

Preface and acknowledgements

My wonderful wife, Georgina Murray, apart from being an excellent sociologist, is a great Leonard Cohen fan. So I get to hear his music a lot. Leonard Cohen wrote a song ‘Everybody Knows’, and so it seems that everybody knows about the future, or at least they pretend they know. But, in reality, nobody knows. In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, written over eight centuries ago, the eighth ring of hell had a special place for ‘diviners, astrologists and musicians’ or, as a later illustration put it, ‘futurolgists’. He was probably right.

So if you are reading this book hoping to be able to join the crowded ranks of those who boast ‘I know about the future’, you may be disappointed. But if you bought it (or at least downloaded it) to find out what others, who say they do know, don’t know, you may be more pleased. What I can claim I know a lot about is the realities of work at present, and how we have to understand those realities to enable informed views on the future to be made. And how we do have to think about the future, and that the choices we make now will shape the way the future turns out. Because if we get those choices wrong, the future could be looking pretty grim—like in that longer song title of Neil Young’s: ‘Everybody Knows This is Nowhere’.

Dante isn’t the only literary figure to get a mention in this book, though he’s the most ancient. Littered throughout, but especially in Chapter 3, are references to books, movies (or, in this preface, songs) from popular or classical culture. That’s partly because one of the most interesting ways people have had of talking about the future is through literature rather than through scholarly work (or speculative writing dressed up as scholarly work). And it’s also because I happen to like some of those literary works and talking about them.

This book could not have been produced without the contributions of a number of other people.

The genesis for this book was over 20 years ago, when I began teaching a course at Griffith University on 'Workplace Industrial Relations'. Over time I produced notes for the students that morphed into weekly readings. At one stage, in the early 2000s, the course was taught externally and Cameron Allan and Keith Townsend helped turn the notes and readings into something more pedagogically oriented for students. They also shaped my thinking in several areas, with Keith, for example, providing a lot of material on consent and control by management that is reflected here, and later on about emotional labour when he updated the course. Cameron contributed useful material on culture, gender and disadvantage. Later on, Janis Bailey updated the course again, including on postmodernism and power. Keith is now a professor at Griffith but Cameron, after a late career in the public service, and Janis have both retired. I want to acknowledge all their contributions.

That course has now disappeared but quite a bit of the 'realities' part of this book originated with those earlier notes. Then Tony Dundon (without realising it at the time, and possibly without realising it until he reads this) sparked the specific idea for this book. After I'd started preparing a manuscript, Werner Nienhüser suggested the plural of the title (it was originally 'reality and future') and that made so much sense. He also developed my literary education by giving me a copy of Dave Eggers's *The Circle*. My ideas on the 'futures' side of this book were further developed through some talks I gave that were hosted by the T.J. Ryan Foundation and in various academic and practitioner conferences and sessions.

The Graduate Center at the City University of New York (special thanks to Ruth Milkman, Kay Powell and Don Robotham) gave me a fellowship that enabled me to finish work on the book, including writing most of Chapter 11 (as well as starting work on another book), and Griffith University allowed me to come here (special thanks to Ruth McPhail). Gregor Murray's Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la mondialisation et le travail, based in Québec, Canada, exposed me to many international ideas and helped me develop several of my own at its various events and conferences.

The quarterly *Griffith Review* kindly allowed me to use some material that I had published originally there—in *Griffith Review* 45 (‘The Choices We Make: A *Sliding Doors* Moment’) and *Griffith Review* 61 (‘Debt in Paradise: On the Ground with Wage Theft’)—as the basis for much of Chapter 1 and a smaller part of Chapter 10. Some more of the ideas in Chapter 10 arose from a report I did for the Queensland Parliament on the operation of the workers’ compensation system in that state (thanks, Grace Grace), while others arose from work I did with Paul Harpur some time after he had completed his PhD on international labour standards, and his work has also contributed to the ideas and text in parts of this book (thanks, Paul). A number of the ideas in several other chapters derived from work with Georgina Murray, but she can’t be blamed for what I got wrong because she doesn’t always agree with me anyway. Indeed, I wish I could blame others for any mistakes in the book but, sadly, I cannot (well, not so far).

Georgina Murray and Ron Kelly read through the complete manuscript and gave worthy feedback, as did two thorough anonymous referees for ANU Press. Frank Bongiorno, also from that university, gave useful advice, and John Mahony undertook some excellent copyediting. I’m also pleased that ANU Press (thanks, Emily Hazlewood and Elouise Ball) is willing to offer refereed academic books in an open-access format that is affordable and consistent with the spirit of open inquiry that is so important in this era of commodification.

And finally, a reverse acknowledgement to the multinational corporation that now owns the copyright on lyrics for certain songs. It demanded a four-figure payment if I were to use a couple of lines from a deceased poet’s song in the final chapter in this open-access book, and thereby demonstrated one of my points about the power of large corporations—in this case, the owner of rights to a tower of songs. Everybody knows I was waiting for a miracle, but it being a book about the future and democracy, in my secret life I thought I might be the man in Manhattan to cry out ‘Hallelujah!’. But when it came to closing time on the editing of the book, I just had to think, hey, that’s no way to say you can’t use it.

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