

*Spellbound...?*

A hermeneutic response to disillusionment in the  
contemporary university

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'Being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else.'

Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004, p.126)

'Dance dance, if you do that dance  
I'm gonna let you join my one-man band  
Be my doll, be my baby doll  
Come get to know me like the back of your hand  
I like the name hanging on that chain  
I like the way you do the push and the shove  
You can blow my mind if you're that way inclined  
All that I know is that you fell from above.'

*Holy Mountain*, Noel Gallagher (2017)

# Abstract

Universities occupy an important place in the world's economies, and the idea and purpose of the university is a question that has historically received considerable attention. In recent years, a state of disillusionment among UK academics has been observed, and attributed in part to a belief that the economic mandate of the contemporary university has become alienated from its academic mission. This thesis aims to further explore and understand this disillusionment in context, through eliciting the experiences and conceptions of teachers, students, and managers—groups that are also, in a sense, alienated from one another—and 'bringing them into conversation'.

The thesis presents a framework of ideas pertaining to disillusionment as a state of mind, including disenchantment as a corresponding state of world and its opposite, enchantment. It uses these concepts to build a theory of disillusionment in the university, drawing on a novel methodology that is informed by philosophical hermeneutics and justified in ethical terms as a responsive vacillation between the modes of understanding and explanation.

At the heart of the thesis is a semi-fictional conversation that has been created by weaving together excerpts from transcripts of individual interviews. It is fictional in the sense that the interaction between the individuals is imagined, and truthful in its intention to represent faithfully the histories and experiences of the teachers, students, and senior managers who participated. The aim of this creative act is to present a fusion of real perspectives on the university. Presented alongside the conversation is a commentary that documents the author's encounter with it as a reader. The commentary highlights tensions, contradictions, and inconsistencies as the author perceives them to emerge from the conversation, and links these with the theoretical and methodological issues discussed in previous chapters.

The thesis concludes by advancing a theory of (dis)illusionment in the university. Having shown that the idea of the university is replete with contradiction, and as such constitutes an 'impossible object', illusionment is proposed as an alternative state of mind (to disillusionment) in which one is able to hold contradictory and/or inconsistent ideas. The specific context of the specialist arts university in which the conversations take place is proposed to be significant, with reference to the tolerance of contradiction demonstrated by the characters in the conversation and the participants whose voices they represent.

The thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge that has both methodological and disciplinary aspects. While its methodological approach and framing of findings may not be considered experimental by those undertaking scholarly activity in the type of specialist arts institution in which this research is situated, the playful and imaginative approach to data analysis documented here has not previously been applied

to the study of higher education itself. In terms of higher education philosophy and theory, the thesis also makes a novel contribution to an understanding of disillusionment in the university, and some of the practical implications of this.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Topic and focus

This is a hermeneutic study of the concept of the university. It seeks to understand disillusionment in the contemporary university through a synthesis of different perspectives on higher education. The synthesis is presented in the form of a semi-fictional group conversation created by weaving together excerpts from transcripts of conversational interviews with individuals. The institutional context of the primary research is a specialist arts university, where I am a senior lecturer leading a postgraduate course in academic practice.

## 1.2 Vision and motivation

Mason (2002) explains that qualitative research is rewarding because ‘it engages us with things that matter, in ways that matter’ (p.1). Educational developers—as educators of university teachers—have a particular interest in the question of the purpose of universities in general, and specifically with regards to their home institutions. Educational developers’ understanding of the purpose of the university informs what and how they teach, which in turn influences those participating in their courses and programmes, and how *they* understand *their* role in upholding that purpose. Hence, in this instance it is not only the question of the purpose of the university that matters. It is also significant that an educational developer (i.e. myself) is asking the question.

The initial motivation for this research project was my own perception of widespread disillusionment, pessimism, overwork and anxiety among staff who teach and support student learning in universities. Wellbeing has become a concern throughout higher education, with increases in the numbers of students reporting poor mental health having been documented over a number of years. In the decade following the publication of the initial Guidelines on Student Mental Health Policies and Procedures for Higher Education (CVCP/SCOP 2000), greater recognition of the factors impacting on student wellbeing and changes to equality legislation (Equality Act 2010) led to the commissioning of a new Good Practice guide by the university leaders’ group Universities UK. The resulting publication presents a complex picture, the authors agreeing with Callender et al. (2011) that staff and student wellbeing is ‘interrelated and interdependent’ (UUK 2015, p.10), while maintaining that ‘universities are academic, not therapeutic, communities’ (p.4). This statement implies a distinction between academic and therapeutic aspects of human flourishing, and a degree of detachment from responsibility for the wellbeing of students and staff.

The disillusionment of university *staff* in particular has often been attributed to a belief that universities have become more like businesses than places of learning. The impact of

performance measurement through the setting and assessment of targets has been well-documented, for example by the education policy analyst Stephen Ball (2003, 2016), and academic authors on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g. Readings 1997, Newfield 2008, Collini 2012) have argued that the economic mandate of universities is increasingly at odds with their academic mission. Scott Carson (2019) explains how responsibility for this drift tends to be ascribed to university governance, and resentment, distrust and resistance (see Gonzales 2014 for examples) is exacerbated by the assumption that more senior members of staff are insulated from the precarious and increasingly demanding working conditions faced by teachers and administrators.

Universities occupy an important place in the world's economies, and it is vital that we continue to try to understand the 'texture and weave' (Mason 2002, p.1) of these complex social institutions, to have faith that it is possible for them to support the common good, and to imagine what that might look like, even—or especially—in such uncertain times. This research aims to contribute to that process, through bringing together the rich, nuanced understandings of very different individuals within one university—from pro-vice chancellors to first year undergraduates—with the intention to illuminate solidarities between them and show how multiple perspectives are accommodated within higher education institutions. Students, teachers, educational developers and managers are distinct from one another in terms of the nature and purpose of their involvement in the university, and in many cases are alienated from one another in the sense that they are not in direct personal contact. Teachers work primarily with students, administrators and other teachers, and educational developers work primarily with teachers. Neither have much—if any—direct contact with senior managers. Educational developers, managers and administrators tend to be at least one step removed from the experiences, motivations and imaginations of students. While higher education leaders like Kerr (1963) and Aoun (2017) have shared their respective visions in the public domain, few studies have interrogated the 'understandings, experiences and imaginings' (Mason 2002, p.1) of senior university managers and their executive boards from within and below, or indeed brought student voices into conversation with teachers and managers.

An initial intention to work towards resolution of conflict was abandoned early in the research process, on realising that the drive to resolve can be a barrier to genuine understanding. This is a common standpoint in conversation theory (e.g. Zeldin 2000, Patton et al. 2011), and is reiterated by Ron Barnett in his recent work on *Imagining the University* (2013), in which it is argued that a fuller understanding of the university is achieved through opening oneself up to others' imaginations of it. Such an encounter relies on acknowledging—and ideally transcending—one's instinctive desire to persuade the other to one's own point of view.

To begin an enquiry with a hypothesis of disillusionment among staff and students—rather than ending it with one—has the potential to lead the enquirer beyond the established and growing body of literature about contemporary universities and their purpose. Recent changes to UK higher education policy, such as the move to a fee loan system and the

installation of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), have been largely consistent with the trend of increasing bureaucratisation and marketisation that predates the publication of the Dearing report (1997), and the sociological literature on universities may similarly be perceived as a proliferation (of polemic) rather than an evolution. Hence, rather than focusing on critiques of contemporary HE policy, I have consciously drawn upon broader sociological and philosophical ideas to fuel an ongoing process of understanding of the tensions at play in the higher education sector.

In accounts of educational disillusionment in the university (e.g. Readings 1997, Ball 2003), references to modernity arise frequently and repeatedly. It became clear to me on reviewing seminal theories of modernity (Bauman 2000) and the ‘disenchantment of the world’ (Max Weber in Gerth & Wright Mills 1946), that these concepts are important in understanding contemporary higher education. As I contemplated the following question, a potential link emerged between the disillusioned state of mind, and the *disenchanted state of world*:

When we talk of disillusionment in the University, what is the ‘illusion’ that has been lost, and in what way—and to what extent—is ‘re-illusionment’ desirable?

The social scientist Howard S. Becker (2007) observes that writing academically about the social world involves ‘so much that ought to be considered, so many connections between so many elements...it seems inconceivable that it can be given a rational order’ (p.132-133). It has been my express intention to incorporate disparate sources of knowledge throughout the writing of this thesis, and to expand my own horizons beyond the comfortable and familiar. In doing this I am exemplifying what I claim to be an important truth about the character of education, namely, that learners benefit from being open to different forms of knowing, and willing to occasionally apprehend the world as a mystery rather than always as a problem to be solved (Munday 2013). Further to this, a teacher—and particularly a teacher of teachers—ought to be and do the same.

### 1.3 Alignment with the aims of the professional doctorate

A doctoral programme is many things. It is both a course of training and a route to professional recognition. It is also an educational endeavour that, for many, can be personally transformative. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose philosophical hermeneutics has inspired and informed this work, a significant aspect of becoming educated is to encounter ‘what is other and different’ (Misgeld & Nicholson 1992, p.xi). By this account, the hermeneutic endeavour *itself* is an idea or ‘imagination’ (Barnett 2013) of higher education and scholarship of all kinds.

Holliday (2007) describes qualitative writing as ‘an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the *total experience* of which it is an artefact’ (p.122, my emphasis). Vygotsky scholar David Bakhurst (2019) uses the Russian word *perezhivanie* to signify a conception of ‘total experience’, which incorporates the cultural context

and personal significance of actions, words and objects. The articulation of something approaching 'total experience' is the aim of what the ethnographer Clifford Geertz' terms 'thick description' (1973), and there is an ethnographic flavour to this work in the sense that the thick description emerging from it aims to represent participants' perspectives in context, including implicit and explicit structures, rules and norms, emotions, interactions and verbal behaviours. Through the semi-fictional conversation presented in this thesis, one gains a sense of *what it is like* for the participants to have had their respective experiences. Subsequently, one arrives at a deeper understanding of how the participants conceive the university as an institution and, thus, how the institution conceives itself. This thesis is not only a work of research, it is also a record and product of an educational process, and an educational artefact in itself.

Doctorates are essentially entry qualifications through which one learns how to be a researcher. In the case of a *professional* doctorate, the enquiry is typically situated within an individual's established professional practice, and may explicitly explore and/or enhance that practice. The particular significance of an educational developer undertaking a hermeneutic study of the university has already been highlighted. Further to this, if an educational developer can arrive at a fuller, more contextualised understanding of how the institution conceives itself and its purpose, there will be profound implications for their own work with teachers.

## 1.4 Location within broader work

The idea and purpose of the university is a question that has historically received considerable critical attention. The *Idea of a University* proposed by the Catholic cardinal John Henry Newman ([1852] 2016) is still frequently cited as a philosophical foundation of British higher education (see for example Anderson 2010 and Biesta 2018), but sector expansion and funding changes, particularly following the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) and the Dearing Report (1997), have led to certain comparisons with American higher education, which has operated a fee loan system for considerably longer. While critical analyses of the university have been offered by both British and American authors (e.g. Readings 1996, Maskell & Robinson 2002, Newfield 2008), a more limited collection of theorists, including Nixon (2013), Barnett (2013, 2018), and to an extent Collini (2017), have advocated for complex and plural interpretations of the University and its purpose. This line of thought may be assumed to have its roots in the United States with Kerr's (1963) concept of the 'multiversity', but this is not necessarily the case. Kerr's ideas were considered highly controversial in academic circles, where he was criticised for his support of the University's role in the post-war industrial complex (Rosenfeld 2013). Kerr subsequently insisted his thesis was descriptive rather than prescriptive, and future editions of his *Uses of the University* incorporated more explicit criticism of contemporaneous social developments. Nevertheless, it would have been as unlikely for a president of a large American university to criticise consumer capitalism at that time as it would be today. The current president of Northwestern University, Joseph Aoun, is a case in point, his recent treatise on *Higher Education in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (2017) very obviously

promoting his own institution—and its ethos of innovation and industrial co-operation—within the higher education market (Jordan 2017). Barnett (2013, 2018) stands in contrast with voices like Aoun's, highlighting the need to bring diverse voices into a conversation that imagines 'feasible utopias' for UK higher education with a focus on ecology and sustainability.

Barnett's gently subversive call to action was an early inspiration for this thesis. Also influential have been the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer ([1960] 2004), Charles Taylor (2008), Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (2004) and Theodore Zeldin (2000), all of whom take an ethical standpoint that the advancement and salvation of humanity depends on an ongoing process of mutual understanding. Some may reject this attitude as political quietism—the acceptance of things as they are without attempting to change them. Indeed, Barnett's optimistic and conciliatory tone troubled me on first reading, attuned as I was to my colleagues' grumbles and the polemic that had permeated the public consciousness. At this point in time, even the popular magazine VICE (Rickett 2015) had entered the fray, with an article accusing universities of turning 'learning into money for corporate fat cats'. A response to the challenge of quietism is given in Chapter Three, where it is argued that the type of mediating work documented in this thesis arises from a progressive rather than a conservative impulse. In the shadow of increasing social inequality and impending environmental collapse, it has become increasingly urgent to challenge 'business as usual' (as I write this, a deadly global virus is doing exactly that, while creating new inequalities and augmenting old ones). Rather than assuming that the challenge must take the form of a battle, I am interested in allowing it to manifest as a dance.

Another way to articulate how this work departs from existing research in the field is to describe it as an apprehension of the university as a mystery (Munday 2013) rather than a problem to be solved. Its primary aim is not to seek or offer recommendations for changes to the university's mission or processes of governance. Rather, its intention is to contribute towards a deeper understanding of the concerns and dilemmas faced by those in these and other roles. While there are of course aspects of the university that could and perhaps *should* change, the theoretical framework and methodological standpoint underpinning this work aligns with that of Hans-George Gadamer, being an attempt to apply 'the hermeneutically attuned mind to the reality of the university' (Misgeld & Nicholson 1992, p.xi). The thesis is not an end point so much as a provocation, and a preparation of the ground for further research.

## 1.5 Structure of the thesis

The remaining chapters of this thesis are grouped into three sections—each with distinct intentions—the first of which seeks to map out a framework of ideas. Taking as its starting point the idea that disillusionment is a state of mind and disenchantment is its corresponding state of world, Chapter Two reviews and synthesises theories pertaining to *disenchantment* as they apply to society in general and the contemporary university in particular. Three interrelated value dimensions of the hypothetical 'disenchanted world' are identified and examined. First,

disenchantment is explained in terms of *secularisation*, i.e. the loss of religious authority and the rise of science over belief. Building from the ideas of Max Weber and Charles Taylor, the epistemological implications of secularisation are considered along with their significance for the university. Two further dimensions of disenchantment are discussed. These are *specialisation* (the segregation of academic disciplines), and *individualisation* (the unmooring of individual persons from social groups and obligations).

The second part of Chapter Two theorises an alternative and opposite state of world to disenchantment. Three interrelated value dimensions of (re)*enchantment* are proposed—*faith*, *wonder* and *unity*—and their potential manifestation in the university is explored. The chapter is brought to a close with a summary of the significance of this framework of ideas for an understanding of disillusionment.

The second section comprises two chapters dedicated to the philosophy and methodology underpinning the primary research. Chapter Three locates the methodology within the fields of education and philosophy, explains how the research has been inspired and informed by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, and reflects on the significance and implications of what is presented as a 'hermeneutic ethic'. Chapter Four describes and justifies the methods used to collect, analyse and synthesise primary data, and explains how these are aligned with the philosophical framework outlined in Chapter Three.

The third and final section presents the outcomes of the primary research and an overarching conclusion. Chapter Five comprises a semi-fictional group conversation that has been created by weaving together excerpts from transcripts of individual interviews. Accompanying the script of the conversation—and presented alongside it in a format inspired by Juliet Henderson's (2018) work on critical deconstructive writing and academic form—is a commentary, which documents my own encounter as a reader of the conversation. The commentary highlights tensions, contradictions and inconsistencies indicated by the research participants and subsequently raised by the fictional characters, and links these with some of the theoretical and methodological ideas discussed in previous chapters. Chapter Six draws together the conclusions arising from the enquiry as a whole. It introduces the idea of the university as an impossible object, advances a theory of (dis)illusionment in the university, and comments on the professional significance of the work and the scope for further research.

# Chapter 2: Disillusionment and Disenchantment

In the broadest sense, disillusionment is the state of mind one lands in when an illusion becomes untenable. Hence, in disillusionment, *knowledge is framed as loss*. On the societal and global level, the notion of knowledge as loss underpins Max Weber's theory of *disenchantment*. Disenchantment is a state of world, while disillusionment is a state of mind. This chapter explores the former with the expectation that it is significant for understanding the latter.

## 2.1 Disenchantment as a state of world

Max Weber's 'Entzauberung der Welt', as detailed in his 1917 lecture *Science as a Vocation* (Gerth & Wright Mills 1946) is a theory of the disenchantment or 'de-magicking' (Allot 2018, p.123) of the world. The central claim of his thesis—that (disenchanted) modernity is characterised by the progress of science—is widely accepted, although the details of how the term 'disenchantment' is to be unpacked remain contested. In this chapter I am not interested in its *general* unpacking so much as its utility as a lens through which to examine disillusionment in the contemporary university. As a starting point for discussion, given that universities are primarily sites for the sharing and production of knowledge, I outline an analysis of knowledge production formulated by the Weberian anthropologist Ernest Gellner. The starting point of this analysis is that the disenchantment of the world is synonymous with the progressive dominance of scientific knowledge (i.e. knowledge produced by science) over non-scientific forms of knowledge (e.g. religious belief and the products of craft). It should be noted that, as a product of sociological method, Gellner's analysis itself exemplifies cognition that is unambiguously scientific. Its clarity offers a precise starting point.

## 2.2 Gellner's analysis of science as a vehicle of disenchantment)

Gellner offers several analyses of the disenchantment/enchantment distinction, and the purpose of what follows is specifically to orientate the reader towards an understanding of his analysis of what it means to be scientific. In *The Scientific Status of the Social Sciences* (1985 p.115-126), Gellner characterises modern natural science as:

1. Consensual
2. Consistent across politics and cultures
3. Cumulative (with accumulation being its indicator of success)
4. Technically learnable by anyone, but requiring prolonged training in forms of thought that are discontinuous with daily life and are often *counterintuitive*
5. Not only *qualitatively different* from the products of pre-modern craft, but also technologically superior (i.e. facilitating greater domination over nature).

Hence, science produces trans-social, formalised, and abstract knowledge. It champions the following:

- Systematic testing of well-articulated hypotheses
- Operationalisation of concepts to enable precise measurement of phenomena
- Careful observation by publicly checkable methods
- Sophisticated, rigorous conceptual structures
- Lasting paradigms shared across extensive scholarly communities

In contrast to the dominance of scientific knowledge production in industrial societies, Gellner shows how the knowledge structures of agrarian societies are *protected* from innovation. In these societies, recorded knowledge tends to be normative and conservative, used for administrative purposes and the conservation of communication along a religious or political hierarchy. Gellner observes that this limited use of the written word tends to result in a cultural dualism between the cognitive insights of an overarching, literate ‘great tradition’—which informs ethics and the means of instruction and documentation (e.g. Roman Catholicism)—and the more practical, embodied and *non-literate* insights of ‘little traditions’ passed down through families and from masters to apprentices. Both sides of this dualism are examples of non-scientific knowledge and stand in contrast to scientific knowledge.

In general, non-scientific knowledge lacks articulated hypotheses and systematic testing. It eludes operationalisation and quantitative measurement. It may well deal with sophisticated, rigorous conceptual structures and great insights, but they are self-sustaining and self-legitimising. Essentially, what is missing in non-scientific knowledge are the features that make scientific knowledge so ‘successful’ (on its own terms).

From Gellner’s analysis one might extrapolate a dichotomy of scientific knowledge as characteristic of disenchantment, and non-scientific knowledge as characteristic of a pre-disenchantment or enchanted state of world. Indeed, the 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist-epistemologist Lévy-Bruhl (Mousalimas 1990) presents a similar dichotomy of ‘scientific’ and ‘primitive’ mentality, with the latter comprised of ‘mystical’ content and ‘pre-logical’ reasoning. But—of course—non-scientific knowledge exists in both industrial and non-industrial societies, often alongside scientific knowledge (and sometimes masquerading as it). Intriguingly, while the very notion of the dichotomy—two mutually exclusive categories—is scientific according to Lévy-Bruhl, his own theory is replete with contradiction. He insists that ‘primitive’ mentality is not inferior to ‘higher mental types’, and claims that pre-logical does not imply an antecedent stage to logical thought, before describing in detail how the former evolves into the latter. Whether or not Lévy-Bruhl was consciously blending the rational with the irrational in order to make a point, his work provides some historical background for a framing of enchantment as the opposite of disenchantment, and explains why contemporary physics—where matter and energy are interchangeable and objects can be in two places at the same time—is enchanting and/or troubling. Such findings subvert the rules of empirical investigation.

## 2.3 Disenchantment and the University

The distinction between scientific and non-scientific knowledge, in conjunction with the concurrence of the establishment of universities with the progress of science, indicates that theories of disenchantment may be productively engaged in an explanation of the character of the contemporary university, and subsequently the disillusionment that resides within. The following discussion documents this engagement, and is structured with reference to three value dimensions of disenchantment, namely *secularisation*, *specialisation* and *individualisation*. The second part of the chapter explicitly considers the nature and value of enchantment in higher education and the potential for re-enchantment. The chapter is concluded with an explanation of the relationship between disenchantment and disillusionment.

### 2.3.1 The secular university

The place of religion in institutions of higher learning is a natural starting point for an analysis of disenchantment and the university. This is not to imply that contemporary academic disillusionment stems directly from the decline of religious faith (although it may well be a factor, as will be discussed presently). The relationship between religion and universities—particularly when extending one’s focus beyond the United Kingdom to consider the first universities in Morocco, Egypt, and Iran, and subsequently in southern Europe—is complex, and not easily determined or summarised. While the religious history of British universities is apparent in the ecclesiastical architecture of the older institutions and the clerical robes still worn on formal occasions, the contemporary significance of the historical influence of the Church is debatable, given that at the time the University of Oxford was granted its Royal Charter (in 1231), state and church were integrated, religion permeated through much of public life, and most institutions—even the business guilds—had patron saints (Taylor 2008). Universities are primary hubs of scientific progress, and Bushfield’s (2016) description of them as ‘radically secular’ appears to justify Weber’s ([1905] 2013) attribution of the decline in religiosity to the progress of science. But is it the case that universities are inherently, *necessarily* secular? How did universities initiate and accelerate the production of scientific knowledge, and has it always been their explicit purpose to do so?

The founding of the first European university in Bologna (reportedly in 1088) was an educational turning point of significance. Gieysztor (2008) explains how the academic community in Bologna formed from the congruence of mutual aid societies for the teaching of civil law to ‘nations’, i.e. groups of migrants seeking to protect themselves from bigotry and oppression by Italian nationals. Bologna’s infrastructure for the sharing, application and development of knowledge was innovative, and incorporated sophisticated mechanisms of governance designed to ensure quality of teaching and standards of education. Aspects of this model reappeared in other institutions of higher learning that subsequently emerged across Europe.

The involvement of the Church in the initiation and governance of these early institutions of higher education was generally much stronger than it is today, but not universally so. Politics of all kinds naturally shaped the higher education landscape, knowledge sharing and production being essentially powerful activities. Nardi (2008) offers various examples, one being the foundation of the first secular university (in Naples in 1224), which is understood to have been a political and personal reaction (on the part of Emperor Frederick II) to the accumulation of institutions of higher learning in Italy, and a resistance to the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic church. More recently, the expansion of the academic community at Oxford is attributed to a prohibition King Henry II enforced on English students studying in Paris.

In summary, the establishment of a network of universities in Europe occurred through a concatenation of factors, events and reactions. If there *is* a coherent narrative about the secularisation of universities, it might well be that the growing network of higher education institutions connected less-scientific (according to Gellner's definition) scholarly activity—such as the study of scripture—with more-scientific innovations in knowledge sharing and production that were being pioneered in secular, purposeful academic communities such as Bologna. The critical mass of those seeking to create communities of higher learning thus encompassed those with an attitude and aptitude for religious scholarship (which presumably coexisted with a general appetite for knowledge), *and* those with specific educational goals. Marin et al. (2018) describe how the establishment of the universities corresponded with the evolution of new text forms that, they argue, played an instrumental role in scientific progress. While scripture was intended to be read aloud as a devotional act, academic texts were structured to enable claims to be taken apart and responded to, and the ideas therein advanced. Progressively structurally sophisticated texts were required for, and in turn facilitated, more sophisticated reasoning. What followed (in time, i.e. not necessarily in a causal sense) was the acceleration of scientific thought towards the Enlightenment and beyond, but the turn away from religion and towards science has by no means been linear or universal.

The theory of disenchantment advanced by Weber—and built upon by Gellner—illuminates a correlation between the metaphysical revelations of scholarly activity, and the social disruption caused by the dissolution of religious authority. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and Frederich Nietzsche (1844-1900) both provoked controversy in their respective times by challenging notions of absolute *moral* truth, and enquiring how the void left by religious authority should be navigated (Yovel 2017). They came to different conclusions. Spinoza found a solution in collective consent to rules, for example the *ethic of reciprocity* (i.e. 'treat others as you would like to be treated'), while Nietzsche's position in contrast was that rules worked for the masses, but the ideal man—the *ubermensch*—was capable of making his own ethical decisions. What Spinoza and Nietzsche present as an erosion of moral authority is generally perceived more positively in industrial post-war democracy, namely as liberal moral pluralism.

The position of theology as a mainstream academic discipline long outlived the decline of the Church's societal influence. Kant's ([1798] 1979) idealised university—notably in

aristocratic, conservative Prussia at the prime of the German Empire—was one of ‘peaceful conflict’. It comprised three ‘higher’ faculties, namely theology, law and medicine, with the ‘lower’ faculty of philosophy serving as a check for their assumptions and methods. While the extent to which Kant’s ideal was actualised—structurally and effectually—is difficult to determine, it was over the next few decades that universities across Europe became decisively secularised almost without exception, while innovations in printing technology were accelerating the dissemination and disruption of ideas (the correlation between these two movements was a key concern underlying Newman’s *Idea of the University*). By the time Weber addressed the University of Munich in 1917, scientific and technological research had become an established activity in German universities, and also to an extent in the universities of Europe and America. In his address Weber considered—as Spinoza and Nietzsche had done—what it means to live without a set of commandments, noting that science ‘cannot decide our values for us’ (Gerth & Wright Mills 1946, p.12). Weber’s own *feelings* about the rise of science over faith are not easily deducible from the text, and Sherry (2009) contends that the pessimistic tone typically attributed to *Science as a Vocation* is down to the more poetic translation of *Entzauberung* as disenchantment rather than, say, the breaking of a spell. Nevertheless, Weber *does* liken the subsequently disenchanted culture to an ‘iron cage’, the implication being that modernity limits humanity’s capacity to construct a meaningful vision. To undermine non-scientific knowledge is to remove the props by which people make sense of their lives. It is one thing to dissect *nature* to expose its mechanisms, but to dissect *humankind* as such leaves nothing to sustain the illusions of the enchanted world—or so at least it seemed to Weber. Gellner’s (1985) ‘rubber cage’ thesis frames religious study as an effective *preparation* for scientific knowledge production, noting that Talmudic societies—which emphasise the study of written *interpretations* of an oral tradition—‘take to science with alacrity’ (p.117). Gellner’s compatibility with Weber is evident in his insistence that modernity is built on—or, as Weber ([1905] 2013) posits, ‘haunted by’—the religious life that it is commonly assumed to have replaced.

It is important to note that Weber’s 1917 address constituted a critical response to the technological utopianism of this period, proponents of which included Karl Marx and H.G. Wells (Hughes 2004). As the horror of the world wars and the Holocaust became common knowledge, concerns around the implications of technology continued to feature in philosophy and social critique. Heidegger’s later work on the technological approach to being (1977) and Bauman’s on ‘liquid modernity’ (1991, 2000) are two contributions of note that add substance and detail to Freud and Durkheim’s earlier predictions of ethical decline wrought by the modern age (Norris and Englehart 2004). Of course, technological utopianism itself is driven by an implicit recognition that scientific knowledge accumulates at an astonishing rate, and that technological innovations have the power to trouble the settled knowledge of religious hierarchies. This is the modern and disenchanted landscape that Heidegger, Durkheim, Marx, Freud and Bauman respond to.

Within universities, the segregation of academic disciplines is a component of what Taylor (2007) calls the 'differentiation of the spheres of life', which he equates with disenchantment. For Taylor's 'spheres of life' include religion, politics, business, law and education. Academic specialisation may be conceived as another value dimension of the disenchanted world—further to secularisation and related to it— with explicit significance for the nature of the contemporary university. This is explored below.

### 2.3.2 The specialised university

The progressive segregation of subject disciplines corresponds with industrialisation, linked as it is with technological advancement and the division of labour. Moran (2010) describes how, in modern industrial bureaucracies, disciplinary study is recognised (e.g. by governments and business) as qualifying individuals for particular careers, and acts in two seemingly opposite ways; both preparing and selecting individuals for professions, *and* affording those professions a higher status in society.

There is international variation in the nature and history of academic differentiation. The ideal of holistic self-cultivation has particular historical and linguistic traction in Germany, where the term *Bildung* has long been used to signify a lifelong process of spiritual, cultural, and personal development, and stands in contrast to *Ausbildung* (training for a specific profession). In the UK there is a longstanding tension between the ethos of an education devoted to useful knowledge, as promoted by the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1789), and the idealised liberal arts education commonly attributed (in the UK) to Cardinal John Henry Newman (1852). The traditional liberal arts university education remains the norm in the US, where Nussbaum (2010) observes its contrast with the disciplinary hyper-specialisation now common in UK universities. The literary critic F.R. Leavis (1969) lamented the penetration of Bentham's utilitarianism in British society, claiming it had promoted *scientism* (i.e. the reduction of all knowledge to that which is confirmed by science), and a shift in the University's purpose towards the production of dedicated specialists. Leavis is not the only commentator to note that, despite Weber's contribution, academic criticism of disciplinarity in general—and scientism in particular—never gained much momentum. The apparently radical dismantling of 'patriarchal' disciplinary boundaries advanced in the 1960s—as observed by the British cultural theorist Thomas Docherty (2009, 2014)—ostensibly did little to subvert capitalist values of novelty and commodity. Rather, the supposedly revolutionary Marxist rhetoric of flattened hierarchies and collaboration has been keenly adopted across managerial domains, including in universities. Gellner (1985) notes that flattened hierarchies and collaborative projects are in fact *characteristic* of disciplined science, whereas non-scientific knowledge structures—which are unaccommodating of innovation—tend to be strongly hierarchical. The mechanisms of academic disciplines may deflect *alternative* forms of knowing and ways of working, but progress is their very purpose.

While universities are the home of dedicated specialists and a single university produces knowledge across several disciplines, times have changed since Kant wrote *Conflict of the Faculties* ([1798] 1979). It is often the case, particularly in the sciences, that academics—say engineering professors—will have a stronger relationship with engineers in other universities than they do with, for example, the social scientists in the building opposite. In the modern world, disciplines are global scholarly networks with their own practices and norms to ensure the rigour and validity of the knowledge they produce.

It was notably at the same time that Lord Robbins' team of researchers were finding the case for the expansion of higher education (Robbins 1963) that C.P. Snow ([1962] 1998) published his final remarks on the Two Cultures debate with F.R. Leavis, which had originated in a public lecture Snow gave four years previously. Snow's conclusion underlines the capacity of technology to improve the quality of human lives, and the special responsibility of scientists to apply their 'scientific imagination' (p.1) to solve the 'oppressive' world problems that he recognised as a by-product of technological advancement. Addressing both pro-modernist thinkers (such as Trilling) *and* anti-modernists like Lukács who yearned to escape from the relentless drive of progress, Snow implores his readers to accept that society and education will continue to change at unprecedented rates, and hence to recognise the danger of having knowledge cultures that do not communicate. His call for creative 'clashing points' ([1962] 1998, p.16) resonates with Kant's description of the university as a place of 'peaceful conflict' ([1798] 1979), and the 'not *too* hostile symbiosis' of the disciplines described by the novelist Aldous Huxley (1963), who frequently plays with scientific references in his literary works. Snow's prescription of imaginative *and* scientific progress for the alleviation of human suffering may be conceived as a loosening of Weber's 'iron cage'. The incorporation of non-scientific forms of knowledge in the modern cognitive landscape is a theme that arises repeatedly in the sociological literature of the late 20th century, for example in Polyani's *Personal Knowledge* (1974), Foucault's 'subjugated knowledges' (Halberstam 2011) and the seminal feminist epistemology text *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al, 1986), which deals with imaginative, emotional and subjective knowing, and their co-existence with scientific thought.

Over half a century on from the Two Cultures debate and the Robbins report, the social, cultural and intellectual landscape is in some ways very different, in others unchanged. Technological advances herald new possibilities while also bearing new challenges and threats. The 'tribalism' of academic, political and national cultures (Becher & Trowler 2001) may still impede the resolution of certain problems but, as Bauman (2000) and Taylor (2007, 2008) observe, these 'tribes' lose coherence as the ties between the individual and their community/ies grow weaker. Margaret Thatcher famously proposed the individual self as the unit of human agency in an interview with Douglas Keay (1987), an edited version of which was published in *Woman's Own* (with a statement elucidating this particular remark issued several months later by No. 10 at the request of the *Sunday Times*):

I think we have gone through a period when too many...people...are casting their problems upon society, and who *is* society? There are individual men and women and there are families... it is our duty to look after ourselves and then after our neighbour... There is no such thing as society.

Thatcher's position is that entitlement corresponds with obligation, and that if individuals prefer to be free from obligation, then this logically entails fewer entitlements. Henceforth, individualism corresponds with an ideology supportive of minimal state intervention and the free market. And yet, as indicated at the start of this chapter, community is intrinsic to the idea and activities of the university, and shared presuppositions across a community of scholars are a necessary feature of scientific progress. Like secularisation, individualism is clearly neither a simple nor a universal trend in the evolution of the university, but the marketisation of higher education assumes and implies it, and it has a strong bearing on discussions of universities and their purpose. The question of whether UK universities are a public or a private good arises frequently in debates on higher education policy, practice and/or philosophy, with many observing the central role finance plays (see for example Williams 2016 and Marginson 2017). The aim of the ensuing discussion is not to review these arguments in detail, but to theorise individualism as a trend of disenchantment and outline its manifestation in higher education.

### 2.3.3 The individualist university

Thus far, I have given an account of the pivotal role universities have played in the progress of scientific knowledge, the dissolution of religious authority, and the diversification of meaning. The atomising character of secularisation is evident in the segregation of academic disciplines and schools of thought. More recently, the concept of the individual as the unit of human agency—rather than the community, the workers' union, or even the family—has been theorised as a progression of this trend (Giddens 1991, Beck 1992). The penetration of individualist themes (e.g. competition, satisfaction, and entrepreneurship) into higher education discourse has been analysed by Collini (2018), who notes that the language used to speak and write of universities, degrees and graduates does not describe what happens *within* the university so much as what happens to the graduate as they venture *beyond* it. This shift not only undermines the institutional ethos of a scholarly community, but, more importantly, indicates that that ethos has already weakened. The increasing alienation between staff, students and disciplines is also one of Gadamer's primary concerns about the contemporary university (1992b, p.53).

A distinction between the goals of the individual and those of the group (the discipline, the institution, or society as a whole) has arguably always been present, Newman ([1852] 2016) having described the Ancient Greek scholars who travelled to Athens as having 'their own object in coming' (p.13). The social sciences recognise and interrogate the role of structure and agency in shaping human behaviour, a fundamental debate being whether our desires, goals and actions (including one's motivations to undertake a course of higher education) are

autonomous, or imposed on us through social norms and mores. There is some degree of consensus between key players in the fields (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1986, Unger 2004) on a *dialectic* relationship between structure and agency, i.e. society forming individuals who form society. This dialectic is manifest in conceptualisations of the university and its purpose, which elide academic, cultural and social norms with ideals of self-actualisation or personal fulfilment.

As Collini (2018) observes, contemporary discourse assumes that university students are typically motivated by the prospect of fulfilling their individual potential rather than, say, dutifully serving a collective endeavour. Has modernity wrought a discernible change in how we value ourselves and what we owe to one another? From the middle of the 20th century, the relatively new discipline of human psychology (e.g. Maslow [1943] 1968, Rogers [1967] 2004) focused on 'self-actualisation', i.e. the realisation of one's talents and potentialities. Subsequently, Foucault coined the phrase 'technologies of the self' (Martin et al. 1988) to denote the means through which one achieves personal actualisation *despite* the objectifying powers of science, distinguishing between self-development as a practice of freedom, and technologies of power (for production, signification and oppression). And yet, Durkheim ([1893] 1997) believed that the 'unmooring' of the individual from the ties of society ('anomie') was constitutive of ethical and spiritual decline, with Robert Putnam (*Bowling Alone*, 2001) and Sherry Turkle (*Alone Together*, 2011) taking up the baton—via other contemporary sociologists (including Bauman 2003)—to observe new frailties in human obligations and commitments. The thrust of the argument advanced by Putnam, Bauman and Turkle is that, in disenchanted industrial society, human relationships become transactional and disposable, and we cannot be relied upon to care for one another when life becomes difficult. A university ethos that champions competition and entrepreneurship fits within this frame.

A discussion of individualisation as a feature of disenchanted modernity would not be complete without mentioning the COVID-19 pandemic, which—at the time of writing—is rapidly and unexpectedly affecting human priorities, obligations and commitments. The novel coronavirus has isolated and grounded individuals in their homes, while, as Zizek (2020) observes, uniting us in global solidarity against a universal threat. Institutions, organisations and other groups have been forced to find new ways to function. Physical grounding is dissolving what were already fuzzy boundaries between work, education, family and social life, and many individuals are finding that they are re-evaluating their priorities and obligations. The imperative to protect the more vulnerable members of society—the old, the sick, and those caring for them—has been underlined as a shared value across cultures, and hence a fundamental character of humanity. At the same time, civil lockdown has restricted individuals' lifeworlds, strengthening local ties and potentially—contrary to Zizek's hopeful vision of a unified humanity—shrinking circles of empathy. The balance of human solidarity and separation has been unsettled, and the broader consequences of the pandemic will no doubt continue to be discussed and theorised at length within and between academic disciplines, and beyond.

This theorisation of the contemporary university across the dimensions of secularisation, specialisation and individualisation indicates that some of the assumptions of at least a limited enchantment may be beneficial for society in general and the activities of the university in particular. The second part of this chapter explores this proposition further.

## 2.4 Enchantment and/or re-enchantment

Having presented the university as both a site and an outcome of scientific knowledge production, the second half of this chapter aims to clarify how enchantment manifests in higher education, and what benefits it might yield in this context. It has already been indicated that the incorporation of non-scientific forms of knowledge, as suggested by Snow ([1958 & 1962] 1998), Polyani (1974), and Gellner (1985), is desirable for primarily disenchanted cultures, and the manifestation of this limited enchantment in the university will now be explored.

Weber's theory of disenchantment is predicated on the decline of religious faith, which he saw as inevitable in the face of scientific progress. While it is unlikely that many of those currently working and studying in British primarily secular universities ascribe their sense of disillusionment to a loss of *religious* faith, the educational endeavour calls for faith of many kinds (e.g. faith in the market and entrepreneurialism). The primacy of faith in theories of disenchantment, modernity, and scientific knowledge justifies its place in a discussion of enchantment in the contemporary university, and so this is where I will begin.

### 2.4.1 Three dimensions of enchantment

#### 2.4.1a Enchantment as faith

I have already cited Weber's earlier work on the *Protestant Work Ethic* ([1905] 2013), in which he maintains that humanity remains haunted by 'the ghost of dead religious beliefs' (p.109), capitalism and performativity (both of which are fundamental to the idea of the contemporary university) being the *surviving remnants* of religious faith rather than its antitheses. A number of theologians have argued that the decline of faith Weber associates with scientific progress has been taken for granted and under-critiqued. Robinson (1966) and Crane (2017) contend that the metaphysical commitments of faith are widely misunderstood (e.g. by scientists and atheists), and that there is a spiritual dimension to human experience that *is* compatible with reason—a standpoint that Caputo (2018) offers as a 'weak theology'. Gantt (2016) proposes that faith can itself be critical, in the sense that its origins and implications may be examined. Hadden (1987) rejects outright Weber's thesis of declining religious faith, claiming that it rests on exaggerated perceptions of past religiosity, and underestimates modern religious and spiritual movements. Jenkins (2000) presents enchantment and re-enchantment as both a reaction to and a feature

of modernity, indicating that disenchantment can directly stimulate (re)enchantment (some examples of which are given in this chapter).

Noting that religiosity correlates with economic inequality, generational value shifts, and population change, Norris and Englehart (2004) posit that faith in an idealised higher power is not simply a corollary of industrialisation and technological development, but also a consequence of existential security and a corresponding independence from the comfort and stability it offers. Aldous Huxley's comparative study of mysticism *The Perennial Philosophy* (1946) and John Robinson's controversial critique of traditional Christian theology *Honest to God* (1963) are two popular contributions to the argument that all belief systems—including atheism—have a stabilising character, and are therefore articulating something similar. This move does not suggest a rejection of, or resistance to science. Rather, it indicates a disintegration of borders around beliefs and practices, both spiritual *and* scientific.

In summary, the aspect of Weber's theory that claims the *untenability* of traditional religious faith in the face of scientific progress has been widely and variably criticised. Nevertheless, if secularisation is interpreted as the *diversification* of faith, i.e. recognition and inclusion of the full range of beliefs that give meaning to our lives, the contentions between Weber and his critics fade. Measures of the extent and forms of faith in society are subject to varying interpretations of key terms and concepts. 53% of the British population now identifies as having 'no religion' (Phillips et al. 2018), but a more detailed study in the United States (Pew 2018), where 44% do not 'believe in God', reveals that 76% of these individuals *do* believe in a 'higher power or spiritual force'. The nature and extent of personal faith cannot be assumed. Indeed, Casanova (1994) describes the trend not as the *disappearance* of faith, but its movement out of explicitly religious organisations and public institutions—such as universities—into individuals' interior lives and subjectivities. Hence, while only a very small number of universities (most of which were founded as teacher training colleges) retain a formal religious affiliation, this does not mean that universities are faithless institutions.

While universities perceive themselves to be radically secular, the tenacity of religious education and instruction in children's schooling (Clayton et al. 2018) suggests (among other things) that certain characteristics of the religious life are perceived as both instrumentally and intrinsically desirable for education. It is clear that character attributes such as resilience, discipline and communality, while by no means dependent on *religious* faith, are predicated on faith of sorts. Examples include faith that one's hard work will be rewarded, faith in reciprocity, faith in the value of altruism, and faith in something being *worth knowing*. In this sense education is fuelled by faith in something beyond oneself, which is worth considering as a possible reason as to why traditional religious scholasticism was (and is still, in some communities) considered transferable to other disciplines.

The specific flavour of enchantment at play in religion and spirituality is *faith in a higher power that evades natural explanation*. Magee (2016, p. 42), offers a natural explanation for this faith itself, ascribing man's tendency to religious enchantment as 'something primitive' in our

biological makeup, and warns that the holding of beliefs counter to natural laws prolongs our ignorance around the great mysteries of life. Somewhat perversely, Magee also acknowledges that it is this very ignorance that fuels our transcendent joy in ‘miracles’ such as consciousness, love and music, conceding that ‘the things we have no explanation for are of the utmost importance’ (p. 47). Attention to things we cannot explain, which I shall call *wonder*, is another dimension of enchantment that is ripe for exploration in contemporary educational contexts.

#### 2.4.1b Enchantment as wonder

Curry (2012) cites wonder as the ‘most important single hallmark of enchantment’. In a state of wonder we often describe ourselves as *spellbound*, our attention having been drawn—or *spirited away*—by an idea, artefact, person or other entity. Wonder is a passive regarding-without-knowing, and hence implies a reverence or respect that is deemed appropriate in dealing with the mediating objects of education, which include those of art, literature, and the natural world. As I have implied above, wonder is related to faith and is closely associated with *awe*, commonly ascribed to the apprehension of God/gods and their doings or, at least, a ‘contemplation of a larger order’ (Taylor 2007, p.27). While Weber’s and Taylor’s theories of disenchantment account for the apparent decline in religious faith and the segregation of knowledge domains, a historical trend for wonder is elusive. An object of wonder may be so by way of evading scientific explanation altogether (e.g. telepathy, mystical experience), or in having an explanation that is contested, partial, or conceptually difficult (e.g. dreams, time, rainbows, gravity). The fact that almost anything can be an object of wonder, when one attends to what is not known about it, should be borne in mind when considering the desirability of wonder in educational contexts. When Kubrick (cited by Agel 1970, p.346) said that ‘when everything is beautiful, nothing is beautiful’, he meant that everything *cannot* be an object of wonder. The claim that wonder has been, or is being lost in the academy (see for example Voss & Wilson 2017), may simply be the kind of romantic yearning for a fictional past noted by Jenkins (2000) in his critique of Weber’s theory of disenchantment, and by Collini (2012) with specific reference to nostalgic ideas of the university. And yet, many people believe it to be true. Why should we not desire—and enjoy—more wonder in our lives?

A more obviously defensible claim regarding wonder is that our attention is too easily spirited away *from* the mediating objects of education. Social media and targeted advertising, pertinently described by Curry (1999) as ‘malign’ forms of enchantment, are inherently self-centred and self-defining. Stories like Snow White (with the evil queen and her magic mirror) and the Myth of Narcissus have historically illuminated the moral threat of bewitchment by one’s own appearance. In contrast, wonder is essentially self-transcendent and other-regarding, with ‘moral correlates’ (Curry 1999) of respect, compassion, and humility (Hepburn 1998) that entail openness to the other, and to new forms of value. More recently, Curry (2012) distinguishes between two concepts that he claims emerge entangled from Weber’s *Entzauberung*: enchantment and *magic*. For Curry, magic is a technique. Its aim, like science, is to achieve

predictive power and/or control over the object in question. In contrast, enchantment—like art—is an activation of the imagination in one’s encounter with another.

To become spellbound is to relinquish control, but we may do so willingly. When we pick up a good novel or go to the cinema, or spend mindful time in nature, we *allow* ourselves to be spellbound by the things we encounter, and we trust (i.e. have faith in) the persons or powers that bring them to us. On these occasions our attention to ourself is diminished. We may be said to ‘forget’ ourselves. This is part of what is important about the experience of enchantment; it allows us to sense, however briefly, something more than the individualised existence that is valued and reified in a disenchanted world.

The examples given above highlight that there is a lived experience and a *phenomenology* of both faith and wonder. Influential thinkers from William James ([1902] 1958) to Abraham Maslow (1968), in their analyses of experiences that are described as *spiritual* or *mystical*, have presented a sense of unity or one-ness as characteristic of these experiences. Could unity therefore be a third dimension of enchantment, implied in both faith and wonder but also existing as an independent concept? This is explored below.

#### 2.4.1c Enchantment as unity

Unity features in translations of some of Weber’s works, but in apparently variable contexts. Taylor (2008) offers a more explicit conceptualisation of unity in relation to disenchantment, which as I have said signifies for him the progressive segregation of the various spheres of life (e.g. religion, politics, education, business) and forms of knowing. For Taylor, enchantment denotes a (prior) unity of these domains. Whether this sense of unity—or experiences that are unifying in this sense—can be said to be desirable for education depends on what one believes the aim(s) of education to be. An experience that troubles a segregated view of knowledge domains might for example be seen as *less* desirable for an education focused on knowledge transmission, and *more* desirable if one assumes a more holistic concept of flourishing to be its aim (e.g. Wolbert et al. 2015). One may, of course, feel a sense of interconnectedness (e.g. with disciplinary ideas, other scholars, and other forms of knowledge) without perceiving it as a spiritual or mystical experience. How does secular culture and education initiate us into *plural* sources of meaning and forms of knowing, and what does that mean for universities, whose very name implies unity?

The plurality of ordinary knowing was clear to me as I began drafting this chapter, on holiday in Wales, looking out over the Irish Sea. In the shape of the waves I observed the effects of surface tension caused by hydrogen bonding. My mind’s eye perceived the chemical structure of sodium chloride. I deduced from the wet sand the wane of the tide, which I knew to correspond with the sun and moon sitting low above the horizon. I counted three different species of seaweed, and smirked at the smutty humour of the marine biologist who named one of them *canaliculata*. At the same time I felt a wrench of sadness as I recalled a memory sitting alone on the beach as a miserable teenager. I felt an emotional connection with the vast body of

water, which I had swum out into a short while earlier, and a faith in a higher power that I might variably refer to as nature, the universe, or God. I imagined what it might be like to *be* the ocean, and wondered whether it was ‘like’ *anything*. I offer this as an example of a moment of enchantment as unity, namely one of knowing and not-knowing in myriad ways, both independent of and dependent on direct experience. The many ways of knowing in this account include those that are saturated with faith and wonder, and it is this, I venture, that renders such moments significant and memorable.

The three dimensions of enchantment proposed here all signify something about knowledge. *Faith* is knowing without proof or mechanism. *Wonder* is a state of attentive not-knowing. *Unity*, or *one-ness*, encompasses plural forms of knowing. The three dimensions may be synthesised into a broad definition of enchantment as *a transcendent encounter, where one is liberated from cognitive and/or reductive explanations of the object in question*. *Disenchantment* signifies the loss or absence of these encounters, its mechanisms including the secularisation of public and private life, the segregation of knowledge domains, and the selfward turn of the attention. Does this definition of enchantment differ significantly from Magee’s (2016, p.47) prescription for ‘living in the world without understanding it or denying its mystery’, nor ‘grasping at supernatural explanations’? I believe it does. Magee’s faith that we will one day have explanations for the inexplicable jars with my synthesis of the other perspectives presented here, namely, and with a nod to Hammond’s (2015, p.226) claim that man is ‘incurably religious’, that we appear to be *incurably enchantable*. Even if the concept of a God is untenable, it seems that we willingly venture under the spell of other inexplicable and perhaps contradictory things.

Gadamer’s concept of the ‘horizon’ ([1960] 2004) articulates a theory of knowing that allows for such a concept of enchantment, one’s horizon being personalised, complex, plural, and in flux (the incorporation of a *literal* horizon in the above example, while not premeditated, is significant). Connections between enchantment and plural forms of knowing abound in philosophical literature, the area of contention for philosophers of education being the possibility, and desirability, of their segregation. Standish (2016), for example, notes the many layers of significance, meaning and concepts that comprise the human experience of ‘world’, as opposed to an animal’s of their ‘environment’. McDowell (1996, p. 76) recognises the ‘disentanglement’ of these different layers as disenchantment, but insists that it is *progressive*, i.e. desirable, a view that I find myself resisting. Perhaps I am among those McDowell is addressing in warning against ‘a crazily nostalgic attempt to re-enchant the natural world’ (1996, p. 76). Nevertheless, it does appear that suspicion of McDowell’s ‘disentanglement manoeuvre’ (Standish 2016, p.11) is not without reasoned support from philosophers in general, and philosophers of education in particular. I will, therefore, continue to explore the particular relationship between plural knowledge forms—whether these are disciplined and scientific, or non-scientific—and enchantment in the university.

## 2.4.2 Enchantment in the contemporary university

### 2.4.2a The problem of specialisation

Metaphorical descriptions emphasise the limited view of the specialist. Nietzsche writes of stopping short of our 'proper height'... from where we might 'survey, look around, and look down' ([1886] 1990, p.131), while the British cultural theorist Tom Steele (1997, p.18) likens disciplinary thought to walking up a 'blind alley'. The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega ([1932] 1957, p.112) commended the Italian Enlightenment philosopher Gianbattista Vico for conveniently highlighting the limitations—and the arrogance—of the specialised viewpoint. Ortega describes the specialist as a 'learned ignoramus', and agrees with Nietzsche's view that their 'conformist' approach, symptomatic of individualist career ambition and the performative mechanisms at play in an increasingly bureaucratic and professionalised society, results, ironically, in intellectual mediocrity. Hogan (2009) makes a similar claim in his treatise on the intrinsic value of education, arguing that academic specialisation serves power and ambitious self-interest more than it does intellectual progress.

And yet, academic interdisciplinarians are often criticised for the mediocrity of their work. Moran (2010, p.170) notes that significant gaps in knowledge are likely to arise from attempts to become conversant in the theories and methods of more than one discipline. Jung, Lacan and Derrida were—and still are—pilloried for not remaining within disciplinary boundaries, or what is perceived to be their area of expertise. One reproof levelled at the new breed of 'academic renegades' (Weiss 2018) who operate through online video interviews and audio podcasts is that these media obstruct established citation, giving the impression that these individuals are lone geniuses rather than, say, charlatans leaching off the disciplined cognitive productivity of the academy. In a recent online discussion about the validity of Jordan Peterson's work, Twitter users argued about whether he should be categorised as a cognitive psychologist, a philosopher, or a 'pseudophilosopher', one participant noting that '...he also spreads nonsense about economics, physics and other social sciences that he's unfamiliar with.' (Kim 2019). Referring back to list of traits of the disenchanting cognitive producer (e.g. the presence of well-articulated hypotheses and their systematic testing, careful observation by publicly checkable methods, sophisticated and rigorous conceptual structures) indicates that the criticism is valid on those terms, as none of the features are explicitly evident in the work Peterson broadcasts.

Contributing to the confusion about the value of interdisciplinarity must surely be a lack of consensus on what a greater unity of knowledge looks like, and how its legitimacy should be assessed. Stember (1990) offers five different levels of disciplinarity:

- Intradisciplinary: working within a single discipline.
- Crossdisciplinary: viewing one discipline from the perspective of another.
- Multidisciplinary: individuals from different disciplines working together, each drawing on their disciplinary knowledge.

- Interdisciplinary: integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a synthesis of approaches.
- Transdisciplinary: creating a unity of intellectual frameworks beyond the disciplinary perspectives.

Stember's categories illuminate some of the previous accounts and examples of disciplinarity. Weber (Gerth & Wright Mills 1946, p5) predicted that specialisation would continue to advance, with some *crossdisciplinarity*; the purpose of which would be to serve the specialist—particularly the scientist—with new questions. The relationship between philosophy and the higher faculties idealised by Kant ([1798] 1979), and offered by Palmquist (2004) as a scalable model for peaceful conflict in all spheres of life, is seemingly a *multidisciplinary* one. A more integrative relationship between the disciplines is apparent in subsequent optimistic ideas of the university, including those of Newman (1858), Gadamer (1992b), and Barnett (2013), whose ideations—like Kant's—are prescriptive as well as descriptive, with ethical aims. But the disciplines cannot presumably become deeply integrated (in an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary sense) without first establishing the effective means of communication and collaboration assumed at the prior levels.

Bauman (1987, p.21) notes that the collective term 'intellectuals' has 'failed to unite' thinkers of different kinds. There is arguably no particular reason why it should have done. Becher and Trowler's (2001) description of academic disciplines as 'tribes' implies a groupish (i.e. insider/outsider) ethic. The tendency for us to differentiate our ethical commitments to those within our group from our commitments to those beyond it has been presented as an innate human characteristic with both emotional and rational dimensions. Haidt (2012) theorises the tendency as a vestigial characteristic that initially promoted human dispersal and colonisation across the continents, and still lingers in social attitudes. 'Tribal' divisions between disciplines could be similarly perceived as enabling the expansion of human knowledge in general, and its explanatory power over nature in particular. And yet, the willingness and capacity of the scientific 'tribes' to collaborate on national and global projects such as weaponry, human spaceflight, cancer research and, latterly, the fight against COVID-19, underlines that the scientific disciplines are fundamentally similar. The principles of disenchanting cognitive productivity bind these particular 'tribes' together, and fuel their dominance in disenchanting cultures. Is *science*, rather than specialisation, therefore the greater enemy of enchantment?

#### 2.4.2b Does science preclude enchantment?

There is much disagreement about whether science directly hampers enchantment. I have explained how Snow ([1958 & 1962] 1998), Polyani (1974) and Gellner (1985) believe that the incorporation of non-scientific forms of knowing—a limited enchantment, or a loosening or the iron cage—is possible and desirable within disenchanting cultures. Wittgenstein recognises that science does little for enchantment, but questions the existence of a relationship between the two, claiming that 'it is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but that it *exists*' ([1922]

2001, p.88). Following Weber's death, and in direct response to *Science as a Vocation*, his contemporary Heinrich Rickert (1926, cited in Sherry 2009, p.371) countered that 'science does not need to lead to a demystification of the world', indeed that science can make us 'fully conscious of the "magic" of life'. Those who enjoy the TV documentaries of David Attenborough, or the writings of physicist Carlo Rovelli (2018), might well agree. The astrophysicist Brian Cox's insistence that religion is not ruled out by science (Rogan 2019, 1:46:08) might have been considered controversial until relatively recently, but now appears to sit more comfortably in the 'maturing' zeitgeist than the militant atheism of Richard Dawkins, who many now find not only arrogant, but naïve (Robbins 2013).

Scientific advances that afford a sense of the scale of the universe and our place within it can be particularly (re)enchanting. The NASA astronaut Jim Lovell recounts his view of Earth from Apollo 8 thus: 'The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring, and it makes you realise just what you have back there'. In light of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the first images of Earth from space have been credited with influencing the environmental conservation movement (e.g. Watts et al. 2019). Nevertheless, emerging technologies such as genetic modification, driverless cars, and artificial intelligence have the potential to change the way we see ourselves, generating unanticipated ethical dilemmas and emotional responses that are not always positive. Mori's (2012) 'uncanny valley' hypothesis, originally applied to human robotics, holds that human aversion increases the closer an artificial entity is in appearance to its natural counterpart. The theory explains humanity's negative emotional response to particular innovations, for example the unpopularity of genetically modified crops—colourfully described by critics as 'frankenfoods'—despite assurances of pest and disease resistance, environmental hardiness, and improved nutrition. As the outputs of science become more integrated and invisible, they pose a greater threat to our autonomy. Hence, suspicion leading to reinvigorated debate on what it means to be human (i.e. more enchanted cognitive productivity) is not only an *emotional* response to technological advancement, it may also be conceived as a rational one.

#### 2.4.2c How can different forms of knowledge be productively integrated?

If attempts at integrating different forms of knowing do not meet expectations, it is perhaps not because there are incompatible ideas about what it means to *know*, but because individuals have incompatible motivations for integrating the perspectives and knowledges of others. To integrate in order to *achieve* something is to use the other as a means. An alternative is to approach integration as an ethical duty, where—in alignment with both Kant's and Gadamer's ethic standpoints—the other is allowed to be an end in themselves. While Kantian ethics have been challenged on the basis that modern, secular society has no grounds for universal rules (e.g. Steiner 1971), Gadamer's (2004) call to engage with other perspectives retains a particular relevance. It highlights a very modern human tendency to apprehend each other (and indeed ourselves) as scientific objects to be explained, predicted and influenced.

I have described how C.P. Snow ([1958 & 1962] 1998) illuminated the gulf between the arts and the natural sciences, and what he saw as a pressing need for greater integration and a partial re-enchantment. Snow explicitly accused literary critics (like F.R. Leavis) of romanticising the pre-scientific era, and thus undermining the vital progress of science that Snow believed was needed to alleviate human suffering (Leavis for his part had previously disparaged not only Snow's own novels, but the work of many writers Snow adored, such as H.G. Wells, for believing—like Snow—that science could solve all the world's problems). Leavis' ([1962] 2013) retort that Snow was neither a good scientist nor a good novelist—and hence lacked the authority to comment on the two 'cultures'—reveals the personal anxieties and grievances entangled with this apparent example of disciplinary discord.

It is of interest that Snow gave his Two Cultures lecture not long after Aldous Huxley published *The Doors of Perception*, an account of his psychedelic experience with mescaline in 1953. Having begun his working life as a physical chemist, one would expect Snow to have been aware of the upswell in clinical research into the potential for psychedelic therapy to heal some of the world's aforementioned 'problems', in particular, the kinds of personal anxieties and grievances that hinder interpersonal and self-understanding. The full cultural significance of psychedelic research was unknown at the time Snow highlighted the schism between science and the arts, and it was only in the context of its recent revival that Huxley's cognitive explorations have been recognised as an attempt not only to bridge Snow's Two Cultures, but also to find some common ground between science and spirituality (Novak 1997, p.370). In his own considered response to the Two Cultures debate, *Literature and Science* (1964, p.5), Huxley presents the division as between the concerns of 'the private worlds of sentient, self-conscious individuals' and the public 'universes' of language, logic and social conventions. Huxley's final novel 'Island' imagines a utopian society that subverts the industrial norms of specialised work and features a school curriculum inspired by Huxley's own experiences with yoga, meditation and psychedelic therapies, which he believed gave him a more integrated view of nature and humankind (1957, p.130). His imagined union between the seemingly contradictory features of the human condition—reason and passion, clarity and sensitivity, control and surrender—offers a link between the integration of disciplinary cultures, and the integration of one's internal world. Both require contradictory forms of knowing to be held simultaneously, despite existing in tension with one another.

A life without conflict—external or internal—might well sacrifice enriching insights for bland platitudes, and even Huxley was only calling for a 'not too hostile symbiosis'. But hostility has had its day. Not only does it alienate and exclude, it is symptomatic of a tight hold on one (or one's) form of knowing, and provokes an equal and opposite defensive response. Snow's antagonism—as a case in point—led Leavis to insist that great literature was 'the *only* possible antidote to the cheapening and corrupting of experience which the dominant forces of modern mass society conspired to promote' (Collini 1998, p.xxxii, my emphasis). Productive debate cannot be enlivened by such insularity of mind.

### 2.4.3 Disillusionment and the potential for (re)enchantment of the university

Hermann Hesse writes in *Journey to the East* (1969, pp.27-28) that 'when something precious and irretrievable is lost, we have the feeling of having wakened from a dream'. The proposition that has been developed over the course of this chapter is that disenchantment is a state of world where scientific progress acts to eliminate contradictory forms of knowing. Faith, wonder and unity are offered as opposing value dimensions, which allow contradictory forms of knowing (or not-knowing) to continue to be entertained. Given that disillusionment is a state of mind corresponding to the loss of an illusion, it is suggested that the theorisation of (dis)enchantment offers insight into the nature of disillusionment and how, if one wishes to do so, it might be ameliorated through a kind of re-enchantment.

(Re)enchantment is—or involves—the accommodation of different and potentially contradictory forms of knowing. There are a number of observations about industrial society and the contemporary university that, in light of this definition, have implications for (re)enchantment. First, as scientific knowledge expands and progresses, the differences and contradictions between forms of knowing become more challenging to accommodate. Second, as observed by Gadamer (1992c, 1992d) and Zeldin (1998), combative modes of discussion and debate seen across academic contexts, government, and news/entertainment media work in direct opposition to the accommodation of plural forms of knowing. Third, while many individuals working and studying in universities will engage in practices that invigorate their own aesthetic, social and spiritual imaginations—such as the appreciation or creation of art and literature, genuine conversation, yoga, meditation, and prayer, even those whose professional role incorporates these practices might agree with Curry (2017, p.47) that a formal 'programme of positive re-enchantment' is doomed to failure in contemporary institutions, which measure and justify their activities in empirical or utilitarian terms.

This pessimistic view may be challenged on the very basis of the definition of (re)enchantment given above. Curry's imagined 'enchantment targets' are indeed apparent in the empirical research on spiritual practices, for example the finding that meditation improves students' focus, working memory, creativity and impulse control (Waters et al. 2015), but these claims are not groundless. They may be disenchanting, but they are not necessarily counterproductive to (re)enchantment. Their scientific legitimacy provides a gateway for those who would not otherwise be persuaded to experiment (or, indeed, 'play') with other ways of experiencing the world. Hence, explicit incorporation of these practices into universities' research and teaching activities may be worth considering.

A no less controversial way in which universities might take a lead in shifting the balance from disenchantment to (re)enchantment would be to give the various metrics by which they are measured their due, and no more. Universities are not duty bound to describe themselves using the rhetoric of excellence and airbrushed images of models in graduation robes. They are free, if they are willing to take the risk, to invoke the enchantment of learning on their websites and prospectuses by communicating a sense of how it feels to have one's perspective on the world

transformed, and what it looks like for teachers and learners to be united in their hunger for knowledge, apprehending one another as human beings rather than pointing, smiling, at a laptop. Universities might also acknowledge that student-focused metrics say at least as much about the students and their attitude towards their own education (and towards the metrics) as they do about the institution and its practices. This is not to dismiss the metrics, but to recognise that total allegiance to them would logically take every university down the same road as Buckingham, the home of the two year degree. There are certain things (research being one) that this path cannot accommodate, hence many universities will—and should—find their own.

Finally, 'big data' sets may be fundamentally *disenchanted*, but they are not necessarily *disenchanting*. Jenkins (2000) proposes that disenchantment generates its own enchantments, and one example of this is the split metrics enabled by HESA data that reveal important mysteries. They show for example that some groups have a better experience than others, and that some are far more likely to complete their studies, and/or to find fulfilling employment. These complex mysteries draw the attention, provoke curiosity, and prompt universities to examine their aims and practices anew. Jenkins' other proposition is that disenchantment stimulates (re)enchantment. University metrics illuminate a thin slice of reality. If that thin slice is assumed to be all there is, it is little wonder that disillusionment abounds. Why not take the narrowness of the shaft of light as *emphasising* what is hidden, and an invitation to explore and articulate it? The Teaching Excellence Framework may transpire to be short-lived, but its ultimate reliance on a panel of human assessors shows that the policy-makers understand that automated analysis of large data sets cannot reveal everything that matters. What is needed from the university—e.g. intercultural understanding, the critical evolution of discipline and craft, knowledge exchange and community engagement—is not only deeply contextual, but largely immeasurable.

# Chapter 3: Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the purpose of the university

While the previous chapter laid out a framework of ideas that inform the thesis as a whole, this chapter aims to establish the philosophical foundations of the primary research design. It justifies the application of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a theoretical frame and the use of conversation as a mode of enquiry, and presents hermeneutics as a methodological orientation with a particular *ethic*, where one allows oneself to be changed in an encounter with another. Hermeneutics is shown to emphasise *understanding*, which is framed as corresponding to (re)enchantment, over *explanation*, which aims to predict and influence and hence corresponds to disenchantment. The account of the methodology of the enquiry and its philosophical framework is continued in Chapter Four, which describes and justifies the specific methods used to recruit participants and analyse and synthesise primary data.

This chapter explains the alignment of the research with the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who prescribes not a rule-based method so much as an orientation with certain formal characteristics, three of which are discussed here in terms of their theoretical basis and practical application. *Fruitful questions*, *historical consciousness*, and *an ethic of play* are discussed in turn, with a fourth concept of Gadamer's—the 'fusion of horizons'—emerging from these. Criticisms of Gadamer, as they relate to the thesis, are addressed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of conceptions of self and time in Gadamer's ideas, leading into a proposal that the hermeneutic ethic may be conceived as an example of a limited re-enchantment, and that it is possible to conceive a symbiotic relationship between the modes of *understanding* and *explanation* in the pursuit of knowledge.

## 3.1 Why Gadamer?

By the time I began to write the proposal for this research, a number of events and decisions had already foreclosed the theoretical framework underpinning the methodology. The topic for my thesis was inspired by the ideological and political polarities that were evident in society at large, and implied in the disillusionment and distrust I was observing in the higher education community. On the night of the 2015 General Election, when the exit poll indicated a Conservative majority rather than the predicted hung parliament (or indeed the Labour landslide I secretly hoped for), I had to confront the fact that I, along with others in my left-wing urban social circle, had read the political landscape very poorly. Further to this, I was faced with the realisation that what I considered to be fact and moral truth were considered contestable by other intelligent people. Marooned at an election night party with individuals from a variety of political persuasions, I noted the the impulse to dissociate from and dehumanise those whose views I disagreed with. I recognised the power of this impulse to obstruct understanding and

destroy relationships, and that it arose in spite of my own rational beliefs about what we owe to one another. Inspired by Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons', an ethical prescription to encounter others as human beings to be understood rather than scientific or psychological objects to be explained or controlled, I resolved to work to orientate myself towards open understanding in my encounters with others, and away from the aim of persuasion.

The claim that Gadamer's hermeneutics is *itself* one idea of higher education has already been ventured. When John Henry Newman spoke of 'a school of knowledge of every kind, consisting of teachers and learners from every quarter' ([1852] 2016, p.5), he envisioned a 'fusion of horizons' of the kind that Gadamer (2004) articulates. Indeed, it is an 'assemblage of strangers from all parts in one spot' (Newman [1852] 2016, p.5) that this thesis aims to achieve, through bringing different individuals into conversation with each other, creating a container for different perspectives, and crucially revealing the 'solidarities' (Nixon 2017a, p.64) that Gadamer argues are the intended outcomes of dialogue, and hence also of education. Christopher Lawn (2006) explains how Gadamer's concept of 'solidarity' was a progression from the 'tradition' he previously espoused in *Truth and Method* ([1960] 2004). While both concepts describe fundamental social agreements about the way things are or should be, Gadamer's turn towards 'solidarity' bears a more overt prescription for shared, *critical* ethical and/or political aspirations, and responds to the challenge that the philosophy developed in *Truth and Method* was mired in the past, uncritical, and lacked relevance to the future. A perception of Gadamer as a conservative thinker might arise either from a shallow reading of his ideas, and/or a lack of faith in his proposals, but Gadamer repeatedly expressed his optimistic belief in the moral progress that could be achieved through emphasising similarity over difference, a standpoint that is echoed by the British philosopher and conversation theorist Theodore Zeldin (1998).

Towards the end of his long career, Gadamer also became occupied with conversation, not only as a remedy for attraction to difference and dispute, but as a 'basic model of understanding' (Malpas 2018) where it is hearing the voice of another in conversation that enables the risk of one's prejudices. Gadamer's standpoint that 'anyone who listens is fundamentally open' (2004, p.361) has similarities—and, Vessey (2005) argues, subtle differences—with Martin Buber's concept of '*I and Thou*' ([1923] 1970). Buber's theory of dialogue was subsequently built on by Emmanuel Levinas (1989), and echoed in Charles Taylor's (1985) conceptualisation of difference as both theoretical (a 'gap in intuitions') and practical (a matter of 'orientation'), the appropriate response to which may well be to change oneself (p.54). Gadamer made a point of putting this theory into practice, and his public conversations with other philosophers make up a significant proportion of his published work (e.g. Dutt 2001, Misgeld & Nicholson 1992). In an essay originally published in 1967, Gadamer (1992c) cites political and architectural examples of infrastructure that assume and promote confrontation, and the dominance of narratives of conflict in the domains of history and entertainment. He recognises academic specialisation as both a product and a source of individualism, a claim that is also acknowledged by Padraig Hogan (2009) in his defence of the

intrinsic value of education, *The New Significance of Learning*. Despite observations like these, Gadamer remained optimistic throughout his long life, maintaining that ‘even in a highly bureaucratised, thoroughly organised and thoroughly specialised society, it is possible to strengthen existing solidarities’ (1992c, p.192). This claim is not inconsistent with the comprehensive theory of history offered by Gellner (1988), which presents specialisation and the weakening of social bonds as *contingent on* industrial society rather than *necessary* for it, and the emergence of a new social order as—although perhaps unlikely—perfectly possible.

Gadamer’s lifetime spanned the 20th century, a period of unprecedented and rapid change in geopolitics, society and culture. He remained in Germany during both world wars while many other philosophers—notably the Marxist critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, many of whom were Jewish—could not. Gadamer’s cultural context lent him a particular perspective on humanity and how we understand each other and the world, not only through everyday speech and text, but also—as discussed in *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1986)—through image, gesture and poetry. He gave a number of lectures relating to the role and purpose of universities, and sketches an overlap between education and the health professions (1996), arguing that medics and educators are both *interpreters* of their traditions (rather than their custodians) in their dealings with an eternally fluctuating humanity. What it means to be healthy, to educate, and indeed what it means to be human—these are key questions that Gadamer was receptive to, and are no less relevant or pertinent today. To explicitly connect with the dilemmas and tensions of the current situation, one might ask: What is the role and purpose of the university when the vast majority of human interactions can be readily mediated through networked electronic devices, and graduates are applying for jobs that did not exist when they enrolled? This is an example of what Gadamer calls a fruitful question; one that is located in the here and now, opens up a wealth of possibilities, and keeps them open. A simpler form of the question—*what are universities for?*—was the starting point for the ten conversational interviews that are the basis for the primary research.

### 3.2 Is hermeneutics a method, or an anti-method?

Interpretation is predicated on sense information, for example from seeing, reading or listening. Prior to Gadamer’s explicit observations on the matter (1996), the American humanist psychologist Carl Rogers ([1967] 2004) also highlighted the common ground between therapeutic and educational practice, in particular their dependence on listening and positive regard. Neither Gadamer nor Rogers articulate an explicit method for their dialogic practices, opting instead to show them in action. Rogers incorporates transcribed excerpts into his writing to demonstrate how the therapist elicits the patient’s self-interpretations, and many of Gadamer’s later published works take the form of transcribed dialogues that model *his* approach to mutually educative interactions. The next chapter discusses in more detail the approach of the educational researcher Peter Clough (2002), who also resists methodological explication of his work, much of which is presented in the form of dialogue.

Gadamer is explicit in his scepticism of the pre-specified methodological procedures that were increasingly popular at the time he wrote *Truth and Method* ([1960] 2004). His aim in this seminal work is to warn against *inappropriate* application of method, showing that *all* method obscures or distorts the truth in some way or another. While Gadamer distances himself from relativism, he finds there are multiple ways to approach and conceive of truth, for example the truth that is encountered through experiencing art (1986). Hence, rather than following methods or rules for understanding, what is called for is an attitude or *ethic* (Vilhauer 2010) where one takes stock of one's own cultural and social histories and their influence on one's interactions with the world. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics emphasises not only *what* we desire to understand, but also the *context* in which we are understanding it, because understanding is always a unique encounter between the interpreter and the interpreted that is influenced by their specific histories. Nixon (2017a, p.49) emphasises that Gadamer does not suggest that enquiry should be *devoid* of method, merely that it should not be *constrained* by it.

Gadamer's standpoint on method is persuasive and helpful in the context of this enquiry. It is clearly important that one learns the rules or norms of social science, i.e. its established approaches to sampling, gathering and analysing data, and what makes them legitimate, before venturing beyond them. But, having engaged with many different forms of research in the fields of education, sociology, and philosophy, and considered at length the conceptions of truth that underpin the methods used and how they further *my* understanding of the world I live and work in, I am confident—like Gadamer—that predefined social science methods might well inform understanding, but understanding cannot be *reduced* to them, and they are unlikely to yield profound revelations, given the question at hand. One reason for this is that social science methods attend to differences in the data, for example by dividing them into themes and categories. In contrast my aim is to disclose the pluralism of perspectives in play and to illustrate how they exist together. Hence, what is required is an engagement of the 'hermeneutical imagination' (Nixon 2017a, p44-45), namely, a sense of the questionableness of the university, and what constitutes a legitimate response in this specific but ever-changing context. As will be discussed in the next chapter, responsive and creative methodologies such as narrative enquiry and autoethnography are more widely accepted now than they were during Gadamer's lifetime. This should be borne in mind when considering what Gadamer meant by 'method'.

While Gadamer presents his conversational model of understanding as an 'orientation' rather than a rule-based method, he does specify the characteristics of this orientation, which include *fruitful questions*, *historical consciousness*, and an *ethic of play*. In the following section I present each of these as formal concepts, and explain how they are actualised in the primary research documented in this thesis.

## 3.3 Formal concepts in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics

### 3.3.1 Fruitful Questions

According to Gadamer, it is the *impulse to question* that makes understanding possible (Nixon 2017a, p.20). The reference is not to the kind of knowing questioning that constitutes the Socratic method, but to genuine leaps into the unknown through which we *become ourselves*. Indeed, Gadamer speaks explicitly about education in these terms, defining the role of the teacher as helping the learner to 'become' through articulating their questions. Nixon (2017a, p.20) posits that our questions give us a *sense* of purpose, and that they are also 'key' to our sense of self, our attention, and our actions. The metaphor of the key implies that questions *unlock* and *reveal* one's purpose, rather than *producing* it. As Kermode (1979) emphasises, questions do not arise out of nothing.

In speaking of 'becoming', Gadamer implies a *potential* of sorts, such as a destiny, a calling, or another driving force. Such a force has historically been understood in various ways, for example in Spinoza's 'conatus' and Nietzsche's 'Will to Power', two ideas that Yovel (2017) argues are fundamentally similar. For Gadamer, the 'fruitful' question is a driving force for understanding. It is laden with potential 'to open up possibilities and keep them open' (Gadamer 2004, p.298). While such a question may be answered, the answer is but a singular impression of an ongoing process. This, according to Gadamer, is the nature of scholarship and the basis for hermeneutics.

In the case of this research, the question that opens each of the conversational interviews—'*what are universities for?*'—reveals an aim to understand one another and to find a common sense of purpose. Some have offered what appears to be a final or eternal answer to the question of the purpose of the university, for example Hogan's (2009) case for higher education as an end in itself, and Collini's (2012) claim that universities are not 'for' anything. Hogan's position may be interpreted as defending the university from (mis)appropriation, and Collini's as leaving it vulnerable, but the opposite could be true, or both authors may be saying the same thing in different ways. Their answers are not as final as they may seem.

The critical connection of the question of the purpose of the university with the 'histories, beliefs and commitments' (Nixon 2017a, p.48) of its stakeholders means that one 'becomes oneself' through asking it. The question is 'fruitful' (Gadamer 1992a, p.45) for the reasons given above, and also because it unites what one is seeking to understand, with the particular circumstances in which one is trying to understand it. These circumstances include the factors that Gadamer groups together as 'historical consciousness', such as past experiences and prior understanding, which will be discussed presently.

It is no surprise, given Gadamer's focus on the question as the driver of understanding and his insistence of the limitations of method, that he has less to say about how exactly one goes about sowing one's questions and harvesting their fruits. Some of Gadamer's

contemporaries—notably the British historian and philosopher R.G. Collingwood (1978) and the American philosopher of ethics and aesthetics Stanley Cavell (1976)—offer insights about questions and listening that are complementary to the fusion of horizons, and are perhaps more immediately applicable. For example, in order to understand what the other really means, Collingwood (1978, p.31) advises that ‘you must also know what the question was (a question in his own mind, and presumed by him to be in yours) to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer’. I explain in Chapter Four how I apply Collingwood’s rule to my own research conversations, and also how my approach relates to theories of listening and dialogue in the domain of transpersonal and transformative education. One example is Otto Scharmer’s (2007, p.5) theory of ‘presencing’, which sketches a progressive shift—enabled by stillness-based contemplative practice—from ‘polite’ (i.e. inauthentic) discourse, to collective creativity and generative flow (Gunnlaugson 2011, p.8). Scharmer’s attribution of this kind of ‘primary knowing’ to the ‘wisdom traditions’ of ancient and modern religions and indigenous knowledge frameworks (p.25) succeeds in subverting the established hierarchy of scientific over non-scientific, ‘primitive’, or ‘prelogical’ knowledge where earlier cultural epistemologists—such as Lucien Lévy-Brühl (Mousalimas 1990)—failed to do so. The fact that Scharmer also highlights primary knowing as a vital component of creativity and creative practice establishes a link not only between Gadamer’s fusion of horizons and the framework of ideas advanced in the previous chapter, but also with the specific arts university context of the primary research. I elaborate on the significance of Scharmer to the research methodology in Chapter Four, and return in Chapter Six to the dialectic character of the creative arts, and its particular relevance for an analysis of disillusionment in the arts-specialist university.

### 3.3.2 Historical Consciousness

Gadamer is not alone in his view that our personalities, past experiences and prior understanding shape how we see the world, and how we respond to other perspectives. Nixon (2017a, p.17) explains how Gadamer’s historicity of conscious experience builds on the ‘historical consciousness’ originally described by Gianbattista Vico. Bakhurst’s (2019) translation of Vygotsky’s ‘perezhivanie’ as a ‘thick’ (unique, personal) conception of experience signifies a similar concept. Nixon (2017a) finds that we have always understood ourselves *historically*, in that every act of interpretation rests on the layers of interpretation beneath it. He cites Vico’s description of the past as ‘another country that has to be understood on its own terms, not our terms’ (p.17), a metaphor that places a particular lens on the difficulty of such an understanding, and the intellectual humility it calls for. The implication is that, if it were possible to travel back in time, we could not help but bring our present knowledge to bear on it, just as when we travel geographically the experience is layered on top of previous adventures and our everyday lives.

Gadamer’s metaphor of the *horizon* also comes into play in articulating the uniqueness of socially and historically effected consciousness. Everyone’s horizon is different, because no two people can stand in exactly the same place at the same time. The metaphor calls on us to

lengthen our focus—as Nixon (2017a, p.30) highlights, ‘the acquisition of a horizon requires looking beyond what’s close at hand’—and to acknowledge the contingency of the horizon on our position. As we move, our horizon alters and our position—with its *prejudices*—is seen to be revisable. In common usage, ‘prejudice’ is generally taken to hinder understanding, but Gadamer remodels it as a necessary starting point of the hermeneutic process, ‘prejudice’ and ‘tradition’ being the personal and cultural aspects of one’s historical consciousness that underpin any endeavour to understand. In conversation with his colleague at Heidelberg, Carsten Dutt (2001, p.45), Gadamer explains how traditions act on us regardless of whether we are conscious of them: ‘we stand in traditions, whether we know those traditions or not’, and that they cannot be shaken off: ‘people who believe they have freed themselves from their interwovenness into their effective history are simply mistaken’.

Building on the earlier discussion of the origin of questions, it could be said—and Gadamer *does* imply this in conversation with Dutt—that it is *traditions* rather than individuals that pose questions, and those questions evolve along with their corresponding traditions as new generations ask them. The major tradition posing the question at the core of this enquiry is philosophy of education, a discipline I have become initiated in through membership of and participation in the Philosophy of Educational Society of Great Britain (PESGB). The question of the purpose of education in general—and of universities in particular—has a rich genealogy that extends back through the formation of this specialism, which was influenced in the last century by critical theory, and has roots—as does the idea of the university itself—in theology. The post-Robbins sector expansion, the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, the introduction of tuition fees, the climate crisis, and the progress being made towards greater equality across protected characteristics, are just some of the factors that have influenced the questions posed by this tradition that pertain to higher education.

In recognition of the restrictions imposed on human understanding by cultural and social histories—as noted by Ortega ([1932] 1957) and Nixon (2017a)—the life histories of the participants were taken as relevant to the primary research, and elicited through inviting elaboration from conversational cues. The intention was to enact a playful and instinctive curiosity (in a manner resonant with Scharmer’s (2007) description of *presencing* as a creative process emerging from a deeper, intuitive wisdom), rather than to provoke *causal* propositions between participants’ life histories and their beliefs about the university. Gadamer offers an ethical imperative to resist the impulse to explain and predict our fellow human beings, and in this particular enquiry, noting and detaching from this felt ethically necessary. Vilhauer (2010) writes at length about Gadamer’s hermeneutics as a form of play (as discussed in the following section), and directly relates this to an ethical imperative not to treat the other as a scientific or psychological object.

Rosenberg (2018) uses numerous historical examples, such as the enduring narratives of dispossession that prevent the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, to show that the stories humans tell to explain ourselves and each other can be harmful as well as wrong, and if

this is the case, one might ask why we bother to educate life stories at all, either through formal research or informal conversation. The answer, I believe, is that in eliciting the diverse histories accompanying diverse worldviews, one learns that it is both possible—and important—for us to *understand* each other, even though we cannot possibly think and feel what someone else thinks and feels.

If psychologising objectifies the other and precludes a genuine attempt at understanding, it might follow—depending on one’s conception of self and self-consciousness—that in apprehending and understanding *ourselves*, one should avoid this also. Indeed, Gadamer proposes that understanding the other and understanding oneself are deeply intertwined. *All* understanding necessarily bears an element of self-understanding, and hence all education bears an element of self-education (Gadamer [1999] 2008). This principle underlies Gadamer’s concept of ‘application’, where the person who is doing the understanding is being *themselves* in the process (Nixon 2017a, p.17), and informs the role I take in the research conversations as a interlocutor rather than an interviewer. As Nixon writes: ‘we cannot understand things from afar or above. We can only understand in the thick of it, in the middle and muddle of things’ (2017b, p7). Undertaking and documenting the interaction as a dialectic enables me to see my own position (and prejudice) in relation to others’, and to embark on a process of understanding.

I have presented historically effected consciousness, rich with traditions and prejudice, as fertile ground in which questions bear fruit. There is a perpetuity—an infinite quality—in the metaphor of fruitfulness. As Gadamer says in conversation with Dutt (2001, p.60), ‘what happens to one in a conversation is really without end’. Roland Barthes (1967, p.5) likewise calls for interpretive perpetuity in his insistence not to ‘impose upon that text a stop clause... to close the writing [by giving it an author]’. An enchanting connection, as described by Yovel (2017), leads back to Spinoza’s ‘conatus’, the innate *inclination* of a thing to continue to exist and enhance itself, exemplified by the biological blueprint of the oak tree within the acorn. The principle of becoming oneself and fulfilling one’s destiny dovetails with a third concept in Gadamer’s hermeneutics that has already been alluded to and will now be discussed further, namely the ‘ethic of play’.

### 3.3.3 An Ethic of Play

For Gadamer, to become ourselves *is* to play. ‘Play’ is an oscillating or cyclical mode of being, a variable movement that implies freedom and the possibility of spontaneity: ‘...we find talk of the play of light, the play of the waves, the play of gears or parts of machinery, the interplay of limbs, the play of forces, the play of gnats, even a play on words’ (2004, p104). The prevalence of natural phenomena in Gadamer’s examples invites us to recognise ourselves as actors in the ‘play’ of nature. Indeed, Nixon (2017a, p.22) highlights Gadamer’s insistence that the act of understanding is a natural or ‘ordinary’ mode of being, requiring only that we ‘adopt an enquiring stance to what is strange and unfamiliar’. Nixon’s description of becoming as both ‘the prime ethical concern’, and an act of relating to the world (p.22) emphasises the same ecological

component of human flourishing invoked by Freya Mathews' 'desire for world' or 'orexis' (2003, p.73), an aspect of self-actualisation she offers as the outwards-facing counterpart to the inner potential of Spinoza's 'conatus'.

A genuine conversation is more playful than a debate. In a conversation, there is no aim to win (Gadamer 2004, p.360). On the contrary, the respective parties are 'learning to lose' (Gadamer 1992d, p.233). A conversation moves back-and-forth as one considers what the other has to say, and re-examines one's own perspective in light of it. MacIntyre (2002) presents Gadamer's approach to conversation as a 'surrender of the last word', emphasising in particular that the fusion of horizons is not a *battle* of horizons, and does not entail the supposition of one over the other. In some cultures, this may already be taken as a given. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal treatise on metaphor reveals that talk of conversation as 'war' is not universally shared across languages and cultures, and that in many languages (e.g. Italian) conversation is more commonly spoken of as a peaceful and collaborative act, such as dancing or tending to a fire. Gadamer himself highlights the importance of metaphor in hermeneutics and how the application of words (such as war, dance and play) to a new sphere (such as conversation) calls us to question their original meaning (2004, p103). War, dance and play are all metaphors of *embodied action*, whereas conversation may be less embodied or purely linguistic. To reach a mutual understanding *is*, perhaps, to find a common language. While 'dialect' assumes a shared meaning, Nixon's (2017a, p31) use of *idiolect* to denote an individual's particular speech habits illuminates the need for spaces of 'improvisatory talk' where participants can work through half-formed ideas & arguments.

Important or difficult conversations are often considered to be so because of their consequences. When the stakes are perceived to be high, so is the pressure to win. But Gadamer urges us to set aside the desire to be right, and many popular experts on conversation, including Zeldin (1998), Patton et al. (1999), and Apps (2014) echo this principle. In a culture where conversation is perceived as war (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), to approach serious conversations with an ethic of play might seem frivolous or harmful, but Gadamer maintains that this is the very kind of play that matters a great deal. Aristotle observed that we play 'for the sake of recreation' (Gadamer 2004, p102), and it is easy to forget—with the various uses and associations *this* word has in the English language—that recreation is to *recreate* oneself (thus, we return to the concept of becoming). Gadamer highlights the paradox in play being opposed to purposeful activity, while simultaneously having its *own* purpose, i.e. for the player to lose themselves (2004, p103). Play may be conceived not as something one does oneself but rather as something that one *channels*. As Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*, 'play reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players' (2004, p103), and 'all playing is a being-played' (2004, p.106). When we take play seriously, we are absorbed by it, and on transcending the 'self', one enters a space opens where different horizons can be encountered.

The phenomenon of self-transcendence will be returned to at the end of this chapter, where its relation to meditative, contemplative and 'flow' states (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) is

explored. It is offered here as a corollary of a playful ethic, one of the defining features—along with historical consciousness and fruitful questions—of the process of understanding.

Next, I present and respond to the potential objections to using Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as the methodological basis for researching ideas of the university.

## 3.4 Criticisms of Gadamer

### 3.4.1 Hermeneutics as anti-method

In his account of Gadamer's hermeneutics in education, Nixon (2017a) reads *Truth and Method* as, on one level, a defence of the interpretive human 'sciences', and an attack on the dominance of scientific method (p.55). The 'natural' sciences aim to establish mechanisms, whereas the 'human' sciences generate questions and build shared understandings around those questions. The concern is not that the two are incompatible, so much as the former having colonised the latter to the extent that it hinders cross-cultural understanding and threatens the foundations of democracy. Gadamer recognised that when Dilthey—who was originally a psychologist—turned his hand to hermeneutics, he focused on 'empathy', 'transposition' and 'reexperiencing' as elements of understanding. This treatment of the other as a psychological object—to be *explained* rather than *understood*—is precisely what Gadamer rejects in his own hermeneutics.

I have already suggested that Gadamer's hermeneutics could be described as an 'anti-methodology', and indicated that the decision not to use traditional research methods should ideally be informed by substantial experience of using them. A defensive response to this—beyond reiterating that Gadamer was not anti-method so much as *cautious* of it—is first that this thesis does *not* dismiss established social science methods (indeed, it incorporates a number of explanations that have emerged from social research). The bolder response is that, whether it is a method or an anti-method, the approach or ethic described in Gadamer's hermeneutics is what this particular enquiry calls for. The work seeks to elicit others' conceptions of the university in a way that allows for them to exist together, and the hermeneutic approach is appropriate because it acknowledges the influence of prejudices and traditions, and opposes scientific and psychological objectification of those who took part. My argument is *not* that there is no place for scientific *explanation* in researching conceptions of the university. It is that hermeneutic *understanding* is the primary aim of this particular enquiry, and true understanding—in the Gadamerian sense—is practically and ethically distinct from explanation.

### 3.4.2 Hermeneutics as relativism or quietism

A second objection is apparent and has been alluded to earlier, namely the critique offered by Jürgen Habermas, who argued that the foregrounding of 'tradition' hinders the recognition and

interrogation of its assumptions (Mendelson 1979). For Habermas, tradition must be subject to criticism, and criticism requires the kind of distance that is provided by the methods of the critical sciences. Gadamer rejects this, insisting that Habermas' optimism about the possibility of objective distance is false, that objectivity is not possible, and it is a pretence for anyone to claim that it is. Gadamer's imperative to acknowledge and accept the traditions in which one is mired resonates with the psychotherapist Carl Rogers' ([1967] 2004) seemingly paradoxical core thesis that one can only change for the better if one accepts oneself as is. The 'fusion of horizons' is Gadamer's term for the creative clash with other traditions that calls one's own tradition into question. Vilhauer (2010) reports that Habermas' scepticism arose from misunderstanding what Gadamer meant by *fusion*, believing that the aim was to achieve consensus and in doing so destroy difference. This was not Gadamer's intention at all, and it leads me to the third objection, which is that Gadamer's hermeneutics might be perceived as uncritical or relativist, namely, accepting of everything, including what some consider unacceptable.

Gadamer has often been criticised for quietitude and acquiescence during the Nazi era when he remained in Germany teaching philosophy, avoiding controversy by basing his seminars on the works of the Ancient Greeks rather than anything overtly contemporary. Nixon (2017a, p.9) defends this stance as 'keeping alive a tradition of philosophical reflection and humanistic dialogue that was in its own quiet way deeply subversive'. Indeed, Gadamer's actions during the war are consistent with the content of his philosophical works.

The potential for Gadamer's approach to yield moral progress is debatable. His 'quiet subversion' did not, evidently, stop the war. One specific question arising from such a challenge would be: how *should* one approach those who see the world very differently? What can be done when the other does not even wish to *have* a conversation, or sees conversation differently? Gadamer claimed that Derrida, for example, was incapable of having a conversation (Dutt 2001), but argues that one can still learn something important from such individuals, namely, by respecting their perspective and engaging the hermeneutic imagination, we learn something about *ourselves*. Another question arises pertaining to the ethical limits of agreeableness. Extreme agreeableness may be equated to relativism, which is widely considered to lack legitimacy as a philosophical standpoint. The relativist character 'Zac' in Tim Williamson's fictional *Tetralogue* (2015) believes himself to be both tolerant and reasonable, but his refusal to engage in debate reveals that he is not in fact taking the other's ideas seriously. Gadamer was himself explicitly accused of relativism by E.D. Hirsch (1967), specifically for his reluctance to distinguish between the authorial meaning of a text and its significance for the reader. At the other end of the spectrum to Hirsch—for whom authorial meaning was of the utmost importance—lies Barthes' (1967) claim that the essential meaning of a work lies *only* in the impressions of the reader: 'a text's unity lies not in its origins... but in its destination'. I argue that Gadamer is not a relativist, as his hermeneutics demands not that one agrees with everything as it is, but that one opens one's worldview to possible revision. Williamson, through

*Tetralogue* (2015), shows us that relativism is diametrically opposed to this orientation. What appears to be open-mindedness is in fact tightly closed, in that if we agree with everything, there is no need for us to consider, concede, or change. The philosopher of education Paul Fairfield (2012, p.80) claims that '[o]pen-mindedness may well be the most essential condition of educational success in general; without it the mind is unteachable apart from the straightforward acquisition of information that merely confirms what one knows'. Here, open-mindedness does not signify the *breadth of one's view*, but one's *openness to change*. I understand Gadamer to be 'open-minded' in this sense, and definitively *not* a relativist, who by agreeing to disagree assumes that *all* perspectives can happily co-exist, and therefore goes nowhere. Gadamer's hermeneutic ethic asserts that there is always something one can learn from the other, and is therefore an explicitly progressive position and a manifesto for how one should live, i.e. neither *accepting* or *allowing* what one believes to be wrong or bad, not immediately denying it, but *engaging with* and *understanding* it. This is a hard line to take in practice. It may feel less rewarding in the short term to have a difficult conversation with someone than it is to complain about them to those sympathetic to our position. But there are ways. Gadamer would attest from his conversation with Derrida that the 'failure' of these conversations generally stems from the lack of a shared intention. Gadamer's stipulation that 'the first condition in the art of conversation is ensuring the other person is with us' (2004, p.360) does not refer to the participants' agreement on the issue at hand, but their intention to explore their disagreement(s) together. The same principle is underlined in popular guides to the 'art' of conversation previously cited (e.g. Patton et al. 1999, Apps 2014.) That having been said, individuals may be ill-equipped to assess the morality of their actions. As Gadamer says in conversation with Dutt (2001, p.46), 'full enlightenment about one's own interests in questioning is not attainable'.

Like Gadamer I believe that all understandings—including my own—are partial and incomplete. While the thesis is accommodating of different perspectives, it departs from relativism in the sense that it constitutes an attempt at listening, and what Gadamer calls a 'fusion' of 'horizons'. Gadamer considers reasoning together across cultural and historical divides (and creating and protecting the spaces where this happens) to be the pinnacle of human achievement. A relativist, in contrast, would not believe this to be a worthwhile activity. Gadamer's 'hermeneutics of trust' (Nixon 2017a, p.19) attends to points of resonance but it does not *ignore* points of dissonance. Rather, it illuminates them as the starting point for conversation. This aspect of Gadamer's thinking has directly informed both the theoretical and the practical components of this thesis in the following ways: first, the highlighting throughout of the historical and cultural contexts of the theories and theorists referred to, and the significance of these. Second, the surveying of the existing views of potential participants to identify apparent disagreements as starting points for conversation. This aspect of the methodology is described in more detail in the next chapter. I mention it here as its explicit purpose is to inform the purposive sampling of a group of participants with seemingly varied and/or opposing views.

### 3.5 Self-transcendence and the *eternal* in understanding

At this point I would like to revisit the connection between the hermeneutic ethic and notions of self-transcendence. In the previous chapter I theorised the experience of enchantment as a diminishing of attention to the self and a sense of something more than the individualised existence valued in a disenchanted world. Above, I have cited Gadamer's call to 'lose ourselves' in the play of understanding (2004, p.103), and in the context of this enquiry I have accounted for this loss at different strata: 1) the *micro-transcendence* of relaxing the rational, responsible mind and allowing intuition to emerge from beyond it, 2) the *meso-transcendence* of relaxing the construct of the self-subject and the other-object, and encountering one's conversation partner without psychologising or otherwise objectifying them, and 3) the *macro-transcendence* of personal transformation that emerges from the fusion of horizons. I will now ground these ideas in an expanded account of what it is like to transcend or 'lose' oneself in these ways by drawing on notions of time-consciousness, because—as shown by both Heidegger and Husserl—time-consciousness is essential to any kind of experience (Vessey 2007).

Gadamer (1986) notes that when one truly attends to the thing one is understanding, time as one experiences it (e.g. as boredom or bustle) disappears. This concept of being fully in the present moment (which has obvious links with Otto Scharmer's aforementioned theory of *presencing*) overlaps with what Berger (1972) defines as 'contemplation' in *Ways of Seeing*, Wittman (2018) as the 'meditative state', and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) as 'flow', and has implications for ideas of the university in modern industrial society. Sennett (1999) and Collini (2017) have both noted how educational bureaucracies—through measures, strategies, and performance indicators—exert consistent pressure on staff and students to think in terms of past and future, the concern being that this emphasis precludes the immersion in the present moment that is required—according to Gadamer and indicated by the likes of Berger (1972), Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and Wittman (2018)—for deep understanding. This account of time-consciousness helps to clarify the micro and—in part—the meso levels of self-transcendence outlined above.

Gadamer also notes how we experience ourselves as passing through different personal stages or 'epochs' throughout our lives (1972). These are often marked by clear transitions where we reconfigure ourselves (Vessey 2007). Gadamer's theory of a discontinuous self-understanding resonates somewhat with Strawson's (2004) concept of the 'episodic self', which Strawson compares with its counterpart, the narrative or 'diachronic' self. While Strawson posits the tendency towards either episodic or narrative self-understanding as a distinguishing feature of individuals, Gadamer conversely theorises that we *all* form continuous life-narratives that are made up of discrete epochs. This aspect of Gadamer's account of time-consciousness helps to clarify self-transcendence from the macro level of personal transformation, and indicates that the same type of phenomenon perpetuates across the three levels outlined, namely, an interruption of one's sense of time that corresponds with an interruption of one's sense of self.

### 3.6 Understanding as flourishing and enchantment

Given that the hermeneutic orientation or ethic entails a diminuendo of 'self', and a fluidity in one's horizon, it follows that such an orientation bears the potential to change who one *is*, particularly in terms of our commitments to others and their expectations of us. The position held by Gadamer is that this direction of change is good and right. It is how we 'become ourselves', a concept that overlaps with what is often referred to as 'human flourishing':

“...the (relatively) unencumbered, freely chosen and developmentally progressive activity of a meaningful (subjectively purposeful and objectively valuable) life that actualizes satisfactorily an individual human being's natural capacities...” Kristjánsson 2020, p.1

Nixon (2017a, p.25) observes that we 'risk dissolution of the self' when we allow ourselves to wonder at (or to be enchanted by) the strange and unfamiliar, but to have an education that 'enlarges our mentality and enhances our humanity' (p.54)—i.e. one that results in flourishing—demands that we do so. If living a good life requires a genuine, non-instrumental concern for the lives of others, Gadamer's hermeneutics offers an approach to understanding that is congruent with this ethic, where one figuratively *stands under* another, allowing oneself to be seen and changed.

To flourish—or to 'become ourselves'—takes courage. Nixon (2017a, p.24) cites the theologian Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* ({1952} 2000) to support his claim that the purpose of education is to provide learners with opportunities to practice courageous thought and action. He maintains that genuine flourishing cannot arise merely from standardised, over-regulated approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Rather, education should open a space for learners to be '*alive to the world*' (Nixon 2017a, p.24). In this passage of Nixon's there is a resonance with Hubert Dreyfus' *All Things Shining* (2011), where classic literature is used to illuminate the innate human tendency to be spirited away by an instinct, passion, or calling. In Dreyfus' account of Homer's polytheism, which posits individuals as conduits for the various gods, one recognises how it feels to undertake an educational journey, driven by a complex range of motivations such as pure curiosity, pleasing others, fulfilling one's duty, avoiding failure, and serving the discipline.

Out of these considerations emerges a conclusion that understanding—the hermeneutic endeavour—calls for a quieting of one's self-narrative and an immersion in the present moment with the other, and ultimately results in personal transformation. I have referred explicitly to the value of faith and wonder in this process, and suggested—with reference to Gadamer's concept of 'fusion' and my own theorisation of self-transcendence—a relationship with unity. Given such an entanglement with the value dimensions of enchantment, I propose that the hermeneutic endeavour *is* a mode of enchantment. Furthermore, and to make explicit the connection with the proposition developed in Chapter Two, I suggest that the pursuit of knowledge calls for phases of *understanding* and phases of *explanation*, the former being humanist, enchanted, and self-

and time-transcendent (and accommodating of plural forms of knowing), and the latter being mechanistic, disenchanting, and self- and time-bound. In the following chapter I offer a methodological account of the primary research undertaken as part of an endeavour to *understand* the purpose of the university.

## Chapter Four: Conversation and Fiction

The hermeneutic ethic positions research participants as partners engaged in an act of understanding with the researcher, rather than as scientific or psychological objects to be explained. It invites both researcher and participants to be changed through the encounter.

The aim of this enquiry is not only to reveal different imaginations of the university, but also to mediate between them and to show how the university accommodates multiple conceptions of itself. It has already been argued that traditional social science methods position research participants as scientific objects, and that there is there is an antimony—an apparent contradiction—between scientific explanation and the linguistic constitution of reality on which understanding is built. Thematic analysis, for example, is a very popular method for synthesising interview data, but it objectifies those who take part in the research. Furthermore, the distinction and categorisation of ‘findings’ into themes and sub-themes risks obscuring the researcher’s interpretative power by lending an impression that semantic and latent meanings are being discovered rather than constructed. Something valuable is inevitably lost when reducing accounts of true experience to categories. It is the particular violence of the analytical approach that Emily Dickinson ([1865]1924) illuminates in her poem ‘Split the Lark’:

Split the Lark - and You'll find the Music -  
Bulb after Bulb, in Silver rolled -  
Scantly dealt to the Summer Morning  
Saved for your Ear, when Lutes be old -

Loose the Flood - you shall find it patent -  
Gush after Gush, reserved for you -  
Scarlet Experiment! Skeptic Thomas!  
Now, do you doubt that your Bird was true?

This enquiry plays with an alternative to thematic analysis in its utilisation of the transcripts of conversational interviews as source material for a semi-fictional conversation between several characters. An explicitly creative device like fictional narrative is honest about the interpretive influence of the researcher, making it obvious both to the researcher (during the creative process) and to the readers of the work, in a way that traditional social scientific analytical methods such as thematic analysis arguably do not.

The greater opportunity for construction and invention with fictional methods lends greater importance to participant checking when evaluating the truth value of their outputs and insights. The American psychotherapist Irvin Yalom (1991) pioneered co-created narrative with his research subjects, collaborating with eight of his patients to produce semi-fictional accounts of therapeutic conversations. Yalom’s topic, namely the complexity of the therapeutic relationship and the unpredictability of outcomes, was revived a few years later in a similar form,

but with a different methodological approach, by the British psychotherapist Susie Orbach (2000). Orbach's characters supposedly do not correspond to specific individuals, but are entirely fictional constructions informed by her extensive clinical experience. A third approach is taken by David Carless (Carless & Sparkes 2009), who uses interview data from three men with serious mental illness to construct first-person accounts of their experiences. The extent of Carless' fictionalisation is well-defined and is limited to the concealment of participants' identities, and the conversion from dialogue to coherent monologue. In contrast, the educational researcher Peter Clough (2002) is deliberately vague about the degree of fictionalisation in his stories about challenging pupil behaviour in schools, which he describes as constructed using 'fragments of real events'. Fictionalisation offers protection against the exposure of participant identities, hence it is unsurprising that noteworthy examples of fictional narrative research tend to arise from the educational and medical disciplines, where the consequences of disclosure are severe. In some cases Clough acknowledges through the stories themselves the primary ethical concern his approach raises, namely the likelihood that the individuals his characters are based on—and/or their families and colleagues—will recognise themselves and feel misrepresented or exploited.

The approach used in this enquiry is to select and synthesise excerpts from individual conversations into one group dialogue. This is not a common approach, but it shares a common purpose with those cited above: to combine discrete voices and interactions into a single artefact that is more than the sum of its parts, while also facilitating the protection of participant identities. It has been applied in this enquiry to illuminate the connections between participants' ideas of the university, converging aspects of their perspectives in a way that would not have been possible or feasible in real life. Willis (2018) says of her own narrative fictional research with politicians:

The picture thrown out by the data was richer, more tangled and more personal than I had expected. It did not seem to me to be appropriate to analyze the data through 'standard' categorization, such as party affiliation, social background, gender, age or previous experience... my aim was not to distinguish between politicians, through comparisons and categorizations. Instead, it was to investigate how politicians, as (a group of) people, navigate their life and work.

Likewise, the aim of this enquiry is not to make comparisons and identify differences between how students, teachers and managers conceive of the University, but to capture the complexity of their conceptions, highlight shared concerns, and ultimately show how the university as an institution hosts and mediates multiple perspectives. This chapter gives a justification for semi-fictional narrative as a legitimate research methodology, describes the particular methods used in this enquiry, and explains their appropriateness in context.

## 4.1 Narratives and knowledge

Human beings use stories to further their understanding of the social world, and develop their moral and ethical responses to it. Clough (2002) recounts a trend arising in the 20th Century in the elision of fact and fiction, and the academic or scholarly status of such works. Clearly it is not the elision in itself that is to be considered new, Shakespeare's historical plays and the biblical parables being among many stories that have retained a central position in British culture in general, and moral education in particular. What is different is how these works are received in modern industrial society generally, and in the academy, given that they trouble a scientific understanding of 'data' that is assumed to be common sense (Clough 2002, p4). One well-known example within and beyond academia is Carlos Castenada's (1968) description of his training with the Yaqui sorcerer don Juan Matus, originally submitted as an ethnographic thesis for an MA in anthropology, and subsequently criticised as fictitious (e.g. Clements 1985). Over time, the topic of discussion has shifted from whether Castenada's story actually happened, to whether this matters (Shelburne 1987), and what it means regardless of its truth status (Lochle 2014).

The sociologist Laurel Richardson (1994) was a pioneer in the explicit presentation of fictional narrative as social research. The origin of the method in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology is unsurprising, given the inherently narrative character of ethnography, an established methodology in these fields. Through fictional narrative the dichotomy between the researcher and the researched is called into question, along with other dichotomies such as form and content, and perception and imagination. The elision of form and content, common across art forms, is an obvious feature of two of the examples cited in the preceding paragraph, Auel's (1980) being a story that highlights—among other things—the ancient history of human storytelling, and Castenda's (1968) being a story about what is real, and what is 'just' a story. A challenge to the legitimacy of fictional narrative as research stems from the tacit nature of the creative process, which is an impediment to the kind of methodological description that enables replication. I proceed to respond to this challenge from two directions, firstly by offering examples of fiction and semi-fiction in education research and showing that they make a valuable contribution to the discipline and its associated professional practices despite the tacit nature of their creation, and secondly by making my own creative research process explicit as far as it is feasible to do so.

### 4.1.2 The use of narrative in educational research

One of Clough's (2002) primary justifications for using fictional narrative in educational research is its capacity to facilitate enquiry into settings that are rich with ethical dilemmas, where inherent power relationships raise the stakes and render the issues especially sensitive. A recent example of this is Kevin Williams's (2019) work on the ethics of sexual desire in the teacher-student relationship. Williams builds his argument on a work of fiction set in the 1930s

(‘The Pupil’, Gibbon 1981) about an educational relationship that crosses the borderline of propriety. It is an effective device, which makes for a compelling article. It is not clear whether—or to what extent—Gibbon was writing autobiographically, but the story is ‘truthful’ in that it articulates emotions and dilemmas that are familiar to the reader in the present day. Clough (2002) likens the use of stories in and as educational research to conceive the process as the creation of a building of which one is the architect rather than the engineer. The question guiding the researcher is not *technical* (how to construct the building), but *purposeful* (what the building does). It foregrounds the agency of the reader and their needs, and the agency of the author, who fulfils the reader’s needs through the story. The purpose of ‘The Pupil’—both for Williams, and presumably also for its author—is to enable the reader to distinguish between right and wrong actions, and to determine how the line was crossed. It clears a space for learning free from the implications that would hamper a discussion based on real events. In this way, literature can be a ‘rich conduit of understanding of human practices’ (Williams 2019, p.561).

In a similar vein lies Bruce MacFarlane’s (2003) collection of fictional ethical dilemmas in higher education practice. Macfarlane’s purpose in writing these stories is, like Williams’ (2019) use of ‘The Pupil’, to provoke discussion about right and wrong action, although the discussions they are designed to provoke—as documented by Macfarlane himself—are divergent in nature, with the appropriate action always being dependent on contextual factors. To achieve this divergence Macfarlane has made his characters (all of them university teachers) familiar and relatable across a wide variety of higher education institutions, almost to the point of cliché. Their conscientiousness is moderated by a weary resentment of administrative duties related to line management, evaluation, and course leadership, which are revealed to be fraught with unanticipated ethical conundrums. The constant (yet always unexpected) frustration of routine operation runs through Macfarlane’s stories, and is both explicit and implicit in the narration (the mildly cynical undertones of which act as an effective sympathetic device). In the prologue, Macfarlane explains his intention to write stories that are both fictional and ‘very real’, and describes how the scenarios have been judged as veridical by the large numbers of university teachers who have used them in his workshops. They may feel clichéd to those who have been working in higher education for a while, but they are essentially moral parables, the purpose of which is to provide a springboard for debate.

I have shown above how fiction and semi-fiction in education research can make a valuable contribution to the discipline and its associated professional practices despite the tacit nature of its creation. My own research differs somewhat in its purpose from Williams’ (2019) and Macfarlane’s (2004) in that its primary purpose is not to provoke debate on right and wrong action. Nevertheless, its broad aim and mode of action is the same; to draw the attention—and provoke a response—to novel perspectives on a familiar situation.

One might ask, given the apparent effectiveness of fictional accounts in education research, why I made the effort to recruit and engage real participants in my own enquiry. The

answer is that fictional and semi-fictional accounts used for this purpose must be truthful—i.e. based on something real—in order to act on the reader in the way they do. The truth in the case of both Williams (2019) and Macfarlane (2004) is the personal experience on which the accounts are based. In comparison, Legg (2013) bases his fictional account on the findings of empirical research, but the purpose and effect is the same. In contrast, given the dearth of existing information upon which to base an imagined conversation of the type featured in this thesis, my own research incorporates both an enquiry into reality and a fictionalisation of it. The decision in this enquiry to construct a semi-fictional group conversation using source material from real conversations, and how this was achieved, is explained below.

#### 4.1.2 The use of fictional narrative in this enquiry

The fictional narrative method used in this enquiry has at least two features that distinguish it from the method used by the educational researchers cited above (Clough 2002, Macfarlane 2003, Legg 2013). These may be outlined and justified as follows. First, an effort was made to adhere as closely as possible to the exact wording of transcripts of real conversations. Approximately 95% of the content of the fictional conversation is either directly quoted or paraphrased from the transcripts of the research conversations, with only 5% of the content created retrospectively to ensure a smooth and coherent narrative. This substantial degree of similarity, more than that implied by Clough's description of 'fragments of data from real events', corresponds with the aim to not only reveal and communicate truths about complex imaginations of the university, but to bring real people into conversation with one another in a way that would otherwise have been difficult, both practically and in terms of the participants speaking freely to one another. Second—and very much related to the first point—the constructed conversation is not required to stand by itself, but is accompanied by a commentary that situates it within the thesis as a whole. An alternative approach would have been to fictionalise the conversation further, incorporating more of these connections into it. A number of theoretical ideas related to conceptions of the university were indeed raised and discussed in the original conversations and subsequently feature in the fictionalised synthesis, for example Max Weber's ([1905] 2013) ideas about capitalism and religious belief, and John Henry Newman's (1852) *Idea of the University*. To bring in more theories, such as those discussed in Chapter Two, would shift the focus away from the primary aim of this enquiry, which is to communicate the complexity of the perspectives of staff, students and managers, highlight their shared concerns, and ultimately show how the university as an institution hosts and mediates multiple perspectives. The conversation as it stands corresponds with that aim, although further fictionalisation to incorporate more ideas from the literature might well be appropriate when developing the work beyond the realms of the thesis.

### 4.1.3 Is fictional narrative an anti-method?

There is little resistance in the philosophical literature to the claim that narrative is a core aspect of human nature. One notable exception is Galen Strawson (2018), who argues that not everyone experiences their life as a continuous story, and questions whether it is even beneficial for individuals to think of their lives in that way. Nevertheless, even Strawson shows himself capable of producing an engaging life-narrative of sorts. It is possible that his 'episodic' account of self signifies not a different variety of self-consciousness so much as a pronounced awareness of the crisis of representation that Denzin (1997) highlights in his vision for ethnography in the 21st century, which recognises the gulf between the stories we tell and the way things are. The philosopher Alex Rosenberg (2018) elaborates this position in his treatise on the dangers of historical narrativity. His categorisation of man's natural 'addiction' to stories as 'defective' appears to subdue Clough's (2002) call for research 'of human significance' that is 'always straining at the limits of method' (p.5). But the postmodernism underlying Clough's approach is a reaction against the modern view held by the likes of Rosenberg. For Clough, postmodern methods are not standard or replicable. They cannot be prescribed in advance but are unique, contextualised responses to specific moral or political needs. These responses are recognised as being part of us, and our contexts—as we perceive them—as self-constructions. Clough's description of 'method'—while in harmony with Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics—is so very different from the common understanding of the word that its use may ultimately be inappropriate when speaking of writing stories. Indeed, Clough maintains that it is not necessary to speak of 'method' at all, and the researcher's duty is rather to articulate the factors that shape fictional narrative research, such as their own moral and political positioning, the relationship between analysis and presentation, the derivation of data, and the ownership of the work. Nevertheless, it is methods rather than anti-methods that are the subject of this chapter. At this early stage in my research career I do not feel I have earned the liberty to *not* speak of methods in accounting for the various decisions taken in the design and execution of an enquiry.

## 4.2 Methods

### 4.2.1 Participant recruitment

Following ethical clearance—and prior to the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation/GDPR—I sent out a call for participants through a number of channels across the university where I work as an educational developer. This included the deposition of flyers and posters in canteens and staff rooms, and the dissemination of email invitations to various groups, including graduates from the university's PgCert programme. Invitations included basic information about the aims and focus of the enquiry, a link to further information, and a link to register interest in participating. Registration of interest comprised the completion and

submission of an online questionnaire with fields specifying the potential participant's name, job role and contact preferences, and five optional Likert scale questions, the responses to which were subsequently used to inform purposive sampling.

#### 4.2.1a Purposive sampling of candidates

Candidates were invited to indicate their agreement with the following statements:

1. Students should pay for their university education
2. Universities are important because they boost the economy
3. It has become too easy to get a university place
4. League tables make universities better at what they do
5. Universities benefit the whole of society

A total of ten participants were subsequently selected from the 22 who had registered interest in participating. The aim was to obtain a sample with approximately equal distribution across the main roles (students, teachers and managers), and within those role groups as much variance as possible in the scaled responses to the five questions listed above. For example, one of the selected senior managers strongly agreed that league tables make universities better at what they do, so another was selected who strongly *disagreed* with that statement. Most candidates agreed to an extent that universities benefit the whole of society, so the sample included the one teacher who did not, and one student who did, but *also* strongly agreed that the cost of higher education should be borne by the individual student, which I felt was an intriguing combination. The final sample comprised three undergraduate students (one in their first year and two in their final year), three teaching and teaching-related staff members (one who had also been a student at the university at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and one who was studying part-time for an MA elsewhere), and four senior managers including two very senior members of the executive board.

#### 4.2.2 Data collection

An unstructured conversation of between 60 and 75 minutes was conducted with each participant at a location of their choosing. Four conversations took place offsite (three while walking along canals and through parks, and one in a coffee shop). Three took place in informal locations in university buildings. The three most senior managers preferred to host the conversation in their private offices. All participants had read the information sent out to them prior to the meeting, and were aware that the focus of the conversation was the question 'what are universities for?'.

While each of the ten conversations proceeded organically with no predefined structure, there were certain commonalities and differences that were evident across the series, and within and between the three role groups. All the conversations included a range of different types of questions, most (but not all) of which were asked by myself rather than by the participants. These included *descriptive* questions to elicit ideas and experiences, and *contrast*

questions to clarify and check meaning and interpretation. The range of information exchanged during all the conversations included facts, theories, beliefs, and judgements about education policy, pedagogy, funding, and notions of quality and value in higher education, as well as accounts of personal experience.

In all three conversations with student participants, I spoke a little less than when in conversation with teachers and managers, steering the focus of the exchanges onto the students' studies, their creative work, family backgrounds, lives off campus and hopes for the future. While this shift was not consciously premeditated, in retrospect I felt that undergraduate students would find my own conceptions and experience of the university less relevant and/or interesting than teaching colleagues and senior managers would (or perhaps *should*, in my view). In contrast, my conversations with teachers tended to be more equally balanced in the number of words spoken by the interlocutors, and included some comparison of our own experiences of higher level learning, with what we understood or imagined of current students' experiences of the university. Two of the teachers worked in more than one role or institution, so these different contexts were also discussed and compared in our conversations.

The conversations with senior managers had more intra-group variability in balance, tone and focus than those with the students and teachers. The first senior manager I met with approached the conversation as if it were a structured interview, giving detailed responses to my questions and then waiting for the next. This was in spite of having received and signed the participant information and consent form, which stated that the conversations were intended to be 'reciprocal'. Subsequently, I took the time to explain further the conversational nature of the enquiry when meeting the other three managers. These exchanges were more reciprocal and relaxed than the first, and generated data that were more suitable for synthesis.

### 4.2.3 Data analysis and synthesis

Verbatim transcription of the ten conversations was followed by a period of continued immersion in the data through repeated close reading of the transcripts. The process that followed comprises both an analytical and an imaginative aspect. Primary analysis involved highlighting relevant excerpts (i.e. those pertaining to conceptions of the university) within the ten transcripts. These excerpts were then cut from their host transcripts and clustered together as source material for the fictional group conversation (as shown in both Figure 1 and Appendix 3). The process of clustering the excerpts is explained further below.

#### 4.2.3a Conversational clusters

The clustering of the excerpts of the transcript was athematic, in that the clusters did not necessarily correspond to themes, topics, or key questions, such as those included in the participant questionnaire (e.g. 'should students pay fees?'). Before attempting to explain how the sections *were* clustered, I will account for why they were *not* clustered thematically.

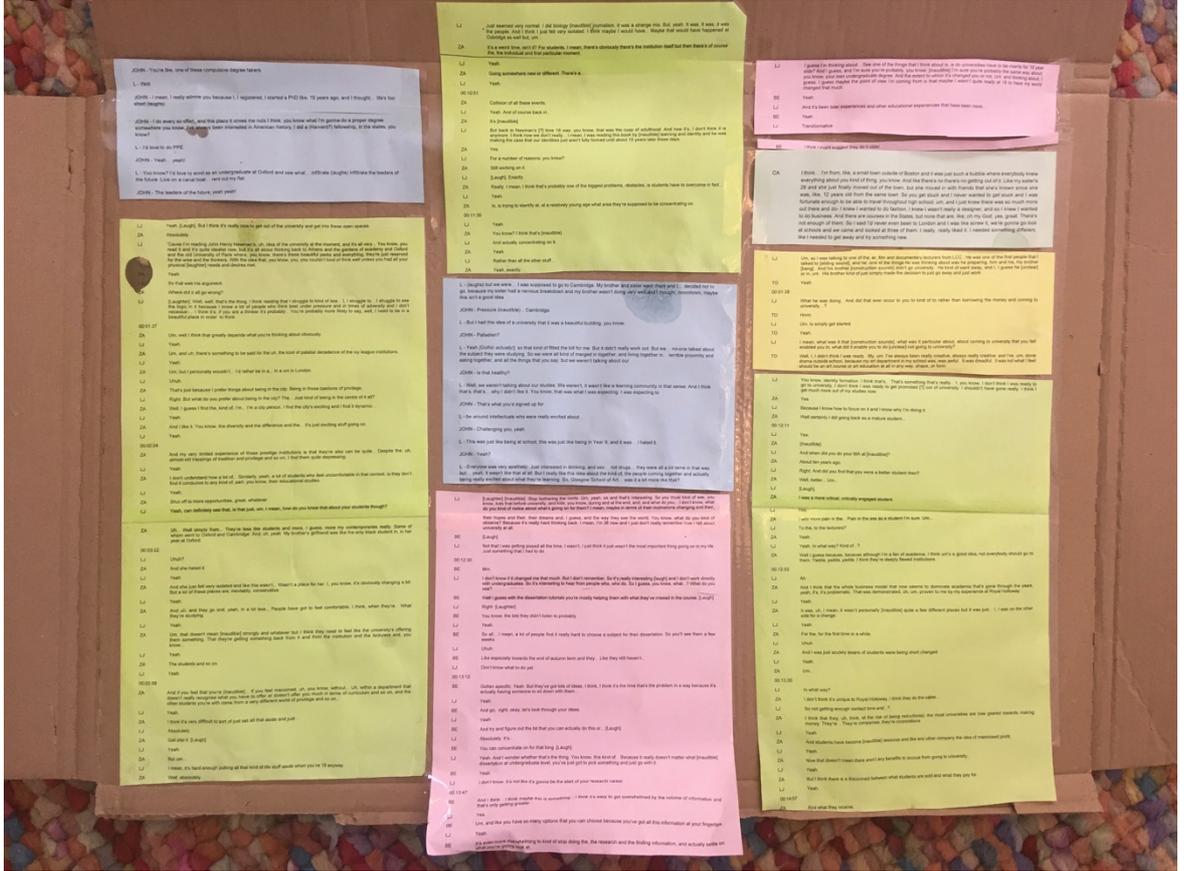
Group conversation—certainly in naturalistic settings but also in facilitated modes—rarely proceeds linearly through an itemised list of themes, but dances between topics, returning to key ideas at various stages, in different contexts, and sometimes from different standpoints. I have previously expressed my desire to approach the question of the purpose of the university as a dance or the tending of a fire, rather than, say, a tactical battle, and it was important to me that the synthesis featured the rhythm of a natural conversation. I wanted the concepts to remain in play as the interlocutors ‘parked’ ideas, spun off on tangents, returned, reiterated and revised, and reached conclusions (or not). An illustrative example of where this was achieved is in the concept of ‘resilience’, which arose repeatedly in the transcribed conversations but in apparently diverse contexts, from discussions about assessment, gratitude, religious faith, and climate pessimism, to pedagogic scepticism. In the fictional group conversation, the concept of ‘resilience’ has been allowed to accumulate, with the characters explicitly documenting its developing complexity. Of course, the source material itself, transcribed verbatim from reciprocal and unstructured conversation, was not ordered according to distinguishable themes. The interwovenness of topics such as fees, challenge, resources, personal fulfilment, employment, and satisfaction is evident from the original transcripts and also, I hope, in the fictional conversation that has been constructed. To produce a thematically-ordered conversation would not only misrepresent the connectedness of these concepts, it would have called for a different methodology in the first place.

The approach used to cluster the excerpts was a consciously creative process, which can be analysed retrospectively with interesting results. Having read through all the transcripts several times, I reached a point where I could *imagine* the participants speaking to one another. As this was a case of apprehending a section from one transcript and allowing sections from others to ‘come to mind’, it is a process that is more effectively illustrated with a specific example rather than explained in the abstract. Figure 1 and Appendix 1 show a cluster of excerpts where the participants are all reflecting on their decision to enter a particular course of study at a particular time. The bright green excerpts follow a conversational arc from beautiful campuses to the limitations of prestige institutions, the capacity of 18-year-olds to make good life decisions, the benefits of mature studentship, and disillusionment with the business model of higher education. The pink excerpt ventures that in many cases ‘it really doesn’t matter’ what one’s dissertation is about, and that later life experiences are more transformative than one’s undergraduate degree. The blue excerpts cover decisions *not* to study, educational fantasies, and the reality of student life not living up to these. In the yellow excerpt a student justifies his decision to go to university with reference to unmet expectations in his schooling, while in the blue-green section another participant shares the aspirations (and the assumption that her expectations will not be met in her home country) motivating her decision to study abroad. When reading one of these excerpts, the other excerpts in the cluster ‘came to mind’ in the sense that I imagined the other participants joining in the discussion with their various contributions. Analysing this cluster retrospectively, what all these excerpts share is *an*

*expression of expectation.* In the green, pink, blue and yellow excerpts, unmet educational expectations have led to disillusionment, while the two students in the cluster (in the yellow and blue-green excerpts) remain optimistic that their expectations of their current course of study *will* be met. This confluence of source material offers an interesting switch from the dominant presentation of student satisfaction as a problem unique to contemporary universities in the era of tuition fees, and indicates that it is not dissatisfaction that is the perennial problem so much as unrealistic expectation. Perhaps this is merely a post-rationalisation, but it is surely possible that when the imagination is engaged—as mine was in clustering these excerpts—a rational analysis may well be being performed without one being consciously aware of it.

# Figure 1: A conversational cluster

Excerpts cut from printed transcripts and mounted on card  
(Appendix 3 shows this cluster in linear text format).



The basic clusters having been established, the process of interweaving and editing them into a single semi-fictional group conversation was similarly imaginative, and alternated between interweaving the excerpts, and ordering and linking the clusters themselves. I will say more about this presently, after explaining how the characters in the constructed conversation relate to the individuals who participated in the enquiry.

#### 4.2.3b Characterisation and the incorporation of my own voice

Seven of the characters featured in the fictional conversation (Kimmy, Holly, Yosef, Peter, Richard, John and Lindsay) correspond with a single real-life participant, while Tasha and Dilesh, like the 'composite' characters in Willis' (2019) work, are generated using source material from more than one person. Willis uses composite narratives partly to confer anonymity, which is of particular importance in her work with public figures, but also because, when participant contributions are similar (or similarly complex and conflicted), they may be merged to maintain a list of dramatis personae that is more manageable for the reader. The composite character Dilesh is the outcome of experimentation with this method. The composite character Tasha serves two further purposes in the conversation. First, she is a convenient package for the more cynical, challenging views that could only have been convincingly expressed in the imaginary context (i.e. in conversation with senior managers) by a confident, experienced and securely employed teacher. Approximately half of Tasha's contributions were in fact expressed by myself in the conversations, and the rest by other teachers, so in effect there are two different characters—Lindsay and Tasha—who are voicing my own words.

The decision to include my own voice in the semi-fictional conversation calls for some justification. As a starting point it should be highlighted that, as the interviews took the form of unstructured reciprocal conversations, my own words constituted up to 50% of the raw data (I spoke much less in conversation with the students, who less frequently indicated interest in my own ideas and experiences). During the data collection phase I sought to elicit my own perspective in addition to those of the research participants, primarily because the process of understanding implied by the 'fusion of horizons' is a mutual process, but also because I was curious to find out what I thought about the purpose of universities, and how entering into a process of hermeneutic understanding would change my perspective. That process would include not only taking part in the ten conversations, but also listening back to myself in conversation with others, and voicing some of my own words through a fictional character, actions that I expected would help me to reflect on my own perspective. Richardson (1994, p.523) emphasises that self-reflexivity is necessary to unmask complex political and ideological agendas that lurk in narrative research. Writing oneself into a story in the third person enables *some* degree of distance between the writer and the character, potentially acting as a reflexive lens. While I remain sceptical of the extent to which one can unmask oneself, through filtering some of my words through the character of Tasha I did feel that I gained new insights into what I had said, and subsequently into what others had said in response. One example is that, through

channelling through Tasha my own desire to study PPE at the University of Oxford, I came to understand the significance of this exchange in the original conversation. In experiencing my own educational fantasies voiced by another, I not only realised how fantastical they were, but was also moved to consider the place these fantasies occupy in our complex, emotional, imaginations of the university. As Clough (2002, p.8) explains, ‘narrative can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.’

#### 4.2.3c Achieving a coherent narrative

Much like in Carless & Sparkes’ work (2009), the method of analysis and synthesis employed in this enquiry could be summarised as ‘orchestrating extracts of interviews into a coherent whole’ (p.198). The drafting and editing of the fictional conversation was a staged process that began with the basic ‘clustering’ method outlined above, and continued with a continuous period of refinement that was variably focused on balancing the contributions of the characters (assisted by the use of coloured paper), interweaving the source material from the excerpts within the clusters, ordering the clusters and smoothing the connections between them, removing unnecessary detail, and substituting potential identifiers. These edits became progressively less substantial and, towards the end, focused on achieving a script that was readable, convincing, and meaningful. As with any creative process, much of this work necessarily remains tacit, although I have attempted to illustrate how the interweaving of the excerpts makes sense in retrospect, and emphasised that a lengthy period of immersion in the transcripts was instrumental to this process. This period of immersion involved reflecting on the conversations as events, transcribing the recordings, and re-reading the transcripts several times.

Clough (2002) describes how his approach to fictional narrative is rooted in philosophical phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty’s description of which—‘not a matter of counting quotations so much as...immersing ourselves in an experience’ (1962, p.xiii)—accords with the approach taken here. In light of what has already been said about the hermeneutic ethic, it is significant that Clough, citing Husserl (1970, p.221), attributes his own ‘faith’ in phenomenology to a personal transformation with moral dimensions (2002, p.10). Our attention—attuned to our moral and political ends—‘finds’ stories (2002, p.11), and there are always other stories besides or ‘beneath’ (2002, p.13) the ones we attend to. Vilhauer (2010, p.37) highlights this as a key point in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics:

...in every artistic presentation there exists an articulation of our reality... or of some subject matter... highlighting certain aspects of a thing, leaving others out [so that] the being of the representation is more than the being of the thing represented.

Clough (2002, pxii) declines to show his workings when constructing his fictional narratives, maintaining that to explain this creative process would be contradictory to the essence of the approach. Clough’s focus on critical incidents involving vulnerable persons is one pragmatic reason why he might resist clarifying the relationship between truth and fiction. A key strategy in

preventing the disclosure of my own research participants' identities was the substitution of potentially identifying details.

#### 4.2.3d Symbolic equivalents

Yalom (1991) advocates for the exchange of certain details with 'symbolic equivalents' to protect the identities of those who have informed narrative research. This apparently straightforward technique raised some dilemmas in my own work. For example, when John describes his own undergraduate studies, he speaks in enchanted tones about the architecture of the university in question, recounting specific details of the building, from the greenhouses in the roof, to the cage and pit where tigers were brought from the zoo. I was keen to retain this material in the fictional conversation because John's tone of delighted wonder stood in such interesting contrast to his frequently cynical comments on arts education in the present day. Unfortunately, if I revealed the actual institution attended by the participant corresponding to John's character, it would be relatively easy for a fellow participant—or any one of his colleagues—to deduce his identity. The plot thickened when I discovered that the institution in question had certainly hosted a range of interesting animals as drawing subjects, but the rumoured 'tigers' were only hearsay (to cite my source for this would reveal everything, so I will not). Hence, I felt the weight of responsibility for safeguarding not only the participant's anonymity, but also the romantic illusions of his youth. I hope my substitution (he did not, in fact, say 'tigers') has been effective.

#### 4.2.4 Member checking

Carless & Sparkes (2008) propose evaluating fictional and semi-fictional narrative research by asking the following questions:

1. Does it say anything new?
2. Does it give a voice to those who are not often heard?
3. Does it show empathy and respect for the participants?
4. Are participants portrayed in an ethically informed manner?

As the author and researcher, the legitimacy and value of my own affirmative responses to these questions is limited. By way of a more rigorous evaluation, participants were contacted by email and asked if they would like to read the final draft of the fictional conversation. Two (one teacher and one student) were no longer connected to the university and their contact information could not be located. Six of the remaining eight participants responded by expressing a desire to read the piece, and this was duly sent electronically with a note as follows, with the aim of eliciting information pertaining to Carless & Sparkes' (2008) questions:

Here it is! Do let me know if you have any thoughts about it. While some of the characters don't necessarily correspond with particular individuals, I imagine you will be able to recognise your own words and I am keen to know whether you feel they've been used fairly. I am also interested

to know whether the conversation rings true to you, as an exchange between managers, teachers and students, and also whether there is anything in here that surprises you.

Three participants (two senior managers and one lecturer) responded with comments that, although brief, were both honest and reassuring. One senior manager expressed mild dismay at how ‘cynical’ his character sounded, but did not feel that this was misrepresentation. In a similar vein, the lecturer who responded observed that it was ‘slightly disconcerting’ to see ‘fragments’ of our conversation emerging, and noted that his character came across ‘a bit negative’, before acknowledging that he does ‘find the situation a bit depressing’ even though he gets ‘a huge kick out of teaching.’ The same teacher commented that he thought the device worked ‘very successfully’ and felt ‘remarkably natural’, comparing it with the Clio Barnard film *The Arbor* (2010), which he described as similarly blurring fact and fiction ‘to create a compelling hybrid form’. The second senior manager praised the originality of the methodology, and expressed surprise at the additional significance one of his anecdotes had gained by being interwoven into the group conversation.

Being the only person who was party to all ten conversations and had sight of all the original transcripts, I was curious to know what someone else would make of the semi-fictional conversation as a distillation of the source material. A member of my supervisory team offered to read through the original set of ten transcripts and comment on the coherence and legitimacy of the semi-fictional conversation that had been constructed, having gained an overview of the source material. Noting that the semi-fictional conversation was ‘much cleaner and easier to read...as compared to the raw transcripts’, she surmised the following:

Having read the transcripts, I think your fictionalised conversation is a defensible, justifiable restatement / curation / gloss on / ‘framing’ of your interlocutors’ remarks in your actual conversations with them.

While resorting to third-party sense-checking may be viewed as undermining the case made in this thesis for the validity of fictional methods in education research, it was very important to me not to misrepresent participants’ ideas and experiences, and this assessment was reassuring.

### 4.3 Authenticity and legitimacy

How true are the stories individuals tell when they are asked to give an account—through formal or informal means—of their experience of the university? Strawson (2018) points out that stories are by definition *eventful*, in that they feature critical incidents, journeys and transformations. Life is rarely as eventful as this, and the events we tend to see as causally connected may not be so. It is Clough’s (2002) view that the *verisimilitude* of narratives—their likeness to truth—should be judged according to *aesthetic* standards, i.e. the extent to which they engage the

reader emotionally. For Clough, an authentic and humanly significant story will engender an emotional response, and vice versa. The social scientist Margarete Sandelowski (1993, p.121) makes a similar claim that, for something to ‘appeal to your heart’, to ‘satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship’, is to believe it.

Are Clough and Sandelowski adhering to the principle that truth is beautiful and beauty is true? This is the Romantic claim staked by Keats; that beauty and ethics are intertwined by the human imagination. In *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Keats (1819) conflates the urn (the visual) with poetry (the verbal), both of which call us to ‘think beyond ourselves and our earthly limits’ (Guthrie 2017). For Keats, beauty is that which leads us to a transcendent truth, and vice versa. This side of the debate—dating at least as far back as Plato—has recently been enlivened by modern-day physicists including Rovelli (2018) and Wilczec (2016), and contested by others such as Hossenfelder (2018), who blames the stagnation of physics on a cognitive bias towards simple, elegant theories. Clough’s view is, in fact, fairly nuanced. He acknowledges that the ‘appeal’ or ‘style’ he promotes is as messy as the morals and politics his work concerns, and calls for ‘messiness of method’ to be considered ‘respectable’ (2002, p.83). Sandelowski (1993) similarly makes no claim to simple elegance in her account of the transcendent truth of artistic and/or scientific objects, and—like Keats—uses a ceramic analogy, citing Kreiger’s (1991, p.89) example of the turned pot that bears the potter’s ‘thoughts, feelings and spirit’.

Likewise, the fictional conversation presented here is by no means a simple, elegant story. There was scope for it to be even less so. I could have had the participants talking ‘past’ each other (as we sometimes did), telling long stories of personal resentments (which happened), and exchanging small talk. I could have included—for the sake of authentic ugliness—the part where the piece of blu-tack I was fiddling with became stuck in my hair and my interlocutor offered to fetch a pair of scissors. But gimmicks like these would only serve to furnish the conversation with a messy *style*, when there were *meaningful* messes to communicate, such as collusion with human rights violations in students’ home countries, cynical views of arts pedagogy as a ‘pantomime’, and the strangely conscious contradiction of individualism and socialism that motivates both teachers and learners. These—and other tensions—are highlighted in the following chapters.

To construct a legitimate fictional narrative in this context requires that one does not confuse the aesthetic, emotional recognition of authenticity and coherence with the (also aesthetic and emotional) recognition of stereotypes and archetypes. To address this challenge, I initially allowed myself only to subtract from the actual words spoken by participants. No new words were inserted until the characters, their experiences and interactions had become firmly established, and the focus of the editing had moved on to achieving a coherent narrative. Again, crucial to this process was the initial period of immersion in the raw data that subsequently allowed me to imagine the participants conversing within creative conversational clusters, rather than according to predefined or so-called ‘grounded’ themes.

## 4.4 Fictional conversation and the hermeneutic ethic

Clough (2002) acknowledges that his own identity is at the heart of the meaning of the stories he constructs from his research in schools, and describes them as a form of 'testament', or statement of moral and political purpose. This principle is fundamental to Clough's own perspective on his work. For him, his stories make a claim about what he believes to be true, and he offers them as a humanist project of solidarity and empathy. Like other narrative researchers before him (e.g. Sandelowski 1993, Richardson 1994), he cites the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1988, p.147) in support of his call for the power of stories to facilitate 'intelligible discourse between people with differences in interest, outlook, wealth and power', and through so doing, challenging the participants'—and the readers'—interests, privileges and prejudices. Stronach & Maclure (1998, p.57) also encourage educational researchers to illuminate accounts that trouble 'assumptions and assertions'. All these arguments are supportive of the intention, construction and presentation of the conversation as seen here. It is not that the research participants are 'marginalised' individuals in the common sense of the word, so much as that their various groupings—senior managers, teachers and students—are in many ways alienated from each other. The conversation is an attempt to forge 'dialogical empathies between the alienated' (Clough & Nutbrown 2012, p.70).

The influence of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics on the research design—and the parallels between Gadamer and Clough—should by now be apparent. Clough's (2002) insistence that our willful creation of events is driven by 'energies of our own psychic and social history' (p84), is a clear echo of Gadamer's 'historical consciousness'. Through his work Clough, like Gadamer, calls for much greater scepticism towards the supposed objectivity of method, and an acknowledgement that data are better defined as *acts* of seeing, rather than consequences of it. Clough's description of data as 'intentionally opposed' to the things themselves (2002 p.90) is consistent with Husserlian phenomenology, where 'intentionality' denotes the direction of all consciousness towards objects (Zahavi 2017, p.7). If mental states are *dependent* on objects, it follows that we survive and thrive through finding (or creating) regularities or patterns in the objects we perceive, a tendency that is reified in scientific methods. The scepticism articulated by the likes of Gadamer and Clough recognises and resists this tendency to construct patterns and predictions. It requires that events are encountered as unique and particular, and scientific 'truth' (which claims independence from context) recognised as approximation. In prioritising genuine understanding, one loosens one's moorings to the patterns and predictions—i.e. the *explanations*—that are instrumental to one's survival. The dichotomy invites a comparison, between the two modes, of where one *stands in relation to* the objects of one's consciousness.

The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology (1966, p.959) posits that 'under' bears not its usual meaning in 'understand', but emerges via Old English as 'between' or 'among', and hence to understand is to *stand among*. Given that this is not widely known, some may assume

that a respect or reverence is implied by 'standing under' something, and/or a viewpoint consistent with wonder and awe. The implied spatial relation (consider for example the famous shot of the spaceship passing overhead in the film *Independence Day*) might also convey a sense of self-exposure and/or vulnerability. Heidegger's word of choice for the moment of verification—*a-lethia*—means 'unhiddenness' and, if we take Gadamer's position that all understanding contains an element of self-understanding, it is not just the object that is 'unhidden' or exposed.

Stories are aesthetic, personal and ethical. Clough (2002) posits that they are without utilitarian justification, beyond being a means by which we may recognise ourselves. Arguments against utility abound in the field of philosophy of education, and these accounts of intrinsic value and learner autonomy (e.g. Hogan 2009, Biesta 2014) are inspiring and enchanting, but they may also appear one-sided or unrealistic. Clough makes a valid point that stories ideally 'work' by enhancing moral agency—i.e. challenging the moral and political intent of the reader rather than telling them what to do, but stories are often used to steer behaviour in a particular direction, and Clough himself acknowledges that there are moral and political purposes underlying the stories he writes. However, when viewed through the lens of Gadamer's hermeneutics, one sees that prejudice, tradition and other manifestations of historical consciousness can inform, rather than preclude, a genuine attempt at understanding.

I have already cited the four questions Clough (2002) offers as a guide to self-reflexive evaluation of fictional narrative enquiry. He offers a further set of questions as a guiding framework for enquiry verification, which I attempt to answer below:

- 1) Is the enquiry object-directed?
- 2) Does it seek to know those objects better?
- 3) What does it use to do this?
- 4) Does it reveal the value that prompts and maintains it?

The value prompting the enquiry, namely the hermeneutic ethic, explicitly precludes the treatment of the other as a *scientific* or *psychological* object. However, it can be assumed that Clough is referring to 'objects' only in the phenomenological sense of the thing(s) towards which one's consciousness (perception, etc.) is directed, which would include those with whom one is engaged in a mutual endeavour of understanding. Indeed, there is an ethic borne through Clough's 'object-directed' enquiry, in that it seeks to be faithful to the spirit and truth of what is revealed, rather than using it instrumentally. There are three levels of object(s) that this enquiry is directed towards, namely the different individuals surveyed, the particular university in which the enquiry is situated, and the university as a general concept. These levels could potentially be conceived as one and the same, the participants being or representing the university as a specific institution or general concept. The enquiry seeks to *understand* these 'objects' through the means of conversation and fictionalisation.

Clough's fifth and final question is: How can one know the answers to these [four] questions? Through this question Clough underlines the point I have made previously—with

reference to Gadamer—on self-understanding, maintaining that it is not only the object of study that is called in question in this type of enquiry, but also the interpreter(s) of it. Hermeneutics is a dialogue within a relationship that rests on pre-understanding or foreknowledge. It is a dialogue that calls the foreknowledge of all interpreters—including the participants, the researcher, and the readers of the work—into question.

## 4.5 Concluding remarks

Clough (2002) describes his work as 'postmodern', and it is clear from his explanation that he sees it as a response to modernity, specifically a deconstruction of the widely-held belief in control by measurement. Science, Clough claims, underplays the involvement of consciousness in the making of knowledge. It suspends the operation of the hermeneutic circle and ignores the linguistic constitution of reality, hence there is an antimony—an apparent contradiction—between explanation and understanding. This antimony has been the topic of philosophical debate. Dilthey (1977) argues that one cannot do both, while Ricoeur (1978) contends that they are two continuous moments of the process of understanding, explanation being a distillation or refinement for the sake of communicability. The proposal that the process of coming to know is ideally conceived of as a vacillation between the two phases potentially satisfies both Dilthey and Ricoeur. An 'oscillation' is regular and therefore predetermined, while to vacillate is to be responsive, i.e. to allow one's movements (between understanding and explanation) to be affected by new inputs. Hence, 'vacillation', typically used pejoratively to signify indecisive dithering and an inability to take a stand, should be considered a valid way of being in the world. If one 'takes a stand', one does not go anywhere.

## Chapter Five: A Conversation

The following chapter presents a semi-fictional group conversation that has been constructed using source material from transcripts of conversations between myself and individual students, teachers and managers. Presented alongside the conversation is a commentary that documents my own encounter with it as a reader. This encounter will no doubt have been coloured not only by my prior experience and assumptions about the university and the individual participants, but also by my personal experience of taking part in the original conversations, listening to and transcribing the recordings, reading the transcripts, and constructing and editing the group conversation. Nevertheless, the commentary represents an attempt to return to the finished artefact from a new angle, with the aim of illuminating connections with the theoretical and methodological issues discussed in the preceding chapters.

The commentary is not necessary for the reader to make sense of the conversation. Indeed, the reader may prefer to follow the conversation in isolation and draw their own conclusions from it before engaging with the commentary. The decision to present the commentary alongside the conversation has been informed and inspired by the critical deconstructive writing of Juliet Henderson (2018), whose experiments in ‘post-qualitative’ writing aim to honour the creative and critical traditions of scientific enquiry while troubling the conventions of linear academic rhetoric. Henderson highlights the researcher’s agency as ‘coterminous’ (i.e. equivalent in space, time, or meaning) with the act (or ‘event’ of writing). The reader will find this point alluded to in the conversation itself, through an exchange about the nature and purpose of academic writing.

I have previously explained the importance of the self-reflexive aspect of this work in terms of coming to understand one’s own perspective and the impact of the hermeneutic endeavour, and also as a means to expose one’s own political and ideological agendas. The commentary in part serves to document this.

This having been said, it may well be the case—depending on the context and purpose—that future presentations of the research findings utilise the semi-fictional conversation in isolation. With further fictionalisation, the conversation could for example be situated in a more engaging naturalistic context, and constructed so that it provokes fruitful discussion in the absence of any background information. To conclude, the conversation that follows is not—and does not need to be—‘finished’. It is an interim outcome with the potential to be recreated.

## 5.1 Dramatis Personae

Students: **Kimmy** (Y1 Fashion Management, International), **Dilesh** (Y3 Fine Art, UK),

Teachers: **Yosef** (Film), **Tasha** (Contextual Studies), **Holly** (Academic Support)

Managers (in order of rising seniority): **John, Richard, Peter**

Educational Developer: **Lindsay**

## 5.2 Conversation and commentary

<p>Lindsay: Okay so, thanks so much everyone for coming together like this. It feels like it's something that's not been done before. It's exciting.</p>	<p>Harvard Fellowships are three year postgraduate scholarships that award exceptional scholars (among them many well-known and prize-winning philosophers, economists and historians) complete academic freedom.</p>
<p>John: I mean, I really admire people like you, Lindsay, because I registered... I <i>started</i> a PhD like, 15 years ago, but, life's too short, you know? Every so often, when this place is driving me nuts, I think about going to do a <i>proper</i> degree somewhere. I've always been interested in American History. Maybe a Harvard fellowship, in the States...</p>	<p>John and Tasha are not articulating genuine intentions so much as <i>fantasies</i> of university education. Both are engaging their imaginations as they warm up to the discussion.</p>
<p>Tasha: I'd go to Oxford. Do Politics, Philosophy &amp; Economics. Infiltrate the leaders of the future...</p>	<p>Championing true knowledge and wisdom over 'glamour' (Tenner 1998), the ethos of the Harvard Society of Fellows explicitly promotes</p>

<p>Lindsay: Infiltrate?</p> <p>Tasha: Yeah, not to influence so much as... out of curiosity. Maybe I'd ask them a tough question or two. And, well, I love a dreaming spire...[laughs]</p> <p>Lindsay: Dreaming spires, yes! Oxford, Harvard... enchanted places aren't they? I've just been reading John Henry Newman... the 1800s. His ideal university was something like the olive groves of Academe in Ancient Greece. A beautiful green space that's separate from the everyday goings-on...</p>	<p>educationally desirable enchantment over what Curry (2019) presents as its opposite, namely the false enchantment of fame. John's assumed commitment to the ethos of the Society notwithstanding, the prestige of the Fellowships illuminates a paradox, and the tone of the Declaration itself recognises—and cautions against—the threat of false enchantment.</p> <p>Likewise, Tasha's (i.e. my own) fantasy of an Oxbridge education, while offered as a product of curiosity or transcendent desire-for-world (Mathews 2003) is also a beguiling imagined self-reflection.</p> <p><b>Noble and worthy bewitchments are often entangled (or <i>confused</i>) with what Curry calls 'false' enchantment.</b></p>
<p>Holly: That sounds quite... exclusive? Elitist?</p>	<p>Yosef presents 'comfort' as being in a place where one's offerings are recognised, and argues that a certain sense of existential security is required in order to get on with 'it', i.e. the business of becoming educated.</p>
<p>Yosef: Yeah. I think a lot of students aren't comfortable with that. Personally I find the city more dynamic, more diverse. And my very limited experience of those prestige institutions is... well, I find them quite depressing. A lot of these places are inherently <i>conservative</i>. People have got to feel comfortable, I think. And if you feel marooned, in a place that doesn't really recognise what you have to offer, and the other students come from a very different world... it's very difficult to set all that aside and get on with it.</p>	<p><b>The contradiction here is the necessity for one to feel 'grounded' or 'at home' in order to be 'spellbound'.</b></p> <p>In contemporary higher education this conundrum is debated in discourses around 'safe spaces'. Opposing the call for safe spaces in education is the</p>

<p>Tasha: A friend of mine works with gifted and talented kids. First generation applicants, you know? She takes them on visits to Oxbridge and Imperial, other places too, shows them around. Like you say... they have to adjust to it. Because it's not going to adjust to them first.</p>	<p>argument that educational spaces cannot be made 'safe'. They are inherently 'unsafe' in that they trouble prior knowledge and disrupt the lifeworld. One suggestion is to replace 'safe' with 'consensual'. Educational enchantment—as opposed to indoctrination—requires the active consent of the learner, who must be confident that the teacher understands them and their needs in order to allow themselves to be spirited away. Hansel and Gretel's trail of sweets is one example from fiction that highlights the interplay of trust and scepticism that may precede enchantment.</p> <p><b>Question: is this contradiction ideally conceived as having one foot in each camp, or as a <i>vacillation</i> between the safety of mechanism and explanation, and the mystery of enchantment?</b></p>
<p>Lindsay: But you'd still like to have studied at Oxford?</p>	<p><b>Tension: institutions are inherently conservative, but they also need to adapt to survive in a changing world.</b></p>
<p>Tasha: Absolutely! I think what they're conserving is important. Vital. I went to Royal Holloway in the end. Incredible gothic architecture, like I say, I wanted my dreaming spires. But the students didn't match up, in my mind. Everyone seemed apathetic about their subject. More interested in drinking and sex. And / felt very isolated there. It's why I love this place so much. People care about what they're doing here.</p>	<p>In Chapter Three I cited Gadamer's comments on traditions as the origins of our questions, which evolve along with their corresponding traditions as new generations ask them. Here, Tasha offers that there is intrinsic value in the traditions of educational institutions. The question of the purpose of</p>

<p>Yosef: It's a weird time isn't it? For students. I mean, obviously there's the institution itself but then there's the individual and that particular moment in their lives...</p>	<p>the university has its roots in theology, and has subsequently been influenced by various societal trends and traditions, from the industrial revolution, to critical theory, to free market economics. Traditions change; their power lies not necessarily in their longevity or stability, but in their capacity to evoke a sense of connection between individuals across space and time. Sheldrake (2017), citing specific traditions such as pilgrimage, and religious and national holidays, refers to this sense of connection as <i>morphic resonance</i>, which is a form of enchantment in that it comprises faith, wonder and unity. Sheldrake's work itself belongs to a particular tradition, namely, a new wave of scientific spirituality, similar in some ways to what emerged in the 1960s, but in the profoundly different context of radical social fluidity and impending environmental collapse.</p> <p>The conversations with students led me to question Illeris' (2013) theory of adult identity formation. Many of today's graduates face a future of houseshares, casual contract work, changes in careers, relationships, personal style and gender expression. This may resemble an extended adolescence, but today's undergraduates face an uncertain, supercomplex world (Barnett 2004). They may never appear 'stable' according to traditional indicators (work, housing, sexuality, relationships, children), but modernity demands that they are confident in themselves and their core values in order to function while society shifts around them.</p>
<p>Kimmy: You mean, it gets less weird after this?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: I think things are about to get a <i>lot</i> more weird. For us.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Well, you might be right. Back in Newman's time eighteen was probably considered the cusp of adulthood. But there's a theory that stable, adult identities aren't formed until, like, ten, fifteen years later these days.</p>	
<p>Tasha: Sure, but maybe the old idea of adulthood is out of date. That fluidity is across the board... across our <i>lifetimes</i> now, it's not just making the same old things happen later.</p>	

<p>Holly: Yes, and I see this—that fluidity—with my dissertation students. One of their biggest obstacles is trying to identify one thing they're interested in. And actually concentrating on that.</p>	<p>Holly's comment explicitly connects fluidity with distraction. The fluidity of modernity offers a confusion of enchantments, and the challenge of disentangling the good from the bad (assuming this is even possible).</p>
<p>Tasha: So many options. And so many distractions. Distraction is a massive issue.</p>	<p>Websites and apps are typically designed and developed by those with something personal to gain. Even not-for-profit and charitable institutions typically employ web designers and social media officers whose</p>
<p>Lindsay: Let's note that to come back to. But I'm interested to know... They say that youth is wasted on the young. Do you think <i>education</i> is wasted on the young? Is eighteen too young to go to university? Too young to know what you're <i>really</i> interested in?</p>	<p>performance is assessed and rewarded by the increases in traffic that their actions create (Dedyukhina 2018). Their innovations in attention-mining compete against less interested (and hence more worthy) enchantments, and enable and exacerbate fluidity (Bauman 2000). Before the internet became a primary mode of human connection, Gadamer noted that 'work...</p>
<p>Tasha: I think it's a good time. To learn to focus. To self-manage.</p>	<p>is achieved by a continual denial of impulses' (1992b, p.55). It did not take long for the world to become awash with distractions, and students and academics to progress from using caffeine to dabbling with substances like Ritalin and Modafinil in order to resist distracting impulses and get their work finished (Maher 2008, Tysome 2007). In modernity, personal freedom is highly valued, but what this 'freedom' actually entails is ambiguous. Wittman (2018) insightfully describes the inability to control one's impulses, i.e. opting for immediate reward over ultimate gain, as a <i>loss of temporal freedom</i>. It appears that the diversification of moral authority and the fetishisation of personal choice renders us <i>more</i> vulnerable to bewitchment by new media, which Curry (2017) refers to as 'malign enchantment'.</p>

	<p><b>There is a contradiction between being free to <i>follow</i> our impulses, and being free <i>from</i> them. Both states have been related to enchantment in the literature. Curry’s (2017) theory of ‘malign enchantment’, Gadamer’s (1992b) concept of work, Wittman’s (2018) of temporal freedom, and Dedyukhina’s (2018) warning of bewitchment by new media are all in alignment with the virtue of temperance (referred to by Tasha as ‘focus’ and ‘self-management’).</b></p>
<p>Holly: I think... I would encourage my kids to go later.</p>	<p>While the reasons in favour of going to university at the age of 18 are numerous, it is clearly not the right time for everyone. While the participants are focused on discussing individual needs, there is potential contradiction between what is the ‘right time’ for the individual, and in terms of effective social and economic structures.</p> <p>Nussbaum (2018) proposes the reintroduction of mandatory (non-military) national service, not only to occupy the young (particularly in countries where semi-skilled work has been outsourced elsewhere), but crucially to move them out of their ‘bubbles’ to broaden their social interactions and widen their circles of empathy. Her proposition runs counter to the ethic of individual choice. Kimmy—who, like Nussbaum, is from the US—may disapprove of her sister’s choice, but her sister is presumably happy where</p>
<p>Kimmy: No way. Like, I had to get out of the bubble. I’m from a small town. Everybody knew everything about you, you know? Like, my sister’s 26 and she just finally moved out of town, but she moved in with friends that she’s known since she was 12 years old. You get stuck. I don’t want to get stuck.</p>	
<p>Dilesh. Yeah, same. I was ready to leave, to do this. My Foundation year was great, but...</p>	

	<p>she is, with people she cares about. It is interesting to imagine the complex implications of Nussbaum’s proposed national service for modern industrial society.</p>
<p>Yosef: And that’s interesting. Because the people who say education—youth—is wasted on the young... they’re usually <i>old</i>. I mean, I <i>feel</i> like I got a lot more out of my studies the second time around, as a mature student, but maybe you just forget what it was like?</p>	<p>Yosef’s account here is of a disillusioned encounter with higher education as a postgraduate. He skirts Dilesh’s question and does not discuss what or how he learned but his awareness of being ‘short-changed’, and his impression of the university as a business. The comparison is complex; on one hand his attentiveness as a mature student to the financial cost and value resulted in a less-than-satisfactory experience. On the other hand he <i>does</i> claim to have ‘got a lot more’ out of his postgraduate studies. His uncertainty illuminates the questionableness of our own narratives, and the difficulty of comparatively evaluating events from one vantage point. This actually supports his central point, which is that dissonance (or disillusionment) is augmented by encountering conflicting perspectives.</p> <p><b>Dissonance and disillusionment may initially be <i>increased</i> by gaining multiple perspectives on higher education.</b></p>
<p>Dilesh: Did you think you were a better student when you were older?</p>	
<p>Yosef: I was a more <i>critical</i> student. More of a pain-in-the-ass student.</p>	
<p>Kimmy: A pain in <i>whose</i> ass?</p>	
<p>Yosef: I think, having been a teacher and then seeing it from the other side, I saw how flawed universities are. The business model. It’s problematic. I was acutely aware that students were being short-changed.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: This brings us back to Newman. The way Newman describes Academe is that it was explicitly about excluding certain activities, <i>particularly</i> business and industry. Many of the students in Athens were</p>	<p>My response to Yosef’s problematising of the ‘business model’ is to highlight that tuition fees are not exclusively linked to modernity and the market model of higher education. This then segues into revelations from</p>

<p>poor. They had to pay for their tuition, usually by working nights. But Academe itself was framed as a kind of oasis for intellectual work.</p>	<p>Holly about how the profit-focused areas of the university operate, and the kind of language they use. As can be seen here, there is a dramatic shift in vocabulary.</p> <p>Language is a reflection of our lifeworld. Different languages highlight the juxtaposition of different lifeworlds with different values, and this can also bring about a sense of dissonance.</p>
<p>Holly: So tuition itself wasn't considered a business? Even though it cost money? That's not really the case anymore. I was on a business development thing only yesterday.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: A business development thing...?</p>	<p>The kind of language Holly uses here would still be disconcerting to many of those working in public universities. Although degree courses have been covered by the Consumer Act since 2014, teaching staff rarely refer to students as 'consumers' or 'clients'. These terms are particularly discombobulating in a creative arts institution that offers courses in, for example, graphic design and fashion, where live briefs are often run in partnership with 'clients' (local businesses and industry professionals), and products are designed and marketed for 'consumers'.</p> <p>Biesta (2018) expresses the same concern Holly raises here with reference to Roberts' (2014) 'impulse society', where a market economy and systems of measurement that prioritise short-term satisfaction results in a higher education system that slavishly provides what people want, as opposed to the tools and structure for people to question their desires.</p>
<p>Holly: Yeah, for everyone in Academic Enterprise.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Is that your department? Has it always been called that?</p>	
<p>Holly: No, it used to be called Enterprise and Innovation.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Right. So, you went to this thing...</p>	
<p>Holly: Yeah, an away day, and we could sign up for sessions, and I went for Design Thinking and Business Development because I'm finding myself in a position where I can start new courses, but I don't always know the best way to go about it. Or when it's <i>not</i> a good idea. You can come up with loads of ideas, but how do you know which ones are actually suitable? It's about aligning the client and the business needs.</p>	

Tasha: The client..?	
Holly: The student.	At this specific institution there is also another level of desire satisfaction at play, as we are educating students (our clients and consumers) to work
Tasha: Ah.	with <i>their</i> potential clients and consumers, while they are simultaneously
Holly: Yeah. And it's hard. Like, it feels out of place in an educational institution because it becomes more about supplying people with what they want.	<i>our</i> clients and consumers. What our students want is to learn how to give other people what they want.
Yosef: Yes, or even making them <i>think</i> they want something that we can supply, that they might not actually want, let alone need.	Yosef's point takes this further; the pressure to survive in a market encourages the <i>manufacture</i> of wants. Does the 'herd instinct' that Bernays ([1923] 2011) attributed to the masses still exist? Are people still that manipulable? In his Aims of Education speech to open the Harvard Business School, Alfred North Whitehead ([1929] 1967) observed that it takes the 'highest intelligence' to manufacture desire. But an undertone of judgement and warning <i>seems</i> apparent from the transcript of Whitehead's speech, to the extent that it surely must have been apparent to his highly intelligent audience. Whitehead's wish, it appears, is that these individuals would use their intellect for worthier ends than the manufacture of consumer desire for capital gains.
Holly: Yeah, like MBAs and Masters degrees in Fashion Law.	
Kimmy: Fashion <i>Law</i> ?	

<p>Holly: Yeah, there's an MA in Fashion Law in New York and they were saying it could draw in new students. I think things can get really confused. The university has always had this revolutionary spirit, questioning everything, you know?</p>	<p>John used similar words in conversation with me ('subversive' spirit), hence his enthusiastic agreement with Holly here.</p>
<p>John: Yes!</p>	
<p>Holly: And so, opposite to what Newman wanted, it feels like we're meshing these two worlds together in order to survive.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: What does it mean for a university to <i>survive</i>?</p>	<p><b>There is a tension between 'survival' as conservation and survival as progression, and also potentially between individual and collective survival, with different perspectives in evidence.</b></p> <p>Tasha has a permanent full time contract and her role (and hence her interest) is tied to the university as it is now. In contrast, Holly is on a casual ('zero-hours') contract, working some hours on publicly-funded academic courses, and others with the short courses offered through the profit-making 'arm' of the university. Holly's individual security is linked to growth and new ideas.</p>
<p>Tasha: It means we get to keep our jobs.</p>	
<p>Holly: I think it's more than that. It's kind of a given that businesses have to grow. It's what they do. If you're not growing you're not succeeding.</p>	
<p>Peter: Do you feel that we see the university as a business?</p>	

<p>Yosef: Well, yes. Universities are geared towards making money. They're corporations. And students have become resources for maximising profit. It's not that there isn't a <i>benefit</i> to going to university, but I think there is a disconnect between what students are sold, and what they receive. At eighteen you're less critical. You just take what comes. But mature students, they'll have given up jobs, they'll know what it takes to work to pay the loans off. And if they're not getting what it says on the tin...</p>	<p>Yosef reiterates the concern that <b>the desire to go to university is, to an extent, being manufactured</b>. This view is not wholly contradicted by Kimmy and Dilesh across the remainder of the conversation, both of whom are accepting—supportive, even—of the requirement to pay fees, but also critical of some of the teaching they encounter. This commonality exists despite their very different financial situations: Dilesh has loans and works two jobs, while Kimmy receives full support from her family in the US.</p>
<p>Holly: I see that ideal of <i>success equals growth</i> reinforced at several levels across the university. And what we're <i>selling</i> people is a kind of growth as well. Personal growth. Personal capital.</p>	
<p>Tasha: Well, that's the metaphor that's used, but really we're talking about <i>change</i>. Which is not the same as <i>expansion</i>. I mean, it's not like you're becoming <i>more and more</i>. It's like the parable of the glass cupboard; you become focused on new things, and, well, you have to drop some stuff.</p>	<p>To be enchanted by something entails a drawing of the attention towards that thing and, therefore, away from others. While some people insist that multi-tasking is possible, others (Csikszentmihályi 1975, Newport 2016), reason that one's best, deepest work is done in a state of focused flow. Hence, <b>there is a compromise involved in enchantment; when one is fully attentive to one thing, other things are left behind.</b></p>
<p>Lindsay: We'll come back to that...to what you leave behind. So, Holly's just linked the survival of the university to <i>financial</i> growth. What do our senior colleagues think about that?</p>	

<p>Peter: There is, of course, an economic mandate. But it's in the service of the academic mission. Or it <i>should</i> be. There shouldn't be a conflict between the two.</p>	<p>Both senior managers (Peter and John) defend the university's economic mandate as vital in enabling the academic mission. Scott Carson's (2019) portrait of attitudes to university governance suggests that this is a more common view among senior managers than sceptical university employees (like Yosef and, to an extent, Holly) would believe.</p>
<p>Lindsay: Would you say there <i>is</i> a conflict? Here?</p>	
<p>Peter: Oh, a tension, perhaps. But...</p>	
<p>John: Yes. And it filters down to the student community. We get a lot of tweets in the downtime, especially around the Easter break. The students want to come in, they want studio time to do their work, when we're renting out spaces to commercial enterprises and events. Obviously, it's reinvested into their courses, but they don't get that narrative. We do it to support the university, but they think we see it as a venue for hire, and them as second-class citizens. Like a rogue landlord. Or, at least, a capitalist.</p>	<p>John's frustration is evident; he knows that these steps are necessary to afford the spacious, modern, light-filled studio spaces that initially attracted these students to the college. But it contributes towards the issue of students not feeling 'at home' (<b>and learners need to feel at home in order to be spellbound</b>). The college building is rented (and effectively sublet during quiet periods). No posters or notices are allowed on the walls, and students are required to take their work with them at the end of the day, or store it in their locker.</p>
<p>Lindsay: That sounds frustrating... having your motives questioned.</p>	<p><b>This is perceived as a conflict by some and a means to an end by those who know that this is the only way to pay for the buildings they feel the students deserve.</b></p>
<p>Tasha: And your politics.</p>	
<p>Peter: Yes. Because we couldn't be more left-leaning, really.</p>	

<p>Richard: Not even <i>leaning</i>. More like, lying up against the wall. But, you know, there hasn't been a Marxist revolution—not a successful one—so as a socialist or a Marxist, someone on the left, how do you work within this system? Given that the whole thing's about providing workers for the capitalist economy, can we at least make capitalism <i>progressive</i>? Universities play a hugely important part in that, and in providing a space for people to disagree. And maybe there <i>isn't</i> that much disagreement about what universities are for... maybe we have this <i>pretence</i> of disagreement because we think that's what you do in universities?</p>	<p>Williams (2016), Haidt (2019) and others have claimed that universities have become political monocultures, intolerant of 'other views'. Popper ([1945] 2002) was in favour of rational public debate to keep intolerant views in check. Rawls ([1971] 2005) was more cautious, stressing that suppression of intolerance should only be invoked if there is a serious and genuine belief that security and liberty are under threat. Popper and Rawls were both concerned that intolerance escalates, and this is what Williams (in the UK) and Haidt (in the US) have observed in today's universities as new 'freedoms' have arisen in broader society that conflict with other rights (e.g. the liberty for individuals to be able to choose their gender exists in tension with sex-based restrictions on behaviour that stem from universal moral foundations of care and fairness). Controversies like these are augmented by internet media that promote and polarise public expression of opinion, and second-order reactions to conflict (e.g. 'white fragility') are a new area of criticism. Determining the appropriateness of such expression is part of participation in social life.</p> <p><b>There is a conflict between tolerance, and tolerance of intolerance.</b></p>
<p>Lindsay: Hmm. There <i>is</i> some stuff that genuinely bothers me. Like, the other day I was observing a Fashion Business seminar. The lecturer</p>	

<p>was getting them to type suggestions into an online document, and the password for the document was 'money'.</p>	
<p>Richard: Right.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: And I was chewing it over and feeling self-righteous about it, and wondering if I should say something in the feedback, or even <i>refuse to teach these people</i>, these teachers, because I'm concerned about the capitalist, consumerist ideology that they're promoting, and how it flies in the face of human flourishing and sustainability, and all that.</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Oh, wow.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: I mean, I wouldn't. But sometimes I think I <i>should</i>. That people need to do something. That we're sleepwalking into an apocalypse.</p>	<p>This anecdote illuminates my opinion that universities have a role to play in conserving and extending humanity, which takes the university as a means to a particular end, assumes a set of values, and may be just as disenchanted a view of the university as one that imagines universities to exist in the service of technological development or economic growth. Fashion and advertising may influence human desire, but it could be argued that they do not create desire out of nothing but respond to drives that are already within us. They respond to our sense of play, pleasure and aesthetics, and therefore add meaning to human lives. Weisman (2008) gives an oddly reassuring account of planetary recovery following the collapse of human civilisation. Plants, in particular, will thrive. It might be argued (as did Arnold Swarzenegger's character in <i>Terminator Two</i>) that it is in our nature to destroy ourselves. But this is a theory based on observations of industrialised society, and our choices also affect indigeneous peoples and other societies with more sustainable values and practices.</p> <p><b>Instrumental ideas of the university exist in conflict with the concept of education as an end in itself.</b></p>

<p>Richard: Well, it's an interesting question. You know, I've occasionally said with very <i>senior</i> managers, haven't I, Peter, that we should talk about our relationship with China. How we work with the authorities, with Chinese students. This is a society that <i>locks up</i> artists, a government that censors the internet, and we act out a set of values that are very different from that. I'm not saying we should have nothing to do with China. But if we are engaged with China in all sorts of different ways, shouldn't part of our discussion be about sustainability and human rights, rather than just about recruitment? We run fashion courses in Saudi Arabia, where it's illegal for women to drive to college or ride a bicycle. And yet, our fashion courses have been at the forefront of a lot of the stuff we've done around social justice.</p>	<p>Asserting our influence on these countries might be justified on the basis of Popper's ([1945] 2002) principle that intolerance should not be tolerated, and/or Sen's (2001) theory of development as freedom. However, these are countries that we are <i>choosing</i> to trade with for our own ends. To object to their laws in this context could be criticised as paternalistic, or as colonial oppression.</p> <p><b>Trading with other countries in the international education market involves a compromise of core values.</b></p>
<p>Tasha: We're colluding.</p>	
<p>Peter: These are important discussions.</p>	
<p>Yosef: But is it even <i>possible</i> that we could act in accordance with our principles? Surely everything we do is focused on preserving our own employment. You know, often at the expense of other people. It's exploitative. It's no different, really, to shareholders getting dividends. It's just a matter of degree.</p>	<p>Peter's comment recognises that these are intractable dilemmas, but—in accordance with Gadamer—it is important to continue debating them and to keep them in play. Hence, an answer is offered to Richard's question of whether we are <i>pretending</i> to disagree because we think this is what universities are for. For Peter, it is the university's role to keep these debates alive.</p>

Richard: Yep.	
Peter: Well...	Yosef's tone is matter-of-fact rather than judgemental, and acknowledges the ubiquity and inevitability of self-interest. Richard agrees, while Peter's urge is to resist their pessimism (as he did with mine during our conversation), being more optimistic about human nature and our capacity for virtue.
Lindsay: Okay. Can I take us back to survival and what that means? Do we need to stay the same <i>size</i> in order to survive? Lots of people say that universities have become too big for what society needs. What do you think about that?	<p>While Collini (2012) and Maskell &amp; Robinson (2002) prescribe a reversal of the expansion of higher education, <b>basing the supply of university places on a desired social blueprint stands in tension with the principle of development as freedom (Sen 2001)</b>, which offers that those who want to access education should be able to do so.</p> <p>The deeper question is not perhaps whether society 'needs' more graduates, but whether individuals have an <i>authentic</i> interest in studying for a university degree, or if this is a desire that is being manufactured (and if so, by whom, and to what end).</p>
Richard: You know other art and design institutions score better on the National Student Survey than we do? There's all sorts of reasons for that, but one is our size. I'm sure it is. It's to do with low staff to student ratios, students feeling... well, we absolutely <i>know</i> that students feel	While the relationship between 'contact' or 'instructional' time and attainment is complex (e.g. Cattaneo et al. 2016), its correlation with

<p>they don't get anywhere near enough contact time, for what they're paying.</p>	<p>student reports of satisfaction seems more straightforward, as evident in the National Student Survey data, and cited here by Richard.</p>
<p>Kimmy: Uh-huh.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Kimmy, do you and your friends talk about what you're getting for your money, in terms of contact with lecturers, tutors? Is it similar to what you'd get in the States?</p>	<p>Newman ([1856] 2016) was passionate about in-person contact as a basic educational principle, and spoke of physical presence in terms of learning from 'the living man, the living voice' (p.14). He was concerned that the commercial printing press would allow ideas to become increasingly more dispersed and divorced from their genealogy, and believed in the necessity of the oral tradition to enchant and inspire.</p>
<p>Kimmy: We talk about it. Sometimes we have lectures but other times it's a workshop, and they'll come round and you get, like, ten minutes with them. But you have to be in the room for <i>two hours</i>. It's like, I could be doing more things outside of here. With my group, still, but getting more done than I am in here. So, why...?</p>	<p>Kimmy's account is not one of enchantment and inspiration, at least not in this anecdote, in which she appears to be thinking of a particular teacher she feels she would learn more without. While this perhaps warrants</p>
<p>Lindsay: I guess the teacher would assume that you'd probably work better in the room. Even though they weren't actually sat with you, they'd kind of be there to see what you needed.</p>	<p>further investigation in terms of the question of what universities are for (does she find peer learning always more effective when unsupervised? What kind of teacher input does she value?), there are some immediate tensions highlighted in her account that will be familiar to university</p>
<p>Tasha: ...and if they just leave you to get on with it, then you might think, 'well, I can do that without even going to university. What am I paying for?'</p>	<p>teachers.</p>

<p>Kimmy: I think it could be different for different groups of people. So if you're ahead of the game and you have your head on straight and you have a plan, then you don't really need that time. But some of the groups have to be told what to do and have to be pushed.</p>	<p>If we give learners total freedom to decide when they attend for instruction, support or guidance, this disadvantages those students who need a more structured curriculum to motivate and organise their studies. These parity concerns are amplified when measures of quantity are given primacy over experiences of quality, which I have presented (in Chapter 2) as commensurate with a disenchanting view of education, and relate here to the possibility of the institution being overinflated.</p> <p><b>Even if a good balance is achieved, and the curriculum is responsive to individual needs, there will always be educational tensions between freedom and structure, and individual and community.</b></p>
<p>Tasha: So you're saying there needs to be a bit more differentiation in terms of what each student needs? And if they need more structure...</p> <p>Kimmy: Yeah, exactly.</p> <p>Yosef: Which is fine in principle but then you have some students getting more time than others, and not everyone is going to be ok with that.</p> <p>Kimmy: I guess.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: So, is <i>this</i> a size issue? Would it be easier to meet different students' needs if we were a smaller university?</p>	
<p>Richard: Well. With Brexit, if we have fewer EU students in a year's time, and if we decide as an institution to stay the same size, then we have to either recruit more international students—which changes the dynamics—or we recruit home students that we don't currently make</p>	<p>'Recruiting home students that we currently don't make offers to' is a tactful way of phrasing the lowering of entry standards. Will this have 'huge' implications for pedagogy and curriculum? Perhaps Richard is expressing fear of a loss of something vitally important but less tangible: status,</p>

<p>offers to. Which has huge implications for pedagogy and curriculum as well.</p> <p>Lindsay: You mean, students who wouldn't have got a place before.</p> <p>Richard: Yes. And that change could come for us really fast; as soon as the government refuses to continue to guarantee tuition fee loans for EU students...</p> <p>Holly: ...and they'll go elsewhere. Germany, Norway, or Denmark. You know, they're teaching courses in English now.</p>	<p>specialness, or an 'aura'. Implied is a view of talent as something that students come to the university with, which is intuitive, but potentially problematic. It also hints at a standpoint of pedagogic scepticism, such as that proffered by James Elkins in his book 'Why Art Cannot be Taught'.</p> <p>Hence, there is another tension <b>between the idea that a university can plan or intend to enact a particular change in people, or the idea that it is just a place where things happen.</b></p>
<p>Lindsay: So we'd <i>have</i> to shrink. To maintain our status.</p>	
<p>Richard: Well, what the vice-chancellor would say is, with the new buildings...</p>	<p>The three senior managers—John, Richard, and Peter—maintain that the institution has an identity, a vision and a mission, and its physical environment is fundamental to that. A world-leading art and design institution cannot be anything but well-designed and a work of art in itself, and the new sites are like modern versions of the academic gardens of ancient Athens in that they elevate students from the everyday concerns of</p>
<p>John: ...we can't shrink.</p>	
<p>Tasha: Because we're already committed to those buildings, and that money...?</p>	

<p>Richard: Oh, we could still pull out. But, actually, financial pressures are starting to hit already and at one point I said, you know, ‘Peter, should we not do this?’ [laughs] Erm.</p>	<p>crumbling buildings, draughty windows and dysfunctional heating. But (and this might be an example of enchantment generating disenchantment), in order to afford such an inspiring space, it needs to generate income. This requires meticulous planning and, for many, a compromised sense of being ‘at home’.</p>
<p>Peter: Not an option.</p>	
<p>Richard: Not an option. We <i>cannot</i> continue on multiple sites, and some of them are, you know, falling apart.</p>	
<p>Peter: So actually in terms of the things we want to achieve with our students... the students <i>need</i> the new buildings. They <i>deserve</i> them.</p>	<p>The university’s estates strategy has two points of resonance with Newman’s Idea of the University ([1852] 2016) which valued students living in dedicated accommodation with other students. Students living in halls do better academically, one possible reason being that stability in the mundane aspects of life so they are free to focus on learning. It should be noted that in Newman’s ancient Greek fantasy, student accommodation was very cheap and incredibly basic, on the principle that students would be spending so little time there: ‘why count the rents in the walls of your lodgings, when wonder calls you away...’ ([1852] 2016, p.40)</p>
<p>Tasha: How much is it all costing?</p>	
<p>Richard: I think the two projects together are 300 million.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Holy shit.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Does it make us less <i>agile</i>, if we own these buildings?</p>	
<p>Richard: Well, since the mid 1990s we had two big goals. One was the colleges being on single sites, and the other was having enough space in halls of residence for the students. That has been the university’s plan under four different vice-chancellors, regardless of what’s been happening politically.</p>	<p>Robustness is the opposite of agility; it is about withstanding and weathering change. Richard does not value fashionable ‘agility’ so much as consistency and longevity. Indeed, an ‘agile institution’ is a contradiction in terms as institutions by definition have an enduring purpose. This tension is</p>

Tasha: It's sticking to a plan.	<p>manifest not only in the built environment of the university but also through its human resources (as precarious employment) and its curriculum, policies, and other structures.</p> <p><b>There is a tension between the stability and the flexibility of educational institutions.</b></p>
Richard: Exactly, whatever's happening with funding, tuition fees, all of that. So it's about not <i>agility</i> so much as <i>robustness</i> . Being able to survive different impacts, different policies.	
Holly: I guess that's the principle of investment, that you look long-term, and there's going to be short-term... wobbles.	
Dilesh: I like the single site thing. It does make a difference. And it's good to be here, in this building, with everything going on.	<p>Dilesh's tone and gesture alludes to what has been said by others in this exchange about inspiring (enchanted?) spaces. Despite the compromises that contribute to not feeling 'at home', Dilesh feels an aura in his college; a sense of place, a 'morphic resonance' (Sheldrake 2018) that Curry (2017) might define as 'concrete magic'. The building has a personality. It is not a generic university building.</p> <p>The Crick Institute at St Pancras, not far from the college, is a new research centre that seeks to bring together scientists of all disciplines. Architecturally, like the college, it has panoptical features, with glass-walled work areas built around central atria. This architectural approach could be taken as resonant with traditional ideas of the university like Kant's ([1798]</p>
John: And with the glass, and the central atrium so students can see what other students on other courses are doing.	
Tasha: Like the Crick Institute. It's designed on the same principle.	
Dilesh: But, my boyfriend, he's in graphic design, and he was saying that we don't have that campus atmosphere. We were walking through UCL for the Slade show, and <i>they</i> have that. On <i>their</i> campuses you've got every student from every quarter wandering around. We don't have that environment here.	

<p>Lindsay: I think Newman uses that exact phrase: <i>students from every quarter</i>. Funny.</p>	<p>1979), Newman's ([1852] 2016), and Gadamer's (1992b), all of whom emphasise the assemblage of thinkers of different disciplines and the fusion of different perspectives. Nevertheless, for Dilesh, that universality is not fully present as he believes it to be at UCL/Slade (his first choice university). Glass partitions and atria give a sense of things going on but also present a physical barrier, which can amplify feelings of separation and isolation. The Jungian psychologist James Hillman ([1982] 2006) describes such 'self-examining' buildings—their 'hollow atrium interior sectioned by vertical shafts'—as 'anorexic' or 'catatonic' (pp.33-36).</p> <p><b>There are tensions between visibility and isolation.</b></p>
<p>Dilesh: Yeah, they've got that integration between everyone, which we don't have here. You say about all the glass; being able to see what other people are doing. That's the <i>opposite</i> of how I felt in the first year. My pass wouldn't even let me go and visit someone on another course.</p>	
<p>Richard: Yes. That was a mess.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Right, so, <i>universality</i>. Bringing different forms of knowledge together. Are we actually a university in that sense? When we're really only dealing with creative subjects and even, you know, with Fashion Business and things, it's not everything, is it?</p>	<p><b>Related to visibility/isolation is a tension between interdisciplinarity and specialism.</b></p> <p>Emerging from the discussion of the assumptions and values of science and scientism in Chapter 2, there is a case for keeping arts education separate from the sciences, particularly in an era when universities are assumed to be scientific objects subject to measurement, prediction and control.</p>
<p>Dilesh: Yeah, that's what I was just discussing with... like just this morning. I think that's what makes it feel quite different. At the Slade, there was a guy who'd made these ice sculptures. And he got the technique to do those ice sculptures by working with the Biology department.</p>	

<p>Lindsay: Ah. That was what I was going to ask you, what you saw at the Slade that you could point at and say, well, <i>this</i> is the benefit of having people coming together from different disciplines.</p>	<p>The capacity to hold tensions and contradictions in play evident in this conversation corresponds to a sense that this particular institution is resisting this scientific self-examination more effectively than many other universities, or perhaps that it is the innate tendency of the institution to not see and act on itself in that way.</p>
<p>Dilesh: Yeah, and there was another guy, he's made a library, like a shelf in the library, and it had these wax books showing where the missing Irish history was. And it was a fantastic piece of work, but it would never have... he thought of it by being in the <i>UCL library</i>. That wouldn't happen here, because there's not a History section, you know?</p>	
<p>Tasha: Yeah. It's a bit of a microcosm, isn't it.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Completely.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Which of you <i>didn't</i> study the arts at university? You studied business, didn't you, Peter?</p>	<p>In pointing out that he disliked (natural) science at school, Peter first implies a disconnect between science and management. He then explicitly denies that management can be wholly scientific.</p> <p>This insight links to the prior arguments about understanding and explanation. Scientific explanations of human behaviour may appear to have some accuracy and effectiveness, and believing that we can predict</p>
<p>Peter: I have a degree in Management Science.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Management <i>science</i>?</p>	
<p>Peter: ...which is funny because at school I dropped science as soon as they let me. In fact I think they might actually have slung me out.</p>	

<p>Tasha: I liked science. I think it was the <i>neatness</i>; the idea that everything could be explained, that there's an answer to everything. But now I find that rather dull.</p>	<p>and control others may lend us a sense of security. However, people do not generally desire to be seen as psychological or otherwise scientific objects.</p>
<p>Peter: Yes. And that scientific approach—the cold, mechanistic approach—was transferred into business. Do this, do that, and the economy will be fine. Do this, do that, and management will be effective. But of course it's not like that at all. People aren't that neat or predictable.</p>	<p>By way of example, there was a tone of amused betrayal in Holly's voice as she recounted this anecdote. I remembered teaching this to her cohort; many had begun to fervently note down the percentages. When I drew a line through it and told them it was make-believe, many laughed, but there was a sense of frustration in the room. Most teachers enrol on our PgCert course wanting or at least expecting to learn methods, i.e. to find out 'what works'. The intended learning outcome of this session was that there <i>*is*</i> a grain of truth behind the numbers, but it is important to think deeply about the nature of that truth and how to understand it better, rather than using a false rule to justify educational choices (e.g. peer-learning over lectures, or the replacement of reading with videos).</p>
<p>Holly: We talked about this on the PgCert; like, 'we remember 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 90% of what we teach someone else', you know? And there's a grain of truth to it but it's not <i>real</i>. Humans <i>aren't</i> that predictable. It's just a neat model that someone's made up.</p>	<p><b>There is a tension across academia between explanation and understanding. This, like other tensions, contradictions and paradoxes presented here, may be conceived as a productive tension, a symbiotic relationship and/or a vacillation between two modes.</b></p>

<p>Peter: Completely made up. Well, they will get some data and do some analysis that will support their position, but...</p>	
<p>Lindsay: You remembered it though, Holly. It does tend to grab people, that one.</p>	<p>To change the way we see the world means to draw the attention, arouse the emotions and cause us to wonder. Such things are therefore enchanting and transcendent; they take us out of ourselves and beyond who we were. But a <i>theory</i> of enchantment is almost a contradiction in terms, because enchantment is by definition mysterious. Curry (2017) argues that any programme for (re-)enchantment is doomed to failure for this reason. In focusing on analysing its ‘dynamics’, his work paradoxically seeks a theorisation that he claims is not possible.</p>
<p>Holly: [laughs] I guess we remember things that change the way we see the world.</p>	
<p>Tasha: Still sounds like a model.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: You mean there’s no model for the kind of learning that really grabs you? The kind that enchants?</p>	
<p>Peter: Well, yes. It’s human. Messy. Often inexplicable.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: So is enchantment to do with mystery? A mystery is different to a problem; a mystery implies not only the absence of a solution, but also a kind of reverence; like it should be left alone, almost?</p>	
<p>Peter: Maybe we need to be careful about saying education is this and business is that. What you just said made me think of the biblical mysteries—the mystery plays—and about how there is theatre in education, <i>and</i> in business. Can I tell you a story?</p>	<p>Peter is highlighting something important; that a <i>purposeful</i> effort to enchant is essentially manipulative. This also highlights the paradox presented above, that <b>enchantment is inherently mysterious, whereas a programme implies that one knows exactly what one is doing.</b> To</p>

<p>Lindsay: Sure.</p>	<p>sell, to 'do business', is to manipulate the will. Teaching is similar; in the post-Dearing era (of expanded, marketised higher education), as theorised by Barnett (2007), a good teacher necessarily inspires and strengthens the will to learn.</p>
<p>Peter: When I was at the business school, our lecturer told us about a company that provides flowers by post. He shows us the brochure, and then there's a knock on the door—to the lecture theatre. He says 'what's this?' and opens the door, all posed... very funny it was. In comes a guy with a cardboard box about a metre high. 'Oh, it's just a brown cardboard box,' he says. He opens it up and inside are some flowers. 'Oh, this is beautiful!' He pulls out a vase from under the desk, puts the flowers in the vase, and the flowers all fall open, you know, as they do? And we're asked; 'what's your impression now of this company? We have the glossy brochure with flowers elegantly standing tall, glass stones holding them up. How does it feel now, if that's your gift?' Nothing round the box. They all fall over. There's the brochure, and then there's the reality of the experience. And it's all theatre; teaching is a performance, and so is business. Those philosophers in Athens were performing.</p> <p>Lindsay: I think I see what you're saying. Because that's management <i>science</i> but still, it's presented as a performance. A performance <i>about</i> a performance.</p>	<p>Holly explicitly articulates a paradox of teaching: <b>one performs best when one forgets one is performing</b>, an insight that is also recognised by Parker Palmer (1997, p.5): 'technique is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives', and is related to conceptions of expertise, for example Dreyfus &amp; Dreyfus' (1980) fifth and final 'expert' stage of skill acquisition, where one is acting intuitively without self-monitoring.</p> <p>These two ideas—the paradox of a programme for enchantment, and the transcendence of expert practice—are resonant with Munday's (2013) critique of the technological or problem-focused approach to teaching and teaching development, which stems from its association with possession (of control, a desired state, etc.). Munday draws on Marcel's work on Having and Being to explain what is wrong with 'having' in this context, namely covetousness, enslavement, the anxiety of 'not having', and the necessitation of the object's independence from the subject in order to be</p>

<p>Holly: We're performing <i>something</i> all the time. The default position when you're teaching is to think 'how am I coming across, how are they viewing me?' But that can only get you so far. I think, paradoxically maybe, you give the best <i>performance</i> when you're able to completely forget yourself and be totally <i>with</i> the students. But you can only do that when you're able to relax. When you're completely confident.</p>	<p>possessed. Munday presents Marcel's concept of mystery as an alternative to 'problems', and a different, more deeply connected mode of engagement with one's students and one's inner landscape as a teacher.</p>
<p>Lindsay: <i>Confident</i>. It means 'with faith', or 'with belief'. So when we're confident, what do we have faith <i>in</i>?</p>	
<p>Tasha: Our abilities.</p>	
<p>Yosef: The students?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: The... the <i>situation</i>?</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Is the situation part of us, or is it beyond us?</p> <p>Kimmy: Probably both, but <i>definitely</i> beyond.</p> <p>Lindsay: Like a higher power of sorts?</p>	

<p>Kimmy: Yeah. God, somebody, whatever. I think there's something. Like, I have to believe there's something looking out for me and there's a purpose to my life.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Like a calling.</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Yeah.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: When you say you <i>have</i> to believe in it...</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Yeah. I feel if crappy things happen—to me or people I care about—it's like, okay, there must be a reason for it. It makes me able to stomach it. To deal with it and move on.</p>	<p>Kimmy uses the same metaphor of ingestion to describe the way these two moral authorities (God and her father) have inspired her to deal with challenging situations: 'stomach it', and 'suck it up'. Her words may be easily misinterpreted as resigned, or hard, but her tone in conversation was matter-of-fact and good-humoured, with genuine affection for her father.</p> <p>The metaphor of ingestion indicates an approach where one takes on the challenge and allows oneself to be changed by it, rather than refusing the challenge or fighting it. But, of course, <b>there is a question arising from this that presents two choices in tension with each other: When is it right to 'stomach' something (or to 'suck it up'), and when is it not?</b></p>
<p>Dilesh: Are your parents religious?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: My mum's a very strong believer in God still. She says to me 'just pray, it'll be ok'. I think, with everything happening in the world, she needs to know there's something good.</p>	
<p>Peter: And your dad...? What advice does he give you, when things get tough?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Oh, so. They're very different. My mum's like the comforting one. And coming here, at the beginning, was the worst. I didn't have</p>	

<p>classes, and I'd go hang out with people but then I'd be crying in my room for five hours. And my dad had to come over here for work and he was like, 'suck it up, you're fine. Get your head out of your ass, you have to do this'. And after that I haven't... I didn't cry at all. Growing up, when we played football—soccer—if I got hurt, he left me on the field until I got up myself. And he always says 'suck it up, suck it up, suck it up'. It's always in the back of my head.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Tough love.</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Yeah, he's good at, like, smacking some sense into you.</p>	
<p>Peter: What about you, Dilesh? Do you have someone who... pushes you? Encourages you?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Not my family so much, with this, but... I had a tutor who, well, I used to make work just with someone else. We collaborated all through the first year. And then this tutor said 'I'm not going to mark any of your stuff until you actually understand why you're doing this'. We weren't necessarily mucking around, but we were... getting away with it. And he said 'I'm not going to write anything. You're gliding through it. It's too easy for you'.</p>	
<p>Tasha: Oh, wow.</p>	

<p>Dilesh: And then we went through a whole term being, like, 'we're not allowed to do any work? This is terrible'. And then... we did our own work. This tutor did something unheard of, which he could've got in trouble for, because he sensed there was something wrong; we didn't really know why we were doing this, and if we continued I would leave the university with <i>nothing</i>. I wouldn't have found my purpose: 'What's my art? Why am I creative?' It was the best thing that's happened to me so far. One tutor seeing it wasn't working. And he wasn't prepared to watch it.</p>	<p>Dilesh's account, contrary to Holly's earlier concerns about marketisation, <i>counters</i> Biesta's (2018) theorisation of the university in the 'impulse society' (Roberts 2014). Evidently some educators <i>are</i> committed to creating spaces where students' desires are questioned, despite short-term impacts on student satisfaction.</p>
<p>Tasha: He did what you <i>needed</i>... rather than what you wanted.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Yeah, and at the time we hated it, and we hated <i>him</i>. We couldn't believe this person in this position could say this to us. But he was just looking out for us. I get that now... and he's not saying 'I told you so' at all.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: So some lecturers <i>do</i> still feel they can take those kinds of risks. Um, it's interesting to see which courses get the higher satisfaction ratings and how that relates to having to tell students uncomfortable stuff.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: It <i>needs</i> to be uncomfortable. You shouldn't just breeze through it. It's a skill and you have to work for it.</p>	<p>This exchange reveals a certain ('resilient') attitude in Dilesh that puts the above account in a particular light; one that assumes the good life to be</p>

Tasha: Well, that's a resilient attitude. Healthy... mentally.	<p>about more than pleasure. The prescription offered—one <i>should</i> undertake challenges rather than avoiding them—resonates with virtue ethics and the moral lessons of various stories, parables and myths. I return to this below with reference to Max Weber's ([2005] 2013) theory of the Protestant work ethic.</p>
Dilesh: Um, well. I don't know. I convince myself a lot. All the time.	
Holly: That's part of it. It's the stories we tell ourselves, isn't it?	
Dilesh: Yeah, it literally is!	
<p>Peter: An attitude like yours, Dilesh... that's what you find in people who, you know, they're ambitious. And resilient. Ask them about happiness, contentment, and they say there's no better feeling than having achieved something difficult.</p>	<p>Dilesh recognises that he has a positive self-narrative. It is not certain whether Dilesh or Holly believe that employing such a narrative is a personal choice.</p>
<p>Lindsay: There's a quote I like about satisfaction; about the most supremely satisfying day not being one where you've lounged around doing nothing. 'It's a day when you've had everything to do and you've done it all.'</p> <p>Dilesh: Who said that?</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Margaret Thatcher. [Everyone laughs, a little uncomfortably]</p>	

<p>So I guess my question is, do you need to have that attitude, that preference, already, to benefit from a university education? Or not? And can it be taught?</p>	<p>The general consensus here appears to be one of pedagogical scepticism, at least in regards to resilience. But the choices we make as teachers assume the opposite. This highlights another point of dissonance:</p> <p><b>We cannot know for sure what impact we have as teachers, but we continue to teach. This requires faith in the face of scepticism.</b></p>
<p>Holly: Like, is university for the resilient and the ambitious? Or can you learn that when you get here?</p>	
<p>Yosef: Maybe it's those people who don't need to go at all. They don't need the structure, the support. My brother didn't. He just went away and started making films.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: I wasn't ready to do that. I had the passion--and the resilience I guess, but I had to come here to make it into something solid. To find a way that I can carry on afterwards.</p>	
<p>Tasha: I don't think we can say one way or the other. I think resilience is a reaction—a positive response—to a challenge. University presents challenges. Life presents challenges. So are we saying that there are <i>generally</i> resilient people, who always take up any call to arms? Because I don't think that's true. We choose our battles.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: I wonder about a link between what we're calling resilience, and faith, and a kind of ethic? I've been reading Max Weber, and his theory is that the biblical lesson of not squandering talents, combined</p>	<p>Kimmy's scepticism that her and her family's work ethic is related to religious faith does not necessarily contradict Weber's theory. Weber maintains that we are haunted by 'the ghost of dead religious beliefs'</p>

<p>with the Protestant idea of certain people being chosen or favoured by God, led to the work ethic we value today. Back when religion was central to public life, if you worked hard and were successful it was a sign that you were chosen by God. You'd go to heaven. So of course everyone tried to do that. Kind of like a backwards logic. Does that make sense?</p>	<p>([1905] 2013, p109); that capitalism and performativity are by no means the antithesis of religious life, but the surviving remnants of it. Laborde (2017) explains that religion extends beyond beliefs and moral codes to theories of identity, association and justice (hence the tensions that arise in the progressive separation of church and state). But the genealogy of these codes and values has been largely forgotten, hence why Weber and others find it an interesting topic for sociological debate.</p>
<p>Kimmy: I'm... we're basically Catholic. We went to church when I was younger and then we started playing sports and sports usually happen on Sundays, so church just kinda got pushed out. I couldn't tell you the last time I went to church.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Mmm. But your dad... you said he's got a strong work ethic, right?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Yeah, fierce. My whole family. But I wouldn't say it's about religion. It's America. The idea that everyone can succeed. If you work hard.</p>	
<p>Holly: Is that still the case though? Because over here, I think people have lost hope in having anything like what their parents had. I mean, I'm not going to have a pension like theirs.</p>	<p>The tension underlying this exchange is that, while continued economic growth is not sustainable and has serious environmental implications, investment infrastructure, including pensions, depends on it. Given that the financial growth seen in the 1980s is unlikely to be repeated, Holly (mid</p>
<p>Lindsay: Have you got one?</p>	

<p>Holly: Well, I pay into the university one. But I don't pay in very much. And I'm not sure it'll even exist in 40 years' time.</p>	<p>30s) and Tasha (early 40s) will be significantly poorer in their retirement than the previous generation. Tasha finds the previous generation responsible, but this is a complicated, perhaps unresolvable, issue.</p>
<p>Tasha: Yeah, and that's galling isn't it? I pay quite a lot into mine. But there was that big shift a couple of years ago. It used to be a final salary scheme and then... I did the calculations and, shit, it looks like it's been slashed in half. And I'm having to pay more into it. Yeah. They really screwed us over, the older generation, didn't they?</p>	<p>Pensions depend on growth that is largely unsustainable, and investment that is often unethical.</p> <p><b>University staff are planning and preparing for a personal retirement funded by the current pension system that assumes maintenance of the status quo, while simultaneously preparing students for a world that may look very different. This creates dissonance.</b></p>
<p>Lindsay: I guess the older generation didn't have it so easy. Twelve percent mortgages, labour strikes, uh, manual washing machines. We have a better quality of life in many ways now. Do we focus more on what we've lost than what we've gained?</p>	
<p>Tasha: I think what we've gained is part of the problem. We're a lot more entitled these days; more accustomed to comfort and getting everything we want. Maybe something will change, but I think—climate change, nuclear war, artificial superintelligence, mass extinction... we'll be gone in 20 years. Or at least under water.</p>	<p>Similarly the specific case of financial infrastructure cited above, this exchange alludes to something akin to the suspension of disbelief. <b>It could also be construed as the holding of contradictory beliefs; one that we are doomed and everything is pointless, and another—the one we allow to guide our actions day-to-day—that our lives have hope, meaning and purpose.</b></p>
<p>Peter: Such a pessimistic view of life!</p>	

Tasha: <i>Cheerfully</i> pessimistic.	Differences in perspective are evident here, which one might be tempted to explain (if one were to venture into explanation) with regards to the relative situations and ages of Dilesh (20), Tasha (40) and Peter (60).
Lindsay: You mean, if you accept that these are probably the end times, it frees you up to live in the moment? I get that.	
Peter: I think you can live in the moment without believing that we're all <i>doomed</i> . Hegel had an optimistic view of the nature of self-realisation. He believed we were moving towards actualising our potential.	
Dilesh: Hegel wasn't facing a climate crisis.	
Lindsay: Did Hegel mean our <i>collective</i> potential? That's always puzzled me... if there's a fundamental driving force, on what level is it acting? Dawkins confused everyone, I think, by attributing selfishness to genes. Because that's obviously not how we experience motivation, as individuals.	
Peter: For Hegel it wasn't about society, it was about a state of being that <i>individuals</i> would reach. That mankind has the capacity to realise ourselves. Marx built on this. And... to get back to the central question, it's universities that offer students that opportunity to realise themselves. Not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but in terms of values as well.	In his <i>Idea of the University</i> , Newman cites the students who travelled to ancient Athens from far away to learn and transform their path in life; students who had 'their own object in coming' ([1852] 2016, p.13). White (1997) also recognises that students bring their own aims with them to university. Nussbaum (2018) finds the event of moving away from the

<p>Kimmy: Yeah, it's about getting out of your family's grasp and <i>becoming</i> your own person, as well as learning and gaining the skills that will enable you to move forward as that person. Back in America, I have friends who go in undecided, they don't have a major, it's to figure out what they want to do with their lives. What their values are.</p>	<p>home community so important in the formation of character that it justifies mandatory (non-military) national service, with every young person dispatched to work elsewhere. Both Newman and Nussbaum's visions champion specific values, which Newman articulates as 'gentlemanly' qualities (namely, one's manner in dealing with oneself and others), and Nussbaum simply as empathy.</p>
<p>Peter: Do you see <i>your</i> values changing? And your career plans?</p>	<p>Kimmy is seeking out the education she feels she needs to put her existing values into practice, while Holly describes her Masters education as more transformative.</p> <p>It is not necessarily the case that there is a tension between education that <i>assumes</i> values and education that <i>transforms</i> values. The difference here is between Holly and Kimmy's perceptions of opportunity to put their values (and their learning) into practice. As an associate lecturer, Holly has little freedom to try out new activities, and little control over curriculum content.</p> <p>Holly articulates <b>the tension between what she learns she should do, and what she will be able to do</b>, to a greater extent than Kimmy does.</p>
<p>Kimmy: Well, I've always had a passion for sustainability, and ethics within the fashion industry, because I think there's so much that can be changed, <i>and</i> I'm optimistic that it will. So I see myself going down that route. And being here is great for that, because we have the Sustainability team, and I go to their events and talks.</p>	
<p>Holly: So sustainability was always a big thing for you. That's interesting. What are you, like, ten years younger than me? Twelve? I did the Education for Sustainability unit on the MA last year, and that made me question a lot of stuff.</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Yeah?</p>	
<p>Holly: Yeah, like, approaches, structures that I'd just taken for granted. That things have to be this way. It made me more critical.</p>	

<p>Peter: And do you feel like you've been able to <i>change</i> anything?</p>	
<p>Holly: Well, hmm. I ran a workshop for the assessment, but when you try to find a place for it in your day-to-day... the problem is, the teaching I do is quite restricted. I work with 16 to 18 year-olds on the short courses, and I support final year students with their dissertations. And that's all very predefined. And time-pressured.</p>	
<p>Peter: Right, I can see that would be difficult.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Hmm. What I'm hearing is a suggestion that we don't necessarily lose the capacity to learn--to change our minds and our values--as we get older. But it can be harder to <i>act</i> on the things we learn. We've already made commitments and compromises. Our relationships--all our life structures--are built around who we are <i>now</i>.</p> <p>Tasha: So that's why education <i>isn't</i> wasted on the young. They can do more with what they learn.</p> <p>Lindsay: Potentially. Although--like Yosef--I struggle to recall any kind of transformation when I went to university. Not like when I did my Masters, or this doctorate. Maybe some teenagers aren't ready to have their worlds changed.</p>	

<p>Holly: But you studied science, right?</p> <p>Lindsay: Biology.</p> <p>Holly: See, I think the idea of a university, in the <i>creative</i> arts, is very different to the idea of a university with a subject like Biology. Or Fashion Business even. It's about creating work visibly, in the presence of other people, and it's explicitly a public thing, from the outset, and an explicitly <i>disruptive</i> thing. Your own development is on display, and up for critique.</p> <p>Lindsay: That <i>does</i> sound a bit like the time we were paired up and made to dissect a dogfish.</p>	
<p>Richard: But what you produce as an art student is very often a reflection of you and your <i>identity</i>. Erm... in a way that I'm guessing your science experiments weren't?</p> <p>Lindsay: Right.</p> <p>Richard: And this impacts on the student experience. It has quite a significant <i>emotional</i> impact, because for many students, it'll be the first</p>	<p>Richard (maybe unwittingly) offers another tension here; that <b>between exploring one's identity (or, perhaps, crafting or building it), and being true to it, which implies that it is already formed.</b></p> <p>Yosef makes both a connection (via the value of diversity) and a distinction between <b>individual achievement and the progress of the discipline (the two of which could be conceived as in productive tension).</b></p>

<p>time they've had a real space to <i>explore</i> their identity, or be <i>true</i> to their identity. And people need to feel that they can bring that identity to university, to their work, and to be confident that their tutors will try to understand that work. And that's why diversity is so important... for <i>attainment</i>.</p>	<p>Margaret Archer's (1982) work on structure and agency illuminates the difficulty of disentangling individual choice or free will from social structures like institutions, norms and mores, disciplines and practices.</p> <p>The recognition that these are 'good questions' (and the tendency of the participants to respond to them with stories) indicates that there are rarely straightforward answers to the question of why we do what we do, and how that relates to one's 'identity'.</p>
<p>Yosef: Yes, and not just from the perspective of the individual and their <i>own</i> achievement. It's important for the progress of the <i>discipline</i>. Film requires so much collaboration, and planning, and financial risk. It takes a lot to change direction.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Do you feel that they're <i>separate</i>, in the creative arts? The development of an individual and the progress of the discipline?</p>	
<p>Yosef: It's a good question. I think they are different, but they depend on each other.</p>	
<p>Holly: When I went to university the first time it was overwhelming. World-changing.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: And you studied Fine Art?</p>	
<p>Holly: Yes, in Nottingham. I did my Foundation course in London, while living at home. It's such a change when you move away.</p>	

<p>Dilesh: I did my Art Foundation at home as well. But for me <i>that</i> was transformative. It was a really good Foundation course. There's at least three people here because of that. And we were all local people. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for that Foundation. The art department in my school was awful.</p>	<p>Dilesh talks about 'the school' as a totalitarian, impersonal single entity. In conversation, his expression was pinched when he talked about the syllabus and what was available to him. This does not appear to have been the right conditions to foster openness to experience, and it is clear that Dilesh understands this to be necessary for his education. He sounds hurt and let down, and, more significantly, <b>completely disillusioned</b>, but with his school rather than (as yet), the university.</p>
<p>Lindsay: It was awful...?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: They were just trying to deliver a syllabus that would get high grades. For the school, you know?</p>	<p>It is hard to believe that Dilesh's teachers simply did not care about what Dilesh went on to do, and whether he was happy. But the fact that he perceived that his destination was of no consequence to the school, and that he was not getting the same support and interest that those applying for university did, suggests not only that <b>educational institutions do indeed prioritise the things that are measured and count towards metrics, but also, crucially, that this does not escape the notice of the students.</b></p>
<p>Lindsay: High grades?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Yeah. All we did was drawing and painting, in the literal sense. Not even in a conceptual way. A lot of websites were blocked as well, so you couldn't be inventive and look at things. We had interests and thoughts forced down our throats. Told what we could do.</p>	
<p>Tasha: And this was at 'A' Level?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Yeah. GCSE was even more like that, but 'A' Level, yeah, same people. I was really creative, I did drama and that sort of stuff, which probably helped my art more than the art lessons. When I was applying for foundation, the school wouldn't even talk to me about it.</p>	<p>This observation gives rise to a number of questions that are ripe for further investigation. Is Dilesh particularly aware, or particularly cynical? On what basis was his narrative (in which he is the 'hero') formed? Was there</p>

Richard: They wouldn't talk to you?	a single critical incident that coloured his perspective on the situation more than anything else? How common is this interpretation among students?
Dilesh: I wasn't going through UCAS, so I was just pushed to one side. I was applying for a local Foundation that let anyone in, so it wasn't going to make them look good or anything. There was no point in helping me to get better grades.	
Lindsay: So for you it was a huge change from school to Foundation. And then, to university. Has that been as transformative? And...worth the money? Foundation was free, right?	
Dilesh: Yeah, I mean, this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. And, actually, having it in the back of my mind that there is something coming out of my pocket while being here, it means I'm not gonna fuck around, I'm gonna work my socks off because I'm really lucky being here, doing something I want to do. If I had another life, I would do this over and over again. Like, it's brilliant.	
Peter: Well, that's wonderful. Is there a sense of... gratitude?	Gratitude may incorporate the dimensions of enchantment (faith, wonder and unity); faith in terms of being grateful *to* or for a benevolent higher power (luck, love, nature, God, goodness), wonder in terms of wondering at one's good fortune, and unity as the connection one feels with the object
Dilesh: Yeah, I'm really grateful. I don't know, it's really... it's a good place to make mistakes. A good place to feel things, to have all these thoughts, to be in a place where you don't know what's happening.	

<p>Peter: Keats called that <i>negative capability</i>. The ability to exist in that space, 'without irritable reaching after fact or reason'.</p>	<p>of one's gratitude. Devenot (2017) notes that Aldous Huxley cited a powerful sense of gratitude in correspondence with the wonder and awe he experienced through taking mescaline and LSD, and reported that these experiences enabled him to appreciate William Blake's claim 'gratitude is heaven itself'; a phrase that Huxley had previously failed to understand.</p> <p>Curry (2019) draws a direct relationship between enchantment and Keats' (1817) concept of negative capability.</p> <p>Throughout the conversation both Dilesh and Kimmy vacillate between disillusioned cynicism and self-transcendent enchantment. The other participants are curious to know how typical these standpoints are. The likely answer is that they are all typical; <b>the student experience is rich and multifaceted, replete with disappointments, instrumental choices, compromise, gratitude, and moments of transcendent delight.</b></p>
<p>Lindsay: Who or what would you say you're grateful <i>for</i>, Dilesh?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Um. A whole bunch of things. People. Circumstance.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Perhaps there's a link here between gratitude and negative capability, and resilience?</p>	
<p>Peter: Yes, I think so. But Dilesh, would you say that was quite a <i>common</i> attitude among your peers?</p>	<p>Dilesh 'minds' when fellow students become apathetic and end up marking time; <i>getting through</i> the three years without <i>going through</i> something significant. For him, this damages the atmosphere of passionate co-creation.</p>

<p>Kimmy: So, my closest friends on the course are from the UK. And... this may sound horrible, but a lot of people warned me that—and it's not with everybody—but the work ethic is just different. Like in America the nine-to-five isn't a thing, at least not in my family. My dad, my sister, will be working until, like, 8 o'clock at night. Here, at 5 o'clock everyone's just running out the door. And some of my UK friends are very like, 'whatever', with their work. It's like, 'nah, I'll do it whenever'. And they'll just do the bare minimum. And that's fine, I'm the same way at this point, I just want to pass the year and move on.</p>	<p>Kimmy alludes to this as well, although there is more of a sense with Kimmy that she is in competition with her peers (and knows that she does well out of that). This is a personal tension in Kimmy's character. She judges her British friends for their relatively poor work ethic, while being concerned that this judgement reflects badly on her. She is concerned about appearing 'pushy', while also appearing to be proud of her pushiness, citing the efforts she goes to to network with tutors and experts.</p>
<p>Lindsay: Because the first year doesn't count towards your grade?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Yeah, it doesn't count at all. Second year doesn't count either, just the third year. Which is very weird because that's not how it is in the US. So, I'm like, I just wanna pass, but I'm still... I still pay attention in lectures. Like, I'll take all my notes. I've seen people who were just messaging everybody and lots of people online shopping during class and talking and it makes me angry. I'm like, 'I'm trying to focus'.</p>	<p>Kimmy's peers, bewitched by more immediate pleasures, actively disrupt the learning space by talking and shopping. It is difficult for her to remain wholly spellbound by educational objects when surrounded by the malignly enchanted.</p>
<p>Dilesh: From speaking with people I've grown up with, for some people—just for some of them—university is not about going to study. It's about getting a student loan for three years, living in halls, and getting really drunk all the time, and that's... honestly, that's what it is for</p>	<p>This anecdote stands in contrast with Dilesh's own account of what paying fees means for him, namely, motivating him to work as hard as possible).</p>

<p>some people. And I have quite a few friends who, it was this chance to leave home. It was less the aura of the university, but the aura of the <i>lifestyle</i>... you know, being free from your parents. They'd hand in something they started three nights before, scrape through and spent the rest of the time drinking. And quite a few of them have moved back home, back in with their parents. I have a friend who did a degree in PR and Marketing and is now a 999 call handler.</p>	<p>I recall feeling similarly about my own peers as an undergraduate, when no-one paid for their tuition, so perhaps it does not make a difference. Perhaps this is just what other people's lives look like when we are the heroes of our own story? How much can one <i>really</i> know of others' academic motivations, and experiences, or what they think about their subject? How much can we know of our own? How true are the stories we tell ourselves?</p>
<p>John: Do you think they didn't take the loan seriously, like it was just paper money?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Paper money, absolutely. And, despite that... they have this attitude like, 'I pay for this'. You do feel that now. I guess it must have shifted from when you got grants and everything, and now it's like we're paying <i>you</i>, rather than the other way around. It feels like the dynamic has completely shifted.</p>	<p>Dilesh is hinting that being given free tuition would have instilled a sense of gratitude. Being of the generation that received full fee grants, I'm not sure this is universally true (and gratitude is an attitude rather than a response to a situation).</p>
<p>Lindsay: Do you think life would be very different if students <i>didn't</i> have to pay fees?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Hmm. It's a huge thing. And there are so many different aspects. When Bernie Sanders was running, all the millennials loved him because he was, like, 'free education for everybody, no debt, get rid of it all'. And everybody was like, yes. And I was not... I mean,</p>	<p>Dilesh and Kimmy are both unexpectedly ambivalent about tuition fees. Kimmy's concern arises from a notion that it is 'fair' for students to pay for their tuition and not be a further drain on the economy, whereas Dilesh's is justified by the impact of fees on student motivation and commitment.</p>

<p>logistically, how the hell are you gonna do that? The US is already in billions of dollars of debt.</p>	<p>Have they 'bought into' the political rhetoric on fees?</p>
<p>Tasha: I guess... they could start fewer wars?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: Mm-hmm.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Another rationale might be, well, here in the UK we've reached this tipping point where people are now paying less back than they used to when the fees were a lot lower. So at the end of the day, universities are still being funded by the state anyway. So why not just be upfront about that and not put all that burden on the students? The concern is that debt is affecting students' life choices in ways that aren't good for them <i>or</i> society. The interest rates on the loans is way above base rate, and there's always the risk of loans being sold off to private debt collectors in the future.</p>	<p>During this exchange, Kimmy and Dilesh's thoughts and feelings about fees are called into question by the other participants, through the citation of specific examples that challenge their prior understanding of the economic necessity of tuition fees, their assumptions of impact on motivation/achievement, and their interpretation of fairness.</p>
<p>Kimmy: There's a design school somewhere in Europe that doesn't charge <i>anything</i>, whether you're international or whatever. But getting in is so difficult. Like, you have to be an amazing designer to get in.</p>	
<p>Tasha: In Italy? Scuola Normale Superiore. It's in Pisa.</p>	
<p>Kimmy: That's it!</p>	

<p>Tasha: Yes. No tuition fees, no living costs... they have their own entrance exam. They teach a few subjects, not just design.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: There are others, lots in Germany, that only charge a tiny amount—an admin fee, really—wherever you're from.</p>	
<p>Tasha: Do you know about School of the Damned?</p>	
<p>Dilesh &amp; Kimmy: No...?</p>	
<p>Tasha: It's like a one year MA in fine art. No degree at the end of it, but it's free. They take, like fifteen students a year? They used to meet above a pub in London, but I think they moved to Margate.</p>	
<p>Yosef: It worked on a labour exchange. They got people in to teach, and the students did a few hours of work, like admin for the teachers, or working in the bar to cover the hire of the room.</p>	<p>Kimmy highlights that universities do not exist in a closed system but are part of the wider economic system. Somehow, they have to be paid for. The rationale for who pays rests on conceptions of who benefits, which stem from a distinction between 'private' and 'public' spheres. The fee system in Germany (cited by myself above) is a product of their national context, where the state has played a more consistent role in research and development and the management of supply and demand. Private interest has historically been a less significant driver of profit and innovation in Germany than it has been in, say, the US (Blessinger &amp; Anchan, 2015).</p>
<p>Kimmy: But that wouldn't work... those teachers... they still have to get paid by <i>someone</i>.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: Yeah. It was more of a <i>protest</i> than a viable alternative to the current system. And the problem with these small, grassroots initiatives is that they can be very exclusive in their own ways. Either in terms of the standard you are when you apply, or—and it was the same in</p>	

<p>Ancient Greece—if you're not already well off you have to work while studying. And that's hard, right?</p>	
<p>Kimmy: My friend works in a bar. Like full time at the martini bar. She hates it. And she often has to leave lectures early and there's been times when we've had group projects and we've done this, and this, and she just hasn't... it's really frustrating. For everyone.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: My flatmate's boyfriend... he went to Oxford, and he said you're not allowed to have a job while you're studying there.</p>	<p>As unenforceable as such a rule is, it is true that 'elite' institutions like Oxford expect their full-time students to not compromise their studies with regular employment. However, Oxbridge graduates generally have little problem gaining a well-paid job on completion of their studies.</p>
<p>Yosef: It's true. It's part of the whole culture.</p>	
<p>Tasha: You can see the rationale behind it, especially if it's the kind of job that requires you to use your brain. You only have so much mental energy.</p>	
<p>Richard: You can see why people were so upset that the grant system was dissolved. It seemed like the only way to level the playing field.</p>	<p>The means-tested grant system ensured that students had their basic living costs covered, meaning that—in theory—all students could apply their full attention to their studies.</p>
<p>Dilesh: I work with the NCS – the National Citizens Service. It's teaching 15 to 17 year olds. And then they go into the community, do a short exhibition. Just three days. It's really easy.</p>	<p>Dilesh says that he is not thinking about the tuition fees, although he evidently is. There is a sense that he is managing his thoughts and feelings in order to tolerate the situation.</p>

Lindsay: Three days a week?	
Dilesh: In the holidays. And, um, when I can during term time. Plus, at home, I'm a swimming instructor. When I go home I work constantly to try and pay off being in London. My loan, I just think of that as rent. And I'm not even thinking about the tuition fees. It's like... everyone else is doing it and I'll deal with it. They've just bumped up the amount you have to earn to start paying it back, to 22K...	
Lindsay: Uh-huh.	This part of Dilesh's account accords with his earlier anecdote about schools and their motivations for advising and supporting student choices. A cynical view would be that, if schools <i>are</i> encouraging pupils to go to university because it improves their performance metrics, it is not surprising that they would not dwell on the fees and their implications. Do schools genuinely believe that university is the right choice for all these cases, or are they just 'chasing targets'? This is a concern raised by colleagues working in Widening Participation; for all the interventions and support provided, WP students are <i>still</i> less likely to succeed than others, and until that is no longer the case, they are being encouraged to get into a large amount of personal debt with no guarantee of personal gain.
Dilesh: And maybe there's not enough transparency when you go to university about what you're getting yourself into. People joke in high school like, 'I'm never going to use this algebra again', but there's never a class that sits you down and says, 'so right, you're about to make this decision and this is what it means, it's going to do this, and this and this. And in the long term, this is what's going to happen'.	
Peter: Do you get <i>any</i> of that here?	

<p>Dilesh: One of the best lectures I've had this year was this guy who came in to tell us about tax and how to balance expenses and things like stationery against... to offset our income, and it was like, <i>wow</i>.</p>	<p>Here, the emphasis is returned to the necessity of the mundane in the service of the enchanting, and the balance between one's 'art stuff' and one's 'job'. Dilesh observes that it is beneficial to have an integrated relationship between the two.</p> <p>Alison Shreeve (2008) identifies five broad categories for the ways art teachers imagine the relationship between their teaching job and their own creative practice. While she is careful to emphasise that they are not hierarchical, her categories do run in a continuum from separation to integration, and an ideal integrated relationship is implied, if not explicitly prescribed. In a later paper (2011) Shreeve illuminates the 'discomfort' felt by academics for whom this relationship is disintegrated. This finding supports Dilesh's assertion that there is 'goodness' in the mixing.</p>
<p>Yosef: Otherwise you're paying tax twice on everything.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Yeah, I had no idea I could do that. So, I'm going to Venice this year, to the Biennale. And this guy, he was like 'claim that ticket'. That was a fantastic thing to learn. Because when you leave, you're going to have to do your art stuff and your job.</p>	
<p>Holly: Yep.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: It's good to find two that mix. It's not necessarily just a job, and my art.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: I think there's a lot of teachers here who feel exactly that. And that's changed. It used to feel like a lot of people who came on the PgCert were only really teaching in order to support their creative practice. And then all of a sudden the university's making them do an academic course in something they didn't really want to do in the first place. With homework, and essays, and the like. You don't get so many like that now.</p>	

Dilesh: You can sense the tutors who are like that though.	
John: Can you?	
Dilesh: Yeah, 100%. There's some brilliant teachers, who are here because they want to be. And then, I could probably name, er, like just one... I won't name him. He's leaving. And when he's talking about <i>why</i> he's leaving, you can see. He says 'I've been in the institution for a long time. I want to understand what / want'. And I was like, 'well, do you not just want to give a little to other people while you're here?'	Dilesh judges this tutor for his focus on what he wants for himself, rather than what he has to give to others.
John: Midlife crisis?	This short exchange (taken verbatim from one of the original conversations) highlights a common tendency towards explanation as opposed to understanding. Being able to explain another's behaviour, when we find it wanting, can be comforting. This is particularly the case when their behaviour has potential implications for one's own self-esteem.
Dilesh: [laughs] I think he might be doing that.	To attribute this tutor's unavailability to their psychology relieves one from self-criticism.
Lindsay: John, you did art at university didn't you? I guess you didn't have Foundation then. No fees either. What was that like?	
John: Indeed. It was a very exciting time, you know? And the college I went to... the whole building was designed for artists. There was a greenhouse in the roof. And a pit in the back; a cage and pit where they used to bring tigers from the zoo for students to draw.	Mirroring the arc of the conversation in general, John's account foregrounds the physical environment of the university, and goes on to describe the people within it, before coming to his own experience. This resonates with something Newman was articulating through his gushing praise of the Gardens of Academe, namely that natural and built
Dilesh: No way!	

<p>John: Yes, and it was incredibly radical, artistically <i>and</i> politically, because it was after the recessions and strikes. A lot of people had been laid off, guys who'd spent ten, fifteen years working in the shipyards, thinking 'fuck this, I'll get redundancy, I've always liked drawing, I'm gonna go to art school'. So it was very mixed, people I thought were <i>old</i> then—in their late 20s—and they had a different work ethic. They were in early, they worked late. Then there was the hedonist group, the 18 year-olds, who were also into their art but... you know. It was an absolutely <i>life-changing</i> experience for me to go to art school. I didn't even know art school existed, about three months before.</p>	<p>environments—grand designs in every sense—and their historical and social significance, lead us to forget ourselves. Rupert Sheldrake (2018) theorises this phenomenon in his writings on pilgrimage and 'morphic resonance', which he argues may be understood spiritually and/or through a purely material (psychological) lens. Sheldrake's work is cited in Chapter Two in the context of the discussion of whether science is fundamentally disenchanting, his stance being that science and spirituality have a mutually beneficial coexistence.</p>
<p>Yosef: So how come...?</p>	
<p>John: Just... I was doing nothing else, and...</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Did you get laid off?</p>	
<p>John: No, I didn't get laid off, I just thought [sighs]... look, my mother and father didn't finish high school. No-one had been to university. No-one had ever <i>visited</i> the university. So they couldn't give me the route map. Anyway, I applied. I was good at drawing, good at English, so I got in. And it was life-changing. You learn things, hand skills, drawing skills, but then you have to come up with <i>ideas</i>. Conceptual. I don't know... is it still like that? Or do the students arrive knowing what the route is going</p>	<p>My impression of this exchange was that going into manual work might have been something of a shock for John; that he had started to follow in his parents' footsteps, and found them wanting.</p> <p>John sounds sceptical that an art education would still be as liberating, open-ended, and perhaps as multifaceted an experience as it was for him, in the context he describes.</p>

<p>to be? They expect to be picked up by a gallery, they expect to make money from their art, to teach...</p>	
<p>Yosef: I have to say, I think a lot of them—as Dilesh says—most of them aren't massively motivated by money.</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Not at all. I just know I want to be making. Creating things.</p>	
<p>Tasha: There are some students who are focused on the process, and some who <i>do</i> have a specific goal in mind for when they leave, and, uh, yeah, a few who just seem to be here for a holiday...</p>	
<p>John: I mean, it was the case when I was at art school as well. When you arrive, and you immediately see two or three geniuses in your year, and they're <i>totally</i> focused on the process. Like Holly said before, you don't go away to a library corner and study art; you're in a studio with a load of other people...</p>	
<p>Dilesh: And you see their work... it's there, yeah.</p>	
<p>John: You see the way they work, you see what time they come in and how late they stay. You see, um, and they will walk over and talk to you about your work. And that is in the <i>DNA</i> of art practice, you know?</p>	
<p>Dilesh: Uh-huh.</p>	

<p>John: ...which is why people find it difficult when they leave art school. They get a studio out wherever and they close the door and they're on their own. After three years of sitting with a group in crits and whatnot. And the competition! I remember my first day at art school, where you start with life drawing and there's a nude model. I'd never <i>seen</i> a nude woman before, or a nude man actually except in PE, in the showers... and this person strips off and it's like, start drawing. And you lean back and you're looking at other people's work and you think, 'shit, I was the best in my school, at drawing, and I am just not even in the... I'd better go to life drawing two or three times a day instead of once a day'. You know? Which is what I did. It really puts you in your place. I think a lot of people go to art and design with the knowledge that it's about the totality of the experience. Not just the practice or the discipline. And they know they might not be an artist after it, but this <i>totality of experience</i> will be the thing they want to do, <i>need</i> to do.</p>	<p>While John presents this as a disconnect between art education and the life of a professional artist, the idea of the university as a community of scholars has a long genealogy, and it was a dynamic that also underpinned the labs and tutorials in my own undergraduate studies in Biology. Comparisons between one's and one's peers' understandings are implicit and explicit across university curricula. While it has both costs (e.g. stress) and benefits (learning) for the individual, the benefit for society is clear; leading students to become less defensive or secretive about their ideas and understanding is a key justification for the conceptualisation of higher education as a public good.</p> <p>The use of the verb 'do' rather than 'have' at the end of John's account seems significant. It implies experience as something that one lives and/or actively creates, and resonates with Munday's (2013) prescription (after Marcel) for 'being' rather than 'having' in educational contexts.</p>
<p>Lindsay: Holly, you said you see students before university and at the end... do you see that experience—that <i>totality of experience</i>—changing them? Their motivations, what they <i>care</i> about?</p>	
<p>Holly: Well—as I said—a lot of them find it really hard to choose a subject for their dissertation. Like, even towards the end of the Autumn term. They need someone to sit with them and figure out what they</p>	

<p>actually <i>do</i> care about. Something they can get behind, and stay behind, for a few months at least.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: But they get through. And do you see them changing?</p>	
<p>Holly: Yeah, it's tricky because I don't see them all the way. Only a snapshot. So you can't compare. It's the writing they're usually worried about when they see me.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: But, isn't it part of the same problem? To write well is to be sure of what you have to say and how you're going to say it. So maybe writing is actually <i>harder</i> now, with computers. You start writing before you've really got a sense of what you're saying, and how you're going to structure and support that.</p>	
<p>John: It's funny because I walk around the studios here, computers everywhere, and I think about the year I graduated and the first Apple Mac arrived in the library. You had to find a secretary, you know, in the art school. And pay them like a hundred quid to type your dissertation.</p>	<p>Although word processors seemed like magic in the 1980s, it was the internet, and the immediacy of information and human connection, that amplified the draw of the screen. Curry (2017) writes of 'malign enchantment' with reference to the internet in its current form, where cookies and algorithms personalise content for maximum relevance and, hence, distraction power.</p>
<p>Holly: Which you'd handwritten?</p>	
<p>John: Which you'd handwritten. It was nuts.</p>	
<p>Holly: I just can't get my head around how you'd do that.</p>	

<p>John: You know, a lot of novelists still write in longhand. John Le Carre...</p> <p>Tasha: J.K. Rowling... Stephen King...</p> <p>Kimmy: No way.</p>	<p>Many people find it a lot easier to focus without app notifications and open browsers—even more so when completely disconnected from the internet (Dedyukhina 2018), and the writers John and Tasha cite are known for their analogue writing practices. The indelible medium of pen and paper prompts deeper forethought. This can lead to fewer revisions and, ultimately, a more efficient process.</p>
<p>Holly: I imagine you get distracted a lot less.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: I get them using pen and paper on the writing module I teach. Free writing, brain dumps, that kind of thing. But I don't practice what I preach. Not enough, anyway.</p>	<p>John is talking about creative, divergent writing practices, rather than the focused, structured articulation of ideas I am referring to. But we are both acknowledging the role and value of tactile, analogue writing practices in creative and flow states (e.g. Fullagar &amp; Kelloway 2009, Csikszentmihalyi 1975, Newport 2016).</p>
<p>John: Automatic writing. The Dada movement. That was Bowie's thing as well, wasn't it?</p>	
<p>Tasha: Yep. That's how Bowie used to write. He used to cut up the words, turn them into songs.</p>	
<p>Lindsay: I was reading a piece the other day on student perspectives on their education, and a lot of it was about writing. There was a quote... this student said: 'I feel much more confident now, I can write about things, I feel like I could write a book about anything.' So there's a sense that writing is a big part of what universities are about. Now, that's</p>	

<p>definitely changed since Newman, who believed in the oral tradition and thought the printing press was, like, <i>evil</i>.</p>	
<p>Tasha: Well; the struggle to communicate ideas... having them down on paper feels like the easiest way to assess that. More reliable, at least. But it's a different skill to vocalising it confidently. And we do that a lot more here than other universities I think. Presentations, crits...</p>	<p>Tasha cites the role of writing in universities as a vehicle for standardised assessment, rather than as a tool for the expression, development and deconstruction of ideas, which Marin et al. (2018) cite as the reasons for academic text's evolution from scriptural text.</p>
<p>Yosef: ...being able to talk confidently about things, yeah, that's crucial. Especially today when you have to pitch everything in five minutes. But you know... you get funding grants through writing still, don't you?</p>	<p>The meaning of 'confidence' arises again, with reference to speaking. There is a sense that it is vitally important in speech that one appears to believe what one is saying. It is less common, perhaps, to talk about confident <i>writing</i>, and perhaps one reason for this is because in textual communication, our bodies and voices are not there to betray our doubts. There is a connection here with Newman's ([1852] 2016) support of the oral tradition (the 'magic of the living voice', p.14) as a mode of learning that is not only more enchanting, but also more authentic and less vulnerable to misinterpretation.</p>
<p>Holly: Yeah. I mean, you do need to write, as an artist. But... I doubt many of our graduates actually need to do <i>academic essays</i> after they graduate.</p>	<p>...hence why educational institutions must remain 'partly without purpose' (Collini 2012). This conclusion aligns with Hogan's (2010) work on intrinsic value in education, and Biesta's (2014a, 2014b) on purpose and risk:</p>

<p>Lindsay: Should we be assessing through different forms of writing? An exhibition review. Some curatorial blurb. Or an actual funding application.</p>	<p>'when you take the risk out of education you ultimately take education itself away; education becomes un-educational and in some cases even anti-educational... this doesn't mean that education becomes good when we take all structure, all sense of direction and purpose away.' (Biesta 2014b).</p>
<p>Tasha: But then... that brings us back to the real world with a thump, doesn't it? Out of the olive groves and the beautiful gardens of ideas...</p>	

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

According to Becker (2007, p.133), research in the social sciences should be concluded with its insights ordered to form an *explanatory* theory or narrative. Having intended and framed this thesis as a *hermeneutic* exploration of disillusionment in the university—indeed, one that makes a clear distinction between hermeneutic and explanatory modes—a question arises as to whether the enquiry must shift into an explanatory mode in order to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

One alternative would be to allow the fictional conversation to ‘sit’ with its audience. Such an approach has a certain pedigree in educational theory, practice, and research. Clough (2002) is reluctant to even *comment* on the fictional narratives his research comprises, and certainly avoids venturing recommendations for educational policy and practice. Instead, Clough invites the reader to sit with the texts and form their own meanings. Biesta (2015) offers a similar prescription for the use of texts and other objects in educational contexts, sketching a pedagogy of ‘adoption’, where learners are invited to sit with an artefact rather than called upon to demonstrate comprehension. Biesta’s approach may be compared to ‘contemplative’ pedagogy (Barbezat & Bush 2014, p.9), where learners sit with texts and artefacts with the specific aim of finding ‘more of themselves’ in them, namely, making connections with their own personal experience, and reflecting on their own learning. I cite these last two examples on the basis that what I offer here is intended as a work of research rather than a pedagogic artefact, but from the standpoint that all scholarly works are—or should be—educational, and that the ‘object’ at which the enquiry is directed might equally be interpreted as the readers of the conversation, rather than the idea of the university, or the individuals who provided the source material.

The fictional conversation *is* a text with the potential to stand alone. A reader would be able to sit with this conversation, without the preceding chapters, commentary, or a concluding chapter, and find meaning in it. Nevertheless, the thesis as a whole does yield insights that amount to a theory of disillusionment in and of the university, and this warrants an explanatory conclusion. Hence, this final chapter explains the bearing the research findings have on an understanding of disillusionment in the university. It also considers the scope for further work.

### 6.1 Understanding disillusionment in the university

The primary aim of this enquiry was to explore and understand disillusionment in the university. This disillusionment was initially recognised as two specific manifestations: first, the perception shared among many of my academic colleagues—and evident in the higher education literature—that the economic mandate of universities has become alienated from their academic mission, and, second, the alienation of academic thought and political opinion from society at

large (underscored by the shock of the result of the 2015 general election). From these perceived alienations arises a concern that the purposeful endeavours of academics are being undermined.

In my role as an educational developer at a large specialist arts institution, I was curious to understand better the disillusionment I had heard expressed by academic colleagues, particularly the extent to which it might be shared by students and senior managers. I was keen to learn what those working and studying in the university understand the purpose of the institution to be, and hence their *own* purpose within it. I particularly wanted to hear about the experiences and conceptions of different *kinds* of people within the university, and to consider what would happen if these different conceptions were brought into conversation with one another.

In conversation with myself, the research participants accounted for their own motivations for entering academia, and the factors influencing their choices. They described the personal rewards and challenges of academic learning, teaching, and management. They expressed their opinions on aspects of higher education policy, particularly the funding of tuition, and commented on the spending decisions and strategic priorities of the university.

There are two findings from having these conversations—and bringing them together in fictional form—that I wish to draw particular attention to. The first was that **none of the participants (including myself) seemed overly disillusioned, and certainly not consistently so**. Frustration and cynicism featured in many of our accounts, but so did joy, optimism, and passion, and each participant alluded to dimensions of both disenchantment *and* enchantment as presented in Chapter Two. The conflict I was anticipating *between* participants' ideas of the university—for which I had intentionally sampled—was not in evidence. Rather, the individual accounts could variably be described as nuanced, balanced, and/or consciously *self-*conflicted. I have already cited Gadamer's observation (1992d) that political and societal structures assume confrontation and pull our attention towards difference rather than similarity. My *own* assumptions of disagreement between participants may have been one factor—along with ethical and practical concerns—in my decision not to attempt to host an actual group conversation (N.B. it was not *mediating* between disagreements that concerned me so much as power relations precluding the authentic expression of opposing points of view).

The second key finding is that through having the conversations, and subsequently transcribing, reading, and fictionalising them, I realised with hindsight that **I had felt somewhat disillusioned, and, crucially, that I now felt differently**. Throughout the course of the research, I came to see how the process and the outcome of my conversations with participants encompassed the dimensions of enchantment set out previously. In setting up the conversations, I had *faith* in myself and the participants, in our intention and capacity to understand each other, and the value of doing so. I was captivated by—and *wondered* at—our accounts of transcendent experience and changes in self-identity, and the many things we discussed that evade resolution and/or explanation. While conversing, listening, transcribing,

reading and creating, I increasingly felt a sense of *unity* with my interlocutors, not only through realising that we shared similar experiences and aspirations, but also as I developed my capacity to hear what they were saying and to feel the feelings they expressed. Through and throughout the research, I felt enchanted; by the participants and their stories, the acknowledged contradictions in their accounts, and their capacity to flourish despite these. In retrospect, these findings offer further justification for bringing myself into the conversation, as had I not done this it is possible that the experience of fusion with the participants' perspectives would be weaker and the personal change less significant.

Gadamer's 'first condition in the art of conversation' (2004, p.360), is a shared intention to explore disagreements together. In hindsight, this could have been a more explicit foundation of my interactions with potential and selected participants. *Mutual* enchantment—further to the personal enchantment described above—is contingent on a shared intention of this kind, and the fictional narrative method employed in this enquiry *sidesteps* this condition. Nevertheless, I contend that the method introduces the *possibility* of a shared intention to explore disagreements, and engages the imagination (of the participants, the researcher, and the readers of the work) in a way that is supportive of this endeavour.

These two findings are very much related to one another and are of fundamental significance. They have a bearing not only on how *disillusionment* may be understood in the context of the university (which I will go on to explain), but on how one understands the university itself, and the spirit of academic enquiry.

## 6.2 A theory of disillusionment in the university

In this section I explain disillusionment in the university, not as equal to or resulting from disenchantment, but as a response to the *recognition of contradiction*. Given the specific institutional context of the research, I consider why a greater toleration of contradiction might be seen—and anticipated—in an institution for the creative arts.

### 6.2.1 Disillusionment does not equate to disenchantment

Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance (the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes) assumes that dissonance is inherently intolerable, and one will always be driven to reduce or resolve it by employing attentive strategies that allow one to settle on one side or the other. For example, dissonance between a scientific and a spiritual view of the world may prompt a move towards either a scientific view of truth, or a more spiritual one. The 'disenchantment of the world' theorised by Weber as the incompatibility of science and religion (and elaborated by Gellner in his theory of cognitive productivity), corresponds with Festinger's theory. Universities originated primarily as religious institutions while also being a primary locus for disenchanted cognition, hence they would have been—and arguably still are—epicentres of dissonance. But, as has already been shown, the disenchanted character of the dominant

knowledge paradigms of modern industrial society does not preclude faith, wonder or unity; consumer capitalism and new technologies have the capacity to confound, amaze, and connect us. Secularisation, specialisation and individualisation—the dimensions of disenchantment—may certainly *challenge* the dimensions of enchantment, but they do not *invalidate* them. Indeed, disenchantment may be taken as *confirmation* of humanity's tendency to enchantment, and the persistent dissonance experienced (when faced with two seemingly contradictory modes of thought) as an indicator that we have not relinquished our *need* for enchantment. As I have argued, human beings are incurably enchantable, and eternally drawn to the enchanted dimensions of affective, attentive (not)knowing.

Hence, disillusionment—in the specific context of one's idea of the university—does *not* equate to disenchantment. A hypothetical disenchanted thinker, who has roundly rejected the products of enchanted cognition, has no reason to feel dissonance or grief. I propose that it is the *dissonance itself* that equates to disillusionment, namely, the discomfort felt on finding that one's idea—one's *illusion*—of the university is contradictory and/or inconsistent, and is therefore impossible.

## 6.2.2 The idea of the university is an impossible object

Examples of contradictions and inconsistent thoughts held by the research participants include (paraphrased):

*The university must shrink in order to survive. It cannot shrink, and it must survive. (Peter & Richard)*

*I need to believe that we are all doomed in order to stay positive (Tasha)*

*Paying for my tuition makes me more grateful for it (Dilesh)*

*The university is a refuge from the outside world, and a preparation for it (Kimmy, Holly)*

Academia is replete with dualisms, and these manifest as the dichotomies, conflicts and paradoxes illuminated in the fictionalised conversation. These include structure/control versus agency/autonomy, safety versus adventure, self-actualisation versus job preparation, and tradition/craft versus innovation. To recognise the university in terms of its inherent paradoxes, I venture, is to regard an *impossible object*.

Impossible objects entered the scientific literature in 1958 (Penrose & Penrose), and visual illusions have since included these figures in various presentations, for example the waterfalls and towers drawn by the Dutch artist M.C. Escher which, as I will show presently, constitute a powerful simile for the idea of the university.

Impossible objects create a sense of bafflement in the observer, who receives simultaneous contradictory evidence that cannot be disentangled. The perplexing nature of impossible objects continues even after they have been explained. Compare the two Penrose triangles pictured on the following pages. The Penrose triangle is drawn as a combination of

three 2D shapes, which are easily perceived when the triangle is pictured in isolation (Fig. 2). In contrast, the otherwise identical triangle in Fig. 3 has a shadow and is situated on a grid, next to an actual 3D object (a wristwatch). These contextual signs render the Penrose triangle as an impossible object.

Escher's illusions, for example *The Waterfall* (1961, shown in Fig. 4), are similarly impossible. The resistance of these kinds of illusions to cognition—a characteristic Sorenson (2001) calls cognitive impenetrability—is philosophically significant in that it contradicts those (such as Marcus 1981) who argue that explaining inconsistency dispels belief, and those (such as Stalnaker 1984) who maintain that only *possible* worlds can be the object of belief. The crucial point borne by these visual illusions is thus: *knowing that the impossible object is an illusion does not resolve the illusion.*

The university itself is not, of course, an impossible object. Universities exist in the messy but perfectly possible form of documents, frameworks, timetables, buildings, inventories, students, teachers, managers and administrators. It is the *idea* of the university, with its contradictions and inconsistencies, that is impossible. The university cannot support itself financially *and* provide a satisfactory experience for students. It cannot educate for sustainability *and* prepare students for gainful employment in a consumer economy. It cannot expand participation *and* maintain academic standards. It cannot have a strategic mission *and* intrinsic value. Disillusionment is one possible outcome from the rational realisation that the university cannot be everything we imagine, claim, or hope it to be. It is a negative emotional response that stems from a need for resolution.

As is the case with the visual examples given here, knowing that our idea of the university is impossible does not make it disappear. David Hume's prototypical theory of mind was thought to be limited by the impossibility of forming the idea of impossible things, such as mountains without valleys ([1739] 1978, p.32). But, as is evident in the impossible idea of the university, thinking something, and it being possible, are not the same thing.

Figure 2: Penrose triangle

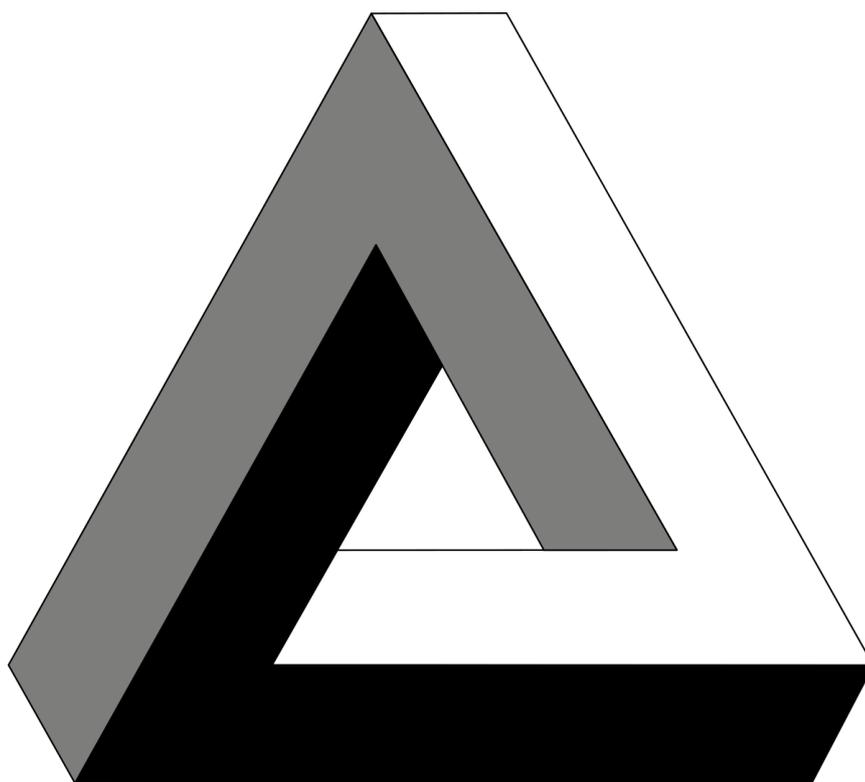
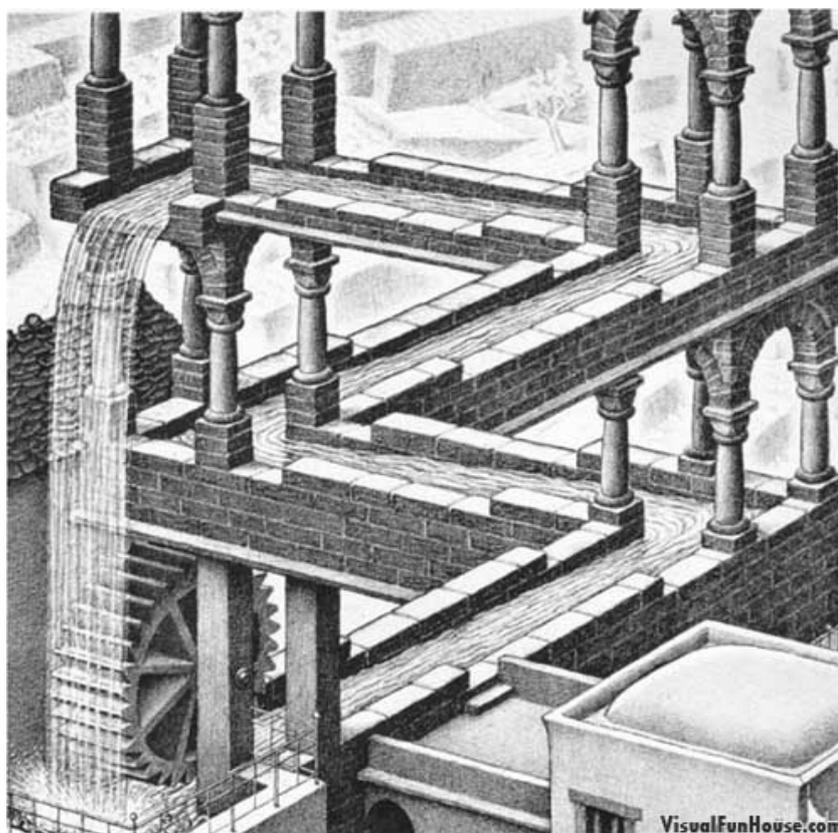


Figure 3: Penrose triangle on grid



Figure 4: The Waterfall (Escher 1961)



### 6.2.3 Disillusionment and illusionment are alternate emotional responses to impossible objects

If, in the case of *disillusionment* in the university, the illusion is an impossible image of the university, in what way does it make sense to speak of *illusionment*?

The common meaning of 'illusionment' is a state of having been deceived by a false impression of reality. This meaning is appropriate in the case of *possible* impressions, but not, I argue, when dealing with the apprehension of *impossible* ones, where one is not being deceived so much as faced with an unresolvable contradiction (as in the visual examples given above). Nor is illusionment a suitable term for a state where one has not yet *recognised* the contradiction. To regard one of Escher's paintings and perceive a plausible structure would not be *illusionment*. Rather, it would be misapprehension or ignorance. My proposition is that illusionment signifies an alternative response to the recognition of contradiction and/or inconsistency.

Illusions are concepts, and we rely on concepts to survive. The philosopher of mind John McDowell (1996) claims that there is no such thing as a concept-free thought. But, even if McDowell is right about this, it does seem that we are able to hold on to some concepts more loosely than others, and that there is the potential for this loose, playful entertainment of concepts to be expanded. Would this be desirable? Becker (2007, p.133) notes that there are two possibilities one faces when dealing with a complexity of ideas; either that 'the world has no real order', or it does, but one cannot find it. Both these possibilities, he notes, can be frightening. Illusionment, I propose, is an *alternative* to anxiety, denial, and the imposition of false order. It is a playful, resilient engagement with impossible concepts, such as the idea of the university.

In the fictional conversation presented in Chapter Five, Peter invokes the poet John Keats' concept of 'negative capability', described in a letter to his siblings in 1817 as the capacity to tolerate 'uncertainties, mysteries [and] doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. For Keats, negative capability is the essence of creative genius. It is the propensity to experience the world without certainty and with an open mind, to imagine a wide range of human experience and other minds, regardless of whether they are aligned with or antagonistic to one's own (Fessler 2017). Walt Whitman ([1855] 1892) expresses a similar propensity in his best-known poem *Song of Myself* ('I contradict myself...I am large, I contain multitudes'). Jean Luis Borges' story 'The Aleph' ([1945] 2000), the titular object itself an impossibility through which one can see everything from every angle simultaneously, captures a similar idea again. Borges' concept of 'selective forgetting' offers a means of oscillating between incompatible realities (Halberstam 2011, p.83), an 'active' process that overlaps with Nietzsche's account of forgetting as a 'preserver of psychic order' ([1887] 1969, p.58). In *The Aleph*, through juxtaposing the attempts of the narrator and a self-conscious poet to express the impossible, Borges invites the reader to consider the meaning of genius, and the nature of aesthetic judgement.

## 6.2.4 The arts university is a site of illusionment

I have cited Biesta's (2015) use of 'adoption' to signify an educational encounter where one sits with a mediating object rather than seeking to explain it. In a similar vein, I am proposing illusionment as the *adoption* of an impossible object, i.e. welcoming it and inviting it to *reside* with us. The metaphor of a settled residence is already present in the commentary on the conversation in the previous chapter, which notes that one needs to feel 'at home' in order to become spellbound or enchanted.

Escher's paintings are just one example of many impossible objects in literature, film and the visual arts that illuminate the concept of illusionment as I have presented it. Indeed, the richness of examples of impossible objects in literature, film and the visual arts is noteworthy when considering the context of this enquiry, which is situated in a specialist institution for the creative arts.

A key finding of the research was that the teachers, managers and students I conversed with gave no impression that they were wholly—or even primarily—disillusioned. I had expected that participants whose personal views were furthest from what I perceived to be the norm in higher education (for example, those who believe that students *should* pay fees) would express negative feelings and definite opinions. Instead, every participant recognised contradictions and inconsistencies in their idea(s) of the university and acknowledged them with good humour. The participants' tolerance and acceptance of these contradictions has been intentionally illuminated through the arc of the fictional conversation, which opens with the dreaming spires of Oxford, the lofty ideals of the Harvard Fellows, and the olive groves of Academe, and ends with the acknowledgement (accompanied, significantly, by light-hearted laughter) that learning outcomes and aligned curricula tear us out of the 'beautiful gardens of ideas' and 'back to the real world with a thump'. It appears to be illusionment, rather than *disillusionment*, that dominates the lifeworlds of the individuals who participated in the research, regardless of the variation in their initial responses to key questions on higher education policy, funding, and governance. The state of peaceful conflict Kant ([1798] 1979) espoused as a feature of the ideal university is indicated, through this work, to be a functional *internal* state as well as one that hypothetically exists between academic disciplines. The fact that the participating individuals all work and study in a creative arts institution is, I propose, highly significant, and offers clues as to what might be wanting in the lives and institutions of those for whom disillusionment is a constant presence.

## 6.2.5 Is this theory descriptive or prescriptive?

In earlier chapters I offered three dimensions of enchantment and argued that they characterise a hermeneutic encounter in which the attention is drawn, the imagination is enlivened, and the mediating object is approached as a mystery rather than a problem to be solved. Gadamer himself refers explicitly to enchantment in his explanation of 'transformation into structure'

(2004, p.112), the phrase he uses to signify something's 'becoming'. He draws a distinction between a temporary state of *bewitchment* (awaiting 'the redeeming word that will transform things back to how they were'), and enchantment, which he sees as a redemption, and a transformation into what one is supposed to be (one's 'true being'). The invocation of redemption lends a moral tone to Gadamer's argument, and a sense that there are ways of being that are true, good, and right, and ways that are not.

Hence, encompassed within this theory of disillusionment is a prescription. The elision in this thesis of illusionment and enchantment with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics yields an ethically significant implication for how one approaches and encounters another (by which I primarily mean other beings, although the principle extends to texts and other human works). Gadamer's hermeneutics does not seek the kind of knowledge whose aim is prediction and control. Rather, it seeks a perpetual *not-knowing* or state of wonder. It is an ethical engagement that allows the other to be an end in them/itself, rather than a means to one's own ends. In overcoming the urge to predict and control the other, we allow ourselves—to an extent—to be led or influenced, and hence to be educated. We allow the other to cast their spell on us.

There is an association in the Germanic languages between 'spell' (an incantation, story, or narrative) and 'spiel' (a play). For Gadamer, to come into one's 'true being' is to play and to allow oneself to be played. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explicitly cites discussions of purpose as a threat to the ethic of play:

'Someone who can penetrate the comedy and tragedy of life can resist the temptation to think of purposes, which conceals the game that is played with us.' (2004, p.112).

And yet, the conversation at the heart of this thesis constitutes a playful discussion of purpose, and/or a 'playing-with' such a discussion. Perhaps Gadamer underestimates our capacity for play, or overestimated its vulnerability to discussions of purpose. Equally, the conversation might be one in which purposes have been discussed (playfully), but not 'thought about' in the way Gadamer means. Nevertheless, it is my view that the conversation illuminates the possibility of playfulness, and the capacity for illusionment, particularly in a specialised institution for the creative arts.

My argument is not that explanation, prediction and control are 'bad', and being playful (and allowing oneself to become spellbound) is 'good'. The enchanted mode of understanding and the disenchanting mode of explaining do not have to contradict each other. Rather, they can and do *complement* one another. A hermeneutic encounter can inform a better explanation, while an explanation (such as the one presented in this conclusion) may inspire a hermeneutic encounter. The specific claim being advanced is that **social knowledge progresses through a responsive vacillation between the modes of understanding and explanation**. A common concern among many of those whose works are cited in the earlier chapters of this thesis, from Weber to Gadamer (including both C.P. Snow and F.R. Leavis, despite their apparent

disagreement), is that—in modern industrial society—there exists an *undue* emphasis on disenchanted explanation, while questions of human meaning and significance (requiring hermeneutic understanding) are underplayed and left unanswered. The belief that the two are incompatible creates dissonance, but *this is a controvertible belief*.

The work presented here is titled as a hermeneutic response but incorporates both modes. Clearly, in order to meet the criteria for a doctoral thesis, the work needs to be explanatory. It needs to show evidence of data collection, analysis, and synthesis, and justify decisions and claims with reference to appropriate literature. It is not my intention to argue that the doctoral criteria are flawed, as I genuinely believe that explanation arises naturally from this work, and enriches it. My intention is that the hermeneutic ethic underpinning this enquiry tips the balance further towards the mode of understanding than is perhaps typical or common in educational and social scientific research, and aims to demonstrate the value in such an approach, not just in research, but as a fundamental principle of academia and education. I will proceed to say a little more about this, before moving on to discuss the practical implications, and limitations, of the research.

### 6.3 The place of the hermeneutic ethic in education

Bass & Good (2004) highlight twin Latin roots of the word ‘education’, namely *educare*—to shape or mould—and *educere*, *to draw out*. These two roots have variable associations. One interpretation of the distinction is that in the former the agent is actively imposing intended outcomes on the passive object, while in the latter (as when drawing out a wire from ‘*ductile*’ metal) the outcome is less certain and contingent on the innate properties of the material. The difference between these two perspectives on education has perhaps been credited with more significance than the etymology warrants, as both linguistic roots refer to an active subject (the educator) acting on a passive object (the educated), and education is not like this. In education—as opposed to indoctrination—there is no clear dichotomy between active subject and passive object. In order to become educated rather than moulded or disciplined (i.e. indoctrinated), the learner is also an active, responsible subject, and this is the basis for Biesta’s (2014) description of the educational process as a ‘beautiful risk’. The learner also has to actively consent to be led, and it is not only the extent and awareness of the consent that is interesting, but also its potentially bidirectional character. A fully *mutual* educational relationship is one in which *both* parties allow themselves to be changed, and a ‘beautiful risk’ is borne by both learner and teacher. Metaphors for education that invoke a *single* leader, traveller, journey, creation or construction fall short of capturing what is really happening, and it is little wonder the translation of *Bildung* presents such a problem for the British, given the inadequacy of our educational metaphors, and hence our impoverished ideas of education.

To express the educational relationship thus, is to clarify the role of the hermeneutic ethic in educational contexts. In becoming educated, one actively *opens oneself up to experience*. But what *is* experience? Gadamer says experience is negative; a refutation or a

confounding of what is previously known or expected. As noted earlier, Vygotsky's use of 'perezhivanie' emphasises the subjectivity of educational experience, and acknowledges—as Gadamer does through his emphasis on historical consciousness—how this is contingent on *prior* experiences (Bakhurst 2019). When individuals embark on a process of understanding one another (either directly or through texts or other works), they do so from different standpoints, and do not know for certain where the other is coming *from*. Hence, to consent to be changed by the other means that one consents to be changed in a way that one *cannot predict*. A useful concept to explain what is going on here is what Galen Strawson (2009) calls 'S-procedures', namely, developmental encounters that are entered into willingly and also somewhat blindly (the 'S', for Strawson, signifies 'shaping', but I find it significant that the letter itself has bends one cannot see around). An 'S-procedure' exerts influences that are not fully known as the outset. The unknowability is not a compromise or a flaw of the encounter, but an inherent feature of it. We know that we do not know what we do not know, so we put our faith in something external—a single teacher, coach, or mentor, or a more complex educational structure—to take us on a journey where we will be shown.

Faith is a fundamental component of education in that it inspires one to proceed, despite not knowing where one will end up. Duke Maskell (2002, p.4) explicitly recognises this as faith in his analysis of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*: 'to aspire to be educated...is to desire to be something different and not to know what it is'. Faith is also—according to Kierkegaard—an 'affirmation that there *can* be no resolution' (Butler 2015, p.126), and opposes despair, 'the result of the effort to overcome the paradox of human existence' (p.125). This dualism of 'faith' and 'despair' can be likened to the concepts of illusionment and disillusionment as theorised here in the context of conceptions of the university. The responsive vacillation outlined above echoes Kierkegaard's insistence that even faith is no solution to paradox, because there *is* no solution. As Butler writes: 'the self is an alternation, a constant pitching to and fro.' (2015, p.125)

## 6.4 Practical implications of the research

Many British universities have programmes for 'in-house' teacher development. The format and ethos of these programmes varies, from 'light-touch' professional accreditation schemes, to academic postgraduate certificate courses and advanced apprenticeships, but they all tend to be designed and taught by specialist, cross-disciplinary educational developers. One implication of this research for the professional practice of educational development is in regard to the design and delivery of the teacher development curriculum, namely that teacher development programmes should ideally manifest a playful vacillation between less-enchanted *explanation* and more-enchanted *appreciation* of higher education theory and practice.

By way of example, let us imagine a developer with an overriding tendency towards a less-enchanted *explanation* of the university and the processes of teaching and learning. If the teachers in their tutelage are *also* inclined towards less-enchanted explanation—say they have enrolled on the course expecting to learn 'what works', pedagogically, in their discipline—the

developer and the teacher may feel well matched, but the learning will be impoverished, as it also will if both developer and teacher share an overriding tendency towards more-enchanted *appreciation*. Participants may well report a satisfactory experience on the programme, but opportunities will have been missed for participants to inhabit alternative ways of thinking and feeling about teaching in the university that will enhance teachers' capacity to entertain a 'confusion' of ideas of the university, and may ultimately enrich teaching and learning. Similarly to my own reclamation of 'vacillation' as a positive state, Serres (2015) reclaims 'confusion' to expose and challenge the assumption that coherence is always good or necessary. It is the claim of this thesis that a positive 'confusion'—which I have called 'illusionment'—redeems the dissonance or disillusionment of contradictory and/or inconsistent ideas of the university.

More immediate problems arise in teacher development programmes if educational developers and teachers have mismatched tendencies. A curriculum focused on specific teaching methods and design principles may be found turgid and uninspiring by a teacher with more-enchanted leanings, and one that revolves around poetic literature, affect, and reflection on the teacher's 'inner landscape' (e.g. Palmer 1997, hooks 1994) will not meet the less-enchanted teacher's expectations. Either situation may result in poor engagement, attrition or deferral, and/or low levels of participant satisfaction. Disillusionment may even be accelerated or exacerbated in this situation if the teacher perceives their *own* idea of the university, and/or the priorities of their college, department or programme, to be incompatible with the conceptions offered through the teaching development curriculum.

In summary, teaching development programmes in universities need to incorporate both more- and less-enchanted ideas of the university, and demonstrate that they can coexist in a state of playful vacillation. One way in which such a 'peaceful conflict' (Kant [1798] 1979) may be achieved is through layering the teaching development curriculum into aspects that are explicitly taught through content, and those that are—ideally also explicitly—taught through the pedagogic approaches used. For example, one might teach affective and/or poetic content using pedagogic methods and strategies that are explicated and discussed with participants, and/or invite creative, personal responses to theoretical and practical content.

This conclusion may of course be generalised. *Any* teaching that entertains both less-enchanted *explanation* and more-enchanted *appreciation* of concepts augments the learner's capacity to approach these concepts in different ways. But this 'confused' view of concepts may or may not be considered desirable in other institutional concepts and disciplinary domains. The particular focus of this thesis is on addressing the disillusionment felt by university teachers, which, it is argued, stems from dissonance about seemingly incompatible ideas of the university.

## 6.5 Limitations and opportunities for further research

Some will maintain that fictional narrative methods are inherently flawed, and that the researcher's creative agency in analysis and synthesis invalidates their claims to truth. Having

accounted for the methods used and the principles and criteria on which they should be assessed (in Chapter Four), what some might see as a methodological limitation I have shown is a clear strength in terms of what it has allowed me to explore in this thesis, which attends to what I found interesting about the conversations, and (no doubt related to this) how they led to the recognition and amelioration of my *own* disillusionment. It is unlikely that another researcher would have found *exactly* the same things interesting, or perceived themselves to have been changed in the same way. Although the process of fictionalisation was overseen by a supervisor who felt that the final synthesis was a justifiable framing of my interlocutor's remarks, it is uncertain whether another researcher would have concluded that the participants, despite their varied opinions on the way the university should be governed, judged and funded, demonstrated an unexpected, common capacity for illusionment.

One way to further this line of work—that potentially addresses these limitations and uncertainties—would be to employ fictional conversations as mediating artefacts in discussions between university students and staff. A similar methodology was applied by Bruce Macfarlane in his work on ethical dilemmas in higher education practice (2003), which used fictional accounts as the basis for group discussion in a workshop format. An analysis of participants' responses would add a further dimension to the work and expand its contribution to the field.

There may be a distinct limitation in terms of the scale of the work, which raises the question of how one might go about exploring empirically other universities' engagement with playful illusionment. This was beyond the scope of this research and indeed was not the intention. An enquiry of this nature and focus might demand a different methodological stance.

## 6.6 Final reflections

A recent special issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* features articles (e.g. Aldridge, Kenkies, Sun, Lavery, all 2019) on various educational invocations of Eros. Plato identified Eros as a demon or *daimon*, a force that is part of us but also controls us, and a desire to conquer and possess forever (Nygren 1983). The invigorating force of Eros in education is emphasised by hooks (1994, p.195), who quotes Keen (1984):

When we limit “erotic” to its sexual meaning, we betray our alienation from the rest of nature. We confess that we are not motivated by anything like the mysterious force that moves birds to migrate or dandelions to spring.

Barnett's (2007) understated 'Will to Learn', Gadamer's (2004) 'fusion of horizons', and Newman's 'living voice' ([1852] 2016) all allude to a natural (and good) force, experienced as a desire or appetite. While my thesis frames these particular concepts as enchantment, self-transcendence, and a hermeneutic ethic, Aldridge (2019), citing Susan Sontag (1964), acknowledges the question as to whether Eros, with its possessive, persuasive aspects, actually stands in *opposition* to hermeneutics. Here, again, there is both contradiction and

illusion. I have *felt* enchanted by the experiences of my colleagues and students, and by the work of writers like hooks, Barnett, Gadamer and Newman, but the pull has also been appetitive. The educational odyssey of doctoral study has required me to *strive* as well as to become *spellbound*.

Together, the striving and the spellbondage have invigorated my own understanding of the university and transformed my professional practice. My doctoral work has directly informed the evolution of the teaching development programme I lead. I now use much more playful and creative teaching methods, I incorporate poetic and fictional literature into the curriculum, and balance seminal pedagogic theory on *how* to teach (e.g. Salmon & Jaques 2006, Biggs & Tang 2011) with more philosophical texts on *why* one teaches (e.g. Kant [1798] 1979, Freire 1996, Hogan 2010, Biesta 2014), and how one *feels* about teaching (e.g. hooks 1994, Palmer 1997, Bache 2008). I have a greater desire to relate to and connect with my students and colleagues, and to respond to their needs. This shift to a more personal and responsive approach to teaching has coincided with increased pleasure and reward in the work, and—soundly evidenced through formal evaluation and other indicators—with my students' enjoyment of learning. Attendance, punctuality, mood and energy in my classes is higher than it used to be, and increasing numbers of colleagues report that the course has transformed their approach to teaching. Year on year the course receives more applications, indeed more than we have the capacity to accommodate (we now enrol over 100 participants annually). No doubt becoming more capable and confident over time and with experience is a factor. Nevertheless, I feel significantly more enchanted—and less disillusioned—with the idea of the university and its purpose than I did when I embarked on this journey.

Inside the cover of *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 2004) is a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke:

*Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is  
Mere skill and little gain;  
But when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball  
Thrown by an eternal partner  
With accurate and measured swing  
Towards you, to your center, in an arch  
From the great bridgebuilding of God;  
Why catching then becomes a power—  
Not yours, a world's.*

To be 'the catcher of the ball thrown by an eternal partner', rather than catching 'only what you've thrown yourself', is what I have described as the 'hermeneutic ethic', namely, an imaginative attentiveness to other horizons. In explaining his inclusion of the poem in the book, Gadamer writes: 'It is this sense that founds community' (2004, p.19). Rilke's nomination of God as the driving and steering force of this mode of engagement calls the reader's attention to the mystery of the given, and leads one to consider whether this way of being is *natural* or *moral*, or

indeed whether Nature and God are one and the same. While Gadamer himself (and/or the translator for the Continuum edition) only uses the word 'enchantment' twice in *Truth and Method*, the foregrounding of Rilke's poem hints at not only an ethical, but also a *spiritual* significance that Gadamer ascribes to his hermeneutics.

To be enchanted with plural ideas of the university does not, I argue, equate to living in a fantasy world. In an address given at Heidelberg in 1986, Gadamer talks explicitly about the idea of the university, calling for it not to be *imagined* it so much as recognised 'in concrete reality'; specifically, a modern, industrialised reality that depends on organised, bureaucratic systems while also being a space of 'abstract, exotic and unpragmatic knowledge' (1992b, p.56). Through this thesis I have asked whether the apparent tension between the abstract or exotic, and the pragmatic adroitness required for professional practice, can be invigorated as a positive vacillation. It seems, from the synthesis of the transcripts of conversations with students, teachers and managers at my own university, that it can. The extent to which this is true across the higher education sector remains in question.

The prefix 'dis-' signifies that something has been lost or taken away. If disillusionment in the university stems from an idealised university replete with contradiction, it is an example of cognitive dissonance, an uncomfortable psychological state arising from conflicting attitudes, beliefs, and values. According to Festinger (1957), humans are naturally impelled to resolve such inconsistencies and reestablish a state of harmony, with the intensity of the pressure being proportional to the magnitude of the dissonance. Festinger's theory is logical and disenchanting, claiming that dissonance is reduced through either changing, adding or de-weighting beliefs. I have argued here that some inconsistencies can and should be tolerated, even embraced. In Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* ([1798] 1979), the ideal university is a space of perpetual, peaceful, and legitimate conflict (Palmquist 2004). I feel that, in one university at least, this ethos has been shown to persist.

The specific structure of Kant's Prussian universities, and the evaluative connections between philosophy and the other disciplines, are no longer in existence (if indeed they ever really were). Ethical guidelines are well-established in the medical and legal professions, the sciences and the social sciences, and are regularly reviewed. Perhaps the integration of philosophy into and across the disciplines has become more sophisticated and less obvious? Some feel something is lacking. Sheldrake (2018), like C.P. Snow ([1958] 1998) before him, argues that, while medical sciences are making rapid advances, 'they do not confer a sense of meaning or purpose in life, nor are they about improving relationships, or instilling values of gratitude, generosity and forgiveness' (p.13). For Sheldrake, this can only be borne through spirituality. On the other hand, a certain spirituality could be said to be *abundant* in medicine. While medicine and law increasingly rely on electronic 'intelligences', and it has been argued that these are among the professions most highly susceptible to computerisation (Frey & Osborne 2013), there are other stories—notably emerging from the current coronavirus pandemic—that illustrate the absolute reliance of the medical profession on faith, hope and

love. So perhaps it is the case that we tend to adhere to a particular narrative, and to entertain multiple narratives is generally uncomfortable. It should also be noted, with regard to the dualism of enchantment and explanation, that the pandemic has troubled our assumptions of dominion over nature by reminding us that pathogens are also constantly evolving in ways that circumvent our expectations.

Contemporary literature on higher education is rich with apparently unifying, consistent theories, but they all have their blind spots. In seeking coherence, they fail to hold the impossible truth in play.

When I embarked on this thesis, I was motivated by a desire to help a particular group of people who I perceived to be struggling, i.e. those who teach in universities. Many of us working in education and other public services are acting on a similar drive. Van Kessel & Burke (2018, p.8) note that 'teaching has long been constructed as a profession that saves'. They also point out that this desire can be self-centred, in that through creating a legacy we avoid being forgotten. It is certainly a truism that in serving others we benefit from feeling needed, and this has likely influenced my *own* motivations in investigating the idea of the University. At the outset of this project I sought to get to know the university, to identify what might make things 'better', and how I might contribute. This framing sounds both instrumental and naive to me in light of a lengthy contemplation of enchantment, illusionment, and the notion that darkness has to accompany light; one cannot exist without the other (Bengsten & Barnett 2017).

This exploration has left me with a different perspective that is complex and nuanced. It has made me aware of my own faith, awakened my sense of wonder, and given me reason to hope. I am curious to see what others will take from it. Perhaps it will encourage them to interrogate their own assumptions about what universities are for, and how they are understood and experienced by those working and studying in them. My hope is also that it will inspire and enable more bold, creative conversations about the purpose of the university.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: A conversational cluster

The purpose of including this cluster in the appendix is to provide the reader with the detail (shown but not discernible in Figure 1) of the source material making up the conversational cluster described in Chapter Four. The text shown below gives a sense of the tone and content of the actual conversations, the transcripts of which are not included in their entirety. It enables comparison with the fictional conversation in Chapter Five, and an assessment of the extent and nature of the process of fictionalisation.

John      You're like, one of these compulsive degree takers

LJ         Well

John      I mean, I really admire you because I, I registered, I started a PhD like, 15 years ago, and I thought... life's too short (laughs)

---

John      I do every so often, and this place it drives me nuts I think, you know what I'm gonna do a proper degree somewhere you know, I've always been interested in American history, I did a (Harvard?) fellowship, in the states, you know?

LJ         I'd love to do PPE

John      Yeah... yeah!

LJ         You know? I'd love to enrol as an undergraduate at Oxford and see what... infiltrate (laughs) infiltrate the leaders of the future. Live on a canal boat... rent out my flat.

John      The leaders of the future, yeah yeah!

---

LJ         Yeah. [Laugh]. But I think it's really nice to get out of the university and get into these open spaces.

Yosef     Absolutely.

LJ         'Cause I'm reading John Henry Newman's, uh, idea of the university at the moment, and it's all very... You know, you read it and it's quite idealist now, but it's all about thinking back to Athens and the gardens of academy and Oxford and the old University of Paris where, you know, there's these beautiful parks and everything, they're just reserved for the wise and the thinkers. With the idea that, you know, you, you couldn't kind of think well unless you had all your physical [laughter] needs and desires met.

Yosef     Yeah.

LJ         So that was his argument.

Yosef Where did it all go wrong?

LJ [Laughter]. Well, well, that's the thing. I think reading that I struggle to kind of see... I, I struggle to... I struggle to see the logic in it because I know a lot of people who think best under pressure and in times of adversity and I don't necessar-... I think it's, if you are a thinker it's probably... You're probably more likely to say, well, I need to be in a beautiful place in order to think.

Yosef Um, well I think that greatly depends what you're thinking about obviously.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Um, and uh, there's something to be said for the uh, the kind of palatial decadence of the ivy league institutions.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Um, but I personally wouldn't... I'd rather be in a... In a uni in London.

LJ Uhuh.

Yosef That's just because I prefer things about being in the city. Being in those bastions of privilege.

LJ Right. But what do you prefer about being in the city? The... Just kind of being in the centre of it all?

Yosef Well, I guess I find the, kind of, I'm... I'm a city person. I find the city's exciting and I find it dynamic...

LJ Yeah.

Yosef And I like it. You know, the diversity and the difference and the... It's just exciting stuff going on.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef And my very limited experience of those prestige institutions is that they're also can be quite... Despite the, uh, almost old trappings of tradition and privilege and so on, I find them quite depressing.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef I don't understand how a lot of... Similarly, yeah, a lot of students who feel uncomfortable in that context, is they don't find it conducive to any kind of, part, you know, their educational studies.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Shut off to more opportunities, great, whatever.

LJ Yeah, can definitely see that. Is that just, um, I mean, how do you know that about your students though?

Yosef Uh... Well simply from... They're less like students and more, I guess, more my contemporaries really. Some of whom went to Oxford and Cambridge. And, uh, yeah. My brother's girlfriend was like the only black student in, in her year at Oxford.

LJ Uhuh?

Yosef And she hated it.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef And she just felt very isolated and like this wasn't... Wasn't a place for her. I, you know, it's obviously changing a bit. But a lot of these places are, inevitably, conservative.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef And uh, and they go and, yeah, in a lot less... People have got to feel comfortable, I think, when they're... What they're studying.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Um, that doesn't mean [inaudible] strongly and whatever but I think they need to feel like the university's offering them something. That they're getting something back from it and from the institution and the lecturers and, you know...

LJ Yeah.

Yosef The students and so on.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef And if you feel that you're [inaudible]... If you feel marooned, uh, you know, without... Uh, within a department that doesn't really recognise what you have to offer or doesn't offer you much in terms of curriculum and so on, and the other students you're with come from a very different world of privilege and so on...

LJ Yeah.

Yosef I think it's very difficult to sort of just set all that aside and just...

LJ Absolutely.

Yosef Get into it. [Laugh].

LJ Yeah.

Yosef But um...

LJ I mean, it's hard enough putting all that kind of life stuff aside when you're 18 anyway.

Yosef Well, absolutely.

---

LJ Just seemed very normal. I did biology [inaudible] journalism. It was a strange mix. But, yeah. It was, it was, it was the people. And I think I just felt very isolated. I think maybe I would have... Maybe that would have happened at Oxbridge as well but, um...

Yosef It's a weird time, isn't it? For students. I mean, there's obviously there's the institution itself but then there's of course the, the individual and that particular moment.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Going somewhere new or different. There's a...

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Collision of all these events.

LJ Yeah. And of course back in...

Yosef It's [inaudible].

LJ But back in Newman's time 18 was, you know, that was the cusp of adulthood. And now it's, I don't think it is anymore. I think now we don't really... I mean, I was reading this book by [inaudible] learning and identity and he was making the case that our identities just aren't fully formed until about 15 years later these days.

Yosef Yes.

LJ For a number of reasons, you know?

Yosef Still working on it.

LJ [Laugh]. Exactly.

Yosef Really. I mean, I think that's probably one of the biggest problems, obstacles, is students have to overcome in fact...

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Is, is trying to identify at, at a relatively young age what area they're supposed to be concentrating on.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef You know? I think that's [inaudible].

LJ And actually concentrating on it.

Yosef Yeah.

LJ Rather than all the other stuff...

Yosef Yeah, exactly.

---

LJ (laughs) but we were... I was supposed to go to Cambridge. My brother and sister went there and I... decided not to go, because my sister had a nervous breakdown and my brother wasn't doing very well and I thought, mmmhmm, maybe this isn't a good idea

John Pressure (inaudible)... Cambridge.

L But I had this idea of a university that it was a beautiful building, you know.

John Palladian?

L Yeah [*Gothic actually!*], so that kind of fitted the bill for me. But it didn't really work out. But we... no-one talked about the subject they were studying. So we were all kind of merged in together, and living together in... terrible proximity and eating together, and all the things that you say, but we weren't talking about our

John Is that healthy?

L Well, we weren't talking about our studies. We weren't, it wasn't like a learning community in that sense. And I think that's, that's... why I didn't like it. You know, that was what I was expecting. I was expecting to

John That's what you'd signed up for

L be around intellectuals who were really excited about...

John Challenging you, yeah

L This was just like being at school, this was just like being in Year 9, and it was... I hated it.

John Yeah?

L Everyone was very apathetic. Just interested in drinking, and sex... not drugs... they were all a bit tame in that way, but... yeah, it wasn't like that at all. But I really like this idea about the kind of, the people coming together and actually being really excited about what they're learning. So, was yours a bit more like that?

---

LJ [Laughter] [Inaudible]. Stop bothering the coots. Um, yeah, so and that's interesting. So you must kind of see, you know, kids that before university, and kids, you know, during and at the end, and, and what do you... I don't know, what do you kind of notice about what's going on for them? I mean, maybe in terms of their motivations changing and their, their hopes and their, their dreams and, I guess, and the way they see the world. You know, what do you kind of observe? Because it's really hard thinking back. I mean, I'm 38 now and I just don't really remember how I felt about university at all.

Holly [Laugh].

LJ Not that I was getting pissed all the time, I wasn't, I just think it just wasn't the most important thing going on in my life. Just something that I had to do.

Holly Mm.

LJ I don't know if it changed me that much. But I don't remember. So it's really interesting [laugh] and I don't work directly with undergraduates. So it's interesting to hear from people who, who do. So I guess, you know, what...? What do you see?

Holly Well I guess with the dissertation tutorials you're mostly helping them with what they've missed in the course. [Laugh].

LJ Right. [Laughter].

Holly You know, the bits they didn't listen to probably.

LJ Yeah.

Holly So all... I mean, a lot of people find it really hard to choose a subject for their dissertation. So you'll see them a few weeks.

LJ Uhuh.

Holly Like especially towards the end of autumn term and they... Like they still haven't...

LJ Don't know what to do yet.

Holly Gotten specific. Yeah. But they've got lots of ideas, I think, I think it's the time that's the problem in a way because it's actually having someone to sit down with them...

LJ Yeah.

Holly And go, right, okay, let's look through your ideas.

LJ Yeah.

Holly And try and figure out the bit that you can actually do this or... [Laugh].

LJ Absolutely. It's...

Holly You can concentrate on for that long. [Laugh].

LJ Yeah. And I wonder whether that's the thing. You know, this kind of... Because it really doesn't matter what [inaudible] dissertation at undergraduate level, you've just got to pick something and just go with it.

Holly Yeah.

LJ I don't know. It's not like it's gonna be the start of your research career.

Holly And I think... I think maybe this is something... I think it's easy to get overwhelmed by the volume of information and that's only getting greater.

LJ Yes.

Holly Um, and like you have so many options that you can choose because you've got all this information at your fingertips.

LJ Yeah.

Holly It's even more overwhelming to kind of stop doing the, the research and the finding information, and actually settle on what you're gonna look at.

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LJ I guess I'm thinking about... See one of the things that I think about is, is do universities have to be mainly for 18 year olds? And I guess, and I'm sure you're probably, you know, [inaudible] I'm sure you're probably the same way about, you know, your own undergraduate degree. And the extent to which it's changed you or not. Um, and thinking about, I guess, I guess maybe the point of view I'm coming from is that maybe I wasn't quite ready at 18 to have my world changed that much.

Holly Yeah.

LJ And it's been later experiences and other educational experiences that have been more...

Holly Yeah.

LJ Transformative.

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Kimmy I think... I'm from, like, a small town outside of Boston and it was just such a bubble where everybody knew everything about you kind of thing, you know. And like there's no there's no getting out of it. Like my sister's 26 and she just finally moved out of the town, but she moved in with friends that she's known since she was, like, 12 years old from the same town. So you get stuck and I never wanted to get stuck and I was fortunate enough to be able to travel throughout high school, um, and I just knew there was so much more out there and do- I knew I wanted to do fashion, I knew I wasn't really a designer, and so I knew I wanted to do business. And there are courses in the States, but none that are, like, oh my God, yes, great. There's not enough of them. So I said I'd never even been to London and I was like screw it, we're gonna go look at schools and we came and looked at three of them. I really, really liked it. I needed something different, like I needed to get away and try something new.

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LJ Um, so I was talking to one of the, er, film and documentary lecturers. He was one of the first people that I talked to [sliding sound], and he, one of the things he was thinking about was he preparing, him and his, his brother [bang]. And his brother [construction sounds] didn't go university. He kind of went away, and I, I guess he [unclear] or in, um. His brother kind of just simply made the decision to just go away and just work.

Dilesh 1 Yeah.

LJ What he was doing. And did that ever occur to you to kind of to... rather than borrowing the money and coming to university...?

Dilesh 1 Hmm.

LJ Um, to simply get started.

Dilesh 1 Yeah.

LJ I mean, what was it that [construction sounds], what was it particular about, about coming to university that you felt enabled you to, what did it enable you to do [unclear] not going to university?

Dilesh 1 Well, I, I didn't think I was ready. My, um, I've always been really creative, always really creative, and I've, um, done drama outside school, because my art department in my school was, was awful. It was dreadful. It was not what I feel should be an art course or art education at all in any way, shape, or form.

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LJ You know, identity formation. I think that's... That's something that's really... I, you know, I don't think I was ready to go to university, I don't think I was ready to get promoted [?] out of university. I shouldn't have gone really. I think I get much more out of my studies now.

Yosef Yes.

LJ Because I know how to focus on it and I know why I'm doing it.

Yosef Well certainly I did going back as a mature student...

LJ Yes.

Yosef [Inaudible].

LJ And when did you do your MA at [inaudible]?

Yosef About ten years ago.

LJ Right. And did you find that you were a better student then?

Yosef Well, better... Um...

LJ [Laugh].

Yosef I was a more critical, critically engaged student.

LJ Yes.

Yosef I was more a pain in the... Pain in the ass as a student I'm sure. Um...

LJ To the, to the lecturers?

Yosef Yeah.

LJ Yeah. In what way? Kind of...?

Yosef Well I guess because, because although I'm a fan of academia, I think uni's a good idea, not everybody should go to them. Yadda, yadda, yadda. I think they're deeply flawed institutions.

LJ Ah.

Yosef And I think that the whole business model that now seems to dominate academia that's gone through the years, yeah, it's, it's problematic. That was demonstrated, oh, um, proven to me by my experience there.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef It was, uh, I mean, it wasn't personally [inaudible] quite a few different places but it was just... I, I was on the other side for a change.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef For the, for the first time in a while.

LJ Uhuh.

Yosef And I was just acutely aware of how students were being short changed.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Um...

LJ In what way?

Yosef I don't think it's unique to where I went, I think they do the same...

LJ So not getting enough contact time and...?

Yosef I think that they, uh, think, at the risk of being reductionist, the most universities are now geared towards making money. They're... They're companies, they're corporations.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef And students have become [inaudible] resource and like any other company the idea of maximised profit.

LJ Yeah.

Yosef Now that doesn't mean there aren't any benefits to accrue from going to university...

LJ Yeah.

Yosef But I think there is a disconnect between what students are sold and what they pay for...

LJ Yeah.

Yosef And what they receive.