

**Student Satisfaction in Higher  
Education: Philosophical  
Perspectives on Voice, Settlement,  
and Customer Relations**

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## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the notion of student satisfaction and its effects on the Higher Education (HE) sector. It takes issue with two key features of the current literature on this topic: that 'student satisfaction' is taken as a given, and; that ensuring students are satisfied is typically accepted as a good thing. This thesis explores philosophically what it means to be 'satisfied' with one's education, considering what this implies about the value of HE, and the potential impact of this on universities, academics, and students alike. In offering a new and original stance on the issue of student satisfaction in Higher Education, this thesis draws on the philosophical works of Stanley Cavell, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Martin Heidegger, and Martin Buber to inform its argument.

Part I of the thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of 'student satisfaction', its introduction into the HE sector, and how this is linked to other marketised discourses such as 'value for money' and 'service quality'. It argues that what is currently missing from the empirical literature on student satisfaction is a philosophical consideration of student voice, a questioning of the value of student satisfaction, and reflections on how the dominance of satisfaction measures impacts on relationships in the contemporary university. Part I includes an overview of the current, mostly empirical, literature on this topic and then discusses the philosophical 'method' employed here.

The thesis then turns to its central themes – an attention to language, voice, perfectionism, and ethical relationships – to demonstrate that the exploration of key concepts is central to the 'method' pursued here. Part II of the thesis discusses three issues in HE that are inextricably tied to the student satisfaction agenda: the collection of student *voice*; the recent drive to offer a kind of *settlement* in teaching and learning, and; the shift from academic-student relationships to mere *customer relations*. The issues investigated here are discussed in light of three key distinctions: between 'feedback' and 'voice'; between forms of 'un-educative settlement' and 'educative

unsettling', and; between relationships of 'exchange' and those of 'encounter'. In drawing on the philosophical works mentioned above, Part II not only problematises certain discourses and marketised practices in HE, but it also considers the practical implications of these ideas for universities, academics and their students.

Part III of the thesis returns to the central distinctions made in Part II, such as that between 'feedback' and 'voice', to argue that what is most problematic about student satisfaction and its associated discourses is the encouragement of the former distinctions (for example, feedback) to the exclusion of the latter (such as voice). While acknowledging that student satisfaction cannot simply be removed or eradicated from the HE sector, the thesis offers a productive way forward in light of the issues raised by drawing an original and significant distinction between two different forms of 'satisfaction': the 'now-' and the 'not-yet-'. The thesis concludes by laying out several philosophically-informed principles for resisting current iterations of student satisfaction, and for embracing a richer conception of 'voice', encouraging educative unsettling in the classroom, and fostering relationships premised upon encounter.

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## Preface

By the end of college I had come to realise that music was not my life. How that *crisis* eventually produced the conviction that a life of study and writing growing out of philosophy was for me to discover (Cavell, 2010, p.4, my emphasis).

My interest in philosophy of education could be seen as growing out of a similar crisis to that experienced by the American philosopher Stanley Cavell. While Cavell's work is extremely influential for the thesis presented here, I feel that there are certain affinities between his philosophical 'method' and my own. Rather than the crisis occurring at the end of my undergraduate degree and after studying music as Cavell did, my own experience of being unsettled happened after studying biology for a year at Durham University. It was not that I disliked the course, but rather I felt that biology was maybe 'not for me'. Reaching the end of my first year, I definitely experienced a crisis akin to what Cavell discusses, whereby I was concerned that maybe a university education itself was not the right thing for me to pursue. So my choice was either to change course or to leave Higher Education (HE) altogether. But in reflecting on why I chose biology in the first place, I realised that this decision was premised on more of an 'oh well, I seem to have excelled at biology before', rather than a real love of the subject and wish to have a career in science and industry.

I decided to change course and thought that I would like to study primary education with a teaching qualification embedded in it (offering Qualified Teacher Status, QTS, upon completion). However, this move could not be easily accommodated so I applied instead for Education Studies with Psychology. Despite this decision being a bit of a punt and a gamble, I discovered not only a passion for education, but particularly for philosophy of education. In contrast to what I had studied before, I revelled in the ambiguities and open-ended nature of questions arising in philosophy of education. In a module I undertook in my second year, we dealt with such issues as 'can we ever really "know" another?', 'what does the self consist of?', and 'should philosophy aspire to be a social science?'. Following this, I decided to write a philosophical dissertation in my third year which

compared different accounts of selfhood from philosophy and psychology. My lecturers in philosophy of education had clearly unveiled some passion and commitment to philosophy that I was not previously aware of, and this encouraged me to study the subject at doctoral level and work toward a career in academia, but what question or topic would I deal with for the PhD?

My interest in student satisfaction came about primarily through my own experience of completing the National Student Survey (NSS) shortly before graduation in 2015. Having studied a joint degree, with very different experiences in the education and psychology departments, I struggled with being able to accurately represent my experience as a whole. The virtues of the education department largely outweighed some of the unaccommodating experiences I had had in psychology, and so I based my responses on that. I remember students discussing the idea of boycotting the NSS at the time, as it merely reinforces the marketisation of HE and academic labour, although choosing not to respond would have implied dissatisfaction with our experiences. All students seem to be aware that responding to the NSS is like playing a game, with both academics and students being the chess-pieces moved around at will by government policy. Hence, refusing to fill in the NSS did not seem a viable option, especially as I was almost badgered with email, text and call reminders about the survey.

Not only did I personally experience an issue with making my 'voice' heard authentically, but I also realised that such measures overemphasise the tangible, and typically marketable, 'ends' of HE. The final question on the NSS asks students about their overall satisfaction with course quality. While I cannot recall whether I ticked 'definitely agree', 'mostly agree' or otherwise for this question, it made me wonder when and how students might know that they were satisfied, and by satisfaction here I am referring to more than the short-term meeting of needs. Three years on, I still feel unable to answer this question regarding my undergraduate degree, despite my HE experience being extremely positive and transformative. What I can say for now is that I know that studying the course changed my life and shaped my

future ambitions in unimaginable and inexplicable ways, while the influence of certain lecturers is still felt today. Of course, measures such as the NSS cannot account for responses such as mine, where the 'outputs' and measurable benefits of HE are not easy to delineate and reify.

Adding to these concerns over the student satisfaction agenda, I was also witness to the rise in tuition fees in 2012, although I was in the last cohort of students paying roughly £3,500 per annum. As tuition fees increased to £9,000 the year after I entered Higher Education, it made me question how the price might impact upon the student experience and approaches to teaching and learning. Arguably, those entering HE in 2012 paying higher fees would receive the same education as those paying around the £3,000 mark, but the huge increase in student debt may have altered students' expectations.

I am dubious about whether, if having to pay the higher tuition fees, I would have entered HE at all, but I can only speculate on that. Bearing these concerns in mind, I became more skeptical of the drive to create what Peter Roberts calls 'pleasurable and measurable experiences' (as cited by Gibbs, 2017, p.152). I was also wary of a dissonance between how students approach such surveys as the NSS, and how they are used for public accountability and to guide student choice, in turn shaping the HE marketplace through the creation of institutional league tables.

When looking through the literature to see if a philosophical exploration of student satisfaction and its associated discourses would be valuable and original, I was struck by the dearth of research that was asking such questions as I will deal with here; for example, 'what does it mean to be satisfied with one's Higher Education?', and 'should we [even] be aiming to satisfy students?' So my commitment to philosophy of education stemmed from a questioning of what I felt to be a rather asinine measure of student satisfaction, and this paved the way for the research presented in this thesis. The question remains whether I am 'satisfied' now, or indeed was satisfied with my undergraduate education. But 'satisfaction' is ineluctably tied to the

notion of 'value for money', which is not something I set out to obtain from university. I have not felt the benefits of the so-called 'graduate premium', with higher wages gained according to one's educational qualifications, although again this idea is tied to an economic rationality. In answer to the NSS asking about the quality of resources, availability of academic staff, and promptness of feedback, yes I am satisfied with my Higher Education. Yet student satisfaction measures only speak to the economic value of HE, without in any way explaining its personal worth to each student.

In contrasting satisfaction with happiness, Paul Gibbs writes that fundamental happiness 'is not the satisfaction of exciting preferences, but the securing of one's action in a life-plan of one's being' (2016, p.5). While satisfaction and happiness may often coincide, it is my contention that universities should not overemphasise excellence, efficiency, value for money, and competitiveness; in striving to ensure satisfaction, we may bypass happiness altogether.

My own Higher Education has not only given me a sense of satisfaction but also an immeasurable happiness, self-confidence, and the determination to succeed. I do not have a neatly laid-out list of skills that my university education provided, although I was often encouraged to 'audit' and record my skills from induction. *Bildung*<sup>1</sup>, or self-cultivation, seems to be a more apt description of my Higher Education, encompassing the idea that education should enable a person to grow into themselves, or 'a state of being content with oneself' (Gibbs, 2016, p.3). While educationalists often write of the power of education to transform and change lives, HE is, and should be, focused on shaping students into who they are and who they want to become.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Bildung* was initially used by German philosopher, Wilhelm Von Humboldt. Though *Bildung* is often described as being 'untranslatable', it generally means an individual's capacity for self-realisation, or their 'self-culture'. For further details, see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wilhelm-humboldt/> [Accessed 08 March 2019].

# Part I

## Chapter 1

### Literature Overview – Policy and Practice Context of Student Satisfaction Measures in the UK Higher Education Sector

#### 1.1 Introduction

##### 1.1.1 Policy Background

The rise of student satisfaction measures and institutional league tables of performance in the UK Higher Education (HE) sector can be linked back, at least in part, to the initial introduction of university tuition fees in 1998 (Teaching and Higher Education Act, 1998). Initially set at £1,000 per annum, tuition fees have continued to rise since then, and the cap on tuition fees was raised to £9,000 per year in 2012 after the publication of the Government's White Paper which emphasised that 'students [should be placed] at the Heart of the System' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2011, p.1).

To promote the widening participation agenda and to mitigate against the potentially negative effects of introducing higher fees, universities charging the maximum of £9,000 were required to submit access agreements to the newly established Office for Fair Access (OFFA, BIS, 2011). Such agreements outlined institutional efforts to encourage typically under-represented groups (such as Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) students, and those from low-participation neighbourhoods) and non-traditional students to apply. All of these changes to the HE sector were reflective of a broader commitment to driving up quality, increasing competition between universities (which in turn is meant to raise efficiency), and placing greater power in the hands of student-consumers (Yeo, 2008; Blackmore, 2009; Stensaker and Harvey, 2013).

Universities are now more pressured to make their work publicly accountable, and institutional autonomy is receding as the commercialisation of HE progresses. That Higher Education is a commodity is increasingly taken as a given (Molesworth *et al.*, 2011; Bates and Kaye, 2014), with educationalists often debating how best to regulate the market and/or

improve student satisfaction (Rolfe, 2002; Blackmore, 2009; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014), rather than questioning the extent to which HE should be considered as a market. The marketisation of the HE sector is now widely accepted and the thesis opens from this position.

As tuition fees have increased, student expectations of 'service quality' have changed (Rolfe, 2002; Mark, 2013; Bates and Kaye, 2014), and students are now considered as 'customers', 'consumers', and/or major stakeholders of Higher Education services (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Blackmore, 2009; Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Mainardes *et al.*, 2013). As students are progressively viewed as 'customers' and market principles have encroached on the HE sector, measures of student satisfaction have been introduced as a way of ensuring 'value for money' for students (Rolfe, 2002). Coinciding with this, there has also been a promotion of greater competition between institutions which is thought to increase quality and efficiency (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012; Brockerhoff *et al.*, 2014). The results of student satisfaction measures, such as the National Student Survey (NSS)<sup>1</sup> which is used in the UK, are used to compile publicly available league tables. League table position can influence the decisions of prospective students when choosing which universities to apply to (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005), and NSS results are often taken as an overall measure of institutional quality and reputation (Beecham, 2009; Bedggood and Donovan, 2012).

In order to provide a broader context for discussions of student satisfaction internationally, I will also consider literature based on studies from America, Australia, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore among others, but the

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<sup>1</sup> The National Student Survey (NSS) is completed by final-year undergraduate students at Higher Education Institutions across the UK. It consists of 27 questions covering different areas of provision such as academic support, assessment and feedback, teaching quality, learning resources, and student voice. The results of the NSS are made publicly available in order to 'inform student choice', 'enhance the student experience', and to 'provide public assurance' (NSS). For further details, see: <https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/institutions.php> [Accessed 05 January 2019].

thesis as a whole will focus on HE policy and practice in the UK. As I will discuss further below, there are many interesting similarities between measures of student satisfaction across very different cultural contexts, thus showing the prolific nature of the marketisation of HE and the emphasis placed on accountability. The most prominent measure of student satisfaction in the UK HE sector is the aforementioned NSS, which was introduced in 2005 and is conducted by the market research company, Ipsos-Mori.

Measures such as the NSS are not only used for accountability purposes (Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield, 2007) – to hold both universities and individual academics to account – but also to inform institutional quality assurance and management procedures (Stensaker and Harvey, 2013). The increasing marketisation of HE has necessitated that universities pay more attention to student feedback, in terms of satisfaction survey responses, and word of mouth appraisals (whether students would recommend their institution to friends and family). This emphasis on being ‘customer-focused’ is also advocated by the UK Government, who have expressed their commitment to ‘doing more than ever to put students in the driving seat’ (BIS, 2011, p.2).

### **1.1.2 Recent Policy Initiatives**

The policy landscape of UK Higher Education changed dramatically again in late 2015, with the publication of the HE Green Paper titled ‘Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice’ (BIS, 2015). In this paper, the Government proposed the ‘Teaching Excellence Framework’ (TEF) to place teaching on a more equal footing with research in universities. It was announced that judgements of ‘teaching excellence’ were to be based on student satisfaction data, with those institutions achieving



'gold' being allowed to further increase their tuition fees in line with inflation from the 2017/18 academic year (BIS, 2015).<sup>2</sup>

Aimed at improving teaching standards in universities, the Green Paper explained the need for the TEF in terms of providing 'value for money' – a proxy measure of 'satisfaction' – for students (BIS, 2015). While a consistent definition of 'teaching excellence' remains elusive, its evaluation is broadly based on three aspects: 'teaching quality', 'learning environment', and 'student outcomes and learning gain' (Gunn, 2018, p.137). The TEF purports to measure not only the quality of universities' teaching practices, but also their overall 'teaching mission' which includes direct teaching, and facilities and environmental factors that support student learning (Gunn, 2018, p.135). As Gunn states, 'the teaching mission includes all the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes of the student lifecycle' (2018, p.135). As the TEF focuses on the student lifecycle from pre-enrolment to beyond graduation, its metrics include non-continuation data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the 'Graduate Outcomes Survey', in addition to NSS responses.

As tuition fees increased at universities, so did the proliferation of regulatory bodies, such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). But with the passing of the *Higher Education and Research Act (2017)*, this was both consolidated and simplified. The newly established Office for Students (OfS) assumed the regulatory responsibilities of both Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the OFFA, ensuring that widening participation was at the forefront of the agenda and that universities continued to provide an excellent quality service (BIS, 2016). The *Higher Education and Research Act (2017)* also sought to create one system for regulating, and allocating funding for, research which is to be managed by

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<sup>2</sup> The implementation of financial incentives for teaching excellence, in the form of raised tuition fees, is now contingent upon a review of the metrics used in the TEF, and differential fee caps are now set to come into effect from Autumn 2020 (Morgan, 2017).

the newly formed 'UK Research and Innovation', or UKRI. The UKRI regulatory body, which combined the previous seven current research councils with 'Innovate UK' and 'Research England', is responsible for facilitating and supporting new research in science, technology, and the humanities (Higher Education and Research Act, 2017).<sup>3</sup>

The *Higher Education and Research Act* (2017) can be seen as the concretising of what came before (BIS, 2011; 2015; 2016), with the UK government seeking to 'reform the Higher Education system architecture to make it simpler and more efficient' (BIS, 2016, p.3), and therefore easier to manage and regulate for modern day student-consumers. These multiple processes of regulation, accountability, and quality assurance can be seen as a direct response to the 'customerisation' and marketisation of HE (Love, 2008, p.18), whereby the 'business' of universities is now considered in terms of 'service provision' (Clayson and Haley, 2005) which is critically evaluated by their 'customers' (students).

The extent to which students consider themselves as 'customers' or 'consumers' remains dubious, but there has been a clear shift in student expectations over the past decade or so, with a rise in 'student entitlement' attitudes (Rolfe, 2002; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014). As the 'customerisation' of students has recently been formalised under the *Consumer Rights Act* (2015), this inevitably reframes HE as a commodity which, whether considered to be a product or a service, students are 'entitled' to given their high personal investments in it (Finney and Finney, 2010; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014; Marshall *et al.*, 2015). This shift is evidenced from the very titles given to recent journal articles including 'I'd be expecting caviar in lectures' (Bates

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<sup>3</sup> The councils previously responsible for regulating and funding research across the HE sector were as follows: the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council, the Natural Environment Research Council, and the Science and Technology Facilities Council.

and Kaye, 2014), 'I Paid for It, so I Deserve It!' (Marshall *et al.*, 2015), and 'Her Majesty the Student' (Nixon *et al.*, 2018).

This increase in, and recent simplification of, regulatory bodies should also be seen in light of the internationalisation agenda; the UK HE sector is now compared to those of other countries, with student mobility and intercultural knowledge exchange on the rise. In order for UK universities to attract a large number of international students, who bring a substantial income with them, there is a need for the UK HE sector to demonstrate its quality in order to remain globally competitive – student satisfaction measures and the creation of league tables are central to this.

Thus far, I have given a policy background to the implementation of student satisfaction measures and explained their rising prominence in the HE sector. In the following sections, I will explore some definitions of 'student satisfaction' and discuss its different determining factors. I will then move to give an overview of the literature on the measurement of student satisfaction, cultural and gendered variations in level of satisfaction, and then examine the links between student satisfaction and service quality.

## **1.2 Definitions and Determinants of Student Satisfaction**

### **1.2.1 Definitions of Student Satisfaction**

With increasing emphasis placed on student satisfaction measures in Higher Education, it is all the more important that stakeholders know what the term 'student satisfaction' means and what exactly is being measured in such surveys as the NSS. However, as Garcia-Aracil states, there is a distinct 'absence of a consensus on the definition of satisfaction as a concept' (2009, p.2). Where student satisfaction is more clearly defined, the concept seems to have been simply transferred from the business and marketing world. Here, attention is given to an evaluation of 'post-consumption' satisfaction (Guolla, 1999) and subsequent consumer behaviour – whether the 'consumer' would buy from that business again, whether they would recommend the service to others, and how likely they are to complain (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013).

Academic attributes (such as 'teaching quality') are pivotal to students' overall evaluation of their satisfaction, but the literature also highlights the importance of social, physical, spiritual, and emotional factors (Elliott and Shin, 2002). While these socio-emotional factors are not exactly absent from the NSS, the influence of these may be hidden within an overall judgement of the quality of 'the student experience'. Students' assessment of their (dis)satisfaction with their Higher Education was initially considered to be the result of a careful weighing up of their positive and negative experiences, and a retrospective comparison between their current perceptions of service quality and their initial expectations (Baldwin and James, 2000; Vuori, 2013). But the role of feelings and emotions in one's evaluation of satisfaction is now recognised (Alves and Raposo, 2009; Bedggood and Donovan, 2012; Bianchi, 2013; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014). This may also be related to the fact that students' satisfaction and subsequent loyalty to their institutions as alumni is linked to their having 'shared values' with the university in question (Schlesinger *et al.*, 2017, p.2183). Indeed, as Bainbridge (2004, as cited by Carter and Yeo, 2016, p.636) stated in reference to universities' marketing strategies, institutions now have to develop not only a Unique Selling Proposition (USP), but also an Emotional Selling Proposition (ESP).

Stukalina defines student satisfaction as:

An outcome of the expectations and experiences of the subject, study course, or study programme as a requisite element of the integrated educational environment (2012, p.92).

This stresses that one's evaluations of a service are integrated from a number of different factors, and as Bianchi states, both the core (teaching and learning) and peripheral (accommodation, facilities, social life etc.) services of a university are 'directly related to overall service quality and customer satisfaction' (2013, p.397). Elliott and Healy define student satisfaction as 'a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of a student's educational experience' (2001, p.2).

Another commonly-used definition of student satisfaction is related to the 'expectancy disconfirmation paradigm', whereby satisfaction results when a customer's expectations are met (or confirmed), and dissatisfaction may occur when expectations are disconfirmed (Appleton-Knapp and Krentler,

2006; Alves and Raposo, 2009). Thus, customer (student) dissatisfaction tends to come from their high expectations not being met, or from their perception that the service quality is substandard. Such a definition of 'student satisfaction' is almost identical to that for consumers in other product and service industries (McCollough and Gremler, 1999; Clemes *et al.*, 2007; Alves and Raposo, 2009; Elsharnouby, 2015); indeed, it is increasingly acknowledged in the HE sector that students are now 'customers', and that universities are essentially selling the services of teaching and learning (Guolla, 1999; Elliott and Healy, 2001; Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Vuori, 2013).

A central feature of 'student satisfaction' that makes it difficult to define is that it is inextricably linked to other concepts such as 'the student experience', 'employability', and 'service quality'. Students' expectations of Higher Education are often tied to obtaining a good degree classification – increasingly an upper second or first – in order to benefit from what is commonly termed the 'college premium' increase in employability and earnings (Walker and Zhu, 2008, p.695; Mark, 2013). The potential danger of such an economic focus though, is that students may be more passive, expecting their university to award them a degree because they have paid for it (Rolfe, 2002; Blackmore, 2009; Bates and Kaye, 2014); an exchange has taken place. As Molesworth *et al.* describe this potentially odious effect of the student satisfaction agenda, they state that 'the current HE market discourse promotes a mode of existence, where students seek to "have a degree" rather than "be learners"' (2009, p.277).

### **1.2.2 Determinants of Student Satisfaction**

The number of determinants of student satisfaction varies widely across the literature, but all of the models evince both 'teaching' and 'non-teaching' elements of the student experience as central to the level of satisfaction (Carter and Yeo, 2016, p.639). The factors determining students' satisfaction are 'academic experience and faculty quality (teaching elements)', as well as wider contextual factors such as 'campus life, facilities, and placement support' (Carter and Yeo, 2016, p.639). The primary factors influencing general (rather than degree-specific) student satisfaction include 'university

flexibility and adaptability to student needs, the university environment, its services, student value in the employment market, making new friends and academic life, and personal self-fulfilment' (Mainardes *et al.*, 2013, p.369). Adding to this, Gibson also identifies 'social integration' and 'student centredness' as important for *ensuring* that students are satisfied (2010, p.256).

The current literature often refers to the factors influencing student satisfaction as 'antecedents' (Parahoo *et al.*, 2013; Carter and Yeo, 2016; Harvey *et al.*, 2017; Santini *et al.*, 2017), but here I will use the term 'determinants', as using antecedents could imply that certain things precede satisfaction rather than contributing to it. This linguistic choice should not affect the meaning, but it is worth noting that this kind of instrumental language – with reference to 'antecedents' and 'consequents' of student satisfaction – is used throughout the literature to discuss such measures.

When considering the academic experience as a whole, Parahoo *et al.* have stated that the following six factors can influence student satisfaction:

University reputation, faculty academic competence, faculty communications, interactions among students, student interactions with admin and IT staff, and service quality of electronic communications (2013, pp.147-149).

Stukalina argues that students' evaluations of satisfaction are holistic, encompassing the 'integrated educational environment' as a whole, which can be considered in terms of four main factors: the 'physical and technological environment including university facilities', the 'instructional environment' including quality of instruction and availability of resources, the 'executive environment', and the 'psychological environment' developed through the approach to learning advocated and the study process itself (2014, p.130).

The literature acknowledges that student satisfaction is a holistic evaluation of one's 'student experience', and that it is not limited to academic factors alone, such as 'teaching quality' and 'perceived faculty competence' (Parahoo *et al.*, 2013; Xiao and Wilkins, 2015). As Alves and Raposo put it,

'the dimensions [of student satisfaction] found practically cover the whole educational product, as well as the way it is provided' (2009, p.204).

Different studies may use different terms for their explanatory models of student satisfaction, but they tend to converge on factors such as quality instruction, university reputation, availability of staff, social life and facilities, and the market value of the degree studied (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Clemes *et al.*, 2007; Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012; Bianchi, 2013; Mainardes *et al.*, 2013; Xiao and Wilkins, 2015; Harvey *et al.*, 2017). It is thus clearly evident from the literature that 'student satisfaction' cannot be easily separated from the overall 'student experience' and/or concerns over 'service quality' received. Another interesting feature of this 'determinants' literature is that the factors influencing student satisfaction are predominantly related to university provision rather than a student's own contribution to the experience, therefore placing the onus on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to ensure that students succeed and enjoy their experience. This issue of students being passive consumers instead of active learners is evinced in the recent rise of student entitlement attitudes (Finney and Finney, 2010; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014; Marshall *et al.*, 2015).

### **1.2.3 'Dissatisfiers' and Consequents of Student Satisfaction**

Current research has also investigated what may be 'dissatisfiers' for students and the possible consequences of student (dis)satisfaction (Bianchi, 2013; Santini *et al.*, 2017). Bianchi identifies four main categories of HE provision that influence student satisfaction, with subcategories of these being considered as either 'satisfiers' or 'dissatisfiers'. The central factors are: 'international student performance', 'educational service performance', 'socialisation performance', and 'living environment performance' (2013, pp.400-402). The most important 'satisfier' for international students was found to be their own academic performance, whilst common 'dissatisfiers' were 'inappropriate accommodation and healthcare services as well as feeling discriminated against' (Bianchi, 2013, p.406).

When it comes to the potential consequences of student (dis)satisfaction, Santini *et al.* identify that in the Brazilian context, customers' (students') level of satisfaction may impact on their 'attitude toward the Higher Education Institution', their 'intention to recommend' the university to others, their current and future 'involvement' with the institution, and their 'loyalty, trust and word-of-mouth' (2017, p.9). Ensuring student satisfaction is not only pivotal to student retention rates (Stewart *et al.*, 2018), but also to the recruitment of prospective students through positive word-of-mouth feedback from alumni (Elliott and Healy, 2001; Khoo *et al.*, 2017). Wilkins *et al.* describe the link between student dissatisfaction, word of mouth feedback, and future student numbers at international branch campuses in the UAE. They highlight that 'achieving positive word of mouth from current students and alumni is a vital element of every institution's promotional mix' (2012, p.544).

Opportunities for socialisation and the suitability of accommodation are important factors influencing international students' level of satisfaction (Bianchi, 2013). These factors are also central to the experience of 'home' students, but the effect on student satisfaction may be more pronounced for students studying in a foreign country. Cultural differences in student satisfaction will be discussed further in what follows, but it is worth highlighting here that factors influencing satisfaction are found to be relatively stable across European countries, where 'contacts with fellow students', 'course content of major subject', 'equipment, and stocking of libraries', and 'teaching quality and the variety of courses offered' are the primary drivers of student (dis)satisfaction (Garcia-Aracil, 2009, p.3).

## **1.3 Measuring Student Satisfaction**

### **1.3.1 UK Context**

The most commonly used measure of student satisfaction in the UK is the National Student Survey, or NSS. Consisting of 27 questions with Likert-type responses, the NSS is used for both institutional ranking and accountability purposes. Administered to final-year undergraduates shortly before they finish their studies, the NSS purportedly gives students (consumers) greater power in the marketplace of Higher Education, whereby their feedback can



influence a university's league table position (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012). Generally speaking, if students perceive that their university has a good reputation (and hence their degree may have a high marketable value) they will be more satisfied with their student experience (Mainardes *et al.*, 2013; Parahoo *et al.*, 2013; Elsharnouby, 2015). But if students are dissatisfied, and this is expressed on measures such as the NSS, then levels of (dis)satisfaction can impact on the future reputation of that university.

The NSS is now such a high-stakes measure that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) increasingly seek to manage 'the student experience' by implementing strategies to ensure 'value for money' and student satisfaction, hence protecting their institutional reputation and maintaining their 'competitive advantage' in the sector (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012, p.544; Parahoo *et al.*, 2013; Stukalina, 2016; Santini *et al.*, 2017). A prominent example of such marketing strategies and reputational management is the increasing use of local 'satisfaction' surveys developed by, and distributed in, individual universities; one such example is the use of 'module evaluation questionnaires' that are given to students after the completion of each element of their degrees (Simpson and Edwards, 2000; Martensson *et al.*, 2014).

### **1.3.2 US Context**

The 'Student Satisfaction Inventory' (SSI) is the measuring instrument distributed throughout the USA by Ruffalo Noel Levitz.<sup>4</sup> The Student Satisfaction Inventory is arguably more comprehensive than other surveys, as it rates the importance of items as well as the student's satisfaction with them; this could reduce the influence of what is termed 'indifference bias' (Yorke, 2009). Elliott and Shin (2002) have found that attributes rated as very important include 'knowledgeable faculty', 'tuition paid is a worthwhile

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<sup>4</sup> Ruffalo Noel Levitz is a technology services, software, and consulting company that works in partnership with US universities to manage student enrolment, provide retention analytics to support student success, and fundraising efforts through alumni contributions and donors.

investment', and 'intellectual growth' – such factors are also identified as influencing student satisfaction (Mainardes *et al.*, 2013; Elsharnouby, 2015; Santini *et al.*, 2017).

The SSI is not only a measure of student satisfaction but it highlights which aspects of the student experience are most influential for evaluations of service quality (and hence satisfaction). That students may be (dis)satisfied with both 'important' and 'unimportant' aspects of their HE experience means that it remains unclear how these different factors are combined to form an overall satisfaction rating (Elliott and Healy, 2001). Elliott and Healy advise HE quality managers that:

[In order to improve student satisfaction levels] a university should determine the aspects of campus life which students have identified as having a high level of importance but a low level of satisfaction (2001, p.6).

### 1.3.3 Australian Context

Another measure of student satisfaction (*vis a vis* teaching quality) is the Course Evaluation Questionnaire (CEQ), which was first developed by Paul Ramsden in 1991, and used nationally since 1994 (Baldwin and James, 2000). The CEQ is similar in format to the NSS in the UK, but the questionnaire is given to students after they have graduated. The five scale characteristics of the CEQ are: 'good teaching', 'clear goals', 'appropriate workload', 'appropriate assessment', and 'emphasis on independence' (Ramsden, 1991, p.134). Judgements of these characteristics, and hence teaching quality, may be influenced by students' learning approaches; for those students adopting a 'surface' approach, this was negatively correlated with teaching quality across all five dimensions (Ramsden, 1991).<sup>5</sup> Speaking of both the CEQ and the NSS, Wilkins *et al.*, have highlighted that 'although

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<sup>5</sup> A landmark study by Marton and Säljö (1976, p.4) identified that students may process information in different ways, adopting either *surface-level* or *deep-level processing*. The adoption of one approach or another will depend on the intentions of the student, whether they wish to acquire and understand a body of knowledge for its own sake (deep-level), or whether they want to take in information for some extraneous end, such as passing exams (surface-level).

these surveys have been (to an extent) popular with students, parents and the media (for example, to help compile institutional rankings), critics often claim that these surveys do little to improve the student experience or quality in Higher Education Institutions' (2012, p.545).

### **1.3.4 Methodological Issues**

As Yorke (2009) points out, questionnaires with Likert-type responses, such as those used to measure student satisfaction, can suffer from issues of extremeness in responding. Extremeness in responding may be influenced by demographic variables as it 'tends to be positively correlated with age, and negatively with education level and household income' (Yorke, 2009, p.725). Likert-response scales may also be impacted by 'acquiescence bias' (Friborg *et al.*, 2006; Yorke, 2009), and can be influenced by cultural factors (Flaskerud, 2012).

'Acquiescence bias' occurs when a respondent answers all questions in the same way and their responses are indiscriminate, such as in the case of 'yea-saying' (Ipsos MORI, 2015). All of these student satisfaction measures are at risk of presenting inaccurate results because of different forms of bias and are therefore of questionable validity and reliability. Indeed, the NSS has even been described as a 'blunt tool' which allows only a general picture of satisfaction to develop (Sutcliffe *et al.*, 2014, p.79). But while these measures are not exactly perfect, if indeed any survey instrument could be, Beecham argues that 'a general picture is better than no picture at all' (2009, p.137).

This picture could be altered and potentially disingenuous though if measures such as the NSS are used for other purposes than those for which they were designed; this is an ethical issue which is underpinned by the opacity of the concept 'student satisfaction'. As there is still no universal definition of 'satisfaction' in the current literature, measures of it are often equated with being a measure of 'quality' (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Pedro *et al.*, 2018), 'teaching effectiveness' (Blackmore, 2009; Stewart *et al.*, 2018), or the responses can be misunderstood as a sum evaluation of 'the student experience' (Bedggood and Donovan, 2012;

Elsharnouby, 2015). While the surveys themselves can fall prey to biases – a kind of internal validity must be guaranteed – there is also a potential issue with external validity here. As Lucas explains, ‘external validity refers to the generalisation of research findings, either from a sample to a larger population or to settings and populations other than those studied’ (2003, p.236).

Measures such as the NSS cannot account for demographic variables, cultural differences, motivational style, and gender, therefore the extent to which results may be nationally and globally comparable – the external validity of such a measure – is highly contestable. Methodological issues pertain not only to the measures themselves, but also to the ways in which the results may be utilised and disseminated. It remains dubious whether, even at a local level, NSS results can be grouped together by institution as this would obscure potential disciplinary differences.

While universities do acknowledge the potential biases of student satisfaction measures they cannot afford to ignore the results as they are too high-stakes. Results from the NSS can strongly influence prospective students’ perception of an institution’s reputation as it is used as a formal indicator of ‘quality’ which is seen as commensurable between different universities (Stukalina, 2012; Bianchi, 2013; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013). With universities increasingly having to compete for students, the HE sector is rapidly becoming a ‘buyer’s market’ which is moulded by the wants and needs of student-consumers (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Rolfe, 2002; Blackmore, 2009). In order for a university to maintain their ‘competitive advantage’ in the HE marketplace, giving credence to ‘the student voice’ through satisfaction measures is essential (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012, p.544).

## **1.4 Influence of Demographic Variables on Student Satisfaction**

### **1.4.1 Gender**

Drawing the different explanatory models of student satisfaction together, the determinants generally fit into two categories: social and support aspects of the student experience, and academic dimensions of the student

experience, such as teaching quality and the market value of one's degree. Bean and Vesper have found that relational factors – 'contact with advisors, having friends, and living on campus' – are significant predictors of student satisfaction for females, but not for males (1994, p.1). Male student satisfaction seems to be driven instead by career factors such as their 'choice of major and occupational certainty' alongside familial influences, for example, their father's educational level (Bean and Vesper, 1994, p.1).

Adding to this debate, O'Driscoll has found that for both males and females 'academic support' is a significant predictor of student satisfaction, but that female students consider 'welfare support' as being similarly significant for their satisfaction level (2012, p.251). For males, 'academic support' had a greater impact on their satisfaction than 'communication' (another factor identified as significant), whilst for females 'welfare support' was more influential than 'academic support' (O'Driscoll, 2012, p.251). While most of the current literature on student satisfaction focuses on final year undergraduate students, O'Driscoll's study investigated the experiences of first-year students at a HE college in Ireland, so it is worth highlighting that these gendered differences seem to persist throughout students' Higher Education.

These gendered differences in student satisfaction have implications for quality assurance and enhancement policies, namely that efforts to improve the student experience should address 'non-teaching elements' such as facilities, services, and social life (which may be more important for females than males), as well as universities' core services of teaching and learning (Carter and Yeo, 2016, p.639). Males and females seem to value the same aspects of Higher Education, but judge their importance differently, so an attention to subgroups of students is necessary, although typically lacking in student satisfaction measures.

#### **1.4.2 Internationalisation and Mode of Study**

Gendered patterns of student satisfaction may also be exacerbated by students' ages and country of study, whether they are 'home' or international students. As Finn and Darmody (2017) identify, international student

satisfaction with studying in Ireland varies according to gender. Female international students tend to be up to three times more satisfied with their studies and university experience than their male counterparts but being aged under 23 was 'negatively associated with satisfaction' (Finn and Darmody, 2017, p.552). Thus, mature female international students were more likely to be satisfied than male international students and younger female students. Mode of study (international, transnational, or 'home') can also influence student satisfaction.

In the case of transnational education,<sup>6</sup> often referred to as 'offshore education', student satisfaction (with Higher Education provided by Australian universities) across multiple Asian countries such as Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia was highly influenced by 'the instructors' communication skills, and/or the local instructors' dedication to students and teaching' (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012, pp.12-16). Where a combination of local and Australian instructors were used, students rated the Australian lecturers as being better and they were more satisfied with their instruction (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012).

Local student recruitment and maintaining high quality standards are often seen as being in contention when it comes to international branch campuses, but Wilkins *et al.* have found that students are 'largely satisfied' across various factors of the student experience, such as 'programme effectiveness, quality of lecturers and teaching, student learning, assessment and feedback, learning resources, use of technology, and

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<sup>6</sup> 'Transnational education' can be described as any programme 'in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based'; this is exemplified in the recent surge of international branch campuses (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012, p.12). In the case of transnational HE, students often study locally but the degree itself is from an internationally recognised university located elsewhere; the US, Australia and the UK are market leaders in transnational education (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012), with most international branch campuses established in the UAE (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013).

facilities/social life' (2012, p.543). Across the literature, students studying at international branch campuses tend to be satisfied with similar factors to students studying at their home/awarding institution. The only notable difference is that students at international branch campuses seem to place more emphasis on effective technology usage in their teaching and learning (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012; Wilkins *et al.*, 2012; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013).

### **1.4.3 Cultural Background**

Gender differences in student satisfaction may also interact with cultural factors. Findings by Parahoo *et al.* (2013) and Elsharnouby (2015) point to gender differences in student satisfaction: they identify that female student satisfaction is mostly influenced by 'university reputation', but for males both 'reputation' and 'perceived academic staff competence' are significant predictors of satisfaction. While one study was based in Saudi Arabia (Parahoo *et al.*, 2013) and the other in Qatar (Elsharnouby, 2015), a great deal of the current literature is based in Anglo-European and Asian contexts, so gender differences in student satisfaction here may be confounded or exacerbated by cultural factors. As Harvey *et al.* state in reference to this:

The differences exhibited by the two genders in learning environments may be attributable to cultural differences masked by gender roles and societal expectations [especially in paternalistic societies], not actual gender differences (2017, p.153).

Many universities in Saudi Arabia have separate campuses for men and women (Parahoo *et al.*, 2013), and in more patriarchal societies in the Gulf region, women may still feel pressure to conform to gender stereotypes, in essence, that getting married and having children is more important than a university education (Harvey *et al.*, 2017).

It seems as if the determinants of student satisfaction are relatively stable across different cultural contexts, but their order of importance may differ and gender can also affect students' evaluations of universities' service provision. Factors such as gender, age, mode of study, ethnicity, and cultural background inevitably shape student satisfaction ratings in particular ways such as: social factors are more influential for females than males

(Bean and Vesper, 1994); mature international students are more likely to be satisfied than younger students (Finn and Darmody, 2017); technology use is more important for student satisfaction at international branch campuses (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012; Wilkins *et al.*, 2012; Wilkins and Balakrishnan, 2013); and cultural influences may mean that students have different instructor/instruction preferences (Parahoo *et al.*, 2013; Elsharnouby, 2015; Harvey *et al.*, 2017; Khoo *et al.*, 2017).

## **1.5 Satisfaction and Service Quality**

### **1.5.1 Defining 'Service Quality'**

There has been a noticeable shift since 1997 from a focus on quality 'assurance' to quality 'enhancement' (Filippakou and Tapper, 2008), that is, from assessing the quality of Higher Education provision to a more active approach that pre-emptively improves quality before it is 'measured' as such. This emphasis on quality assurance and/or enhancement is epitomised in the recent surge in student 'voice' initiatives, both nationally and within individual institutions (Hall, 2016; Higdon, 2016; Canning, 2017). In such initiatives, 'voice' is collected in order to inform curricular development and innovations – in essence, to provide a measure of 'quality' – and feedback may also be utilised for staff development (Brooman *et al.*, 2015).

As with student satisfaction, the term 'quality' is utilised widely throughout the literature but a definitive understanding of the term is lacking. As Zafiroopoulos and Vrana (2008, p.34) put it, 'not a single workable definition of quality is possible'. Sahney *et al.* (2004) even argue that conceptions of 'quality' may be context-specific, can change over time, and may vary between stakeholder groups. Due to the opacity of the term 'quality' and its relationship with satisfaction (which I will elaborate further below), measures such as the NSS are often taken as a proxy measure of 'quality' in Higher Education (Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014; Higdon, 2016). A prominent model of service quality asserts that it is the result of an evaluation of one's expectations as compared with perceptions (Barnes, 2007). If the 'service' experienced in one's Higher Education is perceived as being better than initially expected, then this results in satisfaction, and *vice versa*.



Harvey and Knight identify that the various conceptualisations of 'quality' used in the literature can be drawn together into five separate, yet interlinked approaches to the concept; these are as follows: quality can be viewed as 'exceptional', as 'perfection or consistency', as 'fitness for purpose', as 'value for money', and as 'transformative' (1996, p.13). The 'meta-quality concept' that pervades all five conceptions is 'transformation', whereby the 'quality' of one's Higher Education is the extent to which it changes the individual student's outlook and empowers them (Harvey and Knight, 1996, p.25). In attempting to define service quality in Higher Education, Adina-Petruta has also distinguished between the 'structural-formal' and 'psychological-cultural' elements that make up a shared 'quality culture' (2014, p.3808). She defines 'quality culture' as follows:

Quality culture includes values, beliefs, attitude, commitment, expectation, agreement, capacity, negotiation, participation, unity and trust of the individuals, groups and stakeholders involved with the quality (Adina-Petruta, 2014, pp.3807-3808).

So a 'quality culture' not only involves the processes and measures put in place to assure and enhance quality (the 'structural-formal' elements), but also the sharing of beliefs and values (the 'psychological-cultural' elements) related to quality among those involved (Adina-Petruta, 2014, p.3808). This highlights that, as with student satisfaction, conceptions of 'quality' must incorporate more than mere academic concerns; 'service quality' is greater than the sum of quality assurance processes in place at a particular institution and any attempt to reify the concept should capture the ideals of multiple Higher Education stakeholders engaged in a shared 'quality culture' (Adina-Petruta, 2014, p.3808).

Student satisfaction and service quality, as I will discuss further below, are inextricably linked. Both satisfaction and service quality are measures of consumer behaviour and these evaluations influence students' 'favourable behavioural intentions' following a service encounter, for example, word of mouth feedback to others (Khoo *et al.*, 2017, p.430; Santini *et al.*, 2017). Parasuraman *et al.* differentiate 'satisfaction' from 'quality' in terms of the timing of service encounters, as they write:

Consistent with the distinction between attitude and satisfaction, is a distinction between service quality and satisfaction: perceived service

quality is a global judgement, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service, whereas satisfaction is related to a specific transaction (1988, p.16).

Judgements of 'quality' according to this definition are cumulative for the student experience as a whole, whereas satisfaction may be confined to particular 'service encounters' (Elsharnouby, 2015, p.243).

Across the literature, the most commonly used definition of 'service quality' is that of the 'gap' between expectations (of service quality) and perceptions (of actual service quality received) which aligns with the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm of student (dis)satisfaction (Alves and Raposo, 2009; Stukalina, 2012; Parahoo *et al.*, 2013; Khoo *et al.*, 2017). The basic premise is that meeting and/or exceeding student expectations will result in higher perceived service quality and greater likelihood of satisfaction with the service provision. But 'quality' is a multi-faceted concept which can be difficult to tie down. Thus, attempts to define the term may be most successful when it is contextualised in relation to Higher Education, and when operationalised definitions from reliable measurement tools are used.

### **1.5.2 Measuring 'Quality' in Higher Education**

Measures of student satisfaction and/or 'service quality' are increasingly high-stakes; as Stensaker and Harvey put it, 'quality assurance indeed has become the core global accountability instrument in Higher Education' (2013, p.33). Linked to the increase in tuition fees and a focus on providing 'value for money' for students (Rolfe, 2002; Finney and Finney, 2010; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014), Higher Education Institutions are now not only held accountable for assuring, but also for actively enhancing, quality. Attempts to define what is meant by 'service quality' in the HE sector have been made through the development and adaptation of the 'SERVQUAL' framework (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Barnes, 2007; Zafiroopoulos and Vrana, 2008). The SERVQUAL framework was initially developed by Parasuraman and colleagues in 1988 as a measure of consumer perceptions of service quality. The measure was not used in reference to the HE sector until recently, while the notion of 'service quality' was not directly considered in relation to Higher

Education until 1995.<sup>7</sup> Despite being developed in the US (with particular contextual influences) for more general consumer environments such as retail (with particular 'consumers' in mind), the reliability and validity of the framework has been evidenced for the Higher Education context specifically (Barnes, 2007; Khoo *et al.*, 2017).

The SERVQUAL framework is made up of five dimensions: *tangibles* (such as 'physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel'), *reliability* ('the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately'), *responsiveness* (a 'willingness to help customers and provide prompt service'), *assurance* ('knowledge and courtesy of employees, and their ability to inspire trust and confidence'), and *empathy* ('caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers') (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988, p.23).

Use of the SERVQUAL framework across the HE sector is another illustration of the move to considering students as 'customers' or 'consumers' like those in retail environments. Much current literature draws on this particular measurement tool, yet it is acknowledged that definitions of 'service quality' are still problematic. As discussed above, the dominance of student satisfaction in the HE sector is cognisant of a broader move to raise 'quality' and to put students 'at the heart of the system' (BIS, 2011, p.1). Quality assurance and enhancement seem to go hand in hand with student satisfaction as both are representative of the increasing marketisation of Higher Education (Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Khoo *et al.*, 2017; Santini *et al.*, 2017).

There are several regulatory bodies which act as gatekeepers of 'quality' in Higher Education, such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) for

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on this shift, see, for example: Hill, F. 1995. Managing Service Quality in Higher Education: The Role of the Student as Primary Consumer. *Quality Assurance in Education*. 3(3), pp.10-21.

teacher training programmes situated in universities. The newly formed Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) will also be involved in assuring the 'quality' of Higher Education service provision for students (to be evaluated in the TEF) and the quality of research outputs (measured in the Research Excellence Framework, or REF). The QAA is arguably the most prolific agency for maintaining standards and ensuring quality across the UK HE sector.

Whether universities and their courses are judged to be of an acceptable standard by the QAA will impact upon their degree awarding powers, future funding from HEFCE and other research councils, and their ability to recruit students whose Higher Education is essentially funded by the taxpayer (as mediated by the Student Loans Company).<sup>8</sup> The QAA was established in 1997 shortly before tuition fees at universities were first introduced, so the need to assure the 'quality' of HE service provision is clearly linked to the marketisation of the sector, although it preceded the recent conceptualisation of the student-consumer. While 'quality' can be measured and is typically positively correlated with student satisfaction, what is meant by these terms still needs clarification.

The partnership between the OfS and QAA was formalised in July 2018, with the QAA obligated to report to the OfS on the quality of each Higher Education Institution seeking to be registered with them as well as providing ongoing reports of quality. Only institutions which are judged to be of a good quality will be registered with the OfS and eligible for public research funding. The OfS's regulatory framework is based on a series of principles rather than strict guidelines for judging whether Higher Education providers are meeting student needs appropriately; these principles are: 'a student

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<sup>8</sup> This judgement is subject to the QAA's 'Quality Code' which sets out 'qualifications frameworks' and 'subject benchmark statements', identifying what skills students need to demonstrate in order to gain a particular qualification and what standards are expected of each subject discipline. For more details, see The QAA Quality Code. [Online]. [Accessed 05 April 2018]. Available from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Pages/The-Quality-Code.aspx>.

focus' which should protect students' interests; 'clarity' of HE sector regulation; 'accountability' of both Higher Education Institutions and the OfS; 'consistency' of provision across the UK; 'proportionality and targeting' of regulatory efforts to high- rather than low-risk provision, and; 'competition' to encourage innovation, diversity, and greater student choice (OfS, 2018, p.14).

The QAA's Code of Practice sets out what is expected of providers in delivering a high-quality Higher Education, it describes common practices that universities should implement if they are to ensure quality provision, and it offers advice and guidance in these areas. But in all of this, a definition of 'quality' is lacking; it is almost taken as a given that quality can be measured and compared between different institutions operating in very different contexts. But since the UK HE sector is increasingly heterogeneous, measures of student satisfaction and service quality cannot easily account for this diversity.

### **1.5.3 Relationship between Student Satisfaction and Service Quality**

Measures of student satisfaction are often seen as synonymous with measures of 'service quality'; these two concepts are difficult to separate out and define, and it remains unclear how these discourses are interlinked in predicting consumer behaviour. The variety of explanatory models of student satisfaction referred to above include quality factors – such as 'quality of instruction' (Elliott and Shin, 2002, p.207), 'academic experience and faculty quality' (Carter and Yeo, 2016, p.639), and 'service quality of electronic communications' (Parahoo *et al.*, 2013, p.149) – as determinants of satisfaction. Santini *et al.* also identify 'service quality perception' as being an antecedent of student satisfaction (2017, p.4). This link is bolstered by Pedro *et al.* (2018) who have found that while 'perceived quality' is positively related to student satisfaction, the level of satisfaction can vary according to which teaching approaches or methods were used.

Service quality and customer (student) satisfaction are often positively correlated (Khoo *et al.*, 2017); what makes students satisfied is receiving

high quality service provision, and if students are satisfied they may evaluate service quality more positively. What is still being debated in the literature is whether service quality is a constituent factor of 'satisfaction' or whether (dis)satisfaction is a dimension of service quality. While the recent use of student satisfaction data as a proxy measure of 'teaching excellence' in the TEF sparked controversy, Gunn acknowledges that while 'student satisfaction is clearly not the same as teaching quality...it would be erroneous to assume they are not related; student satisfaction is more likely to follow an excellent teaching experience, than a poor one' (2018, p.138).

Evaluations of service quality and/or satisfaction with a particular service, in this case Higher Education, can influence post-purchase 'favourable behavioural intentions', such as word of mouth and repeat purchasing from that provider (Khoo *et al.*, 2017, p.430). Whether customers stay loyal to any particular company, or university, is determined by service quality and this relationship is mediated by satisfaction (Finney and Finney, 2010; Stukalina, 2012; Khoo *et al.*, 2017, Santini *et al.*, 2017). As the Higher Education marketplace is increasingly competitive, maintaining student-consumer loyalty is of central importance, hence quality assurance and enhancement policies are being targeted towards raising both student satisfaction ratings and students' perceptions of service quality (by improving service provision itself).

Quality assurance and enhancement are processes of continuous improvement in Higher Education; student feedback is collected, institutional policies are audited, and this enables management strategies to be put in place to enhance provision and/or increase student satisfaction. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2015) – which works in association with the QAA – highlight that quality assurance is central to a mutually trusting relationship between universities and their numerous stakeholders. Whether students trust their institution influences their commitment to it (Schlesinger *et al.*, 2017), and this impacts on the likelihood of 'repeat purchase' (returning to that university for further qualifications), their involvement as alumni, and word of mouth feedback (Khoo *et al.*, 2017; Santini *et al.*, 2017). As Chen describes:

Brand association [which is influenced by measures of quality] has a direct influence on student trust, commitment, and satisfaction in Higher Education Institutions. Student trust and commitment also have a direct influence on student satisfaction, and they are all mediating variables (2017, p.982).

Stukalina describes the link between quality assurance and satisfaction as follows, 'quality function deployment', that is, attempts to assure and enhance quality can be used as a strategy to 'attain customer satisfaction' (2012, p.90). The current emphasis placed on attaining student satisfaction and positive perceptions of service quality cannot be detached from the increasing adoption of the 'student-as-customer' concept throughout the HE sector (Watjatrakul, 2014, p.686; Bay and Daniel, 2001; Blackmore, 2009). But the application of marketing principles to Higher Education may not be as straightforward as initially envisaged; the idea that increasing competition between service providers raises quality may not apply to all Higher Education Institutions nor to the student experience as a whole. Student satisfaction measures are used to develop institutional quality assurance and enhancement processes; utilising student feedback to ensure a higher quality of service provision will impact on league table position and institutional reputation. As Stukalina notes:

Students' evaluation of the educational services (that is consumer-oriented assessment) can be regarded as one of the most significant educational management tools used for stimulating quality enhancement in a university (2014, p.127).

While 'service quality' is considered to be a global evaluation of service provision – in contrast to one's 'satisfaction' with specific transactions – the concept is multi-faceted (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Clemes *et al.*, 2007) and there may be a tension between raising service quality and degrading teaching quality (Watjatrakul, 2014). The link between satisfaction and service quality is influenced by the teaching approach used; moving away from traditional didactic teaching, for example in the use of problem-based learning, exerts a greater effect on both perceived quality and satisfaction (Pedro *et al.*, 2018). Attempts to enhance service quality may thus need to be targeted towards different areas of provision in order to increase student satisfaction.

In Part II of the thesis, I will explore further whether measures of service quality are suitable and justified in relation to the student experience, and if so, whether this is confined to particular aspects of Higher Education provision. It is assumed that students could evaluate the quality of their degrees in the same way as they might review a hotel stay on Trip Advisor. Such a comparison may have once seemed nonsensical, yet the creation of a 'MoneySuperMarket' style comparison website for the HE sector was recently proposed in 2018 by the then Universities' Minister, Sam Gyimah (Busby, 2018b).<sup>9</sup>

## **1.6 Limitations of the Current Literature**

The current literature highlights that students' evaluation of their satisfaction with Higher Education is holistic, taking into account the 'integrated educational environment' (Stukalina, 2012, p.92) which is made up of both 'teaching' and 'non-teaching' elements (Carter and Yeo, 2016, p.639). While student satisfaction ratings are an overall evaluation of service quality, students' perceptions may still be influenced by their most recent experiences and/or particularly significant interactions (both good and bad), as well as by social and emotional factors (Baldwin and James, 2000; Bedggood and Donovan, 2012; Vuori, 2013; Sarrico and Rosa, 2014). Students receiving the same service from a university may also perceive it differently due to the influence of multiple demographic variables noted above. Whether students develop 'strong', 'weak', or 'no ties' to their university is related to their age and gender, and the formation of one's student identity in these terms subsequently impacts on their 'attitudinal loyalty' to an institution and alumni contributions (Koenig-Lewis *et al.*, 2015, p.63).

While this literature is extremely useful for conceptualising and measuring student satisfaction in the HE sector, it does have a tendency to crowd out other ways of thinking about, and researching, these marketised discourses.

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<sup>9</sup> Sam Gyimah was replaced as the Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation by Chris Skidmore on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018.



Student satisfaction measures exemplify the current focus that stakeholders have on what is easily calculable and measurable, but this focus also extends to educational research more broadly. The use of randomised controlled trials, or RCTs, has acquired a sort of mythical status in educational research, responsible for generating 'evidence-based' policy and practice as policy-makers are increasingly enthralled by 'what works' research (Bridges *et al.*, 2008, p.5). The 'virtue' of this method is seemingly that RCTs 'have the potential to operate at the same level of scientific rigour as RCTs in medicine or agriculture' (Davis, 2012, p.568). So the search for empirical evidence is often reduced to scientism.

Under increased accountability pressures, policy-makers want researchers to evidence their impact, and this is easily captured in the development and testing of educational interventions targeted towards figuring out 'what works' (Biesta, 2007; 2010; Smith, 2008). This sort of research is often given greater credence as statistical analysis certifies it as 'robust, reliable, and replicable' (Smith, 2008, p.191). What such a dominant research paradigm misses out though, in its quest for generalisability and applicability, are the human and relational aspects of education. As Biesta writes, 'the uptake of the idea of evidence-based practice in education...threatens to replace professional judgement and wider democratic deliberation', which is aptly termed the 'democratic deficit' (2010, p.492). In Chapter Two, I will explain further how the 'method' and approach used in this thesis differs from such evidence-based, 'what works' research. This is not to say that the research presented here is not evidence-based, but rather that the 'evidence' presented here is a result of sustained thinking and critical engagement with philosophical and literary sources, as well as media such as film.

I find that there are three central issues with the current literature on student satisfaction. First, that the collection of student 'voice' is seen in much scholarship as a means to an end (Seale *et al.*, 2015). Second, the literature supports the notion that the expectations of 'student-consumers' must be met (Mainardes *et al.*, 2013; Khoo *et al.*, 2017), thus providing students with what I want to refer to as a kind of settlement. Third, the literature accepts that academic-student relationships are increasingly contractualised

(Blackmore, 2009) and this discourse of marketised interactions is rarely questioned.

These three concerns also sit within a broader, overarching limitation that I have found in the current literature, namely that student satisfaction is generally taken as a given and is accepted as being something that universities must work towards. It is in questioning what is often taken as ‘unquestionable’ – the legitimacy and pertinence of measuring and ensuring student satisfaction – that this thesis adds to the current literature. These three limitations will form the basis of Chapters Three to Five in Part II of the thesis, but at this point, I will simply outline how such pertinent questions remain unaddressed in the current literature. This provides the basis for the methodological approach that I take in this thesis, which I will elucidate further in the next chapter.

### **1.6.1 Student ‘Voice’**

As ‘student satisfaction’ is a relatively opaque concept which is difficult to define, researchers often align it with the collection of feedback via surveys such as the NSS. Attempts have been made to enhance the validity and reliability of such measurement tools, but empirical research typically refrains from questioning the usefulness of measuring satisfaction in the first place. Where student ‘voice’ is discussed, this is generally confined to considerations of quality assurance and enhancement as outlined above (Hall, 2016; Higdon, 2016; Canning, 2017). The eliciting of student feedback or ‘voice’ is considered as a strategic imperative for managing a university’s reputation; this feedback goes into league tables which are central to the decision-making of prospective students (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; Stukalina, 2012).

Measures of student satisfaction and/or ‘voice’ contribute to both institutional and national accountability mechanisms, whereby student voice is seen as little more than a tick-box exercise (Carey, 2013; Brooman *et al.*, 2015).

Student ‘voice’ is seen as synonymous and interchangeable with the feedback provided in Likert-type response scales on satisfaction surveys. As Sabri writes of the problems associated with collecting student ‘voice’ and/or

measuring the 'student experience', she states that "the student experience" homogenises students and deprives them of agency at the same time as apparently giving them "voice" (2011, p.657).

The collection of student feedback, when considered simply as a means of ensuring 'value for money', and contributing to accountability and quality assurance procedures, reinforces the 'consumerisation' of students (Rolfe, 2002; Canning, 2017). Students are increasingly positioned as 'customers' or 'consumers' of services provided by universities, so responding to surveys evaluating this 'service provision' can be seen as the end-point of the marketised feedback loop of Higher Education (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Mark, 2013; Vuori, 2013). The lines between a retail consumer environment and that of HE service provision are becoming progressively blurred, and student 'voice' is limited in scope as a result.

### **1.6.2 Meeting Student Expectations**

Across the current literature, researchers have sought to define and measure student satisfaction as a way of determining how to further increase satisfaction levels. Student satisfaction is commonly understood as the sum evaluation of one's expectations and perceptions, whether this is related to specific aspects of the student experience or the educational environment as a whole (Stukalina, 2012; Elsharnouby, 2015; Khoo *et al.*, 2017). The implication is that universities are increasingly held accountable – through such measures as the NSS – for meeting student expectations and satisfying students' needs by enhancing the quality of service provision and/or enriching 'the student experience' (Yorke, 2000; Staddon and Standish, 2012; Jordan *et al.*, 2018). Reflective of this, talk of 'managing' the student experience is common in the empirical literature (Temple *et al.*, 2016, p.33).

I am not arguing here that meeting student expectations – in essence, settling students down – should be unimportant to educators and policy-makers in Higher Education, but rather that this should not be accepted unquestioningly. The imperative to satisfy students should be balanced against other central functions of Higher Education, such as the

development of responsible citizens, and a commitment to the self-cultivation and transformation of students. Such a critical stance towards student satisfaction discourses is what is seemingly left out of the current literature.<sup>10</sup> There is some existing philosophical literature that is critical of the student satisfaction agenda; the emphasis on providing a certain kind of ‘student experience’; and student voice initiatives (Ramaekers, 2010; Staddon and Standish, 2012; Standish, 2005; Fulford, 2009; 2013; 2017). However, the originality of *this* thesis lies in its holistic exploration of satisfaction.

### **1.6.3 Academic-Student Relationships**

Further unquestioned assumptions – such as the idea that the collection of student ‘voice’ and measurement of ‘satisfaction’ are valuable endeavours – also arise in the current, mainly empirical, literature when it comes to considerations of academic-student relationships. Here again, models of consumer behaviour are applied to students and to university-student relationships. The literature draws attention to the importance of maintaining positive and productive academic-student interactions as a way of ensuring student-consumer loyalty and an institution’s competitive edge in the Higher Education marketplace (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; Yeo, 2008; Stukalina, 2016). Thus, the creation of fruitful relationships in the HE sector can be seen as little more than a strategic management technique (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Stukalina, 2012).

Aligned with the increasing marketisation and contractualisation of academic-student relationships, the ‘Customer Relationship Management’ (CRM) approach to quality assurance and enhancement is focused on universities becoming more explicitly ‘customer-oriented’ (Stukalina, 2012, p.95). The current literature seems to almost accept it as a given that

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<sup>10</sup> Where I refer to student satisfaction and its associated ‘discourses’ in this thesis, it is important to highlight that my ‘method’ is not a form of discourse analysis. Rather, my use of the term ‘discourse’ is aligned with Johansen *et al.*’s definition, that ‘discourse mean[s] language as a social practice, conditioned by existing social structures, such that the text, whether spoken, written, or otherwise presented, is relative to and formed by social practices’ (2017, p.265).

academic-student, and HEI-student, relationships are something to be 'managed' as a means to an (economically beneficial) end. But as I will discuss later in the thesis, the infiltration of market principles into pedagogical *relationships* turns them into mere service provider-consumer *interactions*, thus debasing these relationships and removing something distinctive of Higher Education itself.

In Part II of the thesis, I will discuss three different iterations of student satisfaction – voice, settlement, and customer relations. These concepts are distinct but are intricately woven together, as voice and settlement could also be situated within the more expansive notion of 'customer relations'. Initiatives aiming to capture the student voice and satisfy students are often motivated by principles of the market, essentially that happy 'customers' (students) will positively influence institutional reputation and income, both directly and indirectly. In the following chapter, I will explain how the methodological approach adopted in this thesis deals with these issues, chiefly by offering an analysis of student satisfaction that goes above and beyond the current emphases placed on marketisation and quality assurance. What this thesis will offer in conducting such an analysis is an opening out and reframing of the concept 'student satisfaction', in turn demarcating a way forward for thinking about Higher Education in more than economic terms. I will also suggest ways in which we may all live and work productively in the sector despite current policy constraints.

## Chapter 2

### Philosophical 'Method'

#### Scenario

#### CHARACTERS

Claire, Undergraduate student (education and psychology)

Richard, Professor of Education (specialising in philosophy of education)  
*The scene takes place in Richard's office.*

#### SCENE ONE

*Richard is in his office, reading in his armchair. A desk is strewn with papers. Behind this, there are several bookcases filled with works of philosophy. From the window, Durham Cathedral is clearly visible on the horizon. A summer's day. There is a knock at the door. Claire enters.*

Claire: Hi, are you alright?

Richard: Yes, hello. [*Claire and Richard shake hands, she sits down in a chair next to him.*]

Claire: I just wanted to ask you something. You know that I love education, and I've decided that I would like to be an academic. Well, I was wondering if I could help out with your research over the summer, like a placement sort of thing.

Richard: Erm, sorry, I don't quite know what you mean...

Claire: Well, I've been helping one of my psychology lecturers to do his research. You know, finding the participants, running the experiment with them, and debriefing them afterwards. I just wondered if I could help out with your research in some way to get experience of it? [*opening her notebook, pen in hand*].

Richard: Hmm, well you know I don't do experiments...how do you think you could assist with my research?

Claire: I don't know really...I don't know a lot about what philosophers of education do, so I'd like to find out. Could I do some work experience with you over the summer?

Richard: Well...erm no, I don't see how you could. Research in philosophy doesn't work in the same way as psychology. You couldn't really assist my research as it involves me sitting at a desk and reading...

Claire: Oh, right.

Richard: [*smiling*]. I mean, you could get books down off the shelf for me as I write...

Claire: Well, I know your 'method' in philosophy of education isn't the same as the experiments we do in psychology, but I just thought there might be some way for me to see what it's like before I commit to it. To test it out, if you know what I mean...

Richard: Frankly, *I'm* still testing out what philosophy of education is. There's not a particular method, or set of methods to choose from in quite the same way as the sciences.

Claire: Oh, right. So I won't know if philosophy of education is the right thing for me until I do it myself... [*she looks away*].

Richard: That's often the case with philosophy. But I have noticed you ask some very thoughtful questions in the lectures...have you considered what you might do for your dissertation yet? I know it's early, but it's good to think about it over the summer.

Claire: Well, I know what I'm doing for my psychology project anyway, it's experiments with mice, similar to conditioning. But the education dissertation, erm, I don't know yet...but I enjoyed learning about the 'self' in class.

Richard: You know I would be happy to supervise you if you wanted to 'test out' doing something philosophical, just let me know what sort of question you're interested in.

Claire: Ok, thanks. I'll see you in October then. [*She goes out through the door, right.*]

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SCENE TWO

*Richard is in his office, reading in his armchair. A desk is strewn with papers. Beside his chair, several books are stacked, open and bookmarked. From the window, Durham Cathedral is clearly visible on the horizon. A cool autumn day. There is a knock at the door. Claire enters.*

Claire: Hi, did you have a nice summer?

Richard: Well, yes, I got lots of research done. How are you?

Claire: Alright, yeah. Ready for third year, well, ready as I'll ever be. [*Richard invites Claire to take a seat, she takes the chair next to him.*]

Richard: Good. Now, you told me before that you were thinking about a dissertation related to the topic of 'the self'. What ideas do you have now?

Claire: Erm, well, I'd still like to do something about the self...and I would like to do my dissertation philosophically, but I'm not sure how to go about it.

Richard: First off, what is it that made you particularly interested in the self? I would like to know more about your opinion on it.

Claire: Well...erm, what we spoke about in class got me thinking. I want to know if the 'self' is a coherent whole and if it stays the same over time or not. In a psychology lecture about the self, they had a model with three aspects that make up the self, but I'm not sure it's as straightforward as that. [*She looks puzzled, deep in thought.*]

Richard: So how do you hope to answer that question?

Claire: I'm not sure really... [*She looks down, avoiding his gaze.*]

Richard: How about you start by reading this. [*He hands her a book*]. Let me know what you think of it.

Claire: Ok, thanks. So I just read this for now, there's nothing else to do for me to get started?

Richard: Well, you could have a think about your own 'self' and what it means for you. Start making some notes about why you want to focus on this topic rather than others that we've looked at in the module...

Claire: I'm not sure about my own 'self', that seems too personal...am I allowed to put that in the dissertation?

Richard: I don't see how you could really separate it from what you're writing about, there must be a reason why this topic has resonated with you...and in that respect, it's definitely useful to write autobiographically.



Claire: So in philosophy of education, I'm allowed to write in the first person, saying what 'I' think? Don't I need to put in loads of citations and references for a dissertation?

Richard: Yes, you can write what you think...this is *your* dissertation. As for having loads of citations, that has no bearing on the quality of work so don't worry about it. In philosophy of education, we often use fewer sources, but look at them in greater depth...so be prepared to read that book at least three times [*smiling*]. Just make some rough notes at this point, and we'll chat about it next time.

Claire: Thanks, well, I don't know my 'method', but I at least know where to start now [*laughing*].

Richard: That's often the case for my own research. Take care, and I'll see you in a few weeks. [*She goes out through the door, right.*]

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The scenes presented above are illustrative of the difficulty that philosophers of education often have when describing their 'method' (Ruitenberg, 2009; Smith, 2009; Standish, 2010). The dialogue is based on my own experience as an undergraduate student grappling with what it meant to 'do' philosophy, but the scenes are also partly fictionalised. It is a central feature of my own 'method' in this thesis that each chapter from here onwards will start with a scenario that is autobiographical in nature, as dialogue is integral to this work. Engaging in dialogue can be seen as both the goal and the means of this thesis; the research presented here is tasked with engaging others in dialogue about student satisfaction and its related discourses, and the methodological approach adopted is dialogic in nature.

The work of the American philosopher, Stanley Cavell, contributes substantially to this thesis, as I will explain further below, but his vision of philosophy itself exemplifies the philosophical 'method' used here. As he writes, 'I have wished to understand philosophy not as a set of problems but as a set of texts' (Cavell, 1979a, p.3). This thesis will draw on, and engage in dialogue with, a particular set of texts – outlined below – in order to reframe how satisfaction discourses in Higher Education are currently conceptualised and discussed. But first of all, I will briefly recap the main points to be taken forward from Chapter One as the empirical literature deals with student satisfaction in a very particular way. This approach is valuable in its own right, but there are numerous philosophical questions underlying these practical concerns which remain unaddressed; restating these problems is necessary here in order to foreground and explicate the reasoning behind the philosophical 'method' used in this thesis.

This chapter follows on from Chapter One, where I ended by offering three particular criticisms of the empirical literature on student satisfaction. The philosophical 'method' adopted in this thesis is designed to address such concerns and, as I will discuss further below, to deal with questions which cannot be tackled via the collection and analysis of empirical data. This chapter will explore what it means to 'do' research in philosophy of education, how this approach differs from research in the social sciences, and elucidate why this thesis has been conducted philosophically. I will

discuss here what a philosophical 'method' may consist of – although talking of a 'methodology' in philosophy of education is deeply problematic – and how this approach is more suited to the 'research questions' being examined here. I will conclude the chapter by drawing out the main themes permeating the thesis, and explaining how the philosophers I engage with contribute to an exploration of these, namely by generating a dialogue that moves away from the empirical literature's almost single-minded focus on measuring and improving student satisfaction in a marketised Higher Education system.

## **2.1 Themes in the Empirical Literature**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the emphasis in the current literature is placed on measuring, and improving the measurement of, student satisfaction. This literature is concerned with providing explanatory models of 'student satisfaction', reporting on interventions to raise satisfaction levels, and with explaining the consumerist behaviours of university stakeholders, primarily students. Researchers have developed a 'recipe' for service quality in the HE sector (Yeo, 2008), and have devised strategies for customer relationship management that are applicable to students (Stukalina, 2012; Clark *et al.*, 2017). The impact of motivation – whether students have an internal or external locus of control (Stukalina, 2012; 2014; Kirmizi, 2015) – and demographic variables on student satisfaction has also been investigated, both in the UK and internationally (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012; O'Driscoll, 2012; Elsharnouby, 2015; Carter and Yeo, 2016). Student satisfaction has been measured and evaluated not only at undergraduate level, but also for taught postgraduate and doctoral students.

The collection of student feedback, particularly in student satisfaction surveys, is used as a mechanism of accountability and quality assurance. Student satisfaction figures are increasingly used as a measure of other facets of Higher Education, such as 'teaching excellence' in the newly

proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in the UK.<sup>11</sup> Student satisfaction measures not only influence universities' league table position, and therefore institutional reputation, but they also relate to universities' income, both directly – those awarded 'gold' in the TEF (a measure based on NSS results) are allowed to increase their tuition fees – and indirectly, by influencing prospective students' decisions of which universities to attend.

## 2.2 Originality

The literature on student satisfaction is comprehensive, research has been conducted on satisfaction and its related discourses from seemingly every angle. Research evidence considers measures of student satisfaction, service quality, student engagement, and the student experience more broadly. On one level, there is nothing wrong with such literature; it is extensive and varied, with researchers focusing on different facets of student satisfaction. The literature seemingly provides a full and systematic account of student satisfaction. So what is at issue here; how is this doctoral research original, and what does it contribute to the existing discussion?

The originality of this research lies in the fact that it both departs from, and yet adds to, the other broadly empirical literature in a distinctive way. This thesis not only fills a 'gap' in the literature, but deals with a gap that has not often been acknowledged or even envisioned. The empirical literature is extensive, yet there are fundamental questions underlying such research which are not, indeed *cannot* be, addressed empirically. To consider 'student satisfaction' as another variable to be measured or manipulated in one's

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<sup>11</sup> Proposed in late 2015 as part of the HE Green Paper titled 'Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice' (BIS, 2015), the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) aims to place teaching on an equal footing with research outputs in universities. Universities will be judged on the quality of their teaching using student satisfaction data, with those achieving 'gold' being allowed to further increase their tuition fees (BIS, 2015). The differential fee caps are to come into effect from Autumn 2020 (Morgan, 2017), and the motivation for implementing the TEF is explained in terms of providing 'value for money' for students (BIS, 2015). For more information, see: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/whatistef/> [Accessed 20 October 2017].

inquiry brushes over the uncertainties and complexities inherent in its usage across the HE sector; it is this ambiguity of concepts that I will highlight and address in the thesis.

Central questions to be considered in this thesis are ‘what does it mean to be satisfied with one’s education?’, and ‘is student satisfaction educative in itself?’ I will also question whether universities should be aiming to satisfy their students, and what the implications of this might be. Existing literature seems to skim over questions such as these, taking the concept of student satisfaction, and its assumed positive effects, as given. Rather than questioning the concept itself, researchers question instead how its measurement can be improved. My aim here is not to devalue the existing literature on student satisfaction, but rather to highlight what is missing from such an account.

While the current literature tells us a great deal about student satisfaction and its related discourses, it never quite seems to get to the heart of the matter – that is, a consideration of how student satisfaction relates to the purpose and aims of Higher Education. There are several clearly delineated ‘research questions’ guiding this thesis, but it is often unavoidable, and indeed part of what might amount to its ‘method’, that research in philosophy of education opens out the initial research questions onto other, perhaps broader questions still. To state explicitly the research questions of this thesis in advance thus seems in some ways antithetical to what it means to ‘do’ philosophy.

In what follows, I will discuss several philosophers’ attempts to characterise their ‘methodology’, but the questions that I will deal with in this research cannot be evaluated at the end in the same way as tends to happen in the social sciences. It would be too simplistic to consider whether this thesis answers the ‘research questions’ it posits, and in fact philosophical questions are often ‘unanswerable’ in the sense of providing one definitive,

correct response.<sup>12</sup> Research in philosophy of education is not as methodologically formulaic as other kinds of research; there is no straightforward linear process that proceeds from devising research questions, proposing hypotheses, to collecting empirical data, and then answering one's research questions. Instead, the research questions and hypotheses, or 'propositions', may emerge as the research progresses.

I intend to approach the questions identified above philosophically. As I will explain in what follows such an approach, or 'method', is suited to the kinds of conceptual and justificatory questions that I am raising in relation to discourses of student satisfaction in contemporary Higher Education. This thesis is primarily concerned with clarifying and rethinking consumerist concepts in the HE sector, such as 'student satisfaction', 'value for money', and the 'student-consumer'. This research will also investigate broader questions surrounding Higher Education; for instance, my discussion will touch on the purposes and aims of HE, as satisfying students is increasingly viewed as the main function of a university education alongside a concern with producing employable graduates. I have identified several issues with the empirical literature not merely as an exercise in criticality, but as part of the rationale for adopting a philosophical approach instead. In the following section, I will explain what philosophy brings to this thesis and discuss what a philosophical 'method' may consist of.

### **2.3 The Turn to Philosophy**

It is not necessarily the case that empirical and philosophical research are diametrically opposed, but rather that philosophical questions underlie the most empirical of concerns. Philosophical questions regarding education may often begin in very practical concerns, such as 'how can I improve my

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<sup>12</sup> In *The Claim of Reason* (1979a), Cavell makes an argument along these lines regarding skepticism. Referring to the work of the later Wittgenstein, Cavell discusses how attempts to remove skepticism and obtain certainty in our knowledge of the other are erroneous. As he describes, we can never claim to have full knowledge of the other, nor remove skepticism entirely, instead criteria determining what is 'true' or 'false' must be applied to each situation.

students' achievement?' But as Paul Standish describes, these practical questions 'usually lead to "big" questions about the nature of knowledge and the nature of the good life' (2010, p.8). It seems as if such 'big' questions are particularly suited to being dealt with philosophically; as Standish explains:

These [questions] are addressed in some way or other in various aspects of educational research. But they are the kind of thing that cannot be resolved by empirical study. They need reflection and judgement and argument. This is central to philosophy' (2010, p.8).

Research in philosophy of education, and philosophy more generally, involves dealing with certain types of questions. Standish (2010) discusses how conducting a philosophical thesis allows the researcher to deal with questions that either could not be answered empirically, or those questions for which empirical research would not be appropriate. The utilisation of philosophy's 'method' is advantageous when dealing with questions of conceptual clarification, and also for tackling questions of justification and value (Standish, 2010).<sup>13</sup> The research questions outlined above are questions of this kind: what do we mean by 'student satisfaction?', and 'is satisfaction justified as an end of a student's experience of Higher Education?'.

This research is non-empirical, so there will be no data collection nor analysis of empirically collected data; instead, the thesis will involve a rigorous interrogation of concepts and ideas. Its 'method' is to do this through reflections on, and consideration of, a selection of philosophical and literary sources, and, unusually, of several 1940s Hollywood films. As Fulford and Hodgson (2016) highlight, the 'sources that inform educational philosophy need not only be works of literature', but philosophers may also draw on film (Cavell, 1996; 2005a; Read and Goodenough, 2005; Vansieleghem, 2016), poetry (Standish and Saito, 2017), and even picture books (Johansson, 2016) as part of their research. It is important to emphasise here that whilst my 'method' in this thesis is original, other

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<sup>13</sup> Whilst qualitative researchers may also deal with questions of value and justification, this is often considered in more practical terms, such as 'what is the value of my results?', and justifying their choice of participants, equipment, *et cetera*.

researchers have already argued for the legitimacy of an engagement with literature, film, and poetry alongside the more 'traditional' philosophical works, as part of a range of methodological approaches in philosophy of education (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016).

This thesis is set within the sub-discipline of philosophy of education, and is in line with the continental, rather than the analytic philosophical tradition.<sup>14</sup> Unlike empirical research which is associated with a variety of methodologies and related methods, for which numerous research methods textbooks provide guidelines on how to conduct such research (see, for example, Newby, 2010; Thomas, 2013), conducting a philosophical inquiry is arguably less straightforward. This is in part because there is no fixed 'method', or range of methodological approaches available from which one can be selected and applied to the 'research question' at hand. Indeed, there is no structured 'method' to be used in philosophical research; there may be as many different 'methods' in the discipline as there are authors, particularly in the continental philosophical tradition.

Research in educational philosophy is not concerned with conducting experiments, giving out questionnaires, or data sampling methods; to put it simply, philosophy's 'method' could be described as reading, thinking, and writing – and not necessarily in that order (Smith, 2009; Fulford and Hodgson, 2016). As Richard remarks in the opening scenario, 'you couldn't really assist my research as it involves me sitting at a desk and reading'. In reality, the situation is much more complex than this. Philosophy's 'method' is difficult to identify clearly, and Richard Smith has warned of the dangers of trying to explain what we do in terms simply of 'having a method'. As he writes, 'in doing philosophy we need to be aware of the awkwardness of thinking in terms of having a method, still more any kind of "methodology"' (2009, p.437). In empirical research, it is common for the methods to be agreed in advance before the 'research' itself is carried out, whereas in

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<sup>14</sup> For clarification of this distinction, see: Critchley, S. 2001. *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



educational philosophy, it may be more difficult to separate out the method from the research process itself; it is as if content and methods are ineluctably linked (Standish, 2010; Fulford and Hodgson, 2016).

Fulford and Hodgson (2016) distinguish 'philosophy of education' from 'educational philosophy', highlighting that these terms are not necessarily synonymous and interchangeable. As they write, 'philosophy of education' is an approach whereby engaging with a source means 'finding an educational truth or principle in its content [the source being drawn on] that can then be applied to education' (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.28). On the other hand, 'educational philosophy' focuses on how encountering particular sources, such as texts, films, artworks etc., can be an educative process. This thesis is more commensurate with educational philosophy, whereby 'education' is considered in the broadest sense, but I will also discuss the educational implications of certain texts, which aligns with philosophy of education itself. Whilst these terms are in some senses distinct, both are pertinent to the thesis and constitute part of its 'method'.

While Standish (2010) draws a rather sharp distinction between empirical and philosophical research (this is helpful in clarifying what is distinctive about research in philosophy of education), others are resistant to suggesting a clear dichotomy between these types of research (Vansieleghem, 2016; Vlieghe, 2016). Vlieghe acknowledges that 'a qualitative investigation mapping students' real experiences might do this job [investigating what it means to 'practice' in education] far better than the philosopher sitting behind her desk', but as he sees it, the only difference between the two approaches is who the researcher engages in dialogue with (2016, p.62) – whether this is the 'target population' of a study, or the authors of philosophical works. Both Vlieghe's phenomenological approach and qualitative research may be concerned with the same questions, but they simply arrive at their conclusions via different channels, either through 'philosophising', or by data collection and analysis.

Blurring the distinction between philosophical and empirical research even further, Nancy Vansieleghem refers to what she does as 'empirical

philosophy', as she writes: 'the substantive question of empirical philosophy is not how to do research, but how to do difference' (2016, p.97). 'Empirical philosophy' as a method is not just about conceptualising and interpreting difference, but combining philosophy with empirical research can helpfully bring together theoretical questions with more practical concerns. So a distinction might be suggested between philosophical and empirical forms of research, but this is better considered as a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy. While I am not conducting empirical research and collecting primary data as Vansieleghem does, her understanding of 'empirical philosophy' as evincing how philosophical reflection can be brought to bear on practical concerns is also pertinent to this thesis. As my research involves reflecting on philosophical and literary works in order to explore further what student satisfaction means and how it impacts on the HE sector, it could thus be considered as an example of such empirical philosophy.

### **2.3.1 Reading**

What does it mean to read 'philosophically' then? Fulford and Hodgson describe the philosopher's use of literature as follows, 'in educational philosophy, the nature of the question, and so the potential literature to inform it, entail a greater depth of reading' (2016, p.146). Philosophy may not present data and statistics, so its argument consists of the logical reasoning to substantiate claims, and the choice language with which to do it. Arguably the same could be said of qualitative and interpretive enquiries, but educational philosophy is distinct from these other kinds of research by virtue of the sources used to inform it.

A helpful dichotomy has been set up between 'reading-*for*-research' and 'reading-*as*-research' in order to distinguish reading in philosophy of education from other disciplines (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, pp.141-144). The former, 'reading-*for*-research' (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.141) typically involves the researcher reading a wide range of literature, but this may be little more than skim reading in order to 'fillet a publication' for one's own purposes (Silverman, 2013, p.345).

In contrast, there is 'reading-as-research' which constitutes part of the 'method' of research in educational philosophy (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.144). While philosophers often draw on fewer sources to form their arguments, this by no means equates to a limiting of what is read. Philosophers of education do not always stick to classical philosophical texts to inform their research, and neither are they necessarily restricted to texts which speak directly on, or about, education (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016). Moreover, to read 'philosophically' is less so a 'filleting' of information (Silverman, 2013, p.345), and more akin to a 'conversation'; that is, a conversation with the authors of what one is reading, but also a '*conversation with oneself*: looking at words and conceptual clarifications others have developed, one tests whether they make sense for oneself' (Vlieghe, 2016, p.63).

The reading characteristic of educational philosophy is akin to a conversation or dialogue, between oneself and the text, and between oneself and the author. As Cavell (1981a) describes, to engage with a text implies a relationship – between author and reader – of mutual responsibility, for one's words and being convicted by these words. As he explains:

The writer keeps writing things I know I ought not to have stopped trying to say for myself; and shows me a life there is no reason I do not live...the writer keeps my choices in front of me, the ones I am not making and the ones I am (Cavell, 1981a, p.49).

The initiation of a relationship between an author and their readers, an engagement in joint dialogue, is central to 'reading-as-research' (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.144).

The practices of reading and writing are not as distinguishable as they might appear to be, but are intricately woven together in the fabric that is philosophy. Dialogue permeates both the practices of reading and writing in philosophy of education; some classical philosophical works were written as dialogues (for example, Plato's *Phaedrus*), and current educational philosophers may also write up their research in the form of a dialogue (Smith, 2009; 2016). In this thesis, I will engage in several dialogues: with a

set of texts, with the authors of those texts, and the ideas discussed here were informed by numerous conversations with colleagues. Part of the originality of this thesis also lies in the creation of a dialogue between the authors I draw on, and particularly between Stanley Cavell and Martin Heidegger, two philosophers from very different traditions and with contrasting approaches.

As discussed above in terms of the 'research questions' guiding this thesis, definitive answers are difficult to find here, and aiming to do so seems almost inimical to what it means to 'do' research in philosophy of education. As Cavell alludes to in *The Senses of Walden*, certain texts may never permit 'a final reading', or such a reading may not be appropriate (1981a, p.12). The collection of texts and sources used to inform this thesis are of this infinite sort; philosophers of education may never settle on a single interpretation of, for example, Thoreau's *Walden* (a fact noted by Cavell himself), but the depth of reading involved and various approaches to such texts can facilitate a dialogue that is educative in itself.

### **2.3.2 Writing**

Writing philosophically is a practice central to this thesis. Writing in philosophy of education often takes the form of a peer-reviewed journal article, but the structure of one's argument and the literature used to inform such research, can vary widely – this is evidenced in part two of Fulford and Hodgson's (2016) monograph, where there is no shared 'method' or style of writing among their contributors. In explicating philosophy's 'method', Fulford and Hodgson have another dichotomy which is useful for setting apart philosophy of education from other disciplines – they have made a distinction between 'writing-as-report' and 'writing-as-research' (2016, p.5).

The distinction between 'writing-as-report' and 'writing-as-research' is dependent upon the time at which the 'writing' is carried out, whether it is considered as the final stage, the writing up of a research project, or is part of the research itself (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.5). When considering 'writing-as-report', often for empirical research, the 'research' itself is carried out, data is collected, and then the writing takes place as a summary of what

has been found and concluded from the research. The process of 'doing research' is implied here as taking place in a linear fashion; if we think back to the scenes at the beginning of the chapter, this seems to be what Claire assumes; she almost wants to discover philosophy's 'method' as something discrete akin to the methodology of psychological research. In contrast to this, writing in philosophy of education is more in line with what Fulford and Hodgson call '*writing-as-research*', whereby 'writing *is* the research, not just something tagged onto the end of the real work of research, of data collection and data analysis' (2016, p.151). As Richard jests in the first scene that opened this section, the only way in which Claire could assist his research would be to pass him the necessary books.

Although '*writing-as-research*' is central to research in educational philosophy, this does not mean that it is absent from some empirical research (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.5). Indeed, empirical research may also be characterised by '*writing-as-research*' (this may be more likely for qualitative methods), or a combination of the two methods as they are not mutually exclusive (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.5). In setting up this distinction, Fulford and Hodgson (2016) do emphasise that both philosophical and empirical research may accommodate either mode of writing. This is not a simple dichotomy between, on the one hand, empirical research that is written up as a report, and on the other, philosophical research that is enmeshed with the process of writing itself. The methods used are shaped by the questions guiding the research; what marks out research in philosophy of education from that of the social sciences is the self-evolving and dialogic nature of the questions it addresses. In educational philosophy, the initial research questions iteratively open up

onto other questions, and the aim is not necessarily to find an easy answer to the initial question.<sup>15</sup>

The practices of reading and writing are inextricably linked, and are constitutive of this type of research (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016); they also exemplify my 'method' in this thesis. Writing is not something carried out at the end of the research, but is part of the research process. As Paul Standish puts it, 'sometimes you don't know what you think until you have written it' (2010, p.11). The thinking is not something 'figured out' before writing takes place, instead writing is itself an exercise in thinking, and in thinking philosophically.

### 2.3.3 Thinking

I have discussed the practices of reading and writing that are constitutive of philosophical research, and have explained how such reading and writing may differ from that of other disciplines. In this section, I will explain how the 'thinking' characteristic of philosophy of education also differs from that of the social sciences. Crucially, what sets apart the 'thinking' of philosophical research is that it is constitutive of it; thinking is not just part of such research, but is the conducting of it. The thinking *is* the research, as much as the practices of reading and writing are. Similar to the distinction made by Fulford and Hodgson (2016, pp.141-144) between 'reading-as-research' and 'reading-for-research', in this section I will contrast 'thinking-as-product' with 'thinking-as-process'.

To consider 'thinking-as-product' in one's research implies that the thinking happens at a particular stage of the process, such as in the writing up and

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<sup>15</sup> An example of this can be seen in the work of Nan Shepherd (which I will discuss in greater detail in Part III), whose book *The Living Mountain* offers a different account of what it is to 'know' the Cairngorm mountains. Shepherd (1977/2011) urges her readers to think beyond the question of how to reach the summit, instead focusing on its recesses. This movement away from thinking only of scaling and conquering the mountain is allegorical of the shift away from randomised controlled trials and 'what works' research in philosophy of education.

analysis of results. If thinking is regarded as a 'product', then such thinking may be conducted for a particular purpose and directed toward specific ends. There is nothing inherently wrong with considering thinking as just one methodological tool among others, as a procedural element of research, but this is not the type of thinking characteristic of educational philosophy. As with the practices of reading and writing, thinking is integral to research in philosophy of education, and is not something that should be tagged on to the end of the process. Thinking is not something that we simply 'do' at a certain stage and then move on from, it is inseparable from the research itself.

If thinking is conceptualised as a valuable 'process' in and of itself, then thinking is not confined to a discrete stage of research, but is rather an integral part of one's inquiry, present throughout. To consider 'thinking-as-process' implies a commitment to thinking that goes beyond merely thinking as and when research dictates, in essence, thinking for a particular end-goal. Such thinking allows one to tackle questions of value and justification, to clarify difficult concepts, and thus constitutes a significant aspect of my philosophical 'method' in this thesis. 'Thinking-as-process' may also be characteristic of research in the social sciences; I am not suggesting a dichotomy here which would match up different types of research to these different types of thinking, but I am highlighting that there are different ways of thinking about, and within, one's research. The approaches evinced here, 'thinking-as-product' and 'thinking-as-process', can be considered as being on a continuum (whereby thinking is considered in more instrumental or value-laden terms), with different types of research residing at either end of the scale, and at various points in between.

The following processes are thus constitutive of the 'method' employed in this thesis: 'reading-as-research', 'writing-as-research' (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.144, p.5), and 'thinking-as-process'. The philosophical 'method' used here will consist of these practices of reading, writing, and thinking which are inextricably linked. I will engage in a dialogue with a particular set of texts, which will be detailed below, and will draw several

authors together in a conversation to reflect on the educational implications of current marketised discourses in Higher Education.

## **2.4 My Philosophical ‘Method’**

The philosophical ‘method’ adopted in this thesis could be considered as an iterative process of reading, writing, and thinking in dialogue with a set of texts and their authors. This research, as with others in educational philosophy, cannot be separated from the sources used to inform it. The philosophers I will engage with in this thesis may appear rather tangential in their relation to Higher Education, in fact, they are not regarded as philosophers or theorists of education in the same way as, for example, John Dewey or Alfred North Whitehead are. But the works and authors that I bring to bear on this research do have an educative force, wherein ‘education’ is considered in its broadest sense as a way of life, rather than mere instruction or schooling. The pertinence of each philosopher to this thesis will be explained further in what follows, but as Amanda Fulford describes, approaching an issue ‘almost obliquely’ can enable one to ‘gain a different perspective’ (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.47).

The philosophers I engage with each contribute to the discussion in a particular way and thus situate my work in relation to a number of themes: an attention to language, conceptions of voice, perfectionism, and ethical relationships. In what follows, I discuss these central themes, indicating how the works of each philosopher either add to and/or transform the discussion of each theme. As noted above, philosophical questions often have their roots in more practical concerns, the practical questions being addressed in this thesis include: ‘what do we mean by student “voice”?’; ‘how does marketisation affect academic-student relationships?’ and; ‘can we really understand students’ experiences from survey feedback?’ These very practical concerns will be examined further using the philosophical literature, but the central themes may be expressed differently in doing so. I will now outline four themes that are pertinent to this thesis, detailing the contribution of each philosopher selected to these themes.



### 2.4.1 An Attention to Language

An attention to language permeates this thesis, as it is through a considered use of language that the analysis of student satisfaction discourses will be presented. At its most basic, this thesis is concerned with how student satisfaction can be understood through the language used about it; an exploration of how 'satisfaction' is tied to concepts such as 'service quality', 'employability', and 'value for money' will be central to the research presented here. Two of the philosophers I draw on, Cavell and Heidegger, share a concern with language, with the way we 'word the world', and with how the world is disclosed to us through language. Both Cavell and Heidegger have felt the weight of what is known as a 'state of inexpressibility, of words not matching our [their] needs', and they have responded in kind by reframing what it means to express one's voice in philosophy (Cavell, 2005b, p.220). Cavell and Heidegger have each in their own way been forced to shun traditional philosophical convention in order to express their ideas.

For Heidegger (1962), in his seminal work *Being and Time* (hereafter BT), this meant creating neologisms comprised almost entirely of verbs. The language used in BT is a language of activity, and in developing his own compound words, Heidegger enacts the very structure of temporality he discusses. The (re-)invention of ordinary German words was for Heidegger not merely an exercise in creativity, but was fundamental to his project in writing BT. For Cavell, the movement away from traditional philosophy is evinced in a different way, albeit still in terms of rethinking what it is to write philosophically.

Cavell's work deals with among other topics, issues of voice, skepticism, and language and community (to be discussed further below). Although his writings do not directly address education – at least, not in the sense of formal schooling – the educative force of his work has been recognised (Fulford, 2012; Saito and Standish, 2012; Standish and Saito, 2017). Cavell has fought for the legitimate use of autobiography in philosophical writing, and in his own writing he explains this as follows: 'I am unsure for whose views beyond mine I would be speaking' (1994, p.4).

In his movement away from traditional (analytic) philosophy, Cavell turns to the tradition of ordinary language philosophy (OLP), which he inherits from the work of J.L. Austin and the later Wittgenstein. OLP can be briefly summarised as the task of 'leading words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use'; it is concerned with our everyday utterances and use of language (Wittgenstein, 1963, §116). This concern with the ordinary explains why Cavell draws on examples from Hollywood film, Shakespearean plays, and the world of opera in his writings, rather than relying on more abstract metaphysical examples. While their concern with language is manifested in very different ways and is informed by different perspectives (phenomenology for Heidegger, and OLP for Cavell), nevertheless there is a shared concern with language, and this is reflected in their innovative approaches to writing and doing philosophy. I will discuss this attention to, and creativity with, language in Chapter Five, where I will examine the effect(s) of introducing market terminology into pedagogical relationships.

An attention to language is not only evident throughout this thesis, but it is also influential for the 'method' employed here. As Naoko Saito highlights, both 'philosophy as autobiography' and 'philosophy as translation' are constitutive of Cavell's philosophical 'method' (2007a; 2009; 2015). I have noted above that Cavell ardently defends his use of autobiography in his writings; in doing so, this gives credence to autobiography as a 'method'. The scenes used to introduce this chapter, and the scenarios composed in subsequent chapters, are autobiographical in nature, but fictionalised. Perhaps more fundamental to this thesis though, is the use and embodiment of 'translation' as a methodological tool.

Here, I do not mean 'translation' in the traditional sense – as in a translation from one language to another – but instead refer to a translation within one's native language that heightens understanding of the subtle nuances inherent in language itself. This can be termed an 'inter-discursive' and/or 'intralinguistic' translation. As Claudia Ruitenberg states, inter-discursive translation, as a means of displacement can 'arrest thinking about a text' (2009, p.426). What Ruitenberg means by 'inter-discursive' translation is a shifting of discourses 'into other discursive registers so as to enable new

questions about them' (2009, p.428). In this thesis, I will be aiming to not only arrest thinking about particular texts, such as Thoreau's *Walden*, but also to arrest and disrupt thinking about certain discourses in universities.

This thesis can be considered as an act of, and epitomising, translation in the Cavellian sense, whereby 'translation' encompasses more than simply changing words from one language to another. As Saito explains, Cavell's use of 'translation' as part of his 'method' is one in which the act of translating a text implicates the translator themselves. As she writes of the experience of translating *Senses of Walden* (Cavell, 1981a) into Japanese, Saito notes that 'it was a process in which existing Japanese translations of *Walden* were destabilised, the meanings of its sentences and words overturned' (2007a, p.263). The difficulty of translation (both within a language and between different languages) is not merely being able to find the right words to exchange for one another, but comes from a sense of alienation from one's own language community. Saito describes this as a recognition of the 'foreign within the native' (2007a, p.271), and such an attention to language is provocative of transformation and conversion. Incorporating a tenet of Cavell's 'method' into my own, the translation evoked here will involve disrupting common understandings of terms such as 'student satisfaction'.

#### **2.4.2 Conceptions of 'Voice'**

Conceptions of 'voice' are central to this thesis and will be explored throughout, but particularly in Chapter Three. Chapter Three will address a fundamental concern that is neglected in the empirical literature, namely that student 'voice' is conceptualised as the mere collection of feedback. Drawing on the works of Stanley Cavell, I will argue that 'voice' consists in much more than the comments made on satisfaction surveys. Cavell has written extensively about 'voice' in relation to film (1996; 2005a), and he has also expressed concerns that traditional (analytic) philosophy may 'arrogate voice' (1994, p.10); in addressing this issue of the denial of voice, Cavell asserts his own right to write autobiographically in philosophy.

What Cavell's work adds to this the theme of 'voice' is an opening up of how the term is conceptualised, taking in ideas of selfhood, and pursuing what it means for one's voice to be withheld and/or recovered (1994; 1996). This richer conception of 'voice' will be elucidated by drawing on film, a 'method' used by Cavell himself. The discussion of 'voice' in this thesis will thus be informed by drawing on philosophical sources, in addition to film and literature.

### **2.4.3 Perfectionism**

Another important theme to be explored in this thesis is 'Emersonian moral perfectionism', a concept described by Cavell (1990) through drawing on the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Perfectionism is a concern with the moral life, with how one lives according to their [one's] own principles, and in communion with others. Building on Emerson's work, Cavell emphasises that perfectionism is not about 'perfectibility', or reaching a final *telos*, a perfect state of the self (1990, p.3) – in fact, Emerson's conception of the self is characterised by antifoundationalism, the idea that the self cannot be finalised. In *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990), Cavell outlines what he means by 'perfectionism' as follows: 'there is no one unattained/attainable self we repetitively never arrive at, but rather...“having” “a” self is a process of moving to, and from, nexts' (p.12).

Ineluctably tied to the concept of 'perfectionism' – the idea that the self is always in flux and in a process of becoming – are themes of leaving, unsettlement, and crises in the work of Emerson's contemporary, Henry David Thoreau. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, one of the key issues with student satisfaction is that it implies a certain teleology to one's Higher Education, in essence, that upon graduation one's education is 'complete'. This teleology relates to the fact that settlement is inherent to 'satisfaction' (etymologically), but in this thesis I will explore whether and in what sense satisfaction could be perfectionist, hence always attained *and yet* to be attained.

In his seminal book, *Walden* (1854/1997), Thoreau explains how leaving can be educative, and that crises are important for self-transformation/cultivation.

Both leaving and crises imply a sense of unsettlement, which Thoreau sees as a renewal or rebirth of the self, contrary to the commonly accepted pejorative connotations of these terms. It is only in leaving or undergoing a crisis that one is able to close that particular circle, 'around which another can be drawn' (Emerson, 1841/2000, p.252). I will engage with the works of Thoreau and Emerson in Chapter Four, as a response to concerns that settling students down and meeting their expectations may not be educative in the richer sense referred to by these philosophers. Perfectionism is important throughout the thesis as it offers a space for critique and resistance against the kind of 'end-stopped' (Sturm, 2011, p.6), instrumental student satisfaction in Higher Education that is currently expected under the market model.

The antifoundationalism of Emersonian moral perfectionism is pertinent to both Chapters Three and Four as it opens up, rather than closes down, the educative possibilities of recovering/expressing one's voice and of being unsettled. The discourses of student 'voice' and satisfaction position students in a particular way, as 'customers' or 'consumers' (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Blackmore, 2009), which constrains their moral outlook to what is expected of them by the labour market (and neoliberalism more broadly). The impulse to perfectionism begins in crises, that is, from an undeniable sense that 'either you or the world is wrong' (Cavell, 2005a, p.29). But in aiming to satisfy students, all forms of unsettlement and crises are prevented as they could lead to dissatisfaction, which is vilified in the era of accountability and commodification. The theme of perfectionism, and therefore the works of Thoreau, Emerson, and Cavell, is of paramount importance to this thesis as it offers an alternative vision of Higher Education to that exemplified in the widespread use of student satisfaction measures.

#### **2.4.4 Ethical Relationships**

A concern with the ethical, in one's relationships with others and with the world, is also central to this thesis. Ethical relationships will be considered particularly in Chapters Three and Five, where I will discuss how the expression of 'voice' ties one to a particular language community, and investigate how the contractualisation of academic-student relationships

affects the nature of dialogue that is permissible in such interactions. The philosophers who contribute most to an exploration of this theme are Cavell and Martin Buber.

For Cavell, ethical relationships are central to Emersonian moral perfectionism, to what it means to 'do' philosophy, and to how people express themselves in language. As I will discuss further in Chapter Three, conceptions of 'voice' are inextricably tied to one's language community. In expressing one's voice, there is an extent to which one must conform to the criteria laid out by their language community in order to make oneself intelligible to others (Cavell, 1979a). While these criteria are often implicit, one's agreement in criteria must be given freely (and thus ethically).

For Cavell, skepticism in ethical relationships is expressed as the worry that one may never truly know another. Gaining knowledge of another, and hence being in relation with them, is arrived at through language. While Cavell acknowledges – building on the work of the later Wittgenstein – that this skepticism can never be fully overcome, building relationships with others through language is a case of invoking the 'we', creating mutuality by establishing what 'we' mean in saying a particular word (1979a, p.179). Appeals to the 'other' in this sense, as appeals to the 'we', epitomise the impulse to ordinary language philosophy (Cavell, 1979a; 1994; Gould, 1998).

Ethical relationships are also important in perfectionism, as a concern with the moral life is expressed in how one understands oneself, one's relation to others, and to the world. In Chapter Five, as part of the discussion of 'customer relations' in Higher Education, I will outline how one's relationships with others, particularly those who provoke the impulse to perfectionism, are central to working towards the transformation sought. Rather than being transformative, I will argue that marketised and (increasingly) contractualised academic-student relationships are shaped by an economic rationality premised upon exchange, with the lack of communion in such interactions merely reinforcing the individuation of student-consumers. In Chapter Five, I will also draw on another aspect of

Cavell's work (2005b) – his extension of J.L. Austin's speech act theory – to argue that genuine ethical relationships between oneself and the other may necessitate confrontation, risk, and exchange (things typically avoided in service provider-consumer encounters in Higher Education).

This engagement with the other as an 'other' will be explained further by drawing on the work of Martin Buber. In his works, Buber imagines poetically how we might relate to each other, and ultimately, to God. Buber then builds on these ideas, linking different modes of dialogue to contemporary issues in religious ethics, psychology, art, and crucially for my arguments here, education. The educational force of Buber's work has already been recognised, with philosophers of education using his work to discuss the different modes of dialogue at work in the classroom (Nolan and Stitzlein, 2016), and the format of academic tutorials in HE (Fulford, 2016a). Buber's ideas on how we may relate to, and engage with, others are important for my discussion in Chapter Five, which will be focused on the rise of 'customer relations' in Higher Education.

Buber (1947/2002; 1970) was deeply concerned with how we relate to others, which he explains as depending on whether one recognises the other as an 'other' akin to themselves, or instead objectifies them. As Buber (1947/2002) argues, one's relation with another may be characterised by different modes of dialogue, ranging from the genuine to the debased; this distinction will be invaluable for the consideration of academic-student relationships, and the dialogue constitutive of such relations, in Chapter Five. The philosophy of Buber will advance the arguments pursued here by bringing in an attention to relationships, encounter, and dialogue that is currently removed from the marketised HE sector. Buber's work is central to this thesis, as his conception of ethical relationships offers an alternative to the current proceduralisation of academic-student relationships under strict accountability and performativity measures.

While the philosophical works I will engage with in this thesis are aligned with different traditions, and the philosophers themselves come from very different backgrounds, there are lines of connection to be made between

them and several common themes emerge: an attention to language; conceptions of 'voice; Emersonian moral perfectionism, and; a focus on ethical relationships with the other. These themes will be explored through an iterative process of reading-as-research, writing-as-research (Fulford and Hodgson, 2016, p.5), and thinking (*as-process*). In order to consolidate this discussion of philosophical 'method', I will now return to the opening scenario and offer a fictional scene three.

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SCENE THREE

*Richard and Claire are having a supervision meeting to discuss progress on her dissertation project.*

Richard: Morning Claire, how are you getting on?

Claire: Alright yes, I have read that book that you suggested last time.

Richard: And was it helpful?

Claire: Definitely...though I'm still a bit unsure of how to actually start the dissertation or what my 'method' involves. Last year, we had a whole module on Research Methods and I don't think it applies in this case...

Richard: Indeed. Research Methods modules do tend to focus on empirical research and data collection rather than philosophical research. Have you been doing any other reading around this topic?

Claire: Yes, I have a few great books on 'the self' and have started to make some comparisons between how it is understood in psychology and in philosophy...but I'm not clear on where to go from here.

Richard: Well the next step in our philosophical 'method', if it could be said that we actually have a 'method', is to think about and reflect on what you have read so far.

Claire: So I have to just sit and think? That doesn't seem very productive...

Richard: While thinking might not feel like you are doing much, research of this kind cannot proceed without it...thinking is an important part of research in philosophy of education.

Claire: Ok, so I need to spend some time thinking, that's fine. But then what do I need to do?

Richard: You need to clarify which concepts you will be talking about and reflect on why they are central to your dissertation...then you might want to start writing so that you can think about the topic in a slightly different way.

Claire: Writing 8,000 words feels very intimidating right now, I still don't know where to start...

Richard: Most philosophers still experience that kind of 'unknownness', in one sense it might be easier if we had a list of specific 'methods' to choose from. But just focus on the key themes or concepts and start by writing about what made you so interested in this topic. Does that sound alright?

Claire: Yes, thanks for your help. I'll send you a draft when I have started writing. See you in a few weeks then. [*Claire exits Richard's office*].

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This research opens up from a consideration of the key concepts pertaining to the research 'question' as suggested in scene three, while the processes of reading, writing, and thinking in all forms of research in philosophy of education are iterative and cyclical. In this vein, I will now turn in Part II to a discussion of three key concepts that are integral to the research presented here: voice, settlement, and customer relations.

## Part II

## Chapter 3

### Student Voice: Conformity, Compliance, and Self-Reliance.

#### Scenario 1

*A team meeting in a university setting is about to begin. The teaching team are gathered together to discuss potential strategies for improving NSS results.*

Curriculum manager: Morning everyone, how are we all feeling? I hope the teaching's going well so far.

*[Some of the teaching staff nod but remain silent].*

Curriculum manager: Ok, so the first item on our agenda is the mid-module reviews I've asked you all to do with your student groups. How are we coming along with those, do you think we can get all students to fill them in before the deadline?

Academic 1: Well, I've handed them out and the majority of students have filled them in, but they do seem a bit dubious about filling in a survey after only three weeks of teaching...

Curriculum manager: Ah right, yes, I know what you mean. It is collecting their voice at an early stage admittedly, but it helps us to make any necessary changes before they come to fill in the NSS.

Academic 1: Oh, ok, so these reviews are like a pre-emptive measure of how our students might rate us on the NSS...

Curriculum manager: Yes. And we need their feedback now in order to tackle any issues or problems before they are able to voice their concerns more formally...I'm sure we all know what bad NSS ratings can do to an institution these days.

Academic 2: I did have a question about these reviews though. Do they have any impact on staff appraisals and our job security? I mean, it can be difficult at times to please all of our students regardless of what we do, and they often only think about negative aspects of their experience when it comes to filling in surveys.

Curriculum manager: The short answer to your question is no, student feedback at this point in the academic year does not directly affect my and your line managers' judgments of how you're performing. But ultimately, if students aren't happy with what they're paying for this could come back to bite us further down the line in terms of NSS scores and league table position...which affects job security for us all.

Academic 3: But with these measures being so important, do students even know what the questions are really asking?

Academic 1: No, I think they only consider, let's say feedback, in terms of our comments on their assignments, without taking into account the informal feedback we're giving them in class all the time.

Curriculum manager: That's an interesting question, which brings me on to our new strategy for improving NSS ratings. The plan is that all staff will go through each survey question and explain what it refers to before handing them out to students. That way, we can make sure that they actually read and understand each question before filling it in, meaning the institution may come off better. How does that sound?

Academic 3: I mean, it makes sense to me that it's worth explaining to students what they are being asked about, but I wouldn't want to think that I had interfered with their answers either...

Curriculum manager: Well, we're not telling them exactly what to say and how to respond, obviously that's up to them. However, clarifying what they are responding to is important I think.

Academic 2: I'm not too sure about this strategy, aren't we then 'gaming the system' in a way?

Academic 1: To be fair though, University X is doing the same. They even tell students that bad NSS ratings can devalue their degrees in the labour market...

Curriculum manager: I don't think our new policy would be considered as 'gaming the system', it's just a matter of explaining to students how important these surveys are, even the mid-module reviews we ask them to complete, and encouraging them to spend more than two minutes filling them in. Right, if everyone's clear then let's move on to the next item on our agenda.

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## Scenario 2

*A lecture on an undergraduate programme in Education is about to begin.*

*The students are in their final year.*

Lecturer: Morning everyone, I hope you've been getting on alright with the readings I gave you last week. Just before we get started, can I ask you all to fill in the mid-module review form on your tables.

Student 1: Ah, not these forms again...we had to fill them out on Tuesday as well with another tutor.

Lecturer: I know, you might have filled one in already, but we have to complete them for each module separately.

Student 2: It seems a bit early to give a review, doesn't it? We've only got three weeks to talk about here...

Lecturer: Yes, it is quite early but we're asking for your feedback now so that myself and the rest of the team can make improvements to your experience before getting to the end and realising that certain things haven't been working for you. Now, before you fill them out I just need to explain what it's asking about in terms of feedback. Obviously, you haven't handed in your assignment yet so that question is really asking about informal feedback that I've given to you in sessions, as well as any responses I've sent you via email. Is that clear? So, feedback is not only the comments you get on summative assignments, but it includes the responses I've given to individual queries.

Student 1: [*sighing*] I feel like I haven't got much to say on this module yet...

Lecturer: Ah. I know it might seem odd to have a mid-module review now and one at the end, but we really are trying to capture your voice and listen to it constructively.

Student 3: Aww, right. I thought that's what the student committees were for though?

Lecturer: Yes, the course committee meetings are also a chance for you to make your voices heard, but that's about your overall experience of the programme and this is focused on each module. [*3 – 4 minutes elapse. Some students are writing on the evaluation forms*] Ok, have you all had chance to fill the form in now? [*Students nod in response*]. Great, then let's get started with today's session.

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### **3.1 Measuring Student Voice**

What I have sought to illustrate in both opening scenarios is the extent to which the measurement and 'collection' of student voice is now prolific in universities across the UK. As measures such as the National Student Survey (NSS), the Student Experience Survey (SES), and the 'Graduate Outcomes' survey have become increasingly prominent in the HE sector, universities have devised their own strategies and policies to improve institutional reputation and league table position. Scenario 1 clearly highlights how the collection of student voice is often motivated by market concerns rather than an encouragement of students' free expression and empowerment, with universities edging ever closer to what could be considered as 'inappropriate influence' over the results (Ipsos MORI, 2017, p.6).

The newly formed Office for Students (OfS) has been explicitly tasked with investigating allegations of 'inappropriate influence' of universities on the completion and results of the NSS. As the OfS and Ipsos MORI (the statistics agency responsible for conducting the NSS) state, a university's role in the NSS process should only be to advertise the survey to the appropriate groups of students, namely those in the final year of undergraduate study. Institutional campaigns should be kept separate from NSS activities, with some examples of 'inappropriate influence' including getting students to fill in the survey in mandatory sessions, and/or explaining the questions to them. While the policy proposed in scenario 1 may be an exaggeration of the daily practices and policies of contemporary universities, I shall use this partly fictionalised scenario as a heuristic tool for exploring current iterations of student voice initiatives.

Scenario 2 should seem all too familiar to many academics: students questioning the usefulness of measures that are apparently implemented for their own good, and academics forced to comply with their use. Again, this scenario is fictionalised but is based on real experiences of studying and working in Higher Education. What scenario 2 makes clear is that often, the student voice is collected for institutions' and policy-makers' benefit rather than for students themselves. Interestingly, where students do seem to

express their own voices in the scenario, this is to denigrate the usefulness of the survey itself. So, if we were really listening to ‘the student voice’, then surely this would resolve the issue of ‘survey fatigue’ (Adams and Umbach, 2012, p.579), a common complaint for students who are repeatedly reminded to complete the NSS by email, text, and phone call. As the lecturer’s comment at the end – ‘let’s get started with today’s session’ – shows, it is almost as if conducting student evaluations of teaching gets in the way of teaching itself, meaning that formal measures of student voice may encroach upon, rather than bolster the value of, the student experience.

In both scenarios, the idea that academics should explain survey questions to students before they fill in their answers seems disingenuous at best, and at worst, could constitute a limiting of voice within certain parameters. While collecting and acknowledging the student voice looks to be an empowering ideal, in practice, students can only respond to whatever institutions have decided to ask them about, and then their responses may also be restricted to Likert-type response scales. A central issue to be explored in this chapter is that initiatives such as the NSS and module evaluation questionnaires tend to ‘homogenise students and deprive them of agency at the same time as apparently giving them “voice”’ (Sabri, 2011, p.657). That attempts to collect and/or ‘measure’ the student voice often result in a limiting of voice is, as I will argue, largely due to the fact that such measures are typically imposed on students from without, and that they stem from institutional objectives rather than student concerns.

While this is not directly referred to in the two scenarios above, it is also a common practice for students to be rewarded in some way for filling in numerous surveys. Incentives may include free printing, tea and coffee, chocolate, entry into a prize draw etc. But in effect, offering inducements in exchange for student feedback can reduce the whole process to a mere financial transaction, rather than a meaningful interaction. If the collection of student voice is understood as transactional, then this again reinforces the limiting and restriction of voice. The limiting of ‘voice’ here is not only structural – in terms of the questions asked and responses available on surveys – but also relational, meaning that how students understand the



function of voice initiatives relative to their experience affects the expression of their own voice. It surely does not go unnoticed by students that the feedback collected at the end of an academic year will generally be used to improve provision for the following year, meaning that those students who lend their voice to a particular measure may not directly benefit from doing so.

Another key issue with student voice measures is that they may not be as democratic as they appear to be, given that responses to surveys cannot be made on students' own terms. While both national and institutional initiatives target individuals and purport to acknowledge their voices, it remains up to HE managers and policy-makers to decide which students' feedback is presented in marketing campaigns, while other voices may be suppressed or ignored altogether. Even in campaigns such as 'You Said, We Did', the individual 'you' will often be lost among the statistics as institutions tend to select the student feedback that best supports their strategic imperatives.

While on the NSS there are both open and closed questions, allowing for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, quantitative data is undoubtedly much easier to analyse and is typically considered as more objective. But even with quantitative data, universities can still put their own strategic slant on the results by reporting their position relative to others in a particular region or county, whereas national comparisons might not look as glowing. So while a particular institution might be ranked in the 'top 25' for employability nationally, they can also achieve second place for the same measure when results are compared regionally.

In an era of increased competitiveness across the Higher Education marketplace and the globalisation of knowledge, universities now focus on 'big data' which contributes to accountability measures. Every attempt to collect, measure, and/or account for 'the student voice' is thus premised upon market ideals rather than a concern for students' self-cultivation. The fact that universities now rely on such formal student 'voice', or rather feedback, to prove their value against competing institutions, further instrumentalises its collection and use.

The current literature on 'voice' in education (whether this refers to pupil voice initiatives in schools, strategies to involve students more in curricular decisions in Further Education, or the use of surveys to 'collect' voice in HE) seems to use the terms 'voice' and 'feedback' almost interchangeably, as if this is unproblematic. If students are 'customers', as they are increasingly seen to be (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Mark, 2013), then it seems appropriate for the purchasing of a product or service – their Higher Education – to be followed by the giving of feedback. What is pertinent here is that the term 'feedback' implies a particular endpoint to a process. But as I will explain further in what follows, the recovery/discovery of 'voice' as conceived of by Stanley Cavell is an iterative, perfectionist process, rather than one with a discrete beginning and end.

Feedback is typically viewed in a positive light, as providing the link between problems and solutions; in the case of Higher Education, this is manifested in the use of student survey responses for staff development and curricular innovations (Brooman *et al.*, 2015). The collection of feedback in HE through a variety of surveys and questionnaires is thus seen as a way of checking that everything is working properly, in essence, that everyone is functioning effectively (meeting student needs), and as a way of addressing problems. This is clearly the motivation of the Curriculum Manager in scenario 1, seeking to implement a new policy to explain survey questions before asking students to fill them in. That current measures of student voice are little more than instrumental, means-ends exchanges is evident in both scenarios as it becomes clear that student feedback is only collected to meet accountability pressures.

These central criticisms of student voice measures – that they are limiting, transactional, instrumental, and potentially undemocratic – stem not only from how and why 'voice' is collected in the first place, but also from how student feedback is then subsequently used. Internally, student 'voice' or feedback will often be used to inform curricular developments as part of a university's quality assurance process. While using what students have said to change and improve teaching practices looks to be a valuable activity, this does not guarantee that each individual student's voice has been listened to.

Whatever feedback students give, the onus is still on institutions to decide what voices to acknowledge and what may be side-lined. As one student discusses student voice measures:

[Democratic] I wouldn't say so. Because I'd say you are still reporting things to the department and then the department decide what to do with the things that are reported. So you have the power to say this is an issue but you don't have the power to do anything about it yourself (Freeman, 2014, p.181).

In an increasingly competitive HE marketplace, students' expectations are assiduously attended to as those left dissatisfied may simply take their business elsewhere, following a similar logic to that of switching energy providers. As students are considered more as customers and consumers who can 'vote with their feet', this implies an economic individualism which is captured in such marketing taglines as 'Have *Your Say*' and 'Build *Your Future*'. Yet the voices of individual students are simply not taken into account by those in power; instead each student's voice becomes merely part of 'the student voice' which is considered as synonymous with feedback.

In what follows, I seek to re-think the issue of student voice, and present a richer conception of 'voice' by drawing on the philosophical works of Stanley Cavell. The discussion will be informed by several central distinctions such as that between conformity/compliance and self-reliance, a distinction between voice and feedback, and a consideration of how voice is expressed both individually and communally. If the collection of student voice is to genuinely empower students, rather than being a mere tick-box exercise, then universities need to consider whether current initiatives are fit for purpose; a central tenet of this will be how they can account for those dissenting in criteria.

### **3.2 Student Voice: Conformity and Compliance**

I now turn to the etymologies of both 'conform' and 'comply' to argue that current student voice initiatives depend on conformity and compliance. While measures of student voice do allow students to express their voices, such 'voice' is invariably shaped by accountability pressures, institutional

objectives, and response formats available. Ultimately, this reduces the possession and expression of voice to mere ventriloquism, a point made previously by Fulford (2009) in relation to the development of students' academic writing.

As shown in both opening scenarios, what is most contentious about such contrived measures of 'voice' is that it is not only students who must comply and conform, but also academic staff and institutions themselves; as the curriculum manager in scenario 1 states, 'I'm sure we all know what bad NSS ratings can do to an institution these days'. The potential to account for student voice in a different way is difficult to envisage as the NSS and similar surveys now exert great power over the HE marketplace, essentially determining which institutions are the 'winners' and 'losers' in the game of student satisfaction.

It is my contention that student voice campaigns are reliant on students' compliance and conformity, which contradicts their implicit – and sometimes even explicit – claim to promote autonomy and freedom. From the etymology of 'comply' (meaning to 'carry out, to fulfill, to accomplish'), it is clear that compliance is what is demanded from students as they are reminded numerous times over a given period to lend their voice to particular surveys, almost to the point where non-compliance is no longer seen as a viable option.

Another interesting feature of the etymology of 'comply' is its intransitive usage from 1600 onwards, meaning 'to consent' or 'to act in accordance with another's will or desire'. The fact that compliance may mean acting in accordance with someone else's wishes implies a kind of subversion here, and this is particularly problematic if universities are claiming that the motivation behind student surveys is to encourage students to express their own voice. Such compliance is illustrated on the part of academic and student alike in scenario 2, as the lecturer has to comply with the new policy introduced by her Curriculum Manager, and the students *do* fill in the mid-module review forms despite initially expressing their disdain.

Where there is compliance, there is also likely to be conformity. The etymology of 'conform' (from *confourmen* meaning to be obedient (to God) and to comply) is helpful here as it implies that conformity involves changing one's own behaviour to match up to the expectations of some higher authority; in an ordinary sense, this is typically God. The intransitive sense of 'conform' also means to 'act in accordance with an example'. In the case of student voice, the 'example' or point of reference for what to say will often come from prominent marketing slogans and institutional campaigns. A prime example of this is where universities ask their students to say why they love studying at that institution, with taglines such as '#LoveUniversityX'. While these marketing and branding activities would not be considered as 'inappropriate influence' over NSS results (Ipsos MORI, 2017), it is important to acknowledge that these discourses can become totalising, unconsciously influencing whether students choose to lend their voice to such campaigns, and if so, how they may express their voice.

The inherent conformity and compliance of student voice measures can similarly be seen in the way that they privilege the individual voice over and above any sort of collective, or communal, voice. On the face of it, focusing on the individual voices of students seems to be a valuable endeavour, and in theory it should promote diversity rather than conformity. However, the issue is that typically, only those student voices which are saying what an institution wants to hear will be listened to. Emphasising the value of the individual voice also prevents the student body from thinking and responding as a community. This relates to the criticisms evinced above but equally adds that what universities are doing by encouraging conformity, compliance, and an economic individualism is little more than producing 'excellent sheep' (Deresiewicz, 2015).

That Higher Education Institutions, and the education system more broadly, are producing a large number of 'excellent sheep' is evidenced by an increased emphasis being placed on the student trajectory or 'lifecycle' (Raven, 2016; Roberts, 2018), with universities seeking to capture a significant 'market share' in terms of student numbers, and then getting these students through their degrees as quickly and efficiently as possible

(Bates and Hayes, 2017). As Deresiewicz reflects on his own university experience, he writes that:

What it meant to actually get an education, and why you might want one—how it could help you acquire a self, or develop an independent mind, or find your way in the world—all this was off the table (2015, p.1).

In terms of creating a 'sheepish' student voice then, this tendency to obliterate difference and to assume that all students want the same educational journey is exemplified in a particular approach to assignment writing. Here, I am thinking of the increasingly common practices of providing students with writing frames and/or model answers to assignment questions. What I have found from my own teaching experience is that undergraduates not only want – one could even say *expect* – to be given a writing frame for their assignments detailing how to structure their academic work (with explicit guidance on what to include in each section), but moreover they also want to be given approximate word counts for each part of their assignment.

In one sense, it is a good thing for students to be given clear guidance on what is expected of them in a particular assignment, such as what the learning outcomes are and how they could meet them. But offering up writing frames and model answers may in fact be hindering students' progress more than they are helping them, as what such detailed outlines and structured plans actually do is prevent students from thinking about it for themselves, from using their own initiative and responding creatively to the problem or question posed. All that is therefore required of students is a kind of passive conformity and compliance to university requirements; this could be considered as a denial or repression of voice (Fulford, 2009). Such a limiting of voice in assessment guidance should also be seen in stark contrast to campaigns such as 'You Said, We Did', exemplifying that the student voice is only encouraged and acknowledged in particular domains. Moving *away from* voices of compliance and conformity will involve a shift *towards* 'self-reliance', a concept taken from the work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American essayist and philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and I will turn my attention to this next.

### 3.3 From Conformity to Self-Reliance

'Self-Reliance' is one of Emerson's earlier essays and also one of the most well-known. Writing in mid-nineteenth century America – specifically Concord, Massachusetts – Emerson is considered by Cavell to be among America's greatest philosophers. His work has been most widely expounded by Stanley Cavell, who, in writing *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (1990), generated a renewed philosophical interest in Emerson's work and particularly in the concept of 'Emersonian moral perfectionism'. It is important to note that Emerson was not writing about education in the formal sense of schooling, but what Cavell has shown by discussing key Emersonian ideas is how his works are pertinent to a broader consideration of what it means to be 'educated'. I will say more about this in the next chapter where I also discuss the work of Emerson's contemporary, Henry David Thoreau. Of import here is the link between self-reliance and voice.

Put simply, self-reliance is the ability to trust one's own judgment. It pertains to following one's own ideas in the midst of conflicting arguments from society. But becoming self-reliant is also inextricably linked in Emerson's work to the awakening of genius. The self-reliant person is the most cultivated one; thus, becoming self-reliant is educative in itself as this exemplifies *Bildung* or self-formation. As Cavell writes, 'Emerson's "upbuilding" in "the upbuilding of man" virtually pronounces *Bildung*' (1989, p.8).

While the self-reliant individual will exhibit a greater independence of thought, rather than imitating and regurgitating what others have thought, this does not necessarily imply that self-reliance consists in solitude. Self-reliance does not mean being so independent that one turns away from one's community. Instead, it is about trusting one's own genius rather than blindly following that of others. As Emerson writes: 'to believe your own

thought, to believe that what is true for you in your own private heart is true for all men—that is genius’ (1841/2000, p.132).<sup>16</sup>

Self-reliance can also be understood as the aversion of conformity; Emerson regards only nonconformists as true men and women. Here, self-reliance and/or nonconformity is not simply about disrupting the status quo, rather becoming self-reliant is a matter of each person reconciling themselves to themselves, independent of the influence of what is customary. As Emerson explains:

No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it (1841/2000, p.135).

Becoming self-reliant is a process of learning to trust oneself, one’s own thoughts and judgments, which in turn means acting in accordance with one’s nature rather than social convention alone. What this means for ‘voice’ then is that nonconformity should be cherished rather than shunned. Equally, the shift from what Emerson terms ‘Intuition’ to tuition should not mean that one’s natural Intuition, which is related to genius, is entirely superseded. Self-reliance is often expressed in a number of ways, with the possession and expression of one’s voice being one of these. Emerson’s own self-reliance is writ large throughout his essays.

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<sup>16</sup> Emerson’s concept of ‘self-reliance’ can be understood as stemming from his turning away from the Unitarian Church in the mid-nineteenth century. Although his father was a Unitarian minister, Emerson believed that Christianity contributed further to man’s condition of ‘secret melancholy’ rather than the awakening of genius; hence his avocation of self-reliance as the aversion of conformity can be seen as an aversion to Unitarianism. In turning away from such organised religion, Emerson and his contemporary, Thoreau, became key figures in the establishment of Transcendentalism which argued that a religious/relational connection to the world should be sought through an immersion in nature. For further details on this see the entry on Ralph Waldo Emerson in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Online]. [Accessed 11 February 2019]. Available from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/emerson/>.



Emerson's distinctive way of writing embodies the themes he deals with and he turns away from many culturally accepted ways of thinking about these ideas including nature, experience, and scholarship. In addition, his writing style and structural choices might be thought to constitute the expression of his voice, as well as enacting the nonconformity he advocates. As Cavell argues in relation to another of Emerson's essays:

Emerson's 'Experience' announces and provides the conditions under which an Emersonian essay can be experienced – the conditions of its own possibility. Thus to announce and provide conditions for itself is what makes an essay Emersonian (1989, p.103).

One could add to this that the conditions of possibility for being and becoming self-reliant are similarly announced in the writing of 'self-reliance'. In what follows, I will further explore the distinction between conformity/compliance and self-reliance by drawing on the works of Stanley Cavell. While Emerson's writings not only discuss, but also embody self-reliance, I will argue further that Cavell's works similarly evince such (educative) nonconformity.

### **3.4 Philosophical Conceptions of Voice: The Turn to Cavell**

The American philosopher Stanley Cavell does not write directly about Higher Education, or even education in the sense of formal schooling. Indeed, his work draws on film, opera, the works of the American transcendentalists, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and even on Shakespearian tragedy, to inform his philosophy. His writings address (amongst other things) issues of morality, skepticism, and ordinary language philosophy. However, this does not mean that his work does not have a bearing on education; indeed, the educational force of Cavell's work is widely recognised (Saito and Standish, 2012). Saito and Standish explain the pertinence of Cavell's work as follows:

He engages in a sustained exploration of the nature of philosophy that takes teaching and learning (and the anxiety inherent in these) to be at its heart; it is also that he is preoccupied with *what it is to teach and learn*, with the kinds of transformation these might imply and with the inseparability of these from what a human life is. In his considerations of the ordinary and the social world, questions of teaching and learning recur (2012, pp.2-3).

In his work, Cavell repeatedly turns to issues of voice. But for Cavell (1979a; 1996), voice does not equate to the expression of mere opinion; he conceptualises 'voice' in a more philosophically nuanced way as being tied to one's sense of self and one's search for a particular form of education. In *Contesting Tears*, Cavell (1996) discusses several films from the genre he titles 'The Melodramas of the Unknown Woman'.<sup>17</sup> I will discuss one of the melodramas – *Gaslight* – in detail here, to illustrate how the principal woman's search for a voice is complex, involving moments of both repression and recovery.

### 3.5 'Voice' in Cavell

The writings of Cavell are both autobiographical and exploratory, often refusing to conform to more traditional ways of writing in philosophy. One prime example of how Cavell's writing is different to other writing in philosophy is seen in his approach to film criticism. Sinnerbrink draws attention to Cavell's writing on film, stating that:

Cavell is clearly not dealing with the more conventional philosophy of film, in which it is precisely a matter of 'formal argumentation' or even 'scientific evidence'...In Cavell's hands philosophy is thus neither science nor poetry but exists ambiguously between the two (2014, pp.57-58).

So, Cavell's work is not structured in terms of verifiable propositions and/or the search for objectivity. Instead, his writings are deeply reflective, encouraging his readers to see themselves and the world differently. Due to this, it has been difficult for Cavell to be recognised as a philosopher, and specifically, an ordinary language philosopher (Gould, 1998; Saito and Standish, 2012). Cavell has redefined what we generally think of as constituting 'philosophy' and also what it means to write philosophically.

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<sup>17</sup> This genre includes *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), *Gaslight* (1944), *Stella Dallas* (1937), and *Now, Voyager* (1942).

### 3.5.1 Cavell's Own Search for a Voice

Timothy Gould has highlighted three distinct understandings of voice in Cavell's work: (i) first, there is Cavell's own voice as discovered through his philosophical project; (ii) there is 'the human voice that philosophy is characterised as banishing'; and (iii) there is the metaphysical voice or 'voice before language' (Gould, 1998, p.53).

In *A Pitch of Philosophy* (1994), Cavell describes his struggle to find his own 'voice' in philosophy and how his autobiography is inextricably linked with this search for a voice. As he puts it, 'the autobiographical dimension of philosophy is internal to the claim that philosophy speaks for the human, for all; that is its necessary arrogance' (Cavell, 1994, p.10). There is a play on words evident here in the use of both 'arrogance' and 'arrogation' to describe the 'voice' constitutive of Anglo-analytic philosophy.

The first section of *A Pitch of Philosophy* is titled 'Philosophy and the Arrogation of Voice' and as Cavell (1994) explains, the fact that philosophy often assumes the right to speak for all (its arrogance), is exactly what has led to the 'arrogation' of his own voice in the discipline. What Cavell (1979a, p.154) characterises as the 'denial of the human self' is symptomatic of the risk that the human voice may be 'sidelined elsewhere in philosophy' (Jenner, 2013, p.119), that is, in the Anglophone philosophical tradition. But as Jenner explains, 'a decisive virtue of ordinary language philosophy for Cavell is that its methodological appeal to "what we say when" foregrounds and insists on the human voice' (2013, p.119).

For Cavell, finding his own voice in the discipline meant writing outside the traditional confines of 'philosophy' by acknowledging that his own 'voice' was both autobiographical and personal, and that this voice still had something legitimate to offer to the field. The concept of 'voice' pervades Cavell's work but time and again he resists confining his conception of 'voice' to a specific list of features. As Gould (1998) highlights, 'voice' and 'method' are intimately connected for Cavell; in a seemingly paradoxical manner, the discovery of his own voice is both the means, and the goal, of his philosophical project. It is through crafting and writing his own philosophical

works that Cavell hopes to discover and/or recover his own voice,<sup>18</sup> but his 'voice' likewise is the means through which he conducts his philosophy – it constitutes his 'method', so to speak. It is in this sense that Cavell's own writings enact a kind of Emersonian self-reliance, which involved accounting for his own genius and voicing his personal experiences. Cavell states the aim of his project from the very beginning of *A Pitch of Philosophy* as follows:

I propose here to talk about philosophy in connection with something I call the voice, by which I mean to talk at once about the tone of philosophy and about my right to take that tone (1994, p.3).

That Cavell does not simply imitate the writing styles of earlier philosophers also signals his growing self-reliance. While this is evident throughout his works, Cavell's nonconformity is clearest here when discussing the tendency of philosophy to privilege some voices over others, thus constituting an arrogation of voice. It is important to highlight here that Cavell's conception of 'voice', chiefly concerned with what it means to possess and express one's voice, is inextricably tied to the search for his own voice within philosophy. Cavell's search for a voice was not simply an exercise in stubbornness or contrariness, or indeed a matter of style alone. His expression of self-reliance involved a recounting of what 'counts' as philosophy; this is nowhere more evident than in Cavell's commitment to exploring Hollywood film, and film itself, as a philosophical medium.

Cavell defends his use of the autobiographical when he states: 'I am unsure for whose views beyond mine I would be speaking' (1994, p.4). Another justification for Cavell's use of autobiography is that he admits: 'I feel the need to recount what I have so far written, to add it up again' (1994, p.6). Philosophy for Cavell is not the sort of discipline in which concrete, definitive

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<sup>18</sup> Throughout this chapter, the terms 'discovery' and/or 'recovery' will be used interchangeably, unless specified. The term 'discovery' will be used where one's search for a voice – after first recognising that one's voice has been repressed – has only just begun. In contrast, the term 'recovery' will be used to denote the subsequent finding of one's voice after the initial repression, although this recovery does not have a definitive endpoint.

answers can be found and then turned away from. Instead, the kinds of questions we ask in doing philosophy are questions which demand our utmost attention, they are questions which we must 'devote our most alert and wakeful hours to' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.95). Thus, Cavell keeps revisiting his ideas in different works over the course of his career, but marks the initiation of what he terms his own 'intellectual voice' in his first encounter with J.L. Austin (1994, p.6).

### **3.6 Voice, Criteria, and Community**

Cavell's conception of 'voice' cannot be understood as separable from its relation to Wittgensteinian criteria and how these operate in a language community. The possession and expression of voice ties one to a particular language community, by virtue of using language, and this expression is strongly influenced by that community's criteria. Criteria tell us what 'counts' as an instance of something and what does not, allowing us to then make judgments as to the quality of a particular case. Wittgensteinian criteria structure our utterances in a particular way as they determine the meaningfulness of our expressions.

Cavell explains the role of criteria in language use with the example of a diving competition; there are criteria involved which determine whether a 'dive' has taken place, either we agree that a particular set of movements counts as a dive or not. But we must first agree that something is a 'dive' in order to then rate it out of ten, for example (Cavell, 1979a, p.91). As Cavell explains, 'the judge has a more or less clear area of discretion in the application of standards, but none whatever over the set of criteria he is obliged to apply' (1979a, p.12). The criteria that make possible certain language-games are communally agreed upon; to be part of a community is to agree in criteria, otherwise a shared language would be almost impossible.

Criteria are not explicitly formulated and taught, instead they are acquired as a child is initiated into a particular language community. One cannot learn the criteria from looking up a word in the dictionary; grasping the criteria means knowing what to count as an instance of 'x' and learning a language

is learning 'how to go on', that is, how to use words in other contexts than have been taught (Cavell, 1979a, p.122).<sup>19</sup> But just as a community's set of criteria are not explicitly taught, it can be difficult to explicate what they are in a particular scenario. In fact, our criteria may only be put to the test once a disagreement occurs. As Cavell puts it, 'to say we "have established" full criteria for our word does not mean that we can establish what they are on demand: our investments in a word are rarely liquid' (1979a, p.72). It is for this reason that Cavell expresses dismay that we agree in our criteria, and judgments based on these criteria, to such a great extent.

Criteria are often appealed to and are thus made more explicit when we "don't know our way about", when we are lost with respect to our words' (Cavell, 1979a, p.34), or in Wittgensteinian terms when 'language has gone on holiday' (1963, §38). Appealing to criteria is a way of settling judgments; if I elicit my community's criteria for 'something's being so' and you have different criteria from mine, then in order for us to continue communicating, either you must accept my criteria as correct, or I must accept yours (Cavell, 1979a, p.45). If we can agree in this particular judgment but then again realise that we have different criteria for the same concept, we may eventually exhaust our justifications, reach bedrock, and be left with nothing else to say than 'this is simply what I do' (Wittgenstein, 1963, §217). But the fact that we mostly do agree in our judgments as a language community is represented in the fact that we are able to use the term 'we'. In the title of his work *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cavell (1969/2015) is using *we* in both a first-person, and in a plural sense. Cavell describes how eliciting 'we' is a call to one's community:

When Wittgenstein or at this stage any philosopher appealing to ordinary language, 'says what we say', what he produces is not a generalisation, but a (supposed) *instance* of what we say. We may think of it as a sample. The introduction of the sample by the words 'We

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<sup>19</sup> In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell describes this learning 'how to go on' with language as an 'appeal to [one's] projective imagination', that is, an 'invitation to imagine a context' and what one would say in this figurative context (1979a, p.154). On this view, to learn a language is to be able to find words suited to one's needs; this ability to 'voice' oneself is acquired through testing out one's vocabulary in new and different contexts.

say...’ is an invitation for you to see whether you have such a sample, or can accept mine as a sound one (1979a, p.19).

The appeal to ‘what we say’ is an invocation of the ordinary and it is concerned with our everyday utterances. Such appeals to ‘what we say’ often reveal the extent to which we agree in both criteria and judgments. The extent of our agreement reaches beyond the specific examples evoked in appealing to ‘what we say’ and as Cavell puts it, ‘the idea of agreement here is not that of coming to or arriving at an agreement on a given occasion, but of being in agreement throughout, being in harmony, like pitches or tones, or clocks, or weighing scales’ (1979a, p.32); this he terms our ‘mutual attunement’ with one another. That we are ‘mutually attuned’ means that we typically agree in our judgments, for example, we can judge whether a word has been used appropriately or not in a particular context. But as Cavell states:

There is no logical explanation of the fact that we (in general, on the whole) will agree that a conclusion has been drawn, a rule applied, an instance to be a member of a class, one line to be a repetition of another (even though it is written lower down, or in another hand or color); but the fact is, those who understand (i.e. can talk logic together) do agree. And the fact is that they agree the *way* they agree; I mean, the ways they have of agreeing at *each* point, each *step* (1979a, p.118).

Our agreement in judgments is largely influenced by a community’s social conventions; these are practices which influence our way of life (Cavell, 1979a). So, to be part of a community and to communicate with others in one’s community, we must be involved in the same set of language-games and know the rules for such games, whether this understanding is implicit or explicit (Wittgenstein, 1963). Our criteria then allow us to make judgments of meaning as to whether the rules of a particular language-game have been obeyed, such as whether this particular instance ‘counts’ as what we mean by ‘x’.

It is important to highlight the link between criteria and community, but also that these criteria are ineluctably tied to one’s voice. The expression of one’s voice is always framed by a community, by whether one chooses to either consent to, or dissent from, that community’s criteria. To consent to the community’s criteria is to allow that community to speak for you, and in

return you are also able to speak on behalf of the community. If you consent in criteria then this is 'not mere obedience, but membership in a polis' (Cavell, 1979a, p.23).

In order to speak for yourself in a true sense, you must either acknowledge your membership of a particular community and your adherence to their criteria, or you must choose to dissent, and thereby assert that the community does not speak for you. As Cavell puts it, 'once you recognise a community as yours, then it does speak for you until you say it doesn't, i.e. until you show that you do' (1979a, p.27). The shift from mere conformity and compliance towards self-reliance is enacted here. The distinction rests not so much on whether one consents or dissents in relation to their community's criteria, but whether this is an informed choice rather than tacit consent being assumed on the individual's behalf.

As discussed above, self-reliance does not mean removing oneself from a community in order to be completely independent; it involves following the bent of one's own genius despite conflicting societal influences. As Emerson writes:

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within...[and once found, we should] abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side (1841/2000, pp.132-133).

To express one's voice without acknowledging the communal influences framing such 'voice' would be at best naïve, and at worst disingenuous. In being initiated into a language community from childhood, one's language is always inherited, and so there may always be some sense in which my words are not entirely my own. It may only be when a disagreement arises that the criteria influencing my judgments and use of language – constituting my 'voice' – are made explicit. Being part of a community can mean that one's tacit consent is assumed; choosing whether to actually be part of the language community may occur through learning to express one's voice politically. As Cavell explains:

To speak for oneself politically is to speak for the others with whom you consent to association, and it is to consent to be spoken for by them –



not as a parent speaks for you, i.e., instead of you, but as someone in mutuality speaks for you, i.e., speaks your mind (1979a, p.27).

The alternative to this would be to dissent in criteria, to speak for oneself privately rather than politically. But choosing to dissent in criteria does not mean cutting all ties with one's community, instead it will involve a renegotiation of the content of such criteria. As Cavell describes here, 'dissent is not the undoing of consent but a dispute about its content, a dispute within it over whether a present arrangement is faithful to it' (1979a, p.27). While I may consent to the criteria of my language community – my 'voice' is not only expressed in dissent – nevertheless, this consent is always tentative and based upon specific instances of 'what we say'.

The pertinence of these ideas for thinking about measures of student voice in Higher Education is that they open up questions of community, consent, and dissent; these are concepts which are typically left out of university initiatives focused merely on the collection and measurement of student voice. Cavell's own search for a voice in philosophy can be seen as metonymic of many students' discovery or recovery of voice, although the 'arrogance of philosophy' that contributed to the arrogation of Cavell's voice (1994, p.10) is here replaced with a kind of 'arrogance of policy' or of accountability. The distinction made earlier between conformity/compliance and self-reliance will now be discussed in relation to Cavell's conception of 'voice', with illustrative examples taken from film.

### **3.7 Voice, Cavell, and 1940s Hollywood Film**

Stanley Cavell has written extensively on film to elucidate his conceptualisation of 'voice', and particularly the woman's search for a voice, with works including *The World Viewed* (1979b), *Pursuits of Happiness* (1981b), *Contesting Tears* (1996), and *Cities of Words* (2005a). In his work on 1940s Hollywood film, Cavell (1981b; 1996) distinguished and characterised two particular genres of film which he titled 'The Melodramas of the Unknown Woman', and 'The Comedies of Remarriage'.

There are several characteristic features that the melodramas have in common: the principal women in the films are often depicted at two stages of life: 'a state of innocence, and a state of experience, years apart' (Cavell, 2005a, p.233). The heroine's voice is usually depicted as suppressed by a man (typically her spouse), and her 'metamorphosis' – which in part consists of the finding, or recovery of her voice, her expressiveness – is often a very risky process, 'sometimes to her mortal danger (as in *Gaslight*)' (Cavell, 2005a, p.234). In the melodramas, 'marriage is explicitly rejected as part of the woman's perfectionist ambitions'. The role of the mother is central in these films, and 'the principal woman's mother is always present and the principal woman is herself presented as a mother' (Cavell, 2005a, p.395). The fate of conversation – the physical expression of voice – between the principal women and their spouses is also of central importance in the melodramas, since 'conversation, the opening of mutual understanding, is defeated, negated, by irony' (Cavell, 2005a, p.234).

In the melodramas, the principal women are often seeking a 'voice' and a particular sort of education through marriage and/or romantic encounters. The men in these films initially present themselves as a guide or 'coach' for the women towards transformation and independence, but instead they are seen to suppress the women's voices – either indirectly through avoidance tactics and unavailability, or through deliberate manipulation and control. While the heroines in these films start out thinking that they can discover their own voices – or expressiveness – through marriage, the recovery of voice is often enacted through a negation of marriage itself (Cavell, 1996).

The woman's search for a voice depicted in the melodramas is related to ideas of criteria and community. The woman's recovery of voice towards the end of each film is inextricably tied to her community, either through her consent to, or dissent from, criteria. The pattern that Cavell charts across the melodramas generally involves a shift from the repression or suppression of voice towards its discovery/recovery. As I will argue here, this pattern can also be considered in terms of a move from conformity and/or compliance, towards self-reliance. While the recovery of voice and the development of

self-reliance are not synonymous ideas, they are interrelated through the use of language, criteria, and ties to community.

The role of the 'Other' in the process of recovering one's voice is also significant. While striving for independence and self-intelligibility, the principal women often need a 'friend' ('voice coach', or 'therapist') to guide, even prompt, their journeying towards transformation (Cavell, 2005a, p.27). Towards the end of each film, the audience is left feeling that the heroines have 'recovered' their voices to some extent, but that full expressiveness is still to be achieved. The end of the films also portray the moment of 'conversion' (Cavell, 1990, p.36) or 'realisation', which marks out the beginning of the recovery of voice; this can occur either in a moment of confrontation, or of silence.

The journey towards a recovery of 'voice' is complex and on-going, indeed Cavell describes it as perfectionist. The discovery and/or recovery of voice, as depicted in the melodramas, can be seen as a perfectionist quest for 'self-reliance' or as 'an aversion to conformity' (Emerson, 1841/2000, p.134). This theme of Emersonian moral perfectionism is evident throughout the genre of the melodramas and is a feature of each heroine's search for a voice. The starting point for such a perfectionist journey is often the experience of a moral crisis, and as Cavell puts it:

To be chagrined by every word that most men say is going to put you at odds with those men and make your common sense sound paradoxical. This is the crisis out of which moral perfectionism's aspiration takes its rise, the sense that either you or the world is wrong (2005a, p.29).

The crisis experienced here forces one to consider whether one's own conduct is 'confrontable in moral conversation', that is, whether one could justify one's own actions, sense of self, and expression of 'voice' to others in one's community (Cavell, 2005a, p.12). But that self-reliance involves an aversion of conformity may mean that one realises that one cannot commit oneself to the world in the way that the community sees it – this is to dissent in criteria. This is not about being obstinate in response to questioning from others in one's community, but rather that each person must reconcile

themselves to themselves first and foremost, as self-intelligibility must precede the acknowledgement of others.

Thus far, I have introduced the genre that Cavell (1996) has titled 'The Melodramas of the Unknown Woman' and delineated the main characteristics shared among the films. I have also outlined some of the significant features of the woman's search for a voice in the melodramas, particularly the fact that it is perfectionist in nature. With these points in mind, I will now discuss the film *Gaslight* at length, with some further some examples taken from *Now, Voyager*.

### **3.7.1 *Gaslight***

In *Gaslight*, the principal woman Paula is shown as not only searching for a voice and sense of self, but for a voice that is entirely her own. From the opening scenes of the film, the audience witnesses Paula struggling to make herself heard authentically in her singing lessons. She is being taught by Signor Guardi, who also coached her aunt Alice Alquist to become a famous opera singer. But Paula clearly feels unable to live up to her aunt's reputation, and in fact she does not wish to, as she complains 'I haven't the voice, have I?'. This dissatisfaction with her voice may stem from the pressure to conform to the standards of operatic singing, with its distinctive style and sounds. Signor Guardi also seems to expect Paula to imitate her aunt Alice's voice which, while adored by many fans, renders her voiceless even as she sings louder. So, as is characteristic of the melodramas, Paula hopes to discover her own voice, expressiveness, and sense of self through marriage. Paula is charmed by the piano accompanist to her singing lessons, Gregory Anton, and they marry only a few weeks after meeting.

Paula and Gregory settle in her aunt Alice's house in London, although Paula feels uncomfortable there as her aunt was found murdered in the house. Unbeknownst to Paula, Gregory is the murderer of Paula's aunt, and is desperately seeking her jewels that he believes to be stored in the house. On their first outing as a married couple, Paula and Gregory visit the Tower of London. Before leaving the house, Gregory gives Paula a brooch he has inherited from his family, making a scene of his carefully placing it into her

bag. As they walk around the tower, Gregory takes the brooch from Paula's bag while she is not looking and then alerts her to its loss; Paula feels terrible for losing it, though she cannot remember moving the brooch herself. This scene highlights Gregory's deviousness and marks out the beginning of Paula's 'decreation', another central feature of the melodramas (Cavell, 1996, p.49).

On several occasions, Gregory moves pictures and other items around the house, claiming that Paula has done it and then forgotten. But his sustained attempts to drive Paula mad (in the hopes of inheriting Alice Alquist's jewels himself), are most clearly exemplified in the fluctuating gas lighting in her bedroom as Gregory searches for Alice Alquist's jewels among her belongings stored in the attic. Paula, having been made to doubt everything she knows, looks to the house servants to support what she sees, and to explain how the lighting could fluctuate when no one in the house seems to have turned on other lights. Gregory's manipulation of Paula not only constitutes an arrogation of voice, but this is also described by Cavell as a kind of 'vampirism' (p.70), whereby 'a way of describing the mode of torture that is systematically driving Paula out of her mind is to note that *she is being deprived of words, of her right to words, of her own voice*' (1996, p.57, my emphasis). Thus, the suppression of Paula's voice exemplifies an extreme form of what Cavell terms 'the threat of inexpressiveness', and this is associated with madness.

The Antons' marriage could quite easily be compared to a dictatorship, with Gregory holding all the power over his wife due to his manipulations of her mental state. Paula must comply with Gregory's wishes and whims, most notably in 'playing the game' of searching for objects that she has not misplaced. But there is also a degree of conformity evident in their relationship. As Gregory's deviousness continues throughout the film, Paula expresses her voice less and less. Even where Paula does make her voice heard, she is typically restricted to a sort of authorised script, with her own role in the marriage dictated as that of the 'mad woman'.

A prime example of how Paula's voice is suppressed through compliance and conformity is this:

Gregory: You tell Miss Thwaites [a friendly neighbour]...that your mistress is sorry, but she's not well enough to see her [directed at Nancy, the maid].

Paula: Gregory, why did you do that? I would've liked to have seen her.

Gregory: I thought you were only trying to be polite. Why didn't you tell me you really wanted to see her?...If you really wanted to see her, all you had to say was: 'Show her up, Nancy', wasn't it?

After speaking to the maid on Paula's behalf and sending away their visitor Miss Thwaites, hence denying her voice altogether, Gregory then makes it seem as if Paula could have changed the outcome if only she had spoken up. But when she tries to speak and intervene, Gregory represses Paula's voice, claiming that his actions are for her own benefit. Paula is not more assertive here as Gregory has already manipulated her into submission, with compliance and conformity taking the place of love and mutual respect in their marriage. While *Gaslight* shows the suppression and arrogation of the principal woman's voice to be coercive and controlling, even abusive, in the other melodramas this is often subtler.

### **3.7.2 Now, Voyager**

*Now, Voyager* depicts the heroine Charlotte Vale's search for a voice and sense of self. The crisis that marks out Charlotte's perfectionist journey is seemingly a mental health crisis, with Charlotte on the verge of a nervous breakdown due to her mother's controlling ways. Psychiatrist Dr. Jaquith comes to visit Charlotte and realises that her problems could be addressed by taking her away from the overbearing Mrs. Windle Vale. After spending some time at Cascade, the clinic owned by Jaquith, Charlotte sets out on a voyage to South America. On her travels, Charlotte meets the affable Jeremiah Duvaux Durrance, known colloquially as Jerry. They have a romantic dalliance, but this is short-lived as Jerry is already married and hence unavailable to Charlotte.

Charlotte and Jerry part amicably and decide to remain friends but on her return, Charlotte is nevertheless transformed. She is able to renegotiate the

terms of her relationship with her mother and reclaims her own voice through fighting back against Mrs. Vale's tyranny. After a heated argument, Mrs. Vale dies of a heart attack and Charlotte returns to Cascade for Dr. Jaquith's guidance. There, she meets Jerry's troubled daughter, Tina, and strikes up a friendship with her. Over time, Charlotte takes on the role of a mother to Tina and they leave Cascade together. It is through her mothering of Tina, rather than through marriage, that Charlotte finally attains a kind of self-reliance and recovers her voice.

In *Now, Voyager*, the repression of Charlotte's voice is enacted in her relationship with her mother, Mrs. Windle Vale. The meddlesome Mrs. Vale controls all aspects of Charlotte's life – what she reads, how she behaves, and her appearance – in hopes of keeping her unmarried, and so available to act as her nurse should the need arise as Mrs. Vale gets older. Bound to her mother's rule, Charlotte is forced to conform to what is expected of her, even though this leaves no room for free expression, and it conflicts with her own genius. However the suppression and arrogation of the principal women's voices occurs, it is a significant feature of the melodramas that it does occur; this suppression is often the result of compliance and conformity to another's wishes. In all of the melodramas though, the discovery and/or recovery of voice is at least underway by the end of each film with the help of a 'Friend' or 'voice coach' (Cavell, 2005a, p.27).

### **3.7.3 The Recovery of Voice: The Role of the 'Voice Coach'**

The recovery of Paula's voice begins with the intervention of local detective, Mr. Cameron. Cameron's interest in the married couple is sparked when he observes one of Gregory's staged 'lost watch' scenes at a social gathering, and he wishes to help Paula if he can. Following this, Cameron observes Gregory's activities and witnesses him leaving the house on an evening and re-entering his own attic from a neighbouring house – obviously wishing to keep his search of Alice's possessions a secret. Mr. Cameron gains Paula's trust by showing her a glove he was given by her famous aunt, and then with his encouragement she is able to admit what she hardly dared to believe; that it is Gregory who is responsible for the noises in the attic and the

dimming of her light, and that he killed her aunt Alice in his greedy quest for her precious jewels.

Cameron's role is that of a 'voice teacher', assuring Paula that she possesses a voice and should not be terrified of expressing it, despite Gregory's attempts to convince her she is going mad (Cavell, 1996, p.58). Cameron does not use Paula's voice or lack thereof for his own gain, as Gregory does throughout the film, but instead he urges Paula to reclaim her own words and sense of self. In a pivotal scene Cameron says to Paula, 'Mrs. Anton, you know, don't you? You know who's up there', to which she replies, 'No... How could he be?'. Paula does not seem surprised that Gregory is her tormentor in the attic, but rather that Cameron acknowledges the same noises and changes in lighting that she herself witnesses, leading Paula to draw her own conclusions. Cavell describes Cameron's role in the recovery of Paula's voice as follows:

The young detective, in giving her [Paula] an explanation [for the noises in the attic and fluctuating gas lighting], in a sense, of what she saw, bringing her back from strangulation, reintroducing her to language (demonstrating that her words are not shameful, but ordinary and perfectly credible, that the speech act is hers to define), returns her to her voice (1996, p.58).

It is important to note that Paula's being able to confirm that Gregory is in the attic, as prompted by Cameron, is the *beginning* of her perfectionist journey towards self-conversion and the recovery of voice, rather than its ending.

Paula's reintroduction to language and reclaiming of her words is not something to be conducted once and for all; instead it will require a continual striving towards her 'unattained but attainable' self that marks it out as perfectionist. While the path of perfectionism can be traced in these films, it would be misleading to think of these journeys toward the recovery/discovery of voice as having discrete beginnings and endings. The person seeking transformation may never reach a definitive end-point of their journey – a final *telos* – but they will nevertheless achieve ends within the process itself; as Cavell puts it, "having" "a" self is a process of moving to, and from, nexts' (1990, p.12).



The role of the 'voice teacher' is also central to Charlotte Vale's recovery of voice (Cavell, 1996, p.58). For Charlotte, although she looks for an education from Jerry, it is in fact Dr. Jaquith who supports her perfectionist quest. This is not only because he acts as her 'therapist', another side to 'the Friend', but moreover due to the fact that only he recognises Charlotte as the person she truly is. While Mrs. Vale refers to Charlotte as her 'ugly duckling' and Jerry goes along with her alias 'Camille Beauchamp', Dr. Jaquith acknowledges Charlotte's own voice from the beginning. Charlotte's transformation over the course of the film is symbolised as that from an 'ugly duckling' to a 'funny butterfly', the title Cavell gives to his chapter on the melodrama in *Contesting Tears* (1996, p.115).

What enables Mr. Cameron and Dr. Jaquith to act as 'voice teachers' in these melodramas is nothing less than their acknowledgement of the principal women on their own terms (Cavell, 1996, p.58), a capacity which is typically misplaced or unused by the heroine's spouses/love interests. As Cavell explains the threat of inexpressiveness or 'unknownness', he writes that 'the woman's problem is not one of not belonging but one of belonging, only on the wrong terms' (1996, p.213). This tension between belonging and (in)expressiveness is also characteristic of Cavell's own search for a voice within philosophy. For Cavell, the problem was not that he could not have a legitimate voice in the discipline of philosophy, but rather that his voice was expected to conform to customary ways of doing and writing philosophy. Cavell's assertion of his right to write autobiographically thus constitutes an aversive act of self-reliance, allowing for a genuine expression of voice.

The role of these voice coaches or 'the Friend' is central to perfectionism, but it also implies something about how the possession and expression of one's voice is inextricably linked to a language community and is framed by criteria (Cavell, 2005a, p.27). The quest for one's own voice and sense of self is intimately bound up with others in the community, whether the voice that is discovered and/or recovered necessitates either consenting to, or dissenting in, the criteria of such a community.

While each heroine in the melodramas is on their own individual journey

towards recovering their 'voice', sense of self, and experiencing transformation, it is important to note that this is not a path they tread alone. Just as the *recovery* of voice involves another and is tied to one's community, so too may the *expression* of one's voice be dependent on an encounter with the other, such as Cameron. This raises the issue of the political in Cavell's conception of voice, as speaking for oneself at all implies that one is speaking politically. Each utterance one makes is an expression of communal ties and of one's membership in a *polis*, therefore any instance of speaking for oneself also implies speaking on behalf of others. This makes speaking itself, and the possession and expression of voice, an inherently political act.

### **3.7.4 Voice: Self-Reliance and Perfectionism**

In the melodramas, the way in which the principal women's voices are reclaimed happens not only in dramatic scenes, such as Paula's 'aria of revenge' against Gregory, but also in quieter moments like when Charlotte Vale walks off the boat a transformed woman after her voyage. Paula's 'aria of revenge' takes place when Gregory's ulterior motives have been uncovered and Mr. Cameron has tied him to a chair while they await the police (Cavell, 1996, p.59). Paula states that she wishes to speak with her husband alone, and Gregory then tries to convince Paula to free him, arguing that his actions have been misunderstood. Among her aunt's possessions in the attic, Paula finds a knife which Gregory asks her to use to cut him free. But here, Paula conforms to her role as a mad woman and uses it to her advantage. By assuming the 'madness' that Gregory has tried to induce in her, Paula is finally able to make her voice heard, and the following constitutes her '*cogito*' (Cavell, 1996, p.60):

Are you suggesting that this is a knife? I don't see any knife. You must have dreamed you put it there...Are you mad, my husband? Or is it I who am mad? Yes. I am mad...If I were not mad I could have helped you...But because I am mad I am rejoicing in my heart without a shred of pity, with glory in my heart.

Here, Paula is not only asserting her own voice but also affirming her existence, chiefly that her vision of reality coincides with that of others (such as Mr. Cameron), meaning she is completely sane despite Gregory's manipulations. What Paula says here evidences her growing self-reliance as

she trusts her own judgment over Gregory's. Paula acts like a mad woman, but she subverts conformity – she does not conform to what Gregory would have wanted her to say, and neither does she comply with his wishes (to release him). In this scene Paula's voice is recovered, yet her remark in the final scene that 'this night will be a long night' signals that there is still more work on the self to be done. This is a central characteristic of the melodramas but also of Cavell's conception of 'voice', that the search for a voice is perfectionist.

The discovery and/or recovery of voice is no less complex in *Now, Voyager*, wherein Charlotte Vale reclaims her own voice from her mother's influence by asserting that she is no longer afraid of Mrs. Vale's threats to her finances and her reputation. While this is one instance in which Charlotte's transformation is visibly marked, the recovery of her voice and developing sense of self-reliance is also exemplified in the final scenes of the film when she is confronted by Jerry. Towards the end of the film, Jerry questions Charlotte as to her motivation for looking after his daughter Tina, wrongly assuming she is doing it as a way to remain close to him.

After correcting Jerry on this, Charlotte seems to have finally detected that 'gleam of light' which is characteristic of self-reliance (Emerson, 1841/2000, p.132), noting that she no longer wants to pursue what social convention tells her she ought to – a house of her own, husband of her own, and children of her own. Here, Charlotte effects a romantic separation from Jerry, although they will still be tied together in their relationships with Tina. In this final scene, Charlotte is expressing her voice in her own terms, and not merely as the 'ugly duckling' or as Jerry's love interest. This marks the closing of that particular circle in which she was 'unknown' to herself and to others, while the ending of the film can be seen as the drawing, in Emersonian terms, of a new circle.

While *Gaslight* provides several prominent examples of how conformity and compliance may come to replace self-reliance, it also offers an insight into what the recovery or discovery of one's own voice (and sense of self) might look like. While it could be said that Paula's voice is recovered in her

powerful 'aria of revenge' (Cavell, 1996, p.59), the process of becoming self-reliant in terms of possessing and expressing one's voice is ongoing, as alluded to in the closing scene of the film.

Despite the fact that Paula is not simply silenced in the film, the pressure placed on her to conform and comply to Gregory's demands contributes to an erosion of her self-intelligibility, and of the right to possess her own words. While the examples taken from *Gaslight* and *Now, Voyager* are stark, in reality the dividing line between conformity/compliance and self-reliance is not fixed. Some relationships may be premised upon conformity/compliance, such as Paula and Gregory's marriage, but others support and encourage self-reliance (such as that between Paula and Mr. Cameron). Yet the picture is typically more complex than this, with the move towards self-reliance or mere conformity resting on every speech act or expression of voice.

The discovery or recovery of one's voice will depend on a commitment to 'testing out' the depth of one's adherence to the criteria of a language community, or in essence, the extent to which one is in 'mutual attunement' with others (Cavell, 1979a, p.32). The importance of maintaining one's own voice and asserting this despite the influence of others, is described by Emerson as follows:

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude (1841/2000, p.136).

What it means to possess and express one's voice is inextricably tied to a language community; our agreement in criteria should be up for negotiation with every invocation of what 'we' say if conformity and compliance are to be avoided. It is important to highlight though, that a genuine, self-reliant expression of one's voice can equally be made through consenting to, or dissenting in, criteria.

Cavell's conception of 'voice' – as tied to one's sense of self and perfectionist – is arguably much richer than that currently pervading the Higher Education sector. Current measures of student 'voice' regard it merely in terms of quality assurance and enhancement (Brooman *et al.*,

2015; Hall, 2016; Higdon, 2016), whereby voice is collected as a means to an end; to improve the 'quality' of service provision in order to attract more student-consumers. Some researchers have already critiqued the vacuity of these initiatives, stating that the collection of student voice is little more than an 'element' in the 'disciplinary machine' that is the contemporary, corporate university (Canning, 2017, p.522). But the criticisms I have discussed here, that voice measures are limiting, transactional, instrumental, and potentially undemocratic, stem from the fact that current measures of 'voice' amount to little more than collecting feedback. Bearing the central distinction between conformity/compliance and self-reliance in mind, I will now explore some potential implications of these ideas for the HE sector.

### **3.8 Nonconformity and Self-Reliance: Implications for the HE Sector**

At the end of Emerson's essay 'self-reliance', he asserts that 'a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living' (1841/2000, p.147). I argue that this idea has import for the current state of the HE sector. I will now consider not only what self-reliance may look like in relation to 'voice', but also how it could be practically encouraged and/or incorporated into university initiatives.

A significant sign of progress in moving from conformity/compliance towards self-reliance would be for university managers and policy-makers to recognise that current attempts to capture, collect, and measure 'the student voice' generate little more than feedback. This distinction is exemplified by the fact that student 'voice', in essence feedback, is typically only collected and acknowledged at the end of the student lifecycle, meaning that it is used to make improvements to service provision for future student-consumers without directly impacting on those lending their 'voice' to such measures. Even where student voice is collected at an earlier stage by a university, the impetus is often to pre-emptively feed their responses back into quality assurance and enhancement processes. Before this gap between voice and mere feedback can be addressed, there is a need to acknowledge that 'voice' and 'feedback' are not synonymous terms.

While this distinction between feedback and voice intuitively makes sense, what really differentiates the two is the extent to which one's self is implicated in each expression, with feedback being a relatively low-stakes report on the consumption of goods or services. Feedback is often structured in terms of the good, the bad, and the ugly – underpinning what one says will be a reflection on how the goods or services delivered matched up with one's expectations pre-delivery, known as the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (Appleton-Knapp and Krentler, 2006; Alves and Raposo, 2009).

The provision of feedback following a consumption experience inevitably positions the person expressing their opinions as a 'customer' or 'consumer' and nothing more. As such, while the giving of feedback does count as an expression of voice, it is an experience that is entirely structured by conformity and compliance, meaning that this does not exemplify 'voice' in a richer, Cavellian sense. While feedback will be taken at face value, as providing a sum evaluation of a consumption experience, Cavell argues that when it comes to the expression of voice 'saying something is never *merely* saying something, but is saying something with a certain tune and at a proper cue and while executing the appropriate business' (1994, p.30, original emphasis).

The possession and expression of one's voice is thus 'never *merely* saying something' but it ties one to a particular language community, through which one is able to say what 'counts' for them, and what they consent to being said on their behalf through an invocation of the 'we'. Just as Cavell relates the recovery and/or discovery of voice to one's sense of self, so too could the expression of voice equally relate to what Emerson terms 'the self-sufficing and therefore self-relying soul' (1841/2000, p.144). Thus, the expression of voice is a laying bare of the soul even in the most ordinary, everyday utterances.

Making one's own voice heard, an act of self-reliance and nonconformity, is not simply a linguistic matter. It is through the possession and expression of voice that 'we' each show how the world looks to us, offering up an example

to the language community which may be accepted or rebuked. With this in mind, Cavell writes that particular utterances can 'risk, if not cost, blood' (2005b, p.187).<sup>20</sup> So the expression of voice, unlike the giving of feedback, is high stakes as it implies the difficult resolution of an internal tension between self-knowledge and self-loss; this is clearly exemplified in Paula's 'aria of revenge' (Cavell, 1996, p.59).

If the expression of voice is shaped by institutional pressures of conformity and compliance, then it is easy to see how self-reliance could be side-lined. While student voice initiatives typically emphasise how they take account of each individual's voice, with taglines such as 'Have *your* say' and 'Make *your* voice heard', this is at risk of being negated by the way that student responses are then analysed and evaluated, which tends to group students together in terms of their course, department, and institution. The collection of student 'voice' via the NSS is even analysed and compared nationally. What is left out here is any consideration of the student body as a community, although the expression of each individual student's voice does imply claims to community through the application of criteria to structure what is said. That our language is shared also means that any expression of voice is in some sense communal, whether this refers to the student community or something broader, yet current voice initiatives cannot account for this.

Where the language community is acknowledged, there is an assumed homogeneity present as universities and policy-makers refer to *the* student voice, as if all students expressed the same opinions. As considerations of 'the student voice' ignore the feedback of individual students, institutional managers will also tend to group different communities of students together, although this is not unproblematic. Across various measures of student satisfaction, it has been found that male and female students value social and academic aspects of their Higher Education differently, mature students are more likely than their younger peers to be satisfied overall, and that

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<sup>20</sup> Passionate utterances, or the perlocutionary effects of speech, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

cultural differences can similarly influence students' perceptions of service quality (Miliszewska and Sztendur, 2012; O'Driscoll, 2012; Parahoo *et al.*, 2013; Elsharnouby, 2015).

Given that the impulse to collect student 'voice' or feedback is ineluctably linked to student satisfaction then, it is misleading to consider students as a homogeneous group. In order to account for each individual's voice – as university marketing campaigns often promise – it will be necessary to capture *students' voices* plural, rather than simply 'the student voice'.<sup>21</sup> An example of doing so would be to keep a record of all those students who do not fill in surveys such as mid-module reviews, particularly when they express their reason for not doing so. To withdraw one's consent from the language community in this way constitutes an act of self-reliance, and its legitimacy as an active expression of voice needs to be better acknowledged by universities and policy-makers alike.

For those who decide not to lend their voice to dominant measures such as the NSS, this, in effect, renders them voiceless. It may be considered by policy-makers as a sign of students' apathy or disengagement with their Higher Education, but as Fulford writes of disengagement:

[It is] *not* a failure to act and an absence of will, but rather...[it can be considered as] an awakening of voice that is an active expression of a commitment to one's language, community, and education (2017, p.108).

To disengage from powerful discourses that rely on conformity and compliance itself counts as a move towards self-reliance, as one asserts that a particular language community does not speak for them. If universities are to produce more than just 'excellent sheep' (Deresiewicz, 2015), then encouraging students to possess and express their own voices should involve a commitment to students' moral/intellectual cultivation and self-reliance, rather than the administration of a mere tick-box exercise. While student feedback is of instrumental value to university managers, supporting students' discovery and/or recovery of voice is intrinsically valuable to us all.

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<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. Anne Pirrie, for this insight.



## Chapter 4

### Modes of Settlement in Higher Education

#### Scenario<sup>22</sup>

*An assessment drop-in session for undergraduate students is taking place. Student attendance is entirely voluntary and a register is not kept. The session is held ten days before the assignment due date.*

Lecturer: [*To one of the students*] Hi, how are you getting on with the assignment then?

Student 1: Well, I've been a bit stressed about it really. I'm just not sure I am doing enough to get a good 2:1 mark...

Lecturer: It's ok, I can look at your essay plan today and let you know if you're on the right lines. Have you brought your plan with you?

Student 1: Well, erm, no...I haven't really done my plan yet. I was hoping you could tell me what to put in it...

Lecturer: Right, well if you tell me your ideas, then I can guide you with your plan. So, are you going to write your essay on, the first three lectures or our second set of lectures?

Student 1: The first three lectures.

Lecturer: Ok, and have you read the articles I put in those folders online? The module handbook also has guidelines for the assignment...

Student 1: Aww, right...well, I haven't read the handbook but I just need to get a good mark on this assignment so this module boosts my percentage overall. How can I make sure that I do well on this essay?

Lecturer: All you need to do is talk about the lecture materials, make reference to the articles I've given you...and show what you've learned in this module. Think about the learning outcomes of each lecture, and match this up with the assessment criteria. I've given you a choice of two questions to split the material and make it less difficult. All you need to get a good mark is to make your essay speak to the criteria...

Student 1: Erm, well...I've never really understood the criteria to be honest. I mean, what is it that makes an essay worth a 2:1 rather than a 2:2?

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<sup>22</sup> This scenario is based on a real situation, but is partly fictionalised.

Lecturer: The main thing I look for in an assignment is a coherent argument, which is backed up by research evidence. What grade an essay gets will depend on how well it does this...you have to be critical in your writing rather than just descriptive. Does that make sense?

Student 1: Yeah, I think so. Could you look over a draft of my essay before I hand it in to check that it would be alright?

Lecturer: I'm afraid I can only look at your essay plan, but send that over to me when you have it and I'll give you some feedback on it. Are you feeling happier about the assignment now?

Student 1: Yes, thanks for your help. I'll see you next week.

[*Student 1 exits and Student 2 enters*]

Lecturer: Hi, how are you doing?

Student 2: Alright I think, I just wanted to check if I'm including the right things in my assignment.

Lecturer: Yes, that's not a problem. Do you have your essay plan with you?

Student 2: Ah, I have it here. (*student 2 places a flow chart on the table*).

Lecturer: Well, this looks very detailed so well done for being so organised. You've got a lot of literature to be included here...what point are you arguing for?

Student 2: Sorry, what do you mean?

Lecturer: Are you arguing that *x* is the best policy to use in early years settings, or is *y* better?

Student 2: Erm, well I'm going to talk about them both...

Lecturer: But what do you think about the issue? Reflecting on this should make your writing more critical, which is what gets the top marks.

Student 2: So I'm allowed to put my opinion in there?

Lecturer: Well...yes, if it's backed up by research.

Student 2: And then I should get a 2:1 right?

Lecturer: It depends on how well you present your argument...but you're engaging with international literature which is great, so just make sure to follow the structure which you have shown me today.

Student 2: So if I stick to this essay plan I should be fine?

Lecturer: Based on what you've shown me, I think your essay will definitely pass but focus on being critical if you want the higher grades.

Student 2: Ok, I'll try my best...thanks for going through it with me. I think I know what to do with the essay now.

Lecturer: Very good, then I'll see you in the next lecture.

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The students depicted in the scenario are invariably seeking a form of settlement; they want to know exactly what to include in an essay, and how to meet the assessment criteria to get that 'gold standard' 2:1 degree classification. While the scenario is fictionalised, it is based on a real experience observed in a university context. Staff interactions with students are changed by students' focus on the degree classification and the high tuition fees given in exchange for this, whilst universities' scrutiny of satisfaction scores from the NSS are used as a form of accountability. These policies and pressures, when taken together, can mean staff feel the need to settle students down, rather than to provide opportunities for the kind of educative conversations (about the content) that might well be *unsettling*. This is exemplified by the lecturer asking the student 'are you feeling *happier* about the assignment now?' The scenario that opens this chapter shows how student satisfaction measures have substantially impacted upon teaching and learning practices in the university.

In this chapter I focus in more detail on the idea of settlement, and I will describe how the etymology of 'satisfaction' implies forms of settlement, in terms of both settling up and settling down. The issues with such settlement in Higher Education were detailed in Chapter One, namely that it leads to an 'end-stopped' (Sturm, 2011, p.6), outcome-focused education that is ontologically inauthentic, and this can be stifling to independent thought. In arguing against settlement, there is an important distinction to be made here between the kinds of (economic) settlement that are being critiqued, versus a more personal form of settlement, such as settling in to university. Students clearly need to be 'settled' in certain ways, such as the provision of induction activities, comfortable halls of residence, and sufficient administrative information. But I argue that settlement is problematic when its focus is directed towards a kind of closing down in relation to learning, teaching and assessment practices.

I make a distinction here between forms of *un-educative settlement*, such as that depicted in the scenario which is shaped by concerns over 'value for money', and *educative unsettling* characterised by other ways of teaching and being with one's students. If an institution's chief aim becomes student

satisfaction then this implies that student expectations must be met at all costs. But this raises the question of ‘are we giving students what they *need*, or merely what they *want*?’ I argue that settling students down in this way is fundamentally un-educative as it limits the possibilities for self-transformation and human flourishing in favour of particular ends – that is, preparation for one’s place in the labour market. In this sense, Higher Education is reduced to mere instruction or training, as it is increasingly aligned with student-consumer desires.

In order to reconceive the value of Higher Education in more than monetary and instrumental terms, I argue against forms of un-educative settlement that are inextricably tied to the use of student satisfaction measures. To settle teaching, learning and thinking from the outset, confining students to learning outcomes and module specifications, is anathema to Higher Education in its richest sense. Instead, I will explore the possibilities of educative unsettling as a reframing of the way we account for ourselves, and will move to discuss a perfectionist education of the self. In order to introduce these ideas and elucidate what may be valuable about educative unsettling, I will briefly discuss the etymology of ‘satisfaction’ before turning to the works of the American transcendentalist writers, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Themes of unsettling and perfectionism will be investigated by drawing on Thoreau and Emerson’s writings, and Cavell’s interpretation of these works, before moving on to a consideration of an ontological form of unsettlement – the *das Unheimliche* – taken from the work of German philosopher, Martin Heidegger.

## **4.1 Etymological Tracings**

### **4.1.1 Satisfaction: Settling Up<sup>23</sup>**

As I have argued previously, the etymology of ‘satisfaction’ (from the Latin *satisfactionem dare*, meaning to satisfy a creditor, or discharge a debt) suggests that it can be understood in terms of a kind of settlement of an

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<sup>23</sup> Sections of this chapter were published elsewhere in Skea, C. 2017. Student Satisfaction in Higher Education: Settling Up and Settling Down. *Ethics and Education*. 12(3), pp.364-377.

account (Skea, 2017). 'Settlement' has also been used in a legal sense, when cases are drawn to a close and this involves the payment of an account, such as the "settling of arrangements" in a divorce'. The etymology of 'satisfaction' shows that this is linked to the 'settling up' of a financial transaction (Skea, 2017). 'Satisfaction' could thus be considered as a form of 'settling up', as when we 'settle up' the bill in a restaurant. Upon leaving Higher Education, the students' debts will be settled up once they obtain a graduate job. 'This is the exchange value of a degree: obtaining a degree typically involves the development of transferable employability skills (for which they have paid substantial tuition fees), and then entering graduate employment is seen as a return on their investment through increased earnings...[Thus] employability could be considered as the ultimate 'settling up', and endpoint, of the financial transaction that is one's Higher Education' (Skea, 2017, pp.366-367).

#### **4.1.2 Satisfaction: Settling Down**

I have also argued that student 'satisfaction' can be considered as a form of settling *down*. Initially in the 1620s, the term 'settlement' was used in reference to the colonisation of land and setting up a new territory; this is akin to an idea of settling down – of making home. Talk of 'early settlers' relates back to the surge in emigration to North America in the early 1600s, where people ventured to new lands and made it their own (Skea, 2017).

The etymology of 'satisfaction' is also linked to a sense of 'appeasement' or 'contentment'. Contentment in relation to student satisfaction could be considered as the meeting of student needs and/or expectations, with a focus on ensuring 'value for money' and settling students down. This is not to give an entirely negative account of settling down. Of course, in some contexts, settling down is just what is needed (think of a child who has grazed her knee and needs to be comforted, and settled); it is rather to question forms of settling down and contentment in Higher Education (Skea, 2017).

'From looking at the etymology of both satisfaction and settlement, it seems clear that these terms could relate both to a form of settling up (an idea

which directly relates to forms of economic exchange), as well as settling down (making everything comfortable and homely). Both settling up and settling down are concepts steeped in market economics. If student “satisfaction” can be seen in these terms, that is, inextricably tied to the language of economic rationality, then it too denotes forms of settling up, and down’ (Skea, 2017, p.367).

## 4.2 ‘Educative’ Unsettling?

In what follows I will draw on one of the central ideas that informs this thesis, Emersonian moral perfectionism, to argue for the educative potential of being *unsettled*, before going on to explore several illustrations of perfectionist ideas in the works of Thoreau and Emerson. While the writings of Thoreau are not directly about education in the formal sense of schooling, the educational and philosophical force of his work has been emphasised by Stanley Cavell among others (Cavell, 1981a; Saito and Standish, 2012).

The ultimate aim of such a perfectionist education could be stated as a movement toward ‘conversion’, ‘transformation’, and/or ‘self-transcendence’ (Cavell, 1990, p.36; 2005a, p.29; Saito, 2012, p.181). This movement towards one’s next, higher self necessitates leaving and unsettling. Of crucial importance here is that both Thoreau and Emerson are described as ‘orienters’ and as ‘philosophers of direction...tirelessly prompting us to be on our way, endlessly asking us where we stand, what it is we face’ (Cavell, 1981a, pp.141-142). Thus, to read their works is to be unsettled and educated, in the sense of being awoken from our lives of ‘quiet desperation’ (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.9).

Unsettling is something that Thoreau, Emerson and Cavell not only discuss, but also embody in their works; they demand of their readers a willingness to traverse previously untaken paths. The kind of educative unsettling I wish to pursue, and that counteracts the impulse to un-educative forms of settlement, is thus underpinned by the perfectionist vision of education that is exemplified in these philosophical works. With this in mind, I will now explain in greater detail what is meant by the term ‘Emersonian moral perfectionism’ (Cavell, 1990, p.12), and how it is illuminating for the

considerations of settlement that are discussed here.

### 4.3 Perfectionism and Unsettling

'Emersonian moral perfectionism' is the term used by Stanley Cavell to characterise a central aspect of Emerson's work, that the self cannot be a fixed entity, but is continually aspiring toward a higher version of itself. This Cavell describes as our having an 'unattained but attainable self' (1990, p.12). Perfectionism is perhaps most clearly described in Emerson's essay 'Circles', where he describes the journey of the soul as being an 'apprenticeship to the truth' in which 'around every circle another can be drawn' (1841/2000, p.252). The closing of each circle marks out significant moments of self-transformation, yet each is not the end-point of the soul's journey towards what Naoko Saito terms 'self-transcendence', but is merely a stopping point along the way (2012, p.181). It is important to emphasise here that perfectionism 'does not imply perfectibility' (Cavell, 1990, p.3), so it is not that there is a 'final' state of perfection that we cannot reach, but rather that there is no finality to be found here. As Cavell explains:

I do not read Emerson as saying...that there is one unattained/attainable self we repetitively never arrive at, but rather that "having" "a" self is a process of moving to, and from, nexts (1990, p.12).

While Cavell refuses to give a list of necessary and sufficient conditions for perfectionism, he does specify a number of texts which, 'in their interplay', could be considered as perfectionist including: Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Augustine's *Confessions*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and several of Emerson's essays (1990, p.4).<sup>24</sup> In the introduction to *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, Cavell writes that 'a definition of what I mean by perfectionism, Emersonian or otherwise, is not in view in what follows' (1990, p.4). Instead, the texts and films listed are to serve as exemplars of his theme.

What is central to perfectionism is that the concern with one's moral life is invoked by experiencing crises; this is typically expressed as 'the sense that either you or the world is wrong' (Cavell, 2005a, p.29). Seeking to make

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<sup>24</sup> For a full list of these texts, see Cavell (1990, p.5).



oneself more intelligible to the community naturally involves a reappraisal of one's self, invoking a consideration of the path of the soul. The movement from one's current self to a next, higher self, thus necessitates leaving and unsettlement. Crises not only mark out the beginning of a perfectionist journey, but they also exemplify the kind of anti-settlement that I am advocating here.

An illustration of being unsettled – in the perfectionist sense – is Thoreau's method of accounting for the self. In *Walden*, Thoreau disrupts the use of economic language in everyday life as he draws attention to the fact that certain terms did not initially have economic connotations. For Thoreau, an 'economisation' of language was an unfortunate consequence of the industrialisation of the age. Neufeldt describes the importance of 'economy' to Thoreau's work when he writes that:

I am convinced that our understanding of Thoreau's writings is impoverished or enriched by the extent to which we probe his culture, recognize the new economic vernacular with its range of semantic shifts and differentiations, and acknowledge the implications of the linguistic changes for the culture in which he had to locate himself (1989, p.23).

In the opening chapter of *Walden*, titled 'Economy', Thoreau lists his outgoings and income, detailing exactly what it cost him to build his hut and how much it cost to maintain himself while he was at Walden Pond for two years. Thoreau lists his expenses but argues that the accounts which are most important to him are not those of the economic kind, as he writes, 'I, on my side, require of every writer [every neighbour], first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not what he has heard of other men's lives' (1854/1997, pp.5-6). The 'accounting' of which Thoreau speaks unsettles terminology that is commonly taken to be economic; instead he encourages his readers to see that the most fundamental account we can give is of ourselves.

A specific example of Thoreau's 'translation' of economic terminology is his use of the term 'interest'. Thoreau writes of 'interest' in terms of what strikes him and what he is interested in, rather than mere monetary interest as the accumulation of capital. Cavell states that this transformation of the term

'interest' is an integral part of *Walden* itself, and as he writes, 'it would be a fair summary of the book's motive to say that it invites us to take an interest in our lives, and teaches us how' (1981a, p.67). Terms such as 'interest' and 'investment' clearly have economic overtones; Thoreau is not attempting to do away with this instrumental language entirely, but by unsettling such terms and putting certain words in translation, his work offers readers an alternative way of accounting for themselves.

Thoreau's 'accounting' involves a reappraisal of our language in the form of an inter-discursive translation, as discussed in Chapter Two. Throughout his work, Thoreau reframes such economically focused terms as 'account', 'interest', and 'audit'. But he also sheds new light on the following terms: leaving, unsettlement, crises, and homelessness (Thoreau, 1854/1997). Despite their common pejorative connotations, these terms are not discussed negatively by Thoreau; instead, he sees settlement and leaving as being different stages of undergoing crises, which are not only necessary but transformative.

#### **4.3.1 Crises**

As with the forms of unsettlement discussed above, to undergo a crisis is not necessarily a negative experience but could instead be considered transformative. In the essay *Walking* (1862/1993), Thoreau expresses his dismay that we tend not to experience many crises at all, and he links crises to the exercise of thought, or in essence, genius. As he writes, 'it is remarkable how few events or crises there are in our histories, how little exercised we have been in our minds, how few experiences we have had' (Thoreau, 1862/1993, p.70).

To experience a crisis is likened to undergoing a conversion or transformation through which one gains greater knowledge of oneself; such crises thus represent a significant step towards 'self-transcendence' (Saito,

2012, p.181).<sup>25</sup> As Thoreau writes, 'our moulting season, like that of the fowls, must be a crisis in our lives' (1854/1997, p.23). Experiencing a crisis may be deeply unsettling and uncomfortable, but it also marks the closing of one particular circle and the drawing of another. The moulting of the fowls discussed in Thoreau's *Walden* – as symbolic of crises – could be seen as comparable with the perfectionist journey of the self. The shedding of old feathers and gaining of a new plumage is transformative for the duck, yet this process must be repeated systematically and cyclically; it is not the case that once the duck has moulted, its journey is finished. What Thoreau says of crises also matches up with his preference for wildness over cultivation; finding one's way through a swamp (which may include getting lost) is ultimately more valuable than navigating neatly laid-out paths. A crisis, whilst being a valuable experience in and of itself, can also mark out a concern with the moral life that is perfectionism.

Crises necessitate unsettlement and leaving, yet in experiencing a crisis there is also a renewal of oneself which can be identified as a form of awakening. The awakening of genius is meant to counteract what Thoreau describes as our condition of 'quiet desperation', whereby 'we are sound asleep nearly half our time' (1854/1997, p.295). It may be only through undergoing a crisis that one's genius is awoken and thus a concern with one's self-intelligibility, a marker of perfectionism, is ignited. There is immense value to be found in experiencing unsettlement and crises if these provoke both transformation and conversion.

The kind of 'rebirth' that is exemplified by the regular moulting of the fowl is emblematic of perfectionism and hence, of being unsettled. This is not something characteristic of the unique event of Christian baptism. Instead, the notion of rebirth in *Walden* refers to a daily baptism in our life and words, such as Thoreau underwent in the waters of Walden Pond. What is meant

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<sup>25</sup> 'Self-transcendence', that is, conversion and transformation of the self, is the aim of Emersonian moral perfectionism; this theme will be detailed later in the chapter. But the term 'self-transcendence' is used by Naoko Saito to describe the perfectionist journey as a movement from 'self-obscurity' to 'self-realisation'. See: Saito (2012).

by this sense of baptism in Thoreau's work is aptly summarised by Martin Luther, quoted in the preface to Cavell's *Senses of Walden*: 'for all our life should be baptism, and the fulfilling of the sign, or sacrament, of baptism' (1981a, p.xvi, my emphasis). Crises form a significant aspect of this baptism and rebirth, as they foreground the transformation or conversion invoked here. They disrupt one's current sense of self in order to move on to a higher self, while rebirth itself can be seen as one of many tangible 'ends' within perfectionism; each instance of rebirth can be considered as part of the perfectionist journey towards self-transcendence.

#### **4.3.2 Bottomlessness**

In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson's writing is the enactment of his theme; the essay itself can be seen as an act of aversion. To read his essays is to be awakened, but it is also to allow oneself to be put into question. The sense of bottomlessness in Emerson's work, that there is no 'final' reading or interpretation to be arrived at, is an example of the kind of educative unsettling that I am arguing for here. To explain the theme of an Emersonian essay, or what features mark out a work as Emersonian, is no easy task. As Cavell (1989) describes his reading of Emerson's *Experience*, it is only when he reaches the end of the essay that he realises the 'answer' he sought is writ throughout and set up from the first few lines. He comments on the opening question of *Experience* 'where do we find ourselves?' (Emerson, 1844/2000, p.307), asking of his readers and Emerson himself, 'who, in what straits, asks such a question? Of whom?' and then notes that 'the question has itself to be asked in the perplexed, say disoriented, state the essay goes on to describe' (Cavell, 1989, p.88).

The ambiguities inherent in Emerson's writing provoke a feeling of uneasiness. There is a sense of bottomlessness in our possible interpretations of such a text, and this is inextricably linked with the reading required of *Walden*. As Cavell explains, part of the difficulty of reading Emerson's essays – yet also a marker of their philosophical value – is that we may never arrive at a final interpretation of his words. To settle things decidedly for us would be much easier on Emerson's readers, but would not provoke the very self-reliance he is advocating. Instead, we must be

prepared to undergo crises, to be unsettled, and to experience a sense of bottomlessness as transformative rather than ignominious. While a firm 'bottom' or conclusion may not be reached, or at least not definitively, it is not the case that there is no bottom at all; there is still a *'point d'appui'* to be found in every line of Emerson's essays, just as there are distinct 'ends' in perfectionism (Cavell, 1981a, p.71; 1989).

Cavell elucidates these ideas in the essay 'Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's "Experience"' (1989, pp.77-119). Here, every instance of our finding a 'bottom', or for example, agreeing on the definition of a word together, is provisional. Every act of 'finding' is something we must move on from in order to 'found' something else, and in this sense, the reading required of Emerson's work could itself be described as perfectionist (Cavell, 1989). To be faced with Emerson's question 'where do we find ourselves?' could be extremely unsettling and provoke a crisis in his readers (1844/2000, p.307). In answer to this, Emerson writes that we find ourselves:

In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. *We wake and find ourselves on a stair*; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight (1844/2000, p.307, my emphasis).

So we do find ourselves somewhere, that is, on a stair, and reach a bottom. Yet this is a place from which we must turn back upon ourselves in order to be transformed, and to progress towards our next, higher selves – this is the task of Emersonian moral perfectionism. What this sense of bottomlessness shows us is that in doing philosophy, and in aspiring to lead lives of more than 'secret melancholy' (Emerson, 1844/2000, p.411), there is an ongoing movement of the self; to be unsettled in this sense is educative.

That this kind of unsettlement and bottomlessness can be educative incorporates a rich notion of what it means to be educated, in terms of self-cultivation or *Bildung*, rather than a process of simply acquiring facts and information which is later to be tested. The way in which being unsettled, lost, and/or experiencing crises is 'educative' is cognisant of its etymological roots, whereby 'educate' involves a 'bringing forth' or 'leading out' (from the Latin *educare*). Being unsettled means that one must be led out from what

they have always accepted as given, from their life of 'quiet desperation' and conformity (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.9), and in turn what is brought forth is a different way of accounting for oneself.

This theme of bottomlessness is also present in Thoreau's work as he discusses the bottom of Walden Pond; Thoreau mocks his neighbours who believe that certain ponds are bottomless without checking this for themselves. As he writes, 'it is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottomlessness of a pond without taking the trouble to sound it' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, pp.254-256). It is a significant part of his project in *Walden* to measure the depth of the pond, and to monitor its seasonal changes. At issue here is not so much whether Walden Pond is actually 'bottomless' nor whether we can arrive at a final interpretation of Emerson's work, but rather that each person should follow the bent of their own genius and discover their own way.

Unsettlement and bottomlessness are distinctly left out of the opening scenario; as one student asks 'how can I *make sure* that I do well on this essay?'. Both students are seeking a definitive way forward with their assignments, whether they have a plan or not, and they are relying on the academic to provide this kind of settling down. While this is not referred to in the scenario, it is now also a common practice for students to be given model answers, writing frames, and word counts for each individual section of an assignment – leaving little room for the bent of genius.

Perfectionism is imbued with a sense of bottomlessness and unsettlement, as well as being provoked by crises. The value of such disruption is epitomised in a transformation of the self. Cavell's discussion of 'finding as founding' – summarised as the fact that 'foundation reaches no farther than each issue of finding' (1989, p.114) – is not only characteristic of Emerson's *Experience*, but it also describes the kind of educative unsettling that is writ large in the theme of perfectionism.

#### **4.3.3 The Bent of Genius**

While offering his community an exemplar of life as aspiration (to the human)

rather than desperation, Thoreau was not advocating for everyone to mimic his project, and move into the woods with him. Instead, what Thoreau wanted of his neighbours was for them to awaken to what their lives consisted in, and what their society was becoming, that is, little more than an economic machine. Following one's own genius necessitates being unsettled, as it involves a turning away from one's community in order to pursue what one wants to be and carving out one's own path through the wilderness. But such solitude and turning away from society must be balanced against the needs of one's community, indeed a significant feature of Thoreau's project at Walden was that he lived only a mile from his neighbours, thus his 'experiment of living' could be seen, and his words heeded, by others in the community (1854/1997, p.47).

Thoreau is acting as the chanticleer,<sup>26</sup> bringing the morning and waking up his neighbours, both in conducting his 'experiment of living' and in the writing of *Walden* (1854/1997, p.47). Thoreau wishes to awaken his community to their own genius, as he puts it:

I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead (1854/1997, p.65).

But Thoreau's *Walden* is not a prescriptive 'how-to' guide for the awakening of genius. He is offering us an exemplar of what it means to live beyond the confines of societal machinations, and his readers are urged to find out for themselves what this means. To live after one's own ideals, whether living in solitude or amongst one's neighbours, and to follow 'the bent of [one's own] genius' however crooked or narrow, is what *Walden* itself and the trope of

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<sup>26</sup> The chanticleer is mentioned in the epigraph to *Walden* which is as follows: 'I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.5). The chanticleer is not only meant to awaken Thoreau's readers, but the book itself was written in order to wake his neighbours up, particularly to the dangers of leading lives of mere 'quiet desperation' (p.9).

the chanticleer are meant to evoke (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.51).

Thoreau discusses the independence of genius in terms of his approach to farming and growing his beans. A central feature of *Walden* is Thoreau's physical involvement in building his hut and growing his own beans, in addition to the labour of writing the book itself. When it came to tending his bean-field, Thoreau committed himself to working his land with only primitive tools, such as hoes and spades. He did not hire other men, or horses and machinery, to assist his work. His project in growing his beans was about more than crop yield and profit, it was part of his daily work. Just as the community questioned Thoreau's project in living by Walden Pond, they disregarded his farming methods too. But Thoreau sowed and tended to his beans as he felt appropriate, developing a relationship of intimacy with them.

For Thoreau, following the bent of his own genius meant that his 'was one field not in Mr. Coleman's report' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.142),<sup>27</sup> but the economic rationality underpinning such a report was precisely what Thoreau wanted to resist. Following his own genius involved an unsettling of, and movement away from, convention. The awakening of genius may not always involve new and innovative methods of farming (or living), or developing alternatives for the sake of it, but it does necessitate a kind of aversive thinking along the lines of Emerson's 'self-reliance'. The unsettling involved here may also put one on the path of perfectionism.

Following the bent of one's genius, as Thoreau discusses, involves a sense of bottomlessness or groundlessness as well as departure, envisaged as pulling up anchor and sailing away; as he states: 'you want room for your thoughts to get into sailing trim and run a course or two before they make their port' (1854/1997, p.127). For Emerson, following one's own genius rather than relying on public opinion is captured in his concept of 'self-reliance', which is an aversion of conformity. Self-reliance is not simply an exercise in stubbornness – that one must stick to one's own ideas

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<sup>27</sup> This report by Henry Coleman involved a large-scale survey of agriculture throughout Massachusetts.



relentlessly – but rather offers an account of the awakening of genius. The development of one's capacity for self-reliance may be not only contentious, but also unsettling. Self-reliance involves being able to follow one's own convictions amidst societal pressures and this is where it may be unsettling, both for oneself and others in the community. Such productive unsettlement is clearly what is lacking in the opening scenario, as the academic explicitly tells the students 'all you need to do is...' and 'all you need to get a good mark is...', meaning that there is no need for students to awaken their own genius, let alone follow it.

What we see in the scenario is more synonymous with blind conformity than the aversion of it. Even where there is the potential for the awakening of genius, such as the academic asking student 2 'what point are you arguing for?', this tends to be dismissed as both students are only seeking a particular grade on an assignment. While there is nothing wrong with having a firm ground or '*point d'appui*' to guide one's genius (Cavell, 1981a, p.71), the students in the scenario seem to anchor their thoughts purely in terms of criteria and learning outcomes, with no potential for them getting into 'sailing trim' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.127).

What Thoreau's project at Walden Pond adds to this discussion of settlement and being unsettled is an exemplar of how to balance these two foci; this is clearly laid out in his discussion of why he settled by the pond in the first place, and why it was equally important that he leave it. As Thoreau writes:

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one (1854/1997, p.287).

#### **4.3.4 Walking, Sauntering, and Homelessness**

Strongly related to the theme of unsettlement are the interlinked themes in Thoreau's work of walking, sauntering, and homelessness. Here 'homelessness' means being *sans terre* (being a saunterer), that is, without a home and yet being equally at home everywhere (Thoreau, 1862/1993, p.49). Thoreau refers to sauntering, rather than walking, as an act of daily baptism and of going to the Holy-Land (metaphorically) in one's walks which

necessitates leaving and unsettlement. What it would mean to remain settled in one's thoughts while walking is captured here: 'I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit' (Thoreau, 1862/1993, p.52). There is something unthinking about walking which, while it allows for bodily exercise, has no claim to the exercise of one's genius.

For Thoreau, walking is a matter of sticking to neatly laid paths and established roads, allowing one to arrive at their destination as efficiently as possible. But sauntering necessitates that one be 'free from all worldly engagements', in a sense unsettled, before setting out on a walk (Thoreau, 1862/1993, p.51). The act of sauntering involves blazing one's own trail through the wilderness rather than relying on commonly used roads and highways of travel. While forging one's own path in the wilderness may result in getting lost, Thoreau highlights that this itself can be 'a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable, experience' (1854/1997, p.154). He explains the value of such an unsettling experience as getting lost in the woods as follows:

Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.154).

Adding to this distinction between mere walking and sauntering, Thoreau writes that 'the walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise...but is itself the enterprise and adventure of the day' (1862/1993, pp.51-52). So sauntering involves an intellectual exercise as one is walking. It is important to say that I do not mean this in the sense of a psychologised 'embodied cognition', but rather that freeing oneself from thought in an engagement with nature is a useful exercise in itself. Sauntering and being unsettled were integral to Thoreau's 'experiment in living' (Cavell, 1981a, p.45).

The sense of homelessness Thoreau refers to in *Walking* – that of being a saunterer – is exemplified in his project at Walden Pond. Cavell describes the purpose of Thoreau's 'experiment' as being 'not to learn that life at Walden was marvelous, but to learn to leave it. It will make for more crises.

One earns one's life in spending it; only so does one save it' (1981a, p.45). The necessity of Thoreau making his home by Walden Pond and then learning how to leave it (engaging with a sense of bottomlessness and/or homelessness) could be explained by the fact that perfectionism is inherently anti-settlement, and demands of us a continuous movement between settlement and leaving, whereby such unsettling is educative in itself.

That homelessness is an illustration of perfectionism and educative unsettling is also shown in Cavell's autobiography *Little Did I Know* (2010), where he documents his almost annual movements between Sacramento, California and Atlanta, Georgia throughout his childhood. While Cavell's uneasiness with this cyclical uprootedness is clearly evident and it increases as he grows up – for example, he writes that 'Berkeley and Harvard were the two places that I [he] had ever felt at home' (2010, p.401), rather than any of his childhood homes – nevertheless this could be described as educative, as Cavell had to learn how to live with a sense of being both at home and yet experiencing the unhomely at the same time.<sup>28</sup>

In his autobiography, Cavell details the movement away from his musical roots (Cavell's mother and three of his uncles were renowned concert pianists) toward a life of philosophy. Cavell's own sense of 'homelessness' is both physical, in that he never truly felt at home either in Sacramento or Atlanta, and ontological, as it was only after studying music to a high level that he decided that it was not what he was truly interested in (taking on Thoreau's translation of 'interest'). As Cavell explains:

By the end of college I had come to realise that music was not my life. How that *crisis* eventually produced the conviction that a life of study and writing growing out of philosophy was for me to discover (2010, p.4, my emphasis).

That Cavell describes such a stark realisation as a 'crisis' again links back to Thoreau's reverence for crises as transformative – and hence educative in

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<sup>28</sup> This sense of being equally at home and unhomely is known as 'the uncanny' or *das Unheimliche* in Martin Heidegger's work, I will explain this term further in the next section.

the perfectionist sense – experiences. As discussed in the previous chapter, Cavell argued for autobiography to be accepted as a legitimate mode of writing in philosophy, and so in a sense this ‘homelessness’ and unsettling persists throughout his academic work. The homelessness discussed here is not merely the case of one’s being without a home, but of being *sans terre*, a particular sense of ‘homelessness’ that characterises both sauntering and perfectionism (Thoreau, 1862/1993, p.49). Having discussed several iterations of Emersonian moral perfectionism, I now take a rather different turn to consider what an ontological perspective on settlement and unsettling may offer.

#### **4.4 Heidegger, Settlement, and the Ontological**

The themes of crises, bottomlessness, and homelessness present in Thoreau and Emerson’s writings are also evident in the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, although with a different focus. I will now elucidate the links between the works of these philosophers from different traditions and backgrounds in order to show why some of Heidegger’s concepts are relevant to the argument here, before moving on to discuss his notion of the uncanny (or *das Unheimliche*), and the educative potential of experiencing angst.

The links between Thoreau and Emerson are more easily explicable than those between the two Transcendentalists and Martin Heidegger, yet there are lines of connection between their ideas that merit attention here. The American philosopher Stanley Cavell has drawn connections between the ideas of Thoreau and Heidegger, and he has also stated that he sees Emerson’s work, via Nietzsche, as an anticipation of Heidegger’s (Cavell, 1989; 2005b). As Cavell (2005b) describes, to read the works of Thoreau and Heidegger is to be awakened, but they are also linked through their joint affinities with poetry.

Thoreau’s own writing could be considered as poetic and/or prophetic (Cavell, 1981a; 2005b), while in his later works Heidegger draws substantially on the works of the German poet, Friedrich Hölderlin. As Cavell writes, ‘Hölderlin and Thoreau [may be taken] as inspiring or requiring or

providing philosophy' (2005b, p.216). This requirement and provision of philosophy by Thoreau and Heidegger can be seen as provoked by a sense of alienation, or a skepticism of language being (in)appropriate to their needs, although expressed in very different ways (Cavell, 2005b). The conditions of 'quiet desperation' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.9) and/or 'secret melancholy' (Emerson, 1844/2000, p.411) are mirrored by Heidegger in his concern that our being is typically constrained to inauthenticity in everyday life.<sup>29</sup>

As I will discuss below, Heidegger's (1962) major concern with the subject of 'Being' is that its questionability has been forgotten; people tend to become absorbed in worldly concerns which leaves little room for ontological considerations. The crisis marking out perfectionism, a discord between oneself and one's community, is not only considered transformative by Thoreau and Emerson but could also be seen as such by Heidegger. To move away from one's community in order to examine one's own soul and capacity for genius could be considered as heeding Heidegger's warning that in 'Being-with' others, we are trapped by the common opinion of 'the they' or *das Man*<sup>30</sup> and confined to inauthenticity (1962, p.137). The a-teleological nature of perfectionism, as a continual striving towards one's next, higher self, also shares some commonalities with what Heidegger says about Being. In Heidegger's work the 'awakening', or rather uncovering, of

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<sup>29</sup> The terms 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' when used in reference to Heidegger do not have the same connotations as in common parlance. It is not that one way of Being is superior to another, in essence, that being 'authentic' is better, but each term is representative of the different relationships one may have with their own Being. To be 'authentic' can be likened to having an awareness of one's own Being, whereas inauthenticity is an obliviousness to this fact.

<sup>30</sup> *das Man*, or the 'they', is the others or society with whom one's own Being is connected. As Heidegger writes, 'The Self of everyday Dasein [our human Being, translated as Being-there] is the *they-self*'; this means that one's own Being and experience of 'Being-in-the-world' is dictated by others. The 'they-self' is inauthentic as the limits of one's experience 'have been established with the "they's" averageness' (Heidegger, 1962, p.167).

the question of Being (rather than genius) is also an ongoing, iterative process. One's authentic self as a case of *Dasein* may be revealed through angst,<sup>31</sup> yet this does not mean that one can then choose to be authentic and subsequently conduct oneself in this way. In fact, *Dasein* often conceals itself as much as *das Man* may direct one's experience of the world (Heidegger, 1962). Connections between Thoreau, Emerson, and Heidegger have already been drawn by Cavell. The links between these writers that merit attention here are the common themes in their works of sleeping/inauthenticity, bottomlessness, homelessness, and the ongoing search for a sense of self or Being.

For Thoreau (1854/1997), the awakening of *genius* is to be provoked by his trope of the *chanticleer*; whereas for Heidegger (1962), a concern with our *Being* is to be awakened or uncovered through *angst*. The 'Being' of human beings is structured by our 'Being-in-the-world' and 'Being-with' others, both of which are typically inauthentic (Heidegger, 1962). This is an ontological form of unsettlement, characterised by the fact that we may never truly grasp what our Being consists in; what Heidegger alludes to is that we are always unsettled and 'un-homely' in our Being.

## **4.5 Unsettling in Heidegger's Work: The *das Unheimliche***

### **4.5.1 Heidegger's Philosophical Project**

Martin Heidegger first introduces his notion of the uncanny, or the *das Unheimliche* (literally un-homely), in *Being and Time* (1962, hereafter BT). The uncanny is inextricably tied to Heidegger's project in BT to explicate and

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<sup>31</sup> Angst, like boredom, is a grounded mood which characterises our 'Being-in-the-world'. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger proposed a threefold structure of our 'Being-in-the-world' consisting of: *Befindlichkeit* (moods or attunements), *Verstehen* (understanding), and *Rede* (discourse). Angst shapes what it means for one to be in the world and to be with others, influencing how we interpret the things we encounter and determining our experience of the world in a particular way, in this case, being predisposed toward angst and anxiety. As Heidegger explains, 'a mood makes manifest "how one is, and how one is faring"...in this "how one is", having a mood brings Being to its "there" [uncovers our Being]' (Heidegger, 1962, p.173).

pose the question of Being. This investigation of Being is conducted phenomenologically and Heidegger discusses 'Being' itself through the mode of *Dasein*. *Dasein* literally translates as 'Being-there'; it describes a Being or entity for which the question of Being is relevant (Heidegger, 1962, p.27). As Heidegger puts it, 'Dasein is in each case mine' (1962, p.67), and I am that entity for whom there is a question of Being; as such, my own Being is implicated in this question (Skea, 2017).

As I have argued previously, 'although comprehending the question of Being may itself be unsettling, considering one's own ontological condition could also be transformative – and thus educative – in its own right' (Skea, 2017, p.370). In what follows, I will discuss Heidegger's notion of the uncanny as provoked by the mood of angst. The uncanny could be considered as the most primordial form of unsettlement – an unsettlement and unhomeliness within one's Being – but there are benefits to be gained from this experience. As Katherine Withy (2015, p.4) puts it, 'the uncanny experience is not a negative revelation of what everyday life has been like but a positive revelation of what the human essence is like', and it is this positive value of being unsettled and experiencing the uncanny to which I now draw attention (Skea, 2017).

#### **4.5.2 The Uncanny**

As I have written elsewhere, 'Heidegger's 'uncanny' or *das Unheimliche* is integral to our human condition, and it is contingent upon the fact that we ourselves are cases of *Dasein*' (Skea, 2017). The 'un-canny' is conceived of as a negation of that which is 'canny' or homely. 'Canny' is a word of Scottish origin, meaning among other things, a sense of 'knowing and comfort, coziness' (Withy, 2015, p.1). The term 'uncanny' was originally coined by Sigmund Freud, and in seeking English equivalents to '*Unheimlich*', he describes the uncanny as: 'uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal, uncanny, ghastly; (of a house) haunted; (of a man) a repulsive fellow' (1919, p.2).

Freud (1919) translated *Unheimlich* as 'un-homely', understood as a sense of the unfamiliar within what is familiar, this was explicated through the

example of Hoffman's 'The Sandman'.<sup>32</sup> While clearly influenced by Freud's work, Heidegger's (1962) conception of the uncanny differs from that of Freud in that his conception is much stronger. 'Rather than the uncanny being a feeling we experience at a particular time, and provoked by a particular situation, Heidegger considers the *das Unheimliche* to be something more primordial – as something ontological within our human condition' (Skea, 2017, pp.370-371).

The *das Unheimliche* to which Heidegger refers implies a sense of homelessness inherent to the human condition, that we are both at home and not at home at the same time. Withy (2015) describes this as the double condition of being at home without having access to the hearth which is the true homely. The uncanny nature of human beings as cases of *Dasein* may be revealed through experiencing angst, and what is uncovered in angst is the fact of our 'thrownness' (Heidegger, 1962). Thrownness describes the condition of our never being able to quite get to the bottom of our Being; there is an existential dread – or uncanniness – provoked here by the fact that we cannot know why we are here, and why we are the kinds of beings we are.

It is in realising the thrownness of our condition that we may recognise our uncanny nature, that there is a sense of obscurity within ourselves and within our Being that we can never fully overcome. This concern with one's Being is not something we are always aware of but rather, the uncanny nature of *Dasein* may be revealed through angst. Angst is a grounded mood, which means that unlike other moods such as fear, it is not object-oriented or directed towards particular situations (Withy, 2015).

To experience angst and uncover one's Being as a case of *Dasein* is unsettling and discomfiting, but it can also be transformative for our own

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<sup>32</sup> For further details, see: Freud, S. 1919. The Uncanny. *The Massachusetts Institute of Technology*. [Online]. [Accessed 09 March 2017]. Available from: <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>.



self-understanding. Angst could be considered as opening the door to our uncanny nature, revealing what is inside, which is the fact that human beings are 'the most uncanny of all that is uncanny' (Heidegger, 1984/1996, p.92). It is in the self-revelatory nature of angst that experiencing the *das Unheimliche* can be considered educative. To become aware of one's own inherent uncanniness, that we are ontologically un-homely, could constitute a crisis marking out the perfectionist journey.

It is not that angst is felt at a particular time and then we move on from this; as with the *das Unheimliche* itself, angst is inseparable from the human experience. As Withy puts it, 'Being-in-the-world *is* angst' (2015, pp.80-81, original emphasis), and as I have explained it elsewhere, it is 'through the mood of angst, [that] the question of one's Being (and the very unintelligibility of this question) [is] revealed' (Skea, 2017, p.371). With this in mind I will now elucidate how this ontological form of unsettlement, in essence, the uncanny, may manifest itself as Being's continual struggle between self-obscurity and self-knowledge. To explain this further, I will draw on an example from Sophocles' *Antigone*.

#### **4.5.3 Sophocles' *Antigone***

As I have described Heidegger's philosophical project, he draws on several Greek plays to discuss the question of Being, and as he explains here 'this poetry [of the Greeks] is tragedy – the poetry in which Greek Being and Dasein [a Dasein belonging to Being] were authentically founded' (2000, p.154). In both the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (2000) and *Holderlin's Hymn "The Ister"* (1984/1996), Heidegger discusses Sophocles' play *Antigone* and the choral 'Ode to Man' in particular, as an explication of the uncanny (Skea, 2017).

The first stationary song from Sophocles' *Antigone*, the choral 'Ode to Man', has been discussed at length by Heidegger as an example of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*), with Antigone herself being characterised as 'the supreme uncanny' (1984/1996, p.104). The choral ode is made of two strophes, with each having a corresponding antistrophe.

For our discussion here, I will present the initial six lines of the first strophe:

Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing  
More uncanny looms or stirs beyond the human being.  
He ventures forth on the foaming tide  
amid the southern storm of winter  
and crosses the surge  
of the cavernous waves  
(Heidegger, 1984/1996, p.58).

What this extract highlights is that the human being is the uncanniest entity of all, and that this uncanniness is manifold or doubly *δεινόν* – *deinon* (Heidegger, 1984/1996).<sup>33</sup> 'This manifoldness represents the fact that one's Being, as uncanny, is always counterturning back upon itself' (Skea, 2017, p.372).

The counterturning of Being is a continual movement between presencing and absencing, or between 'self-obscurity' and 'self-knowledge' (Skea, 2017). That this movement is on-going and involves unsettlement means that our uncanny nature, and our existential condition of homelessness, adds ontological weight to the perfectionist argument. Our condition of uncanniness, or *das Unheimliche*, is inextricably tied to the fact that in perfectionism one is always moving towards that 'unattained but attainable self' (Cavell, 1990, p.12). Just as our Being is uncovered, it is again plunged into self-loss; there is a position of 'doubleness' wherein we can feel at home while still being denied access to the hearth (Withy, 2015). 'This quest for intelligibility (with *Dasein* as the sense-maker) is analogous to being cast forth on the foaming tide, as the ode puts it' (Skea, 2017, p.372). Withy explains this as follows:

The human being's "faring forth" into the sea does not refer to sea travel or fishing but poetically projects the human being's entry into being's struggle...The human being breaks away into the overwhelming sea, stretching out beyond itself towards being (2015, p.125).

Venturing forth on the foaming tide, as provoked by encountering the uncanny, involves a breaking away from firm ground, 'it breaks out

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<sup>33</sup> Heidegger interprets the term 'deinon' as meaning 'on the one hand, the fearful, but also the powerful, and finally, the inhabital' (1984/1996, p.67).

(*auszubrechen*) from that-which-is-homely' (Withy, 2015, p.125). 'In recognising the uncanniness within one's own Being, one then has to leave what is 'canny' or homely in pursuit of self-knowledge' (Skea, 2017, p.373). This could be seen as analogous to what Thoreau writes about one's thoughts getting 'into sailing trim' (1854/1997, p.127), and the importance of lifting anchor and sailing into the unknown, although for Heidegger what constitutes the 'unknown' is our own Being.

There is also a significant link here between the 'homelessness' that is fundamental to the *das Unheimliche*, and what Thoreau writes of being homeless or *sans terre*, that it allows one to follow the bent of their own genius. The balance discussed earlier between being settled on the one hand, and leaving and departure on the other, is accurately depicted in the ode's image of the human being's search for an authentic self or Being. 'This being cast forth on the foaming tide is a treacherous and difficult journey, both literally and metaphorically, as representative of a concern with one's soul. One must ride the crest of the waves, without being able to plunge into its depths' (Skea, 2017, p.373).

If we as human beings are inherently uncanny, then unsettlement is part of our ontological character. Even when we think we are getting closer to uncovering the nature of Being, we realise the shallowness of our view and that there are more bodies of water to explore. That Thoreau urges his readers to 'explore the private sea' (1854/1997, p.286) before embarking on expeditions further afield is emblematic of the characterisation of the *das Unheimliche* in Sophocles' play. For Heidegger, that which anchors cases of *Dasein* and prevents such self-exploration is the inauthenticity of everyday existence, whereas for Emerson this would be envisaged as conformity.

Heidegger considers the doubleness of human beings to consist in their being homely, whilst at the same time feeling 'un-at-home' (Withy, 2015, p.100). There is a sense of homelessness fundamental to *Dasein* which is echoed in Thoreau's endorsement of sauntering. With a sense of homelessness comes the freedom to follow the bent of one's own genius, or rather, to uncover an authentic sense of Being. Recognising the obscurity of

oneself and one's Being, in essence, our condition of thrownness, may be unsettling but even remembering that there is a question of Being marks a significant step forward. As I have explained previously, 'in dealing with the question of Being, the most fundamental question that we have, we may indeed feel 'lost at sea' with no safe ground in which to (re-)anchor ourselves...but it may also be utterly transformative' (Skea, 2017, p.373).

Clearly, this chapter has also involved a 'faring forth' as I have moved from the particularities of the scenario to a broader conception of what it means to be 'educated' and to be unsettled in helpful and transformative ways (Withy, 2015, p.125). While the works of Thoreau, Emerson, Cavell, and Heidegger are not commonly referred to in educational philosophy, nor in relation to the Higher Education sector, I have drawn on their works here to argue that experiencing crises, bottomlessness, homelessness, and the unknown (both within and without oneself) may constitute a perfectionist education of the self. I will now outline how angst is related to the *das Unheimliche*, before offering some specific examples of what such a crisis or sense of bottomlessness might look like in Higher Education.

#### **4.6 Angst**

While it may be uncomfortable and unsettling to experience angst, and primarily so because we do not know why we feel anxious, it is revelatory for Being. What is revealed in angst is our own uncanny nature, the fact that we are in a position of 'doubleness' ontologically, being both at home and 'un-at-home' at the same time (Withy, 2015, p.100). It is in recognition of one's 'thrownness' and the *das Unheimliche* that we are cast forth 'on foaming tide' (Heidegger, 1962; 1984/1996). The trajectory of Being as envisaged in Sophocles' 'Ode to Man' could be likened to Thoreau's discussion of sauntering, that to saunter requires us to 'go forth in the spirit of undying adventure...prepared to send back our embalmed hearts' (1862/1993, p.50).

Angst may be self-revelatory, prompting us to think about ontological considerations rather than just our everyday, worldly concerns. In experiencing angst, numerous questions of self-knowledge could be uncovered, in essence, that there are depths beneath the waves as yet

unchartered (Heidegger, 1962). Recognising one's self-obscurity – whether this has occurred through conformity (as Thoreau and Emerson discuss) or absorption into the 'average everydayness' of *das Man* – could be extremely unsettling, but it also marks out the beginning of Being's journeying towards self-knowledge (Heidegger, 1962, p.43).

The perpetual oscillation of exploration and covering-over of Being is described by Withy as a 'counterturning', with the riding of the waves characterised as a movement between 'self-possession and self-loss, openness and finitude' (2015, p.122). Such counterturning seems almost synonymous with the perfectionist journey of the soul towards self-transcendence, whereby one acknowledges the present state of their self and yet strives towards their next, higher self.

Both Emerson and Heidegger discuss the cultivation of oneself; for Emerson, this is manifested as a concern with one's soul, whereas Heidegger is concerned with the unconcealment of Being. While Emersonian moral perfectionism is antifoundationalist and resists finality (Cavell, 1989), there are still ends to be reached within the journey, but from a Heideggerian perspective the uncanniness of human beings is not something that can be overcome. There is a sense of homelessness and unsettlement that is ontologically distinctive of human beings. So I argue that to emphasise student satisfaction and seek to settle students down in Higher Education is disingenuous to Being itself. Emphasising student satisfaction not only reinforces the commodification of teaching and learning, but the forms of settlement it bolsters also unhelpfully shelter students from experiencing angst, thus covering over the fact that we as human beings are fundamentally ontologically unsettled.

#### **4.7 Educative Unsettling: Uncanniness in the Classroom**

If universities were to recognise the importance of students' experiencing angst and uncanniness, then what would this mean for teaching and learning in HE? In practical terms, students' recognition of their own uncanniness could be prompted by adopting less prescriptive teaching approaches in Higher Education. By this I do not mean encouraging the tick-box exercise of

'student-led enquiry' (Cook-Sather, 2009; Madriaga and Morley, 2016) or a 'flipped classroom' approach (Nanclares and Rodriguez, 2015), but rather something more in line with what Paul Gibbs calls 'pottering-about' in the curriculum (2016, p.8).

Distinguishing contentment and 'profound happiness' from short-term desire satisfaction, Gibbs argues that '*a university should challenge students to develop the capabilities to optimise their potential to make responsible, or at least informed, choices*' (2016, p.8, my emphasis); this sounds much like the capacity for Emersonian self-reliance. So with greater freedom in the 'curriculum' of Higher Education, students may experience angst and feel uncomfortable. Indeed they may have been used to more didactic teaching methods in school, but it could also prompt greater self-reflection, encouraging them to think beyond immediate concerns to consider what it is they want from their education.

It is not necessarily that educators could provoke angst in students, but what is within their remit is the creation of intellectual impasses. As Schwieler and Magrini highlight:

Authentic learning is not only related to the impasse we find in...conversion, beyond this, its potential lives only in terms of an 'inquiry' that unfolds as the *strife* between 'truth' and 'untruth' (2015, p.27, original emphasis).

The impasse or strife that is educationally conducive to the unconcealment of Being is not only that regarding the nature of truth, but that which is encountered in the 'thinking of Being' itself (Schwieler and Magrini, 2015,

p.27).<sup>34</sup> Such strife is captured in the counterturning of Being, whereby *Dasein* is torn between self-knowledge and self-loss, and continually moving between the two (Withy, 2015). Thus, as with uncanniness, strife is central to the human experience.

Strife and unsettlement are not only experiences we may encounter in our everyday lives, but they are part of what it is to be human. Rather than contributing further to the covering-over of Being, Higher Education could be a space for freeing students from their everyday ontic concerns, so that ontological considerations – such as who they are, what their Being consists in, and what they want to be going forward – could come to the fore.

While the unconcealment of Being may be provoked by experiencing angst and being unsettled, this is educative in itself as it could reveal our capabilities rather than narrowly focusing on acquired competencies. This is exemplified in Gibbs' notion of 'profound happiness' which he describes as a 'contentment in becoming what one wills one's being to be, in the knowledge of one's capabilities' (2015, p.56). While the creation of intellectual impasses is one example of what educative unsettling might look like in Higher Education, I will now turn to two further examples to illustrate what a perfectionist education might consist in: Williams' *Stoner* (1965/2003), and Thoreau's notion of 'uncommon schooling' (1854/1997, p.99).

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<sup>34</sup> An example of such educative 'strife' or intellectual impasse is given by Heidegger in 'The Art of Teaching' (1945/2002). There, he advocates for the creation of impasses through adopting a model of Socratic encounter in teaching in HE. Heidegger discusses the value of *aporia*, which is 'a specific kind of lack or want, a perplexity achieved by encounter with the previously unthought, an uncertainty about where to go next driven by a desire to progress' (1945/2002, p.41). A teacher withholding their knowledge in certain situations, that is, 'temporarily staging the scene of resourcelessness' could provoke angst in students, but it might also create an intellectual impasse that is both transformative and edifying (1945/2002, p.41).

#### **4.8 Educative Unsettling: *Stoner***

Educative unsettling, in contrast to pervasive forms of un-educative settlement, is central to the perfectionist Higher Education I am advocating for here. *Stoner* (1965/2003), a novel by American writer John Williams, serves as an exemplar of what it might look like to be unsettled and to experience crises as part of one's Higher Education. The book traces the life of its main character, William Stoner, and tells the story of his life from the point where he begins his Higher Education. Stoner is from a rural farming community, and almost naturally, it seems, goes to the University of Missouri to study agriculture, with the plan of then returning to the farm and taking it over from his parents. Stoner settles readily into Higher Education, finding his studies manageable, if not a little too easy. He feels at home studying soil chemistry, but it is the required course in English literature that 'troubled and disquieted him in a way nothing had ever done before' (Williams, 1965/2003, p.10).

As I have explained elsewhere, 'Stoner is clearly unsettled and discomfited by his classes in English literature. When asked by his tutor, Archer Sloane, to explain one of Shakespeare's sonnets in front of the class, Stoner cannot answer. Despite not knowing the "correct" answers, and being unable to explicate his thoughts, Stoner is clearly seduced by English literature and the unsettling experience this has offered him' (Skea, 2017, p.374). Although he entered Higher Education with a particular end-goal in mind, Stoner experiences an unsettling in the English literature classes that he is captivated by, and this changes the trajectory of his whole life. Stoner subsequently commits himself to studying English literature and becomes a professor in the discipline.

While Stoner's education is perfectionist in nature, and so in a sense 'a-teleological' (Schumann, 2017, p.6), there are still ends to be found within this journey such as the completion of his PhD and the publication of his first monograph. But Stoner's education continues over the course of his lifetime and is characterised by a perpetual, on-going renewal of the self. Thoreau's vision of crises being akin to the moulting of the fowls is exemplified in *Stoner*. As Williams describes, just when Stoner believes he may have



grasped the knowledge he so desperately seeks, 'there would come to him the awareness of all that he did not know, of all that he had not read; and the serenity for which he labored was shattered' (1965/2003, p.26).

Stoner's education epitomises Cavell's notion of perfectionism as involving 'moving to, and from, nexts' (1990, p.12); what the character of William Stoner offers readers is a concrete vision of the human being's perpetual striving towards its next, higher self. The perfectionist move from self-obscurity towards self-transcendence is never 'complete' or finalised, but rather it is something that each person must dedicate their lives to. This is illustrated in Stoner's final movements as he reaches for his first monograph:

It hardly mattered to him [Stoner] that the book was forgotten and that it served no use; and the question of its worth at any time seemed almost trivial. He did not have the illusion that he would find himself there, in that fading print; and yet, he knew, a small part of him that he could not deny was there, and would be there (Williams, 1965/2003, p.277).

It is only at the end of his life that Stoner is able to reflect on the value of his Higher Education and recognise the contribution he has made. What this example brings to the fore is that experiencing unsettlement in one's Higher Education may be utterly transformative; such unsettlement is educative as it forces one to take up a critical position of 'doubleness', evaluating the current state of one's self against a higher self they aspire to. Focusing on settling students down rather than offering opportunities for them to be unsettled, to experience crises and/or angst, is precisely to 'limit the possibilities of thought that a university education should open up' (Fulford, 2009, p.226).

#### **4.9 Educative Unsettling: Uncommon Schooling**

A final example of what a perfectionist, unsettling education might consist in is depicted in Thoreau's concept of 'uncommon schooling' (1854/1997, p.99). What Thoreau means by this term is much broader in scope than merely formal schooling. The 'uncommon schooling' which Thoreau calls for is precisely that whereby our 'education' extends beyond the confines of the classroom, where our education does not end upon reaching adulthood, and such 'education' can be described as an initiation into 'a form of life'

(Wittgenstein, 1963, §19). In advocating for an 'uncommon schooling', Thoreau argues that a liberal education should be available to all. But the thrust of this concept is that it goes beyond formal education; we should be educated into our culture in such a way that we can make our own decisions over which texts are important, and over where we place our personal, moral and intellectual 'investments'.

What Thoreau wants his neighbours to gain from such an 'uncommon schooling' is precisely the kind of self-cultivation that is normally the preserve of noblemen, and as he writes 'instead of noblemen, let us have noble villages of men' (1854/1997, p.101). Thoreau's argument rests on his belief that the pursuit of liberal studies should not be restricted to those with greater financial resources and/or unavailable to those in smaller villages like Concord. The fact that 'the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation' (p.9) is not simply due to the fact that the neighbours Thoreau was referring to were farmers and traders, but rather that 'what with foddering cattle and tending the store, we are kept from school too long, and our education is sadly neglected' (1854/1997, pp.99-100).

It is also important to highlight here that Thoreau, in advocating for uncommon schooling, was not suggesting that the life of a farmer is in any sense of less worth than that of a nobleman. Thoreau did not want to educate his fellow villagers such that they became noblemen or took up a different vocation, as this would be disingenuous at best. What he sought to achieve through the idea of 'uncommon schooling' was more about awakening people to their condition (again the trope of the chanticleer is prominent) and 'crossing the gulf of ignorance which surrounds us' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, pp.99-101).

The aim of this kind of uncommon schooling is to transform people's outlook on the world so that they are able to re-evaluate their position in it. Such an awakening of genius can be likened to 'the morning or the spring of our lives' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.98). Thoreau's 'uncommon schooling' is perfectionist in nature as it implies that our education is in some sense never complete or final, so committing oneself to this kind of liberal self-cultivation

necessitates unsettlement (this is demonstrated in Thoreau's own project at Walden Pond). If Thoreau's vision of education were perfectible instead then our 'common schools', which end just before adulthood, would be sufficient. However, as he argues, '[while] we have a comparatively decent system of common schools, schools for infants only...[we have] no school for ourselves' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.99).

The perfectionism inherent in Thoreau's concept of 'uncommon schooling' is further elucidated and developed in Cavell's notion of philosophy as the 'education of grownups' (1979a, p.125). In Cavell's work, as in that of Thoreau and Emerson, any discussion of 'education' is not limited to formal schooling. The 'education of grownups' refers to an education that continues once we reach adulthood (Cavell, 1979a, p.125), but it is also a perfectionist education in which the 'other' may prompt one's journey toward 'self-transcendence'. Here, the relationship between reading and writing, and between an author and their readers, may be understood as 'a metonym for the teacher-student relationship' (Saito, 2012, p.181).

In delineating what a perfectionist 'education of grownups' might consist in, Naoko Saito has stated that both perfectionism itself, and a perfectionist education, are characterised by 'goallessness' (2012, p.173). Such an education is envisaged as a joint enterprise between oneself and a 'friend', or in this case, a teacher. In the perfectionist journey, initiation is always followed by departure, and settlement is always coupled with leaving. Unsettlement is therefore integral to 'teaching' in this sense. The transformation sought in perfectionism, as in education, may involve discomfort and undergoing crises as one comes to realise that they have until now been living in 'secret melancholy' (Emerson, 1844/2000, p.411).

I am not advocating here that academics should invoke crises in their students, for example, by discussing traumatic experiences in the lecture theatre. But allowing students to encounter uncertainty, to encourage them to take up a position of 'doubleness' in relation to themselves, without jumping in to ensure their happiness and contentment, could be educative in this richer sense of a movement towards self-transcendence. The

'doubleness' involved in perfectionism is that of conformity on the one hand, and 'critical self-aversion' on the other; as Schumann explains, moving towards our next self necessitates that 'we are drawn to becoming ashamed of our present self, we are drawn to draw another circle around the present circle' (2017, p.6).

The teacher's responsibility could thus be seen as that of prompting forms of educative unsettling in their students. As Saito describes, the teacher aspiring to Emersonian moral perfectionism is charged with 'offering not a place for security or settlement but rather the rough ground, the "*point d'appui*" (Cavell, 1981a, p.71), that can constitute the turning point for the student' (2012, p.183). What we see in the opening scenario is anathema to this: the academic almost constructs the students' assignments for them, removing their need for independent enquiry, thinking, and research. I am not advocating for the removal of support, guidance, and supervision but rather I highlight that the scenario takes such support one step further in seeking to ensure the students' happiness and/or satisfaction. Allowing room for students to struggle in a particular way – with concepts, with ideas, with finding their own voice – could be ultimately more transformative. Indeed, as Fulford argues, students should be afforded time and space in the curriculum in which they can (productively) 'be lost' (2016b, p.530).

The rise of student satisfaction often involves a closing down of educative possibilities, whereby 'knowledge' is reduced to mere 'information' that one collects and consumes, and teaching is reduced to either knowledge transmission or even 'instruction'. This raises the question of whether Higher Education is still providing 'education' or whether it is now more akin to a kind of 'training' for the globalised knowledge economy? Bearing these examples of educative unsettling – strife and *aporia*, *Stoner* (Williams, 1965/2003), and 'uncommon schooling' (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.99) – in mind, I will now discuss the practical implications of these ideas for the HE sector.

#### 4.10 Implications for the HE Sector

The opening scenario is illustrative of forms of un-educative settlement which are implied by the current focus on student satisfaction measures in the HE sector. If Higher Education is to promote self-cultivation and transformation then aligning it with forms of educative unsettling seems imperative. In practical terms, provoking student experiences of unsettling rather than satisfaction may involve greater freedom in the curriculum, allowing students to 'potter about, to follow the byways of their curiosity and not to worry about learning outcomes or assessment criteria' (Gibbs, 2016, p.8).

But in returning to the scenario that opened this chapter, the practical implementation of forms of educative unsettling, for example the creation of intellectual impasses, is not unproblematic. To move away from a focus on the 'outcomes' of Higher Education could be easier said than done when faced with students asking exactly how they can achieve a 2:1 grade classification on a particular assignment. Both academics and students are subjectivated to these discourses of marketisation and there is little room to step outside of them, for example, in refusing to discuss assessment criteria. Student feedback is now afforded such importance in HE that any indication of dissatisfaction could prove catastrophic for an academic's career.

While I am not seeking to develop a curriculum for educative unsettling here, the perfectionist themes and engagement with angst discussed above do have very real implications for teaching and learning in Higher Education. I am not arguing here for a teaching revolution in universities, but academics may demonstrate their commitment to educative unsettling by 'withholding' their knowledge in certain situations, letting students experience angst and *aporia* without stepping in to save them straight away (Heidegger, 1945/2002, p.41).

An aim of Higher Education could be to prompt students to realise the extent of what they do not know and that their quest for knowledge can never really be fulfilled and satisfied, that 'deep calls unto deep' (Emerson, 1836/2000, p.38). There is also a need for forms of educative unsettling that could help

to uncover our Being; encouraging students to embrace angst and uncanniness could be ontologically educative. Taking these ideas one step further, Roberts has even argued for the value of experiencing despair in one's education, emphasising that education is 'an unsettling, uncomfortable process' (2013, p.472). While despair and angst cannot be conflated, the notion that education is, and should be, uncomfortable to a certain extent adds weight to my argument for the benefits of educative unsettling.

If universities are to remain sites of self-cultivation and transformation, then encouraging students to become self-reliant and resist blind conformity could constitute part of their mission. Prompting students to embrace unsettling experiences and follow the bent of their own genius is important, but equally it could be met with resistance as it does necessitate leaving the beaten track (Thoreau, 1854/1997; 1862/1993). While the impulse to satisfy students and settle them down seems anathema to this educative unsettling, it also reinforces and perpetuates a certain (consumerist) worldview. As Gibbs argues, 'the satisfied student perpetuates the current lifeworld in which they find themselves, seeking to improve the quality of the services provided' (2016, p.1) rather than questioning their validity. As universities are facing greater pressure to conform and to aspire to student satisfaction over and above other aims of Higher Education, Gibbs writes that 'we are teaching our students not to be resiliently critical, but to cope with the anxiety of the market through short-term palliatives' (2017, p.14), in essence, by meeting their current expectations.

While the dominance of student satisfaction measures and 'value for money' rhetoric have invariably reduced HE to a consumable good or service, the 'product' that students will receive cannot be clearly delineated from the outset as it depends on their engagement with the university in question. In this sense, aiming to meet students' initial expectations cannot be considered educative as it precludes the potential outcome, giving students exactly what they want and nothing more. Yet promoting crises, a sense of bottomlessness or continual openness, embracing angst and the ontological homelessness it reveals, could pave the way for a perfectionist education that transcends accountability measures and performativity pressures.

Students should leave their Higher Education with something they had not anticipated beforehand, they should leave with not simply a collection of facts about a particular subject and/or their degree certificate, but with a certain capacity for self-reliance.

The end of one's Higher Education marks the closing of one circle around which another can be drawn; students should be encouraged to see that their education is not about achieving some final perfectible 'end' but rather requires a daily baptism in their words and life. The educative unsettling I envisage here implies an education which accounts for the fact that perfectionism necessitates both settlement and leaving. It is only in experiencing crises and being unsettled that we may be able to resist what Thoreau describes as our 'remarkable' tendency to 'fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves' (1854/1997, p.287). If the edifying mission of universities is to be realised, then a degree of educative unsettling is not only necessary but vital.

## Chapter 5

### The Rise of 'Customer Relations' in Higher Education: Exploring Possibilities for Dialogue

#### Scenario

Head of Department (HoD): Good morning everyone, so top of the agenda for today's team meeting is the new tutorials policy.<sup>35</sup> We'll look at the document together and you can ask any questions about it before we move on. It's worth saying that this is not a policy I have been involved in developing, but it's something we're all going to have to put into practice, okay...Have you all read the booklet setting out the new guidelines for conducting tutorials?

*[There are murmurs and nodding heads around the room]*

HoD: Alright that's great, and do you have any initial questions?

Academic 1: Well I was wondering...in the booklet it says that every student should be given a tutorial at least two weeks prior to assignment submission, but what about those who don't sign up for any of the time slots and don't come for a tutorial?

HoD: Ah, I see your problem there. But of course, we all have a responsibility to engage students and encourage them to be more active learners, getting them to take up the opportunities we offer them.

Academic 1: Ok, so can I just clarify that I wouldn't be penalised if not all students received tutorials, or if some of them decide they don't want to come along?

HoD: That's right, as long as you can prove that you made every effort to fit said tutorial in around their schedule... Yes, anything else?

Academic 2: Erm, the policy also states that students should come to the tutorial with a list of issues that they want to be resolved or questions they need to ask. Do I need to meet *all* of their expectations in just one tutorial session?

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<sup>35</sup> By 'tutorials' here, I am not simply referring to the practices of Oxford and Cambridge universities in the UK, where individual meetings between academics and their students is central to teaching and learning. I am thinking of 'tutorials' here in a broader sense, encompassing any one-to-one interactions between academics and students; such tutorials may include, for example, the discussion of student progression, pastoral concerns, and/or assessment preparation.



HoD: Yes, you should definitely work hard to ensure that all students leave their tutorials knowing what to do for their assignment, and with their questions answered.

Academic 3: That sounds a bit unrealistic to me though...some students may not even know what their expectations are.

Academic 2: Indeed, I'm not entirely sure that I can guarantee that all of a student's questions will be answered in just *one* tutorial...What if the conversation moves away from assessment criteria to a broader discussion of course content? Surely, this would still meet their needs, albeit in a different way...

HoD: The policy states that the 30-minute academic tutorials should be focused on student assignments, if you wish to go beyond this then it would be on your own time... Do we have any further questions?

Academic 1: What would we do if a student asked for a tutorial to go over their feedback on an assignment? The policy only seems to be focused on guiding them before submission...

HoD: Well, going through feedback with students sounds like an excellent idea, but you would have to offer this kind of tutorial to all of your students, rather than just those who asked you for it. The reason why this new policy is useful though, is that it protects academic staff from serious complaints being made against them. And we know that student complaints are rising year on year. Yes, a complaint could still be made about the effectiveness of a tutorial, but if staff are following the guidelines set out here [*they hold up the policy booklet*] then they will be afforded a level of protection from potential disciplinary action.

Academic 2: So if we follow this policy, then we couldn't be sued for inadequate academic support or something like that?

HoD: I don't think so, no. Or at least if you're following this policy then the university would be strongly supportive of your practices.

Academic 1: Is this policy being implemented because of the new student-consumer charter that the university has announced?

HoD: This tutorials policy can be seen as an off-shoot of that, yes. We can reduce the risk of complaints being filed by carefully delivering exactly what is promised in the prospectus. But implementing this new policy should also enhance the student experience we provide. Having a clear policy on tutorials, in addition to the charter, should make our jobs a lot easier as everyone knows what's expected of them. Is everyone clear on the format of tutorials then?

Academic 1: Yes, so we look at students' lists of questions and address these with a view to helping them meet the assessment criteria...

HoD: Excellent, I'm sure that if we all subscribe to this then we'll have happy students. And happy students mean better NSS results, which is something I'm sure we're all concerned about. Alright, well if there's nothing else then we can move on the next item on the agenda.

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## **5.1 The ‘Customerisation’ of Academic-Student Relationships**

The scenario presented above serves to highlight how reframing academic-student relationships as ‘customer relations’ often reinforces the commodification of Higher Education, exemplified in concerns over the completion of student satisfaction surveys. The emphasis on student satisfaction, and its concomitant repositioning of academic-student relationships as ‘customer relations’, is clearly evident in the scenario. By implementing an explicit tutorials policy, which is ultimately aiming to standardise the form and content of one-to-one meetings between academics and students, the Head of Department (HoD) seems to be implying that there are correct and incorrect, if not more and less efficient, ways of dealing with students.

The fact that the policy has been given, ready-made, to the HoD and academic staff is problematic. There is also a hint of irony in the HoD’s claiming that the new policy, if adhered to, will afford staff ‘a certain level of protection from disciplinary action’. The need to ensure a certain level of consistency and transparency in university teaching practices – such as the tutorial – is embodied in the tutorials policy discussed in the scenario, and this is symptomatic of a broader shift from academic autonomy to customer accountability in the HE sector (Harvey, 2005; Filippakou and Tapper, 2016).

Over the past decade, students have been increasingly positioned as ‘customers’ and ‘consumers’ of, or even ‘stakeholders’ in, Higher Education (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Blackmore, 2009; Gruber *et al.*, 2010; Mainardes *et al.*, 2013). With students as ‘customers’, academics and universities are reframed as mere ‘service providers’ (Clayson and Haley, 2005; Bates and Kaye, 2014) or ‘information brokers’ (Tomlinson, 2017, p.454), thus pedagogical relationships have become successively marketised. The relationship between student feedback and a university’s league table position, and hence their income, is mediated by ‘customer relations’. Institutions are now even resorting to ‘customer relationship management’, for example, through using social media to engage with student-consumers in order to enhance quality (Stukalina, 2012, p.89; Clark *et al.*, 2017).

It seems as if the new tutorials policy alluded to in the scenario removes the need for conversation beyond curricular concerns and issues of assessment, thus reducing academic-student relationships to mere 'service encounters' or exchanges (Bianchi, 2013, p.398). The policy can be seen as providing a kind of proforma or 'script' for conducting academic tutorials, which could not only protect staff from potential complaints made against them, but also assures students that their questions will be answered and that a certain standard will be met in terms of feedback and support. In one sense, having clear policies or charters setting out what is expected of students and what they can expect from academic staff can be a useful tool for the management and negotiation of expectations. However, what I critique here is that this way of relating to students, in essence, 'contracting' with them (Fulford, 2018), increasingly shapes all academic-student interactions.

The discourses discussed in previous chapters – the collection of student 'voice' (Chapter Three), and modes of settlement associated with student satisfaction (Chapter Four) – can be considered as iterations of a wider focus, to which I turn in this chapter, on 'customer relations' in the HE sector. Universities are concerned with student 'voice' as a means of shaping their service provision according to student feedback (Yeo, 2008; Blackmore, 2009), and this is ultimately aimed at meeting student expectations and settling them down (Mainardes *et al.*, 2013).

As I argued in Chapter Four, the impulse to settle students down and meet their expectations is not egregious in and of itself – indeed certain kinds of settlement are not only permissible but necessary, for example, students need to feel settled and comfortable in their accommodation. But problems can occur when students are, as it were, settled down in their learning, and when their consumer wants are attended to without consideration for what they might actually need. The tutorials policy discussed above can be seen as an iteration of such settlement, as well as exemplifying the recent 'customerisation' of academic-student relationships (Love, 2008, p.18).

I argue here that the reduction of academic-student relationships to 'customer relations' is evident in students' evaluations of their Higher

Education in consumerist terms; as one student puts it, '[if students were customers] the school would then dance to our tune' (Vuori, 2013, p.183). The increasing 'customerisation' of these relationships is also exemplified in the recent surge in formal student complaints (Love, 2008, p.18; Fulford and Skea, forthcoming). This raises such questions as 'who is pushing these consumerist discourses in Higher Education?', and 'do students consider themselves as "customers" of universities?' The contractualisation of pedagogical relationships is clearly driven by government initiatives seeking to place *Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS, 2011) and to provide 'MoneySuperMarket' style rankings (Busby, 2018b).

A stark example of 'customerisation' is found in the response to recent strike action by some academic staff in the UK, resulting in thousands of students petitioning for financial compensation for their cancelled lectures (Bird, 2018; Busby, 2018a; Weale, 2018). Many students from the University of York, and King's College London, campaigned for a refund of their tuition fees based on the following premise:

We pay a large amount for our tuition fees and we expect the university in return to provide us with the appropriate education and to pay the staff effectively enough to give us an education. They want students to pay but don't want to give us consumer rights. If I were to pay for a water bill, and the water didn't come through, I would expect compensation and it's exactly the same with universities (Weale, 2018, no page).

This exemplifies the rise of 'customer relations' in UK Higher Education.<sup>36</sup> Treating students as customers is not always problematic; in fact they are quite clearly 'customers' when paying for accommodation and university catering. But the growing 'customerisation' of HE is an entirely different matter when academic-student relationships are seen as a means to an end; here, pedagogical concerns are replaced by economic ones. As Sabri

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<sup>36</sup> The role of students in this strike is more complex than Weale (2018) suggests. Although many students did campaign for refunds of a portion of their fees and/or compensation, there were others who were also supportive of university staff strike action. Students themselves tried to explain that they 'stood in solidarity with lecturers' but equally felt that the missed lectures affected their value for money. For further details on this, see Bird (2018).

explains, the dominance of discourses such as ‘the student experience’ and the NSS has led to a ‘sacralisation of the customer...[whereby] the consumer is a sacred form’ (2011, p.665). The privileging of student-consumer expectations over and above other stakeholders’ views – particularly academics – seems to increase student choice and their ability to shape the HE marketplace, but this comes at the cost of genuine academic-student relationships.<sup>37</sup>

In focusing on customer relations in this chapter, I argue that ‘student-consumers’ are increasingly seen as indistinguishable from customers in other sectors such as retail. Student voice campaigns are one example of this, whereby universities are collecting student feedback in order to make service improvements, just as any other business must respond to customer remarks if they are to maintain their client base and position in the market. Once the preserve of homeware stores such as Ikea, the use of ‘smiley terminals’<sup>38</sup> is now pervasive in many service industries, and they are increasingly being used across university campuses, allowing students to simply press a button to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the facilities there.

A consumer identity seems to have been almost forced upon students, as the increasing marketisation of the sector and use of evaluative tools to encourage competition between institutions has been bolstered by UK government policy, whilst alongside these changes market principles have

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<sup>37</sup> While the term ‘genuine’ is contested, I am using this with specific reference to the work of Martin Buber, who articulates the notion of ‘genuine dialogue’ whereby the relationship does not wholly involve objectification of the other. I discuss Buber’s work below in section 5.2.

<sup>38</sup> These terminals usually have a range of ‘smileys’ or different faces on display which consumers can press to show whether they were happy or disgruntled by their experience. One manufacturer of these terminals describes their usefulness in terms of being able to ‘cut through the noise and get feedback right at the point of experience’. For further details, see: [https://www.honestly.com/feedback-terminals?kw=smiley%20terminal&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIoeClo\\_Pp2glVBrTtCh2zzAoZEAAAYAiAAEgL7UfD\\_BwE](https://www.honestly.com/feedback-terminals?kw=smiley%20terminal&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIoeClo_Pp2glVBrTtCh2zzAoZEAAAYAiAAEgL7UfD_BwE) [Accessed 03 May 2018].

infiltrated pedagogical relationships. A wealth of literature focuses on different ways in which universities and individual academics may resist the 'student-as-consumer' model, highlighting its negative impact on learning (Clayson and Haley, 2005; Carey, 2013; Mark, 2013). Ironically though, the 'voice' that is missing from this debate is precisely that of students. But where students' own conception of themselves, as consumers – or otherwise – has been explored, this has revealed an extraordinary tendency towards narcissism (Nixon *et al.*, 2018).

As Nixon *et al.* describe 'marketisation enshrines the *satisfaction* of the sovereign student as a legitimate and central imperative of the HEI' (2018, p.929). Increasingly, students themselves are recognising that their position as 'consumers' of Higher Education is one of 'sovereignty', wherein academics must bend to the will and desire of '[his or] her majesty the student' (Nixon *et al.*, 2018, p.927). The link between students' adoption of a 'consumer orientation' and their academic performance is worth noting here, as those students who identify more strongly as consumers of HE tend to have lower academic performance (Bunce *et al.*, 2017). Thus, student identity is not only inextricably tied to their satisfaction and alumni loyalty, but also to retention and academic outcomes.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, the collection of student 'voice', targeted as it is towards quality assurance and curricular development processes, often takes it as a given that students are 'customers' and that they behave in line with this (Watjatrakul, 2014). Students' resistance to their presupposed consumer identity typically takes the form of political expression, as evidenced, for example, in student protests in 2010 prior to the increase in tuition fees in England (Murugesu, 2017), and in their support of academic staff strikes (Rosenvinge. 2018).

The extent to which students actually identify and act as consumers, or rather have this status imposed on them, remains to be seen (and researched), but it is increasingly difficult for students to see Higher Education as anything other than a commodity when 'signifiers of the student's sovereign status as "chooser" [and therefore consumer] are

abundant' (Nixon *et al.*, 2018, p.929). While 'the notion of the student as consumer has been widely embraced by universities' (Little *et al.*, 2009, as cited by Carey, 2013), the concomitant impact of this on academic-student relationships has received little attention. It is to this I now turn.

### **5.1.1 Customer Relations**

There are three different types of customer relations to which I will refer here, before elucidating which kind of relationship I find holds the greatest educative potential. These three types do not constitute an exhaustive list of potential customer relations, but they will be outlined here in order to discuss what kind of relationships currently persist, and what could be envisaged, between academics and their students.

First, there is the kind of relation that occurs when a customer buys a product; I call this the *product-based relation*. Whether the purchase is conducted online or in person, buying a tangible product is arguably less reliant on the creation of a relationship between seller and buyer. A customer may come with a desirable product already in mind or they might find a suitable product while in the consumer environment, but it seems as if the product features speak for themselves, with the seller's role confined to merely facilitating the purchasing process. For example, in buying a new television from an electrical store, customers will choose between different models – with the seller guiding their decision as required – but the establishment of a relationship between these parties is not central, as the customer is committed to buying a product rather than receiving a service. This is not to say that good customer service is unimportant to such a transaction, but rather that the exchange is not primarily determined by the seller-consumer relationship.

The second kind of customer relationship I highlight is that of paying for a service that involves minimal interaction with the service provider. Here I am thinking of buying one's car insurance online; this could be referred to as the *service-oriented relation*. While this kind of transaction may involve telephone contact or a one-off meeting, as long as the service is delivered on time and to the expected standard, there is likely to be little or no further



contact. This type of customer relation does involve more of a long-term interaction between service providers and consumers, since the contract term may be for a period of months, but the relationship implied here is both distant and impersonal. The lack of personal engagement here may be preferred by some customers who have little time to spare and/or for convenience wish to be primarily online consumers.

Finally, the third type of customer relation to which I draw attention is that of buying a personalised service which involves sustained contact between the service provider and consumer, whereby a trusting, mutually beneficial relationship is arrived at. I refer to this as the *customer-focused relationship*. As an example of this kind of relationship, I am thinking of that rapport which might exist between a hairdresser or beautician and their clients. To allow someone to cut and colour one's hair necessitates a certain level of trust between an individual and the hairdresser, this can only develop as a relationship is created and nurtured over time. Whether a customer returns to any particular salon will not wholly depend on the service, price and location, but it will typically also be mediated by the quality of the relationship itself.

The 'service' provided in the case of one's hairdressing is not something pre-packaged that can be consumed or utilised indiscriminately; instead each client will receive a personalised, almost tailor-made service that meets their needs and expectations. While in this kind of customer relation a service is provided, the service itself is not the focus, but rather customers themselves. In such a relationship, service provision must be informed by, and responsive to, each customer's wishes. That the customer is at the 'heart' of such a relationship aligns with the UK government's drive to place students 'at the heart of the [Higher Education] system' (BIS, 2011, p.1). This and other recent policy initiatives have sought to make Higher Education increasingly 'customer-focused' under the auspices of quality assurance and enhancement, although arguably this has been ruinous for academic-student relationships.

Returning to the scenario that opened this chapter, I argue that the type of 'customer relations' implied by the new tutorials policy, while presented by the university as customer-focused is, in fact, a service-oriented relation. Such a policy removes the personalisation of academic-student relationships, mandating that all students be given 'the same treatment', while at the same time proclaiming their commitment to meeting the expectations of individual students. While focusing on the service itself could lead to improvements in the quality of provision, the issue with this kind of relation is that student-consumers tend to be regarded as a homogenous body with a coherent set of expectations. The guiding assumption is that all students want to be 'satisfied' merely in terms of successful assessments, and obtaining a good degree classification which can be 'traded in' for higher graduate earnings.

In describing these three types of customer relations, the use of either 'relation' or 'relationship' is deliberate. As I will explore later in the chapter with reference to the philosophy of Martin Buber, there is a distinct difference between 'relations' and 'relationships'; the former comprise a kind of means-ends, goal-directed interaction, while the latter imply 'a past, a present, and potential for a future' in an encounter with the other (Kramer, 2003, p.38). So the customer-focused relationship is generally richer and more dialogic, continuing over an extended period of time. Product-based and service-oriented relations, on the other hand, may be limited to particular transactions, and the focus is more on what is being exchanged than on the other party involved, the consumer. I have briefly discussed these three different kinds of customer relations in order to draw out what is potentially problematic about the tutorials policy featured in the opening scenario, in particular the promotion of a customer-focused relation, which is in fact a service-oriented one.

My critique of the 'customerisation' (Love, 2008, p.18) of academic-student relationships is threefold: (i) that such discourses are *reductionist*, limiting conceptions of Higher Education to what is valued in the globalised knowledge economy; (ii) that pedagogical relationships are reduced to the *transactional*, whereby they are considered merely as 'service encounters' in

a university's provision (Bianchi, 2013, p.398), and (iii) that such relationships are seen in more *instrumental* terms not only limits the possibility for genuine dialogue, but is inimical to a perfectionist, dialogic, and transformative education. As academic-student relationships are increasingly contractualised and proceduralised, exchanges between academics and students may take on an instrumental, *quid pro quo* rationale. And as Fulford highlights, the reduction of academic tutorials to a 'quasi-contractual' relationship can have 'a stifling effect' (2016a, p.416; 2012, p.77).

Admittedly, not all academic-student relationships are explicitly constrained by 'customer relations' policies and procedures as depicted in the scenario above. While I am not arguing against universities seeking to provide an excellent student experience, I do wish to draw attention to the ways in which consumerist terminology may confine such relationships to the realm of economic exchange. The language used in academic-student interactions inevitably frames the relationship in a particular way, that is, in terms of the production and consumption of knowledge. As I will argue here, repositioning pedagogical relationships solely in terms of 'customer relations' is antithetical to an edifying and dialogic Higher Education.

## **5.2 Educative Relationships with the Other: The Turn to Philosophy**

Having outlined my concerns with the reframing of academic-student relationships in terms of 'customer relations', I will now draw on the works of Martin Heidegger, Stanley Cavell, and Martin Buber to explore how the use of economic language effects certain relationships, before moving on to a consideration of the modes of dialogue that broadly align with these different kinds of relation. I will build on earlier discussions of the works of Cavell and Heidegger, but also bring the philosophy of Buber to bear on this issue of relationships with the other.

Heidegger's work is pertinent here for thinking about how we use and often misuse language, and that language itself is intimately tied up with our Being. In discussing Heidegger's unique conception of language I will

highlight that the infiltration of a kind of economic, accountability-based language into the HE sector is problematic as it frames what it means to live and work in the university in a particular way. I will show that the language 'we' as a community use implies certain kinds of relationships, and such talk of academics as 'service providers' (Bates and Kaye, 2014) or 'information brokers' (Tomlinson, 2017, p.454) serving 'student-consumers' (Yeo, 2008) limits the potential for dialogue between parties. I will propose what a more edifying, dialogic Higher Education might consist of in three ways: (i) by drawing on the works of Martin Buber; (ii) by engaging with Cavell's discussion of speech acts and educative relationships, and (iii) by exploring how these themes are illustrated in film.

### **5.2.1 The Contributions of Buber and Cavell**

The writings of Austrian-born, Israeli philosopher, Martin Buber, are varied, dealing with ethical relationships to the other, Hasidism, Zionism, and also fictional works. His philosophy is often described as being a 'philosophy of dialogue' as this concern permeates his works (Kramer, 2003). Buber not only wrote about dialogue, but was also actively engaged in many dialogues over his lifetime with colleagues such as Gershom Scholem, Franz Rosenzweig, and Herman Hesse among others.<sup>39</sup> That these continued exchanges informed Buber's work highlights the potential for understanding the other through dialogue, and this is another central tenet of his philosophy.

While Buber's philosophy is not strictly a philosophy of religion, it must be considered in light of his strong commitment to Judaism, as he ultimately considered one's relationship to the other as a model of man's relationship with God. Buber writes very little on education in the formal sense of schooling, but he was involved in Jewish adult education in Germany until 1938, before lecturing at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The educational force of Buber's work has increasingly been recognised, as

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<sup>39</sup> Gershom Scholem was a renowned philosopher and historian, Rosenzweig was a translator, theologian and philosopher, while Hesse was a famous poet and novelist.

several researchers have explored the implications of his philosophy of dialogue for schooling (Morgan and Guilherme, 2012; Stern, 2013; Jacobi, 2017) and Higher Education (Fulford, 2016a). I will add to this body of work not only by focusing on tutorials and conversations in HE, but also on the broader discourse of ‘customer relations’.

I draw again on the work of Cavell, particularly his extension of J.L. Austin’s speech act theory, to argue that genuine dialogue may in fact be restricted by the proceduralisation of language – the tutorials policy discussed in the scenario being an example of this. I will show how Cavell’s move away from Austin’s focus on procedure and ‘felicity conditions’ invites his readers to ‘improvisation in the disorders of desire’ (2005b, p.185). Where Austin is criticised for being ‘skittish about emotion’, Cavell emphasises the importance not only of what is said, but also how one says it and the effect this may have on the other. What Cavell adds to Austin’s work is the conception of passionate utterance, which takes language beyond the procedural and accounts for relational concerns. Thus, Cavell’s work is valuable for this chapter given its concern not only with dialogue *per se*, but also with the relationships that exist between academics and their students.

As I will argue in what follows, to engage in genuine dialogue and encounter with the other may be educative in itself, and I will explore this in relation to film. Film is central to Cavell’s philosophical project, as I discussed in Chapter Three with the examples of *Gaslight* and *Now, Voyager*. Film’s value is evidenced in the capacity of the medium to screen, and offer up, a particular vision of the world. As Cavell writes:

The world of a moving picture is screened...What does the silver screen screen? It screens me from the world it holds—that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me—that is, screens its existence from me. That the projected world does not exist (now) is its only difference from reality (1979b, p.24).

As one is drawn into the world of the screen, there is a certain alienation from the real world. And yet, the world that is screened is a reflection of the world itself. As I am absorbed in the world of film, I am both ‘in’ and out of the world, hence I am placed in a position of ‘strangeness’ relative to my world. The use of film in this chapter also counteracts a common criticism of

Buber and Heidegger's works, that their philosophy is too abstract and lacking in real world examples. Film not only has the capacity to make abstract concepts more real, but it can also bring educational and philosophical questions to the fore. For example, Cavell finds that 'Emersonian moral perfectionism' is beautifully exemplified and brought to life in film (Cavell, 1990; 1996).

By engaging with the works of both Buber and Cavell, I make an original link between them which will offer a way forward in rethinking what it means to be in relation with/to another, and how such a relationship is structured by dialogue. While dialogue is the focus, I will also explore how this impacts upon relationships, highlighting that certain relationships and conversations may be educative in and of themselves. In what follows, I will draw lines of connection between what Buber terms 'genuine dialogue' (1988, p.69), and Cavell's extension and elaboration of Austin's speech act theory; at the heart of both philosophers' works is a recognition of the importance of engaging with the other on their own terms.

To be open and attentive to the other is central to Buber's 'genuine dialogue' (1988, p.69), and as I will show, such an openness relies on there already being an established relationship between interlocutors whereby one can make demands on the other. This is something Cavell describes as being able to 'demand from you a response *in kind*, one you are in turn *moved* to offer' (2005b, p.182). For Buber, genuine community can only be created through relationships that are dialogic, mutual, and reciprocal (Kramer, 2003, p.77). To be in community with others is also educative in a broader sense of what Cavell terms 'the education of grownups' (1979a, p.125). In what follows, the connection between dialogue and relationships will be explored by drawing on both Buber and Cavell, and in doing so, I will argue for the educative potential of 'genuine dialogue' (1988, p.69) and being in community with others.

### **5.2.2 The Proceduralisation of Language**

The language used in the scenario – typically the language of consumerism – is suggestive of a certain kind of relationship, one which is premised on an

exchange and can be judged as to its efficiency. The language used is ineluctably tied to the enactment of the 'relationship', or more precisely, the interaction. Here, language is seen as merely a means to an end, useful for fulfilling one's side of the bargain but then pushed aside once the exchange has occurred. A proceduralisation of language implies a proceduralisation of relationship, and this limits the potential for genuine, authentic dialogue between interlocutors. Admittedly, this is a bold claim to make but the proceduralisation of language is so pervasive and routinised that it comes to shape relationships, framing them instrumentally. An example of this is when we contact service providers over the phone, it is as if their whole interaction with us is driven by a script from which there is no divergence. The language used in such a case is not communicating anything between parties, but merely effecting a procedure.

In his later works, Heidegger was critical of such 'technicalisation' of language, arguing that rather than language being a device we utilise and then dispose of, we need to learn how to 'undergo an *experience* with language' (1971, p.57, my emphasis), through which the nature of language itself could be revealed. In the first chapter of Heidegger's *On the Way to Language*, an extensive dialogue is presented between a Japanese Participant and an Inquirer (presumed to be Heidegger himself). The main premise of the dialogue is to discuss issues of translation, particularly the fact that certain Japanese terms used in reference to art cannot be equated to any Western terminology. The interlocutors are already constrained by speaking in their common language of German (not the native language of the Japanese Participant). As the Inquirer acknowledges these difficulties, he states that 'the language of our dialogue might constantly destroy the possibility of saying that of which we are speaking' (Heidegger, 1971, p.15). So while the partners in dialogue can clearly converse with each other, it seems as if the language used to do so, in this case German, almost inevitably closes down certain possibilities of thought and dialogue.

It is my contention that in a similar manner, the language of 'customer relations' represents a limiting of dialogue to the realm of exchange and to what is the 'business' of the day. The issue at stake here is not that a

language of 'customer relations' exists in and of itself, but that it increasingly dominates conversations in contemporary universities. To highlight the potential dangers of this, I will draw a distinction between relationships premised upon exchange, and those influenced by the possibilities of encounter.

### **5.2.3 Exchange versus Encounter**

As the opening scenario illustrates, accountability pressures, and the impulse to meet student expectations, can reduce academic-student relationships to mere transactions. The scenario (which is increasingly typical of some HE practices) suggests that what is exchanged between academics and their students is information or knowledge, and only that which is needed to help students to meet assessment criteria. Even without an explicit tutorials policy, with rising tuition fees and higher student expectations (Bay and Daniel, 2001; Rolfe, 2002; Mark, 2013), academic-student conversations may be all too easily reduced to mere exchanges. Fulford describes this emphasis on exchange in Higher Education when she writes:

Student satisfaction, in the tutorial context, derives from a conversation (rather than a discussion) which is based on the contentment derived from knowing exactly what is required to gain a pass mark in an assignment, or to achieve a certain degree classification (2013, pp.116-117).

Academic tutorials, once a space of conversation and exploration, are now increasingly dominated by economic imperatives and a zealous concern with satisfaction. As suggested in the opening scenario from Chapter Four, students may arrive at tutorials, whether they have done the necessary work or not, expecting academics to provide them with the necessary advice of how to achieve a certain grade on an assignment. Focusing on improving students' work is rightly a central part of being a good tutor, but my concern here is that this should not be the sole matter under discussion. Focusing entirely on assessment outcomes and grading criteria could not only limit the potential for dialogue between the parties, but it may also reduce education itself to the mere acquisition of marketable knowledge and skills, which in turn are exchanged for higher earnings in the labour market.



While I am not entirely vilifying 'exchange' here, it is my contention that problems can arise where exchange comes to dominate thought and action in Higher Education, and particularly in teaching and learning contexts. Exchange writ large cannot be eradicated: students pay tuition fees in exchange for their teaching and learning opportunities, while teaching itself necessarily involves an exchange of information. But where exchange becomes the ruling logic of academic-student relationships, genuine dialogue and the potential of the university to embody 'the great community' is negated (Buber, 1957/1990, p.102).

My discussion here will not be restricted to academic tutorials, but the limiting of academic-student relationships to the realm of exchange remains a wider issue throughout the HE sector, exemplifying what Paul Standish refers to as a 'closed economy of exchange' (2005, p.54). In such a closed economy, the emphasis is on what goods or knowledge can be exchanged for others; conversations with one's peers and lecturers may be seen as means to other ends, and the tendency is always towards considerations of market value. What is problematic about such an economy is not that certain goods and services are exchanged, but that the persons involved may consequently be objectified and reduced to a function of their utility. Under such an economy, academics are considered as mere 'service providers' (Bates and Kaye, 2014), facilitators or technicians of learning, and even 'human capital' like any other (Jones-Devitt and Samiei, 2011, p.88). But what is distinctive about the role of academics, and what marks out an edifying Higher Education experience, is that the 'ends' cannot easily be known or stated from the outset.

At the heart of a transformative Higher Education is a commitment to knowledge and truth, the quest for which must be embarked on by academics and students together. This necessitates that one's worldview be challenged and questioned, and that meaning-making is mutually negotiated. I am arguing here that academic-student relationships should transcend the realm of mere exchange and that pedagogical relationships should rather be characterised by encounter, it is to this that I now turn.

'Encounter', understood as a meeting of adversaries or confrontation, comes from the Old French *encontre* meaning 'a meeting, a fight, and/or an opportunity'. While an 'encounter' does have negative connotations, it is in the positive idea of encounter as 'opportunity' that I find its educative potential. To be confronted by another may not always mean to have a fight or disagreement with them, but instead encountering an 'other' could be an opportunity for self-transformation and progression in the perfectionist sense.

In encountering another who may hold a different point of view, one's own beliefs and values may be questioned and contested. Being confronted by another may also help to separate out what one really thinks and believes from those culturally normative values into which one has been inculcated. The educative value of being confronted by another through discussion has already been highlighted by Fulford who draws a distinction between a 'conversation' or con-versation (deriving from the Latin *convertere* meaning to turn together, with others), and a 'discussion' (from the Latin *discutere* meaning 'to strike asunder', 2013, p.116).

As I argue here, whether a conversation or discussion takes place between academics and students will depend on whether the relationship is premised upon exchange, or rather encounter. I suggest that it is only through encountering the other authentically, that is, in allowing oneself to be challenged and confronted, that academic-student relationships can transcend economic concerns; this would constitute a significant move away from the impulse to settle students down. To encounter another is an opportunity to learn more not only about the other, but also about oneself. Relationships based on encounter will necessitate a turning toward, and engagement with, the other; they will involve an acknowledgement of the other that is not primarily concerned with what one might gain from them. To encounter another in this way means to approach them, and engage in dialogue with them, as a valuable end in itself.

The fundamental difference between relationships of exchange and those of encounter is that those centred on exchange tend to be outcome-driven, for

example, where students simply seek to ensure a particular grade on an assignment. Relationships that are premised upon encounter, however, cannot be determined by a means-ends rationality as the 'outcome' of any particular encounter and/or confrontation may not be known in advance. While not all forms of exchange between academics and students are problematic, reframing these relationships in terms of an openness to encounter could be more educative in revealing new paths of thought, and new ways of seeing the world and one's place in it. It is my contention here that Higher Education should support such an edifying process of self-revelation and transformation.

The repositioning of academic-student relationships as 'customer relations' in current educational policy reinforces the notion of 'exchange' as central to HE, with broader concerns over student satisfaction and 'value for money' having a trickle-down effect on the day-to-day conversations between academics and their students. In order for academic-student relationships to be *relationships* rather than mere *transactions*, creating an open space for encounter and (educative) confrontation between these parties is imperative. For such encounters to take place, academic-student relationships need a foundation of mutual trust and reciprocity, rather than accountability and skepticism. In what follows, I will draw on the works of Martin Buber and Stanley Cavell to elucidate how educative relationships founded upon encounter could encourage greater dialogue between academics and their students.

### **5.3 Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue**

Martin Buber's most celebrated work is his exposition of dialogue and ethical relationships in the short volume *Ich und Du*, translated as *I and Thou*. In it, he distinguishes between two principal word-pairs that make up our experience of the world and influence how we interact with others. These word-pairs are the *I-It* and *I-Thou*. As Buber states, the 'I' is inseparable from these word-pairs, so any invocation of the 'I' will be in relation to either an 'It' or a 'Thou'. The *I-It* is a relation based on exchange whereby the 'other' is objectified and seen as a means to an end. The emphasis here is placed on

what one can gain from interacting with this 'It', whether they are another human being, an animal, or an inanimate object.

Crucially, what marks out an *I-It* relation is its being 'goal-directed' (Buber, 1970, p.13). The *I-It* belongs to the realm of experience, so an encounter with another person will be evaluated and analysed for what one can take away from it, rather than being valued in and of itself. There is something subversive about *I-It* relations, that the 'I' involved always seeks to consume or control the 'It' in some way, and as Buber notes, one can never enter this world of experience with their 'whole being' (1970, p.9).

In contrast, the *I-Thou* is a relationship which transcends particular interactions and is not oriented towards goals and outcomes. The *I-Thou* is founded upon reciprocity, that 'I' recognise the 'other' as a 'Thou' similar to myself. Rather than just one side of the relationship benefitting from an encounter, the *I-Thou* places demands on both parties to be open and responsive to one another. The primary word *I-Thou* establishes the world of relation, as opposed to mere experience, and uttering the word *Du* or 'Thou' to another implies a relationship which has 'a past, a present, and potential for a future' (Kramer, 2003, p.38).

While something may be exchanged between an 'I' and a 'Thou', the relationship is not founded upon this alone. In an *I-It* interaction, the role of the 'I' is almost negligible and the emphasis is placed on obtaining something from the 'It'. But in an *I-Thou* relationship, the 'I' must be fully present to the other and as Buber explains, 'the primary word *I-Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being' (1970, p.9). It is this placing of oneself fully into relation with the other that makes the *I-Thou* ethically richer than the *I-It*; the former involves reaching out towards another and creates a communion with them, while the latter is confined to individuation and merely objectifies the other.

In *I and Thou*, Buber gives a clear example that explains how the two principal word-pairs shape our interactions differently; this is his illustration of how one may encounter a tree.

He writes:

I contemplate a tree. I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground...I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life...I can dissolve it into a number, into a pure relation between numbers, and eternalise it. Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition (Buber, 1970, p.57).

This exemplifies the *I-It* relation wherein one tries to analyse and gain an understanding of the other, in this case a tree, by reducing it to the sum of its parts. What occurs in this relation is that a clear line is drawn between subject and object; the tree is reduced to an objective 'It' that I can use as a means to an end and so it is not experienced holistically. Assigning the tree to a particular species, and/or dissolving it into a number, also denies the individuality of *this* tree that 'I' am faced with; considering the other as an 'It' removes the potential uneasiness of confrontation that may be evoked in truly encountering the tree.

While Buber does not distinguish the *I-It* from the *I-Thou* in terms of exchange versus encounter, I suggest that the *I-Thou* relationship would be more accommodating of genuine encounter between interlocutors. Rather than objectifying the 'other', whether this is a tree or another person, the *I-Thou* is a relationship founded upon an openness to, and recognition of, the other as the kind of entity they are. *I-Thou* relationships necessitate that the 'Thou' is considered in their own 'personal uniqueness', as the 'Thou' that they are rather than what 'I' presume them to be (Kramer, 2003, p.19). This different sense of individuation, that the 'other' is singled out and encountered as a 'Thou' rather than an 'It', is also presented in Buber's discussion of the tree. As he states:

It can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me...The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no aspect of a mood; *it confronts me bodily* and has to deal with me as I must deal with it—only differently...What I *encounter* is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself (1970, pp.57-58, my emphasis).

A fundamental difference between these two ways of understanding and relating to the tree is that in viewing the tree as a 'Thou', it is experienced as

a whole without concern for the usefulness of its component parts or seeing it as a means to an end. What can be taken away from Buber's tree example is that whether an *I-It* relation or *I-Thou* relationship is established between oneself and another will depend on how one approaches and views this 'other'. Both principal word-pairs are necessary to the human experience, so the *I-It* is still important. But as I will argue here, the *I-It* should not be allowed to dominate our interactions with others, especially academic-student relationships.

In the *I-It/I-Thou* distinction, the two are inextricably linked and cannot be considered mutually exclusive. So while the *I-It* may seem less desirable when compared to the reciprocal, mutual relation that is the *I-Thou*, neither word-pair has precedence over the other, but rather each person continually moves between the two. One could not live entirely in the world of the *I-It* or *I-Thou*; both are necessary to our experience of the world and others in it. As Buber writes, 'without *It* man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man' (1970, p.24). It seems almost inevitable that an *I-Thou* relationship will be reduced to a mere *I-It* over time, or as conditions change, yet the *I-It* cannot become an *I-Thou* once the 'other' has already been objectified. Buber describes this condition as the 'fated lapse into *It* of every single *You* [*Thou*]' (1970, p.145).

The 'It' is not a final *telos* of the *I-Thou* relationship, but rather marks out a different realm of human relations. It would surely be exhausting if all our engagements with others took the form of an *I-Thou* relationship. While the 'Thou' may be reduced to an 'It' in particular contexts, the *I-Thou* relationship can still be reasserted, although an 'It' can never become a 'Thou'. The *I-Thou* can be seen as a richer, more dialogic version of the *I-It*, and thus as the metamorphosis of ethical relationships. While the *I-Thou* may involve an exchange, the relationship is not limited to this alone as it is founded upon reciprocity and a mutual openness to the other. Bearing this central distinction in mind, I will now discuss the different modes of dialogue that Buber describes as characteristic of these relationships, before exploring how these ideas are exemplified in film and their pertinence for education.

#### **5.4 Educative Relationships: Modes of Dialogue**

In *Between Man and Man* (1947/2002), Buber adds a further dimension to his philosophical thought by elucidating how one's relationship to an individual 'other' – whether this is an *I-It* or an *I-Thou* – is related to a broader community of others. While dialogue features heavily in *I and Thou*, it is in his later work that Buber distinguishes between three different modes of dialogue. First, there is genuine dialogue. In such an encounter, 'each of the participants really has in mind the other or others...and turns to them with the intention of establishing a *living mutual relation* between himself and them' (Buber, 1947/2002, p.22, my emphasis). As Buber explains, genuine dialogue – whether verbalised or silent – is characterised by a kind of openness to the other and relies upon recognition of the other as the person they are, rather than what 'I' perceive them to be.

In genuine dialogue, the person with whom one is speaking is the focus rather than the subject being discussed, if indeed anything is discussed. A prime example of genuine (and silent) dialogue that Buber refers to is the passing smile of a stranger in the street. What marks out such an encounter as genuine dialogue is that the person smiling, and the stranger noticing this, are drawn briefly into relation with one another. Genuine dialogue is premised upon being able to experience 'the other side' of the relationship, and this can only occur when the singularity of the other is recognised (Buber, 1947/2002, loc.158). While genuine dialogue is not necessarily confined to the realm of the *I-Thou*, it seems as if the *I-It* negates the possibility for such dialogue, as the other is already objectified.

Second, there is technical dialogue. In this mode, what is communicated between interlocutors is mere information, hence its denotation as 'technical'. The exchange of information is what is central to this form of dialogue, rather than the people involved. As Buber writes, technical dialogue is 'prompted solely by the need of objective understanding' and as such, the interlocutors are unlikely to be drawn into relation with one another (1947/2002, p.22). Thus, technical dialogue is more aligned with the realm of exchange than encounter. In this form of dialogue, there is communication – in terms of an exchange of information – but it remains unclear the extent to

which the interlocutors are in 'conversation' and/or having a 'discussion' (Fulford, 2013).

Technical dialogue is more likely to characterise *I-It* relations than *I-Thou* relationships; the 'It' could be the information that is transmitted or the 'other' with whom one is in dialogue. I suggest that the scenario that opened this chapter exemplifies technical dialogue, and this mode of dialogue also characterises the tutorials policy described. The Head of Department (HoD) is clearly concerned with transmitting information, rather than engaging in genuine dialogue with those with whom he/she is conversing. In the scenario, it seems as if both the HoD and academics involved have been objectified and reduced to 'It's'.

The third form of 'dialogue' – which is not really dialogue at all – is monologue disguised as dialogue. This form of 'dialogue' appears to be a dialogue, as two or more people meet and talk to each other. But as Buber highlights, those involved only 'speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources' (1947/2002, p.22). Such 'dialogue' is vacuous, with each interlocutor pretending to be interested in the other and what they have to say, while really only listening to themselves.

While 'technical dialogue' is less desirable when compared to 'genuine dialogue', Buber still sees it as useful in certain situations. In HE, technical dialogue may be necessary when giving student induction talks, for example, or when explaining to new students how to use the library facilities. On the other hand, Buber remains extremely critical of 'monologue disguised as dialogue', as it takes no account of the persons or information involved in the dialogue. This third type of dialogue is exemplified in what Buber describes as:

A conversation characterised by the need neither to communicate something, nor to learn something, nor to influence someone, nor to come into connexion with someone, but solely by the desire to have one's own self-reliance confirmed by marking the impression that is made, or if it has become unsteady to have it strengthened (1947/2002, p.23).



This refusal to acknowledge the other in monologue is why Buber states that it is one of many 'faceless spectres of dialogue' (1947/2002, p.23). Relating these modes of dialogue to the three types of customer relations discussed previously, the product-based relation could be considered monologic in nature as the product is bought and utilised/consumed, rather than being something the customer is brought into relation with. Technical dialogue is exemplified in the service-oriented relation, whereby the dialogue is centred on information regarding a product or service being transmitted from one party to another. The 'smiley terminal' is an example of such dialogue, as information is shared but the 'relation' is confined to a particular 'service encounter' (Bianchi, 2013, p.398).

The mode of dialogue that most aligns with the customer-focused relationship is seemingly genuine dialogue. But this type of customer relation cannot break out of mere technical dialogue as the 'other' is already experienced as a 'customer', thus making it difficult to encounter *this customer* as the person they are. Even in the customer-focused relationship which is more personalised and dialogic, what is exchanged in this relationship is information, and that which ultimately creates a better service for the customer. With the role of each interlocutor in this type of customer relation already pre-determined (that one is the service provider and the other a customer), the complete singularity of the other to whom one is speaking cannot be acknowledged, thus confining the customer-focused relationship to technical dialogue.

These different modes of dialogue are exemplified in different practices in contemporary Higher Education. Technical dialogue may characterise a large proportion of student induction activities for example. Monologue disguised as dialogue can typically occur in the development of new university initiatives and policies, wherein academics and students may be asked for their 'feedback' on a policy which is to be implemented regardless of what 'consultation' has taken place.

Monologue is most evident where the student 'voice' is collected and analysed from student surveys; here I am thinking of the NSS, but also of

institutional initiatives purporting to take account of students' feedback. The space for genuine dialogue in universities is to be found in academic-student relationships, in those one-to-one conversations that are characterised by mutual openness to the other and receptivity. Genuine dialogue can also occur in lecture theatres, in libraries and in seminar groups, but whether this happens will depend on how the 'other' is positioned, either as a 'Thou' or an 'It'.

Buber distinguishes three types of dialogue – genuine, technical, and monologue – from each other but they are not mutually exclusive, just as his *I-It/I-Thou* distinction is not. The pertinence of Buber's philosophy of dialogue to a discussion of customer relations in Higher Education is clear given that the different modes of dialogue he elucidates imply different types of relationships with others. While Buber's modes of dialogue were not used to describe relationships in the economic realm, such as that between service provider and consumer, there is an affinity between this and his critique of 'modern existence' as 'inalienable' and devoid of genuine dialogue (1947/2002, p.22).

While I have discussed here different types of dialogue and the effect of these on relationships, I will now move on to a further exploration of how dialogic relationships can be educative by drawing on Cavell's work. I suggest that Cavell's 'passionate utterance' is a concrete example of Buber's 'genuine dialogue', though the two concepts should not be conflated. Where Buber focuses on the surprise involved in genuine dialogue with another, Cavell emphasises the moral aspect of conversation, that we are ultimately responsible for our words and their effect on the other. What Cavell highlights here, in line with Buber's argument, is that the topic being discussed is not what is most important, but rather the relationships that are implied by such dialogue.

## **5.5 Stanley Cavell and Passionate Utterance**

Cavell's notion of 'passionate utterance' builds upon and extends J.L. Austin's speech act theory, highlighting the importance of 'the passions, or say, the expressive, in speech', an aspect which he found lacking in Austin's

work (2005b, p.159). In *How To Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin (1962) explained his binary model of speech acts where he distinguished constatives (statements) from performatives (doing something *in* saying something). Austin devised a list of felicity conditions or 'criteria' to determine whether an utterance was 'happy' or not, and thus whether it counted as a performative.

Austin gives several examples of performatives including, 'I name this ship *The Queen Elizabeth*', 'I now pronounce you man and wife', and 'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother' (Cavell, 2005b, p.158). Felicity conditions include, for example, the necessity that the context is appropriate (naming the ship as part of an official naming ceremony), that the correct persons are involved (only an ordained minister can marry a couple), and that the persons involved commit themselves to subsequently acting in accordance with the performative (they act as a married couple, and the watch is given to the bequeathed brother).

What Austin's felicity conditions cannot account for, however, is the effect of the emotions and desires on speech. In fact, Austin only briefly mentions perlocutionary speech effects as utterances which may have 'consequential effects on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others' (Cavell, 2005b, p.169).<sup>40</sup> It is here that Cavell extends Austin's theory of speech acts. The passionate utterance is, for Cavell, a speech act which has an effect on the other, termed its perlocutionary effect. The perlocutionary speech act describes utterances in which a person is 'doing something *by* saying something' (Austin, 1962, p.91). Often what a person is doing is affecting an

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<sup>40</sup> Austin distinguished between three different aspects of language: the locutionary force of words (where we simply say something meaningful, what he termed 'constatives'), the illocutionary force (where we do something *in* saying something, what he termed 'performatives'), and the perlocutionary effect of words (where we do something *by* saying something). The perlocutionary effect pertains to the effect our words have on another.

'other' in some way, for example, getting someone to stop what they are doing by saying 'I beg you to stop'.<sup>41</sup>

Cavell adds to Austin's discussion of the perlocutionary by stating that the effects of such utterances are not only felt by the other, one's respondent, but also the utterer him or herself. This effect on the other may be designed and orchestrated, or it may be unforeseen, but each individual is responsible for their utterances and the consequences of their speech acts (Cavell, 2005b). As Cavell puts it, 'to know what perlocutionary acts I am *liable* for "bringing off" is part of knowing what I am doing and saying, or am capable of knowing and saying' (2005b, p.174). Using the title of another of Cavell's works here, in answer to the question *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1969/2015), the appropriate response seems to be a resounding yes. Our speech acts, especially perlocutionary effects, often involve a confrontation, and Cavell wants us to recognise that 'each instance of which [of a passionate utterance] directs, and risks, if not costs, blood' (2005b, p.187).

It is clear that, for Cavell, passion itself has a role to play in successfully executing these perlocutionary effects. This is one of Cavell's analogous felicity conditions (akin to Austin's felicity conditions for performatives), that 'in speaking from my passion I must actually be suffering the passion' (2005b, p.181). I emphasise here that passionate utterances do not necessarily involve speaking 'passionately' to the other, for example, in a heated disagreement. Instead, the role of passion is more indicative of one's motivation to speak, and the other being moved to respond, than the way in which the utterance is actually conducted.

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<sup>41</sup> Cavell lists several examples of perlocutionary speech acts, including A.J. Ayer's well-known example 'I'm bored' and adds his own examples, such as: 'They say I (or: Perhaps I; or: I would not wish to) anger, mortify, charm, affront, encourage, disappoint, embarrass, confuse etc. you', and 'you (or: Are you attempting to...?) anger, mortify, charm, affront, encourage, disappoint, embarrass, confuse etc. me' (2005b, pp.177-178).

In contrast to Austin's felicity conditions for performative speech acts, passionate utterances are harder to judge in terms of their correctness and completion; this is clearly linked to the lack of a governing procedure but also to the ways in which the relationship may be altered. What it is 'we' are doing in undergoing a passionate utterance is nothing less than 'staking our future' (Cavell, 2005b, p.185), putting the future of our relationship at risk; if you decline my invitation to exchange, then there is inevitably nothing left to say.

In experiencing a passionate utterance there is an 'invitation to exchange' which may be accepted by the other, but equally 'you may contest my invitation to exchange, at any or all of the points marked by the list of conditions for the successful perlocutionary act' (Cavell, 2005b, p.182). This invitation to exchange and demand for a response from the other – a demand which may or may not be fulfilled – represents another of Cavell's 'felicity conditions' for perlocutions. While the term 'exchange' is used by Cavell to describe what may – if the invitation is accepted – invoke a passionate utterance, this does not place it firmly within the realm of exchange relations. Earlier, I made a distinction between relationships premised upon exchange, and those of encounter; a passionate utterance is, I suggest, an example of genuine dialogue and encounter, while the 'invitation to exchange' involved here pertains to an ethical and educative, rather than economic, exchange (Cavell, 2005b, p.182).

What marks out Cavell's passionate utterance, and its 'invitation to exchange', as an encounter are the motives underlying the dialogue and informing the relationship itself (2005b, p.182). A passionate utterance must be motivated by experiencing a 'passion', whether this is love, hatred, or even boredom; the interlocutors are not incentivised by the need for information or affirming their own 'self-reliance' (Buber, 1947/2002, p.23). The lack of conventional procedures governing passionate utterances means that each individual case must be judged as to its appropriateness. This appropriateness rests on the fact that I am claiming '*to have standing with you in the given case*' (2005b, p.181).

By engaging in a passionate utterance with you, I am acknowledging you in your own 'personal uniqueness', which is for Buber a marker of genuine, rather than technical, dialogue (Buber, 1947/2002; Kramer, 2003, p.19). While Cavell does list analogous 'felicity conditions' for the conducting of a passionate utterance, this is a rather impish mimicking of Austin's work. In fact, one of the central features of passionate utterance is its definitive lack of proceduralisation; there cannot be a procedure for engaging with the other in this way, as each instance will be unique and shaped by the persons involved. But equally, the lack of strict felicity conditions and procedures does not mean that in Cavell's 'passionate utterance' anything goes. Cavell's argument is more nuanced than this. In fact, he describes a passionate utterance as 'an invitation to *improvisation* in the disorders of desire' (2005b, p.185, my emphasis). Rather than setting up a strict dichotomy between proceduralisation and disarray, what is important here is the improvisation, namely that each interlocutor is able to negotiate with the other what they are willing to speak about; this offers both parties an insight into the criteria that shapes their relationship.

That passionate utterance cannot be pre-determined or carried out according to a procedure or formula is both more authentic to, and representative of, dialogic relationships between people in a language community. Genuine dialogue may be difficult, conflictual and/or confrontational, and there will often be miscommunications that arise between interlocutors. Genuine dialogue does not always flow smoothly, but this adds richness to what is said and strengthens the relationship itself.

The 'testing out' of one's relationship with another in passionate utterance, by offering an 'invitation to exchange' which may or may not be accepted, highlights the improvisation involved in genuine dialogue (Cavell, 2005b, p.182), and there is inevitably an element of 'unknownness' in such dialogue. This 'unknownness' is not necessarily a kind of radical skepticism where one questions the extent to which one may truly 'know' the other, but more a questioning of oneself, and one's relationships. In reflecting on their relationship, the interlocutors involved in a passionate utterance are being educated, that is, they are learning not only about the 'other' in this dialogue

but also about themselves. This is beautifully described by Cavell when he states that 'we are educations for one another' (1990, p.31).

The presentation of the tutorial policy in the opening scenario seems to negate the potential for genuine dialogue, as the exchange it encourages is merely instrumental and economic, rather than there being space for a reciprocal 'invitation to exchange' (Cavell, 2005b, p.182). It seems as if accountability and performativity pressures necessitate the elimination of risk, although for Cavell this marks out a passionate utterance. While exchange cannot be separated out from academic-student relationships, alongside the exchange of information geared toward economic exchange, there is a need to reassert here that tutorials are also a space for encounter and genuine dialogue. But the kind of tutorials advocated for in the scenario are just one example of the gradual erosion of opportunities for passionate utterance in Higher Education; in turn this is replaced by easily accountable performative speech acts.

The occurrence of performatives in HE extends beyond individual tutorials to the making of complaints (Fulford and Skea, forthcoming). While the recent surge in student complaints is illustrative of students' increasing 'customerisation' (Love, 2008, p.18), it seems as if the 'felicity conditions' or policy for making a formal complaint affords a measure of 'safety...that avoids the risk of embarrassing confrontation with faculty staff' (Fulford and Skea, forthcoming, p.6). Thus, the risk and confrontation – in the sense of encountering another – characteristic of genuine dialogue and passionate utterance are being replaced by transparent policies with the intention of ensuring quality and commensurability across the sector. Having now presented Buber's *I-It/I-Thou* distinction and modes of dialogue, and having explored this further through Cavellian passionate utterance, I will now pursue these ideas in relation to film, paying particular attention to what is educative about relationships characterised by genuine dialogue and/or passionate utterance.

## **5.6 Dialogue and Film: *A Special Day***

*A Special Day* (*Una Giornata Particolare*) is an Italian film directed by the notable screenwriter and director, Ettore Scola in 1977. Set on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1938, the film shows the activities of one family and their neighbours over the course of a 'special day' when Hitler visited Mussolini in Rome. In the opening scenes, the audience sees the main character Antonietta preparing her family for the parade celebrating Hitler's visit, with her seeking to ensure that the children look presentable. Antonietta is married to fascist party member Emanuele, and although her family are attending the festivities on this 'special day', Antonietta is involuntarily confined to their apartment as she must still attend to the housework.

As other women from the apartment block leave to join the parade, it becomes clear that attendance is reserved for women of a certain social class, with Antonietta unable to go along as the family cannot pay for a maid. The film opens with historical footage from the actual parade showing the meeting of Hitler and Mussolini. But this serves merely as a backdrop to the other 'special day', a day that proves transformative for Antonietta and her neighbour, Gabriele.

After carrying out several household chores, the audience sees Antonietta attending to her pet mynah bird, who then escapes through an open window. Antonietta, in search of her bird, is drawn into an encounter with her neighbour Gabriele, whom she has not met before. Unbeknown to Antonietta, Gabriele is contemplating ending his own life as he has been fired from his job as a radio announcer, and unveiled as a homosexual, meaning that he will most likely be forced into exile and/or imprisoned under Mussolini's fascist regime. Gabriele welcomes the distraction of meeting Antonietta, yet the more they talk to one another, the clearer it becomes that Antonietta has been subjectivated by the fascist regime. She struggles to understand why anyone who could attend the parade would not do so. In coming face to face with the anti-fascist Gabriele, Antonietta is forced to confront the stark reality of what she believes, and to question whether Mussolini is indeed the great leader that she has been told he is. The



audience is invited to see how, just like the bird who has been locked away in its cage, Antonietta has been locked into particular ways of thinking.

What develops between the pair is a 'bond of shared intimacy', through which, as Foster writes, 'both are subtly transformed'; both are educated (2017, p.4). Over the course of the day, Antonietta and Gabriele reveal something of themselves to each other: for Antonietta, this is her heartfelt confession that she is relatively uneducated, and that both infidelity and politics have strained her marriage to Emanuele. Gabriele, on the other hand, feels comfortable enough with Antonietta to tell her about his struggle with maintaining a façade of heteronormative values.

The dialogue between Antonietta and Gabriele becomes increasingly conflicted; it is as if their dialogue is confrontational<sup>42</sup> precisely because they know that this is allowable within their evolving relationship. There are several 'invitations to exchange' proffered (Cavell, 2005b, p.182), initially by Gabriele, and these are accepted and pursued by Antonietta. A prime example of how such dialogue can be educative, yet also confrontational (in the sense of an encounter), is when Gabriele challenges Antonietta's beliefs with a quotation she has venerated in a photo album. The exchange is as follows:

Gabriele: [*Reading a quotation by Mussolini from Antonietta's album*]  
'Genius is incompatible with the physiology and psyche of the female and is always strictly masculine'. You agree?

Antonietta: [after some hesitation] Of course I agree. Why?...Aren't the history books always full of men?

Gabriele: Sure. Maybe too full. There's no room for anyone else. Least of all women.

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<sup>42</sup> What I mean by 'confrontation' in this section is not any kind of aggressive act whereby two or more people clash together violently. Rather, what I am referring to here is a kind of moral confrontation in which one's conduct may be 'confrontable in moral conversation' (Cavell, 2005a, p.12). It is conversation of this form which marks out perfectionism and can be educative. In HE, the 'confrontation' I am thinking of is that which may occur between a student and the subject material they are introduced to.

Antonietta: You know, you're a tough one to figure out.

Asking Antonietta if she agrees with the quotation that she has commemorated in her photo album is a direct challenge to her political sympathies. This 'invitation to exchange' is taken up by Antonietta (Cavell, 2005b, p.182), but she then seems unable to account for herself as both a woman and a fascist. When she subsequently expresses her difficulty in 'figuring out' Gabriele, we could understand this as a crisis marking out Antonietta's perfectionist journey, and her quest for self-intelligibility and conversion.

The multiple encounters between Antonietta and Gabriele that take place during this 'special day' are educative for both parties as they are confronted with 'the other side' of the relationship (Buber, 1947/2002, loc.158), and in turn, the other side of their own political sentiments. What Gabriele learns from Antonietta complicates, and yet deepens, his understanding of what it is to be a 'fascist'. He comes to know Antonietta in her 'complete singularity' (Kramer, 2003), rather than simply as one fascist among others.

The relationship between Antonietta and Gabriele is characterised by genuine dialogue as both interlocutors acknowledge the other in their own 'personal uniqueness' (Kramer, 2003, p.19), although it does not start out this way. When Antonietta goes looking for her bird which has flown onto Gabriele's window ledge, their initial discussion is a form of technical dialogue marked by goal-directedness; Antonietta wants to catch her bird and return it safely home, while Gabriele plays the role of a dutiful neighbour and nothing more. Their first meeting is thus akin to a transaction. But the development of a relationship premised upon encounter and genuine dialogue transcends this first exchange, with Gabriele visiting Antonietta's apartment under the guise of offering her a book. What is opened up from their first interaction is, for both parties, a wish to know the other.

Dissatisfied with her lot, Antonietta seeks an education from Gabriele and we are persuaded that she learns more from him in one day than in a lifetime with her husband. Antonietta's education up to this point is

incomplete, shaped primarily by the fascist beliefs into which she was inducted by her husband and community. What Gabriele wants to learn from Antonietta is what makes fascists believe what they do, and how they justify their beliefs in light of resistance. While Gabriele is resigned to his fate – that he is likely to be exiled or killed because of his sexuality – he is still seeking an insight into the family life that is heralded by Mussolini. Gabriele wants to see life from another's viewpoint, to experience alterity, and his relationship with Antonietta is integral to his perfectionist education throughout the film. While their differing political views cannot be ignored, this does not limit their relationship to mere technical dialogue. In fact, politics is the subject of a rather heated debate following the visit of a neighbourhood warden. Their subsequent conversation, which exemplifies genuine dialogue and passionate utterance, runs as follows:

Gabriele: I'm generally her [the neighbourhood warden] favourite topic – after her late husband, that is. In his death throes he refused last rites and asked to be buried in his fascist black shirt.

Antonietta: He was a great man, a true fascist. He wasn't a naysayer or one of those...subversives.

Gabriele: Like me, right?...I don't think I'm an antifascist. If anything, fascism is anti-me.

Antonietta: Sure, they're all against you. Spare me...Then tell me why you were fired from the radio. Just for fun?

Gabriele: Because – Perhaps my voice didn't meet official requirements.

It is with the utterance of 'like me, right?' that Gabriele is inviting Antonietta to enter into a relation with him, to talk about difficult topics. Engaging in a passionate utterance with another in this way often means that, as Cavell puts it:

[We do not] stop at what we should or ought to say, nor at what we may and do say, but take in what we must and dare not say, or have it at heart to say, or are too confused or too tame or wild or terrorized to say or to think to say (2005b, p.185).

In a passionate utterance, one may be able to say what is often unsayable, and it is perhaps due to this that 'each instance of which [the passionate utterance] directs, and risks, if not costs, blood' (Cavell, 2005b, p.187). Yet

the risk, or as Buber would describe it 'surprise', is precisely what marks out this kind of dialogue as genuine (1988, p.103).

Antonietta is clearly surprised by Gabriele's challenging of the terms 'subversive' and 'antifascist' here, and she learns that people cannot be so easily categorised in this way. While the pair are learning specific facts about each other, for example why Gabriele was fired from his radio announcer job, they are also strengthening the foundation of their relationship – a relationship that underwrites the distinction between fascism and antifascism. This conversation not only exemplifies genuine dialogue, but it is educative as both Antonietta and Gabriele are 'experiencing the other side' of their relationship (Buber, 1947/2002, loc.158).

As the film draws to a close, Antonietta leaves Gabriele's apartment to return home – after securing their intimacy by having sex – and her family and all those who attended the parade come back. Antonietta and her family have dinner as normal, and here the audience sees that her marriage is characterised by technical dialogue or even monologue, rather than genuine encounter. Emanuele is dismissive of his wife, questioning whether she has been busy cleaning all day or rather lazing in bed, and she is clearly viewed as a mere object. The lack of reciprocity and genuine dialogue in the marriage is exemplified in the final scene when Emanuele demands that Antonietta comes to bed so that they can conceive another child, 'a little Adolf' as he puts it.

When Antonietta refuses to obey her husband's orders, it becomes clear that what she has gained that day is a sense of self-reliance, as she walks away from him to read the book Gabriele gave her. At the end of the 'special day', guards come to take Gabriele away and Antonietta observes this from her window. Whatever happens to Gabriele and Antonietta following this day is unknown, but what is clear is that their relationship has been mutually educative. Antonietta comes to realise that she is more than just a wife and a mother, that she is able to negotiate her identity and express her voice in her own terms; Gabriele learns that not all fascists are the same, a comment he makes to Antonietta herself.

That several conversations between the principal pair are confrontational – conversations marked by genuine encounter – is, as I have discussed here, not a marker of their distance from one another, but rather of their developing relationship of mutuality and reciprocity. Not only do Antonietta and Gabriele exemplify genuine dialogue, with some engagement in passionate utterance, but they also encounter one another in a meaningful and educative way. To encounter another (or even an inanimate object, such as a tree for Buber) in its etymological sense is to be confronted by them, as in a meeting of adversaries, but it is likewise an opportunity. This return to the etymology of ‘encounter’ reinforces the argument pursued here, that what happens between Antonietta and Gabriele on this special day can be aptly described as an encounter in its richest sense.

The ‘opportunity’ taken up by Antonietta and Gabriele is that of coming to know the ‘other’, and thereby coming to know and understand oneself further. It is in seizing this opportunity that both parties are educated, in the perfectionist sense, with their encounter prompting the shift from ‘self-obscurity’ to ‘self-transcendence’ that is characteristic of the movement of the self towards conversion and transformation (Saito, 2012, p.181). Thus, the relationship that develops between Antonietta and Gabriele is mutually educative, encompassing a concern for what it is to live a moral life and what it means to be morally answerable to, and accountable for, oneself. The question of morality in Emersonian moral perfectionism is not that which could be settled by appeals to a deontological ethics, but rather it ‘involves one’s participation in “a city of words”, the language community’ (Saito, 2007b, p.145). As Saito explains, ‘the moral force of perfectionism hinges not on judgment (as in conventional moral theories), but on “every word”’ (2007b, p.145).

Gabriele’s role in Antonietta’s education can be understood as that of ‘the Friend’, a person who intervenes in another’s perfectionist journey and

guides them towards their next, higher self (Cavell, 2005a).<sup>43</sup> The 'Friend' is not necessarily a moral authority; their role is to guide and steer, rather than control, the 'other' along their perfectionist journey. Cavell describes the role of 'the Friend' in perfectionism when he writes that they are 'a figure that may occur as the goal of the journey but also as its instigation and accompaniment' (2005a, p.27). What we note about the role of the 'Friend' in perfectionism is that while they are guiding another in their perfectionist quest, the 'Friend' may be educating themselves. That such an encounter can be mutually educative is exemplified in *A Special Day* (1977).

One's perfectionist journey is, by its very nature, bound up with others through being part of a shared language community. It is 'the Friend' who encourages and challenges them to move on from their current self towards conversion (Cavell, 2005a, p.27). In order for the 'Friend' to guide the 'other' in their perfectionist journey, a trusting relationship characterised by genuine dialogue must be established, and this will be tested by the interlocutors engaging in a passionate utterance. Even if an 'invitation to exchange' is proffered by one and denied by the other, hence even when a passionate utterance is negated, this can still be morally educative and revelatory for the self (Cavell, 2005b, p.182).

In his examination of different modes of dialogue, Buber highlights that genuine dialogue may indeed be conflictual, while the 'great community' is not one in which everyone agrees on every issue but rather consists of a space in which differences can be explored and 'otherness overcome...in living mutuality' (1957/1990, p.102). Thus, a perfectionist education of the self, as exemplified by both Antonietta and Gabriele, must be founded upon dialogue and mediated by mutually trusting, reciprocal relationships.

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<sup>43</sup> As I discussed in Chapter Three (see p.98), the 'Friend' who guides another's perfectionist journey may also occupy the role of 'voice coach': for Paula in *Gaslight*, this figure is Mr. Cameron, and; for Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager*, this is Dr. Jaquith.

The difference between relationships premised upon exchange and those of encounter can be seen by the extent to which trust is evoked between interlocutors; in an exchange, there is no need for reciprocity, mutuality, or an affirmation of trust as the relation it implies is purely goal-directed. Yet a relationship of encounter, with the moral confrontation this may involve, relies on the establishment of mutual trust. As genuine dialogue ties one to others in the language community through 'experiencing the other side' of one's relationships (Buber, 1947/2002, loc.158), this is foundational to the perfectionist movement of the self towards its next, higher self.

I now return to the opening scenario, and to a consideration of relationships in the Higher Education sector, in order to explore what these ideas about reciprocity and encounter mean for academic-student relationships. I will discuss whether relationships premised upon exchange can be educative, and if not, how genuine dialogue and encounter can be encouraged between these parties.

### **5.7 Educative Relationships and Dialogue: Implications for the HE Sector**

The tutorials policy described in the scenario seems to be a particular sort of 'script', restricting and reducing the potential dialogue between academics and students to matters of academic concern alone, particularly assessment guidance. While focusing on assessments and degree classifications is not necessarily wrong, my concern in this chapter is that such exchange can begin to crowd out genuine dialogue and encounter. These discourses of accountability and student satisfaction can subjectivate both academics and students, in turn distorting academic-student relationships and reducing them to mere service transactions.

Universities are arguably subjected to such pressures on a larger scale; they increasingly focus on assessment and feedback, developing policies to ensure that feedback is timely and consistent, as this is one of eight main sections on the NSS. So if students feel that they are not given enough guidance in preparing for assessments and/or receive helpful feedback

within a given timescale (typically 20 working days), then this could influence their satisfaction ratings, and in turn the university's league table position.

The proceduralisation of language in Higher Education, as evidenced by talk of 'student-consumer charters', is concomitant with a kind of proceduralisation of relationships. If students are positioned as 'customers' or 'consumers', and academics are seen as mere 'human capital' or 'facilitators' of learning, this will almost inevitably reduce their relationship to an *I-It* exchange. But the proceduralisation of language and relationships in the university can be seen as just one symptom of a wider shift in the sector towards transparency, public accountability, and the elimination of risk in seeking to ensure student satisfaction.

Conducting one's seminars, tutorials, and lectures according to a 'script' risks limiting both thought and conversation to mere curriculum content reduced to only what is needed to pass the exam, resulting in a kind of 'technical dialogue' or even 'monologue disguised as dialogue' (Buber, 1947/2002, p.22). Thus the reframing of academic-student relationships as mere 'transactions' or 'service encounters' has far-reaching implications for the potential dialogue occurring in contemporary universities (Bianchi, 2013, p.398).

To avoid the proceduralisation of relationships and a technicisation of teaching and learning – where learning outcomes are not only the 'ends' of one's education but its driving force – what is needed is an openness to the other, a commitment to relationships rather than mere exchanges, and a space for genuine dialogue and encounter in amongst competing curricular demands. The student satisfaction agenda and marketisation of Higher Education have led to a sort of 'buyer's market' (Pells, 2017, no page), which while admirable in terms of widening participation, does present a particular set of problems in the classroom. As Richard Smith questions, 'how is the university to know its students as individuals when they are spilling onto the stairs of the lecture-theatre and sitting on the windowsills of the seminar room?' (2005, p.148). With increasing staff-student ratios across the sector,



it seems as if encounter and genuine dialogue may be more difficult to come by in a system now dominated by a market/exchange rationality.

That genuine dialogue has been stripped away in the HE sector is a direct result of opening it up to neoliberal forces. Such dialogue is now typically replaced by 'technical dialogue', if not even 'monologue disguised as dialogue' (Buber, 1947/2002, p.22), and this reduces the potential for Higher Education to be perfectionist in nature. But the erosion of trust in favour of accountability also negatively impacts on the education offered by universities, as teaching and learning processes are progressively being informed by economic imperatives, and a concern for students' self-cultivation is increasingly understood only in terms of their employability. While treating students as 'customers' is now almost common practice in Higher Education, the criticisms I outlined above are pertinent when 'customer relations' crosses over from facilities and services to pedagogical relationships.

That the reframing of academic-student relationships in terms of 'customer relations' is reductive, transactional, and instrumental cannot be rectified by appeals to the 'student-as-producer' or 'co-producer' (Lambert, 2009; Carey, 2013). Admittedly, shifting the student's role from that of 'consumer' to 'producer' does imply more active involvement in their own learning, thus correcting for 'entitlement' attitudes (Finney and Finney, 2010). But the 'student-as-producer' metaphor is still constrained by the language and principles of the market, reinforcing an 'us' and 'them' divide between students and their lecturers.

### **5.7.1 'The Great Community'**

At the heart of what is problematic about the transition from academic-student relationships to mere 'customer relations' is not only the negation of genuine dialogue and the emphasis placed on exchange, but also a movement away from the idea of the university as a 'community'. Higher Education is increasingly seen as an individualistic endeavour; university marketing slogans, such as 'Experience. Yours for the taking.' and 'Discover Your Future', certainly align with this. But there is a contradiction to be

resolved here between on the one hand, devoting attention to students as individuals, and on the other, the massification of the sector.

While technical dialogue may have a legitimate place in universities, it is only through genuine dialogue that 'the great community' can be established (Buber, 1957/1990, p.100). To envision the university as a community of scholars<sup>44</sup> committed to the pursuit of truth and knowledge might seem outmoded, but however this 'community' is expressed, surely it should be a central aim of HE that students are prepared to live in communion with others? Returning to Buber's *I-It/I-Thou* distinction here, the 'I' is never singular, it is always bound in relation to another whether this is an 'It' or a 'Thou'. Thus, building relationships of mutuality, reciprocity, and openness should be at the forefront of teaching and learning in the contemporary university.

As Buber describes his vision of 'the great community', he remarks that 'what is called for is not "neutrality" but solidarity, a living answering for one another...[in] living reciprocity...[and a] communal recognition of the common reality and communal testing of common responsibility' (1957/1990, p.102). Such a 'living answering for one another' and being called upon to respond to the other is more akin to an encounter than an exchange. But rather than closing down potential confrontation and encounter, as the current proceduralisation of language and relationships does, university leaders and policy-makers instead need to recognise the educative potential of genuine dialogue and encounter. Only then can academics reclaim

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<sup>44</sup> This is true to the etymological roots of 'university' meaning a 'body of persons constituting a university', from the Anglo-French *université* (universality, academic community). In the academic sense, 'university' is a shortening of *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* meaning a 'community of masters and scholars'. For more details see: [https://www.etymonline.com/word/university#etymonline\\_v\\_4520](https://www.etymonline.com/word/university#etymonline_v_4520) [Accessed 18 January 2019].

seminars, tutorials, and lectures as sites of encounter where difficult topics may be broached, and even more difficult conversations had.<sup>45</sup>

Encouraging genuine dialogue in academic-student relationships is not a matter of learning and applying 'particular techniques' in the classroom, but of developing an 'attunedness' to one's students (Smith, 2003, p.322). What is central to dialogue and encounter, and to Higher Education itself, is the forging of rich and reciprocal *I-Thou* relationships, not only between academics and students, but also between students and their subject content.

Developing *I-Thou* relationships premised on encounter (rather than *I-It* exchange relations) in Higher Education is emblematic of a perfectionist education of the self. As Buber writes of the significance of the *I-Thou* relationship, he states that 'I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting' (1970, p.9). So the *I-Thou* relationship is a means, as well as a marker, of education in its richest sense. It is only through encountering the other as a 'Thou' that I can become 'I'. Such an education of the self is clearly evident in *A Special Day* when Gabriele acts as the critical friend guiding Antonietta's perfectionist transformation; they encounter each other as instances of 'Thou' and this proves mutually educative.

The kind of dialogue that should pervade academic-student relationships is one in which the interlocutors are more concerned with each other than with solving a particular problem. If a dialogue is goal-directed then this can reduce it to the merely technical, and the same could be said of education when in the grip of performativity measures. If engaging in dialogue with another is to be truly educative in terms of coming to know oneself and others, then all the outcomes cannot be known in advance, and the conversation must remain resolutely open rather than being closed off.

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<sup>45</sup> See Fulford and Mahon (2018) for a philosophical defence of the traditional lecture as a space which allows room for encounter and genuine dialogue.

Genuine dialogue may be encouraged by tackling such questions as 'what is a university for?', 'what do I want to learn from university?', and 'what does it mean to be a student of this subject?'

Anne Pirrie gives an illuminating example of academic-student dialogue in Higher Education whereby a student asks their lecturer 'is it supposed to be this hard?' A first response might be to counter the student's question with 'an invitation to knowledge', such as asking the student whether they have read the module handbook (2018, p.9). On one level, this would answer the student's question, as appeals to programme documentation and learning outcomes constitute a simplification of what students need to learn and understand. But on another level, there is a question behind this apparently straightforward question, or as Pirrie puts it: 'there is a wick that burns in this question. It is a question that cannot be easily extinguished' (2018, p.8).

What the student means in asking this question will depend on their relationship with the lecturer; are they simply asking for conceptual clarification, or questioning the aims and purpose of HE more broadly? Just as one's answer to this student's question is inextricably linked to the nature of the relationship between interlocutors – whether this is a mere exchange or an encounter – so too will the lecturer's response be informed by the relative pressures of the student satisfaction agenda and calls for public accountability. What is interesting about this example is that whether the ongoing dialogue will be genuine, technical, or even monologic is not known from the outset, and it has the potential to be any of these types depending on how the interlocutors engage with each other.

So what does this mean for academic-student relationships and the practices of teaching and learning in universities? My contention is that rather than seeking to remove risk, encounter, and ambiguity from the Higher Education curriculum, academics and university managers should directly engage with it. While there may be a set of 'conditions' – as set out in the opening scenario – for how best to conduct oneself in relation to one's students, these risk being dominated by exchange and informed by market imperatives rather than encounter and a commitment to genuine dialogue.

Moving away from current policies and practices in much of the Higher Education sector is, perhaps, difficult to imagine, but it could start from a reframing of 'customer relations' in terms of a 'relatedness' between academics and their students.

### **5.7.2 Relationships and Relatedness**

The 'relatedness' I advocate here would occur not only between each student and their work or subject content, but also between academics and their students (Heidegger, 1968, p.14). The conception of Higher Education implied by this idea of 'relatedness' is that of an apprenticeship, where one learns a body of knowledge as well as how to apply it to real contexts. But this kind of apprenticeship is less about initiation into a particular vocation, and more akin to what Emerson calls 'an apprenticeship to the truth' which is itself a marker of perfectionism (1841/2000, p.252). The kind of apprenticeship Emerson refers to here is that which reflects the fact that we, as human beings, are always working towards that 'unattained but attainable self' and continually striving towards our higher selves. The self-transcendence which is to be attained through perfectionism is not something that is 'won' and conquered once and for all, but rather it involves an ongoing perfection of the self that necessitates the kind of 'relatedness' referred to above.

Heidegger describes what it is to learn by elucidating the example of a cabinetmaker's apprentice. As he explains, one cannot become an expert cabinetmaker through 'mere practice', and nor is it a matter of 'merely gather[ing] knowledge about the customary forms of the things he is to build'. Instead, what is central to the apprentice's learning of his craft is his 'relatedness' to the wood (Heidegger, 1968, p.14). While the apprentice must learn a certain amount of relevant information and how to use his tools, there is an aspect of his education that cannot be directly taught and must be experienced; this is an understanding of, and respect for, one's raw materials, in this case wood.

Respecting one's raw materials, or in education we might talk about one's subject material, can only be underpinned by a relationship of encounter.

Students could be encouraged to encounter their curriculum content not merely as something to be consumed and then regurgitated when assessments occur, but as something in which they have a stake. Students can be confronted by their subject content in such a way that they come to recognise what Saito refers to as 'the foreign within the native', and this is educative in the perfectionist sense (2007a, p.271). Whether students develop such a 'relatedness' to their subject, as the cabinetmaker's apprentice becomes acquainted with wood will 'depend obviously on the presence of some teacher who can make the apprentice comprehend' (Heidegger, 1968, p.15). The teacher-student relationship thus forms the foundation for a 'relatedness' to one's subject.

Crucially what marks out any particular relationship as one of 'relatedness' rather than a mere (customer) 'relation' is the lack of instrumentalism. The cabinetmaker's apprentice does not apprehend, come to know, and relate to the wood as a means to some extraneous end, but developing a 'relatedness' is educative in itself. Relatedness also implies an ongoing negotiation of one's relationship to the other, whereas in talking of 'customer relations' there is always a finite endpoint to be reached and the relationship is typically confined to mere 'service encounters' (Bianchi, 2013, p.398). What this means for the role of the academic or teacher is that encounter, dialogue, and relatedness should be at the heart of their teaching. More important than the specific content an academic is putting across to their students is the relatedness they espouse to such content, and how students' understanding of this is mediated by dialogue.

What this conception of 'relatedness' highlights is that genuine learning must be dialogic and relational, while what one encounters will depend on the particular person teaching the course. Relatedness is by its very nature, as non-instrumental, an exemplification of how one should be open and responsive to the other, whether this is another person or a body of knowledge. Relatedness is iterative rather than finite and may need to be negotiated between the parties involved; it must also be responsive to the other as their participation in a relationship is already implied. 'I' cannot relate to 'You' unless you are in a relationship with me, whatever this

consists in. Openness and reciprocity, then, are at the heart of an edifying and transformative education, as is genuine dialogue, and the extent of this depends upon relatedness.

Heidegger describes the teacher-student relationship as a difficult one to master, with teachers themselves often in a position of having to learn, and chiefly what they must learn is how to 'let learn' (1968, p.15). Students must surely learn how to learn and what learning consists in, rather than equating learning with the acquisition of information. But teachers and academics must also 'learn' how to let their students learn; this can only be achieved through coming to know their students as individuals and through a developing relatedness with/to them. A pedagogical relationship of 'letting-learn' implies a 'relatedness' and reciprocity whereby 'education' is a mutual endeavour, rather than being a ready-made 'product' that students can buy and then exchange in the labour market (Heidegger, 1968, pp.14-15).

As I have argued, there is value in recognising the educative force of encountering another, as well as the usefulness of dealing with risk and confrontation in dialogue. Whether genuine dialogue will occur depends on the 'relatedness' of the interlocutors and while the encounter may be fleeting, what marks out an interaction as genuine dialogue is openness to the other, in essence, that one is able to apprehend the other in their complete singularity (Buber, 1947/2002; Kramer, 2003).

A serious challenge to reframing academic-student relationships in terms of 'letting-learn' and 'relatedness' (Heidegger, 1968, pp.14-15) is that it would necessitate breaking down the traditional positioning of the academic as 'expert' or 'sage on the stage' (Mark, 2013, p.6), as academics themselves could also be seen as apprentices on a perfectionist quest toward self-transformation. But such learning is foundational to the *I-Thou* relationship, whereby I can only become 'I' through being able to say 'You' or 'Thou' to another (Buber, 1970).

While the provision of university guidelines, charters, and even tutorial policies such as those outlined in the opening scenario may seem

unavoidable as academic-student relationships are increasingly reframed as 'customer relations', they are not to be accepted uncritically. As Cavell highlights in his discussion of passionate utterance, to genuinely encounter the other relies on a distinct lack of procedure. For Cavell, the establishment and testing out of a relationship between interlocutors is more important than the execution of a procedure.

Relatedness, or what Smith refers to as an 'attunedness' to one's students (2003, p.322), is not something that can be planned and implemented according to some institutional strategy; it can only be realised through being open and responsive to the other. Rather than thinking of academics as 'service providers' responsible for passing on certain kinds of knowledge to their 'student-consumers', if teaching is a process of 'letting-learn', then both parties can be thought of as apprentices (to a craft, to the truth).

Relationships are often difficult to initiate, nurture, and navigate, and none more so than that between academics and their students. But a university experience must allow room for risk and encounter in order to attain 'the great community' (Buber, 1957/1990, p.100). Among all the competing demands influencing teaching and learning in Higher Education, there is a need for encounter, as it is in moments of genuine dialogue between academics and students that a perfectionist education may be enacted. In a time when the benefits of a Higher Education are typically seen in individualist, marketised terms, we return again to Cavell's words that 'we are educations for one another' (1990, p.31).



## **Part III**

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions and Implications for the HE Sector

#### 6.1 What's Wrong with Student Satisfaction?

In this thesis, I have provided a philosophical consideration of 'satisfaction' through exploring three iterations of this concept: voice, settlement, and customer relations. As I have argued in previous chapters, many of the initiatives associated with student satisfaction are neither good nor bad *per se*; what is significant is how they are implemented, and which aspects of 'the student experience' are thereby emphasised.

Taking academic-student relationships as an example, it is almost inevitable that students are now considered, and related to, as 'customers' or 'consumers' of Higher Education. While in some areas of student life, such as library facilities and catering, this 'customerisation' is unproblematic (Love, 2008, p.18), it is when this shift in language and relationships moves into the realm of teaching and learning that it can constitute a negation of genuine dialogue, and reinforce instrumentalised ways of thinking about Higher Education.

The issue at stake here is not that student satisfaction and its associated marketised discourses exist in the HE sector; that is something well-established. But it is rather that their infiltration into learning, teaching, and assessment has led to increased accountability pressures and performativity measures. Academics are now, more than ever before, required to publicly account for their activities, with research outputs subject to REF reviews, and teaching to be evaluated via the TEF. While students are paying significant sums of money for their Higher Education and are thus entitled to an excellent 'student experience', my concern is that the drive to create what Roberts terms 'pleasurable and measurable' service encounters distorts what is most valuable about Higher Education (2013, as cited by Gibbs, 2017, p.152): its edifying potential.

Problems arise, then, when student satisfaction is taken to be one of the primary aims of Higher Education. As the concept has been increasingly

reified and codified, this seems to imply a legitimacy in its measurement. But the questions I have raised in this thesis are directed towards such 'legitimacy'. I have questioned the value of measuring satisfaction, have sought to clarify the concept, and have explored the justifications given for its dominance in the HE sector. In a rather reverse logic, it seems as if policy-makers and universities are valuing what we can and do measure, rather than measuring what is considered valuable.

There is also a question of fitness for purpose surrounding the use of student satisfaction measures, as these surveys are used as a broad-brush indicator of 'quality', despite their internal inaccuracies and the lack of a consistent definition of 'satisfaction' in the scholarly or policy literature. These practical difficulties with accurately measuring satisfaction are often cited in the current literature base, but what this thesis adds is a critical reflection on the ways in which aiming for student satisfaction is problematic in and of itself. Aiming for, and directing one's teaching towards ensuring, student satisfaction corrodes the transformative nature of Higher Education, and instead reinforces the rather zealous espousing of market imperatives.

As discussed earlier in the thesis, the etymology of satisfaction is revealing, highlighting its link with an economic kind of settlement and the meeting of expectations. While a certain degree of settlement is required – in relation to, for example, induction programmes and introductions to library facilities – if a university is overly-focused on settling students down in order that they 'settle up', then teaching and learning in universities may be reduced to little more than a business transaction. The premise underlying the current emphases on accountability and performativity (chiefly that they increase efficiency and quality) in no way guarantees a 'better' education, even if it is one with assured 'value for money' (Rolfe, 2002). Economic imperatives clash with educational ideals, risking a commodified and instrumentalised Higher Education.

The collection of student voice across the Higher Education sector is just one example of how market pressures are made manifest, with universities working to ensure their economic competitiveness in an increasingly

crowded market. The collection of 'voice', or more often than not, 'feedback' is linked to a kind of pre-emptive quality assurance. While the NSS is the survey that is most reported and utilised for accountability, the timing of this and other surveys is just one criticism among many that could be levelled at these initiatives.

As discussed in Chapter Three, attempts to capture the student voice are typically tokenistic and transactional, while the subsequent use of such feedback may be undemocratic, granting a 'voice' to those who can shout the loudest, and side-lining other students. In moving away from mere feedback toward a richer conception of voice in the Cavellian sense, both universities and policy-makers would need to acknowledge that student voice initiatives are often limited in scope. The issues associated with these measures arise due to the very fact that they are 'measures' at all, while the impulse to 'collect' student voice can in fact render students voiceless, passive consumers.

The final iteration of student satisfaction that was explored in Part II of the thesis was customer relations, and as I argued in Chapter Five, this language of 'customerisation' can be totalising (Love, 2008, p.18), reducing academic-student relationships to mere 'service encounters' (Bianchi, 2013, p.398). With a concerning rise in formal student complaints (Fulford and Skea, forthcoming) and student co-consumer learner charters being implemented across UK universities, it is almost as if the contractual crowds out the relational aspects of a Higher Education. Academic-student relationships, or exchanges, are now commonly seen as means to other ends; engaging with one's lecturers can simply be considered a means to obtaining one's degree certificate, and engaging with one's students as 'customers' or 'consumers' is *de rigeur*.

Institutions are concerned with maintaining good academic-student relationships as a way of securing from their students 'repeat business', excellent feedback on important surveys, and/or alumni contributions. The scenario proffered in Chapter Five seems strangely imaginable in the current HE climate, and the one way to encourage genuine dialogue between

academics and their students might be to resist the language of service providers and student-consumers. To re-state the primary aim of this thesis, I have sought throughout to re-envision and translate current conceptions of 'student satisfaction', in turn offering a perfectionist, dialogic vision of Higher Education that moves some way towards a more emancipatory, (educationally) unsettling, and edifying student experience.

## 6.2 How to go on

In this section, I will suggest how we might 'go on' (Cavell, 1979a, p.122) from here given the concerns raised.<sup>46</sup> But in doing this, I also recognise that student satisfaction and its associated discourses cannot simply be eradicated from the HE sector. Supposing that student satisfaction measures *could* be removed entirely from universities, this would be problematic on many levels. Firstly, it would involve re-addressing market values which are now ingrained throughout the Higher Education sector. This would also involve going against the expectations of policy-makers, and in turn, students themselves. Claims as to the efficiency and quality of a marketised HE would need to be shown as inaccurate, whilst policy imperatives would need to re-emphasise the educational, rather than the economic, value of Higher Education. Finally, seeking to eliminate student satisfaction from the HE sector could be seen as overly idealistic or even utopian, with one potential criticism being that this implies harking back to some 'golden age' in universities' history.

Bearing all of these concerns in mind then, it would be both unfeasible and undesirable to completely abolish the student satisfaction agenda. In a similar vein, it would be nonsensical to argue for the value of

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<sup>46</sup> The phrase 'how to go on' is taken from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1963), where it is used to describe how children are initiated into language. First, they learn how to use words and what the implicit criteria governing our language-games are by mimicking and copying others. Next, children learning a language must learn precisely 'how to go on', that is, how to apply their understanding of language in new and different contexts. This, Cavell terms 'the appeal to projective imagination' (1979a, p.145).

'dissatisfaction', even in an ontological sense, due to the strong pejorative connotations associated with this term. Instead it seems that a way forward here rests on the following question: if we cannot do away with student satisfaction entirely, then how can we live and work productively with it?

Given that student satisfaction cannot be 'done away with', my aim in this chapter is rather to seek to 'overcome' the concept, meaning that it 'will be surmounted from within itself, in such a way as to be restored to and fulfilled in its own essence' (Lovitt, 1977, p.xxxv). Heidegger describes this overcoming as his response to the dominance of technology, and as I will explore further below, the same criticisms regarding the covering-over of Being could be levelled at neoliberalism itself, of which the obsession with student satisfaction is but an unfortunate symptom.

So how could student satisfaction be 'overcome'? I will now briefly discuss whether different iterations of 'satisfaction' in other languages could provide useful insights. 'Satisfaction' and its analogues in French – *la satisfaction, le règlement, le contentement, la réparation, and l'assouvissement* – are all linked to ideas of settling, payment, the fulfilment of needs, contentment, and appeasement. Similarly the Japanese word for satisfaction, 'Manzoku', is related to notions of fulfilment, happiness, beatitude, peace, and gratification. The Spanish *la satisfacción*, meaning a gratification and indulgence as well as redress, also implies an economic kind of settlement.

Whichever linguistic variant of 'satisfaction' one refers to, they all appear to converge and invoke the same ideas of satiation, contentment, settling, indulgence, and reparation. It seems as if we have now reached bedrock, and our spade is turned (Wittgenstein, 1963). As there seems to be no equivalent term in another language suited to the discussion here, I will now offer a re-framing of 'satisfaction' and will explore whether this concept can be understood other than in economic terms. In what follows, I will offer up a richer conception of student satisfaction which differs temporally, relationally, and dialogically from prevailing understandings of the term.

### **6.3 Towards a Different Kind of 'Satisfaction'**

The central issue to be addressed here is not simply that student satisfaction measures are administered in Higher Education, but that 'satisfaction' has been reified and technicised in such a way that its evaluation is almost something that is done 'to' students rather than coming 'from' them. What it means to be 'satisfied' with one's education is often steeped in a marketised language, with satisfaction being equated to 'value for money', or a return on one's investment in the labour market. Admittedly, the economic connotations associated with student satisfaction cannot be ignored or eliminated, but I wish to draw attention to the ontological, ethical, and relational aspects of 'satisfaction' that have not been previously considered.

To explore further the educative possibilities of student satisfaction, I will make a distinction between two different, yet inseparable, modes of satisfaction: a 'now-' or 'attained' satisfaction, and a 'not-yet-' or 'to-be-attained' satisfaction. As I will explain in greater detail in what follows, current conceptions of 'satisfaction' in HE are, as I see it, limited by an emphasis on what is easily calculable and measurable in one's experience; this in turn reduces one's Higher Education to a series of mere 'service encounters' and business transactions (Bianchi, 2013, p.398). While I am making a distinction between these two forms of satisfaction, they are not mutually exclusive, but should rather be considered as on a continuum where each person may experience one or the other to varying degrees.

This conception of a 'not-yet-' satisfaction is entirely new, thus constituting part of the originality of this thesis, and its contribution to the current literature. In what follows, I will discuss the features that mark out a now-satisfaction with illustrative examples taken from film, before moving on to an explanation of a not-yet-satisfaction. Each form of satisfaction will be explained relative to their characteristic modes of thought, their ontic/ontological character, epistemology, the modes of dialogue and relationships marking them out, and the perfectibility of each kind of satisfaction. An illustrative table is provided below, and each concept will be explained further in the next section.

	<b>‘Now’ or ‘attained’ satisfaction</b>	<b>‘Not-yet-’ or ‘to-be-attained’ satisfaction</b>
Mode of thought	Calculative	Meditative
Ontology	Ontic	Ontological
Epistemology	Knowing as a process of consumption	Knowing as a way of living
Modes of dialogue	Technical dialogue and/or monologue	Genuine dialogue
Relationships	<i>I-It</i>	<i>I-Thou</i>
Perfectibility	Perfectible	Perfectionist

Table 1: Features of the ‘now-’ and ‘not-yet-’ forms of satisfaction.

#### **6.4 A now-satisfaction**

A central feature that underpins both ‘now-’ and ‘not-yet-’ forms of satisfaction are the characteristic modes of thought aligning with each. Here I will draw on Heidegger’s distinction between calculative and meditative thought to assert that aiming towards certain kinds of satisfaction influences our mode of thinking, with a now or ‘attained’ satisfaction typically confined to the realm of calculative thought. In his *Discourse on Thinking* (1966), Heidegger distinguishes what he terms ‘calculative’ from ‘meditative’ thinking. Calculative thought is that which ‘computes’, evaluating the costs and benefits of particular actions, and calculating what is most economical and beneficial for oneself. It is a mode of thinking which ‘computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities’ (Heidegger, 1966, p.46).

Calculative thought is the mode of thinking most associated with technology. As Williams writes, it is ‘a form of thinking that seeks to turn what is thought about into an object for representation and categorisation’ (2016, p.47). Thus, calculative thought by its very nature objectifies all aspects of experience and reduces subjects to objects, and objects are considered only in terms of their use value. The kind of now-satisfaction that currently pervades Higher Education is characterised by such calculative thinking,



whereby questions of economic value and usefulness tend to override ontological concerns.

Discourses around 'student satisfaction', 'value for money', and seeking a 'return' on one's investment in HE are all emblematic of this kind of calculative thinking. Calculative thought can be useful in certain situations and fields of enquiry, as well as in educational contexts, for example, in 'calculating' how best to support a student with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). But my concern here is that such a technicisation and formalisation of thinking may crowd out other ways of thinking about, and approaching, curriculum content and those delivering it to students. It seems as if marketisation and calculation go hand in hand; in Higher Education, this has meant that concerns over employability and market position are now at the forefront of debates in the sector. But as Heidegger writes, calculative thinking is just one mode of thought and while useful for computing, it 'races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself' (1966, p.46).

A now-satisfaction aligns with this calculative way of thinking as the search for this kind of satisfaction is itself calculative, incorporating calculations of utility as one works towards attaining a particular outcome, such as graduate employability. The rationale behind neoliberal policy tends towards the calculative, assuming that customers (or students in Higher Education) are focused on how they can secure the best deal for themselves, and that this underpins any and all decisions in such a competitive economy. This emphasis on what is calculative not only influences the thinking characteristic of a now-satisfaction, but also how one may form relationships with others.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Buber's distinction between the two principal word-pairs, the *I-It* and *I-Thou*, rests on the extent to which the other is experienced in their personal uniqueness (*I-Thou*), or whether they are seen only as a means to an end (*I-It*). A now-satisfaction exemplifies the marketised *I-It* relation. By virtue of its economic and calculative rationality, a now-satisfaction is more individualised, and so is confined to the realm of *I-It*

subject-object experiences. If 'I' am focused on attaining a now-satisfaction, the other never becomes real to me, that is, I can never experience them in their complete singularity (Buber, 1947/2002); instead, my understanding of the other is shaped by my own means-ends calculation of benefit. The current emphasis placed on achieving and ensuring student satisfaction in Higher Education is confined to this kind of now-satisfaction, where relationships (with one's university, one's lecturers, and even the subject material) are seen as means to other ends. Genuine dialogue and *I-Thou* relationships are not entirely negated by aiming for a now-satisfaction, but attaining these richer relations will depend on one's capacity to move beyond the realm of exchange that commands teaching and learning in the contemporary university.

The *I-It/I-Thou* distinction is inextricably tied to dialogue, with different forms of dialogue occurring in these relationships. A now-satisfaction is more likely to be constituted by technical dialogue and/or monologue, whilst being confined to mere *I-It* relations as this kind of satisfaction is goal-directed, and thus the relationships involved are based upon exchange. A now-satisfaction, in its emphasis on the 'now' and on what is easily calculable, implies forms of settling up and down as a way of attaining one's satisfaction. In the scenario that opened Chapter Four, not only is there a kind of un-educative settlement apparent there, but the conversations between an academic and their students are limited to technical dialogue; the exchange is limited to the information required to pass an assignment.

A now-satisfaction is experienced when one's expectations are met. Perhaps of concern is the fact that academics are almost contractually obliged to provide this kind of short-term meeting of expectations. That students' learning is increasingly personalised does not equate to genuinely dialogic, and therefore 'personal', academic-student relationships. What distinguishes genuine dialogue from other modes of dialogue is what Buber refers to as 'experiencing the other side' of the relationship (1947/2002, loc.158), and this ties the interlocutors together into a community. But such an experiencing of the other as a 'Thou' is typically limited in the drive to ensure a now-satisfaction, as individual student-consumers are encouraged

to calculate how they can get the most benefit from their Higher Education, and with increasing competition and rising graduate unemployment this may even be to the detriment of the academic 'community'.

In any relationship between people, whether the other is considered an 'It' or a 'Thou', there is always an invocation of an 'I' as it cannot be separated out from these word-pairs (Buber, 1970). Considering who or what this 'I' consists in is an ontological question, although the ontological difference is also a distinguishing feature of 'now-' and 'not-yet-' forms of satisfaction. In his seminal work *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes an important distinction between two different ways of understanding and experiencing the world and others in it: one is ontic, and the other ontological. Ontic knowledge consists in the objective characteristics of beings, whereas ontological knowledge can only be gleaned through investigating what is foundational to Being and what makes up its essence.

While the ontic and ontological are separate and distinct, the barrier between the two is not impermeable, though the move from one to the other is a complex process involving both the concealment and unconcealment of Being. This ontological difference could also be described in terms of Erich Fromm's distinction between 'being' and 'having' (1997/2013, pp.59-86). In the context of HE, this means that students 'seek to "have a degree" [ontic] rather than "be learners" [ontological]' (Molesworth *et al.*, 2009, p.277, original emphasis). A now-satisfaction, as it involves the pursuit of material goods first and foremost, is confined to the realm of the ontic. To attain a now-satisfaction is to *have* one's expectations met, and this implies a consumptive relation to knowledge.

As a now-satisfaction cannot move beyond ontic knowledge, this means that what it is to be and particularly to be a case of *Dasein*, is not meaningfully discussed or considered. A now-satisfaction, as the name suggests, is overly-focused on everyday concerns and expectations; this exemplifies *Dasein's* condition of fallenness (*Verfallenheit*). As discussed in Chapter Three, fallenness refers to the state of *Dasein's* everyday inauthenticity; this is the fact that human beings often do not face up to the question of Being.

Our absorption into everyday worldly concerns, for example, the need for a graduate-level job upon completion of one's Higher Education, is not a moral or ethical failing by any means, but it does limit both thought and action to what is merely ontic.

In discussing the ontological difference, Heidegger does not denigrate ontic knowledge, but instead seeks to draw attention to the perils of interpreting the world in this way alone. As I argue here, a primary danger of aiming towards a now-satisfaction is that confining Higher Education to the realm of the ontic, wherein calculative thought and a neoliberal rationality pre-dominate, can contribute to a machination of Being not dissimilar to that which technology effects. What Stephen Ball terms 'the terrors of performativity' are rife throughout the HE sector (2003, p.216), constituting a disturbing state of affairs in which teaching and learning practices are reduced to a set of calculable outputs and statistics – calculative thought resurfaces here too. In this context, both academics and students may be viewed as means to ends, rather than ends in themselves, and hence become dehumanised.

That teaching and learning in Higher Education is increasingly commodified, marketed, and measured in terms of concrete 'outputs' is not only problematic in itself; it can also negate the potential for all stakeholders, but particularly students, to 'take a stance' on their Being (Gibbs, 2015, p.59). This dissonance is discussed by Gibbs, who argues that rather than supporting students' questioning of the world and their place in it, contemporary Higher Education instead tends to reinforce and reproduce a kind of 'consumer anxiety' (2017, p.14). As the now-satisfaction which currently dominates the HE sector is confined to ontic knowledge, this frames students' being and becoming in purely consumerist terms.

In the essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', Heidegger states that technology contributes to a 'machination' of Being, 'enframing' and limiting our Being to that which is easily measurable and calculable (1977, p.24). What is inherently problematic about technology and its enframing effects is explained as follows:

The approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced as the only way of thinking (Heidegger, 1966, p.56).

It seems as if contemporary Higher Education is already bewitched and beguiled by calculative and technical ways of thinking, as ontological concerns are suppressed in the curriculum. As I argue here, the criticisms made of technology could also be levelled at neoliberalism and its concomitant marketised discourses. Neoliberal policies have quite clearly reshaped our world according to market logic, extolling the importance of competition, efficiency, and accountability. But what has received insufficient attention in the literature is the way in which 'neoliberalisation' can be seen as 'a process of *ontological violence*...through which things and human capabilities are revealed as an array of "reserves" set available for the market rational utilisation' (Joronen, 2013, p.356, my emphasis).

I suggest that student satisfaction (which in its current form is a now-satisfaction), as a recent iteration of the neoliberalisation of Higher Education, enacts such 'ontological violence' (Joronen, 2013, p.356). Whilst teaching and learning are ever more technicised, it is now a common practice for universities to demand that academics structure and deliver their 'content' according to clearly laid-out, pre-determined learning outcomes. Similarly, what students learn in Higher Education can be measured and recorded as progress tracked against their individual learning plans or trajectories.

The emphasis placed on acquiring a body of marketable skills, with students' identities structured according to their employability, is now evident. Vitae's 'Researcher Development Framework' is a prime example of such a technicisation of the self.<sup>47</sup> Postgraduate research students and academic staff are encouraged to 'identify strengths, plan actions, review

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<sup>47</sup> For further information on the 'Researcher Development Framework' and its organisation tools, see: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework> [Accessed 26 July 2018].

achievements, and create a portfolio of evidence' as one's development is considered ultimately in calculative terms; only that which is recorded and reviewed is of value.

That a now-satisfaction is reified in terms of calculative thought reduces students, academics, and subject content to mere 'standing-reserve' (*Bestand*) or 'flexible raw materials' whereby 'what something is, and what it is worth, is determined by what it can do and produce' (Harvey, 2010, p.190). Thus, it seems as if there is a tendency towards covering-over students' Being rather than supporting their un-concealment. But I argue that Higher Education should have an ontological dimension to it, through which students come to recognise that there is a question of Being, and that this has a bearing on their own ontology. While recognising that one's Being is in question does not ensure a more authentic understanding of oneself, the opening up of such ontological questions is richly educative in itself.

That a now-satisfaction is confined to merely ontic knowledge also implies a particular relationship to knowledge itself, and this is characteristically one of consumption. The language of computer processing such as 'inputs', 'outputs', and 'transformations' often coincides with this epistemological relationship and such terms can eclipse what it is to know. It is my contention that a now-satisfaction is structured and informed by market imperatives in such a way that knowledge is commodified and reduced to mere 'information'.

The distinction I am making between 'knowledge' and 'information' rests on the extent to which each way of knowing is tied to one's sense of self. I suggest that while knowledge is often internalised and embodied – in essence, it can influence how a person acts and lives their life – information is simply collected and stored away. To 'know' something now typically means that one is able to ingest a body of knowledge and then regurgitate facts on demand; this epistemological approach is bolstered by the persistent championing of high-stakes testing throughout education.

While acquiring a set of verifiable facts is valuable in itself, my concern is that in the contemporary university, 'knowledge' is gradually being replaced by 'information'. Information can be disseminated, delivered, and then tested: it fits with the calculative mode of thinking that is now writ large throughout the HE sector and the now-satisfaction this encourages. Knowledge, on the other hand, can be more difficult to measure and its effects more difficult to observe. It is not 'calculable' in the same way. The language of 'inputs' and 'outputs' is significant here, as an emphasis on information processing and its relationship to 'knowledge' can contribute further to the machination of Being.

This shift from 'knowledge' to 'information' is exemplified by the recent drive to measure 'student engagement' in Higher Education. As Macfarlane (2017) rightly critiques, student engagement is increasingly considered in performative terms. Whether a student turns up for their lectures, whether they contribute to class discussions, and whether they engage with the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) are all indicators of engagement, yet there is a shallowness here that needs to be acknowledged. As Macfarlane argues, 'learning at university is fast becoming...about "the performing self"' (2017, p.9); this criticism extends beyond student engagement to my own concerns regarding measures of student voice. This emphasis on what is performative, easily recognisable, and calculable again refocuses one's attention on the 'now' of a now-satisfaction.

Students increasingly value information and experiences which are of immediate use, for example, undertaking a professional placement during one's degree should enhance employability and hence its utilitarian 'ends' are clear. Such a shift from knowledge to information, as from a 'not-yet-' to a now-satisfaction, is also evidenced in recent calls for the humanities to 'justify' or prove their worth in a way that is commensurate with scientific disciplines (Nussbaum, 2010; Damrosch *et al.*, 2014, p.587). The economic value of humanities subjects is here being placed above their educational, edifying value, and this is clearly informed by calculative thought. The danger associated with such a focus on short-term desire satisfaction though, is that it implies that one's education can be 'complete' and as an

off-shoot of this, that meeting student expectations is all universities should focus on. The very fact that a now-satisfaction has discrete 'outputs' means that one's Higher Education can be considered as perfectible.

A now-satisfaction is perfectible, in essence, can be perfected, depending on the extent to which students attain their desired 'ends'. That something is perfectible means that a final, perfected state can be reached, and in turn that one's relationship to the thing being 'perfected' is teleological in nature. A now-satisfaction is something that can be attained, measured, and improved (and all within the standard three-year period of undergraduate study). What this implies about Higher Education is that one can be 'satisfied', one's quest or 'appetite' for knowledge and truth abated, and hence the 'perfection' of one's education is often equated to the much vaunted 2:1 degree classification. The perfectibility of a now-satisfaction provides a kind of settlement to all concerned which, while reassuring, may further entrench the neoliberal tendency to value ontic knowledge over and above ontological considerations. While learning outcomes and other observable, measurable 'ends' of Higher Education are incessantly called for by performativity measures, there is a danger here that such a neoliberalised culture is one in which a now-satisfaction could become totalising.

Having outlined what a now-satisfaction consists in, and discussed the modes of thought, dialogue, relationships, ontology, and epistemology characteristic of this kind of satisfaction, I will now give some examples of now-satisfaction from the films presented in Chapter Three. I add to Cavell's discussion of *Gaslight* and *Now, Voyager* by highlighting what film can reveal about satisfaction, as the melodramas in particular explore what it means to be satisfied with oneself, and with one's education. The now-satisfaction of Paula's education is clearly evident in her 'aria of revenge', a scene in which Gregory is tied and bound ready for police collection. As Gregory cannot hurt her, and with the encouragement of Cameron, Paula is able to say all that has been repressed in her marriage to the devious Gregory.



In the aria scene, Paula takes on the role of 'mad woman' that Gregory has tried to enforce, and she does so in order to eschew this for the final time, to reassert her voice in her own terms. Gregory asks Paula to use the knife in her hand to free him, and her aria begins:

Are you suggesting that this is a knife? I don't see any knife. You must have dreamed you put it there...Are you mad, my husband? Or is it I who am mad? Yes. I am mad...If I were not mad I could have helped you [could have freed you].

Here, Paula is referring to all of the 'confusions' that Gregory has orchestrated over the course of their marriage to drive her mad. This 'aria of revenge' clearly involves a kind of now-satisfaction as Paula is concerned with recovering her voice before Gregory is arrested and taken away. What also marks out this scene as one of now-satisfaction is its goal-directedness, and that the dialogue could at best be considered a 'technical' dialogue, and at worst, a mere monologue disguised as dialogue (Buber, 1947/2002). This is significant as until now, their whole marriage has been characterised by monologue, yet now it is Paula who controls what is said.

A now-satisfaction is also attained by Charlotte Vale in *Now, Voyager* when, upon returning home from her transformative journey to South America, she is able to renegotiate the terms of her relationship with her mother, Mrs. Windle Vale. Through such defiant acts as choosing her own clothes, sleeping in her own bedroom (rather than that next to her mother's), and lighting the fire in the living room, Charlotte achieves her independence and self-reliance for 'now'. This is ultimately effected when, in an argument with Mrs. Vale, Charlotte rejoices in stating that 'I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid, Mother'. While this marks a perfectible 'end' of Charlotte's education of the self, it is one she must move on from.

In all of the melodramas, there are instances, typically attained through marriage, of now-satisfaction. While the heroines' attainment of a now-satisfaction can be seen as educative, this is always a step along the way rather than the 'end' of their journey. The now-satisfaction of marriage must in fact be overcome or negated by the principal women in these films if they are to discover or recover their voices, and hence be morally educated (in a

perfectionist, rather than perfectible sense). A similar shift from the 'now-' to the 'not-yet-' is also much needed in the HE sector. I am arguing for a move away from the current focus on now-satisfaction in Higher Education as 'satisfaction', considered in these terms, does not equate to education. If a Higher Education is to be transformative, dialogic, and edifying, then policy-makers and institutional managers must recognise the legitimacy of, and allow room for, a perfectionist not-yet-satisfaction.

### **6.5 A not-yet-satisfaction**

While calculative thought can be allegorised as a straight-running railway track, meditative thought instead occupies the rough ground alongside it. In this sense, thinking meditatively is akin to having a 'conversation on a country path', the choice title Heidegger gives to his enquiry (1966, p.58). Rather than being confined to the average everyday concerns of the world (*Dasein's* fallenness), meditative thought constitutes a 'releasement' (*Gelassenheit*) towards the question of Being. Meditative thought is that which, in comprehending subjects as they are in themselves rather than as means to other ends, remains 'open to the mystery' of Being (Heidegger, 1966, p.55).

Meditative thought releases us to that which gathers man and Being together in relation to truth, wherein the nature of thinking itself is revealed.

As Heidegger writes:

Authentic releasement consists in this: that man in his very nature belongs to that-which-regions, i.e., he is released to it...[and] we have just characterised that-which-regions as the hidden nature of truth (1966, pp.82-83).

While meditative thought brings us closer to ontological questions and the hidden nature of thinking, it also moves us away from what is merely calculative. As Harvey states, '*Gelassenheit* has to do with a relation toward things that is no longer dominated by the technical' (2009, p.21). Contra to thinking that is technical in nature, meditative thought implies reflection, indeed as Schwieler and Magrini describe:

Reflection awakens us and keeps us awake to the most thought-worthy and question-worthy aspects of our existence. Reflection is about

opening the pathway into the essence of the age, its politics, economics, sciences, and institutions of education (2015, p.17).

The not-yet-satisfaction for which I am arguing here is characterised by this kind of meditative, po(i)etic, and reflective thinking. It is important to emphasise here that meditative thought is not elitist, nor is it confined to philosophy; rather, that which could encourage meditative thought is relatively straightforward. Magrini picks out several 'marginal practices' as examples including 'simple natural pleasures of the home and hearth, a sojourn along a wooded path in communion with nature, or creating and participating in local works of literature, poetry, and art' (2012, p.513).

Encouraging students to seek a 'not-yet-' or 'to-be-attained' satisfaction from their university, and to engage in meditative thinking will not be easy to do. Meditative thought can be encouraged through an attentiveness to literature, art, film, poetry, and philosophy among other subjects. Magrini sees the potential for meditative thought explicitly come to the fore in the humanities, the importance of which he describes as follows:

As opposed to transmitting pre-packed truths, values, and goals, the humanities provide instances wherein students embark on the all-important quest for truth [the truth of Being], a quest that is intimately bound up with the assessment and re-assessment of our values such as justice, equity, and equality (2012, p.520).

This can be seen as one instance of the kind of not-yet-satisfaction I am arguing for, but I am not claiming that this is limited to the humanities alone. Meditative thought can also be realised in the natural and social sciences; the recent drive to include ethics modules as part of medical degrees is one such example (Li, 2000; Robinson *et al.*, 2014; Ruitenberg, 2016). It is my contention that meditative thought is not only achievable in Higher Education, but it should be afforded time and space in the curriculum to develop. If a Higher Education should enable one to 'take a stance' on their own Being (Gibbs, 2015, p.59), then it follows that meditative thought is integral. This is not to say that one mode of thinking could come to replace the other, but I am asserting here that meditative thought – a mode of thinking that is often elusive in contemporary life – has educative and transformative potential.

As meditative thought can release a thinker to the nature of truth and Being, this way of thinking is clearly tied to ontological, rather than ontic, knowledge. That a not-yet-satisfaction is characterised by an ontological way of understanding the world may be the result of its meditative thinking, but equally its lack of goal-directedness. What marks out a not-yet-satisfaction as ontological, rather than ontic, is its lack of instrumentalism and the fact that its characteristic mode of thinking is meditative. While a not-yet-satisfaction may also involve ontic concerns, the open-endedness of this form of satisfaction allows room for ontological questions to emerge.

In the HE sector, such ontological questions may include 'what makes me a student?', 'what does it mean to be a student?', and 'what marks out my becoming a teacher?' (in the case of teacher training). The ontological dimension of Higher Education is that which deals with questions of this kind, questions which are not only about being but also about becoming. A consideration of ontology will always incorporate aspects of the 'now-' and the 'not-yet-', but the everyday inauthenticity of *Dasein* is consummate with the current emphasis in Higher Education on attaining a kind of now-satisfaction.

A not-yet-satisfaction, as the 'not-yet-' would suggest, is forward-looking. These different forms of satisfaction are not mutually exclusive, and both ontic and ontological knowledge are valuable and should be within the remit of Higher Education. But ontic knowledge, helpful as it may be for gaining graduate employment, will not always be edifying and transformative in itself. This is what an attention to ontology adds to one's education.

Another feature which marks out a not-yet-satisfaction is its deeper relation to knowledge, in which what it is to 'know' is intimately tied to what it means to 'be'. In contrast to the epistemology of a now-satisfaction, a not-yet-satisfaction is characterised by a kind of knowing which is 'a process of living' (Shepherd, 1977/2011, p.1). Coming to know in working towards a not-yet-satisfaction is less about consuming and processing facts, and more about living with one's knowledge, embodying this in one's daily life.

Here, I will draw on Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* to elucidate the ways in which our relationship to knowledge can be ontological rather than ontic, and relational rather than consumptive and transactional. *The Living Mountain* is an autobiographical and deeply personal piece of 'mountain literature' (Macfarlane, 2011, xvi), charting Shepherd's exploration of the Cairngorm Mountains in Scotland over a number of years. In it, Shepherd expresses her wish to come to 'know' the mountain and its plateau 'deeply rather than widely' (1977/2011, p.1). What the book emphasises throughout is that one's knowledge, rather than information, can only ever be partial and yet the depth of knowledge enhances its value. As Fulford and Skea write in relation to Thoreau's *Walden* and Shepherd's *Living Mountain*:

What Thoreau and Shepherd both highlight is that one's knowledge of the outdoors [or one's knowledge of any subject] is not something to be grasped quickly and then 'shelved' as appropriate; they do not focus on the 'usefulness' of knowledge *per se*, but on how it can be revelatory for the self... the kind of education this implies is one which cannot be evaluated in terms of content knowledge and/or measured in accordance with 'learning outcomes' (2018, p.6).

The privileging of certain kinds of knowledge and approaches to knowing exemplified in Shepherd's work is characteristic of a not-yet-satisfaction. It implies an epistemological relationship that is always partial, ontological, unsettling, and edifying. While acquiring readily transmittable information is important in Higher Education, students should also come to realise that knowledge of their degree subject is only ever partial, and that the quest for knowledge should not be extricated from ontological concerns.

As Shepherd describes the depth and partiality of her knowledge, she writes that 'one never quite knows the mountain [or any subject for that matter], nor oneself in relation to it' (1977/2011, p.1). Reframing epistemology as a 'process of living' (Shepherd, 1977/2011, p.1) rather than a process of the mere acquisition, consumption, and transmission of information is cognisant of the not-yet-satisfaction I am advocating.

If knowing is to be seen as a 'process of living' (Shepherd, 1977/2011, p.1), and if Higher Education is to fulfil its edifying potential through encouraging students to 'take a stance' on their Being (Gibbs, 2015, p.59), then

elucidation of a not-yet-satisfaction is much needed. If knowing is conceived of in this way, it is not only tied to ontological concerns, but this also implies that one's search for knowledge cannot be 'complete' at any particular point. This means that a not-yet-satisfaction, with its characteristic features of meditative thought, ontological questioning, and its more open-ended epistemological approach, cannot be considered perfectible.

Despite the word 'perfection' being linguistically related to perfection-*ism*, Cavell clearly states that perfectionism is an ongoing journey rather than one with discrete, perfectible 'ends'. The perfection of the self is neither finite nor infinite; rather, it would be more accurate to say that there are 'ends' to be found in the closing of one circle and the drawing of another, though these 'ends' are still to be transcended. The distinction I have drawn here between 'now-' or 'attained', and 'not-yet-' or 'to-be-attained' forms of satisfaction, is premised upon a guiding theme of perfectionism, in essence, that one is always moving towards one's 'unattained, but attainable self' (Cavell, 1990, p.12). This highlights that any epistemological claim to 'know oneself' cannot be settled and fixed, for example, when graduating from university, but rather it is something that must be continually sought in the perfectionist quest towards conversion and transformation.

A not-yet-satisfaction is perfectionist precisely because it requires a position of 'doubleness' and may be prompted by experiencing crises, meaning that one is able to evaluate who they are now and who they want to be. This can create a sense of uneasiness reminiscent of Heidegger's *das Unheimliche*, for as Cavell explains 'any perfectionism—democratic or aristocratic, secular or religious, philosophical or debased—will claim to have found a way of life from whose perspective all other ways of life are judged as wanting' (1990, xxiii). But what is particular to Emersonian moral perfectionism is that one learns for oneself what 'counts' as moral conduct, and where their lines of (dis-)agreement in criteria are drawn. Moving from a 'now-' to a not-yet-satisfaction depends not on dissatisfaction *per se*, but on discomfort, that is, a growing sense of one's separation from the language community, or of one's words not meeting their needs.

That a not-yet-satisfaction is perfectionist means there are no discrete, pre-determined 'ends' to be sought, unlike those of a now-satisfaction. In turn, this implies that the search for one's 'next' self cannot be goal-directed and/or confined to calculative thought. Moving towards a not-yet-satisfaction is not some utopian concept entirely cut off from the 'now', but rather as Cavell explains 'the next self is [always] (already) present...[and this is] the reflexiveness of the self' (1990, xxxv). Thus, one's perfectionist ambitions and capacity to exercise moral judgment stand in need of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) – with the academic guiding a student's perfectionist journey – rather than redefinition. While the democratic nature of perfectionism does entail that persons should make themselves intelligible to their language community, first and foremost, this also requires that one becomes intelligible to oneself. As Cavell aptly describes:

Moral Perfectionism's contribution to thinking about the moral necessity of making oneself intelligible (one's actions, one's sufferings, one's position) is, I think it can be said, its emphasis before all on becoming intelligible to oneself, as if the threat to one's moral coherence comes most insistently from that quarter, from one's sense of obscurity to oneself (1990, xxxii).

Whether the emphasis is placed on a releasement towards Being, or on becoming intelligible to oneself, clearly the role of the academic is to guide students towards themselves, entreating them to consider what they want from life, from their education, and how they wish to position themselves in a community (of scholars, of democratic citizens). While a not-yet-satisfaction may consist of instances of a now-satisfaction, what distinguishes the 'not-yet-' from the 'now-' is that it involves looking beyond short-term desire satisfactions.

I fully acknowledge that the dominance of economic imperatives and the emphasis placed on a now-satisfaction in current HE policy cannot be ignored, but the notion that one can be 'satisfied' with one's education implies that 'education' is perfectible and can be complete. Clearly students' Higher Education is 'complete' upon graduation and this marks a tangible 'end' to their pursuit of knowledge. But if in speaking of 'education', we were to include the journey of the self towards its next, higher self, then graduation would simply be one 'end' among many, rather than a

teleological, final endpoint. This reframing of Higher Education and student satisfaction in perfectionist terms is more cognisant of ontological questions, and it aligns with the conception of knowing as 'a process of living' rather than mere consumption (Shepherd, 1977/2011, p.1). That a not-yet-satisfaction is perfectionist also implies certain kinds of relationships and dialogue between the person undergoing a moral crisis and working towards their next self, and those in their language community.

An individual's perfectionist journey may be provoked, but must be guided, by others. Hence perfectionism is ultimately a communal endeavour, and this is inimical to the individualistic pursuit of a now-satisfaction. The role of 'the Friend' in one's perfectionist education of the self cannot be overstated, while an individual's perfectionist journey is inseparable from, indeed it is informed by, the democratic ideals of their society. While perfectionism may initially call for an Emersonian aversive thinking, in which one turns away from one's community to pursue the bent of one's own genius, this then brings one back to the community – although potentially on different terms. When Emerson writes that 'I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me', this should not be taken as advocating for individuation, but rather as encouraging his readers to see that one's ties to a language community and consent in criteria can be (re)negotiated.

Whether one chooses to consent to, or dissent from, the criteria of a language community will effect different relationships with that community. As I suggest here, a not-yet-satisfaction is more likely to consist in *I-Thou* relationships and genuine dialogue, than a debased *I-It* relation. This is due to its lack of instrumentalism and the fact that it is not underpinned by an economic, calculative rationality. A not-yet-satisfaction opens up dialogue rather than closing it down and drawing its boundaries. This openness is envisaged in Cavell's statement that 'in the mode of passionate exchange [an exemplar of genuine dialogue], there is no final word, no uptake or turndown, until a line is drawn, a withdrawal is effected, perhaps in turn to be revoked' (2005b, p.183).



In genuine dialogue, of which Cavellian passionate utterance is an example, there is a distinct lack of finality to one's words which deepens rather than protracts one's relationships with others (it is perfectionist rather than perfectible, you could say). Each relationship built upon genuine dialogue is founded, and is thus at risk, in every word. Such risk is another feature that distinguishes genuine dialogue from its analogues; Buber refers to 'mutual surprises' and the danger of an 'unpredictable reply' as signalling a real conversation, in contrast to the mere rehearsal and regurgitation of information in technical dialogue (1947/2002, p.241). While genuine dialogue may also feature in a now-satisfaction, it does seem as if risk, surprise, and unpredictability are at odds with the calculability of this form of satisfaction.

The relationships involved in aiming for a not-yet-satisfaction are more akin to an *I-Thou* than an *I-It*. This is partly due to its being characterised by genuine dialogue, but also because the communal ties associated with a not-yet-satisfaction give new meaning to the idea that 'I require You [Thou] to become; becoming I, I say You [Thou]' (Buber, 1970, p.62). An *I-Thou* relationship is much more conceivable for a 'not-yet-' rather than a now-satisfaction, as the 'not-yet-' moves beyond everyday concerns, such as the acquisition of material goods and services, which could otherwise reduce the other to an 'It'.

Without the pressures of obtaining calculable, economically beneficial 'ends', a not-yet-satisfaction does allow room for 'experiencing the other side' of one's relationships with others (Buber, 1947/2002, loc.158), and in turn this leads to genuine dialogue. That a not-yet-satisfaction is perfectionist not only means that the individual on a perfectionist journey will be tied to a language community, but also that this form of satisfaction is apt to foster relationships premised upon encounter rather than exchange.

Having now explained what characterises a not-yet-satisfaction, I will offer several examples of this form of satisfaction from the melodramas. Typically, the heroines' not-yet-satisfaction is pictured at the end of these films, whereby the closing scenes represent the closing of that particular circle, around which another is to be drawn. As the credits roll, there is a sense of

completeness to these films, but the audience is also left with a sense that the principal women's journeys have only just begun.

When Paula says to Cameron in the final scene of *Gaslight* 'this night will be a long night', she means that it will take a long time for her to make a statement to the police, for evidence of Gregory's wrong-doings to be collected, and so on. But Cameron's reply that 'it's already starting to clear' is not only referring to the weather, he is also acknowledging that it will take a long time for Paula's mind to clear from Gregory's manipulations, such that she can finally start to enact her 'cogito' which was glimpsed in the powerful 'aria of revenge' just scenes before (Cavell, 1996, p.59). The now-satisfaction of Paula's 'aria' gives way to a more ontologically-focused and perfectionist not-yet-satisfaction in the final scenes of *Gaslight*, as Paula is then able to reflect on her own Being without Gregory's undue influence.

Charlotte Vale's not-yet-satisfaction is also evinced in the final scene of *Now, Voyager* when Jerry questions Charlotte as to her motives behind taking on his daughter, Tina, as her own. Jerry wrongly assumes that Charlotte's caring for Tina is some way to get back at him for his unavailability for marriage or as a way of maintaining ties with him. Here again, a man's fundamental misunderstanding of a woman – a central theme to all of the melodramas – comes to the fore. In the end Charlotte realises that the life she thought she wanted, a home and husband of her own, cannot assure her of a voice. While Charlotte's metamorphosis throughout the course of the film is clear to see and consists in several instances of now-satisfaction, her not-yet-satisfaction is expressed when she says to Jerry 'Oh, Jerry, let's not ask for the moon. We have the stars'. I take this as signalling an acknowledgement of what Charlotte has already attained, chiefly a sense of self-reliance, but also what is still to-be-attained.

These selected Hollywood films showcase that the search for a voice, a sense of self, and an education is complex. While these heroines may seek solace in attaining a kind of now-satisfaction, often this leads to a reconsideration of what it means to be 'satisfied', and in turn the 'now-' gives way to the 'not-yet-'. The distinctions I have discussed here, which are

illustrated in Table 1, are meant to evoke meditative thought about the student satisfaction agenda in Higher Education. There is no strict dichotomy between the 'now-' and the 'not-yet-', or say, between ontic and ontological knowledge, but the categorisations offered above should be seen as a heuristic tool for thinking through what it means, or could mean, to be 'satisfied' with one's Higher Education.

## **6.6 Educational Principles of a 'not-yet-satisfaction'**

Given the 'method' of this thesis, it would be disingenuous to talk of the 'outputs' or 'results' of my research in terms most commonly associated with empirical research. But the ideas presented here do have very real, practical implications. My concern here is not to fall into the same 'trap' of current student satisfaction measures, namely that 'satisfaction' has been commodified and evaluated through a mere tick-box exercise. What I do not provide in this section is any formal kind of 'curriculum' for a not-yet-satisfaction. I am also not advocating for, or envisioning, some large-scale revolution in the HE sector; as stated above, student satisfaction measures cannot simply be done away with.

What I will do here is elucidate several principles that arise from the ideas pursued throughout this thesis, and the distinction made between 'now-' and 'not-yet-' forms of satisfaction. These principles should not be seen as a list of necessary conditions (or felicity conditions) for ensuring a not-yet-satisfaction, but rather as markers of what a not-yet-satisfaction – and hence a perfectionist, ontologically-oriented, meditative Higher Education – might consist in. It will be to the responsibility of individual academics and universities to consider 'how to go on' with these principles (Cavell, 1979a, p.122), taking into account their institutional context and evolving government policies. The space for doing things differently, and for encouraging students to look beyond a consumerist now-satisfaction, is to be found in the ordinary, everyday practices of teaching and learning.

The principles I will present cannot be taken up wholesale and developed into some new measure of a not-yet-satisfaction, but rather they may be enacted in the HE classroom. For me, the question is not so much 'what do

we *do* now?', but 'how do we *talk* about these concepts now?' The centrality of language to ways of thinking and acting in HE has already been discussed, but one way to resist a whole-scale proceduralisation of Higher Education may be to reframe satisfaction in terms of the 'now-' or 'attained', and the 'not-yet-' or 'to-be-attained'. Such a distinction does not negate the very real pressures placed on academics and universities to fully meet student expectations, but it offers a different form of satisfaction that transcends the economic, ontic, and calculative now-satisfaction.

Listing the following principles as I do is an approach employed by Staddon and Standish (2012), who, in their exploration of the student experience, end with a list of guiding precepts. The principles developed there are meant to 'prompt' or 'stand as a stimulus' for academics, guiding them towards 'a more responsible and more critically alert pedagogical practice' (Staddon and Standish, 2012, p.645). My argument here is in a similar vein: academics and Higher Education Institutions might move towards being more 'critically alert' in their teaching practices (Staddon and Standish, 2012, p.645), but this does not imply that 'student-led' or 'student-centred' learning should replace the traditional lecture (Fulford and Mahon, 2018). The principles I am advocating are listed below.

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**Principle 1: Higher Education could better promote students' recovery and/or discovery of voice.**

A perfectionist education of the self is intimately tied to the search for a voice. The discovery or recovery of one's voice is by its very nature an ongoing process, as well as being tied to one's sense of self and invoked by crises (Cavell, 1996; 2005a). Accounting for student voice in this richer sense would mean that universities come to recognise that students' expression or withholding of voice is tied to the language community. If Higher Education is to contribute to the development of genuine student 'voice' rather than 'feedback', then academics should take up the role of 'voice coach' (Cavell, 2005a, p.27), encouraging students to 'find out and pursue his [or her, their] own way', and giving them the confidence to follow the 'bent' of their own genius (Thoreau, 1854/1997, p.51). Through introducing students to new and conflicting ideas, raising questions of consent and dissent, and academics positioning themselves as exemplars of what it is to 'have' a voice, students will not simply be initiated into a pre-established, conservative form of life: they will come to recognise their stake in it, that is, their capacity to change and shape their community.

**Principle 2: Higher Education could allow room for and encourage students to take a stance on their Being.**

An aim of HE could be to make students aware that they are 'always already' on the way to becoming (Thomson, 2016, p.847), and that their education may be 'complete' at certain points but is never really 'finished'. What it might look like or mean to 'take a stance' on one's Being in Higher Education is exemplified in the example of Williams' *Stoner*. Through being confronted by difficult subject material, Stoner is forced to question who he is and what he wants from life. While this is initially experienced as a kind of dissatisfaction, as it means departing from his family's wishes, Stoner knows that the path he treads in studying English literature will lead to the kind of not-yet-satisfaction I have outlined above.

**Principle 3: The university can be a space for meditative thought.**

Meditative thought is that which brings the thinker closer to ontological questions, thus contributing to the un-concealment of Being. In order to move towards the kind of not-yet-satisfaction I have elucidated above, academics' thinking together with students might be characterised by a resistance of the merely calculative or technical. In order for Higher Education to encourage students to 'take a stance on their Being' (Gibbs, 2015, p.59), what is needed is releasement (*Gelassenheit*).

Students not only need to be released from their everyday concerns in order to consider ontological questions, but their thinking also needs to be released from the grip of performativity, wherein thinking is seen as a means to an end rather than a valuable process in itself. Encouraging meditative thought would then involve a passing on to students of an appreciation of knowledge for its own sake. Meditative or poetic thinking, while it may imply 'a tale too slow for the impatience of our age' (Shepherd, 1977/2011, p.1), should be preserved in HE despite the pressures of accountability and discourses of student satisfaction eschewing the virtues of calculative thought.

**Principle 4: Risk, confrontation, angst and unknowing are valuable aspects of a Higher Education.**

Angst and unknowing are integral to what it means to be, and to be the cases of *Dasein* we are; Higher Education might properly help students to feel comfortable and settled with being unsettled in this way. This marks out the ontological dimension of a not-yet-satisfaction.

Risk, angst, confrontation, and unknowing should not only be advocated in the HE sector, but also lived out in the classroom. One way forward would be for academics themselves to highlight that angst and unknownness are fundamental to what it is to be human and to be a case of *Dasein*. Students might be encouraged to take risks, for example, contributing in class even if they feel unsure of the answer, while unknownness – a recognition of the partiality of knowledge – should be afforded value.

**Principle 5: Academic-student relationships should be sites of genuine dialogue and encounter.**

In the HE sector, universities could foster space for genuine dialogue and encounter to occur, rather than mere technical dialogue and/or monologue (Buber, 1988). Genuine dialogue can be encouraged in situations where academic-student relationships are not 'managed' and accounted for in the sense of charters and policies, and conversations are not reduced to mere transactions. There should be recognition of those spheres of academic life that are amenable to technical dialogue (catering, accommodation, library facilities etc.), and those which should remain resolutely open to encounter, namely the practices of teaching and learning.

**Principle 6: Universities could encourage a perfectionist, rather than perfectible, relationship to knowledge.**

A not-yet-satisfaction and perfectionist ideas are integral to this relationship to knowledge. That one's Higher Education is typically completed within three years has no bearing on the timeliness of an education of the self. A perfectionist, and hence moral, education of the self may consist of a series of 'ends' but there is no final 'end' to be reached.

A perfectionist view of education can be encouraged through guiding students towards a kind of 'lived epistemology', whereby knowledge is appreciated in itself rather than being seen as something to be 'consumed' and then applied. If students are prompted to see knowledge acquisition as a perfectionist process, that is, as a 'process of living' (Shepherd, 1977/2011, p.1), then this could also foster a reframing of education as a lifelong process. Here, I am not referring to the recent increase in 'lifelong learning' initiatives but to a kind of Thoreauvian 'experiment of living' that is educative (1854/1997, p.47).

While learning outcomes are typically narrow and instrumental, emphasising that which can be easily observed and measured, a perfectionist relationship to knowledge could be recognised as an 'outcome' of Higher Education. If academics were to highlight that the curriculum content they 'deliver' to

students is only a portion of their disciplinary knowledge, and that they themselves are still learning new things through research, then this in turn could foster more meaningful considerations of what it is to 'know'. If coming to know is reconceived as a process which continues outside and beyond formal educational contexts, then Higher Education should not simply equip students with a body of facts, but rather should be concerned with cultivating an appreciation of knowledge in itself – whether it has immediate practical utility or not.

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A not-yet-satisfaction is unsettling precisely because what it means to be 'satisfied' is inexpressible, yet the movement from self-obscurity to self-knowledge characteristic of perfectionism (Saito, 2012) is educative in itself. A perfectionist not-yet-satisfaction exemplifies the kind of Higher Education I am advocating for here, that is, a 'genuine education...[which] takes hold of our very soul and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it' (Heidegger, 1998, p.167).

As student satisfaction cannot be done away with, opening out its meaning by highlighting the ontological, dialogic, and perfectionist dimensions of 'satisfaction' as I have done exemplifies one way of living and working productively with this concept in the HE sector. The principles explicated above should be seen as starting points from which academics and their students must learn 'how to go on' together in the neoliberal university (Cavell, 1979a, p.122).

Working towards a not-yet-satisfaction – while not a panacea for the ills of a marketised Higher Education – could mean that a richer conception of student 'voice' is realised, that the value of educative unsettling is acknowledged, and academic-student relationships premised upon encounter are promoted. The importance of this distinction between now- (short-term meeting of expectations) and not-yet- forms of satisfaction is aptly stated as follows:

The achievement of human happiness [or a perfectionist education of the self] requires not the perennial and fuller satisfaction of our needs as they stand, but the examination and transformation of those needs (Cavell, 1981b, pp.4-5).

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## List of Abbreviations

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BME	Black, Minority and Ethnic Groups
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
ESP	Emotional Selling Proposition
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
OfS	Office for Students
	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OFSTED	
OLP	Ordinary Language Philosophy
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
REF	Research Excellence Framework
	Service quality framework devised by Parasuraman <i>et al.</i> (1988)
SERVQUAL	
TQM	Total Quality Management