

**Jay Stowe**  
**Essay**  
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*By way of the virtual universe, Germaine Greer (The Feminist), Peter Piper (The Advertising Executive, who in a past life stole people's children while playing his flute and dancing though villages and now "steals" children through different means) and Clive Hamilton (The Voice of Reason) find themselves in the Lounge Bar at Fawlty Towers.<sup>1</sup>*

*(Other characters appearing include Basil Fawlty (legendary for his sledgehammer sarcasm) and the Major, along with other houseguests.)*

Basil Fawlty: Evening Major. Check the global warming barometer would you? Jolly hot for this time of year. The usual then Major?

Germaine: Clive, how good to see you. How's your work going with convincing the Howard Government that they really should be doing something about greenhouse gas emissions and climate change?

Clive. Ah yes. Hi Germaine. You can imagine. The usual, it's not really happening, not in the national interest, America isn't doing anything so why should we?

Germaine: You know they've released an action plan for climate change?<sup>2</sup>

Clive. Yeah. Always good on rhetoric our politicians. Isn't that Peter Piper over there?

Germaine: Unfortunately.... yes. A member of that ignorant patriarchal media circus who've managed to pervert feminism into a marketing ploy.

*Clive waves to Peter and signals for him to join himself and Germaine.*

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Television. UK

<sup>2</sup> Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (2004).

Clive: C'mon Germaine, he's not such a bad bloke really. Just because he chose advertising as a career doesn't make him a demon. Bet he'll shout the drinks for the rest of the night though you know how he loves big noting himself.

Germaine: (under her breath) I suppose I'm expected to be polite to this.....ahhh, Hello Peter. How nice to see you.

Peter: Germaine, (*nods in her direction*), Clive, it's been a while. Those figures of yours from the Institute<sup>3</sup> on national consumption<sup>4</sup> are pretty interesting. Good indicator of successful advertising don't you think?

Major: Consumption Fawltly? A disease that is considered avoidable at all costs I thought.

Peter: Novel that, (*gesturing toward the wall at the end of the bar*) a global warming barometer. (*Still laughing*) I mean, how serious is it really Clive?

Clive: Well Peter, there's been endless papers written on it. If Kyoto had been given some backbone in the early to mid nineties we may not have such a serious problem on our hands. Glacier melts, warmer than average temperatures, I mean, the death toll in Paris last summer should have been enough to frighten the hell out of everybody<sup>5</sup>. Let alone the costs to the natural world. Whales, polar bears, biodiversity across the planet. It's serious and it's urgent.

Germaine: And may I add Peter, no thanks to your lot for running campaigns to denigrate the science attached to this business.

Peter: Yeah well, what would a feminist know about climate change? More drinks here thanks Basil. Geeez, it's hot.

Germaine: Actually, plenty Peter. I have to say, I have been so incensed by your business, and I mean that in a collective sense, and the way you managed to subvert the very ideas of feminism, and how you managed to miss the message completely, I've deliberately avoided entering any discourse with you.

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<sup>3</sup> The Australia Institute. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Hamilton, Denniss and Baker. 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Times Online.

But here you are. So just for starters Peter, feminism is about freedom for everyone from the patriarchal structures<sup>6</sup> that are cruel to everyone. Somehow or other the message got perverted to mean equality with men in a social system that has so many flaws it really needs a complete overhaul. Somehow feminist principles turned women into paid up members of the market system<sup>7</sup>.

As far as the global warming and climate change goes, feminist principles of freedom and equity for all would include the equitable use and distribution of resources. As opposed to "girl power" through consumption spending!

Peter: But you know as well as I do, that consumption has filled the spiritually empty existence of the modern world, delivered a reason for being. A way to claim an identity, to make ones presence felt.....mmmmm, to be noticed in the world<sup>8</sup>. I'd even go so far as to say it delivers a sense of belonging. Hey Basil, have you got the game for the Rugby World Cup on live TV tonight?

Basil Fawly: "Fraid not. I've got a deal going with Westfield down the road so all we're telecasting is the shopping channel. Tough luck. (*under his breath*) You would've thought an advertising executive could only be thrilled with that.

Clive: Yes Peter. Sure. I could run a survey and ask people who they are/what they are. I'd get answers like, Christian, Buddhist, Atheist ectcetera, but I doubt if anyone would identify himself or herself as a "consumerist". Geeez, It is bloody hot.....more ice in the drinks please Basil.

Germaine: But that's part of the whole problem. Consumerism is so obscure. It appeals to the unconscious. People for the most part, don't know why they consume as they do at all. One of the things feminism is trying to achieve is a raising of consciousness<sup>9</sup>.

Peter: Ohhh, and don't I know it. That is why advertising works so well. It's so easy to manipulate people. And I have to say, that the "new women" that resulted as part of the feminist movement really gave us a whole new demographic.

Not only that, we understood before anyone that the counter culture which appeared to be coming from a closer to the earth position,

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<sup>6</sup> Hooks, p4.

<sup>7</sup> Greer in Hamilton. P113.

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton pp106-107.

<sup>9</sup> Hooks, p11.

you know, the hippie thing, was **really** on about changing the social restrictions that were holding back capitalism<sup>10</sup>. The "counter culture" provided a whole new world for marketing. Consumerism, here we come. Hehehehe.

But on the consciousness-raising bit, do you mean feminism buys into Descartes dualism<sup>11</sup>? My take would've been feminism rejected dualism.

Basil Fawlty: Descartes before deshorse....hahaha. Haven't you antipodeans (*raising his voice*) figured out you can not solve the problem until you have determined your theoretical context?

Clive: Despite his madness, sometimes Basil makes sense. I have to say Peter, you never cease to surprise me. You're saying that you successfully turned the feminist movement into a marketing campaign? And yet you can identify Cartesean theory as part of the western cultural construct posing difficulties to the feminist message?

Even so, the greatest calamity facing us all<sup>12</sup>, is climate change. Something not on anyone's radar pre-nineteen seventy. Aside from that, it's clearly not consumerism per se, we've been at it since we lived in caves. The real problem is the pattern and effects of consumerism.<sup>13</sup> One of the things we must do is reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transfer energy production to clean, renewable sources. The technology is here now<sup>14</sup>.

Peter: You're not the only ones who've studied philosophy you know....mmmmm, but will that, the transfer to cleaner energy systems effect consumption levels?

Germaine: Is there any hope?

Clive: Hard to say, just because you use clean energy doesn't necessarily mean you'll get less production and consumption of anything. The other problems associated with waste and waste management, over consumption of a whole host of things, including food<sup>15</sup>, relate to a whole different set of environmental and social problems.

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<sup>10</sup> Hamilton. P111.

<sup>11</sup> Collinson. D. 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Nordhaus T and Shellberger M. 2004

<sup>13</sup> Shah, A. Behind Consumption and Consumerism.

<sup>14</sup> Worldviewofglobalwarming.

<sup>15</sup> Hamilton, Denniss and Baker. 2005.

Mind you, the entire approach to economic theory has gone way off the rails<sup>16</sup>. What's wrong with a stationary state? What's wrong with a healthy capitalist economy that functions successfully but is not obsessed with unsustainable, year on year "growth"<sup>17</sup>?

Peter: Eeeaaaarrghhh.....that Clive, is tantamount to heresy!

Germaine: Oh, get a grip Peter. If, as mine host says, we need a theoretical context to solve a problem, and I quite agree, then feminism is probably **the** theory for our times<sup>18</sup>. You'll probably have problems with this Peter, having subverted feminist theory as cleverly and cynically as you have, but one of the things you need to understand is that feminism is incompatible with consumerism. Feminism is about liberation, about being true to oneself, aside from putting an end to sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression<sup>19</sup>, while consumerism simply creates an artificial sense of who we are. Consumerism deliberately and insidiously divorces us from our relationship with the natural world<sup>20</sup>. Divorces us from the knowledge and reality that we are Peter, after all, animals. What your mob have managed to create is the "life style feminist". Promoting clothing made in sweatshops in Asia by young girls so western women "can be themselves" hardly fits with feminist theory!<sup>21</sup>

Clive: This is all very well, but can we get back to the point. You're right Germaine, the separateness of humanity from the natural world is a big part of the problem we're facing. David Suzuki, along with others, has been going on about it for decades. You're probably both aware of the UNFCCC<sup>22</sup> and the ICCT<sup>23</sup>. This think tank has come up with a new approach to get the USA and Australia involved in a parallel approach to Kyoto while it allows for the power brokers of the day to save face. One could even think in one's more optimistic moments that they could do better than the Kyoto protocols and emission trading schemes.

Peter: Come on Clive, not with George W in the pilot seat. Remember...? "the American way of life is not negotiable"<sup>24</sup>.

*Just at that moment, Peter Piper's mobile phone rings.*

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<sup>16</sup> Hamilton pp8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton. Pp8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Morgan, R. p8. *Light Bulbs, Radishes and the Politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. in Speaking Radically

<sup>19</sup> Hook, pviii.

<sup>20</sup> Suzuki. P215.

<sup>21</sup> Hamilton p115.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

<sup>23</sup> International Climate Change Task Force.

<sup>24</sup> Evans, p126.

Peter: S'cuse me a mo'. This must be important. Only the financial manager has this number. (*Answers phone.*) Hello Gerard.

Gerard: Bad news I'm afraid Peter. The Swiss skiing holiday has been cancelled.....which means, since the holiday is part of the advertising contract....arrhhmmmm.....the contract has been cancelled. Which means, this year's profit projections have just fallen by forty nine and a half percent. Repeat, forty nine and a half percent!

Peter: I hear you, I hear you. I'm not deaf you know. What's going on?

Gerard: Glacier melts apparently.<sup>25</sup> They're blaming this damn global warming business. They've tried covering or wrapping the glaciers to save the ski industry but it seems it was a waste of time.<sup>26</sup> The point is Peter, what are we going to tell the Board?

Peter. Nothing right now. Let me think about it and I'll get back to you. Bye. (*Rejoins Clive and Germaine*).

Peter: Bloody hell. The Swiss ski holiday's been cancelled and I've just lost the entire contract! Glacier melt! The Board's not going to be happy. Can you believe it?!

Clive and Germaine: Yeeessirreeeee.

Peter: You can? You do? Well what do we do now? How are we going to live?!

Clive: Never thought you'd ask Peter.

Basil Fawlty: If you've got real estate in the Netherlands I suggest you get rid of it. More drinks here?

*There is a women at the bar who has been listening to this conversation and interjects almost hysterically:*

Woman at the Bar: For crying down the sink, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure it out! Why do you think you can buy a global warming barometer? It's really happening! It's really urgent! I'm off for some retail therapy, just shop till you drop...that's me.

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<sup>25</sup> Times online.

<sup>26</sup> Times online. 2004. Reports the "wrapping" of Swiss glaciers in foil to reduce the melt rate due to soaring temperatures.

Mr. Fawlty, please make sure there's a cold, and I do mean cold, bottle of chardonnay in my room would you?

Germaine: Spare me, peleeese. Yeah Peter, what do we do now?

Clive: It's complicated. Complex. We need a cultural paradigm shift for starters.

Peter: Snap my fingers.

Clive: And that includes acknowledging that the economy is really a parasite on society.<sup>27</sup> Changing the western psyche from the "economy is god" to a stationary state<sup>28</sup> economy may not be a bad thing and somehow getting the USA and Australia to adopt our recommendations for policy on Kyoto and beyond.

Along with those notions we need to change democracy. Nobody has put it more clearly than Val Plumwood. We need democracy restructured so that "more egalitarian forms of democratic economy and culture can give everyone one **equal stake in benefits** and an **equal risk of adverse consequences**".<sup>29</sup>

Germaine: Right on sister.

Peter: Mmmm. Now I could probably give you a hand there Clive. Manipulating the electorate is one of our specialties.

Germaine: Onya Peter....and, introducing new ways of measuring economic health, or the health of a nation a la the Genuine Progress Indicator.

Peter: And that would be?...

Germaine: For heavens sake Peter, what planet **do** you live on?

Peter: Give me a break Germaine. I want to know. Like it or not, if this climate change business is going to have dramatic effects on my bottom line, how many other businesses are going to be affected? Have you done any projections on this at the Institute Clive?<sup>30</sup>

Clive: We've had a go at it. Nobody has really been interested preferring to ignore the whole situation. It's going to be an interesting fallout. Anyway,

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<sup>27</sup> J. R. Saul. Public Lecture, Sydney. 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Hamilton, Sherrard and Tate. 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Plumwood, Ecological Crisis of Reason. P239.

<sup>30</sup> The Australia Institute.

briefly the Genuine Progress Indicator, GPI, includes estimates of the economic contribution of numerous social and environmental factors, which the GDP completely ignores. It also distinguishes the difference between economic transactions that add to well-being and those which subtract from it<sup>31</sup>. Did you know for instance, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill disaster actually counted as a positive and increased the American GDP?

Peter: You've got to be kidding.

Clive: No I am not. Further, the warning to western society from the Rio Summit that made it absolutely clear that people in the developed world must reduce their consumption<sup>32</sup> has so far, gone nowhere. Aside from the way we measure our economic health, the critical problem to address is a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Australia's reluctance to take action has been two faced from the Howard Government.

Germaine: Yeah well, you know coal exports count for about four point six percent of the GDP<sup>33</sup>.

Clive: This may be so, but the scientists can hardly ring the warning bells any louder. Our new global plan allows for the US and Australia, and other nations that did not ratify Kyoto, to establish a secondary system that runs parallel with Kyoto while attaining Kyoto or better than Kyoto goals<sup>34</sup>.

Germaine: To get back to your question Peter, what we need to do is activate social and political reforms based on feminist theory. Dramatically reduce consumerism, and put enough pressure on the Bush and Howard administration to adopt Clive and crews new global plan to meet the goals of Kyoto. Simple!

Peter: Sounds like an advertising campaign to me....

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<sup>31</sup> Hamilton pp55-61.

<sup>32</sup> "World Scientist Warning to Humanity" Rio Summit 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Regional Briefing Australia. The mining industry generates approximately 4.6 % of Australia's GDP. Coal itself is a major export, accounting for approximately 11% of total exports

<sup>34</sup> Hamilton, Sherrard and Tate.



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