



## Chapter 1

# Words and Pictures

Looking out the back window to our garden, the rain starts to fall. It's been an unseasonal hot dry winter so far, the shrubs are starting to show signs of stress. The rain is very welcome, but unfortunately it stops as quickly as it started. Our tin roof quietens. Hopefully more normal spring rainfall is on the way, but with climate change this is uncertain.

I love our backyard. It's a steep slope with no grass, just low native shrubs leading up to a view of the forest of Mt Cootha which borders our property. The Tryptamine and purple Hovea are just starting to flower, bringing some welcome colour. The name Cootha is derived from the Yuggera name for this mountain "kuta" which means place of wild honey. This open forest country was somewhere aboriginal people have come for tens of thousands of years to collect honey from the native stingless bees. This gives our place a special importance for me but also a strange sense of ambivalence. I am enjoying what was theirs and what was taken from them. I feel sad and confused knowing that this land, including my backyard, was taken without permission or treaty. I want to pay my respect to all those people past and present who have looked after this country and who have worked to try to overcome the horror of colonization.

When we first moved to this house the backyard was a bit of a dog's breakfast, with a few well established natives such as a lillypilly, flame tree and a wheel of fire. These were planted by much earlier owners, but the more recent owners introduced a vast array of exotics and succulents that were now spreading as weeds. Michelle and I moved quickly to remove the exotics (except for the lemon tree). We then replanted with low natives so we could maintain a view of the forest behind us. The succulent weeds however are an ongoing battle to remove, but now the natives are more established it is getting easier to hold back their incursions. Turn your back however and they start to dominate again. The Colonization of the country has happened at many levels.



As I look out my window I am reminded of all the times I have stood looking in to the backyards of my previous homes as I imagine how to shape and plant the space. Even as a child my parents involved me in the garden, allowing me to contribute to what should be planted and where. I can remember drawing a plan for my Broadland Street backyard when I was about 8 years old with the idea of turning it in to a rainforest with streams running everywhere through the yard. I had in mind the Tarzan TV show and liked the idea of my own rainforest jungle to swing through.

The first house I owned was at 19 Thomas St Red Hill. My good friend Rowie, recently reminded me of how much time I spent looking out the kitchen window to the backyard. At this point I was fully committed to the idea of self-sufficiency and I would gaze to the yard planning what could be. Soon the yard was planted with over 20 different fruit trees with the ever present smell of rotting straw and manure that was regularly brought in to build up the soils.



There have been many other houses and gardens over time including gardens built for friends, family and for income.

Creating gardens, nurturing them and watching them grow and take shape has been more than a recreational pursuit. It is partly an artistic enterprise but it has also been a mission. Greening up barren sites, pushing back weeds and planting food and or native plants has always been a good thing to do. While from time to time I have lost confidence in the benefit of other activities (like being a social worker or teacher), I have never doubted the benefit of this gardening activity. It has always in my mind been a positive thing for the community and for myself.

I have always seen gardening as a part of a social change process. Self-sufficiency is not actually about the self, it is a direct challenge to increasing control multinational corporations have over our food and food production. Growing your own food is a form of direct action, and one that lots of people can take up. Doing this with or alongside others, becomes a social or community action. I have been over the years been part of several community garden projects.



While gardening has been a mission it has also been much more. It is good for one's soul. While not a religious person I have seen written somewhere the idea that 'you are never closer to god than when your hands are in the soil'. I feel something of that connection. When you work with the soil, and encourage new life, it is literally a grounding experience. It makes clear our connection and interdependence to the natural world and it takes me out of my head and puts my whole self in connection to a very particular piece of ground.



So gardening has been all these things for me from an early age. It has been good for my mental and spiritual health, as well as being an artistic pursuit and act of social change. I feel confident to call myself a gardener. I have also wanted to be a change agent and an artist, but in relation to these identities I am much less confident.

### A “would be” change agent

This gardening orientation of wanting to “rehabilitate and transform a space” is also relevant to society. From an early age I have always imagined that society could be better and have seen myself as somehow playing a part in this.

There is of course a huge variety of opposing beliefs about what people think is wrong and what a better place would look like. Further, not everyone is interested in change. Many people of course are very happy with how things are or fear any change could just make things worse. So there is always a resistance to change from those who want to keep things the same. Many people are just happy to float along or follow whatever is the dominant line of the people around them, whether on the side of change or resistance. All of these generalities could apply to national governments, the local soccer club committee or a group of friends deciding what restaurant to go to.

I want the world to be very different in so many ways. I want to see change in the broadest and most fundamental aspects of how our society is organized, economically, socially, politically and emotionally. I want an equal, non-



hierarchical and environmentally enhancing society. Unfortunately we continue to move in the opposite direction. There is so much to be done.

In wanting to change the world, I am not saying everything is bad. Clearly good things happen and it is from these things that I can imagine a better place. It's not all ugly, there are beautiful bits. In fact when you think about the ways most family members support each other (particularly children), things are pretty good. In fact it is remarkable how well society operates given the diversity and complexity involved. Nevertheless, while much is beautiful, the ugly bits are horrific. You only have to think of racial genocide, war, oppression, domestic violence, and the extreme inequality and poverty that exists alongside all our so called economic prosperity. Unfortunately elements of this ugliness sometimes colour friendships and family relationships.

Changing society requires understanding society, but more importantly understanding how change is possible. We do not need to wait for this understanding before acting, as it is only by trying to change things that you can really understand how things are and how they can be altered. When you try to tinker with things, the way this is resisted and what happens as a result, often provides insights into the way something works and how it can be fixed. This manuscript is really about trying to use my own experience of trying to “change the world”, to better understand the world. To bring together experiences and insights over the years to build a deeper understanding of the world and how it can be changed.

This creates an expectation that there may be something impressive about my actions but I want ‘to nip this in the bud’ straight away. Wanting change and making change happen are two very different things. My insights arise from failure more than success. Society is quickly moving in an opposite direction to what I am wanting. I have some experience of success in some small local actions, but even here progress is slow with many setbacks. Moreover my own actions are often flawed, and my insights are also about how I need to change my own ideas and my own behaviours. This change is not easy, and this is good to remember when seeking to change society and so the behaviour of others.

My focus on fundamental change is very different to just wanting change in a specific area. Clearly, if you are try to change an area of activity so that it is more consistent with the general thrust of society you are more likely to be successful



and rewarded by the society. These sort of change agents are very much in demand in our society. They are like societal mechanics who find a problem and get the car running smoothly again. The knowledge learnt here is very valuable and sought after in our society. When you are wanting to change the fundamentals, you are more likely to be irrelevant or annoying to the mainstream. The insights and knowledge developed are of little interest to the mainstream and only valued by others seeking similar change.

Before creating too much of the impression that I am living my life battling the system I need to emphasise that most of my experience is very far from this. While I am in awe of people who have devoted their lives to change, in most areas of my life and at most times of the day I generally go with the flow because I don't know another way, or it's too scary or difficult to try. Also as will become apparent while keen for change I am also a nervous cautious person. While talking about grand change to the fundamentals of society you will see my attempts at change have been very small, local and often very ineffectual.

This manuscript does not provide a model for 'fundamental change' based on a success story. I want to review my failures to better understand what needs doing and to learn more about what I can do better. I hope my story of small scale and often unsuccessful change attempts can be useful to others in understanding "change". It is inspiring for me to read about Gandhi's experiments with change, but it can also be off putting, as it is so very far from my level of courage and ability. I find I learn in practical and achievable way from others who are more at my level. There is much to be learnt not only from our betters, but also from our peers. Further still there is much to be learnt from the creativity and freshness of those just starting to try to build a better world.

### **How do you go about trying to understand things?**

I want to look deeper at my change attempts to better understand how our society works and so that my future change attempts can be more effective. Without a good understanding of the whole a lot of what we try to do can be ineffective and even counterproductive. How do you make sense of everything? More fundamentally how can we be confident about what we know? A quick review of some of the more popular philosophical alternatives from the last few hundred



years, will help to locate my own position on 'truth'. How can we know what is correct?

An obvious answer is to listen to those around us to learn from their experience. To listen to those with lots of experience, our elders. In this way what we learn is given by the group, or society that we are part of. Clearly there is much wisdom and useful knowledge to be passed down like this. However, when you become aware that different societies or groups have different views, then the credibility of one's own groups' views comes into question. It becomes apparent that aspects of what we thought to be true can be just convenient (often self-serving) beliefs of our forebears.

When we realize that certain ideas seem to serve particular interest groups or certain people, what is truth becomes a very slippery question. This is a realization that often accompanies adolescence and we start to question our parents' views and start to see ourselves as an independent separate individual. For some this leads to a relativism where all claims to truth must be interrogated and treated with suspicion. Claims of truth are just a way to obtain power over others. The adolescent can rant against any the 'truths' of adults but such a view does not offer a way forward. Everything is suspect, what can you have confidence in? To be fully consistent how can a proper relativist have any faith in relativism?

Others who started to question the value of 'handed down' beliefs looked in a different direction to the ideologies of the enlightenment. Rather than relying on knowledge handed down by the culture and religious traditions, people decided they could know, directly from their own experience. This is the very basis of the scientific method. Individuals can know the world by experimenting with it. This also strengthened the idea that individuals could change the world. The adolescent begins to challenge their parents and to try to alter the way their family goes about things. The hope was that through science and experimentation we can create a better world.

Just as adolescents often run in to trouble as they begin to assert their own beliefs and independence and ignore the wisdom of their elders, I think 'the enlightenment' has also run in to similar problems. Scientific experimentation has focused on particular bits and problems without often considering the whole picture. Individualism has also lead to an economics which is based on self-



interest. This new science and economics has grown, strengthened and globalized over the last few hundred years, bringing many benefits, but the focus on parts in isolation means it has been often unaware of its externalities and its devastating impact on the environment as a whole. We now have a science and an economy which could potentially threaten the ecological survival of our species. A very clever but over confident, self-centred adolescent.

The need for change to avert this disaster is becoming clearer, but unfortunately most believe a solution can be found within the same scientific and economic framework, that led to this potential disaster in the first place. The over confident adolescent doubles down on what they know to be true and their method of discovery. The elders are ignored.

The postmodern 'goth' teenager all dressed in black can see and criticize the failings of all parents and their pushy adolescent peers, but they lack any way forward and so end up just sitting swapping critiques. Relativism is a very poor counter to those who have an absolute confidence in their position and who are also in positions of power. The scientific and relativist ways of knowing have become part of the problem. We need a new way of 'knowing'.

I think we need a more adult approach. A new form of science and economics which is not about understanding bits in isolation or just 'undermining' the powerful voices. We need an approach that is not about individualism and self-interest but rather is concerned about others, the community and the whole environment. We need to move beyond a blind faith in the correctness of our forebears but also beyond the arrogance of our capacity to know 'the truth' from our own experience, and also beyond the inaction of relativism. A synthesis of all 3 ways of knowing (tradition, science and postmodernism) is required. We need to question everything like a scientist and to look for its weaknesses. At the same time we need to seek out the wisdom of our elders particularly to understand the connections and patterns of the 'whole'. At the very same time we need to continually test our ideas and beliefs in practice. We need enough confidence in our ideas to give it a go but enough critical 'relativist' capacity to review and learn from our mistakes (and also from what seem at first sight successes).

I have tried to adopt this notion of 'truth' in this book. At times I might sound very convinced of my position and closed to criticism, but by putting my thoughts on paper and sharing them with you I am inviting your challenges and criticism.



I want to be confident enough, to share my ideas but open enough to properly hear your alternative ideas and criticism. My approach to ‘truth’ required discussion, and a shared commitment to a better world, it needs community of kindred spirits and critical inquirers.

It seems a very arrogant thing to do to write a whole book on my ideas and experience, but I am actually full of anxiety about sharing it and exposing it to the ridicule of others. Writing the book has been mainly about helping me clarify my own thinking, to help me know what to do next. If you are reading this I am hoping you will be constructive in your criticism and help me with my ideas. It is an invitation for dialogue. I am of course interested in your alternate positions and how you make sense of the whole. This is the very tentative side of my communication. At the same time this book has a much more assertive side. The book is also part of my attempt to change the world, I want the reader to be challenged and moved by what I have to say, I am trying in this way to influence you the reader. So be aware, be careful. While I am interested in an academic discussion about the ideas, but the book is also a call to action, an invitation to people to work on seeking a more equal, less hierarchical environmentally enhancing society, a call for a radical change to our structures.

So the book captures two very different sides of my character. It is a chance for me to work out my ideas better and to tentatively invite challenges and further ideas to help me act better. To learn from the reader. At the same time it more arrogantly seeks to challenge the reader and is itself part of my attempt to change the world. This arrogance is very much tempered by my own tentativeness and lack of confidence in any thing I have to say about ‘change. My other desired identity as an ‘artist’ also shares this strange mix of arrogance and utter lack of confidence. Let me say a bit about painting and then bring my painting and change agent identities together.

### A ‘would be’ artist

Over the last 17 years painting has been a bit of an escape, a chance to relax and withdraw. But it has also become part of my attempt to understand and change the world, but in a very different way to my community actions.

I have always liked art. From an early age like most children I painted and did other artistic things. My family encouraged me and growing up I always had





some confidence in my abilities. 17 years ago I began to think maybe I could maybe make a living or part of a living from my paintings.

As a ‘would be’ artist I want to create paintings that are meaningful and say something about our situation. I want also to see the beauty in what is and in what could be. To lift up what is valuable and important. Generally I look to my environment for inspiration. I look for an image which is pleasing to the eye but which may also have a deeper or perhaps an alternate meaning. I generally take a photograph to capture that image and at that point often only have a vague sense that the image is meaningful to me. Something about the image makes me feel good, or hints at some deeper understanding just beyond me. After gathering several of these images, I then sit in front of the computer to view the images, trawling through recent and old images. At some point something will click with an image, a hint of something worthy is revealed and I will want to start painting.

I get energized when some sort of meaning or idea emerges. Generally the image starts to say something to me, about our society, about life or some important issue to me. While I have in mind someone else may like to view this painting, the critical initial concern is whether I like it or not.

### Comparing Change work and painting

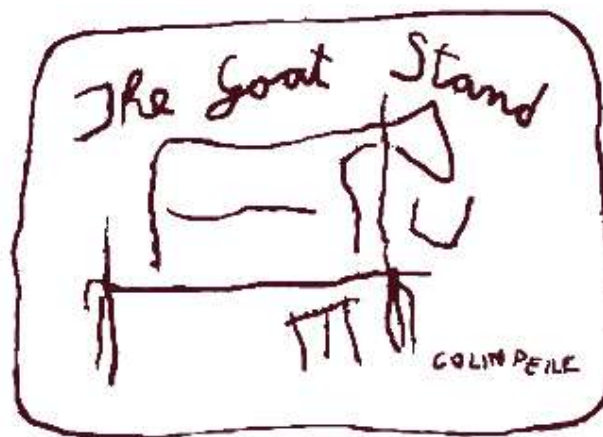
As a “would be” change agent, the things that need changing are generally very obvious. There are so many things to be disturbed and depressed about. At some point a way to challenge this will occur to me. This is very exciting and I feel much better when I can see a way forward. While my painting is a solitary, introspective experience, my “Change” work is by necessity a social experience. I get energized working with others. Working together creates commitment and obligations. While my own motivation might ebb and flow the group helps to sustain a more steady direction. The best and worst bits of being part of such projects are the interactions and relationships with the others involved.

The decision to do something new can be exciting, just like beginning a new painting, however while a new painting may take several weeks, the “change” projects I have been involved with are all long term and take many years or decades. After a couple of hours I know if a painting is not working out. Unfortunately it can take years to realize a social change project is misguided. All the more reason to better reflect on, and understand how society works.

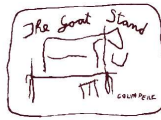


Change work generally begins with a clear agenda, my paintings on the other often begin with an inkling something is important in an image for me and in the process of painting I start to discover what that is. Sometimes just to keep my hand in, I paint a scene with no obvious meaning but which I think looks nice. Sometimes in the process an unexpected idea or meaning will emerge and give new energy to the process.

I can still sometimes years later find new inspiration and new ideas in one of my completed paintings. The painting which provided the title of this manuscript has been such a painting. In my 20's I was living an urban hippy sort of lifestyle, very interested in growing food and self-sufficiency. I was telling a friend that we were getting some milking goats and I would need to build a goat stand to be able to milk them. He asked in a very puzzled way what a goat stand was. I explained how the goat stand held the goat still while they ate chaff, and got them higher off the ground to make milking easier. I did a little sketch to show what they look like. I immediately felt the drawing was really important for some reason. Very excitedly, but not really sure why, a few hours later I turned the little thumb nail in to a bigger painting.



At the time of doing this painting I was employed in at a local neighbourhood centre. I was uncertain about continuing in this community work position (which I enjoyed), but doing the painting helped me decide to leave the job. During the painting process I was struck by the way the goat was simultaneously fed and constrained. This fitted with how I felt about the job. Some years later I was again reconsidering a job I was in at Uni and I wondered why I drew the goat without an udder. Thinking about my own capacity for giving, I decided to leave this job. I will return to fuller look at this painting later as it has continued to provide insights and help for my decision making. I see myself in the painting in different ways at different times. Each new perspective or insight offers more



depth about me but also about society. I would like my paintings to provide this for others as well.

This painting like all the paintings in this book are in some way about me. At the same time I think they are also about us all and the society we are in. I also hope they offer the reader some new perspective in to their connection with society.

For me the processes of change work and art are both similar and very different. To make sense of my own life I need to look at both, together. I think they can inform each other, and hope to demonstrate this in this manuscript. When thinking about myself as a painter I see the words in the book as sort of like the panels that sit beside a painting in a gallery to offer the viewer an insight in to the painting. The book is really a platform to display the paintings. I see the manuscript as some sort of potential sculpture to sit alongside an exhibition of paintings. Similarly when I think of myself as a change agent I see the words as the key thing with the painting there to help expand and illustrate the ideas. The ideas are key.

I hope the reader might also from time to time see things from both perspectives. There are a couple of other things I want to prepare the reader about before getting fully underway. I have written my story in a linear way starting from birth moving through to the present day. I want to just say a little bit about me and where I have ended up as a person just to be a bit reassuring to you as the passenger in this journey. It feels safer knowing where you are heading. I want also to come back to the idea of how we 'know' to sharpen up the strategy I have employed here

### **A little about me (and maybe us)**

My life has been a very good one. A privileged one. I live in a prosperous country. I have grown up in a loving middle class family. I have always felt cared for. I am married with a loving, caring partner and two great adult children. I have never felt financial insecurity for any length of time. My health has been good. I have some very good friends, neighbours and work mates. My life has felt very rich, I have been able to pursue things that I was interested in and or passionate about. I have comparatively had a lot of choice. I feel very fortunate.



Yet despite all of this I have also often been very afraid, anxious and on occasions very depressed. These emotions have at times dominated my life for many months. This paradox of being miserable while surrounded in relative affluence is surprisingly, but none the less, a very familiar 'first world' story. I see and hear it directly from friends and family. This is oddly unremarkable. It should be a matter of national importance that economic prosperity has failed to create widespread happiness. Working out why this failure is the case, should be a top priority. Why should Governments continue to strive for economic growth if it does not lead to more happiness for all? If the system with all its resources is not making us feel safe, secure and content, then surely something must be wrong with the system.

Despite difficult periods and challenges I do feel my life has worked out well. Things often have fallen in to place for me, sometimes perhaps too easily to be fully appreciated. Looking back at my life as a whole it has been a very enjoyable one. Even so, while 90% of everything can be going along very well, often extremely well, it has also been my experience that when something is not right, in maybe 1% of all these things, this bad thing can nag at me, like a prickle in a sock. I can spend an inordinate amount of time and emotional energy agonizing over why for an example a colleague is blocking something I want to do. I have experienced enormous frustration when things have not gone my way in a particular area when any casual observer would say I have had it pretty good. The word spoilt comes to mind.

At a societal level we similarly often focus on problems and negative things. Good news barely rates, the good stuff is all taken for granted and the focus shifts to the negative. Despite our country's economic success we still want more and more. The world spoilt comes to mind again.

It is a lot easier to blame someone else for anything going wrong rather than to accept some personal responsibility. However while outwardly blaming others at a deeper level we can sometimes deep down feel the personal shame of our own failure, weakness and or stupidity. Similarly, when things are going wrong in society, it is generally the case that Government the media and other big institutions look for someone to blame. Someone needs to resign or take responsibility. It seems we want to blame someone for a failure in the system rather than to blame the system itself. In this way I think all the systemic failures seem to get channelled down to the least powerful and become their emotional burden. Some people seem to have a protective shield that protects them from



ever taking any personal responsibility. They can often end up as criminals or CEO's or both. This transfer of feelings in our society will become a key part of my analysis.

I don't like where we are heading as a society. I feel our economic direction is dangerous environmentally. Climate change, pollution and an increasingly toxic environment threaten everyone's health and the potential survival of the human race. I feel like the materialist, growth orientated, competitive 'win at all costs' nature of our capitalist economic system is not good for us emotionally. It does not make us happy. The values of this economic orientation are also starting to creep in to the non-economic aspects of our lives. These values are seeping in to and subverting our family and community relationships. We are moving away from mutual community orientated, supportive relationships with friends and family to becoming increasingly exchange orientated or controlling. We are becoming less connected at a human emotional level while at the same time increasing connected in superficial material relations via social media within the current digital age.

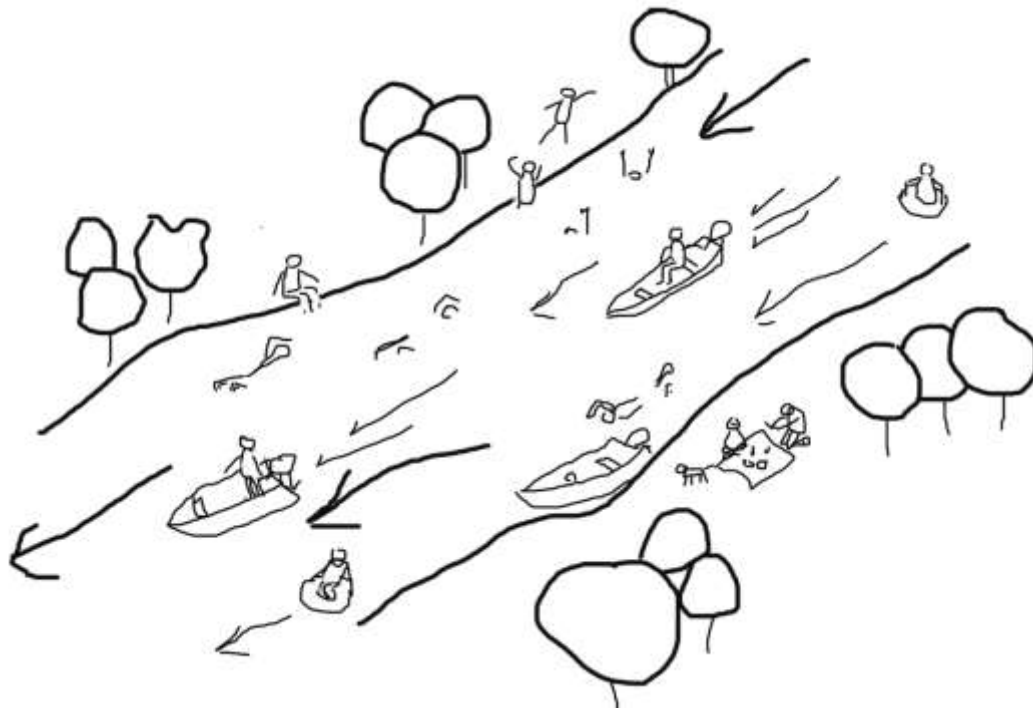
I have from an early age wanted to change the world. Throughout my life I have in little ways tried to change society over time. However the dominance of the current system does not make it easy. While you think you are making some progress it is like swimming against a very fast tide, and you find yourself further away from you destination despite all the effort. I admire people who have been able to swim hard and make a change, unfortunately I am not a good swimmer.

Supporting the system and swimming with the tide provides a much easier life and I find myself sometimes envious of those who are enjoying the benefits of supporting the system. However life for those going with the flow also has its problems. The stream is full of people racing to get to the lead and swimming over the top of people along the way. Those who can't compete start to drown or head to the river banks to survive. It is not a nice picture and it does not seem to benefit even those that find their way to the front. They always have to be looking over their shoulder for those that would take their place. Our former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull recently revealed his depression and suicidal thoughts following being dumped as leader of his party.

This race between people really needs to be rethought, to avoid all the casualties and to allow people to enjoy their swim. So I want to change the race not just because I personally don't like it, but I feel most do not really find joy in this struggle, even though most feel compelled to continue. Those who say they enjoy



the competition and the struggle are generally the ones who often win more often, but even those who have the enjoyment of winning on the day can be crushed in the race the next day. I want to change things most for those who never win and always suffer in this race but also for everyone (winners included). It's a nasty battle for everyone.



### Purpose and Style

This is maybe starting to sound a little like an academic work, but it certainly would not be accepted in that arena. While I read a lot of academic texts a long time ago, I have not been looking at current academic writings. I hope it is thoughtful and well-argued and structured but I am not interested in locating it in any current writing. I have not read an academic text in close to 20 years. This is a much more self-indulgent exercise of personal reflection, of pulling the different stands of my memories together. No doubt academic trends and ideas have crept out of the institutions and to everyday conversation. I am always a bit aghast<sup>1</sup> how much postmodern and post structural language has permeated even

---

<sup>1</sup> I say aghast as I feel despite its dominance as a critique of society it does not seem to have actually lead to any real social change. Its relativist underpinnings make it hard for anyone to really take a stand



everyday conversations and no doubt these and other ideas have permeated my own thinking whether I wanted them to or not.

While not wanting to be hamstrung by the need to locate what I am thinking in relation to the current academic world, my readings from 25 years ago are no doubt still influential on me. When I was an academic there was a couple of my colleagues (Mal McCouat and Maria Tennent from The University of Queensland) who were trying to begin their analysis of things from their own personal experience and I am now following in their tradition, (well I hope it is a tradition now). Their idea which I also supported at the time, was that you can make sense of societal processes by looking not just externally but also to what is going on within oneself. Insight arises from the connections between the inward and outward perspectives

Another idea that has stuck with me from this time was that there is often a strong recursion of processes at all levels of society. This means the same sort of processes can be intertwined at different levels, in politics, in institutions, in families, in neighbourhoods and in individuals. It has been my experience that this awareness can be illuminating. It can illuminate what is happening for an individual when we realize some of what is going on in them is a direct recursion of societal processes. Similarly we can better understand politics when we better understand how individual emotional processes are perhaps being played out within political struggles.

The other idea which flows from this is that we can understand something of the whole by looking at just a part. This book is based on this idea, to see what can be illuminated about society from a review of my own life. To try to understand the whole by not looking just outwardly, but to look inside, and further to look through oneself back to the outside. This is for me a better meaning of insight.

So my life I think can say something about the whole, just as one incident can say a lot about me. However it is also possible to misjudge someone from a single incident. While insight is valuable it cannot be taken as an absolute, it is always provisional and needs to be reconsidered with each new experience. Parts cannot be seen in isolation, we need to keep going back and forth from our understanding of the whole to the part. (The hermeneutic circle)



A more confident picture emerges from several incidents over time. Similarly a picture of society will be stronger and clearer from looking at other biographies. By engaging in your own reflections on your own life experience and looking at the connections to mine and others we can all sharpen our pictures. So my claims here are not intended to be some sort of absolute truth. Rather they are more an invitation for response and reflection and discussion to get a better combined perspective. So I am writing with a clear hope and anticipation for difference and conversation.

There are lots of reasons for me to not write this book. Firstly from my very first memories I have been very shy. When I was 5 years old, I used to run home from my friend's place when his parents came out of the house into the yard. I don't like being the centre of attention. I freeze up in a crowd if all eyes are on me to say something, especially with strangers. However perhaps shyness predisposes me to wanting to critique the world. Shy people are often carefully observing others. By not being in the conversation it is easier to reflect on everyone's interactions and the relationships between people and the interaction as a whole. Artists similarly are often in this position. Rather than being out there completely engaged in the world, the artist and the shy person spend time reflecting on the world from a distance.

Secondly, I am not a good writer or a reader. In the last 4 years I have only read 4 books. Reading is a struggle for me, it's a slow painful process, and not because of any great disability to make such a claim interesting. It feels like I have very weak writing and reading muscles. I am really very unfit to read and write. So while this manuscript has been a very slow process, it has been good





for me to strengthen my literary muscles. Hopefully the reader will have enough tolerance to see beyond the style and look for some substance.

Thirdly, I have not done anything special in my life to warrant the expectation that anyone else will be interested in my meanderings. However, why should the famous and interesting be the only ones that get to do a review of their life? Is there nothing to learn from the dull boring lives that most of us inhabit. If it is true that we need to learn from our mistakes then we should all have plenty to share.

Believing that there is a recursion between different levels of our society leads me to think I have something worthwhile to say. It makes me think we all have something important to say. My shyness makes me think people won't particularly want to listen, but the more confident side of me believes it needs to be said. It needs to be said for myself, so that I can collect and bring together something of my own thinking (so that I can at least hear my own voice). But it also needs to be said for others as well. Some part of me feels compelled to at least try to impact on the world around me and I have just enough arrogance to think that I could be right about what I am thinking (or at least some bits of it). I feel compelled because what I think is contrary to conventional wisdom. As a member of society, a citizen, it would be a bad thing not to have warned others about our directions just in case I was right. I feel a bit like the cartoon character wearing a sandwich board warning others of impending doom.

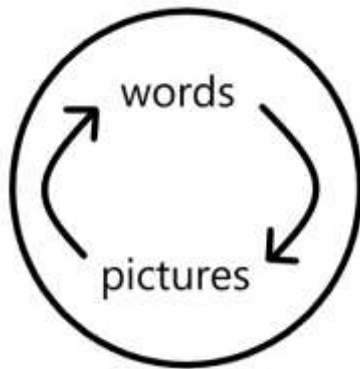
My Mother recently died from Alzheimer's. I am now in my 60s and I have now lost a couple of close friends. My grandfather died suddenly when he was only in his early 60s. A stronger sense of my own mortality spurred me on to finish the book. Sometimes it seemed a very silly enterprise which may have no audience. When I think about the future for my children and grandson (and for my nieces and nephews and their children), I am motivated to think harder about what needs to be done and what part I could play in this. This manuscript has helped my thinking and energized and focused my community actions.

The writing has also encouraged me to get on with more painting. Painting and writing have activity supported each other. Each provides a different way to seek insight. A great benefit of the writing process is that it has led to new ideas for paintings, and these paintings reinforcing the writing. It has also lead me to reconsider and rework some old paintings with new insight.



## Conclusion

What follows could be considered a book with illustrations or a collection of paintings with explanatory notes. I want to try to weave my paintings and written ideas together. Both have the same purpose. Both want to better understand the world and our place in it and both seek to explore what a better world might look like and how change is possible. While the manuscript and paintings are all about me, I hope I have made it clear the actual agenda in this exploration of my own life story is to seek insight in to the whole of our society and so in this way I am actually exploring something about 'us'. I look forward to hearing your own reflections and insights.



vs

