

Windshift Ltd

NEW ZEALAND - THE LAY OF THE LAND

Observations from 2017



JILL CALDWELL

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Jill Caldwell asserts her right to be acknowledged
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Introduction | What Is This?

Here are some of the newsletters I wrote between late 2016 and late 2017, for various audiences within my Windshift Network. Almost all are directly focused on New Zealand or New Zealanders, but some go beyond.

Things you should know before diving in - my observations are data-driven, but opinionated, though I'm not normally strident, unless riled. I have an underlying disappointment that we've reached the future we used to dream about back in the 20th Century, but life still sucks for too many people. So I like helping to fix that. And I feel personally affronted by Donald Trump.

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7 May 2017

TAGS: NZ, MIGRANTS, VALUES

NZ Values From A Migrant's Perspective

Who sees New Zealanders' values most starkly? Migrants do.

From the way we make eye contact or thank bus drivers to the things we expect of our leaders and citizens, our culture hits them in the face. They either adopt these values wholeheartedly, select only the ones they like or reject them and [hopefully, for their sake] leave.

It's all relative of course. Migrants come from places with different values - so they're looking at us through a different filter. Add to that, the fact that today's migrants have to score lots of points to stay in New Zealand, which means they are likely to be better educated, more highly skilled than most of us. And they've moved half way round the world to be here, so they clearly have a double dose of gumption.

What Attracts Them To New Zealand?

So why do they come here and what do they see?

Moving to New Zealand from the faster-moving parts of the world is a bit like an Aucklander moving to Hawkes Bay. It's lovely, but you're getting off the ladder. As one migrant said:

"If you want to work with world leading technology or make your first million by the age of 30 you stay in China. You don't come to New Zealand."

But there are advantages to being here: less time at work or commuting, more time with family. They're here because they don't like the rat race. Not anymore anyway. They want better for their children and they see New Zealand as safe, close to nature and a great place to bring up kids.

In other words - they value the same things about this place that we New Zealand born value. In fact they often value what we value so much, they really don't want too many migrants to come and dilute our core NZ values. [Ironic, much?].

Both the land and the people attract them. The land is clean, the air is fresh, the scenery is beautiful. But it's the

people that make it easy to live here. The people are so friendly.

You know why we're seen as friendly? Because we think we're friendly. Or rather, we think that we should be friendly. When you ask New Zealanders to describe themselves, friendliness is one of the most commonly mentioned characteristics.

Friendliness is strongly encouraged and supported across many cultures in this country. Māori manaakitanga, Pacific hospitality, Pakeha sociability: each provide their own social underpinning. I remember in a project years ago, being astonished to find how very widespread the belief was among parents of all cultures, that a key role of primary school was to teach children to get along with others.

Of course it doesn't always work like that for migrants - casual racism is also prevalent. But there seem to be enough smiles and hellos from strangers, enough random acts of kindness and neighbourly neighbours to tip the scales strongly in favour of a perception of hospitality.

What Don't They Like About Us?

Well prepare yourself - there's quite a common belief amongst migrants that NZ born people are a bit slack. Still

“too much ‘laid back’, not enough ‘can do’” as someone told me in a 2004 study. Near enough is good enough. Or as Peter Jackson once quipped [on a Lord of the Rings DVD actually] : *“typical Kiwi - a day late and a dollar short!”* He's from a migrant family.

They may not be actively seeking promotion and enrichment, but the migrants we've interviewed are very focused on doing a good job. It's a strong part of their identity. Ours? Not so much.

We might describe ourselves as hard-working, though we often don't. But we rarely, if ever describe ourselves as being results-focused or very good at what we do. Being funny, down-to-earth or honest are more likely to be top of mind with us - that's what our culture values.

What Difference Will Migrants Make?

The thing about these migrants and this more cosmopolitan New Zealand is that they will almost inevitably help us raise our expectations in areas like the workplace. These motivated people will rise in organisations and take on leadership positions where they can instil these values more and more. We will tend to like the results so a virtuous circle will result.

But they're not here to turn us into a Singapore or San Francisco. These migrants want to do a good job and then go home at a reasonable hour to spend quality family time. They value effectiveness and efficiency more than office politics or social climbing. They don't like skites any more than we do.

So welcome migrants and thank you for coming all this way. I can tell you're going to be a big asset to our society and our economy. Sorry about the cost of everything and the lack of public transport and great shopping - though we do have H&M and Zara now - so that's something.

21 May 2017

TAGS: NZ, FEMINISM, ZEITGEIST, LOTL, P, SAFETY

Who Says When Our Streets Are Safe?

One of the people in my Kapiti Coast focus group was not like the others. THEY all lived in houses they'd bought in nice middle class areas. HE lived in a rather dangerous little enclave of state houses on the other side of the highway.

I'd already heard a lot about P [methamphetamine] in my Porirua group. There they characterised it as an apparently unstoppable force that destroyed people - especially young men and women – and made life for everyone involved so much more dangerous.

Further up the coast, more P users with hair-trigger tempers and a desperate need for cash were making life difficult for the people they encountered – especially on the 'wrong' side of the highway. *"You can't even walk the streets at night any more!"* said the state house dweller, outraged.

Welcome to My World

The response was unexpected. *"Welcome to my world"* a woman said, *"I've never been able to safely walk the streets at night."* *"But surely you must have in the past?"* he responded. She consulted the other women in the group. *"No"* they said. *"We never have."*

[Actually the woman was me – so unprofessional to call him out like that. But this odd man out, though full of interesting information about his life, was very, very self-focused. He had been difficult to rein in all evening and that was the sound of me gently snapping.]

That is Not Equality

Isn't it interesting that the implicit standard for community safety in 2017 is not whether women can walk about safely at night, it's whether men can? That is not equality.

A friend and I went to a panel discussion called Women & Power on Friday evening – it was part of the Auckland Writers Festival. Morning Report's Susie Ferguson asked questions of three authors: our national treasure, Michelle A'Court, South African writer Mpho Tutu van Furth and Haitian American Roxane Gay, author of *Bad Feminist* and *Difficult Women*.

The dystopian threat of Trump's America kind of overshadowed everything, making the conversation a bit too much about the power of stupid old white men to screw up women's lives rather than the power of women to see off the challenge.

Power and Confidence

We have to be careful about that – if you think you're powerless, you are! The quest for equality demands confidence. *"If only I had the confidence of a mediocre white man"* one of the panellists said on Friday night – I don't remember which one – they were all very witty. But the deeper reality is that imposter syndrome comes with the territory. You do have to fake it till you make it - and sometimes even then.

Sensitivity to criticism is a potent way to get stuck in an unequal situation. One week Susie Ferguson had been told by two different male interviewees *"don't be cute"* and *"don't be clever"* – little reminders to know your place. Equalised women simply cannot afford to even notice such things. As Eleanor Roosevelt said: *"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."* We're not snowflakes. We need to remember that men don't necessarily treat each other well either.

Underlying these sensitivities is a kind of perfectionism that we all absorb to some degree – drawn from the unrealistic expectations that society has of women and the shame that comes from simply being messy and contradictory creatures. [Here's a TED talk by Roxane Gay in 2015 that explores that issue.](#)

“Too many women, particularly groundbreaking women and industry leaders, are afraid to be labeled as feminists. They're afraid to stand up and say, “Yes, I am a feminist,” for fear of what that label means, for fear of being unable to live up to unrealistic expectations.”

[Here's the transcript too.](#)

Don't leave with the impression that this large theatre was full of feminists, sitting around congratulating themselves on their righteousness or New Zealand's somewhat better track record on gender equality. During Friday night's discussion we were brought to the realisation that as a group of middle-class-mostly-white-women we are not only quite blind to the experience of poorer, browner, less educated women, we also often fail to see the unequal assumptions of our own culture.

Like who says when our streets are safe.

18 June 2017

TAGS: NZ, ZEITGEIST, NEGLECT, GENERATIONS.

As Good As It Gets?

[This is a rant so if you're having a lovely day [or want to] perhaps you should put this to one side until there's some kind of mind-deadening substance or someone to hug at hand.]

A project like The Lay of the Land can make you feel very dissatisfied with your fellow New Zealanders. Not because we're awful, it's just that we live in something close to paradise and we take it for granted. We do a lot more worrying about things than we do fixing them, or making better things happen. We put up with things we shouldn't put up with and we overlook things we shouldn't overlook.

My survey shows that no matter where you live in New Zealand around 20% of us live in cold damp houses. Why is that OK? How many more colds and illnesses do kids who live in cold damp houses get? How many more colds and illnesses do other kids come home with because 20% or more of their classmates live in cold damp houses? How

much more could a landlord earn by letting a warm dry house? Tenants would stay longer and take more care.

Heads in Sand

Meanwhile an international report on child poverty is attacked for weaknesses in its methodology, but the government can't tell us the real size of the problem because it doesn't want to collect the data. How many of those children will grow up to have no stake in society, or to take refuge in a powerful but destructive modern drug culture that is far closer to the leafy suburbs than we think?

Almost all of us are as vitally concerned about the state of our lakes and rivers as we are about our need to earn enough to live on. 75% of people in my survey said these two issues matter a lot to them. That's practically everybody! So why haven't we all got together to sort these issues out?

Someone I interviewed for the study was bemoaning the fact that we get so little input here from apparently far more enlightened Scandinavian thinkers about how to create high levels of wellbeing for everyone. Their ideas don't seem to stretch this far - they don't migrate here in any great numbers, perhaps they don't publish in English so much anyway?

I don't think we have any idea how it is that they've created such well-organised societies in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway or how we could emulate them. It can't be based on pure altruism. It's not like they are the warmest, most empathetic people in the world. It may even be as purely practical as my arguments about the effects of cold homes above – perhaps they're simply enlightened pragmatists. Or maybe it's national rivalry. I mean would you want to be the one Scandinavian country that failed to fix their vital social issues? How the others would scoff.

Lessons from Grenfell Tower

On our side of the fence, being part of the Anglo world is starting to look desperately dodgy. Did you happen to see the Twitter thread about the people sitting on the Tube moving ever closer to the Grenfell tower, feeling a collective sense of shame? I felt shame and I've never even lived there.

There is no more fitting definition of a clusterf**k than the Grenfell Tower fire. How toxic does your work situation have to be for an organisation to literally kill people through the act of refurbishing their building? How dehumanised do you have to be to turn your back on the genuine fears of people who just want to feel safe at home?

In the UK they can and will blame the Tories for years of austerity and its impacts on the poor, but the fact remains that that building was built in the 70's with only one central staircase, few, if any, fire safety measures and inadequate access for emergency vehicles. Failing to truly consider the needs of inhabitants was built in from the start.

"She'll be right" is a distinctively Antipodean expression, but the neglectful mindset that it springs from is symptomatic of all the societies we take our examples from, not just the UK. Canada has a clean green Prime Minister but it exports its oil through pipelines that consistently break. Australia keeps trying to pretend climate change doesn't exist so it can sell coal to emerging economies. New Zealand allows the dairy and mining sectors to pollute our water then lowers the standards for water quality, and the USA mutates daily into a winner-take-all kleptocracy.

It's not good enough and we need to change the script.

Is This It?

My 8 Tribes co-author Chris Brown and I were joking the other day that maybe the life we have enjoyed in NZ in our respective life-times is as good as it will ever be - that the world we captured in our last book [2007] was the golden age of democratic capitalism. How we laughed!

But what if it's true? The fact remains that our grandparents and great-grandparents fought wars to make the world safe for us – and the baby boomers were the generation that held the promise of that new better world. I remember feeling that as a student in the 70's – even as we lashed out against the constraints and prejudices of their simpler, more black and white times, destroying their careful foundations. Did the War Generation in their wildest dreams ever envisage this impotent mix of righteous indignation, smug selfishness and a hands-off attitude towards those less fortunate?

Probably not, but then again, they were the people who designed Grenfell Tower.

Rant ends! Take care. . .

30 July 2017

TAGS: TRIBES, ZEITGEIST, ENLIGHTENMENT

Did 8 Tribes Just Get Hacked?

I got an urgent email a couple of weeks ago from a friend I'll call Simon*:

"Hi Jill -

I wonder if you've been hacked. Judith and I both redid the 8tribes questionnaire and got very different answers to what we know from the past. In the past my results were about 50% Cuba St and 50% Raglan. Now - 100% Grey Lynn. Ditto Judith*, she used to be ~90% Raglan, now ~100% Grey Lynn. What's going on??"*

EEEEK I thought - but also- why would someone hack the tribes questionnaire? No one from the Grey Lynn tribe would want anyone who wasn't really Grey Lynn to think that they were. And people who aren't Grey Lynn tribe usually despise them , , , was this the ultimate form of trolling?

Actually [8 Tribes co-author] Chris Brown had had a very nasty letter about the tribes from someone a few months before. A letter, mind you. Posted. From someone with no online social identity at all. "*Why did I get it and not you?*" he complained as I teased him about his retro troll. I thought it was simply because a letter-writing troll needs an address and mine wouldn't be obvious. But perhaps it was part of an arcane personal vendetta, and this was the next step in her devious plan . . .

So I went and tried the questionnaire myself a few times.

Picked out the items we'd placed as markers [or 'traps'] for the Cuba St and Raglan tribes. The aim is to find sentiments that are innately pleasing to the tribe in question but either horrifying or completely irrelevant to everyone else. The last thing you want are either false positives or false negatives.

But it was all working fine - sure it's harder to see your full profile, since the changes I'd made in 2013. Against Chris's advice I'd ditched our original basic tribes graph in favour of a flower motif. I can't remember why - probably because it would look better on social media. We'll redo it all when the new book comes out. I agree now that a graph is better.

So the questionnaire was working fine, but Simon and Judith weren't finding enough of the Cuba and Raglan markers, in comparison to those of the Grey Lynn tribe. Perhaps the items themselves had become irrelevant?

Cuba Street has items like: *"Most people haven't heard the new music I'm into"* and *"I would die if I had to live in the provinces - the inner city is my heartland"*, which are fairly timeless indicators of their tribal culture, although with Spotify, maybe everyone is part of the long tail. And the gentrification of the inner city means it is getting harder to find the quirky low-cost living and working spaces Cuba Street needs.

Raglan choices include: *"I don't care about "getting ahead", I just need to be free"* and *"the older I get, the less I fit into the mainstream"*, which again, seem pretty timeless. Life got hard for many Raglan people after the global financial crisis - they tend to be very 'feast or famine' people, relying on their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, rather than any prudent financial strategy. But since they are almost constitutionally unable to follow mainstream precepts for any length of time, I had no doubt that these markers would still apply.

So what was going on? Had Simon* and Judith* been kidding themselves about their Cuba and/or Raglan status? Or had they simply moved on? Perhaps they'd just been in denial about their Grey Lynn tribe membership - after all they were both researchers - a core Grey Lynn profession. Here's a summary of all the tribes in case the nuances escape you.

I thought about my own situation and how I always say I'm a Balclutha-Raglan blend, to which people almost always reply: "*Oh I thought you would be Grey Lynn!*" - presumably because of my work and penchant for reading about society - and I do wear glasses and start sentences with "*I think it's interesting. . .*". But when I hear that I immediately think: "rule follower. . . over-thinker. . . politically correct . . . smug compassion . . . THAT'S NOT ME!". [Sorry Grey Lynn, but every tribe has its dark side.]

So before I responded to Simon* I thought I should try an experiment and complete the tribes questionnaire myself, focusing not on the way I **wanted** to see myself, but by deeply considering which of the statements did truly resonate with me. And guess what? I belong to the Grey Lynn tribe. Big surprise to me only, probably. But I think it's interesting to consider why some of the Grey Lynn tribe statements resonated with me.

Consider these two statements: "*We must change the way we live our individual lives, so we can change the world*", and "*It's increasingly clear that, as a society, we need to give up our hedonist lifestyles and focus on what really matters*". These are core Grey Lynn tribe statements, but they were probably a lot more polarising in 2006 when we made the questionnaire than they are now.

You see, Dear Reader, the plain fact is - the Grey Lynn tribe's analysis was right. 2006 was the top of the economic boom that swept New Zealand in the early years of the 21st Century. We felt happy and prosperous and hedonistic as anything. And then - oops! The mood of New Zealanders has never even looked like going back to the levels of those heady days. Climate change, authoritarianism, the growing gap between the winners and the losers, the failure of incomes to keep up with the rising cost of housing and food . . . the Grey Lynn tribe knew it would all end badly. . .

I wrote back to Simon*

Hmm - no hacking - though the question list was amended slightly in 2013 after further research - and the algorithm was tweaked a little - no more graphs showing your % of each. But I can still make it deliver me Cuba/Raglan . . . But it could also

be the case that you've changed Simon" - from funky rebel voice to mainstream authority? - indie scientist to university guy? - "it's complicated" to happily married? - inner city denizen to suburban commuter? :) I'm teasing - Cuba/Raglan items are still there if you look for them you should find four of each, but perhaps Grey Lynn's core values were on the right side of history and they've drawn you in. I always tell people it's hard to remain in Cuba St after the age of 29. . . .

And Jude - sorry - you were always quite Grey Lynn - I personally am also in denial about my membership of that tribe - preferring to think of myself as Raglan-Balclutha - but everyone else thinks I'm pretty deeply Grey Lynn.[I just went and very honestly did the questionnaire again and I got Grey Lynn too].

They're creatures of the Enlightenment I suppose - and events of the last two years show that we can't take that for granted. Whereas the zeitgeist of 2003-6 when we developed the tribes was all about Consumption and Raglan tribe rejected all that.

The tribes are about to get an update and I'm in the midst of considering all these themes - so thanks heaps for your email! Would you mind if I used its subject as part of my next newsletter - anonymous of course.

Have a very Raglan weekend anyway!"

*Names changed to preserve anonymity.

24 September 2017

TAGS: LIBERALISM, DEMOCRACY, MERITOCRACY

A Thin & Precarious Crust

I'm really enjoying [The Retreat of Western Liberalism](#) [if you haven't come across it already, it's a book by journalist Edward Luce]. He works for the Financial Times, and is such a good writer I can even forgive him for mentioning his PPE from Oxford on the third page [you never die wondering whether someone has been to Harvard or Oxford do you?].

I like reading this book because our opinions are quite similar, but he has much better evidence. Of course that is the perfect example of confirmation bias in action, but it's not like we have the same start-point. My opinions are largely derived from understanding people, values and change while his come from extreme exposure to global business elites. So I reckon we might be onto something.

What I particularly like is that he seems aware of most of his [and my] personal biases. For example, he critiques 'smug' meritocracies as leading to the growing phenomenon of 'hereditary meritocracy', wherein those who initially succeed by merit, pass their advantages onto their

offspring. Like me he also believes that, however great the impact of the current technological revolution has been, it has as yet had much less positive impact on our quality of life than the scientific and technological revolution of the late 19th and early 20th century that gave us:

“Commercial electricity, the internal combustion engine, penicillin, synthetics, refrigeration and the telephone – to name just a few of the new wonders [that] turned life inside out”

Luce has worked in different parts of the world and it shows. He is much more clear-headed in his view of global economies than most of the Westerners who write these kind of books are — paying due deference to China for the rapid rise in its global economic influence, for example. Lest we forget: *“in terms of purchasing power parity – measured by what you can buy in the local currency – China’s economy surpassed the US in 2014.”*

He points out later that this rapid rise is incredibly dangerous: *‘Historians call it the Thucydides trap, after the Greek historian who chronicled Sparta’s response to the rise of Athens. How does the established power react to the rise of a potential challenger? . . . A 2012 Harvard study examining fifteen such instances since 1500 found that in eleven cases the trap had culminated in war.’*

So Who's Your Daddy Now?

The best thing about this book is that it helps you to think big things through and insert your own prior knowledge into the mix. I've only just read the book so this is just off the top of my head, but overall Luce seems to identify three key threats to liberal democracy:

- The decoupling of the link between social democracy and national wealth. Now that countries like China have shown you can have wealth without very much political freedom, more and more citizens of democracies, faced with a choice of being rich or being free [or equal], seem to be choosing to follow the money.
- The growing division between the haves and the have nots in democracies – and the fear and alienation that grows as a result. Luce not only documents steeply rising costs of housing and education [and of health care in the USA], he also points out the enormous contempt that wealthy people have for the poor and alerts us to the new term 'oikophobia'.
- The mess that the USA has made of its role as post-Cold War superpower – not just militarily [for example in the destruction of Iraq] – but also economically. Luce reflects on the fact that the GFC was not in fact a global phenomenon – China and other parts of Asia continued to grow and build their economic ties with the rest of the world.

Are We Water-Spiders Too?

The part of the book that resonated most strongly with me concerned a paper that John Maynard Keynes gave in Bloomsbury in 1938, reflecting on life before the First World War. This life provided, *'at a low cost and with the least trouble, conveniences, comforts, and amenities beyond the compass of the richest and most powerful monarchs of other ages'*.

Luce writes: *'Looking back, Keynes saw himself and his generation as "water-spiders, gracefully skimming, as light and reasonable as air, the surface of the stream without any contact at all with the eddies and currents underneath'*.

Keynes told the assembled listeners in Bloomsbury:

'We were not aware that civilization was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and the will of a very few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skilfully put across and guilefully preserved'.

Earlier in the book, referring to whistle-blowers from the Nixon era, Luce had written: *"There is no way of knowing how many Felts, Throwers and Walterses are lurking in Trump's Washington. But their stories remind us that it is character, rather than laws, which upholds a system."*

We have just witnessed another election in New Zealand, one of the staunchest Western democracies, where neither compassion for the poor nor fear of the social effects of inequality seem to have been sufficient to sway enough people amongst the 'haves' to vote against their class interests.

Luce ends his book conventionally enough with THAT quote by Benjamin Franklin: *'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance'*. His last words urge us [the liberal elites] to be very aware of the path to tyranny: *"Someone once said that the difference between erotica and pornography is the lighting. There is an equally hazy line between illiberal democracy and autocracy. We will know the difference when we see it."*

That's a bit glib from a person who can also envisage a scenario where Trump leads the world to the brink of a cataclysmic war with China, only to be reined in by Putin. But failure to stick the landing should not stop you from admiring Luce's deep insights. Perhaps I should send a copy to Winston Peters as he ponders which of the two main political parties should form the next government with him.

30 October 2016

TAGS: INSIGHT WORLD, NORMALISATION, TRUMP, CONFUSION

HyperNormalisation | Question The Source

At almost three hours long Adam Curtis's latest documentary HyperNormalisation is surprisingly riveting. It debuted on BBC iPlayer on 16 October, but you can find it on YouTube and elsewhere.

Curtis's overall theme is that we're living in a weird, fake over-simplified world and have given up our collective power to banks, social media and international political technologists from Nixon's man Henry Kissinger to President Putin's Vladislav Surkov, who specialises in 'destabilising' our perceptions. Both of these men and, presumably, many shadowy figures in between them, have developed extremely sophisticated ways to blur our view of reality and keep the populace in a state of confusion.

The documentary begins in the 1970's with two events: the first, the bankruptcy of New York City, the other in Syria, where the elder President Assad [father of the current President], a man with a plan to unify the Arab world, is

being shafted by Henry Kissinger. Curtis then pulls these threads through to 2016, digressing along the way to include Patti Smith, Black Rock, the Arab Spring, Jane Fonda, Russian sci-fi literature, lonely girl 15, the Yakuza, and, it almost goes without saying, William Gibson.

Donald Trump shows up in the documentary as a kind of Forrest Gump figure, participating in key moments of history. Colonel Muamar Gaddafi does too. He was apparently was a fake villain, created to give us the impression we were winning the war on terror when we weren't. Very 1984, the way they rehabilitated him, only to abandon him in the Arab Spring.

Curtis believes that banks and now also the large social media organisations have found it useful to encourage a docile, self-focused, somewhat confused populace that doesn't rock the boat. We are an integral part of the system and everything depends on keeping us pliable and too busy to look up. It's kind of The Matrix plot.

He seems to think that if we did stop and look we would discover how fake and weird the world is. But although watching this and some of his other documentaries has helped me to wise up, I haven't really freed myself. Like an

ant trapped in honey - I suppose I could try to escape, but it is quite nice here.

The Importance of Questioning the Source

After watching HyperNormalisation my first impulse was. . . . to question the source.

I responded to this comment in the Guardian:

"Above all I was left with the determination that no matter what I read or watch, I need to apply critical analysis: Who is telling me this? Why are they telling me this and not something else? What do they gain (or what does someone else lose) by telling me this? What is their publishing/broadcasting history? What do others think about what they have written/broadcast in the past? etc. etc.
" [MizzLizProbert October 18, 3:12]

I wondered: 'Who is this guy Adam Curtis, who speaks so authoritatively, even dogmatically, about what has shaped the world we live in and what we, the population, were thinking in the 80's and 90's? How true are the things he reveals? What do other people think of this?'

So first stop Wikipedia, where I learn that he's basically the Michael Moore of Britain - with the same commitment to film-making and understanding the underlying causes as

Moore, but profound differences in personality as you'd expect of a Brit. I realised I'd watched one of his other documentaries, Bitter Lake - without realising he was a 'name'. Actually I only watched a few minutes before thinking yeah yeah, I know this already.

Then onward to the Guardian to read the review. Not so much for the review itself - since Jeremy Corbyn came along I'm a bit wary of the paper's opinions. But the people who comment are some of the smartest thinkers in the English-speaking world, and many have perspectives that either support or politely refute my own opinions. This is my echo chamber - where ashenfacedsupremo [not his/her real name], in a long and brilliant post that was really a review, said of HyperNormalisation:

"You may not believe the pattern the joined-up lines make but there is no denying they are fascinating dots. All perfect for our modern take on hyperlinked reality, ricocheting from one random search result to another. . . .Everything from UFOs to Prozac are coaxed to fit an overarching, sometimes over-reaching, theory. Is it all a conspiracy, or given the political chaos, corruption and incompetence it details - is it best explained by the cock-up theory of history - what seems like conspiracy is just cock-uppery? . . . Whether you drink or even drain the Curtis Kool-Aid doesn't matter. I always think he

helps on some touchy-feely profound sub-conscious level answer that relentless question: How did we get in this mess?. . .And through his power of nightmares, in our fitful dreams, some fragment of memory falls into place".
[ashenfacedsupremo, 18 Oct 10:09]

I felt those fragments fall into place. Personally I don't think we're in any worse mess than the world has ever been in, I think it's just different now. But I can understand that my counterparts in the UK and the US might think it worse. I think we're definitely more aware of the mess and that the older you are, the harder it is to believe that anyone can navigate their way through it. Curtis is 61.

But I'm also quite pessimistic that any of it can be solved by rational thought and discussion, especially when we are faced with Surkovian levels of crazy. All we can do is question the source.

26 November 2017

TAGS: PHILOSOPHY, FUTURISM, PERSPECTIVES

Thinking Long And Hard

I hope when I'm 78 I sound a lot like Stewart Brand. He was the founder of the Whole Earth Catalogue [1968-1973], an iconic magazine for hippies whose central imagery was drawn from the first images of Earth seen from Space. He is now pivotally involved in a foundation whose purpose will far outlast him, the Long Now foundation, and is working with his wife's foundation, Revive and Restore, to bring back the woolly mammoth and other large mammals in order to restore the ecology of the arctic.

Not that I want to revive lost species [though I believe him when he says that anyone who spends a lot of time around elephants grows to love them].



But I like the idea of working on something that will outlast you. I used to have a poster that said "*A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they*

shall never sit in." It's a Greek proverb apparently.

Ancient Greeks planted a lot of seeds. I recall the first time I read anything Democritus had written, it sounded so contemporary for something that was 2500 years old. Here are some random quotes from him that prove my point:

- Happiness resides not in possessions, and not in gold, happiness dwells in the soul.
- Nothing exists except atoms and empty space; everything else is opinion.
- Everything existing in the universe is the fruit of chance and necessity.
- If you suffer injustice, console yourself; the true unhappiness is in doing it.
- Everywhere man blames nature and fate yet his fate is mostly but the echo of his character and passion, his mistakes and his weaknesses."

I heard Stewart Brand yesterday on a podcast with Tim Ferriss and I found him so interesting that I bought a little book he's written that summarises much of the content of the Long Now foundation seminars. Its website says "*The Long Now Foundation was established in 01996* to foster long-term thinking and responsibility in the framework of the next 10,000 years.*"

Judging by the home page they've become a little side-tracked from fostering thinking to actually building a 10,000

year old clock inside a mountain in west Texas, but hey, they're also saving languages. The summaries refer to what Brand calls hour-long TED talks, held in San Francisco, designed to "help nudge civilisation toward our goal of making long-term thinking automatic and common instead of difficult and rare." They are held at a bar called The Interval, owned by the Foundation.

So yes – there's some serious grandiosity and monument building involved. And sure, it's pretty much all Western thought – American Western thought – actually predominantly Bay Area Western thought – but at least it's thought and since San Francisco has been the centre of world-shaping technology, they do have some credibility.

I used to belong to the World Future Society – and actually went to a conference they held in San Francisco, in 1998 as I recall. It was cool – I met the woman who coined the term 'couch potato' and learned a framework for thinking about change and disruption [in one of the dullest seminars ever] that has served me well ever since. But I was one of the youngest people there and I was 40-something. I assumed the young people were out there making the future rather than sitting around talking about it.

Most of the attendees were white, middle-aged or elderly academic Americans, many of whom claimed to have met the father of futurism, Alvin Toffler. They probably also knew Stewart Brand. I remember having a conversation with one of them about hip-hop and he said sadly – *“we’re putting out our culture to the world but it’s the wrong one.”* And this feels a bit like that. I mean isn’t it Chinese and Japanese cultures that are renowned for long thinking? I read a quote recently: *“if you are one in a million in China you’re one of 1,300 people”*.

They do have Francis Fukuyama in the line-up over at the Long Now, and a Chinese-born American woman called Ping Fu on the Board of Directors, but really I’m sure there are one or two [thousand] other Asian thinkers they could learn from.

The Ancient Greeks were also in a bubble, so maybe it’s not so much about who or where but about the quality, relevance and longevity of thought. And Brand is the real deal, a polymath mind still going strong, still doing cross-fit every week, though his body looks wrecked, still living his Whole Earth Catalogue mantra – *“stay young, stay foolish”*. But limited by his era. He has been at an inflection point in social and technological development, but his conceptual frameworks were still formed in California in the seventies.

Personally I think they would have been wiser to draw on the whole of human thought for their 10,000 year quest. Listening to Stewart Brand makes me want to read more by the guy who said: *"the wise man belongs to all countries, for the home of a great soul is the whole world"*. That was Democritus.

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TAGS: GENDER, SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Whose Year Was it Really?

2017 was not the year men shone. From Trump to Duterte, Erdogan to Kim Jong Un, Weinstein to Lauer, Gallagher to Brash, there have been way too many stupid moments involving men. Especially old men, but definitely, powerful men.

Zuckerberg, Page/Brin and Dorsey [@jack] also dropped the ball, allowing their social networks and/or algorithms to be used to sway elections and to propagate lies and hatred. Not the smartest kids in the room after all.

In fact someone on Twitter the other day suggested that maybe the Rapture had happened and only David Bowie and Prince made the cut.

As a woman, I've always kind of believed what Phoebe said to Rachel in an episode of Friends once: that in gender terms, "*we're the best ones*". Not that I believe women are powerless little creatures who only do good – on the

contrary, it's completely arguable that our gender's quest for better homes, greater safety, and economic equality has contributed, at a species level, to phenomena like gentrification, consumer debt and climate change, and locally, to housing that only families with two earners on high incomes can afford to buy.

Because you know – happy wife, happy life.

A few years ago many of my women friends on Facebook – and in real life – became concerned that young Millennial women were taking feminist gains for granted – translating all the 'firsts' of our generation into the right to go out clubbing with hardly anything on.

That was when we still thought we'd fixed everything. But it becomes increasingly apparent that ours was an incomplete social revolution – just as the US Civil War and their Civil Rights Act didn't end black people's oppression. And apparently even a little Māori on Morning Report still goes too far for some in New Zealand.

Our feminist revolution clearly didn't stop the sexual harassment or destroy the underlying perception of women as objects of gratification for successful men. We tolerated that in return for the right to earn money and buy houses of

our own. Where possible we chose mates and male friends who were more 'evolved' and reserved our anger for those men who did actual physical or economic damage to women, or each other.

From the Women's March[es] in January to the overnight firing of NBC's Matt Lauer this week, 2017 has been a year of rebalancing. The resistance in the US has been overwhelmingly female; serial [and serious] sexual harassment has become an ender of careers and a destroyer of reputations.

Matt Lauer wrote in his 'apology' "*Repairing the damage will take a lot of time and soul searching and I'm committed to beginning that effort. It is now my full time job,*" . . . "*The last two days have forced me to take a very hard look at my own troubling flaws. It's been humbling. I am blessed to be surrounded by the people I love. I thank them for their patience and grace*".

I tweeted "Look – he thinks he's coming back from this."

Ego Defence Mechanisms

What he doesn't realise is that he and Harvey Weinstein and any other high profile man accused of this kind of sexual entitlement are acting as proxies for Donald Trump.

The Harasser-in-Chief has spawned many very Freudian ego defence mechanisms amongst the populace, including displacement – defined as *"the redirection of an impulse (usually aggression) onto a powerless substitute target"*. Lauer isn't powerless, but he's more accessible and more vulnerable to reputational damage. [So therefore also incredibly self-sabotaging.]

Kim Hill's evisceration of Donald Brash for his outdated notions of race is another example of this kind of displacement. I didn't listen to it for the same reason I wouldn't watch the All Blacks play Uzbekistan at rugby – but I understand it didn't go well for Don.

While we're on the subject of ego defence mechanisms, Trump and his cronies tend to favour projection - *"This involves individuals attributing their own thoughts, feeling, and motives to another person"*. [Exhibit A: Crooked Hillary. Exhibit B: Fake News.]

So my theory of change is that, faced with the reality of Trump, liberal and independent women, and their male friends and allies, have embarked on a mission to destroy any example of the ugliness unleashed by him and his fellow Republican swamp dwellers. I would lay odds on the fact that at some point there will be a very vengeful and

furious 'righting of wrongs' that will probably tarnish all our reputations.

There's a good chance that 'we' will either go too far or not far enough. But I'd like to think that when all's said and done we will have a world where kindness, self-awareness and fellow feeling carry far greater weight than they seem to have in 2017. That might be too much to hope for but, like the outing of the social predators in our midst, it is something we can each actually try to do.

Appendix

About The Author



I'm Jill Caldwell. I formed my company Windshift in 2000, after 11 years in the market research industry. I help people in businesses and organisations to understand the world they are operating in and the people they deal with.

There are three parts to Windshift, one of which is Windshift Observations. This involves the generation of insights through research projects and analysis. The research projects are subscription-based and I also write 'think pieces' or deliver presentations on specific topics for clients.

I co-wrote 8 Tribes: the hidden classes of New Zealand and I ran a major study of New Zealanders' values, called The Lay of the Land in 2017, which is covered in the first section of this collection. To see what I'm up to this year, please click here.

I formed the Windshift Network to keep people up to date with what I'm thinking and doing. Join the network now and get my monthly Windshift Observations newsletter. That's the source of many of the observations in this book.

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Thinking Long & Hard

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