is not Other to normative heterosexuality; a concession which recognises the virus's blatant disregard for identity boundaries.

Such is the (il)logic which legitimates the Health Department's recent decision to place up to ten HIV-positive people presumed to "pose a serious threat to the public" under supervision, curfew, and even house arrest. Describing one of the objectives of this panoptic method of public health management, Chief Public Health Officer Dr Graham Rouch, stated that:

For the vast majority [of cases] it is a question of keeping a watchful eye on them, and letting them know we are keeping a watchful eye on them.³⁰

Of course, "supervision and restriction orders are usually lifted by the department after the individual has shown a *willingness* to change attitudes and behaviour".³¹ And who is keeping a watchful eye on the attitudes and behaviour of the conservative right wing? I guess that doesn't matter so much; after all, with such a 'clear mandate' for reform! Anyway, it would seem that there is no substantive and legitimate voice

of dissent, except from those ideologues of 'political correctness'. In fact, any dissenting voice is branded PC, and thereby immediately trivialised and politically disempowered. For as the anti-PC bashers magnanimously reveal from their Archimedean position of ideological neutrality, the aim of this PC orthodoxy is only to stifle free speech and suppress serious discussion. Funny how the discussion of the serious issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia seems to get lost amidst the banal straw debate surrounding PC.

So what exactly is this thing called PC? I thought it was an American right-wing strategy devised to attack affirmative action legislation, and restrictions on US university campuses on discriminatory speech and behaviour? An ABC "7:30 Report" panel recently debated the meaning of PC, and there we were told by Dr Marlene Goldsmith, NSW Liberal Member of the Legislative Council, that PC is, in fact, an attempt to stifle free speech. "People *genuinely* believe that they are not free to raise certain issues that concern them", she argued, "because if they raise those issues they will get labelled racist, sexist, whatever the label is, and their issues, their concerns won't be listened to, they'll just be derided, marginalised and ridiculed".³² I dare say that I have no problem with the idea of ridiculing people like Pauline Hanson after comments such as: "We're sick of minorities having their say!" Who was it that wanted to stifle free speech?

More 'thought-provoking' still was the definition proffered by Stan Zemanek, a 2UE radio announcer who describes himself as "Australia's most biased radio talk back host" (and, incidentally, the most complained about host). Zemanek defined PC as: "Well, basically it is the minority groups telling the majority what to do and how to live their lives". Then after supplying us with this enlightened definition, he went on to comment on what he suggested was the ALP's downfall at the March Federal Election. As his statement makes clear, the leaders of the two major parties were implicitly positioned in relation to the straw PC/anti-PC debate:

I think what we saw on March 2 was that the majority had just had enough, and they said 'Enough is Enough'; we want no more of this, we want to go back to running our own lives, and we're just sick and tired of these minority groups telling us exactly what to do. People want a 'fair go', that's all they ask for, they want a 'fair go'. And the perception in society in Australia is that the minority groups get more than the majority.

The more 'moderate' of the two anti-PC spokespersons, Liberal MP,

Tony Abbott, then stepped in, suggesting that what we need in "modern Australia" is less politically correct discussion and "a greater spirit of 'give and take', a greater spirit of 'live and let live'; less self-righteousness on all sides of the argument, and more of the old 'fair go' ethos which I think is traditional in Australia". To which Zemanek jumped in to endorse and extend:

I think that's a fantastic idea. And I think the sooner the minority groups wake up to the fact that it's got to be 'let and let live' [sic], and live with the majority of the population, and be fair and equal with everybody, we'll all get along much better.

Bloody minorities, if only they'd just shut up and stop demanding special rights!

The chimera of PC is not only surfacing as some inappropriately imported diversionary right-wing political tactic serving, as NSW Magistrate Pat O'Shane succinctly put it on "7:30 Report", "to depreciate the debate". PC delirium is fast becoming that against which poets and playwrights measure their intellectual and artistic creativity. In a recent book entitled *Double Take: Six Incorrect Essays*, Peter Coleman, ex-Liberal MP, gathers together "six of Australia's most outspoken writers" to speak up against the dangers of PC.³³ The likes of Beatrice Faust, David Williamson and Christopher Pearson, to name three of the six contributors, come together to tell their own retrospective personal stories of the benefits of PC defiance, or 'political incorrectness'. The essayists are constructed in this collection as creative and independent thinkers, free of the constraints of ideology, free of the pitfalls of political prejudice, or to quote Tony Abbott quoting Christopher Pearson's words of 'wisdom' regarding PC, free from the "blinkers preventing people from seeing anything they don't want to see and accepting anything that isn't part of their pre-existing belief system". But where does this leave these writers we may ask?: free of a perspective and free of a personal story altogether.

"Political correctness is...anathema to true literary creativity", asserts David Williamson, in one of the most naive, ill-informed and uncritical reflections on the diversity of intellectual thought I have ever read. The "ruling cultural determinist, anti-humanist" orthodoxies of feminism, multiculturalism, social constructionism, poststructuralism, deconstruction and cultural materialism, are all lumped together as the current academic force "that has generated the phenomenon known as 'political correctness'".³⁴ (Pat Buchanan also attacks PC multi-culturalism, arguing that it is "an across-the-board assault on our Anglo-American

heritage".³⁵) In quoting Daniel Dennett, Williamson describes this force as "antithetical to almost all surprising advances in thought". It "imposes a mental set on writers that demands they dispense with all explanations of human behaviour that might rely even partly on biology".³⁶ Here Williamson is installing PC as a dangerous social force which functions to foreclose the scientific emancipation of the truth of human behaviour; a truth which he suggests must be harnessed for the betterment of society. "The politically correct", argues Williamson, "want to believe that anything is possible and that there are few if any limits on human deconstruction and reconstruction". "I think we would do better", he suggests, "to accept and know the truth about ourselves and act from that truth than to entertain fantasies about what we may be if we suppress that truth".³⁷ And, of course, if you are uncertain about the truth of yourself and thus unsure about how precisely to act according to that truth, don't despair, because Williamson is well situated, he seems to think, to provide us with the *real truth* concerning human nature.³⁸ That's not all his expertise reveals for us; *apparently* this truth is emerging as the result of a paradigm shift in the academic social sciences. So we need not be overly concerned with the anti-humanist onslaught after all. Thankfully, Reason is about to triumph:

A paradigm shift is underway in the social sciences that is strongly challenging the cultural determinists. The *new* paradigm is an interactionist one, in which a common biological legacy interacts with a capacity for choice that our advanced evolutionary status has given us (my emphasis).³⁹

Voila! The problem of (the meaning of) human nature is solved. Amazing! And so simple: just take some 1970s sociobiology from E.O.Wilson and graft it onto the archaism of liberal humanism, and there you have it. Truth revealed. Free of the "pernicious" and "flawed ideologies" of anti-humanism; ideologies which, as Williamson reminds us, "promise an over-optimistic belief in a 'quick fix' to human problems that are much deeper and more difficult than they acknowledge".⁴⁰ Why couldn't we see this before? I s'pose we forgot to take off our PC 'blinkers'.

And such forms the basis of "the most popular Australian play ever staged";⁴¹ "true literary creativity", a satire written from a perspective free from PC. *A satire itself of ignorance, misunderstanding and misrepresentation.*

"I have an announcement", says Dean Kiley, to preface what could be

seen as an appropriate response to the absurdity of the PC/Anti-PC debate:

I, Ms No-not-that-Kylie, CLICK'N'DRAG queen extraordinaire, will now— without visible means of support— make the entire Political Correctness 'debate' disappear. You watching? Quiet down the back please.

OK. Here we go.

If you make sexist or racist material then, in a remarkable sleight of hand and politics it don't matter if you call it anti-PC or un-PC or naughty or clever or funny or Aussie ratbaggy and

it don't matter if your name's Gerard or Bernadette or Stephan or Vida and

it don't matter if you've got a condom-filled bra on when you do it, or if you've got your auteur hauteur on, or if you've got your safe white middle-class gay or lesbian head shoehorned up your own arse with the aid of a major credit card

it's still fucking sexist or racist. Phew. Shit that was difficult, wasn't it?⁴²

At a time when there is an increasing gap between right-wing heteronormative discourses and queer discourses, a time when productive public debate of issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia is stagnating and stifled by anti-PC rhetoric, a time when minorities are being disempowered and silenced by charges of "special rights"; this is a time that desperately requires, as Lisa Duggan suggests, strategies that address the gap between "the languages of our classrooms and scholarship, and the languages of public debate". It requires that as queer students and teachers we must "respond to these attacks in the public arena from which they are launched". This is not to suggest that we must always submit to the normative and constraining terms of debate and forms of political intervention which dominate the public political arena. Nor is it to imply that we must abandon our efforts at producing more theoretically sophisticated knowledge. Rather, it is to suggest that in the current political climate we need to formulate imaginative and inventive strategies of political intervention, and "we need to think seriously about how to formulate the insights of queer theory and transport them into public discourse".⁴³ Because the epistemic framework of public discourse is a liberalism which is constituted through ideological assumptions and concepts. These are irredeemably partial, hierarchical, and discriminatory. Often inevitably, liberal concepts must be politically utilised. However, also inevitably, and more importantly, liberal concepts must be constantly deconstructed, twisted, queered, and thus made to do political work they were never designed to do. To be content with anything less, is to be content with a political system inherently structured through exclusion and

discrimination.

¹ Howard quoted in Peter O'Shea, "Howard Comes Out: A New-Age Guy on Gay Issues", *Melbourne Star Observer* (MSO), 26 January, 1996, p.1, (my emphasis).

² Howard quoted in "Libs Draw Line on Gays", *The Australian*, 24 January, 1996, p.3.

³ In the 1970s, divorce rates were higher than in the late 1980s, but in the late 1980s they remained, nevertheless, at a high rate. In short, it doesn't matter what the statistics might reveal for 1995, because the point I am trying to make is that divorce rates in the latter part of this century have increased dramatically. The fact that they can shift and change demonstrates the obvious point about the instability of marriage. Interestingly, however, the late 1980s saw a decrease in new marriages, which means that there had been a reduction in the population under 'threat' from the high divorce rates. This could in fact mean that the divorce rate proportional to marriage increased. See Ailsa Burns, "Why Do Women Put Up With the Double Load?" in Norma Grieve & Ailsa Burns (eds), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, esp. pp.281-283. It is important to note also that the majority of Australians will spend most of their lifetimes outside of marriage.

⁴ See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Routledge, New York, 1993, pp.1-16.

⁵ The Australian Federation of Festival of Light Community Standards Organisations, *News Bulletin*, February 1994, p.4.

⁶ Quoted in Gareth Boreham, "The Lyons Forum: Family Comes First", *The Age*, 8 March, 1996, p.4. The phrase "the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others" is stated in the 1961 Marriage Act.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Quoted in Pilita Clark, "Republicans March to Anti-Gay Tune in Iowa", *The Age*, 12 February 1996, A7.

⁹ Quoted in *New Republic*, 30 March 1992.

¹⁰ "Howard Comes Out", p.1.

¹¹ "Libs Draw Line".

¹² *News Bulletin*, *op. cit.*, p.4.

¹³ Lisa Duggan, "Queering the State", in Lisa Duggan & Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1995, p.187.

¹⁴ Petition, "No Homosexual Privileges", *News Bulletin*, *op. cit.*, p.5.

¹⁵ Quoted in "Gay Man Takes on Albert Park", *MSO*, 22 March 1996, p.3.

¹⁶ "Kennett Bill a Key Issue", *Brother Sister*, Issue 102, 21 March 1996, p.11.

¹⁷ Quoted in "Gay Man Takes on Albert Park".

¹⁸ See Wayne Morgan in this issue for a discussion of the problematic of 'equality'.

¹⁹ It is certainly the case that heterosexuals can also be dismissed under the same provision, however, they would not be dismissed for endorsing heterosexual institutions or the heterosexual 'life-style'.

²⁰ Quoted in Brady, *op. cit.*

²¹ Andrew Mast, "Wait and See' Coalition Win", *Brother Sister*, Issue 101, 7 March 1996, p.5.

²² "Howard Comes Out", p.3.

²³ See Cindy Patton, "Tremble, Hetero Swine", in Michael Warner (ed.), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p.150.

²⁴ Martyn Goddard, "Reality Sandwiches", *Outrage*, No.156, May 1996, p.21. Interestingly, Goddard is paraphrasing Pearson from an article in Peter Coleman's new book on 'political incorrectness'. The connection I am making will become clearer in the discussion of PC below.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Wayne Morgan's article in this issue provides an exemplary illustration of this point.

²⁷ Quoted in "Judge Calls for Equality", *MSO*, 6 January 1995, pp.1 &4.

²⁸ See Morgan in this issue, note 40; see also Patton, *op. cit.*, for an interesting US example.

²⁹ Michael Pirrie, "Aids Clamp: Supervision, House Arrest for Carriers", *Herald Sun*, 8 April 1996, p.1.

³⁰ Quoted in *ibid*, p.4.

³¹ This statement is not Roucher's, but part of the report in *ibid* (my emphasis).

³² Quoted on "7:30 Report", ABC, 8/4/96. All subsequent quotes by Stan Zemanek, Tony Abbott and Pat O'Shane are taken from this program. Marlene Goldsmith has recently published a book called, *Political Incorrectness: Defying the Thought Police*, Hodder & Stroughton, Sydney, 1986.

³³ Peter Coleman (ed.), *Double Take: Six Incorrect Essays*, Mandarin, Melbourne, 1996.

³⁴ David Williamson, "Men, Women and Human Nature", in Coleman, *op. cit.*, p.24.

³⁵ Pat Buchanan quoted at <http://www.fair.org/fair/current/buchanan-bigot.html>, 26/4/96, 9:38:14.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.24.

³⁷ Williamson, *op. cit.*, p.28.

³⁸ Ironically, Williamson subscribes to the idea that "[a]ny genetic predispositions to behaviour that we have may not be appropriate to the type of society we live in now"(29). However, he sides with Peter Singer and Trudi Miller in suggesting that nevertheless we have the "evolved capacity for choice to transcend these impulses"; we do so, however, at a potential evolutionary cost, argues Williamson. This kind of ridiculous and contradictory thinking enables him to deal with the 'politically incorrect' forms of behaviour that are a part of his own moral and ethical framework. It also leaves open the possibility of advocating restrictions to certain behaviours if it can be 'discovered' that such behaviours will harm society. He discusses a particularly absurd example of a fundamentalist sect that has been enforcing selflessness for four centuries. "The cost of achieving this cultural ethos", Williamson points out, "is the prohibition of the free exchange of ideas"(30). Williamson would obviously advise against the social sanctioning of a behaviour "that is the very opposite of the message of egocentricity that is said to flow from our genes"(30). Need I really say more!

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.20. I find this statement offensive in its *arrogant ignorance*; and I'm astounded at Williamson's profound lack of awareness and misunderstanding regarding the 'social sciences' of which he speaks. From which historical period did Williamson say this 'supposed' paradigm shift has emerged?!!

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.32.

⁴¹ Peter Coleman, "Introduction: The Morning After", in Coleman, *op. cit.*, p.3.

⁴² Dean Kiley, "and that's final", *Outrage*, *op. cit.*, p.80.

⁴³ Lisa Duggan, *op. cit.*, pp.181,182,193.