Saying it like it is      Audrey Windram

The ‘its’ that engross our lives and which we might want to declare the ‘is’ of, can leave us incommunicado to much of the world, because the language of ‘it’ is not the language of everyday speech, or perhaps the layers of it have become too closely packed for easy access, so that what we want to share may not be sharable. As well, our world is divided by cultures and their languages.

Within a culture, science, religion, poetry – (all the arts) – dreams, allegories, beliefs, insights – many ways of seeing and potentially saying - can be cordoned within their perhaps inexplicable language. Yet sometimes, without knowledge of that language, intuition, empathy, and respect can help us know what seems hidden within the language of the ‘other’. Sincerity makes a bridge.

But then again some language may be specially designed for ambiguity.

On communication      Tom Windram

The exchange between the personal autobiographical and the expert can be as important as the exchange between compassion and reason, and also connects to how science is talked about. The public discourse of science is seemingly caught behind an unresolvable conflict. It functions both as expert purveyors of truth, separated from the common man with a particular language - whose statements must be accepted on a faith value; and also, as with Catalyst, a fun
and important thing that is seen as 'not too difficult' and encourages people to 'get involved'. The problem with the former is that it misses the fact that there are often areas of uncertainty inside what is known (as well as removing the question of how what is known is known to begin with) - and can lead to many people deciding science is being wilfully obscure, and caught up with separate interests. In short, people can then refuse to make the leap of faith and decry science, instead looking to other areas to guide them or make sense of their lives (homoeopathy etc).

The problem with the second style is that it reduces science, and thus naturally reduces the emotional value people might associate with it or its findings. You can imagine a scientist who has spent ten years researching the immune system cringing at crude descriptions such as, ‘So basically stress damages our brain and can make us depressed’. Cringing because the more you simplify, the less information gets conveyed, and the more it seems like someone’s life’s work can just be summed up in a throw-away line. This can also make science seem simpler than it is, and lead people to an incorrect method of understanding.

I don't know how to deal with it, but I think it might come from a shared language, and this isn't entirely sciences fault, it's the publics fault as well. Science can be quite hard, and it's certainly not for everyone - but at least if there was a shared and open discussion on some of these points with a shared language that didn't reduce the complexity too much, then people would cease to see it as either a colourful fun facts machine, or a suspicious 'behind the curtains' practice.

Drugs research, I think is of particular concern in this regard - as the biochemical mechanisms of the body are so alien to most people that drugs are framed as merely 'It changes my body somehow', which can cause a lot of distrust - along with the evil corporate structure of those companies - and thus see any side-effects, real or imagined as proof that the drugs are damaging.

The paranoiac public notion that vaccines can cause autism is part of this, and part of the divide in language leading to intense distrust to the point that it becomes deleterious. Not that I'm saying all these drugs or vaccinations are perfect, or without their flaws (drug resistance is an impossibly terrifying problem, brought to us by over prescribing antibiotics, and drugs do have side effects) - but just that, I feel if the language and logic behind these drugs were more understood, people would be less knee-jerk in their hostility (modern medical research has improved so drastically in the last 60 years that it's often quite elegant and almost beautiful: Targeting a particular enzyme in a com-
plex system to prevent a particular protein being made, or silencing a single gene.

Further, this problem connects to things like global warming, where science is seen as so distant from people, with scientists babbling away to themselves, that they can be ignored at will. The idea that these people are just professionals who have dedicated their lives to furthering our understanding of the world - has been almost completely lost.

I'd like to comment on stem cells, because that is an area of medical research that I feel has been quite hard done by with this discourse and divide. It has been the public's involvement in university ethics committees and general public sentiment that has hampered stem cell research in many countries for over a decade now. This has been particularly distressing to those people in the field, especially for those with loved ones who might well benefit - because though research is still preliminary, it does seem like stem cells could revolutionise our medical treatments, and fundamentally transform people's lives. It could theoretically serve as a cure for all kinds of things that are far beyond us now - from strokes, to broken backs, to completely removing the need for 'waiting for a suitable donor' for any organ. The cognitive effects of old age, or drinking - could equally be treated, as could almost any disorder.

This seems like I'm just popular science talking it up - but this fits with my understanding of it, and I've spoken to a few people in the area, and they do, tentatively, seem to be that excited about it.

There is work going on in South Australia currently that is looking at the effects of introducing stem cells from under our teeth into the brain. It's all quite crude at the moment, as it has just started, and they've yet to really master the act of encouraging the stem cell to entirely become the cells they want - but even at this stage, just the act of crudely 'injecting them' into the brain and basically letting them do what they want has demonstrated effective recovery rates from stroke many times greater than years of cognitive therapy.

Who knows where we might be with this research had lobby groups not swayed public opinion all those years ago, and I consider it to be quietly upsetting that people still see this area in the negative light that was shone on it at the time.

It's all becoming increasingly important because we are rapidly reaching a point, with: genetic modification, stem cells, telomeres (a sequence of repetitive junk DNA that gets broken off every time a cell divides, placing a natural limit on how long we can live for), cloning and integration with technology that raises the possibility of fundamentally altering our way of life. Unfortu-
nately these things, both in how complex, alien and terrifying they sound to many people, and in how they might question the fundamental premise of what it means to be human, might well lead us into making an emotive mis-step in the future. Knowledge must be popularised, or at the very least, the language of understanding must be spread - so people can more actively participate.

Influences On Depression  Tom Windram

Depression can be the end result of placing too much stress on your mental system, rather than just a lack of serotonin (though serotonin does seem to relate quite strongly). Lifestyle factors, differences with money/class etc, can cause stress which will effect other systems in a number of ways.

Stress is conveyed by corticosteroids which will stimulate your amygdala, the part of your brain dealing with fear and aggression (fight/flight). It will also 'down-regulate' (interact with in such a way as to cause there to be a reduced number by changing gene expression, certain receptors, including some serotonin receptors) This, and other effects of this chemical will actually then change neural genesis (creation of new neurons, preventing current ones from dying) causing cells to die in your hippocampus (memory centre) and pre frontal cortex (abstract thought, self control), but encouraging them in your amygdala (fear centre). This will place a 'burden' on your brain that might lead to depression if it becomes too heavy, or if the system gets too stressed. Individual differences in our brains will make us more or less at risk, depending on how robust the areas are, and thus how able to cope with such things as the burden of stress.

It is interesting to consider, that even aside from a chemical feedback loop, you can readily see on such a larger systems level - how depression, once encountered, becomes horribly difficult to rid yourself of. Prolonged stress at work can, through these mechanisms, alter energy levels, memory and emotional processing, with each alteration being partially self reinforcing - as such alterations make it harder for the individual to 'talk themselves' out of it. In fact people with severe depression often seem to actually present with dementia like symptoms, being unable to remember things and unable to solve simple problems - so severe can be the cognitive effects. Furthermore, stress will also affect the immune system, suppressing it, which is why people often feel so sick as soon as they go on holiday. You stop being stressed for a mo-
ment and your immune system suddenly kicks into overdrive, attacking whatever infection it perceives you as having. Even too much stress and no break can cause this immune response - and this is also important because the immune response has quite severe impacts on the brain. The immune system will take tryptophan and turn it into other things (not serotonin), including some neurotoxins, killing parts of the brain, and affecting global functioning. In fact some people have even gone so far as to argue that depression is deeply connected to the immune system, and is in fact a chronic response. In evolutionary terms, it makes sense for those that are sick to stay inside and not expend too much energy doing things (because they need to conserve their energy to get well). This sounds very similar to depression, and perhaps you can see it as, stress on the mental system getting to such a point that the brain thinks something is actually attacking it - so it initiates an immune response, that doesn't succeed in anything except stressing the system out more - leading to yet more of an immune response and inflammation. All these things can basically lead to the brain ending up, almost at war with itself, due to a maladaptive aspect of our evolution when confronted with the difficulties of the modern world.

_The Meaning of Treason_  Joe Carli

In the closing days of the Second World War, the name "Lord Haw Haw" was synonymous with the cry of ‘traitor!’ because a traitor in those days was seen as a clear-cut thing...in fact, wrote Rebecca West in _The Meaning of Treason_ Penguin 1965 ‘...by broadcasting between ... the eighteenth day of September 1939 and on other divers days thereafter, and between that day and the second day of July 1940, being then to wit, on the said several days, a person owing allegiance to our Lord the King...' It was in fact the case for the prosecution that a person obtaining a passport placed himself thereby under the protection of the crown and owed it allegiance until the passport expired: a clear case of loyalty to the crown, i.e. His Majesty; the King.

Rebecca West makes some very interesting observations. She shows how the modern media has played its part in the dissemination of propaganda. ‘Never before have people known the voice of one they had never seen as well as if he had been a husband or brother or a close friend ; and had they foreseen such a miracle they could not have imagined that this familiar unknown would speak to them only to prophesy their death and ruin.’ Of Wil-
liam Joyce, (Lord Haw Haw), she continues......’He was not only alarming, he was ugly. He opened a vista into a mean life. He always spoke as if he were better fed, and better clothed than we were...

The above portrayal is an example of the malicious persuasion that manipulates a people...a people hungry for simplicity of policy, for entertainment, contentment and insulation from the harsh realities of the world on their doorstep. It is the propaganda style of those who have in many cases helped cause those very disasters that bring trouble to our doorstep, or are trying to stop programs that could alleviate and soften such events in the future. Such people give voice to a meanness of spirit and ugliness of heart and open the door to cruel intent....THAT is a betrayal of the trust given to the mainstream media, a trust that was bestowed upon those called to shine a light on duplicitous behaviour that can ruin a society, NOT to collude with reckless abandon in that very behaviour.

I give the last words on such a tawdry subject to Ariel Gonzales on Rebecca West's book; "The Meaning of Treason reminds us that sometimes the worst betrayal is the trading of values for the illusion of safety." THAT is the meaning of treason!

A small pebble Joe Carli

I crossed the Murray this morning...the Mighty Murray...on the ferry at Swan Reach and I picked up a stone from the one side, carried it across on the ferry and placed it on the other side. I did it because of a story my mother told me years ago that I just remembered as I drove up to the ferry...

My mother grew up near the river. She worked as a house-maid at both Punyelroo and Portee stations near Swan Reach. Many times she was called to accompany the Lady of the House to cross the river on a flat-topped punt, used for ferrying supplies across the river there at the station. She told me of an old German hand there at Portee who, whenever he had to cross the river, would pick up a small stone, a pebble, carry it across and place it on the other side....my mother asked him why he did it....he was at first reluctant to tell her. But she persisted...

“Well, girlie”... (that’s what they all called young women out there then)....”it is my own little thing...I think of the small stone as my soul,...you see, I cannot swim. and so I take the stone, carry it, and if or when I reach safely the solid ground on the other side, I leave it dzair....when I come back, I do the
same"
“What happens if the boat starts to sink?” my mother asked.
“Dzen I will try to throw it with all my might, to the other side....and I think if it reaches there, then I feel I too will reach there...”
“And if it doesn’t?”
“Dzen, I think I will be lost in the waters of the river...”
This morning I crossed the river and I picked up a stone and carried it across and placed it on the other side...I thought of that old man and I thought of my mother, in hospital now, on palliative care for pulmonary fibrosis...she will never again come to cross the river...so I thought of it as me, her son, her bloodline, carrying HER soul safely across the waters...I don’t know what made me think of it after all these years...but I just did...must be a pagan thing I suppose and since she carried my burgeoning soul for nine months, could I not at least carry her soul for a couple of hundred metres?
We arrived safely...

**Coalition of common sense**

Just when we’ve got the world media looking at us and world leaders visiting for the G20 Summit we decide to provide another spot of entertainment. The Palmer United Party is disrupted by the dummy spitting of its most outspoken member. Tasmanian Jacqui Lambie’s conflict between her conscience and party’s policies led to her dismissal from the PUP cabinet. Particularly, the pay rates of service personnel and the refusal of government to protect the interests of investors from bad practices of financial advisors has widened the Lambie support base, resulting in the formation of the “Coalition of Common Sense”. A coalition of common sense!!! Is that legal?
Meanwhile, on channel 3, our second national television station has been airing a short series called *First Encounter* whereby six Australians with little knowledge of our Indigenous people and various degrees of prejudice have visited Redfern (suburban Sydney), small depressed settlements, prisons and schools, and shared in the spiritual experience of Land to which the people belong. The interactions have been emotional and enlightening. Common sense and honesty was definitely deeply the language of the series.
Difference

I am not like you
Rather, this brain
Where my mind roams
Is as a new estate halted in progress,
Its developer bankrupt
Through no fault of his own.

Some roads continuous,
others dead ends,
Unfinished paths with muddy gaps
Too wide to leap.

So it is in my head –
Incomplete networks
Holed with failed synapse
And unlit neuron.
I must wander there,
At times pathless, misunderstood,
Forming lines and perceptions
That are not always to my advantage.

It’s what I live with,
I cannot be like you –
Stop expecting it!

Jonty Whitehead
for Simon – a glimpse into his world.
above: story teller and transcriber
	right: Dance Excentrix Glade performance

River Scene and Unseen
painting by Audrey Windram
BALI BOMBING 2002

Tell it like it is
No sentimental poesie
No pretty rhyme
Not this time.

Cruel and forced, the initiation
Into hellish global community.

Wail for the death of son or daughter!
Despair for the loss of friend or lover!

Maimed and burned, a world
Changed forever in their agony,
In stark reality of fear.

A small thing the bomb
But forged from old hatred
And fierce intent for retribution.

Bring swords to cleave this coil of violence!

Offer requiem for
The unconsenting dead.

Jonty Whitehead
Four women lay in individual beds in the hospital ward. The beds had crisp white linen, plump pillows and pretty foliage-green coverlets. Each bed was surrounded by a modesty curtain which was drawn when one of the women was panned, cathetered, or sanitary napkinned. Cheerful, attentive and very capable nurses attended the women regularly. The nurses brought wheeled contraptions which they used to check vital signs. Patients’ personal effects were stored neatly in bedside cupboards. All was order, cleanliness, predictability and godliness.

One of the patients was me. My left arm had snapped and I was admitted for overnight observation. My ward companions were a hysterectomy, a TIA, and a knee-replacement. This is how the nurses spoke to each other about us.

After lunch, the ward was infiltrated by overall-clad fellows with screwdrivers. They removed the bedside cupboards and the curtains, leaving behind scatterings of sawdust. A lady with a checked headscarf vacuumed these up. Someone else mopped the floor.

Two more beds and their occupants, a pneumonia and a hypertension, were immediately wheeled in. There were now six of us, three along each side of the ward. The cupboards had gone, but our overnight bags sat tidily on chairs by our beds.

By mid-afternoon, orderlies were taking our bags off the chairs and were putting them on the floor. We were assisted out of our beds and onto the chairs. All the beds were wheeled out. Ten pallets were put down on the floor. We six, along with a fractured hip, a facial burn, a spontaneous abortion and a blocked saliva gland were helped onto the pallets. The chairs were removed. Our bags stood on the floor by our pillows. We were now ten, five along each side of the ward.

Before dark, we were rolled off the pallets and replaced onto towels on the floor. A concussion, a cracked pelvis, an epileptic, a morphine OD, a severed finger, a suspected heart attack, a lacerated leg, a delusional schizophrenic, and a slipped disk joined us. In this one ward, there were now nineteen patients lying on towels on the floor.
Injured women kept coming; various cancers, victims of violence, a pulmonary embolism and a kidney dialysis had squeezed into the ward. Our towels were pulled from beneath us, folded lengthwise so that they were half as wide. Now, twice as many of us could be squeezed in. We were lined up along all walls like canned sardines on our narrow bits of towelling. I got pushed into a back corner. There I found a dehydrated toad covered in fluff. His extremities were hard and dry, his eyes shut, but he was making some attempt to move his legs. I got to my feet, and leaving my towel in the corner, took the poor dried toad to a bathroom and gently immersed him in lake-warm water. Soon he’d plumped up, and was trying to escape. I carried him past near-empty wards with many unoccupied beds, out of a side door then placed him on a patch of soil. Working his hind legs, he tunnelled himself backwards and was soon covered with dirt.

When I got back to the ward, my bit of towel in the corner had another occupant on it. I squeezed into a small space on the linoleum in the middle of the ward and lay with no bedding under me or over me. I felt cold and couldn’t sleep.

A siren blared. A smug supervisor appeared in the doorway and yelled that it was a fire drill and we must all evacuate. Irritated, several of us threw our pillows at him. Deftly he caught them and instructed an assistant to take them away for storage. He looked very pleased with himself. He’d just relieved us of our pillows. We left the ward and assembled in a courtyard.

In time, we were allowed back inside. On our way back to the ward, we noticed ill assorted bedding on a shelf. We grabbed armfuls of soiled blankets, threw them onto the floor, then shuffled ourselves among them, wriggling close to each other like individual fish in a school which had been trapped in shallow water. Our personal possessions had disappeared.

I tried to settle for sleep amongst moaning patients on stained and damp rugs. Sick, injured and bleeding women continued to be herded into the ward. One of them was Di, someone I knew.

“What is this?” she was saying loudly. “Why are you lot lying here in this bedlam? Why doesn’t somebody say anything? Why are you all taking this lying down?” On and on she went in a strident tone. Clearly, there was no
possibility of sleep.
“Psst!” I hissed. “Come here for a minute. I’ll tell you something. Lie down and listen.”
With a pained look on her face, she made a space for herself and eased her bandaged body down onto the dirty rags next to me.
“What?” she queried sceptically.
“We are public patients; we’re all sick, weak and vulnerable. But, if you’re up for it I’ve got a plan.”
I told her about the near empty wards with unoccupied beds in them. “Follow me. I’ll lead you there. Then just get into a bed and lie with the covers up to your eyes. We’ll get a bit of sleep before they work out what to do about us.”
And that’s what we did. The quiet and personal space was blissful. I slept long and deeply. Nobody turfed us out.
I became aware of dawn light. The artificial fluorescent lamps of hospital were gone. And there were magpies warbling cheerfully outside my window. Which wasn’t quite right.
“Eh! What are magpies doing here?” It was very strange.
This is what mornings at home sounded like. There was also the smell of home; a hint of vanilla, the perfume that permeates my room.
Puzzled, I opened my eyes and found myself . . . in my own bed . . . in my own home!
I had woken from a strange dream. My brain was playing me tricks.
The truth is that I had been admitted for surgery as a public patient to the local hospital where I had a quiet private room and was treated like a queen with utmost kindness and courtesy. The external circumstances were just as good as you could possibly wish for.
Inside myself however, I was besieged by pain, insomnia and the unpleasant side-effects of drugs which were supposed to lessen the risk of complications. I also suffered the indignity of being bedridden and of being temporarily helpless. Internally, I smarted with impatience. I wanted to escape my situation. No doubt, cortisol, the stress hormone was pumping through the system, and this was not going to help the healing process.
My trusty brain came to the rescue. It facilitated a dream where external cir-
cumstances were pretty well intolerable. But in the dream, a sick toad gave me the empowering opportunity to witness a creature return to health, and the normality, for the toad, of dirt. If a humble toad could do it, then so could I. Rescuing the toad also gave me the opportunity, in the dream, to recognise that there were empty beds close by, and to take note where they were. In the dream, we women had the great triumph of throwing pillows at a tormentor. What power this gives to chuck something with all our might at someone who bullies us. We had the solidarity of doing it together. We lost our pillows, but we certainly showed the oppressor what we thought of him. In the dream, bedding was denied us, but we took things into our own hands and helped ourselves to blankets. Another empowering action. And finally, a dream companion appeared with whom to plot. Together we escaped our impossible situation and gained quietness, privacy and comfort. I’ve no doubt, that at the conclusion of my dream, my body had dissolved a whole barrel of stress, enabling rapid physical recovery and the maintenance of a buoyant spirit. All hail to our intriguing, amazing brains.

Choosing the Words Lesley Williams

There are so many things that this pen and these words could choose to say, and sometimes, most times, there is so much in a day to choose from, a multitude of riches and blessings, in the form of, say, roses, and sunshine, water in the birdbath - birds in the birdbath - friends who take the time to hold you in their hearts, the things you do that are so much part of your being they say how alive you feel, so that you feel as though you will always be doing them, even if you are no longer … and the people who rally around to support when life throws a curve-ball and expects you to meet the challenge, and blessings of words, patterns of life and the journey that unfolds, and then all at once you are still and words drop away into silence … which you cannot maintain because your hand and your heart want to write to the end of the page, because this is what they do, even if they find it impossible to choose what to say.
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"To communicate is a powerful urge, and we find many channels to convey meaning, and find connection. Following the traditions of other cultures, the dancers from Dance Excentrix have developed a passion and commitment to honour the mature dancer, and seek to propagate the legitimacy, physical and metaphysical wisdom, and raw truth of the elders amongst us."