

Recovering the Future – Author Reflections

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 headed up the Graduate School of Environmental Science (GSES) at Monash University. As a result of that meeting I was booked to deliver a series of lectures there in 1988. This book is a result of that invitation.

By then I had moved to 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 my family.

Frank very kindly invited me to put together a selection of readings for the course I was to teach. The latter was to be called *Alternative Australian Futures*. It built upon what had been previously accomplished by colleagues such as Frank, Peter Cocks and Noel Gough. It 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'. Some twenty students took the course and I felt that we had accomplished something new and worthwhile.

The cover design for the book had been produced for me by a designer at the University of Lancaster, where I'd been based for some years. It included a logo that I'd also had designed that had been based on a past, present, futures diagram. But the book was fairly basic in production terms. The font was an ugly sans serif, the figures unsophisticated and the layout unexceptional. Nevertheless, I was proud of my first Australian book. It was divided into four sections:

1. Futures now – exploring the extended present
2. Taking issue with 'the way things are'
3. Futures in education – a quiet revolution? and
4. The answer is a journey.

The central proposition of the book was 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 (one would hope greater sophistication) in many other papers and books. Those who are interested in such things will find an expression of 'early critical futures work' here in *Recovering the Future*.

Delicate Immortal Meanings was a runner up in an SF story competition held in the UK by the Sunday Times and Gollancz, Ltd. It was published in the book illustrated below. Since returning to the UK in 1975 I had met and came to know a number of British and American SF authors. At the time I wondered if I would join them. This SF story was my first attempt at the genre and it clearly drew on my responses to the Bermuda experience. The fact that it was a runner up in this competition suggested that I could perhaps begin a career in SF if I so chose. But as my understanding of SF and FS deepened, so I was drawn more toward the latter. I began to see SF as an early inspiration, but not the field I wanted to work in full time. In later years, however, I drafted a number of other stories springing from the same context. Only time will tell if they will ever emerge - or remain as virtual presences in an alternative future that never took place...