

Bush Mechanics and the Sharehood: futuring the Australian way

'This functional structural mismatch in education (action-less conception and concept-less action) with the valorisation of the abstract and pillarization of the practical has emerged over the past 30 years'

With the spotlight on Australian values, now is the perfect time to report the development of a new approach to futuring that is based on the uniquely Australian concept of the 'bush mechanic'. Dr Paul Wildman of Brisbane has been working on this idea since the 2000, with specific research aimed at seeking to identify commonalities in process between several bush mechanics (see six principles below) This action oriented research in futures beginning in 2002. The 'bush mechanic', or artificer approach to futuring is one that he his research indicates as having immediate practical outcomes for practitioners and their environment, at the same time as it develops a body of expertise that will stand us in good stead in any future emergency.

'In Australia there is a term for someone who links thinking and doing, and can act forward wisely and solve problems with what is available while developing innovations in the field that respond to broader needs,' he explained in an article in the *Journal of Futures Studies* (August 2005).

'A bush mechanic is committed to self reliance and excellence at her task and is not to be confused with a 'backyard mechanic' who does shoddy work. And a Bushy can look both ways to the mechanic and the bench and to the bush to find patterns in nature as with indigenous folks.'

'Bush Mechanic in the Australian vernacular means in German Volk Handwerker. Mechanic can be translated as Arbeit or labour or Handwerker – a chiro-ist so to speak. Intriguingly Mechanic is also a cognate of Spiel or play as Mechanisch. So we have the tri-unity of Mechankier (practical person), Mechanic (Handwerker), and Mechanisch (as in play).

Dr Wildman is deeply concerned about the separation of learning and practice as well as the commercialisation and focus on school NAPLAN scores not student development that has taken place in Australian and indeed western education systems over the past generation. Kids and Adults Learning today is essentially playless, handless and anti-practical. Indeed play has just been eliminated even from pre-school curriculum with the advent of the national preschool curriculum – yes completely eliminated yes for kinder that have been on earth for 48mths yes 48mths is deemed too old for Mechanisch. For me this is the final decay of culture into an amorphous centralised elite controlled Animal Farm. We have to DIY now there is nothing else 'left'.

'We have found that, in conventional social innovations, up to 90% of our energy is absorbed in action as implementation and compliance rather than design and making or (re)conceptualising an idea. So we prefer passive reacting to Government rules rather than innovation this leads to more and more recycling rather than reuse or repair. This is hugely wasteful of embodied energy in our homes, cars, tools, food and equipment. So rather than repair and sharing use as in the Sharehood and Bush Mechanics we bow to planned obsolescence and throw away and buy a 'new' model.

'This compares with up to 90% of the energy expended in the conventional education process as conceptualisation not action. This functional structural mismatch in education (action-less conception and concept-less action) has emerged over the past 200 years and has been identified and explored by many educational innovators. But we have not yet applied the understanding adequately to futures/foresight.'

The 'bush mechanic' approach to futuring proposes re-braiding ideas and action in projects aimed at improving the future. This is a lost art/map where chiro (the hand)

drove cogno (our brain development) – today much of science and basically all of the social sciences see it as the other way round.¹

'In effect, this is a post-industrial form of what in medieval times was called 'artificing' -- a Middle Age precursor to today's technician', Dr Wildman told *Future News*.

'By placing futures, and futures learning, within the context of practical work we can put thinking and doing back together again, re-braiding them in a practical approach to innovation. Ideally the learning that takes place in these practical approaches will be captured in a collection of 'exemplar projects', equivalent to the artificer's 'master piece'. So in the case of the bush mechanic her standpoint is firmly her actions (not intentions, plans, articles or books – rather actual actions towards a better world) towards establishing an 'exemplar project' that demonstrates that a better world is possible tomorrow for our children – a future Nature can live with.

'It is my hope that the concept of bush mechanics will help to demonstrate how such an ancient approach to futuring can help create a better tomorrow today -- a future our children can live with.' After the apocalypse whether it be peak oil, civil breakdown, global warming a world made by hand will be crucial.

With a strong background in action learning – another powerful concept developed in Australia – Paul Wildman has approached this initiative using 'Grounded Theory'. This differs from other research because it works from the bottom up. In other words, Grounded Theory does not test a hypothesis. It sets out to find what theory accounts for the research situation as it is observed in the field. And it does this by establishing key categories/patterns in one's field notes. Paul undertook this research under the watchful eye of Assoc. Professor Bob Dick. Like action research, its aim is to understand the reality, to discover the theory implicit in the data.

Another key feature of the 'bush mechanic' approach is that it is specifically located within a conscious awareness of the 'global problematique' (see page 1), indeed it is a form of what Dr Wildman calls 'craft Koinonia'. The nesting of individuals and societies within this global holarchy, and clear recognition of the need to address problems in today's world in order to create a better future.

Paul Wildman is collecting exemplar projects. He has developed an evaluation form based on the results of his research using the following six principles. Practising members of the Futures Foundation who would like their projects included are invited to contact paul@kalgrove.com and <http://www.kal.net.au/> - top right menu bar has 'adult learning' where the results of this research are available as public domain and global commons.

THE SIX EMERGENT PRINCIPLES OF BUSH MECHANICS

These six principles represent the **commonalities in process** Dr. Wildman identified in decade long Participatory Action Research study of six Bush Mechanics in Australia. By applying Grounded Theory to entries in a learning journal made in the field as he built his own Exemplar Project (a boat) under the guidance of a Bush Mechanic and under the

¹ **A New View of Newton:** 'It was Plato who introduced 'the division between those who know and do not act and those who act and do not know'', Paul Wildman explained in his article in the *Journal of Futures Studies*. 'After Plato in the West we have doggedly followed a staunchly mechanist view, identified with Newton, that 'The Universe was a mechanical one whose order was maintained by a distant God'. Newton in fact wrote more on alchemy than mathematics: he saw the universe tintured and envious by emotion and love. These works remain unpublished. The results of this split are readily seen today in terms of the specialisation of skills, separation of academia from actual social change projects, separation of producing from consuming e.g. we are moving rapidly away from being 'prosumers' - having our own gardens, making our own clothes, sharing our equipment and abilities as in the Sharehood and permaculture and other bush mechanic type activities.

supervision of a respected Academic Elder Dr. Bob Dick. In the following we see embodied participation through an Integral perspective with an eye and hand to transformative outcomes.

1. Exemplar Project Principle – Global Resolutique

Learning from the doing of the bush mechanic is captured and preserved in 'exemplar projects'. The bush mechanic's textbook is learning enacted where in thinking and doing are braided together in the EP that exists in the 'real' or physical world not only in the mind. An EP can be on an individual or community basis and shows in a 'concrete manner that a better world is possible tomorrow for our children'. Here the Artificer is a prosumer extraordinaire – producing and consuming not a dependent consumer. *Exemplar Category.*

2. Inner-Outer Worlds Principle

Such that the exemplar project can be seen as 'walking ones talk' and acting as what may be called a psychonaut linking one's inner 'I' and outer 'that' realms of being – an exploration, manifestation, reification even 'self-realisation' and 'individuation' of so to speak. A Bush Mechanic's work blends internal and external ethics, for example, redefining psychological markers such as autonomy, agency, responsibility income, status, time and task etc. *Individuation Category.*

3. Social Holon Principle

The exemplar project is seen by the bush mechanic as an example of a social holon -- a self-organising nested system which is simultaneously part and whole, hierarchically situated yet autonomous, using fixed rules yet flexible strategies, such as the heart in the circulation system of our body. For the artificers I worked and studied with this involves a certain 'collaborative autonomy'. *Relationship Category.*

4. Global Problematique Principle

The bush mechanic sees herself as a global citizen, locating the EP in a global and indeed Gaian context. And responding the challenges of the Global Problematique by being systemically and ecologically aware and acting locally, concretely, participatively, anticipatively and proactively, through the design building and use of ones exemplar project. *Gaia category.*

5. Harmonisation Principle

Here we have harmonisation of diversity rather than the centralisation of conformity whereby all the various sub-systems involved in the exemplar project fit together i.e. interface efficaciously. This includes resources and its use and users, have to fit in the overall 'pattern language' 'Design like a 'golden mean/thread' together/harmonise/cohere. This is the principle of 'dynamic balance', systems design and is the integral principle. *Harmony category.*

6. Deep Learning Principle

Learning, yearning, earning and concerning link together with all of the above and this includes learning from and within the engagement of establishing the exemplar project and its place in the lived life of the Artificer and her community viz. Life Deep Learning. *Learning category.*

Today we find the shards of what used to be a much wider and deeper distribution of Artificers. Several of these I have identified include: (1) **Bush Mechanic** (techne/artifact builder; P1); (2) **Agape Artificer** (relationship/nurturance facilitator; P3); (3) **Eco-Artificer** (ecological praxis; P4); (4) **Artisan-Artificer** (artistic, artisan specialist; P1), (5) **Community-Artificer** (community animateur; P3), **Green Activist/Social Justice Crusader** (P4), (6) **Systems Design practitioner** (P5); (7) **Pedagogical artificer** (learning, education; P6). There may well be others however in all instances the pattern that connects is, I submit, to large extent identified in the above

Six Principles with a particular one predominating in each of these respective types.²,
³This is the challenge for the next generation Dr. Wildman said as if we are unable to reintroduce these principles in to our earning, yearning and learning activities individually and collectively not only will we have failed our children's children we will have failed Gaia and deep environmental and socio-economic change will be unavoidable.

NB: This article is a longer version of: Wildman, P. (2005). Bush Mechanics: Futuring the Australian Way. *Future News*, September. Pg 6-7.

² We can also see this pattern, to greater and lesser extents at play in emergent sub-cultures such as hackers, punkers (cyber, steam etc), preppers, survivalists. There is however two sides to this coin and in some instances the Artificer can be seen as negative such as a jihadist.

³ Hanna Arendt (1963) claims this is the challenge for modernity: to re-braid thinking and doing.' Such a challenge is welcomed by the Bush Mechanic. And Adorno (2003:xxvi) from *Can There be Education after Auschwitz* ~ To see the newness of the old as well as the oldness of the new. It is in initiatives such as Sharehood, Permaculture and Bush Mechanics that we see the new in and from the old. All of these initiatives are outside and alongside the mainstream business and education and maybe it's on the periphery that we should look for ways to take us forward through the approaching miasma. This is for me a potent test of authenticity.