



Chancellor's Lecture

Event date: 8 August 2019

Draft speaking notes for Professor John Pollaers OAM

It is my honour as Chancellor of this trailblazing university to formally welcome you to the Chancellor's Lecture for 2019.

Our distinguished speaker, Professor Genevieve Bell will address the fascinating and pertinent question: 'Wonder in the age of Artificial Intelligence – what is our human place in the future?'

Professor Bell brings to the topic tremendous insight drawn from her experience as a cultural anthropologist who has worked at the leading edge of technology in Silicon Valley.

Genevieve, you are also known to be a lively and engaging speaker who challenges your audience to think beyond what we already know - I am very much looking forward to your address this evening.

In fact, I have a long-standing academic and business interest in Artificial Intelligence, and since joining the university as Chancellor earlier this year, I have continued to be impressed and excited by Swinburne research and teaching programs in big data and AI.

Over the past year, we have appointed our first Wipro Chair in Artificial Intelligence – Professor Ryszard Kowalczyk.

And with Amazon Web Services, we have launched a new Data for Social Good Cloud Innovation Centre - the first of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

Other strong partnerships – for example with Epworth Healthcare and the Australian Red Cross – see our students and researchers exploring data-driven, technology solutions to challenges in health, humanitarian aid and the law.

We know that to harness the potential of new technologies we also need to address the challenges head on. And we need to retain our human capabilities for deep and creative thinking.

At Swinburne, we teach our students not just how to collect data, but – importantly - how to question it.

The skills we teach at university – critical thinking, observation, analysis, interpretation and problem-solving – are the very assets that are threatened if we do not understand AI-guided decision-making, and if we do not engage with the challenges as well as the possibilities of emerging technologies.

A recent study published by Swinburne’s Centre for the New Workforce emphasised the need for workers to capitalise on their human qualities if they are to avoid being displaced by technology. It concluded that entrepreneurial skills, collaboration and empathy are what differentiates humans from AI and automation technologies.

I’ll build on this and say that independent thought and – even better – extraordinary thought is a key part of what makes us human and is a core strength we can harness as we face the challenges of changing times.

It is all too easy in today's world to gather information. I see us developing a tendency to jump from observation to action. We often skip critical analysis and interpretation. Through the 'quick fix', we are putting ourselves in danger of developing a herd mentality.

It is all too easy to look down – at our phones, our computers. Our mission as a university, is to encourage our students, our staff, our partners in research and industry, to look up.

Look up and encourage and develop new ways of thinking. Look up and understand the world. Look up and think about consequences.

Look up and ponder the question, 'what is our human place in the future?'

And so we welcome our distinguished guest, Professor Genevieve Bell.

Professor Genevieve Bell is a cultural anthropologist, futurist and technologist widely recognised for her work at the intersection of cultural practice and technology development.

She is Vice President at Intel Corporation, and a Senior Fellow, the company's highest technical rank.

During her almost two decades at Intel, Professor Bell led social science research, established the company's first User Experience Group, and was widely recognised as a leading woman in technology.

In 2017, she returned to Australia, to join the Australian National University as the inaugural Director of the 3A Institute, Florence Violet McKenzie Chair and a Distinguished Professor.

At the 3A Institute Professor Bell is leading a program to tackle complex problems around artificial intelligence, data and technology and managing their impact on humanity.

It is my honour to invite Professor Genevieve Bell to the podium, to deliver the Chancellor's Lecture for 2019.