

The Peripherality of Optimism; or, This Time It's Personal

Ben Eldridge

The seed of ignorance is born: thou shalt not think,
thou shalt conform.¹

—Warrel Dane

Strike my eyes: I can't quite believe it.²

—Matt Rose

So they're all humanities grants?³

—Senator Kim Carr

THE circus is back in town. Senate Estimates hearings on Thursday 25 October, 2018, revealed that Simon Birmingham, in his term as Minister for Education, personally vetoed over \$4 million worth of public funding reserved for competitively tendered research projects.⁴ These projects had been recommended for funding approval by the Australian Research Council (ARC) after progressing through one of the most rigorous peer review processes in the world. In keeping with previous statistics, the approval rate for applications in the 2017–18 funding period was below 20%.⁵ The

ministerial rejection of these grants was not made public until the Senate Estimates session in question, and the ARC representatives present for Senate Estimates — Chief Executive Officer Sue Thomas and Executive General Officer Leanne Harvey — repeatedly stated that the “minister is the decision-maker,” and that they were never provided with any reasons for his decision to decline the funding.⁶ Two factors are particularly disheartening in this whole affair: firstly, each vetoed project was within the already chronically underfunded field of the humanities, with no other fields of research being similarly impacted; secondly, these rejections were largely targeted at early-career researchers, with the termination of three Discovery Early Career Researcher Awards (totalling \$1,057,828) and two Future Fellowships (totalling \$1,691,116). Liberal Senator James Paterson immediately leapt to the defence of his government’s decision: “I just want to take the opportunity for placing on the record my appreciation to [the minister] for his careful stewardship of taxpayer dollars.”⁷

This kind of response has characterised consecutive conservative governments’ approaches to the tertiary sector for decades now. The merry-go-round of political interference continues: although the scale of these recent rejections is staggering, the lack of ministerial accountability is certainly not unprecedented. Brendan Nelson, for instance, in his tenure as Liberal Minister for Education, Science and Training (2001–2006), also rejected an unknown number of ARC recommended research proposals based upon their proposed areas of inquiry.⁸ It was clear at the time that Nelson was responding to the polemical rhetoric of conservative commentators — and members of his own government — who considered certain forms of research invalid: projects that were, according to right-wing media personality Andrew Bolt, “hostile to our culture, history, and institutions,” and inordinately “fixated on gender or race.”⁹ Although Nelson never provided a public explanation for the invocation of his veto power, his interventions — reported to be in the areas surrounding gender and sexuality — are legible as instances of ideological and moral censorship, and had a severe chilling effect on the serious pursuit of certain fields of enquiry.¹⁰

The major difference with Birmingham's more recent intervention has been the capricious manner in which the veto process appears to have been applied. There seemed to be no reason for the culling of research grants besides ministerial prejudice against the titles of the proposals, as evidenced by Birmingham's Twitter feed in the wake of the revelations.¹¹ As Roger Benjamin — one of the unfortunate victims of the ministerial vetoes — raged, these decisions seem to have been made by a minister “without the courage or capacity to give a credible explanation.”¹² However, although I share Benjamin's fury, I would nonetheless suggest that Birmingham has actually been remarkably clear about his motivations. Birmingham's reasoning serves to bolster his partisan positioning, and the vetoes themselves provide a useful method for proving his conservative credentials in an increasingly fractious and factional conservative government.¹³ Where Nelson was engaged in moral censorship driven by manufactured public outrage, Birmingham seems to have perceived that dismissing humanities projects is a risk-free method of political gamesmanship: a strategy that might have only a negligible impact on his electability for the broader constituency but pays sizeable party political dividends.

This assault on the humanities — which has seen some of its most outstanding practitioners mocked, and resulted in damage to their livelihoods and reputations — is not particularly surprising.¹⁴ Scapegoating the humanities has long been a pastime of conservative Australian governments, which, as Stuart Macintyre reports, consistently “deride projects in the humanities and social sciences for their esoteric character.”¹⁵ But this gratuitous censorship — and let us not mince words here: as officious acts of political manoeuvring, both Birmingham's and Nelson's respective decisions are plainly acts of censorship — has broader cultural reverberations. Birmingham's veto decisions are a disturbing indication of a more troubling trend. As Ben Etherington writes:

Behind this lies something even darker than ideological interference. The arbitrary nature of Birmingham's decisions reveals this to be an attack on the civic space of public research itself. It fits a pattern of disregard for the independence of our public institutions.¹⁶

The fact that Birmingham's vetoes are thought to be driven by a wilful ignorance and crude — if effective — politicking is irrelevant. His explicitly anti-intellectual agenda reinforces the general sociopolitical offensive being waged on independent expertise. That Birmingham seems to neither regard nor understand the value of peer review and academic autonomy is a distressing attack on the very pillars of intellectual freedom in the research sector.

The continual emergence of jesters from the clown car is quite the spectacle. In the wake of the furore arising from Birmingham's vetoes, Dan Tehan, the current Minister for Education, has announced that a “national interest test” will be applied to project proposals in future funding rounds.¹⁷ This declaration, to put it bluntly, reveals Tehan's ignorance of the tendering process, for researchers already must provide a justification for funding based on their project's national benefit.¹⁸ Tehan's media release explains the changes as follows:

The previous “benefit and impact” application text will be replaced with a compulsory field for the applicant to make their case against the NIT. This statement will be 100 to 150 words and in plain English.¹⁹

How this “new” component will be enacted in the rating of applications remains entirely opaque. What Tehan's response really seems to portend is a movement away from governmental financial support of pure research in favour of research with overt practical — which is to say economic — utility. Ian Lowe identified problems with the so-called economic approach to research policy more than a decade ago:

By steering research funds away from activities promoting public interest, the government has replaced the notion of public interest with an economic view, implicitly equating the good of the private sector with the good of the community.²⁰

That there exists a national economic benefit in having an educated populace, and that a world-renowned tertiary sector in fact offers a significant attraction for international students and scholars, is beside the point.²¹ The major issue is the lack of perspective: the current political orthodoxy considers questions of public benefit outside of economics an anathema.

Interference in the tertiary sector is, sadly, one of the major hallmarks of the current conservative government. Beyond the particularities of competitive research funding, we have also witnessed a concerted political attack on universities on several other fronts. For example, the latest round of ministerial vetoes occurred alongside an equally spectacular trip down the interventionist sideshow alley: a sector-wide reduction in tertiary funding; a proposed increase in student tertiary fees; and a lowered financial threshold for enforced repayment of student debt.²² The wanton incursion into the area of humanities research funding merely reflects the broader rejection of specialist knowledge in contemporary society and education policy. The vetoes are simply a symptom of the more general political censure of professional expertise, and the education that makes such expertise possible. Indeed, the current state of popular discourse is profoundly resistant to expert analysis and critical thinking. We need not look any further than the enflamed debate around anthropogenic climate change, and the corresponding resistance of governments to mitigate the damage, to find evidence of this attitude.²³ Currently, populism and demagoguery comprise the dominant political rhetoric across large swathes of the globe, emboldening the solipsism of many states and reinforcing our collective ineptitude.

In fact, resistance to the humanities as a field of both research and teaching is, I would suggest, one of the major factors in the rapid decline of educational standards in Australia, across all levels of the educational system.²⁴ In a rapidly changing global environment buffeted by the dodgems of technological, environmental, and cultural shifts, the lateral and critical, detail-oriented thinking required within humanities disciplines is an absolute necessity. John Ralston Saul laments that education has been replaced by a rigidly predetermined

framework that does not value critical thinking but has become “a method for recognizing the solutions which will satisfy the system,” and after which “the established internal logic will provide all the necessary justifications.”²⁵ The humanities, in contrast, provide alternative perspectives, and their disciplines offer methods of analysis that contour and often correct the economic assumptions that have become synonymous with our contemporary historical moment. The great benefit of humanistic study is its necessitation of contingency: as Richard Franke suggests, “by questioning how a problem is framed and critically analysing evidence, the humanities serve as a safeguard to the public sphere.”²⁶ The humanities, at their best, allow one to be interested in the production — rather than the mere reproduction — of knowledge. Much of the work of humanities scholars emerges at the peripheries, putting “both the object of analysis and the method of analysis in play.”²⁷ And this commitment to critical interrogation is the humanities’ greatest strength.

And so, this special issue of *Philament* embraces works that negotiate the notion of peripherality in their own multifarious ways. Each of the critical essays engages with decidedly peripheral texts and theories in a provocative and productive manner. Kathleen Davidson’s article, “Naturalising Mindscapes: The Confluence of Modernism and Eco-poetics in Eleanor Dark’s *Return to Coolami*,” journeys deep into the geographical and psychological imaginaries of the Australian author’s much overlooked novel to examine its representation of mind and Antipodean country. Lucia Nguyen’s article “‘Damnatio ad Bestias’; or, Condemnation to Beasts: The Digital as Animal” suggests that our current digital culture exacerbates the human tendency toward spectatorial incivility. Alexander Sallas’s article, “‘Waking from Dreams of Morning’: *City* as Critical Dystopia,” offers a reconsideration of one of the angriest (and funniest) heavy metal records of the late twentieth century, Strapping Young Lad’s genre-bending *City*. The reviews also introduce two new and significant scholarly voices. Chelsea Eriean’s review of Tom McCarthy’s *Satin Island* (2015) suggests that the novel’s form embodies a networked logic, thus reflecting the digital environment of which it is a part. Sydney Nicholas’s review of Caitlin Sweet’s

The Door in the Mountain (2014) examines the complexities of adaptation across time and medium, positioning the novel's reinterpretation of Greek myth as a radical act; similarly, Nicholas's creative excursion, "Prophet of Lies," invokes classical mythology to clinically assess the failures of both ancient and contemporary society.

Indeed, all of the creative offerings in this issue demonstrate the breadth of undiscovered talent working on the peripherality of mainstream artistic practice. Brooklyn Arnot's cover image, "The Garden," represents the natural world as a swarming (con)fusion of technology and biology, while her twisted fairy tale, "The Red Gloves," offers a psychosexual coming-of-age narrative. Megan Buys's "Red Snow/붉은 눈" continues the fairytale motif, injecting harsh political themes into a chilling narrative framework. Kira Legaan's poetry suite, "A Collection of Altered States," repurposes traditional poetic form to engage in a lyrical investigation of trauma, while Stewart Manley's "Sunrise, Sunset" speaks to the peripherality of humanistic practice, both institutional and personal. The rapper Primitive returns for an encore in this second "Peripherality" issue, and his "Mind of a Madman" continues his engagement with the reconstructive power of creativity. C. E. Wall's "Entropic Being: An Existential Love Poem" provides a physical reflection on human emotion, reconceptualising anthropocentric conceptions of love. And finally, Isabelle Wentworth's "Clumps" is an intense psychological vignette that oozes with paranoia and guilt. As readers will discover, each of these pieces are linked by their uniquely subversive approaches, and they speak to one another in unexpected, peripheral, ways.

This special issue marks the end of my guest editorship of *Philament*, and I would like to offer my best wishes to future editors of the journal. I owe acknowledgments to the many individuals who have helped to ensure the journal has maintained such a high standard under my period of stewardship. For this second issue, I express gratitude to my co-editor, Isabelle Wentworth, for her scholarship, support, and brilliance: the issue is much stronger for your involvement. Additional thanks are also due to my studious subeditors — and friends — Megan Buys and Sydney Nicholas for their concerted efforts

to correct my errors; any remaining mistakes are my responsibility. I remain extraordinarily grateful to each of you for your hard work: the commitment you have shown to excellence has been a major inspiration to me personally. I also thank each of the contributors to this issue. I am genuinely honoured to be associated with each of your works, and I hope you found the process from initial creation to final publication beneficial. To all of the anonymous peer reviewers of the pieces within these covers — thank you for giving so generously of your time, and helping to facilitate the continuation of research and creative output from emerging scholars and artists. A special thank you to Jessica Sun and Lucia Nguyen for late discussions on the content of this editorial introduction. Your gracious friendships mean the world to me, and your input makes my work look much more professional than it otherwise would. A thank you also to Liam Semler, whose clinical analysis of the state of contemporary education has informed much of my thinking in this area, and who provided materials I may have otherwise overlooked. My own work on this issue is dedicated to my former students: it has been a privilege to work alongside each of you, and the anger in this introduction arises from a hope that it may have some small impact on the ecological and professional environments you may soon inherit.

I also extend my gratitude to *Philament's* general editor, Chris Rudge, for the opportunity to contribute to the continuation and development of the journal. Long may it thrive. Major thanks are again due to the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) for its continued financial support, which has enabled the journal to receive a design makeover, and branch out into physical publication. Given the tenor of this introduction, to say that the editorial collective are grateful that there remains some institutional support for humanities research would be a massive understatement, and SUPRA has been instrumental in ensuring *Philament* continues to prosper. With such extreme governmental animosity towards the entire intellectual sector of which we are each a part, it behoves us to continue to support new scholarship and creative endeavours in every way we can. Our work is important. I would encourage all readers

of this piece to become active members of the research and creative networks that are available. *Philament* represents one essential avenue, but there are many others.

Ultimately, I am tempted to agree with Labor Senator Kim Carr and label members of the current conservative government a group of “knuckle-dragging philistines” for parroting such populist rhetoric as summarised above in relation to research and education policy.²⁸ But the situation is more complex, and there are other equally deserving targets for derision: modern universities — driven in part by the then Labor government’s “Dawkins Revolution” reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s — have been complicit in their own devaluation as well.²⁹ Tertiary standards are in a freefall, the speed of which is hastened by a pursuit of profit over pedagogy, reflecting the bureaucratic standardisation that defines contemporary approaches to educational service.³⁰ For the Australian tertiary sector, the application of client-service models is proving a failure, as Australian degrees see both an exponential increase in cost and an international depreciation in value.³¹ And though the humanities remain a relatively cost-effective area of study, it must also be conceded that many humanists have not succeeded in persuading administrators or governments of justifications for their research.³² The frequently abstruse nature of humanities research does open the discipline to mockery, as we have seen weaponised by Nelson and Birmingham.³³ Clearly, we need to be more vigilant and proactive in defending the continuing importance and relevance of humanities work, while maintaining our academic standards in an environment in which such standards are in cumulative decline.³⁴ Carr’s recent extraordinary public defence of our sector shows that we are not alone in this fight, and that we need not cede to the relentless political devaluations of tertiary education.³⁵

“Censorship,” observes Nicole Moore, “despite its aims, does not make good readers.”³⁶ We might extend Moore’s declaration here: censorship does not make good citizens. Although that may be precisely the point: the recent decisions to censor research were also made against the backdrop of a government obsessed with flaunting its “no limits” approach to free speech. “People do,” as former Attorney-

General George Brandis asserted, “have a right to be bigots, you know.”³⁷ Such a highly selective approach to censorship reveals more than cognitive dissonance. The balloon has burst, the fairy floss melted, and the vomit now dries on our shoes. These approaches to censorship are purely partisan tactics, sowing divisions in our communities. The pursuit of knowledge should be championed, not vilified. Given the dismissal of humanities research, I want to quote the words of Brett Hutchins and Libby Lester, two of the researchers whose ARC grant was vetoed by the minister. “We all rely on the transparency, if not fairness, of institutional decision-making,” they write, “in order to accept the legitimacy of the systems that govern our lives.”³⁸ It needs to be made clear that it is no longer good enough to simply be unmoved by these developments, to cling to our wasted beliefs and bathe in apathy again. We can no longer remain fools, beholden to the spectacle. While we still have the time, we should show some rage.

Notes

1. Warrel Dane (Nevermore), “Born” in *This Godless Endeavor* (London: Century Media Records, 2005).
2. Matt Rose (Monuments), “Blue Sky Thinking” in *Gnosis* (London: Century Media Records, 2012).
3. Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, Parliament of Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard Estimates (Public)*, October 25, 2018, 126, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/estimate/8e9ac2dc-eb23-45b9-a912-15dfe2c85bcf/toc_pdf/Education%20and%20Employment%20Legislation%20Committee_2018_10_25_6704.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf; footage of the relevant section of the Senate Estimates session has been published at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUtPDjXI8fE>.
4. Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Proof Committee Hansard Estimates (Public)*, 126. Also see Kim Carr, “What Was Simon Birmingham Really Thinking?” in *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/what-was-simon-birmingham-really-thinking-20181031-p50d3q.html>; Paul Karp, “‘Knuckle-dragging Philistines’: Labor Targets Liberals for Blocking Arts Grant,” *The Guardian*, 26 October, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/26/knuckle-dragging-philistines-labor-targets-liberals-for-blocking-arts-grants>; John Ross, “Australian Minister ‘Censored’ Humanities Research,” *Times Higher Education*, October 25, 2018, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/australian-minister-censored-human->

ities-research; Bianca Nogrady, “Australian Academics Fear Political Interference Following Vetoed Projects,” *Nature*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07221-3>; John Piccini and Dirk Moses, “Simon Birmingham’s Intervention in Research Funding is not Unprecedented, but Dangerous,” *The Conversation*, October 26, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/simon-birminghams-intervention-in-research-funding-is-not-unprecedented-but-dangerous-105737>; Ben Etherington, “Birmo’s Pride and Prejudice Show That ARC Grants Need New Rules,” *Crikey*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2018/10/30/birmos-pride-and-prejudice-show-arc-grants-need-new-rules/>; Paul Karp, “Digraeful: University Decries ‘Political Interference’ that Blocked \$4m in Grants,” *The Guardian*, October 30, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/30/disgraceful-university-decries-political-interference-that-blocked-4m-in-grants>; Joshua Sprecht, “Minister, Leave these Grants Alone: What Simon Birmingham Doesn’t Understand About the Public Benefit of Research,” *ABC Online*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/simon-birmingham-and-the-public-benefit-of-research/10451142>.

5. See Australian Research Council, “Scheme Round Statistics for Approved Proposals,” *Australian Research Council*, <https://rms.arc.gov.au/RMS/Report/Download/Report/c1d284de-3f2a-410d-8cc4-71daf59bfef2/0>; see also Carr, “What Was Simon Birmingham Really Thinking?” For more extensive discussion of the grant application process, see Stuart Macintyre, “Universities,” in *Silencing Dissent: How the Australian Government is Controlling Public Opinion and Stifling Debate*, eds. Clive Hamilton and Sarah Maddison (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007); Roger Benjamin, “I Kicked A Winning Goal Only to have the Minister Disallow it,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/i-kicked-a-winning-goal-only-to-have-the-minister-disallow-it-20181030-p50cw2.html>.

6. Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Proof Committee Hansard Estimates (Public)*, 126–28.

7. *Ibid.*, 130.

8. For an overview of the Brendan Nelson veto case see Macintyre, “Universities.” See also Gideon Haigh, “The Nelson Touch – Research Funding: The New Censorship,” *The Monthly*, May 2006, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/monthly-essays-gideon-haigh-nelson-touch-research-funding-new-censorship-214>; Stuart Macintyre, “Research Floored by Full Nelson,” *The Age*, November 16, 2005, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/research-floored-by-full-nelson-20051116-ge18v3.html>. It remains difficult not to read Nelson’s job title as the quintessential example of doublespeak.

9. Andrew Bolt, “Grants to Grumble,” *The Sun Herald*, 19 November, 2003, 18.

10. Mary Spongberg, “Feminist Publishing in a Cold Climate: *Australian Feminist Studies* and the New ERA of Research,” *Feminist Review* 95 (2010): 101. See also Ian Lowe, *A Voice of Reason: Reflections on Australia* (St Lucia: University of

Queensland Press, 2010); Lowe argues that “researchers are effectively intimidated into self-censorship, the most insidious form of censorship because it is totally invisible” (37).

11. Simon Birmingham (@Birmo) via Twitter: “I’m pretty sure most Australian tax payers preferred their funding to be used for research other than spending \$223,000 on projects like ‘Post orientalist arts of the Straits of Gibraltar.’ Do you agree @SenKimCarr? Would Labor simply say yes to anything?” October 25, 2018, 3.25pm, <https://twitter.com/Birmo/status/1055586252244713474>. See also Birmingham’s response to international criticism in Nogrady, “Australian Academics Fear Political Interference Following Vetoed Projects” where Birmingham is quoted as saying “I am confident that in each and every case rejected the vast majority of Australian taxpayers would believe the millions of dollars involved were better redirected to other research projects.”

12. Benjamin, “I Kicked A Winning Goal Only to have the Minister Disallow it.”

13. Miriam Bankovsky, “Forget Publicity Protocols and Pub-tests: Let’s Get Rid of Ministerial Veto of ARC Grants Altogether,” *ABC Online*, 12 November, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/get-rid-of-ministerial-veto-of-arc-grants/10488208>.

14. Universities Australia, “University Leaders Condemn Political Veto on Research Grants,” media release, 30 October, 2018, <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/Media-and-Events/media-releases/University-leaders-condemn-political-veto-on-research-grants#.XAZNdS17G01>. Writing of the of the ultimate rejection of his (ARC approved) grant application, Mark Steven (@multimimetica) tweeted, “If successful, my family would have stayed in Australia.” October 25, 2018, 2.17pm, <https://twitter.com/multimimetica/status/1055568853583966208>. See also the same researcher’s long form response, along with many of the other researchers whose work was vetoed: Mark Steven “The Political is Personal when a Research Grant is Rejected by a Minister,” *Times Higher Education*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/political-personal-when-research-grant-rejected-minister>; Benjamin, “I Kicked A Winning Goal”; Brett Hutchins and Libby Lester, “Some Questions for Simon Birmingham from Two Researchers whose ARC Grant he Quashed,” *The Conversation*, October 29, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/some-questions-for-simon-birmingham-from-two-researchers-whose-arc-grant-he-quashed-105838>.

15. Macintyre, “Universities,” 56.

16. Etherington, “Birmo’s Pride and Prejudice.”

17. Dan Tehan, “Funding World-Leading Research,” media release, 27 November, 2018, <https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/media-releases/funding-world-leading-research>. See also Gareth Hutchens, “Universities Baffled by Coalition’s ‘National Interest’ Test for Public Funding,” *The Guardian*, 31 October, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/31/academics-will-have-to-pass-national-interest-test-for-public-funding-coalition-says>; Gavin

Moodie, “National Interest Test for Research Grants Could Further Erode Pure Research,” *The Conversation*, 31 October, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/national-interest-test-for-research-grants-could-further-erode-pure-research-106061>.

18. See Geoff Maslen, “Minister Should Explain Why Research Grants Are Refused,” *University World News*, 31 October, 2018, <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20181031093833204>; John Ross, “Universities Sceptical of ‘National Interest’ Funding Test,” *Times Higher Education*, 31 October, 2018, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/universities-sceptical-national-interest-funding-test>.

19. Tehan, “Funding World-Leading Research.”

20. Ian Lowe, “The Research Community,” in *Silencing Dissent: How the Australian Government is Controlling Public Opinion and Stifling Debate*, eds. Clive Hamilton and Sarah Maddison (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 71.

21. See Ben Eldridge, “Institutional Peripherality: The Many Deaths of Humanity” (Editorial) *Philament* 24, no. 1 (2018): 1–13. To encourage a valuation of the humanities in raw economic terms is an unfortunate — if understandable — method of asserting their importance.

22. Scott Morrison, “Budget Night Speech,” 9 May, 2017, <https://www.budget.gov.au/2017-18/content/speech/html/speech.htm>; Australian Government, *Budget Paper No. 2: Budget Measures 2017–18*, 1–2, https://www.budget.gov.au/2017-18/content/bp2/download/bp2_revenue.pdf; see also, Naaman Zhou, “Student Debt: How the Government’s HECS Changes Will Affect You,” *The Guardian*, 28 June, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/28/student-debt-how-the-governments-hecs-changes-will-affect-you>.

23. For a consideration of the horrifying environmental state of the planet, see the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5 °C: an IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global warming of 1.5 °C Above Pre-industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (Incheon, South Korea: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018).

24. UNICEF Office of Research, “An Unfair Start: Inequality in Children’s Education in Rich Countries,” *Innocenti Report Card 15* (Innocenti, Florence: UNICEF Office of Research, 2018).

25. John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire’s Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1992), 21.

26. Richard J. Franke, “The Power of the Humanities and the Challenge to Humanists,” in *Daedalus* 138, no. 1 (2009): 21.

27. Edward L. Ayers, “Where the Humanities Live,” *Daedalus* 138, no. 1 (2009): 29.

28. Carr, “What Was Simon Birmingham Really Thinking?”

29. For an overview of the Dawkins Revolution see Arran Gare, "The Neo-Liberal Assault on Australian Universities and the Future of Democracy: The Failure of a Nation," *Concrescence* 7 (2006): 20–40.

30. This is not limited to tertiary education in Australia, but is applicable across the entire educational sector. For a personal account of the decline of standards across primary teaching due to an increased push towards "standardisation," see Gabbie Stroud, *Teacher: One Woman's Struggle to Keep her Heart in Teaching* (Crows Nest, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2018); G. J. Stroud, "Teaching Australia," *Griffith Review* 51, <https://griffithreview.com/articles/teaching-australia/>. For a broad-scale study, see Susan McGrath-Champ, Meghan Stacey, Rachel Wilson, and Scott Fitzgerald, *Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation for Teaching and Learning: 2018 Report to the NSW Teachers Federation*, <https://news.nswtf.org.au/application/files/7315/3110/0204/Understanding-Work-In-Schools.pdf>.

31. Bella Peacock, "Why Doesn't Australia Value Higher Education?" *Overland*, 9 June, 2017, <https://overland.org.au/2017/06/why-doesnt-australia-value-higher-education/>

32. The humanities, Ayers notes, are "largely a solitary craft, inexpensive and undemanding in the larger institutional context." See Ayers, "Where the Humanities Live," 29.

33. See also Philippa Martyr, "Taken for Granted," *Quadrant Online*, 31 October, 2018, <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2012/10/taken-for-granted/>.

34. See Chas Savage, "The Seditious Purpose of Universities," *Southerly* 66, no. 3 (2006), where he notes that "academia is not yet made idiot-proof: not all writing is clear and some research is beautiful only in the eye of the researcher" (124).

35. Carr, "What Was Simon Birmingham Really Thinking?"; Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Proof Committee Hansard Estimates (Public)*.

36. Nicole Moore, *The Censor's Library* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012), 342.

37. See Emma Griffiths, "George Brandis Defends 'Right to be a Bigot' Amid Government Plan to Amend Racial Discrimination Act," *ABC Online*, 24 March, 2014, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-03-24/brandis-defends-right-to-be-a-bigot/5341552>.

38. Hutchins and Lester, "Some Questions for Simon Birmingham From Two Researchers whose ARC Grant He Quashed." Also see Stephen Matchett, "La Trobe VC Challenges ARC Over Research Grant Cancellation," *Campus Morning Mail*, October 29, 2018, <https://campusmorningmail.com.au/la-trobe-vc-dewar-challenges-arc-over-research-grant-cancellation/>.