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Introduction

Redreaming Australia

This special issue of Futures, *Redreaming Australia*, celebrates the rather fuzzy 15th anniversary of 'Imagine The Future Inc.'[1], a very small yet influential project-based cultural development and 'applied futures' organisation I founded in Melbourne, Australia. ITF was conceived and developed when sustainability discourses were being institutionalised after the adoption of the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development by the United Nations in 1987, so it embodies the zeitgeist of these times. The essays in this special issue reflect both the values the organisation was founded upon and our collective 'dream' of ''a society in which we live more harmoniously with ourselves, with one another and with our 'natural' environment'' [2].

One of ITF's first social innovations was the ecoversity [3], an informal institution we defined as ''a place where we explore and exchange the ideas from which we'll build socially and ecologically sustainable societies''. All the contributors to this special issue were either speakers at ecoversity events in the early 1990s, or have supported Imagine The Future in other ways over the last fifteen years. The following essays represent more mature and extended iterations of face-to-face conversations we participated in at the ecoversity and reflect our ongoing engagement, as scholars, advocates, cultural practitioners and activists, with environmental and social issues in Australia and elsewhere. In these essays we call for *radical systemic change*, for an intellectual and cultural revolution, a complete renewal of both civil society and our public institutions. In short we seek a comprehensive re-assessment of the way we Australians relate with one another, with our unique biophysical heritage and the ecological communities we are part of, and with other peoples beyond our shores, especially in the rest of Asia. We offer the following narratives as a contribution to this national re-imagining, or Redreaming of Australia.

1. Many meanings of dreamings

Dreams 'begin' as lived experience, the fuzzy, nonlinear, imagistic and barely understood biological phenomena all people experience in our sleep. We have no direct access to dreams-as-experiences, but once they are 'laid down' in our brains as memories, we can interpret them and re-narrate them as stories [4]. And as stories, dreams have the narrative power to change in the world.

From a scientific perspective, dreaming ''occurs just above the point where electrochemistry turns into psychology''[5]. There appears to be no general consensus in

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scientific discourses about the biology or evolutionary purpose of dreams, but many often-conflicting hypothesises have been proposed to support diverse claims that they "process memory, act as sentinels, fine-tune our vigilance/fear systems, reduce tension, create counterfactual simulations, perform self-therapy, self-formation or neuronal dumping, rehearse our survival and predation routines, and so on"[6]. The proponents of the Contemporary Theory of Dreaming, e.g., suggest that dreams are a means of "weaving new material into the memory system in a way that both reduces emotional arousal and is adaptive in helping us cope with further trauma or stressful events"[7]. These Theory of Dreaming scientists position dreaming at one end of a continuum of mental functioning which extends from "focused waking activity", to "daydreaming", and finally to dreaming proper, a state in which "mental activity becomes less focused, looser, more global and more imagistic" [7]. In this state our minds make connections that can be surprising, even apparently absurd, but such hyper-connectivity is of great evolutionary and social benefit because it can lead to unexpected insights which can change the way we see the world and act in it.

These scientific interpretations of dreams represent one only set of understandings we bring to our Redreaming of Australia, however. In all societies, probably since the earliest days of hominid evolution, dreams have been interpreted as prophesies or messages from other places and other times. In this context they may be seen as "vivid, vital, meaning-rich" events which "provide a direct experience with highly numinous energies" [8]. Such dream narratives are still symbolically significant in modern societies, as any quick scan of a New Age bookshop demonstrates, and they remain important within all the world's major religions. Stories about Queen Maya's conception dream prophesying the rebirth of the Buddha in the ancient Pali texts, the Prophet Mohammed's Night Journey as represented in Sura 17 of The Koran, and Joseph's dreams and his interpretations of the Egyptian Pharaoh's nightmares as recounted in the biblical Book of Genesis, e.g., are familiar and deeply meaningful to billions of believers throughout the world.

Dreaming is also integral to the religious experience of indigenous Australians, notwithstanding the fact that Dreamtime, or The Dreaming is a colonial construct first used in a report by Baldwin Spencer on the 1894 Horn Expedition into the McDonnell Ranges of South Australia [9, p. 2]. Dreamtime or Dreaming now signifies a diverse set of narratives which, as "lore and law", still connect thousands of contemporary Australians of Aboriginal descent with all the other entities that are part of their world. As Bruno David describes it, the Dreaming is "an existence that is defined by the relationships of everything that is and that was". It "at once gives birth to, directs, clarifies, legitimates, defines and explains a world of relationships, giving identity to the people who engage not just *with* but *in* the world [9, p. 18]. As such, the Dreaming is "at once beyond time and continuous yet transformative, always presencing the past, the present and the future" [9, p. 206].

In recent years Dreamtime has acquired more general meanings, even for Aboriginal Australians, as the following warning made in 1988 by the late Charles Perkins testifies:

> *You whitefellas have gotta have your own dreamtime stories. If you bury 'em, you'll have no past, won't know where you have come from and won't know how to find your way into the future* [10].

Dreaming also evokes myriad other associations that are relevant to our Redreaming of Australia, from Freudian, Jungian or Lacanian understandings of the 'Unconscious', to

ideals of justice, freedom and equality as expressed by Martin Luther King in his 1963 'I have a dream' speech [10], or Prime Minister John Howard's disappointingly reductionist vision for the 21st century of "an Australian nation that feels comfortable and relaxed … about their history … about the present … and about the future" [11], to all the other hopes, daydreams, visions, quests, prophesies and reveries we all imagine, speak and savour in our waking lives. In this sense 'sustainability' is also a dream, an aspiration, an uncertain and still ill-defined and unfulfilled quest.

2. Redreaming essays

The authors of the following essays bring all these meanings and values to our re-imagining of Australia's possible futures but, as contributor Paul James emphasises, "Thinking about the future always entails going back to the past to understand the generalities of how we got to the present situation." And we all reflect on Australia's many pasts and presents from our diverse perspectives before considering our homeland's possible and plausible futures.

In 'An end to Aboriginal self determination?,' Ian Anderson maps indigenous peoples' struggle to be counted as full citizens in their own country, e.g., and urges communities to re-assert their right of self-determination by developing new decision making processes and systems of governance that "accommodate the traditions and values that matter most," yet enable them to fully engage with the rest of the world.

Inspired by the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Joseph Camilleri sees cause for optimism in "the possible synergy that could yet emerge from combining the traditional wisdom of Indigenous Australians with the modern technical know-how of recent settlers, and the still potent sense of social solidarity and attachment to notions of 'fair go'" in his contribution to this collection, 'Australia's unique future: reconciling place, history and culture'. Camilleri calls for a complete "intellectual and cultural renewal" which would "necessarily involve raising the level of public consciousness, public participation and public morality". He offers an Agenda for Change which, he believes, could facilitate such a transformation.

Paul James wants not only a "revolution" in thinking, but new Utopian stories about how we increasingly diverse Australians can live together. In 'Reframing the nation-state: rethinking the Australian dream from the local to the global' he offers a set of "principles-in-tension" for a new kind of society in which "negotiated difference across overlapping political, cultural and ecological realms" would be possible, even encouraged. In 'Non-government organisations and the dialectics of state and civil society', Susan Kenny reconsiders the relationship between civil society and the state, and calls for a revolution in global governance, especially as it affects the millions of people who are now considered "outcasts". She presents a provocative future history of an Australian civil society organisation "concerned with supporting cultural diversity and the integrity of threatened cultures." In Kenny's distant future "the whole concept of outcast" no longer exists.

Tony Stevenson, the only author amongst us who calls himself a 'futurist', asks a question we all ponder: "How can busy people be challenged to think about the consequences of their decisions and actions?" In 'Rethinking Oz: more than policy, the underlying mindset,' he condemns the "relentless pursuit of pleasure and financial reward" and critiques the worldviews that support it. He nevertheless sees signs of new mindsets that embrace "reciprocality, mutuality, plurality and degrees of difference" which have the

potential to allow us all to think more creatively about the future. But creative thinking, of itself, does not necessarily take us towards a more sustainable and secure world, as Jim Falk and Chris Ryan point out. In 'Inventing a sustainable future: Australia and the challenge of eco-innovation', they identify climate change and environmental degradation as primary threats to Australia's future prosperity but note that

> *"we also face a paradox: many of these problems have been precipitated or accelerated by human inventiveness, yet it will require human inventiveness to resolve them. We are therefore faced with the difficult problem of clarifying our attitude to scientific discovery, technological development, and more broadly to innovation."*

Falk and Ryan are confident, however, that Australia could become a global leader in eco-innovation and nominate "six strategic principles for eco-innovation" to facilitate this.

Peter Kinrade extends the discussion about social and technological innovation by focussing on the production and consumption of energy in the non-transport sectors of the Australian economy. In 'Toward a sustainable energy future in Australia,' he asks rhetorically "Is a sustainable energy future merely a question of adopting renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, or does the pursuit of sustainable energy have wider implications?" He examines some of the many obstacles to the development and implementation of sustainable energy strategies in Australia and outlines his own broad vision for a sustainable energy future. Alan K. Pears examines the nitty-gritty of energy consumption in terms of building insulation, light bulbs, refrigeration, air conditioning, recreation and transportation, in 'Imagining Australia's energy services futures', and concludes that, in most industries and households, energy consumption could almost immediately be reduced by up to 75% with only relatively minor changes. He rejects future energy scenarios that include nuclear power because they are based on false assumptions and discount the potential of still under-developed, even uninvented technologies and lifestyle choices.

In 'Redreaming the rural landscape' Jason Alexandra and Curtis Riddington focus their gaze on 62% of the Australian continent that is now managed for agricultural and pastoral production. Although they agree that governments "have so far failed to implement policy reforms that are appropriate to the scale of the ecological damage that has already been done to rural landscapes" they see evidence of "a new land ethic" emerging. They offer three provocative 'redreamings' of Australia's Murray–Darling Basin, northern tropics and the eastern coast that are set one hundred years in the future when Australia is a "a mature, independent post-colonial republic" of 67 bioregions.

David Mercer, Linda Christesen and Michael Buxton are more circumspect in considering the future of Australia's land and water resources. In 'Squandering the future—climate change, policy failure and the water crisis in Australia', they focus on "related issues of climate change and water policy" and, like their fellow contributors, call for "radical changes in the way governments and industries operate." They propose a "more dynamic approach" to resource management based on "complex systems theory and the concepts of resilience, uncertainty and integration to model and predict changes within human-environment interactions." Sam Lake and Nick Bond agree that we need a radically new resource management paradigm but focus specifically on freshwater systems. In 'Australian futures: aquatic ecosystems and human water usage' they offer a series of carefully researched alternative resource management scenarios and map the possible ecological impacts of each of these. They also call for "a National Water Plan that guides

the management of water resources and aquatic ecosystems at the natural scale of river basins, thus overriding the artificial scales of state and local interests.''

Finally, I look at fresh water and aquatic ecosystems in 'River stories: genealogies of a threatened inland river system' from a narratological and very personal perspective as a writer and settler–descendant who was born and raised within the catchment of Galiyarr, or the Lachlan River. In this essay, I suggest that both the dispossession of the Wiradjuri people from the river valley, and the deforestation and degradation of the alluvial inland plains, are enacted narratives that 'began' in Europe and southwest Asia and arrived in Australia in the cultural baggage of colonisation. But new and more benign stories are now being narrated and slowly enacted on the inland plains and, with this essay, I add my own Utopian vision of a possible future to them—because who can live on a river on an inland plain on a planet without dreams?

3. Making dreams reality

The social and environmental pathologies described in this collection of essays can all be understood as enacted narratives, the embodiment or reification of hegemonic dreams that have now become toxic and life-threatening—and are therefore in urgent need of 'redreaming'. Those old and now-archaic Euro-stories remain very resilient, however, especially in the *Realpolitik* of this first decade of the 21st century. In this context the super-realist observation Niccolo Machiavelli penned nearly 500 yr ago is apposite for those of us who disagree with the present regime: ''there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things'' [12]. The challenge of transforming our redreamings into ''lore and law'' and into biophysical reality cannot be underestimated but, as moral agents, as citizens of Australia, of Planet Earth, that is our goal, our quest. Let the revolution begin.

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