

# Alex Podolinsky – An Extraordinary Life

- John Bradshaw © (Biodynamic Growing magazine, December 2019 [www.bdgrowing.com](http://www.bdgrowing.com))



**Alex Podolinsky died peacefully on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2019, just short of his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday. His life was one of enormous significance for the world, of great creativity and service to the Earth and humanity. Amongst his many achievements, his greatest contribution was undoubtedly to the development of the Biodynamic agricultural method, worldwide.**

Alex was born on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1925 in south west Germany. He came from a heritage of Russian nobility, his father a Russian count who owned large estates in the Ukraine, and was the last governor of the Baltic states under Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. His grandfather was Sergei Podolinsky, a pioneer of ecology. His family fled Russia during the 1917 revolution and Alex was born stateless. At the age of three, he “woke up”, conceiving a powerful desire to find the land of the Sun.

His Godmother, an Anthroposophist (Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual philosophy), introduced him to Rudolf Steiner’s (the founder of Biodynamics) works and he spent much of his school class time reading Steiner, concealed inside a text book.

Alex was a gifted flautist, and by the time the Second World War started he had already performed solo all

over Europe, working with some of Europe’s leading orchestras and conductors. He was drafted into the German army and as he spoke fluent French, was sent to France as a spy. Discovered and poisoned, he somehow managed to return to a German hospital, which was then bombed. He was badly injured and invalidated out of the army, spending the rest of the war recuperating.

After the war, Alex completed a degree in Graphology (handwriting analysis – his analysis of former Australian Prime Minister John Howard’s signature in his book *Ad Humanitatem* is most illuminating) and taught at the Freiburg Steiner school. French secret police warned him that the Soviet repatriation commission was seeking to return him to Russia to be executed as Russian nobility. They gave him the choice of emigrating to Australia or Canada - he chose Australia, the land of the Sun, arriving in Melbourne in 1949 with his wife Katherin.

He worked in administration at the Broadmeadows migrant camp (Melbourne), building a house at Mooroolbark in his spare time. Amongst many possibilities (many wanted him to devote himself to Steiner education), Alex decided to work in agriculture, and carry out Steiner’s wish that Biodynamics (though



not so named during Steiner's lifetime) be spread widely over Earth. Up until this time, Biodynamics had been restricted to members of the Anthroposophical Society. Alex broke through this restriction, determined to make the method available to all farmers.

## Biodynamic Agriculture

In 1952 Alex took over the management of a farm at Wonga Park owned by Ruby MacPherson and, up until then, run by members of the Anthroposophical society. He was later given the opportunity to buy the farm. Here Alex grew cherries, milked Jersey cows and developed his understanding of Biodynamics. Biodynamic preparations were initially supplied by Bob Williams (Sydney) but Alex soon began making his own. He had great respect for Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, who had done the fundamental work on the Biodynamic preparation making, storage and application methods, corresponding regularly with him until his death in 1961, and exchanging preparation samples from time to time. Dr. Pfeiffer acknowledged that Alex had improved the preparation making technique in some instances (particularly with 504, the stinging nettle preparation).

Using BD preparations, Alex was able to greatly improve the soil and produce healthy cherries in bad seasons, when even conventional neighbours, spraying chemical fungicides, were unable to control rot. He developed a keen interest and great skill in Jersey breeding. Alex: *"I visited all major Jersey herds in Victoria and found that the owners bred cattle on paper, without actually seeing and considering the relationship of the desirable individual cattle features to the pedigree names. By observation I taught myself to see 'sought' features of an animal to the background of one or another important ancestor. In fact I saved 100-200 years of line breeding"*<sup>1</sup>.

It should be noted that from Steiner's agricultural lecture series, given in 1924, until the Second World War, little practical development of the Biodynamic method had occurred. Scientific validation of many of Steiner's suggestions had been carried out by Eugen and Lily Kolisko, and Dr Ehrenfried Pfeiffer had perfected the BD preparation making method and determined the best application methods and rates. However, those who attended Steiner's agricultural lectures were mostly large estate owners and Anthroposophists, not practical farmers. Little practical development had occurred before Hitler's rise to power in 1933, and many activities based on Steiner's insights were suppressed from then until the end of the war. Alex was virtually starting with a blank slate as far as practical Biodynamic agriculture was concerned. At Wonga Park he used rotational grazing (when the Victorian Agriculture Department was recommending set stocking), used deep ripping to shatter and open up compacted subsoils and developed many other aspects of the overall Biodynamic

method. In 1957 he founded the Bio-Dynamic Research Institute (BDRI) to carry out BD research.

Encroaching suburbia led to a move to a rundown farm with good water supply at Powelltown in 1960. Alex milked Jerseys, initially supplying a butter factory, later obtaining a whole milk contract (helping other farmers do the same) with much better remuneration. With a friend, Andrew Sargood, he built a laboratory on the farm and began extensive testing of soils, deepening his understanding of Biodynamics. After two years at Powelltown, using no fertilisers or feed concentrates, the farm began topping Victorian butterfat production. The Victorian Agriculture Department, and other Victorian farmers, began taking note.

In the early 1960s, as the success of his farming method became more widely known, Alex began teaching Biodynamic methods to other farmers. At his funeral service, his oldest son John noted: *"Please reflect for a moment – imagine how difficult it would have been to initially pass on the concept of improving soil quality by burying cow manure in cow horns over winter to produce 500!"*

Trevor Hatch (Biodynamic beef producer) said: *"What impressed them was that this educated, cultured European could speak to farmers in their own language. He spoke in pictures. They could understand what he said, and what he said was relevant to them. When Alex spoke about soil it was unique, but nowhere near as unique as when he spoke about how plants function"*. (During one of these early lectures to farmers, Alex suddenly saw, between him and the farmers, a living, moving, detailed picture of how the plant functions. This is briefly explained on p. 2 of this magazine, and forms one of the fundamental principles underlying the Australian National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce).

Alex travelled tirelessly, lecturing to interested farmers. Many farmers began applying Biodynamic methods and seeing real results. Within a short time, he started the Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association of Australia with 27 of these farmers.



BDAAA Annual Conference, May 1968.

<sup>1</sup> *Life Contra Burocratismus*, Alex Podolinsky, 2015, p.133

It soon became obvious that a stirring machine was absolutely essential to the wide spread of Biodynamics on large acreage farms. Steiner had taught that 500 must be activated for one hour before application to the soil, by stirring in a vessel to create a fast moving, deep vortex, reversing the stirring direction to create a vigorous, bubbling chaos, then a new vortex and so on for the hour. Not only would this enormously oxygenate the water, helping the already highly concentrated microbial life in the 500 further proliferate, but would also bring other essential qualities to the liquid. In 1964, Alex called for the development of a stirring machine, describing the qualities the machine should encompass, and within two weeks, BD farmer Kevin Twigg, together with Murray Gartner (who did the electrical work), had designed and built such a machine.



Extensive testing at the Bio-Dynamic Research Institute proved it to be superior to hand stirring, regarding soil and plant results obtained, for any quantity over 12 gallons (54 litres). This set the stage for the widespread uptake of Biodynamics in Australia.

Soon afterwards, Alex discovered a way of incorporating the six plant-based compost preparations with 500 to make a much more effective soil fertility preparation, known as *prepared 500*. Extensive scientific testing (at the BDRI) proved this to be superior to straight 500, and since then it has been the only form of 500 used on any 'Australian Demeter Biodynamic method' farms worldwide (except on the most degraded or chemicalised soils, where straight 500 is used for the first few applications).

After six years at Powelltown, (testing the soil in the laboratory) Alex, without using any inputs apart from the BD preparations, had increased the organic matter levels from 0.9% to 11.4% in the top 100mm and from 0% to 2.4% at 1040mm! Victorian Agriculture Department scientists calculated that over this six year period, Alex had locked up 1614 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per hectare! This has enormous implications for the future health of the planet.

Trevor Hatch again: "*We accepted this (Alex's picture of how plants should feed under jurisdiction of the Sun) and decided to give it a go. Within a few months (of the*

*first 500 application) metabolic troubles that we'd had for 30 years gradually began tapering off, eventually disappearing altogether, and have never arisen again in 50 years. To us that was reality, because cows aren't influenced by placebo effect. You can't brainwash a cow into thinking it's well – if a cow gets better, it's reality. We then knew that what Alex was telling us was reality and that convinced us to keep going and convinced a lot of others. Alex would come to every new farm and have a look. He would assess the person, what they were capable of, what they could afford, and he would give them a plan. Never any mention of payment for his services, and that was something the farmers couldn't understand, they'd never met anyone like that. But the rub was, once you'd learnt to farm that way you had to pass that on to the next one. If there was a new one in your area you were asked to go and give that time. Alex called it a bank and he always said that bank was started by Alan Earle, an industrial chemist who used to come and stay for a couple of days a week and milk the cows so Alex could get away, and it grew from that, and we've maintained that spirit right through the whole organisation".*

In 1967, the BDRI was vested with the rights and supervision of the Demeter trademark in Australia and began to certify Demeter quality products (the first organic/Biodynamic certification scheme in Australia). It continues to certify Biodynamic and organic operators to the requirements of the National Standard for Organic and Bio-dynamic Produce to this day.





Alex's "Biodynamic Introductory Lectures" were published in book form (after much persuasion by poet and artist friend David Wansbrough). They have been published in over 10 languages and are read worldwide.

Alex developed what we now call the Australian Demeter Biodynamic method as the most comprehensive, state of the art, science-based agricultural system of our time. He could not have done it without the essential creative and practical discoveries of the Australian BD farmers. He provided the inspiration, the scientific basis, and the basic elements of the overall agricultural method (such as careful rotational grazing, deep ripping to break subsoil compaction and many other aspects). In contrast to the way Biodynamics has developed in some other parts of the world, the Australian Demeter method, inspired and led by Alex, has always been strictly science based. The making of BD preparations for instance is a highly skilled undertaking, requiring many years of practise based on carefully (scientifically) established guidelines, and the best quality raw materials. For instance, quality 500 is required to be made in a cold winter area, the transformation (Alex: *transubstantiation*) of raw Biodynamic cow manure into quality colloidal humus with unparalleled aerobic microbial content, occurring under the adversity of *cold winter* conditions. Alex maintained that good quality 500 cannot be made in warm winter conditions, lacking this adversity. The quantities required were established by Dr. Pfeiffer and confirmed by Alex and Andrew Sargood under Australian conditions. We use 35g/acre of prepared 500.

Alex began travelling to Europe at the invitation of Biodynamic farmers who felt that BD, as taught in Europe, was not working well. Indeed, when Alex first visited BD farms in Europe he found little of the soil and plant results achieved in Australia. Thus began decades of (usually) annual lecturing and advisory trips which have totally transformed BD practice in Europe, amongst those who were receptive.



*Alex with Gianni Montanari, 2008. Gianni started Biomechanica with his son, manufacturing Biodynamic equipment including Australian designed stirring machines*



*Flavio Cantelli and Maria Bortolotti, Italian vigneroni, with Alex (Maria Bortolotti Viticoltori)*

Alex's approach has been so successful not only due to his immense insights into Nature and farming and his ability to find solutions to the many difficulties of bringing Biodynamics to broad acre, professional farms, but also because the foundations rest on thorough scientific research, including extensive field trials, which established the fundamentals. Following these fundamentals, any competent farmer can expect similar excellent results. Beyond the fundamentals, farmers are encouraged (indeed required) to become creative, independent thinkers and to observe deeply and objectively in Nature. Every farm has different soil and climatic conditions, and each farming enterprise (be it dairying, market gardening, grain production, orcharding etc.) presents unique challenges. Many discoveries and advances were made by the Australian farmers in every type of farming enterprise, on every type of soil and climate. They all contributed to the development of the overall Australian Demeter method.



By 1980, BDAAA members were applying BD methods to over one million acres in Australia, over 95% of world Biodynamics! In 1981, the Biodynamic Marketing Company was formed as a not-for-profit company to distribute Biodynamic products to consumers. In 1984, the ABC made an episode of A Big Country, about Alex and the Australian Biodynamic farmers. It created a

huge impact, speaking deeply to many farmers. The ABC received thousands of letters, mostly from farmers, the biggest response to any program in their history. Alex answered them all and a new expansion of Australian Biodynamics was under way.

In many countries, the scientific basis that characterised the Australian Demeter method was less rigorous. Some European BD associations decided that the preparations should be dried, as are herbs. The unique microbial richness and colloidal nature is thus lost. Years after Steiner's lecture series, his original hand written notes were found, in which he described a different method of making one of the compost preparations – this was adopted in some countries despite Steiner having changed his mind by the time he delivered the lectures. Pfeiffer confirmed that the lecture version was correct. Yet some have ignored Pfeiffer's results altogether. So bad was the situation in many European countries that at an international meeting of Biodynamic organisations in the late 1990s, one European national BD association had prepared a motion that BD preparations should no longer be required for Demeter certification, as Europe's pollution rendered them ineffective. Following Alex's lecture to the delegates (see *Agriculture of the Future*), they visited Agrilatina (huge Australian Demeter method BD market garden) in Italy. After seeing the impressive results brought about by good quality Australian style preparations and overall BD method, the motion was withdrawn. Alex has worked hard to bring about reconciliation between Demeter International and the many hundreds of European farmers practising the Australian method.

A 2019 edition of a European BD journal discussed how much 500 should be used per acre (based on a worldwide survey done by the Agriculture (Biodynamic) Section of the Goetheanum, Switzerland, concluding that between 20-120g was used per acre (Demeter International's recommended range). In one European country, 20g/acre is recommended, this determined by how many horns would be theoretically available from cows on a certain area of farm land and how much 500 could potentially be produced from these horns. No reference to Dr. Pfeiffer's research or any other scientific determination of best application rates. Many countries still hold annual meetings of preparation makers to compare the quite widely varying prep making methods used and develop some consensus as to the best methods. Many of the BD techniques I have come across worldwide would not be accepted for Demeter certification in Australia and have not been verified scientifically.

There has been an element of envy of the success of Australian Demeter Biodynamics which has held back BD development in some countries, and many advances made in Australia were ignored. I read a European paper on world Biodynamic acreage in the early 1980s in which a world total figure of around 40,000 acres was

reported. This completely ignored the over 1,000,000 acres of Biodynamics in Australia!

Negativity has been generated towards Alex and the Australian Demeter BD movement by some people. Having come across people who expressed negativity towards Alex, I simply asked "have you ever met him?" Invariably the answer was "no". The thousands of farmers, worldwide whose lives have been fundamentally changed by Alex know how much he pushed himself to help others and bring about rejuvenation of the Earth, as well as his incredible warmth and supportiveness. He could at times be hard on people, usually purposely to help them wake up to some weakness or tendency to fixedness. He would not tolerate dishonesty or greed and always insisted on absolutely highest standards in BD practice. However, beyond the scientifically proven BD basics, he encouraged everyone to continue to objectively seek and discover new developments, in general BD terms, and also, essentially, in their own farm environment.

The Australian Demeter Biodynamic method is now widely used throughout Europe and is spreading rapidly through Asia, inspired and guided by Australian BD market gardener, Darren Aitken. European countries in which Alex worked include Italy, France, Germany, Croatia, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Greece, England, and the Ukraine – he also worked with farmers in South Africa, America and Canada.

The following message from Pasquale Falzarano encapsulates much of what Alex meant to farmers around the world:

"From Pasquale Falzarano, also on behalf of Agrilatina and on behalf of the Italian biodynamic group 'Agricoltura Vivente', stimulated by Alex Podolinsky and that is trying to develop his biodynamic impulses in practice. We know that Alex in his passage has been assisted with a lot of love and meticulous attention by family members, whom we warmly thank.

We know that in his last days many people in Australia, in the World, in Europe and in Italy have been close to him in many ways, with affection, with thoughts and with prayers. Now Alex has flown, CLEAN, as he wanted... I can't be present so I send these reflections: Our first meeting 26 years ago. A wonderful relationship since the summer of 1993 when Camilla Conforti (who with Susanna Küffer Heer and her husband John Heer organized some conferences of Alex Podolinsky in Europe) took him for a day's rest near Agrilatina and travelling in front of our farm asked him if he wanted to enter. He said "just a few minutes because I'm tired". He stayed all day... Everything we did was wrong! "biodynamics applies like this...and like this..." and immediately, the following month, my first trip to Australia, with Giovanni my cousin, then the second trip

in 1997, with my wife Lucia, our honeymoon...). He got us to visit many farms, hosted us in his home and gave us many useful impulses. He then came to our house every year...

For many years I went to pick him up at Rome airport. He was with us for some days and then he would go around to spread biodynamics in Italy and Europe. At the end of his tour he was still with us for a few days telling us about the trip experiences: the people he met and the farms he visited became very familiar and alive for us. Then I accompanied him to the airport to return to Australia.

In 1994 we organized a several days course with biodynamics and clay. Then other courses, conferences, meetings... So many conversations together... So many insights... So many long trips by car... so many visits to the farmers... An important figure for our evolution and growth.

In Agrilatina we have deepened together various mixtures of green manure, built tools and improved the ripper "Agriculture of the Future" has begun. He sent us on many visits and softly forced me for my commitment to spread biodynamics in Europe. Then, in Italy, the association "Agricoltura Vivente" or "Living Agriculture" was born, of which I am one of the founding members. He also asked us to coordinate, if possible, with other biodynamic farms in Europe.

Over time, with his special sensitivity, he has attracted many farmers in Italy. Some are in great evidence such as Lorenzo Arcangeli, Stefano Freato (*who started making the first Australian-style 501 in Italy*), Brigitte Olsen (*who travelled to Australia to learn the prep making more than 20 years ago and helped translate a lot of Alex's lectures into Italian*), Saverio Petrilli, Leonardo, Annapia, Antonella, Dora and many others (all contributing to the BD development in Italy)... Some are also involved in the dissemination of BD.

Alex Podolinsky often talked about his experiences, his life and his childhood. He was a man of great knowledge, capacity, kindness, helpfulness and generosity. He understood people, especially the simplest and most outspoken farmers. He could read in the eyes and the heart. He always asked for information on how things were going and he was always close to people and to the farmers with words of encouragement and gestures of goodness. The Humanity and the Earth need a decisive contribution to change and to save themselves, starting with Agriculture.

Alex was a pioneer of a NEW Professional Biodynamic Agriculture, where Knowledge, Art, Music, Perception, Experience and Practice come together for a NEW different Agriculture. He has dedicated a great deal of energy to spread those seeds, as well as his books. A very high mission to accomplish... A moral force and a

great will have supported him until the last years when the body, now debilitated, was leaving him... A MARVELLOUS man... a GUIDE and a FREE and IMMENSE spirit... and those DEEP eyes to perceive INSIDE and BEYOND what appears... Now he has returned, serenely, to the LIGHT from which he came and continues to illuminate us in the way of LOVE and STEINER...

How many memories, images and feelings crowd with force the mind and heart of everyone who has practised or known it... A heavy void... and a poignant pain... We miss it, but its spirit REMAINS in us. We will try to CONTINUE the work of change of the Earth, of the Art, of the Agriculture and of the Healthy Food, rich in Vital Energy, which Alex tried to STIMULATE in all of us.

The Earth needs us and the commitment to change starts with EACH of us... I am and we are bound to him by affection and gratitude, even more so now that he has flown. Alex THANKS for everything... A hug to the Podolinsky Family and to the Australian biodynamic farmers from the Italian and European BD farmers and the 'Living Agriculture' Association - Pasquale Falzarano and family, Giovanni Amoriello and the Agrilatina team"

## Active Perception

In many spheres of human endeavour, the ability to 'actively view' is indispensable. How many doctors now hardly look at their patients, but spend the consultation looking at their computer screen, typing, asking questions of the patient with the occasional passive glance. A real doctor studies the patient intently, unconsciously but actively viewing, taking in the whole person. A good farmer will similarly actively extend out through the eyes to encompass the life in a whole crop, an animal, or group of animals, or to gain an overall impression of the current Nature environment on the farm. Much more can often be gleaned from this active viewing than by blood tests, soil analysis etc. though these also play an important role. Alex developed what became known as 'Active Perception' from 1950 onwards, and trained many people, using the writing samples later published in his book of the same name, and clay modelling. Active Perception is at once objective and subjective – by *actively* viewing, there are objective realities to be found, which all *active* viewers can agree on, but it takes their own subjective efforts to actively view, to find these realities, and requires practice. Television, computer games and the like can destroy the ability to actively view. The method was eventually published in response to a request from the director of a European hospital who wanted to use Alex's method in the development of its young doctors. Many of the bridges on Melbourne's Eastern Freeway (and the weightless wave wall) were designed by one of Alex's active perception/clay modelling students – anyone can see the uplifting, weightless qualities in the wall and many of the bridges.





*Eastern Freeway, Melbourne*

## Architecture

Alex, though untrained in this field, was a gifted architect, designing many important buildings. Active perception played a major role in his work. Alex said: “*etheric architecture requires clear recognition of the ethers: liquidity, light ether, warmth ether and purpose ether (which) have to be clearly experienced as separate from water, light, warmth and life.*”<sup>2</sup> He won an international competition to design a skyscraper facade for Melbourne against the best architects in the world (see picture at right). Due to an oversupply of office space at the time, it was never built. His architect son Paul said: “*In many ways similar to the soil, the (glass) facade composition captures light and expresses fluidity and life forces in its basis*”<sup>3</sup>. The prize money from this competition helped provide the funding for the Warranwood (Melbourne) Rudolf Steiner School.

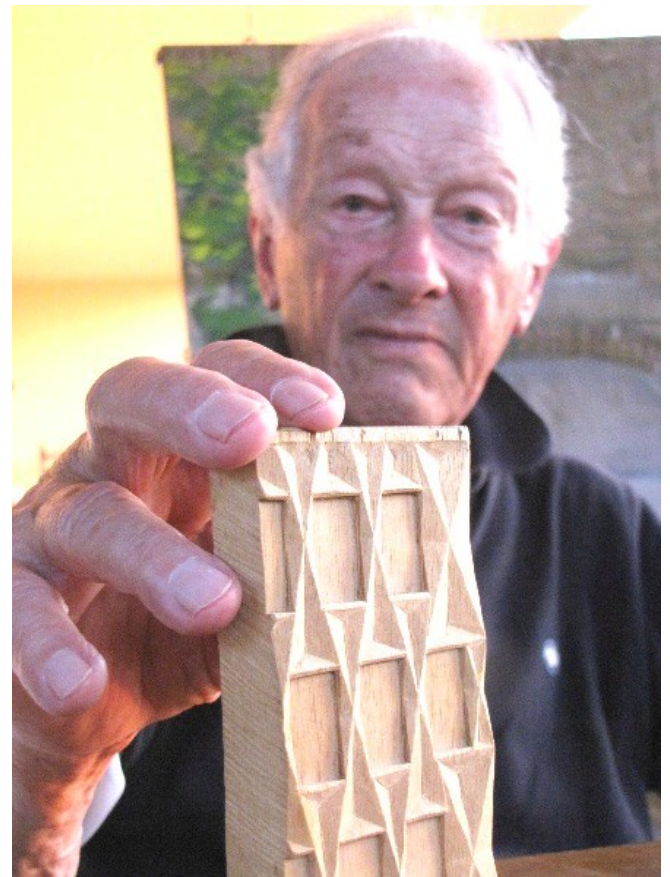
Alex designed the kindergarten and other buildings at the Warranwood Steiner School, the Ghilgai Steiner School, the Canberra Steiner School, the Wandin Curative Home and many private houses (including his own). His buildings are like living entities, and are always acoustically exceptional. He “*saw acoustics as the soul of the building, helping people experience themselves and being made to feel awake*”.

It took Alex over a year of struggle to complete the design of the Warranwood School theatre, a huge building that had to be ‘weightless’. Sadly, this magnificent design was, after commencement of construction, changed by another architect, and was never realized. Regarding the music room at Warranwood, Paul: “*The music room at Warranwood possesses the same quality of space (as the kindergarten), a balance between shape, proportion, structure and harmony. It has resonance, like the highest quality instruments – irrespective of the spaces contained by a sole musician or fully occupied, it works from an acoustic perspective, it is a unique space.*”

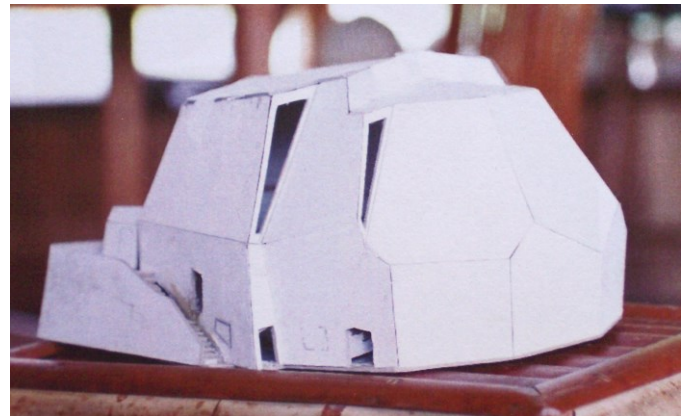
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<sup>2</sup> *Life Contra Bureaucratism, Alex Podolinsky 2015, pp 113, 119*

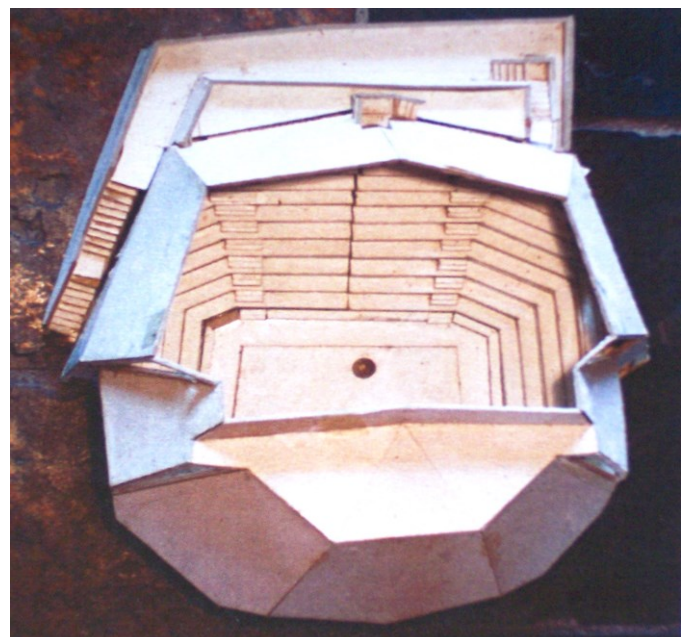
<sup>3</sup> All quotes in this section are from Paul Podolinsky



*Wooden model of the skyscraper facade*



*Alex's model of the Warranwood School theatre*



## Education

Alex (who had taught art and languages at the Freiburg Steiner school) was instrumental in bringing two Steiner schools into existence. At his funeral service, Ruth Wittig, the founding teacher at Warranwood Steiner School (and, later, the founding teacher at Ghilgai School) described how Alex inspired her, newly graduated from teacher's college, towards Steiner education, lending her books on the subject. Ruth attended Alex's lectures and workshops in the city, meeting other teachers there. She met the leader of Steiner teacher training in the UK when he visited Melbourne, and the idea of a Steiner school in Melbourne gained strength.

Ruth travelled to the UK and Europe to prepare for the task. She outlined the development of the Warranwood school, how Alex donated prize money from the architecture competition to provide the financial base for the school, designed the buildings, and helped in the development of the teachers. Ruth (speaking at the funeral service): *“those beautiful buildings, the uplift one gained inside, the nurturing they gave a child at school..... (Alex) negotiated with builders and education authorities.....worked on site doing tractor work, bagging, tiling, whatever needed doing. He introduced a layered style of painting that caused the colour to sing.*

Later, Alex and Ruth, together with a group of parents, started a new Steiner school in Melbourne's outer eastern suburbs. Ruth: *“Alex and I found a degraded piece of land in Kilsyth and a loan from Alex and the formation of a co-op. provided the financial foundations for Ghilgai. Alex was no longer a young man. At 56 everything was just a bit harder. Nevertheless he worked relentlessly in order that the school might come into existence. He'd often milk at 4am, come to school to work and go home to milk again.*

*Alex was a man of great stature, a man of courage and resilience. He was a visionary, a craftsman, a sculptor, a colourist, an architect. He was a thinker, a teacher, a negotiator, a linker, drawing people together so activities could develop. He served education and he served agriculture – these two areas are not separate. BD farming enlivens the soil and the environment and produces nourishing food that enlivens children, Earth's future generations. Steiner education nourishes the whole child and supports the unfolding of his potential that it contributes to community well-being and responsible citizenship, Earth's future again”.*

## Curative Education

Rudolf Steiner curative work (with intellectually disabled people) had started on the Mornington Peninsula, going through several phases before Alex was asked to be involved. A property was found at Wandin, and Alex designed the most beautiful, uplifting buildings. Parents and supporters raised funds and a generous government grant allowed the building to

proceed. Many of the workers attended Alex's lectures and active perception training, which helped immensely in their challenging work. Alex also served on the management committee and helped in the development of the curative workers.

Room colours were chosen to suit the young people who would use those rooms and Alex was instrumental in mixing just the right colours and applying them, with helpers, using his own living techniques.

I was lucky enough to see Wandin in the early 1980s, a wonderful community living and working together in the most uplifting buildings and Biodynamic farm environment, endeavouring to enable the development of the true potential of the young people. In 1982, new management was brought in, leading to the departure of Alex and many of the long-time curative workers, though it continued for some time to operate as a Steiner curative home. In its last years before the dispersal of the young residents under the state government's 'de-institutionalisation' policy, it was under the management of a church organisation.

I heard recently in a roundabout way from one of the intellectually disabled past residents of Wandin Curative Home. She had watched some of Alex's funeral ceremony online and heard Trevor Hatch talk about the exercise Alex gave people, to try to describe the essence of their work in education or agriculture (or any other endeavour) in one paragraph, then reduce it to one sentence, then to one word. Trevor said that in his view, the sentence that best described Alex was *“he was truly inspirational”* and the one word to best describe him was *‘driven’*, because he just never stopped. She said *“The word should be LOVE because he loved the Earth more than anyone else”!*



Photos used in this article: pages 1, 3 and 9 – Oliver Strewé ([www.oliverstrewé.com](http://www.oliverstrewé.com)); p.4 (LH col.) Saverio Petrilli; p.4 (top RH col.) Maria Bortolotti (Maria Bortolotti Viticoltori), p.4 (RH lower) John Bradshaw, p.8 - Daryl Ward.



