

RSA

21st century enlightenment

Journal Issue 1 2018



Making progress?

Emily Robinson says progressives should not abandon people who are resistant to change

Mustafa Suleyman on the potential of artificial intelligence to solve society's big challenges

The Secret Barrister argues that calls for vengeance are endangering due process in the justice system

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“THE LANGUAGE OF BEING ‘PROGRESSIVE’ CAN FUNCTION AS A THREAT. IT IS USED TO MAKE CERTAIN FUTURES SEEM INEVITABLE, WITH THE IMPLICATION THAT WE MUST KEEP UP OR BE LEFT BEHIND”

EMILY ROBINSON, PAGE 10

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“THE SCOPE OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY CHANGES THE RULES OF THE GAME”



MATTHEW TAYLOR

The RSA is unashamedly a progressive organisation. We subscribe to the Enlightenment view of a future with the scope for ever-greater human development and fulfilment. It is with this in mind that we have been addressing the theme of Reprogramming the Future through our events and now this journal, with the aim of setting out a framework for progressive social renewal.

Steven Pinker showed in his recent book and RSA lecture that aggregate human welfare has increased unprecedentedly in the last 200 years. And, as another RSA speaker, Rutger Bregman, argues (check out the great animation based on his lecture on the RSA YouTube channel), if someone from the Enlightenment era were to be reincarnated into a modern, developed society, they would think we had solved just about every significant material problem. With such strong evidence it is tempting to fall into a kind of fundamentalism in which the imperatives of progress can be cited to quash any criticism of change. As Emily Robinson argues in her piece in the journal, this temptation must be resisted. After all, in Trump, Brexit and the rise of populism we have seen how just such a reductive narrative of inevitable change – about financial globalisation – has led to a backlash among those unwilling to accept that the impact on their lives is a price worth paying. As the RSA's Anthony Painter writes, there is a danger that when we talk about technology we again fall into a kind of determinism in which people are expected to adapt to the potential of machines rather than machines being designed to enhance human fulfilment.

Back in 2010, in my lecture on 21st Century Enlightenment, I argued that we had to ground a belief in future possibility with a substantive account of what human progress comprises. Michel Foucault's elegant summary of Kant's view of the original Enlightenment can be a starting point: "It has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis

of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."

The kind of thinking we need now is hinted at by Mustafa Suleyman in a piece made more powerful by the fact he is writing as a key figure in the Alphabet empire that contains Google. Mustafa argues that the scope of modern technology and its pace of development changes the rules of the game. A great deal of the commentary about artificial intelligence focuses on the threat it could pose to social values and human agency. To address the threat and turn it into an opportunity, we need to revive older ideas about the purpose of business. For example, we have become used to everyone from advertisers to financial services companies routinely seeking to shape our preferences to further their own interests while being largely indifferent to ours, but AI puts the techniques of manipulation on steroids. The aim of the RSA's work on AI and ethics should, in my view, not simply be to address the new issues raised by the technology, but also to argue for a step change in corporate transparency and social responsibility. Just as nuclear weapons and rifles are both weapons, but the potential of the former requires a massively different response in terms of vigilance and regulation, so super-fast algorithms applying cutting-edge behavioural psychology demand higher standards and stricter scrutiny than less powerful and forensic forms of marketing.

As I write, there are thousands of tech entrepreneurs hard at work on business models that rely on various forms of manipulation. A combination of agile regulation, informed advocacy and greater public insight is needed to encourage these clever people and their clever machines to develop businesses that make money by providing something of value to customers and society at large.

Whether it is economic inequality, political populism or our inability to solve big problems, it is easy to contrast the slowness of human change with the speed of technological advances. Perhaps it is precisely by demanding that technology work in the service of people and planet that we can rekindle the inventive humanism of the Enlightenment.



RESEARCH

REBUILDING TRUST IN ECONOMICS

There is a widening chasm of trust and understanding, not just between expert and citizen, but between citizen and citizen, according to the final report of the RSA's Citizens' Economic Council (CEC), *Building a Public Culture of Economics*. This is a consequence of economic policymaking that has failed to take into account regional variation and the lived experience of many citizens across the UK, the report says. Diverging views in themselves are not problematic, but the failure of people to engage critically and respectfully with each other is undermining the quality of public discourse on the economy, a trend that the report identifies as a threat to democracy.

"There is an urgent need to rebuild trust in, and the trustworthiness of, political and economic institutions," says Tony Greenham, one of the report's authors and the RSA's director of economy, enterprise and manufacturing. "We need to build a public culture of economics in which diverse citizen voices can be included in and have influence over economic decision-making, so that outcomes are reflective of the needs of people across the country." One route to this end, the report argues, is through the process of deliberation, whereby citizens exchange arguments and consider different claims about how to secure a better future.

At the report launch in March, Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane announced that the Bank would implement the RSA's recommendation to pilot Citizens' Reference Panels within each of its 12 regional agencies. This will recruit ordinary members of the public to share their experiences and hear from Bank staff about the economy and the Bank's role. Lessons from the CEC are also being applied to other programmes of work at the RSA, including the Forum for Ethical AI and the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.

For the full report, see www.thersa.org/public-economics



HOUSING

CO-LIVING

Sometimes described as the hipster's answer to the commune, co-living may represent more than just a trendy throwback to the utopian communities of the past, a new essay collection from the RSA argues.

In their essay, the RSA's Atif Shafique and Jonathan Schifferes argue that the growing appeal of co-living is linked to very modern challenges. Issues ranging from rising loneliness and ageing to changing patterns of work, consumption and living are compelling us to think differently about the sorts of homes we need or desire. Co-living can provide a better quality of life than more mainstream and less affordable forms of housing.

While this trend has partly been forced upon city dwellers because of high housing costs, it is also driven by a desire to get something different out of a housing system that tends to provide little in the way of quality and choice.

Co-living is not a magic bullet solution for the UK's housing challenges, nor is it an approach without critics or problems, which the essays pick up on. But, as Matthew Taylor notes in his introduction to the collection, if it can overcome its challenges, at its root co-living offers new choices for those who see communality as part of how they want to live, work and thrive.

Other essays include pieces on housing in the age of accelerations, homes as living environments rather than commodities, the rise, fall and rise of communal living, and designing for wellbeing. Going forward, the RSA's Housing Equity programme (www.thersa.org/housingequity) is developing practical solutions for citizens and communities to achieve greater financial and social equity.

Read the essay at www.thersa.org/co-living or contact senior RSA researcher Atif Shafique at atif.shafique@rsa.org.uk for more information

CONSULTATION

COMMISSION BIKE TOUR

The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC) has hit the roads on a six-month, pedal-powered journey around the country to actively engage with a wide range of people across the UK – food producers, land managers, food businesses, community groups, public institutions and citizens – about the future of UK agriculture and the countryside.

As Commission researchers travel by bicycle, they are asking people what matters to them about where they live and work, what makes it special, what works well and what needs to change. They aim to identify solutions that will help improve farming, food, public health, the wider environment and the rural economy. The Commission is also meeting and hearing from interest and advocacy groups, professional and technical experts, academics and industry groups along the way.

Citizen and community engagement is at the heart of the work of the Commission and the tour will take in all parts of the country, meeting people in market towns and villages, high streets and supermarkets, farmers' markets and livestock markets, community centres and health centres, workplaces and schools. The tour has already visited the East Midlands and East Anglia and will be following this rough timetable:

May: Scotland

June: Scotland, Northern Ireland,
North England

July: North England, Wales

August: Wales, West Midlands

September: South West

October: South East

You can follow the journey and check for updates via the Bike Tour map and see what people around the country are saying online at www.thersa.org/bike-tour and follow #ffccontheroad on Twitter and Instagram.

To join in, email ffcc@rsa.org.uk



ARTS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

HEALTHY PERFORMANCE

Guildford School of Acting (GSA) at the University of Surrey is using performing arts to address mental health and wellbeing among young people. The effort is being coordinated by RSA Fellows Sean and Anna McNamara as part of GSA's contribution to the Guildford First project, which brings together a consortium of local educational institutions, businesses and charities, all supported by Guildford Borough Council, to work with children in the local community.

GSA is promoting the notion of the 'healthy performer' through its training programmes, which adopt a holistic approach to the development, training and wellbeing (physical and psychological) of students and young professionals. The school's programme of events and workshops to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing makes GSA and the University an active part of tackling a community-wide issue.

A year-long collaborative project with the charity Time to Change Surrey is planned for 2018-19 and will deliver creative workshops in local schools, culminating in a performance festival and seminar hosted by GSA. The project will bring together the children of the town with budding actors, professional performers, writers, directors, councillors and local policymakers to examine mental health and wellbeing in young people through the performing arts.

Using applied theatre and drama therapy practices for the benefit of students and children, GSA aims to maximise its impact in the community.

To get involved in the RSA Performing Arts Network, email networks@rsa.org.uk

ACT EARLY
COLLABORATE WIDELY
BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER
BUILD MOMENTUM
CHANGE CULTURE
SHIFT CONTROL
GROW FROM THE LOCAL
SHARE POWER

COMMUNITY

HEALTHCARE TRANSFORMATION

The RSA has identified eight principles for health and social care reform as part of its Health as a Social Movement project. The project was commissioned by NHS England in 2016 to bring new ideas and influences to bear in meeting the daunting challenges it faces.

Working with the New Economics Foundation (NEF), the RSA has supported six NHS New Care Model sites in England to build momentum for change and drive innovation. The project forms part of NHS England's plan to help reshape the NHS as a social movement that empowers communities and prioritises prevention.

The RSA's report, *From Principles to Practice*, outlines the principles and highlights where these can be seen in action. This includes: Greater Manchester Cancer Vanguard's recruitment of 2,000 cancer champions; the Royal Free London's work on shifting its health improvement offer to better reflect the needs of its lowest paid staff; and the Alzheimer's Society's work in Leeds care homes on culture change.

Working with GP surgeries, schools, Foundation Trusts, care homes, Clinical Commissioning Groups and local authorities, the project has spread evidence of what works beyond the sphere of health professionals. Through working with the RSA's Student Design Awards, it has produced an animation, which has been viewed over 18,000 times.

The project included engagement with RSA Fellows and this will continue through a new Health, Care and Wellbeing Network, which will share ideas and collaborate on projects that drive positive change.

— If you are interested in joining this network please sign up here: www.thersa.org/health-care-and-wellbeing-network. For the report, visit www.thersa.org/health-as-a-social-movement-theory-into-practice

IDEAS

NEW PODCASTS FOR 2018

Starting this spring, the RSA will launch several new podcasts, bringing the best of its research, events and analysis to new audiences. *Enlighten Me* will feature interviews and insights from leading thinkers on the big ideas and debates of our times. *Polarised* will take an inquisitive look at the social and political forces driving people further apart, and dive into the science of persuasion and manipulation.

The RSA's growing podcast platform follows our success on YouTube, where we have more than 600,000 subscribers for our video content. Other new series will follow later in the year. Listeners can already hear recordings from our public events programme on the RSA Events podcast, which is available on Apple Podcasts, SoundCloud and major podcast apps. The new shows will also be available across all of these platforms.

Podcasts continue to grow in popularity in the UK and internationally, and increasingly are supplanting traditional radio, particularly for younger listeners. Six million people in the UK now listen to a podcast at least once a week, and the BBC recently announced the appointment of its first podcast commissioner.

The RSA's new podcasts will be produced by James Shield, our new head of radio. James was named best newcomer and best podcast producer at the Audio Production Awards in 2016.

— You can get in touch at rsa.radio@rsa.org.uk

GDPR

YOUR DATA

The RSA is launching a new online data consent centre to help you manage the data we use to communicate with you as part of our response to new data regulations and efforts to be responsible information stewards. For the majority of Fellows and other supporters, an email link to the new consent centre will be sent out in spring 2018. You can use this to choose how we use your personal data.


— To find more about our how we use personal data, visit www.thersa.org/privacy-policy

EVENTS

CATCH UP ON THE CONVERSATION

Unmissable online highlights from a packed public events season, selected by the curating team for your viewing pleasure!

 youtube.com/theRSAorg

 facebook.com/rsaeventsofficial



First it was Weinstein, then Westminster, then the Presidents Club. In the wake of these shocking revelations, a movement is calling time on injustice. But where do we go from here? This panel features **Laura Bates**, author and founder of Everyday Sexism; **Helen Pankhurst**, activist and author; **Ayesha Hazarika**, commentator and comedian; **Sophie Walker**, founding leader of the Women's Equality Party; and **Susan Riley**, *Stylist* editor.

Watch now: bit.ly/2C0Jnvc
#RSATimesup



We are bombarded with dispiriting headlines, but is modernity really failing? Acclaimed global thinker **Steven Pinker** argues that although we continue to face formidable challenges, we must also recognise and celebrate the remarkable gains that have been made in every measure of human wellbeing.

Watch now: bit.ly/2HC06Q3
#RSAEnlightenment



What is the ideal blueprint for women leaders to follow? Does it need to be a facsimile of male power? Former director of communications for Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, **Jennifer Palmieri** reflects on Clinton's presidential campaign, and offers hard-won advice for women wishing to make it to the very top.

Watch now: bit.ly/2v6yhXp
#RSAPower



What do Pixar, Google and the San Antonio Spurs have in common? **Daniel Coyle**, author of *The Talent Code*, reveals the secrets of the most effective teams and organisations in the world, and offers cautionary advice on toxic workplace culture and how it can be reformed.

Watch now: bit.ly/2jffaQl
#RSACulture



FORWARD THINKING

Rather than marching ahead, assuming that progress is linear and that others are following, we must stop to make the case for change

by Emily Robinson
 @ea_robinson

When the RSA was founded in 1754, the concept of ‘progress’ as we know it was just emerging. Over the course of the 18th century, it developed from being an idea related to movement through space, to one connected primarily with movement through time. Along the way, it gathered a whole host of other associations: improvement, reform, civilisation. It also migrated from being an adjunct to other concepts (the progress of art, of knowledge, of science), to being an active agent in its own right. By the early 19th century, it was possible to speak of the ‘progress of history’ or the ‘progress of time’; by the end of that century, it was common to invoke ‘progress itself’ as a seemingly unstoppable force.

The evolution of this idea was rooted in the history and values of the Enlightenment, as, of course, was the RSA. This is a history that has come under a good deal of criticism over the past 50 years, both because of the colonial and patriarchal assumptions underpinning what is sometimes referred to as the ‘Enlightenment project’, and because of the complacency that comes with a faith in continual improvement, which can sweep aside the messiness of human interaction. But it is also a history that is having a bit of a political comeback. At a time when tolerance, reason and expertise seem to be under threat, the idea of resurrecting Enlightenment values seems attractive.

While it is difficult to oppose the idea of “enriching society through ideas and action” contained in the RSA’s mission to create a 21st century Enlightenment, we need to approach this history with a critical eye. If we take, for instance, the idea of being progressive, which is the focus of this issue of *RSA Journal*, there are big questions hidden behind its seemingly incontrovertible appeal. What does this label include, what does it exclude, and – most importantly – what does it do?

EMILY ROBINSON IS A SENIOR LECTURER IN POLITICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX AND AUTHOR OF *THE LANGUAGE OF PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN MODERN BRITAIN*

Let us begin with an opposition. ‘Progressive’ and ‘conservative’ have long been taken to denote opposing mindsets: forward thinking, experimental and modern on the one hand; stable, cautious and traditional on the other. In political terms, this has tended to be applied to the left and the right of the political spectrum, respectively, but with a great deal of scope for counter-intuitive positioning between them. For instance, in England, as early as 1858, the *Manchester Guardian* was complaining that “the edifying discussion of the respective beauties of progressive Conservatism and Conservative progress” was occupying so much parliamentary time that it was distracting attention from questions of national defence. It has barely been off the agenda since. In contrast, ‘conservatism’ has more often been used as an accusation than an aspiration within left circles, at least in the UK. The term is used to attack both centrist caution and socialist traditionalism; notwithstanding a brief flurry of interest in ‘radical conservatism’ in the immediate aftermath of New Labour.

This asymmetry is revealing. It tells us something about the cultural value of the term ‘progressive’. In his influential compendium *Keywords* (1976), the cultural theorist Raymond Williams suggested that by the turn of the 20th century, ‘progressive’ had become an empty word, more of a persuader than a descriptor. He noted the emergence of ‘progressive conservatism’ as a marker of the term’s boundless elasticity. Although Williams underestimated the longer history of progressive conservatism, he was right that something had changed. By the early 20th century, progressivism had become such a desirable political and cultural trait that, in the words of the conceptual historian, Reinhart Koselleck, “it has become difficult to gain political legitimacy without being progressive at the same time”.

The elasticity of the term might seem surprising to anyone with a background in liberal or left politics. In the UK, this was, after all, the time at which the Lib-Lab

“EXPERT OPINIONS CAN CYCLE BACK AS WELL AS THRUST FORWARDS”

‘progressive movement’ took shape. From the municipal politics of the London County Council to the electoral pact that helped the Labour Party gain its first parliamentary representatives, the history of progressive politics has seemingly been intrinsically associated with the centre-left, and particularly its relationship to one of the three themes of this edition of the journal: welfare.

REBRANDING PROGRESS

In 1896, the first issue of a new journal called *Progressive Review* recognised the inadequacy of liberal doctrines of economic freedom and self-government “to undertake the onerous and multifarious duties which devolve upon a modern State, in contributing by legislative and administrative acts, to secure the material and moral welfare of the people”. Its editors argued that: “If such a departure from the historical lines of party action seem[s] impossible, we can recognize no force in the claim of the Liberals to be regarded as the progressive party of the future.” This was an attempt to reorient both liberalism and progressive politics around a strong commitment to welfare, and to the state apparatus needed to deliver it. This use of language became widely accepted, to the extent that we now forget, for instance, that progressive income tax was originally so-called because it is graduated and sequential, not because it is redistributive. It belongs to the family of progressive salaries, share dividends and hire purchase schemes that were regularly advertised in the late Victorian and Edwardian press. Its resonance with the aims of the new ‘progressive movement’ was a fortuitous coincidence.

But this redefinition was only ever partially successful. It supplemented, but did not replace, existing understandings. Enlightenment views of history had identified commercial freedom as both the driver and marker of social progress. This association remained intact throughout the 20th century. The efficiency, energy and innovation of successful businesses made them seem inherently progressive, and developing nations were expected to demonstrate their progressive credentials through stability, prosperity, rapid growth and self-confidence.

In party politics, progressive arguments were used to resist as well as to espouse state intervention in the economy. Most notably, self-described ‘progressive’ Liberal-Conservative alliances operated at both local and national level from the 1930s well into the post-war years, arguing for freedom for private enterprise in the face of what they saw as socialist

restrictions. For instance, local Progressive Parties set themselves against municipal provision of utilities and direct employment of labour on the grounds that it was expensive for ratepayers and disadvantageous to private businesses. Such schemes had previously been undertaken in the name of progressive politics, most famously by the London Progressive Party. Yet, these new alliances applied the same language to the opposite cause, invoking instead older liberal ideals of retrenchment and good government.

This language has not died out. When David Cameron launched his ‘progressive conservatism’ project in 2009, and his ‘progressive partnership’ with the Liberal Democrats the following year, this was intended to signal a break from the party’s past, particularly Thatcherism, yet this might have sounded less novel to voters than he anticipated. A 2012 YouGov poll suggested Margaret Thatcher was thought more progressive than any other politician except Boris Johnson.

There are two understandings of progress at work here, which see it as either an organic process or a deliberate project. According to the former, state intervention risks interfering with supposedly natural progress through the market. The latter believes that real progress entails harnessing the resources of the state and driving them in a particular direction. This is not, however, as clear-cut as it seems. It is in the space between these two extremes that most self-described ‘progressives’ cluster. Partly, this is marriage between two forms of liberalism, with their two conceptions of progress. It suggests that welfare can only be built on prosperity, and tends to assume that the state can learn from the market, that innovation thrives on competition.

But this line of argument also carries the implication that it is politics itself that is the obstruction. This is what lies behind the repeated refrain that sensible, progressive people – from all parties and none – should simply be allowed to get on with things. ‘Progressive’ in this context denotes rational, reasoned solutions (it is striking that in the historical sources I look at, it is often coupled with ‘sane’). But it also suggests that there is a right answer, which could be found if only we had enough evidence, enough experts, enough creativity. Such attitudes have contributed to the increasingly technocratic and remote nature of governance, which has been blamed for both declining levels of trust and political engagement before 2008, and the anger and frustration we have seen since. Moreover, it is important to recognise that the very language of being ‘progressive’ can function as a threat. It is used to make



certain futures seem inevitable, with the implication that we must keep up or be left behind.

THE PRESSURES OF MODERNITY

This is not just a story of party politics, ideological commitments and policy outcomes. It is about how we relate to one another and how we understand ourselves. Here, it makes sense to think about how progressiveness relates to another slippery concept: modernity. Although this is notoriously difficult to define, most understandings of modernity revolve around the question of time, and our changing relationship to it. That includes the perception that time is accelerating, or that it is less predictable, less continuous, than before. Modernity is also frequently described as a project of the self; it is a state of constant reflection, remaking and reimagining, in which we are always becoming, never just being. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, citizens were constantly encouraged to 'be progressive', both by commercial advertisers and by public agencies. This involved a certain amount of flattery, but also the pressure not to be left behind. To be progressive was, then, both daring and prudent, innovative and conventional. This language works to shift the burden of risk onto the individual. It becomes our responsibility to develop our skills, to adapt to the shifting terrain of the economy, to demonstrate both our willingness and our capacity to continually progress.

But modernity is also a collective undertaking, the means by which communities and nations position themselves in time

and in relationship to one another. The idea of Britain as a peculiarly progressive nation has had a great deal of purchase. Yet, this has always been shadowed by fears that this status was slipping, and particularly that attachment to past glories was holding back progress, creating a cultural drag on innovation. Such fears peaked in the decades after the Second World War, but their continued resonance can be seen in the language surrounding the EU referendum: variously understood as an opportunity to halt decline and restore Britain's independent status in the world, or as a suicidal rejection of whatever stability, prosperity and influence we once had.

One of the recurrent features of this debate is the suggestion that social divisions (such as those opened up by the referendum) should be understood in temporal terms. It has become common to distinguish between those who have benefited from 'progress' and those who have not, and to separate those who are comfortable with the future from those who prefer to dwell on (or in!) the past. This kind of thinking tends to equate cosmopolitanism, economic liberalism and social liberalism with the idea of 'progress itself'. In so doing, it obscures the extent to which these tendencies are not three parts of the same whole: migrants and BAME Britons are, for instance, often at the sharp end of economic liberalism, while social conservatism is by no means the preserve of the poorest.

Casting these divisions in temporal terms also gives them an unhelpfully moral edge. It becomes a question of who is on the 'right side of history', even though once we



focus on specific issues it is often difficult to know which is the right side. And expert opinions can cycle back as well as thrust forwards, leaving previously progressive solutions – high-rise social housing, out-of-town shopping centres, baby formula milk – out of fashion. We could all list many self-consciously progressive reforms that have allowed individuals and communities to live more fulfilled, enriched and empowered lives. But we also need to create forms of politics that include room for those who fail, or refuse, to ‘keep up’, and that enable us to pay attention to the work of maintaining existing systems and relationships, rather than always searching for the new.

Unease with the very idea of progress is not new. In post-war Britain, fewer than half of respondents to a Mass Observation survey felt that mankind was progressing, and one in 12 feared it was progressing backwards (the authors of the report felt this was probably an under-representation). Individual comments included: “Mankind’s progressing to destroying itself,” “We’re progressing too fast, and in the end it will kill us,” and “We’re progressing to degradation everyday.” Such attitudes are perhaps not surprising in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War and with the ever-present threat of the atomic bomb, but it is worth noting that this led to a general fear of science and expertise. As one 55-year-old woman described as ‘educated’ put it: “James Watt and his kettle started all this trouble. I’d like to drown all scientists. We’d be better off without them. We’re not educated up to it. We haven’t the

right principles.” During the war, another Mass Observer had recorded an acquaintance’s view that “all scientists should be hung by the neck until dead and then left as a grisly warning to others... He would also like to see the aeroplane inventors and technicians enjoying a similar fate to the science-mongers.”

THE HERE AND NOW

This is a salutary reminder that innovation is not experienced equally. Alongside ever more terrifying methods of war, we might place perennial scares over automation and job security, or the rather more silent ways in which algorithms entrench inequalities. It is also worth noting that, as the historian David Edgerton has argued, the history of technology is itself uneven. In celebrating inventors and privileging the new, it obscures the way technology is actually used: the way bicycles, coal power and screwdrivers persist in the internet age. While social media may have given us new tools to both commit and resist exploitation, it has done little to change the underlying power structures of gender, race, class and capital at its core. And we should not forget that so many of the most pressing social problems, such as housing and social care, are inescapably physical and relational.

The idea that we are living through an unprecedented era of social and technological change is itself rather old. It was in the 18th century that we came to expect the future to be necessarily different from the past. This was the very foundation of the

“WE NEED TO CREATE FORMS OF POLITICS THAT INCLUDE ROOM FOR THOSE WHO FAIL, OR REFUSE, TO ‘KEEP UP’”

conception of progress and of the condition of modernity I have been describing. Yet, even this sense of accelerated time has been called into question. In the late 1980s, cultural Marxists identified the arrival of what they called ‘New Times’, predicated on the shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy, and from the modernist belief in progress to a post-modern sense of ironic nostalgia. More recently, the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman proposed the concept of ‘liquid modernity’: an unstable, liminal state, in which we behave as tourists, endlessly in search of new and fleeting experiences, rather than pilgrims on a linear path of self-development.

Yet, the idea of progress remains powerful. We need to think about what this does, particularly in a context where our means to achieve it, whether individually or collectively, are in doubt. It is no longer clear, for example, that each generation can expect a higher standard of living than their parents. The American cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has called this a state of ‘cruel optimism’, where our attachment to increasingly unobtainable markers of ‘the good life’ has become an obstacle to self-fulfilment. The conversation around social mobility is an interesting example of the way that the idea of progress continues to shape our expectations of both political and personal success. While it is right to focus on the means by which education and employment can give people power over their lives, we also need to find ways of creating modes of living that are enriching and fulfilling, without the need for constant upward movement, and that are not based on a race that only some can win.

We are at an important political juncture. It is becoming increasingly clear that appeals to progressive rationality do not work and that passion, emotion and identity cannot be sidelined. Might a reconsideration of the terrain of the political allow for the development of a language that does not speak of ‘modernisers’ and ‘left behinds’? Or a notion of political choice that is not constructed as a competition between those who are comfortable with the future and those who are not?

Abandoning a restrictive and linear conception of time has potentially radical implications. It means the future need not necessarily lead on from the past in an ordered fashion. It might, for instance, give us space to explore economic options that are not tied to the male breadwinner models we have inherited from the post-war period, or to the need

for constant growth. It might allow us to revisit abandoned ideas, such as workers’ control of industry, or nationalisation, without fears of going ‘back to the 1970s’. In terms of social change, there is no reason to think that abandoning the logic of progress means giving up on its benefits. It simply means challenging racism, sexism, ableism and heterosexism head on, rather than invoking abstract historical forces to make our case for us. It is not good enough simply to declare that ‘in this day and age’ certain attitudes are appropriate and others are not; it is not surprising that such arguments lead to alienation and resentment. Framing this as a debate about the common good in the present, rather than as an encounter with the impersonal and inevitable ‘forces of progress’, could enable a different kind of political conversation. It might even create space for something genuinely new. ■

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

LEADERS PLUS

“After being on maternity leave and seeing first-hand the drop off in professional opportunities for men and women after having a child, I wanted to make a difference,” says Verena Hefti, founder of Leaders Plus.

The organisation is a network for leaders with babies that aims to help new parents who have taken time out to care for their children to stay on the leadership ladder. It does this by giving new parents access to cutting-edge professional development opportunities, peer support and networking opportunities with inspirational role models.

Verena’s first step towards tackling the issue was to take around 60 professionals and 45 babies to the House of Commons to hear from business people who have built successful careers while also raising their children.

Within two weeks of setting up something more formal, Verena had a waiting list of about 70 people. “It proved that there was a need to address this issue.” A £2,000 Seed Grant from the RSA helped Verena pay for facilitators to come in and speak, as well as a venue.

DEMOCRACY IN DANGER

We assume that democracy is one ideal that most people can agree on, but the data tells a different story

Around the world, millennials are dissatisfied with democracy, according to research by political scientists Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk. Support is dwindling in countries that are supposed to be strongholds of this fundamental liberal ideal: from the UK (where only 28.8% of younger respondents consider it essential to live in a democracy, compared with 69.8% among those born in the 1930s), to Australia (40.0% compared with 77.7%), the Netherlands (34.7% compared with 52.1%), the US (30.9% compared with 73.1%), even Sweden (58.9% compared with 83.0%). Foa, a lecturer at the University of Melbourne, thinks these figures reflect democratic apathy rather than antipathy: “Younger citizens are simply disillusioned by the existing political elite and its ability to deliver meaningful improvements in their lives. It does not mean they have discovered a penchant for authoritarian strongmen, but it does mean they are susceptible to appeals by populist parties and politicians.” Worryingly, this trend combines with increasing openness among citizens more broadly to authoritarian interpretations of democracy (see right). Shoring up democracy is clearly an urgent matter, as Foa warns: “It takes a long time to establish liberal democratic institutions, but a short time to undermine them.”

Is it essential to live in a democracy?

UK survey respondents who agree by decade of birth:



Source: European and World Values Surveys combined data from 2005–7 and 2010–14. For the full analysis on both data sets, see ‘The Signs of Deconsolidation’ by Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk in the Journal of Democracy

Rise in share of people wishing for a strong leader "who does not have to bother with elections"

The European and World Values Surveys asked citizens around the world whether they think that is a good way to run their country. They asked the question in 1995-97 and again in 2010-14. In many countries the percentage of people agreeing with the idea has increased.



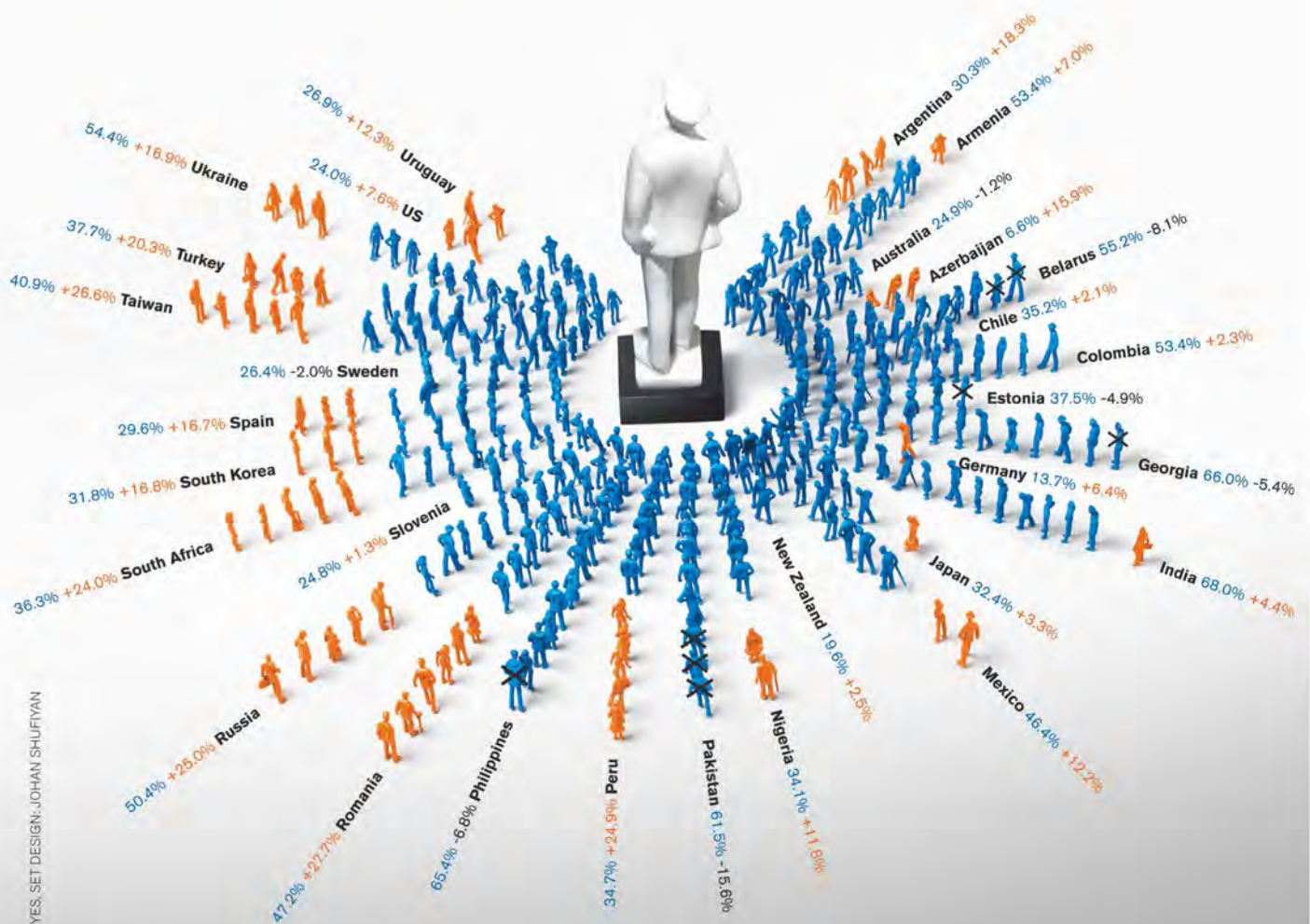
Percentage of people agreeing in 1995-97 survey



Increase between 1995-97 and 2010-14 surveys

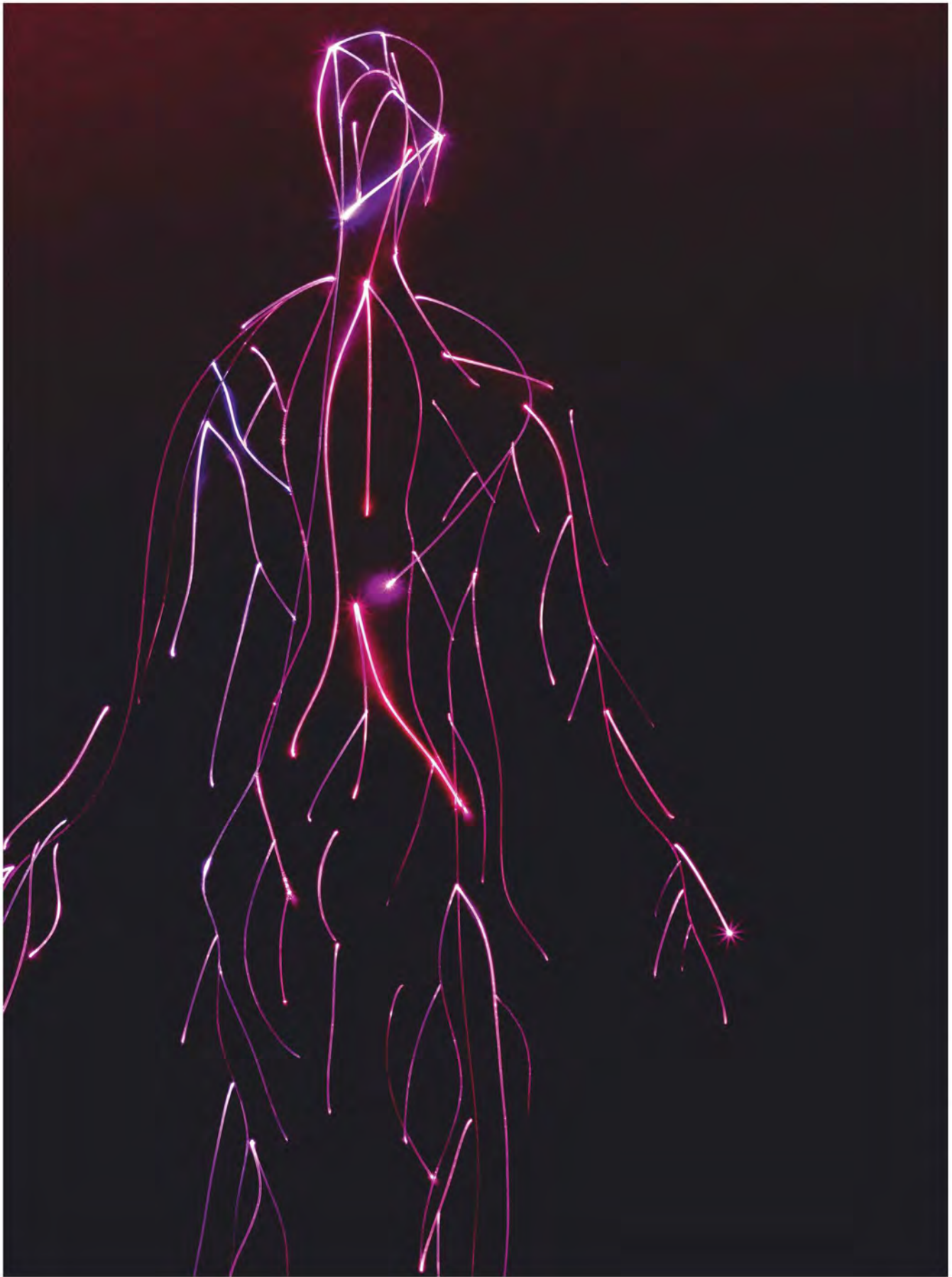


Decrease between two surveys



PHOTOGRAPHY: PIXELEYES, SET DESIGN: JOHAN SHUFIYAN

(Each figurine represents roughly 5%)



PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL HEDGE, SET DESIGN: KERRY HUGHES

VIRTUOUS TECHNOLOGY

The artificial intelligence revolution could solve some of society's biggest challenges, but only if technology companies are held to the highest ethical standards

by Mustafa Suleyman
✉ @mustafasuleymn

If we want to address society's most pressing and persistent challenges then technology will have a major role to play. From climate change to inequality, time and again we have struggled to keep pace with a changing world as the complexities of seemingly intractable problems overwhelm our capacity to intervene.

Scientific breakthroughs facilitated by artificial intelligence (AI) could make the crucial difference by helping to discover new knowledge, ideas and strategies in the areas that matter most to us all. For example, we have already started seeing progress in improving the efficiency of large scale industrial systems; at DeepMind we have started using our technology to improve the efficiency of Google's data centres, which has led to energy savings of up to 40% in cooling systems.

But increasing public concern about some elements of the technology industry should serve as an urgent wake-up call. Of course, many technology companies began with altruistic mindsets. But the truth is that good intentions, initially captured in well-meaning slogans like 'making the world a better place', are now met with increasing unease by commentators and the public.

To be clear, this is not a critique of purpose-driven businesses; I genuinely believe these types of organisations will be a key to our future. I do not >>>

MUSTAFA
SULEYMAN IS
CO-FOUNDER
OF PIONEERING
ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE
COMPANY
DEEPMIND

“MANY IN THE AI FIELD SEE THE POTENTIAL FOR NEW TOOLS TO ACTUALLY IMPROVE SOCIAL JUSTICE”

doubt the sincerity of the motivations of the vast majority of the funders, founders and executives I have met over the years; these people really do want to ‘make a real difference’ and ‘do the right thing’.

Having said that, rising public concern should not be dismissed as simply about there being a perception gap between the developers and users of technology; there is something deeper at work.

There are at least three important asymmetries between the world of tech and the world itself. First, the asymmetry between people who develop technologies and the communities who use them. Salaries in Silicon Valley are twice the median wage for the rest of the US and the employee base is unrepresentative when it comes to gender, race, class and more. As we have seen in other fields, this risks a disconnect between the inner workings of organisations and the societies they seek to serve.

This is an urgent problem. Women and minority groups remain badly underrepresented, and leaders need to be proactive in breaking the mould. The recent spotlight on these issues has meant that more people are aware of the need for workplace cultures to change, but these underlying inequalities also make their way into our companies in more insidious ways. Technology is not value neutral – it reflects the biases of its creators – and must be built and shaped by diverse communities if we are to minimise the risk of unintended harms.

Second, there is an asymmetry of information regarding how technology actually works, and the impact that digital systems have on everyday life. Ethical outcomes in tech depend on far more than algorithms and data: they depend on the quality of societal debate and genuine accountability.

Making this happen has to be a collaborative effort, and requires new types of organisation that facilitate deep understanding of how complex algorithms work and

their impacts on society. This takes courage, trust and the prioritisation of real debate and engagement over the comfort of our institutional roles, in which activists, governments and technologists are often more likely to criticise each other than to work together.

One of the new multi-stakeholder forums is the Partnership on AI, which brings together industry competitors, academia and civil society to discuss the ethics of machine learning, including issues such as fairness, transparency and accountability. The board has equal representation from corporations and nonprofits, making it a truly cross-cutting effort.

There also need to be new technical solutions that enable a wide range of stakeholders to have much greater visibility of how data is used. Interesting efforts are under way within companies, from the increased use of Transparency Reports, to technologies such as DeepMind’s Verifiable Data Audit (VDA), which aim to make all interactions with a dataset cryptographically logged and auditable. The VDA, for example, allows organisations and individuals to see what data has been used, for how long and for what purpose. Efforts like these will hopefully create real accountability between organisations using data and those they seek to serve.

Academics and nonprofits are also developing ways to make the impacts of algorithms easier to understand. For example, MIT Media Lab researcher Joy Buolamwini and the Algorithmic Justice League have created museum exhibits to increase awareness of the deeply disturbing ways facial recognition technologies often fail for individuals with darker skin tones.

This work is critically important. As well as the ethical responsibility to avoid new harms, many in the AI field also see the potential for new tools to actually improve social justice. In the realm of finance, for example, a sophisticated credit-scoring system – if built with fairness and accountability



at heart – could be far more transparent than the historical alternative, where a bank manager would decide who gets a loan, without any real obligation to provide proper explanation, and no meaningful way to address any biases that may influence the decision.

Third, and this is by no means unique to tech, we need to address the asymmetry of motivation between market-based incentives and the other societal goals we aspire to. The standard measures of business achievement, from fundraising valuations to active users, do not capture the social responsibility that comes with trying to change the world for the better.

This disconnect starts early. There might be a lot of money in tech, but the vast majority of entrepreneurs still fail. Any founder hoping to get a new business off the ground has to convince investors and new hires of future growth, and then deliver that relentlessly. Doing this takes single-minded focus on the metrics that appear to matter, with little room to consider complex societal externalities or listen to naysayers.

That is partly why some of the world's brightest minds gravitate towards the safest and most proven ideas and business models. They end up creating new services to personalise soda drinks when half a billion people do not have access to clean water, or new ways to order food by

phone when more than 800 million people are malnourished. Why is it that we can go on a date with a stranger we meet on an app in minutes, but nurses and doctors carrying out life-saving treatments still use pagers and fax machines to communicate with one another?

We need new incentive-based legal structures – ones that put social benefit on the same plane as profit – to encourage more founders to take on real-world problems, and to do so with ethics at the heart. The private sector must bring the same innovation drive that has created so many amazing new products and services over many decades to the modern challenge of designing systems that are ethical and accountable. There is clearly room for innovation here.

None of this is easy. But with rigorous attention to technology's capabilities, research into its inputs and impacts, greater transparency, and a reorientation of incentives, we can break through the complexity that makes society's problems so hard to tackle. If we can deploy these tools broadly and fairly, fostering an environment in which everyone can participate in and benefit from them, we have the opportunity to enrich and advance humanity as a whole. All of us who believe in the power of technology must do everything we can to ensure these systems reflect humanity's highest collective selves. ■

PARTICIPATORY PARIS

France's capital city has found that giving citizens control over a local budget can help rejuvenate democracy

by Pauline Veron
 @PaulineVeron

In France as elsewhere, the economic crisis has turned into a social and political crisis through the weakening of social cohesion and democratic consensus. A great number of citizens doubt that elected representatives can understand their aspirations and create a framework that will fulfil them. This impression has resulted in an increase of voter abstention and a loss of faith in democratic institutions. This cycle has to be broken urgently as it endangers our democracy.

Such a break requires the opening of public action – previously the preserve of local government – to citizens, letting inhabitants involve themselves in every discussion and decision that concerns them. Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo saw the introduction of the Paris Participatory Budget in 2014 as a means of responding to the crisis of confidence that has arisen between citizens and politicians. Its evolution since then has been a great experiment in the democratisation of public action.

This means giving citizens the ability to develop proposals for their city, to communicate with the administration and municipal service experts, and to decide how to use a significant part of the public budget by voting for their favourite projects. In Paris, we decided to allocate substantial resources to such citizen participation, dedicating 5% of the city's total investment budget in the programme every year. This represents half a billion euros for the whole term, which makes Paris the home of the largest participatory budget in the world.

PAULINE VERON IS DEPUTY MAYOR OF PARIS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

In terms of democratisation, in our experience it appears that participatory budgets can be deeply refreshing and innovative. But such benefits are contingent on the right tools being developed to ensure the programme functions democratically, is collaborative and reaches all sections of society. This depends on various factors and on the design of each step of the process.

One of our first major challenges was to guarantee significant take up of the tool across a representative cross section of citizens, taking into account factors such as age and nationality. Guaranteeing a broad representation of the population requires an innovative communication effort. So far, 7% of Parisians are voting in the participatory budget, which is a good rate in comparison with similar schemes. Still, we are striving to improve on that figure. In particular, we are focusing our efforts on the marginalised groups, which tend to be remote from public institutions and traditional political mechanisms. The aim is to include these groups in each step of the process and use the participatory budget as a tool for democratic redistribution, as the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre has done with their model. To achieve this, we have cooperated with not-for-profit organisations that work within these neighbourhoods and groups that are generally excluded from public debate. As well as informing these groups, the scheme has helped them collectively build and formalise their projects according to their specific needs.

To ensure that projects actually emerge in these neighbourhoods, we have reserved a third of the participatory budget – €30 million a year – for these projects. Finally, we chose



to develop both online and offline voting mechanisms in order to reach diverse populations and places.

We have also developed a specific version of the participatory budget for primary and middle school pupils. Students are asked to vote for projects that will occur within their school, whether it is more furniture, more cultural or sporting activities, robotics and so on. This means young citizens are given the opportunity to take decisions that affect their everyday and collective lives, and makes them active citizens from an early age.

WORKING WITH THE PEOPLE

A second important challenge is fostering high-quality dialogue between the administration, political staff and citizens, and guaranteeing total transparency throughout the process. We consider transparency a central value of every democratic device because success depends on everyone understanding and following the decisions. It is therefore important to always guide citizens through the process, which is the mission of our team of six civil servants in charge of the participatory budget. We created an open source platform to receive, evaluate, put to the vote and follow the projects. Thanks to this platform, we are able to communicate directly with all the projects' builders and to give precise explanations for every refusal.

We also decided to allow face-to-face participation because we believe it is key to the participatory process, enabling social links and debate among citizens, and helping them find common interests. To this end, we organise workshops with people who

propose similar projects, helping them to co-construct a collective project. We also hold meetings with the winners to involve them in the implementation of their ideas.

It is a huge challenge for a public administration and political staff to manage such a democratic device and it creates room for criticism, debate and contradiction. But it is also part of a necessary modernisation of public institutions and a new way of building public policies. More than 500 civil servants take part in our participatory budget; this encourages us to learn how to work with the people we serve, to share knowledge and to include constraints from both sides and innovative ideas. In the end, it leads to a more collaborative city and gives citizens a better understanding of public action and of their institutions, which is positive for everyone.

The participatory budget is an overall success for the city, a success that continues to grow. Although, it is not the only measure pushed by Paris in an effort to encourage citizen participation and democratic renewal. We think democratisation has to be inclusive and involve a combination of tools, devices and mechanisms in order to transform the whole of society. In recent years, many citizen gatherings, workshops and consultations have been organised on various aspect of the Parisian life. What should be kept in mind, and what we have learnt, is that such measures must be conceived and developed in a participatory way, and not just imposed from the top down. This is the only way to guarantee more collaboration and more trust between the citizens, their institutions and their elected representatives. ■

LOCAL TIME

Bruce Katz speaks with Matthew Taylor about the rise of new localism and where it leaves national politics

🐦 @bruce_katz

TAYLOR: The idea of localism, of devolving power, has been around for as long as centralisation. So what's new about new localism?

KATZ: New localism is a philosophy and practice of problem-solving that fits with the networked nature of the 21st century. Problem-solving is increasingly led from the bottom up, by cities. It is multi-sectoral; designed and delivered by public, private, civic, university and community labour rather than government exclusively. And it tends to be more inter-disciplinary than the bureaucratic and specialised models of siloed agencies that we developed in the 20th century. More and more we've understood, structurally, that many challenges require a 360-degree assessment.

For example, if you want to tackle traffic congestion, the solution may well not come from your department of transport, which will provide an engineering solution. The solution may lie with how housing is zoned or it may be technological. We're better now at understanding that many of the major economic, social and environmental challenges we face require inter-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches. There is still a very important reason for national governments, but their specialised agencies are only part of the solution. Cities are now the vanguard of problem-solving because they are the engines of economies and the centres of global trade and investment, and because of the political disruption at the national level, and, to some extent, the diminishment of the nation-state.

TAYLOR: Listening to you talk, there's an echo here of Robert Moses vs Jane Jacobs back in New York in the 1950s, when a powerful city planner was stopped in his tracks in lower Manhattan by a neighbourhood

BRUCE KATZ IS CO-FOUNDER OF NEW LOCALISM ADVISORS AND CO-AUTHOR (WITH JEREMY NOWAK) OF *THE NEW LOCALISM: HOW CITIES CAN THRIVE IN THE AGE OF POPULISM*

campaigner who championed a community-centred approach to urban planning. So, in some senses, this conversation between a more organic, networked, evolving way of thinking about change and a more top-down, technocratic, big-lever approach is an age-old dichotomy, isn't it? Or are you arguing that this shift is occurring because the world has changed and the nature of problems has changed?

KATZ: I think there is an evolution in thinking. We've been working at these problems for quite some time and a frustration has developed – not just in the US – with technocratic solutions, which can only go so far. We are now dealing with a city-led world and the process of adapting solutions that might work in one place to another has been sped up. Cities are looking at each other for inspiration on housing, transportation, climate change or early childhood education. They're not trying to copycat a solution from one place and replicate it in another, because there are differences in conditions and legal structures and governance systems, but they're looking for inspiration. The city level is just so much more pragmatic, tangible and concrete than the nation-state level that it enables quick adaptation in an urban world.

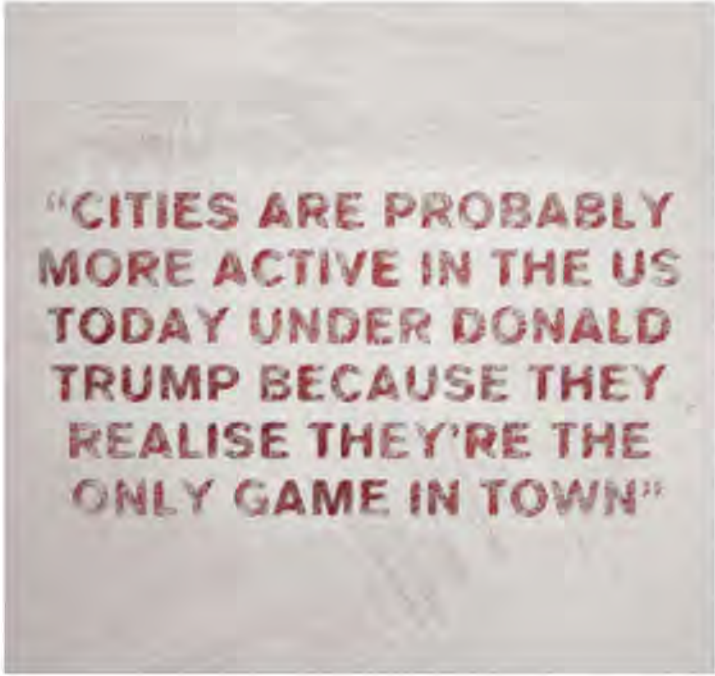
TAYLOR: I remember Geoff Mulgan, former director of policy under Tony Blair, saying to me that, with some things there's a best way of doing them – a hip transplant, for example – and with others there are lots of best ways to do them. Whitehall often pretends that nearly everything is like the former and not many like the latter. Is part of the learning that the 'pick up and plonk down' model of innovation doesn't really work?

KATZ: There's a different understanding of what 'scaling' means today. The way the US operated for a long period of time was to test policies at state level and then bring them up



to the national level: think about the big domestic successes, such as the New Deal or even the Great Society. I think that's very much a 20th century view of how transformative change happens. In this century, because so many of the solutions are networked, and so many solutions require public-private-civic finance and delivery, we're not necessarily thinking about scaling in this vertical way. Instead, we're looking at it in a horizontal way. We may be thinking, for example, about Nordic cities that are inventing not just new policies and practices, but new financial instruments around

green infrastructure. And those practices require special relationships between cities and financial institutions, such that they need to be adapted to different modes of operation in different cities. Scaling today requires multi-sectoral players who may actually not even be in the same country because capital is so mobile. That opens up possibilities. When your national government shuts down or goes on a frolic and detour for any number of reasons, the country doesn't stop. Cities are probably more active in the US, more experimental, more innovative, more affirmative >>



"CITIES ARE PROBABLY
MORE ACTIVE IN THE US
TODAY UNDER DONALD
TRUMP BECAUSE THEY
REALISE THEY'RE THE
ONLY GAME IN TOWN"

today under Donald Trump because they realise they're the only game in town, and they're actively looking for models and norms to adopt and adapt.

TAYLOR: As you know, one of the big questions the RSA is considering is how can we develop a model of economic growth that is more inclusive. Who do you think is doing the best and most interesting thinking about that?

KATZ: There are two approaches to that in the US right now that are worth looking at. First, some cities focus intentionally on labour demand. They're trying to grow industries that can create more and better jobs with decent benefits. Pittsburgh might be the best example of that because of their focus on creating an advanced, innovative economy with next-generation technologies. Second, on the labour-supply side, Louisville is thinking about cradle-to-career development. They're making investments in early childhood education, in our kindergarten to high school system, in degree completion and in apprenticeships and on-the-job training. In the US, like in most places, those four parts of the lifecycle of a child and young adult are very fragmented across different systems, constituencies and bureaucracies. But under the leadership of mayor Greg Fischer, Louisville has tried to bring this under one unified system. If you make investments at certain parts of a child's life and then you make other smart investments later on, they tend to have a cumulative effect. This is the way to reduce the achievement gap and have a more inclusive growth pattern.

TAYLOR: Let's turn to this issue of citizen engagement. At the national level, democracy is in a parlous state, with the rise of populism and high levels of disenchantment. But arguably, the sheer scale of national government – or, in your case, state government – is such that engagement is very difficult to do. Yet good local leaders have developed interesting and quite nuanced ways of keeping citizens in the loop and engaging them in the process of decision-making.

KATZ: What really works is a participatory democracy (see page 22). In cities across the country we include local citizens in local decisions – particularly around zoning and land use – that affect their daily lives and the character of their neighbourhood and community. A lot of this goes back to Jane Jacobs and the desire for citizens to be involved in major decisions that affect the shape of their places. Increasingly, we're finding new technological ways of doing this. But you have to look at places like Helsinki to see how a city is using technology to actually involve citizens in problem-solving. Citizens there are not just affecting how government works, or the decisions it makes; they are also taking responsibility for measuring carbon emissions, for example, and changing their own behaviour to reduce them. In the US we're beginning to focus on the Nordic model for citizen participation as the way forward.

TAYLOR: Is there a moment that you've observed when a city got out of denial, when they recognised they needed to think in different ways? I'm interested in that particular

rebound moment. It may be that you don't see the evidence of success for many years afterwards, but you can trace it back to a particular catalyst, when a city decided it just could not plough on in the way it did before, but it had to think and work differently.

KATZ: In cities where you have a quiet crisis, where the shock comes over a decade or 20 years through the slow undermining of core sectors, I've seen leadership communicate what is happening in such a way that the broader community takes responsive action. In Indianapolis, like many American cities, the shock that occurred was the decimation of the core of the metropolis. There had been longstanding decentralisation of people and jobs to the extent that there was nothing happening downtown in the middle of the 1970s. The response was to restore the core; they understood that for a successful modern metropolis, you needed to have a centre, a heart of a community. First they chose the strategy of becoming the amateur sports capital of the US, and they built a lot of stadia to make that happen. Then they built on that to become one of the bioscience leaders in the US.

TAYLOR: Some 50 years ago the sociologist Daniel Bell said that in the modern world the nation-state would be too big for the small things in life and too small for the big things in life. I take the view (and I suspect you might share it) that the nation-state should think about itself as being there to provide a framework of empowerment for local initiatives and for international collaboration on genuinely global challenges. Do you see any signs of a new breed of politician who wants to work at the national level, but who understands this role of empowerment?

KATZ: There is a different breed but you have to look closely because there's so much noise coming from populism. I'll give you one example of a new way of thinking. In the federal tax bill that just passed in the US, which for the most part just cut corporate tax rates, there was a small provision, little known, that allows individuals and corporations to defer capital gains taxes if they invest in opportunity funds and if those opportunity funds are invested in opportunity zones in low-income neighbourhoods. What's interesting about this tax incentive is it was written by Cory Booker, the former mayor of Newark and by Tim Scott, a Republican from South Carolina who is also a former local official. It's unlike other tax incentives because state governors have to designate the zones, then the mayors and county leaders, along with their business, philanthropic and university allies, have to design and deliver tangible projects – they might

be around real estate or entrepreneurs – while appealing to opportunity fund investors. This is not a traditional federal tax break, this is cities making their best case to investors that have pooled their capital for investment in these places. That's new localism affecting how the national government works to give ultimate latitude and flexibility to local and state leaders. Increasingly, that's how we're going to operate in the US: policy is going to be designed from the bottom up.

TAYLOR: I suspect if you went back 50 years ago, certainly in Britain, and you talked to young progressive people they might have said, national government is where the talent is, where the big ideas are, where the ambition is; local government is parochial, it's lower quality. But today, national politics feels pessimistic, polarised, sclerotic, while local leadership increasingly looks dynamic, progressive, bilateral, outward looking. What are the dangers here? In England, we have seen some on the left of the Labour Party wanting to push back against this kind of entrepreneurial, open, non-sectarian approach. They want proper, left-wing leaders who have a much more suspicious attitude towards business and a much more old-fashioned municipal model. Do you think that in the States it is only a matter of time before the populists say, we need to take on this rather dangerous progressivism that we're seeing at city level?

KATZ: There are populists on both the left and the right that want to deny how the world has changed, how the economy has restructured and the fact that problem-solving in this integrated, affirmative way in different communities is very much the way of the world. Centralisation dies hard. The old belief that we live in hierarchical societies rather than networked societies dies hard. We are going to have a battle between the populists, on both the left and the right, and the localists going forward. But if you're a 25-year-old and you want to dedicate your life to making a difference and you look at all the options open to you at the community level – start a company, or go into a philanthropy, local government or a local corporation – there are more routes to solutions at that level than at government level. The entrepreneurial people will choose to go the local route, and hopefully they will decide at some point to work in national government and try to bend the will of the national government to serve the community. We're in a battle; not one that everyone talks about, but nonetheless a battle between the nation-state and the city-state, between very different ways of operating and perceiving the world. This is one of the great unreported transitions of our time, and, structurally, it may be the most important transition of the West.



BUILDING WELLBEING

Environmental psychologists are investigating how human environments can be brought into sync with our bodies to improve our health, with some surprising results

by Lily Bernheimer

As temperatures soared last summer, even the remotest regions of northern Wales were boiling. In the UK's newest and largest prison, HMP Berwyn, atmospheric conditions were less than ideal. Cell windows had been designed with small, operable side panels, giving prisoners some control over the temperature and airflow in their rooms. But the windows in some staff areas were sealed shut, leading to poor ventilation, overheating and lower staff morale. Prisons are a special case; although they combine accommodation, healthcare, employment and education, historically they have not been subject to the same standards as other living or working spaces. But prisons are not the only modern buildings that have been designed without operable windows based on the promise that technologically superior systems would automatically moderate airflow and temperature better than occupants could. Sadly, not all of these 'smart' buildings

LILY BERNHEIMER IS AUTHOR OF *THE SHAPING OF US, HOW EVERYDAY SPACES STRUCTURE OUR LIVES, BEHAVIOUR, AND WELL-BEING*, AND AN ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGIST

IMAGE: EMMA HACK

“WE LIKE SPACES THAT FLIRT WITH US WITHOUT THREATENING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF OUR GOALS”

turned out to be so clever. How have we lost something so simple and intuitive as the ability to open windows?

Research suggests that evolution attuned us to elements and environments that supported our survival in the natural world. Sadly, we seem to have forgotten this adaptive ability to create and maintain spaces that sustain us. Studying the history of habitats ranging from high-rises and hospitals to roundabouts and self-built settlements for my book, *The Shaping of Us*, I uncovered a common trend. The harder we try to engineer the growth of human environments and our behaviour in them, the worse things seem to turn out.

This is despite the increased adoption of ‘design thinking’, whereby the creative strategies of designers have been applied to ‘reimagine’ everything from better breast pumps to healthcare service experience and the UK’s Behavioural Insights Team campaigns. Oddly, these problem-solving strategies are rarely applied to buildings, such that evaluating and fine-tuning buildings while they are in use is not a common architectural practice. But environmental psychology – the study of how built and natural environments relate to our cognition, wellbeing and behaviour – has developed tools to do just this.

Environmental psychology research often confirms what architects assume: that designing to optimise natural light, fresh air and views is important to wellbeing. But it also reveals the unexpected and the counter-intuitive. Who would guess that we prefer streets that wind mysteriously around the corner to those exposing what lies straight ahead? Or that the sterile and colourless design standards of institutional spaces enhance anxiety because they mimic the experience of neurophysiological breakdown? We like spaces that flirt with us – complex and mysterious settings – without threatening the achievement of our goals.

Surroundings affect our wellbeing on three levels: physical, functional and psychological. On a basic physical level, factors such as cleanliness, air quality and temperature affect our health. But design features such as scale can also take a physical toll. Your heart rate and blood pressure are likely to be higher after spending a few hours in a cramped room compared with a spacious one. On a functional level, environments shape us through the types of activity they enable and discourage. Children raised in high-rise buildings, for instance, tend to be slower in developing motor skills because outdoor play is more difficult.

In the psychological dimension, subtler qualities such as shape, texture and the presence of nature play upon our mood and emotions. Curved forms make us feel calmer than angular ones. Recovering from surgery with a view of a tree can decrease pain perception and accelerate healing. Natural scenes are defined by fractal geometry, a specific recipe of order and complexity that holds the restorative power to decrease stress and sharpen concentration. These same serene patterns are found in valued

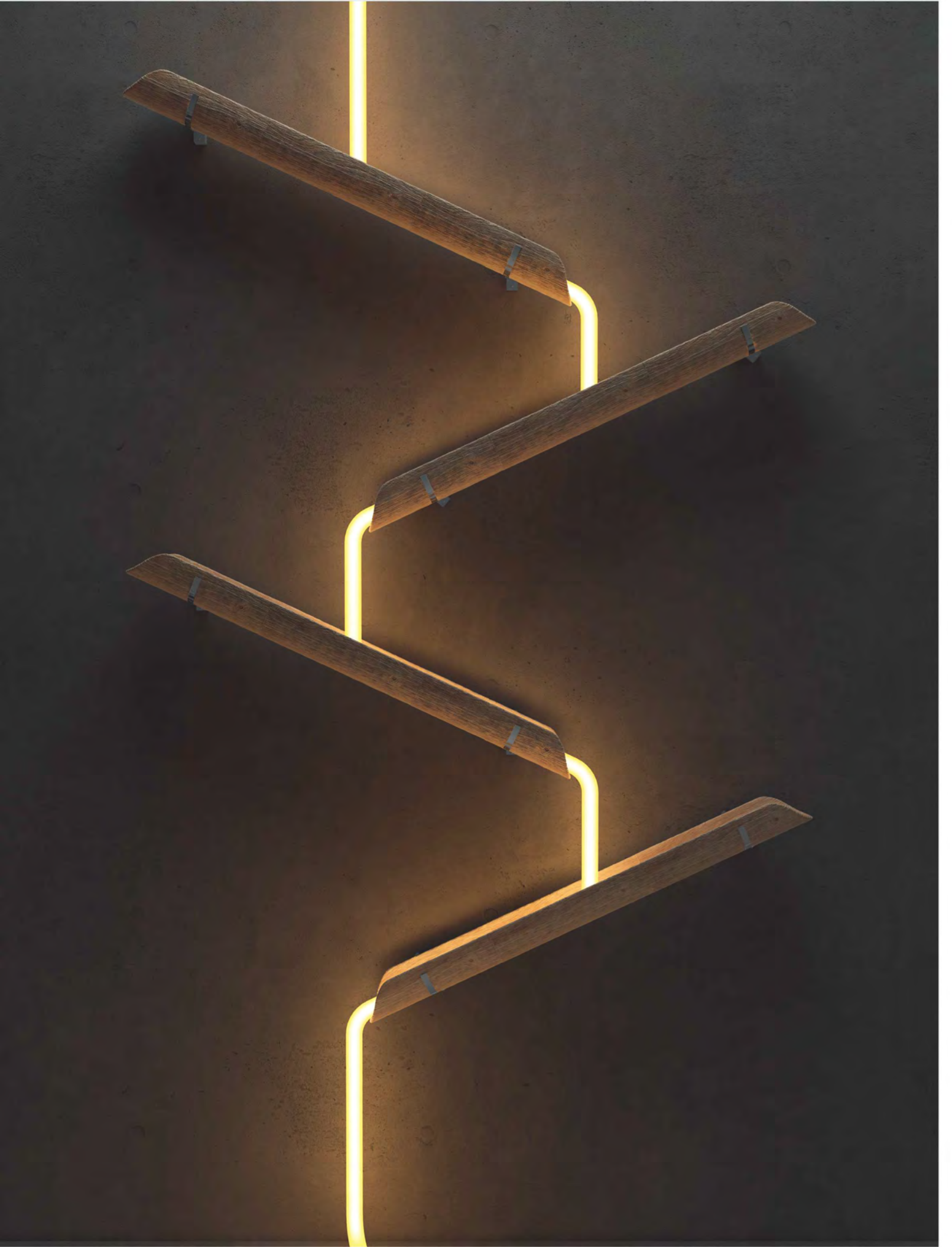
vernacular structures around the world, from the cascading domes of Hindu temples to the detailing of window mouldings.

So how can environmental psychology be applied in practice? In 2017, I joined Matter Architecture on a project exploring the collaborative process between architecture and environmental psychology in creating a guide to wellbeing in prison design. Building on the RSA’s work on prisons, the project set out to identify practical design recommendations that would support rehabilitation. Starting with an extensive literature review and field visits, we conducted a post-occupancy evaluation of HMP Berwyn – the equivalent of ‘user experience testing’ for buildings – employing research techniques including focus groups, interviews, acoustic assessment and surveys.

What did we learn? First, that HMP Berwyn is leagues ahead of outdated Victorian facilities on the physical level, with some crucial oversights. In addition to ventilation issues, the scale of the prison and elements of its structural layout were seen to create barriers to wellbeing. On the functional level, both prisoners and staff complained that the housing block floorplan – imagine a space roughly the shape of a K – created awkward spaces between buildings and limited their utility. A cruciform floorplan could enhance sports activities and window views.

Psychologically, HMP Berwyn made great advances with calming ambient lighting and introducing rounded tables to support social relationships in the visitors’ centre, landscaped areas throughout the grounds and photos of the Welsh countryside on the walls. But our surroundings impact our mental health in ways more interactive than lighting and landscaping. The spaces we live and work in are much more than environmental sticks and carrots; they mediate our experience of community, creativity and identity. While prison design has historically sought to deprive prisoners of their ‘sense of self’, recent findings suggest that supporting a strong sense of identity and ‘normality’ is critical to creating rehabilitative environments. Many staff and prisoners at HMP Berwyn felt its design could do more to support agency and responsibility. These changes need not be costly and there is an abundance of low-hanging, cost-effective fruit to be picked; enabling people to open a window or personalise their room, for example.

Because prisons tend to be so far behind other areas of public services, they are good places to relearn the lost art of building for wellbeing. But the environmental psychology tools we used are identical to those that can be leveraged to improve lives through the design of schools, housing and workspaces. Harmful flaws are replicated because we do not take the time to question whether environments work for the people and purposes they serve. Products such as cars and websites are never put into use without user experience testing and tweaking. We can and should do the same with our buildings.



POWER FLOWS

The technology transforming society will exacerbate existing problems such as inequality unless we build a vision of the future that is experimental and powered with civic energy

by Anthony Painter
 @anthonypainter

When the General Motors factory in Janesville, in the US state of Wisconsin, closed in 2008, it left a community in crisis. The factory lay at the heart of the city's economic and civic life. With good working-class jobs, a sense of identity, belonging, security and stability, Janesville had been the quintessential late 20th century industrial community. There was little warning. Almost overnight, the financial crash hit and production stopped.

The individual stories behind the statistics, brought to light in Amy Goldstein's book *Janesville*, show vividly what happens when security flips into insecurity. Although Janesville has now recovered economically, with unemployment back to pre-crisis levels, thousands of families still bear scars. Political and local systems responded with income support, charity, funding for re-training, support for access to work, and much more, but even these efforts felt insufficient in many respects. The reality of insecurity for many affected was humiliation, addiction, family break-up, much lower wages, house foreclosures, depression, anxiety and, for some, despair. It is difficult not to admire the resilience and determination of the families at the heart of Goldstein's brilliant observation of people at the sharp end of economic insecurity and collapse. But, as individuals, as a city, as a nation, there was little in place to ensure that, should a crisis hit, sufficient support to enable adaptation was in place. Action was reflexive and reactive rather than security being embedded.

The lesson from Janesville is simple. When change comes, you need continuous and resilient systems of support and adaptation to already be in place. Janesville was a sudden-impact event, but slow-impact change such as from the hidden adoption of new technologies over time can be just as devastating, even though these shifts can be more individualised, geographically diverse and silently disruptive. Increasingly, it would appear that we are in the midst of a change event that will

have both sudden and slow-impact consequences. The change? A shift from an industrial to a digital society.

THE DIGITAL SOCIETY

In the early 2000s, the social theorist Manuel Castells described, in a quixotic manner, the internet as “the tapestry of our lives”. We now know he was both right and wrong. He was right that connected, digital technologies were becoming a pervasive force, premature though his pronouncement seemed at the time. But, in his fabric metaphor, he saw these technologies as a neutral platform, a means of self-identity and expression. From the vantage point of 2018, we know that digital communications technologies, overlaid with algorithmic code, are far from neutral. These technologies intersect psychology, our relationships, our politics, our knowledge and our economic life. This intersection is heavily biased. Some people, places, nations, genders, skills, viewpoints, political styles, access to capital and to networks are favoured over others. Some inequalities can be subverted as new doors open for the technologically and culturally dexterous but, overall, they are more likely to be exacerbated. The influence of digital technology is now socially pervasive.

The effects of economic forces on Janesville were not neutrally distributed; they were particular, biased and concentrated. Similarly, access to power, wealth and opportunity is heavily biased in a digital society. The benefits have been enormous, but a darker side is becoming apparent; we can, for example, see that non-neutrality means deeply destructive political, geopolitical, criminal and terrorist forces can unleash chaos. The travails of Facebook over the Cambridge Analytica affair are just the latest instance of non-neutrality. We can also observe that power and wealth can become concentrated in new ways as particular platforms and global marketplaces are able to capture and occupy magnified network effects. Mental wellbeing, a sense of agency in work and the political decisions you make are all influenced by the degree of control you have over digital platforms.

All of this may seem unduly pessimistic, but it is not intended to be. For it is by facing the risks associated with the spread of the digital society that we can better secure the rewards. New forms of work, a better environment, healthcare, new ways of interacting and cooperating and access to knowledge and new ways of collectively solving problems are just some of the many benefits. But too few may be able to partake in them unless we manage the risks as well. Social discontent may become far more prevalent. We have some historical examples for guidance.

Following the American Civil War, that society faced a transition from an agrarian to an industrial one in the late 19th century. For digital technology today, read the railroads then. As America expanded westwards, its economy became ever more shaped around commerce and industry, while agriculture declined. American cities expanded and were reshaped. Chicago – at the heart of railroad expansion – boomed and was even rebuilt following a great fire flattening over three square miles of the city. Its rebirth was celebrated in a World’s Fair in 1893 (modelled on London’s Great Exhibition, with which the RSA

was intrinsically linked). But the glitz of the so-called ‘Gilded Age’ masked a society in a state of deep conflict.

Railroads were the non-neutral connective tissue that helped reshape and redistribute power in American society. Simmering tensions, around immigration, class struggles, power, corruption and riches, lay beneath a wealthy veneer. These tensions were exemplified by the ‘robber barons’: men who had deployed political and financial influence to take advantage of an enormous new single market catalysed by the transcontinental railroads. Business empires such as that built by JP Morgan were forged in this furnace. Ultimately, the politics of this dynamic but divided nation became unsustainable and spilled over.

A nasty four-year depression in the 1890s spurred a progressive reaction; first as a movement, then in the form of parties such as Teddy Roosevelt’s Progressive Party. The biggest dynamic driving this movement was a fight against political corruption and obscene wealth. Progressivism became an all-encompassing force for change, from expansion and promotion of education to improved working conditions and trust-busting. Mixing in with prevailing middle-class puritan moralism (prohibition of alcohol was one thread of progressivism) and scientism, where the professions, academia and industry were to be placed on a more elevated scientific footing, this progressivism was a creature of its time. The Fordist (or Taylorist) factory as intricate organising machine came out of this way of thinking. Nonetheless, this progressive era was a remarkably creative response to the raging inequalities and insecurities of the Gilded Age.

Railroads and big business were regulated properly for the first time and consumers protected. Some businesses were broken up in a wave of ‘trust-busting’. And a progressive income tax was introduced, while tariffs were reduced to the benefit of consumers. In his 1910 ‘new nationalism’ speech, Teddy Roosevelt laid out a case for social welfare, healthcare, inheritance taxes and greater worker rights. Some of these became elements of his (fifth) cousin Franklin’s ‘New Deal’ in the 1930s. Of course, none of this was reserved for the US. Welfare states as an answer to raging inequality were developed and extended within many European contexts and the building blocks for the modern British social contract were put in place by the Liberal government of the time.

Then, as now, disruptive technologies reshaped society and the economy. Just as now, social tensions and a state of insecurity, albeit alongside a sense of possibility, abounded. Unlike now, a coherent and significant set of ideas started to come to the fore with a political, social and intellectual movement behind it. Admittedly, the full fruits of this thinking did not ripen until a subsequent depression in the early 1930s opened the political field. This only emphasises that if we are going through a similarly disruptive change, then a greater pace is required.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INACTION

We have barely begun to seriously discuss what sort of society we want in this increasingly digital world and how can we steer towards it. A progressive vision of the digital society must combine freedom and justice, and the means by which we seek these goals changes with time. Late 19th and early 20th century progressives



used different means in different contexts, but they were aiming towards similar goals. The challenge is no less involved, no less all-encompassing and requires no less imagination today.

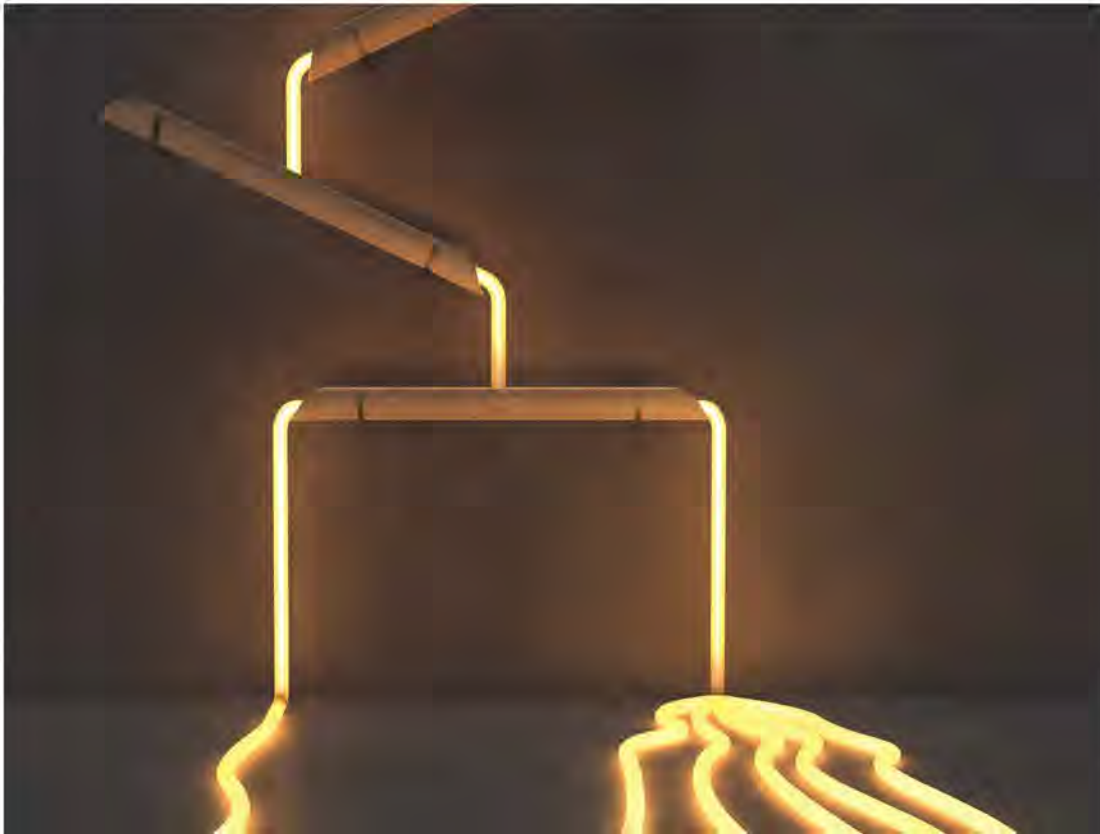
If the premise is right and we are indeed going through a slow process of change, then to what immediate tensions will a new progressivism have to respond? Some are becoming apparent already. The politics of the moment contains both echoes of past problems and omens of new ones. In Brexit, and indeed the victory of Donald Trump, there is an echo of the old wounds of de-industrialisation. In Rock County, where Janesville is located, there was a 7% swing from Democrat to Republican between 2012 and 2016. Almost half of Trump's winning margin in Wisconsin can be put down to that shift alone. A correlation between post-industrial Britain and support for Brexit has been established. The echo contains cultural as well economic divides, with concerns over immigration linked to rising economic insecurity.

In the UK, one signal of tension is the relative success of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party in last year's general election. His coalition is built on the under-45s and 'held back' – the bedrock of Labour's new supporter base – rather than the over-65s and 'left behind', among whom Brexit and new Tory support is found. Faced with austerity, student debt, lack of access to affordable and suitable housing, economic insecurity, work-life imbalance, low savings and long working lives, this group have become a – perhaps surprisingly – radical force. But, for all their economic stresses,

these voters are not generally motivated by the same social conservatism or cultural anxiety as the Brexit constituency. They have tended to be socially liberal and remain supportive of those principles. They are generating a new political energy that arises from the current economic and cultural strains. The viral politics of the digital society has accelerated the expression of this energy.

The characteristics of being held back are best explained in reference to a treatise of economist Albert O Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. Hirschman's core thesis was that in the face of institutional decay, there are two potential responses. One is 'exit', which is the market method. You can work, shop or devote time elsewhere. 'Voice' is the democratic method. You can show up and seek to influence direction. This is the world of citizens, solidarity and active participation. But what if neither good exit routes nor the opportunity to influence through voice are available? There is an irony here. Never have we had more 'voice' as social media platforms spread, but turning that into change appears elusive. In the workplace, as trade unions and other supports have decayed, often we have little voice at all. As the political economy of the digital society emerges, this paradox of unlimited voice but little influence may be precisely the situation for a growing number of held back, often younger, people. 'Loyalty' becomes the only, yet dissatisfactory, option.

The RSA's survey of modern work, *Thriving, striving or just about surviving?*, identified two groups of highly >>>



insecure worker, the ‘chronically’ and ‘acutely’ precarious. Both groups were younger than average compared with the working age population. Some of these workers are on their way up but a huge number may well be ‘stuck’ in their current situation. When we see that 41% of the survey sample have accessible savings under £1,000 and 32% have less than £500, you understand how people get stuck even in work with sub-optimal income and opportunity for experience. When you add in a welfare state that is constructed on the basis of a simple equation of work – any work equalling economic security – then the stuck and held back nature of work for many becomes even clearer.

Insecurity interacts with inequalities of income and wealth and feeds into lower productivity as people get stuck and fail to have good access to new skills. This exacerbates political divides and cultural conflict. Meanwhile, a digital society is emerging where control over the algorithm, data and platform increasingly creates potential for exacerbating inequalities of wealth, income and power. The conflicts and tensions of agrarian America were not properly resolved, particularly in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, before the disruptive force of continent-wide industrialisation and communication took hold. A similar situation is evident now. The progressive reaction from the 1890s to the 1930s (with a distant echo in the 1960s) ultimately responded to acute social tensions. From ‘muck-raking’ journalism, active chronicles of injustice in America’s cities, to visionary politicians and lawyers, radical social theorists and

movements, at critical moments a progressive response became possible and then was realised. A similar task is now ahead.

A NEW PROGRESSIVE VISION

Progressives today should share a sense that the current distribution of power, wealth and opportunity is not quite a square deal. But a progressive political economy cannot be silent on human purpose and meaning. Progressivism should exalt civic and economic citizenship. It is through empowered citizenship – participation – that freedom comes into view.

The digital society opens out new means of participating and new creative possibilities, but it also creates new collective challenges, such as bias in machine learning. We need to create an environment where participation, on an equal footing, in work and democratic life, and civic and social engagement is possible. This would create a broad notion of citizenship through which our collective challenges, digital or otherwise, can be confronted. We know that the human mind is moral, creative, social and complex. So diversity, creativity and solidarity should be embraced as means of maintaining a common life in a complex world.

One critical response will be to deepen and widen education and learning systems. Throughout our lives, from school to our final years, deeper access to the world of knowledge should be matched with wider engagement with the world of action and participation, the embodiment of citizenship. Passion, resilience, generosity and determination should be a part of the

“WE CAN ALREADY SEE THE CONTOURS OF THE CHANGE NEEDED AND THE THREATS WE MAY FACE”

life-long learning picture too. This expansive culture is akin to head teacher Peter Hyman’s head, hand and heart approach to education, described in a previous edition of this journal and in the RSA’s *Ideal School Exhibition*, and should become a lifetime pursuit with learning systems and supports to match. This would require a significant rethink of how we enable people to access quality learning more continuously in the post-16 environment.

If the potential upside of digital society is greater scope for human freedom, diversity and creativity, then a very real downside has to be confronted. There is a harsh truth here. Freedom cannot be widely enjoyed without disparities of wealth, income and power being addressed. The fear is that already, as can be seen in debate about unequal access to opportunities in the technology sector, a model of division rather than diversity is emerging. Without access to resources – financial, and networks of opportunity, influence and voice – freedom is a hollow concept. Resources create a bedrock of security on which creativity is expressed.

This is why there is a strengthening case for a universal basic income. The RSA itself has recently suggested that a sovereign wealth fund could be established to provide up to two years of basic income-type support for working age people and their families. Such a ‘basic opportunity dividend’ could help release the held back and the stuck and open new vistas of opportunity. It essentially puts a greater array of ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ options on the table. Basic income alone is only the beginning of a new social contract. As Tony Greenham argues elsewhere in this edition (see page 36), economic democracy also relies on a wider distribution of assets, ownership and voice. As new strategic economic approaches are adopted, especially at the local or regional level, new forms of business and asset ownership should be explored. New forms of worker support and solidarity have to be a part of this voice amplification. And existing concentrations of wealth and power have to be contended with.

That is why there needs to be consideration of how common assets can be deployed in a manner that better balances public and private gain. This is ultimately where railroad-era America failed. For example, could the transfer of data from citizens to global digital platforms be levied to help fund the sovereign wealth fund we have proposed? We believe so. Moreover, new models of public influence, voice and regulation will be needed to help ensure that machine learning is grounded in public and not just private benefit.

THE METHODS MATTER

The progressive movement in early 20th century America spanned interventions ranging from tax to worker support to education and new social investment and security. A new progressivism

would cover a similar span. Yet, pre-determined solutions will not do; the method matters, and it must be experimental. The vision must be bold, but getting there relies on sources of civic energy within complex systems. The RSA’s methods try to ally promising ideas with experimentalism and working with others to explore implementation at scale. A new progressivism needs ambition and boldness, but interventions should test where opportunities for change actually lie: thinking systemically, acting entrepreneurially.

We know that change takes time, but we can already see the contours of the change needed and the threats we may face. Industrial society was too blind to the social and environmental impacts of its technologies. We cannot be blind to the psychological, social, environmental and political challenges of a digital society.

For those who wish for an authentic freedom, then new approaches must inevitably follow. If we fail, the risk of sudden-impact events such as Janesville become more likely. The social division of today will barely be the beginning. But if we observe and learn from past change events then a new progressivism can help us navigate through. Foresight, knowledge and imagination are, after all, necessary conditions of a modern enlightenment. ■

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

GREATER EXPECTATIONS

The Girls’ Network was established by Charly Young FRSA and Becca Dean, two secondary school teachers in north-west London who noticed multiple barriers facing girls in the classroom.

In 2013 they established a one-to-one mentoring scheme for 30 girls based on research showing that conversations and personal relationships could have a big impact on challenging stereotypes and expectations. They believed the girls needed greater access to opportunities, but also the confidence to seize these chances and the skills to thrive.

The Girls’ Network mentoring scheme was soon in high demand, and now operates across London and the south coast, working with more than 1,000 girls each year. Every girl on the programme last year reported feeling more confident in themselves and in understanding how to get where they want to go. Teachers saw 89% of girls demonstrate more resilience and self-motivation at the end of the year.

The Girls’ Network recently received a £10,000 Scaling Grant from the RSA to support this important work.

ACCESSIBLE ECONOMICS

Economic democracy is the best way to see marginalised communities thrive once again

by Tony Greenham
 @TonyGreenham

Over 80 years ago, George Orwell vividly thrust the living conditions of the industrial working class into the consciousness of the British elite. In his 1937 classic *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell documented the lives of the left behind communities of his day. From the harsh physical trials of the coalmines, through desperate slum housing, to the slow, undignified and lonely deaths of the elderly in cheap lodgings, he won plaudits for immersing himself in the miserable bleakness of northern industrial towns.

Ranked in economic statistics as the UK's most deprived community, Clacton-on-Sea in Essex was visited by the modern equivalent of Orwell's diary and pen in 2015 when Channel 5's camera crew rolled into town. In the resulting programme, *Benefits by the Sea*, the Brooklands area of Jaywick was described as the "closest thing the UK has to a shanty town". This prompted lurid newspaper headlines and outrage from local residents in equal measure. And, when the RSA's Citizens' Economic Council went to Clacton-on-Sea as part of a series of workshops aimed at hearing the experiences of economically marginalised communities, we found widespread cynicism about the motives of government and business, and disillusionment with the lack of economic opportunities. But in common with all of our regional workshops and citizen council deliberation days, we also found a deep community spirit and latent energy for more active participation in the economy.

The gulf in lived experience between rich and poor, north and south, graduates and school leavers, urban and rural, certainly echoes loudly down the decades from 1937. Despite enormous economic growth over eight decades, one in three children in the UK live in poverty. But here the similarities should end. Today, we need a very different response to revelations of economic inequality and social division. One that proceeds from

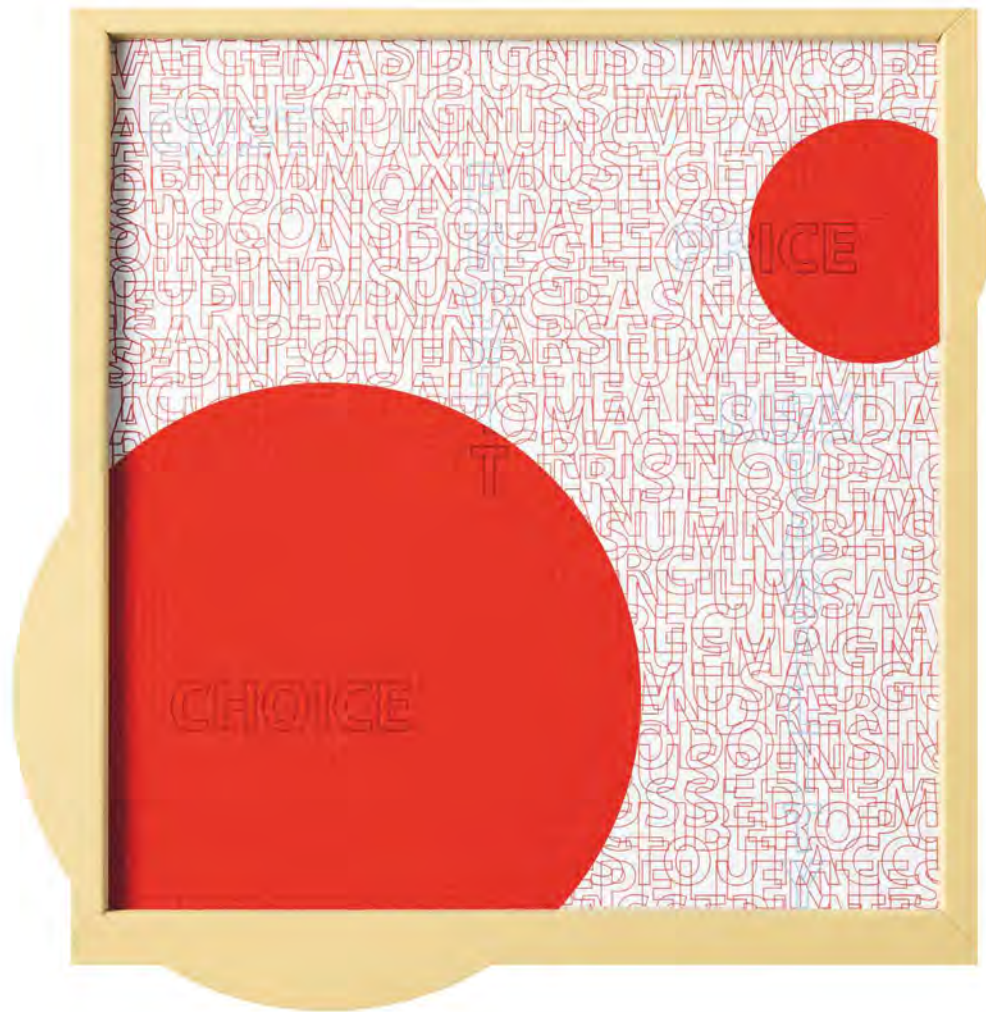
the belief that people experiencing a sense of exclusion are not a problem to be solved but are themselves part of the solution.

The progressive reaction to Orwell's revelations was, by and large, a technocratic one. The educated elites, immersed in theories of scientific socialism or in the patrician one-nation Tory tradition, would absorb his evidence and use it to formulate better social and economic policies to improve the conditions of the masses. Maybe that was appropriate to the time; the huge improvements in living standards brought about under the post-war welfare state consensus would suggest so. This was a period of centralised and technocratic policymaking like none before or since. Mass production was the foundation of the economy, and command and control managements representing capital negotiated with hierarchical unions representing labour. The UK's government machinery, having won a world war and still governing an empire spanning the globe, was supremely confident in its ability to formulate and implement policies: to grow the economy and fairly distribute the rewards, to predict and provide.

That age is behind us. The challenges of wicked problems, of complex and increasingly globally interconnected systems, and the seeming impossibility of creating change in large, complex and bureaucratic organisations – public, private and charitable – have been well explored in this journal. Even if government's policy levers are still connected to something, it seems we have only the haziest notion of what will actually happen when we pull them. But this is not a counsel of despair. We have more data, more processing ability and more experts than ever before, including artificial intelligences that just might help us harness this explosion of information for social good. But the response we need is not simply to upgrade our expert systems. Instead, we need to upgrade our notion of economic citizenship and create new institutions, policies and cultural norms that can activate it. We need to build an economic democracy.

Traditionally, the notion of economic democracy refers to broadening the control of industry to include workers

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PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL HEDGE. SET DESIGN: KERRY HUGHES

and other key stakeholders. The definition that underpinned the RSA's Citizens' Economic Council is more expansive. It calls not just for all stakeholders to have a voice in economic decision-making by corporations, governments and civil society organisations, but also for more citizens to own and control economic resources collectively and individually. In short, it might be argued that economic power, like muck, is most effective when evenly spread. While some might interpret this as old-school socialist redistribution of wealth, it is in fact even older-school free market economics. Adam Smith's commanding insight into how markets organise economic resources for the common good rests upon the even distribution of power between market participants. Remove that qualifying condition and the proposition falls. Thus the reality of markets today is that imbalances of power are pervasive and efficiently exploited by the powerful for their own gain.

A real commitment to economic democracy must go much further than inviting citizens to participate in economic decisions. This was the philosophy of David Cameron's Big Society. Undoubtedly well intentioned, and grounded in a similar asset-based view of people as a source of untapped energy

and creativity, the project's fatal flaws were doing nothing to address the huge and worsening inequalities of economic power that already existed, and failing to invite public participation in the policymaking processes of government. This approach entrenches the economy as a game of Monopoly stacked in favour of some players, who start with Mayfair properties, and men, who collect an extra £50 when they pass Go, while others begin in debt, and some are barely allowed to play at all.

Building an economic democracy does not imply equality of economic outcomes, however, but it is interdependent with economic security for all. Greater understanding of the lived experience of the most economically marginalised leads to policies that promote a better base of economic security. Equally, when people feel more secure, they have a greater sense of individual agency and flourishing that enables them to confidently engage in civic life. This is why our work on universal basic income is not merely seeking to tackle poverty and inequality; the real prize is empowerment. We need to create a level economic platform on which everyone has the opportunity to build a creative and fulfilling life. As Franklin D Roosevelt put it in his 1944 Economic Bill >>

of Rights, “We have come to a clear realisation of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.”

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN

How might an economic democracy be different from our current practices and institutions? One of the key insights from *Building a Public Culture of Economics*, the final report of the Citizens’ Economic Council, is the importance of deliberative processes as a counterweight to marking crosses in boxes in polling booths. While representative democracy still stands as the least bad model of national governance, our recent experience of UK-wide direct democracy in the form of referenda on Brexit and electoral reform has seemed more endarkening than enlightening. Brexit was a resounding vote for something, but what, exactly, is vigorously contested.

Processes such as citizens’ reference panels, where a selection of people from all walks of life are deeply involved in the process of policymaking, are effective on a number of levels. First, they markedly increase citizens’ sense of agency and influence over the economy. Second, they create a convergent dynamic, encouraging empathy, understanding and civilised debate instead of a divergent dynamic of bitterly divided ‘yes’ and ‘no’ camps shouting abuse at one another. Third, they unearth a much richer understanding of the concerns, lived experience and aspirations of citizens. Finally, they have the

potential to shorten the feedback loop between decision-makers and those living with their decisions and to improve the efficacy and legitimacy of policy.

This is true of all domains of policy, but economics is one of the spheres in which people have felt most disempowered and disengaged, with public levels of trust in economic institutions from business to Local Enterprise Partnerships to government departments in decline. Fortunately, we do not need many citizens to directly participate in such processes to reap the benefits. Evidence suggests that, where citizens have been meaningfully involved in decisions, not only will the design of policy be better informed and so more effective, but the public will have greater confidence in those decisions. Our own survey revealed that one in two people would trust economic institutions more if they knew that ordinary citizens were formally included in their decision-making.

WHAT IF WE RAN IT OURSELVES?

Economic democracy is more than having a voice. To spread economic power also requires more people to have ownership and control over economic resources.

More than 16 million people in the UK have savings of less than £100. This matters because even small levels of savings change the way people interact with the world, encouraging and enabling longer-term thinking and boosting self-confidence and sense of personal agency. Our research on self-employment and small business reinforces the importance of asset ownership for the chances of success as an entrepreneur.

Furthermore, concentration of economic power in markets, particularly in the hands of large and global corporations, can adversely affect the vibrancy of civic life. For example, a study of Walmart stores opened over a 30-year period in the US found that they were correlated with decreasing voter turnout, lower participation in political activities, less philanthropy and declining social capital (‘Discounting Democracy’, 2009). This stemmed from individuals having less contact with each other in the street, and local business owners having to work longer hours to compete. In other words, a vibrant local small business sector has positive benefits for democracy and society far beyond what can be captured in raw economic statistics.

An increasingly important means of widening asset ownership and governance is the vibrant and growing community business sector and the RSA recently partnered with Power to Change, Sheffield University Management School and the Real Ideas Organisation to deliver training and support to more than 50 community business leaders. Local people are increasingly coming together to take over important businesses such as shops and pubs, save community services such as libraries and village halls, and invest in new enterprises such as renewable energy companies. Often this gives people a direct ownership stake in their local economy, but, unlike passive and remote ownership of companies through pension funds, it also activates more direct and active engagement with the business.

The new Fellow-led Community Savings Bank movement is another expression of economic democracy in practice.

FELLOWSHIP IN ACTION

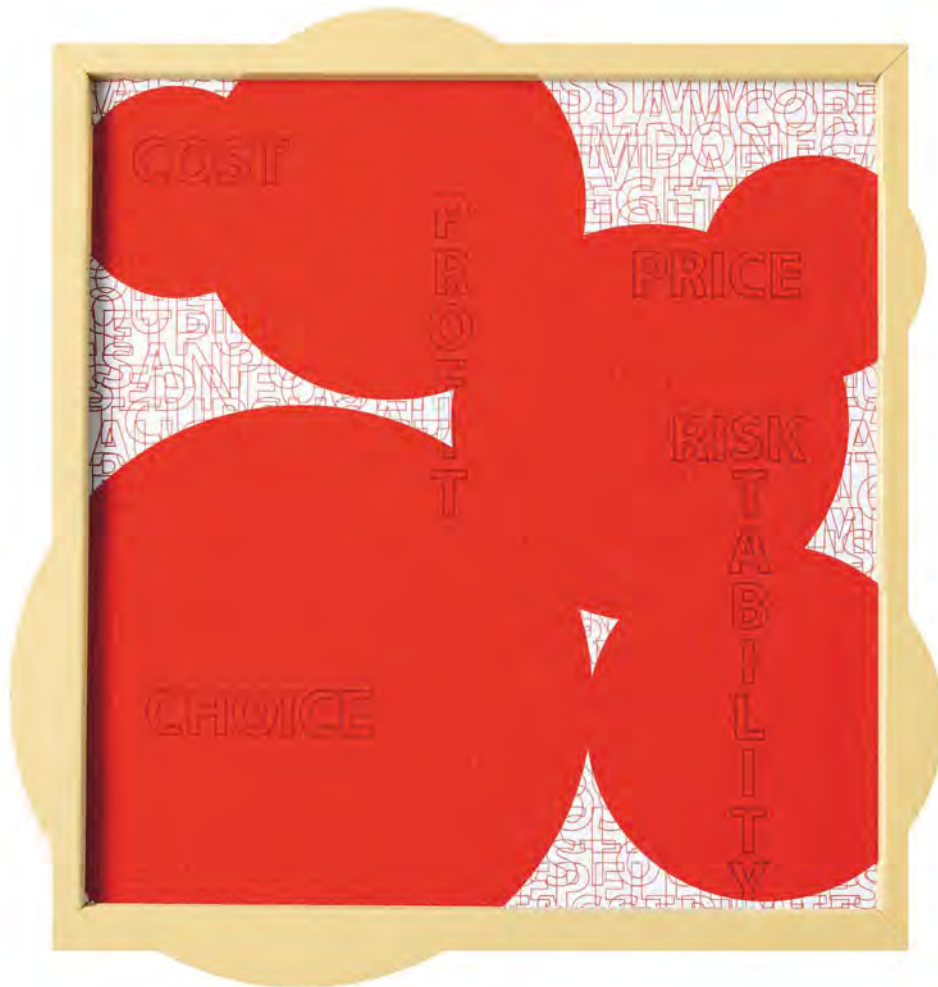
A WELCOMING SPACE

Oli Monks is a recent management and entrepreneurship graduate from Lancaster University. He established Place with Purpose after witnessing his brother’s journey with autism. “There are many challenges that autistic people face in the UK,” says Oli. “Place with Purpose is my way of trying to respond to these challenges in a positive way.”

Place with Purpose recently received a £2,000 Seed Grant from the RSA. “We’re using this money to trial a space in London for a few months. It will be for people who are neurodiverse and are either out of work, freelance or self-employed. It is also for companies who wish to provide employees with a working environment that is sensitive to the needs of their autistic employees.”

The space will have little touches like ear defenders, for when the noise gets too loud for people trying to work, and Oli wants to have a sensory room, where the lights are low and people can take five minutes out if they are facing a sensory overload. There will also be designated spaces for quiet working, and anyone who comes into the office will be aware of the neurodiverse community and their needs.

“It’s about helping neurodiverse people be able to be the best that they can be,” says Oli.



Customer ownership removes the temptation to mis-sell that is inherent in financial services. And the profits of the business are distributed more evenly between the economic stakeholders, in this case shareholders, savers, borrowers and employees. The equality of members each having one vote regardless of their shareholding or financial status creates a mutuality of trust and respect.

However, mutual ownership is not a prerequisite of economic democracy. Corporations can innovate with multi-stakeholder governance models, including worker representatives, consumer and supplier panels. The creation of new collective investment vehicles such as social wealth funds, and the promotion of open source knowledge, are ways of promoting wider access to economic resources. But there is a danger that our economic and legal institutions have failed to keep pace with new ways of creating value in the digital age. The current dominant digital business model of providing free services such as search engines, social media and health and fitness apps in exchange for gathering enormous and valuable datasets on people and society might be seen in retrospect as just as iniquitous and abusive as the enclosure of agricultural commons in the 17th and 18th centuries.

So how, in practice, can we create a more democratic economy? The increasing adoption by national and regional governments of inclusive growth strategies is a great opportunity. To seize

on this, the RSA has a multi-dimensional approach. Tackling unemployment and income poverty while promoting skills progression and supporting growth sectors are all fundamental to inclusive growth. In addition, we need to pay attention to three further factors: wealth, voice and future generations.

For inclusive wealth we can learn from the success of Preston, Lancashire and Cleveland, Ohio, in adapting the procurement policies of anchor institutions, such as local councils, hospitals and universities, to create more opportunities for SMEs, owner-managed businesses and mutuals in local supply chains. On the national level, creating social wealth funds, as recommended in our report on the Universal Basic Opportunity Fund, is one path forward. And the RSA's Citizens' Economic Council reports set out a number of ways of giving citizens greater say in economic decision-making at both national and regional level. Our recommendation to convene citizens' panels for the Bank of England's network of regional agents was immediately endorsed by its chief economist, Andy Haldane. Last but not least is the need to consider the interests of tomorrow's citizens by ensuring a safe climate and thriving natural environment.

The test of whether we have arrived at an economic democracy will be when towns such as Wigan and Clacton are no longer held up as emblems of dissatisfaction and disadvantage, but instead as places of enterprise and economic opportunity for all. ■

CONTEMPT FOR COURT

National pride in our justice system often gives way to primal calls for vengeance. To prevent hard-won rights from being eroded by moments of rage, we must explain why the law works as it does

By *The Secret Barrister*
 @BarristerSecret

On 18 January 2018, the new Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, David Gauke MP, concluded the speech at his swearing-in ceremony by promising: “I will be steadfast in my commitment to defend the independence of the judiciary and respect the rule of law, and I will be determined in our work to create a justice system that is open to all, a justice system that everyone in the country can have confidence in, and one that lives up to the deep-rooted sense of justice and fairness the United Kingdom is known for around the world.”

He did not have to wait long for our world-renowned ‘deep-rooted sense of justice’ to manifest itself. Before Mr Gauke had removed his ceremonial full-bottomed wig, the media – both mainstream and social – were convulsing in paroxysms of rage at the criminal justice system’s treatment of one of its most infamous and unsympathetic products: Jon Venables.

Faced with the public reappearance of a man found guilty of the most unspeakable of crimes – the murder in 1993 of three-year-old James Bulger – our stiff upper lip wobbled and our resolve appeared to falter. The tribunes hooting loudest were calling for ‘solutions’ far closer to vigilantism than the plotted course of due process.

The re-conviction of a murderer for offences committed while on release on life licence, offences that involved the possession of images of child abuse, threw up multiple and conflicting

questions of the purposes of criminal justice; of rehabilitation, punishment and the diminishing returns of redemption. Just as in 2010, this man, deemed fit for release by the Parole Board and bestowed with a new identity and a clean start, showed contempt for the system by committing yet further grotesque crimes. Presented with one among us who appears unsaveable, many of us asked ourselves: how in these most unsettling of cases can society meaningfully dispense justice?

What was grimly familiar was not the temperature of the responses, much less their one-sidedness, but how little space was made for reporting some of the most basic facts upon which unmalleable – and often fatalistic – opinion was forged. As anger swelled at the ‘soft’ 40-month sentence imposed for Venables’ latest transgressions, scant attention was paid to the patient explainers pointing out that the practical effect of breaching the licence of his life sentence through this type of offending is that he may never again be released. Nor was much understanding attempted at how the court arrived – or was required to arrive by prescriptive Sentencing Guidelines – at the length of sentence. Petitions calling for politicians to intervene to recalibrate the duration of Venables’ incarceration were endorsed by commentators oblivious to the precedent set by his original case. The then Home Secretary Michael Howard made a populist intervention in 1994 to increase the tariff of Venables’ life sentence, culminating in a European Court of Human Rights decision preventing politicians from ever again interfering in independent judicial sentencing decisions. The rule of law, after all, requires an independent arbiter, rather than a headline-savvy politician, to determine the fate of those who have transgressed.

THE SECRET BARRISTER IS A JUNIOR BARRISTER SPECIALISING IN CRIMINAL LAW WHO GIVES AN INSIDE VIEW ON THE JUSTICE SYSTEM VIA THEIR BLOG THESECRETBARRISTER.COM





Meanwhile, the uncritical press reflection of the entirely human desires of Denise Fergus, mother of James, that Venables be stripped of his court-ordered anonymity, left a void of explanation about how his reinvention by the justice system was necessary to save him from being killed. Justice, in this discourse, became synonymous with not simply punishment or retribution – both of which may form part of the purposes of criminal justice, although never its whole – but moulten, unyielding vengeance. We don't care how, the dominant narrative stomped, we don't care if it's lawful or for the ultimate consequences; we just want this man to suffer.

The tensions between our outward façade of sober, evidence-based due process and our internal, primal dialogues over justice – the clashes between national id and superego – are often exposed at their rawest when we are tested by these most unsettling cases and an ostensibly undeserving person. No doubt it was ever thus, but I fear that this is merely the highest profile instance of a wider, more dangerous trend, in which discussions about justice are publicly conducted at maximum volume with minimum effort made at understanding the facts of the matter at hand, or our supposedly treasured founding principles of justice.

Venables provides a recent illustration, but one does not have to browse online commentary for any length of time to observe how quickly and rashly we tie ourselves in knots over the justice system, and how facts, nuance and concession are notable by their absence. While pedantic lawyers will decry

the stock image of a gavel that accompanies every legal story, notwithstanding that they have never been used by English and Welsh judges, criminal sentencing stands as perhaps the most frequent example of how we misunderstand the nature and purpose of the justice system, and the way in which judges are required to execute their oaths.

'Soft sentences' will be reported with an out-of-context snippet of the judge's sentencing remarks and a gaping absence of analysis explaining how sentencing works in practice. The casual reader is not told of the Sentencing Guidelines, published by the Sentencing Council, an independent body accountable to Parliament, and which judges are required by law to follow. There is no acknowledgment of the existence or interpretation of statutes and case law that bind judicial hands in such cases, nor of the extraordinary circumstances, outlined at length by the judge when passing sentence, which inform an apparently inexplicable decision. And woe betide the MP who, faced with voters fattened on tabloid outrage, serves up anything other than a lardy diet of tutting at 'out of touch' judges and 'broken justice'. Urging calm understanding of the equally important purposes of rehabilitation and restitution that may explain a 'lenient' sentence garners few votes.

The indulgence of such laziness, and the failure of those who know better to challenge inaccurate assumptions, threatens to undermine public trust in the legal system at a time when the independence of the judiciary itself is imperilled.

“WE MISUNDERSTAND THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM”

It is not merely the repetitive judge-bashing over decisions in front-page criminal cases. The *Daily Mail*'s “Enemies of the People” front page following the High Court decision in the ‘Brexit litigation’ in 2016 drew the loudest gasps, but in truth was but a totem in a heightening climate of anti-judicial toxicity. Newspapers and politicians competed to dissemble over the facts, meaning and scope of the judgment; threatened populist marches upon the Supreme Court; and ran nakedly intimidatory profiles on the personal lives, backgrounds and, in one instance, sexuality of the judges involved.

Throughout this, then Lord Chancellor Liz Truss, notwithstanding her sworn oath to defend the independence of the judiciary, remained silent. Nowhere, following the High Court judgment, could one find a government minister prepared to challenge the tabloid narrative and explain to an understandably troubled populace how the judicial system works, and that, whatever political interpretation one might sensibly construe from the judgment, any suggestion of malfeasance, bad faith or “defying the will of the people” was as misplaced as it was dangerously demagogic.

While one might sense political ambition lying behind Truss's reluctance to challenge her colleagues and their media cheerleaders, a deeper malaise can also be seen to have taken root: a failure in public legal education. This crisis is obvious from all of the above and far more besides. The tone and quality of public debate over the legal system betrays a fundamental lack of awareness throughout society as to the operation of the law in practice, and how it seeks to remain faithful to our first principles: equal treatment before the law; an apolitical, independent judiciary; access to justice; the presumption of innocence in criminal proceedings; the primacy of evidence-based decision-making; and the protection of fundamental human rights.

The natural consequences of a population starved of accurate information about the operation of the justice system are twofold. The first is a degradation of public discourse, as we lack the tools to critically appraise stories of injustice that instinctively strike at our values. The second arises in the shape of governments granted effective licence to chip away at our rights without our noticing, distracting us with brightly coloured mobiles of ‘outrageous’ sentencing decisions and ‘liberal elite judges’ as they do so. The removal of legal aid, both civil and criminal, has taken place to no public outcry, notwithstanding the damage that is thereby done to our societal fabric. The most vulnerable among us – victims of domestic violence, disabled people reliant on state

assistance, single parents at the mercy of rogue landlords or exploitative employers – have been excised from the scope of publicly funded legal assistance, described by Amnesty as “decimating access to justice”. In the criminal courts, legal aid ‘reforms’ mean that the falsely accused are now unable to recover the legal costs of securing their acquittals. The absence of hysteria at these, genuinely shocking, perversions of justice speaks to the distortion of priorities to which I fear we have succumbed.

LAW SCHOOL

The solution is not easy, but it is at least identifiable: an urgent re-emphasis on public legal education, from schools to parliament to the media. The newly convened Parliamentary Committee on Public Legal Education is an overdue start, but far more is required. School curricula need to ensure that an ingrained understanding of our institutions of democracy and justice, the rule of law and the separation of powers is instilled not merely through discrete citizenship classes, but by infusing these values throughout the curriculum as diversely as they are diffused throughout real life. To this end, while many legal practitioners and charities work tirelessly on outreach projects in the local community, aimed at bringing law to the people, far more is required. Lawyers need to find time, and inclination, to demystify the impenetrable tradition and alienating legalese and answer plainly the questions of the public that may appear obvious to us, but which left unanswered contribute to fear and misunderstanding.

Public access to the actual text of the law, which one might presume to be a given, is still far from realised in 21st century Britain. The government forces growing numbers of litigants to self-represent, yet the official legislation.gov website contains statutes that are years out of date. If you wish to easily identify the case law that explains or interprets that legislation, you will need either a subscription to a law library or a commercial law database. This is untenable. We cannot expect the public to engage with the law when it is kept fortified out of public reach.

And stern words must be reserved for those, in parliament and the media, whose silent endorsement, and sometimes wilful participation in, misrepresentations of the law do more damage than perhaps they contemplate. Ensuring that campaigns to change the law faithfully reflect the content of the existing law, reaching for facts rather than hyperbole to secure political advantage and attempting at least an affectation of balance in the reporting of difficult cases may be a bucket list bordering on the naïve. But until our democratically elected representatives and their watchdogs in the fourth estate improve their efforts, the principles of justice that we purport to hold so dear have little prospect of being understood by those they serve, let alone of flourishing on the global stage.

A CRITICAL MOMENT FOR FEMINISM

The challenge for the modern feminist movement is self-reflection and true inclusivity

by Minna Salami
 @MsAfropolitan

If feminism were an element of nature it would be a mountain. It became prominent on the political and ideological landscape by cracking through the crust of patriarchal thought like an erupting volcano, and, although it differs in form from region to region, feminism exists on all continents. It has peaks, such as the fight for women's suffrage, the invention of the birth control pill, and women's armed revolutions in Africa during the continent's independence struggles.

Contemporary feminism reached its current peak on 21 January 2017, one day after the inauguration of US president Donald Trump. Millions of women and men around the world joined the Women's March to protest not only Trump's election, but with the aim of dismantling all systems of oppression. When I returned from marching that day, I posted a social media update saying, "When women start marching like we did today, from Washington to London to all around the globe, you know the rules of the game have changed."

This is turning out to be true. Not only was 2017 the year of marches, it was also the year that the Merriam-Webster dictionary made 'feminism' its Word of the Year, and that *TIME* magazine gave its Person of the Year award to whistleblowers who exposed sexual harassment. Above all, it was the year a grassroots campaign initiated by an African-American activist, Tarana Burke, went viral under the hashtag MeToo, culminating in nothing short of a feminist awakening.

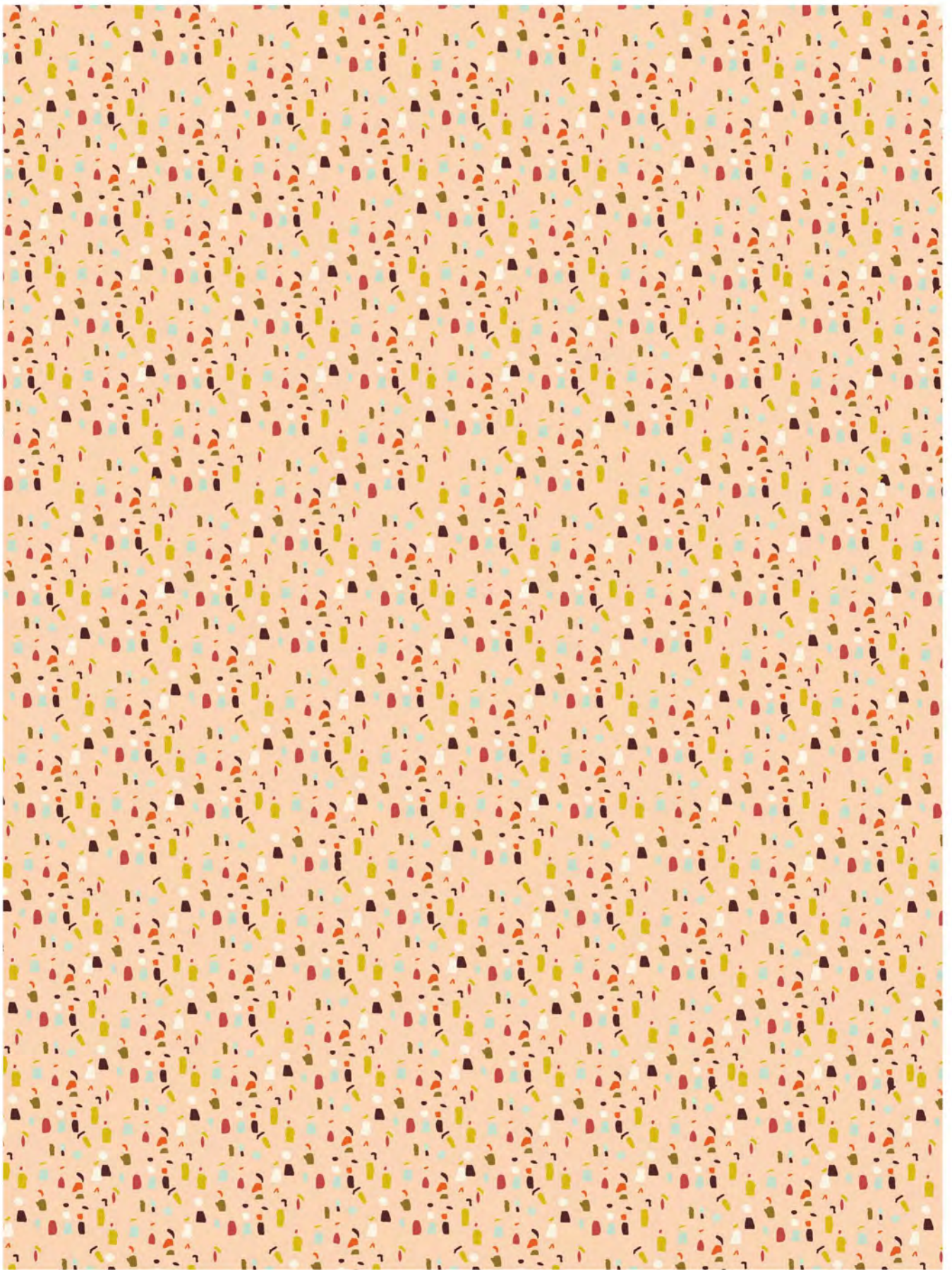
The point here is not to rerun the incidents that led to MeToo, but to think through what this movement means for where feminism ought to go next. What are the challenges it faces today? What opportunities does the reinvigorated interest in feminism provide? In short, now that the word 'feminist' is mainstream, how do we go about truly integrating it into society? To respond to these questions, one must first understand that the

mainstream will not automatically become feminist because feminism is mainstream. The second thing to understand is that feminism, a centuries long women's intellectual tradition, has gained momentum in a time that is markedly anti-intellectual. News and debate have become entertainment and drama with the ultimate aim of evoking strong emotional reactions to meet commercial ends. In times with too little room for reflection and consideration, the big challenge modern feminists face is to take a step back, evaluate the zeitgeist and ask necessary questions. In other words, the challenge for progressive feminism is to encourage critical reflection.

The prevailing popularity of feminism lends an unprecedented political, cultural and economic will to disenfranchising patriarchal systems that disadvantage women. In order to galvanise these inclinations, feminists must ask questions such as: what do they want to have achieved one year from now? What changes do they want policymakers to implement? Depending on location, feminists ought to use the zeitgeist as an impetus to demand that policymakers implement key feminist demands, such as gender-equal education, increase maternity and paternity leave, provide cheaper childcare, reform agriculture, promote environmental sustainability, invest in conflict resolution, and end human trafficking, sexual objectification and violence against women.

There are undeniably unique opportunities to seize the moment, all of which require critical reflection. Through critical reflection, it becomes clear that feminist history has a huge amount to teach about how we got to where we are and how we might move forward. For instance, MeToo, although timely, is better understood when embedded in the compendium of knowledge on sexual assault that feminists have produced over a long period of time. I am thinking, for example, of Catharine MacKinnon, who already in 1979 argued that sexual harassment should be made illegal, seven years before the UK Court of Session would

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acknowledge that sexual harassment can be a form of sex discrimination. Or French feminist Julia Kristeva's notion of *jouissance*, which involves women positioning themselves as subjects in the sexual sphere, as is increasingly happening. Hardly anyone is making these important associations, so a lot of energy is being spent reinventing square wheels.

For decades, feminists have attempted to discover, expose and destroy the dominant ideas and practices that enable 'rape culture', a term second wave feminists coined to describe the normalisation of sexual violence and objectification of women in society. Feminists like bell hooks and Michele Wallace have analysed masculinity, power and violence in depth; for example, in books such as *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (hooks) and *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (Wallace). Anita Hill, whose 1981 allegations against then Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas raised awareness about sexual harassment in the workplace, has been writing and lecturing on the topic for decades. Sarah Grimke had already written in her 1837 letters on equality that black women were "employed by the planter, or his friends, to administer their sensual desires". In other words, feminists have hundreds of years of analysis about how to tackle sexual violence and harassment. The fleeting and fast-paced nature of social media does not easily allow for depth and critical thinking, but without this kind of historical context, MeToo risks becoming an ephemeral event, which is a likely risk when a movement's pinnacle is a hashtag.

If historical contextualisation is the first opportunity that critical reflections of modern feminism present, the second opportunity is the chance to become truly inclusive. There is no denying that feminism is more diverse than ever before, with a growing discourse considering how race, ethnicity and sexuality affects women. But by inclusive, I do not simply mean 'intersectional'; that is, I do not simply mean that feminism needs to be cognisant of the multiple oppressions a woman may face by way of her gender, class, race, sexual orientation or gender identity. Rather, the real opportunity is for feminism to become not only intersectional but also – and this truly is unprecedented – globally relevant without losing its dissenting voice. In the past, when feminism has become widespread, it has lost some of its subversive temper, but MeToo has re-radicalised even those feminists who were becoming comfortable with the status quo in all parts of the world, from the UK to China, Nigeria, Egypt and Brazil.

That said, if MeToo brings women together on a global scale, the anti-globalisation public sentiment that is largely to thank for Donald Trump's election, Brexit and the rise of ultra-right parties in Europe, threatens to push women apart. However warranted the criticism of neoliberal globalisation may be, feminists need to tread carefully onto an isolationist, jingoistic territory. When we look at feminism from both a historical and inclusive perspective, it becomes clear that borders have never offered women enough protection. By contrast, some of the greatest feminist victories have been achieved when women

“THIS IS THE TIME TO END WHITE SUPREMACY AND ELITISM WITHIN THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT”

transcended borders to organise transnationally. These kinds of collaborations laid the foundations for organisations such as The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1915; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a crucial political instrument for feminist change that is effectively an international bill of rights for women and was adopted by the UN in 1979; and the Join me on the Bridge event in 2010, which saw women from Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda congregate on the bridge connecting their countries, showing they could build hope following war.

LESSONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Moreover, without a global view, Eurocentric biases in feminism result in a failure to learn from female victories in other regions. The majority of top leaders in politics are non-Western, for example, and the two majority-female parliaments that exist are outside of the west: in Rwanda and Bolivia. In fact, it is unlikely that there would be a Women's March and a consequent MeToo in the first place, as the march was inspired by a Latin American women's movement, Ni Una Menos. This is the time to truly end white supremacy and elitism within the feminist movement. Elite western women's domination of feminist discourse has led to the pathologisation of other women through a false universalism such as, the endless analogies between women and people of African descent that suggest the latter are different somehow, or the failure to include capitalist critiques in feminist analyses. There are important exceptions such as Kate Raworth's 2017 book *Doughnut Economics* or Christine Delphy's *Separate and Dominate*, both of which view their subject matter through a global lens, but by and large there are numerous blind spots.

One last key feminist area missing thoughtful reflection is gender identity, specifically the divide between trans women and so called 'TERFs' (trans exclusionary radical feminists). The present discussion about gender identity is simplistic, with one side reluctant to acknowledge the problematic but nevertheless undeniable role that biological difference has in shaping womanhood, and the other equally intransigent about the fact that connecting womanhood primarily with the reproductive organs alone is elemental. Propelled by a culture of sensationalism, the divide has resulted in a disturbing surge of transphobia as well as unacceptable abuse of feminists accused of being TERFs. Yet, when viewed in a historical context, it becomes clear that the divide is neither new nor insoluble. The debates go back at least as far as critiques of biological determinism – the idea that physiological differences between women and men determine their social roles. They can be seen in classic books such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990)

and Nigerian feminist Oyeronke Oyewumi's *The Invention of Women* (1997), which could be contrasted to Canadian-American radical feminist Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) or Catherine Achelou's *Motherism*, books which at least in part are biologically determinist. Arguably, they go even further back to Enlightenment-era feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who saw womanhood as a social construct, compared with cultural feminists in the 1800s, such as Margaret Fuller, who thought women to be innately different. The point is that modern feminists are not the first to quarrel over a 'gynocentric' woman-centred approach. On the one hand, feminists have argued through recent history that women are biologically different to men and that their differences should make the basis of a progressive feminist politics, and, on the other that womanhood is a social construct and that malleable gender roles should therefore make the basis of a progressive feminist politics.

Neither school of thought is entirely right or wrong; female physiology does shape women's experiences to a significant extent, but it is also possible to be a woman without being biologically female. Trans women are women, if with experiences that are unique to them. Furthermore, some of the crucial feminist voices in history are trans women. Take for example, Lucy Hicks Anderson, who fought for marriage equality in the US in the 1940s or Raewyn Connell, one of the leading feminist theorists of our times.

I started by saying that if feminism were an element of nature it would be a mountain. Here is a sobering fact about the world's highest mountain: Everest is also the world's highest graveyard. Of the more than 4,000 climbers who have reached the 8,800m summit since the first ascent in 1953, many of the nearly 300 who did not make it home perished in the area above 8,000m called the Death Zone. Many of them died while descending Everest – often after having reached the summit – merely because of a loss of coordination, confusion and a lack of judgement caused by extreme fatigue.

Descending the feminist peak after the initial surge of awareness and action that came with MeToo, feminists are now faced with the task of making sure change happens throughout society. If current discussions are not treated mindfully, there is a risk of entering a metaphorical Death Zone, characterised by confusion, a loss of coordination, and a lack of judgement. The only way to progress is with a clear view of the situation. Disagreement and disappointment is an inevitable part of this journey downward, but to quote the late rapper Tupac Shakur, "Out of anger comes controversy, out of controversy comes conversation, out of conversation comes action." If feminists encourage critical reflection they will turn anger and controversy into conversation, and conversation into action. ■



SUSTAINING CHANGE

Progress has been slow to reach some, but international targets provide the framework

by Adanna Shallowe

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that there has been unprecedented improvement in human progress over the last century, resulting in falling rates of infant mortality and illiteracy, and rising levels of life expectancy. This has been accompanied by economic growth and staggering advances in technology that have improved the lives of millions of people all over the world. However, for many globally, deprivation, economic inequality and social exclusion persist and limit their capacity to exercise complete agency over their lives. The voicelessness of the poor and marginalised within our global community is shocking given the overall improvement in levels of wealth, opportunity and prosperity. Progress has also come at the cost of possibly irreversible damage to our environment. These shortcomings have led many to question what human progress means and how it should be measured.

In recent years, significant strides have been made in answering this question. Led by UN agencies and other intergovernmental organisations and endorsed by all 193 UN member states, the annual review of human development indicators (a measure that looks at standard of living, health, wellbeing and education) actively assesses progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The latter represents a historic, long-term and collective effort that started this century to address the most intractable challenges facing humanity, employing a sustainable agenda agreed at an international level.

It is within this context that, over the past three years, RSA Global has supported the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Impact Challenge (AIC), a programme managed

ADANNA SHALLOWE
MANAGES RSA
GLOBAL

by innovation design company Scope Group in partnership with 35 organisations regionally. Since its launch in 2015, the AIC has accelerated innovations and supported entrepreneurs who address challenges facing the region. Last November, during its third cycle, the AIC focused on fostering inclusive innovations aligned to the sustainable development goals.

At the close of the programme, the RSA invited the 10 AIC finalists to become part of the RSA Global community of change-makers. In the spirit of partnership and collaboration, RSA Fellows will also mentor the finalists as they put their ideas into action. The RSA Fellows will guide, coach and support the finalists over the next six months. The projects include Indonesia-based Waste4Change, which is developing a holistic approach to waste management in an urban setting. This project will be mentored by UK FRSA Jane Dodson, who specialises in advising and supporting community development and urban regeneration projects. Education project Edukayson supports students from school to employment in the Philippines and is being mentored by London-based FRSA Madeleine Evans, who has an extensive background in finance and impact investments. And JALA, which uses an Internet of Things device to help farmers test water quality, is being mentored by Nicky Wilkinson FRSA, who is based in Singapore and has worked with a number of social innovation projects.

Our partnership with the AIC chimes with Goal 17 of the sustainable development goals, which encourages partnerships built on a shared vision and values to confront the challenges of today. And it elevates a central goal of the RSA: to address today's problems in new and innovative ways with the aim of advancing human progress all over the world.

NEW FELLOWS

GENEVIEVE BENTZ



Genevieve is currently researching global terrorism and collective moral responsibility for the European Research Council, as well as

historical debt, emoluments and American lexicography. "My research focuses on systematic inequality in access to government information," explains Genevieve.

Genevieve is particularly interested in increasing access to education and intellectual resources outside of the traditional ivory tower. "With such a globally interconnected world, I think access to knowledge is a key concern for society moving forward. What is the role of editing in the public square? Is 'fake news' inevitable or a reflection of the breakdown of the education system?" she asks.

Genevieve continues: "We have more access to knowledge than in any previous period, in terms of number of literate adults and digitised, mass-accessible documents. Increasing non-university-based spaces for conversation, debate and consensus is a crucial response to the balkanization of online and real-life communities."

As a Fellow, Genevieve hopes to use the RSA's resources and networking opportunities to expand her understanding of complex issues. "You don't know what you don't know and I hope my Fellowship will help me expand my perception," she says.

NICK JENNINGS



"Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a topic that has broad societal impacts and implications for jobs, ethics and fairness, and I've been

interested in what the RSA has been doing around that broader theme," says Nick Jennings, professor of artificial intelligence at Imperial College London.

The most recent large-scale AI project Nick worked on involved looking at teams where some members are humans and others are smart AI tech systems. "It's interesting to see how you can apply these systems to real-life situations and how working together brings the best out of both," he says.

The project, Orchid, targeted three main application areas – disaster response, smart energy and citizen science. "In disaster response we worked with Rescue Global, a charity that aims to be the first on the ground in a disaster," explains Nick. "Rescue Global used our technology to fuse together information from many sources, like tweets and photos, to understand the evolving situation."

Through his Fellowship, Nick would like to be able to engage with others who are interested in the societal impacts of advanced technologies. "It's a good opportunity to speak to people from other backgrounds," he says. "I'd like to know what people are really thinking about AI and tech, and what people from other disciplines believe the impact will be on society."

IN BRIEF

Here are a few more Fellows who are working to drive social progress:

Matt Zwolinski is professor of philosophy at the University of San Diego and founder and director of the university's Center for Ethics, Economics and Public Policy, which fosters creative thinking about how to improve the political and economic institutions of society.

Kavita Prakash-Mani leads WWF's global practice on markets, which leverages market mechanisms including working with small producers and enterprises and international companies to help meet the WWF goals of protecting wildlife, forests, freshwater and oceans, as well as mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Alison Sharpe is a director and a senior communications leader at PwC. She is passionate about stimulating debate around the issue of public trust, and believes that belonging to the RSA will offer a platform for this. Alison believes in the important role that organisations have in building trust and helping to solve societal challenges.

Peter Hall is Krupp Foundation Professor of European Studies at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies. Peter's work focuses on developing a better understanding of the economic and social problems facing developed societies.

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conservatism

*Preserving existing values and making progress
do not have to be direct opposites*

By Ruth Davidson
 @RuthDavidsonMSP

At times, we conservatives can seem like an Eeyorish bunch. Take one of the most famous incantations of conservatism, from the American journalist William Buckley: that his mission was to “stand athwart history, yelling ‘stop’”. I fear he might have been hard work at parties.

Unlike the Buckleys of the world, I do not see conservatism and progressivism as diametrically opposed. If anything, quite the opposite. It is by harnessing the two that we stand the best chance of not just preserving, but enhancing the liberal order.

Let me explain: my theory is that often people only realise they are a conservative when something they value is at stake. They can’t necessarily express why they value it. They can’t necessarily argue from reason alone why it should be preserved. They only know that to lose it would be bad. Try this out on any card-carrying, *Guardian*-reading liberal, and eventually you’ll find some social custom or institution that fits the pattern.

This is a good thing. And conservatism’s best instincts – to defend the civilised, to be sceptical about grand projects, to anchor policy in the simple human freedom to get on with your own life – should also be shared by anyone calling themselves progressive.

Look around the world and it is clear we need this cheerful conservatism now more than ever. Abroad, populist parties are on the march, a US president is testing every basic limit of what a commander-in-chief can or should do, autocrats like Putin in Russia and Orban in Hungary are plotting away. At home, politicians attack the media for bias, social media eats itself, and debates that long seemed settled re-emerge with a vengeance.

RUTH DAVIDSON
 IS THE SCOTTISH
 CONSERVATIVE
 LEADER AND MSP
 FOR EDINBURGH
 CENTRAL

The stakes are high. The status quo is being tested, within and outwith our democracy. If conservatism has a point, it is surely to defend an order that has delivered unparalleled social and economic progress. For politicians, this demands we renew arguments that our immediate predecessors simply didn’t have to make. History is alive and kicking.

While, for many, it remains self-evident that free markets and a liberal economic order continue to be the best way to make the world richer, healthier, better educated and more equal, this view doesn’t carry the same weight it did a generation or two ago.

And you can see why. Paeans to market capitalism can sound abstract when your idea of building up a mortgage deposit is to cross your fingers and play the Euromillions on Friday night. Similarly, it’s difficult to feel invested in the modern economy when you have limited job security and have to wait for mum to finish using the bathroom.

As always, diagnosing the problem is easier than administering the treatment. That said, there are clear areas where improvements can be made, whether that is promoting technical education or building more affordable homes.

But there is a broader point here too. While a consensus is there to be challenged, those of us who believe in the liberal order must have the courage of our convictions; the confidence to stand up for our beliefs. Buckley certainly did. He may have been howling at the wind, but you can’t say he wasn’t up for the fight.

Those who feel as I do must be similarly bold. We have a good case to make and evidence on our side. If the liberal western order is at stake, then at least we know what we’re fighting for. What’s more, we can even do it with a smile on our face. ■

Do you know someone who would make a great Fellow?

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