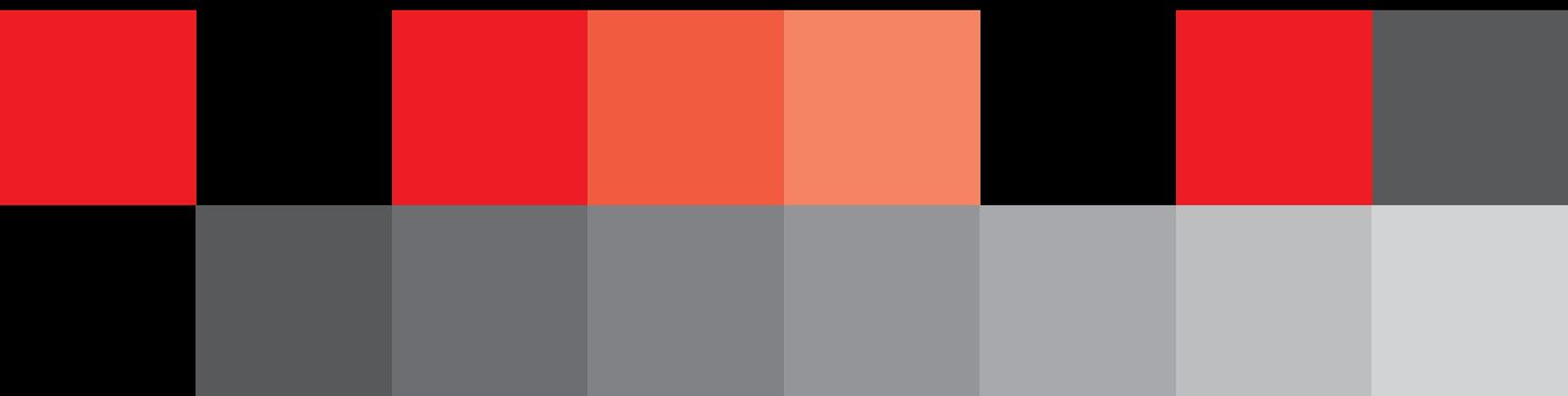# Whitlam Institute
WITHIN WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

PERSPECTIVES
on Education for the Public Good

Charting Uncertainty

Professor Sharon Bell

September 2017

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Professor Sharon Bell is an academic leader with twenty-five years of leadership experience in the Australian higher education sector. She is currently Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Planning) at Western Sydney University and an Honorary Professor at the Australian National University. Professor Bell is also an Emeritus Professor at the University of Wollongong.

Professor Bell holds a PhD from the University of Sydney in the discipline of Anthropology and began her career as an ethnographic filmmaker at Film Australia. In addition to holding senior executive roles in Australian universities over the past decade she has conducted research on gender equity in the Australian academy and she authored the influential report *Women in Science in Australia: Maximising Productivity, Diversity and Innovation* (FASTS, 2009). With Professor Lyn Yates from the University of Melbourne she has completed a major project as CI on an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant on *Women in the Scientific Research Workforce: Identifying and Sustaining the Diversity Advantage.*

As Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Charles Darwin University (2011-2016) Professor Bell had what might be described as an unparalleled coupling of strategic and leadership challenges in the tertiary education sector. In this role, with responsibility for the International, Research and Academic portfolios she led a highly focussed and strategic engagement agenda that concentrated on developing long-term and multi-faceted relationships with a small number of valued partners, together with capacity building investment in a wider range of institutions.

Throughout her career Professor Bell has also been privileged to work closely with Australian Indigenous Communities. Her award winning documentary *88.9 Radio Redfern* was first screened on Australian television in 1989, is regularly rescreened on NITV and was screened in 2016 at the ARC cinema in Canberra as part of the Black Screen program. Professor Bell established the University of Wollongong's artistic exchange program with the Yolngu community of Yirrkala, a link that was strengthened during her time at Charles Darwin University with community leaders at Galiwin'ku.

Professor Bell is a regular contributor to the Higher Education supplement of *The Australian* and also to *The Conversation*. Her commentary focuses on equity in the higher education sector.

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Whitlam and pursues the causes he championed. The Institute bridges the historical legacy of Gough Whitlam's years in public life and the contemporary relevance of the Whitlam Program to public discourse and policy. The Institute exists for all Australians who care about what matters in a fair Australia and aims to improve the quality of life for all Australians.

The Institute is custodian of the Whitlam Prime Ministerial Collection housing selected books and papers donated by Mr Whitlam and providing on-line access to papers held both at the Institute and in the National Archives.

The other key area of activity, the Whitlam Institute Program, includes a range of policy development and research projects, public education activities and special events. Through this work the Institute strives to be a leading national centre for public policy development and debate.

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Foreword

On 23 October 2012 Professor Janice Reid, the then Vice-Chancellor of what was the University of Western Sydney, concluded her Sir Robert Menzies Oration on Higher Education with the following words:

> Our best influence…is in our capacity to embed in the lives of our institutions those values which [Menzies] and Whitlam invoked, however different and distant their times: the duty to use knowledge for social benefit, to strive to remove barriers to equality of opportunity, to create the grounds for productive engagement with our communities and to pass the baton of responsible citizenship to the generations which follow us. This is what makes a higher education higher.

I recalled these words as I sat down to write this Foreword to the Whitlam Institute's latest Perspectives paper, *Charting Uncertainty*, by Professor Sharon Bell.

Sharon offers a narrative on the tides that have ebbed, flowed and at times battered our universities in the years since she commenced her studies at the University of Sydney in 1969. While it 'does not pretend to present a contemporary history' of higher education, it does offer rich insights weaving together her 'personal provenance' and an insider's account of institutional change.

It is an account well attuned to these times in which, she concludes, universities have become uncertain of their role. As the prolonged debate about university reform drags into another year, Sharon questions the path we've been on and makes a case for the restoration of the public good as the cornerstone of higher education's role.

I would suggest that this is firstly but not simply a matter of principle.

It points to a need, in the first instance, for the university sector and its leaders to be clear as to its purpose. As this paper testifies, the public good cannot be assumed to be a genuinely common purpose. This is evident in the continuing saga over Higher Sector Reform where we seem incapable of raising our sights above the trenches of funding, competition and institutional survival.

As can be discerned in the organisational shape-shifting Sharon describes, institutional design flows from the institutional purpose. If that purpose is not consciously articulated then the institution itself is left to the fate of invisible hands.

Sharon urges the sector to seize the 'post-truth moment' for the greater good.

I would go further. For what becomes very apparent in *Charting Uncertainty* is that we all have a stake in the greater good of higher education and it is too important to be left to the vagaries of institutional fads. Sharon rightly warns us of the risks of sleepwalking into our future.

Charting Uncertainty invites us to contemplate a different path ahead.

Eric Sidoti
Director
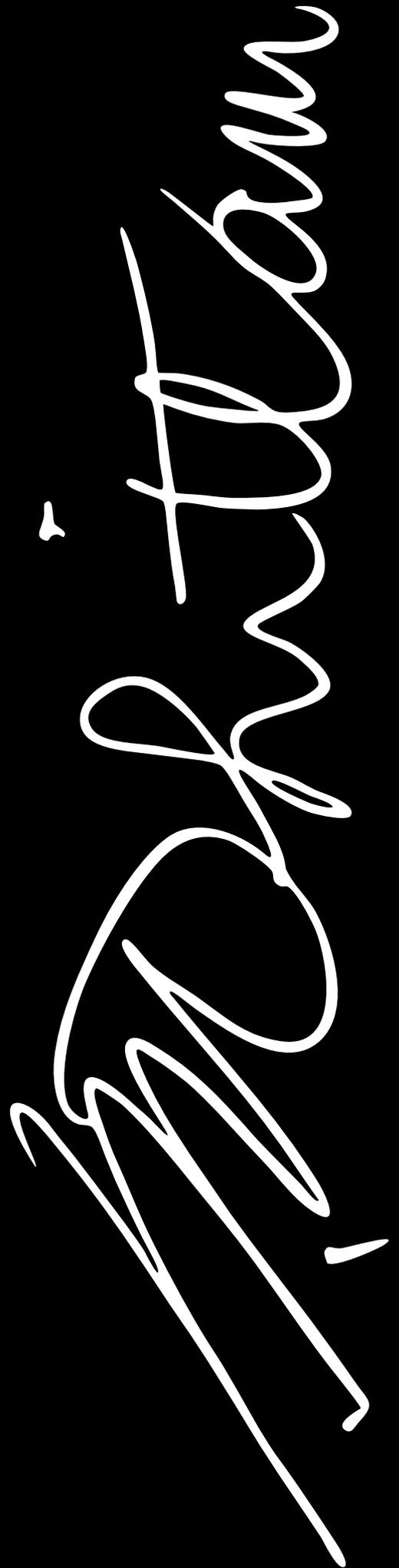
Charting Uncertainty

> The war of intervention in Vietnam is ending. The great powers are rethinking and remoulding their relationships and their obligations. Australia cannot stand still at such a time. We cannot afford to limp along with men whose attitudes are rooted in the 1950s—the slogans of fear and hate. If we made such a mistake, we would make Australia a backwater in our region and a back number in history… (Whitlam, 1972:3-4)

Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister (1972-1975) both shaped my personal academic experience and transformed Australian higher education, laying the foundations of what was to become the accessible, high participation sector in which I have worked for over twenty-five years. Whitlam's legacy was not just policy firmly grounded in the value of education to a society that embraced equality of opportunity, but the inspirational belief that we can be bold to achieve what matters[1].

The focus of this paper is on some of the processes and dynamics of incremental change that have shaped contemporary higher education in Australia, and the government policy and underlying political philosophies that have driven this change. I am interested in exploring the question of whether we in higher education were seduced by the utopian intellectual dream of the academy playing a central role in the emerging knowledge economy whilst sleep-walking in to our future. I hope to provide a strong sense of the way changes rolled over us in the universities without people having a strong sense of where each new wave might take us or how apparently positive changes might ultimately have unintended consequences.

The paper does not pretend to present a contemporary history of Australian higher education. It is closer to a Foucauldian diagnosis of the present, documenting experience over the period and asking: 'How is today different from yesterday?' (Foucault, 1967) As such I hope it offers a modest case study of why the contemporary moment is so difficult to describe and comprehend[2] and why over-arching labels such as 'neo-liberal' (Harvey, 2005; Klein 2007), when used to describe policies, doctrine, ideologies, and periods are often dismissed as inappropriate or misleading.

Following Taussig (1987), the structure of the paper is built around memories of the author's experience in the Australian higher education sector that have been rescued and offer the capacity to 'alter radically the way in which the present is seen' (1987:105). Critical developments identified include: the learning experience of early days in a rapidly evolving entrepreneurial university; the emergence and faltering of the engaged university and the national equity agenda; and the dissonance of the parallel development of the knowledge economy with the contemporary 'post-truth' world. Intertwined with these developments are key enduring themes that reflect Gough Whitlam's brief period as Prime Minister of Australia: internationalisation and normalization of relationships with Asia; education and equality; and white Australia's unresolved relationship with Indigenous Australia.

When I look back it is important to emphasise that I am playing with memories sparked by incomplete documentation and the capricious processes of recollection. Memories lack the stability of geological strata, but rather need to be seen in terms of an active past-present relationship (Robins, 1995:204). I am also mindful that it is women who tend to take on the task of conjuring the impurities of experience while men are busy doing the 'real thing' (Dumont, 1978:8). I do not pretend to offer a chronicle, rather I have selected significant elements of my experience that facilitate diagnosis. I have omitted those experiences that do not serve this purpose, and also those that I do not yet fully understand, which includes some of the most painful professional experiences of a woman in leadership—destined perhaps to be the subject of another paper.

Any such diagnosis runs the risk of reproducing an account that is reflective only of individual experience and perspective and not necessarily generalisable or verifiable. To address this inherent short-coming I try to situate myself socially and politically to provide readers with the space to question the perspective and analysis presented. This personal provenance[3] is important as it records a moment in time when a woman whose personal and professional identity, forged in the feminist movement and reinforced by a Marxist intellectual lineage, could aspire to, and achieve, senior leadership roles in the Australian higher education sector[4]. That time has passed. In the sector as it is now constituted it is hard to imagine someone with my background and non-traditional academic profile being able to forge a career in academic leadership. That may simply be an inevitable consequence of changed imperatives and needs, but it also raises questions of increasing conformity and conservatism and the risk of convergent thinking amongst our leaders. This is particularly important as Australian universities, that may appear at a generic level to be doing what they have always done, have changed significantly in terms of how they enact their role and how they set priorities—evidencing the mores and language of economic rationalism and shaped by meeting the demands of a culture of audit and compliance. The ethnographic gaze suggests our universities are no longer sites of complementary or even competing cultures, but organisations increasingly characterised by ambiguity of core purpose and conflict of values. I suggest that this is particularly evident in younger universities with less developed academic cultures, that lack powerful professoriates and academic senates, and whose cultural formation coincided with the impact of neo-liberal policies.

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1   Etheringham (2016) observes that even Gough's death (2014) was perfectly timed to remind us of this legacy, lending weight to the subversion of Minister Pyne's deregulation agenda.

2   Latour (2013) has devoted a whole project to this goal. His aim is to take 'an inventory of the Moderns in order to know what we are to inherit: the accounts the Moderns have invented in the course of their various struggles; and the values they have held to during this same history, through experiences that can be shared…' (2013:12)

3   I am grateful to my son Aaron Burton for his articulation of a model of provenance as a 'framework for constant dialogue'. See Burton, 2014.

4   A number of women whose political skills were honed in the feminist movement and who came from a range of disciplinary backgrounds held senior executive roles in the sector from the 1990s.

Personal Provenance

The war of intervention in Vietnam was ending as I concluded my undergraduate degree at the University of Sydney. I was first in my family to attend university. I had joined a then highly elitist university with the support of a Commonwealth Scholarship[5], which arguably added an intellectual elite to the University's dominant social elite. It was the established social elite, largely university college dwellers, who defined the culture of the University at the time. In common with the handful of fellow travellers from Manly Girls High School who commenced university in 1969[6], I didn't feel I fitted in until I developed close alliances with colleagues in the Department of Anthropology, and the then emergent political economy and feminist movements—alliances with those who were questioning the status quo.

As an undergraduate I became a product of generational change, when women's status in society and our reproductive rights were simultaneously being liberated by the very loud and visible second-wave feminist movement[7] and availability of oral contraception[8]. Second Wave Feminism was fuelled on campus by the publication and promotion of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and by attendant concepts of 'open marriage'[9] (O'Neill and O'Neill, 1972). The student newspapers *Honi Soit* and the University of New South Wales *Tharunka* proclaimed our generation's right to challenge and satirise, as did the cultural event of its time, the staging in Sydney of the rock musical *Hair* (Metro Theatre, Kings Cross, 1969). In my discipline major, Anthropology, Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935) and *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) were compulsory reading[10], forcing us to question our own social mores, and importantly encouraging us to pose the question: 'Where are the women?'. A question I have been asking ever since[11].

This was a long way from the dominant values I had grown up with which were more aligned with those 'rooted in the 1950s'[12]. As a post-war child I had been born on the northern beaches of Sydney into a conservative southern Australian culture that looked to the United Kingdom and Europe for identity and direction. Like many of my generation I studied French and German in secondary school, which further reinforced our European cultural heritage. By the time I commenced university, popular culture was just beginning to tip us towards Americanisation. I was an avid reader of the iconic US *Seventeen* magazine and prior to assuming the jeans, ethnic shirt and black sweater that constituted the uniform of the University of Sydney Department of Anthropology, I emulated the 'preppy' college look that magazine promoted, reflecting the appeal of that publication at the time to the ivy league US universities (Massoni, 2010).

My 'conservative' period did not last long. As an undergraduate student Australia's engagement with Asia was most clearly marked by post-war legacies and prejudices and, for my generation, the radicalising movements of protest against Australia's participation in the Vietnam War. The Vietnam conflict bit at the roots of the academy, and university campuses were the focal point of protest, particularly against military conscription[13]. The Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney was bitterly divided by the politics of alleged complicity of Thai experts with counterinsurgency programs among the hill tribes of northern Thailand. The head of department at the time, Professor Bill Geddes, was a key adviser to the Tribal Research Centre in Chiang Mai. Activists and some fellow anthropologists, including the man who would become the Sydney editor of *Nation Review*, George Munster[14], accused Geddes and two of his postgraduate students of complicity in counterinsurgency[15]. A public and transnational furore erupted[16], and deep and enduring divisions characterised the department for years to come[17].

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5 The provision of 3,000 Commonwealth scholarships per annum was approved by Chifley's cabinet on the recommendation of the Mills Committee in August 1949 and awarded first under the Menzies government in January 1951 to cover fees and provide a means-tested allowance for students from lower socio-economic groups http://guides.naa.gov.au/land-of-opportunity/chapter24/

6 Sadly, most of those school friends with whom I started university did not complete first year—not due to lack of academic ability, but due to the fact that we did not come with the social and political capital, or the economic means to reside in the supportive environment of university residential colleges.

7 Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was published in 1970. My Anthropology honours (1975) thesis was an exploration of feminism and racism entitled *Woman as Nigger: A Reconsideration.*

8 http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/e50a5b60e048fc07ca2570ec001909fb!OpenDocument
In his first 10 days in office as PM Gough Whitlam abolished the luxury tax on all contraceptives and placed the Pill on the Pharmaceutical Benefits list. These measures reduced its price to a dollar a month.

9 *Open Marriage* promoted the concept of personal space and non-monogamous relationships.

10 Derrick Freeman's very public (1983) refutation of Mead's work in Samoa had not yet taken place.

11 Bell & Bentley 2006; Bell 2009; Bell & Yates 2015.

12 This section of the paper is drawn from a Professorial Lecture delivered in Darwin in 2013. See Bell 2013.

13 Military conscription was introduced under the *National Service Act 1964*, and from 1965 this could include overseas service, including in Vietnam.

14 For a brief biography see http://www.adb.anu.edu.au/biography/munster-george-john-15786

15 Golson, J. 'Geddes, William Robert (Bill) (1916–1989), in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <adb.anu.edu.au/biography/geddes-william-robert-bill12529/text22547>

16 The American Anthropological Association created an Ad Hoc Committee on the Thailand Controversy, which issued a report in 1971. See Davenport et al. (1971).

17 Robinson notes that the accused anthropologists seemed to accept the presumption that communism represented a threat to the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand and anything that limited the influence of communism was a good thing (2004: 390). For a detailed critique of the events see Robinson, K. (2004).

The influence of Asia at this time was both tangible and ideological. Reaching out for alternatives to the 'capitalist war machine', some students were card-carrying members of the Communist Party; and many who were not carried copies of Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*—a compulsory reference for university radicals in the days of flagon wine and protest marches.

The changing Australian political environment reinforced our interest in the political economy of Asia, and the nature and validity of Asian engagement. In an historic moment in July 1971, when I was protesting in Sydney against South African apartheid during the Springbok rugby tour, Gough Whitlam as Leader of the Opposition led an ALP delegation to China and produced a series of commissioned articles for *The Australian* newspaper. His expectations were not high, but resonate uncomfortably with contemporary tensions in our region:

> I do not expect to find the Chinese exactly agog with excitement about us. I do not ever expect Australia to have very great influence with China. But we do have meaningful relations with the two other great Pacific powers – the United States and Japan…
> It may even be that our influence could have been exercised with the U.S. against the disastrous escalation of the war.
> It is just part of the price we are all paying for 22 years of political schitzophrenia [sic]. So our visit is really no more than a modest contribution to the cause of human sanity.
> (Whitlam, *The Sunday Australian,* 1971:2)

This visit paved the way for Australia's recognition of China in 1972 by the newly elected Whitlam government. Within days of coming to office, Whitlam also abolished military conscription.

Stumbling Towards an Academic Identity

In the mid-seventies, when I chose to undertake a doctorate that demanded postgraduate anthropological fieldwork, I took the advice of learned colleagues and shied away from the increasingly politically fraught territory of Australian Aboriginal communities[18]. Ironically, I subsequently spent much of my time among academic and bureaucratic colleagues in Sri Lanka justifying my presence in the then feisty, isolationist, socialist state. There too, foreign researchers, especially anthropologists and linguists, were suspected of having CIA connections, but many of my closest colleagues, defenders and lifelong friends were one time insurgents and remained social activists[19]. It helped that the theoretical perspective that informed my research was a derivative of Marxist anthropology popular at the time, with a focus on relations of production, in this case women as wage labourers in the colonial and post-colonial economy. Alongside my copy of Maurice Godelier's *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology* (1977) a cherished copy of Mead's *Blackberry Winter: My Early*

Years (1972) was part of my field luggage, a 25th birthday gift inscribed by my first husband: 'If there is an anodyne to "Paradisal" loneliness, it is here, it is here.' Only partly true.

While Godelier provided a conceptual framework synergistic with the feminist and post-colonial moment in which I was heading for the field[20], Mead filled a gap in my experience in an academic department dominated by senior males and a discipline that, despite having produced a significant number of female leaders, at the time continued to produce accounts of societies in which the women were invisible. Mead was a role model as a public intellectual and the focus of much of her research was women and cultural expectations that shape women's lives. She was also, as a citizen academic, an activist for often controversial causes. Throughout her career she evidenced a remarkable capacity to embrace, sometimes foreshadow, the profound changes in her own society and culture[21].

I undertook a PhD as I wanted to work with women and understand their lives. I also erroneously believed that my senior male colleagues would take me more seriously as Doctor. It turned out that I understood very little about anthropology, and even less about the knowledge hierarchies of the academy—my colleagues were infuriated by my unorthodox proposal to base my thesis on the aural histories and visual documentation of significant women who had generously shared their knowledge and experience. Such close colleagues were then known as 'field informants' rather than collaborators. As Latour reminds us: 'As respectful as anthropologists wanted to be of 'the savage mind', it was from the starting point of 'cultivated' or 'learned' minds that they had to conceive of the difference' (2013:13).

My first paper on return from fieldwork to the Department of Anthropology entitled *'From Paddy Field to Prose'* (22.3.79) was a passionate plea for the polyvocality that is a hallmark of contemporary ethnography:

> …Such papers were (and I presume still are) a critical test for the doctoral student of Anthropology. This is a time to ascertain not just the intellectual strength of the candidate, but to judge how they have come through (and indeed whether they have come through) the 'rite de passage' that is fieldwork - and whether the student might be welcomed into the anthropological fold.
> It was summer, the Reading Room of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. The characteristic mustiness of that room on that warm day was pervasive…The senior male members of the clan gathered - at that time all the senior members of the clan were male. My subject, I thought, was not controversial - the impact of the British rubber economy on the position of women in southwest Sri Lanka. My delivery was earnest, committed (even passionate) …bordering I suspect on youthful arrogance.

18 The Northern Territory land rights legislation of 1976 saw anthropologists at the centre of disputes between Aboriginal communities, settler Australian landholders and government. See Robinson, K. (2004:396).

19 My closest colleague, whom I had met through a fellow post-graduate student at Sydney, was Sunila Abeyesekera (1952-2013). Sunila worked on women's rights and human rights for over 20 years. She won the United Nations Human Rights Award in 1999.

20 As Taussig notes on the rise and fall of Marxist Anthropology 'It came and went in the blink of an eye and what seemed like a brilliant future for Marxist Anthropology in the mid 1970s now lies in a grave of dead-ended approaches bearing the epitaph 'Political Economy'…' (1987:111)

21 The influence of Mead was the subject of the author's *'Key Thinkers'* public lecture at the University of Melbourne, October 2009.

The response was disastrous. Not only did my colleagues not appreciate my paper, many were angry, some furious. Did I not understand, they interjected, the nature of scholarly research, nor my role as a doctoral student to place one small building block of knowledge on the wall that is the established canon? Obviously I did not. (Bell, 1998:330-331)

Fortunately, my reading of Mead had taught me how to mediate notoriety and that to be occasionally strident was acceptable, even for a woman. I have been reminded that fellow honours students were not averse to going on strike and boycotting seminars to generate change in this male dominated culture[22].

I remained impatient with the fact that the outward oriented anthropological fieldwork experience all too often translated into prose that was dense, pedantic and jargon ridden. I felt that most anthropologists were forfeiting their responsibility to communicate lived experience that reflected the geo-political context in which they worked. Before I went to the field, poring over unread theses in the Stack of Fisher Library, convinced me that producing a series of documentary films would reach an audience, including the subjects of the films[23], whereas a thesis would most likely remain a lonely tome on infrequently visited shelves (Bell, 2004). I was not to know that this excursion into ethnographic filmmaking would catapult me into creative academic leadership roles at an early career stage, and introduce me to my lifelong partner, father of my children and unfaltering support person.

Over a professional lifetime there have been many influences that have shaped my academic leadership and research, but the most profound and enduring included that two years of fieldwork and filmmaking in Sri Lanka and, subsequently my work as a documentary filmmaker with the Aboriginal community of Redfern in inner-city Sydney. My experience in Sri Lanka has never left me—a profound privilege but also, as a foreign researcher, a source of anxiety and uncertainty (Bell, 2009b). Ten years later my experience making the documentary film *88.9 Radio Redfern* in 1988 during the Bicentennial protests in Sydney, required me to grapple with fundamental ethical questions regarding the right to document and represent people whose lived experience, belief systems and heritage were completely divorced from my own, and who at that time did not have access to the means to translate their own experiences to film[24]. My experience in Redfern shaped my engagement with Indigenous communities in each of the universities in which I worked, and also shaped me.

These, together with having two children while completing my PhD[25], were the life-changing experiences that gave me the opportunity to develop patience, perspective, adaptability, resilience, and skills of listening, analysis and negotiation—a handy leadership repertoire on which to draw. These experiences also had the unintended consequence of extending my engagement with radical social movements beyond my undergraduate years. I am sure they contributed to the defiant confidence to take on, as a woman who did not accept the status quo, leadership roles in the sector. They provided the stamina to endure the attendant challenges thrown up by male (and sometimes female) colleagues (and my mother), who deemed in different ways, that I did not fit their expectations—or perhaps that I simply did not fit[26]. In difficult times I have often recast myself as a 'participant-observer' drawing on the anthropological ability to step back from the taxing emotional work of negotiating institutional politics to focus on analysis of the systemic issues, structural impediments and social dynamics being played out (Bell, 2007). At times this habit has infuriated colleagues.

Nascent Corporatisation

Under a Labor Government, Commonwealth spending on schools and teacher training will be the fastest expanding sector of budget expenditure.
This must be done, not just because the basic resource of this nation is the skills of its people, but because education is the key to equality of opportunity.
Sure – we can have education on the cheap…but our children will be paying for it for the rest of their lives. We will abolish fees at universities and colleges of advanced education. We believe that a student's merit rather than a parent's wealth should decide who should benefit from the community's vast financial commitment to tertiary education[27]. (Whitlam, 1972:6-7)

The brief outline of 'personal provenance' above situates me as an unlikely leader in the conservative hierarchy of Australian universities, although I only see, and indeed recall, the degree of my unorthodoxy clearly in retrospect. It is important to remember that what appears unorthodox or even radical now, was the orthodoxy of the time—a time when universities were vociferously challenging the established social order. I had no reason to believe that my beliefs or political viewpoints would be career limiting.

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22 To give a flavour of the times students and some staff argued for a course in feminist anthropology. This was condoned but only with one of the senior men teaching components for 'gravitas' (personal correspondence Professor Kathryn Robinson, ANU).

23 With my partner Geoff Burton, we produced a series of three films: *The Sri Lanka Series.* Produced on 16mm film. We went to great lengths to screen the completed films in the villages where they were shot. Thirty-three years later these films became the basis for my son to establish a dialogue with the sons and daughters of my Sri Lankan collaborators. See http://www.roninfilms.com.au/feature/13105/my-mothers-village-sri-lanka-series.html

24 For an exploration of the complex political dynamics of personal success dependent on communities without access to such opportunities. See Bell, S. (1990).

25 The writing up stage of my PhD was excruciatingly long and painful. I was deemed to have wasted too much time producing three documentary films on my return from fieldwork. My unconventional thesis meant I enjoyed less than fulsome support from senior colleagues, and then there were the pregnancies that undoubtedly indicated I was not destined to be a serious academic.

26 I am aware as a woman that this is in part a reflection of the well-documented 'imposter syndrome' (Clance & Imes, 1978:241-271)

27 In the podium copy of this speech this sentence is scored through.

When I took on the role of Dean of the Faculty Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong (UOW) in 1994[28] I was one of nine Faculty Deans, only two of whom evidenced traditional academic career paths. I was the only woman. The University at that time was relatively small in scale (approximately 12,000 students) and developing a reputation for creativity, innovation and quality under the inspired leadership of two leaders committed to long-term development and change: Professor Ken McKinnon and his successor Professor Gerard Sutton. This longevity of commitment is now a rare trait amongst vice-chancellors who often see, and are encouraged by executive search agents to see, their leadership of a small or regional university as a temporary but necessary step to leadership of a higher status institution—a stepping stone to be endured on the path to greater professional status and influence.

Vice-Chancellor McKinnon promoted the idea of a university modest in size, humane in values, within a setting informed by valuing and nurturing aesthetic, social, community and international values. He simultaneously fostered an environment with a hard edge where policies and objectives were clearly articulated, where options weren't necessarily easy and where drive, negotiation and advocacy of clear strategies were as important as beliefs and commitment[29]. The University was not going to be offering education 'on the cheap' or be dependent solely on the revenue generated by growth in student numbers.

VC McKinnon was not modest in his aspirations for this 'steel city' university, constantly reminding us that the great universities of the world were not located in capital cities and that we should aim to be the 'Stanford of the South'—never mind that we weren't located in Silicon Valley, were dependent on government funding rather than private endowments and were not at the time a model for technology transfer, although we enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the neighbouring corporate giant BHP in relevant fields of research.

McKinnon knew how to seed innovation offering opportunities and funding devoid of complex bureaucratic requirements, thus creating extraordinary pressure to deliver. A good idea articulated in a one-page proposal only had to be tested against the applicant's commitment to the proposal under consideration to generate small grants that were expected to reap significant benefits[30]. In subsequent years this commitment to innovation, with a stronger industry focus, materialised as one of Professor Sutton's highest priorities. The *UOW Innovation Campus,* opened in 2008*,* was designed to provide an innovation hub to contribute to diversification of the regional economy and encourage business success.

While I knew the University was developing a reputation for innovation, I was too inexperienced to recognise the signs that Wollongong would be at the vanguard of entrepreneurial universities, a forerunner of what is being described as the dominant, if variegated, neo-liberal model of higher education in Australia (Marginson, 2016). I suspect my lack of foresight was in part due to the anthropological bent of my ways which focused on structural challenges and internal decision-making rather than national policy and sectoral change. Also because an inventory of what was deemed important at UOW included many contradictory elements, as the late Sir David Watson astutely observed: both conservative and radical; both critical and supportive of our myriad "stakeholders"; both competitive and collegial; both entrepreneurial and caring; both autonomous and accountable especially in relation to our financial support; both local and international in focus; and both excellent and equal in ambition and values (Watson, 2003:1-2). The commitment to equity and social transformation at UOW was central to the University's mission—so strong that it did not require the constant reiteration that our ambitious path to excellence demanded.

Re-defining the role of universities in the economy

With the introduction of the Unified National System (1988/89 under the Hawke Labor government), and in the shadow of the recession of the mid-80s, there was a stated need for higher education to better serve economic growth and productivity, striking 'a new balance between the traditional objectives of a liberal education and the external requirements of the economy and labour market' (Dawkins, 1988:12)[31]. The Government reinforced a significant commitment to the vocational dimension of higher education:

> The traditional distinction between broadly based and vocationally specific education is narrowing, and the long-term interests of students will be best served by courses that incorporate elements of both 'vocational' and 'general' education. (Dawkins, 1988:9)

The University of Wollongong clearly defined its mission and responsibility as transformative in a region of 'old' manufacturing. The University's Act (1989) makes specific reference to 'having particular regard to the needs of the Illawarra region' with the expectation that instruction and research will 'meet the needs of the community' (Section 6:2). The steelworks and associated industries had once been the mainstay of the local economy and the largest employer.

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28 After completing my PhD, I had worked in the Ethnographic Film Unit at the government film unit, Film Australia and then as Head of the Fulltime Program/Head of Studies at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS). My employment at both institutions was based on the fact that at the time there were very few creative practitioners who also held PhDs, with the exception of the field of music which had historically been part of the academy.

29 Personal notes 24 March 1994.

30 In 1994 the Faculty of Creative Arts was provided with seed funding ($14K) for a reciprocal artistic exchange with the Yolngu community of Yirrkala. The agreed intention was to facilitate an educational and artistic exchange that would provide evidence of the Faculty's long term commitment to the community and verify the Faculty's willingness and ability to meet Yolngu desire to expand the range of artistic skills and techniques of the community. This led to a successful DEET National Priority (Reserve) Fund grant ($100K) in 1995 that enabled the exchange program to continue to 1998. (See Bell, 1997)

31 The Unified National System was linked to the Relative Funding Model based on weighted equivalent full-time student units (WEFTSU) and discrete allocations for teaching and research.

The University was taking over that role and Wollongong is now very much a university town rather than a 'steel city' (Braithwaite et al, 2013).

The Unified National System had resulted in institutional amalgamations of universities, Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs), Teacher Training Colleges, Nursing and Creative Arts programs. This brought a wider range of students into the university sector generating what would become a recurrent theme, or 'moral panic', at times of significant sectoral expansion[32], with questions raised regarding the suitability of students and quality of education, in particular in terms of preparation for a more technologically sophisticated economy.

As a Dean I observed, and contributed to, the imperatives of growth in student load and attendant revenue generation, in particular through an early foray into international education, which at the time was framed as an export industry by market and educational trade imperatives (Bradley et al, 2008:90)[33]. But even at that time we found that it was also an opportunity to do more—to subvert the market paradigm and forge early and lasting partnerships[34]. I confess I was active in ensuring the Faculty was engaged with marketing and promotion, research benchmarking, staff profile planning and performance reviews, and contributed to accessing funding and commercialisation of research through industry partnerships, in particular through Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs)—a development for which many researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences were unprepared[35]. These managerial imperatives were cast in terms of aiming for new revenue streams, particularly important for a university without reserves, and efficient and effective business processes which would benefit us all. I did not recognise them as components of a corporate inventory even though by this time a critical literature was emerging that clearly identified the impact of corporatisation of universities and its detrimental impact on civic responsibility (Chomsky 1999; Giroux, 2002). At UOW corporatisation was in fact proceeding hand-in-hand with service to the community, and that service was not limited to economic contribution, although this became increasingly important, and has since been documented and played to political advantage (Braithwaite et al, 2013; Branigan et al, 2016).

People and cultures

Prior to the turn of the century we were also witnessing the first significant changes to our contract with our students since the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in 1989[36]. In 1996 the conservative Howard Coalition Government increased HECS by approximately 40 per cent and introduced a differentiated fee structure based on the perceived value of courses and future income potential of graduates. Full-fee places were also created. This change had the effect of very quickly shifting the mind-set of students. What was previously seen as a modest tax, now became a fee and our students became our 'clients' with very explicit expectations and demands (Sappey, 2005). We began articulating graduate outcomes and these were codified into formal lists of 'graduate attributes'. Emphasis on the private gains associated with the acquisition of higher education knowledge, skills and credentials, informed by human capital theory, was set to increasingly frame the education policy environment (Norton, 2012; Marginson, 2016:98-104).

Similarly, our employment relationship with staff was changing significantly. In the mid-1990s when I first commenced as Dean, the largest proportion of employees were on continuing contracts and less than one third of the workforce were casual. The introduction of the Higher Education Contract of Employment (HECE) award in 1998, following a period of constrained funding, saw a significant decline in staff on fixed-term contracts and a commensurate rise in casual staff and, for a period, staff in continuing positions. The Award regulated the use of fixed-term contracts but placed no restrictions on the use of casual employment. Within a decade casual employees outnumbered continuing employees and managing with an increasing base of casual staff was to become the norm in the sector[37]. Research provides evidence that the majority of undergraduate teaching in the sector is now undertaken by casual staff (Percy et al, 2008)—a huge unintended consequence of what appeared at the time to be an industrial policy designed to generate a more secure employment base.

Staff were also expected to generate 'productivity gains', and at UOW they certainly did. In the period I worked at UOW (1994-2003) the student population grew from just under 12,000 to over 20,000 yet there was little change in the total staff profile, which grew from 1464 in 1994 to 1602 in 2003, with a significant decline in staff 1997-2001 during a period

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32 Carole Leathwood argues that 'notions' of academic 'ability' are central to higher education, with a university education generally regarded as a mark of significant intellectual capacity. Traditionally, access to higher education was reserved for a relatively small and elite strata of society, and moves to expand and widen participation in the 1960s resulted in claims that academic standards would inevitably decline. This moral panic about 'dumbing down' has accompanied both increasing levels of achievement and the participation of new groups of students in the academy. Classed, racialised and gendered assumptions impact on the kinds of higher education deemed appropriate for different students, the valuing of different courses/disciplines, the denigration of 'needy' students, and what constitutes a 'good' university (Leathwood and Read 2009).

33 Since 1990 international students have been required to pay full-fees. This became an increasingly important source of non-government revenue for Australian universities.

34 The Faculty survey exhibition of contemporary Australian Art, Identities: Art from Australia, Taipeii Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan 1993 and return exhibition of contemporary Taiwanese Art, Art Taiwan, MCA 1995 led to interest in UOW that extended beyond Creative Arts.

35 The CRC Programme was established in 1990 to bring together researchers in the public sector with the private sector and industry associations. While the first rounds included funding for 'public good' CRCs, recent emphasis has been on key sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, mining and agriculture. See https://crca.asn.au/about-the-crc-assoctaion/about-crcs/

36 As the sector expanded and higher education costs escalated the Hawke Labor government introduced a Higher Education Administration Charge of $250 per student per year in 1987 and then the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in 1989. Under HECS a fee of $1,800 per student applied.

37 NTEU data indicates that in 2009 casual employees outnumbered continuing employees and there has since been a rapid escalation of the number of casual staff. The casual workforce is estimated on the basis of recent research that accessed de-identified UniSuper data to be up to 67,000 individuals—a greater number than the 'tenured core'. Women form the majority of these staff (57%) and over half are 35 years or younger (May et al, 2013).

of particularly constrained funding (UOW Annual Reports: 1994, 2003).

As a Dean I defined my role as representing my constituency in executive decision-making while also being mindful of whole of institution interests. There were issues that generated heated debate such as the proposal for an off-shore campus bearing the University's name. Guaranteed place fee-paying pathway programs through a University of Wollongong College were equally controversial. I, and some of my fellow Deans, were perplexed by the University's apparently schizophrenic initiatives: we were determinedly recruiting students with a wider and wider range of capabilities from a wider and wider catchment area and 'trawling the stans' whilst aiming to be a leading research university; we provided space on campus to commercial entities while struggling to accommodate increasing student load; and we actively promoted equity and diversity while turning a blind eye to a bully-boy culture that was well-established in some parts of the University[38].

None of these inconsistencies are unusual in large and complex organisations, but are more marked in universities—institutions that are effectively constituted by an amalgam of semi-autonomous tribes and identifiable sub-cultures (Becher & Trowler, 2001). The question of whether UOW needed to pursue such initiatives to accelerate its development is impossible to answer—it is difficult to accurately document how much was lost over years on unprofitable enterprises or whether those enterprises ultimately served to better position the University; or how many good people were lost to the organisation due to a culture that privileged being 'one of the boys'. Perhaps such risk-taking was an essential component that ensured UOW emerged as a research-intensive university, when its history and location might have pre-determined the University be an outer-metropolitan university that focused on teaching to meet regional needs.

As I navigated this landscape I naïvely believed that the most appropriate governance model for a young and innovative university was to adopt the best of collegial governance and marry this with the decisiveness and timeliness afforded by informed executive governance. In part this is how the University operated, or appeared to operate, but senior executive decision-makers were one step ahead. They recognised that the academic community was not well-placed and would not necessarily support certain entrepreneurial academic ventures so these were generated and hosted through the University's commercial arm—a pattern that has been repeated many times in the sector[39]. Such strategies can be seen as corporatisation by stealth or, more generously,

as an attempt to protect academic and collegial cultures whilst creating business opportunities and much needed new revenue streams[40]. Perhaps this was inspired leadership that recognised that a university that aspired to be research intensive would benefit by giving time for nascent academic cultures to develop and mature, and that more was to be gained by supporting collegial and unionised cultures in parallel with the development of an entrepreneurial, non-unionised, operational arm.

Sir David Watson identified a number of 'dos' it takes for a university to be successful in the early twenty-first century with which it is difficult to find fault including: an excellent portfolio of courses taught well; excellence in some aspects of research; engagement with the community economically and culturally; and progressively improving the domains in which it works (2003:16). These might have been penned as descriptors of UOW at the turn of the century although the University was simultaneously playing a high stakes game in terms of entrepreneurial initiatives and reputational risk. Deployment of the University's commercial arm to do this was undoubtedly seen as a risk-management strategy—a firewall designed to protect the University's reputation and resources. It in fact enabled risk-taking by by-passing academic interrogation and collegial decision-making.

Cultures of Audit and Accountability

Sir David notes that success is about 'charting uncertainty', given that most of the above 'dos' are very hard to measure in ways that ensure accountability. Yet we increasingly frame our knowledge production in the language of audit: inputs and outputs, quality assurance, cost-effectiveness, key performance indicators, benchmarks and standards, timelines and target audiences. We give priority to that which is measurable and inevitably the quantitative colonizes the qualitative (which is acknowledged but to which value is so difficult to assign). Unconsciously we adopt corporate management imperatives and render ourselves auditable.

I encouraged the Faculty of Creative Arts to engage enthusiastically in the national audit exercise, from which we and the community benefitted as there were small monetary rewards attached[41]. I did not realise that we were taking the first tentative steps into an audit and compliance culture that would come to have a profound impact on academic work practices in teaching and learning and in research; that would change the relationship between academic and professional staff; would consume significant resources; and would

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38 Over time the Deans, who had initially reported directly to the VC, were removed one step. This coincided with a time when the majority of Deans were women.

39 In 1993 ownership of the Illawarra Technology Corporation was transferred to UOW after posting a loss of over $1m (Annual Report 1993) and was not to turn a profit until 1999 (Annual Report 1999). In the interim international and domestic student recruitment, marketing and promotional activities and commercial services, including international consultancy, had been transferred to ITC. 'Commercially experienced' Directors were drawn from the business community, including BHP. At this time the University of Melbourne was also taking risks with the founding of Melbourne University Private. Professor Glyn Davis announced the closure of this venture in 2005 soon after his appointment to the role of Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. See Cain & Hewitt 2004. Similar cases in the U.S. are eloquently documented by David Kirp (2003).

40 Well documented in the case of the rise and rise of Warwick University through its 'developmental periphery' (McCaffery, 2010: 44).

41 The Faculty of Creative Arts used the funding to seed an expanded music performance program for the community. This enabled performances by leading national and international orchestras and ensembles over several years, together with master classes for students.

become a defining feature of the Australian sector[42]. At the time of that audit (1994) Michael Power's *The Audit Society* (1997) had not been published and the critical literature on audit and accountability in higher education had not yet emerged (Strathern, 2000).

From a policy perspective throughout the 1990s it is tempting to define the higher education sector as dominated by a neo-liberal frame of reference, reflecting the attendant mores of New Public Management and the dogma of the market (Lorenz, 2012), with staff assessed within cultures of productivity and performance, and with individuation and human capital theory re-defining our critical relationship with our students. Changes that are clearly identifiable with hindsight, and are now well-documented, included the introduction of managerial governance together with the rise of the entrepreneurial university (Marginson, and Considine, 2000; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004). The attendant focus on audit and accountability was to have a pervasive and lasting impact on the sector, as was the entrenchment of casualisation of the academic workforce. But it is important to emphasise that the impact of the neo-liberal project was spatially differentiated and imperfectly realised—contradictory imperatives persisted and democratic[43] and collegial sub-cultures remain.

Equity and Engagement

> All of us Australians have to insist that we can do much better as a nation. We ought to be angry, with a deep determined anger, that a country as rich and skilled as ours should be producing so much inequality, so much poverty, so much that is shoddy and sub-standard. We ought to be angry, on our own behalf but even more on our children's behalf at the destruction of our national and historical heritage. (Whitlam, 1972:1)

It is important to emphasise that the corporatist, market-driven path on which we had embarked was not a singular, consistent or linear journey. In Australia, the determination of equity goals was an explicit objective of the Dawkins reforms (under the Hawke Labor government) and set an agenda that has proven exceptionally durable (Harvey et al, 2016:3). This agenda coupled the role of universities as drivers of economic growth with the imperative to promote fairness and social inclusion:

> As a nation, we have consistently voiced our demands for a fair and free society. All Australians expect and deserve an equal chance to succeed in life, with positive assistance given where necessary to make up for financial or other disadvantages.

> Access to education is vital. Education is one of the principal means for individuals to achieve independence, economic advancement and personal growth. But in the past, the benefits of higher education have been enjoyed disproportionately by the more privileged members of our community. Those benefits need to be shared more widely and more equitably in the future. (Dawkins, 1988:6)

A Fair Chance for All (DEET, 1990) established the Commonwealth's equity framework for participation in higher education to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole[44]. Marginson (2016), following Piketty (2014), argues that the expansion of opportunity and meritocratic social mores were a legacy of post-war reconstruction of the 1950s and 60s and the determination to create a more democratic and humanist order in which planners sought to '…combine excellence and equality, consistent with the existing social and institutional hierarchies, while providing pathways for movement into those hierarchies' (2016:167). However, in the context of increasing inequality in the Anglo-American world, while we have created 'a fairer system for individuals and for particular localities', societal changes have been limited. Marginson also asserts that concepts of a 'knowledge economy' or 'innovation society' will not change this (2016:179). Yet these concepts have been embraced with enthusiasm by many institutions in the Australian Higher Education sector.

Complementing a well-developed equity framework, at the turn of the century the late Sir David Watson and Professor Michael Gibbons were actively involved with a number of Australian universities to develop conceptual roadmaps for engagement. The interest in engagement at the time was forged by the emergent 'knowledge economy' together with the UK's introduction of Third Stream funding linked to Knowledge Transfer[45].

A Brief Moment in Time

In what seems a policy lifetime ago the engagement of universities and their communities received attention in the Australian government 2002 Ministerial Discussion Paper *Higher Education at the Crossroads* (Nelson, 2002). The Minister, under the Howard Coalition government, invited the university sector to provide input to the development of a 'Third Stream' funding model similar to that which had been introduced in the UK. A number of strategies were canvassed, including: payment of a 'social premium' to universities to deliver community service obligations within their region; State governments to contribute to the cost of some activities on a fee-for-service basis; and funding of community bodies to purchase the higher education services they need (IRU, 2005:2).

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42 The Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was established in 1993 and institutions were invited to voluntarily participate in quality reviews, with the incentive of modest additional funding attached. Three areas of university activity were considered: teaching and learning, research and community engagement. In 2000 this role was taken over by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and in 2011 codified and expanded under the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) which regulates and assures the quality of Australia's higher education sector against the Australian Qualifications Framework and Higher Education Standards Framework.

43 Or at their worst 'ultra-democratic' cultures characterised by individualism and autonomy manifested as an aversion to discipline, preventing decisions from being made and policies from being carried out. Often refined to a high art in faculties of Arts and Humanities.

44 *A Fair Chance for All* generated targets for student access, participation and completion rates for identified equity groups: people from low socio-economic backgrounds; people from rural or isolated areas; people with a disability; people from a non-English speaking background; women, particularly in non-traditional courses and post-graduate study; and Indigenous people. For over two decades this framework has enjoyed bipartisan support.

45 This section of the paper draws from Bell, S. (2017).

These issues were overtaken by the Bradley Review (2008) which recommended that 'A separate stream of funding should not be provided for community engagement or 'third-stream' activities given that these activities are an integral part of an institution's teaching and research activities' (2008:xxviii). But the Bradley Review did recommend a new financing framework with improved competitive funding for the core activities of teaching and learning and research including funding to advance the social inclusion agenda (2008:151). Beyond funding attached to growth, Australia has not yet seen the increased investment that would enable significant expansion of engagement, or the equivalent of Third Stream funding which in the UK was introduced specifically to support Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to increase their capability to respond to the needs of business and the wider community[46].

The UK Third Stream model might be seen as firmly grounded in the context of 'a neo-liberal market-facing agenda' that sought to encourage a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurialism and to generate commercial activities that would be of economic benefit to HEIs and the state (Clough & Bagley, 2012:178). In contrast to the UK, and perhaps reflecting our geographically distributed nature and robust equity framework, Australian proposals were at pains to emphasise public good over commercial imperatives. The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) group emphasised that:

> It is important from the outset to emphasise that Third Stream funding is not only, or even primarily, for universities to undertake commercial work. While much discussion about Third Stream activity focuses on the commercial application of knowledge and capabilities, vast amounts of university knowledge are shared freely for the public good, resulting in economic and social benefits. (IRU, 2005:3)

Marginson (2016) defines the contribution to the common good through the global public good that characterises research science, together with national public goods—social sharing and social solidarity (2016:35). He sees the latter in particular being eroded by budget austerity and growing economic and social inequalities. He also contends that individuation, characteristic of the neo-liberal policy environment, transformed what many thought of as collective and communal processes of equality of opportunity:

> Policy-makers and researchers of higher education recycle the belief that it is enough to extend the boundaries of participation, to create social equity in the sense of inclusion; as if socially disadvantaged families can be transformed without modifying the larger social relations that sustain advantage.' (Marginson, 2016:29)

However, the engagement agenda, and how it was enacted in Australia, provides a further example of the complexity and contradictory nature of institutional responses to the higher education policy environment that clouds, or rather obscures, a simplistic neo-liberal lens. The view can look very different from different parts of the sector. Working, as I did for five years, at Charles Darwin University (CDU) in the Northern Territory after the University of Melbourne Parkville, is akin to working in another culture on another continent. The Australian Higher Education sector is, despite the political rhetoric that consistently laments the lack of diversity, multi-faceted and regionally diverse—to borrow the words of Derek Bok 'a many-splendored creation' (cited Boyer, 1996:11).

A Rich and Evolving Tapestry

In some ways the higher education sector has been shaped by the same single Australian idea of a university–public, self-governing, secular, commuter, comprehensive, and research focused (Davis, 2010). But age and locale drive significant difference: some universities are research intensive, some young institutions are on a clear trajectory to become so; some are focused on professional formation, often with large concentrations of students and staff in the fields of education and health sciences; others are becoming increasingly expert in teaching and learning, particularly through deployment of, and innovation in, digital technologies; some are highly internationalised; some offer students significant opportunities to develop social and political capital, while others focus on instrumental goals and employment outcomes; some are highly dependent on government funding and some have well-developed entrepreneurial and philanthropic income streams. None of these categories are mutually exclusive but they combine in rich and evolving tapestries.

As noted above UOW's development was characterised by corporatisation coupled with service to the community—a tightly-managed business pursuing equity and the common good. Development of an international research profile was pursued in tandem with community development initiatives, including the establishment and support of cultural institutions integral to the fabric of a rapidly changing community[47]. Student equity provisions were a well-established component of this service with a range of alternative admission pathways, regional bonus points, early admissions, guaranteed places, recognition of prior learning and equity scholarships offered by the Faculties and by the UOW College. The University was arguably engaged in ensuring that social equity based on opportunities for individual participation and success were coupled with modifying 'the larger social and economic relations that sustain advantage'. The University sought opportunities, sponsored research and funded initiatives to address systemic issues in its region such as the spectacularly high youth unemployment rates (Stubbs, 2000; Pomfret et al, 2008; Burrows, 2010), together with diversification of the region's economy[48] and rural and regional provision of health services.

An even more explicit coupling of equity/individuation and engagement/social sharing was embarked upon by Professor

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46 This has now morphed into the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) standing at £601 Million 2011-2015. A crude estimation of the impact of the funding suggests that, for every £1 of HEIF invested, it returned £6 in gross additional KE income (2003-2010) PACEC (2012) *Strengthening the Contribution of English Higher Education Institutions to the Innovation System: Knowledge Exchange and HEIF Funding*, iv-v.

47 Including Wollongong Conservatorium of Music, Wollongong Symphony Orchestra, Project Art Space, Theatre South, Five Islands (Poetry) Press.

48 *Film Illawara* was an example. Established in 1999 with seed funding from the University, the Illawarra Region of Councils NSW Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Film location services were provided with a requirement for local employment, service provision and internships. The initiative was sustained for a decade.

Glyn Davis as Vice Chancellor of Griffith University (2002-2005) and continued by his successor Professor Ian O'Connor. Professor Davis was strongly influenced by Boyer's 'scholarship of engagement', perhaps like Boyer recognising that at the turn of the century 'institutions of higher learning are not collectively caught up in some urgent national endeavor' (Boyer, 1996:11). Through *The Griffith Project* (2002) the University developed a clear statement of institutional values that included equity, social justice, tolerance and understanding. It also reflected the belief and aspiration that Griffith University had the responsibility and commitment to make a real difference to students and capacity building in communities.

An Office for Community Partnerships (OCP) was established on the Logan campus, an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage, in 2003. I was privileged to lead this initiative, with an investment of over $2m per annum to build on the University's capacity 'to tackle pressing social and policy problems in our region' (*The Griffith Project,* 2002). The University aimed to establish strong working relationships with its communities, both the local geographic communities included along the Gold Coast—Brisbane corridor and the University's communities of interest. The aim of this initiative was to promote the University as a genuine partner in the community and as an approachable and accessible collaborator; to identify the range of social, political, economic, cultural and ecological issues in these communities and target those to which the University had a capacity to respond; and to ensure sustainability, following Boyer's schema, as far as possible to link these imperatives with learning and teaching and research. Although the OCP did generate funding that would not have otherwise come to the University, revenue generation was not part of the brief for the OCP.

The coupling under a Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Equity portfolio and Community Partnerships imperative was seen as strategic (and efficient). The OCP was expected to have substantial capacity to contribute to the delivery of equity goals and the potential to broaden the reach of equity goals and programs 'beyond principles governing human resource management, student recruitment and service provision'—beyond individual equity and attainment (Bell, 2003). The University sought to articulate and inform national debate around critical issues through the launch of the *Griffith Review* in 2003, again this required a significant financial investment. At Logan Campus we were keen to ensure that our local communities were included in these debates by hosting literary lunches with guest authors of national and international standing as each new edition appeared.

Our focus was on educational attainment but this was not confined to school leavers or potential students. The Griffith Business School offered very successful financial literacy programs at the local Women's Support Centre through the support of the OCP[49]. The women described these courses as life-changing experiences. The Indigenous community of Inala and the large Pacific Islander community of Logan were high priority communities in these outreach initiatives and we

worked with local elders to find the most appropriate and respectful ways to encourage participation.

One of the most critical and ultimately rewarding responsibilities as PVC Equity and Community Partnerships (2003-2006) was to work with the Indigenous Advisory Committee Chair Uncle Graham Dillon and Director of the support and resource centre, GUMURRII, Professor Boni Robertson, to 'find common ground' and provide educational opportunities to empower our Indigenous communities. Indigenous colleagues were determined that we would not just have a Reconciliation Statement but also a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP); that we would not just engage symbolically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders but that we would recognise the Elders' intellectual, scholarly and cultural contribution through an Elder-in-Residence program[50]; that we would pursue inclusive practices in the curriculum and provide appropriate institutional support to facilitate this; and that we would work with our communities to create opportunities in employment and training. Given Griffith's geographic spread this involved working with six family groups as the traditional custodians of the land from Brisbane to the Gold Coast. This was at times politically fraught emotional work. A huge amount was achieved but the timelines required for engaged and respectful practice were at odds with corporate practice, involving constant negotiation and renegotiation of roles and responsibilities over years, not weeks or months.

Engagement and the Public Good

My experience at Griffith confirmed that the role played by universities in processes of social transformation and generation of equitable opportunities, particularly those situated in outer-metropolitan, rural and remote communities, remains significant. This is despite the fact that the funding for this civic responsibility is meagre or project based and therefore not always as effective as it should be in generating long-term change. An unintended consequence of the Bradley recommendation discussed above is that our commitment to, and continuing investment in engagement has been rendered less visible. Even so, due to the emergence of competing imperatives of massification, internationalisation and research excellence[51] it is hard to argue that we have sustained the movement envisioned by Sir David Watson (2011):

> In universities around the world, something extraordinary is underway. Mobilizing their human and intellectual resources, institutions of higher education are directly tackling community problems – combating poverty, improving public health, and restoring environmental quality.

Marginson (2016), following Murphy (2015), asserts that after two decades of the Neo-Liberal Market Model:

> …higher education has become more business-like and competitive, more productive in volume terms and almost more certainly financially efficient, although there

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49 See https://www.griffith.edu.au/business-government/centre-financial-independence-education/research

50 In 2010 this initiative was formalised as the Griffith University Council of Elders.

51 The introduction, in 2003 of the Academic Ranking of World Universities by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and following proliferation of global university rankings (including QS, THE, SIR, U-Multirank, Leiden) had a profound effect on 'public good' agendas which were displaced by a new emphasis on research productivity and research excellence.

is no evidence that teaching is better or that the rate of fundamental discovery in research has quickened. (2016:220)

Given the well-documented wider patterns of increasing inequality, Marginson chooses not to explore the contribution of universities as critical agents of change and social transformation in geographically dispersed and disadvantaged communities. It is true that the impact of engagement is hard to measure, as profound societal change generated by educational opportunity is likely to be generational (Collini, 2015). It is only the economic impact of universities that is readily captured through employment of standardized practices (Braithwaite et al, 2013b; Branigan et al, 2016). In the absence of an identified funding stream, universities committed to engagement have increasingly embedded engagement within the core activities of teaching and learning and research, as Bradley foreshadowed. This further compounds measurement of impact and institutional case studies become the default evidence base (Watson, 2011; Winter et al, 2005).

The ambiguity associated with the public good versus private/individual benefit of universities, promulgated by the rhetoric of current government higher education and innovation policy, is one source of tension in universities forging relationships with the communities with whom they interact. But it is not new and, although to an extent disguised by contradictory tendencies, has its roots in policies promulgated through the 1980s and 1990s. As Ernest Boyer observed:

> …what I find most disturbing…is a growing feeling in this country that higher education is, in fact, part of the problem rather than the solution. Going still further that it is a private benefit, not a public good. Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation's most pressing civic, social, economic and moral problems…Not that long ago, it was generally assumed that higher education was an investment in the future of the nation—that the intellect of the nation was something too valuable to lose, and that we needed to invest in the future through the knowledge industry. (Boyer, 1996:14)

The persistence of the equity and engagement agendas, although impoverished, provides evidence of the agency being exercised within institutions, in tandem with their communities, in countering the market-focussed policy environment and instrumentalist perspectives, thereby sustaining civic engagement and contributing to the common good.

How is Today Different from Yesterday?

> Our program has three great aims. They are: to promote equality; to involve the people of Australia in the decision-making processes of our land; and to liberate the talents and uplift the horizons of the Australian people.

> We want to give a new life and a new meaning in this new nation to the touchstone of modern democracy—to liberty, equality, fraternity. (Whitlam, 1972:5)

Regardless of, and sometimes despite the policy and funding environment, over the past twenty-five years the higher education sector in Australia has evidenced adaptability, agility and resilience. One measure of this is that the sector has responded to over sixty significant reforms since the introduction of the Unified National System and HECS in 1989 (DET, 2015:31-33) and successfully blocked, or at least delayed, an ill-considered reform package proposed in 2014 (Marginson, 2014; Moodie, 2014; Parker 2014; Bell & Probert, 2016).

The sector has grown and expanded its reach domestically and internationally to a population of over 1.4 million students; 25 per cent of these are international students and close to 30 per cent are postgraduate students. The number of domestic higher education students has more than doubled since 1989 and the introduction of the Demand Driven System (2012), which lifted previous limits on the funding of bachelor degree students at public universities, saw a 25 per cent increase in Commonwealth supported undergraduate places 2009-2015 (DET, 2015:4-5). This transformation from an elite to a high participation sector has demanded the accommodation of a much wider range of students, many mature-age, many part-time, and many whose first language is not English, while maintaining quality and credible retention and graduation rates.

The sector has introduced diverse entry pathways and often employs multiple entry criteria, particularly for non-traditional disciplines such as the creative arts. Participation and success of students from identified equity groups have been monitored and support services adapted to better meet student needs. Higher education institutions have introduced innovative initiatives to improve diversity, especially in relation to women and Indigenous representation and leadership. The sector has sought to address the challenges of geography and demography to improve regional and remote educational opportunities (DIIS, 2016). It has facilitated work-integrated learning and international student mobility. It has appropriated potentially 'disruptive' technologies and utilised these to enhance teaching and learning and research, added mixed-mode or blended teaching delivery to online distance education and deployed MOOCs[52] to improve visibility and marketing. It has worked collaboratively with increasingly demanding professional associations and regulatory bodies to maintain graduate standards.

Australian universities have continued to produce new knowledge, making world-class contributions to a wide range of disciplinary fields (ARC, 2015) and have increasingly enabled multi-disciplinary teaching and research. The sector has generated research with impact and produced innovative solutions to local, national and global problems (GO8 and ATN, 2012). It has fostered and sustained community, national and international partnerships despite the lack of significant and consistent funding. It has accommodated the introduction of audit and accountability measures and associated reporting on every facet of operations (Dow, 2011). It has weathered the erosion of funding that has not kept up with expansion in comparison with comparable OECD countries (Universities Australia, 2015:5-8) and has actively sought non-government revenue streams through philanthropy and entrepreneurial

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52 The acronym MOOC is defined as 'massive open online course'. These courses are available over the internet to a large number of people, without charge.

initiatives. It has withstood attempts to reconfigure, and even reinstate sectoral models that were in the past found inadequate to meet future needs. Despite its relative youth and small scale, the sector performs well in international global rankings and international education has become Australia's third largest export industry—the largest service sector export industry. Each University has contributed to this achievement in differentiated ways that reflect context and capacity.

Gough Whitlam, in setting out his reform agenda, referred to '…the commanding heights of education, at the level of the university itself' (1972:7-8). Even if some of the above may be seen as symptomatic of a neo-liberal agenda, the achievements summarised may well be regarded as 'commanding heights'. Yet it is very difficult to imagine a Prime Minister or portfolio Minister now using such a descriptor, except perhaps to invoke a re-imagined glorious past in which a small number of elite institutions produced excellent graduates, leaders and future professionals (Bell & Probert, 2016:223-227). The universities I have worked in over the past twenty-five years bear little resemblance to the University of Sydney in the 1970s and only passing resemblance to UOW in the 1990s. I sometimes wonder whether, when politicians invoke images of universities, they conjure their own experiences of a now unrecognisable past. Is this why the dominant narrative of the present is that universities are, as Boyer noted twenty years ago, 'part of the problem'—perceived to be producing graduates who do not meet professional or business aspirations for a 'work-ready' pool; are populated by academics who enjoy excellent working conditions and who are resistant to measures to improve productivity; that don't always satisfy their customer students; that are led by a cohort of mendicant vice-chancellors; and that are failing to capitalise sufficiently on public investment? Perhaps this is because, as Marginson argues, despite the fact that neo-liberal discourse has been influential in higher education policy and regulation through a focus on market reform, universities remain 'incompatible with the neo-liberal imaginary' (2016:220) and, I would add, are therefore cast at best as problematic or at worst, oppositional.

The Damage of the Market Paradigm

Taking Whitlam's lead as a reformer I want to draw out the most troubling aspects of change in the environment of Australian higher education—to identify where 'we can do much better as a nation'. To do this successfully it is necessary to move beyond the dominant narratives and critique—to ask what are we not talking about? Are there changes that have taken place that will prove detrimental to our sector and to our nation?

The critical gaze provides the opportunity to document a litany of the broad consequences of neo-liberal policies. I do not intend to revisit those that are important and well-documented, such as that of restraining taxation and the resource base available to public institutions[53]; the associated failure to improve the public contribution to higher education evidenced by other OECD countries; the failure to

comprehensively implement the recommendations of a raft of highly regarded reviews (Bradley, 2008; Lomax-Smith et al, 2011; Behrendt et al, 2012; Kemp & Norton, 2014); or the debacle and uncertainty of the national research infrastructure funding and higher education reform agendas of the past three years (Bell & Probert, 2016:221-242). My focus is on the most detrimental changes in which the sector has been complicit—changes that lead to the conclusion that there has to be a better way.

In keeping with the market paradigm, over the past twenty-five years one profound change has been that Australian universities have been exhorted not just to be entrepreneurial, but to be more 'business-like' in every facet of their operations, including their governance. Decision-makers, consciously or unconsciously, have adopted out-sourcing strategies for a raft of services—everything from cleaning and security to strategic planning. They have even been seduced by purveyors of technological solutions to outsource core academic functions such as recruitment, responsibility for retention and student success, work-integrated learning and student mobility, and most recently tutoring services through organisations such as 'Uberversity' (Dodd, 2017). Cultural services to the community such as art galleries and collections, radio and television services, performance venues, even schools of music, have been asked to 'show cause' and too often deemed an unnecessary drain on institutional budgets. This is partly a reflection of global trends which have seen companies in the Western world being exhorted to focus on 'core competencies' and to rely more on part-time employees, temporary assistance, external contractors and out-sourcing of services (Weil, 2014; Pfeffer, 2015). But it is also a sector specific response.

In the 1990s, with deteriorating public funding and the first flood of international students to Australian universities, grave concerns were expressed regarding the stability of this new market, especially for schools of business where the demand from international students was concentrated. Much academic employment was subsequently defined as based on 'soft-funding' and conditions of employment for many in the sector began declining. Such significant changes were also occurring in other higher education jurisdictions (Smyth, 1995; Shelton et al, 2001) and students, now clients or customers, also began to redefine their role and the demands they placed on institutions and staff in what have become 'service encounters' (Sappey, 2005). The lecturer at the podium who briefly became the guide on the side, is now expected to be the 24/7 resource person. These changes have been exacerbated by the introduction of the Demand Driven System (DDS) in Australia which generates new pressures in a constrained funding system. At the very time we are asking our students to bear more of the responsibility for their education, the DDS has the potential to impact graduate employment outcomes if the relevant sectors of the economy, just like the universities, fail to generate the promised opportunities for 'knowledge workers'.

The shock of the new is that Australian universities have now become serious players in the 'gig' economy—dependent on a contingent workforce of at least 67,000 individuals (May et al, 2013). For researchers the 'gigs' are often so short that halfway through grant funded employment the researcher is

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53 This is particularly important in Australia, where the tax to GDP ratio is in the bottom 20 per cent of the 34 OECD developed economies even though surveys indicate that 80 per cent of Australians believe that the country is high- or mid-taxing (Hetherington, 2015:27).

distracted by the necessity of finding or generating the next 'gig'. Those employed to teach on a casual basis may have little more than the promise of being included in a pool of 'approved' casual teachers and will not know how many hours they can expect to work, or whether they will gain work, until after the academic term has begun—a classic Marxian 'reserve army'.

As the Australian Council of Learned Academies pointed out in its 2012 report *Career Support for Researchers*, 'Almost universally, respondents to the survey like their work but not the employment system in which they work… Uncertain job prospects stood head and shoulders above other issues when respondents were asked to nominate the single worst thing about a career in research' (ACOLA, 2012:7,16). Concurrent research on women in the science research workforce provided evidence that there is currently a significant disjunction between postgraduate aspirations and the reality of employment opportunities (Bell & Yates, 2015:5). Moreover, by producing an over-supply of PhD graduates who have had to demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to their academic field and have been carefully inducted into the symbolic economy of the academy with its peculiar skill set and valued attributes, we have effectively created a separate and relatively isolated labour market where many find transition to another sector extremely difficult (Bauder, 2006). For the PhD graduate who has invested up to ten years of their life training for a research or academic role, the best available career opportunity is to become a university administrative officer, or 'third-space' professional (Whitchurch, 2008).

When the public face of universities looks increasingly like the for-profit sector and institutional success is measured in growth of student load, research productivity and associated revenue; when Australian Vice-Chancellors' salary packages, like the CEOs of the corporate world are publicly reported to be 'skyrocketing' and Australia leads the pack (Hare, 2015 & 2016; NTEU *Advocate*, 2017); when there is significant competition between universities in the public arena; when prospective students, especially international students, are defined as a 'market' and current students as 'clients' who need to be forewarned of 'trigger points' in course content that may not fit with their world view; and when our proclivity to critique generates broad distrust of scientific facts, this does not just signal change. It signals the fact that universities have become mixed economies underpinned by a range of very different value systems and priorities—that in charting uncertainty we have become uncertain of our role.

Fissured Workplaces

The profound and potentially damaging impact? Following David Weil (2014), universities are at risk of becoming 'fissured workplaces': workplaces constituted by an older, predominantly male management and tenured core; a growing and younger, predominantly female contingent or secondary workforce; technicians and administrators who enjoy greater security of employment but lower wages than their academic colleagues; and a range of independent contractors, often demanding exorbitant fees; and service providers. Some parts of the university, such as marketing, particularly international marketing, student recruitment,

'advancement', research commercialisation and facilities offices, are effectively for-profit organisations, where profit is defined by 'load' and revenue generation; other parts of the university, such as quality assurance, human resources and ethics offices resemble the government public sector and are driven by rules; and most academic divisions are guided by disciplinary mores and values—often very passionately held values. In a sense universities have emulated the government preferred 'three-sector solution' to service provision and the resulting fissured workplace is likely to display a '…clash of cultures, in which distrust, misunderstanding and cross-purposes are ever present risks' (Butcher, 2017). The import of these internal changes is that increasingly, fundamentally different sub-cultures within our universities also mean that it is hugely challenging to promote and maintain the status of 'public good' institutions in the eyes of our students and our communities, thus eroding the stability and longevity that has been a foundational strength of universities for their communities.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the remote Northern Territory of Australia where the only university, Charles Darwin University (CDU) , has sought to educate and innovate as a key to economic and social development, offering everything from a Certificate 1 qualification to a PhD. This is an institution which most of the staff have joined 'in order to make a difference' but it is a university operating *in extremis* in all possible dimensions: social, economic, political, cultural and physical. Community expectations and ownership of this dual sector institution are high but, in the words of the foundation Vice-Chancellor, Professor Helen Garnett, this is a 'tough environment' (Watson et al, 2011:41). A slowly growing population base of under 250,000, 30 per cent of whom are Indigenous, is insufficient to sustain a university in the Territory. The Commonwealth Government has effectively allowed the University to operate in a Demand Driven System, even before that policy platform was introduced, even so, there is a constant risk to viability and a commensurate risk of mission drift.

Mission drift powerfully draws the University away from its local commitment, including commitment to the significant Indigenous population, to pursue market solutions online and in more populous interstate locations to generate much needed revenue. The University's foundational commitment to 'close-the-gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes and life chances, constantly runs the risk of being usurped by the imperative to internationalise, and to a large extent, as elsewhere, that imperative rests on the University's ability to maintain its global ranking based on research intensity. Efforts to place Indigenous commitment and identity at the strategic heart of the University and link this to internationalisation have been thwarted. Significant place-based research in environmental science and public health is a distinguishing feature, but in this environment engagement is too easily rendered a vehicle for revenue generation (CDU, 2016:8) and the civic role of the university is seriously constrained despite significant opportunities and chronic need. The circumstance of CDU highlights the question of whether neo-liberal policies have greatest impact in the marginal institutions and CDU is that case *in extremis*—no well-established academic culture, immature governance structures, and no powerful professoriate. The University serves a community that is either transitory[54] or

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54 There is a 30 per cent per annum turn-over of professionals in the Northern Territory.

has limited knowledge and experience of universities so engagement is too often framed in a narrow transactional space[55].

Shaping the Future

There are numerous publications that attempt to predict what universities of the future will look like. These range from academic forecasts, emphasising scenarios such as: the civic role of the university sustained by elite institutions; the commodification and modularisation of undergraduate education for the 'mass'; new divisions among pure and applied institutions; and the growth of a privatised sector (Blass et al, 2010). At the other end of the spectrum are the pragmatic forecasts generated by the large professional services (aka accountancy) companies emphasising: availability of online learning opportunities and digital technologies that make this viable; funding pressures and increasing competition attendant with mass higher education participation; demographic changes and 'non-traditional' students; globalisation, intensifying competition for international students; new opportunities for mobility; and inevitably closer ties to the economy and partnerships with business (Ernst & Young, 2012)[56]. There are also more alarmist reports of a sector in crisis, prophesying the need for 'deep, radical and urgent transformation', global competitive intensity, the need for 'unbundling' of services and adoption of outsourcing' (Rizvi et al, 2013).

Yet none have foreshadowed the most disruptive change of all: the rise of profound inequality and concomitant rise of the 'post-truth' era that questions the value of scientific knowledge—knowledge perceived to be produced by elites, generating irrelevant evidence on which unpopular or incomprehensible public policy is based. This is an era in which, rather than being at the centre of the knowledge economy, or perhaps facing the risk of being at the centre of the knowledge economy, universities are cast from the 'commanding heights' to join the low-life of the political and bureaucratic swamp.

It is timely, as the issue of market failure, and the failure of the ideology of the market, and its social consequences are playing out globally, to resist the mixed-economy path we are on and to bring together the dialogue of equity and innovation with a new dialogue to elucidate the role of the university in the post-truth era and a new social rationale (Smith, 2000:335). The social context of increasing concentration of wealth and increasing inequality (Piketty, 2014) takes this task out of the academic realm and cloaks it with a new urgency. This is coupled with a new urgency to imagine how sustainable academic modes of production might be constituted–how we can draw on all those tribes and all those layers of the academy, particularly those that have resisted corporatisation, to generate 'a more authentic modernisation reform agenda…one that is focused on public goods as well as private goods' (Marginson, 2016:251). Such a reform agenda would seek to resolve the issue of competing priorities and cultures, or at least acknowledge and manage these, fostering collaborative governance based on diversity and mutual respect. The public face of the sector would be unequivocally associated with the urgent national and global endeavour to address the great challenges of our time, which of course includes cultivating problem-solving graduates whose capacity to contribute is not burdened by increasing educational debt.

Following Barnett (2011) there are many alternatives to the status quo. With an eye on 'the empirical conditions of our age' and a robust 'conceptual landscape', our higher education leaders need to rebuild our fissured workplaces and our fissured relationships with our communities (Bell, 2017), to reflect 'authenticity and responsibility' and the public good. This will only be achieved if we promote equality as a core responsibility; involve colleagues in institutional and policy decision-making; liberate the talents and uplift the horizons of those who currently constitute our marginalised and contingent workforces; and in so doing redefine our relationship with those whom we currently interact as clients and customers. We all need to become genuine participants in complex institutions that collectively seek to understand and change our 'ways of being'.

The risk of not doing this is that the public good role of universities becomes the preserve of only the most elite institutions; that these institutions also sequester social and political capital formation; and that the majority of higher education institutions become very thin organisations populated by a growing reserve army of knowledge workers. As many of us become 'thinner' institutions and our engagement with our students also becomes 'thin' we begin to look more like vocational training institutes and the (generally very thin) private providers (Bell, 2013:21). We can, and must do better than offering 'education on the cheap' as a nation.

Our higher education narrative needs to shift from short-term (budget cycle) cost and student debt to inter-generational investment; from the rhetoric of an undifferentiated sector to one which understands our youth (remembering that the first Australian PhD student did not graduate until 1948) and evolving evidence of significant differentiation; and to shift from being seen as an under-valued to a highly-valued contributor to the public good. This will only occur if the sector seizes the post-truth moment for the greater good and invokes what was once the bipartisan Menzies-Whitlam consensus in which universities were understood to be 'spaces of public scholarship in which claims to expertise can be tested transparently and made available for the good of the entire society' (Etheringham 2016).

Postscript

One of the small but incredibly important highlights of my career was designing and teaching a course on post-modernism, a field that was not a formal part of my academic repertoire. I attempted to stay a week ahead of my large cohort of students, but failed. The students ultimately took over the class through a segment I had introduced to assist us to grapple with how to analyse the present moment. 'Great moments in post-modernism this week…' saw a

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55 There are of course notable exceptions to this such as the Menzies School of Health Research's long-standing relationship with the Galiwin'ku community of Elcho Island and the educational partnership between CDU Yolngu language experts and the Yolngu community of north-east Arnhem Land.

56 For a critique see Goedegebuure 2012.

range of students draw on examples from their daily lives and experience and apply a critical lens to better understand the social and cultural import of their experience and how it was reflective of an identifiable historic period with antecedents and complexities, thought-leaders and detractors. One mature-age music composition student led the way and at semester's end composed a musical score to reflect the structure, concepts and colour of the course. I seem to recall that the piece was performed by a small ensemble using a range of found objects, and that the music was somewhat discordant.

Understanding neo-liberalism in the contemporary moment presents the same challenges and generates the type of discomfort my students felt for many weeks of that post-modernism course. 'Why does our existence have to be rendered so complex, so theoretical, so French…' they asked. Like post-modernism, a further complication is that it is difficult to slate responsibility for this transformational ideology to the political left or the right (Humphreys & Cahill, 2016) even though there are a number of current discussions that conjure conspiracy theories around the dominance of neo-liberalism (Monbiot, 2016). This does not mean that the exercise and the exploration of how the present moment is actually experienced is irrelevant or inappropriate. I fear if we do not attempt to name, document and analyse this moment and how it is impacting on public institutions we risk sleepwalking in to our future and universities, despite all their intellectual and cultural capital, will fail to evidence different ways of being that might just help address those great challenges of our time and tie the higher education sector to an urgent national and global endeavour.
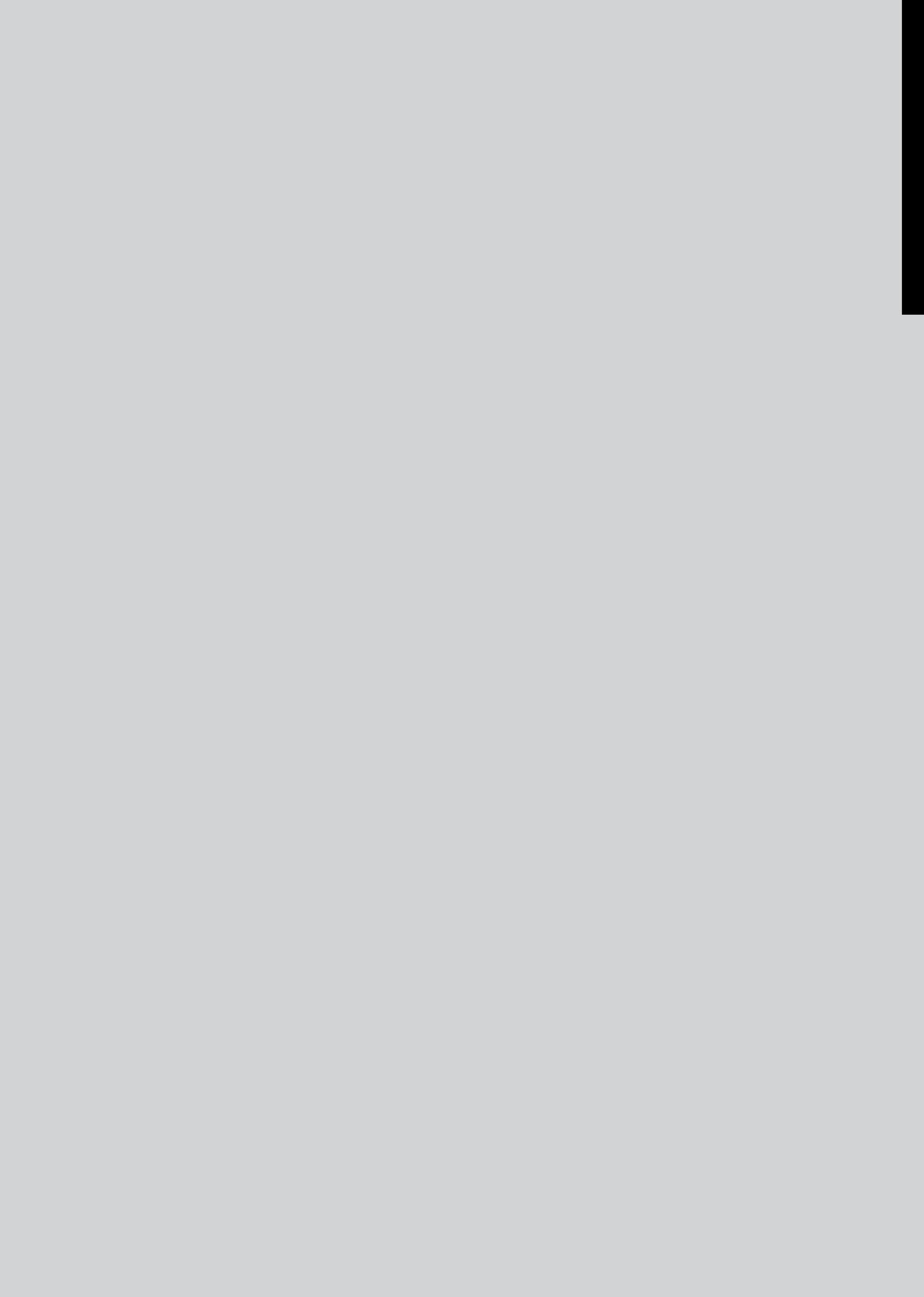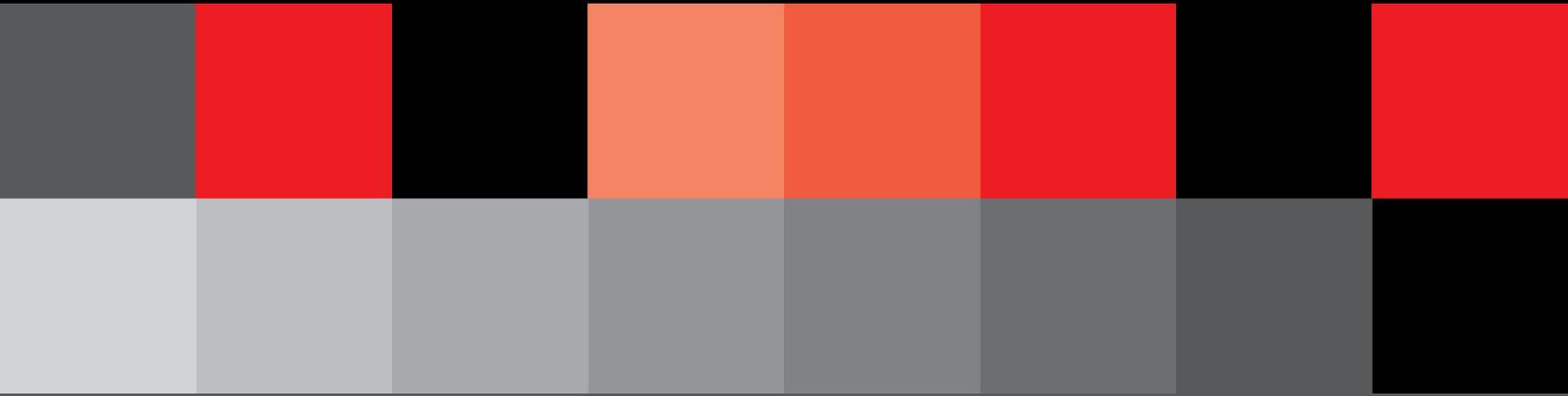
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