This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30080031

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright : 2015, University of Canberra
Towards a ‘Non-Didactic Didacticism’ of the Sociopolitical

Assemblages and the Event in ‘Surface Tension’ and ‘Shame’

To write sociopolitical fiction is to be caught in an odd double bind. The term itself, ‘sociopolitical’ (hyphenated or not), implies an ‘assemblage’, and the terms it combines—‘the social’ and ‘the political’—each suggest complex, worldly assemblages. However, the more the writer attempts to express the assembled complexity of the sociopolitical domain, the more he/she feels a tug in the other direction: towards the version of ideas that might best explain the sociopolitical world and motivate political action. This article engages with the aesthetic and political challenges that arise in writing within a genre in which, to some extent at least, a moral content is desired by readers as an explanation for sociopolitical issues, only to be resisted when, as it often does, it becomes didactic. Co-author Cathryn Perazzo’s sociopolitical novel-in-progress, Surface Tension, is, we suggest, a laboratory of an assemblage in action. In it, we test and elaborate our hypothesis of the ‘assembled idea’ or ‘assembled morality’ of the sociopolitical novel. We conclude with a look at a published short story, ‘Shame’, by co-author Patrick West, which similarly deals with the sociopolitical, with how ‘non-didactic didacticisms’ might be germinated, and, most explicitly, with the ‘event’, following Deleuze’s use of this term.

Keywords: assemblage — event — novel — short story — sociopolitical

Introduction

This article explores ways writers might propagate ideas designed to effect political and social change without sounding sententious. This has long been a topic of interest to writers, readers and those interested in public intellectualism. Writing in 1948, Charles G. Whiting argues that Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of ‘engaged literature’ is both desirable and possible without in any way undermining ‘the literary qualities of the novel’ (84). The aftermath of World War Two prompted Whiting to nominate ‘the dual objective of political and economic liberty, a combination of socialism and individual freedom’ as the goals of an engaged literature (85). Extrapolating from issues of climate change, asylum seekers, and terrorism, today’s writers would more likely describe a goal something like global community awareness. Like Sartre himself, and us for that matter, Whiting condemns the destructive tendencies of agitprop writing (born of ‘the propaganda methods of Marxist literary theory’ [87]). However, we think that he is too sanguine in his assessment that it is relatively easy, in fact, to ensure that a sociopolitical novel succeeds also as art. Whiting concludes that ‘far from detracting from the novel, the addition of another dimension will contribute to its enrichment’ (88).
Saul Bellow, writing in 1962, however, states that 'there is much in modern literature...to justify our prejudice against the didactic' (2015: 127).

Bearing in mind such conflicting perspectives on what Bellow calls the novelist's involvement 'in programs, in slogans, in political theories, religious theories and so on', we begin our article with a discussion of what we think it is to write an effective work of sociopolitical creative writing—writing that is true to the aesthetics and history of its form rather than mere propaganda (127). Then, given that some writers with a viewpoint might be more successful at communicating that than others, we look at several writers whose techniques we consider heavy-handed. We then consider writers who are more proficient at presenting a point of view in their work, so that the creative work is more akin to art than propaganda. From this flows an idea of 'assemblage', which we distinguish from assemblage theory in creative-arts practice, and which relates to how we are constructing or have constructed our own creative works as inspired by, or in engagement with, sociopolitical ideas.

There is assemblage, too, in the act of working together on this article, and in the different kinds of writing that we utilise here in order to make our claim, from an examination of literary examples, to examples of our own creative work. The key focus of the article, however, is on the interaction between the idea of 'assemblage' and the methodology/making of what we call our own 'non-didactic didacticisms': that is, writing wanting to engage with matters sociopolitical, but that is executed in such a way—is delivered to a readership in such a way—as not to come across as didactic. We enact this methodology as an approach to writing fiction that retains the ambiguity of the complex, writing art form itself. In Cathryn Perazzo's case, she zeroes in on the assemblage of character, while Patrick West looks at how ideas might start to rise to the surface of fiction, be formed within its inherent complexity, as well as at the 'event', in 'Shame'. This is fiction that is assembled before being, as we will put it (following Gilles Deleuze), 'evented' into the world (albeit from within or on the margins of the work itself). We will speak of an 'event-assemblage'. We concern ourselves with the making, and the making good, of ideas; of course, how any work is ultimately received is another matter.

Our overall intention is to show how ideas should be assemblages as complex, or almost as complex as, the worlds they aim to affect, on the model of a homology between the complex assemblage of the novel and of the world beyond the novel, where readers live. Might we bravely admit we are trying to engineer reactions in a sociopolitical context, as a directive toward social change, and suggest that 'eventing' expresses this possibility (Perazzo has written more on 'eventing' elsewhere [2014]). Ideas, or moral guides for action, have their place; but as much as they need to present as ideas, they need to be of a similar order to the operations of the world surrounding them, fictionally and in real life. Otherwise, the possibility of any productive interplay between ideas and the world (the space of the sociopolitical) starts to look absurd. By our terms, unassembled ideas—simplistic moralisms—will simply bounce off the surface of the sociopolitical, rather than entering it and altering it from within. This is what we mean by a 'non-didactic didacticism'.

Theories and illustrations of the sociopolitical novel
‘We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies’ (Picasso 1968). Picasso is speaking as artist, rather than writer, but the statement is transferrable. Regarding the poet’s take on the world, Jen Webb says that ‘This is ethical, and socially engaged, because readers can appropriate that knowledge [of the individual poet] – not to test it, not to apply remedies to society, but to revisit both thought and being’ (2012: 9). Webb zeroes in on ‘... poetry’s capacity to offer small, local and contingent truths’ (9).

Let us explore some of these ideas with reference to the novel-in-progress, *Surface Tension*, by Perazzo. In writing a sociopolitical novel, one that explores the issue of race relations, Perazzo intends to deliver a novel that is true to its form, that is recognisably ‘novel’. One doesn’t have to agree with Milan Kundera, that ‘In the richness of its forms, the dizzyingly concentrated intensity of its evolution, and its social role, the European novel (like European music) has no equal in any other civilization’ (2003: 143) to believe that the novel must, above all, always be ‘novel’, new.

*Surface Tension* is set in contemporary Melbourne, and was germinated in 2009, following a number of violent attacks on Indian nationals in that city. These incidents gelled with other ideas of Perazzo’s at the time, but her clear goal was to interrogate matters of race in Melbourne and to explore that in a work of fiction. She is still in the writing process. She is writing, as all writers do, from her own limited perspective, wanting to make believable and authentic fiction while also bringing in ideas to stimulate, or suggest, change in the world (the social and political domain). Without sufficient authenticity, she fears she may fall down in enabling readers’ revisiting of both ‘thought and being’, to re-deploy Webb’s words (2012: 9).

Milan Kundera indicates the need to proceed gently with communicating ideas in fiction:

> Outside the novel, we’re in the realm of affirmation: everyone is sure of his statements: the politician, the philosopher, the concierge. Within the universe of the novel, however, no one affirms: it is the realm of play and of hypotheses. In the novel, then, reflection is essentially inquiring, hypothetical.... There is a fundamental difference between the ways philosophers and novelists think. People talk about Chekhov’s philosophy, or Kafka’s or Musil’s, and so on. But just try to draw a coherent philosophy out of their writings!... [Dostoyevsky] is a great thinker only as a novelist. Which is to say that in his characters he is able to create intellectual universes that are extraordinarily rich and original.... Once it is part of a novel, a reflection changes its essence: a dogmatic thought turns hypothetical. (2003: 78,79)

The caveat is Kundera’s clear implication that the novel writing be handled well, because he continues: ‘This is something philosophers miss when they try to write novels’ (2003: 79). Our response to Kundera is that, while ideas change within the ‘well-written’ novel, they also need to persist as ideas if they are to be pointers towards change in the world. Authentic sociopolitical fiction and didactic, or unassembled, fiction might appear to be at opposite ends of a continuum. We call didactic fiction unassembled fiction because the assemblage ruptures the singular impulse of thought necessary to didactic fiction. Expressing or communicating ideas within fiction is one thing, doing so in such a way as to produce authentic fiction, and hold the attention of an audience, is another. Michelle de Kretser tells us that her intention with * Questions of Travel* (2012) is merely to ‘ask questions’. Writers sometimes say they want only to ‘start a conversation’ or ‘stimulate discourse’.

Still, however modest the agenda, if one is intended, the file must be buried inside the cake, the grit hidden at the heart of the pearl, lest one lose the more impatient of readers. Here is the required balancing act, then, between 'good' novels and ideas that remain, relatively autonomously, as ideas for action.

The history of nineteenth and twentieth century working-class literature provides numerous examples of texts that combine a sociopolitical concern with the presentation of ideas that at least tend towards didacticism. Often the framing devices, the impetus for the production of such texts, seem also to trigger the most importunate presentations of the ideas/didacticisms they contain.

*The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell, for example, was commissioned by the Left Book Club. In it, we read, 'To sum up: There is no chance of righting the conditions I described in the earlier chapters of this book, or of saving England from Fascism, unless we can bring an effective Socialist party into existence' (1987: 202). Of course, Orwell's text is not fiction, yet still there's a strain between such didacticisms and the more creative, novelistic elements of a text suggestive of what today we might call creative nonfiction. Orwell's text is also interesting for what it says about the tension between people's desire for both a 'good read' and a 'plan of action'. He writes, 'We can only get it [Socialism] if we offer an objective which fairly ordinary people will recognize as desirable' (1987: 202). Fairly ordinary people being, we suggest, for Orwell, those who would also appreciate, and be attracted to in writing, the lived complexity of the 'sociopolitical' as what today we might call an assemblage. Orwell is very aware of the need not to turn people off through language. It's a question of what 'fairly ordinary people' will recognise, and we think that they would recognise, above all, the complexity of the real world. Noticing the stigma attached to the very word, 'Comrade', Orwell writes, 'You have to make it clear that there is room in the Socialist movement for human beings....' (1987: 196-7).

Orwell thematizes the problem of our article:

For several weeks running there had been a certain amount of talk about Shakespeare; whereupon an incensed reader wrote to say, 'Dear Comrade, we don't want to hear about these bourgeois writers like Shakespeare. Can't you give us something a bit more proletarian?' etc., etc. The editor's reply was simple. 'If you will turn to the index of Marx's Capital,' he wrote, 'you will find that Shakespeare is mentioned several times.' And please notice that this was enough to silence the objector. Once Shakespeare had received the benediction of Marx, he became respectable. That is the mentality that drives ordinary sensible people away from the Socialist movement. You do not need to care about Shakespeare to be repelled by that kind of thing. Again, there is the horrible jargon that nearly all Socialists think it necessary to employ. When the ordinary person hears phrases like 'bourgeois ideology' and 'proletarian solidarity' and 'expropriation of the expropriators', he is not inspired by them, he is merely disgusted. (Orwell 1987: 196)

Orwell's defence of Shakespeare as Shakespeare shows, in a certain form, the tension one can still identify today, between ideas as didacticisms (in Orwell's case, Socialism) and all the complexities of the 'sociopolitical' assemblage found, not least (!), in Shakespeare. Orwell's context is not our context, of course, but the tradition he represents and reflects upon lingers today. You do not need to care about Shakespeare to accept Orwell's point that life is bigger than any idea/didacticism.
Jack London's allegorical novel *The Iron Heel* (1976) is another rather uneasy marriage of complex, worldly assemblages and didacticism. The introductory blurb reads, 'Its publication in 1907 caused a sensation, yet sixty-eight years later its message is just as clear: allow the Revolution to be defeated and the ruling class, in their own words, "will walk upon your faces". It is hard to take this line un-didactically!

Finally though, even didactically put ideas can be reshaped, while remaining ideas qua ideas, in the reception of certain texts (which is also, of course, always a certain re-production of that text's initial crafting). Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (2006), which was intended by the author as a critique from a working-class, Socialist perspective, was largely received as a proto-Vegetarian argument/idea, or at least as a text about food safety and security (as the blurb inside the front cover reads, the book 'was a major catalyst to the passing of the Pure Food and Meat Inspection Act, which has tremendous impact to this day'). Thus, even when the ideas (plural) of a text might be said individually to be didactic, as in *The Jungle*, assemblage has the potential to emerge, as in the passage (which can never remain uncontaminated by difference itself) from one idea to the other. This is what happens in Sinclair's text. Assemblage orbits in close proximity to the very notion of the idea. Here then, perhaps, lies a stronger possibility for a 'non-didactic didacticism', which is what we want to explore in the rest of this paper.

To help us here, we draw upon Terry Eagleton's engagement with similar issues to those addressed by Milan Kundera. Eagleton sheds light on matters of technique. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin is not an embarrassingly second-rate novel because it has a specific moral purpose...but because of the way it executes it' (2012: 69). More specifically,

> If you were trying to present a moral case in written form, you might feel the need to edit, highlight, slant and stylise your materials so as to bring out its salient features. You might also find yourself constructing narratives, or fashioning dramatic cameos of key situations, or creating characters who graphically illustrated the main aspects of your argument. You would, in short, find yourself writing a novel.... Flesching out your moral case would mean turning it into fiction. Moral content and literary form would gradually converge, until it was hard to tell them apart. (2012: 67)

Eagleton makes it sound easy, you simply go away and write a good novel. But how exactly?

At least two contemporary texts present as exemplars of non-didactic didacticisms. In looking at these, we observe the evidence of the craft that underpins these works. This leads us into discussion of the crafting of our own creative works, with emphasis on the necessary nuances of that often maligned term, craft. Paul Carter refers to the 'discourse of dance' to speak of the particular material knowledge that comes out of craft. It is not as though any 'craft-ing' will produce the same knowledge, or that craft is merely the transparent window of pre-crafted notions:

> The yield of choreographic discourse, for example, is not the representation of an idea that could be demonstrated more reliably by other means. It resides in the gymnastics itself, in the forming of a constellation of poses into a composite signifying material thinking. (2004: 178)

To this extent, Eagleton's 'moral content' will always be nuanced by individual and/or collective re-
craftings.

At its heart, Ian McEwan’s 2010 novel, *Solar*, is about global warming and climate change. How does McEwan navigate such issues and keep an audience? Largely, he employs story-telling hooks, humour, and a protagonist we love to hate: the egotistical Michael Beard, a man who has spent his life coasting on one successful period early in his career which earned him a Nobel prize, but is unlucky in love. He’s experiencing the breakdown of his fifth marriage when we first meet him, and before too long he is both extricating himself from accusations of murdering his wife’s new lover and simultaneously appropriating that young man’s potentially world-saving scientific work (a synthetic photosynthesis for sunlight capture in the manner of plants) which, if it succeeds, will mean a boundless energy supply.

This strategy of using the un-likeable Beard means that the reader does not feel hammered with the attitudes of a holier-than-thou zealot. If, from the outset, he were on a mission, aiming to convince us that we are doomed unless we act, it would be all too easy to suspect him of parroting McEwan’s views; however, Beard’s stumbling onto the issue integrates his engagement with it into the workings of story and character. We find ourselves caring more about character and situation than message, but about message all the same, while we see what Beard crashes into next. That Beard is a liar and a cad to the end, doesn’t make the science any less faulty. This means he is an effective conduit of ideas held by the Global Warming convert.

Similarly, Elliot Perlman, in his novel *Three Dollars* (1998), notwithstanding the novel’s serious subject matter, at times employs humour. The novel is set somewhere in the late 1980s to mid 1990s, in Melbourne, Australia, following the crash of the late 80s; this is the time of Keating’s interest rate ‘J’ curve and the ‘recession we had to have’. But as with *Solar* (2010) it is the engaging characters that are to the fore, carrying the narrative, and therefore the grit at the heart of the pearl: the sociopolitical underpinnings, for the reader.

The narrative involves the protagonist, Eddie Harnovey, falling on hard times (due in large part to his being an honourable man). It’s the system that’s to blame: the divide between rich and poor, the unscrupulousness of the rich. We learn this through what happens to Eddie and his family, and through what is articulated by Eddie and his wife, Tanya. Perlman establishes Eddie and Tanya as people who could hold the views they do and be believable about it, including how their various rants are delivered, so that we see their world view as authentic and not contrived. Eddie is established as a good guy. Examples include his helping out both a little old lady in a café who has a bit of a turn, and also Nick, who is just generally down on his luck.

Eddie has only $3 left in his account when he sees Nick again, now living in an equivalent to skid row in the city. This shows how small a gap exists between chugging along with house and family and being destitute. In Eddie’s case, however, his middle-class background means he is less likely to fall so far. As the novel plays out, we see that, indeed, things will probably work out for Eddie. But what about the others, we are left to wonder?

*Surface Tension and the crafting of ‘non-didactic didacticisms’*
Perazzo is engaging with the crafted assembly of the assemblage of character from affect, its relationship to complexity, and the writing of a nuanced, even ambiguous, authentic sociopolitical novel. Eagleton’s work helps frame hers:

A novel which in every character and situation was set by a predetermined moral agenda... would not only have an implausible ring to it; it would also undermine the cogency of its own moral vision. Ironically, it is presence of contingency, not least in realist fiction, that makes a novel’s outlook so convincing.... In this way, the non-necessary comes to the support of the necessary.... Its carefully contrived arbitrariness gives it the rough-and-ready feel of everyday existence. (2012: 146)

Extrapolating from Eagleton, the effort of working against form and order and predictability within the fictional work, creating a ‘carefully contrived arbitrariness’, producing an ambiguity rather than the pat answer, can supply a greater impression of artistic truth. In line with the goal of complexity and ambiguity, Perazzo is practising an ‘assemblage of character’.

Wanting to create a nuanced sociopolitical work true to the goal of satisfying its own ends, is a desire also held by others, of course. Jaspreet Singh, author of Helium (2013), a recent novel engaging with the issue of the 1984 Sikh massacre in India, was interviewed at the Brisbane Writers Festival regarding the nature of writing fiction based on real events. Singh has a particular take on this issue. He complains he has been accused of didacticism because his characters seem to spout facts regarding real events, and he himself instructs readers on what they can research themselves for further information. Singh defends his position, stating that in only suggesting wider research, he has avoided telling readers what to think. In any case, he says, he doesn’t write conventional narratives, he writes his own way. Someone else might do it differently, but this is his way (2014). To some extent, we could see this as a crafting of a ‘non-didactic didacticism’. Perazzo likes to think she treads more lightly than Singh. All the same, usefully, Singh stresses that his story of the Sikh massacre occurs mainly through character, and that his major focus is on the personal journey of the narrator and how he deals with the situation he finds himself in. This emphasis on character matches Perazzo’s own.

Along with Singh (and arguably McEwan and Perlman), for Perazzo, character is the driving force of her sociopolitical novel. Through depicting the loss of her protagonist’s son and how she deals with that situation, Perazzo underscores the vagaries of Sarah’s personal journey. In the telling, and through her choice of placing an Indian man in the driver’s seat in the car accident where Sarah’s son dies, Perazzo shows Sarah’s personal journey in conjunction with ideas around race relations. Perazzo is taking this approach with other characters too.

Perazzo privileges assemblages of character in her construction of the ‘richly realised’ sociopolitical novel. Her manner of assembling character can be likened to how the character of the subject grows in life, how humans morph and change with new experiences, how we are not set, how we don’t arrive fully formed; most importantly perhaps, how we come from affect. Following in the footsteps of other artists inspired by Deleuze, she is guided in this by the following interpretation of Deleuze from Clare Colebrook: ‘Character is not a single unified ground or body...characters are collections or “assemblages” of randomly gathered affects’ (2002: 83). Colebrook speaks against big picture and top-down thinking: ‘We do not begin from an idea, such as human culture and then use
that idea to explain life. *We chart the emergence of the idea from particular bodies and connections* (italics ours). She goes on to say: ‘We can see how this might open up new ways for thinking about literature’ (2002: 82, 83). This takes us to the myriad variations in ‘real’ characters...characters who are intensities formed from affect. This is uncluttered characterisation, far from stereotype; it cannot be interpreted in only one way. In short, it suggests a character of E. M. Forster’s ‘round’ kind, who ‘...is complex in temperament and motivation [and is therefore] as difficult to describe with any adequacy as a person in real life, and like most persons, is capable of surprising us’ (cited in Abrams & Harpham 2012: 46). As Colebrook continues, ‘the other is another possible world of differences’ (2002: 83). Likewise, Kundera remarks of people, ‘Our “self” is inconceivable outside the particular, unique situation of our life; it is only comprehensible in and through that situation’ (2005: 62). Regarding character, he says of Kafka’s The Trial (2009), ‘If two strangers had not come looking for Joseph K one morning to inform him that he was under indictment, he would be someone totally different from the person we know’ (2005: 62, 63). Here is a character being formed, in a Deleuzean sense, through experiences.

Sarah has not come to Perazzo complete. She doesn’t presume to know everything there is to know about her in these latter stages of her first draft, and she will be refashioned, Perazzo is sure, in consecutive drafts. Perazzo is assembling Sarah, as though she is someone the author is getting to know, and, in doing so, aiming to keep Sarah fresh and authentic, *her ideas subtle*. She is writing aspects of her little by little, and since each new aspect has Perazzo rethinking previous ones, she is keeping a dossier on her, on who she is and what her life is like. Craft re-enters here clearly. Given that aspects of Sarah’s personality and backstory are as yet uncertain to Perazzo, the very documenting of the process of character creation is itself a crafting of assemblage. Furthermore, craft is reified by product. Sarah herself keeps a journal or dossier, and often her ideas are born in (are crafted in) this journal form (just as ideas about *her* crafting appear in Perazzo’s notes).

The following extract from *Surface Tension* constitutes a recent experience/collection of memories Perazzo has given to Sarah, in continuing to assemble her, that show how Sarah’s character is being built as she experiences more, and as her personality, and thinking, develop:

*We are all migrants [Sarah’s journal]*

Herring Island: cut off from Richmond for the flow of Yarra flood waters, built up by silt, is now covered in grass for bbqs and picnics, sculptures, a former scout hall with a straw-bale fence. What a great town, I thought, which has an island in the middle of its main waterway where I can stand at the point imagining I’m on a granite-tipped boat, parting the water and cars to left and right, in a wash of traffic burble.

Later that day, I walked along streets I had known in my twenties.... I remembered a visit to Como House on the school bus as a 15 year old country kid (Meatloaf’s ‘Bat out of Hell’ as our backing music), and shopping trips on a red rattler into Flinders St Station. I didn’t know then that I would live in this city one day: would tip the balance into having lived longer away than at home. Inconceivable thought, with layers of farming and tradition anchoring me to land and small-town living.

I understand at last that I am a migrant too, in my own way. It is often said we are all migrants here, so often that it has become a cliché you rarely think about. After six generations in Australia, it seems rather like a token to call yourself a migrant (from the
mother country?), just something said to show support. But moving to the city, that is a migratory experience I relate to, a choice I’m glad I wasn’t blocked from, or made to feel uncomfortable with, that didn’t see me excluded from services or opportunities or in any way judged. I became odd to people at home, but perhaps admired – being the first of my tribe to go to the Big Smoke.

I can’t imagine not migrating to the city. (Perazzo 2014)

Self-evidently, the forming of the subject in fiction differs from that of life because the shaping hand of the writer (the crafter in chief) is at work. In the end, Perazzo will decide which aspects of back story will stay and which will go, but as much as possible, she is attempting to have her characters emerge from the flow of the fictional world, in the way a subject does from the flow of the ‘real’ world, as an eddy, as collections of experiences. The strategy is, as closely as possible, to approximate the forming of a subject through affect. The person of Sarah, for example, is then more likely to be a substantial—as in ‘of substance’—person, a nuanced fictional character in the way of any other fictional character without, necessarily, a barrow to push.

We liken the forming, the assembling, of character to the raw material of the Deleuzean event, the means (as we will detail below) by which the ideas of the novel are proposed and framed for its eventual readership.

‘Shame’ and assemblage

A finished and published work that elaborates on what we have been discussing to date, and nuances our developing concept of ‘assemblage’, is Patrick West’s short story, ‘Shame’. In its own way, ‘Shame’ is an assemblage of characters in and from their gendered and national identities. It tells the story of a Japanese student, Miyume, who is studying for a PhD on social movements in the American occupied island of Okinawa. It investigates the tensions between the local, islander social movements and the American personnel on the military base on the island. Ideas of social change are mixed in with a depiction of a personal American-Japanese relationship. Given these complexities, the characters as ideas (or expressions of ideas), as in Perazzo’s endeavour with the characters in Surface Tension, are themselves complex. For example, the name ‘Miymue’ ‘can be translated to mean either three dreams, or dream number three’ (West 2011: 39). Complexity becomes a Russian Doll of complexity. Sociopolitical change, married to an environmental awareness, is anticipated, nudged into being. However, rather than drawing out this reading here, we will return to West’s story in our conclusion as an example of how the ‘event’ itself might work.

The text and the world

A problem with the analysis of much sociopolitical fiction is that it fails to convincingly explain how the ideas or impact of any given text might result in change in the real world. Writing of Julia Kristeva’s theory of the potential social impact of avant-garde writing, Toril Moi states that
[Kristeva] seems essentially to argue that the disruption of the subject, the sujet en procès displayed in these texts, prefigures or parallels revolutionary disruptions of society. But her only argument in support of this contention is the rather lame one of comparison or homology. Nowhere are we given a specific analysis of the actual social or political structures that would produce such a homologous relationship between the subjective and the social (1985: 171).

We want to avoid the problem in our work that Moi notices in Kristeva’s; to deliberately ask, how is the impact of the ‘assembled’ idea meant to translate into change in the sociopolitical domain? No-one should simply assume this will happen.

This is where we need the notion of the ‘event’. While the assemblage has provided us with a way of thinking about complexities of the construction of character, and by extension ideas, the event provides us with a way of thinking about the assembled complexity of different orders of being: the text and the world. The event is, in a way, the assemblage maximised. In this, it allows for the assembled ideas of the text to filter into the world. Against Charles Whiting, whose argument rests on an un-assembled division of text and world (what he calls the ‘field of literature’ and the ‘sphere of reality’), our thesis is that the event merges the greatest intensities of world and text. We call this an ‘event-assemblage’. In contrast, Whiting notes that ‘just as the question of engagement is outside of literature, so is the question of [literary] value entirely within’ (1948: 87).

The ‘event’ of the idea as the passageway from text to world (part 1)

In answer to a question about how the concept of the event in The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque (1995) differs from events as the media might portray them, Gilles Deleuze responds

I don’t think the media have much capacity or inclination to grasp an event. In the first place, they often show a beginning or end, whereas even a short or instantaneous event is something going on…my favorite sentence in the book is “There’s a concert tonight.” In Leibniz, in Whitehead, there are only events. What Leibniz calls a predicate is nothing to do with an attribute, but an event.... (1995: 159, 160)

Assemblages within the work of fiction, which grow character, and events within the fiction itself for that matter, could be thought of as creating a world of (often un-attributed or de-attributed) threads that become actualised, woven together or ravelled—tied into a knot, as it were. Deleuze uses the term ‘knot’ himself in relation to what he calls the ideal event:

What is an ideal event? It is a singularity—or rather a set of singularities or of singular points.... Singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling.... The singularity ... is essentially pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual. (2003: 52).

What happens in the space occupied by the writer, fiction and the worldly reader, with a sociopolitical but non-didactic work? To think of fiction as an event is also to think of complexity.
In terms of ambiguity, fiction written arising from passion of expression, but with the intention not to instruct, not to be didactic, but to raise questions, can be understood perhaps as an event of fiction on Deleuze's terms of the use of the event. One shade of meaning of the event for Deleuze is in terms of participation—for example, as in a concert (1993: 81). From this perspective, the 'eventing' writer sets up the conditions for 'the concert', for an event of fiction to occur. The reader is invited (to push out the metaphor) to attend the concert.

In the 'non-didactic didactic' text as event, the event is contrived only to the extent that one occurs. It is open rather than closed. The situations are not forced, the characters are not stereotypes. Information is not transmitted as though from a lecture. This is not fiction with predictable intentions or outcomes; rather, we can speak of friable events, of knots with frayed edges. Here, the text of assemblages itself is the event. The text is like a singular invitation.

'Shame' as instance of the event (part 2)

Given what we have just noticed in Deleuze's philosophy of the event, how can we now see this in application around sociopolitical novels (like Surface Tension and Three Dollars) as an aspect of writing in contact with the world? From this point on, we refine Deleuze's notion of the event to equate, not to the text as a whole (as an entire 'concert' of words, for example), but only to certain parts of it ... favourite sentences.... Here then, at least potentially, is a different sort of passageway of change from the text to sociopolitical reality.

In our readings above of texts like The Jungle and The Iron Heel, we dwelt on the writing along their margins, on cover blurbs for example. We thought of these writings as the places where the text was presented to the world, sometimes perhaps misleadingly (for however a text is presented, its readership can always lead its meaning another way). Now, we would like to re-present these same moments of writing (like author's notes, titles and thesis proposals) as the evidence of the 'fraying' of the event: the 'knot', 'bottleneck' or 'point of fusion' between the text as text and the text as part of the world that it relates to and is received into by readers (Deleuze 2003: 52). The difference we want to underscore is between the text as an assemblage of characters, ideas and intra-textual events (the event part 1), on the one hand, and the text as an assemblage of (ultimately orbital) multiple layers of text (the event part 2) on the other hand.

'Shame' shows this very clearly, for the way it contains examples not just of assembled ideas (in the 'disguise', for example, of characters), but of instances of the event as the difference between the layers of discourse of the text. In the 'writings within writing' of the following passages, there is a sense of texts being presented outwards...as if to the world (the event part 2):

An academic post had been established by a private sponsor of the University of California for my father, a 'respected expert in the neuropsychology of animals', as the author's note in one of his books said.... (West: 30)

The woman behind the counter read over what I gave to her, moving her lips slightly, before handing me my pink receipt: 'I intend to research ... the Japanese social movements
opposed to the presence of US military bases in Okinawa and on the Mainland.’ (West: 33)

Posters condemning the radical views of an Australian philosopher about to begin an American lecture tour were pasted onto every bollard; Peter Singer’s name obscured advertisements for the forthcoming tour by the Rolling Stones. I wondered if somewhere, buried deep within the accumulated layers of mouldy paper and crusts of glue, there was still—hidden from sight—a poster with a crude version of the Japanese character for ‘criminal’, in blood-red strokes. (West: 32)

Upon re-reading ‘Shame’, the author, West, was surprised to notice just how many examples there are of language instances (the event part 2), detached from larger language instances. Similarly, the title, even the author’s name in its orbital detachment from this or that text, might be the formation of the event (part 2) of production/reception within the sociopolitical world.

This is not mere homology (recalling Toril Moi’s critique of Julia Kristeva) but a metaphoric and also material/literal way in which texts (containing ‘non-didactic didacticisms’) might stimulate crucibles of social change without relying solely on the text in itself and as a whole as the event. Little things like Miyume’s thesis statement trigger, or suggest, the larger operations of ‘Shame’ as a passageway of ‘non-didactic didacticisms’ into the world.

It is salient that often these smaller instances of language are heavily imbricated, within ‘Shame’, with a material, literal, we might even say, sociopolitical setting. The following extract, for example, contains its own impulse towards sociopolitical (specifically gender-based) change:

One year in Tokyo, my brother and I each took home an envelope, addressed in strictest confidence to our parents, from the office of the principal of our local high school. Inside was a form of report card, soliciting a parental comment on the most ‘favourable or positive qualities’ of the student named in blue ink at the top of the ruled page. I found out later, from a teacher either malicious or foolish, that the comment on me comprised only a single word: ‘obedient’. The whole rest of the page was left blank. (West: 33)

At the limits of assemblage is where events of all sorts might begin, as if little events of discourse were gathered across the entire surface of the greater text as event (parts 1 and 2 combined). Where didactic ideas of sociopolitical change, in fiction, often claim a totality of the event of an idea, writing itself inevitably undoes any such claim to totality. In some ways, the event must and should be always between the text and the world, travelling between these finally-not-commensurate spaces, only fitfully didactic, but didactic for all that, teacherly—non-didactic didacticisms....

WORKS CITED:

Bellow, S 2015 *There Is Simply Too Much to Think About: Collected Nonfiction* (ed. Benjamin Taylor), New York: Viking


Colebrook, C 2002 *Gilles Deleuze*, London: Routledge

De Kretser, M 2012 *Questions of Travel*, Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin

  – 2003 *The Logic of Sense* (First published 1990 by Athlone Press), London: Continuum


Orwell, G 1987 *The Road to Wigan Pier* (first published by Victor Gollancz 1937), Middlesex: Penguin


Perazzo, C *Surface Tension*, novel-in-progress

Perlman, E 1998 *Three Dollars*, Nth Sydney: Random House


Singh, J 2013 *Helium*, New York: Bloomsbury


West, P 2011 *The World Swimmers*, Mt Lawley, WA: The International Centre for Landscape and Language for CREATEC, Edith Cowan University, 29-39


**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Cathryn Perazzo is a PhD candidate at Deakin University. For her practice-led PhD, she is working on a novel and exegesis. Her research interests include creative writing theory and practice-led research. Cathryn's other writing interests span poetry, short story and life writing. She has published short works of both fiction and non-fiction. Cathryn is a member of Poets of Odd: a group of poets with publishing credits who have also jointly edited and produced an anthology of their work, *The cat and the philosopher went for a walk*.

Dr Patrick West is a Senior Lecturer in Professional and Creative Writing at Deakin University, Melbourne. His short-story collection, *The world swimmers*, was published by The International Centre for Landscape and Language, Edith Cowan University, Perth, in 2011. *The Australian*'s reviewer wrote that *The world swimmers* contains 'incredible insight into the human condition throughout.' In 2012 Patrick wrote and co-produced the 27 minute fictional-documentary film *Sisters of the sun* (directed by Simon Wilmot).