

THE THIRD SIR JOHN QUICK BENDIGO LECTURE

Towns and Gowns :
the Humanities and the Community

by

Dr Janet McCalman

Prize-winning author and
Australian Research Council Research Fellow

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The role of the humanities turns on the nature of the humanities and the forms of knowledge that its disciplines - the study of literature, language, history, society, archaeology, philosophy and the creative arts - are engaged in. The humanities study the human: at the sentient level rather than at the biological or molecular level. Its focus is human experience, thought, belief, imagination and emotion. Its stuff is that of conscious life itself, of reflection, creation, analysis, criticism. Its proper subject is what the human means, has meant and will possibly mean in the future. It is largely conducted in verbal language, but can include image, plastic representations and sound. It is not conducted in mathematical language except in certain forms of logical philosophy and in linguistics. It depends always on acts of communication between its creators and an audience. It is therefore an intrinsically social intellectual activity: it does not exist if it is not communicated or created in such a way as to be communicated. If it is written, it is written for someone, somewhere, sometime to read. If it is expressed in a language and form which no-one else on earth, now or in the future can understand, it has no value.

It is social in its subject matter as well as its form. It depends on people, either as individuals or in collectivities, for its very life. It is all about people and their worlds; alienated from the source of its subject and its inspiration, it withers and dies. Therefore whatever the most esoteric of scholars may busy themselves with in the most remote of ivory towers, is still dependent on some part of the great human enterprise for its existence. The subject of the humanities is teeming humanity and the humanities have to maintain the connection with humanity - with the towns - or else they stand still.

But if we are so important, why are the humanities in danger? They are dying in our schools. In 1995 only 6.4 per cent of VCE students took Australian History. (Perhaps the Prime Minister is worrying unnecessarily about the black arm-band version of the Australian past—the audience is very small at senior level.) Just 41 per cent of Victorian and 37 per cent of South Australian secondary schools offered some history units at year 12. In Victoria, even some of the most prestigious private schools admit to finding it also impossible to persuade year 12s to take a history: the best they get is a handful wanting easy marks in year 11. History other than Australian is almost the preserve of girls' private schools. Many government schools offer virtually no real history at all between years 7 and 10, burying a trivialised remnant of the subject in SOSE. The majority of Victorian students are taught—or rather exposed to and allowed to play with - only Australian History. Consequently, many arrive at university studies in history bored with their own national story and terrifyingly ignorant of anything else. It is simply not acceptable for students to arrive at university in a first-world country in the late twentieth century having not heard of Hitler, let alone the Industrial Revolution, or imperialism, or totalitarianism, or the Tennis Court Oath, or the People's Charter, or the Combination Acts, or the Reform Bills, or the Enlightenment, or the Ten Days that Shook the World, or of Stalin and Mao. And what of the hundreds of thousands who do not go on to higher education in the humanities? They are left to rely on largely visual media which perforce simplifies and distorts for dramatic effect and where there is no control over the integrity and accuracy of the content. In other words, they learn about the world and its past from Hollywood. This is not merely unfortunate, it is dangerous. Ignorance disempowers, inhibits independent judgement, exposes the individual to being manipulated by the knowledge-rich. Ignorance vitiates citizenship. And it is a denial of our young people's human rights to know, to be educated, led into knowledge. To withdraw subjects from a school syllabus because they are believed to be too culturally specific and elitist for a given school's constituency, is a denial of educational equality and an institutionalisation of inequality. A high school near us offers no humanities at senior level because, it says, most of its students are

Asian: the implications of that are appalling. I had a student a few years ago who was of Ukrainian origin, lived in the high-rise in Fitzroy, and had to threaten to leave her progressive local high-school because she wanted to study English literature in her final year, and the school considered it too elitist for high-rise migrant kids. She said she wanted to study Shakespeare. She succeeded, got into Melbourne University on its special entry scheme for the disadvantaged, but she was so badly prepared and so intimidated by the private-school assurance of her fellow students, that she didn't really get on top of her work until towards the end of her third year. She belatedly realised that she wanted to do honours, but her track record was not good enough.

The reasons for this disaster in our schools, nationally worst in Victoria and South Australia, but happening elsewhere, are complex, and involve many policy changes, intellectual currents, political and economic pressures, social changes and of course the coming of mass schooling. But contributing to it has been the politicisation of the humanities. I am not, in any way, joining the attack on black-arm-band history. Quite the reverse. Nor am I unaware of the enormous improvement in many social values coming from the deliberate teaching of social justice in government and Catholic schools. If you look at the age break-downs of the Victorians who revealed themselves to be the least racist of all Australian states in the survey published recently, it is the young who are the most tolerant. I live in an area with a large community in public high-rise flats. My children attend local state primary and high schools; at both schools Anglo-Celts are an ethnic minority; neither of my children can recall a nasty racist incident at school. Incidentally, that high school believes in teaching history and geography from years 7 to 10, starting with the Ancient World, then Medieval and Early Modern Europe in year 8, Australia to Federation in year 9, Asian History in year 10, before the VCE courses. Nearly half the students are Asian Australians. They manage the curriculum perfectly well. But it is undeniable and wonderful that Victorian schools in the last twenty years have done a great deal to make their students care for the environment and respect and tolerate social difference of all sorts, including gender.

But preaching at children is not the only way. If you want to eradicate racism, you really need to teach history: World War II, colonialism, nationalism, and to do so with narratives which dramatise those lessons, show how such things happened, in context, in a human frame, deepening understanding. It is far more effective to attack racism by showing what it has done to people, how it develops, how it gets used by ambitious leaders, how it gets out of control. And if you study it properly it has a human face, and

that human face could be ours if we permit prejudice to fester. But in their eagerness to teach the right moral lessons, many teachers have lost the sense of the discipline of exploring the past. Instead of teaching history, they have been guilty of debasing it to propaganda. The universities have been complicit in this and now we may be in for it.

I suspect that we are now confronted with political masters who at the deepest level abhor a great deal of what scholars in the humanities and the wider intelligentsia have been claiming is their task in the world. And what they are voicing is echoed by quite a few in the general community. The humanities and the arts have enjoyed the luxury of being funded over the past decade and a bit by governments who at least paid lip service to the necessity for dissent in a healthy society. Labor is itself a product of a long culture of criticism, and draws nourishment from the idea that the highest purpose of education, especially in the humanities and social sciences, is to instil the habit of criticism. We have therefore become careless over the last decade in speaking of universities and the humanities as being important because they are among the most important sources of social criticism, as though this alone is their pre-eminent *raison d'être*. And this has understandably alarmed and alienated many people, institutions and organisations, the present government among them. Sir Robert Menzies, for all his faults, understood universities, cherished them, and treasured language and literature as being of the essence of a culture which gave him immense personal pride and pleasure. He of course did not like Marxist academics and modernist painters and atonal composers, but he valued traditional scholarship, fine writing, and the literature of the Ancient world, of western Europe, and above all, of the British Isles. He is no doubt turning in his grave as his old university, of which he became Chancellor, has been fighting over the future of Classics. There was no question for him that literature, including ancient literature, is fundamental to the culture: and inconceivable that to cancel Classics is a cultural trifle, fully justifiable on economic rationalist grounds. For Menzies, the university was a preserver of tradition, of civilisation, of cultural heritage. If there were subversives within it, that reflected on them, not the university as an institution. The university was intrinsically noble; it was some of its personnel who were undesirables.

The political left has conceived of the university differently. The universities were late fellow-travellers in the culture of criticism, not showing the first real signs of radicalism in Australia until the 1930s. (The student left was entirely marginalised, as witness the fate of anti-conscriptionists in World War I.) In Australia, it was World War II which injected radical confidence into both staff and undergraduates, and during the cold war, the left retreated to the academy as a refuge from quite real discrimination in the

wider community. The anti-suburbanism, *épater les bourgeois* of the intelligentsia was intensified by the Cold War and their marginalisation in Australian society. And with that came a growing alienation from the community which was the very source of the humanities' project.

Universities around the world became more radical places after World War II. While most in them got on with the business of creating and imparting knowledge, their public image became more dissenting. The role of the university, it seemed, above all was to *critique* - the university somehow became a place in opposition to the wider society; gowns were there to find fault with towns and to instruct them on how to fix themselves up. The towns, understandably, took offence especially when that critique of society began to be expressed in language only the initiated could understand.

When we speak in specialised languages and when we construct the academy as somehow morally and intellectually apart from the wider society, then we are resented as moral elitists and perceived as irrelevant.

Witness our new minister for Employment, Education and Training, Senator Amanda Vanstone. The *Australian Book Review* editor, Helen Daniel, earlier this year quoted from an interview with Senator Vanstone: "People who talk about some fairyland dream of changing the system", scorns Amanda Vanstone, 'are chasing a pie in the sky'. They may as well go and write books for university". Helen Daniel continued:

In the Vanstone vision, the academic is not only engaged in futile activity but is at best marginal. In a simple binary world, there is the public arena (important) and the academic world (irrelevant). It seems to me that implicit in the Vanstone vision is a small problem about grasping the notion of Australian intellectual life. It seems unlikely that Senator Vanstone is familiar with the notion of the public intellectual. While intellectual and academic are far from synonymous, I suspect it is a term she would regard as oxymoronic. (*ABR*, June 1996)

And so an intellectual cannot be a useful participant in the public life of society: intellectuals are too specialised, elitist, rarefied, detached, and therefore isolated from real life. We take for granted the clichés 'ivory tower' and 'the university of real life' and can forget the deep anger and resentment they always betray. What is the source of that anger and resentment: is it simply the discomfort we may feel in the presence of sharper minds than our own, or does it spring in part from some sort of disappointment, that somehow people feel let down by their experts?

Are the experts themselves at all to blame for some of it? The French critic Roland Barthes has made much of society's fear of words and argued that one reason for hostility towards intellectuals is that an intellectual is regarded as a being of language. And language, he avers, jeopardises the 'assurance of a world which arrogantly sets "realities" against "words", as if language were merely the futile decor of humanity's more substantial interests'. (*The Rustle of Language*, Basil Blackwell 1986). But does he mean that the 'realists' are without language themselves? Almost everything human is mediated in language, therefore he must mean that the intellectual's language is superior to the realist's, and is entitled to be *privileged*, to use a popular piece of academic jargon, over that of ordinary, apparently inferior people. And clearly it remains a mystery to him why people should resent being talked about in words they don't understand even in their native tongue. This elevation of the intellectual is scarcely endearing, however understandable it may be in a materialistic, consumerist world which is apparently inimical to reflection, questioning and creation.

This does not mean that intellectuals are uninterested in the popular world. Quite the reverse: cultural studies, which is attracting many of the brightest young minds in the humanities, is fascinated by popular culture and has elevated it to the forefront of serious scholarly inquiry. The difficulty is that what cultural studies scholars do with popular culture is incomprehensible to most people outside the academy and even to many within it.

Yet there are branches of knowledge which are necessarily specialised, which only those with a particular training can understand and enjoy and that's the way things are. This is obviously so in the sciences and few in their right mind resent a physicist's closed intellectual world. In the humanities we are more exposed, because most of our activities are conducted in words, and when towns don't understand gowns' words when they expect to, they can become suspicious.

None the less there are areas of intellectual endeavour in the humanities which are both valid and highly specialised, and they matter because they are usually the cutting edge of a long chain of knowledge - a continuum - which passes on and translates learning into various levels and applications. This is most clearly so in the educational process from advanced research to post-doctoral research to post-graduate research to undergraduate training to secondary schooling right down to the primary school. Another path is from gown to town. Advanced learning is expected to filter down, that a profound and path-breaking book or article will speak to a handful of the author's

peers, and one day move into the outside world - simplified and refined to its essence so that it can be absorbed by the less expert. But any confidence expressed in that process is misplaced if attention is not paid to the quality and quantity of the filters.

What are the filters? Books, articles, broadcasts, films, multi-media, talks, educational text-books, classes, talk. And how do they work and where can they fail? They depend on outside money, not the money of the universities and research institutes themselves: the money can be from governments in government broadcasting and government libraries, schools and tertiary institutions as consumers of texts and media, but most of it comes from private enterprise - even, these days, for scientific and scholarly journals. They are all very vulnerable. First, as we all know too well, Governments can institute cutbacks. Second, in the private sphere, the capital invested by the publishing and media industries is considerable internationally, and the profit margins small compared to many other forms of business and manufacturing. The commercial relationships are complex: publishers depend on publicity from media, largely newspapers and radio, and on the private capital of distributors and retailers to sell their books. Then there are the production services of typesetting, design and printing. A lot of people - interested parties - need to make a living out of the book. They are utterly dependent on its quality, that is, its saleability. If no one will want it, it cannot be published. And quite a few will need to want it, because the publisher is going to have to invest at least \$25,000 if it is an average sized monograph. Therefore the market decides. The publisher only decides to make a gamble; the market decides its fate. And the market at the end of the commercial chain is either an acquisitions librarian or a consumer who hands over private money to be able to read this particular book.

Do we ignore the market if it is uninterested in parting with \$40.00 or even \$60.00 for the opportunity to read our books? Or do we pander to what we believe to be the lowest common denominator so that lots of people cough up to read our books, knowing that if we make them really racy and sexy, both literally and metaphorically, we will sell lots and the price can go down so that we can sell even more. How popular do we make ourselves and does this force us to compromise with our scholarship? For we know that in cutting things down to their essences, we lose detail, and when we lose detail, we lose nuances, all the little exceptions to the rules, the lights and shades - that is, the complexities over which we have laboured so hard, and which form the bases for considered judgment. In pursuing depth, we are always seeking richer understanding and from that richer understanding perhaps make assessments, find causes, assess significances, contemplate consequences which are morally finer ones.

We are driven by the need to push deeper into things. It has not been enough to observe and explain the world with the naked eye: we have striven to see things in a smaller scale through the optical microscope, then the electron microscope. Biology is now down to the molecular level. Similarly we have ached to see the stars more clearly and even to see beyond them. And so it is in the humanities: we want to know why rather than just note what is. We seek reasons behind things; we struggle to place meaning on things - things in the past, in the present and in the future. And just as for the scientist, we are driven to this by a conviction that at the end of the tunnel, we will find some sort of truth.

If I can now say something about my own discipline of history. Its subjects - culture, ideas and emotions - are made by people. We make our way through the world of sensation and experience by placing mental constructions on it. History itself is a construction. It does not exist 'out there', perfect, truthful, awaiting discovery by research. It is something we create with our minds, and its status depends on the skill with which we create it according to current intellectual and cultural fashions. In history we are seeking shapes in the past, shapes that are stories, interpretations, explanations, insights. Hegel defined the distinction between history and chronicle as being story with ideas, with argument, with deliberately constructed meaning.

Perhaps one of the easiest ways to understand what we do when we make histories, is to look at personal history. We each construct inside our heads an autobiography and that personal history constitutes our evolving sense of identity. We are our memories, or rather the constructions of our memories. But we also change as our lives change. The person who experienced unemployment in 1931 is not quite the same person who tells you about it more than sixty years later. And the version told now is tailored to the occasion of its telling: how has this individual come to terms with his or her life, and will the story be different if told to a member of the opposite sex, of a different age and social class? Let me give you an example. Outraged adolescents will recount the saga of conflicts with parents differently at sixteen from aged forty-six when they are in turn parents of outraged adolescents, and differently yet again at seventy-six when they are grandparents of outraged adolescents. Are any of these historical accounts better than others? Not necessarily: they are different because the historian has changed and they all have their own validity; although we can make judgements about their relative significance. Oral history can be seen, therefore, as a dialogue between two historians, one of whom really has exclusive control over the evidence.

But if history is a construction, re-written by each generation in its own image, what does that mean about its truthfulness? Most people expect historians to be telling a certain type of truth: that's our job in the eyes of society, to discover and communicate 'true things' about the past. But how can historical truth be 'the truth' if it is essentially a social construction? What is historical truth, can it exist, how do we achieve it and how do we recognise it? That it is not fiction, most have agreed until quite recent times. That its truth matters most have also agreed, and an historian who is found to be wrong, to have promulgated an *untruth*, is judged to have made a professional error. Yet few agree on a fixed truth, and few would argue that it's possible to write a definitive history or biography. Strictly speaking, a definitive history is impossible. You can have very good histories, greatly detailed histories, exhausting and apparently exhaustive histories, but not definitive ones for all time. There have been advocates of absolutely truthful histories: Ranke argued that if you collected every collectable fact you could eventually write the truth. And others argue, or more often imply, that you can extract theoretical truth from the past: that there are laws of cause and effect which reveal truth and which result in facts proving theory and theory proving fact. The past is a social laboratory for theory and theory is truth.

We need to recognise at this point something that is common in human behaviour and experience which we could call the craving for truth, or the craving for certainty, for closure. Truth causes all sorts of problems for us in life and for society as a whole. A great deal of human energy and money is devoted to eliciting the truth of matters: in human relationships (does he/she love me and do I believe him/her when they say they do?), in contested human actions (did she poison him/did he sexually harass her?), in society (is the premier telling the truth about the Casino licence?), in professional relations (is the doctor telling me the truth that my lump is benign?), in everyday life (is my son telling me the truth when he claims to have done the vacuuming while I was out and now wants to be paid for it?) We cannot in fact conduct daily life without a reasonably secure sense of ordinary truth in all our activities. If no one can be relied upon to be telling the truth about anything, then comes madness. A truthless world is an unendurable one of utter alienation. Truth binds human beings together; no truth destroys society. Totalitarian regimes have known well to subvert truth and by denying, distorting and perverting it, to ensure compliance through distrust, isolation and terror.

Making the past into stories which are then communicated to others in speech, writing or image, is a public, a social, a political act. And this history making is fundamental

to the proper workings of human society. Historians have fearful responsibilities to their audiences, and their vigorous, critical and passionate devotion to finding out 'the truth' about the past is crucial to the moral health of the world. But if historians become so intellectually specialised that they can only talk to each other, society is forced to rely on bad history - at its worst, propaganda; at its most trivial, nostalgia. If historians seek truth only in high abstractions, then society is denied its right of access to advanced learning. Historians have a special duty of citizenship, and to carry that out they need to respect their audience and regard it as a scholarly obligation to be lucid and inclusive rather than arcane and obscure. High theory and dense writing are inevitably elitist, however much their practitioners might insist that this private intellectual world is in the service of the masses. Finally, to verify scholarship, historians who accept their duty of citizenship have to work within intellectual frameworks of evidence and even explanation which accord with the sense of truth that obtains in most free societies, and in the international courts and moral forums. If arguments are to be believed, they have to advance satisfactory evidence: it is a search for the truth of matters that the person in the street understands perfectly well. We can choose as scholars to be as epistemologically sophisticated as we like, but the more removed we become from the epistemological commonsense of everyday life, the smaller will become our audience.

All the humanities are expected by society to be driven by some sort of search for the truth of things - not just historical truth, but moral truth, aesthetic truth, philosophical truth, or more generally the *right* answer to the question that prompted the inquiry. Are scholars meant to be dispassionate seekers of true things or are they allowed to be political and passionate persons? On the whole we now allow that scholarship is political and the personal can be political, as feminism has taught us. But there is also an expectation that the scholar will approach the solution of an intellectual problem with certain ethical standards: we can't expect the scholar to be a person without private views, but we do expect the scholar to be self-conscious about the role of those private views, rather than unconscious of their operations. Above all we expect the scholar to accept that in the quest for answers, the evidence and analysis may throw up answers inimical to his or her own values. That is, we expect scholars to face up to drawing conclusions they would prefer not to have to draw. Not all do this. It's not easy, whereas it is very easy to find only the evidence you want to find. It's what used to be called scholarly humility.

Humility is an old-fashioned notion in these days of 'self-realisation', self-esteem', 'up-frontedness', 'feistiness', where diffidence means failure and the world belongs to

those who can sell themselves the best. It is not so long ago that the greatest social crime after breaking any of the Ten Commandments, was to be 'big-headed', 'full of yourself', 'above yourself'. Diffidence and discipline were the hallmarks of maturity; today they can mark you as one of life's losers. Parents in both the working class and the middle class withheld praise and even affection from their otherwise dearly loved children, lest they got 'too big for their boots'. For many older Australians one of the great struggle of their lives has been to find self-confidence, but in our understandable reaction to undo the damage of the past, we have lost sight of the virtues of humility before genuinely complex and difficult things.

The academic world is these days crowded and highly competitive. You don't get far hiding your light under a bushel. You have to promote yourself, appear at conferences, publish everything you can, persuade selection committees and research grant panels that you are better than the other hundred or so very talented people you are up against. It is tough and it is corrupting. It breeds a culture of over-confidence, of attention-seeking, of such high productivity that work is rushed off after insufficient research and time for reflection. Young academics are usually bearing heavy teaching loads and working frantically to get into print. Anyone who is *slow* to publish arouses suspicion: he/she should have published more in those two years after the PhD, or he/she should have got more out of that study leave. Publications are counted and used as statistical bench marks for universities' performance which in turn determines their funding from the government. And the result of all this unseemly haste is bad writing, because it takes time, and effort, and draft after draft to produce lucid, effective prose which expresses complex ideas. It is far easier to write in jargon - jargon is nothing but a shorthand which saves you the trouble of thinking through what something really means and getting the words exactly right. It is also easier and quicker to be critical rather than creative, and yet the real business of the scholar is not just criticism, but in fact the creation of knowledge.

And this really is the most important thing I want to say tonight. The subject of the humanities is the human and they are therefore at the centre of life. There should be no real separation between town and gown for the gowns are intrinsically part of the town. If gowns construct themselves as a class apart, intellectual watchdogs of the wider world, then they diminish themselves. Criticism is a fundamental intellectual tool, but it is but one tool among many, and if the intellectual as critic is all the world hears, then scholarship will be marginalised rather than incorporated into the core of our society.

But perhaps most important of all in this state in this country, is that the role of the critic has overtaken the role of the teacher and we have lost confidence in what was once called the liberal curriculum. We no longer feel confident that there is a body of knowledge, of accumulated learning in the humanities, which we can pass on to our children in the schools and our undergraduate students. We have over-valued *critique* to the point that real *critique* is difficult for the student to apply because he or she knows so little. (A VCE English candidate was quoted recently after doing the exam in English: 'They didn't seem to find out what we knew; they only wanted our opinions; which is a bit frightening because they might be fascists'.) In school history students are meant to evaluate critically different historians' interpretations before they know enough to be able to do so sensibly. As you all know, the struggling student understands this to mean that everyone and everything is biased: nothing is to be accepted and believed, no one has authority to speak truthfully - a very dangerous thing to do with young people in these difficult times.

I am not thinking wistfully of the good old days when children were really taught things in school: I have done too much research into children's school performance from the 1920s to the 1970s to have any illusions about classrooms of the past. Not only was the pedagogy often unsympathetic to children and young people, most students could not read well enough for effective senior schooling. By this I don't mean the ability to decipher words and read essential things in daily life; I mean the complex functional literacy of being able to read fluently enough to absorb meaning without effort. And in the late 1980s, still only around a third of Australian adults read that well, and the older they are the worse they are. In the 1950s the embarrassingly high failure rates at the University of Melbourne were finally diagnosed as largely stemming from the students' inability to read fast enough with the comprehension levels necessary for university studies. These problems are with us still in tertiary institutions, and are never more obvious in schools now that retention rates have risen so high.

Facing classes of students who lack the basic skills to enjoy the humanities and competing with a powerful consumerist youth culture, it has all seemed so much easier to concentrate on process, on teaching *critique* rather than content. With the VCE, the process tasks, the CATs, absorb so much time and energy that there is no time left between CATs to actually teach the course. Self-directed learning, however, has its limitations. The texts have to be within the student's own reading abilities;

classes drift without the constant contribution of a stimulating interaction with a teacher. The students' own efforts, unsurprisingly, are poor, but the teacher is there to revise their drafts and polish it so that the end result is a performance that reflects more on the teacher than the student. At the university arrives a student who has little or no background knowledge, has achieved marks in the VCE which he or she cannot match on their own, and amazingly, considering the intentions of the VCE, a student, even with the highest TER, who is poor at independent learning. All they have are research skills - research skills they really will not need unless they do post-graduate research. The VCE has been a disaster for the humanities in this state, but we have to do some very deep thinking about what we want our children to know and in fact rebuild our entire school curriculum. We cannot afford to keep turning out future citizens who do not know what World War II was about.

I believe that the lead has to come from the universities, as well as from the many teachers I know who are just as concerned and from parents and students themselves. We all have to start speaking out, and be unafraid to admit past mistakes. We need to make the humanities, not a gloss of culture, a finishing on a balanced education, but, along with basic science, the core of that education. We need to build the humanities into the fabric of our children's lives, where they belong, for it is only there that they will survive and flourish. But we also need to think again about the role of the gown in the town: to show the town that we are citizens of it also, not a class apart; to talk and write creatively as well as critically; to take pains to reach as wide an audience as possible; to take seriously the role of public intellectual; to watch our language and practise wherever we can, principles of democratic scholarship. We must make it impossible for towns to charge us with living in ivory towers; and we can only do this by being members of towns ourselves.