

# BOOK REVIEWS

Christopher Beanland, *Concrete Concept: Brutalist Buildings Around the World* (London: Francis Lincoln Ltd, 2016); pp. 192; ISBN 978-0-7112-3764-3.

Christopher Beanland's *Concrete Concept: Brutalist Buildings Around the World* is a welcome and timely publication, as the demolition of many icons of Brutalism proceeds around the globe. Beanland's "Introduction" details: his own love of the style, which developed during his residence in Birmingham from 2002 to 2007; the roots of Brutalism in the Modernist "International Style" which Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887-1965) departed from when he built the Unite d'Habitation in Marseilles in 1952; and the fact that while there were supremely talented artists working in massed concrete, the majority of Brutalist architects were "copycats, functionaries on meat-and-potatoes missions to put up cheap bits of vernacular work which ... stand out like gloriously grisly sore thumbs on streets around the globe" (p. 7). He argues that while Brutalism is ugly, sinister and even frightening to some, it is important to understand that good examples of this style are beautiful, and that Brutalism was an architectural mode that explicitly broke with the past to evoke a vision of the future (unlike postmodern architecture, with its accumulated quotation of motifs from past eras). Brutalism was therefore original and linked to progressive social democracy and political ideas that have all but disappeared in the neoliberal contemporary world. The "Introduction" is followed by Jonathan Meade's "An A-Z of Brutalist Architecture" which introduces readers to a number of figures, sites and concepts crucial for a working knowledge of Brutalism.

The book is a listing of fifty superb examples of Brutalist architecture from Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia/ Oceania, North and South America. The details of each building (name, location, architect, date and purpose) are provided, and quality photographs, both historical and contemporary, are supplied. Some buildings are immensely famous (Unite d'Habitation, referred to above), while others are little known. The Molecular Bioscience Building at the University of Sydney, Australia, built by Stafford, Moor & Farrington in 1973, gained heritage listing in December 2016, when fears about its future and Beanland's featuring it in

*Concrete Concept* coalesced into a staff petition to the National Trust. Beanland draws attention to the lack of female architects in the book. Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992), an Italian who worked in Brazil, is represented by the São Paulo Museum of Art and SESC Pompéia, and Alison Smithson (1928-1993), who worked in partnership with her husband Peter are the only two mentioned. The great variety exhibited by Brutalist buildings is also emphasised; from blocks like The 9 (Cleveland Trust Tower, 1971 by Marcel Breuer) with its monolithic plainness, to the gaiety and exuberance of Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67 (Montreal, 1967), where an organic feel emerges from the asymmetrical stacking of box-like components.

*Concrete Concept* also demonstrates the vast range of functions that Brutalism was harnessed to serve. Some of the most intriguing buildings are religious; the sculptural Wotruba Church on the outskirts of Vienna (Fritz Wotruba 1976) has a monumental interior; Couvert Sainte-Marie de la Tourette (Le Corbusier and Iannis Xenakis, 1959) has a lightness and charm befitting its rural setting; and the Pilgrimage Church at Velbert-Neviges in Germany, by Gottfried Böhm (b. 1920) has, to quote Beanland, "a kind of Star Wars sensationalism ... a kitschy sci-fi menace" (p. 114), which is very surprising in an ecclesiastic structure. A few names recur. The Nichinan Cultural Centre (1963) by the Japanese architect Kenzō Tange (1913-2005) is featured, while his Kuwait Embassy (1970) and St Mary's Cathedral (1964), both in Tokyo, also merit mentions. Sir Basil Spence (1907-1976), probably best-known for his rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral, destroyed during World War II, is represented by The Beehive (New Zealand Parliament, 1977), Wellington and the British Embassy in Rome (1970). That some Brutalist structures are loved is acknowledged; the Barbican (Chamberlin, Powell & Bon, 1965-1982) and Trellick Tower (Ernö Goldfinger, 1972), both in London are warmly commended. Yet, Peter and Alison Smithson's huge estate in Poplar, the visionary Robin Hood Gardens, was demolished in 2017 despite years of campaigning for listed status on the part of architects and heritage bodies.

*Concrete Concept* is a beautiful and fascinating volume, in which Beanland has succeeded in making Brutalist architecture comprehensible, approachable and attractive, possibly even to its detractors. It joins other twenty-first century revisionist publications, like the magnificent *100 Buildings, 100 Years*, issued by the Twentieth Century Society in 2015. Beanland's work shows that Brutalism served religious, governmental, judicial, educational, art and heritage, residential, transport, business and

infrastructural purposes with a high degree of success; he convinces in his argument that no subsequent style has come close to its vision, innovation, and originality. This book is heartily recommended to all interested in architecture, modernity, and twentieth century culture.

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Lawrence Kramer, *Song Acts: Writing on Words and Music* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); pp. xix + 463; ISBN 978-09-04-34212-5.

Lawrence Kramer is a giant in the field of musicology. Back when I was an undergraduate, and the lines between music theorists (focussed on formal musical analysis) and musicology (about the composer and, invariably, his context) were still sharply drawn, Kramer's work was a revelation. He was part of a vanguard who combined aesthetics, philosophy, literature, and the historical context of the work and its creator, with analysis of the music - and, more importantly, what it might be saying. Interpretation, still a dirty word, was being picked up and brushed off by Kramer and his ilk, opening up whole new avenues in musicology.

For this reason, I was keen to review *Song Acts: Writing on Words and Music*, a collection of Kramer's work from 1984-2014, edited by Walter Bernhart and with a foreword by Richard Leppert. Collections such as these provide a window into the evolution of an author's thought, in this case through the lens of the interaction of words and music. *Lieder* is the main focus, but opera and even concert overtures and music criticism (words *on* music) appear. Kramer's collection tackles pervasive notions of music as a simple, descriptive tool for the words it sets, or as a superior art form which transcends those words through pure and abstract ineffability. All of which, Kramer indicates, is something of a cop-out: "Music does not by nature lack, surpass, transcend, or escape involvement with the multitude of things that words address. But a certain cultural ritual, repeated in many forms from everyday uses of music to scholarly accounts of it, *extracts* music symbolically from those worldly meshes... music is unthinkable - not impossible but unthinkable - without language... We navigate music by triangulating culture, subjectivity, and speech..." (pp.

451-452). Each chapter in *Song Acts* is such an act of triangulation. All twenty have been published before and revised for this collection. Subjects include: *lieder* and song cycles (Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, and Carter; settings of Walt Whitman's poetry); opera (Wagner, the 'great American opera' [Previn and Adams], murderous women in German opera), and problems in musicology (the Turkish March in Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy', Shakespeare or Collin in his *Coriolan*, Tolstoy and the *Kreutzer*).

Two intriguing chapters sit next to each other in the collection: one explores artistic interpretations of the sirens, and the other, the enlightened sublime in Haydn's *Creation*. Between them, these two chapters epitomise both the best and the most frustrating aspects of Kramer's writing. Chapter 12, "'Longindyingcall': of Music, Modernity, and the Sirens [2006]" (pp. 282-303), opens with a persuasive and descriptive introduction that melds the *femme fatale* appeal of the sirens with the fluid philosophy they also represent. Kramer ranges across poetry, painting and music to "trace the wavering course of the siren trope from peak to peak" (p. 291). This he does very well; the analysis of Mendelssohn's *The Fair Melusine* is one of *Song Acts*' highlights. While this essay has some of the most beautiful writing in the collection, it skims the surface rather than diving deep. That Kramer acknowledges from the start that this was his intention does not satisfy my desire for closer scrutiny. This feeling played out for me in other parts of the book, where analyses that just seemed to be finding the meat of the subject are handed over to the reader for further dissection (for example, Chapter 10, pp. 248-268, an interesting initial foray into Walt Whitman's significance, both to America and to music, left me hungering for something more detailed and tightly woven). Kramer usually notes when he is seeking to start a new conversation instead of providing detailed commentary, and perhaps it is the nature of the book that it contains a lot of starting points for ideas that he has developed more fully in other work.

Following the sirens, 'Recalling the Sublime: The Logic of Creation in Haydn's *Creation* [2009]' (pp. 304-328) is an outstanding combination of Kramer's strengths. His deep understanding of philosophy contemporaneous to Haydn allows him to recreate Enlightenment ideas of the sublime, and the following close analysis of key moments in the music allows us to hear in it what Kramer argues Haydn wished for his audience to hear. This same successful combination of philosophy and musical analysis appears in Chapter 14, 'Wagner's Gold Standard: *Tannhäuser* and

the General Equivalent [2010]' (pp. 329-352), although here the strands are again not quite as tightly woven.

*Song Acts* frequently contains evidence of Kramer's bravery in touching untouchable subjects. This includes the excellent Chapter 9 (appropriately), 'The Harem Threshold: Turkish Music and Greek Love in Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' [1998]' (pp. 229-247). All musicians know that Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is a problematic work in many ways, but, as Kramer notes, the particular problem presented by the so-called 'Turkish march' section is too embarrassing for most musicologists to tackle. Kramer does so squarely, and also throws in a substantial side-serving of problematising the pervasive scent of 'brotherhood' on which the text - and music - depends. Also, in the courageous scholarship category is Chapter 6, 'Hugo Wolf: Subjectivity in the Fin-de-Siècle *Lied* [1996/2009]' (pp. 146-177), where Kramer incorporates Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and that most untouchable of all, Sigmund Freud. Kramer has a nuanced understanding of Freud as an explicator of Western subjectivities and social constructions and brings this to bear on Wolf not as an individual but as a product of his milieu. I suspect it was a brave step to take up the Oedipal mantle at a time when Kramer had no way of knowing whether this kind of psychoanalysis of a composer and his music would take on. Regardless of fashion, Kramer is at his most successful when he adopts an external framework to guide his interpretation, especially when it is a culturally relevant one.

If there is one disappointment to me in Kramer's writing it is his handling of subjectivity. The early chapters, especially those dependent on Kramer's interpretation of German *lieder* and the poems they set, can be forgiven for not indicating an awareness that Kramer's arguments are built on interpretations that can be contested. For example, my understanding of Schumann's *Stund* differs from his (Chapter 1, 'Song,' pp. 1-51), but I am aware that the climate in which Kramer wrote in the 1980s considered subjectivity in academic writing to be something of a dirty word. While any confidence I had that later essays would include a comment on Kramer's awareness of the personal nature of some of his own interpretive choices, or the naming of his own subject position, proved unfounded, his language around possible interpretations does become more circumspect. The book's biggest failing is its complete lack of an index, which, considering the very broad range of subjects its 463 pages cover, as well as the robust price of

## *Book Reviews*

the volume, is a real disappointment. There are also a distracting number of typographical errors (see, for example, the first paragraph on p. 202).

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Peter Eason, *Mystic: Poems* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2007); pp. 76; ISBN 978-1-86254-781-0.

This slim volume of poems by Australian Peter Eason may be broadly situated in the genre of spiritual writing despite the brevity and gnomic quality of much of the verse, and the fact that some of it is earthy and comical. Eason's delightfully humorous "Autobiography" characterizes his life path as learning "much about nothing" and arriving at the certainty "of knowing everything" (p. vii), and it and the extract from Rabindranath Tagore's "Gitanjali" point toward Rob Johnson's "Foreword," which tackles the question of what it means to be a mystic, Eastern or Western, in the contemporary world. Johnson notes that, while Eason is aware of mystics like Julian of Norwich and Meister Eckhart, he rejects "Christianity's insistent differentiation of creator and creature, God and the individual soul" (p. xiv). The poetry's insistent celebration of nature and identification of human life with the cycles of nature on Earth and as part of the wider cosmos testifies to the accuracy of this assessment.

Most of the poems are short, one page or less, and most are infused with a quiet jokiness that occasionally breaks into hilarity; "Did You See That Bloody Horse?" concerns the vision by the driver of a car on an Australian country road of "the face of God ... the long serious smile that must belong to God" in a horse he sees as he car passes through the landscape, reinforced by his companion's profane revelation, "Did you see that bloody horse? He was staring at me" (p. 3). Modern classifications of certain types of experience are treated in "Autism or Mysticism" in which describes the repetitive action of striking a telegraph pole with a stick (p. 9), and the presence of the sacred in the everyday is evoked in "As One Guise or Another," in which the poet encounters, in a decaying amenities block, an old seatless toilet pan, "Stained and encrusted, / But sat unmoved, / Solitary, serene, / Like a pagan shrine, / Or a deep, still mind" (p. 10). For

this reviewer, the poem called to mind the site sketches of archaeological structures with ash pits in the middle, variously interpretable as kitchens or temples, the interrelationship of the mundane and the astonishing.

One especially beautiful work, “The Dissolvings,” considers the ways the psyche, the self, and mystery are connected, its brevity belying structural perfection and impressive linguistic economy (p. 16). Short poems like “The Shores of Mystery” (p. 19) and “Baptism” (p. 20) reference religion rather more directly; the former in the Buddhist concept of emptiness, the latter in the Christian initiation rite. The sea, and things associated with it (gulls, rafts, boats, cliffs and waves) feature prominently, as Eason speculates on whether a particular gull he observes is “waiting for a Messiah Gull” in “Gull” (p. 30) and reflects on the strangeness of a woman who “lives/ Too close to the ocean/ They see the fish/ Swimming in her” (p. 45). Particular favourites of this reader include “Multicultural Furniture” (p. 36), a poem about the feelings we have about our domestic environment (can we embrace the huge variety of cluttered old furniture, or do we dream of modernist, monocultural minimalism?) and “She Tells of the Grass” (pp. 47-48), a rare poem voiced by a female character reflecting on sex with a man in the dune grass.

Poetry is not for everyone, and contemporary poets are swimming against the tide; when students are informed that people read poetry as entertainment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they often express disbelief. How can Wordsworth or Milton compare to the other worlds of the novel, the film, and the online environment with its virtual worlds and massive multi-player games? Yet poetry still may be read for pleasure, and Peter Eason’s *Mystic* is a volume of short, seemingly uncomplicated verses that reward greater scrutiny, having a haiku-like quality of depth and meaning despite their brevity and plain language. The theme of mystical experience, dissolution of the self in the face of nature, and of the transcendent in the ordinary in moments of heightened awareness makes these poems an integrated expression of Australian spirituality in the twenty-first century. If you read them – and who knows how many will? – you are likely to enjoy them.

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## Book Reviews

Ivan Head, *The Magpie Sermons: Poems 2005-2017* (Sydney: St Paul's College, 2017); pp. 48; ISBN 978-0-6481698-0-1.

The appearance of this volume of poems coincides with the retirement of Ivan Head as Warden of St Paul's College at the University of Sydney. Head is a scholar and poet, as well as an administrator, and *The Magpie Sermons* is a collection of forty-seven short compositions that reveal a learned sensibility, a preoccupation with Christian spirituality and experience, and a deep and abiding affection for Australianness in its natural (flora, fauna, landscape) and cultural manifestations. The poems are often funny in a gentle, understated way; "A Prior Potato Sermon" reflects on the bodies of the dead, as it were, "planted" in the churchyard and the potato garden on the other side of the cemetery wall, speculating on the ultimate fate of the potatoes ("frying") and of the buried faithful ("bright, clear, radiant, agile and undying"). So far, so good, but the reader is hard-pressed not to smile (if not actually laugh aloud) and the poem's concluding verse; "Most of the time/ I think I would prefer/ to be harvested by an angel,/ But for now I really feel like a chip" (p. 7).

"Flowers on the Bridge" (subtitled "St Joseph Copertino pray for us") opens with the poet apprehending flowers tied to the railing along a motorway, and thinking about roadside memorials for those who died in car accidents. Yet this prosaic opening segues into a meditation on a kind of mystical apprehension "that someone had walked out along the road/ to that point, perhaps in the soft black of night/ and having figured it out/ thought that they might fly upwards into the light" (p. 11). This reader had to look up St Joseph Copertino, and the poem is more comprehensible when it is known that the saint was a seventeenth century Franciscan friar, and a mystic whose spiritual feats included levitation. Another more learned, and more secular, poem is "Ballet at the Sydney Opera House: Thinking about Slessor," in which the poet and his companion drink champagne in the light rain on the balcony before Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* is performed. Head links the scandalous and riotous debut of this ballet in Paris in 1913 to Australia's "red earth and didgeridoo" (p. 16). The poet Kenneth Slessor (1901-1971), referenced in the title, is relevant; the Opera House is home to a glorious mural by John Olsen that is inspired by "Five Bells" (1939), Slessor's best-known work, commemorating his friend Joe Lynch, who drowned in Sydney Harbour.

Head's feeling for the Australian climate is apparent in poems like "Tully under Cyclone," which transforms a teenage memory of an approaching storm into a spiritual experience of "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*" (p. 23) and "The Ibis," which celebrates these amazing birds, found in urban areas fossicking in rubbish bins. There are a group of six poems of eight or fewer lines that are generally very amusing. "Lost in Translation" is seven lines about a Magpie, recalling the volume's title. This Magpie concludes that the poet "speaks very poor Magpie" and that rather than being St Francis of Assisi, famed for preaching to birds, "he has lost his marbles" (p. 26). The six line "Pie Apocalypse" sees the poet eating a pie in Stanmore, a Sydney suburb; it concludes "I drool, lick my lips,/ And ponder the Apocalypse" (p. 34). Poems like "Plato Goes Mauve in the Salisbury Bar" and "Mr Eliot also Caught the Tube" feature pleasing literary allusions, and "Entertainments: Montezuma I Prezuma" is simply hilarious. The Magpie Sermons is a fresh, funny, thoughtful and spiritual collection of poetry that should find a warm welcome amongst poetry lovers and perhaps even among those who are not generally well-disposed to the poetic art, because of its down to earth quality, grounded in twenty-first century Australia.

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Adam Greenfield, *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life* (London/New York: Verso, 2017); ISBN 9781784780432.

In one way, *Radical Technologies* is misfit title for this book. Adam Greenfield is dealing with technologies that are with us right now or very soon to be – smart phones, augmented reality devices (Pokemon Go, Google Glass), desktop factories, algorithms that teach machines how to think for themselves (Tesla Autopilot, Alpha Go), policing programs, and face-recognition surveillance systems – things that do not seem so radical because we are already acclimatised to their presence, if we are not eagerly awaiting their availability. Similarly, this book is not really about "the design of everyday life" because "design" seems to suggest that as a community, or as a cohort of designers we will structure our lives with care

and amenity and this will continue in the days ahead. This is not going to happen. The “radical” of Greenfield’s title is best applied to *the results* of this technology on our idea of self and community for the main theme here is how “utopian” technology very quickly finds other uses and as a result, serves other political agendas than those first imagined during its design. In the end, Greenfield’s big story is how these emergent technologies have the capacity to radically alter our lives without any “design” considerations coming to fruition at all. In reading this book, one feels our future will be a victim of these technologies as much as it might be a beneficiary.

I would suggest that there is much relevant material in this work for the scholar of religion, for futurists, sociologists, designers, and a range of policy makers, but given my abiding interest in social aesthetics – what conditions concepts of appropriate behaviour between us as social actors? – this review focuses on Greenfield’s use of the word “everyday” in his title. In numerous respects Greenfield has composed a partial rewrite of Ervin Goffman’s masterwork *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). *Radical Technologies* does not delve into Goffman’s stage metaphors much, but he does provide a view at the level of the everyday on how these epoch-marking technologies that will interrupt, interfere, rewrite, and reconfigure how human “actors” get on with the world and each other in newly framed performances. The author cannot do this with every aspect of his analysis – some of the technologies he discusses are yet to be part of our everyday world just yet. Other technologies he speaks of (particularly those connected with crime prevention) may be in use, but their operation is closely guarded by both their developers and clients, and this also retards a full view of their impact on us. But wherever he can, Greenfield analyses what these new technologies will do to humans as social actors.

Greenfield commences with the smartphone. He rose to prominence as an information architect with Nokia, then moved to a writing and academic career, specialising in urban design and the digital. With this background, he is able to provide insights into both the technological and social consequences of Apple’s great handheld microprocessor and its copies. He discusses the schizoid-like, interruptive life that the smartphone has given us, the porosity of our selves, the little victories the convenience of the ’phone have over our concerns for privacy, the impact of the little dopamine hits we suffer, as we constantly link with and “like” the comments of others and are “liked” in return. He speaks of the increase in pedestrian accidents as, focused on the little screen in their

hands, people walk out into traffic, and sums up this new level of interconnectivity in a brief passage potent and clear: “The individual networked in this way is no longer the autonomous subject enshrined in liberal theory, not precisely. Our very selfhood is smeared out across a global mesh of nodes and links; all the aspects of our personality we think of as constituting who we are – our tastes, preferences, capabilities, desires – we owe to the fact of our connection with that mesh, and the selves and distant resources to which it binds us” (pp. 27-28).

The second chapter, ‘The Internet of Things,’ considers the relationship between humans and objects, beginning with those biometric devices that collect vast amounts of data on health, activities, and movement, all to tell us how to be “fitter, healthier, more productive.” Greenfield is concerned that wearers of Fitbit and Apple watches are eager to let information about the specific functioning of their bodies out into the world and worries about the way this will change health systems and insurance companies in the near future. He then moves onto consideration of the various devices in homes, like the Amazon “Dash” button and technologies like “Alexa” that grant the convenience of ordering items with a simple voice command. He speculates that such instruments will make humans increasingly less critical about the ways they satisfy immediate wants, which will be to the advantage of monolithic supply organisations such as Amazon. This all builds to another telling conclusion where Greenfield wonders why “the internet of things... so often seems like an attempt to paper over the voids between us, or slap a quick technological patch on all the places where capital has left us unable to care for one another” (p. 60).

In Chapter Three Greenfield writes about augmented reality, focusing on Pokemon Go and Google Glass, and he analyses the potential results of that divided attention given to other humans and the built environment if augmentation is taken up only by some, including the beautiful balletic moves executes as we flow around each other walking down city streets. But, he asks, “is this achievement being eroded by our involvement with technologies that demand to be at the focus of attention, to the exclusion of all else?” (p.80). One suspects that the failure of Google Glass has meant that the formula for reading reality and its augmentation is not yet perfect, but soon will be. This section could become a book in itself, considering the full ramifications of what interruptive technologies can do to the “actions” people commit in social space and how technologies will

subvert the agreed behaviours of particular social atmospheres. For a few weeks after the Pokemon Go came out it was possible to search for the Charmander Pokemon between the huts at Auschwitz; such actions remind us of the very human complexities of all social spaces and the ways in which technology design fails to address completely those complexities.

Chapter Four analyses the realm of desktop factories and the promise of unceasing abundance they offer. My concern is that Greenfield seemed too quick to accept the notion that these machines, more advanced than 3D printers, but not yet at the stage of building items from the atomic-level up (soon though) will end want on the planet. This is debatable. He provides a potted history, explaining that the ethos of these small factories was that once the first machine was built, it would be able to replicate itself, and so soon the whole world would be filled with such devices. The author is canny enough to point out that very few of these machines are presently where they are needed (in the developing world), and he is critical of where users source the filament that serves as the basic material of the machines (a source not green enough). But what cannot be done here is any deep speculation on how these machines will in fact change everyday life, beyond the idea that humans will have more stuff. The internet of things seems at first soteriological, but will it simply make Amazon a larger company?

Chapters Five and Six are two parts of a whole. Greenfield starts with a detailed explanation of Bitcoin in Chapter Five, which leads to a fuller explanation of the ramifications of blockchains in Chapter Six. The discussion of the operations and limitation of Bitcoin is exacting, but when Greenfield shifts attention to a similar cryptocurrency, Ethereum, the full consequences of crypto money become clear. In Chapter Six Greenfield carefully explains how Ethereum can be linked to DAOs or decentralized autonomous organisations. Such an organisation is established in a blockchain to lock in certain contractual obligations for certain actors. Only once these obligations are met will an amount of Ethereum be released to those actors by way of payment. This has unending consequences for: a) how we might establish companies in the future (free of the complex legislations of any state); or b) how paralegal contracts may work well beyond the grip of any national jurisdiction; and more disturbingly, c) how DAOs might impact on labour relations and condition the future of work. That is, all the formal agreements that can be made between humans, but which are tightly regulated by states, might now bind without that state care

or without the instrument of policing to ensure compliance. The message behind this is ambiguous; on one hand blockchain agreements promise an effective post-national organisation structure that cannot be de-internationalised and which remains beyond the meddling of any state. A promise of new freedoms emerges, yet the same technology seems to foreshadow the ominous collapse of freedoms that have been so long fought for. Again, Greenfield only touches on the full possibilities of the expansion of DAOs, and he does enough to show that blockchain systems are not yet fully enforceable in the real world, nor particularly popular just yet. But there is enough here to suggest, again, that a radical re-imagining of the negotiated space between humans is about to radically impact.

Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine can also be assessed together. Chapter Seven analyses automation, and the term “the unnecessary” arises in the argument of the book. This is not a term coined by Greenfield, but he deploys it to refer to those vast sections of the population whose very existence is being rendered unnecessary by these emerging technologies. The author deploys figures on employment types across America to show that the economies of certain regions will be decimated as automatic technology takes over the major industries that employ most of the labour in those regions, with the transport industry most at risk. It is at this point that a kind of “technology fatigue” set in with this reader. Greenfield, earlier in the book, notes the much quoted proclamations by John Maynard Keynes and others earlier in the twentieth century that technology would set people free, would result in fifteen hour working weeks, or four hour days, but in much of the discourse on technology in this book we see that the real economic focus is on how the great “Stacks” of the international economy – Google, Apple, Facebook, the Musk companies, and Amazon – can exact maximum profits, and maximum political influence from the peoples of the world and their government systems. As they suck dry the communities they feed off, states merely become ancillary partners in the Stacks’ quests to be larger and more dominant. Moreover, to achieve this end the processes of getting to the future involves the ongoing interruption of community and the isolation of the individual.

Technology helps in this as the invasive monitoring of the human workforce increases while humans, for the time being, are valued only in the way they can work *like* robots. Greenfield touches on this drive in Chapter Ten as well (‘Radical Technologies’) but from Chapter Seven onwards he demonstrates how machine thinking has been improving

throughout the last few years. He provides a fascinating examination of Tesla's automated driving system Autopilot. This relies on significant and ongoing data collection from all its cars; each of them slowly builds a vast database of road experience and open-ended algorithms, and assesses and adds to this knowledge whilst also teaching themselves new ways of reading and organising this information. Greenfield's one use of the adjective "Orwellian" is saved for his discussion of a range of crime-predicting programs that now have police in numerous jurisdictions focusing on neighbourhoods and on people who are more likely be the site of criminal activity. But these programs advise police not on crime – but on the statistics that are available regards crime – statistics that have their own biases. Greenfield worries about the "black box" nature of these programs – the functioning of the program must remain mysterious if its inventors are to retain the economic advantage of its uniqueness. We cannot investigate the parameters of the program, the data scope, or why it might recommend police be stationed in one neighbourhood rather than another.

The "intelligence" of machines is best summed up in Greenfield's comparison between Deep Blue's win at chess over Garry Kasparov in 1997 and AlphaGo's victory over go master Lee Sedol in 2016. Deep Blue was simply a chess machine that could go through a pyramid of possible moves faster than Kasparov. AlphaGo, on the other hand, was a vast thinking machine that had been adapted to play the game of go. The ability of machines to not exactly "think" but to be open to finding patterns in new data received is making Tesla Autopilot and AlphaGo able to learn from the increasingly large amounts of data on the world that is presently being produced. Greenfield includes a quote from a go player who was watching the matches. At one point he shouted out "that's not a human move!" It is here that I began to see another, more beautiful possibility for what is taking place: that as people teach machines to think, they in turn teach people how to expand our experiences of being human. In one way this does happen, but only, it seems, as a side effect of more pressing neo-capitalist urges. Greenfield does not specifically mention Kurzweil's singularity. But he does give five possible scenarios of what might happen as machine intelligence spreads. After reading these I wondered if a better title would be *Apocalyptic Technologies*. But these five scenarios are only so interesting, as they take Greenfield away from the matter of his book and into deep speculations on the ecological state of the planet. What is clear from all five possibilities is that design fails. Inventors with utopian gleams

in their eyes put forward an idea that will supposedly help us, and the technology gets rerouted easily enough to serve prevailing power systems, not new and more liberal ones.

Nevertheless speculation on how fast machines can learn if they are connected to other machines that learn is one of the mind-blowing possibilities that Greenfield only touches upon. The possibility of how good it could be for the whole world is not completely obscured. It is at the end of Chapter Nine that Greenfield turns unexpectedly elegiac: “We’ll feel pride that these intelligences have our DNA in them, however deeply buried in the mix it may be, and sorrow that they’ve so far outstripped the reach of our talents. It’s surely banal to describe the coming decades as a time of great beauty and greater sadness, when all of human history may be described that way with just as much accuracy. And yet that feels like the most honest and useful way I have of characterizing the epoch I believe we’ve already entered, once it’s had time to emerge in its fullness” (p. 269). It is, however, the ability of design to go wrong that leaves Greenfield worried about what we shall become as many of the deep implications behind how emergent technology come to pass.

Yet in this book we get a solid view of what social aesthetics will look like in the immediate future. Greenfield’s research allows further insight into the developing nature of interpersonal interaction, including the appropriateness and beauty in the senses of politeness that make human lives and cities that contain them operative. At the conclusion this beauty, politeness, and operability seem at the edge of destruction, leaving the author to make a final political plea about how we should assess the design that shapes everyday lives: “The fundamental insight... is this: people with left politics of any stripe absolutely cannot allow their eyes to glaze over when the topic of conversation turns to technology, or in any way cede this terrain to existing inhabitants, for to do so is to surrender the commanding heights of the contemporary situation. It’s absolutely vital, now, for all of us who think of ourselves as in any way progressive or belonging to the left current to understand just what the emerging technologies of everyday life propose, how they work, and what they are capable of. A time of radical technologies demands a generation of radical technologists, and these networks are the material means by way of which we can help each other become that... And perhaps we could do a better job of pushing back against the rhetoric of transcendence we’re offered. Every time we are

## Book Reviews

presented with the aspiration towards the posthuman, we need to perceive the predictable tawdry and all-too-human drives underlying it” (p. 314).

This is a sound point to conclude with, because social aesthetics at its heart is about the enunciation not only of the sense of beauty and politeness of human interaction, but about the inherent power structures that make social interaction smooth, jarring, or sublime. What is evident from Greenfield’s book, barring some fringe exceptions, is the absence of so many of the issues he raises from the field of democratic discourse on either side of the political fence. In addition to the breadth and usefulness of his research, it is the absence of discussion of these issues in mainstream politics that makes *Radical Technologies* a significant place to recalibrate who we are as both social actors and political beings.

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Mark Byrne, *The Outback Within: Journeys into the Australian Interior* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017); pp. xi + 198; ISBN 978-1-4438-9121-9.

Mark Byrne’s *The Outback Within: Journeys into the Australian Interior* is a multi-faceted text that combines psychology, literary and film criticism, Indigenous and settler history, spirituality, and memoir into a beautiful meditation on the nature of nature (the desert inland of the island continent) and the nature of culture (of those Indigenous and White people who have sought encounters with this harsh landscape) in Australia. Part One, “Travellers”, consists of six chapters exploring different models or archetypes of individuals who embarked on epic journeys to the interior. Byrne’s personal engagement is apparent from the outset; readers learn that his great-grandfather, Charles Stansmore, was the last nineteenth century explorer to die in the desert on the expedition led by David Carnegie at the start, and the intention of the book is equally clearly stated: “We will be going on a journey into the Australian soul using journeys to the outback as our guides. More specifically this book focuses on mythological themes, especially death and rebirth, in outback journeys in literature and film” (p. 3). An interest in the literal desert at the heart of the continent is

overshadowed by the interiorisation of the “outback,” which Byrne designates an “idea” (p. 9). This idea is a White fixation, and the journeys covered are those of “settlers” not Aboriginal Australians, and Byrne is scrupulous in his concern that the narratives he analyses do not project White “spiritual fantasies” onto Indigenous Australian culture (p. 9).

The archetypes covered in Part One are the Explorer-Hero, the Antihero, the Initiate, the Stoic Survivor, the Father-Pilgrim, and the “Brownfella” (p. 75). For Australian readers, many of the stories and people discussed are familiar: the theme of Chapter 1 is heroic failure, and the tales of Robert O’Hara Burke and William John Wills in whose 1860-1861 expedition seven lost their lives and Ludwig Leichhardt’s expedition which disappeared in 1848 are revisited; the chapter concludes with five pages of quotations from explorers that illustrate Byrne’s understanding of the Explorer-Hero’s journey (Departure, Initiation, Death, Return, and Legacy). Chapter 2 surveys the Antihero; Patrick White’s fictionalization of Leichhardt as *Voss* (1957), Randolph Stow’s *To the Islands* (1958); David Malouf’s *An Imaginary Life* (1978), and Dal Stivens’ *A Horse of Air* (1970) are key texts. The quotations illustrating the Antihero’s journey are organised under the same headings, save that the Antihero does not return. Chapter 3 on the Initiate considers women in the desert: *Tracks* (1980), a memoir by Robyn Davidson; *Cleave* (1998), a novel by Nikki Gemmill; *Japanese Story* (2003), a film “written by Alison Tilson and directed by Sue Brooks” (p. 46); and *Highway of Lost Hearts* (2009), a memoir by Mary Ann Butler of her road journey from Darwin to Sydney after a bereavement are the stories Byrne analyses. As I was unfamiliar with most of these texts, having read/seen only *Tracks* (and being a woman), this chapter was especially fascinating. The quotations at the end of the chapter are again under the stages of the Explorer-Hero, but Initiation-Death has become merged).

Chapter 4 focuses on the Stoic Survivor, and muses on the lesson of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (that all people will die), and most poignantly, analyses Reg Cribb’s play *Last Cab to Darwin* (2015), in which the dying Max accepts death and the love of his Indigenous neighbor Polly. The schema governing the quotations at the end is Departure, Initiation, and Legacy; the reward is that “stoic survivors are not different people at the end of their journeys; they are just more truly themselves” (p. 61). The Father-Pilgrim is revealed in texts as different as: Nicholas Roeg’s *Walkabout* (1970), in which the White children are brought to the desert by

a father who first attempts to shoot them and, failing that, shoots himself; Rachel Ward's film, *Beautiful Kate* (2009), in which the incestuous relationships between the settler siblings recalls Rodney Hall's magnificent Yandilli Trilogy, *A Dream More Luminous Than Love* (1994); and Jane Campion's *Holy Smoke* (1999). The journey in this case study is; Departure, Encounter with the Father, Return and Legacy. Byrne's final archetype, the Brownfella, is a White who has "gone native" and the texts include *Crocodile Dundee* (1986), Rolf de Heer's *The Tracker* (2002), and Brad Collis' novel *The Soul Stone* (1993). In seeking to "shed their white skin and become more 'black'," Brownfellas do not have a heroic journey; thus, there are no quotations marshalled at the end of this chapter.

Part Two of *The Outback Within* is titled "Views" and consists of six chapters that offer interpretations of the outback. Chapter 7, 'An Australian Monomyth?' asks if the Mad Max series of films might constitute a local instance of the American monomyth, though Byrne is aware that Max, a stoic survivor, is the way he is due to trauma, and "isn't much of a role model for modern men, or for a nation whose dominant mythic figures – like the loveable larrikin and the selfless Anzac – are more like wish fulfillment or one-dimensional personas than well-rounded complex characters" (p. 102). Other possibilities include Chapter 8, 'Internalising the Outback,' in which Byrne mines the Ned Kelly paintings of Sidney Nolan, the poems of Francis Webb, and Nicolas Rothwell's *The Red Highway* (2009), to show that the journey from the coast to the outback is an inner meditation, that "our dreams take us to desert places" (p. 114). Chapter 9, 'Obstacles and Helpers,' shifts attention to stuff like the vast amount of provisions that Burke and Wills took into the desert, to Voss's spiritual connection to Laura, left behind in the city, and to the complex relationships between Whites in the desert and Aborigines. For example, Burke and Wills and their men would have survived if they had accepted the help offered by Indigenous people. Chapter 10, 'Dark Places,' asks what do White settlers in Australia fear lies in the desert? Films like *The Rover* (2014) and *Wolf Creek* (2014) build on the real events of Peter Falconio's murder by Bradley John Murdoch, and Ivan Milat's murders in the Belanglo State Forest, and the violence of John Hillcoat's *The Proposition* (2005) evoke what Byrne terms "dark gods who demand supplication in order to enter their territory" (p. 136).

Chapters 11 and 12 address "The Empty Centre" and "The Spiritual Desert," in turn. The former touches on the British legal fiction of

*terra nullius* and covers the journeys of Australian bands with a sensitivity to the natural environment, such as The Triffids and Midnight Oil. An intriguing thought that emerges is that Australia does not have a frontier myth, like the Wild West of America, because “there is nothing to be discovered, defended, advanced, pillaged” (p. 145). The idea of a “spiritual” desert suggests that what is there is not material wealth but riches to be stored up in heaven. In the final chapter, the poet A. D. Hope, Bruce Chatwin, author of the best-selling *The Songlines* (1987), and Robyn Davidson are drawn together as rare examples of writers “who can write convincingly of the spiritual desert” (p. 158). These last two chapters each conclude with Byrne’s reminiscences of travels he has undertaken, intensifying the personal tone of an already personal book. The brief ‘Conclusion’ thinks through the meaning of death in the desert, and the ‘Coda’ is a piece of fiction, a new myth, that Byrne has devised for modern Australia. It is wry, understated, humorous and wise in the relationships between men and women (and goannas and wallabies). *The Outback Within* is a gorgeous book; it is easy and pleasurable to read, despite the serious subject matter, it is funny and relevant, reflective and fast-moving, the product of intense thought and wide reading, that is presented modestly as an offering, an opening to a conversation. It deserves a wide readership; I hope, if there is any justice, it will garner much praise and be read and loved by many. But even if it does not, Byrne’s achievement will be apparent to the select few who happen across it. Bravo!

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