The elusive siloed subjects

Sacrificing humanities to Techno-Tehan

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This article questions the use of the term 'siloed' to describe certain degrees or subjects in the Australian university curriculum. Education Minister Dan Tehan used the term as part of a justification of a re-set of funding priorities for university education from 2021 which he announced in June 2020. The Minister partly turned his argument on the floating of an impression that humanities degrees are 'siloed'. They or, more specifically, units within them, would become more expensive for students since 'job readiness' needs to be prioritised. The author analyses the term, its uses and applications to fields of knowledge, and concludes that such a term is neither accurate nor useful. He suggests that focusing on needs arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic might provide a less conflicted and future-oriented way of thinking about the problem rather than making superficial judgments of the merits of particular undergraduate degrees as a foundation for dictating education and education funding policy.

On 18 July 2020, Federal Education Minister, Senator Dan Tehan, announced Government plans for education to be put in place in response to the economic effects in Australia of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main focus of his announcement (*National Press Club Announcement*) was the need for undergraduates to take up degrees which would provide jobs and quickly serve the needs of the economy in a national task of job building and rebuilding. To act in this way would, he argued, spur recovery from the recession into which the country had fallen, and, in the process, lead directly to jobs for young people (Tehan, 2020a).

In the course of his speech (*National Press Club Address,* 2020), Senator Tehan outlined cheaper levels of fees for certain courses and dearer ones for others. The cheaper levels included education, IT, medicine and nursing, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects. Subjects like law and economics would be dearer. In general, fees for the humanities would be 113 per cent higher. Most school leavers and their parents would regard such costs as intimidating. It seems likely that this is the point of increasing costs, in a strategy to enforce what the Government regards as priorities, a not entirely unreasonable approach from a budgetary point of view:

> Universities will play a crucial role in producing the job-ready graduates that Australia will need to drive its post COVID-19 recovery. Our universities' response to the Government's challenge to roll out short courses demonstrated they can be innovative and flexible in skilling and re-skilling Australians. We will need to harness that innovation as Australia reshapes the higher education architecture with a greater focus on domestic students – specifically regional and Indigenous Australians – and a greater alignment with industry needs. (Dan Tehan (2020b), 'Job Ready Graduates', 19 June 2020)

One of the main justifications which Senator Tehan in his presentation offered for deciding on such a cost was that the humanities subjects are instances of what he called 'siloed' subjects: 'We are encouraging students to embrace diversity and not think about their education as a siloed degree.' (Tehan, 2020b).

He argued that if you are going to learn history, you should perhaps learn how to teach history, and be a teacher. Citing his own story, he argued that if you are going to do economics, perhaps you should learn another language. He confessed that his lack of a language had limited him earlier in his career in

obtaining a job. However, many arts degrees are structured in such a way that there is already a degree of flexibility and variety across subject areas so that a candidate can choose from a smorgasbord of subjects and skills, within the degree, some of which might serve the presumed 'employability' criteria. Might. The Minister did not note that many, if not most holders of arts degrees, go on to obtain some form of professional postgraduate diploma or degree, and seek registration in professional organisations. The degree itself may include one or more subjects which offer the possibility of employability more than others in it. I suspect most students would already embrace within an arts degree the 'diversity' which he encouraged in his speech. University administrators across the varied tertiary landscape could provide figures attesting to the variety or exclusivity where it exists.

I suspect that there would be few candidates who would pursue philosophy (only) – which the Senator used as a perhaps rather obvious example – across an undergraduate degree (if that were possible) followed by continued, exclusive immersion in philosophy at the postgraduate level. Again, it might conceivably be safe to attack philosophy, not just because philosophy is inherently resistant *in se*, but because the more obvious target, performing arts, is at the time of the Minister's presentation, being smashed by the restrictions brought about by the pandemic, and the public has been made only too aware of performers' plight, even if the Government seems to have performed throwing arms up in the air and turning deaf ears, despite the announcement of a competitive application round for funding which is likely to assist only the big-end-of-the-town of performing arts producers; for example, Michael Cassel and his *Harry Potter* production, as mentioned by Arts Minister, Paul Fletcher on ABC's *Insiders* program (28 June 2020). Clearly, it is all the arts subjects in the arts degree which will be penalised in terms of cost. It is also clear that the young people he was addressing were not the scientists, the architects or the budding teachers, but those intending to pursue arts degrees. There was no hint at all in Dan Tehan's speech that he was encouraging scientists and mathematicians, for example, to 'embrace diversity.' The students which he encouraged towards diversification, in a seemingly heartfelt way, were exclusively humanities students. 'If you are an architect, think about doing choreography. You can learn a lot about the flow of line' was the kind of specific advice which never arrived.

A short anecdote: I have, oddly, only ever met two dedicated philosophy students whom I can recall in the last twenty years. One was a hospitality worker at the Melbourne Town Hall where I sometimes worked as a doorman. I thought he was 'just' (but usefully) a hospitality worker, so was surprised to learn that he was doing postgraduate studies in Philosophy. I met the second at a postgraduate seminar. He was well into his PhD: expensively, immaculately dressed, with a hint of a Toorak accent, and in his thirties I guessed. I sensed financial independence. He may test or grease racing cars on the weekends in order to earn a crust. I have no idea. But, if so, such anomalies are not unusual. There was recently in our department a double PhD working on a musicology thesis. He is an older man, like me, and a motorbike freak with significant skills and accomplishments in the public service, in the very relevant field of public transport, nationally and internationally. The point of the stories is rather obvious – that nothing in life is as clear cut as the incision Dan Tehan has made into the heart of humanities.

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There are three questions which I would like to probe into in this article. The first is to ask if the term 'silo' and its cognates is merely analogical and does not accurately describe the nature of many undergraduate arts degrees. In addressing this question, I will move quickly to confine myself to the performing arts, an area with which I have familiarity. It is also an area which is an easy target for the Minister's pricing. Its apparent 'siloed-ness' which can be inferred and might well be implied is, unfortunately, part of the national myth. While actors may seem to inhabit some fairy land in the eyes of the public, their presence on television is taken for granted almost to the point that the characters they play are often taken, I believe, by some of the viewing audience to be real people. I agree that this is a strange phenomenon, and its explanation would take longer than the space I have available here. Actors might in return believe that, in this fantastic case, it is the viewing audience which is 'siloed' away from the lives of actors. The present writing attempts to throw some light on the ignorance which informs that view. The second question addresses the implication that the performing arts in the workplace-as-endpoint-of-arts-education is somehow 'siloed' in itself and that such a view leads to a position where high pricing is justified. The third question is whether and to what extent the cheaper, now favoured or sometimes short courses or subjects, are 'non-siloed'.

What does 'siloed' mean in relation to the humanities subjects to which the Minister referred? It may be helpful to remove that image which readily comes to Australian minds of a concrete cement thing straddled by a dusty road and railway line – a tall thing, thick, impenetrable and filled with stuff that is homogenous and mysterious because it is so locked away. There is something emotive about the image. On the other hand, the descriptors are not useless. Most of

them fit with the effects of bureaucracy outlined by Karl Weber (Gerth & Mills, 1946). The height of the silo suggests a structure that is strongly present, formidable, a work of thought, construction and labour. Its thickness suggests the barrier that keeps things in, and out. The thickness guards the capital (intellectual, marketable or financial) that the product represents. It is impenetrable. There are bodies of knowledge, rules, protocols and regulations which make the scoria of the thing itself. These combinations constitute its opaque life: its life is to slow and capture life, something analogous to setting concrete. It moves painfully slowly, like the Australian Immigration Department. It asserts life and the movement that is productive export, but its manifestations can be selectively arcane or lightning fast in its harnessing of technology and use of it: grotesque, effectively, in such hybridity and excess. Being deceptively unpredictable, it can shock and surprise. It can also slam on the brakes quickly, keep people out, police them, and track them down and bring them 'to confront the full force of the law,' if necessary. The matter which the silo contains is distinctive and necessary to the purpose of the silo, or the aims of the organisation. The matter may be plucked chickens, state security, barley, digitised requests or trading algorithms. Not all bureaucracies are thorough-goingly hermetic, but most are. It is difficult to begin to think that humanities could possibly be like this.

A quick Google search throws up some interesting thoughts about silos and workplaces. They both generate a lot of hot air. You can 'drown' in them; they stop you breathing and then you sink, particularly if the silo/organisation is being emptied ('going to the dogs') at the same time. The use of the term as a descriptor has been used across a wide range of fields: the nature of organisations (Niemi, 2019; Norton, 2011), educational organisations (Barnes, Weinbaum, & Francis, 2012), the nature of work groups; racial or ethnic groupings (K.M. Gillespie, 2015), animals and others (K.A. Gillespie, 2015), transnational mobile subjects and technology (Gomes, 2018); the management of data (Choi, 2014), the preservation of laboratory samples (Treene & Grigoryan, 2020); the complexion of subjects of study: art education (Creegan-Quinquis & Thormann, 2017), arts education (Weston, 2019), medical education (Kitts et al., 2011, Weston, 2019), integration of Indigenous content into health curricula (Virdun et al., 2013), health systems (McKnight, 2005); the being of nations (Mukharji, 2018); the teaching of STEM subjects (Thornburg, 2009; Newhouse, 2017), the teaching of engineering (Gallegos, 2010); web development project teams (Dalziel et al., 2018), and groups in long chains of command (Terziovski & Kanchan, 1991), for example, the army. Although this list is not exhaustive – I have not referenced the siloes that sheath nuclear weapon rockets – it suggests that 'siloed' behaviour can occur in any organisation. The only exceptions which I anticipate are anarchist 'organisations'.

A perusal of the literature suggests that the descriptive term 'siloed' gained currency around 2010. I have not been able to determine the exact origin of its metaphorical use.

David Ian Willcock (2013) describes 'silo working', for example, as

> when people in organisations focus on their own needs and goals to the exclusion and sometimes detriment of the wider organisation and its aims – a lack of joined up or holistic thinking and behaviour (2013 p. xv).

'Silo' operates metaphorically in all the above contexts, no less when an minister of education applies it to university degrees: some degrees or subjects within them are 'siloed', in his opinion, and some are not. Perhaps Mr Tehan, indulging in a little expensive philosophy, can conceive siloes as worlds in relation to other worlds. Each is presumably a particular kind of world (with a limited number of combinations/academic subjects to be studied and/or with limits within them) in greater or less proximity to other worlds (university degrees or subjects or a great many but finite number of ideas), each of which, in turn, also has a large, finite set of combinations. Such an attitude fits comfortably with late Enlightenment philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of what counts for understanding in our world: matter, ideas, psychology, history, culture, and feelings are part of the world. One may explain the natural world empirically, but understanding requires a broader, less 'siloed' response, I think he would suggest. Eric S. Nelson (2011, p. 33) comments:

> ...Dilthey interprets naturalistic world-picturing to be an expression of a mode of life that, as a life rather than a theory, has its own legitimacy and cannot be refuted. Dilthey argued that there can be no one unified natural worldview common to all humans, but concluded from this that naturalism is one expressive possibility of life among others rather than impossible. Naturalism is one expression and enactment of the truth for Dilthey and only untrue when it overextends itself and takes on a totalising metaphysical form. A world-view is essentially historical for both Dilthey and Heidegger, but for Dilthey this entails that it is irreducibly individual and worthy of recognition for itself.

Finding the worlds and defining them may be more challenging. I am certain that Dan Tehan in his heart of hearts does not believe in the possibility of science, as narrowly understood, or language as the end-point of all that we know and feel. Where are the barriers or walls of the ideas? Where do they end? Can we be sure that each idea, discipline, theory, application can start only in one place? Can we make cuts at their boundaries with sharp obsidian blades like the Aztec priest to get to the heart of the matter? Is there more than one origin of an idea and so on? As I walk across the world of my loungeroom to the table and pick up *The Sunday Age* (21 June 2020) to check the front page article by journalist Zach

Hope, I hear Ken Done, a successful Australian artist in the artistic and commercial sense, say on the telly in the corner, 'I am ever grateful to my parents who let me leave school to go to Art School.' He partly answers my question. Zach Hope (2020) opines:

> The changes announced by minister Dan Tehan last week are intended to encourage students such as Andrew [the school captain at Oakleigh South *my insertion*] to move away from more nebulous humanities degrees and into 'job-relevant' studies (p.1).

'Nebulous'. 'Cloudy' and 'airy-fairy' is the meaning and, quite possibly, the underlying meaning in the Minister's use of 'siloed', as Hope implies. It is Hope's descriptor, not Tehan's, but it seems to be an attempt to get at the feel and attitude of the siloing operation which the Minister imputes to all humanities students. Note that clouds are romantically 'soft' as in 'soft subjects'. 'Siloed' sounds more academic, 'nebulous' dismissive, crass and insulting by usage. But, for the purpose of the argument in favour of putting an impost on the nebulous, at least 'nebulous' provides a means of contrast with the 'un-siloed' subjects which supposedly have ends and beginnings: they are upright solid-citizen things that belong. They fit and make up the new hard-headed world, the new Rinascimento. They are things that you can pick up and put down, and leave: like banging in the last nail or whipping out the last catheter at the end of the shift, putting the hammer back in the tool box and rubber gloves in the bin instead of having to think about the meaning of 'education' (Latin root [language!]: to lead out or to go somewhere) or 'crisis'(Greek root: gathering together and unfolding) or 'adaptation'(Latin root: moving to another skill), to a 'renewed focus' on types of work as Mr Tehan described the purpose of the new policy. Clouds *(L. nebulae)* also have the tendency to make you think of the world and its big questions, like *how do I belong to the world and how does it belong to me? How do I have it? How does it have me?*

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Maybe one should not even ask this question about ends and beginnings and leadings on, because, according to the Minister, Philosophy is definitely a siloed subject, and, after all, we're talking about money for real jobs, money with its more or less clear rules and demands and edges which somehow live, permeating all, digitised in another sort of cloud. In short, I do not believe that arts degrees are in any way siloed since there are always many ways to express life, as Dilthey has proposed.

I have indicated that I will question whether a performing arts degree can be siloed. It is obvious to all, I would think, that the performing arts bares its breast to all aspects of life. Its teaching proceeds in that spirit. The degree exists for many reasons, but one is that it opens up that comportment to those who undertake it. There is not a field of interest in human activity which is closed to the emergence of ways of thinking in performing arts. It is a sieve, filter and shaper of all ideas. Above all, performance characterises all human activity.

Inversely, at its most basic level, all kinds of activity occur in performing or may be the 'subject' (or 'object') of performing arts. Performing arts invites and prepares for many things: mimesis (copying more or less), demonstration, teaching, satire, explanation, critique, philosophy, identity, protest, specialised physical activity, contemplation, teamwork *par excellence*, reading, relaxation, laughter, improvisation, imaginativeness, design, self-development, physical fitness, safety-awareness (stages can be dangerous places), craft, play ('siloed play' is an oxymoron), aesthetic experience (feeling or beauty), co-operation, propaganda, marketing, celebration, income-generation, exhibition, re-creation, creation, ritual, habit, socialising, socialisation. Performing arts enterprises offer all types of tasks or formal specialised areas of employment : law, accountancy and business management, marketing, stage design, carpentry, welding, mechanical invention or application, electrical knowledge, costume design, properties, sound design, curation, lighting design, writing, stage management, computer skills, cleaning, public relations, customer services, hospitality, export, booking and ticketing, tourism, casting, small business creation, one-off project creation (repeated/ development). Students who undertake performing arts take up roles and occupations in one or often more of these activities in myriad projects, including much 'rough theatre'; only occasionally on the mainstages familiar to Government ministers who often get invitations to their orgiastic or magical Slytherin theatricalities. Many of the activities and skills of skilled arts workers are transferable, able to walk out the door to other spheres of work. A significant proportion of acting graduates leave acting but move into related fields, sometimes with additional formal study, and learn additional skills on the job or formally. If the work area of the nebulous arts degree is somehow also a silo, it is a fertile one, an incubator, and capable of letting its steamy contents burst out.

It is hard to see how the learning and work activities which I have described could be termed 'siloed' if the term means 'cut off', 'disconnected from', or 'immured against' the world it adjoins, abuts or inhabits. It can only be siloed if someone else or something else, like a government with funds, cuts itself off from it. To 'silo' something is thus to use a metaphor to make a value judgement about something. 'Silo' discourse usually occurs in a negative context, although its possible opposite, 'integration', sometimes attracts criticism, such as the parking

of history, geography and religion under 'social studies' or some such. Most educators see knowledge as connected, not something to be sliced and diced, as it has often been in educational settings for different reasons. On the other hand, the reverse may be true. Some of the 'job-ready' degrees may be victims of 'siloing'. Thornbury, Neahouse and Gallagos (above) all bemoan the siloing which occurs in STEM subjects and engineering, study areas which Minister Tehan bravely implies are non-siloed in contrast to the humanities. He adds a voice which makes the way up and through the intellectual thicket unnecessarily rocky and conflicted. Even on less demanding peaks, making one's way in the world requires using the equipment available to us, co-operatively I would urge. The motto of the Melbourne City Council, *'Vires acquirit eundo'* catches succinctly the value of learning: 'We get stronger as we go along.' A variety of equipment from many store-houses can help.

The kinds of activities which I have listed above are those which actually occur in workplaces in which people who have studied in the performing arts work. Students of performing arts may not have studied marketing, for example, as part of their degree but may well find themselves having to learn about and do it when engaged in a production, especially of the alternative or 'rough' kind. Forget *Potter* (even though I auditioned for Dumbledore – and I am not envious). This is how it works for ninety-five per cent of the five per cent of actors who are employed at any one time: three weeks' rehearsal and one to three weeks of performance (the other five per cent are doing commercial or mainstage theatre). Finish. Split of the door of $300 to $700 ($33 per day) for the whole period, if you are lucky. Back to your day gig, dear actor, as even the Potters will also do eventually. So, yes, be open and unsiloed to learning about, say, statistics or formally study Statistics for the casual few days of the week you work for that superannuation company.

My second question is to ask whether the type of work in which performers engage post-study is siloed. One does not need to snoop around for too long to discover that this is not the case. I will offer personal evidence from some work which I have done in the last couple of years in theatre which demonstrates theatre performance's open stance. *The Ghetto Cabaret* (Klas, 2019) at fortyfivedownstairs (a not-for-profit theatre in Melbourne) in 2019 entered the pain of a discriminated group, Jews, in crisis. Jews were forbidden to lecture or study at university thanks in large part to the ideological work of Alfred Rosenberg (Rydell, 2015) and Hitler which infected Nazi Party policy. While the experience of the play enabled me to deepen my understanding of the dark Nazi history, it was a stark reminder about maintaining vigilance for justice in our own times. Similar attention to injustice was present powerfully in the play *Coranderrk* (Nanni & James, 2013) in which I played over seven seasons: it concerns the wilful destruction, by political operators and rent-seekers carving out for themselves (stealing) the land of a successful Aboriginal settlement in late nineteenth-century Victoria. In playing Nicholas II in *Tchekov at the House of Special Purpose* (Johns, 2019) at La Mama in 2017 and 2019, I was brought to a deeper understanding of a father's caring relationship with his daughters. Although I am a father of daughters myself, I was able to enter somewhat into experiences which might be useful in understanding even deeper the real-life 'substitute parent' role which I can bring to international students in my English language classes, and empathise with thoughts and feelings which their parents at home might have. I am likely to have learned at least as much as I might have from a psychology textbook. Psychology, it should be noted, is an area of study which will attract a reduced fee, as the Minister noted in his presentation. Am I to infer that psychology is non-siloed?

It seems to be that way.

In playing two drunks in *Bottomless* at fortyfivedownstairs in 2018, I got some sense of the world of the alcoholic and was able to tap a similar empathetic understanding. And how does sociology stand? Allow me to go back further, to the Kennett years. In Melbourne Workers Theatre's large-scale production of *The Tower Light* at the end of the Twentieth Century, I participated in an event which warned about and presaged much of the misery and venality which has since flowed through Melbourne's casino along with the tax dollars. I protested at the opening of the casino itself with members and supporters of MWT, kept by security at a distance, on the other side of the Yarra. Well-known actor, Rachel Griffiths, sneakily got herself much closer, topless, in protest, onto the main door's red carpet. Siloed? With a degree in drama and dance? 'Catapulted' might be a better descriptor. With the same company's Rapid Response Team, I once dressed up as a (53-year-old) baby in a nappy in Bourke Mall to protest the cutting of childcare subsidies. My willingness to be involved depended on my understanding of the issue. I may have stood on the tramlined stage bawling, but not blind. I could offer many other examples in which the work of actors is intimately connected with, not 'siloed' off from, the society in which we live. I have a recurrent feeling that some politicians would just like us to go away because performing is often a way of asking difficult questions. We could all become psychologists (lower fees) or philosophers (higher fees) rather easily. I know several actors who have headed off into 'unsiloed' psychology where the income is higher and more assured than performers' median income. Can you blame them?

In order to play certain roles, I have often had to learn some small skills. The range of skills that I have learnt or understandings developed are more closely related to psychology and teaching methodology and practice, and

discourse analysis, subjects which I had studied at times. I have not yet been in a situation where I have had to learn some of the skills contained in some of the degrees and qualifications which the Minister will make cheaper, and which humanities students will subsidise. Some actors have. It is not unusual for an actor to have to learn how to cook a particular meal or meals during the course of a play. Cooking becomes the focus of the work: that is largely the play (for example, *Emma: Celebrazione!* (Ciccotosto (1996)), performed by Laura Lattuarda, 1996-97). Other actors have built things, like cupboards. During the course of a 12-hour production of *John Gabriel Borkman* by Theatertreffen in Berlin in 2012, the space of the proscenium arch was bricked up during the course of the play (Perkovic 2012). I have no idea whether a bricklayer was brought in for the gig, or whether the actor learnt or was already able to lay bricks. I would not be surprised if either of the latter alternatives was the case. I have worked with actor Chris Bunworth (2020) who works as a labourer on 'job-ready' building sites when he is not doing a gig, and loves it. It is hard to see how the acting work in which actors engage exists in a silo. It is not hard to imagine ways in which both kinds of work cross-fertilise. Chris can play great ocker types and, job-ready, carry heavy lighting equipment around the stage for the job at hand.

The third question asks if the (by implication) 'non-siloed' degrees or subjects are, in fact, silo-free. The concept suggests something which is not hermetic; it is something open, free and dynamic, exploratory, boundary-busting, world-connected, down-to-earth, pragmatic, practical and adventurous, and needed. Since the 'non-siloed' are – by inference and announcement – nursing, medicine, English or language (Chinese or... Inuit?), psychology, and IT, I should ask if these subjects all fit this description? On the face of it, they all do. Nursing has a place for compassion, humour, teamwork, role-playing (dealing with the schizophrenic patient, for example), cleaning, writing (reports), knowledge, patient assessment, and other things. The list may not be as long as that found in working in the theatre which I know, but it is not 'siloed'. It connects with many facets of human life. A similar case might be made for the rest of the list. Although IT might be somewhat removed from the flesh, it is not a field in which imagination and empathy should go AWOL or be exposed to forces of destruction, although some think as if anything goes. Dan Tehan did not, however, urge IT students towards teaching or language learning or choreography in the name of diversity. That would be to give some of the game away. It (not a pun) is a field in which conjunction, 'the provisional and precarious syntony of vibratory organisms that exchange meaning' (Birardi 2015, p. 31) might somehow occur. That hope is likely a vain one. Siloing will be complete, of course, when the computers are entirely robotic and exercising their own will, and building, without payment or reward, other computers to do the same thing and gradually remove/silo (v.) the human. Whether we should allow that to occur or not is a matter which only philosophy can answer.

Another meaningful anecdote: I recently had an interesting conversation with an efficient, skilful, funny, and empathetic young, Vietnamese nurse in an outer suburban public hospital where I found myself, in emergency, for a couple of days. I must say that I was deeply impressed, in fact emotionally moved, by the professionalism, skill and sheer hard work of all the nurses – without exception. I was so impressed that I wrote to the Health Minister to convey my experience and to state my belief that we are doing very well in health education and that we should apply that attitude to other areas as we move out of the pandemic. I asked this nurse how she de-stressed from the pace and demands of her work.

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The explanation she gave me was almost entirely in terms of endorphins: the explanation was empirical and, therefore, limited as an understanding of human experience. Historical, emotional, cultural and aesthetic experiences were absent in the account. I don't believe that this woman de-stressed by feeling the science (naturalism) in such an 'objective' way, but it seemed that she had limited resources, partly but not predominantly to do with language, to convey the experience. I suspected that she had been encultured in an educative silo which emphasised the empirical so firmly as to encourage her to express herself solely in terms of science and with a degree of automaticity. Her performance seemed to indicate a victory of Apollo over Dionysus. This despite my overall high estimation of the nursing education she had apparently received, its pragmatic roundedness, and my observation of some flexibility in her interaction with patients and other staff. I expect that if I had continued the conversation with the nurse, I might have been able to encourage her to recount her experience in a freer, broader, more phenomenological way. It is difficult, I suggest, for humans to be so completely cut off, amputated, from inner and outer perceptions so that the only remainder is the purely measurable and conceptual, as Dilthey believes. Of course, one may be conditioned to

do so, and maybe that work is better left to robots. In the meantime, striving for what humans can do best in all their richness should not be discouraged.

I have hinted here that 'siloed' is not a useful term to characterise degrees or the subjects which compose them. Knowledge cannot be merely sliced and diced either in designing curricula or in teaching methodology, and such an understanding is hardly new. It might have been better if Dan Tehan had simply said that there will be a need for certain kinds of jobs and the country needs to prepare to meet them. It would have been more honest if he were to have simply said that his Government does not have high regard for the humanities (even though I suspect most of the Government members have been schooled in them), and that such studies should be sacrificed for the greater material and (it seems) psychological good of the population. Better to say that the change is a policy of social engineering. I do not wish to convey the impression that I am casting any aspersions on the intended and useful policy outcomes needed: dealing with an ageing population and the increased mental stresses in society generally, attracting young people into school teaching (which has been a relatively underpaid occupation with high burnout) to deal with the 'Costello baby boom' numbers (which the Minister admitted), and staffing schools in growing outer suburbs caused by immigration are all matters of some urgency. The greater good also includes, obviously, the fuelling of the operation of the digital world (which has its 'siloing' problems, as Choi (2014) and Dalziel et al. (2018) discuss), and the provision of mental health services founded on Psychology to deal with anxieties and behaviours emanating from recent and anticipated social and environmental weakening, damage or collapse.

As for the performing arts, we have been here before. In 1960, the time of Menzies' Science blocks for schools and before Whitlam's free tertiary education, I was working regularly as a young actor in the Channel 9 studios in North Adelaide in the pioneering children's show Southern Stars. I had my heart set on going into teaching, which I did a couple of years later, and am still doing sixty years later. At the studio, a crew member told me after shooting had finished one Sunday afternoon, 'There's this acting school that's just opened up in Sydney.' He was referring to NIDA, of course. I had no idea that one could make a career of acting in Australia. Most Australian actors had to go to RADA in London to study, and most of them came from families who had the means to support them. In the meantime, we Australians have established our own way of doing things and have made studying performance in academic or craft institutions a reality to young people of all backgrounds. Regarding such studies as 'siloes' or imagining them to be so is neither an accurate description nor useful for the way ahead. It is a step back to a gone world in practical terms, and a step back to nowhere in perception and judgment about the merits of different fields of study: as the Editor of *The Sunday Age* (21 June 2020) concluded:

> During society's deepest challenges, from war to recession and depression, it is so often cultural touchstones such as the arts that throw up the champions of our age. The government is right to address the jobs crisis, but it mustn't throw the baby out with the bathwater and jeopardise what helps to make us who we are (p. 22).

The coincidence that Vera Lynn died on the same day as Dan Tehan delivered his speech (18 June 2020) is not lost on me. The institutions we build should not be the 'reshap[ed]... higher education architecture' (Tehan, 2020a) of the tiered terraces of Tenochtitlan down which the heart-less corpses of sacrificed humans were let tumble, but open silos of fermenting knowledge, skill and bravery.

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