8 On Prophets and Metaphors: Devices for Coping in Times of Change

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A prophet doesn’t have to have any brains. They are good to have, of course, for the ordinary exigencies of life, but they are no use in professional work. It is the restfullest vocation there is. When the spirit of prophecy comes upon you, you merely take your intellect off and lay it somewhere in a cool place for a rest, and unship your jaw and leave it alone; it will work by itself. The result is prophecy.

Mark Twain (1835 – 1910) A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.

Introduction

If we believe Mark Twain, prophecy is not a particularly arduous activity, nor an overly cerebral one. Yet, even if one disagrees with this opinion, no one – not even Mr. Clemens – would deny that prophecy involves a certain element of risk.¹ Nor is it immune to professional hazard. Of all the professional hazards – and they are many, obloquy, incredulity and the crown of martyrdom not least – the greatest that stands in wait for the prophet is his – rather rarer, her – very own prophet’s version of Hubris. Hubris – the Fate that in the Antique world swiftly followed upon the sins of pride and above all presumption – comes less from being convinced by one’s own utterances so much as the complacency that comes with having made them in the first place. And then there is the terrible burden of knowing one possesses the Truth. This is the greatest risk of all because all too often it tempts others to furious heights in seeking to cut the prophet down to size. The upshot generates unexpected dialogue, which even if it ends in martyrdom for some, is beneficial for others. CHEPS does not claim to be in unique possession of the Truth. Prophets are not without honour save only in their own country, and since our utterances were made precisely on our own turf, clearly what we have done is to explore possibilities, rather than foretelling what will be. Our purpose was to stimulate debate. And in this no risk is too great. That CHEPS should mark its two decades of achievement by taking such a risk is, surely, what one would expect from a Centre, located in an establishment, itself singled out not so long ago by one of higher education’s leading spirits as a prototype of the ‘Entrepreneurial University’ (Clark, 1998).

Prophecy as the Art of Risk-taking

Nevertheless, the exploration of scenarios has some similarity with the art of prophecy, which is risky for other reasons and they are more substantial and substantive. The first of these is that those who indulge in divination’s noble art tend to work in the very

¹ Mr. Clemens’ view on the matter was ‘Prophecy is a good line of business, but it is full of risks.’
long term. There are, not surprisingly, exceptions to this general rule. The Sport of Kings – betting on horses, and its more demotic edition, betting on dogs – is one. It is short-term and, from this perspective, may perhaps be seen as applied divination. Like most things that migrate from theory to application, the risk as one does so rises enormously. For this reason, the natural operative span of the prophet lies in the long-term. If the original utterance is remembered, so much the better. But the passing of anno domini serves all too often to absolve the utterer of all responsibility. This it does in two ways. First, there is the Ultimate Absolution of Responsibility that follows upon the utterer’s passing on to spheres higher – or lower – depending on one’s personal theology and the chaos particular utterances brought about. This is the secret of economic forecasting, as John Maynard Keynes (1923) knew full well. Death is the saving grace of the economist, if not always of his ideas – alas.

The second saving grace for the prophet comes from within the corporation of prophets itself. Others have come along in the meantime and by grabbing the aforementioned obloquy, incredulity and martyrdom for themselves, lift them from the shoulders of the giants who precede them. In the world of academe, this is called ‘advancing the theory’. And from the perspective of the corporation of prophets, it is vital to ensuring the prophetic equivalence of a ‘high audience rating’. Those brought up in an earlier age will remember Elijah’s handing over his cloak to Elisha, which in a less God-fearing and more evaluation, assessment and quality-conscious time will doubtless be construed as the young prophet’s being accredited by due authority to ‘go forth and prophesy’.

Still, there are many gambits available to those active in the ‘vision business’, methods which, in the argot of the horse-racing man, allow them to ‘hedge their bets’. One gambit is to be downright apocalyptic. This is sometimes known in the trade as the ‘Patmos Strategy’ so named after Saint John of Patmos. It is sometimes known as the ‘Tactic Divine’ for Saint John was that as well. The second gambit is to construct impossible – or in default of impossibility, inspiring – utopias. If the first two fail, there is always a third; that is, to take refuge in a language that is downright obscure and leave the burden of interpretation to the individual who has been so incautious as to lend his or her ears. This latter has a familiar ring to those of a Classical education. It is the old scam – the Antique World’s edition of the confidence trick – perfected over centuries by the Pythonesse at Delphi whose trademark and some would say, methodology have been loaned for the occasion.

**Prophecy as a Serious Business**

If prophecy is a risky business, it is also from the prophet’s view of the world a serious one. All too often, prophecy is driven by deep discontent and by a sense of outrage. The shape of things to come – whether one turns to Isaiah as a classic example of the prophet in residence or H.G. Wells as a latter-day fellow-traveller – is not simply an exercise in projective techniques, though as scholars, statisticians, futurologists or even policy analysts we can call upon a far greater range in the armoury of sophistication and techniques than Isaiah had at his disposal, just as we may go beyond those techniques – rhetorical in the main – that Mark Twain so cuttlingly dismissed. What
distinguishes the type of prophecy undertaken in celebration of CHEPS’ 20th summer
from the rantings Twain savaged is precisely that CHEPS ‘brings the brain back in’.
But this does not explain why prophecies have been made and needed throughout the
ages. Still less their purpose.

Prophecies tend to be made in strange spots and, as the Book says, by ‘voices, crying
in the wilderness’. But they have a purpose and they have a context. Prophecies fulfill
a number of important tasks. The first and most obvious is to break out of the routine
constraints of the present, to move beyond those limitations of historic contingency,
path dependency (to revert to some of our jargon), to step beyond from the geological
pace of adaptation that structures, procedures – and let it be said, democracy as well –
place upon the pure vision or the ultimate end toward which our efforts should be
tending. This is prophecy as clarification – a term itself largely anachronistic, it is true
but that is one of the drawbacks of sustained metaphor, namely having to work
across two domains which in appearance have only a tenuous relationship between
them. Prophecy acting as clarification – or as revelation which makes it part of the
Patmos gambit – serves to strengthen resolve amongst the Faithful, to inspire them to
labour more strenuously for the clear and inspiring rewards that must come if only the
Faithful persist. In this setting, the purpose of revelation lies most assuredly in the
present, not the future. Goals are sharpened, resolve strengthened and hopefully one
pushes forward a little:

Through the night of doubt and sorrow
Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Singing songs of expectation
Onward to the Promised Land

But the ‘revelatory tradition’ of prophecy has another side to it. Rallying the Faithful
through inspiration – what psychologists would term ‘positive reinforcement’– is not
its only dimension. There is another genre and it has to do with ‘negative
reinforcement’, effectively amending the error of one’s ways by projecting into the
future what will happen if one continues to persist with present praxis. The first face of
the ‘revelatory tradition’ drives by inspiration, literally enthusiasm – that is, in the
literal meaning of the original Greek, infusing the individual with the divine spirit,
with the presence of the gods. The second drives by fear. This particular genre is
somewhat rarer in higher education policy, though some may care to debate the point
whether it might indeed be less rare than one might think as the basic psychological
instrument in the culture of evaluation, for example. It is far from being rare in other
domains: for instance, in environmental affairs, where negative reinforcement is
largely the predominant discourse. One has only to think of climate warming, the
greenhouse effect and the use of fossil fuels to grasp that this prophetic style – the
secular edition of the ‘Hellfire Sermon’ – is very far from dead.

Prophecy as negative reinforcement is to be seen in higher education policy from time
to time, largely in the form of opinion that dissents from policy during the phase of
negotiation and implementation. Statements about the deterioration in the conditions of
academic work, lamentations about the loss of national competitiveness, and – to make
the obvious jeu de mots – jeremiads about the ravages of managerialism tend to fall
into this category though the luridness of the consequences more often than not tends to be implicit rather than painting an explicit vision of what flows from them. Such representations rest upon the imperative that policy should be amended to avoid the vision unspeakable. They are an interesting instance of prophecy acting in the short term. Indeed, the very shortness of the time intervening between the prediction and the realisation of the unspeakable is often seen by those having recourse to such arguments as justifying in the first place the call for the rapid amending of ways or changing of policy.

**Prophecy and Utopia**

There is, however, a third variant, which falls into the second of the three categories I outlined earlier. This has to do with ‘inspiring Utopias’. Now the essential feature of Utopias in higher education, as Sheldon Rothblatt has argued with his customary brilliance and sparkle (Rothblatt, 2002) is their function as a social critique. In general, utopias are set in far-away places, largely isolated from the outside world. They are also explorations less of the way the present social order could be reconstructed so much as a vehicle for criticizing those particular features of it that the writer – or the prophet – deems undesirable or insufficiently underscored in the present. Thus, for instance, in the original of the genre, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, one of the main sources of its inspiration, was More’s abiding dislike of the acquisitive behaviour that marked 16th century England. Amongst the other critiques that higher education’s equivalent of Utopias have developed have been gender relations, manpower planning, social structure and genetics, the classic form of the latter being Aldus Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and that other theme, that runs across the centuries from Plato to Newman – namely, the role of learning in securing social stability (Rothblatt, 2002). Utopias have less to do with direct predictions or approximations as to what will or might happen. They are in the literal sense of the word, inconsequential: they have no outcome. Rather their purpose is to pose questions that have not yet been broached. In doing so, they posit a situation and a frame so alien that they are not to be attained, nor are they attainable. Rather they may be seen as ‘thought experiments’ that draw attention to particular issues. Whether these issues are taken up subsequently, whether they then become part of that eternal question of change ‘How to move from what is to what ought to be’, is no concern of the seer, though it may become so for those for whom the vision appeals.

**The Place of the Pythonesse and Delphi**

The final strain in the functions of prophecy – the Delphic School – by contrast, does involve decisions and choice, whereas the Patmos strategy does not. If one looks carefully at the Patmos strategy, irrespective of whether it is grounded in positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement, it is not about choice between different courses of action – or options – so much as making sure that the Faithful follow the line the prophet has revealed.
The Pythonesse of Delphi, however, was nothing if not subtle. Prophecy in this mode was essentially ambiguous. It could be interpreted in many ways. Accordingly, the onus of deciding which interpretation was valid, rested with the supplicant, once he had puzzled out the different meanings and reviewed his own situation. Man might not be master of his own Fate, for the gods were nothing if not capricious. But the application of intelligence, rather than obedience, might sometimes serve to double-guess and out-smart the worst of their intentions. The Pythonesse put a premium not just on self-awareness, but also on cunning.

The Place of Celebration

When one places CHEPS’ celebratory romp against this backdrop of the various schools of divination and their purposes, clearly the fit is not an easy one. The scenarios are very far from being utopic in the sense that Rothblatt suggested. They are located in time, situated in place and though inventive in their imagination and imaginings, they provide a plausible connection between where we are and the paths, decisions and marker points that lie along the roads to Centralia, the City of the Sun, to Octavia the Spider-web City and to Vitis Vinifera, the City of Traders and Micro-Climates. Suggestions are made, though they are more explicit in the first scenario than in the second and third about how we reached Jolly Old Europe. In the literature of Utopias, as Rothblatt pointed out, how Paradise is constructed over time, remains a mystery. It is there. How it got there is immaterial. It is this difference that makes the CHEPS scenarios marginal to the Utopian tradition, though it does not wholly exclude them from it. There is a second element that places a distance between the two. The scenarios do not contain an explicit critique of our present condition. They are, to put matters bluntly, an extrapolation from an accepted situation. They are neither a critique nor a problematique. And though one could indeed pore over the text to extract a critique from the social values and political assumptions that are set out in each scenario, this would be to place an interpretation on the exercise that it neither bears nor was meant to bear.

It is no coincidence that of the four prophetic schools I mentioned, the closest correspondence both in purpose as well as the name of the methodology employed in this exercise lies with the school of Delphi. CHEPS’ scenarios can have no claim – and it has to be said that they never made in it the first place – to be considered as having even remote ties with the Tactic Divine in its purest form, though there are purposes which it fulfils that have a certain kinship with it. There is a very good reason for placing a considerable distance between the Patmos strategy and the European Higher Education and Research Landscape. This is because in academia, there is no place for revealed knowledge. Even so, these visions – all three of them – in varying degrees do have Utopic under-currents in the sense that they are, if not removed from reality, then recognizable as an extreme extrapolation of it. Still, though projected forward, certain dimensions – modes of course delivery, stratification between different types of university, the central place of management and the somewhat fragmented – which is less brutal than battered – place of teaching staff, remain recognizable on the basis of what we know of current trends. Purists and those who do not look upon such developments with great gladness of heart, will point out of course that some of these
projected developments are strictly speaking better qualified as ‘dystopic’ rather than ‘utopic’; that is, they anticipate not a happy scene so much as a distressing one (Rothblatt, 2003). Each to his – or her – own opinion.

The Significance of Scenarios

There is much that is of value in such an exercise, even if as scholars and students of higher education we know all too well that the road even to relatively simple visions of a near future is never straight and rarely turns out as the prophet – or those having power – would have it. And there we have a clue to the appeal that lies in drawing up what is best described as a series of ‘idealised alternatives’. For although the Delphi technique does not make a complete break with quantification – indeed, it is to some degree built on it – it is nevertheless a step beyond quantification. It has recourse to those elements of scholarship that, if not to the fore in the way we go about our work, are nevertheless present. Those elements are intuition, insight, the post-rational even. A number of arguments can be adduced for using this unusual approach. A particularly good case could be built which takes as its point of departure the speed of change itself. We have still to ascertain how well higher education institutions cope with change as a constant feature though the lesser prophets of the hour have predicted that if universities do not cope, they will not survive (Duderstadt, 1999).

As a Centre, we have looked at the individual dimensions – governance, management, finance, student costs, academic work, institutional performance and output, to mention some of our feats of arms. But these have been studied largely in an immediate context either to enable others to narrow their options with a view toward acting later or to show what the consequences are or the outcome is, plotted against the original intent. As an alternative, we contribute to the instrumentality for scrutinizing the ability of institutions to meet change and weigh the sensitivity of these proposed indicators. We have yet to express any studied opinion about the effects these changes will have when they operate in conjunction. We tend to examine each aspect separately. And, furthermore, we also tend to leave aside the conditions of their sustainability when set against the sustained performance of the institution. We assume somehow that higher education will cope with change and that those which do not pay the price of an unidentified and generally presumed incompetence. Though it has to be said that the study of ‘failing institutions’ could well furnish interesting insights into the general issue of adaptation to change as our study of those successful – perhaps more so.

Change, Prophecy and the Higher Education Community

The logic of the acceleration of change – and leaving aside the acceleration of knowledge itself, poses a certain number of – shall we say, ‘existential problems’ – for the higher education research community. The first and obvious point is that as change speeds up so as scholars in the field we may know more about higher education, but what we know is more rapidly dated. Certainly, our techniques and analyses advance our knowledge and the knowledge of others who rely on us. And in that sense, both we – and they – progress in understanding. But the question remains whether such
advance serves to close the gap between what we analyse and what is taking place before our eyes. Or whether the pace of change serves to make the gap wider. In conditions such as these, forward projection – prophecy by another name – serves a number of purposes. First of all, it provides the opportunity of setting the ‘tyranny of the present’ in perspective. By projecting forward, we oblige ourselves to undertake a species of synthesis, which is very often denied when working within the conventions that accompany our various disciplines, domains or fields of expertise. In effect, when we embark on long-range scenario building, we stand the interplay between expertise, the corpus of our special knowledge and imagination on their heads. Working within the canons of a particular body of knowledge demands that we limit our imagination and hold it in reign to the techniques and methodologies of our particular personal discipline. Forward projection, by contrast, invites us to place those same techniques and methodologies at the service of our imagination. That is the condition of the intuitive great leap forward. Thus, in reply to Mr. Clemens’ bromides, the CHEPS version of prophecy engages the brain very actively – and indeed many brains. It may not be the same part of the brain as those regions where analytic capacity is located. Imagination, some hold, dwells in the left hemisphere rather than the right. But the organ plays its part, even so.

**Benefits Bestowed by Building Scenarios**

There are also other benefits to be had. In scenario-building, we set ourselves the task of creating a coherence into our different fields, juxtaposing them one against the other. The act of constructing both coherence and synthesis for the future has a ‘fall out’ on the present. We see how our different disciplines and fields contribute to the constitution of a whole vision, as opposed to our daily use of them to examine the individual facets it contains. By building ‘a whole vision’, we obtain some insight about the way different disciplinary perspectives may fit together or act in complement to one another. Creating a ‘rounded vision’ is arguably of especial importance, given the natural trend of ‘disciplines’ to fragment – a process that Walter Metzger (1987) termed ‘subject parturition’. Projecting coherence into the future is then of special significance to the domain that studies higher education. It is important because that domain is already so deeply fragmented that exercises in cohesion – even if projected – provide a counterweight to the fragmentation that is our daily lot and on that account have an indispensable part in creating an awareness of the scope of the domain when different disciplines and perspectives are brought together. Paradoxically, scenario-building thus serves – and here I too am ‘hedging my bets’ – to improve what the military call ‘situational awareness’ in the present. Seen from this perspective – which attends less to the nature of the prophetic utterance or to the specific image or vision it entails than to the function it performs for those carrying it out – forward projection contributes to reaffirming both the significance of what one is doing as well as reinforcing the common identity of those doing it.
The Immediate Significance of the Three Cities

In this sense therefore, the very creation of the three Cities of Learning itself fulfils a role not greatly dissimilar to that of the Tactic Divine, in its positive capacity. It reinforces both the collective determination as well as the place of the individual as a practitioner and exponent of a particular discipline or as actor in a particular domain. Forward projection is not simply about how we see the future. It is also a statement of how we view ourselves today, how we work together. The scenario of the future is at the same time a statement of present identity.

This latent function of ‘vision-building’ in higher education is, or so I consider it, of very special importance for the fields of study that bear on higher education and on higher education policy. The reasons for this assertion are both structural and conjunctural. In the structural domain, the study of higher education stands as the supreme example of multi-disciplinarity. Fifteen years ago, Tony Becher (1992) identified some twenty ‘feeder’ fields. Others have evolved since. With such a wealth of perspectives on which to draw and, which are also characterised by the rapid development of new ones – evaluation studies, internationalisation, accreditation, to mention but a few – the sheer variety is often an obstacle to being able to claim a specific and recognised intellectual identity. The second reason is simply to re-state the same thing but drawing on a different area of representation and depiction to justify it. This second area has to do with the depth in the changes that are settling around the institution of higher education.

Moving the Metaphor: or, Beyond Statistics

It is the basic and constant belief of every generation in industrial society that it lives through changes more radical and far-reaching than its parents ever did. And much of the effort of scholarship in the social sciences has been directed towards devising ways of testing, plotting and substantiating that claim. Higher education is no exception. Today, many of the most powerful ways of registering change are based on quantification and they have varying degrees of appropriateness, sensitivity and relevance. There are, however, other indicative forms apart from statistical indicators. One of the most interesting, though very little used, is the shift in metaphor to illustrate changes in social perception. It is an approach rarely used in higher education for the obvious fact that if linguistic analysis is certainly part of those fields that may occasionally shed light on our quasi-penumbra, it is not in the mainstream of the social sciences and rarely is to be seen wandering around our neck of the woods in Academe.

We are all aware of this shift in metaphor if only because we deal with it and are engaged in analysing the very changes that have brought it about and which, in its turn, it brings about. No-one in higher education can fail to be aware of ‘metaphor shift’ even though it tends to parade under different flags. Metaphor shift is seen in the re-designation of Vice Chancellors and Rectors as Chief Executive Officers, of students as ‘consumers’, administrators as ‘managers’, with everyone from governments through to alumni and sponsors lumped together as ‘Stakeholders’. Perhaps most
wounding of all is the metamorphosis, fragmentation and forcible ejection of Faculty or academic staff from the heights of Donnish Dominion down into a general, quasi-proletarian and definitely subterranean category described as ‘knowledge workers’, the whole accompanied by a mealy-mouthed jargon, variously culled from writings on ‘Human Resources’, private business practice and management gobbledegook (Fuller, in press). The shift can be described in terms many and various: as part of that long-drawn-out historical process that has been going on for the best part of two centuries or more in Europe – namely the désacralisation of knowledge and of its institutions; or in more immediate and contemporary terms, as the central process in the drive towards the so-called Knowledge Economy; alternatively, as one of the stages that mark higher education’s assimilation into ‘the market’ and the subsequent commodification of knowledge. You pays your money and you takes your perspective.

Balancing Metaphors Ancient and Modern

Given the power that changes in terminology have in shaping the way activities and functions are perceived and understood, the basic metaphor on which the three CHEPS scenarios have been erected, it is of more than passing interest. The vision CHEPS builds is not simply a projection forward of current trends already rooted in the new imagining and in the new ‘human resources’ discourse. It is also grounded in a very traditional ‘framing metaphor’ – that of the City. The use of the City as a metaphor for the university – and, by extension, for the higher education system – is a very old and respectable literary conceit. In choosing it, CHEPS reminds us that the City – like the university itself – was from the earliest times the symbol of freedom. One has only to recall to mind the German proverb ‘Stadtluft macht frei’ for this particular association to be born out. The City was also the place where two contradictory forces in human affairs – continuity and change – were played out, shaped the polity and did so in ways occasionally urbane (Neave, 2005).

Interesting debates can be had over the precise moment when the purpose of the university was re-defined less in terms of ‘continuity and change’ which contains a number of very specific presumptions about the university’s role in society, and the moment when that basic vision moved on to the no less subtle combination of ‘continuity in the midst of change’ which has equally fundamental consequences for the purpose of both system and institution. What we can say with little fear of contradiction is that these self-same forces of continuity combined with change also brought the university down from its status as ‘the City on the Hill’ – itself a metaphor striking on account of its overt religious connotations – and, as Clark Kerr noted with insight and eloquence more than forty years ago, brought the university into the City and imposed on the university the industrialised form of the multi-versity (Kerr, 1964).

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2 I have explored the interplay between these two conditions in the seminar dedicated to celebrating the life work of our good friend, Maurice Kogan (Neave, 2005).
The Garden of Delight

The City is not the only enduring metaphor. There is another. It too is variously woven into the three scenarios. It was singularly influential in shaping the 18th and 19th century university both in the United Kingdom and the United States. It is a theme that once again has been pursued with deftness and sensitivity by Sheldon Rothblatt (1998). This is the horticultural metaphor of the university and its functions. Indeed, the University as a Garden of Delight, which is what Eden signifies in the Hebrew, brings together both the most ancient images – prelapsarian – in both theology and in education (for Paradise Lost was nothing if not a supremely pedagogic experience, indeed it was the very first in an infinite trail of moral tales) which subsequently made its way into the history of the University (Ruegg and De Ridder Simoens, 1992). The horticultural metaphor played its particular part in shaping both the vision of higher learning and very often, its physical siting. The green field campus which is in effect a Lapalissade – an oxymoron – since campus in Latin means field – has been immensely influential shaping those systems of higher education where students are seen as adolescents – as young people in need of protection from the wiles and temptations of this world (Rothblatt, 1998). By the same token, those cultures in which students were held to be fully mature and self guided – in a word, autonomous – tended to place their universities in the heart of cities, on the contrary assumption that it was necessary for future leaders to be in direct contact with the society they would eventually lead. Whether by endorsement or denial, however, the horticultural metaphor – symbolic of an enclosed, organic, self-sustaining community – has long been used to describe ideal institutional and organisational forms from the Old Testament through to Hieronymus Bosche and beyond.

As an aside, it is surely paradoxical to say the least that CHEPS’ should so resolutely woo the urban metaphor for in truth, the University of Twente is the only Dutch university to be set in a garden. We can then, like Falstaff, ‘babble of green fields’ and do so with considerable justification. And though these scenarios have been constructed around the urban metaphor, it is also a matter of record that an earlier episode in scenario-building on the future of higher education in the Netherlands saw CHEPS cultivating the horticultural metaphor with equal vigour (Huisman, Westerheijden & de Boer, 2001).

Expropriating the Garden

Whilst the garden remained a symbol of purity and innocence, it was also a symbol of detachment from the things of this world. The Garden beyond the City – or even the Garden within the City for that matter – has, to all intents and purposes, vanished as a symbol of the university in mainland Europe. It still retains its power, however, in what is perhaps erroneously called the ‘Anglo-Saxon world’ where today it plays a slightly different role – that of being a final expression confirming another version of institutional stratification. In a world where the relationship between University and Society is increasingly based on the principle of integration, of closer links between the two, the horticultural metaphor can apply only to certain establishments. Thus, the Garden becomes not a shared construct so much as a construct that sets those grounded in it, apart from the rest. It is no longer a shared ideal but a statement of difference.
More to the point, the metaphor is knowingly used to uphold that difference and very particularly so when it combines with an elite status. Thus, the outward constancy of the metaphor itself hides a shift in the associations, *sous-entendus* and connotations within it.

The shift within the metaphor is most evident in precisely those systems where the ‘marketisation’ of higher education stands at its most advanced – that is, in the Anglo-Saxon systems – the United States, the United Kingdom and above all, as an example of the offspring overtaking its ancestors – Australia. In a world where competition is fought out through images and symbols, that of the Campus as Garden assumes a new weight in projecting a specific elite appeal, setting those able to sustain it, off and apart from the urbanised and universal segments of the higher education system that the three scenarios anticipate, though developing along different paths. The symbol of the university qua Garden is then an interesting pointer to the changing function of a particular metaphor, which outwardly seems to derive from continuity between certain modern elite universities and the stereotype of a pre-industrial Arcadia, but in fact serves a very different purpose. Hence, whilst there are neo-Arcadians as a political party in Centralia, the City of bureaucracy triumphant, I am by no means sure that Arcadia as an image for ‘selling’ high quality learning will either desert Academia, still less be relegated to irrelevance. Quite the contrary.

**Leaning on the Ivory Tower**

Yet, the Garden metaphor is not the only one to suffer from ‘epistemic drift’. That trusty cliché – which is a metaphor worn down to the bleeding gums – of academia as an Ivory Tower has been subject to similar reworking since its first usage by Wilhelm von Humboldt (Nybom, 2003) as indeed, in certain quarters has the notion of the ‘Humboldtian University’ (Varia, 2004). Rather than being conditions to ensure the impartial and sceptical nature of academic work – of distance and time placed between the individual academic and outside society – these very same expressions are today associated with overtones of detachment qua institutional irresponsibility, of individual self-indulgence, social futility, pedagogic irrelevance and undesirable on all those counts. Indeed, if we look very closely at the situation portrayed in all three of our scenarios, it is clear that we have, in a manner of speaking, come full cycle. For just as the Ivory Tower no longer stands as an expression of the desirable – quite the contrary, it is more often than not highly pejorative in its current usage – so the city has changed its status. In all three of the CHEPS scenarios, the city and the university are inseparable. Effectively, in *Vitis Vinifera*, the former has wholly engulfed the latter. Its singularities have been absorbed and dispersed across an immense, ephemeral and basically anarchic social construct. The University is no longer the city come down from the hill. Rather, it has been ingested by the city. It has become symbiote of service to the city rather than an institution possessing a particular and definite identity.
Envoi

It is precisely when long-accepted metaphors begin to acquire different overlays, to convey an image and a meaning at odds with what was previously conveyed that we need to have some idea where we may be going. Or at the very least to have some insight into the range of probable alternatives that deserve scrutiny. Precisely why higher education stands to benefit from this perhaps more than other domains, I have argued earlier. Presenting such alternatives – however idealised they are – serves another purpose and that is to show very precisely that policy ought not to rely on single track solutions – or to take refuge in the cry of the unimaginative that there is in essence, no alternative. We may not be clear about where we are going and even less sure about how we will get there. But the willingness to contemplate alternatives that could arise from our present condition makes us aware that accepting today’s orthodox account is in all probability neither necessary nor very wise. In short, it is precisely when metaphors begin to change their inner reference points that prophets come into their own. They force us to go beyond the routine of the moment. Even if their visions are apocalyptic, an exaggeration or even a pastiche of what we perceive as possible from our own appreciation of the condition in which we find ourselves, we find ourselves obliged to contemplate alternative possibilities. And that is indeed the serious business if not of prophesying then very certainly of scenario-building.

References


