







SASA  
GALLERY

**THE ENDS OF THE EARTH**

**13 October - 28 November 2009**

## Things are heating up

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 stands as the greatest global crime of the new century. The months and weeks before the invasion saw many demonstrations of millions of people against Australia's involvement, but to no avail. The same thing happened in Britain: in both countries the military/industrial complex simply overrode public opposition to their running of the world. Six years on the once sovereign state of Iraq is practically destroyed by a conflict that has been remarkable primarily for the cynicism of its perpetrators and for the vast quantities of pollution it has generated. What we have seen of Iraq on television makes it look as though it's hell on earth... psychotic violence, extreme trauma and relentless heat. But it's all so far away and there's nothing we can do about it – although we tried. While we may, regretfully, distance ourselves from the reality of contemporary Iraq, the media images we have seen from that country are prophetic glimpses of what other regions of our world may soon become – zones of mounting violence, trauma and heat.

While Iraq wasn't destroyed by climate change it has suffered a collapse of government and social infrastructure, hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced, killed, mutilated and traumatized in ethnic fighting and from attacks by insurgent groups from surrounding territories. There is a shortage of everything and the resources of the state are stretched beyond capacity to deal with the catastrophic change in the country's fortunes. Such is the kind of scenario that may soon become not uncommon in the future of our climate changed world. The disaster that was brought upon Iraqi society was caused by old fashioned naked aggression, but this is what will also occur as states and communities are pitted against each other in battles for survival in an environmentally degraded world. In the context of Iraq the prize for the invaders was oil; in a future scenario the prize may well be food, or the territories in which to grow it, or the power and water required to provide the conditions for growing it.

Higher temperatures will result from climate-change as it becomes increasingly manifest in various places around the world. The industrial revolution is finally coming home to roost. The biosphere is reacting to the effects of 250 years of belching chimneys, exhaust fumes and the overuse of resources. Relatively small increases in global temperature are already being experienced as higher local temperatures and an increase in both drought and

flood conditions. Floods will result from both extreme weather conditions and from the rise in sea levels as the polar-ice melts. The combined impact of both drought and flooding on the production of food and the loss of social infrastructure will lead to local conflicts and the inevitable atrocities to follow. Increasingly, the world will become a more dangerous place and in time the more privileged societies will also become affected.

Resource conflicts are most likely to arise in the developing world but the more advanced and affluent countries are also being threatened by the damaging and destabilizing effects of global climate change. As temperatures rise in the big cities social structures will start to break down. Long hot summers could mean weeks and months of temperatures in the low to medium forties. The increased demand for refrigeration and air-conditioning will lead to power outages and power rationing and the inevitably increasing costs. The gap between the haves and the have-nots will become more noticeable: security forces will outnumber the police.

Climate change may send democracy to the wall, whereas capitalism is designed to exploit whatever the conditions may be. Irrespective of the very real looming catastrophe that will engulf future generations the movers and shakers of entrepreneurial capitalism have realised that there's money to be made out of climate-change, and lots of it.

Compared with less privileged cultures, post-industrial societies are largely insulated from the vicissitudes of hunger, exposure, disease and corrupt governance. Some societies live in fabulous luxury compared with their not so well off global neighbours. Such luxury however requires a considerable investment in infrastructure which in turn generates wealth through the production of resources and commodities. Nobody knows or cares where the food in the supermarket or the goodies in the hardware stores comes from; likewise the petrol for the car and the power and water needed to make all the appliances work. Providing that these requirements for a comfortable life remain in place and available, the only really bad things that can happen to this world will happen on television.

However, it is more than inconceivable now that the unthinkable will happen. While contemporary cultural theory has demonstrated the concept of progress to be a transparent myth, post-industrial societies are still making 'progress' in their attempts to become more climate-change-proof. By investing heavily in further technologies wealthy societies ensure the continued delivery of the fundamental requirements for a comfortable life.

With the probabilities of an uncertain future, the need to secure power and water is perceived as crucial for population and industry alike and in facilitating the supply of such resources big corporations are making, and will continue to make, a killing. A case in point is the growing popularity of desalination plants around the world. Current numbers of these facilities is around 7000 with 60% of them servicing the fresh water needs of Middle Eastern oil states. The financial cost of these plants is enormous but the money to be made from their supply and operation will be beyond counting. Indeed, in terms of sheer value, water is becoming the new oil. With an increasingly promising future, desalination plants are popping up everywhere and the inevitable *salination* of surrounding gulfs and oceans will soon begin in earnest.

Access to fresh, clean water has increasingly become an issue worldwide, as a number of factors come into play affecting both supply and demand. Traditional supplies of water are drying up due to mass industrialization in manufacturing and agriculture. The impact of climate-change on rain patterns and river flows is exacerbating the problems of supply. These issues have combined to make water a security issue in some regions, with experts predicting resource wars over water, with obvious parallels to the conflict in Iraq caused by the desire to secure that country's oil reserves. Consequently, water desalination plants are seen as an absolute necessity to shield affluent societies from the nightmare of critical water shortages. After all, there's plenty of water out there in the sea...

These so called 'plants' need plenty of water; with each plant pumping around 75 million cubic metres of water per year, in ten years time approximately 20,000 desalination plants will be pumping the equivalent of ten cubic kilometres out of the oceans per year. But only half of that amount is usable and thus between four and five cubic kilometres of poisonous brine and chemicals will be pumped back out to sea. And this volume will increase decade by decade. The impact that such an exchange will have on already massively depleted marine life is an unknown facet within the overall equation. And of course much of the fresh water produced will go to industry. For example, the amount of fresh water consumed annually in the production of concrete is equivalent to a tower of water 2.1 kilometres high by one kilometre wide by one kilometre deep. Once the concrete sets the water is lost forever to the biosphere as it can never be reconstituted.

It is through such ruthless commodification of finite resources that affluent societies will aspire to hold out against the drying-out and poisonous effects of climate-change. In a not too distant future privileged societies that continue to live relatively insulated from the degrading biosphere and associated zones of conflict, will become less and less aware of the reality that exists 'out there'. In much the same manner that the invasion of Iraq and subsequent horrors are only ever seen on television, so too will viewers and gamers in the insulated societies of the not too distant future, experience the real 'out there' in the form of mediatised fictions, ingeniously constructed simulacra, that for the time being will belie the reality of being under siege by increasing numbers of displaced and desperate climate change refugees.

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*Darkness*, by the English romantic poet George Gordon, Lord Byron, composed in 1816, describes a nightmare scenario of the death of the world as it expires in cold and darkness after a catastrophic extinguishing of the sun. The poem was written *in the year without a summer* when the skies over northern Europe were unnaturally darkened due to large amounts of ash in the upper atmosphere from a volcanic eruption in the Indonesian archipelago. Drawing on biblical imagery the poem describes a world bereft of salvation in which horror is the norm, the kind of horror that comes only in the appalling realisation that all hope is gone. To light their darkness people burn entire cities and then vast forests until all is blackened and destroyed and famine consumes the lives of people and animals alike. Burned out and freezing the now dormant, colossal wreck that was the earth, drifts off into an eternity of darkness.

The protracted destruction of life on earth due to climate-change won't have quite the apocalyptic drama as is graphically depicted in *Darkness*; but while things generally may get darker, it won't get any colder. On the contrary, as we now know, things are heating up...

Jim Moss  
September 2009

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## Images

Front: Jane Castle & Linda Dement, *wax box blood*, 2009, wax, blood, dimensions variable

Middle: Linda Dement, *killer 01*, 2009, digital image, 100x100cms

Back: Jane Castle, *vapour trail 1*, 2009, lambda print, 100x66cms

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