The Rise and Rise of Oz Lit

The irresistible rise of the Aussie novel has been a feature of the 80s. Jim Endersby spoke to three prominent members of the Australian literary community - critic, Helen Daniel; publisher, Louise Adler; and author, Peter Carey - to get their views of where the Australian novel has come in the 80s and where its likely to go in the 'nineties.

The contemporary Australian novel was one of the things that brought me to Australia. Reading Carey, Hasluck, Jolley, Grenville and others gave me an image of Australia; a huge dangerous place with white people in cities clinging to its edges, while black people roamed the dangerous, empty centre. The books gave me a desire to see the country for myself.

I doubt that I'm the only one. The Australian novel has achieved an enormous international prominence in the last ten years; Peter Carey's novel Oscar and Lucinda, winning Britain's prestigious Booker prize, is only the most recent example.

Louise Adler, publisher of Heinemann's Australian list, thinks that "part of the heightened sense of being Australian, as a worthwhile thing, has been a rise in the Australian novel, and the Australian publishing scene has blossomed over the last twenty years".

Helen Daniel, critic and editor of the recent books Expressway and The Good Reading Guide (see p64), agrees that the rise of the Australian novel has been closely linked to a rise in the notion of Australianness. "In the work of Peter Carey, for example, or Nicholas Hasluck, they are essentially Australian novels. And what is of great interest is the way the Australian content is being explored in ways that are international. But because of the Australian content they have a directness and an urgency for Australian readers."

Many readers notice the affinity between Australian and, for example, Latin American novelists. Much Australian work doesn't seem out of place alongside that of 'magic realists' like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, or Isabel Allende. That, according to Daniel, is no coincidence. "I think all over the world there are writers searching for new forms that can accommodate the kinds of upheavals all of us find towards the end of not only the 20th Century but of this millenium. But for people to be searching out those sorts of new modes and using Australian material is of particular urgency for Australian readers."

This growth in Australian nationalism has a darker side too, according to Adler. "The Australian in the swimming pool at the Olympics, with his hand in a sort of shove up into the sky, fist clenched. It looks like a moment of fascism - 'I've done it' - and I think those kinds of images are now seen in some kinds of Australian writing. So that when we see Carey win the Booker we say 'bugger you, we did it, didn't we? we're as good as you are'."

Carey certainly finds reactions to his London triumph are complex. "After the Booker people were asking me all these things to do with Oscar and Lucinda and Australia, and how I felt about being Australian. And I knew, on the one hand, that Australians would be very pleased and proud, but on the other hand I had to say things that I couldn't help saying, which were in fact intensely critical of Australia. When I got back I saw someone I know, who said something like 'did you have to go all that way to shit on your country?'".

Carey's ambivalence towards Australia is uncharacteristic of the prevailing nationalistic mood, which reached a peak during 1988's Bicentennial celebrations. It seems to fit more with the 'cultural cringe' era of the 50s and 60s. "I left Australia in 1968. I felt alien here; the Vietnam War was on, lots of my younger friends were being drafted, or finding ways to avoid the draft. If you had long hair, you would feel continually threatened just because of how you looked.

"We all of us had rather low opinions of ourselves, and you still find that we have in many respects - we as a culture. I think you can look at that 'making a bee-line for London' in two ways. One as a sign of inferiority - that you have to go where the real culture is. But the other thing, which is easy to forget, is that in many ways Australia was a bloody terrible place to be. To arrive in London, in 1968, was such a good feeling. One felt loose and light, and home, and never wanted to leave."

The relationship with Britain continues to mark Australian literature, not just in its content and style but the practical problems of publishing Australian books. Adler still finds her position, as the Australian publisher of a British-based multinational like Heinemann, ambiguous.
"I don't think it's possible any longer to argue that people like me are holding positions that are likely to go at any moment; because British companies are not really interested in Australian publishing at all, nor in Australian writing.

"They're simply interested in the profit margin and if the profit margin is bumped up by a publicity stunt - like an Australian list - then they'll do that. The idea of being a branch office of an English publishing company is a self-aggrandising notion of local, and often provincial, publishers. It's now absolutely essential to be seen to have an Australian identity as a publishing company."

Yet it's still more common for a company like Heinemann to take titles from their British parent company, than for the parent to take theirs. A sign perhaps that Australian writers still have a lower status in British eyes? "Yes. And everyone would argue that's the proof of the pudding and we're still in this colonial relationship.

"I'd argue that what we're publishing, most of the time in Australia, is actually not interesting to anyone other than Australians. You can either call it the birth of an Australian cultural identity and a writing culture that's authentic to Australia, or you can say its parochial - it can be either.

"I don't see any reason why the consumer in England is going to be interested in short stories by a person who lives in Melbourne, about Melbourne life. Why on earth should they be? I'm not particularly interested in a book from Golder's Green unless the book says something to me beyond that."

Daniel, too, has a sense that the link with Britain is diminishing in its importance. But her response is more to do with Australian literature's content, than with the problems of publishers. "In the last decade there is an increasing sense of an Australian consciousness that is without any hint of cultural cringe, and it is not any longer as a kind of offshoot of the European consciousness."

New ways of exploring Australia's, and that of Australian literature's, place in the world seems to be becoming more important for Australian writers. According to Daniel, a novel like Oscar and Lucinda, or Rodney Hall's Captivity Captive, or those of the new, younger writers, is re-exploring the 19th Century. It's a very interesting development in Australian writing, that it is addressing itself to the past in order, I think, to turn into addressing the future.

"The kind of things we can see in Oscar and Lucinda, aren't confined to Carey. There is a range of writers who are trying to explore where we have been and the kinds of collective concerns that we all have - partly in order to identify the nature of the future but also there is a kind of shift of geography going on in fiction writing.

"Christopher Koch (author of The Year of Living Dangerously and The Doubleman) once talked about 'the strain of the lost hemisphere' in our writing, the harking back to European mythic frameworks for our thinking and our writing.

"There is a shift away from the northern hemisphere now and a sense of moving into a new geographical area. On one level this emerges in a number of novels that are set in the Asian and Pacific area, and there's also a lot of interest in South American writing. South America too has this sense of being like 'another Europe', with strong ties back to the northern hemisphere but an increasing quest for an identity within one's own geographical zone.

"It is partly a matter of place, a sense of place and space. Out of that many Australian writers are opening-up new ways of looking at the familiar world. Of course if you read an American, South American or an English novel there are often all sorts of resonances and affinities that you recognise, but there isn't that..."
primal sense of space that has the capacity to reach an Australian reader."

Carey agrees that the historical theme of Australia's place is something he's addressing. *Oscar and Lucinda*, for example, starts in 19th Century England and then follows Oscar to Australia. Carey's comment on why he tackled the historical theme is interesting. "You have to, if you're going to deal with the country at all. It wasn't something I sought out because it was a theme that interested me, but suddenly I had this idea to do with glass and this church, which involved being written at a certain period. And the minute you start to think about the period then you've really got to look at that connection.

"I felt particularly with *Illywhacker*, but also with *Oscar and Lucinda*, that the culture's so incredibly thin that the country hasn't yet been invented. I grew up, in a literary sense, writing these short stories - *The Fat Man in History* and *War Crimes* - and I did want to invent fictional worlds, but I always wanted to write about Australia in the same way that I'd written about those more imaginary societies. And in a way, with Australia being what it is, you can do it here. It would be much more difficult to think of doing in the UK."

The optimism of Australia, the 'lucky country' image, is reflected in the literature boom, says Carey. "Going to the Adelaide Festival a couple of years ago I spent a lot of time with friends from out of the country. I tended to be a bit jaded but they were really impressed - by the vitality, enthusiasm, energy, and optimism; and the number of people who are writing. Yet I always feel compelled to argue against that sense of Australia, the one that I've just put forward, because it's what people see when they arrive. Looked at that way it looks like a country that could do anything.

"Yet when you look at all the other evidence around you, our balance of payments for instance, or manufacturing industry or our record in foreign affairs, you see what's hidden under this great excitement and enthusiasm and optimism; a country with a very fragile economy, that's sold out its independence to other powers - historically it's been keen to act like a child to parents. I always feel so mean even mentioning this with visitors who're excited about it. They're coming from Europe and the problems of Europe, we seem like these happy dancing fools with nothing to worry about."

The complexities of Australia's relationship with the USA seem in some ways to have displaced those of the relationship with Britain. They're certainly a theme in Carey's work. In his first novel *Bliss*, for example, several of the characters are itching to get away to New York. "I'm with them," admits Carey, "I'm off to New York to teach in January, I love New York."

But Australia's relationship with the US is a more complex matter, he says. "That's a different thing, that's talking about politics and governments, what I respond to in New York is the great, raw, ugly, cruel machine - it's a very exciting place."

In his short story 'American Dreams' (from the collection *The Fat Man in History*), for example, the kids in a small Australian country town are really in love with America. Yet when American tourists arrive, the town's inhabitants become parodies of themselves as they try to entertain the Americans and get their dollars.

"But the story originally had a last paragraph," says Carey, "which my editor at the time suggested I cut off because the story had too many endings. At the moment the story ends with one of them posing for the tourists, saying 'I feel I've let them down by growing older and sadder'. The paragraph that was cut out said 'but we're saving the dollars they're giving us and we're going to America'.

"I think my editor was right about the story but I still mourn the more complicated truth."

Carey says he has no real feeling of the direction in which Australian fiction in general is going. He's busy working on a new novel and two movies at present. "I'm a self-centred writer," he says, apologetically, "basically obsessed with my own work and perhaps not in a very good position to give any sort of overview."

Adler, however, feels confident that the boom in Australian publishing will continue with Australian publishers continuing to develop their independence and continuing to win a wider acceptance in the world. It's an optimism Daniel shares, "In terms of the writing I find that incontestable. There can only be a continuing surge because of the number of younger writers as well as the established writers."

But her confidence is tempered by a few doubts about her fellow critics, "I think the terms of debate, dialogue and discussion are still very limited. The fiction is ahead of us. I hope that in the nineties there'll be much more adventure and risk-taking. I think it's very important that there be all sorts of exploration of the tensions and the differences, the diversity, the contradictions within our writing. And I hope there'll be more and more critical books and more and more critical debate about what is happening because at the moment I don't think we're keeping up with what our writers have been doing for nearly twenty years."

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Getting the Edge on Dolly

Fantasy is still the major attraction of teen magazines. May Lam looks at what's changed over the past two decades.

I grew up with Dolly. The first issue came out in November 1970 when I was in Year Eight. It was a heady time. My pocket money was going up and up. The Whitlam government was about to be elected, 'things' were happening out there in universities and city streets 25 miles east of where we lived in a semi-suburban, semi-rural town optimistically expected, like everything else, to boom. (In 1987-88 Dolly's circulation was 228,000. It enjoys the highest readership saturation for a particular age group of any women's magazine: 58.6% of 14-17 year old girls read the magazine.)

Leafing through old issues I am incredulous to discover that I remember, almost word for word, an article on how to kiss boys. And did I really read Are You the Dolly Girl He Really Wants?, So How Do You Get To Him?, How to Write a Love Letter, and Keep Every Bit of You For Him?

For me, then, the tone of the magazine was frank, friendly and informative. I do not wish to succumb to the all-too easy benefit of hindsight, forgetting conveniently that then (as now in other ways) we were anxious to learn the codes of behaviour and style that would enable us to move with some assurance in the big, mean world.

To that end, Dolly discussed precisely the kinds of things I wanted to know ('Virginity - does it matter to you?'), and it could be argued that its pages were not so much indoctrination into a constraining model of adolescent femininity as a means of shrewdly negotiating that model. Articles on how to get boys to like you, for example, did not leave much to fate or chance, but assumed literally a working girl's approach to fashion and seduction. Of course I would not argue that Dolly did not operate as a key signifier of successful femininity. But it is also true that feminist discourse in the 'seventies had its own interests in identifying such mass media role models as passive and powerless.

Perhaps part of the reason we shook our heads in sorrow over the hegemony of those images is attributable to our bitterness at never having achieved the heady fun/beauty/fashion idea of magazine feminism. It is easier for me critically to disembowel media images of women in popular magazines than painfully to come to terms with the fact that I will never fulfil my ideal self, whatever the model for that may be.

In any case, by the mid-eighties, feminist scholars of popular culture had come around to attempting to understand, from the point of view of 'readers' (both 'us' and yet 'not us'), the appeal of reading feminine pulp such as the paperback romance and women's magazines. This kind of approach suffers from the danger of a tendency, identified by British critic Judith Williamson, towards "leftwing academics ... picking out strands of 'subversion' in every piece of pop culture from Street Style to Soap Opera".

This is a timely caution. If, broadly speaking, in the 'seventies we were preoccupied with cataloguing the sexisms perpetrated by a magazine such as Dolly, in the 'eighties we run the risk, already hinted at here, of reading the mass media to detect negotiation, appropriation, even subversion of its codes of femininity. This is consistent with the need to argue that the oppressed constituency is implicated in the making of those codes and therefore empowered to resist or change them.

Yet, while we have, for a decade, been debating the theoretical means of making sense of Dolly, and its absurdly anachronistic title persists, the very object of our anxieties has arguably changed. A survey of the magazine for 1989 suggests that Dolly has begun to reflect, even if palely, some of the issues feminists have put onto the agenda: 'Jobs that Don't Pay'; 'Child Abuse: What Can You Do?'; 'Did He Rape You?'; 'Is this Our Future? A Look at Australia's Environment Hot Spots'; 'It's OK to Be Gay'. And if Dolly still runs the 'how to talk to guys' genre of story and gives a fashion twist to its story on political protest movements ('How to Change the World - a Protester's Guide to Radical Chic') the magazine clearly understands that times have changed.

Looking at a new magazine like The Edge provides one way out of the bother of how to comment on a magazine like Dolly while retaining a sort of wry awareness of fashions in interpretive strategies that exist at any historical period. The Edge was first published in March 1989 and was intended, in the description of assistant editor Clinton Walker, to fill a potentially large gap in the male market that the success of Dolly magazine implied.

This kind of 'gap marketing' strategy did not occur to me when Dolly made its debut, but when The Edge hit the streets, I was media-literate enough to roll my eyes heavenwards at the inevitability of a magazine that proclaimed itself as "lifestyle for young men - sport, humour, music, current issues". This description is offered in Margaret Gee's Media Guide, and we can only speculate about "fashion, beauty and lifestyle for teenage girls" while The Edge opted for the "Lifestyle" category. Neither did The Edge nominate the age group of its intended readership, although it was originally targeted at 18 year olds.

I was also relieved to be afforded a reprieve from endlessly examining as Dolly, in the 'eighties we run the risk, already hinted at here, of reading the mass media to detect negotiation, appropriation, even subversion of its codes of femininity. This is consistent with the need to argue that the oppressed constituency is implicated in the making of those codes and therefore empowered to resist or change them.
what was wrong (or right) about mass media for women. A study of The Edge would make a fascinating complement to the plethora of research and writing on women and mass media - an abundance that inclines one to agree with Andreas Huyssen: that women, the mass and mass culture are conflated in an opposition to the real, authentic culture of modernity. I was not, then, predisposed to read The Edge in the same way that I had read Dolly.(1)

The first editorial exceeded my wildest dreams:

"Welcome to THE EDGE. It’s the one magazine that won’t waste time on wimps and bullshit. THE EDGE brings you the latest on anything worth knowing about. Like this issue. You’ve probably taken a few drugs in your time but do you know anything about Ecstasy? We give you the rundown on the latest in designer drugs and look at X-head antics. Ever wondered what a girl wanted from sex? You could always ask one. We got all the answers from a girl who’s not afraid to tell exactly what she wants. Or maybe you wanna hear..."

To say that The Edge formula is based on sex and drugs and rock and roll might suggest a somewhat flat, tired set of options. Far from it. Feature stories have focussed on a series of ‘lifestyle’ consumer activities such as getting a tattoo, how to buy a used car, ‘hard’ and ‘designer’ drugs, sex aids, night clubs, sex shows, comics, up-market prostitution (now why not down-market prostitution, I wonder?) and lingerie ("...So why not give her a surprise? Show her you’ve got style"). There are stories on murderers, torture, boxing, planes, cars and a regular sprinkling of stories on music and bands.

Fashion, beauty and fitness tips are conspicuously absent, but there are style pointers aplenty: how to be hip, how to give a party, what kind of cigarette lighters and hip flasks to buy. The magazine does not so much eschew fashion as concentrate on style as a total concept: where to go, how to behave, and what to talk about being at least as important, in this ethos, as what to wear.

The Edge has a specific reason for avoiding fashion features. In a ‘don’t quote me on that’ interview I gathered that fashion features might call into question the masculinity of the magazine, or its readers, or both. In any case, and this is something assistance...
Not So New

How new is New Woman? Not too much, according to Jennifer Craik.

New Woman Storms Stands ran the headline in the trade journal, B & T, heralding the success of Australia's newest women's magazine. The voracious appetite for women's magazines is attested by the success of two recently launched additions to the market place: New Woman and Ita. New Woman alone sold 275,000 copies of its inaugural July 1989 issue, reportedly the largest selling first issue of any Australian women's magazine.

Its publishers, Murdoch magazines, printed 350,000 copies of the August issue, a staggering increase on the initial target of 75,000. Sales are expected to stabilise between 150,000 and 200,000, which would make it a significant rival to Cleo and Cosmopolitan; or perhaps a companion, for Australian women tend to buy several magazines on a regular basis.

Ita Buttrose has said that New Woman complements her glossier, up-market Ita which was launched in February. Both magazines are aimed at women over 30, women who New Woman declares are "into gym and tonics". Editor Julia Zatta (pictured cuddling the cover model's baby during the photographic session), characterised it thus:

"It is to share what we experience today as women; the vast number of choices we have at our disposal - marriage, working, kids, all of these, some of these or none of these. Travel, study, big business or small businesses of our own. Entwined in all this, keeping one's personal life balanced, beautiful and full with all the sensivity and magic that requires (sic). Then, of course, there is your own self... we hope to keep you fit, healthy and glowing, realising that this is not without its price of effort either."

According to Matt Handbury, managing director of Murdoch Magazines, New Woman was launched because women "want a magazine that deals with them as women". Research has been commissioned to establish "exactly who these women are", and what they like and dislike about the magazine. Meanwhile, Ita has been fine-tuning Ita, refining the punchy pitch to "women who weren't born yesterday" (a format and slogan borrowed from an American magazine).

Of the two, Ita (published by Capricorn) looks rather more professional - it uses thick and glossy paper; has a more sophisticated layout; has more content which is more stimulating; and carries two-thirds less advertising. At $5, in contrast to New Woman's $2.95, Ita is aimed at a better heeled, better educated and more adventurous readership. This is reflected in the diverse opinions expressed in the letters page which are refreshingly cogent and positive about dealing with life's rich tapestry.

But this may well be the death knell for Ita since, as Nova found in Britain in the 'seventies, a magazine which pitches itself above the common denominator and gains a loyal readership for so doing cannot defy the logic of publishers obsessed with mass markets.

New Woman is a somewhat scruffy object by comparison. The curious choice of thin, transparent paper cannot do justice to glamorous advertisements or typeface. A good many of its articles rely discursively on reprints of material from elsewhere, presumably bound by Murdoch copyright. This gives the appearance of a casual market gambit - a budget production using recycled material to test the market place. On the basis of its initial high sales, New Woman will raise its advertising rates of $2,850 (full page) in September; one can only hope that production values will rise accordingly.

So what will the new woman find in its pages? Articles in the first issue include: are you indispensable?; self-defence for women; is marriage making you fat?; more sex please; the difficulties of step-mothering; setting up house with another woman; men who won't commit themselves; how to cope with ageing (faces); how to turn stress into success; and how to divorce your mother.

These topics are clearly pertinent to the new woman, but the articles themselves give off a slightly desperate, defeatist air, suggesting that women cannot quite cope and would prefer a simpler life. Undoubtedly the recognition of stress, multiple demands and invisibility will appeal to readers accustomed to the suburban norms of the Women's Weekly and the superwomen of Cleo, but New Woman still relies on the formulaic journalism of these magazines that falls short of adequately addressing new issues and endorsing contemporary lifestyles.

Moreover, there is a constant contradiction between articles constructing and promoting the new woman, and articles and advertisements with a very different message; for example, the article "Is marriage making you fat?" appears opposite an advertisement for YSL perfume featuring a very slim glamorous model. This kind of schizoid presentation can only confuse and further undermine neophyte new women. Surprisingly, men's opinions feature prominently in New Woman; apparently the new woman still cherishes his views. Indeed, a male writer leads the issue with "Who is this new woman?"

He concludes:

"But new woman or not, she likes kittens, flowers on her birthday, Sunday breakfast in bed, little kids unwrapping Christmas presents, boiled eggs and 'soldiers', Maltesers at the pictures, and me. Her favourite things are, like me, paradoxical."

It would seem that this new woman is very like the old. An article on balancing work and home argues for the new woman still cherishes his views. Indeed, a male writer leads the issue with "Who is this new woman?"

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It would seem that this new woman is very like the old. An article on balancing work and home argues for balance between "love and work", to be like Francesca, a 38-year old film editor.

"My work is stimulating and challenging. I love it and the people I work with. I also love my time away from work, whether I'm with my husband and our
son or with close friends or alone with myself, away from everything. My life is really a rich tapestry, and all the threads contribute to the beauty of the design."

The contradictions between the ideals and realities of the new woman are reinforced by the selection of advertising, most of which plays on the fear of losing youthful looks and bodies. The Elle Bache Neck Creme advertisement epitomises this theme by depicting three cackling chooks in bonnets and bows over the caption "Unprotected necks end up looking foul". Elle Bache can, of course, "restore your neck and give it a more alive skin".

It is an effective advertisement and carefully targeted, though it is a disturbing reflection of how little conventions about femininity and beauty have changed. Women consumers are still hypnotised by the magical, transformative powers of potions and products.

In all, over a third of the advertisements promote cosmetics (perfume, skin care and 'personal' products) appealing to a middle range and concerned with preserving one's looks. Fashion (designers, hosiery and shoes) and food (healthy) each account for about 13%, followed by a smattering of other products and services: travel (Greece, Philippines, Victoria, Terrigal); kitchen equipment (upmarket); cars (Pulsar, Rover and Galant); and financial advice. Looking somewhat out of place is an advertisement for a pewter hip flask; a better tonic for some perhaps than the gym!

This array of advertising reflects the equivocal appeal of New Woman, at once acknowledging new lifestyles and new habits, but still emphasising old values. The focus on youth, health, slimness and 'looking good' relies on the old formula. Even though New Woman features some (slightly) older models, for example in a fashion spread on 'Home-Work', featuring a couple and a child in tableaux of domestic and working life, (very) young models are still the norm.

More disconcerting is the convention employed to photograph subjects of the 'Face to Face' interviews; women who weren't born yesterday receive the soft focus treatment to soften the ravages of time.

Faces interviewed are John Mangos (newsreader), Liisa Moessis (florist) and Wendy Harmer (comedian). Wendy's mother advised her: "Don't put your personal life on the stage, dear. It makes you very vulnerable", advice which many new women will have heard! More realistically, Wendy observes: "Women can't reasonably expect to have a career during the day and still be treated like a delicate sex object at night."

The magazine has the familiar variety of arts reviews, beauty advice, fashion, fiction and horoscopes. It also gives financial advice and features an article on day care. Its recipe section is limited to two recipes, Le Cassoulet and Souffle Omelette, giving two staples a cosmopolitan makeover; the dishes are photographed in Vermeer-like earthy tones of a rustic kitchen (strictly European). A reader's cultural identity is further confounded by Anna Dell'Oso's column which, as usual, is written beautifully; she revisits her pet topic, namely the difficulties of growing up in the 'fifties as a New Australian. But now, as a new mother, she seems to be rediscovering her roots, her mother and the values of the 'fifties. Dell'Oso sees new mothers "looking at our mums with new eyes, as allies rather than ideological or lifestyle enemies"; for her, new women need "to be nurtured into standing on our own female ground".

The future of the new woman is clearly contested; it is hard to know how much New Woman is a serious attempt to address the issues and how much a disingenuous construction of a new target market. Either way, if the range of issues and opinions in the inaugural issue is any guide to the challenge facing all new women, the task is formidable. And I doubt that New Woman is the answer.

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Making the World Go Round

World Music: trick or treat? Paul Chapman offers an answer.

World Music is a useful if slightly misleading label. Michael Jackson, Kylie Minogue, the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd and Sting make what is really World Music. Their music is as ubiquitous and inescapable as pollution. They are global by virtue of the commercial-technical power of the West.

Live Aid, Sport Aid, Sting's Aid, Mandela's Aid, global telecasts all serve to reinforce the domination of Western rock-pop. The new category World Music was not created to describe this music. Paradoxically, the term describes local musics! Therein lies its challenge to the dominant discourse.

World Music was invented by a group of UK distribution companies as a marketing device to facilitate the sale of mostly African music in retail stores. African music, or Salsa for example, would disappear in the record shops into jazz, reggae or folk sections when it was none of these things. The retailers are happier to stock the material now they know where to put it. There is, and has been, a market for this material for some time. The device has worked: everyone now knows about the existence of the category even if they don’t know what it is. A subtly subversive piece of marketing.

World Music has become a catch-all description to cover non-Western popular music. It could be described as the rest of the world’s response to the global domination of Western music. Reactions to this phenomenon cover a broad range. One sort of reaction is to ignore completely Western music or ban it (USSR, China, Guinea). Another is complete internalisation of Western music and the rejection of indigenous local traditions. A third is incorporation of Western music into traditional local music creating a new syncretic or hybrid music. The latter is the most interesting and creative response to the commercial monopolising of Anglo-American music corporations.

This syncretic music subverts our traditional definitions of rock, pop, jazz, ambient and so on - the very reason retailers were reluctant to stock the material in the first place. Syncretic music also quietly undermines any notions, still strong in the community, of equating technical mastery with cultural superiority. Not the least of its qualities is that these forms of music can remind us that there are viable cultures other than our own. These political acts of resistance are all there in the music itself without the need for sloganeering. Their basis is local economies, individual communities or language groups and local entrepreneurs. These may be very fragile but it is these alternative sources of power which enable the musician to maintain competing musical-cultural and political discourses.

Recent popular music history has shown that the forms of music which simply proclaim their rebelliousness are among the most easily absorbed by the multinational corporations. As the cultural critic Adorno once observed: "music represents the immediate manifestation of impulse and the locus of its taming". Punk rapidly became high fashion, an empty sign or simulacrum of rebellion. Hip hop, for all its taboo violations, ends up confirming the rules it breaks. Its bricolage techniques remain enclosed within a self-referential rock-pop mythology. Their occasional successes feed the commercial culture they often complain oppresses them. Internationally they only add weight to the steamroller of American culture that squeezes other music culture into insolvency.

Syncretic musics of resistance have existed and flourished in the non-western world for more than twenty or thirty years. These musics have been infrequently heard in the West because it was not in the interests of the ‘majors’ (the big five - CBS, WEA and RCA in America, EMI in the UK, and Polygram in the Netherlands) to sell the material outside their local communities. From the early days of recording, the companies divided up the world into dis-
crete 'territories'. This was part of the process of creating a controlled market. Other companies would adopt a 'hands-off' attitude. It was important to prevent the market from being flooded with material and actually keep other music out. These artificial barriers have been breached to a certain extent, due to recent developments. Among these are the setting in place of global distribution networks for rock-pop, disco music, greater ease of communication and increased mobility. Tourism can enable people to hear and see different musics. Jumbo Van Rennan, UK head of Mango records (a subsidiary of Island), considers that 'access' is the basic reason for the upsurge in interest.

The 'majors' do not have complete control over World Music: that is its great advantage musically and politically. What is happening is that the 'majors' are signing more and more 'licensing deals'. The local originators of the music sell the reproduction rights of their material outside their home territory. It is, of course, an area wide open for abuse and exploitation. The protection these World musicians have is that they don't need the West and its 'majors'.

It is in the nature of music that it is a transient reflection of culture, politics and society. The moment of World Music may last longer than many other musical phenomena because there is still such a great diversity of musics, cultures and societies in the world. The creativity displayed in these musics must make us question the sterility of our own culture outside the technical and scientific fields. The Michael Jacksonisation of the globe continues apace. The president of international operations for 'Toys R Us' recently said "There are fifty million kids in Europe and they have converging lifestyles in music, designer labels and Big Macs. The international market is a reality and consumers are becoming more similar globally." World Music is a herald of these developments and points the way to creative strategies to meet the challenge.

PAUL CHAPMAN presents 'Globestyle', the African and World Music program for Sydney Community Radio Station 2SER-FM.

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**A DATE TO REMEMBER**

Dear Subscribers,

From February 1990, ALR will be going monthly. The issue you’re holding in your hand is our bumper summer issue, covering the months November to January. From February, therefore, existing subscribers will unfortunately find their six-issue subscriptions expiring twice as quickly. But as a small token of thanks to our loyal subscribers we’ll add two months free of charge when their current bi-monthly subscriptions expire.

You’ll also be pleased to know that the new monthly subscription rates, published elsewhere in the magazine, are actually relatively cheaper than the bi-monthly rates they replace. They’re also cheaper than those of any comparable monthly magazine in Australia. We’re sure you’ll find the new monthly ALR more stimulating, topical, surprising and possibly exasperating than ever.

Yours sincerely,

David Burchell & Jane Inglis.
An Era Closes

The collapse of ‘actually existing socialism’, and the winding-down of much of Western communism, marks the end of an era. For many veteran socialists, it seems a final chapter of defeat. Eric Aarons argues on the contrary that the lives of two generations have been far from wasted...

Most of my colleagues, I think, share Adam Farrar’s considered optimism for the success of a new left party (ALR 112). But there are others among us oldies who feel the emergence of new political forms and the fading of old ones mean that their life of devotion to the cause has been wasted and that the principles for which they have stood through thick and thin are in danger of being cast aside.

I can readily envisage that there are similar comrades in China, the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and other countries; indeed, I know some personally. And I know some other lifelong socialists, in the Labor Party for example, who feel somewhat the same way.

Having 55 years’ membership in the Communist Party I can understand and sympathise with their feelings, but I do not share them.

People like myself have made the sober assessment that there is no great likelihood that the fortunes of the old organisations of the left will radically revive. This assessment is based on our own strenuous efforts over many years to achieve just that, on our long experience of both success and failure, and on our analysis of present conditions in Australia and elsewhere, including in countries where communist parties have ruled for a long time.

And I do not regard my life as having been wasted, though I could not say as Edith Piaf does in her song that "I regret nothing". I believe I became a better human being through being in the CPA than would have been likely had my life taken a different course.

Nor do I fear that the values and principles for which I have stood side by side with others, or the traditions in which we have developed, are in danger of being ditched.

The old shoes may be comfortable and familiar and have travelled many memorable miles; but the soles no longer keep out the stones or the water, and no amount of polish can halt the disintegration of the uppers.

The challenge facing socialists everywhere is precisely to find the ways in which what we have stood for, suitably developed and modified, can best be fought for.

The first responsibility of a revolutionary, to my mind, is to their ideals, not to a particular association. The second responsibility is to find the best vehicle through which to pursue those ideas in the conditions in which they have to live and struggle. One recalls, for example, that Marx three years later left the Communist Party for which he had written the Manifesto because that organisation could no longer adequately further its principles.

Members of ruling parties in socialist countries, including those who have held power for decades, are having to face similar issues and the prospect that, without change and reorientation, they could well face extinction, despite great past achievements.

What specific forms of organisation will emerge is still unclear and will no doubt differ from country to country. But it should now be obvious that the changes will have to be radical and will take a long time, during which the inspiration formerly provided to the cause of socialism elsewhere is not likely to be matched, to say the least.

As we receive increasingly loud messages that we are in a new political epoch it may be useful to review some of the features of the previous one in which my generation of socialists, and the generation just before mine, grew up. (I was born in 1919.)

World War One and the Russian Revolution formed the general background, changing everything. I experienced as a child, directly and by observation, the grinding poverty, unprecedented unemployment and indignities inflicted on people during the Great Depression. I was informer (through one parental side) of opposite conditions in the Soviet Union. I felt the dangers from the rise of fascism, was revolted by colonial wars such as those of Italy against Ethiopia (Abyssinia) and of Japan against China, and was intimately involved with the Spanish Civil War in which my father fought. I felt in my guts the ominous forebodings of world war.

Then came the war itself with its success of heavy reverses in which the Soviet Union, with incredible heroism, played the key role. There was the war against Japan with the (as we then thought) possibility of an invasion against which communists and others would have fought whatever the odds, while sections of the ruling class would have collaborated.

We supported and celebrated the post-war national liberation victories, especially that of China in 1949.

These great events and issues embodied the values and principles for which we stood: for equality, against exploitation and injustice, for the social good against pursuit of private profit, a concern for people and their dignity, against the rich, their economic and social control and their opposing values; against war and colonialism and for the equality of races, nations and the sexes.

These values and principles were con-
solidated by and reflected in a theory - rather, a particular interpretation of a theory - which for many activists and intellectuals throughout the world for that whole period seemed adequately to explain and (with acceptable blips) satisfactorily predict the general course of events.

These were powerful formative influences and they enabled us to make a substantial contribution to practically every aspect of Australian life. I include here also an input from the many thousands who passed through the Communist Party, most of whom, in my experience, continued to carry with them positive elements absorbed during their passage.

They also sustained us during the attacks and reverses of the cold war and consolidated a determination, dedication and spirit of self-sacrifice broadly appropriate to the twenty or so years from 1929.

But the same influences and framework of thought also had negative consequences. They fostered dogmatic tendencies and even self-deception as to the real conditions and dynamics of both socialism and capitalism.

They congealed simplified views as to the nature and sources of women's oppression, for example, and blinkered perception of new issues and popular concerns.

We were not without a tinge of belief that we were indeed 'people of a special mould', armed with a special knowledge which conferred on our party the mantle of 'general staff' of the working class. We were not immune to authoritarian ways or an arrogance not necessarily part of our individual personalities.

Our view and practice of democracy left a lot to be desired as we responded to the 'requirements of the class struggle' based on extreme conditions and accepted Soviet pronouncements as to the necessity of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' characterised by a monopoly of state and ideological power by the communist parties.

Sireneous efforts over the past twenty-five years to review attitudes and practices have proved insufficient to overcome public perceptions reinforced by the focus of the media and the gathering problems of socialism as practised by the CPs in power.

All this, together with new world conditions, new concerns, and changed attitudes to politics, parties and forms of political organising require that a fresh start be made, to which we aim to bring what is good in our traditions and experience, and an attitude of learning from others.

But, some ask, will the principles for which we have stood (developed and modified over the last 25 years) be adequately embraced in a new movement And, anyway, can we count on their wide acceptance?

The New Left Party's political manifesto, A Time to Act, describes its principles as: social justice, equality of rights and opportunities and equitable distribution of wealth for all Australians; the expansion and transformation of Australian democracy in all areas of economic social and cultural life; an environmentally sustainable society; Aboriginal self-determination; a foreign policy for independence and peace; women's rights; an economy which serves social and ecological objectives rather than the profits or power of a few or the pursuit of economic growth for its own sake; for a broad vision of the tasks of socialism and the development of workable strategies towards these goals.

That will do me for a start.

If statements like this do not formulate these principles in the same language as we might have used in the past, that is a plus.

If they acknowledge that there are as yet unanswered questions about socialism in practice, that is also a plus.

And if they do not claim possession of superior theoretical knowledge or rights to leadership, that is also a plus.

And if they recognise that, in pursuit of fundamental social change in Australia today, there is no alternative to long-term work within existing society and that strategies must be developed on that basis, it is only stating what anyone with even half a realistic eye already knows.

And the chances of success?

Acceptance of one or more of the above principles are today the basis for mobilisation of large and growing movements which extend far beyond the presently organised left.

And while it is a difficulty that many participants in these movements (and in the labour movement) do not count themselves as being part of the left, shared values and principles provide a solid basis for broad actions and alliances which can make a real impact in the course of which perspectives can broaden.

As to political practice, organisations which claim to be or act as though they think they should be the 'general staff' or 'vanguard' of today's movements will get short shrift, as they deserve to.

New political skills have to be developed, and are being, in the very process of forming new political groupings, as Adam Farrar pointed out.

Guarantees cannot be given, either for the success of the new or a revival of the old.

But I am certain in my own mind as to which is the more worthwhile direction of effort and the more likely to renew the fortunes of the left.

ERIC AARONS was joint national secretary of the Communist Party in the mid-1970s. He now writes and sculpts.