MORE THAN HALF a century ago, Arthur Koestler wrote that much of what you needed to know about a person was revealed by the year of their birth. He called it a "secular horoscope". Rather than the alignment of planets and stars, a secular horoscope provides vital clues to a lifetime of values and behaviours by noting the wars, revolutions, depressions, booms and natural disasters that struck in childhood, youth and early adulthood.

These days, the secular horoscope has been replaced by "generationalism", as patterns of behaviour are ascribed on the basis of the block of fifteen to twenty years in which you were born. The move to generational date-stamping is a by-product of the unprecedented spike in the birth rate in much of the West from 1946 to 1964. The generation and a half of Baby Boomers born in the growing affluence of the postwar years have sat like an undigested lump ever since. Their sheer numbers – still more than a quarter of the population – have made Boomers a force to be reckoned with ever since the oldest turned eighteen in 1964. The relentless desire to capture their attention and get them to spend shaped the final third of the twentieth century.

Now the children of their first marriages – Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979) – and the children of their second marriages and those of the second wave of Baby Boomers – Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1994) – outnumber their parents. They make up almost half the population, and are demanding to be taken seriously. They want their turn in the spotlight, although the Boomers are reluctant to exit stage left.

Hence this issue of Griffith REVIEW: with one exception, it is given over to writers and artists from the generations whose provisional names – X and Y, could have been taken from a whiteboard in a marketing office – have stuck. The world they reveal is one shaped by the relentless commercialism of the past quarter-century, of saturation media, globalisation, technology, affluence, choice, education, booze, sex and the fear of terrorism.
THE LEGACY OF their parents' much-celebrated political activism, of social reforms and increasing opportunities is pervasive, but not immediately obvious. The bitter-sweet fruits of affluence are much clearer.

Therein lies the Baby Boomers' first dirty little secret. As Creed O'Hanlon argues in his forensic dissection of his generation, for all the celebration of the activism and social transformation wrought by the generation born after the war, their lasting impact may be less about equality of opportunity and more about having lots of stuff. It may be that the Baby Boomers have claimed a political impact which was scarcely theirs in the first place, but one which they absorbed and made their own through television, music and films.

Much as the Boomers enjoyed the excitement and urgency of activism in the '60s and '70s, as they hit their thirties in the 1980s, the prevailing ethos was shaped by more chilling apocalyptic visions – the invasion of Afghanistan, the escalating Cold War and HIV/AIDS. From that point, in much of the West, political activism took a back seat to getting on with life, to reaping the benefits of co-option into the pervasive economic machine of global capitalism. The response – which has made many Boomers richer than their parents could have ever imagined – was the very busy, slightly guilty enjoyment of the fruits of greed being declared good.

Yet Koestler's secular horoscope is a useful tool when trying to understand big social movements – and this year the first of the Boomers turn sixty. That is a salutary thought in more ways than one.

We all squirmed when Paul McCartney's lyrics, *Will you still love me, will you still need me when I'm sixty-four?*, seemed to be answered in the negative as his birthday coincided with the collapse of his marriage. But when McCartney – the youngest of The Beatles, the quintessential Boomer group – turned sixty-four, it was more than a sad illustration of life imitating art. It revealed that he is not, and never was, a Baby Boomer. Nor was John Lennon, who would have been sixty-six this year. Yoko Ono turns seventy-three.

Check the birth dates of the icons, the leading activists of the '60s and
'70s, the ones Boomers have claimed as their own, and you will find a disturbing trend. Most of them were not Boomers, but members of the Silent Generation – those whose childhood and early life was shaped by the Depression and Second World War. Do the maths: it is clear -pick a name and the chances are they'll be well over sixty.

Creed O'Hanlon – the token Boomer in this issue – argues persuasively, that the conscience of the twentieth century was shaped more by the Silent Generation.

They were the ones who led the anti-nuclear marches, the civil rights movement, the resurgence of feminism, the end of colonialism, the rise of the welfare state. Their secular horoscope makes sense of this. They observed the failures of capitalism without a safety net, the horrors of war, the consequences of colonialism and inequality.

Rather than being the leaders, Boomers – especially those of us born in the '50s – made up the numbers and absorbed some of the lessons. We then as O'Hanlon shows, turned it into a product, an entertainment, a diversion, and told our kids we were there because we sort of believed it ourselves – we had seen it on television so many times, we may as well have been.

Therein lies the second dirty Boomer secret. At its core, this generation has been preoccupied with selling stuff. Shopping – for pleasure, not need – is the biggest entertainment in the world today. Forget Death of a Salesman, Arthur Miller's wonderfully scathing insight into the emptiness of a commercial life; Bill Gates, the apotheosis of the Boomer generation, is richer than any single man has ever been before. The residual impact of his secular horoscope may have influenced him to create the world's largest charitable foundation, but only after decades of unwavering profiteering.

Boomers have made more stuff, and sold more stuff, than any other generation. Much of it is creative, cultural and innovative, but it is stuff nonetheless – branded, targeted and sold at a healthy margin. The market researchers are already busy typecasting Generation Z, who they have decided are seeking something to care about, a result of the impact of 9/11: watch now for brands bundled with social meaning.
whiff of a new product, a new niche, a new market, a new sub-culture and Boomers are there with a business plan to "productise" it, and maybe give some of the excess profits to a worthy cause.

That's another thing about Boomers: we expect to have it all, to do well and do good.

THIS RATIONALISATION IS not one that our children are able to accept quite so readily, as the writers in this issue show. They bear the grudges that the young must always hold against their elders. They dislike our hypocrisy, pettiness, control and selfishness, just as we disliked these things in our parents. As Philip Larkin wrote: *They fuck you up, your mum and dad/ They may not mean to, but they do./ They fill you with the faults they had/ And add some extra, just for you.*

The contributors to this edition bring a clear-eyed focus to the legacy they have been left and the challenges of a world which has changed profoundly in few decades. The world they depict is fraught and confusing, but the world they imagine is creative and exciting, bursting with possibilities and opportunities. The times are a changing, again.

The transformation wrought by technology and globalisation means we are poised on the edge of a new generational revolution. The excitement, the energy, the confusions and the opportunities are very real. This is most obvious in cyber-space, but the new networks extend well beyond this virtual world. The question is whether the values of the Silent Generation or the Boomers are more deeply embedded in the secular horoscope of those born since 1980. The evidence from the writers in this issue suggests that this most-able of generations is capable of shrewdly picking the best of what has gone before, to create a brave new world for the beginning of this millennium, in which values not just acquisition are central. The will not be easily typecast.

This issue of *Griffith REVIEW* deliberately creates the space for their stories to be told, their analysis to be developed. It is the result of a unique editorial process, made possible by funding from the Literature Board of the Australia Council and the invaluable contribution of Marni
Cordell, as assistant editor. Marni has already made her mark as one of the founders of the independent magazine Spinach7. Her network of younger writers and artists, who want to be heard, is unrivalled.

In putting together this issue, we invited new and emerging writers to submit essays, stories, reports and poems in response to a brief which discussed, with some scepticism, the characteristics the market researchers have ascribed to Gen Y. Several hundred responded. The task of selecting those to include in the book and online was challenging – the talent revealed in the submissions impressive and humbling.

Most of the art featured in this issue is from the Hatched '06 exhibition of the most promising graduates from art schools around Australia held at the Perth Institute for Contemporary Arts this year. The cover was designed by Hazel Dooney.

This is a quite brilliant generation which will make a big impact. It is time for Boomers to offer quiet leadership and let go.

Watch this space. This may be the first time you have heard of many of these writers and artists, but it won't be the last – they may well embody the craven, quintessential Boomer quest for the next big thing. In the meantime, they have plenty to say and are worth listening to.