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BYRON GUIDE

PEOPLE, POLITICS AND CULTURE

IN THE LIGHT OF THE TIMES

DAVID BROMLEY



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FROM HER BOOK *THE IDEA OF AUSTRALIA*.



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RUSTY'S BYRON GUIDE 2024

Editor: Tricia Shantz
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Cover artwork: David Bromley 2023
Contributing photographers: Tao Jones, Eben McCrimmon, Nelly le Comte, Rusty Miller, David Young.
The charities we have supported are: Byron Bay Community Centre, Fletcher St. Cottage, Grata Fund, Greenpeace, Northern Rivers Community Foundation, The Chappell Foundation, The Life you Can Save, Uniting Natives.
The views of the authors are not necessarily those of the publisher.
We acknowledge the Arakwal/Bumberlin People of the Bundjalung Nation as the traditional custodians of the land.





IN THE LIGHT OF THE TIMES

TRICIA SHANTZ & RUSTY MILLER

We began doing Byron Guides in 1984, initially with the Byron Chamber of Commerce and then independently. The Meatworks/Anderson's Abattoir closed in November 1983, putting 300 people out of work in a town of 3000 people. It was one of the town's major events in its history. So, the Council of the day invited Sydney journalists to Byron Bay to write about Byron Bay to get tourists here. Tourism was seen to be the economic saviour of the town.

Lawrence Wright writing in the New Yorker magazine in February 2023 about Austin, Texas, said, "A person can live in many places but can settle in only one. You may not understand the difference until you've found the city or the town or the patch of countryside that sounds a distinct internal chord." Byron seems to have that effect on people. It is seductive, it draws you in, it's hard to leave, but it's also hard to stay, it's a push-pull. It looks easy, but it's not. And, it is certainly changing, fast, now. In Wright's article he writes about how Austin is changing from when he first arrived. The name Byron Bay or Byron Shire could replace the name Austin in his article. Vastly different places, but similar dynamics of change going on as they both were a small place but had free parking, students (say backpackers), and limited (cheap) restaurants.

"Life in Austin was offbeat, affordable, spontaneous, blithe, and slyly amused as if we were in on some hilarious secret the rest of the world was unaware of. Even then, the place had a reputation for being cool, but in my experience

it was just extremely relaxed, almost to the point of stupor." (Wright, L.). Byron was many of these things in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Keep Austin Weird was the city's unofficial motto. *Keeping Byron Unique* was the title of Byron's first tourism plan produced in 1983.

Forty years on, it's been a constant battle for residents/activists to try to keep *Byron Unique*. How do we describe that uniqueness? What is it about Byron that is unique? Besides the natural environment, being the most easterly point of this great continent of Australia is unique. It used to be the buskers on the street, the colour, the small shops owned by residents, no chain stores here, dare we say, the egalitarianism of it? It's uniqueness now is having the most homeless people outside of Sydney, having the most Airbnbs in NSW, in having the highest house prices outside of Sydney. None of this is the kind of unique that was envisioned in that report written in 1983. Although, housing was recognised as an issue as Byron's first Housing Plan was written in 1984-85. Nothing new here.

In the 200th edition of *The Monthly* magazine, in the editorial it talks about how hard it is to publish in Australia. It identified all the 'thinking' magazines that hadn't survived; *Oz*, *Nation Review*, *The National Times*, and many more. "As for scepticism, you didn't need to look far to see examples of failed attempts to successfully launch or maintain local magazines of ideas, politics and culture. In the pages of the first issue, Mungo MacCallum wrote about the many already defunct Australian



"Difficulties are just things to overcome." — ERNEST SHACKLETON

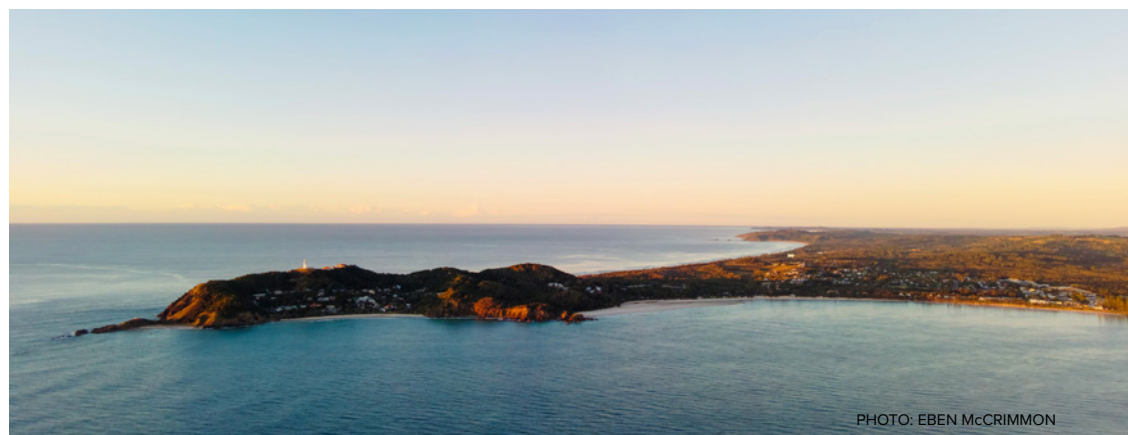


PHOTO: EBEN MCCRIMMON

magazines that he'd written for: *Oz*, *Nation Review*, *Living Daylights*, *The National Times*... The list was long, and the graveyard of failed magazines with worthy intentions clearly crowded. As Mungo put it: The only truly long-term survivors have been the university papers, with their built-in subsidies and captive audiences... If a year is a long time in politics, then ten years is a lifetime for an Australian political magazine."

Now, we are not comparing ourselves to these esteemed publications, nor *The Monthly* magazine, but over these 40 years of being involved with a Byron Guide, now called *Rusty's Byron Guide*. *People, Politics, Culture*, our point of difference to other 'tourist' publications is that we thought it was important to provide visitors and residents with incisive writing about big topics, with a Byron slant. Our tag line is to: Read, Think, Act.

Over these years we've had writing from big Australian name writers/thinkers, as well as some from overseas: Peter Singer, Rob Drewe, Craig McGregor, Richard Neville, Jennifer Clement, John Ralston Saul, Julianne Schultz, Colleen Ryan, Mungo MacCallum, Kerry O'Brien, Helena Norberg-Hodge and many more. We ask of visitors and those who live here to enjoy the delights of

where we live environmentally, climatically and creatively, but to think while they're here of why they've come to Byron Shire and what it is that is so different about it. This is true of new residents also. We are about writing, about ideas and how Byron is both a place and an idea. Our other tagline is: Perception and Reality. We even produce a t-shirt with this on it. There is a perception out there, perpetuated by the mainstream press, about what Byron is, eg expensive real estate and then there is the reality which is, homelessness and struggle. They exist side- by- side in the town of Byron Bay. There is no 'one' Byron anymore. It is many things. It was once, 'one' thing; a small, industrial, working-class town. That changed in 1983.

Byron is known for its activism in terms of development, or rather, inappropriate development. Byron would be a very different place if it weren't for people in the community stepping up to counter proposed developments, as is what the development process system asks for. There is a lot of change going on. Sometimes, it's surprising it hasn't happened quicker, when researching the history of Byron Shire. Thankfully, it hasn't and there is still a quirky element to this place we love called Byron. Keep Byron Unique.

We met Bill Cleary when he arrived in Byron Bay in 1985. This article originally appeared in the 1985-86 Byron Bay Holiday Guide, the second edition. He had been the Associate Editor of Surfer magazine in the '60s, published Surf Guide, and in 1963 co-authored a book with David H. Stern,

Surfing Guide to Southern California, still considered a classic, re-published in March 2002. He is said to have, 'virtually introduced surfing to Spain, France, Morocco and the Canary Islands' in the early sixties. Cleary passed away in July 2002.

THE LAST PLACE ON EARTH

Back in the sixties when an American surf mag printed the first photos of Noosa, I was stoked. Later when the same surf mag printed photos of Kirra, I knew I was going to move to Australia. It was only a matter of time. Those waves were so perfect.

Of course I happened to be living on the beach at Malibu at the time, and I also happened to be running that surf mag, and that meant we not only had the best summer wave in the northern hemisphere in our front yard, but every winter when the surf in the front yard went flat we took off for Hawaii. On business, of course. The north shore of Oahu was the Mecca for all big wave warriors in those days.

But nothing lasts forever. America turned into a zoo in the late nineteen-sixties, Vietnam was one reason, and the death of the last real hope of the Kennedy's was another. There were a lot of reasons, and a lot of us left America then.

Before walking out the door of the surf magazine for the last time, I went into the files and pulled out those original photos of Noosa and Kirra and folded them up and put them in my wallet. Those photos were the stuff of dreams. I might have been leaving America, but I sure as hell wasn't abandoning the dream.

Over the next decade I lived in a lot of different countries, checking out the international kaleidoscope. But little by little the world was closing down. Wars, famines, revolutions: chaos was the name of the game.

Not my game; I didn't want to play.

But life is funny that way. And one day the war came along and moved in next door. I was living in Costa Rica at the time. I remember hearing the machine-gun fire echoing across the valley and then walking into my studio and looking at the globe, wondering where to go next. I looked for places where freedom was still held to be somewhat sacred, and that eliminated almost everywhere right off the top. Then I looked for places that in addition to being free also had plenty of sunshine and good surf. That really cut down the odds. In all the world there was only one place left to go.

Australia.

I opened my wallet and pulled out the remains of those old surf photos of Noosa and Kirra. They'd been torn and rained on and sat on by a camel (in Morocco, I think) but they were still in one piece. Even an old dream is better than none. I packed my typewriter and took off for Noosa, family in tow.

But alas, Noosa had become a zoo, too. Oh, the waves were still there, beautiful as ever, but Noosa had been discovered by the jet setters and the developers. Noosa had become San Tropez, sur. Will people never learn? We headed north for greener pastures . . . and found killer jellyfish and sharks and no waves. We turned around and headed south to Kirra and found worse: Surfers Paradise.

Awash in despair, we bought maps, flipped coins, consulted the *I Ching*, and lastly we interrogated our friends. Tom Morey, who invented the boogie board and had been around said, "Go to Byron Bay." But what did he know? Bob Cooper, down in Coffs Harbour, one of the early American surf explorers of the Aussie coast said, "Go to Byron Bay." Steve Pezman, publisher of *Surfer Magazine* told us, "Go to Byron Bay."

Why not? We went to Byron Bay.

It was a beautiful sunny day. Our American host from Coffs Harbour drove like a dinkum Aussie, which is to say we flew in low over the windswept veldt of Lennox Head in his BMW. The landscape was beginning to look promising. We pressed on. We turned off the coast road onto a dirt road that crossed over to Broken Head. Wow! Open beaches, idyllic coves, hillsides covered with native bush — a miniature Big Sur there — and not a condominium in sight! After California, after Hawaii, after the Riviera and all the other beach paradises we'd lived in and which had eventually fallen under the developers' axe, the green hills of Byron were paradise!

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We passed on into the Bay itself. Lunch time. We stopped in Byron for a dynamite meal: locally caught prawns and fish and home made pasta. A gourmet feast. We walked up and down Jonson Street and everybody was friendly. The local restaurants and shops were intriguing. We stopped to admire the mural on the Community Centre across from the train station.

A Byron local came walking along with her surfboard under her arm. She stopped long enough to pull the long blonde hair out of her eyes and tell us who the people in the mural really were. Byron abounded with characters, it seemed, ranging from Fast Bucks to dubious Bonds.

The Byron surfy politely excused herself. "I've got to go surfing," she said. The wind, she explained, had just switched to south. She flagged down a passing taxi.

"Gone with the wind," I mused as the cab screeched around the corner and was gone. My wife shot me a curious glance.

"I mean I like it here," I said. "Where else can you find taxis with surfboard racks?"

It was my kind of town.

We returned to the restaurant where our host from Coffs Harbour, a famous surfy with an infamous appetite, had just ordered dessert. He was warming up with a half dozen eclairs from the French Patisserie next door.

"Where's this place called The Pass," I said. "One of the locals just told us the surf was up . . ."

Thirty seconds later we arrived at The Pass. I was still trying to figure out where all those eclairs had gone. Five minutes later I'd forgotten about the eclairs and Noosa and America and what I'd even sat down to write about, because here we were and it was an eight foot day with only a few guys out. Warm clear water, gentle offshore winds, everybody sharing waves . . .

I looked up at the late autumn sun; the sun smiled down radiating warmth and promise. I looked at my wife and shrugged. We smiled. We both let a wave pass with nobody on it . . . as an offering to the gods.

we were home.

Bill Cleary
Wategos Beach, July 1985



Local founding surfing father, Bob McTavish slides along a clean wall of water.



"We need to learn to want what we have, not to have what we want."

— DALAI LAMA



PHOTO: DAVID YOUNG



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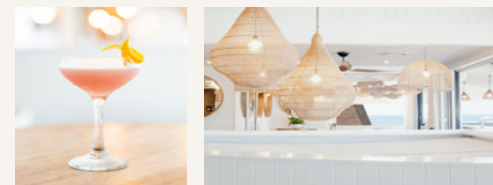


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BLACK SHEEP

ROLAND ELLIS

Adopt the cynical view from far off. Up close it probably won't last.

The clichés are burned into our brains by now: Influencers in earthy linens wielding black Amex cards. Social media marketing managers who moonlight as yoga teachers. A near endless stream of luxury vehicles waiting in the drop-off line at the local Montessori school.

Some of these vignettes hold up in the flesh. On a recent two week visit, I saw a woman with a shock of sun-bleached hair driving a white Tesla SUV with the license plate IMPERIAL. There are probably more absurdly attractive people in Byron per capita than anywhere else in the world. There are also more than enough musclebound blokes rolling with property developer energy, and women in color-coordinated activewear outfits. But to say that this is all Byron is these days — a textbook case of over-gentrification; a neoliberal pimple on Australia's ass masquerading as a bohemian playground, as one disgruntled old Sydneysider put it to me — would be to miss a lot. To write it off in this way is at best lazy, at worst ignorant and politically motivated. A place is never just one thing. I find this to be particularly true of Byron Shire.

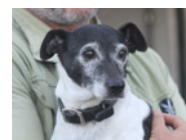
Admittedly I went into my recent trip — my first to Byron in about a decade — having adopted a pretty cynical view of my own from far away, as is somewhat reflected in a piece I wrote about the Byron homelessness crisis for Rolling Stone magazine in 2022. But by the time I left I felt, well, less so.

I was surprised to find it's still a place for the weirdos. Maybe *the* place, as far as Australia goes.

The strange ones trying to break loose of the suffocating and naysaying atmospheres that we as Australians know all too well. Maybe they don't live down in Byron Bay itself anymore — because what kind of self-respecting stranger could ever afford to live in Byron these days? They're mostly up in the moody hills around Bangalow and Mullumbimby instead, or to a lesser extent—because it's still too expensive—down in the perennially flood-threatened lowlands of Suffolk Park and Lennox Head. But they're still here.

They've been here at least as far back as the late 1960s when a bunch of draft-dodging surfers started to roll in from places as far flung as California, as I found out in sitting on the front deck of Rusty Miller and Tricia Shantz's house one morning. Rusty brought bowls of Greek yogurt with blueberries and cinnamon, then proceeded to tell me about the pioneering surfers who came here to find little aside from the rancid stink of the local abattoirs that used to dump their off-cuts directly into the surf out off Belongil Beach. It's what Byron was known for back then: Meat.

The surfers also found good, untouched surf. The quality of the waves—running all the way from Broken Head to Lennox Head—was enough to convince a lot of them to stay. Living was cheap and it was rough. There was hardly any infrastructure outside of Byron's few main streets. Hardly anyone lived around at Wategos Beach in those days. Instead of a block of land costing no less than twenty million, you could buy one for \$300. The surfers founded some of the first surfboard shaping shops on the east coast. They founded cafes with



"Beauty is what leads to love of nature. ." — DOUG TOMPKINS, AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN, CONSERVATIONIST & PHILANTHROPIST

names like the Rib Cage. Gorgeous women started to appear like apparitions on horseback moving languidly down the centre of Jonson street while the abattoir workers in their bloody scrubs looked on. Many credit the surfers with being the first ones to bring drugs to the region in significant quantities. Certainly the cops credited them for it. Raids and arrests were common facts of life. Tensions between the stuffy old guard and the new bronze invaders who never seemed to work were palpable. It's a time and movement comprehensively chronicled in Tricia's book *Neverland*.

Really the drugs were always here, at least in one respect. These hills be rife with naturally occurring psilocybin. The hinterlands of the rainbow region also provide optimal conditions for growing pot, so I've been told.

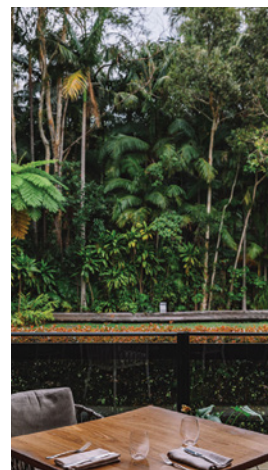
Soon after the surfers came the hippies in the

hinterlands. The *Aquarius* festival in 1973 drew a crowd of roughly ten thousand. Many of whom didn't want to go home after the festival. It turned out they didn't have to. Aquarius coincided with a collapse in the local dairy industry. This left a number of abandoned farmhouses and banana sheds for the hippies to take up in. The region's infamous blue moon dances ensued. The Sannyasins moved in to establish a commune. At the same time as a permissive and hallucinogen-centric culture had started to take root, the Buttery rehab centre opened its doors. A lot of eccentric and well-known people passed through it. Many of them never left. Paul Kelly later immortalized it in the song "*To Her Door*."

Some of those black sheep from the early days still remain: A subset of old Aquarius outlaws who see themselves as still being on the run from the cops; elegant old timers like Rusty Miller who read

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the *New Yorker*, listen to jazz on vinyl, and see surfing as nothing short of a spiritual act. But their maverick energy has also seeped down to a new generation. Mandy Nolan—comedian, activist, would-be federal senator for the Greens, platinum blonde force of nature—wants to keep it alive. It's increasingly difficult with property prices soaring, and with the gradual creep of more and more bland development—see the charmless Mercato Centre on Jonson Street with its *Wahlburger*, for example. But the outsider energy still somehow remains. A few trips through the local arts and industrial area were enough to assure me of that. Out there, one can enter a dark hut and partake of a silent Japanese tea ceremony. Or visit a niche bookstore called *Bacteria Books*. Or sign up for a tantric sex club operated by a pair of tantra gurus named Oceania and Icarus—not sure I'd want to be taking sex classes from someone named Icarus, just as an aside. It just wouldn't seem to bode well long term.

It's different here. Something in the air. I wake up in the blue light of pre-dawn. Birds honking out their elaborate dawn songs from the trees. Living in New York for the past ten years, I've grown depressingly accustomed to not hearing any wildlife except for the occasional squeaking of a rat from deep within a pile of garbage bags. I drive over to the Pass. A pod of dolphins mills out there just off the point, having fun. A few mal riders bob in the teal water. Some early tourists watch from the platform at the top of the big haystack rock as a squadron of surf skis paddle over from Wategos through a column of golden sunlight laying across the ocean. Golden boys. Lean teenage surfers running out into the waves now. A homeless guy

sleeping in a hammock strung between two trees in the bush just back from the beach. A pair of bright green crocs on his dangling feet. I go back to my hotel and I feel like writing. And maybe nothing I write will prove any good. But the point is that I feel like doing it while I'm here.

To break up the drive from Byron back to Sydney, I stopped midway for a night in my own hometown of Port Macquarie. As soon as I stepped out of the car on one of the main streets I felt it—the old familiar dead-zone energy starting to settle back in. Just as it does in all the other carbon-copy versions of Port Mac that are dotted along the coastline and across the continent at large. I find it soul crushing. I immediately felt the itch to get back in the car and back up the coast to Byron Shire. In Byron I'm home. But it's not just the black sheep who need it. We all do. Without it I fear we're all but lost to the homogenising, brain-drained and artless forces that apply incredible amounts of pressure in Australia.

Roland Ellis is an Australian writer-director living in Brooklyn NY. His first feature film THE REUNION will be released in 2024. His columns appear regularly in Rolling Stone magazine.



PHOTO: NELLY le COMTE



"Listening to why someone disagrees with you is the only way that good social change happens."
— TIERNAN BRADY, IRISH MARRIAGE EQUALITY ACTIVIST



PHOTO: NELLY le COMTE

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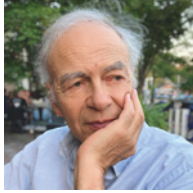
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DIFFERENCES AND CONVERGENCES

PETER SINGER

I am not, and never have been, a religious person. I have spent my life teaching and researching philosophy, particularly ethics, and I base my beliefs on evidence and reasoning, not faith. That puts me at odds with the systems of belief that are sometimes described as “the world’s major religions,” a category that typically includes Buddhism. Yet since I was a student at university, I have found Buddhism to be closer to my way of thinking than other major religions. Buddhists do not believe in a god or a divine creator. So should we really think of Buddhism as a religion, or is it rather a philosophy of life, in the broad sense of an understanding of human psychology and an approach to how best to live?

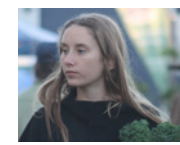
When I was still a graduate student in philosophy, I came to see that there is no justification for our exclusion of animals from the circle of beings to whom we have ethical obligations, and I stopped eating meat. Some people asked me if this view had anything to do with Buddhism. It didn’t, but it did give me a sense of affinity between my own ideas and Buddhism, because the Buddhist precept of refraining from taking life includes all sentient beings. This is, in my view, a distinct improvement over the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic religious traditions, which limit their injunctions against killing solely to members of our own species.

Nevertheless, there seemed to be some aspects of Buddhism that I could not accept. Do Buddhists really believe that if we act wrongly, we will inevitably suffer for it, as the popular understanding of the doctrine of karma suggests? That would be

a complete answer to the question “Why should I act ethically?” with which philosophers since Plato have grappled, without finding, in my view, a convincing answer. But it is easy to think of people who have done great harm to others and yet were able to live long and happy lives. Some Buddhists would say that those who have caused harm will be reincarnated and their next life will be miserable, but that seems no more plausible than the Christian idea that they will burn in hell for all eternity.

I also had some ethical problems with Buddhism. For one thing, when visiting countries like Thailand and Japan, where there are many Buddhists, I found very few vegetarians. I was surprised to find that even among Buddhist monastics, many eat meat or fish, despite the fact that this obviously makes them complicit in the killing of animals. Of course, Buddhists would not be the only people to fail to live up to the precepts of their religion. Jesus is quoted in the Gospels as saying that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, but there are plenty of rich Christians. Still, the acceptance of meat-eating by Buddhists, and the apparent absence of efforts by Buddhist leaders to do anything about it, was disappointing.

There is also a broader difference between my utilitarian view and what I took to be the Buddhist view of how we ought to live. Utilitarianism is concerned about the consequences of what we do or do not do. Utilitarians hold that we ought to do as much good as we can for all sentient beings, so utilitarianism encourages activism. Buddhism, as I understood it, encourages contemplation,



“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

— VIKTOR FRANKL, AUSTRIAN PSYCHIATRIST

focusing on meditation to improve oneself, rather than on acting to make the world a better place. I could not endorse that set of priorities.

In 2014, Venerable Shih Chao-Hwei, whom I had met many years earlier at a conference, invited me to speak at a conference in Taiwan titled “Animal Liberation, Animal Rights, and Equal Ecological Rights: Dialogues between Eastern and Western Philosophies and Religions.” She also organized a tour for me and other conference guests to Hualien City to meet Master Cheng Yen, a Buddhist female monastic who in 1996 founded the Tzu Chi Foundation, a Buddhist humanitarian organization. What we saw was most impressive, but for me the journey itself was even more significant, because in several conversations with Chao-Hwei, I learned that her understanding of Buddhism had led her to be not only a vegetarian but also an activist in many of the areas that concerned me—including, of course, the ethical treatment of animals, as well as aid to people in great need and the empowerment of those who are marginalized, especially women.

On the train to Hualien City and over delicious vegetarian meals during our travels, Chao-Hwei

explained the bodhisattva tradition in Buddhism. Bodhisattvas are enlightened people who choose not to achieve nirvana, because they want to continue to work to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings. She also spoke about the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, those who see engagement with the world and the reduction of suffering as important components of their way of living. These conversations made me realize that I could learn a great deal from an extended exchange of ideas with Chao-Hwei and that a wider audience—whether Buddhists, secular utilitarians, or just people interested in different ways of thinking about how we ought to live—might also benefit from our dialogue.

We have arranged the dialogues that follow to start with foundational questions about the nature of ethics, which will be a valuable precursor to our discussions of important ethical issues. I was also keen to learn more about some Buddhist concepts, particularly those of karma and nirvana, which are frequently mentioned in the West, but in a way that suggested to me that they had been taken out of their original context; hence, the popular Western understanding of them might not reflect

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their true sense in the Buddhist tradition. Speaking with Chao-Hwei gave me the opportunity to ask a leading Buddhist scholar, monastic, and activist, how she understands them, and we thought that this discussion would also be a useful preliminary to the later dialogues. Next, we have the dialogue in which Chao-Hwei describes her struggles when seeking equality for female monastics, as that enables readers to know more about her activism. From there, it is easy to see a connection with the dialogue about sexuality, and after that we move on to questions relating to abortion and embryo experimentation and then animal welfare, the topic that originally brought us together. The last two dialogues are on issues about taking life: euthanasia and suicide, the death penalty, and killing in war.

Australian philosopher Peter Singer is Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and the recipient of the Berggruen Prize for ideas that shape human self-understanding. He is the author of more than twenty books, including *The Ethics of What We Eat* (with Jim Mason) and *The Most Good You Can Do*. Singer divides his time between Princeton and Melbourne.

This is the Preface from the book: The Buddhist and the Ethicist: Conversations on Effective Altruism, Engaged Buddhism, and How to Build a Better World. By Peter Singer and Shih Chao-Hwei. Publication 3 January 2024. RRP \$36.99



PHOTO: NELLY le COMTE



“Happiness is like being struck by lightning: the storm merely heightens it. Knowing we could die quite soon means each moment is unrepeatable.”
— ROBERT DESSAIX, AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR



PHOTO: DAVID YOUNG

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WHAT IS SYMBOLISM?

PIERCE FLYNN PHD

Have you been hearing neighbors and your coffee barista using that \$5-word, symbolism, recently?

Wondered what symbolism really means?

Try this!

An artist friend says symbols and symbolism (the use of symbols) are what we use to tell stories.

Also, symbolism is the idea that things represent other things ... like a *flag* representing a *nation*.

A symbol is an image that stands for something other than itself ... like how an *Egyptian ankh* symbol stood for divine life and the pharaoh's power.

Symbolism can also take the form of a simple word, object or action that stands for a complex meaning or concept ... like when you flash the *Hawaiian shaka*. Or, a symbol is an *image in a painting* that seems to hold more hidden meaning than it looks like at first glance.

Say we look at something.... maybe, the *color red* — and conclude that this red represents not only the color red, but *something more beyond it*.... for example.... hot passion, love, or devotion. Or maybe the opposite: infidelity....¹

Red is symbolic!

The famous depth psychologist, C. G. Jung, writes that symbols and symbolism in our *dreams* are *symbolic images* that express, in strange, fantastic ways, our own deep mystical ideas, emotions, sexual fantasies, hidden experiences and transcendent states of mind.²

Like when you saw an open door in your dreams last night and decided to walk through it. What was that open door? An unconscious symbol for you? Symbolizing *freedom*? *Confidence*? *Nonconformity*? *The unknown*?

Our symbols are based on, and tell stories about our experiences, whether we are aware of using symbols or not. We continuously communicate and tell stories through symbols and symbolism. We borrow other peoples' symbols, which become meaningful to us and our friends in personal, shared ways....like a *wedding ring* or a *gift*.

Shared symbols can create a culture. And culture creates shared symbols.³

What symbols do you use for yourself? Symbols for what you believe in, yourself, or socially with others? A *cross* for Christianity? A *lotus flower* for yoga or buddhism? A *wave emoji* for the love of surfing? An *image* for a political party?

Do you rock a *tattoo*? That's symbolism. It means something very special to you (and others) beyond the ink.

How about wearing an ultra-cool, little known, clothing brand with a mysterious *logo*? That logo is a brand *symbol*, a symbol for you, and a story sent by you to others.... that you know what's up in fashion and cool.

There are many different symbols which different cultures use. Yet the same symbolic image can have very different meanings. For example, in many Western cultures, the *color white* is worn to signify the purity and love of marriage. But in some Eastern Asian cultures, white is used to adorn the dead, to represent a passage into a new life. Westerners use *black* to symbolize death⁴ Anthropologists call these differences in symbolic meanings, *cultural relativity*.

This Indigenous American modern artwork contains *culturally significant tribal symbols* from



"The ordinary is the extraordinary in a human life. Extraordinary things happen to ordinary people every day – if you're paying attention." — HEATHER ROSE, TASMANIAN WRITER

the Native Anishinaabek Nation by the Native artist, Hadassah GreenSky.⁵ The Tribal Lands Conservation Fund is using the artwork to raise awareness of their campaign (6). GreenSky interprets the symbolism like this:

"The painting is done in the woodland style, which typically depicts *animals, humans, and spirits within the dream world*. Here, there are *multiple traditional stories interwoven into an urban landscape*, reminding us of a world not forgotten, a world existing below the pavement.

The northern lights, or *green skies*, in the woman's hair are a reminder of my tribes's ancestors, *the turtle* being the clan I come from. *The crane* represents leadership, *the sturgeon* the survival of my people through harsh winters.

The crooked trees in the woman's hands are a reminder of my people's post-contact resistance to colonizers' destructive logging industry. The land *the city* (Detroit) lies on still lives on, despite alterations through modern technologies.

Each character is interconnected through the *orbs and spirit lines*, reminding us all that we are all interconnected and always connected to the land."

Are there universal symbols? Symbols that contain the same meaning across all societies and cultures? Some people think so. Everyone agrees that *kangaroos* stand for Australia and *bald eagles* stand for the USA and Yanks? Right? Yet, I think there is evidence that every person and subculture (like surfers, artists, musicians, etc.) ultimately creates and uses its own symbols, creatively



drawing from multiple symbolic systems, past and present, in each moment, depending on the social and cultural situation.

And I think that symbolism works best when there is knowledge and respect for different cultures' symbolic meanings, stories and histories. Example...don't use a *thumbs up* symbol to express good times to certain Greeks, because to them, that symbol usually means the same as giving the *middle finger* to others!

Each of us agrees, is culturally conditioned, to use certain collective symbols in order to communicate, interact and tell stories with others using those collective symbols. *Language* is a collective symbol system. These collective symbols, become taken for granted by us and become the unconscious storytelling building blocks of our reality, perception and life maps.

Each person chooses, whether consciously or unconsciously, which symbolic system and meanings to communicate within every interaction depending on who you are interacting with. Are you talking with a surfer, an Indigenous person, a politician or a priest? You're probably going to use different symbols to communicate with each of them.

Symbolism is an act of creativity which we all express, whether we realize or not. So, let's have fun with our symbolism! Let's use our symbols consciously to create new inspiring stories for the Earth and its inhabitants.

¹ What is Symbolism? | Definition & Examples.

<https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-symbolism>

² Man and His Symbols. C.G. Jung. 2023, Bantam.

³ Peace Symbols, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_symbols

⁴ Cultural Symbols:

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/cultural-symbol-definition-examples.html>

⁵ Artist Hadassah GreenSky: Instagram:

@coolwatergreensky; www.hadassahgreensky.art

⁶ Tribal Lands Conservation Fund: www.firstnations.org/tlcfund/

Pierce Flynn, PhD, is a cultural ethnomethodologist and researcher from UC San Diego, with 25+ years experience directing nonprofit, university and corporate organizations. Pierce lives in San Diego, with his artist wife Lindsey, and surfs regularly.



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LIBERATION LARDER

ROLAND DIXON

With just 40 volunteers Liberation Larder have notched up some big numbers this year, feeding nearly 7000 vulnerable people and producing in excess of 31,000 meals, using food that may otherwise have gone to landfill.

The inspiration for Liberation Larder was the idea that Venerable Honu Dawson, who passed away in September 2023, had 15 years ago when she witnessed the numbers of homeless and rough sleepers in Byron Bay. Honu was an Australian-born Buddhist who founded Liberation Larder.

Her idea was to feed them nutritious food for a small donation and with that she produced mainly Dahl and Rice. As demand grew and with the increase in food waste it was decided that Liberation Larder could rescue food by approaching restaurants, supermarkets and farmers at the local markets to pick up food and produce that would normally be thrown out and go to landfill.

Over the years this has developed into a core part of the charity with volunteers picking up donations seven days a week from local donors. A major source of food rescue now is the festivals; BluesFest, Splendour in the Grass and Falls which this year alone yielded 3.2 tonnes of foodstuffs that would normally have been thrown away. The total that Liberation Larder has rescued or "liberated" from landfill this year is 45 tonnes.

After pick up the food and produce are sorted by volunteers for use in the production of meals or

to be handed out to our clients. Liberation Larder have established a kitchen at the back of the Byron Community Centre where from 6am each Monday and Thursday the donated food and produce is prepared into healthy and nutritious meals for our clients.

The demographic of the clientele has changed over the years with the rise in the cost of living and housing crisis that has seen this area top many statistics. Now, Liberation Larder clients are not only made up of homeless people but recently flood victims, families, pensioners and single mothers. The situation is such that even employed people are spending up to 80% of their wages on rent so access our service.

As well as all the donations of foodstuffs Liberation Larder also depends on the generosity of financial donors which enables us to purchase staples such as rice, pasta and oil as well as equipment for the kitchen like freezers and kitchen appliances.

The picture has changed a lot over the last 15 years with the need much greater than Honu could ever have imagined. Liberation Larder is a registered charity, run 100% by volunteers with no government funding and depends on both the generosity of locals for both food and financial donations.

This tells our story.

Roland Dixon, Committee member.
www.liberationlarder.org



BURNING MAN

ARCHER MONK

There's so much that lies behind those two words. What is it? Why haven't you been? Distilled, it's one of the biggest parties on earth out in Nevada on a lifeless parcel dubbed "the Playa". It's an unbelievable feat that attempts to adhere to 10 principles centered around radical thought and community. Feel free to look them up. I have been four times since we moved to the Bay Area starting in 2013 so I'm certainly not an "original" Burner. I wasn't there when there were conflicting styles of music, no city grid and the occasional gun being fired in the air. Since then, it has evolved into this massive well-oiled machine with upwards of 70,000 attendees that camp out for a week of art, dancing and partying. We have been involved with registered camps but prefer to go "rogue" in our crappy van, untethered.

One reason why it's so intellectually intriguing to me is that it constitutes the absolute best as well as the worst. Last year, it was 100F degrees at 7:56am in our van and when we finally got back "home" to "sleep" after a big night, it felt as if we were getting blowtorched. This year, dubbed "Muddy Man", was yet another extreme. As the rains came in on the Friday evening, my wife and I slid around the streets in search of a friend's gathering (which we eventually found) but it was mainly a good story to tell our grandkids (if we had any). It was arduous at best. It was still raining, and there was no way of keeping the Playa mud from clinging to your shoes other than sheltering in place which Burning Man HQ instructed everyone to do.

There were few sane people out that night. It was the quietest Friday that the Playa has ever seen and will likely ever see. It felt like you were

lifting the weight of 10 pound concrete blocks with each step. We slid and skidded for what seemed like an eternity and landed in puddles in our party outfits. And cursed. I wanted more than anything to be somewhere other than where I was. I was grumpy and beyond speaking. The night prior, however, we had gone out on our bikes at 11pm, lit up in every way, and danced for hours and hours, saw the sun rise with Kruder and Dorfmeister killing it, and engaged in hilarious, deep, shallow, heartfelt and inane conversations with dear friends and complete strangers. Utter bliss. I wanted nothing more than to be exactly where I was near my twirling beaming wife.

There is a saying, "The Playa Provides", which can mean a myriad of things. You can twist it and turn it into any new agey metaphor that suits your current mood or you can believe in it with utmost sincerity, one actually based in reality. Perhaps the Playa provided for me an uncomfortable shove those mornings in our scorching van and that night of mindless treachery in the rain and mud to get out of my own way like a good masseur releasing a knot in the soul or a bird pushing its young out of the nest.

I could also argue, though, that if the Playa really provides, it would gift me a super sweet RV, a huge hunk of unsustainable metal and plastic rolling along at nine mpg on gas sucked from stolen lands to chill out in and escape the heat or mud so I can listen to Kruder and Dorfmeister while sipping tequila and cuddling my wife. Notice I said my wife and not some sequin bummed fleshy burner from Amsterdam or Des Moines. People often label it an "orgy in the desert". Sort of true. However,



"There must be something strangely sacred in salt. It is in our tears and in the sea."

— KHALIL GIBRAN

infidelity is happening everywhere on earth. It's just that it's probably not as fun as it is out on the Playa, cuddling some new "friend" on a fluffy couch in an art car that looks like a giant mollusk or a ghost ship blasting doof doof at deafening volumes. Not that I would know.

There is also another Burner saying of "Leave No Trace" which, once again, can mean a myriad of things. The organizers and most Burners take this seriously and it's a beautiful thing. It's really difficult to find rubbish or MOOP (matter out of place) anywhere and when the party is over, Burner volunteers form a big line and move like a giant tentacle across the Playa scooping up anything in their path, leaving it as it looked when the dinosaurs last partied. While the Playa may be rubbish free (there is some concern about the amount of MOOP buried in the mud this year), leaving no trace is a lofty, problematic goal. The resources used up by Burners just getting there and the CO2 released when structures are burned might not be offset by planting trees on your 100 acre hobby farm in Big Sur. But we try.

It's a festival of double standards. I guess that's life. The main takeaway for me with each Burn is

not that the festival is fabulous, which it is, and flawed, which it is, but rather that it signifies what "normal" life on earth lacks. Burners relish that week with their resilient community out in the desert, being anything or anybody they want to be with very little judgement. Time is mostly irrelevant. Conversation can be unstructured yet powerful. Your new friend who you just bonded with at 4am at that Prince tribute show might be an actual prince. Everyone is a potential soul mate willing to give the sparkly shirt off their back to you, connecting with you like a long lost sibling, despite possibly never seeing one another again. And then, just like that, it's all gone like smoke and we all go back home, trying our best to eat dinner by 8 so we can get to sleep before 11. Burning Man? You should definitely go. Or not.

Archer Monk is a musician/writer based in Mill Valley, California but lived in Sydney for 8 years after falling in love with his Aussie wife who lured him in using Byron Bay as bait. www.archermonk.com





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THE POLITICS OF GENTRIFICATION

BE CROWLE

In 1750, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote, “Money buys everything, except morality and citizens ...”. In 2023, money still buys everything except a Byron vibe. Where are the visionary architects and planners protecting and enhancing this ramshackle surf town’s social fabric and built environment? If you glance at the documents created by our council, you may think we are in safe hands. Simple guidelines are in place to ensure that *‘local development is appropriate and environmentally sensitive’*. And we can rest easy in Byron Bay town as the Local Environment Plan (LEP) states that development will *‘contribute to the natural, cultural, visual and built character values of Byron town centre’*.

Research indicates that the wider community benefits from retaining built heritage in various architectural styles and periods, thus avoiding a homogenous suburban environment. As much as developers try to turn Byron Bay into Palm Springs by the sea—we are not a mid-century town, nor are we the Gold Coast. Thoughtful development enhances the built environment and respects the existing Development Control Plan (DCP)/LEP, which specifies setbacks, landscaping and height restrictions. We need to hold the line on this precise point.

NSW Heritage has identified several buildings in the shire, including places in Byron Bay, that contribute to the ‘built character... of Byron town centre’. The charming 20th-century row of shops on Fletcher Street, the Balcony building on Lawson St and the 19th-century Post Office and Railway buildings. In addition, there are residential areas with

original weatherboard houses, wide grassy verges, and modest single-storey houses on the west side of Shirley Street, along with the welcoming row of Norfolk Pines on Ewingsdale Road.

Byron Bay’s roots and growth are closely aligned with Haleiwa, a surf town an hour from Waikiki in Hawaii. Both towns are under pressure from those with dollar signs in their eyes. Haleiwa has a similar creative vibe surrounded by agriculture and the sea, with an unpretentious main street that is being preserved and enhanced. Byron Bay’s slightly daggy and unsophisticated elements are born from the origins of a working town and the people who lived here. Much of this laid-back vibe is being demolished, and in its place are tilt-up concrete buildings with rooftop bars and plunge pools. Recent refurbishment and adaptive reuse of buildings by Sustainable Bakery, Atlantic Hotel, The Swell, Sunseeker and long-time favourite The Top Shop maintain the Byron vibe. The modern yet tasteful Patagonia/Commonwealth Bank building exemplifies good commercial development. And the heritage-listed Balcony Bar is always humming—clearly, the proof is in the patronage.

In contrast, the vacuous Mercato building, a concrete monolith, demonstrates what inappropriate, bigger-is-better development looks like. With tokenistic sustainable elements (recycled ceiling) and excessive height, this upmarket mall fails to connect with its environs, residents, or tourists who drift through the Bay. Who wants to visit Byron Bay and sit inside a concrete shopping centre five metres above street life? Jonson Lane and the new builds in

Marvel St are comparable, with little natural light and a heartbreaking absence of landscaping, reducing their street appeal.

Byron Shire residents have long championed and protected the low-rise, small-scale aesthetic of the region. However, since Covid, concrete has become the material du jour. Cement production has a high environmental cost, accounting for 8% of global emissions, and is the world’s biggest industrial cause of carbon pollution. Not to mention the chronic use of sand in this process. The UN observes that current sand extraction is leading to a global crisis and can potentially devastate entire ecosystems. For a place once revered as a haven of understatement, sustainability, and progressive environmental design, the influx of this development style in Byron Bay is an unsettling reality.

Developers are naturally in the business of making money; still, we need to protect what attracted people here in the first place. We have

regulations, but administrative decisions allow variations to chip away at the aesthetic elements that make good buildings part of the community. These are forever structures, often procured by investment funds and handed over to developers who may never live in Byron Shire. The looming sales of Mitre 10, Repco, and Secret Garden are the subsequent dominos to fall. If you value what’s left of the low-key, understated surrounds—now is a good time to voice it.

It’s no secret that the hazy days of alternative living, surf culture, backpackers and koalas are under threat in Byron Shire. But that doesn’t mean we have to replace all the colours of the rainbow with black boxes and give away *‘the needs and aspirations of the community’* when it comes to development.

B.E. Crowle lives and works in Byron Bay. Currently studying at SCU, her interest lies in the social pressures of gentrification and the community’s struggle to retain what they value in their environs.



PHOTO: TAO JONES





STUMBLING FORWARD ON CLIMATE ACTION

ISABELLE REINECKE

My toddler has been on a “Bear Hunt” binge lately. The catchy words are on a loop in my head. “We’re going on a bear hunt, we’re going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day!”

Like me, you might have heard these lines as a child or read them endlessly to your little ones. There’s a profound little nugget in there, that goes something like... “Oh no! We can’t go under it, we can’t go over it, we’ve got to go through it! Stumble trip, stumble trip, stumble trip”.

Navigating the facts of climate change and the herculean task of transitioning away from polluting industries can feel a lot like this. Sometimes it’s totally overwhelming. You think to yourself, “How in the hell are we going to get through this?”. And other times, you find yourself marching on. Stumble trip, stumble trip.

It’s what those who specialise in climate psychology call the ‘climate grief cycle’. And yes, there is a whole sub branch of psychology that has needed to emerge, dedicated to helping — particularly climate scientists and young people — with the existential anxiety caused by our collective anticipation of climate catastrophe.

The cycle starts with denial. Not full blown climate science denial (they’re not even in the cycle yet), but the “nothing that scientists and market forces and teamwork can’t solve!” denial. The “I’ll use my KeepCup and recycle and it’ll be okay” denial. We all start here.

But then, you go deeper. A lightbulb moment - you learn the raw, unvarnished detail of climate science for the first time. For me, it was understanding the scale of climate change impacts. As a reptilian sunseeker, I wasn’t completely distraught at that

idea of a few hotter days a year; until I realised it’s more like the earth has a fever. A fever of a degree or two in the globe is the difference between being healthy or being hospitalised; living life or total systems failure or death. It’s at this point that the need for climate change psychologists starts to make a bit more sense.

For others, the lightbulb moment has come after experiencing climate change impacts first hand. Like former NSW State Liberal MP for Bega Andrew Constance, who described the impacts of the 2019 summer bushfire season in his electorate as “like an atomic bomb”. Moved to tears on live TV he choked, “it’s just unfair isn’t it.” Later on radio he reflected on how seeing something so traumatic up close “just changes you”. “It really just makes you realise, politicians can expend too much energy on the internal machinations and forget why they’re elected,” he admitted. “We’ve got this mechanical political approach to everything, that it’s all scripted. Let’s start operating on our guts.” He went on to announce he would be quitting politics once he’d spent time helping his community recover.

Once you’ve absorbed the reality of climate change and how serious and devastating it can be, you turn to anger before taking a trip to depression. Eventually though, you start talking to people about it, you find hope in community and, finally, you reach an inevitable conclusion. There is no choice but to keep marching ahead. Stumble trip, stumble trip...

In mid-2023, I traveled to the northernmost point of Australia to stand alongside two traditional owners, Uncle Paul Kabai and Uncle Pabai Pabai, community leaders from Saibai and Boigu islands



“... because the way we move through time is by an accumulation of unexpected turns.”

— RIVKA GALCHEN, VETERINARIAN

from the Guda Maluyligal Nation in Zenadth Kes (Torres Strait). They are taking on the Australian government in the most significant climate change case the country has ever seen, in their fight to save their communities from the devastating climate impacts they are seeing on their islands every day. The Uncles are arguing that the Australian Government has a duty of care to its citizens in the Torres Strait, that it’s approach to climate change has been negligent and that the Government must reduce pollution in line with what the science says is necessary to halt global heating to the level Australia and the world agreed to in the Paris Agreement in 2015. It’s an extraordinarily courageous move, but one that Torres Strait Islanders have a proud history of, thanks to Eddie Koiki Mabo’s lasting legacy, which established land rights for First Nations people in court in the 1990s.

In response to the Uncles’ case, the Federal Court of Australia traveled to the Torres Strait to hear about the impacts of climate change from locals, before hearing from some of the world’s most eminent scientists in Melbourne. There, Professor David Karoly, a former Chief Scientist of the Government’s own science body, CSIRO, told the court that Australia is a “significant contributor” to climate change. Climate change pollution may well be a global problem, but it is having deeply local effects, and the Uncles are arguing that the Australian government should be accountable for them.

In the Torres Strait, climate change is already so severe that dugong populations have plummeted, agricultural land has turned to salt, and swamped cemeteries are being washed into the ocean as the coast is swallowed by rising sea levels. Within 80 years, the science says that two thirds of Uncle Pabai’s island Boigu will be under sea level; before then, if nothing more is done by the government, the island will become uninhabitable.

Here in the Northern Rivers, people know all too

well the impact of pollution-driven climate change. Did you know a house can have flood water as high as a door frame, and then set alight in fire, because of gas spilling through the water and reacting with still-firing electrical wires? Did you know that in the midst of a flood that destroys roads and sees dead cows floating down the street, belly to the sky, you probably won’t have mobile phone reception to call for help? Did you know that you could be left on your rooftop waiting so long for rescue that your breastmilk for your baby dries up from dehydration?

During the ghastly floods of 2022, this community learnt these lessons. Barely 18 months later people living in demountable pod housing just north of Byron Bay were evacuated due to an out of control bushfire. As the fire crossed Tyagarah, one bewildered local told the ABC News, “I didn’t know a swamp could catch fire.”

There’s an acute dissonance caused by knowing these horrifying facts and feeling that there is nothing you can do about it. Accountability will come though, and the Uncles are leading the way in the courts. The law will catch up with polluting governments and corporations, just like it did with companies who profited off asbestos while it caused terminal disease. In the interim, we have to resist the temptation to give up too early in the climate grief cycle, wherever we are in it, and reach the inevitable conclusion: the only way out is through. As Rebecca Solnit writes in her essay *Hope in Darkness*, we can have confidence that “yes, we can change the world, because we have many times before.” Stumble trip, stumble trip.

Isabelle Reinecke is the Executive Director and Founder of Grata Fund, which is backing the Australian Climate Case, and the author of Courting Power: Law, Democracy and the Public Interest in Australia. Learn more about the case at: australianclimatecase.org.au | gratafund.org.au



RAINFOREST WARRIORS – THE HIPPIES WERE RIGHT

STEPHEN WYATT

Australia's first ever anti-logging protest was seeded in the Byron hinterland. It was momentous for Australia's environment.

A bunch of half-naked hippies took the fight to the NSW government and convincingly won.

Rainforest logging was halted in NSW, the 8000ha Nightcap National Park was created, along with a chain of National Parks down the spine of NSW. Eventually about 120,000ha of native forests were protected.

Hugh and Nan Nicholson – who were always fully clothed – discovered workers preparing, the then, State Forest at Terania Creek for logging. That was in the early 1970s.

The Forestry Commission's plan was simple. Log the rainforest for any valuable timber, then burn the rest and replant the area with Eucalypts.

The Nicholsons were horrified.

How could such an ancient, valuable and vibrant rainforest be intentionally destroyed by an agency of the people – the NSW State Forestry Commission?

The fight was on. Nan and Hugh got the word out to the newly arrived counter-cultural residents.

Many had stayed on after the 1973 Aquarius Festival in Nimbin, many others had moved into the region to start new lives on the land – 'the back-to-the-earthers'.

Northern NSW had undergone massive cultural change. The disillusioned youth back then – disillusioned by the Vietnam War, by materialism, by the destruction of nature and by the simple boredom of suburban life – could not go to Queensland in the 1970s.

Queensland, under then hard-right Premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, was not welcoming. "Lefties" and "hippies" were given a hard time by a corrupt, ruthless Queensland police force.

So, the counter-culture hunkered up into the North East corner of NSW. The area offered good surf, cheap land and a great climate.

The Northern Rivers changed from being a dairy farming region to being Australia's rainbow region; a region that contained the largest concentration of counter-cultural communities in the Southern Hemisphere in the 1970s.

Suddenly, there was a critical mass of environmentally concerned people around who were up for a fight. They were emotionally and politically invested in saving the rainforests.

The environment, at last, had the numbers.

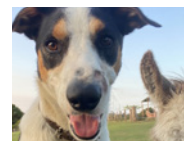
This marked the beginning of environmental activism in Australia. It was a turning point; the time when environmental destruction met opposition; when loggers met protestors.

It was key to a changing perspective on nature. These new arrivals saw the natural environment as a living body, critical to the planet's health and, not simply, a resource that was there to be exploited.

And the region was in dire need of a changed perspective on the environment. The Big Scrub had been raped.

The Big Scrub was once the largest expanse of subtropical rainforest in Australia. It covered 75,000 hectares between the present towns of Lismore, Ballina, Byron Bay and Mullumbimby.

The Big Scrub is a unique, diverse and complex ecosystem, much of it ancient Gondwanan



"She struggled to understand why the world came to be organised for profit and not for human or ecological thriving." — JENNY ODELL, WRITER

rainforest, with almost 500 plant species, some with lineages back 250 million years.

Logging started in the 1830s and clear felling for farming followed. Just 1000ha were left in the 1970s.

The Bundjalung people had no VOICE. It was their land.

They had lived in the area for over 6000 years; before the age of the Egyptian Pharaohs, before the Sumerians and Hittites and way before the ancient Greeks and Romans.

But this land was simply taken by axe, fire and gun.

First Nations people were moved off country and put onto missions and reserves at places like Cabbage Tree Island, Tabulam, Casino, Evans Head, Ballina, Yamba, Kyogle and Grafton.

But a new era was underway with the arrival of the counter-culture.

Old values were challenged. The fabric of the society in the hinterland behind Byron Bay was getting a facelift.

New lifestyles on communes blossomed. Nimbin was painted in rainbows. Young people were trying to rework their lives into sustainable existences.

Some 60 communities of varying political and social persuasions remain in the hinterland.

The 'rainforest warriors' were born. And they have never stopped fighting.

The outcome of the Terania Blockade of 1979, along with a second blockade at Mt Nardi, near Nimbin, in 1982, was wildly successful.

Dailan Pugh, one of the great environmental warriors of the area, said that the forests saved "were the heart of our remaining intact forests, really. And there was not a lot left. So, Terania picked them up. I think it was momentous".

Terania turned the NSW Labor Government green – according to Bob Carr. It stopped rainforest logging and created national parks.

But, critically, Terania created a culture of activism.

The success of the first fight against the

Government's logging program at Terania Creek triggered a belief that activism really can work.

Many other causes followed. Environmental activists, for the first time ever, had a blueprint of just how successful direct action can be.

Terania built confidence. Sand mining was challenged, Bob Brown took heart for the fight for the Franklin, the Daintree protests were given life.

And the fight didn't stop back then. This is because the NSW Forestry Corporation continues to log old growth forests and continues to kill threatened native animals.

Blockades have occurred at places like Washpool National Park west of Yamba, Chaelundi National Park South West of Grafton, Richmond Range State Forest, Cherry Tree State Forest near Tabulam, Mount Royal National Park near Barrington Tops, in the Barrington Tops National Park and Yabba National Park north of Tabulam.

And protests have now spread to the broader issues of climate change and extinction.

The Terania protestors, inspiring a host of younger new activists, now protest against coal seam gas and coal production – think Bentley, think The Pilliga Scrub.

The Terania Creek action was one of Australia's great protests and even though it occurred 44 years ago, the culture of environmental activism it sponsored is alive and well today. 'Lest we forget'.

Stephen Wyatt has had a block outside Byron for the past 30 years. It was a degraded paddock. Now it's full of big scrub species. It's come alive. He has been a journalist with the Australian Financial Review and the Financial Times. His last posting was as joint China Correspondent (with his partner Colleen Ryan) for the Fin Review in Shanghai. His book 'Rainforest Warriors - the hippies were right' is in the process of publication.

BYRON BAY

AUSTRALIA'S MOST EASTERLY POINT



"It is sometimes said that, like other wild creatures, we, too, have three imperatives: to eat, to not be eaten, and to procreate. I would add a fourth: our imperative to have purpose – our need for art, for beauty, for understanding how we fit into the universe, and, closer to home, how we fit into the web of life that surround and includes us. Therein lies the hope: that we might allow the fourth imperative to counter the instincts we have carried with us out of the plains of Africa."

— Rick Ridgeway, Life Lived Wild



JINDI, A BUILDING SOLUTION THAT DOESN'T COST THE EARTH

VIKKI KITE

Studio Kite, based near Byron Bay, has recently 3D printed a small house. It's called the Jindi and is 3D printed in recycled plastic.

In collaboration with National Parks and Wildlife Services and Wild BNB, Studio Kite designed a range of 3D-printed nests for endangered wildlife left homeless due to devastating fires and deforestation. After the 2022 floods in the Northern Rivers, NSW, it became clear that wildlife were not the only creatures needing shelter. Hence the birth of Jindi.

Steven Rosewell and Vikki Kite from Studio Kite have been around for over 30 years and are responsible for many much-loved film props, public sculptures, prototypes, and medical models. They were the first professional model-making company in Australia to introduce 3D printing.

Steve and Vikki's journey began when they crossed paths at Penang's train station in Malaysia. Their collaboration in the world of creativity immediately ignited. Steve was embarking on an Australian tradition, a gap year trip around the world, while Vikki was on the road with Disney on Ice in her role as a property master.

Steve's artist mother and scientist father shaped his upbringing, giving him a strong foundation in practical arts. He was always curious about mechanics and architecture, which led him to start his career as a builder before embarking on his round-the-world adventure.

Several months later, they officially formed as a dynamic duo. Steve joined Vikki with the Disney team, travelling the world for several years.

However, the constant life on the road eventually wearied them, and they began planning for a more settled existence. Their choice for a home base was Sydney.

Upon arriving in Sydney, they were presented with an opportunity when the promoters from the Disney tour launched the largest opera production in the southern hemisphere, "Aida." Vikki was hired as the property master, and Steve worked with the staging crew. "Aida" was the perfect gig to propel them into their Australian freelance career.

They operated Studio Kite for 23 years in Sydney's eastern suburbs. The work was both thrilling and demanding. However, they eventually felt the need for change, desiring a closer connection with nature while remaining rooted in the creative world.

After extensive research, they discovered that the Byron Shire was the ideal fit for their vision. It was full of natural beauty with fantastic weather, boasted two airports within an hour's reach and attracted forward-thinking individuals and artists. Furthermore, Warner Bros Studios was less than an hour away.

Steve had become increasingly concerned about the tremendous waste of making one-off props for the entertainment industry, which led him to design and build CADzilla, a massive 3D printer which was an efficient, financially viable, and eco-friendly process to fabricate large sculptures and industry prototypes. CADzilla's products proved to be a huge savings on labour and materials. It further reduced waste by recycling test prints and support material, which could be re-chipped on-



"The notion that tending to an actual garden can make us fitter stewards of our minds and ultimately, our world. " — REBECCA SOLNIT, AMERICAN WRITER / ACTIVIST PARAPHRASED

site and fed back to the machine.

This innovative technology paved the way for the birth of Jindi. Jindi is a building solution designed to be environmentally friendly and cost-effective. Each 32m² Jindi home would upcycle and repurpose two tonnes of plastic waste that would otherwise end up in landfill. Jindi's emphasis is as a small backyard dwelling that utilises existing services like sewerage, electricity, and roads. Small homes emit less CO₂ than larger ones, and placing them in backyards further enhances sustainability and reduces strain on infrastructure.

Studio Kite's Jindi building system proved highly competitive, with the potential to reduce construction costs substantially. The curved and self-supporting roofs create an illusion of spaciousness, and windows can be directly integrated into the 3D print, eliminating the need for additional window and door frames. Storage cupboards could also be incorporated into the printed walls, reducing fit-out expenses.

Using a non-toxic fire retardant and reinforcement fibre in the recycled plastic makes the material self-extinguishing. In areas with a high bushfire risk, a thicker external layer of cement

render would be applied to meet the highest fire risk ratings. The base materials of the Jindi system are waterproof, ensuring durability in cases of flooding, while the monolithic structure seal out vermin and prevent rot or rust. White ants will have no interest as there is no wood.

The construction method ensures that the Jindi structure is exceptionally well tied to the subfloor and adds protection against cyclones. Studio Kite's vision was to address the issue of plastic waste and contribute to affordable housing with Jindi homes, transforming plastic waste into a valuable resource.

Jindi is a Yugambah Bundjalung word used for nests. The Bundjalung Nation are the custodians of the northern coastal area of NSW, Australia.

Vikki graduated from the Ringling School of Art in Sarasota, Florida, with a degree in fine art. Her love for the circus led her to start her career as a scenic painter and sculptor with the Ringling Brothers Combined Shows. Later, she moved to New York City and pursued a freelance career in film, television, and Broadway as a model maker and scenic painter.

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POINT OF CHANGE – NIAS AND BYRON BAY

RICHARD EVERIST

Point of Change is a beautifully-made documentary about the changes to the island of Nias that came after the discovery of one of the most perfect waves on the planet: the Point, on Lagundri Bay.

It was appropriate the world premiere was shown as part of the 2023 Byron Bay International Film Festival - not least because of the role played by Byron locals in the discovery of Indonesia's incredible surf.

Nias is a fascinating example of what has occurred in many parts of the world.

We've all visited or lived in places that we believe have been changed for the worse.

Nias is one. Some argue Byron Bay is another.

There is a powerful belief in the benefits of change and progress, which are both seen as inevitable, but there's an equally powerful idea that innocence and paradise are lost as a result.

Certainly not all change, not all progress, is good. Point of Change explores this. And it quickly becomes clear to the viewers of the film that even though we might not have been lucky enough to experience Nias when it was paradise, we have all had the experience of paradise lost.

Tempting though it is to blame surfers, Lonely Planet backpackers, or mass-market tourists for the destruction of Nias, Bali, Barcelona or Byron Bay.... to do so would be to lose sight of the real villains. And failing to see the real villains is dangerous.

For a start, the era of mass travel could not have begun without the Boeing Corporation and the cheap air travel made possible by jumbo jets.

However, blaming outside forces like Boeing runs the risk of downplaying the agency

and autonomy of local communities. It's not unreasonable for local communities to want economic development, jobs, roads, health care and education.

Just maybe, Nias wasn't paradise for the locals in the first place. A highly stratified, violent society with a warrior tradition of headhunting doesn't sound that great. Working in the Byron Bay Meatworks doesn't sound all that great either.

Many of the hippies and surfers travelling the hippy trail were frighteningly naive, and ignorant of the risks they were taking and the cultures they were stomping across - but most were well-intentioned. They did not set out to destroy traditional cultures. Although they may not have found enlightenment on their travels, many returned home with a much broader perspective on life and humanity.

They learned that humans all over the world were mostly good, and mostly friendly. They learned that the world can look very different depending on your cultural lens, but most people want much the same things: healthy children, a car, and a nice house with a refrigerator, a TV and air-conditioning. Turns out we all also wanted ensuite bathrooms, education, health care, Coca Cola, an aged pension, overseas holidays - and a shitload of other stuff.

Ironically, most of the idealistic young travellers of the '60s, '70s and '80s, returned home to an existence that was not hugely different to that of their parents and the post-war lifestyle they had ostensibly rebelled against. Over the following decades as the baby boomers aged, real estate became more expensive, but stuff



"A criminal is a person with predatory instincts without sufficient capital to form a corporation."

— CLARENCE DARROW, LAWYER, WHO FOUGHT FOR THE AMERICA, CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

like refrigerators, TVs, air conditioning, cars and airplane tickets became much cheaper. And then there was the internet...

Most people seek, at minimum, to do no harm. Unfortunately wilful blindness, and a failure to accept individual responsibility for what often seem to be small acts of omission and commission are common. We constantly ask ourselves questions like what difference will it make to the world if we eat just one more Big Mac, or take just one more cheap flight to Bali...

Arguing that our individual actions will have no substantive impact is hardly taking the high moral ground, but it is also true that we in the West have had little more control over our own communities than the people of Nias had over theirs at Lagundri Bay. We are all peasants. We all drank the kool aid. We all sold out. To the relief of our feudal lords, our

price was not high.

We have had some victories, but most of us have watched in horror as our favourite places - at home and abroad - were despoiled by rampant development. Most of us have watched in horror as environmental issues - at home and abroad - have increasingly threatened the viability of human life.

It's not always easy to identify the forces that have so effectively disempowered us all, the real villains at Lagundri Bay:

- Massive organisations operating solely to meet their owners' interests, often to achieve power and/or profit at any cost;
- Individualism which has come to mean people have the right to believe whatever they want and to pursue their own happiness and fulfilment with little regard to others;



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- The belief that gross inequality is not just inevitable, but acceptable and necessary;
- Sophisticated advertising and brainwashing designed to create dissatisfaction then to present a solution, which is invariably the acquisition of a commodity that will enrich a massive organisation.

These forces are so big, so powerful and play so strongly to intrinsic human characteristics that we, the peasants, scarcely see them. It's much easier to blame a bunch of surfers and hippies.

It's hard to see how these global forces might change - even though we know everything changes and that the only constant is change.

It's unlikely the people of Nias saw the three scruffy Australian surfers who arrived in 1975 as harbingers of an unimaginable future and it's quite possible we are blind to their equivalents in our midst in Byron Bay today.

But everything changes.

As Joni Mitchell sang in Big Yellow Taxi:
*They paved paradise, put up a parking lot
 With a pink hotel, a boutique, and a swingin' hot spot
 Don't it always seem to go
 That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone
 They paved paradise, put up a parking lot*
 So here we are in beautiful Byron. Paradise paved? Or paradise saved?

Perhaps some things will be worse in 20 years. It will almost certainly be more crowded. And if it is, people will fondly remember The Pass carpark during the 2023 Christmas holidays.

But perhaps some things will be better.
 Change is coming.

Richard Everist pleads guilty to writing and publishing travel guidebooks, organising small-group travel adventures and moving to Byron in 2016. He is now a relatively sedentary and harmless writer.
www.aroundthesun.com

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TREAD LIGHTLY

TRACEY HOLMES

I am not one for starting each year with a resolution. Mostly because after about ten days I forget what it was I had committed to or promised myself. Even if I did remember I would probably have changed my mind by mid-January anyway.

What I do, though, at the start of each year is pick up a copy of The Economist's 'The World Ahead' in which the magazine's journalists each delve into their area of expertise to boldly predict where they think the globe is headed.

For a year the magazine will sit on my coffee table at home, or be buried somewhere at work amongst my seemingly always high pile of 'to do' lists, or occasionally I will put it in my backpack to peruse while I am on a flight or a long road trip. Checking up at monthly intervals to see how much the forecasters got right is at least as entertaining as tackling another sudoku puzzle.

This year I have particular pity for the journalists who compiled The World Ahead 2024 edition. Who can guess which twists and turns and failed somersaults the global population will make this time around the sun? Will regional wars really escalate rather than end? Who will lead us to peace? Where are the leaders who will drive us forward – peacefully and inclusively? What will be our worth as the AI armies roll into town to take our jobs? Will the Olympics survive another quadrennial? Will the US and China realise they need each other more than they need to disagree with each other? Will democracy survive? Will Elon Musk invent a self-driving car that can double as a satellite, orbit space, and send its own tweets, freeing us up to, well, do something else.

So, cutting to the chase: what's wrong with

this picture?

For many, Byron Bay is the annual escape from this increasingly fast-paced, tense, loud and divided world. A heavenly place to be able to put the news behind us for a while, to tune out of the noise and into the environment, to detox from the world we have created.

The challenge is to turn the reprieve into something that extends beyond an annual getaway.

A decade or two ago, a chance meeting with a Buddhist monk in Shek-O, a Hong Kong village delightfully trapped in a time warp, taught me a treasured life-lesson: tread lightly.

The seemingly insurmountable challenge of making the world a better place requires only that each person do his/her/their best to leave the smallest footprint possible, consume only what is necessary, be respectful, and love all human beings as you might your mother.

It is so simple. Yet so devastatingly difficult. And herein, at the centre of this dilemma, we find ourselves.

Another gem the monk imparted keeps popping into my mind like a thought bubble that reincarnates as soon as I push it aside to deal with far more important things.

He told me anybody can meditate on the top of a mountain with an unobstructed view, or from the depths of a dark and isolated cave. The challenge, he said, is to be able to meditate in the thick of a normal day or while sitting commuting in traffic battling the temptation to succumb to road-rage.

When I bump into the monk again, I will embarrassingly have to tell him how badly I have failed on both fronts.



"This site was ours, you may recall / Ages before you came at all."
— OODGEROO NOONUCCAL, (KATH WALKER)

I don't tread anywhere near lightly enough. My boots stomp down hallways as I rush from here to there. I drink coffee in excessive amounts. I want to have my cake and eat it too. Usually at the same time. Those shoes in that window are not necessary, but I just HAVE to have them. At work I write, I talk, I talk, I write, I edit, I talk. All those words – but who is listening? And if someone is, I apologise. I realise how much I am contributing to the noise around us, the noise of all of us who keep dialling it up another notch so 'I' can be heard.

Instead of talking more (ironically, it is what I'm paid to do), why can't I flip the paradigm and listen more? Why can't the media, generally, listen more? As mothers cry for their lost children in times of war, is not their story enough without the need for the media to describe it more? To tell it again today, tomorrow and the next day?

Audiences are tuning out of the news around the world. Who can blame them? Rupert Murdoch once told a guest that the US is split – it is either Republican or Democratic, he reportedly said. His guest told him he was wrong. There is only one divide, he said, that which separates what is constructive or destructive.

I have often wondered if Murdoch's guest was my friend, the monk?

Division, destruction, the binary of politics, and the rabid extremes of social media come so easily to us these days. Being outraged is the default position. It is our new norm. But to where does it lead? Ultimately to a place I imagine few enjoy and given the opportunity few would choose to inhabit. But again, this is where we find ourselves.

It's no business of mine to ask what you will do with your year ahead. But here's what I'm thinking: I will listen more and talk less. When I do talk, I will endeavour to make it constructive, not destructive. I will meditate on peace in the heart of the mayhem.

I will tread more lightly.

Sounds remarkably like a New Year's resolution, doesn't it?

Tracey Holmes is a freelance journalist and Professorial Fellow of Sport at Canberra University. She examines the societies we live in, challenges we face, and the geopolitical landscape impacting us all through the prism of sport.

X: @traceyleeholmes

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It was a familiar road for Kelly, and drew from the deepest well. It was way back in 1986, on his epic double album *Gossip*, that he made his first foray into music and black politics. *Maralinga* sang up the story of British atomic tests in South Australia in the 1950's – on Anangu land – and the grave and fatal injustice those tests inflicted on the traditional owners who lived there. It took

It was there in the whitefella rock of the Goanna Band on *Solid Rock*, in the reggae-rock of No Fixed Address declaring *We Have Survived*, in the desert-rock anthem *Blackfella Whitefella* by Papunya's Warumpi Band and in the uncompromising rock of Midnight Oil's *Beds Are Burning* and the *Dead Heart* – both songs written in the wake of the Oil's career-defining Blackfella Whitefella tour with the



Warumpis through remote communities in the mid-1980's.

By the end of that decade a magnificent Yolgnu band from Yirrkala, in NE Arnhem Land, called Yothu Yindi danced its way into the charts calling for a *Treaty*. It was a simple proposition and it spoke of the decades' long land rights struggle that began with the famed bark petitions from the early 1960's, signed by the Marika and Yunupingu clans, that led to the first Land Rights Act in the NT in 1976. Dr M Yunupingu, the leader of that mighty tribal band, hailed from that same family lineage. His elder brother, revered clan-leader now known as Yunupingu, had already recorded the iconic *Gurundji Blues* in 1971 - the first to sing-up that famed wave-hill walk-off story that would inspire Kelly and Carmody decades later.

These were heady days and the stories poured from the country's living heart, in music. So visceral, so tangible, so filled with possibility that it made a generation believe that music could change the world.

As the 1990's rolled on Paul Kelly would co-produce one of the most enduring and important albums in Australian music history – *Charcoal Lane* – and introduced an emerging musical giant called Archie Roach. That album, in every way a collaboration with the love of Archie's life Ruby Hunter, changed the national conversation. Because when Archie's honeyed voice spoke of the trauma and terror of the Stolen Generations in *Took the Children Away* – he sang his story,

and Ruby's story and gave voice to the tens of thousands of lives wrecked by white arrogance who thought they knew better.

But Archie Roach also started a journey to heal the nation's soul. Perhaps it is a blessing he didn't live to see the outcome of the Voice Referendum. The heartbreak and trauma we have triggered as a nation who said NO is a burden we all have to shoulder. And while the nation struggles to face up to our darkest truths, it is music that continues to walk where others fear to tread.

It's there in the songs of Dan Sultan and Briggs, Kee'Ahn and Emma Donovan, Shellie Morris, Kutcha Edwards and Alice Skye, and Ziggy Ramo and Kaiit and Mitch Tambo and the Kid Laroi, to name a few. They are roaring and invincible and defiant. And they are singing up a change that's gotta come.

I'm still that idealist holding out for hope. Still that kid on the wireless at the Jays in the 80's, hoping to change the world. I'm a believer, still. In the power of music to lift us up and dust us off and ready ourselves for the road ahead... with an earworm I can't shake: *if not now, when - if not us, then who?* As PK implored, we have to make this country larger in its soul.

Tracee Hutchison is a broadcaster, film-maker and author. She is Chair of Green Music Australia, the national peak body working to deliver sustainable solutions to green the music scene.
www.greenmusic.org.au



PHOTO: DAVID YOUNG



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LOOKING UNDER THE BONNET OF AI

CHARLIE S

Writing about technology is an attempt to catch a falling knife. Today's aspirations, acronyms, pronouncements and protagonists quickly change. The marvellous becomes mundane. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is accelerating even faster than prior waves of technology, driven by the weight of all it builds upon. Even the very language of AI is arcane - *Midjourney*, *DALL-E*, *LaMDA*, *ChatGPT*, LLMs. By the time we've fathomed one term, three new ones arrive.

It might be steady, to start with a little history. AI seems portentous, but our lives are already much attended by AI of some form. The order of photos in your social media feed, that new insurance premium or sudden automatic braking in a taxi - are experiences all invisibly mediated by machines with intelligence. What brings us to this particular sharp moment in AI, is the culmination of several great leaps forward in the field.

The first leap - training machines to learn. For most of computing history, every action, rule and exception had to be coded into the machine. It was theoretically possible to know exactly what the machine could do. Of course, machines performed tasks with incredible scale, precision and speed. But all by rote, requiring painstaking translation of concepts - rules of chess, calculating airspeed of an airplane - into machine readable language. The leap was to take the improved scientific understanding of our own brains, and build machines that could be trained to solve problems in ways not written explicitly into their code. Not only could a machine arrive at a novel solution for winning at chess, it was not always possible to know how it chose the move.

The second leap - training machines to handle fuzzy ideas. Much of what you do effortlessly is very challenging for machines. Knowing your lover is unhappy, choosing the right slang word, or drawing a perfect wave from memory - all are complex because the rules are uniquely human. The leap was to train (ever faster) learning machines on huge quantities of information and design them to build their own feedback loops for learning. The full richness of the Internet - from pictures of cats, to advice on job applications and videos of humpback whale migration - has been encoded into different mathematical models. Machines used these models not just to analyse information, but create new works. It was possible for a machine to generate a realistic photo of a (non-existent) cat when asked, because there were millions of Internet cat pictures to learn from.

The third leap - we connected machines to the Internet, and to other learning machines. No longer was a machine in isolation on some University campus, learning from downloaded information. Machines were plugged into live sharemarkets, received millions of questions via chat, and trained on updated documents written inside a company. This meant the answers were ever more relevant, detailed and precise. Every time we used an app to ask a machine to paint a sunset like Van Gogh, this provided more information on how to paint 'successfully' like a human. Being connected compounded the speed of learning.

You might wonder why I haven't mentioned the many controversies and worries that shadow the history of learning machines. Or what app you should try out. There were no jokes about a

Terminator 'Sky-Net' or 'hallucinating' AI. That's because I want to try to catch the falling knife. Rather than write just for this moment, it feels more helpful to sketch out the shape of some tools that we can use during a period of great change.

Look under the bonnet

Much fear comes from not understanding how technology works, and AI appears magical. The brief history above attempts to 'look under the bonnet'. It's not necessary to become an expert, only to understand fundamental concepts. For example, it's helpful to know that Chatbot AI doesn't understand the answer it gave you. The machine made mathematical predictions based on a composite of thousands of answers to the same question. This means answers may only be as good (or bad) as the source data. Putting it into practice - when AI analyses, writes or creates for us, it will be important to look for provenance and ask a few skeptical questions. Who provided the data? How long ago was the training? What protections were put in place to avoid bias?

Reject Extremes

Often under the influence of science fiction - characters like Kubrick's HAL-9000 in "2001" and Spielberg's emotive robots in "AI" - we've embraced extreme AI scenarios. Utopia or Dystopia. Malevolent intelligence conquering the world, or pliable servant for our convenience. These dichotomies are easy but unhelpful. AI will, like all technology, both liberate and oppress in an unpredictable myriad of ways. For example, it will be extremely difficult to legislate effectively for something as fast moving as AI, but history has also shown us that unfettered market driven innovation will not lead to safe self-regulation. Putting it into practice - when hearing about the risks and opportunities around AI, it's best to assume the reality is messy and in the middle somewhere.

Learn from History

Depending on how you measure, AI is more than seventy years old. Discussion of 'thinking machines' goes back centuries. Our fore-mothers and fathers had different tools, but they thought deeply. And we have been through multiple, similar shifts in our lifetime, where problems keep recurring. For example, AI image generation has predictably been

used for harmful purposes like placing celebrity faces in pornography. This has happened in every generation of image modification from the dawn of photography. Putting it into practice - we don't need to wait for actual harms to occur to teenagers from the pain of AI-generated fakes - we can be proactive and anticipate those scenarios already.

All systems are connected

To create these learning machines, somebody dug to extract raw materials, refined metals, transported parts, connected cables and wrote policy. Every one of those people exists in socio-economic, cultural and ecological systems which shape AI. Nothing is neutral. For example, if the training comes from the Internet, we know there could be awful things in the data. Which means somebody had to look at horrible images and label which ones were offensive, in order for the machine to build a model of images to remove. Putting it into practice - we should always ask questions about the humans behind AI. Who are the people? Where are they living? What are their circumstances?

Listen globally and talk locally

It is possible to acknowledge the complexity of global systems driving AI, without losing our sense of agency as a community. People still shape opinions, choose what to download, how to educate their children and why to vote, based on community around them. We should curiously and carefully listen to signals on AI - not just from San Francisco - but from Bangkok, Delhi and Newcastle. For example, AI can remove some of the asymmetry of services that comes from where we live. It's possible that AI will be part of the medical devices of the future (from watches to asthma inhalers), so rather than waiting for days, or driving for hours to an appointment, AI can do some level of up-front diagnosis for you and your doctor.

Putting it into practice, just helping each other through sharing critical thinking tools and information, can mean that we have some level of agency and control over the role of AI in our future. Let's look under the bonnet together.

Charlie is a designer living on Bundjalung country. He specialises in designing software products, and has worked with some of the biggest companies in the technology industry.



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GONE PHISHING

YANYA VISKOVICH

For most small businesses in the Byron Shire – from the hair salon to the local Deli – cybersecurity is not likely to be top of the agenda. Even for those of you who are concerned that your business might be vulnerable to a cyber attack, you have limited time and operating expenses to devote to cybersecurity, or you may be wondering where to begin? Cybersecurity is complex and rapidly evolving, challenging even the experts. Despite these challenges, however, the question that you need to be asking in today's digital world, is how many days, weeks and months could your business survive without access to your business information, including your customer database, supplier details, email and website?

Today's cybersecurity incidents commonly manifest as people being tricked by social engineering attacks; the art of manipulating, influencing, or deceiving you to gain private information, access to your data, or valuables. Usually, it's by unwittingly clicking on a compromised link in an email ('phishing'), or as is increasingly common these days, via SMS ('smishing') or voice communication such as through a phone call or simulating the voice of someone you know ('vishing').

What is at stake? A cyber incident that brings down your payment system until you pay a hefty ransom (usually hundreds of thousands if not millions in \$ or Bitcoin), or takes down your website, email account, Instagram page and other digital branding sites – could be fatal. Sixty percent of small companies go out of business within six months of falling victim to a data breach or cyber attack. No business or organisation is immune. Even many of

the world's largest Fortune 500 companies have not been able to prevent cyber attacks on their systems. So how can you meaningfully secure your small business from a growing cyber threat in an economically feasible way?

By doing what small businesses do best: focussing on people. This relatively affordable and extremely effective mitigation strategy challenges even the largest multinationals, but for small businesses, it's in their DNA.

Today, over 75% of successful cyber incidents remain a consequence of threat actors preying on *human* vulnerabilities in order to exploit *technical* ones. Many larger companies often forget this crucial aspect of security: the importance of your people. This includes developing a security mindset among your workforce and creating a culture that prioritises security as integral to keeping your digital business operating. This can be done in a few very cost-effective ways. Here are 3 key actionable principles you can implement:

1. Focus on culture. The word 'culture' comes from the Latin word, '*Cultura*', which means to nurture and grow. In an organisation, the culture can be understood as, '*The way we do things around here.*' It is widely recognised in security research that an organisation's culture is foundational for its effective security. Many large organisations still overlook this and instead invest solely in technology, yet still experience massive cyber attacks and data breaches costing many millions of dollars. Many small businesses have an advantage over larger corporations when it comes to organisational culture, which they can leverage for



"Be ruthless with systems. Be kind with people." — MICHAEL BROOKS, LATE US POLITICAL COMMENTATOR

their enhanced security with great effect. One way to do this is by creating an environment in which all employees feel safe enough to ask questions, raise concerns, and admit mistakes. This is what is known as 'psychological safety' which research has shown to be essential for strong security. Psychological safety can be fostered by business owners and managers openly admitting their own fallibility and not punishing people for honest mistakes. There are other cost effective actions that create a strong and positive security culture, too. At the very beginning of every team meeting, start with a "security moment". It works like this. Business owners, managers and colleagues alike take turns to present at each team meeting for 1-5 minutes max, sharing 1 one thing they have learned about cybersecurity or a security habit they do in their personal lives to secure their information, or need to change. This could be brainstorming ways of tackling cyberbullying at school and discussing parental controls on devices, sharing a recent news story about a data breach, or explaining a handy method for creating a strong password (such as coming up with a phrase with a string of words that have meaning to you but would be very difficult for anyone else to guess, e.g. "Do2MorningCoffeesTasteBetterOnTallows-OrBelongil?"). Having a moment dedicated to security at the start of every meeting demonstrates that leadership takes security seriously, is a small but effective method to embed it into your organisational culture and drives home the message that good security requires *everyone* to champion it. It's a hack adapted from "safety moments" which are a regular feature in lots of large companies whose bread-and-butter work involves lots of potential occupational health and safety hazards and has been shown to be effective and easy to implement.

2. Use mindfulness. That's right. Mindfulness We're in the nation's capital of it, so why not embrace it for better security, too? Clicking on phishing links remains the number one way that cyber threat actors continue to get into a business's systems and data. Attackers appeal to our emotions, writing to us (in increasingly typo-free emails, thanks to ChatGPT) and imploring us to urgently respond by clicking on a link, or pose as someone we know, asking us to do something like transfer funds immediately. If we'd stopped to think about it a while, we'd likely have realised that the request is a bit suspicious. Interestingly, security researchers have discovered that when organisations use mindfulness techniques in their cybersecurity awareness trainings, their employees are significantly less likely to accidentally click on a phishing link. Pause. Think. Act. This forces us to delay, think slower, check before clicking, taking us out of 'automatic' mode, and into what Daniel Kahneman termed 'slow thinking' in his international bestseller, "*Thinking, Fast and Slow*".

3. Put yourself in others' shoes. As a small business owner, you wear many hats, and likely so do a number of your employees. Security doesn't need to add more complexity and increase your workloads if you make it easier for people to

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do the right thing, and harder to do the wrong thing. So do what you as a small business owner does best: get into the minds of people, think about how they behave, and then cater to them. For example, most companies require staff to use a password for their work devices and accounts that is complex and different from the passwords they use on any personal device or account. But remembering multiple passwords – and complex ones – is difficult even for those with great memories, and humans are a bit like water: we will always look for the shortcuts (just look at the well-trodden diagonal paths to the beaches, in contrast to the longer concrete ones – why Council insists on not paving the paths that humans have already carved out remains a mystery to me, but that’s for another article...). In security, that means finding workarounds that are counterproductive to business security, like writing a password on a Post-It Note stuck to the computer or using the same password for every account and device. One way to make creating and remembering secure passwords easier is to provide staff with an (encrypted) Password Manager which is a tool that allows you to create and store all your passwords in a safe location. And since remembering one complex master password to the Password Manager is still rather inconvenient for most people, many password managers also allow you to log in using fingerprint or face recognition instead (as iPhones do). They also allow for selected information to be shared with colleagues without copy-pasting it into an email or instant message. You can purchase reputable Password Managers for a nano-fraction of what a data breach or web hack will cost you. In addition to a Password Manager, consider having a password requirement (known as a password policy) that isn’t just “Passwords must contain at least one uppercase letter, one lowercase letter, a number and a special character”. Why? Because 99% of people will create a password that uses the name of their company, followed by either the ‘1234’, the current year, or their birth year, and invariably the exclamation mark, e.g.: “ByronBay1234!”. A password policy created with users in mind, would instead read something

like this: “Pick a secret phrase that’s easy for you to remember but would be very difficult for someone else to guess. You can take inspiration from a picture, a place, your favourite – or least favourite – food. Make sure your password is at least 12 characters long and include at least one uppercase letter, one lowercase letter, a number and a special character. For example: “DoIPrefer 1KebabOr2SmashedAvosAfter-ASurf?” Oh, and tell people not to store their passwords in their browsers. Even the fancy new complex phrases. Even on a Mac.

In addition to applying these human-centric principles for some quick security wins, there are some relatively cost-effective solutions which can and should also be implemented. These include using Multifactor Authentication (MFA). MFA, also known as two-factor and three-factor authentication (depending on the number of layers of security), is an additional security measure placed on top of your standard username and password login procedures (which in today’s world are insufficient). MFA validates the identity of specific users, so that even if your username or password is stolen, attackers won’t be able to get into your business’ information without that additional layer. Whilst implementing MFA is not necessarily very easy for small businesses, there are some very cost effective and free options available. For example, if you have Microsoft Office365, check under the bonnet and see if you can turn Multifactor Authentication (MFA) on. If you can, that’s an excellent quick win (just Google, “Set up multifactor authentication for Microsoft 365” and follow the instructions). Let’s say you’re not using O365 and you’re using Google’s suite of products, including Gmail. In that case, you can turn on “Turn on 2-Step Verification” in Gmail and download a free app to identify you and your staff when logging in to your business’ email and systems accounts.

As you would with your personal photos and documents, back up your business’ most critical data and information. Even if that means you just the write names, phone numbers and email addresses of your most important suppliers in a



“Today, your cell phone has more computer power than all of NASA back in 1969, when it placed two astronauts on the moon.” — MICHIO KAKU, THEORETICAL PHYSICIST AND AUTHOR

little black book that never leaves your house. Or invest in an external hard drive. Again, they’re far cheaper than what it will cost you to recover if your most important data is locked up in a ransomware attack or deleted.

Implementing these key principles and actions will take some practice, and commitment. But they are not expensive. And even if they were, they’re never going to be as expensive as a breach or cyber attack on your increasingly digital small

business. In the age of AI, there has never been a better time to be human-centric.

Yanya Viskovich grew up in Byron Bay and is a cybersecurity consultant specialising in the human factor. She is a TEDx and international keynote speaker. Follow her at:

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FROM THERE TO HERE

MATT SIEGEL

I was born in New York City at the tail end of January 1978. My poor mum went into labour during the biggest snowstorm to strike the city in a decade, which feels like it should be some kind of metaphor, but was probably just yet another bit of bad luck for her.

It was still the old New York you'd recognise from hundreds of classic movies and TV shows: dirty, dangerous and thrilling. This was the New York of CBGB's and Taxi Driver, not The Disney Store and brunch in Williamsburg. My warmest childhood memories pretty much all involve running around with my friends like a pack of feral dogs in Central Park and on the cobblestone alleyways of Greenwich Village.

It's hard to imagine a place farther away - geographically and in spirit - from where I live now, perched over the Pacific Ocean in an off-grid community where wild animals significantly outnumber wild children, at least on most days. The journey from there to here was certainly stranger than anything my younger self could have imagined.

My friend Chris died this week, after a long and difficult illness. He was our neighbour, a family friend and an exceptionally odd duck, which is probably why I liked him so much. He fixated on the things he loved, like CB radios, film photography and road safety signage. He was generous with his time, a passionate and terrible dancer and he was adamant as he approached the end that no one use his death as an excuse to bang on about religion or spirituality, which he just could not abide.

He was quirky and he could be prickly, but he didn't have a single unkind bone in his body.

Not everywhere is welcoming of those who are different; society has traditionally placed a necessary premium on conformity. But in this part of the world, in this part of the country, he found his place. In the end, he was so beloved within our little community that it's almost hard to imagine it going on without him.

I am myself a quirky and often prickly person, like Chris, and his death has got me thinking a lot about my past, particularly how I ended up here, in one of the few places in Australia that's so well suited to folks like us.

I've moved around a lot in my life. I left home two weeks before my sixteenth birthday and never really looked back. When I was 25 - after a brief career in the music industry - I decided to move to Moscow and quickly found out that I was a journalist, which was a very pleasant discovery.

I'd always been a good listener. During our holiday meals, while the other kids huddled at the children's table talking about toys or sport or God knows what, I sat at the end of the grown ups table with the alte kakers (that's Yiddish for "old farts"), hanging on their every word as I begged them to tell me what it was like growing up during the Great Depression and what they did in The War. I wrote my first play - a truly, truly terrible one act - when I was 14 and my first screenplay at 18. Storytelling was always in my blood.

I covered my first war in 2008, as a reporter for The New York Times. I rode through the burning streets of South Ossetia tucked inside the belly of a Russian armoured personnel carrier listening to the thud, thud, thud of mortars raining down on the peasant huts kindling the flames. I remember



"A body of men holding themselves accountable to nobody ought not to be trusted by anybody."

— 1791. THOMAS PAINE, REVOLUTIONARY, POLITICAL THEORIST, AUTHOR OF *COMMON SENSE*

watching a donkey tow a brand new refrigerator down a dirt road as bullets wizzed overhead and his owner whipped his behind. Some things stick with you, even if they're ultimately not of any consequence to anyone but the donkey.

I spent the rest of that year living in Tbilisi, covering the aftermath of the war for The Associated Press. Georgia is the most beautiful place that even the most intrepid European traveller has probably never been to; even without hot water and consistent electricity, it was one of the most thrilling and fulfilling times of my life.

A lot happened over the next few years. I moved to Kazakhstan to serve as Central Asia Bureau Chief for Agence France-Presse, which brought me to Afghanistan for my first time. I covered the overthrow of Kyrgyzstan's despotic President and the ethnic cleansing of that country's Uzbek population in its wake. I got deported from Turkmenistan, perhaps the most isolated country in the world after North Korea, and flew resupply flights between Kandahar Airbase and Tarin Kowt, where much of Australia's troops spent that war.

I drank a lot and didn't set down a single root anywhere.

It was during that time that I came to Australia for the first time. The weather in Sydney was terrible so a friend and I flew to Port Douglas in hopes of some sunshine. The first night I was there I walked into a bar and saw the most gorgeous woman I'd ever seen waiting tables. Five days later she quit her job, broke up with her boyfriend and followed me back to Sydney. 14 years and two kids later, we're still married.

I never thought we'd stay in Australia when we moved to Sydney from Almaty in 2011; it was always meant to be a pit stop between overseas postings so that Emma could finish her Masters. The news cycle is a bit slower here than I was used to, so even as I continued working as a journalist for The Times and then Reuters, I branched out into producing and directing factual shows for networks like SBS and Ten, which opened up a whole new avenue of storytelling that I continue to use to this day.

That quiet was hard, though. If you keep running, you never have to sit still with your feelings. Provided you lubricate with whiskey and wine, you can pretty much ignore anything until you can't. In 2016 I was diagnosed with complex



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PTSD, which is something I continue to deal with now. I took up cycling and gave up drinking, both of which have been very helpful. I could say it's not embarrassing to talk about publicly, but it is. That's why I make myself do it, so it's a little bit less embarrassing for the next person.

Children change things, don't they? I know that everyone thinks their children are the best children in the world, but they must all be wrong, because they're not my girls. My daughter Sadie was born in Sydney in 2016; Freida joined us in Melbourne in 2018, where we'd moved so that I could serve as a senior adviser to then-Greens Leader Richard Di Natale. When he retired, we decided to move back to the property where Emma grew up, so that we and the kids could be closer to family and give us both the chance to slow down and breathe after such a long and chaotic period of time.

I've lived in the Northern Rivers for four years now. That's the second-longest stretch of time I've spent in one place in more than twenty years. Outside of our community, I've put down roots through the purpose-driven content agency I opened when we moved here - Green Thumb Media - through which I've been able to contribute

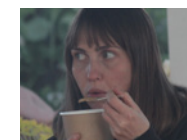
to the success of local businesses doing good for the community and the planet.

There are a lot of things I love about this part of the world and there are a lot of things that drive me nuts. What we lack in donkeys pulling refrigerators, we unfortunately more than make up for in single mums sleeping in their cars next to multi-million dollar homes. We can do better.

I don't know if I'll spend the rest of my life here, but I've been extremely grateful for an experience so unlike anything else I've encountered in my travels. For a quirky, prickly guy like me, that's really all I've ever wanted.

Vale Chris.

Matt Siegel is the founder and Creative Director of Green Thumb Media, a purpose-driven content agency that specialises in producing high-end branded content and commercials for world-bettering businesses. www.greenthumbmedia.com.au



"In matters of style, swim with the current. In matters of principle, stand like a rock."
— THOMAS JEFFERSON



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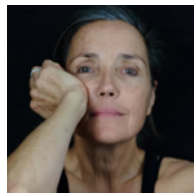
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ART IN BYRON BAY: A FLOURISHING CREATIVE HAVEN

CAITLIN REILLY

For nearly three decades, I've had the privilege of calling Byron Bay my home, and throughout this time, it has become evident that the region possesses a thriving arts community that has always been an integral part of its identity. The vitality of this community is driven by the need for artists to connect with their audience and to find spaces to exhibit, perform, and flourish. While conventional spaces may not always be accessible due to soaring rents and an ever-increasing number of creatives, it has not deterred the artistic spirit of the Northern Rivers.

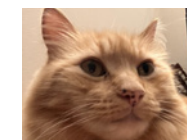
Byron Bay is not only blessed with the picturesque landscapes and serene beaches that make it a tourist hotspot but also with a vibrant arts scene that thrives in the most unexpected of places. Take, for instance, the park overlooking Main Beach. As the sun begins its descent, buskers perform, belting out tunes. And when the sun dips below the horizon, live entertainment graces the main streets and pubs, ensuring there's never a shortage of artistic expression. Additionally, the community centre hosts an extensive calendar of events featuring local and visiting performing artists, adding to the rich tapestry of cultural experiences in the area.

For those who seek visual art, The Lone Goat Gallery, located within the Byron Library, showcases diverse emerging and established Northern Rivers artists. Meanwhile, Gallery 3, a micro space as you venture out of town, is an artist-run space that consistently exhibits local artists, at 1 Kendall Street. At the edge of town, in the arts and industrial estate, you'll discover

places like Yeah Nice Gallery, Thom Gallery, and Japan International – all contributing to Byron's artistic landscape. But the art doesn't stop at the town limits; it extends throughout the Northern Rivers region, from Mullumbimby to Brunswick Heads, Bangalow to Lismore, and Murwillumbah. There, you'll find creative communities of ceramists, painters, weavers, and many more. Notable destinations include the Picture House in Brunswick Heads, MARTS in Murwillumbah, and BSA in Mullumbimby. And in Bangalow, a visit to Ninbella, Pac, Galleon, Container 13, and Station Street Co-op is a must to fully appreciate the diverse artistic offerings in the area.

The sheer volume of artists and the multitude of mediums they work in can be mind-boggling, leaving one to ponder why this region is such a hotbed for creativity within such a relatively small geographic space. The answer, I believe, lies in the unwavering encouragement to create art. Our teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing budding talents, with Byron School of Art (BSA) in Mullumbimby standing out as a prime example. The instructors themselves are accomplished exhibiting artists, and they emphasize studio practice, instilling the importance of daily dedication, questioning, and creation. It's the relentless support and magnetism within our artistic community that propels us forward. Over the past five years, this community has witnessed remarkable growth, perhaps due to the adversity faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating floods, which brought us even closer together.

Our commitment to the arts is further demonstrated through our attendance at events held in



"We are not divided by land. We are connected by water." — HAWAIIAN LIFEGUARD

unconventional, off-the-beaten-track venues like Pearces Creek. We show up to support artists when they take that brave step onto the stage or hang their creations on gallery walls for the first time. The sense of collective participation is palpable in the numerous community art markets and small art prizes we enthusiastically engage in. We tune in to Bay FM, our local community radio, to stay connected to the artistic pulse of the region. It is this attentiveness and dedication that have fuelled the remarkable and diverse growth of the arts in the Byron Bay region.

This narrative, while shedding light on the flourishing arts scene, only scratches the surface of the boundless creative energies that continue to thrive and grow not just in Byron Bay but in the neighbouring towns as well. Personally, I count myself incredibly fortunate to be a practicing artist in this inspiring environment. I have the privilege of running art spaces like Gallery 3 in Byron Bay and Station Street Co-op in Bangalow, both of which are collaborative efforts with fellow artists. The life force of these spaces, like many others in the region, hinges on the symbiotic relationship between artists and their audiences. It's the dynamic and supportive audience of the Byron Shire that keeps the creative spirit alive and thriving, and for that, we are eternally grateful.

The art scene in Byron Bay is not just a testament

to the remarkable talents of the artists who call this region home, but also to the unwavering support and active participation of the local community. The creative spirit in Byron Bay is a beacon of resilience and ingenuity, continually evolving and growing in ways that are as diverse as the mediums explored by the artists who call this place their muse. Byron Bay is more than just a destination; it's a living, breathing work of art, and all who contribute to its artistic tapestry make it a truly special place to call home.

Caitlin Reilly is a multi-disciplinary artist who has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions across Australia, China and Europe. She is the founder of Gallery 3, an artist run initiative offering contemporary works by local artists, and creates and connects to the public at Station Street Co-Op in Bangalow. gallery3byronbay.com.au | caitlinreilly.com

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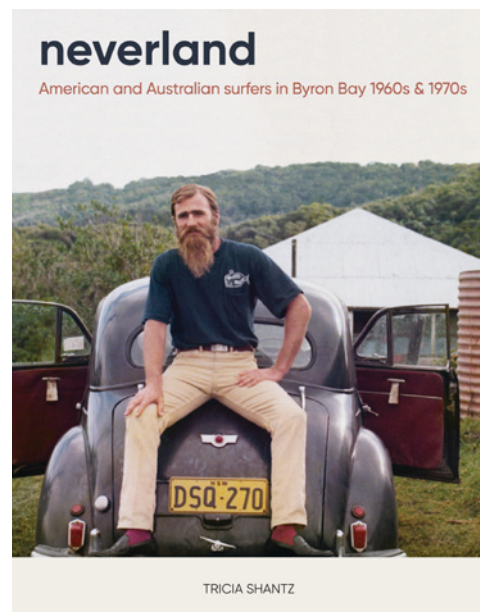
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