

Recovering the Future (1988)

Introduction: Reflections on Recovering the Future

In 1986 I was invited to Australia to address a conference entitled *Futures in Education*. While there I noted some huge differences between it and the UK environment. I'd finished my PhD in 1982, been out of work for a year and, by chance, received a post-Doctoral fellowship from the then Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). But that was it. Once the fellowship was over, I was stranded. No one wanted a freshly minted futurist. Foresight projects had yet to be invented. Then came the call from Australia.

To cut a long story short I took part in another conference in Melbourne. This time it was the centenary conference of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). I was a visiting fellow there for a while and, as such, took part in the meeting. It was here that I met Frank Fisher who then headed up the Graduate School of Environmental Science (GSES) at Monash University. As a result of that meeting I was invited to deliver a series of lectures there in 1988. This book was a result of that invitation.

By then I was living in Australia and had written a handful of published articles. These minor successes, and other related work, had left me feeling that there was a chance I could 'make it' in this new environment. But things were not that simple – they seldom are. It took a good deal longer to land a lectureship in the Institute of Education at the University of Melbourne. These were hard times both for myself and for my family.

Frank invited me to put together a selection of readings for the course I was to teach on *Alternative Australian Futures*. It built upon what had been done before by others (including Frank, Peter Cocks and Noel Gough) and presented, perhaps for the first time, a truly 'critical' approach to futures enquiry and action. Then, as now, the term 'critical' did not mean 'to criticise'. Rather it means 'looking in depth'. Close to 20 students took the course and I felt that we had accomplished something new and valuable. The book was fairly basic in production terms. It had an ugly sans serif font, the figures were unsophisticated and the layout unexceptional. Nevertheless, I was proud of my first Australian book. It was divided into four sections:

- Futures now – exploring the extended present;
- Taking issue with 'the way things are;'
- Futures in education – a quiet revolution? And;
- The answer is a journey.

The central proposition of the book is that '*by recovering our individual sense of the future we may steadily recreate what has been for too long missing from our public life: a quality of participating consciousness in space and time.*' This and other themes have since been worked out in much greater depth (and hopefully greater clarity) in many other papers and books.

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Out of print. A revised version of the book is included on the CD-ROM *Towards a Wise Culture* (Foresight International, 2005).