

A visit to Seabird Rescue

by Pam Pussycat

Over the recent school holidays, I attended a tour of the Australian Seabird Rescue (ASR) rescue and rehabilitation facility at Ballina. ASR does more than just rescue a few varieties of seabirds, and I received quite an education about their work in a few hours out there.

ASR has been called as far as Nimbin to rescue a large seabird in distress from the Nimbin hospital carpark. Volunteer Keith Williams took the tours for two weeks as part of the ASR education program.

Founded by Lance Ferris, Australian Seabird Rescue was established at Ballina in 1992, following the rescue of a pelican hooked in fishing tackle. Since that time, ASR volunteers have been involved in the rescue and rehabilitation of seabirds and shorebirds, marine turtles, and to date, have rescued over 1000 Australian Pelicans.

In almost all human-populated estuaries, at some time, every pelican is at risk of becoming entangled or hooked in fishing tackle. ASR volunteers developed techniques for capturing pelicans and many other species of birds, even those which still had the ability to fly.

The team embarked on training missions across the country, passing on their hard-won knowledge to other wildlife rescue groups and Government agencies involved in the conservation of the many native species. ASR's efforts were



recognised at the inaugural Landcare Awards where the volunteers were awarded the National Community Coastcare Award.

Sea turtle rescue

ASR's turtle hospital is one of only four licensed facilities in New South Wales, and the only facility on the East Coast manned by volunteers. These volunteers have been rescuing turtles from the North Coast of New South Wales since 1998.

Six species of sea turtles inhabit Australian waters. The species include Loggerhead, Green, Hawksbill, Olive Ridley, Flatback and Leatherback turtles, and all are either endangered, threatened or vulnerable.

The most common sea turtles found in our region is the Green sea turtle, which has a vulnerable listing. Loggerhead is next to most common seen around here, followed by the Hawksbill turtle, which is the only source of "tortoiseshell", used in jewellery etc, and still traded in Japan and Cuba. It has been estimated that Loggerhead and Hawksbill turtles have around 20 years left until extinction.

Sea turtles suffer from many diseases and conditions, but on the North Coast of New South Wales, the most fatal of all threats is ingestion of plastics. Whether it be a tiny hatchling, or a 100 kilogram adult, plastic pieces of all sizes, colours and shapes present an attractive food item – and in most cases - with disastrous consequences.

In one case, 76 pieces of plastic were found in a dead

Eye-opener. A large female green turtle and two hatchlings (above); Keith Williams and Dakota Rogers releasing 'Stinky', a green turtle (below); and Keith with Pam.



Green turtle – the turtle was only 19 centimetres in length! And yet another turtle still died, even after passing 107 items, including plastic, rope, fishing line, and even part of a clothes peg.

Sea turtles have an amazing ability to survive for long periods, while swallowed human rubbish blocks their intestines. A slow death from starvation follows.

Boat strikes, bacterial attack, parasitic infection, entanglement in ropes and drowning in trawl nets are just some of the other threats to sea turtles, and while ASR addresses these issues at every opportunity, the threats continue.

More information about Australian Seabird Rescue can be found at www.seabirdrescue.org. For rescue advice, phone 6686-2852 or 0428-862-852.

Koala Kolumn



by Lorraine Vass

Local government elections are fast approaching. Councils are the closest level of government to our daily lives and to the environment which most of us value so highly.

Under the NSW Local Government Act (1993), a council has the following charter:

"To properly manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible, in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the principles of ecologically sustainable development."

The Act also requires a council to produce annual State of the Environment (SoE) reports. A comprehensive report must be completed every four years and, in between that period, annual supplementary reports.

Although the State is doing its best to wrest the planning system from local government and the public for that matter, local environment plans (LEPs) and development control plans (DCPs) are still instruments over which local government has control. It is also responsible for ensuring that development applications are regulation compliant.

The three main legislative requirements for councils relating to koala protection are the Local Government Act 1993, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and State Environment Planning Policy (SEPP) 44, Koala Habitat Protection.

The importance of elected representatives in effective environmental stewardship cannot be underestimated. It is a matter of considerable disquiet that none of the six local government authorities in which



Friends of the Koala operates has in place a Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management.

Friends of the Koala is keen to ascertain the level of support its work will have from elected representatives over the term of the next Council. In the lead-up to the elections we will be writing to each candidate standing for election in the jurisdictions of Ballina, Byron, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed and putting to them five questions related to koala conservation and management on the Northern Rivers.

Responses will be assessed for their koala-friendliness and published on the group's website and in the media so watch this space with interest.

Of course the Koala's plight is by no means the sole purview of local government. Community concern for its future back in the 1990s brought about a National Koala Conservation Strategy which was published by the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council in 1998.

The Strategy didn't do much, apart from bringing together a series of motherhood statements about koala conservation and management that have had little if any impact on the ground. The Federal government is now evaluating the 1998 Strategy's effectiveness with a view to its amendment. It's difficult to see that the political will is there to give the Strategy the teeth to improve conservation outcomes for koalas, however we live in hope.

Background information and an electronic version of the Strategy can be found at: www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/koala-strategy

Information about koalas and Friends of the Koala is available at: www.friendsofthekoala.org or email info@friendsofthekoala.org or phone Friends of the Koala's (24/7) Rescue Hotline: 6622-1233.

STOP PRESS

The Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) has advised Friends of the Koala that it has requested Lismore City Council to cease assessment of the application to expand Champion's Quarry at Tucki. The agency has directed that additional information be sought from the applicant to address various issues of relevance to DECC's statutory responsibilities. One of the issues of concern is the potential for impacts upon koalas and their habitat.

DECC's involvement with the koalas at Tucki extends over 40 years.

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Direct Action on Climate Change

A report on the Newcastle Climate Camp, 10-14 July 2008



by Graeme Dunstan
Peacebus.com

Some locked-on to the rail wagons, others climbed on top of them, danced and threw off lumps of coal, and still others played chasey with cops along the track.

The outcome of all these shenanigans was a shut down of the Port Waratah coal loader in Carrington, Newcastle, for seven hours.

That was on Sunday 13th July, when the first ever Climate Camp rallied 1000 people to parade to the port in protest against the reckless export of coal from Newcastle, which, at 80 million tonnes a year, is the biggest coal port in the world.

The next day was a day of independent actions in and about Newcastle. Some of us rallied outside the office Michael Costa MLC, NSW Treasurer, Minister for the Hunter, ALP thug, climate change skeptic and cabinet front man for privatising power generation in NSW and promoting the coal export industry.

Meanwhile a bunch of just three students went back to Carrington, locked on and again stopped the coal loading, this time for four hours.

Given that the Carrington ship loading facilities operate at 2,500 tonnes per hour, these blockades represented a major disruption of the so called Hunter Valley Coal Chain which is already strained to keep up with export demand. All praise to the courage and determination of the protestors.

The Climate Camp itself attracted some 200 participants who camped for 5 days at Wickham oval which is about 3km from the coal loader.

The camp was organised by a coalition of climate change activists of which Rising Tide (Newcastle), Friends of the Earth (Melbourne and Sydney), the NSW Greens and Resistance (Sydney) were prominent. Greenpeace Pacific was also there but in the background, a sponsor to the tune of \$20K, I understand.

Also prominent was the Rainbow Chai Tent and the glorious flags and banners of Benny Zable. In truth the Chai Tent was the heart of conviviality and comfort both for Climate Camp and the annual Students of Sustainability Conference which

preceded it and this year took place at the University of Newcastle.

Gratitude to the dedicated service of Michael Jack for his efforts in setting it up and coordinating the volunteers. And also to the band of Nimbin activists who supported him; Benny, Brigitte, Binnah and Dan to name a few. Peacebus.com was there too with flags and lanterns and its mobile PA was of service both for Camp announcements and also at the actions.

It was beautiful camp, part because of the Nimbin color but more so for the uplifting companionship. In these times climate change is the issue that is attracting the best hearts and minds to the defense of the Earth and the welfare of future generations.

As we have come to expect of the NSW cops, they were invested with extraordinary powers and acted like overbearing bastards. Horses with face guards, not unlike the leg shields of the April Fools Day Bust, were used in a violent but futile attempt to corral the crowd. More show policing. Dramatic images of Horsemen of the Apocalypse driving into the backs of protestors and headlines like "Peaceful protest turns violent" made up the News Ltd reports. Such as they were.

The crowd however danced in front of the horse line supported by a "junk percussion band" (wheelie bins and plastic barrels) and after a while flowed around the horses, over and through a fence and onto the rail corridor.

Thereafter cops on foot went about retrieving protestors from the great queue of rail wagons, workman like and without any particular aggression that I saw. But I did meet one young woman in the Camp after the action, her arm in a sling. A broken elbow caused by a fall from a coal wagon, she told me. Thrown off by a cop.

That's a fall of over three metres onto rock ballast. Lucky you didn't break you skull, I replied. Cushioned by dreadlocks, she said. Dreads are more than a fashion statement, folks.

Some 50 arrests were made on the first day of protests but the arrestees were quickly processed, given on the spot fines and released. The Camp legal crew estimate the total fines to be of the order of \$28K, a nice day's work for Costa's



coffers.

On the second day, Monday 14 July was a day slated for independent actions by the various Action Groups formed in the Camp.

The cops responded by harassing protester movements and among other things they did over Dan and defected his van and stopped and searched Benny while walking in his gas mask costume. Peacebus.com was stopped and searched on both days on its way to set up for protest actions.

On the first occasion the excuse was to seek objects that might "be of danger in the event of a public order incident" but the lead cop went straight for my stash which had been a parting gift from the HEMP Embassy. No charges were laid but they kept the pot. Bastards!

The second stop and search happened in the CBD while on my way to Costa's Newcastle office. "Suspicion of cannabis" was the excuse given by Sergeant LAC 012 (the only identity he would give me). But these were the words that the Newcastle TV news recorded me saying when arrested the previous day, so maybe he was being facetious.

Whatever, I was furious at the harassment and, foolish and passionate old man that I am, let them know in no uncertain terms - they and everyone else within earshot.

Soon I was up against a wall surrounded by 8 cops, given a lecture by LAC 012 about being a bad mannered, drug-using criminal, told I ought be grateful that he was not proceeding with further detention and trouble that was within his power to bestowed ... and released.

Courage in the face of the toxic tyranny of coal. There was a lot of it about at the first Climate Camp; that and uplifting friendships. Who else but us, willing to draw the line?

The corporate super rich, their servants and protectors are in denial; their media churns out lies and equivocations as the craven ALP weaves and deceives.

But climate change is upon us, folks, and we don't need a weather man to tell us the winds of change are blowing. Climate Camp was sign enough of things to come.

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A Coal New World

Landmark ruling halts Georgia coal plant on basis of CO2 emissions

A Georgia coal plant cannot go forward until it receives an air-pollution permit limiting its carbon dioxide emissions, Fulton County Superior Court Judge Thelma Wyatt Cummings Moore ruled last week. The ruling marks the first time a judge has used the Supreme Court's classification of CO2 as a pollutant to regulate emissions from an industrial source. Moore's decision overturns a previous ruling that had allowed the Longleaf Energy Plant, Georgia's first new coal facility in more than 20 years, to go forward. Environmentalists say the case sets a heartening precedent. "We will be taking this decision and making the same arguments to push for an end to conventional coal," says Bruce Nilles of the Sierra Club, which is in active litigation over dozens more coal plants across the country. Adds the club's Patti Durand, "I can't be more thrilled. It's a huge ruling. This is a new day in the United States, and I'm thrilled."

The Wings Beneath Our Wind

Investment in renewable energy skyrockets

Global investment in renewable energy was a record \$148 billion in 2007, jumping 60 percent from 2006, the United Nations reported Tuesday. About one-third of the investment went to wind power; solar power was the fastest-growing clean-energy sector from 2006 to 2007, with investment nearly doubling to hit \$28.6 billion. Investment in biofuels dropped in the same time period, falling to \$2.1 billion. Most clean-energy investing is happening in Europe, says the report, followed by the U.S.; China, India, and Brazil are also seeing significant investment, while "sub-Saharan Africa, arguably the region that has the most to gain from renewable energy, remains largely unexploited." The report expresses optimism that an international climate-change treaty will emerge in 2009 and that the next U.S. president will "make renewable energy and energy efficiency a political priority" -- two factors that would help ensure that clean-energy investment continues to rise.

The Window to the Sol

Your windows could collect solar energy, says study

Have windows? Then you could collect solar energy, says a new study published in the journal Science. Researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have developed a light-absorbing dye that, when painted on a window, transfers energy via the glass into solar cells at the window's edges (through a process we don't pretend to understand). If the dye-coated glass is placed atop a solar panel, wavelengths of light that sneak through the glass can be converted into electricity by the panel. "We saw approximately 30 percent higher performance in the combined system compared to a stand-alone solar cell," says coauthor Marc Baldo. "We think that ultimately this approach will allow us to nearly double the performance of existing solar cells for minimal added cost." The MIT folk say their "solar concentrator" is inexpensive, easy to manufacture, and could be marketed within three years.

Giving "Vast Wasteland" a Whole New Meaning

Chemical in flat-screen TVs is worsening climate change
If you didn't feel guilty about your TV habits already, here's a new reason: a chemical used in making flat-screen televisions has been found to be a potent greenhouse gas, 17,000 times stronger than carbon dioxide. In a study published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters, atmospheric chemist Michael Prather called nitrogen trifluoride, or NF3, "the missing greenhouse gas," and warned that the climate could suffer as the chemical is produced in ever greater amounts to meet soaring demand for LCD displays. If all of the NF3 produced in 2008 were released into the atmosphere, it would have as much warming effect as 67 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, the study found -- about the same as the annual CO2 emissions of Austria. NF3 isn't covered by the Kyoto Protocol because it was only being produced in tiny amounts in 1997 when the treaty was negotiated.

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Autonomy or Not To Be?

by Garth Kindred,
ARC Chairman

Autonomy is the antithesis of Empire and having it in ever greater measure may well be our best defence against Empire's evil encroachment into our lives. In better organising ourselves on a community and regional level we can resist its incessant drive for exploiting resources, draining life forces, and turning our paradise into endless sprawling suburbs and ever more mega malls.

Autonomy is not the equivalent of anarchy and doesn't necessitate division and conflict. It's fundamentally about the right of people to have greater control of their destiny and to facilitate development and trade that is real, rational and sustainable for all.



Autonomy simply means to be self-governing and it equates with independence and self-reliance. The principle may be more easily applied to early child rearing but often gets lost when it comes to adults and society at large. While our modern capitalist world provides the illusion of freedom and choice it promotes dependence and external control over that of autonomy. Supposed Free

Trade Agreements designed to create a level playing field and greater affluence instead lock whole countries into long term, divisive and restrictive deals. The playing field still has many hills and hollows and we are just beginning now to pay the price of our affluence.

A deep shift in our collective mindset will enable us to appreciate the power and potential of autonomy, and eventually deliver us a

truly level and sustainable playing field.

Of course total autonomy is not fully achievable at any level as every thing is ultimately dependent on something else. We can merely seek to determine, encourage, support and create the greatest degree of autonomy achievable at every societal level. As individuals, we are hopefully endowed with both autonomy of movement and independent thought while in our relationships, as families or partnerships, we establish the simplest form of government, allowing us to fulfill needs not able to be achieved alone. At a community level we might achieve maintenance of the land and public structures, while our local government with the power of our collective purse may take care of local roads. A

region or state may be big enough to address education, while health and defence etc may need to remain a national concern.

The role of the leader would become one of encouraging greater levels of autonomy, empowering the communities rather than taking their power away. So rather than the NSW State Labor government taking planning powers away from local government and threatening rebel councils with forced amalgamation or dissolution, they would do better to empower them to organise themselves into regional entities which can increasingly take over some of the roles traditionally taken on by the state – public housing and transport systems, power generation etc could all be run by a cluster of councils formed into a regional entity. This could start here in our Northern Rivers as an extension of the Northern Organisation

of Councils (NOROC). There are different paths to greater autonomy, among them the movement to create a new micro-state here as a cluster of self sustaining bio-regions. This would enable us to legislate, attract a fairer share of the GST (as we're currently ripped off by the 'NSW' that is Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong) and enable us to freely shape our own identity in this very special and bountiful part of the world.

The Autonomous Regions Coalition (ARC) is working towards the creation of self governing and self reliant regions across Australia and a real grassroots democracy. For us it's a question of autonomy or not to be, and the answer is – it's got to be!

If you'd like to know more about our ideas and campaigns please contact arc@ar-c.org.au and look for our logo on flyers promoting presentations being held around the region.

Sustainability Forum

A Community Sustainability Forum is being organised for Lismore and district.

To be held at Lismore Workers Club from 6pm on Thursday 21st August, the Forum aims to bring together everyone and anyone in the community working in sustainability issues.

"Sustainability makes sense," said convenor Gordon Fraser-Quick. "The planet may be in crisis but this forum will show just how much our community is already doing and identify what the gaps are in our approaches to sustainability."

The Forum is being co-convened by the Northern Rivers Greens and the Our Sustainable Future group. Whilst both groups are standing candidates in the September Council elections, the forum is a tangible demonstration of their commitment to community unity in tackling climate change and other environmental problems.

The convenors have invited representatives from many organisations to make a short presentation on how they are contributing to sustainability and the reduction of greenhouse gas

emissions.

"Sustainability affects all of us, and we all have a role to play," said Gordon Fraser-Quick.

The programme for the Community Sustainability Forum will include:

- Introduction –Community Sustainability , An Overview: Councillor Vanessa Ekins (The Northern Rivers Greens)
- Five minute presentations on sustainability by each of the groups represented – facilitated by Simon Clough (Our Sustainable Future team)
- Discussion: all present to have their say on sustainability
- The Way Ahead – (what are the gaps? What practical steps do we need to take to fill them?)

It is hoped the Forum will lead to ongoing work with a view to assisting the identification and implementation of a more sustainable Lismore district.

"We all need to work together for a more sustainable future," said Gordon Fraser-Quick.

For more information or to book a presentation session at the forum, contact Gordon on 6622-4221.

Commonsense Human Values

Sixteenth in a series by Laurie Stubbs



We've been talking about Life Develops Itself (LDI) as a principle underlying Earth and its creatures.

If you accept the LDI idea, then purposive-ness is clear. Life is going somewhere.

We can only guess at where it's heading. But we know life started out as a molecule able to reproduce itself and developed over billions of years to concept wielding intelligences in complex bodies. In a word you and me!

How do we make ourselves a set of human values that use this LDI principle? First, maybe, we need to look at why no-one has come up with this principle before. As a species humans have always had a yearning after "certainty" and "purpose". The species specific answer we've supplied has been various Religions and Gods. Widely different faiths and practices fit these moulds, but the result of all of them is to give a reason for life; and a set of rules to live by.

Most sophisticated faiths start (and end) with humanity, though a few traditional ones – like our Aborigines – include Earth and all other beings. Religious thinkers may have begun the trend to seeking answers to end

all questions. "God created mankind to glorify himself" – does a fair job of cutting off any further queries, and that was OK, given the leap of faith that underpinned religions of that time.. And after all, the early religious people had smaller historical perspectives to inform them. Science in turn, beguiled by its own successes, went seeking "ultimate" answers – but hasn't yet found them. It seems likely the problem is not enough information. There's a huge amount yet to understand about the Cosmos and our part in it, so ideas science talks about cannot yet be thought of as "soundly based"

It's human to want answers. Yet 99% of the answers we need are immediate and short term. Decisions that are important in our lives, like jobs, marriage, children, are taken on the best information at the time. There are few real certainties in our lives. We live with open-endedness in many areas (How long will I live? What happens after I die?) that it's – perhaps – understandable to want one big overriding answer.

Wanting ultimate answers springs from reasoning which says they can be found, because we have the capacity to think. Perhaps at this time we don't have enough thinking capacity or information to produce ultimate answers. Forget about assembling and handling enough fact; the important point is that we may not have developed our capacity to think about ultimate levels. Remember, we are left brain orientated; we have not yet developed

the right brain; nor have we integrated both. Plus we have yet to learn how to bring to bear on such matters the collective power of brains united in a common and shared thought. These might be pre-conditions to a quantum leap of ability to 'think'. We may need these as a prerequisite to ultimate understanding.

Perhaps the real question is: Why must we have an ultimate answer? Since getting the question right is over half the battle; let's refine it: "Why must we have such an answer - now - ?" In this form the question loses urgency. It allows us to accept that an answer will come but that the time is not yet ripe. There's plenty of parallels in ordinary life; Recognise this thought? "We'll see what's the next move when we've carried this phase to its end"? Nothing stops us asking, but till the basics are present, the answers will be unrecognised pure guess work.

We ask the ultimate questions because our brains let us do so. Answers don't have to be available simply because we ask. However it does seem right that capacity to understand slowly improves over time as intellectually we climb over threshold after threshold. Humans are such opinionated cusses that often we find it hard to accept we haven't the mental equipment to understand everything at once. It is true that the last two centuries have seen a giant leap in understanding, but perhaps not as big a leap as will become available when humanity brings into play all those right brain capacities.

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ROBOTS RULE – OK?

by Rob Harle

Will we become slaves or an underclass to super intelligent robotic machines? Is the end of human beings nigh – environmental holocausts notwithstanding? Ridiculous questions, impossible! Perhaps, but I don't think so.

I've just finished reviewing a very challenging book, *Beyond AI: Creating The Conscience of the Machine*, this is not science fiction. Also the book is not a messianic futurist's rave, it is a well argued, well researched investigation concerning all aspects of Artificial Intelligence (AI). It will chill even the most incredulous reader to the bone.

I believe that the invention and development of the digital computer is equal in its impact upon human culture as was the discovery of fire or the invention of the wheel. The computer is no longer a simple tool! A hammer doesn't bang in nails when we put it down, but a computer may just keep working on its own, or in the company of other computers via networks, 24/7. The old concept that computers only do what we tell them to do, and within the limits of the programming, is about as outdated as the notion that we could never build heavier-than-air flying machines.

The first seemingly insignificant blow to our arrogance and rampant egos was the miniature pocket calculator. The second was in 1997 when the world chess champion Gary Kasparov was beaten decisively by IBM's Deep Blue computer – not impressed? Just number crunchers these machines – yes they are good at that! Recently the University of Alberta's Polaris computer beat professional poker players, "in the final two rounds of the match, Polaris beat both human teams, two wins out of four, with one loss and one draw!"

Polaris is so good not because of its number crunching ability but because of its ability to learn and improve itself beyond its original programming parameters. It learnt to outwit humans and exploit their weaknesses after only playing 500 rounds of poker. Winning at poker requires interactive skills like bluffing, facial expression and cunning, not just assessing the statistical chance of the remaining cards being dealt.

I think I can state without fear of contradiction that computers and micro-controllers are here to stay, and secondly, that they will only become more prevalent and more powerful, perhaps according to



Moore's Law. What concerns me, and I suggest should concern all thinking humans, is not so much specific computer prowess like chess wins but the ubiquity of computers and the way we have incorporated them into every facet of our existence – transport, medical, banking, navigation, auto-control systems, communication and education to mention just a few.

So if we concerned individuals can't stop the "rampant breeding" of computing the only thing we can do is to guide and control what we create before it is too late with embedded computers expanding beyond our control. I believe this to be an urgent and as important issue as environmental destruction, global warming and the control of over population. As Vernor Vinge said in 1993, "Within thirty years, we will have the technological means to create superhuman intelligence. Shortly after the human era will be ended". If you don't have a pocket calculator handy that's 2023!

The really frightening thing is, who could, or would we, trust to develop and own these super intelligent AIs – not private corporations, not governments with secret military and control agendas and certainly not religious organisations.

A growing number of cosmologists are suggesting that the universe is an information processing entity and that we and everything else are intimately immersed within it. This accords with the ancient spiritual/occultist

notion that everything has a soul, or group-soul in the case of plants. Why then would an AI robot with a conscience not have a soul too? This is getting into woo woo land but it highlights my criticism of most books and research into AI that ignores, human dreams, the subconscious, repressed drives and emotions. These should be researched and included in all AI work as they are not trivial artefacts of human existence as

some reductionist robotic scientists seem to think. As one of my favourite quotes in the front of *DomeBook II* goes, "He looked upon us as children – smart but not wise".

We need to develop forums and research at both community and university level to develop guidelines for not only AI development but also nanotechnology. The intelligence of computers and the Internet now is but a shadow of what we will have when quantum computers and nanotechnology applications combine. As the saying goes, "The best way to predict the future is to create it". As always, apathy is a problem but who cares?



Cyberspace, rules and roles

by Warwick Fry

I entered my computer into the Nimbin Poetry Cup a few years ago, and it didn't get past the first heat. I was pleased. I didn't mind, because it wasn't particularly good poetry (although better than a few of the semi-finalists) and I am sure it will do far better next year.

And at least my computer feels no resentment, jealousy or pain. Although... it is capable of projecting some nastily provocative simulations of these feelings. But, only if I enable the necessary permissions.

And that takes us to what, as Shakespeare's Hamlet is programmed to say: 'is the question: "Where do 'computer intelligences' and human intelligences meet and interact?"

"The Internet!" says one set of flashing signs in black and bony white monochrome text based fantasies. "Cyberspace" says another, flashing in 64 thousand colour tones with three-dimensional animation (if your video card and bandwidth is up to it). Virtuality, space free interaction ... sensual merging for the linguistically gifted. A new way to present your fictional and idealistically rationalised realities and identities.

Yes, no, and maybe. Some day. On the Internet the Playspace of imagined regions (like a rainforest vista?) has turned into business space. 'Second Life' was modelled on the 'play spaces' of old Dungeons and Dragons fantasy games. As the genre evolved into multimedia virtual spaces, increasingly the values of capitalist society that many of the original players were trying to escape were imported.

The play of virtual real estate in Second Life has been converted into 'real life'; money, with speculators selling virtual currency that is converted into thousands of US real life dollars per virtual hectare! These are amounts of money I thought would have been unbelievable when I first heard of Second Life, almost eight years ago. Legal firms have been set up (in 'virtual' business districts) to deal with disputes over the legalities of the virtual property 'deals' – that are currently contested cases in Real Life US law. It reflects the way one should approach the Internet – as a communications medium, mind to mind, and not Mind to Money.

More ugly values have been imported into this world of virtual 'property' as concomitant



baggage. Property as Power: property; as some assumed 'God' (or Goddess-given) rights to 'freedoms' that can be imposed on the vulnerable.

Also known as pornography. The 'wonderland' area, which the managers of Second Life managed to overlook for several months while paedophiles (or paedophilic fantasists) could take little girlies on playground swings into snuff and torture rooms (only, virtually, of course).

It is interesting that the "Second Life" scandal was exposed on a rival site, which is unashamedly, and honestly sexually oriented, Uthervers, which is occasionally called 'pornographic'. One of the virtual disc jockeys (of dancing disco virtual rooms) became upset when he realised that he was streaming to Second Life (after the paedophile disclosure) as well as the Uthervers RLC. He declared that he would not work with the Second Life server until it stopped down and apologised for the 'Wonderland' space.

I expected sleaze and exploitation, and found valuable friends, intelligent discourse, honest play and life experience on the so-called sleaze and porno site. Far more honesty than on 'Second Life'

The problem is not the Internet. It is the ugly minds 'out there'.

• For those interested, there is a YouTube clip, where an investigative journalist exposes the child porn site on Second Life: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc0C9k5tQRw>

See Also CNN on Second Life: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZ1BVLUqPts&feature=related>

CTC courses

Interested in getting more out your computer and more out of your CTC?

Under the auspices of Nimbin's Community School, your CTC already offers Photoshop and Introduction to Computer classes every term and now, for this term, there is also a Video Editing class. Via our relationship with ACE Lismore we will once again be hosting Jamie North's popular Reason and Flash classes.

To improve our service as IT educators we believe it's possible to offer a much greater variety of IT related courses suited to our community's needs. We invite enquiries from both potential students and tutors to help us tailor classes, one-off workshops or one-on-one tutoring.

A suggested range of topics might include the following examples: Digital photography, Video production, Power Point or other

application, Email and Internet navigation, Computer maintenance and protection, Setting up computers for people with special needs, Seniors classes.

Of course, the CTC is more than just computers and education, it's also about having fun and what better way to combine the two than by making a digital movie. There has never been a better time to get into movie making than now. To give you a stage for your digital creation, the Nimbin CTC is taking submissions for this year's Nimbin Film Festival. Organisers are calling for local and not so local films to screen over the three day event to be held at the Nimbin Bush Theatre on October 24 25, 26. Drop into the CTC or visit our web site, URL: <http://www.nimbinfilms.co.cc/> for a submission form and don't forget to place your order for the Nimbin Central School June Bahzoooley DVD.

We're inside the Nimbin Community Centre at 81 Cullen Street, or phone 6689-1183.

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