Editorial

The struggle for meaning: Geriatric budgie smuggling and the politics of the everyday.

Chris Hudson, Editor

Readers of a certain age will no doubt understand the anxiety invoked by thoughts of age-related professional and personal redundancy and the inexorable lurching towards old age and the all-too-obvious embodiment of creeping decrepitude. Glen Donnar's article on 'geri-action'—*Narratives of cultural and professional redundancy: Ageing action stardom and the 'geri-action' film*—and his discussion of *The Expendables* series might be a harsh reminder that we are all expendable. His investigation into ageing action stars, however, also highlights the ways in which the use-by date might be extended. The emergence of the sub-genre 'geri-action' may have invented new forms of representations of masculinity, but it can hardly escape the reference to *geriatric*. Action movies have always relied on 'hard bodies' and muscularity, and even Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis, among many others, cannot avoid or conceal their obvious decline. Attempts to deny the realities have resulted in recent action movies with a number of subtle stylistic differences from earlier versions. In presenting renovated images of the masculine, new elements have been introduced, such as clothes to hide ageing bodies and the use of ever more aggressive weaponry and macho vehicles. Donnar's point is that regardless of the strategies to keep the lucrative franchise going—including the possibility of *Expendables 4* and *Rambo: Last Blood*—the physical exhaustion of the action heroes and the exhaustion of the genre itself, ultimately cannot be prevented.

The making of another kind of masculinity in the form of a masculinized political figure, is the subject of Edward Hurcombe's essay—*The making of a captain: The production and projection of a political image on the Tony Abbott Facebook page*. With mythic categories such as Ideal Leader and Popular Candidate in mind, Hurcombe examines the images on the Facebook page of former Prime Minister of Australia, Tony Abbott, to consider how social media is used to create 'personal' engagements with users and create a more 'intimate' relationship through the construction of a digital persona. Abbott's attempt at establishing

'authenticity' unsurprisingly deployed images associated with the standard themes of the military, the heterosexual family, statesmanship, athleticism and action. It is perhaps these last two themes that link it to Donnar's investigation of the cultural power of muscularity. In Australia, the appeal to the popular imagination is also seen to rely on a form of masculine athleticism and devotion to sport, an idea that manifested in Abbott reinscribing himself as 'captain'. I doubt that readers will misunderstand the implications associated with Abbott's appearance wearing extremely tight and revealing swimming trunk known colloquially in Australia as 'budgie smugglers', with all that image suggests about phallocentrism, masculine power and who has the right to lead the nation.

Brooke Gizzi-Stewart's article—*New visions and vintage values: Shifting discourses of Australian national identity in 21st century prime ministerial rhetoric*—examines a different sort of image-making activity. In her investigations of the rhetoric generated during election campaigns, Gizzi-Stewart considers the ways in which campaign language and political communication can reorient the consciousness of the electorate and ultimately the nation itself. Drawing on common perceptions of shared civic character, or national identity, in Australia this has meant that politicians continue to reprise the orthodox myths of nation: the threat from the Other and the need for strong borders; the stoicism of the Australian people; and the "Australian spirit". All perceived threats to the nation, appearing in metaphorical forms describing "the storm clouds gathering on the horizon", must be met by strong leadership. The rhetoric employed by the last three prime ministers has been characterised partly by masculinised discourses in which a key feature is the struggle for nation encapsulated in the declaration by one prime minister that "there is so much worth fighting for". The discourse also relied on the exploitation of common, and manipulable, understandings of Australians' perceptions of their national character to invite voters to see themselves through the various political parties' the versions of the nation.

The construction of identity through language in the public domain is also the subject of the essay *Analysing everyday online political talk in China: Theoretical and methodological reflections* by Scott Wright, Todd Graham, Yu Sun, Wilfred Yang Wang, Xiantian Luo and Andrea Carson. The production of public reason and mutual understanding through everyday political talk and the problems associated with observers' ability to appreciate it is confounded by Chinese citizens' extensive use of digital media as the platform for this chatter and by the discursive strategies they deploy. While the internet provides diverse spaces for public deliberation, institutional barriers in authoritarian societies may forestall free use of digital forums. This however, does not preclude the emergence of the political, even if it is

couched in terms that might not conventionally be thought of as political. Wright et al. focus on "the politics of the everyday", a phrase that encapsulates the idea of political talk that avoids appearing as contentious. If certain online discussion forums appear more interested in 'lifestyle' than political action, then observers may be left wondering how to identify political talk and distinguish it from other forms of chatter. If Chinese "netizens" use coded language and metaphor to make political points and arguments to disguise their real meaning in a seemingly non-political "third space", censors may be confused, but this also makes it all the more difficult for researchers to unravel the layers of meaning. The authors consider the methodological and theoretical implications of these digital strategies.

Finally, Axel Philipps, Hagen Schölzel and Ralph Richter's article—*Defaced election posters: Between culture jamming and moral outrage. A case study*— investigates alternative communicative practices and considers them in the context of the legacy of avant-garde movements such as the Situationists. During the 2013 German federal election campaigning in Leipzig, Philipps et al. discovered widespread defacement of the posters of legitimate German political parties. Far from being able to promote unhindered individual political personae or party positions through rhetoric in the way described by Gizzi-Stewart, it seems that no party could escape some destruction of the original message of the posters at the hands of tactical interventions by activists. Drawing on the Situationists' concept of *détournement*—a diversion or detour—to deflect or divert the standard meaning by painting over or otherwise destroying party symbols and rhetoric, they noted that defacements constitute everyday strategies of the sort described by Michel de Certeau. Whether the various sorts of graffiti and defacements can be understood as more or less subtle or overt forms of political communication, radical culture jamming or moral outrage, what is clear is that the practice of defacing political posters frustrates representations even though such actions may have lost their power to scandalise in a democratic system. The use of the visual to obstruct communication is part of a vibrant culture of protest in Germany, where, unlike the situation faced by Chinese netizens, political statements can be bold and unequivocal. This intervention speaks above all to the struggle over meaning and the disruption of the dominant voice.

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