

Common Endeavour?

The 2017 Posts - so far



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[Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#)

October 2017

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JUST WORDS - how language gets in the way. A sceptic's glossary of 100 plus terms used in government, academic and bureaucratic discourse which I've been using for 20 years but have only now updated....

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Introduction

It was in 2000 that I first began to feel deep unease about the direction societies with which I was familiar seemed to be taking - increasing privilege, systemic corruption, centralization, ecological destruction, "consumerism", poverty, privatisation and a failure of European vision were the things I listed in a paper I circulated amongst friends in an effort to clarify where I should be putting my energies and resources when I found myself with more time. I itemized the people and organisations whose work I admired; regretted the lack of impact they were having; and then explored what channels we seemed to have for making more of an impact.

A decade later - after the bursting of the bubble - I returned to the subject and beefed up the paper - the results of which can be read at [Draft Guide for the Perplexed](#)

But full-time projects still required my attention during that period - when I was also articulating an increasingly [sharp critique of the assumptions of the sort of development assistance](#) I was seeing

With more time at my disposal from 2009, I started a blog about my various experiences - generally inspired (or angered) by an article or book I had read relating to my disparate interests in what we might call the field of "social endeavour" - and developed the habit of excerpting and including relevant hyperlinks.

I consider myself very lucky that, 25 years ago, I uprooted myself from my country and started to get good money from travelling around talking and writing about European systems of public management and governance. Initially the experience on which I drew was largely British - but the requirement to explain it to foreigners made me start to question aspects which, up until then, I had taken for granted.....and took me into wider aspects of European systems.

It was actually George Monbiot's 2000 book [Captive State - the Corporate Takeover of Britain](#) which forced me first to question the belief I had until then in the soundness of British institutional practice..... A post [in spring this year](#) reminded me of how, all of 20 years ago, I had been framing (for my counterparts in central Europe and Central Asia) my understanding of British constitutional practice

For the past ten years I've been lucky enough to have had a foot in both Bulgaria and Romania, spending most summers in my Carpathian mountain redoubt and winters in Sofia; with occasional forays to Bucharest. One of the delights of my semi-nomadic existence has been the rediscovery each year of my libraries in these places - particularly the extensive one in Transylvania. I have, for example, just opened the Introduction to Clive James' [Cultural Amnesia](#) (2007) - copies of which I keep in both the Bucharest and the mountain house and which must be considered one of the most important tributes to writing ever published. You can get a sense of the book in this [Slate journal](#) review and it is further [discussed on his website](#). He has been a voracious reader (of far more novels than I) and, indeed, annotator of books - reading many of the European books (including Russian) in their original language. His book is a tribute to the spirit of liberty which so many of the writers celebrated in his book kept alive.

And his introduction made me realize **that my blog is at least partly a tribute to those writers who have kept me company at one time or another on my journey of the past half century or more.**

My earliest memory of what I might call "seminal" books are those of [Bertrand Russell](#) - and then the titles of the 1950s - Tony Crosland's revisionist "Future of Socialism" (1956); and two New Left counterblasts - [Conviction](#) (1959) and "[Out of Apathy](#)" (1960). University - particularly the political and economics streams I opted into from 1962 - was the profoundest influence on my mind. The key influence may have been Karl Popper's [The Open Society](#) - but there were others such as historian [EH Carr](#); scholar of religion and realism [Reinhold Niebuhr](#)....and social philosopher Amatai Etzioni

A couple of years ago I listed the 50 or so books which have [made an impact on me here](#) - and [here](#). In what I call the "restless search for the new", we would do well to pause every now and then and cast our minds back to such books and try to identify the "perennial wisdom" embodied therein.... Intellectual histories are quite rare - notwithstanding the great efforts of people like [Russell](#), [Jacoby](#), [Peter Watson](#), [Mark Greif](#), [George Scialabba](#) and even Clive James himself....

As a bonus I've added, as an Annex, a **Sceptic's Glossary** - being my definition of some 100 plus terms used in the questionable discourse of our elites. I've set this in the context of texts (and images) which I've found useful during my life in the puncturing of their pretensions.....

Ronald Young
September 2017

The Year so Far

Readership

- Blog traffic has been increasing here - hitting 10,000 in April for the first time (a 3-fold increase since last year) and, in May, the 200,000 mark for the entire period since 2010. August saw another 10,000 hits....although it dropped thereafter, reflecting what I understand to be a general drop in readership of blogs this year,,,,
- **Native English speakers account for only one third** of that (most from the US) - with **Russian and Ukraine** readers coming in (in the past year) at a strong 15% share. It's not idle speculation to feel that part of this latter interest may be a reflection of official Russian oversights of western blogs and accounts - although I don't get any comments on posts from that source - perhaps because it's not been my policy to comment on Russian politics and Putin's intentions? But why the strong interest from Ukrainian readers? *After all, recent posts have, if anything been even more "reflective" than usual, trying to put recent events in a fifty-year timescale.....*
- Readers in **France, Germany, Bulgaria and Romania** account for some 20% in total of the traffic - the latter two for obvious reasons. I've blogged quite a bit on Germany (indeed put a little E-book up on the list at the top-right corner of the blog) and am pleased to find readers from that source - and from France.

A new Feature

With two thirds of my readers not having English as their first language, I have perhaps become more conscious of the need for an inviting start to these posts which also try to "position" the subject in the wider commentary.....

So a new feature is the "Further Reading" resource with which book notes in particular now end...

Focus

Early posts couldn't help touching on the first shocking weeks of bully boy Trump's occupation of the White House but, thereafter, ignored the idiot. Political misbehaviour in Romania caused more of a public backlash there and was duly the subject of a few posts.

For several weeks from mid-March, I ran a series of posts which started with an [observation about how badly served we are by the hundreds of economics books](#) which jostle for our attention. The opening post suggested some tests we might apply to screen books out - with the drawback that we actually need the book in our hands! Follow-up posts used some diagrams.....which also help guide the reader through the maze of books.....

More than 100 key books were identified, briefly explained - and hyperlinked. And will all be useful in the task which lies ahead - of severe editing of the present draft of [Dispatches to the post-capitalist generation](#)

[This May post shows the encouragement](#) I now take from the increasing respect being shown to the concept of "The Commons"

June saw the British electorate join the US electorate in bloodying the nose of pundits and the Establishment...but, in the event, also giving progressives back a little bit of hope..... Hence a couple of posts on social democracy....

Mid-Summer saw various posts connected with discussions I was having with a young Bulgarian journalist about an interview (which appeared at the end of August) which raised difficult questions about progress here in Bulgaria and Romania since 1991 and the curious silence of the past decade about the subject of "transitology" which so consumed the chattering classes in the 90s. The issues about political and institutional behavior which were first raised in the 50s by Edward Banfield; and then in the early 90s by Robert Putnam; remain.

Close Encounters with bureaucracy

BLOGPOSTS

Romania's Socialist Realism

John Berger - someone to look up to

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Revolutionary Times?

Can Outsiders ever understand what's going on in Romania?

Impervious Power

A Divided Country - dangerous times

The Revenge of History?

Rise and Fall...

The Great Disruption?

We the People?

What is Truth, asked Jestig Pilate

Memoirs and Diaries

The Progressive Dilemma

Citizens are not well served

The End of Work?

Memorable Messages

Understanding the Mess We're In

Exemplary Critics

Economics - a rare example of good writing

Mood Music

Sketches for a Future World

Thinking Beyond Capitalism

Stories we Tell

Ways of Seeing

How the Scales Fell from Eyes

Are we really Masters of our fate?

Why Transition will last a hundred Years

Why role conflict is good for you

Avoiding Best Practice

Values

Power - the Elephant in the Room

The Left on its Knees

Denial, Distraction and Despair

Interlude

An Ode to the Palate

The Left is Dead - Long Live the Left!

Journals worth Reading?

The Solidarity Economy

The Commons

Cultural Amnesia- and common endeavour

A Ceausescu Moment?
Passing Thoughts
20 good sites
Taking Reform seriously
New Hope for Britain - if not Europe?
Talking Past one Another
Balkan Social cooperation

Cultural Change
When will it ever change?
The continental divide in public admin studies
The Sovereign Myth and the Future of Social Democracy
Confessions of a social democrat
Thinking Institutionally
In Praise of Journalists
Stories
"Bridge of Friendship" Interview
A Political Economy Thriller

Styles of thinking - and writing
French letters

Close Encounters
Understanding the crisis
How the attack on the state harms us all
We need to talk about....the state
Miniatures and Matrices
The state of the state - part 5
Why have we allowed the academics to blind-side us? State of the Part 6
Those who went before....

Romania's Socialist Realist tradition



Art galleries are, for me, the last bastion of civilisation - private galleries (at least here in the Balkans) offering the chance to chat; and well-structured (and curated) public galleries the opportunity to think.

Bucharest's National Gallery gave me on Saturday such an opportunity - with its (first ever) post 1989 exhibition of Romanian Socialist Realism - [Art for the people 1948-1965 ?](#) - which will run through to the spring....

....A nicely-presented Catalogue (of 300 pages) accompanies the exhibition and is, for the first time for the Gallery, bilingual and well-priced (13 euros). I have today selected more than [70 of the reproductions for this flickr album](#)

Bulgaria and Romania may be neighbours but have rather different experiences of the communist period - with Bulgarian communism having a strong presence at the start of the century and a horrific killing period marking the [Bulgarian takeover](#) which started in September 1944. Romania, on the other hand, is reckoned to have had only about 1000 members of the communist party when the Red Army rolled in and the communist takeover took therefore some 3 years before they could officially take over...



The two countries also tend, very sadly, to pretend that the other doesn't exist - whether in matters of culture or wine.....the Danube certainly does seem to act as a bit of a geopolitical barrier (both physical and mental) but Bulgaria stole a bit of [an edge on its larger neighbour last year with an exhibition](#) on the subject - building on one it held as far back as 2002 about the paintings of the 1980s which languish neglected and forgotten in the archives of Sofia City Gallery...(I have its superb catalogue)

And I was remiss in not writing about the autumn exhibition [Afternoon of an Ideology](#) in Sofia's City Gallery about the communist period and painting during this period - which attracted [this great blogpost from a young Bulgarian](#).

Sunday, January 1, 2017

John Berger - someone to look up to....

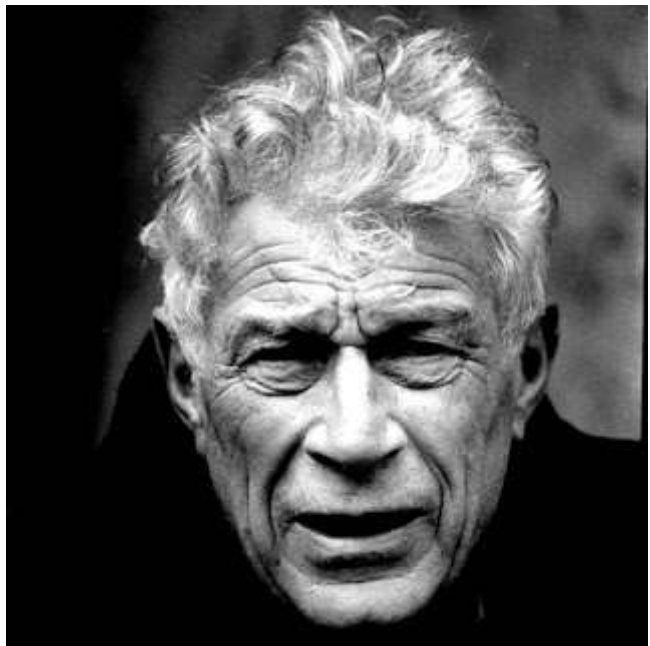


[John Berger](#) is dead (at age 90) and I feel it very personally since he has accompanied me for most of my life....I vividly remember his (black and white) television documentary in the early 1970s - [Ways of seeing](#)- whose very title indeed continues to echo in my head and has [influenced my writing in recent years](#). The book can be [read here in full](#)....

He was a writer who used words to craft sensitive stories about both artists and peasants (he lived in a village in the Haute Savoie from 1974) but was, for me, at his most powerful in two books he wrote with the Swiss photographer Jean Mohr -

- [A Fortunate Man](#) (1967) which followed the life and travails of [an English country doctor](#) and which [can be read in its entirety here](#)
- [A Seventh Man](#) (1975) which looked at the fate of immigrants in post-war Europe....

His writing, like the man [we saw in later interviews](#), was extraordinarily thoughtful - not for him the slick phrases which pass for most interviews these days. [Words were magic](#) and needed to be weighed carefully....I was amazed to find, as I googled for the Berger resource I have put together below, [a virtual conversation Noam Chomsky](#) had with him in 2014



A John Berger resource

<http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/06/i-think-dead-are-us-john-berger-88>
<http://www.drb.ie/new-books/a-fortunate-man>
<http://designobserver.com/feature/on-my-shelf-a-classic-by-berger-and-mohr/32608>
<http://www.drb.ie/essays/what-lies-behind>
thesis on Berger <https://lra.le.ac.uk/bitstream/2381/30264/1/U155538.pdf>
the art of looking 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeBcecwcQw>
about time <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USzGCdoLhjQ>
<https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/book-review/a-monument-a-world-of-his-own/>

Tuesday, January 3, 2017

The Slaves' Chorus



If you're looking for a good read in this relaxed period after the New Year, let me recommend [The Slave's Chorus - the 2016 posts](#) whose format I explained in [this post a month ago](#)

The title is a reference to the Brexit and Trump upsets - when the vox (and disgust) of the populi was loudly heard - and reminded me of the electrifying performance of Verdi's opera of that name which I heard in the early 90s in [Brno \(Moravia\)](#). The way it was being sung sent shivers down my spine with its expression of the long pent-up frustration in

the country.....

.....I do the drive between Bucharest and Sofia fairly frequently and had interesting side trips to both Eastern and Western parts of the two countries during the year which are duly recorded.....as well as my artistic and wine experiences.....

A nice feature this year, I think, are the illustrations which, for the most part, are taken from my painting collection....and here is the book in more accessible format -

https://issuu.com/ronaldyoung0/docs/the_slaves_chorus

Wednesday, January 4, 2017

Revolutionary Times??

For the past 2-3 months the Brits have found themselves [discussing a constitutional issue](#) - namely the scope of parliamentary power. For the British PM, "Brexit is Brexit".....it is her government, she asserts, not parliament, which should make the formal request to the European Union to start the negotiations for withdrawal... The relevant [Article 50](#) of the Lisbon Treaty says: "Any member state may decide to withdraw from the union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements." But the UK's constitution is unwritten and, therefore, contentious.....inevitably therefore some people took the government to (the High) court on the issue



The UK calls itself a "parliamentary democracy" but was judged by a senior Conservative Minister in 1976 to be more of an [elective dictatorship](#) - by virtue of the power Britain's "first past the post" electoral system [gave Prime Ministers](#). British Parliamentarians are generally "whipped" into support for "their" government (of whichever sort) and shows its independence only in times of crisis or when government whips cannot drum up the necessary numbers.

It was the narrowness of the votes which forced (a Labour) government into the first concession to a Scottish referendum (on the question of an elected Assembly in 1979) - although it was actually the third time that decade the device of a referendum had been used. The first - in 1973 - was one for Northern Ireland voters alone - one of no fewer than 8 localised referenda for different parts of the UK (inc in 1998 for London). The 1975 referendum seeking confirmation of the British membership of Europe which had been negotiated 2 years earlier was the country's first UK-wide one and also the first time British Cabinet Ministers had been allowed a free vote.

Brexit was actually the eleventh referendum in British constitutional history but only the third which was open to all UK voters (The second UK-wide referendum was in 2011 - when a proposal for a system of proportional representation was soundly rejected...)

So a referendum is still a rarity in British constitutional practice.....as such, its results are (and must be) highly prized.....

The issue before the UK's Supreme Court is simply whether government or parliament should trigger the request to Europe to withdraw. This is how [a prominent public law specialist put it](#) -

The decision of the High Court in London (in November) was a ruling not on whether Brexit should happen, but on how it can happen lawfully. Some of the press coverage of the decision has been deplorable. There is nothing-nothing at all-in the court's judgment to block the will of the people, to reverse the result of the referendum, or to get in the way of Brexit. Nor is there anything inappropriate in turning to the courts to determine how Brexit can proceed in accordance with the rule of law.

To rule on such matters is emphatically the courts' job. For 25 years I have been among the first to criticise judicial rulings that trespass into terrain better left to politicians and Parliament. But this is no

such case. The court has done nothing improper and those who sit idly by whilst others who should know better castigate the judges for doing their job should be ashamed of themselves. We are a country that abides by the rule of law, and we should act like it.

So the question is whether ministers can trigger the beginning of the UK's formal departure from the European Union without further parliamentary enactment. The question is not whether ministers could conclude that process without further parliamentary enactment. (The answer to that question would clearly be no.)

In other words, the question is not "does Parliament have to be involved in the Brexit process". Of course Parliament has to be involved. The question is a much narrower one: "does Parliament have to be involved before the Brexit process may be formally commenced under Article 50?"

The Professor then goes on to argue that the High Court was actually wrong in its eventual judgement that it was parliament which had the right to trigger article 50.

A good friend of mine runs a [website which exposes the manoeuvrings of what he calls the global nomenklatura](#) and the deceit and silences of the corporate media. I have a lot of sympathy for his position - if not quite his same faith in direct democracy and "the people"

A couple of weeks ago he sent me an article he had written which [excoriates those who dare challenge the thrust of Brexit](#). It contains a sentence which had me reeling -

"The outcome of a referendum cannot at all be questioned by anyone - just as God's word cannot be questioned"

- which admirably captures the underlying thought process of Brexiters.

I see just three little problems with this statement -

- The result of the 1975 UK referendum was never accepted by eurosceptics whose subsequent and unceasing campaigning efforts eventually paid off after more than 40 years. The 2015 Scottish referendum result has not been accepted by Scottish nationalists and others..... Public debate never ends.....so I don't accept the view that those who continue to argue for "remain" have somehow lost their right of free expression. Indeed I find the vehemence of the campaign mounted by the popular press in Britain against judges and "remain" parliamentarians (for example) frightening and indeed dangerous in its utter lack of respect for (if not understanding of) democratic rights.....The British system is one which, until now, has respected the rights of minorities since, one day, they too can become the majority....

- Britain's "unwritten constitution" has placed parliament; the judiciary; and a neutral civil service at its core. I grant you that (a) parliament seems to have abrogated much of its authority (if not respect); (b) the judiciary's deep class partiality has been successively exposed in judicial mistrials (such as The Birmingham Six; and Hillsborough); and (c) that the senior civil service has been heavily politicised in the past decade or so.....

But how ironic that it is the very Brexiters who talked about "parliamentary sovereignty" who are now objecting to parliament being given a voice in the withdrawal process....The main opposition party has made it clear that they support Brexit - but that the significantly different forms Brexit takes require parliamentary discussion and approval (or another referendum) of its precise shape.

- The third problem I have with the statement that the "people's will is God's will" is simply that most of us are at least agnostics, if not downright atheists - and even believers interpret God's will in many different ways

The Guardian newspaper embodies the voice of the liberal elite and is, indeed, a paper I have been reading myself with increasing scepticism (respecting only journalists such as John Harris and Gary Younge) but [this article had an important](#) insight...

For decades, eurosceptics revered the UK's unwritten constitution: its sovereign parliament, its independent judiciary, its neutral civil service. But an alternative centre of power - the people - has now been established. Rather than their loyalty to the constitution, institutions are now judged according to their loyalty to the demos (nearly half of whom voted to remain) ... The elected Commons is no more respected. There is only one parliament that is currently guaranteed a say on the final Brexit deal - and it is not the British one. Brussels' much-maligned MEPs, unlike MPs, are assured a vote.

Like past revolutionaries, the Brexiteers are seeking to remake national institutions in their own image. But as they contend with the biggest task facing any government since 1945, they may yet regret their dismissal of accumulated wisdom.

I have never been a friend of the mass media or the political class - this is the [best expose of the Nomenklatura](#) for me (written by Anthony Jay of "Yes Minister") which I always highlight in my continuing effort to make sense of the global crisis eg [Dispatches to the post-capitalist generation](#) (p70). And this is the expose of the corporate media - [Fraudcast News](#) - written by Pat Chalmers who, for more than a decade, was part of the Reuters News system.

But I get worried when [the rule of law gets ridiculed or trampled](#)....It takes us back to the 1930s.....

Monday, January 9, 2017

Can outsiders ever understand what's going on in Romania?



An article and paper from a British consultant/hired gun [about aspects of Romania's judicial system](#) has coincided with an explosive scandal here in Romania about tapes of conversations between anti-corruption agents, Prosecutors and the Secret Service apparently targeting for prosecution people, for example, who were getting under the skin of the previous President.....

It got me reflecting for the first time for some years on what Francis Fukuyama called the "[Getting to Denmark?](#)" [question](#) - namely how long it takes a society to develop strong and reliable institutions of liberal democracy..... This will be a rather personal and disjointed post as I try to collect my thoughts...so forgive me.....I will try shortly to gather them more coherently...

My relationship with Romania goes back exactly 26 years - I arrived to heavy snow and dim lights in January 1991 and, for a week, was ferried to places such as Brasov and Alba

Iulia in an ambulance (I was on a WHO assignment) to meet various dignitaries; subsequently travelling to and from Iasi in the East by train.

In mid 1992 I took up a year's assignment in the Prime Minister's Office, working with the newly-elected big city mayors and the Ministry of the Interior to design the country's first EC project of support for local government - during when I had discussions with several very senior politicians and officials and had a vague sense then of the iron fists and years of experience concealed in their gloves, eyes and voices....

I was even one of a small number of foreign guests given seats of honour and a special mention at one of the first Conferences then of the renamed Social Democratic party (PSD) - which was all too quickly admitted to the Socialist International...This proved to be a useful network for some very skilful operators to use to pull the wool over Europe's eyes about the dismal reality of reform efforts in the country in the 90s.

I remember vividly [Ralf Dahrendorf's judgement in 1991](#) that it would take at least a generation to make the beginnings of an impact on the communist mindset inculcated in central European countries for 50 years. But the European Commission knew differently and made a decision in 1997 which shocked me to the core - that EC technical assistance to central European and Balkan countries would no longer be governed by "developmental" objectives but rather by their ability to meet the formal legal requirement of the *Acquis Commaunitaire* (AC).....ie of EU membership

It was obvious that the old power structures were still firmly in place but a break in the rule of ex-communists had taken place in 1996 when a liberal President was elected who sadly proved to be ineffective - and the old communist rule continued under Ilescu until sea captain and Bucharest ex-mayor Basescu took power in 2004. Only then can it be said that the reform of state agencies (slowly) started - very much under the eye of the EC.... Although the country was admitted (with

Bulgaria) to the EU in 2007, its judicial performance (with BG's) caused sufficient concern to ensure that it was subject to continued monitoring under the terms of the Verification Mechanism. This continues....

By then, however, the EC and EU strategy was simply to request Romania to observe the legal formalities of the AC; and to set up and ape the institutions of old Europe (already started through "twinning" with appropriate agencies in member countries, in the last decade with the hundreds of millions of euros of EC Structural Funds managed entirely by Romania).

Tom [Gallagher's Romania and the European Union - how the weak vanquished the strong](#) (2010) documents the sad results

Noone, it needs to be stressed, is an expert in the transition from communism to a system of liberal democracy - or whatever we want to call the European system. We need to be very clear about this....noone expected it the Wall to fall - the only remotely equivalent experience was the collapse in the 70s of the Iberian and Latin American dictatorships - so people like me had (slowly) to try to build up a new set of putative skills and capacities.....with rather limited success as I try to explore in [The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) (2011)

I can't pretend to be an expert on Romania - since I returned only in 2009; have divided my time since then between Bulgaria and Romania; and don't even speak the language.....

But, thanks to my Romanian partner, I did take part in workshops, for example, for Young Political Leaders led by American advisers who really shocked me for the disdain they showed for policy matters - everything was about political marketing....These, of course, were the days when everyone was preaching that the State should be dismantled....only in 1997 did the World Bank Annual Report grudgingly admit that they may have gone too far in their exhortations about privatisation.....

Another memory I have of these days is the [Head of the European Delegation](#) (Karen Fogg 1993-98) who gave every consultant (like me) a summary of Robert Putnam's [Making Democracy Work - civic traditions in Italy](#) (1993) which suggested that the "amoral familiasm" of southern Italian Regions had undermined their pretences at modernism and effectively placed them 300 years behind the northern regions. Putnam indeed spawned an incredible technocratic literature on the concept of social capital and ideas on how it could be "engineered" to deal with the new alienation of modern capitalism..

Romanian communism had almost 50 years to inculcate more cooperative attitudes and beha

viour - but the forced nature of "collective farms"; the forced migration of villagers to urban areas to drive industrialisation; and the scale of Securitate spying created a society where, paradoxically, no one felt able to trust.

From 1990 the market became God; Reagan and Thatcher had glorified greed; the state was bad; and television - which had been limited by Ceaucescu to 2 hours a day - the great good.....As the commercial stations and journals spread, the values of instant gratification became dominant.

The short pamphlet [Fighting Corruption with Con Tricks- Romania's Assault on Democracy just produced](#) by the [Henry Jackson Society](#) shows absolutely no understanding of any of this.....nor the scale of theft perpetrated by business - national and international.

I want to be fair to this article and the 20-odd page pamphlet about the Romanian both of which I have read very carefully. I think he makes some very fair pointsWhat, however, is missing is any balance. The scale of the plunder carried out by Romanian businessmen and politicians challenged only by the establishment a few years ago of the anti-corruption agency is never mentioned - nor the scale of the the plunder and the role of the PSD in sustaining it....

And unlike this [longer academic review of the Romanian judiciary](#) published last year, Clark's brief coverage of the communist period's influence on the judiciary is used simply to tar the current system with communist methods....

Clark is not stupid - he must realise that in the heavily politicised Romanian context, his paper is going to be used to weaken the only agency which has been giving ordinary Romanians some hope that their country was at last making progress toward a system which held powerful people accountable.....Nor am I naïve - I understand the power various secret agencies exert here over judicial and political figures.....but that requires us to be so very careful and balanced in what we write - not to give succour to the devious

Those who really want to get a sense of the country can do a lot worse than clicking [Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#)

Wednesday, January 11, 2017

Impervious power

For more than a decade I lived and worked in states in central Asia and central Europe which were (and remain) systemically corrupt - my work being in "small islands" of institutional improvement.

"[In Transit- notes on good governance](#)" was the little book I used as a calling card in Uzbekistan (3 years); Azerbaijan (2 years); Kyrgyzstan (2 years), Bulgaria (2 years) and, more briefly, Romania (whose project management I could take for less than a month),

I devoured the literature first on "[transitology](#)" (early reading was captured in the 2nd chapter of "In Transit") and then on "[anti-corruption](#)"and tried, in various papers, to make sense of my experience.

In 2007 I brought my critical thoughts together in a paper [Missionaries or mercenaries? - presented to the Annual Conference of Network of schools of public admin in central and eastern Europe](#) which I updated in 2011 in response to an audit and subsequent review of the European Commission's programme of Technical Assistance (the "Backbone strategy").

That second paper was called [The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) - and, in it, I coined the phrase "the impervious state" because of the ease with which, for various reasons, systemically corrupt political regimes have been able to deflect criticism (both domestic and from international bodies)



like water slipping down a duck's back. Sadly, the phrase didn't stick but states continue to be (ever more) impervious to public discontent.

And, equally sadly, Romania is a prime example of both this systemic corruption and apparent public indifference. There were no celebrations at the beginning of the month - when the country might have been expected to be celebrating what was, after all, the tenth anniversary of its membership of the European Union and when indeed it was celebrating the 27th year of freedom from the iron grip of Ceaucescu.

Privatisation was a policy insisted on by global institutions after 1989 but was favoured by apparatniks and leaders of many political parties in the region as a means of enriching themselves. State bodies were left alone - as the fiefdom of these parties - with "reform" efforts consisting basically of new acronyms and rhetoric.

Lack of any serious reform efforts meant that Romania had no chance of being allowed into Europe in 2004. Although its membership was approved in principle in 2005, a system of [annual monitoring and verification reports was installed from 2005](#) - and is actually still in place for judicial reform. Indeed its eventual membership was allowed 3 years later largely because of the reform efforts of the Minister of Justice [Monica Macovei](#) - appointed in 2004 by newly-elected President [Traian Basescu](#).

It was however typical that the very day after Romania entered the EU (and therefore escaped most of its "conditionalities"), the Romanian Senate voted for Macovei's resignation which duly came the following month..... - just one of so many attacks over the years by politicians and the media on attempts [to sustain an independent judiciary](#)

The Anti-Corruption Agency (created in 2003) has managed to hang on....although it is clear that many of the subsequent convictions have been on the basis of tenuous evidence.....public support remains high (judging perhaps it better to have a [few "Al Capone" type convictions](#) than let the systemically-corrupt walk free)....

It is remarkable how few Europeans know (let alone care) about Romania. Tom Gallagher is an academic who published his [Theft of a Nation - Romania since Communism](#) in 2005; [Romania and the European Union - how the Weak vanquished the Strong](#) (2010); and has written over the years frequent columns for the European and Romanian press. His interests, however, are much wider which means that the occasional article by outsiders who know little of Romania (such as these by [Dennis McShane](#) and [David Clark](#)) can so easily (and shamelessly) mislead. Gallagher must have French and German equivalents but I don't know of them....

Alina Mungiu-Pippidi is a highly respected academic indeed one of the world's [foremost writers on anti-corruption efforts](#) (now based in Berlin) but her efforts to help her country are [attacked by the local corporate media](#)....since she is seen as parti-pris.....Here is a typical piece she wrote about her [country's successful efforts in outsmarting the EU](#).

Sunday, January 15, 2017

A Divided country - dangerous prospects



Public protest in [Romania has won yet another famous victory](#) - forcing the newly-elected PSD government to cancel the emergency decree it had signed (one midnight earlier last week!!).

A decree (rather than a bill which would have been subject to parliamentary and public discussion) [to release many imprisoned for corrupt practices](#) - and to stop the prosecution of hundreds of others (including the leader of the PSD).

[More than 100,000 people protested](#) outside central government (just 5 minutes walk from

our flat) [for several days](#)- just as they had 15 months earlier when a series of scandals eventually forced a previous PDS government to resign. On that occasion, the President appointed a non-political figure as Prime Minister whose government was a mix of technocratic and minor political figures.

The lack of scandals and the ongoing work of the anti-corruption agency (DNA) perhaps made people imagine that "rule of law" had eventually arrived in the country. But, amazingly, the PSD party (inheriting its corrupt Ceaucescu traditions) came back, in the parliamentary elections last December, to a landslide victory - if on a turnout which was less than 40% of the electorate. And immediately declared that it would be taking action to [release from prison those convicted and those facing criminal prosecution](#) for corrupt actions of less than some 40,000 euros (its [government programme was 173 pages long](#) and I'm still trying to find how that bit was phrased)



Bad enough that this was the first thing they announced - even worse that they made it the subject of an immediate emergency decree with the clear intention of avoiding any public let alone parliamentary discussion. Such is the action of totalitarians - treating the public with contempt. Hardly surprising that people resent being treated in this way....

Here's [an interesting video discussion from Al Jazeera](#) which contains a good take from someone who had been an adviser to a recent PSD Prime Minister. One of his important points is that the old guard was long cleared out of the PSD and that the current issue is simply that of a fight for survival of the younger political class which has received a thoroughly western education - but which now feels under threat from an over-zealous anti-corruption drive. This goes back to the point I made in an earlier post about the American training of this younger generation which I

witnessed for myself in the early 90s as the proponents of the Washington Consensus descended on the country.....

It's clear that the country is split in two on this issue - with very few neutrals. The issues I referred to in the 2 previous posts have unleashed powerful emotions about the very fabric of the nation - with the revanchist rhetoric of Orban in Hungary and Putin's minions in Moldova and Bessarabia ([added to Trump's ambivalence about NATO](#)) striking fear into many Romanians. It is significant that the government statement about the withdrawal of the Decree recognised the danger of such public divisions.

Political legitimacy is now being denied by each side - that is what makes this such a dangerous issue. Romania's President Klaus Iohannis is hardly a conciliatory figure, making no secret of his determination to bring down the PDS but with his own legitimacy still in question - he was, after all, almost the only one of some 200 mayors being targeted in 2012/13 for corrupt practices whose case was suspended and then forgotten! And the intellectuals (of which Romania has so many!!) have been all too quick to take sides.....leaving a dearth in the space for a more honourable scepticism.....

Much of Romania may be celebrating today - but some cool heads are needed. Talk of bringing down the government so soon after its landslide victory is foolhardy. Already there is talk of the country being "ungovernable".

Cooler heads and minds should rather be focused on holding this government to account for the implementation of those parts of its programme which are not divisive and can help unite the country

Update! This is the [best short piece I've read so far about the situation](#)

The reproductions are from Bucharest's (first ever) post 1989 exhibition of Romanian Socialist Realism - [Art for the people 1948-1965 ?](#) - which will run through to the spring.....A nicely-presented Catalogue (of 300 pages) accompanies the exhibition and is, for the first time for the Gallery, bilingual and well-priced (13 euros). These are more than [70 of the reproductions from my flickr album](#)

Sunday, February 5, 2017

The Revenge of History?

We have become fat, lazy and careless.....taking the levels of financial and institutional security enjoyed from the 1950s through to the 1990s too much for granted ("we" being the citizens of the core European states and the US)

And whatever lessons the post-war generation learned about the killing fields of Europe in the first half of the 20th century have clearly not been properly absorbed by their descendants....Nuclear war was a real and evident threat until the late 70s and seemed to have disappeared with the demise of the Soviet Union.

For many, therefore, the last 6 months have been a rude awakening - as the final vestiges of public trust in (government) leadership came crashing down and we found our attention being directed to

Themes of intellectual discussion
The managerial revolution End of capitalism
Keynesianism Meritocracy New world order
End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour
Corporate planning Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals
Costs of economic growth Public choice theory Small is beautiful Change

the last time we confronted such uncertainty - the 1930s. But at last a sense of history is beginning to develop again. A couple of articles crystallised this for me - first [one by Tobias Stone](#) which actually appeared last summer -

During the Centenary of the [Battle of the Somme](#) I was struck that it was a direct outcome of the [assassination of an Austrian Arch Duke in Bosnia](#). I very much doubt anyone at the time thought the killing of a minor European royal would lead to the death of 17 million people. My point is that this is a cycle. It happens again and again, but as most people only have a 50-100 year historical perspective (from parents and school) they don't see that it's happening again.

As the events that led to the First World War unfolded, there were a few brilliant minds who started to warn that something big was wrong, that the web of treaties across Europe could lead to a war, but they were dismissed as hysterical, mad, or fools, as is always the way, and as people who worry about Putin, Brexit and Trump are dismissed now.

The other article [Why Elites always Rule](#) took me back to my university days in the early 1960s when I first encountered (and was impressed by) the work of the [elite theorists](#) Robert Michels, Mosca and Pareto; and of other central Europeans such as Schumpeter (of "circulation of the elites" fame) on the central issue of how the masses might be controlled in an age of democracy..... I also remember Elias Canetti's [Crowds and Power](#) making a big impact on me when its English translation was published in 1962.

By the 1960s, however, far from fearing the masses a lot of us in Europe and America were celebrating them - whether through the fashion for "[participation](#)" let alone [community action](#), direct action or [community development](#)

Major political and economic events in the 1970s punctured that optimism and ushered in a celebration not of mutuality but of egocentricity, greed and commodification. Adam Curtis' [The Century of the Self](#) captures the process superbly.....

Some time ago, I doodled a table which tried to catch the focus of intellectual discussion, decade by decade, starting with the 1930s - eg "deindustrialisation" is the first of the themes of the 1980s...

I don't like conspiracy theories but it does seem fairly clear now that a lot of very big money started in the late 1940s to fund a large number of new think-tanks devoted to pushing a radical neo-liberal agenda.

I remember when I first encountered in the 1970s the pamphlets from the British [Institute for Economic Affairs](#). Their ideas (such as road pricing) were presented with quite ruthless elegance and were quite shocking - but had a coherent logic which allowed me to present them to my surveyor students as examples of the usefulness of economic thinking and principles...

Philip Morkowski's 2009 study [The Road from Mont Pelerin](#) details (in its 480 pages!) how exactly the think tanks managed to achieve this ideological turnaround and to capture most powerful international bodies such as The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, OECD and the EC.

corporatism	
Deindustrialisation	
Privatisation	
Pursuit of excellence	
ecology	
decentralisation	
globalisation	
End of history	
Flexibility and reengineering	
Reinvention of government; NPM	
Climate change	
The learning organisation	
Washington consensus	
Good governance	
Neo-liberalism and its limits	
Environmental collapse	
Migration and social integration	
Migration	
financial capitalism	
austerity	
Inequality	

The Financial crash of 2008 should have been the catalyst to a rethink but, despite the valiant efforts of people such as Joseph Stiglitz and Mark Blyth, it has taken Brexit and Trump to challenge the assumptions of the neo-liberal machine.....

I don't think it helps to throw labels around - whether "populist", "racist" or "fascist". (I try not to use any word which ends in "ist" since [objecting a few years ago to being called a leftist](#))

Populist parties started to worry some people around the year 2000 - as you will see from [this academic article](#) but intellectual, political and business elites were so trapped in their bubbles that they didn't spot it coming. Jan Werner-Mueller's recent little [What is Populism?](#) is one of the few books which have so far been written about it and builds [on this earlier pamphlet](#)

We do not necessarily have to accept that "what goes around, comes around" ie that history is cyclical. But I suspect that it is a more fruitful approach than the one which has been prevailing in recent decades - namely that it's linear and takes us through innovative change to a better world.....

I was impressed that some academics have tried to remedy our myopia and have put together a Trump Syllabus with a fairly extensive reading list -

<http://www.chronicle.com/article/Trump-Syllabus/236824>

<http://www.publicbooks.org/trump-syllabus-2-0/>

<http://www.publicbooks.org/trump-syllabus-3-0/>

In that same spirit I offer these hyperlinks -

Trump Resource

[How to Build an Autocracy](#)

[Age of Kakistocracy](#),

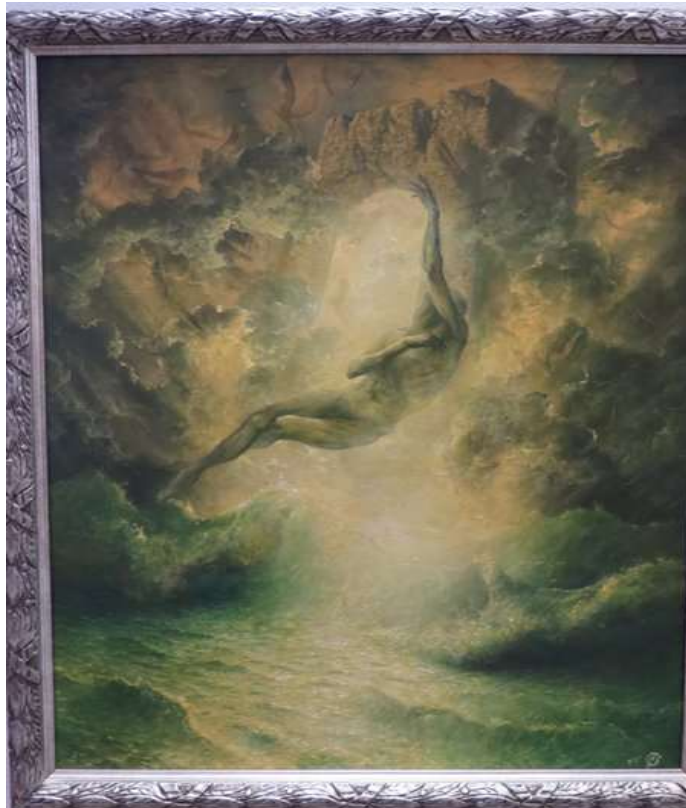
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>

<https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2017/01/25/driftng-towards-great-catastrophes-premonitions-from-the-1930s/>
<https://almostrational.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/read-canetti-stop-trump/>
<http://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2011/08/crowds-power-canetti-book-eyes>
<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2016/11/14/1598974/-Listen-to-Trump-voters-Listen-to-Gessen-Eco-and-Canetti-first-learning-the-lessons-of-history>
http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2017/01/31/populistauthoritarian_strains_worry_koch_network_132949.html
<http://washingtonmonthly.com/2017/01/31/the-12-early-warning-signs-of-fascism/>
<https://www.onfocus.com/2016/11/6845/anti-authoritarian-immune-system>
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/robert-borosage/trumps-perverse-populism>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Revolt_of_the_Masses
<http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/revolt.pdf>
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017>
<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/04/america-tyranny-donald-trump.html>

The title of this post I now see is one quite frequently used - eg 2 contemporary books by leftists ([Seamus Milne](#) and Alex Callicos) and also of this [useful article](#)

Monday, February 6, 2017

The Rise and Fall.....



A lot of claims have been made in recent weeks for writers who anticipated Trump's rise to power. First it was [Richard Rorty](#) - in a long-forgotten book published in 1998. Then the son of Neil Postman, who had written in 1985 a powerful critique of the effect of modern television - [Amusing Ourselves to Death](#) - popped up to claim that [his dad had seen it all coming](#). The son's article referred us back to [Brave New World](#) - issued in 1935....

But the boldest (and perhaps most credible) claim was made last week by one of my favourite bloggers (John [Michael Greer](#)) [for an amazing book](#) written a century ago by Oswald Spengler - [Decline of the West](#)

The conventional wisdom of our era insists that modern industrial society can't possibly undergo the same life cycle of rise and fall as every other civilization in history; no, no, there's got to be some unique future awaiting us—uniquely

splendid or uniquely horrible, it doesn't even seem to matter that much, so long as it's unique.

The theory, first proposed in the early 18th century by the Italian historian Giambattista Vico and later refined and developed by such scholars as Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, that civilizations rise and fall in a predictable life cycle, regardless of scale or technological level. That theory's not just a vague generalization, either; each of the major writers on the subject set out specific stages that appear in order, showed that these have occurred in all past civilizations, and made detailed, falsifiable predictions about how those stages can be expected to occur in our civilization.

Have those panned out? So far, a good deal more often than not. In the final chapters of his second volume, for example, Spengler noted that civilizations in the stage ours was about to reach always end up racked by conflicts that pit established hierarchies against upstart demagogues who rally the disaffected and transform them into a power base. Looking at the trends visible in his own time, he sketched out the most likely form those conflicts would take in the Winter phase of our civilization.....

Those left out in the cold by these transformations, in turn, end up backing what Spengler called Caesarism—the rise of charismatic demagogues who challenge and eventually overturn the corporate-bureaucratic order. These demagogues needn't come from within the excluded classes, by the way. Julius Caesar, the obvious example, came from an old upper-class Roman family and parlayed his family connections into a successful political career.

Watchers of the current political scene may be interested to know that Caesar during his lifetime wasn't the imposing figure he became in retrospect; he had a high shrill voice, his morals were remarkably flexible even by Roman standards—the scurrilous gossip of his time called him "every man's wife and every woman's husband"—and he spent much of his career piling up huge debts and then wriggling out from under them. Yet he became the political standardbearer for the plebeian classes, and his assassination by a conspiracy of rich Senators launched the era of civil wars that ended the rule of the old elite once and for all.

Arguments about "rise and fall" have never gone down all that well with opinion-makers who tend to have a vested interest in "progress" and Greer's long post gives a detailed rebuttal of the sort of logic used by those who would counter the argument of "declinists"

Thus those people watching the political scene last year who knew their way around Spengler, and noticed that a rich guy had suddenly broken with the corporate-bureaucratic consensus and called for changes that would benefit the excluded classes at the expense of the affluent, wouldn't have had to wonder what was happening, or what the likely outcome would be.

It was those who insisted on linear models of history—for example, the claim that the recent ascendancy of modern liberalism counted as the onward march of progress, and therefore was by definition irreversible—who found themselves flailing wildly as history took a turn they considered unthinkable..... And, as Spengler sketches out the process, it also represents the exhaustion of ideology and its replacement by personality.

A good [sustained analysis of Decline of the West](#) which appeared in 1983 argued that Spengler knew that men are generally disdainful of experience and that, driven by limitless and uncontrolled hope, they like to conceptualize the future in terms of what they consider the desirable rather than the likely course of events.

In counterpoint to these, in his view, irrational trends, he remarked that optimism is naive and in some respects even vulgar, and that it surely stands for cowardice when one is afraid to face the fact that life is fleeting and transient in all its aspects.

You can dip for yourself into the 1000 plus pages of [the original 1918 book here](#)

Thursday, February 9, 2017

The Great Disruption?

We have seen such massive changes in our lifetime that I find it odd that key people in Brexit and Trump's victory talk of the need for "[Leninist](#) and [Maoist](#) approaches" to help "destroy all of today's establishment" -

"Lenin," Stephen Bannon is quoted as saying "wanted to destroy the state, and that's my goal too. I want to bring everything crashing down, and destroy all of today's establishment." Bannon was employing Lenin's strategy for Tea Party populist goals. He included in that group the Republican and Democratic Parties, as well as the traditional conservative press.

[The Great Disruption](#) (2014) was an entertaining examination of the scale of recent technical change - and its social and political impact. Many would say that 1789 marks the start of Europe and the modern age's relentless focus on challenging tradition with reason; others trace it further back - to [the Scottish Enlightenment](#) of a few decades earlier; [the industrial revolution](#) of the same period; or to [the Protestant Reformation](#) two centuries earlier (Martin Luther's 95 theses were nailed to Wittenburg's church door all of 500 years ago this October!!)

And yet each passing generation seems to feel that it is being hit afresh with change. The different words - "revolution", "modernisation", "reform", "change", "reinvention", "innovation", "disruption" - reflect the confusion as events have played out in the post-war period.

The Turbo-Capitalism we have seen in recent decades may have undermined people's confidence in government capacity and integrity; and in routine and formal political activity - but technology and the social media have given people an outlet for expressing their anger and grievances.....

Brexit and Trump's victory seem to show that it's possible to "take back control".....suddenly there seems an opportunity to stop the previously irresistible onward charge of globalisation. But how real is this? Human agency may be back in fashion again after the apparent fatalism of Margaret Thatcher's TINA doctrine ("There is No Alternative")

But is this all sleight of hand? We are used to being told by the change managers about the need for thorough preparation for significant change, for implementation strategies..... But no one had given any thought to the possibility of Brexit winning or prepared any strategies; and the first 3 weeks of Trump rule has consisted of only bluster and ill-considered executive orders

"Change" is a word that has had me salivating for half a century. According to poet Philip Larkin, "[Sexual intercourse began in 1963](#)..." - at roughly the same time my generation began to chafe under the restrictions of "tradition" - so well described in David Kynaston's [Austerity Britain](#) and [Modernity Britain 1957-1962](#).



The notion of "modernization" (as set out in a famous series of "What's wrong with Britain" books published by the Penguin Press in the 60s) became highly seductive for some of us - Coincidentally 1963 was the year Harold Wilson delivered his famous speech about the "[white heat of technology](#)" to an electrified Labour Party Conference, presaging one of the key themes of the 1964-70 Labour Government.

The need for reform of our institutions (and the power structures they sustained) became a dominant post-war theme and I eagerly absorbed the writing which was coming from American progressive academics in the 1960s (such as [Warren Bennis](#) and [Amitai Etzioni](#)) about the new possibilities offered by the social sciences; and listened spellbound on the family radio to the 1970 Reith Lectures on "[Change and Industrial Society](#)" by Donald Schon - subsequently issued as the book "Beyond the Stable State". In it, he coined the phrase "[Dynamic conservatism](#)" and went on to talk about [government as a learning system](#) and to ask [what can we know about social change](#). From that moment I was hooked on the importance of organisations (particularly public) and of institutional reform.....

In those days there was little talk of management (!) and only a few Peter Drucker books..... Toffler's [Future Shock](#) came the very next year (1971) by which time I had started to proselytize the "need for change" in papers which bore such titles as "Radical Reform of municipal management" and "From corporate planning to community action"..... One of these early papers picked up on the theme of "post-bureaucracy" and anticipated that future systems of (public) management would look very different from those previously known..... It was a decade later (1982), however, when Tom Peters first burst on the scene with his celebration of entrepreneurial management "[In pursuit of Excellence](#)" - presaging the demise of large corporations such as IBM and General Motors.... was to take another decade for this to be reflected in the Clinton/Gore [Government Reinvention agenda](#) and 1997 for the start of the British [Modernising Government agenda](#).... All this coinciding with the [dot.com revolution](#).....

Since Brexit and Trump's victory, what I would call [Kerensky liberals](#) are feeling a bit outflanked by a motley crowd of Bolsheviks, Leninists and Maoists.... and are trying to understand the revolutionary doctrine being preached by the likes of Trump's key adviser - Stephen Bannon - who [talks of "tearing down" institutions](#). [Der Spiegel makes a good attempt here](#) - In November, the news website BuzzFeed published [a 50-minute audio clip](#) of remarks made by Bannon via Skype in 2014 that provides a strong glimpse into his world view. They were made at a conference at the Vatican of representatives of the religious right in Europe.

Exactly 100 years ago tomorrow, Bannon began, the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand sparked World War I. Until that day, there had been "total peace. There was trade, there was globalization, there was technological transfer ... Seven weeks later, I think there were 5 million men in uniform and within 30 days there were over a million casualties."

He went on to say that the world is once again at such a point, "at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict." He blamed it on "a crisis both of our church, a crisis of our faith, a crisis of the West, a crisis of capitalism." Bannon described, first, a system of "crony capitalism" of the elite that only created wealth for the establishment, allowing that he knew what he was talking about from his own background. He said there's a desperate need for a renaissance of "what I call the 'enlightened capitalism'

of the Judeo-Christian West," with companies that create jobs and prosperity for all. (although he has also said that the more hard-nosed it is the better!!)

The second threat, he said, comes from the secularization of society. He noted that the "overwhelming drive of popular culture is to absolutely secularize" millennials under 30. He said Breitbart had become the voice of the anti-abortion movement and the traditional marriage movement.

The third threat, and perhaps the greatest, Bannon preached from the computer screen, is Islam. "We are in an outright war against jihadist Islamic fascism." But this war, he warned, is "metastasizing far quicker than governments can handle it." He said a "populist revolt" of "working men and women" is now needed to battle Wall Street and Islam at the same time, an international Tea Party movement modelled after Britain's right-wing populist UKIP, which he knows well. The U.S. Republican Party establishment, on the other hand, he described as a "collection of crony capitalists."

An international alliance of populists united in their hatred of the elite, appealing to the workers and brought together by a common enemy -- only with the Muslims replacing the Jews this time. It all makes Bannon, and Trump along with him, sound like a fascist.

But are they? Times are different today, as are the means, paths and goals. There's no longer a need for masses of brown shirts or a screaming Goebbels. The masses are on the internet today and they read Breitbart and follow Trump on Twitter. The manifestations today are modern and the ideology has also been modernized. But the attitudes themselves seem to be enjoying a renaissance.

The painting which adorns the post is another which "got away" recently. It is a small Tony Todoroff which I should have snapped up immediately (at only 300 euros). But I hesitated....and he who hesitates.....

[We, the people?](#)

I almost threw a book at the television screen at the start of Trump's inaugural address last month when he said that this "was the day power transfers to you, the people". How could that be? He didn't talk during the campaign about strengthening democracy; and, in any event, any serious programme would involve things like citizen juries, participatory budgets etc and would take time to implement properly....

On Inauguration Day power passed only to..... Trump - and we are therefore left with the clear conclusion that he elides "the people" with himself - as did a certain French monarch when he was famously reported as saying "L'Etat, c'est moi!!"

Or was it perhaps more of a promise that the "real" America he addresses (and assured in that same speech "never to let down") could be confident that theirs were the only voices/votes he would bother about?? The rest - particularly journalists, judges, civil servants, politicians, experts, academics, protestors - he would simply ignore and bypass. [One article this week](#) put it thus -

Trump's inaugural address carried the stamp of hot ambition even in its (opening) salutation: 'Chief Justice Roberts, President Carter, President Clinton, President Bush, President Obama, fellow Americans and people of the world, thank you.'

What were the people of the world doing here? It has been conjectured that Trump was greeting a blood-brotherhood ..that encompassed the followers of Farage, Le Pen, Orban, Wilders and others. Just as likely,

given the grandiosity of the man, he meant to suggest that the fate of the world was so implicated in his ascension that it was only polite to say hello.

The next section, however, seemed to see the American people as deciders for the world: 'We, the citizens of America, are now joined in a great national effort to rebuild our country and restore its promise for all of our people. Together, we will determine the course of America and the world for many, many years to come.' This was immediately followed by an attempt to divide friend from enemy within the US.

"Against me, the establishment ('Washington'); with me, the people - or rather the people who matter. In the new era of globalisation, 'politicians prospered but the jobs left and the factories closed. The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories. Their triumphs have not been your triumphs.' For the people, for once, this inauguration day would be a day of celebration, and Trump would rejoice with them: 'January 20th 2017 will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again. The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer.'

"People power" a la Suisse is all very well - if a bit tiring. But the Swiss have an active citizenry - who can afford to give their time to debate and referenda. Letting a "demagogic kleptocrat" loose who has declared war on many of the key elements of "the public space" which is the crucial link between the people and rulers is something else.....

I have never been a fan of the word "populism".- on the grounds that it is clearly a derogatory term which is used to cut off discussion.....In [a post before the Trump victory](#) I offered some of the elements which I think might reasonably be attributed to the term.

Jan Werner-Mueller's recent little [What is Populism?](#) is one of the few books which have so far been written about it and builds [on this earlier pamphlet](#).

But this [short video \(from last summer\)](#) manages to punch home the key elements and, in so doing, to persuade me that almost all the conditions are now in place in the USA for a significant breach in the democratic process.....

And the LRB article I quoted from above then goes on to spell out very dramatically how the [much-vaunted Obama legacy could so easily be used to muzzle dissidence and protest](#) -

The national security state that Obama inherited and broadened, and has now passed on to Trump, is so thoroughly protected by secrecy that on most occasions concealment will be an available alternative to lying. Components of the Obama legacy that Trump will draw on include

- the curtailment of the habeas corpus rights of prisoners in the War on Terror;*
- the creation of a legal category of permanent detainees who are judged at once impossible to put on trial and too dangerous to release;*
- the expanded use of the state secrets privilege to deny legal process to abused prisoners;*
- the denial of legal standing to American citizens who contest warrantless searches and seizures;*
- the allocation of billions of dollars by the Department of Homeland Security to supply state and local police with helicopters, heavy artillery, state-of-the-art surveillance equipment and armoured vehicles;*
- precedent for the violent overthrow of a sovereign government without consultation and approval by Congress (as in Libya);- precedent for the subsidy, training and provision of arms to foreign rebel forces to procure the overthrow of a sovereign government without consultation and approval by Congress (as in Syria);*
- the prosecution of domestic whistleblowers as enemy agents under the Foreign Espionage Act of 1917;*
- the use of executive authority to order the assassination of persons - including US citizens - who by secret process have been determined to pose an imminent threat to American interests at home or abroad;*

- the executive approval given to a nuclear modernisation programme, at an estimated cost of \$1 trillion, to streamline, adapt and miniaturise nuclear weapons for up to date practical use;
- the increased availability - when requested of the NSA by any of the other 16 US intelligence agencies - of private internet and phone data on foreign persons or US citizens under suspicion.

The last of these is the latest iteration of Executive Order 12333, originally issued by Ronald Reagan in 1981. It had made its way through the Obama administration over many deliberate months, and was announced only on 12 January. As with the nuclear modernisation programme in the realm of foreign policy, Executive Order 12333 will have an impact on the experience of civil society which Americans have hardly begun to contemplate. Obama's awareness of this frightening legacy accounts for the unpredictable urgency with which he campaigned for Hillary Clinton - an almost unseemly display of partisan energy by a sitting president. All along, he was expecting a chosen successor to 'dial back' the security state Cheney and Bush had created and he himself normalised.

Monday, February 13, 2017

"What is Truth?" asked Jesting Pilate.....and would not stay for an answer..



I first came across the term "[post-truth politics](#)" last summer - but hadn't appreciated the scale and nature of the "denial of facts" on the blogosphere until the Trump campaign hit us full blast in the autumn.

"[Political correctness](#)" has apparently become [everyone's favourite hate](#) but seems now to be degenerating into a mindless post-modern contempt for anything that smacks of evidence

This is not an easy topic to discuss in a civilised way - so let me put my own cards squarely on the table.....

I have quite strong memories of the 1980s as the issues of feminism, racism and sexism first moved in from the margins.....I was heavily

involved in issues of community development and the social exclusion which affected low-income people - and wasn't too impressed with the new language of "the glass-ceiling"....

So I understand the concern about "progressives" becoming (progressively) more focused on social aspects of power and equality - to the neglect of the economic.....And I have been no fan of the rise of academic ghettos (particularly in the (North American) universities accompanying the development of women's, black and gender studies.

The backlash to "political correctness", for me, was always a disaster waiting to happen.

But even so, I watched open-mouthed last night the antics of a self-centred, loud-mouthed, hyperactive effeminate [called Milo Yiannopoulos](#) (yeah - pull the other one!) who is apparently the epitome of a new breed of libertarian publicists who out-do Oscar Wilde in their urge to shock.

Although he's apparently an editor (of one of [Breitbart website](#) series) he's also a wag and "provocateur" on the same level as the characters in the [Little Britain series](#) of more than a decade ago

Jill Lepore gave us recently in [The Internet of us and the end of facts](#) the best history lesson I've seen of the whole post-truth phenomenon (be aware, it's the last para of the excerpt which counts). She starts with a childhood incident when she found herself challenging someone she knew had stolen something she valued (a bat) -

The law of evidence that reigns in the domain of childhood is essentially medieval. "Fight you for it," the kid said. "Race you for it," I countered. A long historical precedent stands behind these judicial methods for the establishment of truth, for knowing how to know what's true and what's not. In the West, for centuries, trial by combat and trial by ordeal—trial by fire, say, or trial by water—served both as means of criminal investigation and as forms of judicial proof.

Kid jurisprudence works the same way: it's an atavism. As a rule, I preferred trial by bicycle. If that kid and I had raced our bikes and I'd won, the bat would have been mine, because my victory would have been God-given proof that it had been mine all along: in such cases, the outcome is itself evidence. Trial by combat and trial by ordeal place judgment in the hands of God. Trial by jury places judgment in the hands of men. It requires a different sort of evidence: facts. A "fact" is, etymologically, an act or a deed. It came to mean something established as true only after the Church effectively abolished trial by ordeal in 1215, the year that King John pledged, in Magna Carta, "No free man is to be arrested, or imprisoned . . . save by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land."

In England, the abolition of trial by ordeal led to the adoption of trial by jury for criminal cases. This required a new doctrine of evidence and a new method of inquiry, and led to what the historian Barbara Shapiro has called "the culture of fact": the idea that an observed or witnessed act or thing—the substance, the matter, of fact—is the basis of truth and the only kind of evidence that's admissible not only in court but also in other realms where truth is arbitrated.

Between the thirteenth century and the nineteenth, the fact spread from law outward to science, history, and journalism. What were the facts in the case of the nail-polished bat? I didn't want to fight, and that kid didn't want to race. I decided to wage a battle of facts. I went to the library. Do they even have baseball in Italy? Sort of. Is my name the name of a baseball team? Undeterminable, although in Latin it means "hare," a fact that, while not dispositive, was so fascinating to me that I began to forget why I'd looked it up.

I never did get my bat back. Forget the bat. The point of the story is that I went to the library because I was trying to pretend that I was a grownup, and I had been schooled in the ways of the Enlightenment. Empiricists believed they had deduced a method by which they could discover a universe of truth: impartial, verifiable knowledge. But the movement of judgment from God to man wreaked epistemological havoc. It made a lot of people nervous, and it turned out that not everyone thought of it as an improvement. For the length of the eighteenth century and much of the nineteenth, truth seemed more knowable, but after that it got murkier.

OK - here's the punchline -

Somewhere in the middle of the twentieth century, fundamentalism and postmodernism, the religious right and the academic left, met up: either the only truth is the truth of the divine or there is no truth; for both, empiricism is an error. That epistemological havoc has never ended: much of contemporary discourse and pretty much all of American politics is a dispute over evidence. An American Presidential debate has a lot

more in common with trial by combat than with trial by jury, which is what people are talking about when they say these debates seem "childish": the outcome is the evidence. The ordeal endures.

The title of this post is the opening sentence of one of Francis Bacon's [most famous essays](#)

Sunday, February 19, 2017

Diaries, Memoirs and Blogs

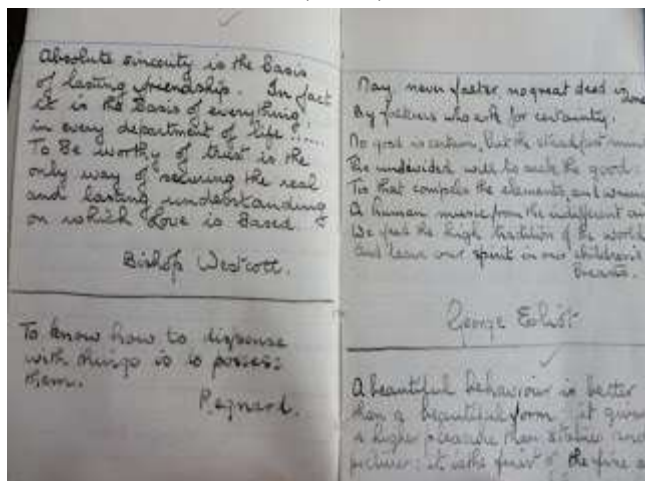
Amongst my most treasured possessions are some notebooks of my grandfather and father from 1929 as they trekked and camped in north-western Scotland (these came to me in 1990); and my mother's tiny common place book(extracts accompany this post) which came to me on her death in 2005.....

She was the wife of a Scottish Presbyterian Minister from the late 1930s and the friendship and hospitality which I remember at our home (as well as the strictures of the times) are evident in the quotations chosen by my mother....they express sentiments which profoundly affected my upbringing (the photo below is from her 100th birthday celebrations.

Although I know that both of my parents were very proud of the distinctive path I chose for myself, I'm not sure if they would altogether approve of the element of egocentricity which a blog implies....



My first ever diary (which I rediscovered recently) was about a bike trip from London to Toulon but I started the habit only in my 40s when I was a reforming politician in Europe's largest Region. For



16 years I actually held down a position at the heart of policy-making and, in the 1980s, kept a large A4 diary into which I would paste relevant cuttings, papers and articles and scribble my thoughts on project work.

I still have 5-6 of these diaries - others I donated to the library of the urban studies section of Glasgow University (when I was a Fellow there for a couple of months in the early 90s) in the fond belief that some researcher of the future might find these jottings about the strategic management of Europe's largest local authority of interest (!).

Memoirs have been given a bit of a bad name by the egocentricity of politicians - although some time back I identified some 20 [life-accounts which gave superb analyses of times and lives](#). And I missed out such things as Count Harry [von Kessler's amazing memoirs](#) from the 1880s through to the second world war (he was an amazing cultural figure) and the rather more depressing ones of [Viktor Klemperer](#) covering the Nazi period....

I suppose the best contemporary exponent of the Diary in the UK is.... Alan Bennett who is [excerpted from time to time in the London Review of Books](#)....

Nowadays the energy people used to devote to their diaries tends to find its outlet in blogging.....although books made from blogs [do tend to be frowned upon](#)...

Not that this discourages me as you will see from the list at the top right corner of this blog.....

I personally have made a good living from words - both spoken and written - although the balance between the two changed significantly after 1992. In the 70s and 80s it was the spoken word which earned my modest keep (as a social science teacher) and reputation as a regional politician - although my papers, journal articles and even a small book also attracted attention.



From the 1990s, the written report was the lynchpin of the project management system which lay at the heart of my work universe - as a well-paid consultant in the EC programmes of Technical Assistance to ex-communist countries. My job was to transfer experiences - and perhaps lessons - from government systems and agencies of Western Europe to those in Central and Eastern Europe and central Asia. Fortunately I had a bit of preparation for the role - being a member in the last half of the 80s of various European working groups working on urban issues.

The work in "transition countries" the 90s and noughties was a real eye-opener - giving me a vantage point to identify the various patterns in systems of local government and Civil services. Suddenly I was seeing similarities in the powerful influence of informal processes in Austrian and Dutch systems - let alone Italian and Romanian!

Even so, switching roles and developing new skills wasn't easy - and it took me almost a decade before I was able to produce the coherence of [In Transit - notes on Good Governance](#) (1999) and essays such as - [transfer of government functions](#); civil service systems; [decentralization](#); and [Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies?](#). This material forms the "Lessons from Experience" section of my website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#)

As I was starting to phase out my project management work in 2010 or so, I [started blogging](#) - using my work experiences and reading since the 60s as the main focus of posts which now number almost 1,200. Some of these I've used to produce E-books - on such topics as "[crafting more effective public management](#)"; and cultural aspects of Bulgaria; Romania; and even Germany;

But for some time I have been trying to produce a little book from the many posts I've done which bemoan global social, economic and political trends....It was actually in 2000 I first wrote an essay expressing concern about global trends and asking where someone of my age and resources should be putting their energies to try to "make a difference"....

Seventeen years later I'm still not sure what the answer to that question is - although it's clearly in the area of mutualitybut rereading and editing the posts (which cover a decade) has made me realize that it's actually quite useful to see the process of one's thinking "longitudinally" - as it were. Tensions between lines of thought can be seen - if not downright contradictions. Far from being a nuisance, these help to clarify and develop...And one post tried to put a lot of the economic books [into a typology](#) - allowing me to see gaps in coverage....

On the other hand, blogging requires a very different set of skills from that of writing a book which flows and has coherence.....

At the moment the book bears the title "Dispatches to the post-capitalist Generation" and has sections entitled "Our Confused World"; "How did we let it happen?"; "The Dog that didn't bark (covering the decline of the political party); and "What is to be done?" (a question I've used for quite a few of my papers in my lifetime)

The other thing I've realized as I reread the draft is that my blog is at least partly a tribute to those writers who have kept me company at one time or another on my journey of the past half century or more.

My earliest memory of what I might call "seminal" books are those of [Bertrand Russell](#) - and then the titles of the 1950s - Tony Crosland's revisionist "Future of Socialism" (1956); and two New Left counterblasts - [Conviction](#) (1959) and "[Out of Apathy](#)" (1960). University - particularly the political and economics streams I opted into from 1962 - was the profoundest influence on my mind. The key influence may have been Karl Popper's [The Open Society](#) - but there were others such as historian [EH Carr](#) and scholar of religion [Reinhold Niebuhr](#)....

A couple of years ago I listed the 50 or so books which have [made an impact on me here](#) - and [here](#). In what I call the "restless search for the new", we would do well to pause every now and then and cast our minds back to such books and try to identify the "perennial wisdom" embodied therein.... Intellectual histories are quite rare - notwithstanding the great efforts of people like [Russell Jacoby](#), [Peter Watson](#), [Mark Greif](#), [George Scialabba](#) and even Clive James..... perhaps the direction in which I should be taking this draft??????

<http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s10326.pdf>

Wednesday, February 22, 2017

The Progressive Dilemma



The eminent British journal [The Political Quarterly](#) has given us for 80 years the most elegant and insightful writing on British politics.

Given the current desperation of the British left, it is understandable that the journal's current issue focuses on "Progressivism" and contains a fascinating account of the nature and course of that bundle of ideas in America and Britain over the past century

In the US and the UK, progressivism went badly wrong in its politics: Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalist campaign of 1912 divided American

reformers fatally, as did Lloyd George's postwar Coalition in Britain after 1918. Now, even after Brexit, a progressive alliance seems further away than ever. The story of the 'Progressive Dilemma' remains one of unrealistic projects, invariably disappointed.

The article [Dilemmas and Disappointment: progressive politics 1896-2016](#) (paywall) is from historian Kenneth Morgan and is well worth reading - not least for the amazing purchase price of 15 euros for internet access to the journal's entire archives.

A book on ["Britain and Transnational Progressivism"](#) also gives a fascinating picture of the progressive strand and its impact on, for example, the West of Scotland in the late 19th and early 20th century

A couple of months ago I wrote about various political labels - mentioning that my father had, in the 1950s, been a member of a local political group called "progressives" or "moderates" who sat as overtly apolitical councillors ...I saw them as ["fuddies and duddies"](#) and myself as the van of a newer, more multi-coloured European Left - although I resisted the siren calls of both the 70s/80s "hard left" and Blair's New Labour.

What a pity that EU membership did not seem to lead to any broadening of perspective as a result - the "single market" was very much a Thatcher-driven issue to which the British left generally had an angry reaction; and the positive stance taken by New Labour to the entry of new member states from the east is a stance now regretted by many in the Labour party.....Quite what the intellectual legacy of EU membership will be for the UK is, for me, a moot question...

The question I have been wrestling with for some considerable time is where should I be putting my political energies? As I have lost my voting rights, this translates into the question of what vision and programme of politics should I be espousing in my writings?

[The P2P Foundation](#) is one which has struck chords recently. Every day my mailbox receives at least a couple of interesting posts from them eg <https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/yochai-benkler-on-advancing-towards-an-open-social-economy/2017/01/24> which introduced me to the work of this legal scholar of the internet.

Their posts have also made me aware of the potential of what they call "platform cooperativism" about which I have some reservations - which are well reflected in [another of their posts](#). One of the problems I have is their language - and the feeling that they are unaware of the wider experience of "mutuality" expressed in the work, for example, of Paul [Hirst](#).

Friday, February 24, 2017

Citizens are not well served....

You would think that, after the last decade of the global crisis, it would not be difficult to find a few impartial books clearly written by those familiar with the huge literature on the subject - and which help the concerned citizen understand what sort of policies could realistically rekindle hope....

We have thousands of books about the causes of the global economic crisis of 2007/08 which pin blame, variously, on banks, speculators and a score of other explanations - but few have actually been written which satisfy the five preconditions which the previous paragraph specifies - in relation to purpose, audience or knowledge

Almost all are rather produced to argue an existing (partial) viewpoint; are written for students (to pass exams) or for other academics - rather than for the concerned citizen; and cover only those parts of the literature which the author's job and/or inclinations require him/her to pay attention to.... (the last therefore excludes, for example, work which comes from the political economy (eg Susan Strange; Mark Blyth); or sociology (Wolfgang Streeck) fields...

I have a simple test for whether a book on the crisis is worth buying - go the Preface/Introduction and check how many of the key points are covered (award one point for each)-

- Does it say why yet another book is needed to add to the huge pile we already have?
- How well does it try to argue (if at all) that the book has something distinctive to say?
- Does it identify the different schools of thinking about the issue?
- And clearly indicate where these will be covered?
- No book can be comprehensive - does the author list what subjects (s)he has excluded?
- Is there a (notated) further reading list in an annex?

I can't say I was greatly helped when I googled phrases such as "best sellers in the global crisis" - I got [a list of 100 books](#) - but a simple list does nothing to help me make a selection.

I did, however, find [this annotated list of 12](#) from someone who was writing his own book and recounted how difficult it was to get past the book buyers of the major companies,

And there was a [rare annotated list of 25 "must read"](#) (mostly American) books on the crisis on an interesting website [Planning beyond Capitalism](#) - but its selection was understandably a bit light on books from other ideological stables...

["Economics for Everyone](#) - a short guide to the economics of capitalism" (2006) is a very user-friendly book which can actually be downloaded in full (from KSU members - all 360 pages!!) and has an excellent ["further reading"](#) list which was probably the best there was at that time....

[Zombie Economics - how dead ideas still walk among us](#); by John Quiggin (2010) is a great read. [The Economy - the core project](#) probably errs too much on the side of brevity and simplicity. But [a Reading Group on economics](#) has some good reading (and viewing) material - with hyperlinks....

I'm currently sifting all the references I've made in my thousand plus blogposts about the issue - to see if I can come up with a commentary which might help others in my position...The names which figure are the following (in no particular order) - Michael Lewis, Michael Hudson, Martin Wolf, David Korten, Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Mason, Will Hutton, Paul Hirst, Andrew Gamble, Herman Daly, Susan George, Mark Blyth, Wolfgang Streeck, David Harvey, Michel Albert, Colin Crouch, David Marquand...

If asked to make a single recommendation, I would plump fairly confidently for Mark Blyth's [Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#). But I'm sure there is another book out there which I could recommend to the concerned citizen?

At least, people are now prepared to call the system by its name - "capitalism" - before the crisis, this was [a word which rarely passed people's lips](#). Now the talk everywhere is not only of capitalism but "[post-capitalism](#)".....

And an encouraging American initiative [The Next System](#) had an initial report - [The Next System Report - political possibilities for the 21st Century](#) (2015) which contains extensive references to writing I had not so far encountered and to good community practice in various parts of the world. It has since followed up [with a series of worthwhile papers](#).

Update:

This post got me thinking and is probably responsible for the long lists of books which were the subject of 9 further posts - from which I would recommend two for those wanting to make sense of the opaque subject of the present state of economic affairs.....

- [Debunking Economics - the naked emperor dethroned](#); Steve Keen (2011 edition); first saw the light of day a decade earlier.
- [Vampire Capitalism - fractured societies and alternative futures](#); Paul Kennedy (2017) A sociologist's treatment which earns high points by stating in the very first sentence that it has "stood on the shoulders of so many giants that he is dizzy" and then proves the point by having an extensive bibliography with lots of hyperlinks... It is very well written and [can be downloaded in its entirety here](#)

The End of Work?

Every now and then in my everyday life, I've had the sudden feeling that I was being granted a flash of insight into the future. In the late 1960s I had access to the writings of Americans such as [Donald Schon](#) and [Warren Bennis](#) who were beginning to sketch the flexible organization of the future - the title of Alvin Toffler's 1971 book caught the spirit of the age to come - "[Future Shock](#)".

Personally I was rather excited by the new organizational possibilities - exemplified in [Charles Handy's](#) 1978 book [Gods of Management](#) which contrasted the familiar hierarchic or "Zeus" (club) culture with the Appollonian (role), Athenian (task/matrix) and Dionysian (existential) ones. Roger Harrison was a great organizational consultant who actually beat Handy to the idea of organizational cultures but Handy packaged it better. Harrison left us a [superb set of "parting thoughts"](#)

I had established a pioneer matrix structure a few years earlier in a very large organization - Strathclyde Region - and our [Member-officer groups](#) broke from the conventions of municipal decision-making in various ways -

- its members (middle-level officials and councillors) were equal in status
- no one was assumed to have a monopoly of truth - by virtue of ideological or professional status
- the officers nominated to the groups were generally not from Headquarters - but from the field
- evidence was invited from staff and the outside world, in many cases from clients themselves
- they represented a political statement that certain issues had been neglected in the past
- the process invited external bodies (eg voluntary organisations) to give evidence
- the reports were written in frank terms : and concerned more with how existing resources were being used than with demands for more money.
- the reports were seen as the start of a process - rather than the end - with monitoring groups established once decisions had been made.

I had another flash of insight when I read an article in the early 1980s from an American economist (Alan Schick?) about the prospects for the privatization of the National Health Service - so much so that I sent the opposition spokesman for Health a warning note.....And it was Charles Handy's 1984 book "[The Future of Work](#)" which convinced me that the familiar contours of our world were moving under our feet - it was this book which warned us that the notion of life-long jobs was gone for ever and which introduced us to the term "portfolio life"...

There's a [nice little video here](#) of Handy presenting his (more recent) idea of the "[second curve](#)" during which he reminds us of the discussions he had in the 1970s about the purpose of the company - and the casual way people such as Milton Friedmann and his acolytes then introduced the idea of senior managers being given "share options" as incentives. Handy regrets the failure of people to challenge what has now become the biggest element of the scandal of the gross inequalities which disfigure our societies....

A few years after Handy's Future of Work, I vividly remember the impact on me of Zuboff's [In the Age of the Smart Machine](#) (1988) - which drew on the evidence of the new information technology industries to underline the threat the future held to our notion of a normal working life....(she's just producing another fascinating book on [Surveillance Capitalism](#))

We have all subsequently taken advantage of the speed, choice and capacity with which we have been richly endowed by the new information facilities - but perhaps been a bit slow to recognize the scale of its consequences. Google's driver-less car and the speed with which companies such as Uber and Airbnb have scaled up brought it all home to us....But people like [Frithjof Bergmann](#) and Jeremy Rifkin - the latter with his "[the End of Work](#)" (1995) were amongst a few at the time who appreciated what Handy was onto.....Since then there have been quite a few books with the title "The Future of Work" - [Thomas Malone](#) (2004), [David Bollier](#) (2011), [Jacob Morgan](#) (2014) to which I should have been paying more attention....

But, very suddenly it seems, the scale of the impact of IT and robots on jobs previously thought safe from automation [has hit people](#) and the prospect of the majority of people living without paid work is now beginning to both excite and frighten....[Race against the machine](#) (2011) is perhaps the most famous of the books about this....

The air is thick with talk, for example, of the necessity of a Basic Income; and of the writings of both Keynes and Marx on this subject....

[Inventing the Future - Postcapitalism and a world without work](#) is typical of the titles which are now appearing. You can [read it for yourself in full here](#)
It's a book which has attracted a lot of attention and I shall give some excerpts and comments in future posts....

Update: a nice [overview here of what modern work now offers](#) far too many people.....
A [great diagram - as well as content](#) from an important Conference on the Digital Revolution and [an important ILO report](#) I missed in 2015. [from Book Forum - http://www.steven-hill.com/die-zeit-youre-fired/](#)

Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Memorable Messages

I've set myself a rather challenging task - to sift through the 200 plus books which have popped up on my blogposts over the past eight years which relate to what we, rather egocentrically, call "the global crisis"; and to identify those which I would recommend to those members of [the younger generation struggling to make sense of the mess](#)....

It's challenging because I'm finding that I was too hasty in my reading the first time round - or, if I'm totally frank, that I was too lazy or distracted to do much more than flick the pages....But a trawl like this offers the great advantage ofcomparison and contrast...I now know (or think I know!) what I'm looking for.

A previous post set out some of the [prerequisites I now look for](#) in any book and, the more I skim the material I've collected, the more ruthless I feel about exploring the question of what elements in a book give it impact and might actually change the way the reader looks at the world....

Bear in mind that I bring to the task no fewer than 60 years of quite intensive reading while trying to make sense of (those bits of) the world (I feel I should be making an effort to understand)....When we do these [lists of the century's "key books"](#), I often wonder how many the

compilers have included from a sense of duty - rather than from a sense of its felt impact.....
And so I did a little test - I asked myself which books had actually so impressed me that I had given them as presents to others or used in my project work of the past 25 years
I was quite surprised by what I came up with....

The typology	Author; source	Further detail
3 incentive types	Etzioni (1971)	Carrots, sticks, norm compliance
8 Roles in any effective team	Belbin (1981) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Team_Role_Inventories	Plant, resource investigator, coordinator, shaper, monitor, teamworker, implementer, finisher, specialist
10 Rules to stifle innovation	Rosabeth Kantor (in her 1983 book "The Change Masters" http://nomadron.blogspot.bg/2010/04/lists.html	See later
7 Habits of Effective People	Stephen Covey (1989) http://www.sachem.edu/schools/north/pdfs/coveysevenhabits.pdf	See later Full book available on internet - just google!
4 Gods of Management	Charles Handy/Roger Harrison in Gods of Management (1984)	Zeus (boss culture); Appollo ((hierarchy - role culture); Athena (task culture); Dionysus (individual professional)
4 basic interpretive stances	Mary Douglas grid-group theory (1970s); Chris Hood's "The State of the State" (2000)	Hierarchical, individualist, egalitarian, fatalist
48 ways to gain power	Robert Greene in " The 48 Laws of Power " (1998)	Link gives access to entire book
6 global threats to capitalism	Susan George in " The Lugano Report - on preserving capitalism in the 21st century" (1999) - a powerful critique in the form of a spoof report produced by consultants for the global elite	Strongly recommend the new Introduction she wrote - accessible on the googlebook link

In one of my blogs I referred to the pleasures of lists - the Seven Deadly Sins; Seven Habits of Effective People (Covey); Ten Commandments (God); and Ten rules for stifling innovation (Kanter) seem just about manageable.

When I was working in Central Europe in the 1990s I used to buy multiple copies of **the Covey book** in the local language - Hungarian, Slovak and Romanian - since it was one of the few books I knew in

English which was also available in the local language and was useful as a means of professional conversation. I know that the book is rather frowned upon in intellectual circles but I still think it's got something.....including the [famous sketch of a woman](#) which demonstrates so powerfully our disparate perceptions.....The principles were/are -

- be proactive
- begin with the end in mind
- put first things first
- think win/win
- seek first to understand : then to be understood
- synergise
- "sharpen the saw" - ie keep mentally and physically fit

When I moved to Central Asia and Caucasus in 1999, I found that presentation of Rosabeth Kanter's "**Ten rules for stifling innovation**" was a marvellous way to liven up a workshop with middle-ranking officials.

She had concocted this prescription as a satiric comment on the way she discovered from her research that senior executives in US commercial giants like IBM, General Motors were continuing to act in the old centralised ways despite changed structures and rhetoric.

1. regard any new idea from below with suspicion - because it's new, and it's from below
2. insist that people who need your approval to act first go through several other layers of management to get their signatures
3. Ask departments or individuals to challenge and criticise each [other's](#) proposals (That saves you the job of deciding : you just pick the survivor)
4. Express your criticisms freely - and withhold your praise (that keeps people on their toes). Let them know they can be fired at any time
5. Treat identification of problems as signs of failure, to discourage people from letting you know when something in their area is not working
6. Control everything carefully. Make sure people count anything that can be counted, frequently.
7. Make decisions to reorganise or change policies in secret, and spring them on people unexpectedly (that also keeps them on their toes)
8. Make sure that requests for information are fully justified, and make sure that it is not given to managers freely
9. Assign to lower-level managers, in the name of delegation and participation, responsibility for figuring out how to cut back, lay off, move around, or otherwise implement threatening decisions you have made. And get them to do it quickly.
10. And above all, never forget that you, the higher-ups, already know everything important about this business.

"Any of this strike you as similar?" I would cheekily ask my Uzbek and Azeri officials.

Robert Greene's 24 ways to seduce; 33 ways to conduct war; and **48 Laws of power** are, also, tongue in cheek. The first to hit the market was the 48 Laws of power and I enjoyed partly because it so thoroughly challenged in its spirit the gung-ho (and unrealistic) naivety of the preaching which characterised so many of the management books of the time - and partly for the way historical examples are woven into the text. I've selected a few to give the reader a sense of the spirit of the book

- Never put too much trust in friends; learn how to use enemies
- Conceal your intentions
- always say less than necessary
- Guard your reputation with your life
- Court attention at all costs
- Get others to do the work, but always take the credit
- Make other people come to you
- Win through your actions, never through argument
- Use selective honesty and generosity to disarm your victims

I found a Russian translation of the book in Baku and gave it as a leaving gift to the Azeri lawyer in the Presidential Office with whom I had worked closely for 2 years on the project to help implement the Civil Service Law. He obviously made good use of it as 3 months later he was appointed as Head(Ministerial level)of the new Civil Service Agency my work had helped inspire!

Luther's 95 theses on the wall of the Wittenberg church may seem excessive - but, given the success of his mission, perhaps contain a lesson for the media advisers who tell us that the public can absorb a limited number of messages only!

Sarah Bakewell suggests in [How to Live - or a Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty attempts at an Answer](#) that Montaigne's life can usefully be encapsulated in 20 injunctions -

- Don't worry about death
- Read a lot, forget most of it - and be slow-witted
- Survive love and loss
- Use little tricks
- Question everything
- Keep a private room behind the shop
- Be convivial; live with others
- Wake from the sleep of habit
- Do something no one has done before
- Do a good job - but not too good a job
- Reflect on everything; regret nothing
- Give up control

At the very least, when I see such lists, it suggests we're in for some fun!

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Understanding the mess we're in



The left-right scale has a long history - the left label coming in the 20th century to designate people on the basis of their attitude to the economic role which the state should play in society. Since, however, the late 50s and the arrival of a more "self-expressive" spirit, an additional dimension was needed to indicate attitudes to the hierarchy /participation dimension (ie political power).

The [political compass website](#) - which allows you to take your own test - labels these additional dimensions "left authoritarian" and "left libertarian" Last year I came across [a couple of diagrams](#) from the Commons Transition people which I found very useful correctives to the normal

simplifications we get about what is going in the world....

It uses six dimensions - which it labels "politics", "the economy", "work", "citizens", "conscience" and "consumption" to identify a dozen key concerns which have surfaced about recent global trends. We can certainly quibble about the logic of the dimensions - and the labels used for the trends - but the diagrams are thought-provoking and worthy of more discussion than they seem to have obtained in the couple of years they have been available.

The first of the diagrams details the "[Current Capitalist Paradigm](#)" but, for my money, could be improved by adding some names of illustrative writers.

I have therefore taken the liberty of producing a [simpler version of the diagram which includes about 20 names](#) - with hyperlinks in each case to key texts. Readers who are frustrated by the tiny lettering of the names around the perimeter should therefore simply click on the link (NOT the diagram above) and then click the particular name whose material they want to access.

The second diagram is entitled [Beyond Capitalism](#) and does include illustrative names. This too could, in my view, do with some additions (and deletions) and I hope to include an amended version in a future post. For example, it is a bit light on robotisation.....

For the moment, however, let me simply offer my readers the diagrams as a better way of mapping the literature to which we should be paying attention.....

March 25

Exemplary Critics

I'm a great fan of diagrams - apart from giving us a breathing space from text, they show that the writer is aware that we all operate with [very different types of understanding](#). Even more than the act of writing itself, the process of designing a diagram will quickly throw up the flaws in your thinking.....

Six categories form the heart of the two [diagrams](#) from [the Commons Transition people](#) I referred to yesterday - I liked the selection of the worlds of "work", "citizens" and "conscience" as key categories - we all behave differently in these spheres.....and I understood the "politics" and "economy" labels - we have various assumptions and expectations in those fields....

It was the sixth category however - of "consumption/production" which utterly confused me. What exactly is it - and how does it differ from "economy" and "work"?? And why are "workers' cooperatives" not included in the "economy" category (and "social enterprise" included not there but in "work"??)

There were actually two diagrams - one purporting to illustrate the "present capitalist paradigm", the second "Beyond Capitalism" and containing illustrative names.....

The first diagram, however, was also bereft of such illustrations and I therefore offered [a simpler version of the diagram](#) which included the names of writers I considered offered useful examples of the schools indicated (with appropriate hyperlinks)....

I readily concede that the names selected probably said more about the world of an ageing (male) Brit than anything else - even so, of the 23 names selected, only five are actually English.

I do, however, have to confess that all but two are male (although I generally quote people like Susan Strange and Susan George).

Let me introduce this exemplary group - in future posts I hope to say more about those who have written critically in the past 50 odd years about the economic and political system which has us in its grip..... I start at the [top left corner of the diagram](#) with some key names in the increasingly critical debate about the health of our democracies.....

[Sheldon Wolin](#) was one of America's most distinguished political scientists - producing in 1960 one of the most lucid and inviting political textbooks "[Politics and Vision](#)" (700pp). As a student of politics between 1960-64, it was his book (and Bernard Crick's "In Defence of Politics") which inspired me to pursue politics as a vocation.....

He died in 2015 at the grand age of 93, having produced seven years earlier a withering critique of the American political system - [Democracy Incorporated - managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism](#) (2008)

[Peter Mair](#) was a highly respected Irish political scientist who died at the height of his powers at the age of 60 and is renowned for [Ruling the Void - the hollowing of Western Democracy](#) (2013) which encapsulated the increasing despair of serious political scientists about the post 2000 trajectory of democracy.

[Robert Michels](#) started the critique a hundred years earlier with his "[Political Parties](#) - a sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy" first produced in German in 1911.

Steven Keen is an Australian economist whose first edition of [Debunking Economics - the naked emperor dethroned](#) was published in 2001

Jeremy Gilbert is a British academic whose [Reclaim Modernity - beyond markets; beyond machines](#) (2014) was a contribution to the ongoing debate about the future of the British Labour party

[David Graeber](#) is an American anthropologist who has written powerfully about the history of debt; about anarchism; and more recently about aspects of modern work.....

[Mark Blyth](#) is a Scottish-American political economist whose [Austerity - history of a dangerous idea](#) made a big impact when it first appeared in 2013 and even more so in his subsequent lectures...

Yanis Varfoukis is a Greek-American economist who wrote [The Global Minotaur - America, the true origins of the financial crisis; and the future of the world economy](#) (2011)

Wolfgang Streeck is a German sociologist who has produced a series of powerfully-written critiques of the modern economy, culminating in [How will Capitalism End?](#)

David Harvey is an English Marxist geographer who has been based in the States for the past few decades; and become famous for his courses on Marxism and capitalism. One of his most powerful books is [A Brief History of Neo Liberalism](#) (2005)

Guy Standing's claim to fame is [The Precariat - the new dangerous class](#) (2011)

[New Capitalism? The End of Work](#) (2009) by Kevin Doogan is a [surprisingly critical assessment](#) of the writing which from the mid 1980s has warned of the increasing job insecurity which lies ahead. It's worth reading for its summary of writing of this important field.

[Barbara Ehrenreich](#) is an American journalist who has famously worked undercover to bring to readers her experiences of just how grim working life can be eg "Nickel and Dimed"

Joseph Stiglitz was the World Bank's Chief Economist until his challenges of its Orthodoxy proved too much for them to bear. [Globalisation and its Discontents](#) (2002) is one of the many trenchant books he has written to expose the emptiness of economics orthodoxy....

[John Michael Greer](#) is an American writer and one of the most prominent of what might be called [the apocalypticists](#) - who consider that the western world is on a "Long (if slow) Descent" to a simpler world...I'm using the word in a respectful way since a lot of their arguments are convincing - and Greer's analysis of American politics is the most profound I've seen.

[Dmitry Orlov](#) is another such apocalypticist - a Russian engineer who came to the States in 1974 (when 12) and, on home visits, having seen the USSR collapse at first hand, has been suggesting since his [Reinventing Collapse; the Soviet Experience and American Prospects](#) (2005) that a similar fate awaits the States...

[Michael Pollan](#) is a Professor of English in the States who became famous for his writing on agro-business

[Naomi Klein](#) is a radical Canadian journalist who made an impact with her "No Logo" (1999) and "The Shock Doctrine" (2007) books about capitalism. [This Changes Everything](#) (2014) is her yake on the ecology crisis

[Oliver James](#) is a British psychologist whose various books (such as "[Affluenza](#)" 2001) reflect the concerns of a lot of people....

Pope Francis has become the remaining hope of a lot of progressives. [On Care of our Common Home](#) (2015) is an encyclical which lambasts the present economic system and doctrines...

[Christopher Lasch](#) was an American cultural analyst whose [The Culture of Narcissism](#) (1979) caught well the self-centredness of America in the post 60s period. His penetrating critiques continued with [The True and Only Heaven - progress and its critics](#) (1991) and his posthumous [The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy](#) (1995)

[Edward Snowden](#) is the whistle-blower par excellence - working for a CIA sub-contractor he unearthed and spilled the story of the scale of American hacking of private accounts...

[Julian Assange](#) is an Australian computer expert, publisher and activist who has been holed up in London's Ecuador Embassy since 2102 for fear of extradition to the US for "trumped-up" charges by the Swedish authorities....

[Danny Dorling](#) is a British geographer whose [Injustice](#) (2014) rivals the moral power of [RH Tawney](#)'s writing and whose [A Better Politics - how government can make us happier](#) (2016) is one of the clearest invitations to a better society

So??

Sunday, March 26, 2017

Economics – a rare example of good writing

We're so overwhelmed by the mountain of books and blogs available about economic issues that I've sought to give readers [some tests they can use on material](#) they come across - to help them more easily select the material worth spending time on.....

One of the five things I look for is **clarity of writing** - from the simple argument that confused writing is a sign of a confused mind. Authors who rely on abstract language have allowed the language to take over their thinking.

A second thing I look for are signs that the author is able and willing to classify other specialists according to the different perspectives they bring - and generous in his attributions...

I've just come across an excellent example of what I mean - from the Michael Robert's blog [The Next Recession](#) who starts his latest post with a great name-check on the Keynesian economists who dominate leftist discussions there days -

Keynes is the economic hero of those wanting to change the world; to end poverty, inequality and continual losses of incomes and jobs in recurrent crises. And yet anybody who has read [the posts on my blog](#) knows that [Keynesian economic analysis is faulty](#), empirically doubtful and its policy prescriptions to right the wrongs of capitalism have proved to be failures.

In the US, the great gurus of opposition to the neoliberal theories of Chicago school of economics and the policies of Republican politicians are Keynesians [Paul Krugman](#), Larry Summers and [Joseph Stiglitz](#) or slightly more radical Dean Baker or James Galbraith. In the UK, the leftish leaders of the Labour party around Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, self-proclaimed socialists, look to Keynesian economists like Martin Wolf, Ann Pettifor or Simon Wren Lewis for their policy ideas and analysis. They bring them onto their advisory councils and seminars. In Europe, the likes of [Thomas Piketty](#) rule.

Those graduate students and lecturers involved in [Rethinking Economics](#), an international attempt to change the teaching and [ideas away from neoclassical theory](#), are led by Keynesian authors like James Kwak or post-Keynesians like Steve Keen, or Victoria Chick or Frances Coppola. Kwak, for example, has a new book called Economism, which argues that the economic faultline in capitalism is rising inequality and the failure of mainstream economics is in not recognising this. Again the idea that inequality is the enemy, not capitalism as such, exudes from the Keynesians and post-Keynesians like Stiglitz, Kwak, Piketty or [Stockhammer](#), and dominates the media and the labour movement. This is not to deny the [ugly importance of rising inequality](#), but to show that a Marxist view of this does not circulate.

Indeed, when the media wants to be daring and radical, publicity is heaped on new books from Keynesians or post-Keynesian authors, but not Marxists. For example, Ann Pettifor of Prime Economics has written a new book, [The Production of Money](#), in which she tells us that "money is nothing more than a promise to pay" and that as "we're creating money all the time by making these promises", money is infinite and not limited in its production, so society can print as much of its as it likes in order to invest in its social choices without any detrimental economic consequences. And through the Keynesian multiplier effect, incomes and jobs can expand. And "it makes no difference where the government invests its money, if doing so creates employment". The only issue is to keep the cost of money, interest rates as low as possible, to ensure the expansion of money (or is it credit?) to drive the capitalist economy forward. Thus there is no need for any change in the mode of production for profit, just take control of the money machine to ensure an infinite flow of money and all will be well.

Ironically, at the same time, leading post-Keynesian Steve Keen gets ready to deliver [a new book](#) advocating the [control of debt or credit as the way to avoid crises](#). Take your pick: more credit

money or less credit. Either way, the Keynesians drive the economic narrative with an analysis that reckons only the finance sector is the causal force in disrupting capitalism.

So why, Roberts asks, do Keynesian ideas continue to dominate? Here he brings in **Geoff Mann** - director of the Centre for Global Political Economy at Simon Fraser University, Canada and his new book, entitled [In the Long Run We are all Dead](#) which argues that Keynes rules .

.....because he offers a third way between socialist revolution and barbarism, i.e. the end of civilisation as we (actually the bourgeois like Keynes) know it. In the 1920s and 1930s, Keynes feared that the 'civilised world' faced Marxist revolution or fascist dictatorship. But socialism as an alternative to the capitalism of the Great Depression could well bring down 'civilisation', delivering instead 'barbarism' - the end of a better world, the collapse of technology and the rule of law, more wars etc.

So he aimed to offer the hope that, through some modest fixing of 'liberal capitalism', it would be possible to make capitalism work without the need for socialist revolution. There would no need to go where the angels of 'civilisation' fear to tread. That was the Keynesian narrative.

This appealed (and still appeals) to the leaders of the labour movement and 'liberals' wanting change. Revolution was risky and we could all go down with it. Mann: "the Left wants democracy without populism, it wants transformational politics without the risks of transformation; it wants revolution without revolutionaries". (p21).

Those wanting more detail can read this well-written paper (20 pp) by Mann entitled "[Keynes Resurrected?](#)" (2013) as well as his [critique of Thomas Pikety](#)

28 March

Mood Music – How the intellectuals have made sense of our economic system

In the decade after the 1929 Great Crash, capitalism had been in such deep trouble that [its very legitimacy](#) was being questioned. Almost 90 years on, we seem to be back in the same place....
<https://ia902608.us.archive.org/8/items/comingstrugglefo035175mbp/comingstrugglefo035175mbp.pdf>

The destruction wrought by the Second World War, however, supplied a huge boost to European economies - supplemented by the distributive effort of [Marshall Aid](#) and the new role of global agencies such as The World Bank and the IMF - let alone the role of American Capital... ..

In Europe, Governments replaced key private monopolies with public ownership and regulation; and earned legitimacy with social provision and full employment. The "mixed economy" that resulted brought the power of unions and citizens into a sort of balance with that of capital.

By the mid 50s, therefore, Labour politician CAR Crosland's seminal [The Future of Socialism](#) could argue to some effect that managerial power was more important than ownership - an analysis with which economic journalist Andrew Shonfield's original and detailed exploration of European [Modern Capitalism - the changing balance of public and private power](#) (1966) concurred. And which was already evident in the 1959 German SDP's [Bad Godesburg programme](#).

And, by 1964, the British PM Harold McMillan expressed the ebullient European mood when he used the phrase "you've never had it so good" - the growth of the core European economic countries being one of the factors which encouraged the UK's membership of the Common Market in 1973 - although even then there were voices such as that of EJ Mishan warning of [The Costs of Economic Growth](#) (1967) and of.... The [Limits to Growth](#) (Club of Rome 1972).

[Daniel Bell](#) was another important voice questioning the brash confidence of the post-war period - with his [Coming of Post-industrial Society](#) (1971) and [Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism](#) (1976)

But most people by then were convinced that governments, science and big business had found the answers to the problems which had plagued the 20th century. The [ending of American dollar convertibility \(to gold\)](#) and the first oil crisis of the early 1970s may have led to first questions about the "[overload](#)" of [state capacity](#) - but privatization seemed to give the economy new energy if not a new [era of greed](#). And the early 1970s also saw the American Democrats sever their link to the proud Populist tradition

James Robertson's [The Sane Alternative - a choice of futures](#) (1978) may have been the last voice of sanity before Thatcher took over.....(ditto in the US the Hermann Daly book)

There's a [nice little video here](#) of Charles Handy reminding us of the discussions in which he participated in the 1970s about the purpose of the company - and the casual way people such as Milton Friedmann and his acolytes introduced the idea of senior managers being given "share options" as incentives. Handy regrets the failure of people then to challenge what has now become the biggest element of the scandal of the gross inequalities which disfigure our societies in the 21st century.

The 1980s and 1990s was a celebration of a new spirit with even social critics apparently conceding the irresistibility of the social and technical change taking place - Charles Handy's "[The Future of Work](#)" (1984); James Robertson's [Future Work - jobs, self-employment and measure after the industrial age](#) (1985); [Casino Capitalism](#) by International Relations scholar, Susan Strange (1986); [The End of Organised Capitalism](#) by sociologists Scott Lash, John Ury (1987) and the columns of [Marxism Today - the journal](#) expressed the mood.

One of the latter's contributors, Andrew Gamble (a Politics Professor), wrote the most clear and prescient analyses of the key forces - [The Free Economy and the Strong State - the politics of Thatcherism](#) (1988). It's taken 25 years for the power of that analysis to be properly appreciated.... [For the Common Good](#); Herman Daly and John Cobb (1989) gave us a sense of how things could be organized differently....

Then came the fall of communism - and triumphalism. Hayek (and Popper) were wheeled out to inspire central European intellectuals - I encountered so many well-thumbed copies of the former's (translated) [Road to Serfdom](#) (written during the second world war) as I travelled around Central Europe in the 1990s on my various projects

But, by the mid-90s, the shine was going off the unexpected western victory... .. and a deluge not only of critiques but of alternative visions began to hit us..... I can't pretend this is exhaustive - but these are some of the titles which caught my eye over the decade before the global crisis of 2008....

- [The State We're In](#); Will Hutton (1995); after Michel Albert's book on different sorts of capitalism, this was the book which showed us Brits what we were missing in the Seine-Rheinish variant
- [The Future of Capitalism - how today's economic forces shape tomorrow's world](#); Lester Thurow (1996). Always ahead of himself, it's significant that this book never got a serious review
- [Political Economy of Modern Capitalism - mapping convergence and diversity](#); ed C Crouch and W Streeck (1996). Gives the Hutton thesis a much more technical gloss
- "[Everything for Sale](#) - the virtues and limits of markets" - Robert Kuttner (1996). The first major blast across the bows of neo-liberalism
- [Short Circuit](#) - strengthening local economies in an unstable world" - Ronald Douthwaite (1996). Very practical - but also inspirational....21 years on, it hasn't really been bettered
- [Making Sense of a Changing Economy - technology, markets and morals](#); Edward J Nell (1996) delightfully-written and unforgivably neglected book - since it went against the grain of the celebratory claims for economics at the time
- [From Statism to Pluralism - democracy, civil society and global politics](#); Paul Hirst (1997) argues the case for "associational democracy" in both the public and private sectors. It has a powerful beginning - *The brutalities of actually existing socialism have fatally crippled the power of socialist ideas of any kind to motivate and inspire. The collapse of communism and the decline of wars between the major industrial states have removed the major justifications of social democracy for established elites - that it could prevent the worse evil of communism and that it could harness organized labour in the national war effort. Those elites have not just turned against social democracy, but they almost seem to have convinced significant sections of the population that a regulated economy and comprehensive social welfare are either unattainable or undesirable*
- [Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution](#); Paul Hawken (1999). A persuasive vision of how green technology could revitalize capitalism....
- [The cancer stages of capitalism](#); John Mc Murtry (1999). A much darker vision....
- "[The Lugano Report](#): On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century" - Susan George (1999). A satirical piece which forces us to think where present forces are taking us....
- [The Great Disruption - human nature and the reconstitution of social order](#); Francis Fukuyama (1999) An important book which passed me by until 2017 - it is a critique of the loosening of our social fabric since 1965.....
- [Economics and Utopia - why the learning economy is not the end of history](#); Geoff Hodgson (1999) a clear and tough analysis by a top-class economic historian of why socialism lost its way - and exploration of what it will take for it to restore its energies. If you want to get a sense of the range of arguments which have convulsed economists and activists over the past century, this is the book for you).

- [CyberMarx - cycles and circuits of struggle in high technology capitalism](#); Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999). It may be a PhD thesis - but it's a great read....
- [The New Spirit of Capitalism](#); L Boltanski and E Chiapello (1999). Surprising that others have not attempted this critical analysis of managerial texts since they tell us so much about the Zeitgeist.....these are mainly French (and a bit turgid)....The only similar analyses I know are a couple of treatments of managerial gurus by Brits (one with a Polish name!)....
- [Capitalism and its Economics - a critical History](#); Douglas Dowd (2000) Very readable bit of economic history - from the 18th century
- [Anti-capitalism - theory and practice](#); Chris Harman (2000) A Trotskyist take....
- [The market system - what it is; how it works; and what to make of it](#); Charles Lindblom (2001) One of political science's "Greats", Lindblom (now 100) first grappled with the mysteries of the market when he was an economist.
- [Globalisation and its Discontents](#); Joseph Stiglitz (2002) is probably the best on the subject - exposing the emptiness of economics orthodoxy....
- "[We are Everywhere](#) - a celebration of community enterprise" (2003)
- [Another world is possible](#) Susan George (2004) - one of the great critical analysts of global capitalism
- [Why Globalisation Works](#); Martin Wolf (2004) - one of its most powerful defenders
- [A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism](#) - David Harvey (2005). One of the world's experts in Marxist economics - so a bit heavy going....
- [Knowing Capitalism](#); Nigel Thrift (2005) A geographer turned turgid post-structuralist, this book requires considerable perseverance - with some doubts as to whether it's worth it!
- [Models of Capitalism](#); Colin Crouch (2005).... It was in the 1990s when the full extent of the [variety of different capitalisms](#) was properly appreciated
- [Capitalism 3.0](#) (2006) by Peter Barnes - a very fair-minded entrepreneur sensitive to the evils of unregulated capitalism
- [Global Capitalism - its fall and rise in the twentieth century](#); Jeffry A Frieden (2006)....an exceptionally well-written account of a subject which, at the time it was being written, was not a popular one!!
- [The Culture of the new capitalism](#); Richard Sennett (2006). Sennett remains one of the few intellectuals capable of matching Bell in the lucidity of their exposition (and breadth of reading) about social trends....

- Olin Wright's [Envisioning Real Utopias](#) (2007) which instances the amazing Mondragon cooperatives but is otherwise an incestuous academic scribble.

- [Theorising Neoliberalism](#); Chris Harman (2007) Strong analysis from a Trot....

And that's all before the crash

30 March

Sketches for a Future World

Just a recapI'm writing a text entitled "[Dispatches to the Next Generation](#)" which, in confessional mode, tries to make sense of the mess which my generation has made of things.....

I am, of course, well aware that thousands of books have been written about the global crisis - but almost all have one simple defect - they attribute blame to **other people**.

I start, instead, from the spirit which infused a 1978 book called "The Seventh Enemy" (by R Higgins) which listed 6 global enemies- then seen as "the food crisis"; the "population explosion"; scarcity; environmental degradation; nuclear threat; and scientific technology.

The seventh enemy was....ourselves....our moral blindness and political inertia.....

Another such rare book is Danny Dorling's hugely underrated [Injustice](#) (2011) which identified 5 "social evils" - elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair - and [explores the myths which sustain them](#). Unusually, the argument is that we are all guilty of these evils and of sustaining these myths.....

There is a further problem about the literature about the global crisis - which is that a lot of it identifies the problem as the financial bubble which exploded ten years ago and fails to do justice to other issue and to the [other voices which were issuing strong warnings](#) from the 1970s.....It's only in the past year that people have been realizing that this crisis is deeper and goes back longer.....

The book at the moment has an odd structure - since it's made up of posts I'd written which had been triggered by my reading of the past decade.....and, as I've got deeper into the editing process, I've realized that I need to be more disciplined in the selection of key texts which have shaped "our thinking" over the past 60 years... ..

And, in this, I've been helped by [these two diagrams from the Commons in Transition](#) people - one called the "Current Capitalism Paradigm", the second "Beyond Capitalism".

Last week I presented [an improved version of the first diagram](#) which contained hyperlinks to authors who gave good analyses of the various problems identified about the current capitalism paradigm....and [a later post gave additional detail](#) on these important writers

Now it is time to look at some of the key texts which appeared after it had sunk in that this crisis was not going away.

Of course, any such list is highly arbitrary - I have tried to offer an all-too-brief justification for most of the choices

[New Capitalism? - the transformation of work](#); K Doogan (2009) A good academic take.....

[The Spirit Level - why more equal societies almost always do better](#); Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009). The first really powerful blast against the ruling consensus on greed

[Them and Us](#); Will Hutton (2010) - the third of Hutton's books about Britain should be adopting a European rather than US model of capitalism.

[23 Things they don't tell you about Capitalism](#); Ha Choon-Wang (2010). The first closely argued book against the conventional economic wisdom

[The Enigma of Capital](#); David Harvey (2010) Puts the crisis in proper historical and economic context although a bit too technical for my taste..

[Humanising the Economy](#); John Restakis (2010) An excellent treatment of a more cooperative vision

[The Global Minotaur - America, the true origins of the financial crisis and the future of the world economy](#); Yanis Varoufakis (2011) One of the few economists on the list and, quite simply, the best on the subject....click the title and you get the entire book!!

[The Strange Non-Death of NeoLiberalism](#); Colin Crouch (2011) The first of a wave of books to explore why, far from dying, neoliberalism was even stronger...Crouch is a political scientist but not the easiest of reads.

[Injustice - why social inequality persists](#) - David Dorling (2011) Quite excellent (see opening para above) treatment from a prolific geographer

[The Future of Work - what it means for individuals, markets, businesses and governments](#); David Bollier (2011) A good sound treatment by someone prominent in the P2P movement

[Beyond the Corporation; David Erdal \(2011\)](#) Inspiring story of an entrepreneur who passed his business to the workers..

[Misrule of Experts? The Financial Crisis as Elite Debacle](#) M Moran et al (2011) a rare essay which Goes beyond the common explanation of the crisis as accident, conspiracy or calculative failure and **frames** the crisis differently as an elite political debacle

[Capitalism](#); Geoffrey Ingham (2011)

[The Capitalism Papers - Fatal Flaws of an Obsolete System](#); Jerry Mander (2012). Highly readable analysis from a great American journalist

[Debt and Neo-Feudalism](#); Michael Hudson (2012) - one of a series of papers where this prominent and radical economist spells out his view of financial capitalism - which can also be [found in his blog](#).

A joint article on the [rentier aspect of the crisis](#) is here...Also have a look at this 2012 discussion - [how finance capitalism leads to debt servitude](#)

[Owning our Future - the emerging ownership revolution](#); Marjorie Kelly (2012) Another excellent text on the cooperative approach

[The New Few; or a very British Oligarchy](#); Frederick Mount (2012). A surprising attack on the system from one of Margaret Thatcher's advisers

[New Spirits of capitalism? Crises, justifications and dynamics](#); ed_Paul du Gay, Glenn Morgan (2013) This book is a collection of papers from organizational and management theorists who analyse the 1999 book by French theorists..

[Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#); Mark Blyth_(2013) A political economy treatment - and surpasses and updates Varoufakis.

[Buying Time - the delayed crisis of democratic capitalism](#); Wolfgang Streeck (2013) Highly readable critique from a German sociologist

[Cooperative enterprise building in a better world](#); Terry McDonald (2013). Sorry if I'm overdoing this subject - but it is so important and so neglected in discussion....

[The Entrepreneurial State](#); M Mazzucato (2013). A rare and powerful justification of the role of the state

[The Locust and the Bee: Predators and Creators in Capitalism's Future](#); Geoff Mulgan (2013) A disappointingly boring read

[Perfect Storm](#); Tim Morgan (2013). A good treatment by an international consultant

[Does Capitalism have a Future?](#) Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Mann, Craig Calhoun (2013) I came across this very recently....I'm not sure if I missed much - but with such a title and set of authors, it has to be listed

[End of capitalism?](#) Michael Mann (2013) Substantial academic essay from a historical sociologist - and good summary of what the author contributed to the previous book

[Take Back the Economy - an ethical guide for transforming our communities](#); J Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy (2013) Very readable localist approach

[Democratic Wealth](#) (2014) - being a little E-book of Cambridge and Oxford University bloggers' takes on the crisis

[Rebalancing Society - radical renewal beyond left, right and center](#); Henry Mintzberg (2014) who is my favourite management guru - for the bluntness of his writing...In a famous 2000 HBR article he warned that 1989 and other socio-economic changes were creating a dangerous imbalance.

Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism; David Harvey (2014). Book can be downloaded - anything from this Marxist geographer is worthy of note

[Civic Capitalism](#) (2014) a short paper from the interesting SPERI unit at Sheffield University

[Renewing Public Ownership](#) - making space for a democratic economy (2014) [reviewed here](#)

[Crisis without End - the unravelling of western prosperity](#); Andrew Gamble (2014). A political scientist who has analysed neo-liberalism since the 1970s (google the phrase and you will be able to download a very helpful analysis he did as long ago as 1979!). This is **probably the best book** on the crisis

[The Limits of Neo Liberalism - authority, sovereignty and the logic of competition](#) ; William Davies (2014). A cold analysis

[The future of work](#); Jacob Morgan (2014). A useful overview - if a bit too American in its spirit!

[Reinventing Organisations](#); Frederic Laloux (2014) - a strange sort of book (which can be downloaded in full from the link) redolent of the American 1990s' style of [Peter Senge et al](#) who promised a more liberating type of organization.

[Shifts and Shocks - what we've learned, and still have to, from the financial crisis](#); Martin Wolf (2014) - with accompanying [power point presentation](#). Although Wolf was an apologist for globalization, he is as clear and objective economist as that breed is capable of producing..

[Laudato-Si](#) - the Papal Encyclical (2015). A summary is [available here](#). Its entire 184 pages [can be read here](#)

[Rise of the Robots](#); Martin Ford (2015). I'm told this is one of the key writers on this fashionable topic

[Sociology, Capitalism, Critique](#); Dora, Lessenich and Rosa (2015 - translated from 2009 German original). My posts are, of necessity, too anglo-saxon so I am delighted to include this reference.

[A New Alignment of Movements?](#) D Bollier (2015) How the thinking of the "platform commons" people has moved on since 2011

[The Butterfly Defect - how globalization creates systemic risks and what to do about it](#); Ian Goldin and Mike Mariathasan (2015) I actually don't know anything about this book but the theme is an important one

[Mammon's Kingdom - an essay on Britain, Now](#); David Marquand (2015)

[Change Everything - creating an Economy for the Common Good](#); Christian Felber (2015 English - 2010 German). I'm not impressed with this book at all - too simplistic and doesn't reference the relevant literature but it seems to have encouraged some European groups....

[Commons Transition](#) (2015) a curious book from the Commons in Transition people which is frankly a bit of a scissors and paste job from various projects including one in Ecuador....

[Post Capitalism - a guide to our Future](#); Paul Mason (2015) a best-seller but bit of a curate's egg whose basic thesis is spelled out [here](#)....

[Inventing the Future - Postcapitalism and a world without work](#); N Srnicek and Williams (2015) - sociologists . You can [read it for yourself in full here](#) and take in a [good review of both above books here](#). Also a best-seller....

[How Good can we be? - ending the mercenary society](#); Will Hutton (2015)

[Cyberproletariat - global labour in the digital vortex](#); Nick Dyer-Witheford (2015) Thought provoking book from a Canadian media/political economy academic

[The Next System Report - political possibilities for the 21st Century](#) (2015) The opening essay from a fascinating American project whose latest output is this [great series of papers](#)

[Undoing the Demos - neoliberalism's stealth revolution](#); Wendy Brown (2015) update of Sheldon Wolin's.....typical Foucault-an take on the subject...precious.....

[Rethinking Capitalism - economics and policy for sustainable and inclusive growth](#). Ed M Jacobs and M Mazzucato (2016) A rare social democratic voice

[Four Futures - life after capitalism](#); Peter Frase (2016) a short book which sketches four scenarios, using two axes - abundance/scarcity; and hierarchy,equality - based on [this original article](#)

[Vampire Capitalism - fractured societies and alternative futures](#); Paul Kennedy (2017)
A sociologist's treatment which earns high points by stating in the very first sentence that it has "stood on the shoulders of so many giants that he is dizzy" and then proves the point by having an extensive bibliography with lots of hyperlinks... It is very well written and can be downloaded here <https://www.scribd.com/document/336342198/Vampire-Capitalism-Fractured-Societies-and-Alternative-Futures-by-Paul-Kennedy>

[The Corruption of Capitalism - why rentiers thrive and work does not pay](#); Guy Standing (2017)

8 April

Thinking Beyond Capitalism

Sadly, my blogspot host (in all other respects so generous) doesn't give the option of uploading pdf files - which I need for my diagram with hyperlinks. And the photographs I am allowed are technically unable to contain hyperlinks.



I therefore have to ask those readers who want to know more about the illustrative names at the perimeter of the diagram which graces this post [to click here for an interactive version of my amended version of Beyond Capitalism](#)

The normal caveats prevail - namely that I owe the basic structure of 6 dimensions and 15 boxes to [the Commons in Transition](#) people; that the simplified text and indicative names are my personal responsibility; and that I am well aware

of the limitations of these last two....

Having said that, let me offer an initial commentary on some aspects of the six dimensions

1. The POLITICS Dimension (Democracy and the Commons)

As representative democracy has eroded in recent decades, direct democracy has attracted increasing attention - eg [referenda](#), citizens' juries, participatory budgeting or random selection of electoral positions. There is no obvious name to offer - although John Keane's huge book on [The Life and Death of Democracy](#) is one of the best resources.

[Paul Hirst](#) advanced the idea of "[associative democracy](#)" until his sad death in 2003. This drew on the thinking of figures such as GDH Cole...

As the internet has developed, so has the principle of "The Commons" of which [Elinor Ostrom](#) and [Michael Bauwen](#) are key figures....

2. The ECONOMY (or Finance??) Dimension

actually reads to me more like the International Finance Regime - with a concession made to the importance of local banking but **the normal economic world of production and other services missing**. The [North Dakota State Bank](#) is one example of the wider concept of local banking. [David Graeber](#); [Thomas Pikety](#); [Joseph Stiglitz](#); and [Yanis Varoufakis](#) are just a few of the most important writers on the issue of debt and capital

3. The WORK/ECONOMY Dimension

It is here I have my most fundamental questions about the classification - since the original diagram gives only one phrase ("enterprise- social and responsible") for what is arguably the engine of the economy AND places this in the "Work" box - rather than the "economy" one....

- [Robert Owen](#); [Mondragon](#); and [Ronald Douthwaite](#) are examples of those who have inspired global cooperative endeavours which account for far more jobs than people realize - about a quarter of jobs globally. With the appropriate tax regimes, that could be much more...
- Even so, privately-owned companies have a critical role - as recognized by Paul Hawken in [Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution](#) and Peter Barnes in [Capitalism 3.0](#)
- [CASSE](#) (advocating the "steady state economy") should be transferred to this box.....
- The original diagram also failed to mention robotisation which has been the subject of much discussion recently such [as here](#) and [here](#). [Martin Ford](#) is probably the key writer at the moment on the issue - perhaps also [Jeremy Rifkin](#)

4. The 4th Dimension

Here again, I'm uncomfortable with the designation originally given to this box - "consumption/production". It seems to me to cover at the moment the field of self-sufficiency (??) as propounded by people such as [John Michael Greer](#) and [Dmitry Orlov](#) - the latter in his [Reinventing Collapse; the Soviet Experience and American Prospects](#) - or the Resilience magazine

5. The CONSCIENCE Dimension

Robert Quinn's [Change the World](#) is, for my money, the most persuasive tract - despite its off-putting (and very American) sub-title "how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary results". And, despite the cynicism he has attracted, Stephen Covey's [The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#) is actually a very worthwhile read....If these are too "exhortatory" for readers, you may want to look at [Character Strengths and Virtues](#) by Martin Seligman

Danah Zohar's [Spiritual Capital - wealth we can live by](#) (2004) is an interesting critique of capitalism with a rather too superficial approach to its amelioration. [The Ethical Economy - rebuilding value after the crisis](#) by A Arvidsson and N Peitersen (2013) covers the ground better - it's summarized [here](#) and critiqued [here](#).

A fascinating and totally neglected book is [Questions of Business Life](#) by Richard Higginson (2002) which is what a cleric produced from his work at an ecumenical centre for business people....

6. The CITIZENS Dimension

The internet attracts great hopes - and fears. On balance, people are persuaded of its net benefits to democracy - although the high hopes of various "springs" and movements have been bitterly disappointed. Writers such as Paul Hawken and Paul Kingsnorth have written powerfully about these experiences...

[Yochai Benkler](#) is a new name for me. A legal scholar, he has written profusely about the limits and potential of the open source technology which leads us back to platform democracy and cooperatives....

9 April

[Stories we tell](#)

As I was skimming the hundreds of books I have been checking for my Dispatches to the Next Generation, I was reminded of the idea of there being only [a small number of basic plots](#) writers use in their novels (eg voyage and return; rags to riches; the quest; the tragedy). Some people have suggested [seven basic plots](#), [others twenty](#); one even 36. [Kurt Vonnegut had an amusing little clip](#) here with a simpler approach to story-telling



But what about non-fiction books?

Since we were small children, we have all needed stories to help us give meaning to the strange world we inhabit.

In this post-modern world, "narratives" indeed have become a fashionable adult activity for the same reason. Just google "story telling in management" if you don't believe me - [this booklet is just one fascinating example](#) which the search produced

At University in the 60s I had been interested in how social systems held together and why people (generally) obeyed - [Max Weber's](#) classification of political systems into - "traditional", "charismatic" and "rational-legal" was an eye-opener. But it was the sociologist [Ametai Etzioni](#) who impressed me in the 1970s with his suggestion that we behaved the way we did for basically [three different types of motives](#) - "remunerative", "coercive" and "normative" - namely that it was made worth our while; that we were forced to; or that we thought it right. He then went on to suggest (in his 1975 "Social Problems") that our explanations for social problems could be grouped into equivalent political stances - "individualistic", "hierarchical" or "consensual".

During the 1980s, when I was doing my (part-time) Masters in Policy Analysis, I registered the potential of [Frame Analysis](#) which showed how different "stories" were used to make sense of

complex social events - but had no occasion to use it myself. Little did I realize that it was becoming a central part of [post-modernism's](#) encouragement of diverse realities...

For me, the typologies surfaced again in political scientists Chris Hood's [The Art of the State](#) (2000) which used [Mary Douglas' grid-group theory](#) to offer a brilliant analysis of 4 basic "world views" and their strengths and weaknesses in particular contexts. Substantial chunks of a similar sort of book "[Responses to Governance - governing corporations and societies in the world](#)" ed by John Dixon (2003) can be read on google books.

Michael Thompson is an anthropologist who has used Mary Douglas' cultural theory to make [The case for clumsiness](#) (2004) which, again, sets out the various stories which sustain the different positions people take on various key policy issues - such as the ecological disaster staring us in the face. There is a [good interview with the author here](#)

Three short reports give an excellent summary of all this literature; and how it finds practical expression in government policies - Keith Grint's [Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions](#) (2008); [Common Cause](#) (2010); and [Finding Frames](#) (2010)

Three years ago I enthused about a book called [Why We Disagree About Climate Change](#) which uses seven different lenses (or perspectives) to make sense of climate change: science, economics, religion, psychology, media, development, and governance. His argument is basically that -

We understand science and scientific knowledge in different ways
We value things differently
We believe different things about ourselves, the universe and our place in the universe
We fear different things
We receive multiple and conflicting messages about climate change - and interpret them differently
We understand "development" differently
We seek to govern in different ways (eg top-down "green governmentality"; market environmentalism; or "civic environmentalism")

But few authors have had the courage to apply this approach to the global economic crisis. Most writers are stuck in their own particular "quadrant" (to use the language of grid-group writing) and fail to do justice to the range of other ways of seeing the crisis.

[Misrule of Experts? The Financial Crisis as Elite Debacle](#) M Moran et al (2011) is a rare essay which tries to plot the different types of explanation of the crisis - eg as "accident", "conspiracy" or "calculative failure" and then frames the crisis differently as an "elite political debacle"

[As I like such lists](#), I should try to draw one for the crisis and try to fit the existing literature into the various categories! My starter would look like this -

- Stuff happens
- Things go up
- Things go down

11 April

Ways of Seeing



You may have noticed that the last few posts have mentioned the importance of try to see the world from a variety of perspectives. I stumbled on the importance of such a vision through the accident of my birth - caught in the middle of the tensions (class, religious and political) between the West and East ends of a shipbuilding town in the West of Scotland. In my 30s, as a senior local politician, I felt the pull between loyalties to local constituents; to party colleagues; to official advisers; and to my own conscience - and indeed developed a diagram for

students to show the 4 very different pressures (audiences) to which politicians are subjected -

- local voters (if the electoral system is based on local constituencies);
- the party;
- the officials (and laws) of the particular government agency they had entered;
- their conscience.

Politicians, I argued, differ according to the extent of the notice they took of each of the pressures coming from each of these sources - and the loyalties this tended to generate. And I gave names to the 4 types which could be distinguished - eg **populist**; **ideologue**; **statesman**; **maverick**

- The "populist" (or Tribune of the people) simply purports to gives the people what (s)he thinks they want - regardless of logic, coherence or consequences.
- The "ideologue" (or party spokesman) simply reflects what the party activist (or bosses) say - regardless of logic etc.
- The "statesman" (or manager) does what the professional experts in the appropriate bit of the bureaucracy tell him/her - regardless of its partiality etc
- the "maverick" (or conviction politician) does what they think right (in the quiet of their conscience or mind - no matter how perverted)

I tried to suggest that the effective politician was the one who resisted the temptation to be drawn exclusively into any one of these roles. Each has its element of truth - but it is when someone blends the various partialities into a workable and acceptable proposition that we see real leadership,

And, as a nomadic consultant, I have noticed how academic and national boundaries make mutual understanding difficult - **even while they offer superb opportunities for new insights.....**

All this came back to me as I read a paper (from 1995) which, looking at [the relationship of the political party to both society and the state](#), nicely tracks the historical trajectory of the politician.

First "grandees" (above it all); then later "delegates" (of particular social interests), then later again, in the heyday of the catch-all party, "entrepreneurs", parties, the authors argued, have now become "semi-state agencies". The article has some simple but useful diagrams showing how the three entities of political party, society and state have altered their interactions and roles in the last century.

*We are told that proportional representation gives citizens a much stronger chance of their preferences being expressed in the final makeup of a Parliament. **But that fails to deal with the reality of the party boss.** Politicians elected for geographical constituencies (as distinct from party lists) have (some at least) voters breathing down their necks all year round.*

Not so those from the party lists who only have to bother about the party bosses who, in the past few decades, have got their snouts increasingly stuck in the state (and corporate) coffers.

*Looking at the three models as a dynamic rather than as three isolated snapshots, suggests the possibility that the movement of parties from civil society towards the state could continue to such an extent that **parties become part of the state apparatus itself**. It is our contention that this is precisely the direction in which the political parties in modern democracies have been heading over the past three decades.*

(We have seen a massive) decline in the levels of participation and involvement in party activity, with citizens preferring to invest their efforts elsewhere, particularly in groups where they can play a more active role and where they are more likely to be in full agreement with a narrower range of concerns, and where they feel they can make a difference. The more immediate local arena thus becomes more attractive than the remote and inertial national arena, while open, single-issue groups become more appealing than traditional, hierarchic party organizations.

Parties have therefore been obliged to look elsewhere for their resources, and in this case their role as governors and law-makers made it easy for them to turn to the state. Principal among the strategies they could pursue was the provision and regulation of state subventions to political parties, which, while varying from country to country, now often constitute one of the major financial and material resources with which the parties can conduct their activities both in parliament and in the wider society.

Graphic?

April

The political scales Fall

Some 15 years ago, as Team Leader of an EC-funded project in Central Asia, I found myself trying to formulate what might be the "gold standard" of a democratic system - after some false starts, [it eventually came as follows](#) -

- A political executive - whose members are elected and whose role is to set the policy agenda- that is develop a strategy (and make available the laws and resources) to deal with those issues which it feels need to be addressed.
- A freely elected legislative Assembly - whose role is to ensure (i) that the merits of new legislation and policies of the political Executive are critically and openly assessed; (ii) that the performance of government and civil servants is held to account; and (iii) that, by the way these roles are performed, the public develop confidence in the workings of the political system.
- An independent Judiciary - which ensures that the rule of Law prevails, that is to say that no-one is able to feel above the law.
- A free media; where journalists and people can express their opinions freely and without fear.
- A professional impartial Civil Service - whose members have been appointed and promoted by virtue of their technical ability to ensure (i) that the political Executive receives the most competent policy advice; (ii) that the decisions of the executive (approved as necessary by Parliament) are effectively implemented ; and that (iii) public services are well-managed
- The major institutions of Government - Ministries, Regional structures (Governor and regional offices of Ministries) and various types of Agencies. These bodies should be structured, staffed and managed in a purposeful manner
- An independent system of local self-government - whose leaders are accountable through direct elections to the local population¹. The staff may or may not be civil servants.
- An active civil society - with a rich structure of voluntary associations - able to establish and operate without restriction. Politicians can ignore the general public for some time but, as recent history has shown, only for so long! The vitality of civil society - and of the media - creates (and withdraws) the legitimacy of political systems.
- An independent university system - which encourages critical thinking

I did have the grace to admit that "such a system, of course, an "ideal-type" - a model which few (if any) countries actually match in all respects. A lot of what the global community preaches as "good practice" in government structures is actually of very recent vintage in their own countries and is still often more rhetoric than actual practice".

But there was no doubt that I felt Britain was as close to the gold standard as it got. Gradually, however, my naivety was exposed. A year or so later I was writing -

"Public appointments, for example, should be taken on merit - and not on the basis of ethnic or religious networks. But Belgium and Netherlands, to name but two European examples, have a formal structure of government based, until very recently, on religious and ethnic divisions². In those cases a system which is otherwise rule-based and transparent has had minor adjustments made to take account of strong social realities and ensure consensus.

¹ Encouraging a strong and free system of local self-government is perhaps the most difficult part of the transition process - since it means allowing forces of opposition to have a power base. But it is the way to develop public confidence in government!

² Ie each of Belgium's 3 Regions has a both an executive and a "community" structure - with the latter reflecting ethnic issues. Netherlands has long had its "Pillars" which ensured that the main religious forces had their say in nominations and decisions. This has now weakened.

"But in the case of countries such as Northern Ireland (until very recently), the form and rhetoric of objective administration in the public good has been completely undermined by religious divisions. All public goods (eg housing and appointments) were made in favour of Protestants.

"And the Italian system has for decades been notorious for the systemic abuse of the machinery of the state by various powerful groups - with eventually the Mafia itself clearly controlling some key parts of it³. American influence played a powerful part in this in the post-war period - but the collapse of communism removed that influence and allowed the Italians to have a serious attempt at reforming the system - until Berlusconi intervened".

These are well-known cases - but the more we look, the more we find that countries which have long boasted of their fair and objective public administration systems have in fact suffered serious intrusions by sectional interests. The British and French indeed have invented words to describe the informal systems which has perverted the apparent neutrality of their public administration - "the old boy network"⁴ and "pantouflage" of "ENArques"⁵.

A decade later I [had to amend my picture further](#) -

In recent years, bankers have become a hated group. However, before the politicians could do any damage to their privileges and excesses, the British right-wing media was able to make an issue of some excessive financial claims made by numerous member of parliament (average 20k) and neuter what remaining power politicians had in that country. It was Harold MacMillan who suggested at a meeting of ex-Prime Ministers that the collective noun for a group of political leaders was a "lack of principles" (He also, interestingly, said that "we did not give up the divine right of kings to succumb to the divine right of experts"!).

The media scandal in Britain (finally) exposed the moral bankruptcy of the "tabloid" newspapers which struck fear into politicians and therefore reluctant to take actions which would offend newspaper moguls. A joke which beautifully illustrates the perversion of these papers has the Pope in a rowing boat with the leader of the miners' union of the 1980s then in deep conflict with the government. The oars are lost and Scargill (the miners' leader) gets out of the boat and walks across the water to retrieve the oars. The next day's newspapers headlines are "Arthur Scargill can't swim!"!!! That scandal also brought police corruption into the frame in England.

So, in the course of 3-4 years, 4 core professions of the British Establishment (or Power Elite) have been demonised - bankers, politicians, media and police. Perhaps the most powerful professional group, however, has managed to stay out of the spotlight - but needs now to be "outed" and ousted from its privileged and corrupting position. And which group is that? They are

³ There is a voluminous literature on this - the most lively is Peter Robb's Midnight in Sicily (Harvill Press 1996). For an update, read Berlusconi's Shadow - crime, justice and the pursuit of power by David Lane (Penguin 2005)

⁴ published critiques of the narrow circles from which business and political leaders were drawn started in the early 1960s - but only Margaret Thatcher's rule of the 1980s really broke the power of this elite and created a meritocracy

⁵ business, political and Civil service leaders have overwhelmingly passed through the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) and have moved easily from a top position in the Civil Service to political leadership to business leadership.

the (corporate) lawyers. Britain and America have more lawyers than most of the countries of the globe put together - and they basically protect the amorality of corporations. And it is these people who then go to become judges - [Craig Murray has written about the amorality of our judges](#). And those with any optimism remaining for the future of the planet will be disappointed to learn that the majority of graduates these days still want to go into either the finance or legal sectors. If our churches had any morality left they would be focusing on this - and discouraging our youngsters from such decisions.

So I offer you the 5 groups who are destroying our civilisation - investment bankers, politicians, corporate lawyers and judges, tabloid journalists and corrupt policemen. But what about the accountants/economists, academics and preachers??? Damn! There seem to be 8 horses of the apocalypse!

Let me in conclusion, offer this quotation from mediaeval times -

Strange is our situation here on earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other human beings - above all for those upon whose smiles and well-being our own happiness depends

14 April 2017

Are we really masters of our fates?

I've just been doing an interview for a website about my experience of Romania. I found myself giving this rather severe response to one of the questions -

Section 14 of my E-book [Mapping Romania](#) contains two excerpts from key books - the first from an article by a compatriot of mine (like me, with a Romanian partner) who moved recently from Bucharest to France. It describes some typical scenes - which are also the focus of Mike Ormsby's short stories about the country in "Never Mind the Balkans - here's Romania" (You can read a couple of them here in "[Bucharest Tales](#)"). The second, longer excerpt is from a fat book called "[When Cultures Clash](#)" which includes good sections on both Bulgaria and Romania... Section 7 has some further snapshots.....

The overriding impression which remains with me is of a people who are unable to trust - and cannot therefore even begin to cooperate with - one another in matters of business or civic life.....

See, for example, this [fascinating cultural map](#) (which uses 2 axes) which could put Scotland reasonably in the top right cloud - with Romania being half way down the left part of the diagram.. The map is [explained here](#).....

This raises fundamental questions about how free we are to shake off our collective cultural values..... Authors such as de Hodstede; Ronald [Inglehart](#); Frans [Trompenaars](#); and Richard Lewis (in [When Cultures Collide](#)) tells us how such values affect our everyday behaviour. One Romanian academic tried, a few years back, to apply the important [de Hofstede cultural concepts](#) to Romanian organisations).

But few authors, it seems, are brave enough to deal with what the literature calls "[path dependency](#)" - namely the malleability of a country's social system.

Germany, for example, used to be well-known for its "[Sonderweg](#)" ie the distinctive historical and cultural path it had trodden - superbly critiqued [by Fritz Stern](#)....But, somehow, it seems in the last 70 years to have shaken that cultural tradition off...How exactly did that happen? I vividly remember reading Ralf Dahrendorf's sociological analysis of the issue "Society and Democracy in Germany (1967)". There's a thoughtful treatment of [how Germany changed its political culture here](#)

An obvious reason for the lack of trust in country such as Romania is that it experienced 50 years of totalitarian rule from 1945- but, as [Sorin Ionitsa has explained](#), the Ottoman and Greek Phanariot influence of 1700-1870 seems to have left stronger behavioural influences! When I was in Poland very briefly in the early 90s I was struck immediately with the paranoiac level of distrust which separated the various groups (which sadly continues to poison that country's political development)

The obvious question which follows is **what those in authority in those new EU Member States - eg in the universities - have been doing to try to encourage more cooperation** eg in the cross-border field? When I was on a Fellowship in the States in the late 80s I had come across a fascinating structure called City Leadership which brought leaders from all sectors of city life (inc Unions, NGOs, churches, culture etc) together once a month to forge bonds of understanding. There is [a global version of this here](#) - although I can't speak of its success.

Why "transition" will last a hundred years!

I've been in sensitive territory with my last three posts which covered the fields of "formal" and "informal" structures - and of the values which sustain the latter...

I suggested that the Romanian (managerial) culture makes cooperative endeavor difficult - there is simply too much distrust (let alone macho leadership and partiality).

The [Head of the European Delegation](#) to Romania (Karen Fogg 1993-98) used to give every visiting consultant a summary of Robert Putnam's [Making Democracy Work - civic traditions in Italy](#) (1993) which suggested that the "[amoral familism](#)" of southern Italian Regions (well caught in Banfield's [The Moral Basis of a Backward Society](#) (1958) effectively placed them 300 years behind the northern regions. That's "[path dependency](#)" at its most powerful...

Romania had some 200 years under the Ottoman and the Phanariot thumbs - but then had 50 years of autonomy during which it developed all the indications of modernity (if plunging latterly into Fascism).

The subsequent experience of Romanian communism, however, created a society in which, paradoxically, deep distrust became the norm - with villagers forcibly moved to urban areas to drive industrialisation; the medical profession enrolled to check that women were not using contraceptives or abortion; and Securitate spies numbering one in every three citizens.

The institutions of the Romanian state collapsed at Xmas 1989 and were subsequently held together simply by the informal pre-existing networks - not least those of the old Communist party and of the Securitate. Tom Gallagher has documented the process in "[Theft of a Nation](#)".

Sorin Ionitsa's booklet on [Poor Policy Making in Weak States](#) (2006) captures brilliantly the profound continuing influence of the different layers of cultural values on present-day political and administrative behavior in Romania; and uses recent literature to identify the weaknesses of the rationalistic approaches used by the EC.

But the foreign consultants working on the capacity building (which was carried out for 15 years with EC funding) understood little of these informal networks and the values on which they were based – they worked rather with toolkits of rational planning and, latterly, Guidebooks on Anti-Corruption.....and ignored the hint Karen Fogg seemed to be giving them.

The development literature is full of warnings about the pitfalls of a rationalistic approach – but in those days any hapless foreigner who mentioned African (or even Asian) experience got a very bad reaction.

In a paper I delivered in 2011 to the Annual NISPAcee Conference – [The Long Game – not the log-frame](#) – I invented the phrase "[impervious regimes](#)" to cover the mixture of autocracies, kleptocracies and incipient democracies with which I have become all too familiar in the last 27 years. I also tried to explain what I thought was wrong with the toolkits and Guides with which reformers operated; and offered some ideas for a different, more incremental and "learning" approach.

I'm glad to say that just such a new approach began to surface a few years ago – known variously as "[doing development differently](#)", or the [iterative](#) or [political analysis](#).....it was presaged almost 10 years ago by the World Bank's [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) written around the sorts of questions we consultants deal with on a daily basis – one paper in particular (by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the book) weaves a very good theory around 3 words – acceptance, authority and ability. I [enthused about the approach in a 2010 post](#)

But there is a strange apartheid in consultancy and scholastic circles between those engaged in "development", on the one hand, and those in "organisational reform" in the developed world, on the other.....The newer EU member states are now assumed to be fully-fledged systems (apart from a bit of tinkering still needed in their judicial systems – oh.... and Hungary and Poland have gone back on some fundamental elements of liberal democracy.....!). But they are all remain sovereign states – subject only to their own laws plus those enshrined in EC Directives....

EC Structural Funds grant billions of euros to the new member states which are managed by each country's local consultants who use the "best practice" tools – which anyone with any familiarity with "path dependency" or "cultural" or even anthropological theory would be able to tell them are totally inappropriate to local conditions.....But the local consultants are working to a highly rationalistic managerial framework imposed on them by the European Commission; are, for the most part, young and trained to western thought. They know that the brief projects on which they work have little sustainability but – heh – look at the hundreds of millions of euros which will continue to roll in as far as the eye can see.....!!!

Someone in central Europe needs to be brave enough to shout out that "the Emperor has no clothes!!!" To challenge the apartheid in scholastic circles....and to draw to attention the relevance of Ionitsa's 10- year old booklet and [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#)

Afterthought; The title is deliberately provocative! I appreciate that the reference to "transition" in the title implies progress to a "better" system; and that the core "liberal democracy" system is now under question.....**one could indeed argue that, from now on, it is the older member states who need to make the transition to simpler and more resilient societies!!**

But, somehow, our current elites are too smug and complacent to bother with such basic questions.....It seems easier to use meaningless technocratic rhetoric than admit to bafflement. I would like to see elites express more realism, modesty...indeed humility about what is possible....

WHY ROLE CONFLICT IS GOOD FOR YOU.....

I was born and raised in a West of Scotland shipbuilding town, the son of a Presbyterian Minister (or "[son of the manse](#)" as we were known) and received my education in a state school which still then possessed the positive features of Scotland's [Democratic Tradition](#).....now, sadly, much [traded](#).

It would actually have been easier for me to attend the secondary school just a few blocks from our house - but that school was fee-paying. And my parents - although no radicals - knew that this would have created a barrier with my father's congregation, stalwarts as they were of the town's lower middle classes living in more modest houses and apartments in the centre and east of the town.

Thus began my familiarization with the nuances of the class system - and with the experience of straddling boundaries - which was indeed to become such a feature of my life. Whether the boundaries are those of class, party, professional group intellectual discipline or nation, borders are always well protected - if not fortified.....And trying to straddle such borders makes you uncomfortable and lonely - as I was to discover as an active member of the Labour party in my final years at school - at the same time as I was becoming active in the highly conservative circles of the local rugby club.

When I became a young councillor a few years later in 1968, I found myself similarly torn - as I tried to describe in [the post a few days ago about political roles](#). I developed loyalties to the local community activists but found myself in conflict with my (older) political colleagues and officials.

And I felt this particularly strongly when I was elevated to the ranks of magistrate and required to deal with the miscreants who confronted us as lay judges every Monday morning - up from the prison cells where they had spent the weekend for drunkenness and wife-beating.....

The collusion between the police and my legal adviser was clear but my role was to adjudicate "beyond reasonable doubt" and the weak police testimonials often gave me reason to doubt....I dare say I was too lenient and I certainly got such a reputation - meaning that I was rarely disturbed to sign search warrants!

And, on being elevated a few years later to one of the leading positions in a giant new Region, I soon had to establish relations with - and adjudicate between the budgetary and policy bids of - senior professionals heading specialized Departments with massive budgets and manpower.

Yet I was to learn that, if you are able to sustain the discomfort, being exposed to conflicting loyalties can reap great dividends in insight - if not moral strength.

Put diagram here from "Puzzling Development"

That extended to the boundaries between academic disciplines - I started at my College as an economist but moved to political sociology. But the inter-disciplinary nature of my writings was not to my colleagues' liking...

When, in the 1980s, I was able to develop European networks and then, in the 1990s, to work in a dozen countries of central Europe and Central Asia, I became aware of my (North) western European heritage - and to question things I had previously taken for granted.....Changing my role from academic to politician...then consultant - and then to straddle the West-East divide was an incredibly rich experience which I wouldn't have missed for the world...

Avoiding Best Practice

The last few posts (on cultural values) have led me back to the draft of a little book I abandoned two years ago - [Crafting Effective Public Management](#) - a collection of personal reflections about the craft I have followed now for almost 50 years.

As it stands, the document represents the musings I penned as I tried to understand the lessons from the very distinctive work which has occupied me for most of the last half of this period - namely **reforming institutions of local and central state administration in ex-communist countries** in these regions....

The opening section of the book (Part 1) was written in the late 1990s as I was trying to explain to a Central European audience the nature and significance of the changes in organising the business of government which started in Britain in the 1970s and soon became global in scope

Separated geographically by then for almost a decade from that world, I could perhaps aspire to a measure of distance if not objectivity...."Managing Change" may have been at the height of fashion then back home but the projects funded in the "newly-liberated countries" by Europe (and America) were not in the business of "catalysing" change but rather "imposing" it...."This is the way it is to be"!!

I vividly remembering the ticking off I got from the German company which employed me when, as Director of an Energy Centre in Prague, I offered some ideas for how the centre's work might better fit the Czecho-Slovak context (it was 1992). Their response was classic - "*We do not pay you to think - we pay you to obey*".....I kid you not!! German friends tell me that there are traces there of the old Prussian influence! It became obvious to me that these centres (funded by the European Commission) which purported to be helping countries of the ex-soviet bloc adjust to new ways of energy conservation were in fact little more than fronts for the selling of western technology...

"Best practice" was the phrase which the British private sector consultants were bringing with them to projects and was one to which I was starting to object. It was in Tashkent in 2000 that I first drafted material to make a point about the relative novelty of the government procedures in Europe which passed for "best practice" (whether in matters of hiring or procurement) and the number of exceptions one could find not just in southern European countries but even in the heart of Europe.....As writers such as [Ha-Joon Chang](#) have documented in the development field, a lot of kidology was clearly going on!

Old draft material is like a good cheese or wine - it needs time to mature. And, rereading my material on "crafting effective PM" made me realise that, despite my own determination since the beginning of my work here always to start from the local context and to find "local champions", I felt it needed more detail on how exactly to avoid the trap of "the best practice" formulae which are embedded in most EC guidelines... ..

I have never been a fan of the World Bank but its [Governance Reforms under real world conditions \(2006\)](#) is written around the sorts of questions we consultants deal with on a daily basis - one paper in particular (by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of that book) weaves a very good theory around 3 words - "acceptance", "authority" and "ability".

I [enthused about the approach in a 2010 post](#) and notice that he now has another book out [Building State Capability - evidence, analysis, action](#) on the same theme of the need for a practical, "learning approach" (the book can [be downloaded in its entirety from the publisher here](#))....

It may not be the book I would recommend - since it's got too much jargon and tries "methinks, to protest too much" by overdoing the global analyses and this annoying academic habit which has every line of every page disfigured with groups of names in brackets to prove that the author has read everything - but its basic argument is of fundamental importance and can [be read in this earlier paper](#) by Andrews and Moorcock on something called "Capability Traps".

"capability traps can be avoided and overcome by fostering different types of interventions.....which -

(i) aim to solve particular problems in local contexts,

(ii) through the creation of an 'authorizing environment' for decisionmaking that allows 'positive deviation' and experimentation,

(iii) involving active, ongoing and experiential learning and the iterative feedback of lessons into new solutions, doing so by

(iv) engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate and relevant—i.e., politically supportable and practically implementable.

We propose this kind of intervention as an alternative approach to enhancing state capability, one we call Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). We emphasize that PDIA is not so much 'new' thinking as an attempt at a pragmatic and operational synthesis of related

The authors are part of an increasing number of people who want, like me, to "[do development differently](#)" - a few years back it was called.... [political analysis](#)..... [From Political Economy to Political Analysis](#) (2014) is an excellent overview of the thinking process

Although I would express the ideas a bit more simply -

- Fixing on an issue widely seen as problematic
- Getting people to admit that it can't be solved by the usual top-down approach
- Getting wide "buy-in" to this
- Bringing people together from all sectors which are touched by the issue
- Starting from an analysis of where we find ourselves (reminds me of a philosophical colleague known for his phrase "We are where we are"!)
- Avoiding polarisation
- Working patiently to seek a feasible and acceptable solution

Fairly simple steps - which, however, conflict with prevailing political cultures - and not just in Central Europe!!

Values

For almost 30 years I have been living in central european countries (actually seven of the years were in central Asia) and working on projects **designed to adjust their administrative and political cultures to European (indeed "global") norms of transparency and accountability.**

A battery of techniques (variations of "stick", carrot and moral rhetoric) has been used by a legion of [missionaries and mercenaries](#) from organisations such as the World Bank, OECD, the EC and private consultancies to pursue this task.

I drew on my own experience to write a detailed analysis - [The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) - with the title trying to summarise the main thrust of the paper's argument that too much emphasis was laid on rationalistic techniques which didn't fit the local context - and which were expected to deliver overambitious results in ridiculous time-periods.

The paper coined the phrase "[impervious regimes](#)" to suggest not only that the elites of these countries treated their citizens with utter disdain but that this was hard-wired into their DNA - ie that the underlying social values made it difficult for the elites to behave in any other way....

There was a further strand to the argument I have been conducting for more than a decade - namely that the management techniques imported into these countries by the missionaries and mercenaries (who have morphed into local experts) have given the "power elite" a new weapon in the armoury used to keep citizens in their servile places....

I might indeed have added that the EC's Structural Funds have also given a powerful additional boost to the corruption which had for so long been systemic in most of the countries....

But I realised yesterday that this "values" and "path dependency" argument is far too static....after all, so much of my writing of the past 20 years has been about the moral corruption of our very own "Western elites" (see the latest version of [Dispatches to the Next Generation](#))

This week I came across an important book by the famous Francis Fukuyama which he had written in 1999 but which had passed me by, [The Great Disruption - human nature and the reconstitution of social order](#) is a critique of the loosening of our social fabric (and declining social trust) which he argued has been going on since 1965.

At first glance, it bears some similarities to Christopher Lasch's [The Culture of Narcissism](#) which does, however, bear the curious sub-title "American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations".

Both books are important correctives to the all-too-familiar refrain from "the West" that "the East" has some catching up to do....More importantly they touch on a theme central to this blog's very existence - the **tension between what I might call "the moral universe" and "technocracy"**. Remember one of the quotations which grace this blog (if you scroll far enough down the right-hand boxes) -

"We've spent half a century arguing over management methods. If there are solutions to our confusions over government, they lie in democratic not management processes" JR Saul (1992)

The final section of [The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) was a rare attempt to place the unease we feel about management techniques in that wider moral universe.....but this post has been long enough.....tomorrow I will try to pick up the argument where I seem to have left it all of six years ago.....

Power – the elephant in the room

My field of endeavour over the past half century has been “development” – but not of the international sort. I started with “[community development](#)”, moved through different types of urban and regional development to a type of [organizational development](#); then left Britain's shores and found myself dealing more with what is now called “[institutional development](#)” and, latterly, “[capacity development](#)”.....

I have to report that the development world is.....full of funding bodies, Think Tanks and prolific writers – and that you have to crawl through a lot of shit to find any pearls of wisdom.

[Robert Chambers](#) (as the link shows) is one of the few guys worth listening to on the subject. For 40 plus years he has worked with rural people in the world's poorest areas and shamed the “powers that be” to let ordinary people speak and take their own initiatives.

What follows is a table from his great book – [Ideas for Development](#) (2005) which captures what professionals in the field feel they have learned in those 40-odd years (and, no, I do not think it is too cynical to think that perhaps the one they have learned is a bigger vocabulary!!)

Four approaches to development

Approach	1. Benevolent	2. Participatory	3. Rights-based	4. Obligation-based
Core concept	Doing good	Effectiveness	Rights of “have-nots”	Obligations of “haves”
Dominant mode	Technical	Social	political	Ethical
Relationships of donors to recipients	Blueprinted	Consultative	transformative	Reflective
Stakeholders seen as	Beneficiaries	Implementers	Citizens	Guides, teachers
accountability	Upward to aid agency	Upward with some downward	multiple	Personal
Procedures	Bureaucratic conformity	More acceptance of diversity	Negotiated, evolutionary	Learning
Organizational drivers	Pressure to disburse	Balance between disbursement and results	Pressure for results	Expectations of responsible use of discretion

One of Chambers' early books was titled, memorably, “Putting the Last First”. As you would expect from such a title, his approach is highly critical of external technical experts and of the way even “participatory” efforts are dominated by them.

The unease some of us have been increasingly feeling about administrative reform in transition countries is well explained in that table. The practice of technical assistance in reshaping state structures in transition countries is stuck at the first stage (eg the pressure to disburse in the EC Structural Funds programmes!!) - although the rhetoric of "local ownership" of the past decade or so has moved the thinking to the second column.

Mention of vocabulary prompts me to put a plug in for my [Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power. Also well worth looking at is - [Deconstructing Development Discourse - buzzwords and Fuzzwords](#) (Oxfam 2010)

The Left on its Knees

I'm grateful to the library of the [European Council of Ministers for the monthly selection](#) they send me of relevant papers from the more prestigious of the European Think Tanks

Thanks to their efforts, I was able download this booklet from the Fabian Society called [Future Left - can the left respond to a changing society?](#) (160pp).

Its opening section gives an excellent account of how the British left have responded to the changing conditions of the post-war period and nicely complements [the post I did last month about intellectual responses](#) as a whole. It follows that with a thoughtful section about the different strands in the [debate about the future of work](#) which we have been having for the past 30 years. Migration, housing and the future of public services are some of the other subjects which receive good treatment.

Readers will know that a General Election is now underway in the UK - which, for the first time in living memory, the Labour party has absolutely no chance of winning. It will go down to the biggest defeat in its hundred-year history - just as the [French Socialists today will suffer its most ignominious defeat](#)....And this despite the Labour party (in England at any rate) enjoying its largest growth of membership for about 20 years.....

I am no fan of the present leader of the British party - but [the way the corporate media have treated](#) him has been a powerful confirmation that the media no longer performs [the role democratic theory \(if not the public\) requires](#) of it. Of course, Labour MPs have been their own (and the party's) worst enemy - by the manner in which so many of the shadow cabinet manoeuvred a mass resignation just weeks after Corbyn's election - creating a real rift with the wider membership of the party.

The scene is now set for some real blood-letting after the June election..... In 2015 the Labour party was left with just one MP in Scotland (having previously had 50). I expect a few more than that to survive in England.....

Another British Think Tank (Demos) has just produced a book [Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself](#) which looks at the forces which have rocked the UK, France, Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden in the last 20 years - and brought the left to its knees.....The book contains extensive case studies of each of these countries...

By way of total contrast - here's a fascinating blog which offers great links - [this one, for example, on the joys from good writing](#).....

And I also liked [this summary of a book about future scenarios](#) we face - "Journey to Earthland"

Denial, Distractions and Despair



What the corporate media considers important are, for this blog, mere farts.....hot air and smelly.....

The last post was the blog's first reference to the political events which have been gripping the European and British press for the past week - the French Presidential Election and the recently-announced British General Election. For "groupies"....fantastic opportunities to rave....but, for the more sober amongst us, events "[full of sound and fury but signifying...nothing](#)"

A [couple of months ago I referred to the critique of modern television](#) which Neil Postman had published as far back as 1985 - [Amusing ourselves to death](#).

Postman was ahead of his time in suggesting that politics was becoming a mere spectacle - those, after all, were the days when people such as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were forging their neoliberal vision and dramatically changing the institutional landscape.

Nobody could suggest then that politics and political power were of no significance....

But globalisation and privatization have changed all of that.....Macron and [May](#) are Canute like in their acceptance of that agenda.....

The last line of the previous post mentioned a little book - [Journey to Earthland](#) - which puts all the sound and fury in proper perspective. It is one of these rare books which impresses from the start - with a powerful, extended metaphor of the train-wreck of a journey the world is on - with the various passenger reactions categorized into those of "denial, distraction and despair".

The author is founder (some 20 years ago) of a small institute which "conducts studies and simulations to illuminate global challenges and possibilities; and summarized its insights in a 2002 essay [Great Transition; the promise and lure of the times ahead](#) which set "a broad historical, conceptual, and strategic framework for contemplating the global future". Its wider [aims can be read here](#) - and some of those associated with [it profiled here](#).

One strand of its thinking can be read in this pamphlet - [The Homebrew Industrial Revolution](#) (2010); a very [short video seen here](#); as well [as this presentation](#).

The author of the new booklet is Paul Raskin and he sets out 3 fundamental scenarios -

- **Conventional worlds** (market forces; policy tinkering)
- **Barbarization** (Fortress World; Breakdown and dystopia)
- **Great transformations** (Eco-communalism; New paradigm)

Readers will know that I am not, these days, easily impressed by books on these subjects.....

But this one impacts on all sorts of levels - the tautness of its language; the clarity of the various schemas it presents; the imaginative use it makes of sketches of the future and "retrospective stories"; and its brevity - just 110 pages.

The one criticism I have is the usual one - that it lacks a "further reading" section with a clear structure which pays attention to the various "schools of thinking"; and has, ideally, a short explanation of the reason for each book's selection...As it stands the booklet refers almost exclusively to the Institute's own writers

24 April

Interlude

I had a welcome visit last week from one of my daughters - the reason for my blog silence. A round trip to [Koprivshitsa](#), the old town of [Plovdiv](#) and [Rila Monastery](#) ensued - with a lovely night spent at the [Old Plovdiv Hostel](#) right in the heart of the cobbled old town and a superb meal at the [Hebros restaurant](#) just round the corner.

The highlight however (apart from wine-tasting in Sofia) was our discovery of an amazing junk yard on the road back from Rila - with powerful relics of Bulgaria's recent history....



In March the [post on Mood Music](#) subjected readers to a bibliographical tsunami of texts - which plotted (chronologically) perceptions since the 1950s of the western system of political economy....

Inevitably I missed some important books, the most important of which was probably [Economics and Utopia - why the learning economy is not the end of history](#); by Geoff Hodgson (1999) - the link accesses the complete text.....

It's a clear and tough analysis by a top-class economic historian of why socialism lost its way - and exploration of what it will take for it to restore its energies. If you want to get a sense of the range of arguments which have convulsed economists and activists over the past century, this is the book for you.

An Ode to the Palate



After 10 years (this September) of living in Bulgaria (alternately with Romania), I thought I knew my Bulgarian wines - at least the whites to which my metabolism still allows me access.

I had, after all, spent full weekends at the last three of Sofia's most recent annual wine fairs (which take place in November) - and duly swilled, spat and carefully awarded my scores (out of 5.0) in the little note books with which they supply you....

Last year, indeed, I had [posted the results of this courageous endeavor](#)..... making the distinction between my basic favourites (at just over 3 euros) and the new (slightly more expensive) vintages

But that was before I stumbled on the superb little wine-shop [Tempus Vini](#) - opened last autumn. Kallin's in his thirties and will shortly qualify as a sommelier - which shows, since he is the first person I've met in more than five decades of appreciating wine who has actually helped me understand why I get the variable impressions I do on my palate and throat when I swill, view, smell and then let the liquid first trickle down the back of my teeth.....and into my throat....Quietly, with no pretensions, he offers his various explanations - which have deeply enriched my wine experience..

I've been able to visit KAl(add)in's cave every few days these last few months - each time tasting about three whites, discussing the effects and then moving on to get reasons - and directions for future tastings.....all the while updating my copy of the little [Catalogue of Bulgarian Wines](#) which the KA and TA team produces annually in time for the Sofia wine fair and which carries the details of more than 150 wineries in the country..... Kallin's policy is not to stock the wines found in the supermarkets - but he will happily find and deliver a crate for you - which he did when I recently found an amazing Riesling/Varnenski Misket [from Varna Winery](#) (at 5 euros)

The result has been a delightful educational experience - with the drawback that each year's harvests are always different... (last year's wines began to come into the shop in April) and that I am becoming more daring in buying bottles at 6 euros!!

Remember that Sofia boasts quite a few of these delightful shops where you can buy regional wine in barrels and caskets - for 2 euros a litre! My favourite is one that stocks Karlovo wines - including the famous [Chateau Copsa](#) and its Karlovski Misket

At the beginning of the year I was particularly impressed with the Miskets (particularly Sandanski and Karlovski); then moved on to Muscat; Viognier; Tramin; and Dimiat; discovered the amazing [Macedonian Stobi](#) range; moved back to Moscato Bianco; and cuvees such as Chardonnay/Sauvignon Blanc. Last week Kallin gave us a presentation of wines from [Malketa Zvezda](#) - the Enigma range

Last night I tried a bottle with a rare blend of Chardonnay (85%) and Tamianka in the Symbiose range produced by [Bratanov winery](#) - from the same (southern) part of the country
Little wonder that when I visited my dentist yesterday, she commented on how happy I looked!

The Left is Dead - long live the Left!

For those of progressive bent, the big issue at the moment are the apparently terminal state of the British Labour Party and the French Left.

Macron has "reengineered" French politics. Jeremy Corbyn has tried to take Labour back to the 1980s. I hate reengineering and everything it stands for (remember Skvorecky's [Engineer of Human Souls](#)?) but it seems that a major bit of reengineering is now needed for the UK!!

It's a dreadful reflection on how British insularity has grown that **the last English-language book which gave a really detailed insight into French society (in all its regional variety)** was John Ardagh's [France in the New Century](#) (1999). Theodor Zeldin's [History of French Passions](#) and "The French" (published in the early 90s) gave an additional quasi-philosophical dimension. All these books first came out some 20 years ago.

Yes I know about cyclist Graham Robb's "Discovery of France" (2007) - and, of course, some journalists and historians have produced great books eg journalist Jonathan Fenby's [France on the Brink](#) (first edition 2000); [La Vie en Bleu - France and the French since 1900](#) by academic Rod Kedward (2006); and the more recent [How the French Think - an affectionate portrait of an intellectual people](#) by Sudhir Hazareesingh (2015) - but only Ardagh and Zeldin tried to cover all the key aspects....

The French, of course, are the ideologues par excellence not least [the French left](#) - with [Jean Jaures](#) perhaps being its most inspirational figure. But I remember being trapped in a church in Lille when Francois Mitterand came visiting in the 1980s - and being decidedly unimpressed with the atmosphere of obsequy!

Despite the decentralization policy of that period, the country has remained centralized - and its periphery ignored by a self-satisfied homogenous political class in which ENArques have continued to dominate.

The Brits are the pragmatic shopkeepers - and its left had real moral strength from the traditions of [RH Tawney](#), [Keir Hardie](#) and [Aneurin Bevan](#); the Cooperative and union movements; its various (liberal and New Left) intellectual dissenters. But they could never get their act together - and then the Blair spin doctors took over and blew everything up....

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39791036>

Journals worth Reading?

A few weeks back I made a [nasty crack about the superficiality of newspaper coverage](#). Some personal exchanges I've had since then have raised the question of **which (English language) journals** would pass a test which included such criteria as -

- Depth of treatment
- Breadth of coverage (not just political)
- Cosmopolitan in taste (not just anglo-saxon)
- clarity of writing
- skeptical in tone

My own regular favourite reading includes [The Guardian Long Reads](#) and [book reviews](#), [London Review of Books](#) and [the New York Review of Books](#) - and the occasional glance at the [New Yorker](#); [New Statesman](#); and [Spiked](#).

This choice, I grant you, betrays a certain "patrician" position - not too "tribal"although my initial google search limited itself to such epithets as "left", "progressive", "green"; "radical" and "humanist". It threw up a couple of lists - one with ["progressive" titles](#), the other [with "secular"](#).



From these, I have extracted the other titles which might lay some claims to satisfying the stringent criteria set above.....

[Aeon](#); an interesting new cultural journal

[Dissent](#); a US leftist stalwart

[Literary Hub](#); a well-selected literary site with frequent posts

[Jacobin](#); a new leftist E-mag with a poor literary style

[Lettre Internationale](#); a fascinating quarterly published [in German](#), Italian, Spanish, Hungarian and Romanian (where it has [just celebrated its 100th edition](#)), it makes available translated articles with superb etchings..

[Monthly Review](#); an old US stalwart with good solid analysis

[Mother Jones](#); more journalistic US progressive

[N+1](#); one of the new and smoother leftist mags

[New Left Review](#); THE UK leftist journal - running on a quarterly basis since 1960

[New Republic](#); solid US monthly

[Prospect](#) (UK); rather too smooth UK monthly

The American [Prospect](#) (US); ditto US

[New Humanist](#); an important strand of UK thought

[Resurgence and Ecologist](#); ditto UK Greens

[Sceptic](#); celebration of important strand of UK scepticism

[Slate](#); more right wing

[Social Europe](#); a european social democratic E-journal whose short articles are a bit too predictable for my taste

[The Atlantic](#); one of my favourite US mags

[The Nation](#); America's oldest weekly, for the "progressive" community

[The New Yorker](#); very impressive US writing

[World Socialist Website](#); good on critical global journalism

After due consideration, I would probably add only the New Yorker to the small list of my current favourite reads - although I wish there were an English version of Lettre International or even Courrier International

Academic journals

I would not normally deign academic journals with a second glance since theirs is an incestuous breed - with arcane language and specialized focus which breaches at least two of the above five tests. But [Political Quarterly](#) stands apart with the superbly written (social democratic) analyses which have been briefing us for almost a century.

[Parliamentary Affairs](#); [West European Politics](#) and [Governance](#) run it close with more global coverage.

Self-styled "Radical" journals have grown as the political left has been decimated; and got a [not unfair treatment here](#)

Beyond the small grove of explicitly revolutionary titles lies a vast forest of critical publications.

From "Action Research" to "Anarchist Studies", from "Race and Class" to "Review of Radical Political Economics", an impressive array of dissident ventures appears to be thriving.

As Western capitalism jabs repeatedly at the auto-destruct button, it may seem only logical that rebel voices are getting louder. But logic has nothing to do it with it. Out in the real world, the Left is moribund. Socialism has become a heritage item. Public institutions, including UK universities, are ever more marketised. Alternatives seem in short supply.

So, far from being obvious, the success of radical journals is a bit of a puzzle. And they have proved they have staying power. The past few years have seen a clutch of titles entering late middle age, including those in the Marxist tradition, such as "New Left Review" (founded 1960), "Critique" (1973) and "Capital and Class" (1977), as well as more broadly critical ventures, such as "Transition" (1961) and "Critical Inquiry" (1974). Numerous other titles have emerged in the intervening years. And they are still coming.

Recent titles include "Power and Education", "Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies" and "Human Geography: A New Radical Journal". Of course, some disciplines provide more fertile soil for such ventures than others. In cultural studies, politics, geography and sociology, radicalism has entered the mainstream. But even the more stony ground of economics nurtures a wide assortment of dissident titles.

A concept with unrealized potential, I feel, is that of the "global roundup" with selections of representative writing from around the globe. [Courrier international](#) is a good, physical, Francophone example - the others being "virtual" or E-journals eg [Arts and Letters Daily](#) a good literary, anglo-saxon exemplar; [The Intercept](#) a US political one - with [Eurozine](#) taking the main award for its selection of the most interesting articles from Europe's 80 plus cultural journals.

But I give away both my age and agnostic tendencies when I say that my favourite journal remains the monthly "Encounter" which was shockingly revealed in the late 80s to [have been partially funded by the CIA](#).

The entire set of 1953-1990 issues [are archived here](#) - and the range and quality of the authors given space can be admired. [European notebooks - new societies and old politics 1954-1985](#); is a book devoted to one of its most regular writers, the Swiss Francois Bondy (2005)

A generation of outstanding European thinkers emerged out of the rubble of World War II. It was a group unparalleled in their probing of an age that had produced totalitarianism as a political norm, and the Holocaust as its supreme nightmarish achievement. Figures ranging from George Lichtheim, Ignazio Silone, Raymond Aron, Andrei Amalrik, among many others, found a home in Encounter. None stood taller or saw further than Francois Bondy of Zurich.

European Notebooks contains most of the articles that Bondy (1915-2003) wrote for Encounter under the stewardship of Stephen Spender, Irving Kristol, and then for the thirty years that Melvin Lasky served as editor. Bondy was that rare unattached intellectual, "free of every totalitarian temptation" and, as Lasky notes, unflinching in his devotion to the liberties and civilities of a humane social order. European Notebooks offers a window into a civilization that came to maturity during the period in which these essays were written.

Bondy's essays themselves represent a broad sweep of major figures and events in the second half of the twentieth century. His spatial outreach went from Budapest to Tokyo and Paris. His political essays extended from George Kennan to Benito Mussolini. And his prime metier, the cultural figures of Europe, covered Sartre, Kafka, Heidegger and Milosz. The analysis was uniformly fair minded but unstinting in its insights. Taken together, the variegated themes he raised in his work as a Zurich journalist, a Paris editor, and a European homme de lettres sketch guidelines for an entrancing portrait of the intellectual as cosmopolitan.

15 May

The Solidarity Economy

Some weeks back I shared [an excellent couple of diagrams](#) about the ills of our present socio-economic system and [how it might be changed](#).

I had some issues with aspects of the presentation and **have just come across this diagram** which, for me, offers a clearer outline of the features of a better system - one called [a "solidarity economy"](#). Yes I realise that you can't read the small print!

For that, just click the diagram.

The author has a short paper which superbly situates the concept in the wider context of [an emerging global movement of the past two decades](#) in which even yours truly became involved as far back as 1978 - when I launched a community-based project designed to help the long-term unemployed access jobs which would contribute missing local services in poor areas.

Within a decade, it had become a well-resourced Community Business in the West of Scotland - part of a wider [social enterprise effort](#) within Scotland and Europe which continues to this day.

My effort at making sense of this concept can be seen at p 124 of [In Transit - some notes on Good Governance](#) (1999). Interesting to compare it with the amazing richness of the diagram which adorns this post!

The Commons

It was some months ago that I first mentioned [the P2P Foundation](#) which sends me at least a couple of interesting posts daily eg [here](#) and [here](#)

Their posts have also made me aware of the potential of what they call "platform cooperativism" about which I have some reservations - which are well reflected in another of their

posts <https://lasindias.blog/platform-cooperativism-a-truncated-cooperativism-for-millennials>

One of the problems I have is their language - and the feeling that they are unaware of the wider experience of "mutuality" expressed in the work, for example, of Paul [Hirst](#).

But they have led me on to other interesting sites such as [Commons Transition](#) (eg

<http://commonstransition.org/from-platform-to-open-cooperativism>) and [On the Commons](#) from

which I retrieved a fascinating booklet [Celebrating the Commons](#) (71pp). David Bollier is one of the key names and has a book - [Wealth of the Commons](#) which gives good insights....

[Grassroots Economic Organising](#) (GEO) is another good site from which I got yesterday's diagram and article about solidarity economics and which has a nice [explanation of the commons movement](#)

[Share the World's Resources](#) is another relevant site which offers offerings such as this -

<http://www.sharing.org/information-centre/reports/primer-global-economic-sharing>

A lot of material relating to "the commons", however, delicately tiptoes round the topic of "common ownership" - see this excellent overview [The Commons as a new/old paradigm for governance](#) - with a [second section here](#)

But I think I have to revise my opinion about writers not standing on the shoulders of giants...

17 May 2017

Cultural Amnesia; and Common Endeavour

For the past ten years I've been lucky enough to have a foot in both Bulgaria and Romania, spending most summers in my Carpathian mountain redoubt and winters in Sofia; with occasional forays to Bucharest. One of the delights of my semi-nomadic existence has been the rediscovery each year of my libraries in these places - particularly the extensive one in my village home near Bran in Transylvania where I have been since Monday. At 1,400 metres, the barometer registers only 10 degrees - despite the sun!

I have, for example, just opened the Introduction to Clive James' 876 page [Cultural Amnesia - notes in the Margin of My Time](#) (2007) - copies of which I keep in both the Bucharest and the mountain house and which must be considered one of the most original tributes to cultural figures ever published (including entries on Coco Chanel, Charlie Chaplin, Louis Armstrong and 4 Manns!).

You can get a sense of the book in this [Slate journal](#) review and it is further [discussed on his amazing website](#).

He has been a voracious reader (of far more novels than I) and, indeed, annotator of books - reading many of the European books (including Russian) in their original language. His book is a tribute to the spirit of liberty which so many of the writers celebrated in the book kept alive.

And his introduction made me realize that my blog is at least partly a tribute to those writers who have kept me company at one time or another on my journey of the past half century or more. A couple of years ago I listed the 50 or so books which have [made an impact on me here](#) - and [here](#). In what I call the "restless search for the new", we would do well to pause every now and then and cast our minds back to such books and try to identify the "perennial wisdom" embodied therein....

The one frustrating thing about a blog is that it gives a reverse image of reality - with the most recent post coming first and the reader then required to scroll down several times to see older posts.....Noone these days has that sort of patience.....whereas a book format allows you to begin at.....the beginning.

I've therefore begun to upload the 2017 posts in book form - with the tentative title [Common Endeavour](#). This includes an updated version of my **Sceptic's Glossary** as an annex - being my provocative definition of some 100 plus terms used in the questionable discourse of our elites. I've set this in the context of texts (and images) which I've found useful in the puncturing of their pretensions.....

A British Ceausescu moment?

Something strange is going on in British politics - the electorate seems now to be developing a mind of its own!

The British political class has always seen its electorate as [reliable \(if not malleable\)](#) - until the last week or so. For the past two years this particular "Leader of the Opposition" has been undermined by attacks from New Labour Loyalists and subjected to a relentless barrage of ridicule by the mainstream media - and the polls have consistently showed the party and its new leader slipping further in public support....even as its membership numbers hugely increased.....

Theresa May, the new Prime Minister after the Brexit vote, had stated on numerous occasions that she intended to lead the government through to its legal term of May 2020 but, ultimately, could not resist the temptation of an incredible 20% lead in the polls and suddenly, on 18 April, called a [General Election for 8 June](#).

As if by magic, the opinion polls (for what they are worth) [started to show dramatic changes](#) - with Labour gaining a full 10 points at the expense of UKIP and LibDems and the Conservative voting intentions dropping a few points.

The subsequent publication of the two main party manifestos was very much [to Labour's advantage](#) with detailed policies attracting support - whereas the Conservatives seemed to be offering only a much-repeated mantra of "strong and stable leadership" (and yet more cuts). See [this useful comparison](#) of the various manifestos.

And Jeremy Corbyn's higher profile has also worked to his advantage - showing him as a man of integrity.....

And yet the Prime Minister seems scared of debating with her opponents - steadfastly refusing all but the most carefully managed of appearances and discussions. Astonishingly, at last night's highly publicised debate in which her Home Secretary substituted for her, the studio audience [openly](#)

[laughed at her invitation](#) to "Judge us on our record"! (and don't just watch the short video" read the text!!)

This could be a veritable [Ceausescu moment](#) - suddenly, there seems to be a contest - although I can't share the optimism of my leftist friends. **Too many of the leftist votes are stacked up where they won't make much difference. But the incident also reminds me of Brecht's poem - [electing another people](#)**

And [this article does suggest that independent writers](#) are having an unusually large impact on the election....

Highly partisan, semi-professional political blogs are being shared more widely online than the views of mainstream newspaper commentators. Websites run by a publicity-shy English tutor in Yorkshire, an undergraduate student in Nottingham and a former management consultant in Bristol are publishing some of the most shared articles about the UK general election, ranking alongside and often above the BBC, the Guardian and the Independent.

The three sites are [Another Angry Voice](#); [Evolve Politics](#); and [The Canary](#) - with the first being particularly well organised thematically eg this post which [deals with the accusation of Corbyn and the Labour party being ideologues](#)

They represent an interesting development - a rebellion at last against the distorted prejudices being peddled even by once-respected British newspapers.....People have been talking for several years about the coming obsolescence of newspapers. At last I can see what they mean.....

I don't like sites which are too partial - but most newspapers pretend to an impartiality they don't actually have - for reasons varying from editorial control, corporate funding to journalistic laziness. It's about time we had a proper discussion about how journalists and the media can better hold those with power in the public and private sectors to account.

A starting point would be an end to the ceaseless drivel and drivel of "news" - and a strengthening of diagnostics and narratives about products, policies, companies, parties and countries

1 June

Passing Thoughts

My partner complains that I now spend all day with my bum in a chair and my face in the laptop and there is no doubt that our minds and body must be affected by our new style of communication.....One of the interesting literary sites to which I'm now subscribed is [Brainpickings](#) which turns out to be run by a young Bulgarian now working in New York and who shares [her working methods here](#). I'm not sure if they quite fit the needs of an old fogey like me but I was sufficiently intrigued with her mention of the "Pocket" app to give it a test run...At the moment, my library facility is simply a "copy and paste" of relevant URLs which I insert in a word file. We'll see what value this organizer can add.....

It was [Adam Curtis who made me realize last year](#) that I should be paying [more attention to documentaries](#)

Good documentaries require a rare combination - knowledge of the subject; experience of filming; appropriate selection and editing of text, images and music; and appreciation of how to fit them together. One of the best websites for challenging documentaries must be [Thought Maybe](#) - which I thoroughly recommend.

You might also like this list of [the best 50 documentaries of all time](#) - from the excellent Sight and Sound journal. Trouble is, I feel, that they take 30 minutes to say what can be said in 5 at most...

Mainstream media and blog sites are so awful in their slavish repetitions of political conventional wisdom that a search for "alternative sites" seems a suitable response. But where to begin? A few weeks back I reported on [my findings about readable journals](#). Yesterday's post identified (for me) some new UK sites of which [Another Angry Voice](#) was most promising - if a bit shrill. And, by definition, "alternative" sites and mags are....well... "tribal" ie closed to the idea of plurality, generosity or cooperation. Google "anarchist", "[revolutionary](#)", "green" and other epithets and see if I'm wrong.

Which is why I'm currently more disposed to read the stuff which comes from the commons network eg [this paper on policy options](#) for the EU which came in today

3 June

Twenty Good Sites

My last post was a bit too pessimistic in suggesting that those looking for alternative analyses to the rubbish perpetrated on anglo-saxon MSM would find it a difficult task. There are quite a few "alternative news" sites - [The Conversation](#) is a non-profit which I find a bit too bland; the US [Counterpunch](#) is a bit more to my taste with its stronger analysis.

And it's analysis - rather than description - we need these days.

Having explored a few weeks ago the question of **which (English language) [magazines would pass a test which included such criteria as](#)** -

- Depth of treatment
- Breadth of coverage (not just political)
- Cosmopolitan in taste
- clarity of writing

- skeptical in tone

I decided to run the same criteria on anglo-saxon blogs and came up with about 20 -

[Stumbling and mumbling](#); an economist who is intrigued by dilemmas and issues of social science
<http://potlatch.typepad.com/>; Blog of William Davis who is Reader in Political Economy at Goldsmith's, London and also Co-Director of the [Political Economy Research Centre](#).
<http://memex.naughtons.org/>; Naughton is one of the best writers on IT matters
[The memory bank](#); Fascinating site of anthropologist Keith Hart which also contains full text of his book on Money
<http://www.enlightenmenteconomics.com/blog/>; The blog of Diane Coyle, a literate economist
<http://www.coppolacomment.com/>; The blog of Francis Coppola, a highly literate banker
<https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/>; A Marxist economist who makes sense
<http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.ro/>; One of the most thoughtful, referenced and well-written of political blogs - which used to be called "All that is solid". It's explicitly sympathetic to the Labour Party and the unions but never hesitates to call nonsense out,
[The Brexit Blog](#) - a very thoughtful blog of the organizational sociologist who wrote a great little book on studying organisations in the "A Very short, quite interesting and reasonably cheap series".
[PRIME](#) Policy Research in Macroeconomics (PRIME) is a network of macroeconomists, political economists and professionals from related disciplines who seek to engage with a diverse audience in order to de-mystify economic theories, policies and ideas.
<http://neweconomics.org/>; the site of the New Economics Foundation
[Book Forum](#); is a site I've strangely neglected from including in previous roundups. It's a daily list of rigorous (if sometimes too academic) articles selected from a very wide trawl of magazines.
<http://www.progressonline.org.uk/>; site of the soft left think tank.
<http://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/>; Blog of Richard Murphy - who has advised Jeremy Corbyn.
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/comment/>; site of political economy unit at Sheffield University
<http://publicpolicypast.blogspot.ro/>; academic historian of modern Britain

Hard Leftist blogs

<http://www.leninology.co.uk/>
<http://socialisteconomicbulletin.blogspot.ro/>
<http://classonline.org.uk/>
<http://labourandcapital.blogspot.ro/>
<http://socialismoryourmoneyback.blogspot.ro/>

Interesting that the only US site in the list is [BookForum](#).... Not sure why... perhaps because most of them are too tribal and, paradoxically, too mainstream? Of course, there are exceptions - such as the superb and highly idiosyncratic [Brainpickings](#) - which totally avoids any hint of current affairs and gives us timeless excerpts from the classics.....

5 June

Getting Government Reform taken seriously

We are increasingly angry these days with politicians, bureaucrats and government – and have developed an appetite for accounts and explanations of why our democratic systems seem to be failing. [The Blunders of our Governments](#); and [The Triumph of the Political Class](#) are just two examples of books which try to satisfy that appetite.

The trouble is that **the academics** and **journalists** who produce this literature are outsiders – so it is difficult for them to give a real sense of what scope for manoeuvre senior policy-makers realistically have. **Political Memoirs** should help us here but never do since they are either self-congratulatory or defensive – with the Diaries of people such as Chris Mullen, Alan Clark and Tony Benn being exceptional simple because they were outside the magic circle of real power.

Two rare and brave attempts by politicians to pull aside the curtain of power in a systematic and objective way are [How to be an MP](#); by Paul Flynn and [How to be a Minister – a 21st Century Guide](#); by John Hutton

[Various problems](#) make it exceedingly rare for British senior civil servants to publish memoirs.

This leaves the important category of **consultants** and **think-tankers** to turn to – with Michael Barber's [How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy](#) (2015) and Ed Straw's [Stand and Deliver – a design for successful government](#) (2014) being recent examples. John Seddon's [Systems Thinking in the Public Sector – the failure of the Reform regime and a manifesto for a better way](#) (2008) and Chris Foster's [British Government in Crisis](#) (2005) are older examples.

Barber's should be the most interesting since he has made such a name for himself with his "[deliverology](#)" but I find it difficult to take him seriously when he doesn't include any of the other authors in his index. Straw's is an angry book which fails even to include an index – let alone mention of Seddon's or Foster's books. [The Unspoken Constitution](#) was a short spoof published in 2009 by Democratic Audit which probably tells us as much about the British system of power as anyone....And, however, entertaining "In the Thick of it"; and the British and American versions of "House of Cards", they hardly give a rounded account of policy-making in the 2 countries.

Curiously, those wanting to get a real understanding of how systems of government might actually be changed for the better are best served by going to the theories of change which have been developed in the literature on international development eg the World Bank's 2008 [Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions – citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) and its [People, Politics and Change – building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (2011) – in particular the fold-out diagram at the [very end of the 2008 book](#)

Further Reading

Canadian examples are [here](#) and [here](#)
[Good Governance criteria](#); also [interesting diagram](#)
["governance" discourse in India](#)

16 June

New Hope for Britain – if not Europe?

For a year, many of us had virtually given up hope for Britain. The 2015 election had been bad enough in its granting the Conservatives an outright majority – but the commitment its manifesto had given to holding a referendum on EU membership; the speed with which it was held; and its 52-48 result last June knocked most ex-pats into depression.

The sudden announcement in mid-April by a PM (who still had to prove herself) of a General Election – when she was more than 20% ahead in the polls of an utterly disorganized Labour Party (and [after Labour had just lost more than 300 local authority seats](#)) seemed to doom that party to extinction. Talk of a 100 seat Conservative majority seemed generous to the Labour party – For once my predictions (like most people's) were wrong – I had foreseen a Tory majority of 95.....

It is quite astonishing that someone written off not only by the MSM but even by his own parliamentary colleagues [proved to be very popular](#) – once he was actually given air time by that deeply prejudiced media. As did [the policies with which the party ran](#). The result on 8 June saw the Labour party's share of the vote hit 40% – its largest percentage increase since 1945.

My fellow blogger [Boffy records his reactions here](#) and [this article indicates some of the immediate reasons](#) for the astonishing result. As an initial Corbyn enthusiast, journalist Owen Jones is a good bell-weather since he subsequently reneged on his support – [his honest reaction and the subsequent discussion thread](#) reflect the current discussion which is now gripping Britain. The [New Yorker gives here](#) an amusing and good outsider's take

But it is [this post from one of the 20-odd blogs](#) I had identified a couple of weeks ago which gives one of the most profound and thought-provoking analyses.

The rest of Europe is focusing on the British Government's discomfort – and the chaos which seems set to ensue from a badly-wounded Leader and government hanging on to power only through a loose alliance [with a poisonous partner](#).

More significant for me is **the opportunity this presents at last for a proper discussion about the sort of agenda “progressives”, everywhere, should be pursuing**. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Labour party had quite a radical agenda, significant parts of which (such as withdrawal from the EU) I did not support. But I was a strong supporter of what we might call the populist part of the agenda relating to the need for **greater dialogue and popular participation – not least in the economic sector**.

I know we cannot return to that period – not least because the right-wing media and scribblers have tarnished it so in the popular imagination but we need to shout from the rooftops that it was a time when important ideas of the 1960s were being consolidated. [The New Spirit of Capitalism](#); by L Boltanski and E Chiapello (1999) is, for example, a critical analysis of managerial texts which tells us so much about the Zeitgeist..... It is a bit turgid and needs to be read in conjunction with [Management Gurus – what makes them and how to become one](#) by Andrzej Huczynski (1996); and [The Witchdoctors – making sense of the management gurus](#) (1996).

In the meantime, neoliberalism has come.....and may not yet be gone.....but the tide is ebbing and just needs a strong push from an alternative philosophy....People like Mark Blyth, Elinor Ostrom and Wolfgang Streeck have laid part of the foundations – as I tried to point out in my survey in April of [Thinking beyond Capitalism](#). Not so well known, perhaps, is the shape of the possible organizational alternatives – not merely cooperatives and social enterprises but the sort of structures set out in Frederic Laloux's [Reinventing Organisations](#)

Sadly Corbyn's [Economic Advisory Committee](#) was put in cold storage after the last leadership challenge in 2016....(with several of its members delivering withering comments on the lack of direction) so the party's [much praised 2017 Manifesto](#) does therefore need a rigorous assessment if it is to form the basis of the next manifesto for what could be a victorious General Election!!

And we still don't have enough people working at a common agenda globally- although I have been encouraged recently by the [burgeoning literature on "the commons"](#) - to which [the greens have made such a significant \(and unrecognized\) contribution](#).

What I would now hope for is for the British Labour party to resist the siren call of tribalism and to reach out to others who have been trying to build a different world from a variety of encouraging initiatives.

Further Reading

<https://mainlymacro.blogspot.ro/>

<https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/blog/ge2017-corbyn-labour-what-next>

<http://author-chrisgrey.blogspot.ro/2017/06/the-grenfell-tower-fire.html>

<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2017/02/goodbye-liberal-era>

important insight about 1980s from guy who wrote the 2015 manifesto

<http://images.transcontinentalmedia.com/LAF/lacom/Rethinking.pdf>

<http://www.dw.com/en/romania-ruling-party-seeks-no-confidence-vote-to-oust-its-own-government/a-39299067>

<http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.ro/2017/06/advice-for-2017-labour-intake.html>

<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2017/06/it-s-now-all-about-jeremy-labour-mps-way-forward>

21 June

Talking Past One Another

A casual conversation about wine on a flight between Bucharest and Vienna turned, sadly, into a cultural stand-off. The young man in the window seat turned out to be a Romanian sommelier working in Salzburg to whom Daniela, in the middle seat, introduced me - knowing how much I appreciate wines ...ever since a cycle trip in my teens to the south of France in 1960!

But what should have been a pleasurable, if not educational, conversation during the flight was soured by....prejudice....I dare say on both sides.....

I don't pretend to know a great deal about Romanian wines but - after 10 years' experience of drinking Bulgarian wines (not least at 3 of [the massive annual weekend tastings which Sofia](#) organises in November) [and a winter of tutelage](#) under a young Bulgarian sommelier - I do know that Bulgarian wines deserve more respect than this young whippersnapper was giving them...I mentioned the [little Bulgarian wine Catalogue](#) produced on the eve of the annual Sofia tasting and observed the absence of such a Romanian publication - only to be told that I was wrong. He said there is such a publication - but only for sommeliers. He didn't seem to understand that ordinary drinkers might like to have access to such a compendium

On my side I didn't take kindly to his dismissal of the possibility of getting a useful experience from any bottle priced at 5 euros - "they cost more than 3 euros to produce" he expostulated.... But what did it for me was his mention of a bottle priced at 1000 euros - "Just stupid" I muttered - to which he took high offence. Quick end of our conversation - although Daniela continued to engage him in conversation during which he mentioned that he had started drinking wines only in 2009 (!!) and emphasized the intensity of his training - and, of course, my ignorance.

What lesson do I draw...something to do with the closed mind...sommeliers, by definition, deal with rich people and therefore, despite the world of tastes having being opened to them, develop the arrogance of experts.

I'd like to see how [Theodor Zeldin](#) might [have handled such a conversation](#) to more mutual advantage!

A Zeldin Resource

<http://www.gurteen.com/gurteen/gurteen.nsf/id/book-conversation>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263330798_Zeldin_Theodore_1998_Conversation

[http://www.oxfordmuse.com/media/muse-brochure\[final\].pdf](http://www.oxfordmuse.com/media/muse-brochure[final].pdf)

hidden pleasures of life http://www.anilgomes.com/uploads/2/3/9/7/23976281/gomes_tls.pdf

http://delarue.net/blog/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/OLC-April-2011_DeLaRue_Art-of-Conversation.pdf

A wine resource

[This list gives a good indication of some of the Bulgarian wineries](#) who present their wines at the annual fair in Sofia. And [this is the list of Romanian wineries](#) for the Bucharest event (which is in May)

The one field in which Romania does seem to score higher (?!) is that of wine blogs eg

<http://lucrunibune.blogspot.ro/>

<https://vincarta.com/blog/premium-romanian-wine/>

Postscript

I should have done my homework on Austrian wine-bars before hitting Austria...The white wines I could find were all boring variants of their Gruner Weltliner and Riesling!

Far more interesting were those from a new Romanian vineyard (for me) in the Dobrogea area (near the Black Sea) - [Macin vineyard](#). Superb Aligote, Muscat, Sauvignon Blanc and Feteasca Regalas - all for 2 euros a litre.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/jun/23/wine-tasting-junk-science-analysis>

Some Hope in the Balkans for social cooperation?

For some 20 years, part of my life was devoted to the encouragement of community building – first at a neighbourhood level; then at that of a shipbuilding town; then, for more than a decade, at the level of a Region which covered half of Scotland.

Initially the tool was simple mobilisation – talk and organisation.

Then it was structural – setting up [institutions which enabled hitherto voiceless people to gain the ear of those in power](#).

Ultimately the tool was financial – to enable those evicted from the formal economy to create local companies which provided local jobs and services in areas from which commercial activity had been drained. In the mid 1980s I chaired Strathclyde Community Business which channelled millions of pounds into such examples of social enterprise..

When the wall fell in 1989, (wild) west-ern capitalism drove all before it – the few voices advocating an alternative to neoliberalism were soon drowned out. The very mention of “cooperatives” was enough to bring down a torrent of abuse – even so, I wondered every now and then about whether the time might not be ripe for this powerful model to raise its banner one more in this part of the world. After all, tens of millions of people are [employed globally in cooperatives](#) and social enterprise – why should Bulgaria and Romania be any different?

One such opportunity came in Sofia's Ministry of Labour in early 2008 when I was team leader of a training project which selected 5 fields for stronger efforts at harmonisation with EC laws and practices. One of these fields was that of “equal opportunities” and I presented a short 30-year [case-study of our experience in the West of Scotland](#) (based on a much longer paper [Organisational Development and Political Amnesia](#)), hoping that it might encourage some thoughts about social enterprise.

In many ways, conditions in Bulgaria seem more propitious for such ventures than in Romania where so many seem to have sold their soul to the capitalist devil – young graduates in particular mortgaging themselves to the hilt with apartments and new cars. The word I generally use of Bulgarians is “modest” since they have been more subdued in that respect – which seems to fit their greater environmental appreciation. It's significant that you find so many healthfood and traditional medicine shops in Sofia which I sometimes call Europe's “retro” city. Both Bulgaria and Romania are orthodox countries but I feel there is a touch of paganism in Bulgaria – which you can experience in some New Year events and the Rila mountain in August.

“Resilience” has become a fashionable term – and I feel that Bulgaria has more potential to buckle its collective belt and make the necessary adjustments to life as austerity continues to grind us all down....

And yet today, I have been pleasantly surprised to discover that a **fair number of people have been thinking and writing about the issue in Romania** (where, however, employment in the sector is only 130,000)

[Policies, practices and tendencies in social economy in Romania and EU](#) (2010)

– an excellent introduction to the concept and its practice in EU countries – although very light on the Romanian context. Focuses latterly on its scope in the disabled community.

[Social economy – trend or reality](#) (summary of 2012 Suceava conference)

A useful note

[Trends and challenges for social enterprise in Romania](#) (2012)

- a useful, if academic, paper which sketches the legal background and gives a fairly bleak assessment of progress until 2010 or so

[Institutionalising social enterprise in Romania](#) (2012)

- a slightly better presented version of the same previous paper

[A global view from RO](#) (2013)

a PhD student's introductory notes to the subject (with no employment data)

[Social Enterprises in Romania](#) (2014)

what purports to be a first attempt to put numbers on the sector

[The State of Social Entrepreneurship in Romania](#) (NESsT 2014)

- the first consultants' run at the sector

[Atlas of Social Economy Romania 2014](#) (Romanian only)

[Surviving the crisis - bibliography on workers' coops](#) in Romania (2014)

[A pilot profile of the social entrepreneur in a constantly changing Romanian economy](#) (2015)

a typical academic study

[Building the social investment industry - the case of Romania](#) (NESsT 2016)

looks to be the most up-to-date and comprehensive assessment of the sector, focusing very much on different models and the practical steps which can be taken (with case-studies)

[From Challenges to Opportunities - advancing social enterprise for Romania's disadvantaged communities](#) (NESsT 2017)

After a brief intro to the current legal situation and support mechanisms, this is a report from one Swiss-funded body of its recent work

A note on the Bulgarian situation <https://euroalter.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Darina-Zaimova-EN-2.pdf>

Press cuttings

<http://www.nesst.org/romania-eng/nesst-romania-launches-enhancing-social-entrepreneurship-building-bridges-project/>

<http://gemorg.bg/bulgaria-putting-the-basis-for-social-entrepreneurship-as-a-vehicle-of-social-change/>

update

[Shaping Social Enterprise; understanding institutional context and influence](#); ed Janelle Kerlin (2017) - bit academic

New Labour support for SE thesis

https://research.gold.ac.uk/8051/1/POL_thesis_Somers_2013.pdf

Cultural Change - a neglected topic

Two issues have dominated my life - for the first 20 years what we in Scotland initially called (in the early 70s) "multiple deprivation" but which has subsequently become better known as "inequality", Straddling then the worlds of politics and academia, I helped [shape a social strategy](#) which is still at the heart of the Scottish Government's work

In the 1990s, however, I changed both continents and roles - and found myself dealing, as a consultant, with the question of how new public management and governance systems could be built in ex-communist countries which gave ordinary citizens in ex-communist countries a realistic

chance to give vent to their voice and opinions - against the "powers that be"..... who rapidly were revealed to bethe reinvented apparachtniki.....In a [recent pessimistic post about the possibility of the Romanian political culture](#) moving forward, I referred to the theory of "path dependency" which warns that formal institutions are shaped by informal group behavior which is deeply embedded in wider cultural values; and which easily undermines the rhetoric and good intentions of those who lead the institutions...

Until last week I saw these two strands of my life as very separate - but a conversation with a friend has made me realize that there is a profound cultural link between the 2 fields of work. I start by describing the culture of West of Scotland public agencies as I experienced them in the late 1960s and 1970s; then describe the 2 key organisational innovations some of us introduced to one of the UK's largest public bodies in the mid 70s.

Readers will forgive me for going into some detail since these innovations have been neglected in subsequent social history.....I will take up the second part of the story in my next post

In the early days people sometimes asked what, as a western consultant, I could bring to the task of crafting state bodies in such countries. **They didn't realise that, in many respects, Scotland was, until the 80s and 90s, culturally and institutionally, more socialist than countries such as Hungary.** The scale of municipal power was particularly comprehensive in Scotland where the local council still owned three quarters of the housing stock, 90% of education and most of the local services - including buses. Only health and social security escaped its control: these were handled by Central Government. Local government simply could not cope with such massive responsibilities (although such a view was rejected at the time).

This was particularly evident in the **larger housing estates** in the West of Scotland which had been built for low-income "slum" dwellers in the immediate post-war period -

- there were few services in these areas
- employment was insecure
- schools in such areas had poor educational achievement and were not attractive to teachers/headmasters
- local government officials were not trained in management : and treated their staff in a dictatorial way
- who in turn treated the public with disdain

The contemptuous treatment given by local council services seemed to squash whatever initiative people from such areas had. They learned to accept second-class services. Behind this lay working and **other conditions so familiar to people in Central Europe**

- the culture was one of waiting for orders from above. There were few small businesses since the Scots middle class have tended to go into the professions rather than setting up one's own business
- work was in large industrial plants
- for whose products there was declining demand
- rising or insecure unemployment
- monopolistic provision of local public services
- and hence underfunding of services - queues and insensitive provision
- hostility to initiatives, particularly those from outside the official system.
- elements of a "one-party state" (the Labour party has controlled most of local government in

Scotland for several decades).

As a young councillor in the late 60s, I made an immediate impact by the way I mobilised tenants about the patronizing way they were being treated by the local municipality, I was lucky because, Labour having lost local power to a group of "liberals", I had the freedom to flay "the system" with all my energies. In a sense I was giving the national liberals a taste of their own medicine since they were just beginning to invent a new form of "pavement politics".....The community groups I worked with were very effective in their various projects concerned with adult education and youth, for example and one of the most powerful lessons I learned was how much many professionals in the system disliked such initiative.

But it was still a bit of a shock to realise how suspicious my own Labour colleagues were of the people they were supposed to support! Instead they echoed the reservations and criticisms of the officials. One of the things I was learning was the subtle and often implicit ways those with power made sure they kept control - whether in the formality of language used or in the layout of meetings.

I drew on this experience when, in 1977 I wrote a major [article about community development](#) - which was reproduced in a book of Readings about the subject in the early 80s

In 1974 I found myself in a lead role as new structures were set up for Europe's largest regional authority; -

At the end of Strathclyde Region's first year of existence in 1976, a major weekend seminar of all the councillors and the new Directors was held to review the experience of the new systems of decision-making. The exhilarating experience a few of us had had of working together across the boundaries of political and professional roles first to set up the new Departments and second on the deprivation strategy was something we wanted to keep. And other councillors wanted that involvement too.

Our answer was "**member-officer groups**". These were working groups of about 15 people (equal number of officials and councillors) given the responsibility to investigate a service or problem area - and to produce, within 12-18 months, an analysis and recommendations for action. Initially social service topics were selected - youth services, mental handicap, pre-school services and the elderly - since the inspiration, on the officer side, was very much from one of the senior Social Work officials.

The council's organisational structure was also treated in this way in the late 1970s (the extent of external assistance sought was that every member of the group was given a copy of a Peter Drucker book as text!) - and a group on Community Development helped pave the way for the first local authority Committee for Community Development. And eventually, in the mid-1980s, even more traditional departments such as Education succumbed to this spirit of inquiry!

The member-officer groups broke from the conventions of municipal decision-making in various ways -

- officials and members were treated as equals
- no one was assumed to have a monopoly of truth : by virtue of ideological or professional status
- the officers nominated to the groups were generally not from Headquarters - but from the field
- evidence was invited from staff and the outside world, in many cases from clients themselves
- it represented a political statement that certain issues had been neglected in the past
- the process invited external bodies (eg voluntary organisations) to give evidence
- the reports were written in frank terms : and concerned more with how existing resources were being used than with demands for more money.

- the reports were seen as the start of a process - rather than the end - with monitoring groups established once decisions had been made.

The achievements of the groups can be measured in such terms as -

- the acceptance, and implementation, of most of the reports : after all, the composition and the openness of the process generates its own momentum of understanding and commitment !
- the subsequent career development of many of their chairmen
- the value given to critical inquiry - instead of traditional party-bickering and over-simplification.
- the quality of relations between the councillors : and with the officials

With this new way of working, we had done two things. First discovered a mechanism for continuing the momentum of innovation which was the feature of the Council's first years. Now more people had the chance to apply their energies and skills in the search for improvement.

We had, however, done more - we had stumbled on far more fruitful ways of structuring local government than the traditional one (the Committee system) which focuses on one "Service" - eg Education which defines the world in terms of the client group: of one professional group and is producer-led. And whose deliberations are very sterile - as the various actors play their allotted roles (expert, leader, oppositionist, fool etc).

As politicians representing people who lived in families and communities, we knew that the agendas of the Committees we spent our time in were not really dealing with the concerns of the public: were too narrowly conceived; and frustrated creative exchange. For this, we needed structures which had an "area-focus" and "problem focus". We were in fact developing them -

- in the neighbourhood structures which allowed officers, residents and councillors to take a comprehensive view of the needs of their area and the operation of local services:
- and in the member-officer groups.

But they were running in parallel with the traditional system.

The structures we developed gave those involved (not least the officials) a great deal of satisfaction. The challenge, however, was to make those with the conventional positions of power (the Chairmen and Directors) feel comfortable with the challenges raised by the new structures. We were aware that our basic messages to professional staff about -

- the need to work across the boundaries of departments
- the need for consultative structures in the designated priority areas
- the capacity of people in these areas

represented a fundamental challenge to everything professional staff stood for. This was expressed eloquently in an article in the early 1980s - "Insisting on a more co-ordinated approach from local government to the problems of these areas, trying to open up the processes of decision-making and to apply "positive discrimination" in favour of specific (poorer) areas challenge fundamental organising beliefs about urban government - viz the belief that services should be applied uniformly, be organised on a departmental basis; and hierarchically"

What we were doing was in fact running two separate systems - a traditional one and a more innovative one which defied traditional lines of authority. The latter was more challenging - but, paradoxically, left with the younger officials and politicians to handle. And, during the Eighties, more "alternative" systems were developed - such as 6 Divisional Deprivation Groups which to whom the Policy sub-Committee passed the responsibility for managing the urban programme budget in their area.

For 20 years - long before "cultural change" became fashionable - I was therefore in the middle of efforts to change organisational cultures. That helped me not only to see the world from other people's standpoints but also to learn new skills of networking.

It was for this reason that the Head of Europe's WHO's Health Prevention Division commissioned me in 1990 to represent her on missions to the Health Ministries of the newly-liberated countries of Central and Eastern Europe (inc Russia).

So, when the EC started its programme of Technical Assistance (PHARE), I was one of its earliest and most experienced consultants - indeed, for the paranoic Poles, too experienced (all candidates were faulted for one of 2 reasons - knowing too little about Poland or knowing too much - or rather too many of the wrong people - after my work for WHO I was seen as falling into the second category!).

In my next post I will try to explore why the issue of cultural change has not been taken more seriously in central Europe.....

When will it ever change?

Another long post whose basic argument I can perhaps best summarise thus -

- People were overly optimistic in 1990/91 when they talked of one or two generations being necessary for a democratic culture to take hold in central europe
- most locals in Bulgaria and Romania are fatalistic about the glacial pace of reform
- but know exactly where the blockages are
- and few external academic or consultants have even bothered to explore what progress (if any) has been made in improving state capacity in this part of the world - in the ten years during which billions of euros of European Structural Funds has been under local control. I

Ralf Dahrendorf was a famous German sociologist/statesman who wrote in 1990 an extended public letter first published under the title "Reflections on the Revolution in Europe" and then expanded as [Reflections on the Revolution of our Time](#). In it he made the comment that it would take one or two years to create new institutions of political democracy in the recently liberated countries of central Europe; maybe five to 10 years to reform the economy and make a market economy; and 15 to 20 years to create the rule of law. But it would take maybe two generations to create a functioning civil society there. A former adviser to Vaslev Havel, [Jiri Pehe, referred a few years ago to that prediction](#) and suggested that

"what we see now is that we have completed the first two stages, the transformation of the institutions, of the framework of political democracy on the institutional level, there is a functioning market economy, which of course has certain problems, but when you take a look at the third area, the rule of the law, there is still a long way to go, and civil society is still weak and in many ways not very efficient."

He then went on to make the useful distinction between "democracy understood as institutions and democracy understood as culture"

"It's been much easier to create a democratic regime, a democratic system as a set of institutions and procedures and mechanism, than to create democracy as a kind of culture - that is, an environment in which people are actually democrats".

These are salutary comments for those with too mechanistic an approach to institution-building. Notwithstanding the tons of books on organisational cultures and cultural change, political cultures cannot be engineered. Above all, they will not be reformed from a project approach based on using bodyshops, cowboy companies, short-term funding from the EC Structural Funds and [the logframe](#). The European Commission made a decision in 1997 which shocked me to the core – that EC technical assistance to central European and Balkan countries would no longer be governed by “developmental” objectives but rather by their ability to meet the formal legal requirement of the *Acquis Commaunitaire* (AC).....ie of EU membership

In the mid 90s, the Head of the European Delegation to Romania ([Karen Fogg 1993-98](#)) [used to give every visiting consultant](#) a summary of Robert Putnam's [Making Democracy Work - civic traditions in modern Italy](#) (1993). This suggested that the “[amoral familism](#)” of southern Italian Regions (well caught in a [1958 book of Edward Banfield's](#)) effectively placed them 300 years behind the northern regions.

Romania, for its part, had some 200 years under the Ottoman and the Phanariot thumbs - but then had 50 years of autonomy during which it developed all the indications of modernity (if plunging latterly into Fascism). The subsequent experience of Romanian communism, however, created a society in which, paradoxically, deep distrust became the norm - with villagers forcibly moved to urban areas to drive industrialisation; the medical profession enrolled to check that women were not using contraceptives or abortion; and Securitate spies numbering one in every three citizens. The institutions of the Romanian state collapsed at Xmas 1989 and were subsequently held together simply by the informal pre-existing networks - not least those of the old Communist party and of the Securitate. Tom Gallagher's “[Theft of a Nation](#)” superbly documented the process in 2005.

These were the days when a body of literature called “[path dependency](#)” was raising important questions about how free we are to shake off cultural values.... Authors such as de Hofstede; Ronald [Inglehart](#); Frans [Trompenaars](#); and Richard Lewis (in his [When Cultures Collide](#)) were telling us how such values affect our everyday behaviour.

Sorin Ionitsa's booklet on [Poor Policy Making in Weak States](#) (2006) captured brilliantly the profound influence of the different layers of cultural values on political and administrative behavior in Romania which continue to this day. His focus was on Romania but the explanations he offers for the poor governance in that country has resonance for many other countries and therefore warrant reproduction -

- “The focus of the political parties is on winning and retaining power to the exclusion of any interest in policy - or implementation process”
- “Political figures fail to recognise and build on the programmes of previous regimes - and simply don't understand the need for “trade-offs” in government. There is a (technocratic/academic) belief that perfect solutions exist; and that failure to achieve them is due to incompetence or bad intent”.
- “Policymaking is centred on the drafting and passing of legislation. “A policy is good or legitimate when it follows the letter of the law - and vice versa. Judgments in terms of social costs and benefits are very rare”.

“This legalistic view leaves little room for feasibility assessments in terms of social outcomes, collecting feedback or making a study of implementation mechanisms. What little memory exists regarding past policy

experiences is never made explicit (in the form of books, working papers, public lectures, university courses, etc); it survives as a tacit knowledge of public servants who happened to be involved in the process at some point or other. And as central government agencies are notably numerous and unstable - i.e. appearing, changing their structure and falling into oblivion every few years - institutional memory is not something that can be perpetuated"

The booklet adds other "pre-modern" aspects of the civil service - such as unwillingness to share information and experiences across various organisational boundaries. And refers to the existence of a "dual system" of poorly paid lower and middle level people in frustrating jobs headed by younger, Western-educated elite which talks the language of reform but treats its position as a temporary placement on the way to better things.

"Entrenched bureaucracies have learned from experience that they can always prevail in the long run by paying lip service to reforms while resisting them in a tacit way. They do not like coherent strategies, transparent regulations and written laws - they prefer the status quo, and daily instructions received by phone from above. This was how the communist regime worked; and after its collapse the old chain of command fell apart, though a deep contempt for law and transparency of action remained a 'constant' in involved persons' daily activities.

Such an institutional culture is self-perpetuating in the civil service, the political class and in society at large". "A change of generations is not going to alter the rules of the game as long as recruitment and socialization follow the same old pattern: graduates from universities with low standards are hired through clientelistic mechanisms; performance when on the job is not measured; tenure and promotion are gained via power struggles.

"In general, the average Romanian minister has little understanding of the difficulty and complexity of the tasks he or she faces, or he/she simply judges them impossible to accomplish. Thus they focus less on getting things done, and more on developing supportive networks, because having collaborators one can trust with absolute loyalty is the obsession of all local politicians - and this is the reason why they avoid formal institutional cooperation or independent expertise. In other words, policymaking is reduced to nothing more than politics by other means. And when politics becomes very personalized or personality-based, fragmented and pre-modern, turf wars becomes the rule all across the public sector."

Ionitsa's booklet was, of course, written more than a decade ago but I see nothing to suggest that much has changed in Romania in the intervening period. Since 2007, of course, it has been Romanian experts who have been employed as consultants but they have essentially been singing from the same song-sheet as western consultants

I've used the phrase "[impervious regimes](#)" to cover the mixture of autocracies, kleptocracies and incipient democracies with which I have become all too familiar in the last 27 years; have faulted the [toolkits and Guides which the European Commission offers](#) consultants; and proposed some ideas for a different, more incremental and "learning" approach.

I'm glad to say that just such a new approach began to surface a few years ago - known variously as "[doing development differently](#)", or the [iterative](#) or [political analysis](#).....it was presaged almost 10 years ago by the World Bank's [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#) written around the sorts of questions we consultants deal with on a daily basis - one paper in particular (by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the book) weaves a very good theory around 3 words - acceptance, authority and ability. I [enthused about the approach in a 2010 post](#)

But there is a strange apartheid in consultancy and scholastic circles between those engaged in "development", on the one hand, and those in "organisational reform" in the developed world, on the

other.....The newer EU member states are now assumed to be fully-fledged systems (apart from a bit of tinkering still needed in their judicial systems - oh.... and Hungary and Poland have gone back on some fundamental elements of liberal democracy.....!). But they all remain sovereign states - subject only to their own laws plus those enshrined in EC Directives.... Structural Funds grant billions of euros to the new member states which are managed by each country's local consultants who use the "best practice" tools - which anyone with any familiarity with "path dependency" or "cultural" or even anthropological theory would be able to tell them are totally inappropriate to local conditions.....

But the local consultants are working to a highly rationalistic managerial framework imposed on them by the European Commission; are, for the most part, young and trained to western thought. They know that the brief projects on which they work have little sustainability but - heh - look at the hundreds of millions of euros which will continue to roll in as far as the eye can see.....!!! Someone in central Europe needs to be brave enough to shout out that "the Emperor has no clothes!!" To challenge the apartheid in scholastic circles....and to draw to attention the relevance of Ionitsa's 10- year old booklet and [Governance Reforms under real world conditions](#)

The Continental Divide in Public Admin Studies

The last post made a rather casual suggestion that "public administration reform" efforts have been analysed in very different ways in "developed" and "developing" countries respectively....I went so far indeed as to suggest there was **a state of apartheid between two bodies of literature** which are perhaps best exemplified by using the words "managerial" and "economic" for the literature which has come in the last 25 years from the OECD (using largely the [concepts of New Public Management](#)) whereas the UNDP and The World Bank use the language of "capacity development" and "politics" ([the WB in the last decade certainly](#)) in the advisory documents they have produced for what we used to call the "developing" world (mainly Africa).

In fact probably at least four bodies of literature should be distinguished - which can be grouped to a certain extent by a mixture of language and culture. I offer this table with some trepidation - it's what I call "impressionistic" and raises more questions than it answers -

The Different Types of commentary on state reform efforts

Source	Culture	Occupational bias of writers	overviews which give a good sense of status of reform
Anglo-saxon;	adversarial	Academic Eg Chris Pollitt; Chris Hood, Mark Moore, Colin Talbot	International Public Administration Reform - implications for Russia Nick Manning and Neil Parison (World Bank 2004)
West European;	consensual	Lawyers, sociologists Eg Thoenig; Wollman	State and Local Government Reforms in France and Germany (2006) Public and Social Services in Europe ed Wollman, Kopric and Marcou (2016)
Africa	clientelist	Foreign consultants	Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice (World Bank 2008)

and Asia		Eg Tom Carothers	People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform (World Bank 2011)
Central and East European	clientelist	Local consultants	Public Administration in the Balkans - overview (SIGMA 2004) Poor Policy Making in Weak States ; Sorin Ionita (2006) Administrative Capacity in the new EU Member States - the Limits of Innovation? Tony Verheijen (World Bank 2007) The Sustainability of Civil Service Reforms in ECE ; Meyer-Sayling (OECD 2009) Democracy's Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties (2009) A House of Cards? Building the rule of law in ECE ; Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2010)
South European?	clientelist	Local consultants	

People in Central Europe wanting to get a sense of how a system of government might actually be changed for the better are best advised to go to the theories of change which have been developed in the literature on international development eg the World Bank's 2008 [Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) and its [People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (2011). The paper by Matthew Andrews which starts part 2 of the first book weaves an interesting theory around 3 words - "acceptance", "authority" and "ability".

Is there **acceptance** of the need for change and reform?

- of the specific reform idea?
- of the monetary costs for reform?
- of the social costs for reformers?

within the incentive fabric of the organization (not just with individuals)?

Is there **authority**:

- does legislation allow people to challenge the status quo and initiate reform?
- do formal organizational structures and rules allow reformers to do what is needed?
- do informal organizational norms allow reformers to do what needs to be done?

Is there **ability**: are there enough people, with appropriate skills,

- to conceptualize and implement the reform?
- is technology sufficient?
- are there appropriate information sources to help conceptualize, plan, implement, and institutionalize the reform?

My previous post had quoted extensively from Sorin Ionita's [Poor Policy Making in Weak States](#). Ionitsa had clearly read Matt Andrew's work since he writes about Romania that

*"constraints on improving of policy management are to be found firstly in **low** (political) **acceptance** (of the legitimacy of new approaches and transparency); secondly, in **low authority***

*(meaning that nobody, for example, knows who exactly is in charge of prioritization across sectors) and only thirdly in low technical **ability** in institutions"*

A diagram in that World Bank paper shows that each of these three elements plays a different role at what are four stages - namely conceptualisation, initiation, transition and institutionalisation. However the short para headed "Individual champions matter less than networks" - was the one that hit a nerve for me.

*"The individual who connects nodes is the key to the network but is often not the one who has the technical idea or who is called the reform champion. His or her skill lies in the ability to bridge relational boundaries and to bring people together. **Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart.**"*

My mind was taken back more than 30 years when, as the guy in charge of Strathclyde Region's strategy to combat deprivation but, using my combined political and academic roles, established an "urban change network" to bring together once a month a diverse collection of officials and councillors of different municipalities in the West of Scotland, academics and NGO people to explore how we could extend our understanding of what we were dealing with - and how our policies might make more impact. Notes were written up and circulated.....and fed into a process of a more official evaluation of a deprivation strategy which had been formulated 5 years earlier.

The central core of that review (in 1981) consisted of 5 huge Community Conferences and produced a little red book called "Social Strategy for the 80s" which was of the first things a newly-elected Council approved in 1982. It was, for me, [a powerful example of "embedding" change.](#)

It is a truism in the training world that it is almost impossible to get senior executives on training courses since they think they have nothing to learn - and this is particularly true of the political class. **Not only do politicians (generally) think they have nothing to learn but they have managed very successfully to ensure that no one ever carries out critical assessments of their world.** They commission or preside over countless inquiries into all the other systems of society - but rarely does their world come under proper scrutiny. Elections are assumed to give legitimacy to anything. Media exposure is assumed to keep politicians on their toes - but a combination of economics, patterns of media ownership and journalistic laziness has meant an end to investigative journalism and its replacement with cheap attacks on politicians which simply breeds public cynicism and indifference. And public cynicism and indifference is the oxygen in which "impervious power" thrives!

The last of the assessments for central Europe I have in my files is Mungiu-Pippidi's from 2010 (!!) and most of the papers in that box of my table talks of the need to force the politicians in this part of the world to grow up and stop behaving like petulant schoolboys and girls. Manning and Ionitsa both emphasise the need for transparency and external pressures. Verheijen talks of the establishment of structures bringing politicians, officials, academics etc together to develop a consensus. But Ionitsa puts it most succinctly -

"If a strong requirement is present - and the first openings must be made at the political level - the supply can be generated fairly rapidly, especially in ex-communist countries, with their well-educated manpower. But if the demand is lacking, then the supply will be irrelevant".

Curiously, however, only a tiny number of people⁶ seem to have tried to make sense of the efforts at "good governance" in central and east Europe and Asia, Certainly those who write about administrative efforts in central Europe and the Balkans do so from a commitment to the neo-liberal values which underpin New Public Management (NPM)⁷

A few years ago, Tom Carrothers - one of the Carnegie Foundation's best writers - [produced a paper](#) which echoes the [concerns I have been articulating](#) since the mid 90s of the assumptions international agencies have been bringing to their well-endowed programmes.

Carrothers gives us eight injunctions -

- recognise that governance deficiencies are primarily political
- give attention to the demand for governance, not just the supply
- go local
- strive for best fit - rather than best practice
- take informal institutions into account
- mainstream governance (ie don't just run it as an add-on)
- don't ignore the international dimensions
- reform thyself

In 2007 and 2011 I presented my critique⁸ to a network of Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe ([NISPAcee](#)) but have been disappointed by the way the members of the network have simply aped "best practice" nonsense from the west....

Leaders are supposed to be promoters of their protégés; and clan-based loyalties take precedence over public duties for salaried public officials. Such behaviour can be found not only in the central government but also in local administration, the political opposition, academia and social life in general, i.e. so it permeates most of the country's elites. Classic studies of Mezzogiorno in Italy call this complex of attitudes "amoral familism": when extended kin-based associations form close networks of interests and develop a particularistic ethics centered solely upon the group's survival. This central objective of perpetuity and enrichment of the in-group supersedes any other general value or norm the society may have, which then become non-applicable to such a group's members. At best, they may be only used temporarily, as instruments for advancing the family's goals - as happens sometimes with the anti-corruption measures.

Since Romanian society, like others in the Balkans, still holds onto such pre-modern traits, its members are neither very keen to compete openly nor are they accustomed to the pro-growth dynamics of modernity. Social transactions are regarded as a zero-sum game; a group's gain must have been brought about at the expense of others. This may be a rational attitude for traditional, static societies, where resources are limited and the only questions of public interest have to do with redistribution.

⁶ Tony Verheijen's [Administrative Capacity in the new EU Member States - the Limits of Innovation](#) (2006) and Nick Manning's [International Public Administration Reform - implications for the Russian Federation](#) (2006) were two - and in 2009 a collection of papers was published about [Democracy's Plight in the European Neighbourhood: Struggling Transitions and Proliferating Dynasties](#)

⁷ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/21366/12/12_chapter2.pdf

⁸ <http://www.mappingthecommonground.com/the-long-game>

Further Reading

Organ culture in cEE http://193.231.19.17/kozgazdaszforum.ro/admin/upload/3_2014_6_cikk2.pdf
Is corruption understood differently in different cultures? Anthropology meets political science;
Bo Rothstein and David Torsello (2013)
http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/digitalAssets/1443/1443545_2013_5_rothstein_torsello.pdf
<http://www.tlu.ee/stss/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/kollmorgen.pdf>
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http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-concept-paper-n%C2%B01-public-sector-reform-introduction_en
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http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-reference-document-no-9-support-justice-reform-acp-countries_en
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/tools-and-methods-series-concept-paper-n%C2%B02-supporting-anti-corruption-reform-partner-countries_en
<http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mn-bb-16-005-en-n.pdf> no 23

The sovereign mythand the future of social democracy

For the past few years, the refrain of the MSM has been that there could be no returning to the heyday of social democracy But, since Corbyn, Trump and the recent British election, [the talk is of little else....](#) The grip of neoliberal thinking seems at last to be broken. Globalisation is no more.... And yet..... The Crooked Timber blog alerted me to this piece on what the author calls "[the sovereign myth](#)"

One of the defining organizational facts about the state as we know itis that it is integrally connected with transnational finance. In part, but it's an important part, the modern state is a creation of the bond market, and so is the modern democratic state.

Medieval mercantile cities had long been able to borrow money at better interest rates than other political units. In early modernity, states that were relatively representative and relatively commercial learned that they could do the same. First Holland, then England, gained crucial advantages in international competition from their ability to borrow cheaply; the credit market trusted representative governments that incorporated important parts of the commercial classes much more than they trusted absolute monarchs. And Britain's ability to out-borrow France eventually contributed to the bankruptcy of the latter state and the onset of the Revolution.

This is uncontroversial but, from many ideological perspectives, uncomfortable. It means that the growth, stability, and expansion of powerful states governed by representative democracy was in part a creation of the credit market, bondholders, and international finance. That's not a world in which democratic decision makers ever had unconstrained sovereign decision-making authority over public finance, even

in the powerful core states of the international system. It also means that the representative state emerged out of a kind of market competition for creditworthy providers of government.

The representation of those who would have to be taxed in the future to repay the debt was taken as much more credible than a king's prediction that his son would probably find the money somewhere. Moreover, the innovative financial instruments that characterize modern financial markets were often created by, or around, public or quasi-public entities like the Bank of England and the Dutch East India Company. And once these processes got underway, the validity of transnational debt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was often enforced at gunboat-point by powerful states.

Thus, imagined histories of democratic sovereignty over the economy cannot survive contact with the actual history of the emergence of democratic states.

I was in the mood for this sombre message since I had just emerged from reading [The Roch Winds - a treacherous guide to Scotland](#) which is as thought-provoking a vignette on the state of one of Europe's small countries as you can find.

much of the book is dedicated to a forensic analysis of the nebulous cluster of hopes and dreams that constitute 'Civic Nationalism', the ideology that increasingly sets the parameters of Scottish political discourse. In the ongoing absence of any effective opposition to the SNP's complete dominance at Holyrood and beyond, commentary of this quality is badly needed to puncture Scotland's self-satisfied political consensus.

.....its legislation moving at stately pace through its quiet committees, its doors open to trusted representatives of Scotland's established civic institutions, the very design of its hemispherical parliamentary chamber facilitating respectful rational exchanges.

The Scottish nationalists who have been in government in devolved Scotland for more than ten years are very good in contrasting their consensual approach with the bitter antagonisms which are evident in the Westminster parliament. But an [excellent, extended review](#) makes the point that -

Westminster is a 'tax-and-spend' parliament, responsible for raising the money it distributes, whereas Holyrood is 'grant-and-spend' assembly, responsible only for distributing funds guaranteed by Westminster's block grant.

Holyrood is protected from the elemental political forces that buffet the British Government, which carries the burden of raising the money it spends in a competitive global economy. Politics at this level is bound to be confrontational, the angry exchanges at the dispatch box reflecting the impossibility of reconciling the divergent interests of the extra-parliamentary constituencies that fight to determine how money is spent and raised. Westminster's power to set tax rates and pull the fiscal and monetary levers that shape the environment in which business operates subject it to pressures exerted by powerful financial and corporate interests to which the Scottish Parliament is not subject.

Of course I know that the ruthless face of finance capitalism has been evident for several years in the whole tragic saga of Greek debt but The Roch Winds is particularly powerful in its description of how, for the few days immediately before the Scottish referendum of 2014, that ruthless face presented itself when a poll was released suggesting a possible victory for the yes campaign. One of the book's authors wrote [an Open Democracy piece](#) which tells this wonderful story -

Between 1929 and 1931, a minority Labour government tore itself to shreds in a desperate attempt to keep Britain in the Gold Standard international monetary system. Winston Churchill - then Chancellor of the Exchequer - re-established Sterling at the centre of a revived Gold Standard in 1925, revaluing it at pre-war levels despite the devastation which the First World War had inflicted on the British economy. Labour,

seeking to reform rather than overthrow British capitalism, offered little in the way of an alternative. Within the party's social democratic orthodoxy, the stability of the international economic architecture and high finance had to be secured before Labour could focus on its own supporters amongst the industrial working class.

Industrial areas experienced great hardship as Britain struggled on maintaining relatively liberalised trade and a highly uncompetitive currency valuation. The fiscal situation was also hindered, and the Labour government ultimately fell due to an internal feud over further cuts to unemployment benefit.

Yet the rules of the game were dramatically changed just days and weeks after this collapse. The incoming (largely Tory) National Government took Britain off the hallowed Gold Standard, raised tariffs, subsidised industry and set about arranging preferential Commonwealth trading.

Sidney Webb, the leading Fabian intellectual who had served as the Secretary of State for Dominions and Colonies in the Labour administration, responded to the situation with the exasperated cry of: "they didn't tell us we could do that!"

The review continues by reminding us of how

Scottish Labour's uninspiring defence of the Union throughout the referendum - which has cost them a Scottish working class vote that no longer has faith in the status quo - was rooted in the belief that Scotland's public services can only be maintained within the context of British capitalism.

During the Blair and Brown years Labour maintained public spending - and Scotland's block grant - by means of a Faustian pact with finance capital: the City was allowed to let rip in return for the tax revenues it generated. New Labour's perceived impurities continue to be exploited ruthlessly by the SNP and the wider Yes movement, for whom 'any effort to sustain the welfare state in the cesspit of British capitalism [is] like conducting surgery in a sewer.'

The SNP have sought to claim the mantle of a purer social democracy once proudly championed by a more virtuous 'Old Labour', but for Gallagher et al this is just another illusion: the compromises of the New Labour era were the most recent manifestation of Labour's continual battle to broker some form of social democratic state in the teeth of the private sector's hostility.

During the post-war golden era 'Old Labour' might indeed have had it easier: reliable economic growth generated the tax revenues necessary to fund public services, and strong unions were able to force decent wages. But it soon morphed into a messy business of incomes policies, 'beer and sandwiches at No 10' and currency devaluations: **social democracy is always necessarily compromised, a fractious struggle to broker a truce between capital and labour.**

And it has only got harder in more recent decades, the globalisation and financialisation of the world economy limiting the capacity of nation states to draw tax revenues from business, and weakened labour movements forcing governments such as those of Blair and Brown to supplement low wages with tax breaks, minimum wage legislation and easy credit.

The 2008 crash pitched social democracy into full-blown crisis, forcing states to borrow heavily to prevent wholesale collapse of the banks, and to run up debts that must be repaid on terms dictated by finance capital, including tight controls on public spending and the maintenance of cheap, flexible labour markets. For the authors, austerity is a permanent condition enforced by vast corporate and financial interests that nation states are no longer able to control. Any social democratic government prepared to work within the terms set by global capital will be subject to the same pressures:

Labour's inability to respond to austerity was due to the fact that under its social democratic principles it could [not] challenge it, since it was not prepared to operate outside conditions which were profitable for capital. A Scottish state governed by the SNP would have to face up to the same challenges that social democratic parties everywhere, not just Labour, are struggling to see beyond.

Update:

<http://crookedtimber.org/2017/07/26/the-sovereign-myth-asks-the-wrong-question/#more-42725>

Confessions of a Social Democrat

Cards on the table? For most of my life I've been a "mugwump" - with my mug on one side of the fence and my wump on the other. Hiding inside one of Scotland's Regional political leaders of the 70s and 80s was someone who sometimes thought he was an anarchist.

I was a sceptic on much conventional wisdom and power - a reader of New Left Review no less - who saw no personal future in parliamentary activity nor went along with the "militants" in their increasingly oppositionist tactics of the late 70s and 80s....

Support for community enterprise was where I put my energy - and then, as I moved continents and roles, in helping to strengthen the capacity of new institutions of civil service and municipal power in central Europe and central Asia.

As the extent of New Labour's capitulation to the power of finance capital became clear (from the publication in 2000 of George Monbiot's [The Captive State - the corporate takeover of Britain](#)) my sympathies grew with those struggling against financial, commercial and political power alike - but I [still resisted a "leftist" label](#) - even recently....

Like a lot of my generation, I hankered for the "golden age"when, as [Crosland assured us in his powerful Future of Socialism](#) (1956), capitalism had been tamed.....

Given such a personal history, you will appreciate that yesterday's post was pretty significant for me - in being prepared to recognize that social democracy enjoyed the peak of its power at a particular conjuncture of circumstances which are unlikely to appear again.

Or to express this more precisely - that I should have been more aware that **ideas** fit particular **interests** - which have varying degrees of **power** backing them up.....

Put in even more personal terms, I have occupied in my life a very specific academic and political "slot" which has given me the power and interests to pursue specific "reformist" ideas.....

I have always seen myself as a "realist" in the [Niebuhr sense](#) - but one who perhaps has been too carried away by my **ideas and interests** to look critically enough at the wider context in which I was living - and at the **power** of other interests!

I have never been a fan of conspiracy theories but have had to wake up to the fact that what we have called, variously, "globalization", "neoliberalism", "managerialism" etc are ideas which have been pushed in sustained and well-funded efforts by Think Tanks to influence academics....

People are now aware both of (Buchanan) these efforts and also of the potential of technological changes for what is called the "sharing economy" or "the commons" - to such an extent that talk of the end of capitalism is rife....I'm not sure, however, if we have yet given social democracy the funeral rites which are its due.....

I think it's time for another list of these internet links which this blog has become famous for producing (I joke!). As on previous occasions, I have annotated them to help you steer the

appropriate course. And, like you, I still have to dip into them. They are on the list simply because they seem to be essential reading...
So happy reading - and let's see whether some of us can't perhaps share our reactions?

A "Social Democracy" Resource

[After Social Democracy: politics, capitalism and the common life](#); John Gray (1996 Demos)

- Written a year before New Labour took power, this was indeed a prescient book - as well as being so clearly written

[Anthony Crosland - the mixed economy](#); D Reisman (1997)

- A neglected treatment of the ideas of this major British "revisionist" of the 50s and 60s who wrote the seminal "Future of Socialism" (1956). Must be the definitive analysis!

[Crosland's Future - opportunity and outcome](#); D Reisman (1997)

- Its sister book - a great read. Here's a [fascinating review of Crosland's work written in 1963](#) by the famous Lewis Coser

[The Primacy of Politics - social democracy and the making of Europe's 20th Century](#); Sheri Berman (2006);

- The book was the subject of [a great seminar whose introduction says](#) - "Like the social democrats who are the heroes of this book, she takes a classic set of arguments and interrogates and updates them, making claims about what works and what doesn't, what's relevant to our contemporary situation, and what isn't. Second, in so doing she decisively demonstrates the importance of ideas to politics".

[Social democracy in power - explaining the capacity to reform](#); (2007)

- A paper comparing fiscal, employment, and social policies of six social-democratic governments in Great Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark revealing three distinct types of social democratic governments

[The Death of Social Democracy: political consequences in the 21st Century](#); Lavelle (2008)

- A critical assessment by a self-avowed Marxist of the performance of these parties in Australia, Britain, Germany and Sweden which argues that these parties are now impediments to the task of building a better world. This will come, the book argues, from alternative left and global social movements...

The Berman and Lavelle books are [reviewed here](#)

[One Hundred Years of Socialism - the west European left in the 20th century](#); Donald Sassoon (2010)

- An unsurpassable 965 page blockbuster!

[The Social Democratic Model of Society - what is it and does it work?](#) (2012)

- A useful short paper written to assess implications for South Korea

[Social Democracy After the Cold War](#); B Evans and I. Schmidt (2012)

- This 350 page book can be read in full by clicking the link...

[Welfare State and Social Democracy](#) (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2012)

- Very thorough (160pp) treatment of the German situation (in English)

[Understanding the evolution of the Swedish model - change or continuity ?](#) (2015)

[The Crosland Legacy - the future of British social democracy](#); Patrick Diamond (2016)

[The Three Worlds of Social Democracy - a global view](#); I Schmidt (ed) 2016

- Probably the most up-to-date global assessment

[Rethinking German political economy - call for papers](#) (2017);

- This is a great resource I found while googling,,,,,

<http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/2-2monbiot.pdf>
<http://nottspolitics.org/2016/12/15/anthony-crosland-the-future-of-social-democracy/>
<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/how-to-save-capitalism/>
<http://socialdemocracy21stcentury.blogspot.ro/>

Thinking Institutionally

A little book has been engaging my thoughts this past week - [On Thinking Institutionally](#) - published a decade ago by Hugh Heclo, now a retired American political scientist with form for an interest both in political institutions and in European aspects of political culture. I remember his name vividly from the 1970s from the book he wrote jointly with that great doyen of political analysis (and of the budgetary process) Aaron Wildavsky - [The Private Government of Public Money](#)

I had been attracted to Heclo's 2008 book by its apparent focus on what I consider an unremarked feature of contemporary commentary - the ease and frequency with which analysts write off the societies of which they are part. Way back in the 60s, Penguin books had published a series of popular paperbacks with [the series title "What's Wrong with.....?"](#) - in which virtually all British institutions were subjected to a ruthless critique. When I was in Germany for a couple of months in 2013, I noticed [a similar rash of titles](#). And France has been flooded in recent years by the literature on its doom.....

I like a good critique like anyone else - but there comes a point when critical analysis of an institution become so overwhelming as to threaten the possibility of ever trusting that entity ever again. A few years ago, we seemed to reach that point in Britain when the "expenses scandal" hit the political class - was it a coincidence that this happened just when the global economic crisis required some determined political action?

For whatever reason, **trust in our institutions** - public and private - has sunk to an all-time low. This is the issue with which Heclo's book starts - indeed he gives us a 5 page spread which itemises the scandals affecting the public, private and even NGO sectors from the late 1950s - arguing that mass communications and our interconnectedness exacerbate the public impact of such events.

The past half-century has been most unkind to those discrete cohering entities, both formal and informal, that "represent inheritances of valued purpose with attendant rules and moral obligations." Today, people almost universally denigrate institutions, including those of which they are members. Attacks on institutions come from our hyper-democratic politics but stem from the Enlightenment with its unshakeable confidence in human reason; its subsequent obsessive focus on the self; and, latterly, its belief that an institution has no value beyond that which an individual can squeeze from it for personal gain.

In the last 60 years our education system has designated institutions as, at best, annoying encumbrances and, at worst, oppressive tools of the past. Students are taught to believe what they like and express themselves as they see fit. Even people understood to be conservatives—at least in the way we conceptualize political ideology today—assail institutions. Free market economics places a premium on self-interest and assumes institutions stifle innovation and entrepreneurship.

But institutions provide reference points in an uncertain world. They tie us to the past and present; furnish personal assistance; and institutionalize trust. They give our lives purpose and, therefore, the kind of self-satisfaction that only the wholesale rejection of them is supposed to provide.

*How, then, do we protect and promote them? Heclo says that first and foremost we must learn to think institutionally. This is very different from thinking about institutions as scholars do. It is not an objective and intellectual exercise. It is a more participatory and intuitive one. To think institutionally you need a "particular sensitivity" to or an "appreciative viewpoint" of institutions. To be more specific, **the exercise moves our focus away from the self and towards a recognition of our debts and obligations to others.***

To think institutionally is to do something much more than provide individuals with incentives to be part of and promote institutions. It calls on them to modify their behavior. In this way, Heclo challenges rational choice's assumptions about institutional maintenance vigorously.

Heclo argues that acting institutionally has three components. The first, "**profession**," involves learning and respecting a body of knowledge and aspiring to a particular level of conduct. The second, "**office**," is a sense of duty that compels an individual to accomplish considerably more for the institution than a minimal check-list of tasks enumerated within a kind of job description. Finally, there is "**stewardship**." Here Heclo is getting at the notion of fiduciary responsibility. The individual essentially takes the decisions of past members on trust, acts in the interests of present and future members, and stands accountable for his actions.

I have a lot of sympathy for this line of argument – against "the quick buck".... instant gratification..... tomorrow's headlines.....we need cultures which respect partnership, timescales for investment and the idea of "stewardship" which Robert Greenleaf tried, unsuccessfully, to cultivate.....The quotation, indeed, which graces the first page of my [Dispatches to the post-capitalist generation is from](#) Dwight Eisenhower's last address in 1960

We . . . must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for our own ease and convenience the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.

Heclo's book, I concede, is in the tradition of Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott and tended to attract the attention of clerics and university administrators – some of whom produced [this interesting symposium](#)

Thinking institutionally is a lonely pursuit. Its practitioners are unappreciated and considered naive. They expect to be taken advantage of by those who care nothing for institutions, only for themselves. But that does not mean we should not do it.

Readers wanting a sense of Heclo's writing style are directed to page 750 of [The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions](#) (the link gives the entire "Hand"book!) where Heclo has a short essay on the topic.

Further Reading

Curiously, no mention of Francis Fukuyama whose "Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity" (1995) and "Social Capital" (1998) are on the same theme – leading up to [The Great](#)

[Disruption - human nature and the reconstitution of social order](#) (1999) which had tracked the breakdown since 1965! I [wrote about the book here](#)

In Praise of Journalists

A "journalistic scrum" has become a sign of the times - reflecting globalization; the 24 hours new cycle; the merging of news-collecting with the entertainment industry; technological change; and the growth in the journalistic profession.

A recently-issued book by a German journalist of the 1920s and 1930s has had me musing about the journalistic craft down the ages.....

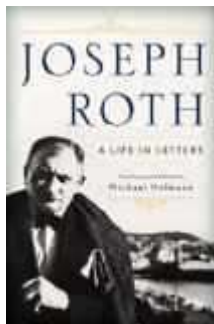
We all know about [George Orwell](#) who established his reputation in the late 1930s with [Down and Out in Paris and London](#) (1933) and "The Road to Wigan Pier" (1937).

But the Hungarian, [Arthur Koestler](#), had been a prolific journalist for the Berlin-based Ullstein press since the early 30s before he burst on the British scene with his [Darkness at Noon](#) (1940) reflecting the totalitarianism of the times. [Ernest Hemingway](#) also started in European journalism in the 20s and wrote up his experiences of the Spanish Civil War - but was always the novelist. Martha Gellhorn made her name as a war correspondent ([see her pieces here](#)); was married to Hemingway for 8 years - and was the [better journalist](#) of the two

[Victor Serge](#) led one of the most amazing lives as an anarchist in France, Belgium and Russia in the first part of the 20th century. [Memoirs of a Revolutionary](#) is perhaps his most famous bit of writing (published posthumously in French in 1951) but he wrote extensively from the early 1920s about his experiences in Russia from 1919 (where he was initially hired by Maxim Gorky)

[Vassily Grossman](#) is another writer who mixed journalism and novels - becoming famous in Russia for his work as a journalist at the Soviet front ([A Writer at War](#) gave us a taste of this in 2005) but having his best work "[Life and Fate](#)" - modelled on "War and Peace" - banned and smuggled out of the country to be published 20 years after his death only in 1985

[Joseph Roth](#) was a less politically involved journalist - but a master of the feuilleton, a peculiar form of journalism that was especially popular in European newspapers in the early 20th century. Roth described it as "saying true things on half a page" and considered it "as important as politics are to the newspaper. And to the reader it's vastly more important." In his confident, controversial way, he added,



"What people pick up the newspaper for is me. Not the parliamentary report. Not the lead article. Not the foreign news....I don't write 'witty columns.' I paint the portrait of the age."

I am currently enjoying his [The Hotel Years](#) which brings together 64 of Roth's feuilletons, nearly half of which were published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* - of which he was a star reporter in the 20s and 30s. Each of these little essays is a pleasure to read, and regarded collectively they present an invaluable portrait of



life in Europe between the two World Wars.

And this we owe to a few brilliant translators In this particular case the poet, critic, and translator **Michael Hofmann**. Without him, the reader of English would hardly know Roth at all. *The Hotel Years* is the 14th of Roth's books that he has translated. (Among the others are [The Radetzky March](#), commonly considered Roth's masterpiece, and [Joseph Roth: A Life in Letters](#), a significant work of scholarship that serves as an essential companion to all of Roth's other writing. Hofmann's commentary is insightful and especially helpful in establishing a context for Roth's life



and work. In the introduction to [What I Saw](#) — a collection of feuilletons written in Berlin during the years of the Weimar Republic, and the first book of Roth's journalism to be published in English — Hofmann describes Roth as “a maximalist of the short form.” In these reports from Berlin, as in the pieces collected in *The Hotel Years*, “What is small is inevitably made to seem vast, and vast things are shrunk into a witty perspective.”

The literary journal [The Millions](#) has a good review of the book -

Roth is perpetually engaging, whether he is decrying the Third Reich, criticizing clichéd notions of Russia, enumerating the unpleasant realities of travel, or simply commenting on the quirks of a hotel cook. They are works of satire, driven by Roth's bristling sense of irony and his unsparing eye for detail. He was a keen observer of everyday life, and he had an ingenious knack for capturing a person or place with a few brief sentences. His essays reveal an obsession with physical descriptions and a fascination with the habits and appearances of the people he encountered, as demonstrated in "The Dapper Traveler:"

The traveler is clad in a discreet gray, set off by an exquisite iridescent purple tie. With complacent attention he examines his feet, his leather shoes, and the fine knots in the broad laces. He stretches out his legs in the compartment, both arms are casually on the arm rests to either side. Before long the gray traveler pulls out his mirror again, and brushes his dense, black parted hair with his fingers, in the way one might apply a feather duster to a kickshaw. Then he burrows in his case, and various useful items come to light: a leather key-holder, a pair of nail scissors, a packet of cigarettes, a little silk handkerchief and a bottle of eau de cologne.

*So much attention and enthusiasm are given to these kinds of details that it often seems as though Roth is creating a world rather than describing the one that already exists. Taken out of context, in fact, many of the pieces in *The Hotel Years* could pass as fiction. Some resemble sketches for novels, travel notes, diary entries. It is remarkable that they were published in newspapers — not because they are uninteresting or poorly written, but because they are so different from the kind of work one expects from a journalist. In an essay on the German city of Magdeburg, Roth explains his writing in the following way:*

What can I do, apart from writing about individuals I meet by chance, setting down what greets my eyes and ears, and selecting from them as I see fit? The describing of singularities within this profusion may be the least deceptive: the chance thing, plucked from a tangle of others, may most easily make for order. I have seen this and that; I have tried to write about what stuck in my senses and my memory.

There is, of course, a transitory nature to this kind of writing. It is short and often very specific, tightly bound to the time and place in which it was written. Roth travelled across Europe, lived in hotels, and wrote essays that were inspired by what he refers to as "the great blessing of being a stranger." He is whimsical and frivolous at times, prone to exaggeration, and indulgent of superficial details that fail to leave the reader with any lasting impressions. But many of his essays endure, as mere ephemera do not.

.....For Roth, writing was not merely a way to make a living, it was a way of life. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, he left the country and never returned.

"Very few observers anywhere in the world seem to have understood what the Third Reich's burning of books, the expulsion of Jewish writers, and all its other crazy assaults on the intellect actually mean," he wrote at the time. "Let me say it loud and clear: The European mind is capitulating. It is capitulating out of weakness, out of sloth, out of apathy, out of lack of imagination..."

Six years later, at the age of 44, Roth died in Paris from the effects of alcoholism. It is frustrating to think of what he might have written had he lived longer, but not because the body of work that he left behind is lacking. As the present publication of "The Hotel Years" proves, much of Roth's writing has been neglected. Although he has come to be remembered mostly for his novels, his journalism is equally as impressive.

Who is it, I wonder, who best embodies this sort of work these days?

There have always been war correspondents - although I was fascinated by this article which explains why [no british journalists were on the Waterloo battlefield](#) 200 years ago. Robert Fisk is for me the greatest - with his [The Great War for Civilisation - the conquest of the Middle East](#).

As the writing craft has become the subject of university course in recent decades, its practice has perhaps become more precious - although [this collection does give a very positive flavour](#) of what has been produced in recent years.

Travelogues have always been popular but globalization giving an added zest in recent decades.....with another interesting trend (at least in the UK) being for novelists such as James Meek, John Lanchester and Andrew Greig to give extensive treatment to political and economic matters....For my money, **three names stick out from the rest of the bunch**

- [Chris Hitchens](#) despite his apostasy, was a powerful and cultural writer.....

- Clive James's wit may sometimes be a bit forced (not least in his television coverage) but the range of his (European) reading and analysis has rarely been bettered, with [Cultural Amnesia](#) as the jewel in his crown,

- Geert Mak is my final choice - not only for his tour de force [In Europe - travels through the 20th Century](#); but for the creative focus he used on his village (in "An Island in Time - the biography of a village"); his city ("Amsterdam - a brief life of the city") and his country "The Century of my Father")

A Joseph Roth Resource

<https://newrepublic.com/article/100482/joseph-roth-letters-michael-hoffman>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/09/books-interview-michael-hofmann-anglo-german-poet-critic-translator>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/feb/24/joseph-roth-letters-michael-hofmann>

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/book-excerpt-the-letters-of-joseph-roth>

http://www.ronslate.com/hotel_years_joseph_roth_translated_michael_hofmann_new_directions
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/11/06/joseph-roth-genius-exile/>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/06/books/review/the-hotel-years-by-joseph-roth.html>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/jan-morris-joseph-roth-hotel-years-michael-hofmann/>
<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/joseph-roth-the-hotel-years/#>!

A Michael Hoffman resource

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/metric-conversion-why-poet-michael-hofmann-stopped-wreaking-destruction-on-his-family-in-verse-832527.html>
<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2000072/michael-hofmann>

Stories

I'm not a great reader of novels - the interactions and fate of fictitious characters pale against those of the real people I find in histories.....And, if I want good prose, I find it in essays, travelogues and short stories - although I grant you that it's only in stories (short and long) that the inner life of people can be treated in depth.....

Perhaps that's why I'm so partial to short stories - produced by the likes of William Trevor, Carol Shields, Alice Munro, Vladimir Nabakov, Joseph Miller and.....Joseph Roth

Seven years ago, however, one post here did actually [pay tribute to about 75 novels](#) which had taken my fancy - **only one third of which, interestingly, were British**.....And, of those, most were Irish or Scottish since I have found their style of writing much more lively than that of English novelists.....It's not just the older generation I'm referring to (such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Edwin Muir and Robin Jenkins) but also the younger writers (such as Andrew Greig, James Meek and James Robertson on the Scottish side - and Sebastian Barry and John McGahern on the Irish).

Too many contemporary English writers seem to be unable to shake themselves out of their limited middle-class environment - eg Ian McEwan, although this is not something you could say about his acerbic mate Martin Amis. Sebastian Faulks and Louis de Bernieres are two exceptions who deal with big issues - the latter giving us "Birds without Wings" about the tragic exchange of population in early 20s Anatolia. And Lawrence Durrell still thrills me - despite the reputation he has unfairly been given for "over the top" writing.....

When I was a teenager in the late 50s, it was the modernist fiction of Aldous Huxley and HG Wells which grabbed my fancy - with Evelyn Waugh for light relief (books such as "Scoop"). Joseph Conrad I read when I wanted something more exotic - and DH Lawrence for the emotional side of things.

The 60s brought the "angry young men" with writers such as Alan Sillitoe, John Bratby and Kingsley Amis - the 70s the university realists - eg Malcolm Bradbury and Howard Jacobson
By the 80s EM Foster and Thomas Hardy were big - as films brought their books to life.

There's a nice little overview of the writing of the [1945-90 period here](#); and a more substantial [survey here](#). It's always interesting to see what foreigners make of British literature and I found the analysis and set of notes of [The Desperado Age - British literature at the start of the third](#)

[millennium](#) (2006) revealing - if a bit forced. The author is Lidia Vianu (2006) who was then Professor of English literature at Bucharest University.

Lists of personal favourites are rather self-indulgent and pointless - unless including some sort of justification for the choices....which might just persuade us to give some of the texts a whirl.... It's in that spirit that I now update that earlier post.

In 2010 I hadn't quite adjusted to my Romanian base - so had missed a baker's dozen of superb books - **Miklos Banffy's** [Transylvanian Trilogy](#) (originally written in the 1950s but only widely available from 2010); **Olivia Manning's** [Balkan Trilogy](#) (written in the 60s but receiving a new lease of life after the film); and **Gregor von Rezzori's** brilliant [three semi-autobiographical books](#) drawn from his time in Romanian Czernowitz (now in southern Ukraine) - first written (in German) between the 50s and 70s but issued by NYRB only recently.

Rebecca West's massive and stunning [Black Lamb and Grey Falcon - a journey through Yugoslavia](#) was first published in 1941 and is actually four books in one - about Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia - but received a huge boost from the 90s Yugoslav conflagration. It's not, of course, a novel but, 75 years on, it is a gripping read - and still repays study.

I would stand by my 2010 list - with the embarrassing exception of Paul Coelho! And I also don't know how Jason Godwin crept onto the list.... Otherwise the mix of South American "magic realism"; French romanticism and nihilism; Irish, Israeli and Egyptian realism; and Scottish whimsy stands up well.....

My tributes to the likes of [John Berger](#) and [William MacIlvanney](#) demand their addition - as do JM Coetzee and Svetlana Alexievitch

Further Reading

Useful review of [von Rezzori's books](#)

An American reading list which [tries to be less insular](#)

[Desperado Interviews](#) - conversations with some UK writers

[The AfterMode - present day English fiction](#); Romanian Professor's take on UK post-modernist lit. A bit opaque for me

["Bridge of Friendship" Interview](#)

I'm "chuffed" at being the [focus of a long interview](#) published this week by a young Bulgarian journalist - on a bi-lingual venture called [Bridge of Friendship](#), Vlad Mitev is based in Russe - which boasts the bridge of that name (over the Danube) - and uses his location to write in Bulgarian and Romanian (and often in English) about various aspects of his region. Not only economic (his original focus) but cultural aspects come within his remit. In this cross-border focus, he is quite exceptional... and deserves support.

I had been intrigued by his blog and we had met up earlier in the summer - in Russe - on my way back to Bucharest which is, of course, a mere 60 kms from the Danube and Bulgaria and it was there he sprung on me his idea of an extended interview. Hardly the shy and retiring type, I was only too happy to oblige....

Behind his modest facade, he's a tough cookie and soon made it clear he would take no diversionary nonsense from me as, inevitably, I tried to move the discussion into more familiar waters.....For Vlad I was merely an intriguing specimen of a Brit who had apparently opted to make his home in both Bulgaria and Romania and he wanted to explore not so much my reasons for this - as my impressions of the two countries and their differences; and any thoughts I might have about the scope for more cooperation...

One would have to be a bit insensitive to straddle two countries without gaining some impressions - which, of course, always say more about the visitor and his values than the "natives". And the more countries I have lived in (almost twelve I think, the more fascinated I have become with cultural aspects (in the widest sense). It's not just history and the language which poses a problem at the Danube - it's the very alphabet! So it's hardly surprising that people say that people tend to turn their backs to one another at the river. For a few weeks, a couple of years ago, I entertained the thought of helping to develop a cross-border project based on cultural aspects - but simply could not drum up enough interest from my (admittedly limited) networks.....

The interview gave me full rein for hyperlinks - and a list at the end gives full access to key texts.....

Earlier in the year I tried to [celebrate the principle of bridge building](#) - across the boundaries which divide groups - not just nations - but classes, intellectual disciplines and professions. At an early age, I found myself a lot in "no-man's land" operating a fairly solitary role but, ultimately, one which offered me exciting new perspectives. But it was, apparently, a central European saying that "the problem with bridges is that horses shit on them in peacetime and they are the first thing to be blown up in times of war"

But Vlad's efforts on [Bridge of Friendship](#) deserve everyone's admiration - and support

22 August

[A Political Economy Thriller](#)

Yanis Varoufakis is like the treacly spread product [Marmite](#) - which people either love or hate - there seems no compromise between the two positions.

I happen to think he's a very good analyst and writer - if rather too prone to court the headlines for slack comments.

I had first come across him in 2012 when I enjoyed [The Global Minotaur - America, the True Origins of the Financial Crisis and the Future of the World Economy](#) (2011) and had then followed his elevation and performance as Greece's Economics Minister - for 6 brief months - in 2015 with great interest.

I have just got around to reading his [And the Weak Suffer what They Must? - Europe, Austerity and the threat to Global Stability](#) (2016) which clearly draws on his experience of his harrowing 6 months in the eye of the financial and political storm - but which resists the temptation to elaborate on his personal encounters with the various European and international players in that "Drama" (which is actually also the name of a small Greek town very near the border with Bulgaria in which a problem with fuel injection once forced me to spend a night!).

Such an elaboration, he told us, needed a bit more distance - but it was not all that long in coming - in the form of [Adults in the Room](#) - published earlier this year which Paul Mason has described as [one of the greatest political memoirs](#).....

Although "And the Weak Suffer....." has been published for more than a year, it has (if Google is to be believed) attracted surprisingly few reviews.

It seems fairly obvious that Varoufakis has offended so many of the powerful figures in politics and academia that only people such as Mark Blyth and Paul Mason are willing to put their heads above the parapets and write positively about him.....

But one fan is an Australian academic whose [review of the book on the Open Democracy website](#) is, for me, a model of how a review should be conducted - with a focus on both content and style -

This [book](#) is far more than a re-statement of Varoufakis' 2011 book, The Global Minotaur...but it is that first book which provides the structure here - as a play in three acts.

***Act One** is set in the years 1944 to 1971. When the present global economy was set up at Bretton Woods, the US was gripped by a New Deal fear of international financial chaos but was not prepared to let its dominance of the post-war globe slip in order to generate a truly self-balancing global economy. This led to the US rejecting Keynes' plan to construct a genuinely international currency and a genuinely international set of surplus and deficit rebalancing institutions but....., by investing their own surplus into Germany and Japan in particular, the US was able to re-build Europe and Asia and recreate them - politically and economically - in something like its own image. On the whole, things worked exceptionally well for what we now call the post-war boom (1949- 1971). But when the astronomical expense of the Cold War kicked in and the US stopped running a surplus, the Bretton Woods system simply fell over, leaving the globe in a mess.*

***Act Two** the US was able to maintain global dominance as a deficit economy. The Nixon Shock of 1971 produced the stagflation sickness of the 1970s which was then 'cured' in the 1980s by the staggering success of financialized and transnationalized corporatism. But the architecture of the post-Nixon area was inherently unstable, inherently disconnected from sustainable human and economic realities, and it all came crashing down in 2008.*

***Act Three** starts in 2008. Here, after acts one and two have both ended in tears, the global economy is terminally wounded and must either die or face radical reconstructive surgery. Now, despite the various appearances of recovery, it is simply the case that the mechanisms and institutions that used to keep the global economic order in some sort of functional balance have all failed. We have only just started Act Three, but it could end quickly, and violently.*

The reviewer then asks one of the questions so few bother to - "So, how does "And the Weak Suffer as they Must?" take up this narrative and tell us things we did not know and need to know now?"

Reading "And the Weak Suffer as they Must?" is like reading a gripping thriller. It is a page turner because the plot itself is a relentless sequence of astonishing twists and turns driven by the cunning ingenuity and hubristic folly of its key protagonists.

Even if you know a lot about the Eurozone, Varoufakis' carefully researched account, with its vivid glimpses into the motivations and outlooks of key players, and its expansive breadth in appreciating the global dynamics pressuring localized decisions, is unerringly startling. Yet it is no novel. Varoufakis' book has something made-up stories can only mimic; the texture of real history.

But here is the key thing that Varoufakis has so carefully noticed. In the texture of real history, convenient illusions are typically a great deal more influential in the circles of power and normality than is truth. It is for this reason that, in real history, truth usually seems stranger than fiction. And yet, Varoufakis also notices that the texture of history is such that truth always has the last say, no matter how hard the powers of illusion and convenience seek to keep the dream alive by helping us to stay asleep.

Varoufakis' insight into the relationship between what normal mainstream people and the great and powerful want (even need) to believe, and what is actually going on, is a key feature of the significance of this book. He weaves his intricate and tense narrative fabric out of illusion and reality (the texture of real history) by constantly shifting our gaze between three interconnected focal lengths.

- With the first, Varoufakis enables us to see how the world looks through the myopia of the common man's desire to doggedly hope that our leaders know what they are doing while we just get on with our lives. This myopia is savagely reinforced by the news media and integrated with the myopia of European high power. And that high power cannot see past the end of its own nose, defined as it is by the bureaucratic echo-chamber of self-perpetuating institutional power.

- This short-sighted focal length insight is then overlaid with a 20 20 focal length perspective provided by Varoufakis' forensic knowledge of how Eurozone power actually functions. Here we get a nauseating sense of how badly awry things are when very basic macro-economic realities are simply banished from the 'negotiating' table laid out by the powers that be.

- This perspective is in turn overlaid with a telescopic focus, the far-sighted and sweeping historical panorama which shows us why the Eurozone is what it is. This enables us to see - in the one account - the disjunction between 'normal' financial and public affairs orthodoxies, the 'realism' mandated by prevailing power interests, and what is actually happening to Europeans.

This is one of those books which needs to be read a second time - and more closely.....and rates up there along with Mark Blyth's [Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#) (2013). In a few months, another (smaller) book will come from Varoufakis. I already have the German version which is called "Time for Change; how I explain the economy to my daughter". The English version bears the title "Talking to my daughter about the economy; a brief history of capitalism"

A Varoufakis Resource

<https://www.yanisvaroufakis.eu/>; his website

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/paul-tyson/varoufakis-%E2%80%93-new-kind-of-politics> (2015); a profile

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/paul-tyson/adults-in-room-by-yanis-varoufakis-london-bodley-head-2017>; review of his "kiss-and-tell" memoir of the crisis

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/03/yanis-varoufakis-greece-greatest-political-memoir>; Paul Mason's review of the memoir

<https://www.adamtooze.com/2017/07/01/reading-varoufakis-frustrated-strategist-greek-financial-deterrence/>

Adam Tooze's review

<https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2017/06/yanis-varoufakis-latest-eurogroup-statement-keeps-greece-on-the-austerity-rack.html>; YV's fascinating doodles about one memo.....

<http://brooklynrail.org/2017/09/field-notes/Inside-the-Disenchanted-World-of-Left-Keynesianism-A-Review-of-Yanis-Varoufakis-Adults-in-the-Room>

28 August

Common Endeavour

Up at 1,350 metres, the season's changes are quite noticeable. August 15th is known as St Mary's day in this part of the world and as the sign generally for a faint new chill to the morning air - after the heat which has driven people up from the plain for the previous month or so....Autumn is coming - and I have decided to make available, in book form, the 60 posts which have featured in the blog so far this year and which bears the title - [Common Endeavour - the 2017 posts so far](#). It's a bit cheeky, I grant you, to offer a 2017 annual just over half way through the year! The one frustrating thing, however, about a blog is that it gives a reverse image of reality - with the most recent post coming first and the reader then required to scroll down for the earlier contributions.....Noone these days has the patience to search for the first posts and scroll UP.....whereas a book format allows you to begin at.....the beginning.

And regular readers will know that a **new Feature** was quietly introduced in recent months - a "Further Reading Resource". With two thirds of my readers not having English as their first language, I have perhaps become more conscious of the need for an inviting start to these posts which also tries to "position" the subject in the wider commentary.....Hence the appearance of the "Further Reading" list with which book notes in particular now end...

Focus

Early posts couldn't help touching on the first shocking weeks of bully boy Trump's occupation of the White House but, thereafter, ignored the idiot - a tactic I'm surprised more have not suggested as a weapon against such a narcissist. Political misbehaviour in Romania caused more of a public backlash here and was duly the subject of a few posts, followed, in the summer, by some musings about the failure of post-communist societies (and others) to take seriously the building of institutional capacity.....

For several weeks from mid-March, I ran a series of posts which started with an [observation about how badly served we are by the hundreds of economics books](#) which jostle for our attention. The opening post suggested some tests we might apply to screen books out - with the drawback that we actually need the book in our hands in order to make the call! Follow-up posts used some diagrams.....which also help guide the reader through the maze of books.....More than 100 key books were identified, briefly explained - and hyperlinked. And will all be useful in the task which lies ahead - of severe editing of the present draft of [Dispatches to the post-capitalist generation](#)

As a bonus I've added, as an Annex, my **Sceptic's Glossary** - being my definition of some 100 plus terms used in the questionable discourse of our elites. I've set this in the context of texts (and images) which I've found useful during my life in the puncturing of their pretensions.....

Ways of thinking – and writing

I've been quiet these past few weeks largely because of the arrival here in the mountains of a (rare) Amazon package containing a fascinating and diverse collection of titles covering art criticism, capitalism, the European Union, populism, Denmark, the Soviet Union, France, political memoirs and.... reflections on death!! I've been going through them – flicking and casting the memoirs aside; and keeping a very interesting [The Passage to Europe](#) for later close study

The pick of the bunch was "[How the French Think – an affectionate portrait of an intellectual people](#)" (the link is a great summary of the various issues by the author) and a book which has encouraged me to explore further the issue of "national mentalities" or "cultural thought patterns" which had been the main focus of [some recent posts](#).

The book resists the temptation of just tracking "cultural traits" (eg that the French are "disputatious") and chooses instead to focus on the arguments of some of the key French figures (starting with Descartes) and on the wider context of their work. Indeed, if I have a criticism, it is that the author probably resists that temptation too well – I would actually like to have seen more treatment of these supposed cultural traits.....

The notion that rationality is the defining quality of humankind was first celebrated by the 17th-century thinker René Descartes, the father of modern French philosophy. His skeptical method of reasoning led him to conclude that the only certainty was the existence of his own mind: hence his 'cogito ergo sum' ('I think, therefore I am').

This French rationalism was also expressed in a fondness for abstract notions and a preference for deductive reasoning, which starts with a general claim or thesis and eventually works its way towards a specific conclusion – thus the consistent French penchant for grand theories. As the essayist Emile Montégut put it in 1858: 'There is no people among whom abstract ideas have played such a great role, and whose history is rife with such formidable philosophical tendencies.'

The French way of thinking is a matter of substance, but also style.Typically French..., is a questioning and adversarial tendency, also arising from Descartes' skeptical method. The historian Jules Michelet summed up this French trait in the following way: 'We gossip, we quarrel, we expend our energy in words; we use strong language, and fly into great rages over the smallest of subjects.' A British Army manual issued before the Normandy landings in 1944 sounded this warning about the cultural habits of the natives: 'By and large, Frenchmen enjoy intellectual argument more than we do. You will often think that two Frenchmen are having a violent quarrel when they are simply arguing about some abstract point.'

Yet even this disputatiousness comes in a very tidy form: the habit of dividing issues into two. It is not fortuitous that the division of political space between Left and Right is a French invention, nor that the distinction between presence and absence lies at the heart of Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction. French public debate has been framed around enduring oppositions such as good and evil, opening and closure, unity and diversity, civilisation and barbarity, progress and decadence, and secularism and religion.

Underlying this passion for ideas is a belief in the singularity of France's mission. This is a feature of all exceptionalist nations, but it is rendered here in a particular trope: that France has a duty to think not just for herself, but for the whole world. In the lofty words of the author Jean d'Ormesson, writing in the magazine Le Point in 2011: 'There is at the heart of Frenchness something which transcends it. France is not only a matter of contradiction and diversity. She also constantly looks over her shoulder, towards others, and towards the world which surrounds her. More than any nation, France is haunted by a yearning towards universality.'

The book is so good that I began to realize how few books there are which tell a compelling and reasonably comprehensive story about a country's intellectual journey. Theodor Zeldin has written brilliantly about [French Passions](#); Perry Anderson has been a fairly solitary English-speaking writer paying serious attention to the ideas on the European continent - whether [France](#), [Germany](#), [Italy](#) or even [Turkey](#).

[Peter Gay](#) wrote amazing books about the Austro-Hungary legacy; Peter Watson's "German Genius" has the scope but lacks the narrative ...it's just a bit too much of an Encyclopaedia. But I am still racking my brains to identify a book which does justice to the UK's intellectual and political traditions in the gripping style of Hazareesingh (the author of the book on the French). There is a guy called [Stefan Collini](#) who has covered some of this ground - but I've never read his stuff.....

The other question which Hazareesingh's book raises for me is **why so few other "knowledgeable people" seem able to write clearly**....indeed seem to take positive pleasure in hiding their thoughts in impenetrable language...

In recent years I have been trying to gather my [disparate thoughts on public sector reform](#) which are currently mainly in the form of papers, blogposts and hyperlinks. Most writers on this subject are academics or consultants (with the latter being in a tiny minority) and I like to think that I have something distinctive to say by virtue of having straddled - at various times - the diverse roles of academic, political leader and consultant (and in 10 different countries). I recently [developed a table which divides the huge academic literature](#) on the subject into five schools

I'm still a firm believer in the adage that if you want to know something about a subject, you write a book about it. It sounds paradoxical but the act of writing forces you to confront your ignorance and helps you to develop the questions to allow you to identify the most appropriate books for you to read.

I may have 200 pages in the present draft but I know they are essentially random notes - there is no "dominant narrative" of the sort you can feel in Hazareesingh's book. I don't particularly want to begin at the beginning again but the text needs the discipline of a clear structure and set of questions.....I decided to let my thoughts run free and look at some academic books on the subject. The [Sage Handbook of Public Administration](#) was produced in 2003 by Guy Peters and Jon Pierre and is actually quite well written for an edited book - as is [The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions](#) (2006) but the language of [Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research](#); D Beland and Robert Henry Cox (2011) is quite incoherent despite containing articles for authors such as Mark Blyth, Colin Hay and [Vivian Schmidt](#) for whom I have a great deal of respect.

I got so angry with the language being used that I went back to some points I had written a decade ago for a group of students in Bishkek - and tried to update and extend the argument in the light of what people like [Stephen Pinker have been saying recently](#)....

The sociologist C Wright Mills once famously took a turgid 400 page work of Talcott Parsons and reduced it to some 10 pages! And I notice that novelists (such as [Benjamin Kunkel](#), [John Lanchester](#) and [James Meek](#)) have started to turn their hand to summarising political and economic texts and trends.....

We really do need a lot more writers helping us make sense of social science writing.....

A Resource

A presentation of "How the French Think" by the author -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLpHCT8GfYk>

"the pessimistic turn in French thought" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izsO2AQ7qk8>

Two reviews of the book -

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/french-thought/>

<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/books/book-review-how-the-french-think-an-affectionate-portrait-of-an-intellectual-people-1-3808527>

<https://focusderquini.wordpress.com/livres/la-pensee-tiede-interview-de-lauteur-perry-anderson/>

<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/555>

<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24209>

<https://acbookweek.com/the-20-academic-books-that-shaped-modern-britain/>

French Letters

The last post suggested it was not easy to find well-written books which gave a true sense of the intellectual styles and trajectories of individual European countries - at least not in the English-language. Perry Anderson is one these rare characters - to whose extensive analyses of contemporary France, Germany and Italy I duly supplied appropriate links - taken from his stunning study [The New Old World](#) (2009) which occupies a prominent place in my library. I have just discovered that [it can be read in its entirety HERE](#) (all 560 pages).

I would rate the book easily the best I have ever read on what it is to be European - about a third being a survey of the literature on the "European Project"; another third being insightful and acerbic analyses of the political and intellectual currents of the "Core" European countries (with the noticeable and dismissive exclusion of the UK); and the final section ("The Eastern Question") devoted largely to Turkey.

I reread Anderson's chapter on France after the last post - and have to say that it gave me a better feel for the contemporary French scene (excluding the last decade) than the book my post was focusing on viz "How the French Think"

And there are other well-written books on France which explore the intellectual as much as the political - with the outstanding [La Vie en Bleu - France and the French since 1990](#); Rod Kedward (2005) due surely for an update?

I bought it quite recently and was immediately gripped by its opening style. But, full confessions, I soon put the book aside - basically because it's too daunting a read at 700 pages...One review (just double-click the hyperlink in the title) puts it nicely -

In recent decades, historians have increasingly attempted to uncover the unique combination of attributes that precisely defines France. They variously study the national "passions", realms of memory, or socio-political characteristics in order to define that most elusive of elixirs: Frenchness. Some authors champion a specific set of characteristics, arguing that the key can be found in immigration, diverse social traditions, or cultural identity. All share a common quest to determine what makes France tick, and how its unique path

formed the national consciousness and institutions. This is not merely an antiquarian exercise. In an age of urban rioting by the children of excluded immigrants, ongoing debates about the legacy of Vichy and Algeria, and strident anti-Americanism, these studies have a striking contemporary relevance.

The latest such effort is Rod Kedward's "France and the French: La Vie en Bleu since 1900", and it ranks among the most ambitious of its kind.

Already acclaimed for his now-standard studies of collaboration and resistance during the Vichy years, Kedward here offers an examination of "French political cultures and their chequered narratives, in which the meanings of the past reverberate through every action of the present" (p. xiii). Simply put, he wishes to eliminate the traditional boundaries between modes of historical inquiry, arguing that political history cannot be adequately addressed without the inclusion of society, culture, memory, and even behavioural studies. Only a proper examination of these "multiple narratives" offers a genuine aperçu into French history and its contemporary resonances.....

Kedward argues that the history of France since 1900 has been dominated by three central themes - the Republic; Ideology; and Identity. From the turn of the century onwards, the population and government were obsessed with the idea of the Republic, a neo-Jacobin conceptual framework perceived to be universal in its application.

Kedward contends that this uniformity dissipated after 1930, inaugurating an era of ideological conflict, in which the nation evolved from elitist party politics towards multiple strands that encompassed "the margins, the outsiders, the subjugated and the minorities" (p. 3). The period culminated in the événements of 1968, pitting Gaullism against a variety of left-wing alternatives. Yet the experience of that year both confirmed the existence of ideological pluralism and simultaneously denied it, yielding to a third duration in 1970, the age of identity, when notions of gender, race, sexual orientation, region, and even ecological commitment all trumped allegiances to political parties and doctrines.

Although various tropes re-emerge in each section--the fight between economic modernization and tradition, the proponents and detractors of dirigisme, struggles for gender equality--Kedward deftly demonstrates the evolution of the various arguments, shifting through the paradigms of unity, diversity, and difference that characterize each historical period.

Inspired by Hazareesingh and Anderson, I now want to go back to Kedward and try to do its 700 pages full justice. I know it deserves it - but it's so much easier to read smaller books!!!

On that subject, let me remind readers of [my ten tricks of fast reading and comprehension](#). They are very simply expressed -

General

- Read a lot (from an early age!)
- Read widely (outside your discipline)
- Read quickly (skim)
- If the author doesn't write in clear and simple language, move on to another book asap. Life's too short.....Bad writing is a good indicator of a confused mind

For each book

- Mark extensively (with a pencil) - with question-marks, ticks, underlines, comments and expletives
- Read the reviews (surf)
- Identify questions from these to ensure you're reading critically
- Write brief notes to remind you of the main themes and arguments
- Identify the main schools of thought about the subject

- Check the bibliography/index at the end - to see what obvious names are missing

And what did I discover when I applied the last test to "How the French Think"? That it doesn't have a bibliography or "further reading" list and that Kedward is not even in the index!! Bad blood somewhere???

Other books on French thinking

[Melancholy Politics - loss, mourning and memory in late modern France](#); Jean Philippe Mathy (2011)
[The End of the French Exception?: Decline and Revival of the 'French Model'](#); edited by T. Chafer, E. Godin (2009)

[The Anthropological turn in French Thought - the 1970s to the present - an academic thesis](#)

[Lignes - thesis on a cultural mag](#); Perry Anderson's studies are always good for an analysis of journals - here's an entire thesis devoted to one French mag!!

Journals develop their own identity

<https://politicsandculture.org/2010/08/10/the-suicide-of-new-left-review-2/>

syllabus

https://frenchhistory.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/france_in_the_twentieth_century_1870-20001.pdf

History of the New Left in Britain

http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/11206/1/In%20Spite%20of%20History_%20New%20Leftism%20in%20Britain%201956%20-%201979%20%28Final%29.pdf

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/49484/1/White_Left_and_Right_in_the_Economic_Crisis.pdf

<https://www.thenation.com/article/french-lessons/> 2006

<https://newleftreview.org/II/73/perry-anderson-after-the-event>

<http://www.adrianfavell.com/Anderson.pdf>

most writers on Europe are american

http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/7801/MW_LS_2008_02.pdf;sequence=1

<https://www.thenation.com/article/andersons-amphibologies-perry-anderson/>

http://ebrandom.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/0/5/14057454/brandom_-_anderson_2012-10-08.pdf

https://www.dissentmagazine.org/wp-content/files_mf/1390330534d5Howard.pdf

<https://web.duke.edu/polygraph/brandombookreview.pdf>

12 September

Close Encounters....

Next year will mark 50 years for me of "close encounters" with "state structures" (or more emotively - "bureaucracy"). Except that I am a political "scientist" - trained in the 1960s in the Weberian tradition - and therefore tend to think "[the exercise of rational-legal authority](#)" when I hear that pejorative term.

Weber - like most classical philosophers and sociologists - was intrigued a hundred years ago by the source of social obedience. Why do people obey the rulers? And he produced the most satisfactory answer - with a famous three-fold classification - traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority.....

By 1945 the world had had its fill of charismatic authority and settled amicably in the 1950s, for the most part, for "rational-legal" authority - although, by the 1960s, clever people such as JK Galbraith started to mock it and such as Ivan Illich and Paolo Freire to critique it.

Toffler's "Future Shock" (1970) was probably the first real warning shot that the old certainties were gone - and organizational change has become non-stop since then.

I've operated at the community, municipal, Regional and national levels of public management - in some ten countries in Europe and Central Asia and have tried, over this half-century, to keep track of the more important of the texts with which we have been deluged (in the English language) about the efforts of administrative reform.

I do realize that I am a bit naïve in the faith I still pin on the written word - in my continual search for the holy grail. After all, it was as long ago as 1975 - when I wrote my own first little book - when I first realized that few writers of books are seriously in the business of helping the public understand an issue - the motive is generally to make a reputation or sell a particular world view.... Still I persist in believing that the next book on the reading list will help the scales fall from my eyes! So it's taken me a long time to develop this little table about the audience at which writers about the subject aim at - and their motives for so doing.....

Communicating administrative reform

Source	Numbers Active in the field	Who they write for	In what format	With what "Tone"
Academics	Too many!	One another - and students	Academic journal articles; and books	Aloof, qualified and opaque
Journalists	Fair number	The public - and professionals	PR handouts generally; more rarely an article	Breathless; More rarely critical
Politicians	A few	The electorate	PR handouts; more rarely a pamphlet	Critical of past; optimistic of the future
Think-Tankers	A lot	Opinion-makers	Booklets; and PR material	Ditto
Consultants	Even more!	Senior civil servants	Confidential reports; very rarely booklets and even a few books	Celebrating their "product"

Senior civil servants	Few	One another; OECD wonks	Descriptive papers and reports	Ditto
Global organs (eg World Bank, ADB, WHO)	More than we think	A global network inc Cabinet Offices, Ministers, think-tanks; journalists;	well-researched, well-produced reports and websites	Omniscient, dry
Mugwumps – sitting on fences	Very few	The poor middle-ranking official who is expected to achieve the required change	Toolkits; manuals; roadmaps; notebooks	Open, humorous

The fads and fashions of organizational "reform" include "reengineering", "transformation".....even "revolution" and we no longer know who to believe or trust – let alone obey.....

Sometimes I try to make sense of this avalanche of material eg the early part of the [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) tries to explain and summarise the key development from the 70s for young Central European reformers – or [The Long Game - not the log-frame \(2011\)](#) where I tried to give a sense of the various organisational models with which consultants were trying to entice central European policy-makers.

More recently I've tried to incorporate such texts with relevant blogposts in a draft book about "Crafting Effective Public Management" – but have had to accept that the text was too scrappy. But someone with my experience of straddling all these worlds must (and does) have something distinctive to say about all this organisational effort!

Only recently did I realize that I had chosen the wrong "tone"... too abstract – "writing about writing"! I started to experiment with a different approach.....indeed went back to papers I had written at the end of projects which –

....."told a story".....of the times when a few of us came together and, through a combination of imagination, discussion, networking and sheer inspiration, were able to craft something (a project) which gave the system a bit of a jolt.....

Most of the writing about reform cuts out that human factor – so what you get is a profound sense of inanimate concepts and forces.....And to be fair, a lot of so-called reform is like that – a few people at the top think something is a good idea; announce it; and expect to see it implemented and working.

Effective change, however, requires not hierarchy and obedience – but open dialogue and negotiation.

There was a time when we thought we had learned thateg from the Japanese.... But that memory faded and, in these autocratic days, too many people in organisations still act like the couriers in Hans Christian Andersen's story about the Emperor's New Clothesdeveloping the groupthink and suspension of disbelief to be able to ignore the Emperor's actual sartorial condition!

But, at my level, all effective changes I have seen have come from a few individuals coming together to explore deeply how they can improve a problematic situation – and then developing a constituency of change around a vision which emerges as consensual. **Never by one person at the top imposing a fad or idea!**

Perhaps that's why charlatans like Michael Barber have been able recently to make such a global impact with his "deliverology" - for which Justin Trudeau is the latest to fall prey.....A new central Unit....reporting to the boss....a few simple messages....a few targets.....big data crunching.....sticks and carrots.....and hey presto...we've solved the perennial problem of implementation!!

19 Sept

Understanding the Crisis

Earlier this year, I ran a series of ten posts which [started with a simple question](#) - why are we so badly served with books about the economic crisis? I bemoaned the fact that authors -

- seem to have made up their mind up about the explanation before they started to write
- make little attempt to analyse previous efforts at explanation
- generally spend their time on diagnosis
- leaving prescriptions to the last few pages

Of course, there are exceptions - in particular Howard Davies' [The Financial Crisis](#) (2010) which identified and briefly assessed no fewer than 39 different explanations for the crisis. And I have just been reading [Vampire Capitalism - fractured societies and alternative futures](#) a book by Paul Kennedy which appeared only a few months ago. An academic sociologist, Kennedy earns high points by stating in the very first sentence that he has "stood on the shoulders of so many giants that I am dizzy" and then proves the point by each chapter of his book having extensive notes (often with hyperlinks) and concluding with a bibliography of 25 pages...

More to the point, the book covers pretty extensively a lot of subjects, such as the ecological crisis and the future of work, which are normally ignored in such texts. You really feel that the guy has made a real effort to track down and summarise for us the most important texts in the field - a quite exceptional approach....which so few others attempt. You can check for yourself since the book [can be downloaded in its entirety here](#).

I suspect that one reason for this feature is that the book is based on a much longer textbook he did a few years back called [Global Sociology](#) - which would perhaps explain the lightness of some of the discussion dealing with the feasibility of "green solutions" to the ecological aspects of the crisis. Surprisingly, there is no reference to [Capitalism 3.0](#) (2006) by Peter Barnes - a very fair-minded entrepreneur sensitive to the evils of unregulated capitalism. Nor to people such Paul Hawken....whose [Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution](#) made such an impact when it came out as far as back as 1999. Hawken indeed has just released an intensive analysis of 100 "feasible solutions" - assessed by a credible advisory team over the past 3 years..... [Drawdown](#)

But I didn't actually mean any takedown - because at least the man has been courageous enough to aim high, write clearly and put his stuff out there for us to assess.....I so much wish others would do likewise.....

In that spirit, let me return to the effort I made earlier this year to identify, in some ten posts, about 200 of the key books which try to explain the economics of the modern world - they are dealt with from pages 35-58 of [Common Endeavour](#)

Somewhere I have made the comment that the best books on the subject for me are actually not written by economists - so I thought I would test that throwaway remark and came up with the following table which simply identifies (very subjectively) some seminal titles which are placed not quite in a left-right spectrum but more in a "tonal" spectrum.....

Key Texts about the crisis - by academic discipline - and "tone"

Discipline	Critical	Moderate	Apologiae
Economics	Globalisation and its Discontents ; Joseph Stiglitz (2002) Debunking Economics - the naked emperor dethroned ; Steve Keen (2011 edition) Geoff Mann Debt and Neo-Feudalism ; Michael Hudson (2012)	Why Globalisation Works ; Martin Wolf (2004) Shifts and Shocks - what we've learned, and still have to, from the financial crisis ; Martin Wolf (2014) - with accompanying power point presentation .	most of the discipline
Political economy	Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea ; Mark Blyth (2013)		The discipline still rediscovering itself
Political science	Democracy Incorporated - managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism ; Sheldon Wolin (2008) Crisis without End - the unravelling of western prosperity ; Andrew Gamble (2014) Mammon's Kingdom - an essay on Britain, Now ; David Marquand (2015)	Paul Hirst (stakeholding) Colin Mair	Few pol scientists trespass into the economic field
Sociology	End of capitalism? Michael Mann (2013) Buying Time - the delayed crisis of democratic capitalism ; Wolfgang Streeck (2013) Vampire Capitalism - fractured societies and alternative futures ; Paul Kennedy (2017)	A lot of sociologists seduced into polling work	The sociological voice is still inspired by C Wright Mills - although divided a bit by the French school
geography	A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism - David Harvey (2005). Injustice ; Daniel Dorling 2014) A Better Politics - how government can make us happier D Dorling (2016)		The geographers are a bolshie lot!
Environment		Why we can't agree about Climate Change ; Mike Hulme (2009) Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution ; Paul Hawken (1999)	Although most of this bunch have been geographers, they pride themselves on their technocracy

Journalism	The Capitalism Papers - Fatal Flaws of an Obsolete System ; Jerry Mander (2012). Post Capitalism - a guide to our Future ; Paul Mason (2015)	How Good Can we be - ending the mercenary society Will Hutton (2015)	They don't enjoy the tenure of the academics - and therefore have to pay attention to their mealticket
Management and management studies	Rebalancing Society ; Henry Mintzberg (2014)	Peter Senge Charles Handy Capitalism 3.0 Peter Barnes (2006)	Most management writers are apologists - apart from the critical management theorists
Religious studies	Laudato-Si - Pope Francis' Encyclical (2015). Accessible in its entirety here	Questions of Business Life ; Higginson (2002)	A more ecumenical bunch!

My apologies to all those who may feel demeaned.....but, as I hope my next post will make clear, there is a very serious point I will be trying to make.....

How the attack on the State Harms us all

We're all ambivalent about "the State"....We slag it off with pejorative terms...and often profess to anarchistic and libertarian tendencies....In my formative period in the early 70s I was very taken with the concept of [The Local State](#) whose corporatist tentacles we saw strangling everything in Scotland. Cynthia Cockburn's 1977 book on the subject and the products of the [national CDP Project](#) were the most powerful expression of this critique - although Newcastle sociologists such as Jon Davies and Norman Dennis had led the way with their books of 1972.

And yet I was an active social democrat, consciously using the levers of (local) state power open to me to push the boundaries of opportunity for people [I saw as marginalized and disenfranchised](#). That period of my life lasted from 1974-90 and is captured in [From Multiple Deprivation to Social Exclusion](#)

Since then, my focus has been more single-mindedly on the development of institutional capacity in the state bodies of ex-communist countries. The World Bank reflected the prevailing opinion of the early 90s in asserting that the state should simply be allowed to crumble..... and only came to its senses (partly due to Japanese pressure) with its 1997 Report - [the State in a Changing World](#)

By the time of my exodus from Britain, the country had already had a full decade of Thatcher - and of privatisation. I confess that part of me felt that a bit of a shake-up had been necessary.....but it was George Monbiot's [The Captive State](#) (2000) - 3 years after New Labour's stunning victory - which alerted me to the full scale of the corporate capture of our institutions and elites regardless of political affiliation ...And why did this capture take place? Simply because of a set of insidious ideas about freedom which I felt as I grew up and have seen weld itself into the almost irresistible force we now call "neoliberalism".....But it is a word we should be very careful of using....partly because it is not easy to explain but mainly because it carries that implication of being beyond human resistance....

The sociologists talk of "reification" when our use of abstract nouns gives away such power - abstracting us as human agents out of the picture. [Don't Think of an Elephant - know your values and frame the debate](#) is apparently quite a famous book published in 2004 by American psychologist George Lakoff - which gives a wonderful insight into how words and phrases can gain this sort of power - and can be used deliberately in the sorts of campaigns which are now being waged all around us...

Amidst all the causes which vie for our attention, it has become clear to me that the central one must be for the **integrity of the State** - whether local or national....I know all the counter-arguments - I am still a huge fan of community power and social enterprise. And the state's increasingly militaristic profile threatens to undermine what's left of our trust. But those profiled in "[Dismembered - how the attack on the State harms us all](#)" are the millions who work in public services which are our lifeblood - not just the teachers and health workers but all the others on whom we depend, even the much maligned inspectorates - all suffering from cutbacks, monstrous organizational upheavals and structures....

I am amazed that more books like this one have not been forthcoming...

Coincidentally, I have also been reading the [confessions of a few political scientists](#) who argue that it lost its way in the 70s and, for decades, has not been dealing with real issues. I do remember Gerry Stoker saying this to the American professional body in 2010 and am delighted that [more have now joined him in a quest for relevance](#)

And I'm looking forward to the publication in a few weeks of [The Next Public Administration - debates and dilemmas](#); by Guy Peters (and Jon Pierre) who is one of the best political scientists of his generation.

For too long, "the State" has been the focus of irrelevant academic scribbling....at last there are some stirrings of change!

1 October

We need to talk about..... "The State"

We need to talk about....the State. Or at least about the "machinery of government" about whose operations I am most familiar - in local and regional government in Scotland from 1968-90 and then in local and national systems of government in some 10 countries of central Europe and central Asia from 1991-2012.

Terminology is admittedly confusing....my first love, for example, was "public administration" since, at one fell swoop in 1968 I became both a Lecturer (officially in Economics) and a locally-elected reformist politician. From the start, I saw a lot wrong with how "public services" impacted on people in the West of Scotland - and I strongly associated with the national reform efforts which got underway from 1966, targeting both local and national systems of government and administration.

Major reforms of the "Civil Service" and of English and Scottish systems of local government were duly enacted - and I duly found myself in a powerful position from the mid 1970s to 1990 to influence [strategic change in Europe's largest Regional authority](#)

But, by the late 70s, national debate focused on "**state overload**" and on "**ungovernability**" and the discourse of private sector management was beginning to take over government.

The 80s may have seen a debate in UK left-wing circles about both the nature of "the local state" and the nature and power of "The State" generally but it was privatization which was driving the agenda by then. "Public Administration" quickly became "public management" and then "New Public Management"....

Indeed by the 90s the debate was about the respective roles of state, market and society. Come 1997 and even the World Bank recognized that the undermining of the role of the State had gone too far.

But it has taken a long time for voices such as Ha-Joon Chang and Marianna Mazzucato to get leverage.....and the space to be given for talk about a positive role for the "public sector".

In the meantime talk of "platform capitalism", the P2P "commons" and automation confuses most of us... and the last remnants of European social democratic parties have, with a couple of exceptions, totally collapsed. **So do we simply give up on the idea of constructing a State which has some chance of working for the average Joe and Jill?**

Because I'm a bit of a geek, I've long followed the discussion about Public Admin Reform and PMR.....trying to make sense of it all - initially for myself....but also for those I was working with....For the past 40 years I have been driven to draft and publish - after every "project" or intervention - a reflective piece.....

It's only now that I feel I am beginning to understand some of them.....particularly those I wrote a decade or so ago about the possibilities of reform systems of power and government in central Asia...

And then a British book about "the attack on the state" provoked me into identifying some questions about this huge literature which academics hog to themselves - but which need to be put out in the public domain. I found myself putting the questions in a table and drafting answers in the style required by the fascinating series such as "A Very Short Introduction" or "A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably priced book about....",

The State (at both local and national levels) is a constellation of diverse **interests** and power - to which we can give (rather arbitrarily) such terms as "public", "professional", "party", "commercial" or "security". But, the questions begin.....

- In what sense can we say that something called the state exists?
- What can realistically be said about the interests which find expression in "the state"?
- How does each particular public service (**eg health, education**) work?
- How satisfied are citizens with the outcomes of state activities?
- Why is the state such a contested idea?
- Where can we find out about the efficiency and effectiveness of public services?
- Where can we find rigorous assessments of how well the "machinery of government" works?
- What Lessons have people drawn from all the "reform" experience?
- How do countries compare internationally in the performance of their public services ?
- Has privatisation lived up to its hype?
- what alternatives are there to state and private provision
- why do governments still spend mega bucks on consultants?
- do Think Tanks have anything useful to contribute to the debate?
- whose voices are worth listening to?
- What challenges does the State face?
- If we want to improve the way a public service operates, are there any "golden rules"?

The next post will try to present a table which addresses these questions - with all the hyperlinks which my readers now expect.....

Miniatures and Matrices - 4th in series

I've been reflecting a lot this year on my working experience of organizational change - now equally divided between the UK (the first 25 years) and central Europe and central Asia (the last 25 years). I do so in a coat of many colours - scholar, community activist, politician, consultant, straddler of various worlds (not least academic disciplines), writer and....blogger.

I have always been a fan of tables, axes and matrices - by which I mean the reduction of ideas and text to the simple format of a 2x2 or 6x3 (or whatever) table. It forces you to whittle text down to the bare essentials.

Perhaps that's why I love these Central Asian and Russian miniatures so much

So I put the questions posed in the previous post (now 14 in number) into such a table with just 2 columns for responses - "how I felt each question has been dealt



within the literature" and "where the clearest answers can be found". Of course, the literature is predominantly anglo-saxon - although the experience covered is global.

This proved to be an extraordinarily useful discipline - leading to quite a bit of adjustment to the original questions. It's a long table - so I'll make a start with the first five questions -

- How does each particular public service (**eg health, education**) work?
- What can realistically be said about the interests which find expression in "the state"?
- How satisfied are citizens with the outcomes of state activities?
- Why is the state such a contested idea?
- Where can we find out about the efficiency and effectiveness of public services?

Basic Question	How extensively has it been explored	Some Good answers
1. How does each particular public service (eg health, education) work? How does it define and deal with challenges?	Each country has its own legal and cultural histories which affect the shape and funding of services. Globalisation and Europeanisation have posed state bodies with profound challenges since the 1980s - with functions transferring from state to private and third sector sectors (and, in some cases, back again) and an increasing emphasis on mixed provision and "partnerships" Thousands of books give analytical treatment of each of our public services - some with a focus on policy, some on management. Measurement and comparison of performance - at both national and international level - have become dominant themes Less emphasis since 2010 on Capacity building and strategic thinking - seen as luxuries for services under severe pressure because of cuts and austerity...	Public and Social Services in Europe ed Wollman, Kopric and Marcou (2016) The New Public Governance - emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance; ed Stephen Osborne (2010) What are Public Services Good At?; Demmke (2008) Parliaments and Think Tanks occasionally report on strategic work
2. What can realistically be said about the interests which find expression in "the state"?	The 1970s and 80s saw an active debate in political science and sociology about the nature of The State (national and local) - and the public, professional, political, commercial and other interests one could find represented there. As the state has "hollowed out" in the past 30 years - with privatisation and "contracting out" - political scientists became more interested in identifying the narratives which justified the remaining structures (see 8 and 9 below). It has been left to journalists such as Jones and Monbiot to look at the issue of interests - particularly commercial and ideational - of the new constellation of the state.	The State of Power 2016 (TNI) The Establishment - and how they get away with it; Owen Jones (2014) Democracy Incorporated - managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism; Sheldon Wolin (2008) The Captive State; George Monbiot (2000)
3. How satisfied are citizens with the outcomes of state activities?	Despite the constant political and media attacks on public services, the general level of satisfaction of the British public remains high - particularly for local institutions	Opinion polls - Gallup, European Union Parliamentary Select Committee on PA eg this 2008 report on citizen entitlements

4. Why is the state such a <u>contested idea</u> ?	In the 1970s a new school of thinking called "public choice theory" developed a very strong critique not so much of the public sector but of the motives of those who managed it. The argument was not a pragmatic one about performance – but rather that politicians and bureaucrats had private interests which they always put ahead of any notion of public interest; and that private sector provision (through competition) would therefore always be superior to that of public provision. Although it was initially treated with derision, it was the basic logic behind Margaret Thatcher's push for privatisation which became global after the fall of the Berlin Wall	Reinventing Government (by Osborne and Ted Gaebler) popularised the new approach in 1992 Public Choice Primer (IEA 2012) is the clearest justification of this powerful school of thinking
5. Where can we find <u>reliable analyses of the efficiency and effectiveness</u> of public services?	In the UK a powerful National Audit Office (with more than 600 staff) investigate Departments of State (inc Hospitals). It is overseen by Parliament's most powerful Select Committee – the Public Accounts Select Committee . For 25 years local authority budgets in England and Wales were overseen by an Audit Commission which was, very curiously, abolished Attack on public spending "waste" has long been a favourite subject for the media – with quite a few books devoted to the subject.	National Audit Office Public Accounts Select Committee Global league tables for health and education sectors The Blunders of our Governments (2013) The most accessible and comprehensive treatment

7 October

The State of the State – part 5

It's strange that "Public Bureaucracy" seems to be of so little interest to the public – since one state alone (eg the UK) can spend no less than 800 billion pounds a year to give its citizens services....

A month ago in [one of this series of posts](#), I actually identified 8 very distinct groups of people (academics, consultants, think tankers, journalists etc) who write about public services – from a variety of standpoints – using a variety of styles (or tones) and formats of writing. We could call them "the commentariat".

It has to be said that little of their material is easy to read – it has too much jargon; it takes 10 pages to say what could be said in 1. Those who write the material do not write for the general public – they write for one another in academia and global institutions. On the few occasions they write snappily, they are selling stuff to governments.

The media do give a lot of coverage to various scandals in particularly the welfare and health services – but rarely give us an article which sheds any real light on what is being done with these hundreds of billions of euros....We are treated, instead, as morons who respond, in Pavlovian style, to slogans.

I am, of course, being unfair to journalists. They write what they are allowed to by newspaper and journal editors and owners – who generally have their own agenda. And who wants to read about the

dilemmas of running public services or arguing about their "functions" being "transferred"? Just looking at these words makes one's eyes glaze over!!

It seems that only journals like "The New Yorker" who can get away with articles such as [The Lie Factory](#) - about the origins, for example, of the consultancy industry.

And yet there is clearly a public thirst for well-written material about serious and difficult topics.

Take a book I am just finishing - journalist Owen Jones' [The Establishment - and how they get away with it](#) (Penguin 2014) can boast sales approaching 250,000. For only 9 euros I got one of the best critiques of British society of the past decade.....

I remember being in New York in 1992 and finding a copy of [Reinventing Government](#) (by Osborne and Ted Graeber) in one of its famous bookstores - which went on to become the world's bestseller on government (with the exception perhaps of Machiavelli's The Prince?). I simply don't understand why someone can't do that again with all that's happened in the past 25 years....

In 2015 Penguin Books made an effort in this direction with a couple of titlesMichael Barber's [How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy](#) (2015) and [The Fourth Revolution - the global race to reinvent the state](#); by John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge (2015). I've refused so far to buy the second since it is so obviously a right-wing tome - and the second suffers for me in too obviously being the special pleading of someone who was Tony Blair's Head of Delivery in the British Cabinet and has now reinvented himself as a Deliverology Guru.

Over my lifetime, I've read/dipped into thousands of books about managing public services and organisations generally. About a dozen have made a lasting impression on me - I'll reveal them in a future post...Let me, for the moment, continue some of the questions I think we should be asking about the state - and our public services -

Question	How has "the commentariat" dealt with the question?	Recommended Reading
6. Has <u>privatisation</u> lived up to its hype?	There is now quite a strong backlash against the performance of privatised facilities - particularly in the field of water and communal services - with the Germans in particular mounting strong campaigns to return them to public ownership.... A lot of such services remain monopolies - occupying the worst of all worlds since privatisation creates "transaction costs" (both in the initial sale process and subsequent regulatory bodies) and boosts executive salaries and shareholders' profits - thereby adding significant additional costs. The only advantage is an artificial one - in the removal of the investment cap.	Reclaiming Public Services; TNI (2017) Our Public Water Future (2015 Public services international research unit) Private Island - why Britain now belongs to someone else; James Meek (2014)
7. What are the realistic <u>alternatives to state and private</u> provision	A hundred years ago, a lot of public services (even in the education and health field) were charitable. That changed in the 40s - but the 80s saw the welfare state being challenged throughout Europe. In the UK, government started to fund social enterprises working with disadvantaged	Social Enterprise - a new phenomenon? (2014) The Three Sector

of Public Services?	groups - new Labour strengthened that work. The 2010 Coalition government started to encourage mutual structures for public services	Solution; (2016) Becoming a Public Service Mutual (Oxford 2013)
8. Where can we find rigorous assessments of how <u>well the "machinery of the state" works?</u>	The process of changing the way the British "machinery of government" started in the 1970s and has been never-ending. Although the emphasis during the Conservative period from 1979-97 was transfer of functions to the private sector, a lot of regulatory bodies were set up to control what became private monopolies - in fields such as rail and, in England, water. And, in an effort to mimic real markets, the health service was also the subject of a major division between purchasers and suppliers. Such innovations were eagerly marketed by international consultants - and copied globally New Labour was in power between 1997 and 2010. Its Modernising Government programme was developed with a strong emphasis on sticks and carrots - eg naming and shaming. Curiously, there are far more books describing the intentions and activities of specific programmes of change than assessments of the actual impact on organisations. A Government that worked better and cost Less?; Hood and Dixon (2015) is one of the few attempts to assess the effects of the British changes of the past 40 years. This OECD paper looks at the earlier period	The two clearest and most exhaustive UK books analysing in detail the reasons for and the shape and consequences of the large number of change programmes between 1970 and 2005 were written by someone who was both an academic and practitioner - Chris Foster author (with F Plowden) of "The State Under Stress - can the hollow state be good?" (1996); and British Government in Crisis (2005) Transforming British Government - roles and relationships ed R Rhodes (2000) is a good if outdated collection An International Comparison of UK Public Administration (National Audit Office 2008)
9. <u>What Lessons have people drawn</u> from all this experience of changing the way public services are structured and delivered?	We have now almost 50 years of efforts to reform systems of delivering public services - and the last 20 years has seen a huge and global literature on the lessons..... Academics contribute the bulk of the publicly available material on the subject - with Think Tankers and staff of global institutions (World Bank; OECD; EC) the rest. Consultants' material is private and rarely surfaces - apart from their marketing stuff. Michael Barber was Head of New Labour's Delivery Unit in the early 2000s and has now become a "deliverology" consultant to governments around the world. He shares his advice here - How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy (2015) Chris Pollitt and Rod Rhodes are 2 of the top political scientists studying the changes in the structure of the state who can actually write well (!) - see Rethinking policy and politics - reflections on contemporary debates in policy	Although the OECD work is funded by the tax receipts of member bodies, their published material is generally behind a paywall. International Public Administration Reform by Nick Manning and Neil Parison (World Bank 2004) had some good case studies of the early wave of efforts. Two of the best collections of overviews

	studies). Their basic message seems to be that a lot of civil servant positions were disposed of; new jargon was learned; management positions strengthened - but "stuff" (ie crises) continued to happen! Best piece is What do we know about PM reform? Chris Pollitt (2013) The Fourth Revolution - the global race to reinvent the state; John Micklewaithe and Adrian Woolridge (Penguin 2015) is a rare journalistic entry into the field (to compare with Toynbee and Walker; and Barber).	are - Public and Social Services in Europe ed Wollman, Kopric and Marcou (2016) AND The New Public Governance - emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance; ed Stephen Osborne (2010)
10. Is anyone <u>defending the state</u> these days?	We have become very sceptical these days of writing which strikes too positive a tone. "Where's the beef?" our inner voice is always asking - ie what interests is this writer pushing? Paul du Gay is a rare academic who has been prepared over the years to speak up for the much-maligned "bureaucrat" and his is the opening chapter of a 2003 collection of very useful articles The Toynbee and Walker book is another rare defence....this time from journalists	Dismembered - the ideological attack on the state; by Polly Toynbee and D Walker (Guardian Books 2017) "The Values of Bureaucracy"; ed P du Gay (2003) - googling the title should give you a complete download)

8 October

Why have we allowed the academics to blindside us?

This is the last part of my tabular presentation of what the commentariat have been saying in the past 50 years about the management and delivery of public services - although it's certainly not my last word on the subject!

This is a subject to which I've devoted most of my life but I have to say that the result of this particular exercise leaves me with the powerful feeling that tens of thousands of academics have been wasting their lives - and the time of their students and of others hoping to get some enlightenment from the writing on the subject

"New public management", "governance", "public value", "new public governance" - the terms, strategies and debates are endless - and little wonder since the discussion is rarely about a concrete organization but, rather, about the system (of thousands of organisations) which makes up the entire public sector.

In the 1990s "the management of change" became a huge new subject in management literature - chapter 6 of my book [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) discussed the literature on management in both sectors - and the earliest book quoted is from 1987.

In the private sector, change was handled according to the perceptions of each Chief Executive and his team. **But not so in the public sector - where reform was determined at the highest political level and its shape uniformly laid down.**

Academics were slow to get involved - effectively as historians and classifiers....at a very high level of abstraction....as will be seen from my summary of chapter 4 of [In Transit - notes on good governance](#)

Question	How it's dealt with by the commentariat	Typical Products
11. How do states <u>compare in quality of public services?</u>	"Benchmarking" national policy systems has become an important activity of bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) - until 2000 The Commonwealth Fund is now the main source for a global assessment of Health systems. The OECD does a global education survey. Occasionally efforts are made to benchmark entire systems of public admin "Peer Review" is also a widespread activity within the EC eg this recent one on the Polish educational system	Health systems overview article An International Comparison of UK Public Administration (National Audit Office 2008)
12. Why do governments still <u>continue to pay consultants</u> vast sums of money?	Private consultants now run a global industry dispensing advice to governments which is worth at least 50 billion euros a year. Statistics are not easy to find - but the UK alone spends 1.3 billion pounds a year - see Use of consultants and temporary staff (NAO 2016) - which is actually about half of the figure ten years ago! Some will argue that this is a small sum to pay for good, independent advice to help ensure that public services are kept up to date. The trouble is that no one really knows whether it is good advice. It is a highly secretive industry - with reports seen only by senior civil servants and the odd Minister. Management consultancy in the private sector has been the subject of at least two highly critical studies (Hucynszki; Micklewait and Woolridge) - which suggest a world of senior executives subject to fads and fashions and given to imposing their will on the work force in an autocratic way. This is even more likely to happen in public bureaucracies which have the additional problem of a political layer on top.	Michael Barber How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy (2015) Ed Straw's Stand and Deliver - a design for successful government (2014) John Seddon's Systems Thinking in the Public Sector - the failure of the Reform regime and a manifesto for a better way (2008)
13. Role of <u>Think-Tanks?</u>	A few Think Tanks have a reasonable track record in this field - generally those who draw on retired civil servants for their insights... eg The Institute of Government The Demos Think Tank was a favourite with New Labour in its early years of the ambitious Modernising Government programme. The Centre for Public Impact is a new body which promises great things from its use of Big Data - We will see.....	Policy-making in the Real World (Institute of Government 2011) Professionalising the Civil Service (Demos 2017) eg The Public Impact Gap (2017)
14. What <u>challenges and choices</u> does the state face in the future?	The focus of these questions has been organisational - there are a couple of important elephants in the room namely finance and technology which are dealt with in other bodies of literature	Governance in the Twenty First Century (OECD 2001) is one of the rare books which tries to deal with future challenges

15. What are the best Toolkits, manuals, roadmaps etc for people to use who want to engage in reform efforts?	Change Here! Managing change to improve local services (Audit Commission 2001) Supporting small steps - a rough guide for developmental professionals (Manning; OECD 2015) A Governance Practitioner's Notebook - alternative ideas and approaches (Whaites et al OECD 2015) OECD Public Governance Reports - Slovakia (2015) I am not a fan of deliverology but..... Michael Barber's How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy (2015) To Serve and to Preserve; improving public administration in a competitive world (Asian Development Bank 2000)	The Essential Public Manager; by Chris Pollitt (2003) is, by far and away, the best book to help the intelligent citizen make sense of this field Although I'm no fan of the World Bank, 2 titles (from the Development field!) offer the best insights - People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform (World Bank 2011) Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice (World Bank 2008)
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[Public Sector Reform - introduction](#) (EC Tools and methods series 2009)
[Institutional Assessment and Capacity Development; why, what and how? \(EC 2005\)](#)

Those who went before....

For the past 3 weeks I've been trying to compress the thoughts I (and many others!!) have had over the past few decades about administrative reform into a table whose columns identify core questions; narratives; and key texts....It was all sparked off by the book published earlier this year on [Dismembering \(the State\)](#) - although the subject has been a lot in my thoughts this year

There may now be hundreds of thousands of academics and consultants in this field but, when I started to challenge the local bureaucracy in Scotland in the late 60s there was a mere handful of **writers challenging public bureaucracy** - basically in the UK and the US.

In the US they were following (or part of) Johnston's Anti-Poverty programme and included people such as Peter Marris and Martin Rein whose [Dilemmas of Social Reform](#) (1967) was one of the first narratives to make an impact - **although Illich (Deschooling Society 1971) and Freire (Pedagogy 1968).**

In the UK it was those associated with the 1964-66 Fulton Royal Commission on the Civil Service; with the Redcliffe-Maud and Wheatley Royal Commissions on Local Government; and, those such as Kay Carmichael who, as a member of the Kilbrandon Committee, was the inspiration for the Scottish Social Work system set up in 1969.

In the 70s, people like John Stewart of INLOGOV inspired a new vision of local government...and my ex-tutor John MacIntosh with a focus on devolution;even the conservative politician Michael Heseltine had a vision of a new metropolitan politics.....**Colin Ward (Tony Gibson)**

It was people like this that set the ball of organizational change rolling in the public sector.... tracked by such British academics as Chris Hood, Chris Pollitt and Rod Rhodes - and which have supplied a living first for thousands of European academics who started to follow the various

reforms of the 1970s in the civil service and local government; and then the privatization and "agencification" of the 1980s. Consultants then got on the bandwagon when British administrative reform took off globally in the 1990s.

Working on the tables incorporated in the past few posts has involved a lot of googling - and shuffling of books from the shelves of my glorious oak bookcase here in the Carpathian mountains to the generous oak table which looks out on the snow which now caps those mountains..... Hundreds of books on public management reform (if you count the virtual ones in the library) - but, for me, there are only a handful of names whose writing makes the effort worthwhile. They are the 2 Chris's - Chris Hood and Chris Pollitt; Guy Peters; and Rod Rhodes. With Chris Pollitt way out in front.....Here's a brief selection of his most recent writing -

There have been many failures in the history of public management reform - even in what might be thought of as the best-equipped countries. Six of the most common seem to have been:

- **Prescription before diagnosis.** No good doctor would ever do this, but politicians, civil servants and management consultants do it frequently. A proper diagnosis means much more than just having a general impression of inefficiency or ineffectiveness (or whatever). It means a thorough analysis of what mechanisms, processes and attitudes are producing the undesirable features of the status quo and an identification of how these mechanisms can be altered or replaced. Such an analysis constitutes a model of the problem. This kind of modelling is probably far more useful to practical reformers than the highly abstract discussions of alternative models of governance with which some academics have been more concerned (e.g. Osborne, 2010). [For a full exposition of this realist approach to programme logic, see Pawson, 2013. For an explanation of why very general models of governance, are of limited value in practical analysis see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011, pp11-25 and 208-221]
- **Failure to build a sufficient coalition for reform, so that the reform is seen as just the project of a small elite.** This is particularly dangerous in countries where governments change rapidly, as in some parts of the CEE. Once a government falls or an elite is ousted, the reform has no roots and dies.
- **Launching reforms without ensuring sufficient implementation capacity.** For example, it is very risky to launch a programme of contracting out public services unless and until there exists a cadre of civil servants who are trained and skilled in contract design, negotiation and monitoring. Equally, it is dangerous to impose a sophisticated performance management regime upon an organization which has little or no previous experience of performance measurement. And it is also hazardous to run down the government's in-house IT capacity and rely too much on external expertise (Dunleavy et al, 2006). In each of these cases in-house capacity can be improved, but not overnight.
- **Haste and lack of sustained application.** Most major management reforms take years fully to be implemented. Laws must be passed, regulations rewritten, staff re-trained, new organizational structures set up, appointments made, new procedures run and refined, and so on. This extended implementation may seem frustrating to politicians who want action (or at least announcements) now, but without proper preparation reforms will more likely fail. Endless reforms or 'continuous revolution' is not a recipe for a well-functioning administration
- **Over-reliance on external experts rather than experienced locals.** As management reform has become an international business, international bodies such as the OECD or the major management consultancies have become major players. A fashion has developed in some countries to 'call in the external experts', as both a badge of legitimacy and a quick way of accessing international 'best practice' Equally, there is

perhaps a tendency to ignore local, less clearly articulated knowledge and experience. Yet the locals usually know much more about contextual factors than the visiting (and temporary) experts. .

• **Ignoring local cultural factors.** For example, a reform that will work in a relatively high trust and low corruption culture such as, say, Denmark's, is far less likely to succeed in a low trust/higher corruption environment such as prevails in, say, some parts of the Italian public sector. In the EU there are quite large cultural variations between different countries and sectors.....

I would suggest a number of 'lessons' which could be drawn from the foregoing analysis:

1. *Big models, such as NPM or 'good governance' or 'partnership working', often do not take one very far. **The art of reform lies in their adaptation (often very extensive) to fit local contexts.** And anyway, these models are seldom entirely well-defined or consistent in themselves. Applying the big models or even standardized techniques (benchmarking, business process re-engineering, lean) in a formulaic, tick-box manner can be highly counterproductive.*
2. *As many scholars and some practitioners have been observing for decades, there is no 'one best way'. The whole exercise of reform should begin with a careful diagnosis of the local situation, not with the proclamation of a model (or technique) which is to be applied, top down. 'No prescription without careful diagnosis' is not a bad motto for reformers.*
3. *Another, related point is that task differences really do matter. A market-type mechanism may work quite well when applied to refuse collection but not when applied to hospital care. Sectoral and task differences are important, and reformers should be wary of situations where their advisory team lacks substantial expertise in the particular tasks and activities that are the targets for reform.*
4. *Public Management Reform (PMR) is always political as well as managerial/organizational. Any prescription or diagnosis which does not take into account the 'way politics works around here' is inadequate and incomplete. Some kernel of active support from among the political elite is usually indispensable.*
5. *PMR is usually saturated with vested interests, including those of the consultants/advisors, and the existing public service staff. To conceptualise it as a purely technical exercise would be naïve.*
6. *Successful PMR is frequently an iterative exercise, over considerable periods of time. Reformers must adapt and also take advantage of 'windows of opportunity'. This implies a locally knowledgeable presence over time, not a one-shot 'quick fix' by visiting consultants.*
7. *It does work sometimes! But, as indicated at the outset, humility is not a bad starting point.*

What If???



As I suspected, I'm still worrying away at some of the issues raised by the series of posts about the massive changes to our public services in recent decades - and how they have been covered in "the literature". I realize that I left out an important strand of thinking - and that the series leaves the impression of inevitability....

The last post paid tribute to some of the people who, in the 1960s, most clearly articulated the demand for a major shake-up of Britain's public institutions - the "modernization" agenda which initially brought us

huge local authorities and merged Ministries with well-paid managers operating with performance targets.

Scale and management were key words - and I readily confess to being one of the cheerleaders for this. The small municipalities I knew were "parochial" and lacked any strategic sense but - of course - they could easily have developed it.....

Were the changes inevitable?

I have a feeling that quite a few of the early voices who argued for "reform" might now have major reservations about where their institutional critique has taken us all - although it was a global discontent which was being channeled in those days.....

However not all voices sang from the same hymn sheet.....**The main complaint may then have been that of "amateurism" but it was by no means accepted that "managerialism" was the answer.** 1968, after all, had been an expression of people power. And the writings of Paolo Freire and Ivan Illich - let alone British activists Colin Ward and Tony Gibson; and sociologists such as Jon Davies and Norman Dennis - were, in the 70s, celebrating citizen voices against bureaucratic power.

The therapist [Carl Rogers](#) was at the height of his global influence. And voices such as [Alain Touraine](#)'s were also giving hope in France.....

The managerialism which started to infect the public sector from the 70s expressed hierarchical values which sat badly with the egalitarian spirit which had been released the previous decade....

But, somehow, all that energy and optimism seemed to evaporate fairly quickly - certainly in the British "winter of discontent" and Thatcher rule of the 80s. What started as a simple expression of the need for some (private) "managerial discipline" in the public sector was quickly absorbed into a wider and more malevolent agenda of privatization and contracting out.....And, somehow, in the UK at any rate, progressive forces just rolled over.... Our constitutional system, as Lord Hailsham once starkly put it, is an "elective dictatorship".

The core European systems were, however, different - with legal and constitutional safeguards, PR systems and coalition governments - although the EC technocracy has been chipping away at much of this.

Just why and how the British adopted what came to be called New Public Management is a story which is usually told in a fatalistic way - as if there were no human agency involved. The [story is superbly told here](#) - as the fatal combination of Ministerial frustration with civil service "dynamic conservatism" with a theory (enshrined in Public Choice economics) for that inertia.... **A politico-organisational problem was redefined as an economic one and, heh presto, NPM went global**

In the approach to the New Labour victory of 1997, there was a brief period when elements of the party seemed to remember that [centralist "Morrisonian" bureaucracy had not been the only option](#) - that British socialism had in the 1930s been open to things such as cooperatives and "guild socialism". For just a year or so there was (thanks to people such as [Paul Hirst](#) and [Will Hutton](#)) talk of "[stakeholding](#)". But the bitter memories of the party infighting in the early 80s over [the left-wing's alternative economic strategy](#) were perhaps too close to make that a serious option - and the window quickly closed.....Thatcher's spirit of "dog eat dog" lived on - despite the talk of "Joined Up Government" (JUG), words like "trust" and "cooperation" were suspect to New Labour ears. [Holistic Governance](#) made a brief appearance at the start of the New Labour reign in 1997 but was quickly shown the door a few years later....

"What if?....."

The trouble with the massive literature on public management reform (which touches the separate literatures of political science, public administration, development, organizational sociology, management....even philosophy) is that it is so complicated that only a handful of experts can hope to understand it all - and few of them can or want to explain it to us in simple terms.

I've hinted in this post at what I regard as a couple of junctures when it might have been possible to stop the momentum....I know the notion of [counterfactual history](#) is treated with some disdain but the victors do sometimes lose and we ignore the discussion about "junctures" at our peril.

The UNDP recently published [a good summary](#) of what it called the three types of public management we have seen in the past half century. There are different ways of describing the final column but this one gives a sense of how we have been moving..

	Old Public Admin	NPM	New Public Service
Theoretical foundation	Political theory	Economic theory	Democratic theory
Model of behaviour	Public interest	self-interest	Citizen interest
Concept of public interest	Political, enshrined in law	Aggregation of individual interests	Dialogue about shared values
To whom civil servants responsive	client	customer	citizen
Role of government	rowing	steering	Serving, negotiating
Mechanism for achieving policy	programme	incentives	Building coalitions
Approach to	hierarchic	market	Public servants within

accountability			law, professional ethics, values
Admin discretion	limited	wide	Constrained
Assumed organisational structure	Top down	decentralised	collaborative
Assumed motivation of officials	Conditions of service	Entrepreneurial, drive to reduce scope of government	Public service, desire to contribute

Further Reading

The regulation state <http://regulation.huji.ac.il/papers/jp39.pdf> 2011

<http://www.ea.sinica.edu.tw/file/Image/Strategies%20to%20Build%20Up%20Holistic%20Governance.pdf>

routledge handbook (ch 3 and 16)

http://www.darryljarvis.com/uploads/2/2/6/9/22690064/new_pub_man_chapter16.pdf

[New Labour's communitarianism](#) 1997

<https://jacobinmag.com/2017/06/labour-corbyn-general-election-nationalization>

17 October

Plain Speech; and the 21st Century Manager

Readers will have noticed my growing impatience with the opacity of the "academic turn" to the writings of those who purported to be explaining what has been happening to our public services in the past 30-40 years - about the only writer I exempted was Chris Pollitt whose [The Essential Public Manager](#) (2003) is, by far and away, the best book to help the intelligent citizen make sense of this field. It's friendly; brings in individuals to play roles illustrating contemporary debates;; clearly summarises different schools of thought on the key issues; and leaves the reader with guidance for further reading....

Most authors in this field, however, are writing for other academics (to impress them), for students (to give them copy for passing exams); or for potential customers in senior government positions (to persuade them to offer a contract) - they are never writing for citizens.

As a result, they develop some very bad habits in writing - which is [why this new book](#) should be in their family's Xmas stocking this year.



It offers priceless advice, including -

1. Bait the hook

"When you go fishing, you bait the hook with what the fish likes, not with what you like." An obvious principle, easily lost sight of. **Putting yourself in the audience's shoes governs everything from the shape of your argument to the choice of vocabulary. Ask what they do and don't know about the subject, and what they need to; not what you know about it.**

Ask what they are likely to find funny, rather than what you do. What are the shared references that will bring them on board? Where do you need to pitch your language? How much attention are they likely to be paying?

This is what Aristotle, talking about rhetoric, called *ethos*, or the question of how your audience sees you. And the best way for them to see you is either as one of them, or someone on their side. As the speech theorist Kenneth Burke wrote - another line I never tire of quoting - "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, identifying your ways with his."

2. Be clear

A lot of style guides, with good reason, tell their readers to write Plain English. There's even a [Plain English Campaign](#) that does its nut, year-round and vocationally, about examples of baffling officialese, pompous lawyer-speak and soul-shrivelling business jargon.

Plain English (the simplest word that does the job; straightforward sentences; nice active verbs etc) is far from the only style you should have at your command. But if you depart from it, you should have a reason, be it aesthetic or professional. The plainer the language, the easier the reader finds it; and the easier the reader finds it, the more likely they'll take in what you're saying and continue reading. Surveys of the average reading age of British adults routinely put it between nine and 13. Trim your style accordingly.

[Steven Pinker](#) talks about "classic style" (he borrows the notion from the literary critics Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner). This, as he sees it, is a variation on Plain English that compliments the reader's intelligence and talks to him or her as an equal. He gives a cute example. "The early bird gets the worm" is plain style, he says. "The second mouse gets the cheese" is classic. I half-buy the distinction; though much of what Pinker credits to the classic style is exactly what's asked of any good instance of the plain. And the examples he offers convey quite different thoughts, and (a bit unfairly) attribute a cliché to the plain style and a good joke to the classic.

3. Prefer right-branching sentences

Standard-issue sentences, in English, have subject-verb-object order: dog (subject) bites (verb) man (object). There are any number of elaborations on this, but the spine of your sentence, no matter how many limbs it grows, consists of those three things.

If you have a huge series of modifying clauses before you reach the subject of the sentence, the reader's brain is working harder; likewise, if you have a vast parenthesis between subject and verb or even verb and object. The reader's brain has registered the subject (dog) and it is waiting for a verb so it can make sense of the sentence. Meanwhile, you're distracting it by cramming ever more material into its working memory. "My dog, which I got last week because I've always wanted a dog and I heard from Fred - you know, Fred who works in the chip shop and had that injury last year three days after coming home from his holidays - that he was getting rid of his because his hours had changed and he couldn't walk it as much as it wanted (very thoughtful, is Fred), bit me ..."

4. Read it aloud

Reading something aloud is a good way of stress-testing it: you'll notice very abruptly if your sentences are tangled up: that overfilling-the-working-memory thing can be heard in your voice. The American speechwriter Peggy Noonan advises that once you have a draft, "Stand up and speak it aloud. **Where you falter, alter.**"

I was about to write to Chris Pollitt to encourage him to produce a new edition of his book (which is 14 years old) but, magically, came across [The Twenty First Century Public Manager](#) scheduled for publication at the end of the week!

Which took me in turn to [The Twenty First Century Public Servant](#) - a short report which came out in 2014.....and reminded me of a book which has been lying on my shelves for all too long - [Public Value - theory and practice](#) ed John Benington and Mark Moore (2011) which is put in context by a very useful article [Appraising public value](#)

Further Reading

http://publiccommons.ca/public/uploads/literature/public_value_practice.pdf

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/public-service-academy/news-events/2014/twenty-first-century-public-servant--eight-lessons.pdf>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262198648_Deconstructed_Touraine_The_Radical_Sociologist_for_the_Sake_of_Social_Actors_and_Society

http://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/13843/1/192967_1347%20Wilde%20postPrint.pdf

18 October

Just Words? How language gets in the way

Ronald G Young MA MSc

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 8. The importance of satire
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PREFACE

Whenever I've been given the chance, I have tried to insert a short glossary of the key words I've used in any official report - and I've become quite daring and provocative in my mockery of the "weasel words" which officials, academics and so-called experts have become so fond of using.

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.

At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for "poverty" changed over time - inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc.

Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about this in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then says ruefully, "at least my vocabulary is improving"!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propel such verbal gymnastics -

- first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure - better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exploring why previous solutions have failed
- Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition - and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.
- And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. "Evidence-based policy-making" is a typical phrase - first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! "There is no better lie than a big one!"

"Just Words" is a deliberately ambiguous title - the "just" could mean "only" or "merely" but the other meaning touches on our notions of fairness and "justice". This little glossary is offered in the spirit of the original dictionaries - which challenged our notions of just behaviour.

1. Purpose

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -
....Trying to use words, and every attempt
is a new start, a and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
for the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
one is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
with shabby equipment always deteriorating
in the general mass of imprecision of feeling*

East Coker; Four Quartets
TS Eliot

History is assumed to consist of hard events like wars and revolts. But such events don't just happen - they are caused by what goes on inside our minds - not just feelings of ambition; fear; greed; resentment; but the stories (theories) we use to make sense of events. And they are legitimised by the words we use.

Words are very powerful - indeed have a life of their own - some more so than others. Once we stop thinking about the words we use, what exactly they mean and whether they fit our purpose, the words and metaphors (and the interests behind them) take over and reduce our powers of critical thinking. One of the best essays on this topic is George Orwell's "[Politics and the English language](#)". Written in 1947, it exposes the way certain clichés and rhetoric are calculated to kill thinking - for example how the use of the passive tense undermines the notion that it is people who take decisions and should be held accountable for them.

Fifty years before Orwell, Ambrose Bierce was another (American) journalist whose pithy and tough definitions of everyday words, in his newspaper column, attracted sufficient attention to justify a book "[The Devil's Dictionary](#)" whose fame continues unto this day. A dentist, for example, he defined as "a magician who puts metal into your mouth and pulls coins out of your pocket". A robust scepticism about both business and politics infused his work - but it did not amount to a coherent statement about power.

This glossary looks at more than 100 words and phrases used by officials, politicians, consultants and academics in the course of government reform which have this effect and offers some definitions which at least will get us thinking more critically about our vocabulary - if not actually taking political actions.

Only in the latter stages of its drafting was I reminded of John Saul's "[A Doubter's Companion - a dictionary of aggressive common sense](#)" issued in 1994 which talks of the "humanist tradition of using alphabetical order as a tool of social analysis and the dictionary as a quest for understanding, a weapon against idée reçues and the pretensions of power". There is a [good interview here with him](#). Saul contrasts this approach with that "of the rationalists to the dictionary for whom it is a repository of truths and a tool to control communications".

I suppose, therefore, that this glossary of mine is written in the humanist tradition of struggle against power - and the words they use to sustain it. The glossary therefore forms part of a wider

commentary on the effort various writers have made over the ages to challenge the pretensions of the powerful (and of the "thought police" who have operated on their behalf). And, of course, the role of satire⁹, caricature and cartoons¹⁰, poetry¹¹ and painting¹² should not be forgotten! Nor the role of films and TV series these days¹³.

2. Searching for the heart of the onion

I have been heavily involved in reform efforts (and words) now for almost 50 years. I was part of that post-war generation which first succumbed to the blandishments of social sciences¹⁴ as my university subjects in 1962. Between 1968 and 1991 I was first a local councillor then powerful regional politician in Scotland; and the last 20 years I have spent advising government units in 8 central European and central Asian countries.

The social sciences were just beginning to flex their muscles in my student days and popular management texts also beginning to appear (we forget that Peter Drucker invented the genre only in the late 1950s). Books such as Marris and Rein's *Dilemmas of Social Reform* (1968); Donald Schoen's *Beyond the Stable State* (1971); and Heclo and Wildavsky's *The Private Government of Public Money* (1974) impressed me enormously - not only for their application of social science to topics such as the fight against poverty; organisational structures and budgeting (respectively) but also for the clarity of their language.

And the combination, between 1968 and 1985 of academic and political work gave me both the incentive and opportunity to explore what light that burgeoning academic literature could throw on the scope for government actions (and structures) for social improvement. Not least of my puzzlements was about the source and nature of power. And the story told by one of the architects of the British NHS (Aneurin Bevan) about his own search for power - from his own municipality through trade unions to the heights of the British Cabinet - used the powerful metaphor of the onion. As each layer peels away, another appears - there is no heart!

I always knew that the best way to understand a subject was to write a book about it. And therefore developed the habit of writing papers to help me as much as others make sense of the various path-breaking initiatives in which I was involved - particularly trying to make government more "inclusive" both in its style and policy impact. The audience for such writing was practitioners - rather than academics - and also, with my first little book *The Search for Democracy* (1976), community activists who needed some help in confronting the more sophisticated bureaucracy (and words) with which they were confronted after a major reorganisation. So the language had to be clear - but not superficial. This explains any idiosyncrasies in the voice I have developed. And writing that first book made me aware how few books seemed to be written to help the average person understand a subject or question.

⁹ not just the literary sort - see section 9

¹⁰ from Honore Daumier to Jules Feiffer and Ralph Steadman

¹¹ Eg Bert Brecht

¹² Goya, Kollwitz and Grosz are the most powerful example

¹³ From the "Yes, Minister" series in the UK in the 1970s to "The Thick of it" of the 2000s

¹⁴ inspired by the writings of such varied figures as Tony Crosland, [RH Tawney](#), EP Thompson (eg *Out of Apathy*) and Bernard Crick (his *In Defence of Politics* (1962

When I looked again at the books I knew, I realised most were written for one of the following reasons -

- help people pass examinations (requiring compressing of knowledge into artificial disciplines);
- make a reputation or money (requiring minimising or discrediting of other writers)
- advance a new tendentious theory

The Readers and Writers Cooperative which started in the early 1970s (now the highly successful "For Beginners" series) was the first to use a more user-friendly approach to issues. And how helpful the Dummies' Guide series are! Even Rough Guides has muscled in on this approach.

This particular effort started, I suppose, way back in 1999 when I selected about 40 words for a glossary which accompanied a little book I wrote then - [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) which tried to capture my understanding of what was then the fast-moving field of public administration - for a younger generation of central europeans. My definitions were jazzed up in order to provoke thought - eg performance measurement; "judging an organisation by measuring what it produces, rather than whom it keeps happy or employed. Most usefully done on a comparative basis - over time: or among units performing similar work".

In 2008, the glossary I left behind in a major report - [Learning from experience; some reflections on how training can help develop administrative capacity](#) - was more outrageous.

I should emphasise that this is not a Cynic's Dictionary - although I readily confess to the occasional lapse into self-indulgent delight in shocking. But the topic of politics, power and government reform is too important for cynicism. It does, however, require a strong dose of scepticism - as evident in this amazing 300 plus page compendium from OXFAM [Deconstructing Development Discourse - buzzwords and fuzzwords](#) (2010)

3. New words and phrases can cause amnesia!

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.. At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for "poverty" changed over time - inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc. Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about it in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then said ruefully, "at least my vocabulary is improving"!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propelled these verbal gymnastics - first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure - better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exploring why previous solutions have failed

Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition - and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.

And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests¹⁵ and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. "Evidence-based policy-making" is typical - first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! "There is no better lie than a big one!"

4. Critiquing the professionals....

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.

[JM Keynes](#) (General Theory 1935)

In the 1970s, a South American priest Ivan Illich attacked professionals and to the mystification of their processes and language - with his various books which eloquently argued against the damage done to learning by formal schooling methods (*Deschooling Society*); and to health by doctors and hospitals (*Medical Nemesis*).

Stanislaw Andreski was one of the few academics who dared attack the pretensions of the social sciences - in his *Social Sciences as Sorcery* (1973 - now out of print).

The importance of demystifying complex language was continued by C Wright Mills in the 1950s and 1960s who once famously summarised a 250 pages book - written in tortuous syntax by the sociologist Talcott Parsons - in 12 pages!

Alaister Mant extended the attack to contemporary leadership (*Leaders we Deserve* 1983 - also out of print) - puncturing somewhat the mythology about business leaders which was being spread in the popular management books which were beginning to sell like hot potatoes. Henry Mintzberg - a Canadian management academic - is about the only one who has written simply about what managers actually do (and attacked MBAs) and, in so doing, has stripped management literature of most of its pretensions.

By reducing management exhortations to 99 self-contradictory proverbs Hood's *Administrative Argument* (1991 and also, mysteriously, out of print) showed us how shallow management ideologies are.

In 1992 John Ralston Saul gave us a powerful but idiosyncratic critique of technical expertise in *Voltaire's Bastards - the dictatorship of reason in the west*.

¹⁵ See section 6

In 1996 Harold Perkins gave us a highly critical account of *The Third Revolution - Professional Elites in the Modern World* - whose moral critique is all the more powerful for its academic origin.

By showing the parallels with religious doctrine, Susan George challenged the economic belief systems which sustained the World Bank (*Faith and Credit - the World Bank's secular empire* (1994).

It was easier for people like Huczynski to take the scalpel to management gurus in *Management Gurus - what makes them and how to become one* (1993) since they are only peripherally of academia.

And a once worthy venture - the European Union - has, sadly, developed such powerful interests of its own that it too is part of this significant obfuscation with its use of such phrases as "subsidiarity".

5. GLOSSARY

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,' " Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!' "

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument'," Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them—particular verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"

Accountability; the convention that those in power explain - in a transparent, regular, structured and truthful way - what actions they have authorised and why. The corollary is that any failure of their explanations to satisfy will lead to sanctions - including dismissal. A popular convention at the height of constitutional propriety, neoliberalism and its handmaiden, austerity, have probably been the main reasons for its eclipse. See also "Open Government"

Address; to fudge. We used to address a person but now address "issues"

Adversarial systems; the more political parties have in common (UK and US) the more they pretend to be poles apart and fight an aggressive, winner-take-all, no-holds-barred contest which leaves no room for civilised discourse; nor policy consensus. Bad policy-making is normally the result (see book references at end of Annex)

Agent; an intermediary who performs actions on behalf of another. A huge theoretical literature was built around this concept in the 1980s - to try to demonstrate the way in which public servants developed interests separate from that of the public - and to justify privatisation and the

separation of public budget-holders from those who supplied public services. Pity that there are so few of these academics now bothering to develop a literature about the (actual rather than theoretical) self-serving and downright immoral behaviour of many of those who now own and manage the privatised bodies and "arms' length" agencies!

Agencies; pretend companies - with Chief Executives and others with hugely inflated salaries and pension rights.

Agnostic; someone who doubts

Ambition; *"Our system obliges us to elevate to office precisely those persons who have the ego-besotted effrontery to ask us to do so; it is rather like being compelled to cede the steering wheel to the drunkard in the back seat loudly proclaiming that he knows how to get us there in half the time. More to the point, since our perpetual electoral cycle is now largely a matter of product recognition, advertising, and marketing strategies, we must be content often to vote for persons willing to lie to us with some regularity or, if not that, at least to speak to us evasively and insincerely. In a better, purer world—the world that cannot be—ambition would be an absolute disqualification for political authority"* (David Hart).

Assumptions; the things other people make - which cause problems. Parsed - "I think; you assume; (s)he fucks up". Project management techniques do require us to list assumptions and identify and manage risks - but in the field of technical Assistance these are just boxes to tick. In any project, the best approach is to list the worst things which could happen, assume they will occur and plan how to minimise their frequency and effects.

Audit; something both overdone and underdone - overdone in volume and underdone in results. A process more feared at the bottom than at the top as frequent recent scandals (Enron; global banking scandals have demonstrated). See also "Law"

Benchmark; a technical-sounding term which gives one's discourse a scientific aura.

Bottleneck; what prevents an organisation from achieving its best performance - always located at the top!

Bureaucracy; literally "rule by the office" (and the strictly defined powers which surround it - as distinct from rule by whim). See "rule of law". The adjective (bureaucratic) has now become a term of abuse.

Capacity; something which other people lack

Capacity development; something which consultants recommend and which generally boils down to some training programmes. In fact capacity is developed by a combination of practice and positive feedback.

Capital punishment; Harriet McCulloch, investigator at Reprieve, said: "Everyone knows that [capital punishment](#) means that those without the capital get the punishment."

Change; something which was difficult to start in public organisations in the 1970s and is now difficult to stop.

Change agent; in the beginning a brave person - now a spiv.

Citizen; a displaced person in the modern polis - replaced by the customer who has to have money and spend it before any rights can be exercised. For an excellent article which explores the significance and implications of the various terms and roles see [this article by Henry Mintzberg](#)

Civil servant; someone who used to be able to stand up to Ministers.

Client; someone receiving a (complex) service from a professional - usually with the protection of a professional code.

Coalition; a government composed of political parties which have normally fought one another in an election; which have not gained sufficient seats to form a majority government; and which cooperate with other parties to avoid facing the electorate again. Seen by some as highly civilised (encouraging consensual qualities) and by other as highly undemocratic (smoke-filled rooms)

Collateral damage; a weasel word for the accidental shootings of innocent citizens.

Commodification; to put a market value on services which were previously offered voluntarily and offering them for sale on the market in order to make a profit.

Communications; the first thing which people blame when things go wrong - parsed "I communicate; you misunderstand; he/they don't listen".

Compliance; consistency with a defined outcome. Traditionally called "obedience". Used a lot in the EC

Consultant; a con-man who operates like a sultan! An outsider who knows almost nothing about an organisation who is brought in to give the air of objectivity to outrageous changes the bosses have already agreed amongst themselves.

Consultation; the skill of bouncing other people to agree with what you have already decided.

Contract out; as in "put out a contract on" - to wipe out.

Control; to ensure that people do what the elites want. This used to be done by fear - but a range of clever carrots and sticks are now used - as well as words and language itself. Control used to be "ex-ante" (detailed instructions before the event) but is increasingly "ex-post" - through audit, monitoring and evaluation.

Coordination; the lack of which is the most annoying thing for the rationalist in organisations

Corruption; a fashionable thing to be against. A new anti-corruption industry of consultants has arisen which reformulates the public administration principles to which NPM (see below) is opposed, thereby generating maximum confusion. See also "integrity"

Customer; the person who has supplanted the citizen and is responsible for environmental destruction et al

Decentralisation; identifying local people who can be made scapegoats for deterioration of service.

Deliberative democracy; In contrast to the traditional theory of democracy, in which voting is central, deliberative democracy theorists argue that legitimate lawmaking can arise only through public deliberation - generally through the presentation of evidence and then dissection of this in discussion - for more, see [this definition](#)

Delivery; what used to be known as implementation - and is now a product marketed by Sir Michael Barber, ex-Head of one of Tony Blair's Cabinet Office units. For more see - <http://followersoftheapocalypse/opened13-instruction-to-deliver/>

Democracy; a system which allows citizens to select, at periodical intervals, from a small group of self-selected and perpetuating elites. For more see Schumpeter

Development; a good thing.

Effectiveness; combining resources to achieve specified objectives

Efficiency; a positive ratio between output and input. For more, see this [great discussion](#)

Empower; a classic word of the new century which suggests that power can be benignly given - when in reality it has to be taken.

Environment; what's around me which I can use and abuse for my benefit.

Evaluation; the process of finding out who is to blame. The EU has a very traditional model of evaluation - carried out by outside experts which takes so long (and is so long and tortuous in language) that its results cannot be used in the design of new programmes. See "learning organisation" below.

Evaluation; job-creation for surplus academics. An important part of the policy-making process which has been debased by it being sub-contracted to a huge industry of consultants who produce large reports which are never read by policy-makers.

Evidence-based policy-making; a phrase which represents the hubristic peak of the generation of UK social scientism which captured the UK civil service in the late 1990s at the time its political masters succumbed to corporate interests and therefore were practising less rather than more evidence-based policy-making!

Focus group; a supposedly representative group of voters who will give us a clue about what we should be doing.

Governance; an academic term to describe the obvious - namely that governments lacked the power to do things on their own and required to work in partnership with private and others. Found useful by the World Bank - which is not allowed to engage in political activity - to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. For a useful discussion, see this [article by Gerry Stoker](#)

Good governance; from a useful insight about the importance of good government to economic and social development, it has become a pernicious phrase which is used by the global community and its experts to force developing countries to take on impossible social and political objectives. It forms the basis of the UNDP Millennium Goals. It shows great stupidity to imagine that this could be developed by a combination of moral and financial exhortations by autocracies and kleptocracies. A few voices of common sense have suggested a more appropriate strategy would be that of "[good-enough governance](#)"

Greed; something which is killing humanity and the planet - and is epitomised by ownership of an aggressive SUV; its assumed that increasing petrol prices will drive these monsters off our street - but a touch of ridicule would also help!

Groupthink; blinkered thinking which overcomes the leadership of an organisation when its culture has become too arrogant, centralised and incestuous: and when it is too protected from critical messages from and about the external world

Holistic; a magical quality - creating harmony - which some people imagine can be created in government by appropriate mechanisms of coordination. Others argue that the job will be done naturally by a mixture of decentralisation and the market.

Hubris; something which politicians and policy experts suffer from - ie a belief that their latest wheeze will solve problems which have eluded the combined skills and insights of their predecessors

Human Resource management (HRM); treating staff and workers like dirt

Humility; something which politicians and policy experts have too little of

Impact; the measured effect of an activity on identified groups.

Impact assessment; the proper (a) identification of the groups which will be affected by a policy change and (b) measurement of the economic impact of the change on those groups. Clearly, very demanding! See "systems approach"

Implementation; the act of trying to bring an intended state of affairs to fruition. The word used in the Slavic language perhaps is more powerful - execution! In the 1970s political science developed an important body of literature which showed the various ways in which the good intentions of laws

were undermined. The classic book by Wildavsky and Pressman had the marvellous sub-title - "How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All". For more [see this article](#)

Input; the resources which are put into an activity

Integrity; something which NPM has cleaned out from public life. The strategy that came after anti-corruption when we needed to hide the fact that corruption was actually increasing.

Joined-up government; New Labour's euphemism for Stalinism.

Kleptocracy; A government system in which the transfer of public resources to its elite is a basic principle which overrides all others.

Knowledge management; a contradiction in terms

Law; "the spider's webs which, if anything small falls into them ensnare it, but large things break through and escape". [Solon](#)

Leader; the head of an organisation or movement whose attributed qualities seem to range from the saintly to the diabolical. Modern leaders are supposed to exercise moral authority rather than the exercise or threat of force - but few understand what this even means.

Learning organisation; something foreign to the EU since its understanding of organisations is trapped in the Weberian model. The last 15 years has seen management theory develop a view that the best way for organisations to keep up with social change is through valuing their own staff by delegation and strong ongoing feedback - not by commissioning external experts to conduct complex and irrelevant evaluations.

Legislators; the most despised group in any society (see "parliamentary power").

Lobbyists; people who make the laws

Logframe; the bible for the Technical Assistance world which - with a list of activities, assumptions, objectives, outputs and risks - conquers the complexity and uncertainty of the world and removes the bother of creativity. For a critique see [Lucy Earle's 2003 paper on my website](#) -

Manage; to make a mess of.

Market; a place or system governed by rules which sets prices through the interaction of buyers and sellers. Under severely restrictive assumptions it can produce what economists call "optimum" results. The most important of these assumptions are - scale (large numbers of sellers; perfect information; and absence of social costs). In the real world, few of these conditions exist. See also ["quasi-market"](#)

Minister; etymologically "one who acts on the authority of another" - ie the ruler. In some countries they last some time (longer often than many civil servants); in others (eg UK) they last barely a year!

Mentor; someone whose experience has given them a high reputation - whose advice can be used to guide others. Sometime adopted as a formal role in organisations.

Modernise; to restructure something which just required some oiling of the wheels.

Monitor; a school prefect.

Neo-liberalism; one of the deadliest ideologies

New public management (NPM); the body of literature which has in the past 20 years replaced that of old public administration. It has borrowed its concepts entirely from private sector management and has encouraged governments throughout the world -

- to see the "citizen" as a "consumer" of services
- to reduce civil service skills to drafting of contracts; definition of service targets; and regulation for services which are managed at "arms-length" by the private sector, other state bodies or NGOs
- to set up reward systems and penalties to ensure targets are met

It slowly dawned even on the NPM zealots that such an approach is positively Soviet in its inflexible emphasis on targets - and that the reward systems undermine the teamwork and policy coordination which good policies require. Despite a backlash to NPM over the past decade, it retains a powerful hold on the new managerial class which inhabits what's left of the public sector (inc universities)

OECD; the club of the rich nations - an apparently neutral body which was in fact one of the most important proselytisers of NPM see Leslie Pal's [The OECD and global public management reform](#)

Open government; an apparent contradiction in terms - "governing" classically involves haggling, compromising, striking deals which will never look good in the cold light of public scrutiny. And even the publication of raw data can prove embarrassing to governments. But Freedom of Information Acts are being passed throughout the world - initially reactive rather than proactive and generally protective of "sensitive" information. Just a pity that this coincides with the run-down of investigative journalism - although a combination of citizen activists with new technology could ultimately prove a powerful combination. For [more see here](#)

Outcome; the wider societal impact which a policy seems to have.

Output; the immediate way in which the faithful implementation of a policy can be measured.

Parliamentary power; when exercised negatively (in the critique and adjustment of incoherent government proposals), something to value very highly. When exercised positively (as legislative initiatives) something to treat as "pork-trough or barrel" politics.

Performance management; the system which sets targets and rewards and penalises accordingly.

Performance-orientation; a concern for the results of inputs and spending – generally in improved customer satisfaction.

Policy; a statement of the tools and resources which government is using to try to achieve an intended set of objectives.

Policy review; the critical assessment of the outcomes and outputs of a policy field. This can be carried out within government – or by academic bodies and think-tanks and commissioned by various bodies including government.

Political party; we may not like it, but the political party has been (for a century) and remains one of the key elements in the translation of our feelings and voice into “deliverable” programmes of government. For closer analysis, see [Robert Michels](#), [Peter Mair](#)

Politician; someone elected by voters who is, in theory, accountable to them but in fact does what his party and its leadership tells him – since this is the only way to survive let alone climb the greasy pole to advancement. Rebels become mavericks.

Politics; “A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage” (Bierce – Devil’s Dictionary)

Populism; a bundle of anti-elitist positions. Normally used as a pejorative by elite representatives....a dangerous strand is its lack of concern for minority rights....

Post-modern; distrust of explanations. “The refusal to describe humanity’s progress as a rational process whose principles can be mastered – as though historical progress were one more step on the way to heaven” (from intro to Postmodern Public Administration by HD Millar and C Fox)

Priorities; “Gouverner”, as the French say “c’est choisir”. State bodies and services can never do equal justice to all the laws they are required to implement. Many new member states continue to churn out strategic documents which are checklists of good intentions – which brings the law into disrepute.

Progress; cars travelling slower in cities than 100 years ago;

Project management; a nice idea! The religion of the new generation which operates from hand to mouth on external funding. See also “assumptions” and “logframe”.

Public administration; a phrase which reminds us that state bodies serve the public – not the state!!!

Public management; something more clever than public administration – which therefore warrants higher rewards and excuses shady behaviour.

Quality management; a fashionable term of the 1990s of which we now hear little.

Quasi-market; a pretend market. In the misguided attempt to introduce business systems into public services, governments have tried to get everyone to compete against one another. Naturally this requires a lot of paperwork and bureaucrats (disguised under the term "transaction costs") - which is, curiously, what the reforms were supposed to get away from! See also "side-effects".

Rationality; how many people remember the incredible debate in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s about rationality, bureaucracy and politics - and whether it was ever possible to have significant policy changes as distinct from incremental fudge ("disjointed incrementalism" as Lindblom called it)? Now we seem to have the opposite problem. Sadly, few academics seem to be discussing it.

Reengineer; to take apart and build in a different way. A new term in the public sector for an interest that goes back to the zero-budgeting of the 1960s. Why is it I always think of Stalin's epithet for Soviet writers "Engineers of the human soul" when I hear the re-engineering word?

Reform; to divert attention from core questions by altering organisational boundaries and responsibilities

Regulation; as natural monopolies have been privatised, a vast system of public regulation has been set up to control the obvious consequences of private monopolies. See also "regulatory reform"

Regulatory reform; "reforming regulations that raise unnecessary obstacles to competition, innovation and growth, while ensuring that regulations efficiently serve important social objectives" (OECD)

Rent-seeker;

Rule of law; the principle that no-one is above the law. See also "Law".

Sceptic; an aggressive agnostic - a quality which is greatly missed these days

Scrutiny; a political form of audit which became popular in the UK recently to give local politicians something to do after local government had been stripped of most of its functions.

Services; what the outputs of government activities should give us - but rarely does.

Side-effects; unanticipated and negative impacts of policy interventions - generally more powerful than the positive. Can lead to a fatalistic view of policy-making (see Hood)

Social capital; a term brought into the currency of think-tanks and government by the combined efforts of Robert Putnam and the World Bank. Most of us understand it by the simpler trust 'trust'. [See also here](#)

State; a bad thing - at least for worshippers of NPM

Strategy; a statement of how an organisation understands the environment in which it is working; what problems or opportunities it sees as priority to deal with - and how it proposes to do that.

Strategic; what I consider important

Strategic management; a proactive style of management

street-level officials; a term used to describe those officials who are in close contact with the members of the public and have to exercise discretion and judgement in their behaviour (field; front-line). Its positive sense is that they often have a better sense of what the public needs than senior management. Its negative sense is that, distant from control, such officials can more easily engage in self-serving behaviour.

Subsidiarity; a term used by the Catholic hierarchy which is now part of EU rhetoric - can be used to legitimise the further stripping of state functions. Its origin lies apparently in Thomas Aquinas and the justification for government action only where private initiative is insufficient or lacking.

Sustainable; a word which, by being placed in front of development, has lost its meaning

Systems approach; an approach to management which appreciates the complexity of the environments in which interventions take place and invites teams to invent their own solutions based on a systematic definition of the problem facing the customer. [A good journal is here](#)

Targets; what those in power use to measure the performance of - and to blame - others

Teamwork; a word to beware! Generally used by those in power to get their way while seeming democratic. While true that decisions taken as a result of joint discussion can be often better (and more robust) than those imposed, a lot depends on the manner in which the discussion is held - whether it is structured in a way designed to elicit problems and ideas or, rather, to sanction a dominant view (see groupthink). See Belbin for details of teams roles and structures

Think-tank; the shock-troops of neo-liberalism. Apparently neutral bodies (funded, however, by big business) which marketed the products for the transformation of the rational-legal state into a state of neo-liberal governance.

Tools of government; the various ways government tries to make you do what they think is good for you. Laws do not implement themselves. Their implementation requires a commitment to change which cannot be taken for granted in societies whose populations are struggling to survive and whose new rulers - many uncertain of how long they will survive in office - are subject to temptations of short-term personal gains. In such contexts, is it realistic to expect policy-makers and civil servants to have an overriding concern for future public benefit? To explore that question requires us to look at the wider issue of motivation.

The table below sets out seven different motivations which can be found in people - and some of the policy tools which would be relevant for such motivations.

Legalism, for example, assumes that people know about laws and will obey them - regardless of the pull of extended family ties (eg for recruitment).

Training and functional review assumes that people simply need to understand in order to take the relevant action.

Other tools assume that man is basically a calculating machine. And so on....

In 2008 the British National Audit Office commissioned [a study on sanctions and rewards in the public sector](#) - the only such government review I know -. However, as Colin Talbot points out in his new book on theories of Performance, the assessment is based on discredited rationalistic theory of behaviour

Motives and tools in the change process

Motivating Factor	Example of tool	Particular mechanism
1. Understanding	Training Campaigns Counting and comparing - league tables	Rational persuasion Appeal to common sense Questioning when one's body compares badly
2. Commitment	Leadership Consultation and cooperation Training	Legitimation; inspiration Shared vision Pride (in behaving professionally)
3. Personal Benefit	Pay increase and bonus Promotion (including political office) Good publicity Winning an award	Monetary calculation ambition Reputation; Psychological Status
4. Personal Cost	Named as poor performer Demotion Report cards	Psychological (Shame) Monetary Pride
5. Obligation	Law Action plan Family ties	Courts Managerial authority Social pressure
6. Peer influence	Peer review Bribery Quality circles	Pressure from colleagues
7. Social influence	Opinion surveys	Feedback from public about service quality

Source; an earlier version of this originally appeared in Young (EU Tacis 2005)

Governments trying to improve the performance of state bodies have also made increasing use of "league tables". This involves audit bodies, for example, collecting and publishing comparative information about the performance of individual schools and hospitals in an attempt to persuade senior managers to address the problems of poor performance (1.3 in table). This can also act as a market-type force - bringing the force of public opinion against the organisation (4.3 in table).

Training; "surgery of the mind". A marvellous phrase an old political colleague of mine used to describe the mind-bending and propaganda which goes on in a lot of workshops.

Transparency; an EU buzz-word - meaning exposing the outside world to the tortuous procedures and language of the European Commission. The reaction to the coverage which Wikileaks gave to the leaked US Embassy cables shows how skindEEP is the commitment to transparency.

Trust; something which economists and their models don't have and which, therefore, is assumed by them not to exist within organisations. As economic thinking has invaded public organisations, everyone has been assumed to be a "rent-seeker" - and a huge (and self-fulfilling) edifice of checks and controls have been erected

Whistle-blower; someone without authority who blows a whistle - and brings everyone down on them for the chaos they cause.

6. Floating in words, metaphors and language

In 1979 some British citizens became so incensed with the incomprehensible language of official documents, letters and forms that they set up a campaign called "The Plain English Campaign". It was its activities in making annual awards for good and bad practice that shamed most organisations - public and private - into reshaping their external communications. Their website www.plainenglish.co.uk contains their short but very useful manual; a list of alternative words; and lists of all the organisations which have received their awards.

But they have seem to have worked in vain - since, in 2007, the Local Government Association felt it necessary to recommend that [100 words be banned](#) (not the same thing as book burning!!), And two years later it had [expanded the list to 200 words](#) -. Some of the words have me baffled (I have not lived in the UK for 20 years!) but I find this is a quite excellent initiative. I have a feeling that it may not - in the aftermath of a General election and massive public cuts - have been taken seriously enough. The offensive words included -

Advocate, Agencies, Ambassador, Area based, Area focused, Autonomous, Baseline, Beacon, Benchmarking, Best Practice, Blue sky thinking, Bottom-Up, Can do culture, Capabilities, Capacity, Capacity building, Cascading, Cautiously welcome, Challenge, Champion, Citizen empowerment, Client, Cohesive communities, Cohesiveness, Collaboration, Commissioning, Community engagement, Compact, Conditionality, Consensual, Contestability, Contextual, Core developments, Core Message, Core principles, Core Value, Coterminality, Coterminalous, Cross-cutting, Cross-fertilisation, Customer, Democratic legitimacy, Democratic mandate, Dialogue, Double devolution, Downstream, Early Win, Embedded, Empowerment, Enabler, Engagement, Engaging users, Enhance, Evidence Base, Exemplar, External challenge, Facilitate, Fast-Track, Flex, Flexibilities and Freedoms, Framework, Fulcrum, Functionality, Funding streams, Gateway review, Going forward, Good practice, Governance, Guidelines, Holistic, Holistic governance, Horizon scanning, Improvement levers, Incentivising, Income streams, Indicators, Initiative, Innovative capacity, Inspectorates (a bit unfair!), Interdepartmental surely not?), Interface, Iteration, Joined up, Joint working, level playing field, Lever (unfair on Kurt Lewin!), Leverage, Localities, Lowlights (??), Mainstreaming, Management capacity, Meaningful consultation (as distinct from meaningless?), Meaningful dialogue (ditto?), Mechanisms, menu of Options, Multi-agency, Multidisciplinary, Municipalities (why?), Network model, Normalising, Outcomes, Output, Outsourced, Overarching, Paradigm, Parameter, Participatory, Partnership working, Partnerships, Pathfinder, Peer challenge, Performance Network, Place shaping, Pooled budgets, Pooled resources, Pooled risk, Populace, Potentialities, Practitioners (what's wrong with that?), Preventative services, Prioritization, Priority, Proactive (damn!), Process driven, Procure, Procurement, Promulgate, Proportionality, Protocol, Quick win (damn again), Rationalisation, Revenue Streams, Risk based, Robust, Scaled-back, Scoping, Sector wise, Seedbed, Self-aggrandizement (why not?), service users, Shared priority, Signpost, Social contracts, Social exclusion, spatial, Stakeholder, Step change, Strategic (come off it!), Strategic priorities, Streamlined, Sub-regional, Subsidiarity (hallelujah); Sustainable (right on!), sustainable communities, Symposium, Synergies, Systematics, Taxonomy, Tested for Soundness,

Thematic, Thinking outside of the box, Third sector, Toolkit, Top-down (?), Trajectory, Tranche, Transactional, Transformational, Transparency, Upstream, Upward trend, Utilise, Value-added, Vision, Visionary,

And what about coach, mentor, drivers, human resource management, social capital, tsar ????

Anyway - a brilliant initiative (if you will forgive the term)

And in 2009 a UK Parliamentary Committee actually invited people to submit examples of confusing language which they then reported about in a report entitled [Bad Language!](#)

I suppose if post-modernists have done anything, they have made us more aware of language. After all, they spend their time deconstructing texts! And they have been active in the field of public administration - [Postmodern Public Administration](#) (2007) is one taken at random - The trouble is that they play so many word games amongst themselves that what they produce is generally incomprehensible to the outsider. Despite their critiques and claims, therefore, I do not consider them helpful companions.

Before the post-modernists came along, M Edelman's book [The Symbolic Use of Politics was published in 1964 but then ignored - not least by myself.](#)

I have never found Chomsky an easy companion - but clearly books like his [Language and politics](#) (1988) are highly relevant to this theme

One of the most insightful texts for me, however, is Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organisation* - a fascinating treatment of the writing about organisations which demonstrates that many of our ideas about them are metaphorical : he suggests the literature uses eight "images" viz organisations as "political systems", as "instruments of domination", as "cultures", as "machines", as "organisms", as "brains", as "psychic prisons", as "flux and transformation" and as "instruments of domination".

7. The role of international agencies in creating La Pensee Unique

The World Bank is not allowed to engage in political activity and promulgated various words (governance; social capital) to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. The OECD has perhaps been an even more effective proselytiser through the way it brings practitioners together with researchers and issues publications selling NPM.

8. The importance of satire

Satire has long been a powerful weapon against the pretensions of power - Voltaire's *Candide* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* are well-known literary examples. Ralph Steadman and Gerard Scarfe are modern caricaturists in the tradition of Hogarth; and the Liverpool poets (McGough) sustained the protestors of the 1960s. British people are not so familiar with the Bert Brecht's *City* poems or the savage anti-bourgeois paintings of Georg Grosz in the 1920s and 1930s.

A powerful satirical essay "[Democracy, Bernard? It must be stopped!](#)" was penned by the author of the Yes Minister TV series and exposes the emptiness behind the rhetoric about democracy and government.

In 1987 Management Professor Rosabeth Kanter produced "[Ten Rules for Stifling Initiative](#)" which I used to great effect in Central Asian training sessions.

1999 saw the appearance of *The Lugano Report; on preserving capitalism in the twenty-first Century* which purported to be a leaked report from shady big business but was in fact written by Susan George.

Management guru Russell Ackoff's great collection of tongue-in-cheek laws of management - [Management F-Laws - how organisations really work](#) (2007) As the blurb put it - "They're truths about organizations that we might wish to deny or ignore - simple and more reliable guides to managers' everyday behaviour than the complex truths proposed by scientists, economists and philosophers". An added bonus is that British author, Sally Bibb, was asked to respond in the light of current organizational thinking. Hers is a voice from another generation, another gender and another continent. On every left-hand page is printed Ackoff and Addison's f-Law with their commentary. Opposite, you'll find Sally Bibb's reply. A short version ([13 Sins of management](#)) can be read here. A typical rule is - "The more important the problem a manager asks consultants for help on, the less useful and more costly their solutions are likely to be".

Robert Greene's *48 Laws of Power* may not be satire but it is a very salutary counter to the thousands of unctuous management texts which attribute benign motives to senior management. I have already referred to the [spoof on the British Constitution](#) produced recently by Stuart Weir which is another good example of the power of satire -

9. The way forward (or back?)

Ever since my acquaintance with Uzbek President Karamov's philosophy of incremental "step-by-step" change, this metaphor of steps has always amused me. As I would mischievously say to the officials I met in training sessions, simply putting one step in front of the other can often take us round in circles!

As I've worked on these words - and been reminded of various key texts which have, over the centuries, tried to puncture the pretensions and deceptions of the powerful and the guardians of "knowledge" which sustained them - I have realised how rare this endeavour has been. Only the specialised cognoscenti have the knowledge and authority to undertake the effort - and they have too much to lose! Of course the discipline of economics, for example, is now subjected to a lot of criticism and adjustment (at least on its edges) - and post-modernists have cleverly dissected bodies of knowledge - but hardly in a reader-friendly language!

But we are overdue a text which will give the average interested citizen the incentive to understand just how weak are the intellectual justifications for so much of the behaviour of modern elites - and satire and ridicule will probably be important elements in such an expose.

10. Further Reading

In addition to the texts quoted in the introduction above, I would add the following as useful companions in the search for understanding -

The Art of the State - culture, rhetoric and public management; Chris Hood (2000)

The Future of Governing - four emerging models; B Guy Peters (1999)

Market-driven politics - neo-liberal democracy and the public interest; Colin Leys (2003)

[How Mumbo-jumbo conquered the world](#); Francis Wheen (2004)

Books like King and Crewe's "*The Blunders of our Governments*"(2013); *Great Planning Disasters* (Peter Hall 1982) and *Seeing Like a State - how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (James Scott 1998) showed us how bad centralised decision-making could be.

Christian Wolmar's "*The Great Railway Disaster*" (1996) and Allyson Pollock's "*NHS plc*" showed us how wasteful the private end of the spectrum was. For the effect on transition [countries see here](#)

Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of hope - reliving The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1994); Robert Chambers (*Whose Reality Counts? - putting the first last* 1997); and Tony Gibson (*The Power in our Hands* 1996) are all important inspirations for those who believe in putting the ordinary citizen in the driving seat.

Mintzberg's [The management of government](#) (2000) is one of the most thoughtful contributions to the question of how we should organise government.

Daniel Dorling's recent *Injustice - why social inequality persists* gives us not only a lot of useful material but, even more importantly, the suggestion that 5 belief sets sustain contemporary inequality - that elitism is efficient; greed is good; exclusion is necessary; prejudice is natural; and despair inevitable.

Finally - this is a great site <http://www.civilservant.org.uk/jargon.pdf>

The table which follows is from <http://www.thepoke.co.uk/2011/05/17/anglo-eu-translation-guide/>

Invitation

Feedback on definitions would be much appreciated - as well as further reading and references

Anglo-EU Translation Guide

What the British say	What the British mean	What others understand
I hear what you say	I disagree and do not want to discuss it further	He accepts my point of view
With the greatest respect...	I think you are an idiot	He is listening to me
That's not bad	That's good	That's poor
That is a very brave proposal	You are insane	He thinks I have courage
Quite good	A bit disappointing	Quite good
I would suggest...	Do it or be prepared to justify yourself	Think about the idea, but do what you like
Oh, incidentally/ by the way	The primary purpose of our discussion is...	That is not very important
I was a bit disappointed that	I am annoyed that	It doesn't really matter
Very interesting	That is clearly nonsense	They are impressed
I'll bear it in mind	I've forgotten it already	They will probably do it
I'm sure it's my fault	It's your fault	Why do they think it was their fault?
You must come for dinner	It's not an invitation, I'm just being polite	I will get an invitation soon
I almost agree	I don't agree at all	He's not far from agreement
I only have a few minor comments	Please re-write completely	He has found a few typos
Could we consider some other options	I don't like your idea	They have not yet decided

No Comment

Historians like Arthur Schlesinger and theorists like Albert Hirschman have recorded that every thirty years or so, society shifts - essentially, from the public to the private and back again. The grass, after a while, always feels greener on the other side. The late 1940s to the late 1970s was a period of the public, the late '70s to now, the private. Now the conditions are right for another turn, to a new common life and the security and freedom it affords, but only if we make it happen by tackling a market that is too free and a state that is too remote

Compass Think Tank 2011

Decade	Themes of intellectual discussion	Key names
1930s	The managerial revolution End of capitalism	J Burnham J Strachey
1940s	Keynesism Meritocracy New world order	JM Keynes
1950s	End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour	D. Bell A. Shonfield; Tony Crosland JK Galbraith
1960s	Worship of scale Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals	Peter Berger Pateman; Ivan Illich
1970s	Costs of economic growth Collapse of welfare state Small is beautiful Change corporatism	EJ Mishan Buchanan E. Schumacher; L. Kohr S. Beer; A. Toffler; D. Schon Cawson
1980s	Deindustrialisation Privatisation Pursuit of excellence ecology decentralisation globalisation	Blackaby; Dyson Consultancies; World Bank Tom Peters James Lovelock OECD Stiglitz, Martin Wolf
1990s	End of history Flexibility and reengineering Reinvention of government; NPM Climate change The learning organisation Washington consensus	Fukayama OECD Scientific community Senge World Bank
2000s	Good governance Neo-liberalism and its limits Environmental collapse Migration and social integration state building	World bank; OECD Naomi Klein Scientific community ? ?
2010s	Migration The financial system Breakdown of society Injustice	everyone Stiglitz Dorling-

About the author

"Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

His next 22 years were spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

Since 2012 he has divided his time tasting wines and paintings from a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains."

In such a manner is a life normally described - and how little of the hopes, pleasures and anguishes of life does it give away....so the following lines try to be more honest and revealing... ..

In 2008 I started a website which contains the major papers written over the years about attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles I'm lucky enough to have played - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propaganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

Since 2009 my blog - [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - has tried to make sense of my organisational endeavours - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

A new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

This book reflects a life (and perhaps attitude) shaped by the good fortune I've had -

- to work from an early age (26) with an unusually wide range of people (professionals, politicians, community activists - and a much smaller number of academics) who shared an aspiration to improve social conditions;
- To have had a job in a Polytechnic (and planning school) in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s which gave me the licence to talk and write about the issues relating to this work
- to have achieved a position of influence which helped develop a more inclusive style of government in the West of Scotland for 20 years
- to reengineer myself as a consultant, working and living for 25 years in central Europe and Central Asia - in the pursuit of what the turgid academic literature has come to call "good governance"

- all the while trying - through wide reading and writing - to try to make sense of what the masthead on my blog calls our "social endeavours", ie efforts to make the world a better place...

I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council - so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for - whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely - so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development - managing to straddle the worlds of community action and political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) - but imagine putting that word in a passport application!

For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.

At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics - with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.

All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term - so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threatening activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted - but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!

When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader - but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" - someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches - but I have a poor memory for verse.

This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me - "collector"! I collect beautiful objects - not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" - first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries - in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe - finally central Asia and beyond.

Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had - father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector - I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the

marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!

And it was TS Eliot who wrote that

old men ought to be explorers

I believe in people coming together at a local level to work for the common benefit - principles enshrined in [communitarianism](#) (about which I do have some reservations). I spent a lot of time supporting the work of [social enterprise](#) in low-income communities. None of this went down all that well with the technocrats or even members) of my political party - and the national politicians to whose books I contributed (eg [Gordon Brown](#)) soon changed their tune when they had a taste of power.

But, above all, I am a [passionate sceptic](#) - or [sceptical pluralist](#) - which is the reason for my adding the terms which form the glossary at the end - [Just Words?](#)

[This flickr account](#) gives with more examples of art.....[also this one](#)

LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[Dispatches to the Next Generation](#) March 2017

[The Slaves' Chorus - the 2016 posts](#)

[In Praise of Doubt - a blogger's year](#) (2016)

[Bulgarian Realists - getting to know Bulgaria through its Art](#) (2017 edition)

An unusual take on a country, the core of this book are 300 short notes on painters who caught my fancy in the decade I have known Bulgaria....

[Crafting Effective Public Administration](#) (2015);

This is a collection of short reflective notes about the efforts we have seen in the past 50 years to improve the machinery of government - with an emphasis on the role of the EU and its various programmes. They draw on (a) my pretty extensive reading of that extensive section of the literature on public administration reform which focusses on British experience (since 1970); but also on that of the various countries of central Europe and central Asia with which I have become familiar since 1991; and (b) my own experience as a political change-agent for 22 years and then consultant on administrative reform for the past 25 years

The book should be read alongside two long papers which I produced a few years ago -

- "[administrative reform with Chinese and European characters](#)" (2010) starts with an outline of the 12 features of Chinese public service which impacted on me when I lived in Beijing for a couple of months, preparing for a longer project. The rest of the paper is a summary of the sort of lessons I felt I had learned up to 1999 about public administration reform
- "[The Long Game - not the logframe](#)" was a caustic paper I presented to the 2011 NISPAcee Conference (building on an earlier paper to the 2007 Conference) in which I took apart the superficiality of the assumptions EC bureaucrats seemed to be making about the prospects of its Technical Assistance programmes making any sort of dent in what I called (variously) the kleptocracy or "impervious regimes" of most ex-communist countries.

With the exception of some 20 pages, they are, in effect, chatty notes on my everyday reading and thinking in a period - after 2009 - when I could be fairly relaxed. I had basically "hung up my boots". Although I was nominally Team Leader of an (EU Structural Fund) project in Bulgaria in 2010-12 and also involved in a bid for another (unsuccessful) project in the same country - my role was not a demanding one and gave me the time and opportunity to reflect.

[The Independence Argument - home thoughts from abroad](#) (2015)

How I tried to make sense of the 2 year debate which took place in Scotland about its referendum about independence.

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014) My (cultural) introduction to a little-known country

[Introducing the Romanian Realists of the 19th and early 20th Centuries](#) (2014) a disorganised set of notes about a little-known painting tradition...

[Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed](#); a short paper I wrote in 2001 to share my concerns about the direction in which Western society was going.....

[The Long Game - not the log-frame](#) (2011); an attack on the myopic and arrogant assumptions western development agencies have taken to the task of building effective institutions in transition countries....

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics](#) (2010) my guilty contribution to a failed mission.....

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies](#) (2009) - this paper extracts some lessons from the work I've done in the last decade - particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Bulgaria. Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian](#) project

[Building Municipal Capacity](#) (2007) - an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan](#) (2007) - this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing and using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate \(2006\)](#)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries](#) - This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

[Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000](#) I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

[In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999) The book I wrote almost two decades ago for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Annotated Bibliography for change agents](#) - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes on the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its systems work for people](#)

Some three years ago I was so frustrated with the failure of those opposed to neo-liberalism to establish common cause that I opened a new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - mainly as a resource for relevant books and papers.

Academia, politics and free-lance consultancy has given me the freedom for 40 years to "[do it my way](#)" - and to write and publish in a fairly carefree manner. This book reflects a life (and perhaps attitude) shaped by the good fortune I've had -

- to work from an early age (26) with an unusually wide range of people (professionals, politicians, community activists - and a much smaller number of academics) who shared an aspiration to improve social conditions;
- To have had a job in a Polytechnic (and planning school) in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s which gave me the licence to talk and write about the issues relating to this work
- to have achieved a position of influence which helped develop a more inclusive style of government in the West of Scotland for 20 years
- to reengineer myself as a consultant, working and living for 25 years in central Europe and Central Asia - in the pursuit of what the turgid academic literature has come to call "good governance"
- all the while trying - through wide reading and writing - to try to make sense of what the masthead on my blog calls our "social endeavours", ie efforts to make the world a better place...

For me a post written 4-5 years ago is every bit as good as (perhaps better than)



yesterday's - but the construction of blogs permits only the most recent posts to be shown. A book format, on the other hand, requires that we begin.....at the beginning ... It also challenges the author to reflect more critically on the coherence of his thinking

It was only in 2014 that I started to publish annual collections of these posts - part of a stand against the ephemerality which besmirches our lives - the earlier versions can [be accessed here](#).

This volume is different, however, in that I started to think of it taking form as a book in the summer. This proved to be a useful discipline - as indeed I had found when developing the two E-books about cultural aspects of [Romania](#); and [The Independence Argument - home thoughts from abroad](#). It makes you reread the posts and question where they're going - if not indeed the entire purpose; perhaps that's why their frequency declined over the summer and autumn months...

And I also started to give more thought to the "visuals" - the artefacts which head about half of the posts.....particularly those from Central Asia in which I spent 7 years....I've become a bit of a collector in this latest phase of my life - not just of paintings but, as I [discovered some years ago](#), of small artefacts . As the blog purports to represent the "brain activity" of a not untypical North-West European man born during the war, I felt that some cultural references were critical to the endeavour.....

.....based on posts?

Notwithstanding the purists who require a book to have a structure of (maximum 12 or so) chapters, I rather like the format of a blogpost of some 700 words (at most a couple of pages). Management guru [Charles Handy](#) famously said that he had learned to put his thoughts in 450 words as a result of the "Thought for the Day" BBC programme to which he was a great contributor.

Perhaps my father's hand is evident in the format and discipline of the blogpost - he was a Presbyterian Minister who would, every Saturday evening, take himself off to his study to anguish over his weekly sermon which he would duly deliver from the pulpit the next morning.....Arguably



indeed the dedication given these past 6 years to the blog is a form of "giving of account" or justification of one's life!!

I have grown to appreciate the discipline involved in marshalling one's thoughts around a theme (in my father's case it was a biblical quotation).

It also has echoes of my favourite literary format - the essay as practised by such people as [Francis Bacon](#), [Charles Lamb](#), Michel Montaigne, [William Hazlitt](#), George Orwell, Clive James or Julian Barnes.....although I didn't appreciate that the literary canon [distinguishes various forms of essay](#) and that "personal essay" is the more precise term for the type I like.

According to Phillip Lopate - in his superb introduction to [The Art of the Personal Essay](#)

The hallmark of the personal essay is its intimacy. The writer seems to be speaking directly into your ear, confiding everything from gossip to wisdom. Through sharing thoughts, memories, desires, complaints, and whimsies, the personal essayist sets up a relationship with the reader, a dialogue -- a friendship, if you will, based on identification, understanding, testiness, and companionship. (xxiii)

The personal essayist must above all be a reliable narrator; we must trust his or her core of sincerity. We must also feel secure that the essayist has done a fair amount of introspective homework already, is grounded in reality, and is trying to give us the maximum understanding and intelligence of which he or she is capable. . . .

How the world comes at another person, the irritations, jubilation's, aches and pains, humorous flashes -- these are the classic building materials of the personal essay. We learn the rhythm by which the essayist receives, digests, and spits out the world, and we learn the shape of his or her privacy. (xxiv-xxv)

I've used last year's experience of turning the posts about Romania and the Scottish Independence Referendum into E-books to good effect this year - with three new E-books - about

[The Global Crisis;](#)

[Crafting Effective Public Management;](#) and

[Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - updated edition](#)

And why should you read it?

My claim for the reader's attention is simply expressed -

- experience in a variety of sectors (and countries) - normally closely manned with "gatekeepers"
- the compulsion (now almost 50 years old), to record what I felt were the lessons of each experience in short papers
- Long and extensive reading
- A "voice" which has been honed by the necessity of speaking clearly to audiences of different nationalities and class
- intensive trawling of the internet for wide range of writing
- notes kept of the most important of those readings
- shared in hyperlinks with readers



I confess somewhere to an aversion to those writers (so many!) who try to pretend they have a unique perspective on an issue and whose discordant babble make the world such a difficult place to understand.

I look instead for work which, as google puts it, builds on the shoulders of others.....my role in a team is that of the [resource person](#)....who finds

and shares material....

I believe in people coming together at a local level to work for the common benefit - principles enshrined in communitarianism (about which I do have some reservations). I spent a lot of time supporting the work of social enterprise in low-income communities. None of this went down all that well with the technocrats or even members) of my political party - and the national politicians to whose books I contributed (eg Gordon Brown) soon changed their tune when they had a taste of power.

But, above all, I am a passionate sceptic - or sceptical pluralist - which is the reason for my adding the terms which form the glossary at the end - Just Words?

Introduction



"How can I know what I think until I read what I write?"

Henry James

One of the timeless bits of advice to those about to communicate is -

- Tell people what you are about to say
- Say it
- Tell them what you have just said

The Preface has introduced the author - and tried to justify the format of a book based on blogposts or mini-essays.

The purpose of the Introduction is to cast an eye over the nature of blogging and the advantages it brings to both blogger and society; and then, very briefly, to identify the key themes which have cropped up during the 15 months of the book's scope....

This is a book of reflections from a blog - "[Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#)" - which was started 6 years ago when the end of my last full-time project gave me the time for more reflection about some of the big themes which have engaged my life and work.

I've been a nomad for 25 years but am now based in Bulgaria and Romania - the posts started in my mountain house in the Carpathians and continue in Bucharest and Sofia.....

The word "blog" has become so ubiquitous a term that we tend to have forgotten its etymology - "web log". An eloquent essay [Why I blog](#) surveys the world of blogging and gives this account of the second term -

A ship's log owes its name to a small wooden board, often weighted with lead, that was for centuries attached to a line and thrown over the stern. The weight of the log would keep it in

the same place in the water, like a provisional anchor, while the ship moved away. By measuring the length of line used up in a set period of time, mariners could calculate the speed of their journey (the rope itself was marked by equidistant "knots" for easy measurement). As a ship's voyage progressed, the course came to be marked down in a book that was called a log.

In journeys at sea that took place before radio or radar or satellites or sonar, these logs were an indispensable source for recording what actually happened. They helped navigators surmise where they were and how far they had travelled and how much longer they had to stay at sea. They provided accountability to a ship's owners and traders. They were designed to be as immune to faking as possible. Away from land, there was usually no reliable corroboration of events apart from the crew's own account in the middle of an expanse of blue and grey and green; and in long journeys, memories always blur and facts disperse. A log provided as accurate an account as could be gleaned in real time.

It continues -

As you read a log, you have the curious sense of moving backward in time as you move forward in pages—the opposite of a book. As you piece together a narrative that was never intended as one, it seems—and is—more truthful. Logs, in this sense, were a form of human self-correction. They amended for hindsight, for the ways in which human beings order and tidy and construct the story of their lives as they look back on them. Logs require a letting-go of narrative because they do not allow for a knowledge of the ending. So they have plot as well as dramatic irony—the reader will know the ending before the writer did.

How Blogging improves your Life

Of course, blogging is seen by many as a bit narcissistic- a reflection of the "selfie" age we live in...But there are blogs....and blogs....Self-indulgent "look at me!" ones and blobs of erudite text which few can understand.....And it can get you into trouble One academic blogger, famously, found himself out of work as a result of his blogging (in the early days) and wrote to tell the tale - in [A Blogger's Manifesto](#)

I would like to hope that readers come to my site looking for some originality - be it the *diversity of the topics (and experiences)* the posts deal with; *the thematic summaries* (eg on memoirs or mountain villages); *the range of the references* in the hyperlinks; *the glimpses of rarely seen painting traditions* and, who knows, perhaps even the *celebration of good writing*.

One writer offers no less than [15 justifications for why people should blog](#). I would go with nine -

1. You'll become a **better thinker**. Because the process of writing includes recording thoughts on paper, the blogging process makes you question what you thought you knew. You will delve deeper into the matters of your life and the worldview that shapes them.
2. You'll become a **better writer**. - once, that is, you start to reread your material or get feedback which shows your text was ambiguous...
3. You'll live a **more intentional life**. Once you start writing about your life and the thoughts that shape it, you'll begin thinking more intentionally about who you are, who you are becoming, and whether you like what you see or not. And that just may be reason enough to get started.
4. You'll develop an **eye for meaningful things**. By necessity, blogging requires a filter. It's simply not possible to write about every event, every thought, and every happening in your life. Instead, blogging is a never-ending process of choosing to articulate the most meaningful events and the most important thoughts. This process of choice helps you develop an eye for meaningful things.
5. It'll lead to **healthier life habits** (although my partner doesn't agree!)!. Blogging requires time, devotion, commitment, and discipline. And just to be clear, those are all good things to embrace - they will help you get the most out of your days and life.
6. You'll **inspire others**. Blogging not only changes your life, it also changes the life of the reader. And because blogs are free for the audience and open to the public, on many levels, it is an act of giving. It is a selfless act of service to invest your time, energy, and worldview into a piece of writing and then offer it free to anybody who wants to read it. Others will find inspiration in your writing... and that's a wonderful feeling.
7. You'll become **more well-rounded in your mindset**. After all, blogging is an exercise in give-and-take. One of the greatest differences between blogging and traditional publishing is the opportunity for readers to offer input. As the blog's writer, you introduce a topic that you feel is significant and meaningful. You take time to lay out a subject in the minds of your readers and offer your thoughts on the topic. Then, the readers get to respond. And often times, their responses in the comment section challenge us to take a new, fresh look at the very topic we thought was so important in the first place.
8. It'll serve as a personal journal. It trains our minds to track life and articulate the changes we are experiencing. Your blog becomes a **digital record of your life** that is saved "in the cloud." As a result, it can never be lost, stolen, or destroyed in a fire.
9. You'll become **more confident**. Blogging will help you discover more confidence in your life. You will quickly realize that you do live an important life with a unique view and have something to offer others.

That puts it rather well - although I would amplify the first point by emphasising the sharpened critical faculty regular blogging also brings to the reading of what others write. Thomas Hardy was spot on when he (apparently) said - "*How can I know what I think until I read what I write?*" You thought you knew something but, when you read back your own first effort at explanation, you immediately have questions - both of substance and style.

But this also conveys itself very quickly to changes in the way that you read *other people's* material - you learn more and faster from a critical dialogue (even with yourself) than from passive reading.....That's why they say that the best way to learn about a subject is to (try to) write a book about it (rather than reading several books). It sounds paradoxical (as well as presumptuous) but it's actually true - and the reason is simple.

One of its greatest advantages

Your attempt at writing quickly gives you the questions with which you **interrogate** the books. If you simply read, you will forget. Another blogger - [Duncan Green](#) - makes the important point that -

regular blogging builds up a handy, time-saving archive. I've been blogging daily since 2008. OK, that's a little excessive, but what that means is that essentially I have a download of my brain activity over the last 7 years - almost every book and papers I've read, conversations and debates.

Whenever anyone wants to consult me, I have a set of links I can send (which saves huge amounts of time). And raw material for the next presentation, paper or book.

Green is spot on about the help a blog like mine offers in finding old material...you just type in the keyword and the relevant post with its quotes and hyperlinks generally appears immediately - a record of your (and others') brain activity that particular morning. I also have a file of more than 100 pages for each year with raw text and thousands of hyperlinks which didn't make it to the blog.....an amazing archive of months of brain activity which, of course, needs a bit more time to access.....

But both he and the list of justifications underestimate the significance of the blog's facility to archive and find hyperlinks. Very little of what I download do I actually read - although it is there in carefully labelled folders. But one of the world's great frustrations for people like me is remembering you've downloaded a paper but not knowing which folder it's in...that's where the blog archives are priceless.....

In what sense is it different from other blogs?

Mine is a blog which eschews the never-ending news cycle or the partiality of disciplinary lens and disputes and focuses rather on "wicked issues" and on books. In that respect, it is unlike most blogs.

Readers of blogs expect them to be frequently updated and will soon stop visiting sites which remain static.....as mine did for a month toward the end of the year.....Although critics of the net say that hyperlinking tends to encourage partisan reading, I have a folder with the sites of some 200 other bloggers whom I [rarely access](#) - the main reason being the **predictability** of what they say.... For me, one of the nicest things you can say about someone is that "they are never boring" (a wife once paid me that compliment)

A brief overview of what to expect

It may seem odd to start this book of a year's blogging in October and run it for 15 months - but only for people who have not heard of "a baker's dozen" - the addition of an additional freebie to an expected 12 (none of the definitions I read of this phrase explain why on earth medieval bakers should be offering people 12 loaves!).

Readers are eased gradually into the swing of things by the initial musings on reading and writing. Several rather pessimistic pieces then follow before a more proactive spirit starts to prevail... then a series of reflections about the consultant's life.

January starts with conversations and confessions and marks the Charlie Hebdo murders with an overview of satire. February sees the start of a series of heavy posts about extractive societies which reach a crescendo in March when discussions of **cooperation** (or sometimes its lack), **capitalism** and **consumerism** loom large. As do musings about **democracy** and about lessons from **organisational reform** - whether in the "developed" or "developing" worlds (such loaded terms).

The book's more than 100 mini-essays also cover other topics -

- The use (and misuse) of **words** is clearly a bee I have in my bonnet....
- **Change, development, management, consultancy** and **social science** are favourite subjects - the last four generally with lots of derogatory remarks!
- As you would expect from a blog about the Balkans and Carpathians, events in **Bulgaria** and **Romania** get mentions.

- As does **Europe's continuing crisis** - although not as frequently as you might expect
 - It is, however, **books, paintings** (even sculptures), **encounters** and **good writing** which are celebrated most - as is a (rare) visit from one of my daughters.....
 - Musings about **cultural identities** show my increasing interest in that subject - and explain why travelogues are one of my favourite genres of reading
 - **Loss** has been a frequent theme - whether of lives, elections or livelihoods. Familiar (and unfamiliar) faces have departed the scene and screen.
 - I also muse about **intellectual trends** and **Memoirs** - with, it seems, increasing frequency
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