Never before in human history have such grotesque inequalities of power, material wealth and human dignity cut quite so deeply, or quite so fast, into the fabric of the earth. Never before have we faced such a clear and present danger of self-inflicted environmental calamity. Never before have ‘world markets’ been accorded quite such a defining role in human affairs. One has to keep asking: where in the name of creation can all this conceivably lead?


The question, where in the name of creation can all this conceivably lead, is foremost in the articles featured in this issue of Social Alternatives. They focus on a growing gap that is fundamentally grounded in disparities of wealth, but that also spill over into issues of commodification, community, care, ecology, war, racial and sexual inequality, education, media representation, globalisation and capitalism.

Challenging commodification, and the idea that we ‘are what we own’, Hoepper reminds us of the pleasures of a convivial, conserver society and the gratification gained from simplicity, community and care. Presenting a compelling case for an alternative understanding of individual and community, Maddox calls for an ethic that recognises long-standing patterns of advantage and disadvantage, and does not valorise the success of the few, at the expense of the many. Observing that poverty is not just something that happens to others, Milojevic urges us to become dissatisfied with old mythologised utopias and imagine ‘poverty free futures’. Finally, Matthews argues that if education is to challenge the status quo and move beyond the production of techno-wise marketeers, it must ‘dare to’ confront market-speak and edu-business. Taking exception to recent media depictions of violence against women in Aboriginal communities, Sheehan argues that these are not neutral accounts, but representations that use Indigenous Culture as foil against which a righteous ‘white Australian’ moral centre manages to establish itself as epitomising all that is ‘good and right’.

Hil and Gopalkrishnan consider the nature and effects of globalisation. For Hil, contemporary capitalism is not an inevitable consequence of mysterious forces of globalisation, but the political ideology of revamped twenty-first century neoliberalism, and its recognition as such, focuses political activism. Gopalkrishnan observes that globalisation is not new, but an effect of colonial expansion, trade, war and exploration that placed colonised countries in a position of ongoing disadvantage. The solution to this historically structured relationship is ‘globalisation from below’ where local renewal sets the terms of future ‘global governance’.

Face with incalculable ‘facts’ of innumerable global urgencies, and appalled by the ability of contemporary Western culture to proliferate sites of inequality and exponentially increase its own destructive capacity, it often seems to me that the untenable conditions which cast the shape of my life, thoughts and political commitments loom ever larger; ever more severe. The articles in this issue do not take it that disillusionment with ‘progress’, ‘culture’ and ‘society’ mean a return to a former states of pre-modern civility and ‘worlds we have lost’, nor do they seek salvation in science, technology, and a ‘worlds we will find’. The articles here grapple with the limitations of our current understandings of ‘where we are’ in order to offer new ideas about ‘worlds we must make’.