

# BELIEVING IN THE UNIVERSITY

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# What I do...

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## **Associate Professor in Supervision and Mentoring in Higher Education**

- Centre for Teaching Development and Digital Media (TDM), Faculty of Arts

## **Deputy Director of Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF)**

- Researches the changing role and purpose of universities and higher education

## **Founder and Coordinator of national SIG-Group in supervision and mentoring in HE**

- Danish Network for Educational Development in Higher Education (DUN)

## **Chair and co-founder of Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Society (PaTHES)**

- Philosophy and Theory of Higher Education Conference (PHEC)
- Journal *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education* (PTHE) (edited by John Petrovic)



# Inspired by...

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- Barnett, R. & Bengtzen, S. (2019 – in press). *Knowledge and the University. Reclaiming Life*. London & New York: Routledge
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- Bengtzen, S. & Barnett, R. (Eds.) (2018). *The Thinking University. A Philosophical Examination of Thought and Higher Education*. Cham: Springer Publishing
- Bengtzen, S. & Barnett, R. (2017). Realism and education: A philosophical examination of the 'realness' of the university. In Waghid, Y. & Higgs, P. (Eds.). *Reader in Philosophy of Education* (pp.121-137). Cape Town: JUTA & Company, Ltd.
- Barnett, R. & Bengtzen, S. (2017). Universities and Epistemology. From a Dissolution of Knowledge to the Emergence of a new thinking. *Education Sciences*, 7:38, doi: 10.3390/educsci7010038
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# Higher education as a means, not an end

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*”Universities have been so successful in appealing to the political and wider societal arenas that, today, it is almost impossible to imagine universities as being more and **otherwise than promoters of higher education** for the local job market domains, national and regional policy strategies, and global rankings and benchmarking agendas. The university as a form of being has arguably been **emptied of an identity beyond sole educational production mechanisms**, and few today explore the university’s noninstrumental and “darker” levels of **being**. This paper, as a contrast, aims to explore the being of the university anew and with a focus on the **dimensions of the university that are not linked to higher education** and, therefore, only occasionally have overlaps with teachers, students, and a formalized curriculum.”*  
(Bengtzen, 2018)



# Focus of the talk

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## Philosophical foundation

- Provide a philosophical platform for thinking about ‘transformational education’

## Conceptual re-orientation

- Education → Knowledge
- Institution → The world
- Skills, careers → Engagement and participation

## Open up for new thoughts and ideas

- Think aloud with you – trying to help build a language for ‘transformational education’
- Discuss implications for (situated) higher education practices and contexts together

# Content

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- Part 1: Loss of faith and regaining faith in the university
- Part 2: Knowledge as assisting in the fulfillment of life
- Part 3: Knowledge as engagement in societal life
- Part 4: Conclusions

# PART 1

## Loss of faith and regaining faith in the university

# Loss of faith in the university

(Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Barnett, 2000; Peters & Besley, 2017; Wright, 2016)

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Hightened discrepancy between universities and society - target of suspicion  
Associated with privilege, elitism, arcaneness, lack of trustworthiness

## **Societal level**

Calls for impact, skills, employability, and marketable knowledge

## **Political level**

Discourses about excellence and value-for-money press upon universities

## **Academic level**

No knowledge foundation, institution is epistemologically undermined

## **Educational level**

Students doing themselves a disfavour by going through higher education





# Towards the mode 3-university

(Barnett, 2004; Hansen, 2010; Barnett & Bengtson, 2017; Nørgård & Bengtson, 2018)

Mode 1- University	
<b>Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Valuable in itself</li><li>• Universal</li><li>• Comment to society</li></ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inwards into discipline</li><li>• Self sustaining</li><li>• Research oriented</li></ul>
<b>Institution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ivory tower</li><li>• Closed geography</li><li>• Closed ontology</li></ul>

# Towards the mode 3-university

(Barnett, 2004; Hansen, 2010; Barnett & Bengtson, 2017; Nørgård & Bengtson, 2018)

	Mode 1- University	Mode 2- University
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Valuable in itself</li><li>• Universal</li><li>• Comment to society</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Situated</li><li>• Economic</li><li>• Policy driven</li></ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inwards into discipline</li><li>• Self sustaining</li><li>• Research oriented</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outwards to society</li><li>• Problem solving</li><li>• Skills, competences</li></ul>
Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ivory tower</li><li>• Closed geography</li><li>• Closed ontology</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Factory</li><li>• Open geography</li><li>• Closed ontology</li></ul>

# Towards the mode 3-university

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	Mode 1-University	Mode 2-University	Mode 3-University
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuable in itself</li> <li>• Universal</li> <li>• Comment to society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Situated</li> <li>• Economic</li> <li>• Policy driven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogic, interplay</li> <li>• Ecologic</li> <li>• Societally engaged</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inwards into discipline</li> <li>• Self sustaining</li> <li>• Research oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outwards to society</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Skills, competences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical-creative involvement</li> <li>• Value based</li> <li>• Academic citizenship</li> </ul>
Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ivory tower</li> <li>• Closed geography</li> <li>• Closed ontology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Factory</li> <li>• Open geography</li> <li>• Closed ontology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agora, Cooperative</li> <li>• Open geography</li> <li>• Open ontology</li> </ul>

# Method

(Barnett, 2018; Barnett & Bengtson, 2019; Lingis, 1998; Marcel, 1950; 1951; Levinas 2003)

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## Philosophical concepts applied

- Gabriel Marcel: Concept of faith – opening oneself up for greater power (Levinas, otherness)
- Ronald Barnett & Søren Bengtson: Concept of life-oriented knowledge (Nietzsche, life)
- Alphonso Lingis: Concept of the imperative – speaking for others (Levinas, ethics)

## An argument in three steps

1. Regaining faith in the university (Marcel)
2. Knowledge as assisting in the fulfilment of life (Barnett & Bengtson)
3. Knowledge as engagement in societal life (Lingis)

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**“Conviction appears as an unshakeable position, definitive, [but] without the power to justify these characteristics. Faith [is] the movement from the closed (opinion, conviction) to the open. To believe is not to believe that, but to believe in, that is, to open a credit in the favour of, [and] to place oneself at the disposal of [a greater power]. Through faith, I take on a fundamental engagement which turns upon what I am, and I open myself to a personal or supra-personal reality.”** (Marcel, 1951)

**“Faith is the act by which the mind fills the void between the thinking ego and the empirical ego by affirming that they are linked transcendently (...) as a living and active reality.”** (Marcel, 1952)



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*”A **dark ontology for higher education** (...) includes **liminal states** and aspects of **hiddenness, tension, ambivalence, unknowingness,** and even **incomprehension**. Such higher education reality **disturbs and unsettles** the anthropocene configuration of the **higher sector**, where policy, education, and job market interplay. (...) [T]here is **no guarantee** that higher education will enable students to come out of the learning process unscathed, and institutional frameworks and pedagogies must work from the premise that **students should not merely be managed,** but also **have room for letting go and becoming lost and returning as different persons and so entering new worlds.**” (Bengtzen & Barnett, 2019)*

# Regaining faith in the university

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## Knowledge

- Connects us with the world, *knowledge* is privileged – not people
- That knowledge not only speaks *of or about*, but *from and for* society and world

## Higher education

- Job market entry → human potential and self-formation (Marginson, 2018)
- Focus on skills → personal growth, “dignity in knowledge” (Newman, 2015)

## The university

- Institution of truth (Rider, 2018): “Safe zones” with legitimate authority
- “Buffer zone” (Nixon, 2008) between personal self-interest and the state



# PART 2

## Knowledge as assisting in the fulfilment of life



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*“**Wanting to know**, in the deep sense presented here, is the same as directing one’s **attention towards life**. **Trying to know** is letting one’s **methods and practices** of knowledge creation become **shaped and infected** by the **vibrancy** of the phenomenon studied. **Knowing** is **being touched by life** and **carrying on this vitality** within **oneself** and one’s **engagement** with others and with wider societal domains. In this way, knowledge comes into the centre of **societal vitalism** and **cultural and historical vibrancy**. Knowledge is **life resonating** within us and in the ways we try to improve universities. Knowledge is **edifying for life itself**.”*

(Barnett & Bengtson, 2019 – in press)



# Knowledge as assisting in the fulfilment of life

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## Knowledge

- From socio-political agendas (Anthropocene) → to the rooting in knowledge's other; force of life (Nietzsche, 1968; Harman, 2005)

## Higher education

- The world comes close, becoming imbued with the phenomena we study
- Involvement - may turn into fascination, wonder, obsession, enslavement

## The university

- Ontological power station, a 'clearing of being' (Heidegger, 2011), making the world (not human beings primarily) more real – reality enhancement
- The primary institution (societal and cultural place) we have for such 'openings' in the fabric of our reality – for strangeness, surprise, otherness

# PART 3

## Knowledge as engagement in societal life



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*“When we speak, **we speak in the place of others.** We present insights, appraisals, and feelings **another will make her own.** In answering his questions, we formulate for him thoughts and feelings he had **begun and could not finish.** (...) We **speak for the silent** and for **the silenced.** We say what others would say if they were not **absent, elsewhere, or dead.** (...) We speak in order to **give the other her own voice.** We speak in order that the other can **speak for himself.** (...) Speech becomes grave and imperative when we **speak for infants,** for **foreigners** who do not speak the language. When we speak for **those in a coma,** for the **imprisoned,** the **tortured,** the **massacred,** those buried in **mass graves.**” (Lingis, 1998)*



# Knowledge as engagement in societal life

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## Knowledge

- Eliciting: the absence, periphery, margin, other, the homeless, exile
- Edifying: summoning lost/silent voices, taking us there, connecting

## Higher education

- Creation and sustaining 'deep culture'; kinship, history, values (Nietzsche, 2001)
- Threshold: between known/other, the ground-beam (Heidegger, 2001)

## The university

- Cultural leadership: not leaders of the culture, but leading the culture
- Meta-political: abundancy, excess, and academic citizenship



# PART 4

## Conclusions



# Re-enchanting the higher education curriculum

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*"I can think of no better technical term than **charm**. This word should be heard with **overtones of witchcraft** rather than those of social skills. What is at issue is **not** some sort of **people-pleasing** faculty in things, but a sort of **magic charm or elixir** that **we sense** in each thing, as when warriors devour tiger hearts or druids cautiously approach forbidden trees. The charm of objects is their innocent **absorption in being just what they are**, which in each case is something that **we ourselves can never be**. Packed full with deeply sincere agents, the **world resembles the hideout of a sorceress**, with its numerous medicines, poisons, vegetables, mushrooms, weapons, jewels, scents, tamed animals, gifts, toys, uniforms, and omens. In our most **memorable moments**, the **world** is certainly no less interesting than such a **witch's hut would be**." (Harman 2005, p.137)*



# Conclusion

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**To regain faith in the university, it is important that:**

- Universities assume legitimate authority as institutions of truth
- Universities connect to a deeper ontology: life-oriented institutions
- Universities connect to a deeper culture: absent, silenced, other

**Implications – expanding the institutional role**

- Universities become more, and other, than providers of HE
- Professionalisation (skills) → cultural leadership (values)
- Developing and promoting academic citizenship (Macfarlane, 2007; Nørgård & Bengtson, 2016; 2018): career trajectories → societal and cultural engagement



# Some examples - Mode-3 revisited

	<b>Academic Citizenship</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Universities as societal drivers</b> (Shumar & Robinson, 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responding to societal disharmony</li><li>• Knowledge as 'social imaginary'</li></ul>
<b>Education</b>	<b>Citizen scholar</b> (Arvanitakis & Hornsby, 2016) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Critical thinking and agency</li><li>• Democracy and diversity</li></ul>
<b>Institution</b>	<b>Academics in residence</b> (Nørgård & Mathiesen, 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• University at public library</li><li>• Merging public spaces</li></ul>

# Some examples - Mode-3 revisited

	Academic Citizenship	Cultural leadership
<b>Knowledge</b>	<p><b>Universities as societal drivers</b> (Shumar &amp; Robinson, 2018)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to societal disharmony</li> <li>• Knowledge as 'social imaginary'</li> </ul>	<p><b>Universities as hothouses</b> (Bengtson, 2019 – in press)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing world-views</li> <li>• Exploring value systems</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<p><b>Citizen scholar</b> (Arvanitakis &amp; Hornsby, 2016)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical thinking and agency</li> <li>• Democracy and diversity</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Care-full PhD</b> (Barnacle, 2018)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research guided by ethics</li> <li>• PhDs inform collective awareness</li> </ul>
<b>Institution</b>	<p><b>Academics in residence</b> (Nørgård &amp; Mathiesen, 2018)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University at public library</li> <li>• Merging public spaces</li> </ul>	<p><b>Institutions of truth</b> (Rider, 2018)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncensored spaces – 'safe zones'</li> <li>• Uncorrupted and trustworthy</li> </ul>

# Thank you for your attention!



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