Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications
and other research outputs

Speaking out in a digital world: humanities values, humanities processes

Book Section

oro.open.ac.uk

Speaking Out in a Digital World: Humanities Values, Humanities Processes

Jan Parker *6800 words*

As Belfiore points out, there has been a crisis in and of the Humanities since at least Bérubé and Nelson's seminal 1995 *Higher Education under Fire: Politics, economics and the crisis of the humanities*. And, as Looseley in this book, the financial implosion has felt to many of us to be both a nail in our humane coffin, and a hatchet handed to those [re]introducing a deeply illiberal agenda.

But, there may be, just may be, a new audience for our arguments, a new generation brought up to be skilled consumers and players of the market but who are open to looking for more. And while we work, as we must, to win over that generation (and their financing parents!), we must also become skilled advocates, convincing society that what has been called 'the Humanities project' is as valid, urgent and transformative as ever.

To do that we must meet a challenge from that generation, focused in the UK by widespread and very well supported high school and student demonstrations against the proposed increase in university fees and removal of central support funding. The removal of funding for all but STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) Higher Education teaching dichotomised Humanities and Arts from STEM: promoting STEM as useful, of economic benefit, generally valuable to the country. That Oliver Twist movement: 'please, Prime Minister, we want some more … humanities education', crystallised the issues for non-STEM disciplines (or, as we prefer as moving away from a deficit model which defines us by what we are not, CLASSH: studies in Culture, Languages, Arts, Social Science and Humanities). For at the heart of what could be described as a consumer rebellion was a call for academics to speak out, to act, to move away from the politician-induced 'counter-revolutionary subordination' and reject, with the protesters, the market/consumer discourse in education. As one Humanities student at Cambridge wrote,

> the widespread grassroots student movement that emerged, coalescing around occupied spaces in almost thirty universities, sought to redefine the value of higher education by demanding the abolition of tuition fees, rejecting market/consumer rhetoric, and redefining 'the university' by creating autonomous spaces within their own institutions.
> ('Speaking Out', Robson 2011)

It was in answer to this that Humanists in the UK formed their own advocacy group: founding *Humanities Matters*, 'a campaign to celebrate and support world-leading humanities and social science teaching and research in UK universities' (http://humanitiesmatter.com), publishing and disseminating theses by contemporary Humanities' public intellectuals, including those like Collini referred to in this volume.

In doing this, they are capitalising on some of the skills that we can claim are peculiarly the result of a Humanities education: skills of rhetoric, of envoiced and engaged citizenship, of composing and addressing complex, multiply persuasive texts: and, indeed, capitalising on that very world - globalised, market-led, digitally interconnected - that we have felt threatened by and with. (It is no accident that country-by-country destination figures, where they are available, show our graduates welcomed into those global media - broadcasting, journalism and publishing. They are welcomed because of Humanities curricula 'skilling' our students in communication, in creating and

decoding complex narratives, in using and writing critical, hermeneutic and semantic analysis, in addressing different audiences and, all importantly in today's global market, in intercultural communication (Parker 2008a and 2008b).

Important 'speaking out' initiatives like *Humanities Matters* and the US-founded *4Humanities* (http://humanistica.ualberta.ca/mission) use the resources of that interconnected global market - www2 communication, feeds and alerts and dissemination technologies that seemingly change weekly together with the fast-developing and important social referencing fora. (Academic social referencing started by such initiatives as *Linkedin* and *Mendeley* form and maintain clusters around 'opt-in' common interests and projects rather than the more sinister profile target marketing technologies that search out and compile a profile of interests from an individual's Google searches, buying patterns and key words in emails on open servers.) The *4Humanities* 'speaking out' site, 'Humanities, Plain & Simple', asks individuals from all walks of life to speak up about why the Humanities matter to them, 'calling leading scholars, administrators, professionals, students, research centers, even celebrities to add their voices to this campaign'.

This of course is not a new call: many conferences, colloquia and public events have done the same, inviting media, performance, business and society 'stars' to demonstrate the benefit of a liberal arts education. But all too often that demonstration is no more, or no less, inspiring than a statement that amounts to 'I had a Humanities/liberal education and look at me now'. This particular advocacy site asks for much more specific claims about skills and benefits:

> How has Humanities-based thinking directly or indirectly altered or innovated strategies, ideas, businesses, research, leadership, learning?
> (http://humanistica.ualberta.ca/category/special-4humanities-projects).

And it invites writers to use the language of everyday life – serious or sarcastic, particular or holistic - to address a general audience and to refer to real-world situations.

The *4Humanities* website does also have a comprehensive 'advocacy' section, of influential statements and publications from the US, UK and Australia, which it links with recommendations of 'how to advocate for change', an important forum for gathering together individual initiatives which to be effective have to move from 'speaking' to 'speaking out'. A comment at a recent such forum – the last plenary US National Forum for the Future of Liberal Education, founded 'to identify and prepare a core national group of emerging academic leaders to guide the future of the liberal arts' – was thought-provoking. Misquoting Steve Jobs, he said that while it was energy-consuming to *create* wealth or in this case action and change, it was considerably less so to unlock *latent* energy and enthusiasm. This seems an illuminating personal and technological challenge for us advocates, to tap into others' valuing of the Humanities and unlock their advocacy … for change, because that is what is needed, using the weapons of the sophisticated global market.

The *4Humanities* advocacy site and the UK's *Humanities Matters* publish and disseminate theses by contemporary Humanities' public intellectuals such as Stefan Collini (whose disquisition on and excoriation of the UK government's strategy report 'Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System', published with open access by London Review of Books, has become a rallying cry for UK Liberal Educationalists, including some in this volume.

Public Valuing of the Humanities

It is interesting, however, that Collini refuses to be drawn into defending or justifying the Humanities – necessarily, he thinks, a matter of saying they are important because they contribute to something more important, usually money making. It is precisely against this instrumentalist discourse that this volume and these contributors have come together.

He, rather, sees his role as Professor of English Literature and Intellectual History as one of explaining the evident value of the Humanities.

(FOOTNOTE in his contribution to the Cambridge Centre for Research in Arts, Social Science and Humanities, CRASSH symposium, 'Why the Arts and Humanities Matter' (Facebook Videos Posted by CRASSH: Collini, http://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=739326751470)

For:

> we in the US and UK have lost the automatic valuing of the Humanities as universities and research have come more and more under the aegis of bodies whose primary concerns are business, trade and employment. The terms in which the activities of universities are now discussed have been honed in shaping other kinds of 'corporate and business unit strategy'. (Collini, S. 2010)

This lack of automatic valuing of the Humanities in the UK is strange in a country still adhering to and deeply if sometimes unconsciously valuing a class system in education and politics, given that Bourdieuian cultural capital has for long been seen to rest in Humanities and Arts 'highbrow' [sic] elite culture and elite cultural institutions - such as the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Festival Opera and the Royal Shakespeare Company - and where most cabinet ministers of all parties went to Oxford and Cambridge to study Humanities (the parliamentary 'training' subject is Politics, Philosophy and Economics). It is generally said that in the parts of Europe influenced by the Humboldtian model, the problem is the opposite: given no automatic elite status of the arts, Humanities are very easily absorbed, institutionally and in popular discourse, within an all-encompassing intellectual domain of *Wissenschaft*. Although in Humboldt's Schleiermacher-based model of the university this is best translated as 'Liberal Arts' (and indeed when adopted in the US the resulting colleges were called Liberal Arts foundations), it has become thought of as signifying useful, productive higher knowledge and equated with 'science'. It is therefore all too easily brought into a Two Cultures discourse, always seemingly used to denigrate Humanities' worth and contribution.

But on reflection, maybe this very elitist attitude to the Humanities and Arts, this investment in them as 'classy' cultural capital, has led to another problem? One marketeers' strategy lies in separating off and making inaccessible the product you want to promote; some of the Ivy League and UK Russell Group have wanted to claim elite exclusivity for their research. The sciences while so doing have been prominent in showing that their research outcomes have public benefit and have promoted the Public Understanding of Science. But any similar exclusivity in Humanities research has served precisely to separate it off, by its discourse and lack of attention to public involvement, and has been made to seem part of an excluding agenda. As that Cambridge student protest

attested, it is the divorce between the Humanities elite and society that has led on both sides to a devaluing of real rather than simple economic discourse:

> During the nine-day Cambridge occupation, the Old Schools administrative building became the site of the free exchange of ideas, imagination and collective learning. The 'ivory tower' was occupied by present and future students, academics, trade unionists and parents, sharing skills and ideas about a common struggle for social good valued outside an economic system based upon profound inequality. The concept of higher education as the preserve of an intellectual elite, alienated from the rest of society, was challenged as direct action workshops shared space with academic lectures on the financial crisis and supervisions took place at the same time as discussions about free education.(Robson 2011)

There may, however, just be an unlooked for benefit for Humanities Higher Education from our exclusion from STEM funding and marginalisation in terms of the market economy. Disastrous, yes – the future for Humanities young academics looks bleak indeed – but there may just be a breaking down and turning outwards of this Humanities research silo. For there will be little money and few jobs for Humanities researchers; could it be (I speak as an archaeologist whose profession has embraced 'amateur' help and expertise since the 18th century) that Humanities research will again become driven by 'amateurs' (viz: 'passionate devotees') coordinated and enabled by university departments functioning as outward-facing research networks?

And maybe this would contribute to gaining ground in the task of re-valuing the Humanities and Arts: encouraging them to move away from any 'exclusive' label, to drop arcane, specialist and heavily theorised discourse and rediscover and re-embrace the Public Understanding of Humanities.

As the History student leader concluded,

> Universities need to rediscover their reciprocal relationship with society in order to assert their social value; just as society needs these spaces of critical enquiry, the future of universities as spaces of critical enquiry is contingent upon the support of the rest of society in their struggle. For, as we learned last autumn, the fight cannot be won alone.

Humanities and Public Engagement

Professor Collini professes; he writes and speaks out as a public intellectual. Another way of professing is the personal, civic and social one: to meet another distinguished professor, Colgate's Robert Garland's challenge:

> For me, it's payback time. I believe that all of us, as Humanists, have a duty to be active in exporting our expertise and our passion beyond the gates of the academy. There are several ways in which we can do this, both to the benefit of society and to the health of the Humanities. One way is to contribute to a popular journal.… if a subject engages one's attention for several years without having any interest for the educated public at large, then there must at least be a question as to the value of those years spent. Another avenue is to engage in outreach to one's local community tailored to the specific needs and interest of the community.… Another is to actively explore ways in which there may be a social or

> political dimension to one's research interests that can help inform public debate.… Yet another is to participate in Humanities-related festivals. (Garland 2012)

This amounts to no less than a redefinition of the role of the academic and of the academic tenure and promotion structure. For just as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning movement in the US and now worldwide has argued for a parallel and equal career in university teaching as in university research, Garland in effect calls for the valuing of a third member of Boyer's famous scholarships – the Scholarship of Engagement.

Public engagement - the involvement of universities with society - is a suddenly vital topic, for various reasons. Whereas in the US it has always been part of university curricula, public engagement being seen as an opportunity or even an obligation, in the UK it became part of a New Deal, allowing universities to charge and then to raise tuition charges provided they improved access for lower income families burdened disproportionately by long term debt and for members of minority ethnic groupings, and they took responsibility for sharing their scholarship and innovative thinking with the community.

It is generally presumed that this affordance plays to Humanities' strengths, in that Humanities research can be seen more easily to have imaginative outcomes and presentations. It certainly seems a vitally important aspect of our work as academics to those of us who hold the Humanities to be life-transforming as well as life enhancing. But this turning outward of the Humanities has met immediate internal resistance, more so than 'Public Understanding of Science' events.

One can only speculate about the causes – a deep-seated fear of the Humanities disciplines beings seen as lightweight, merely populist? - but it does not seem to be helped by the anti-Humboldtian attempts by successive UK governments to divorce and privilege research from and over teaching; various Research audits, bringing with them a slew of managerialist discourse, have, again, privileged the research 'star' – often perceived as a lone academic – over other members of an integrated university body.

Digital Humanities: the answer?

> The humanities are in trouble today, and digital methods have an important role to play in effectively showing the public why the humanities need to be part of any vision of a future society. (quoted in Svensson 2012)

Given the prominence, status and marketability of Digital Humanities in the US, UK and the rest of Europe (many funding bodies giving precedence, it sometimes seems, to anything with 'digital' and 'transformation', 'dissemination', 'data mining' or 'knowledge transfer' in its project title), it does seem that there is an important role for Digital Humanists to perform, one within, to borrow the title of an Oxford Science Chair, 'the Public Understanding and Public Appreciation' of the Humanities.

And in any such turning outwards, digital innovation will be central: to building inter-disciplinary communication and the inter-disciplinary access to disciplinary expertise needed to create, evaluate and disseminate new Humanities knowledge. And also to help any remaining lone scholars break out from their ivory tower! The US's seminal HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory) was founded a decade ago to provide a forum: 'to rebalance

intelligence for the interactive digital age with emphasis on collaboration, on interdisciplinary crosstalk'.

 [FOOTNOTE For one young scholar's experience of working as a HASTAC scholar, see Kim Singletary's 'Interdisciplinary intellect: HASTAC and the commitment to encourage collective intelligence' (Singletary 2012).]

As *4Humanities* ('a platform and resource for advocacy of the humanities, drawing on the technologies, new-media expertise, and ideas of the international digital humanities community'), claims above, 'digital methods have an important role to play in effectively showing the public why the humanities need to be part of any vision of a future society'.

Svensson, director of HUMlab at Umea University, Sweden, argues for the Digital Humanities as a trading zone and meeting place, enabling a 'Project for a Changing Academy' (Svensson 2012). The result is that rather than disregarding 'the digital', interpreting it as purely technical challenge, it can make the Humanities a catalyst for interchange, development and envisioning the future of the academy: an important place for thinking about, experimenting with and rethinking the Humanities.

This large claim is borne out at any Humanities or Humanities' disciplinary conference, where a major strand is sure to be devoted to digital research: sometimes a 'bells and whistles' application or programme applied to traditional disciplinary material or methods, but sometimes indeed a new field. For instance, there has been claimed to be a 'visual turn' in the Humanities, suggesting, after the seminal *Picture Theory: Essays on Visual and Verbal Representation* (Mitchell 1964), that such a 'visual turn' has replaced the 'linguistic' turn in recent years. And certainly Digital Humanities has embraced the opportunities to go beyond the digital enhancement and presentation of data to create dynamic, interactive 'visible knowledge' such as PELAGIOS (Pelagios Enable Linked Ancient Geodata In Open Systems) with an aim 'to make possible new modes of discovery and visualization for scholars and the general public' and the highly significant Visible Knowledges Project which is important also in involving the whole community – students and the public – in the projects (Bass et al. 2009).

Born Digital: a new Humanities Field?

> Already within the broad field of Digital Humanities, we are seeing a flowering of interdisciplinary, collaborative, and technologically-sophisticated research and pedagogy that is producing new modes of knowledge formation. (White Paper, University of California at Los Angeles 2009)

Pelagios and the VKP are digitally enabled, both in processing of data and in team communication; both are disciplinary in that both produce disciplinary knowledge, with the help of digital designers.

The place of the digital in the Humanities envisaged by many digital humanists, however, is a different domain from the traditional one, one seen as made up of discrete Humanities disciplines peopled by lone scholars and their doctoral students. Digital Humanities, rather, has a vision of digital scholars as part of a transformatory, supra-disciplinary, collaborator community:

I don't want a digital facelift for the humanities, I want the digital to completely change what it means to be a humanities scholar. (Perry, much quoted in MLA 2009 and 2011 Digital Humanities blogs and discussed by Svensson 2012)

But a UK conference on 'Digital Technologies: Help or Hindrance for the Humanities?', engaging many born and late-adopting digital humanists, resisted such demands for changed role and identity, and elicited some interesting expressions of the affordances of this brave digital new world. There was much nostalgia for traditional disciplinary processes and for a disciplinary identity based on local and regular meetings, seminars, newsletters, conversations (including 'insider' black humour and ironies) rather than the ever more 'linked in' world of international contacts and socially referenced communities – all inclusive and targeted but not, finally, bonding and providing a group identity.

There was also a nostalgia for the days when research data were tangible, were there to be quested after: an archive, a painting in a basement or something else that the researcher could uniquely work on, claim and be identified with. This can be justified: no digital reproduction can provide all the contextual and inscribed detail of 'the original'. But it seemed a more visceral response: people talked of the trek, the 'aventure', the blowing off of dust from something 'discovered', all as a rite of passage. I was reminded of a colloquium discussed by Loosely in this book when Professor Dame Strathern talked of the importance of the particularity of Humanities data (Parker 2008b). She spoke as an anthropologist, inclusion into which discipline has traditionally rested in the completion of a unique project – the observation of a particular culture at a particular time and afterwards 'writing culture'. One of the claims that we make for the Humanities is that we do deal with that which is singular – discrete, unrepeatable – and that which is particular – located in a certain context. Our hermeneutic is one of deriving interpretative narratives, often plural, avowedly partial, from singular, particular events. With digital data, however, there is, rather, a sense of dizzying plurality, seemingly stretching almost to infinity; of data analysis and interpretation getting faster and faster. There has been a cross generational call rather for 'slow reading'; a hermeneutic of concentration, of inwardness – looking at the object rather than always seeing the outward leading network. A call, too, for the product of single-minded concentration on and reflection about a unique artefact or cultural process or product, finally honed into a singular – in all senses – analytic, significance-highlighting and disciplinary-identity granting authoritative narrative.

There are, many of us think, intellectual as well as emotional and nostalgic reasons for hesitating. It is not necessarily Luddite for Humanities scholars to resist digital determinism – the presumption that because the research techniques are digital and innovative the results are necessarily 'cutting edge' (an image, interestingly, of research as a tool for carving out new data). For valuable, even vital, though we can argue Humanities to be in interdisciplinary projects and in tackling interdisciplinary problems, a founding European Research Area Humanities meeting outlined questions that can be pre-eminently tackled using Humanities methodologies and paradigms, problems where technico-scientific methods and approaches can be shown to have failed. (So many drug, diet-related and engineering cases spring to mind; one notable example to a Londoner is that of the Millennium Bridge, one of many engineering projects which were faulty because the move from calculation to application was too narrowly thought through processually, overlooking elements of the scaling up for production or, here, of human behaviour: for a crowd tends to fall into step, into synch, which made the suspended bridge sway….)

Or where the questions asked are not those that produce the answers needed because they have to be asked of classes, of sets, of data; because they ignore the human: psychology, error, senses, emotions and imagination.

Or where large data sets are inappropriate and too rough grained because they are so large that the individual and the particular are lost and no meaning or significance can be derived. (How often have we heard popular reports of correlations and risk derived from large-scale experiments where a little knowledge of context, cultural history, psychology – or the human condition! – serves to generate many other meanings and questions?) For as philosopher Ron Barnett has so well identified, we are living in a world not of Newtonian system but of complex and super-complex paradigms, which clash and contradict (Barnett 2000).

The Humanities: empathy, therapy, subjectivity

Arguments about disciplinary transformation and skills, like much of the advocacy mentioned above, are inherently and properly personal: a sense of the value of and gratitude for the Humanities and Liberal Arts education that enable people in many different walks of life to flourish and live full, rich lives in times of success and to survive times of trial.

Nussbaum has claimed that the distinctive value of the Humanities lies in its ability to cultivate empathy and the moral imagination (Nussbaum, 2010); a large claim for humanists to make. The autism and empathy expert, cognitive scientist Baron-Cohen, the grandson of a Holocaust survivor, is concerned to expose the role of indifference in genocide: the lack of empathy that facilitates the objectification of others. In *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A new theory of human cruelty* he proposes that the idea of evil be replaced by the idea of culturally-created empathy-erosion, so distinguishing the effects of enculturation from conditions such as autism (Baron-Cohen 2011). In his important argument he is concerned to trace de-humanising rather than 'humanising' mechanisms and strategies. There is however one immediately prominent therapeutic use of the Humanities: many hundred projects using classical Greek tragedy with returned Iraq soldiers, many diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. (*Theater of War* has in one year mounted more than 200 productions of Greek tragedy in workshops with Iraq veterans: http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/overview, and have generated profound testimonies to their effect: 'Acting Out War's Inner Wounds', NY Times 1st Jan 2011 and subsequent articles in their series: 'The Hard Road Back: Unseen Injury')

Humanities research suggests that alien drama – such as the 5th century BCE Greek tragedies – is enabling those damaged by a current war to play out and play with their experience, so generating for themselves other narratives. (UK Broadmoor Maximum Secure Hospital's Forensic Psychiatrist Gwen Adshead has written in terms resonant to a literary critic: of her necessary task to be the rendering dialogic of her patients 'cover story', their position statement of self and motivations. She also uses drama and film in group sessions, following on from Broadmoor Director Murray Cox's famous work engaging 'lifers' and those diagnosed as psycho-and socio-paths with the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Hamlet. (Adshead 2012a and b)

The prize winning Sri Lankan actress, Anoja Weerasinghe was also hailed as 'Healing wounded minds' for her touring production of *Mother Courage,* coming out of a series of psychosocial drama workshops held in diverse parts of post-civil war Sri Lanka for those traumatized

by disaster and conflict; her adaptation of *Pericles*, similarly growing out of many workshops with those affected by the tsunami, won Edinburgh Festival Fringe First and Spirit of Edinburgh awards. [FOOTNOTE: 'Healing wounded minds' http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2006/03/19/fea27.html; 'Drama group aids tsunami victims' http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4139042.stm.]

Her Sri Lankan Abhina Academy, which 'brings together a cross section of individuals from every part of society who share a common passion and belief: the healing power of drama, theatre and performing arts' is just one example of many such performing arts projects around the war-torn world. One persuasive account of the humanising effects of such initiatives was the story of how Anoja started this work: a famous Bollywood film star, she managed to persuade the soldiers guarding the 'Killing Fields' 'refugee' camp to allow her inside. Once there, the workshops grew to involve a large proportion of the camp – perpetrators as well as victims of what have been deemed crimes against humanity (http://srilanka.channel4.com/index.shtml).

Such testimonies and life-enhancing stories form narratives of particularity – of the effect of this Humanities text and engagement in this humane exercise. Thoughtful advocacy and powerful rhetoric from the influential and personal, self-validating, particular narratives of experienced value and benefit are needed in this time of 'speaking out'. But this must go with a complementary evidence-based documentation and theorisation of the value of the Humanities.

When a group of European Humanists came together to develop our arguments for the value of our disciplines (Parker 2008b), we felt that one of our problems was the rhetoric of the *impersonal* (sc. science) v the *personal* in what my mathematician colleague calls 'the touchy-feely Humanities'. We argued, rather against the supposition that the Humanities are:

(a) un-empirical (there is nothing more empirical than attending to how people really think: there are, for example, no facts where the imagination is not at work; recent work on the relations between facts and narratives highlights how there is more than one kind of authentic representation);

(b) un-rigorous (for Humanities' rigour lies in its appropriateness, its responsiveness to the human world which is its material);

(c) subjective (for the Humanities deal with subjectivities but accept responsibility for understanding and explaining the other and other ways of knowing).

Value and Valuing in a Digital Age

We put together a manifesto on the value of Humanities processes for the European Commissioner for Research at a time when our questions and processes are perceived as needed as never before: the METRIS (Monitoring European Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities) report says:

> Both the current recession and a number of fundamental issues ranging from global warming to disenfranchisement and poverty are not questions that lend themselves to merely technical solutions. They often require a fundamental rethinking of assumptions that are taken for granted about society, governance, or economic values. (METRIS 2009 21-2)

Especially, in this digital age it seems that now is the time, as Belfiore's project, to put our best analytical and reflective skills to arguing for, as that METRIS report also says: 'New approaches to value and valuation in the context of knowledge economies'.

Humanists range in reactions to such demands for impact- and value-metrics. One consortium responded to European Research demands for metrics by 'attempting to explore the issue of the measurement of value by reframing the idea of the value of arts & humanities research away from a purely monetary value towards a desired set of outcomes from policy-makers, academics and social partners'. The project, HERAVALUE, funded by national and European bodies with a well followed Twitter stream (http://twitter.com/#!/heravalue), 'seeks to develop performance measures which can quantify or capture the impacts that arts and humanities research has upon society'.

Humanists whose mantra tends to be 'What can be counted does not count and what counts cannot be counted', are resistant to metrics. And it was expressions such as HERAVAUE's 'dissonance between the claims to excellence and independence that academics make, and the reality of a widespread set of micro-outcomes generated by individual projects which defy easy mobilisation into figures' that led the Humanists mentioned above, summoned to a European Parliament special conference to establish 'Future Priorities for the Humanities', to decide to meet.

That particular European Parliamentary Conference stressed the problems that could not be addressed by normal science nor large-data-set social science: fearfulness, terrorism, insecurity, lack of flourishing, depression. The stand we made was to highlight the distinctness of Humanities methods and different but no less valid interpretative and analytic processes; not to refuse to work in inter- and multi-disciplinary contexts but stressing that we ask different questions, operate within and challenge different paradigms and narrate out findings in different forms.

For we were tired of accounting for ourselves in deficit, positivist language, and of being, we perceived, an afterthought to 'real science' projects – those with large data sets and using a great deal of equipment – to make attractive brochures and 'things like "installations"; like cricketers' wives allowed into the club house to make the after-match tea. We decided to make a stand – to tackle the rhetoric of skills, competences and employability and transferable skills by forming a higher, more claiming and less subservient discourse. We declared that the Humanities can contribute vitally, precisely by offering an alternative to hard science inductive-deductive method, and to the whole positivist mind set so tellingly deconstructed by Law in *After method: mess in social science research* (Law 2004). And by offering encountered, disputed, agonistic knowledge; emphasizing non-closure, provisionality, disturbance.

Singularity. Particularity

These are large claims; in a response to both employers and the European Science Fund, it seems important both to unpack and particularise such assertions. Particularise rather than give evidence, because that is what the Humanities do – mount argument from particulars and highlight and give narratives to the singular.

Professor Dame Strathern has made a strong case for Humanities methods in and of themselves as vital – as skilled and skilling in dealing with multivocal, multicause, supercomplex and

unpredictable conditions. Mistress of a Cambridge College, government advisor and consultant on the Nuffield Council on Bioethics as she has been, in her arguments and her concern with particularity – that which is particular to a person or cultural experience at a certain time and certain context - and singularity: that which is discrete, unrepeatable (neither of which social science data sets and bell curves can account for or understand), she speaks as a Humanist as well as an anthropologist. For Humanists are trained to observe a particular text, practice or artefact at a particular time and then, by writing a narrative of its particular significance to 'write culture'.

This is one of the claims that we make for the Humanities: that we do deal with that which is peculiar to a person and located in a certain context. Our hermeneutic is one of deriving interpretative narratives, often plural, avowedly partial, from a singular, particular event, reading or performance which pierces what Attridge in the *Singularity of Literature* calls the carapace of idioculture (Attridge 2004). That is to say, that each individual moves, responds and is affected from within a shell of accumulated cultural expectation and it takes a piercing representation to get through and disturb the individuals' preconceptions. (Teaching Greek tragedy as I do, I think of the protagonist faced with the norms and expectation of the chorus, who trot out standard judgments – pride goes before a fall; tall poppies; blood will have blood; call no man happy until he is dead – that are shatteringly inadequate as responses to the horrors that the protagonist has gone through.) Singular characters, plots, themes, dramatisations and visualisations act not as representations of that individual's life experience but as a case study, a singular, particularised exemplum, an exemplum of someone whose life and experiences do not fit under any normal distribution/bell curve.

Studies of identity talk of the storied life, of identity as layers of memory and Adshead's 'cover story': the position statement of self and motivations. Singular literature puts that cover story, those layers, under scrutiny. Two pieces of Greek wisdom come to mind: man is the measure of all things (man is the cynosure and judgment-ruler) and for every *logos* – narrative of cause and effect, of explanation, of argument - there is an equal and opposite. That is to say that Humanities' narratives are centred on, focused on a human - person, event, society - out of which human - not divine, not absolute - judgment arises. And that scrupulous logic and analysis can always be countered by a shadow side that takes the same premises and events and draws a different meaning-making, significance-highlighting narrative explanation.

Dealing with complexity and dislocation: Robustness and Identity

The European Commissioners' conference on Future Priorities for the European Research Area reported as the major problem facing employees in the European Union to be financial, economic, and social insecurity, inducing a state of fearfulness and sense of threat.

Living and operating in the 'broken', fearful society described by politicians, marked by lack of faith and structure, by identity issues (gangs, religion v ethnicity etc) and, indeed loss of confidence in politics – single issue, single rhetoric; in marketeers, bankers, economists; in the future …require robustness of identity, ability to handle plural and conflicting narratives and an ability to imagine the future and re-represent the self in the past.

This maps onto something that employers contributing to the UK Council for Industry and Higher Education reported: that the intangible though definite quality needed in new graduate

employees is that they are robust. This they unpacked as secure in themselves and their identity; able to cope with, and, importantly operate in, challenging and strange new situations; to be able to communicate with 'others', which requires intercultural and imaginative skills as much as linguistic.

And the philosopher Ron Barnett has described a global, interconnected, information overloaded www2 world as producing an incapacitating and paralysing state of supercomplexity: a saturated solution of complex systems such that no decision or action can be taken in the light of all the factors, because the factors are informed by incompatible systems (Barnett 2000). Yet, inaction is not possible: the doctor/scientist/politician/manager must act. Barnett said the Humanities were particularly good at dealing with incomplete, partial – in both senses – vestigial, provisional data; patching and embroidering the pieces into workable, informing, explanatory framework.

It is this robustness in the face of manifold threat, instability and supercomplexity that the Humanities can properly claim to develop, in students, in employees, in society. In addition to Barnett, prominent humanists claim for the Humanities an especial place in creating robustness: Martha Nussbaum -stresses the ways in which focused, systematic study in the Humanities equips young people with skills and habits of mind necessary for human flourishing in an increasingly complex and diverse world. (Nussbaum 2010)

As another member of the Colgate/Emory colloquium member, Ivan Karp said:

> Exploring new worlds in this way fosters an appreciation for being surprised, so that having one's taken-for-granted assumptions challenged is experienced as pleasurable rather than threatening. In the pluralistic worlds we increasingly find ourselves in, this may be the humanities' most valuable contribution to global citizenship. (Karp 2012)

Otherness and Being Human: Mediating a transforming encounter with the other

> 'Otherness exists only in the registering of that which resists my usual modes of understanding, registering alterity is a moment in which I simultaneously acknowledge my failure to comprehend and find my procedures of comprehension beginning to change as a process' (Attridge, 2004: 27).

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) 2011 report on *The State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies,* in celebrating South Africa's 'rich and fecund diversity of the creative and the performing arts' which helped to 'transform Society and enshrine Human Rights in the post-apartheid constitution', was, with Attridge, arguing that only the affecting cultural work can pierce the carapace of prejudice, can enable the imagination of otherness.

Such empathy and moral imagining with not just '*la même*' – the self, the same – but with '*l'autre*' – the other, the alien - form the basis of what we classicists claim for our courses as a 'mediation of a transforming encounter with the other'. 'Mediation', because the Humanities deal with non-consuming/non-appropriating interpretation and account-rendering; 'a transforming encounter' because experience of Humanities' texts has dimensions of both challenge and ethics; of the Other, of what is outside the self's experience, time, culture. In a world which mediates, perhaps hypermediates, others' experiences it is particularly important that the Humanities stand for and develop, active not passive, transformatory intercultural encounters.

The result of real encounter is to render the other's challenge intelligible and worthy of interest and rather than inducing fear. Given the fearfulness of the post 9/11 world, the skill of constructing and dealing with images of otherness can be seen to be both vitally needed and markedly absent in current hegemonic knowledge practices. We must argue for Humanities' other ways of seeing and listening – of dealing with and engaging with difference, of accounting for self and other – and other ways of learning about others' cultural practices (ethnographic, experiential, empathetic, imaginative, sensory, multilingual and multicultural, responsible and responsive); they are urgently needed.

Conclusion

Employers want what has been named 'oven-ready and self-basting' employees - robust, with communicative and inter-cultural skills - for a world of prevailing contemporary dislocation, lack of control and fearfulness. All three are heightened when marked by 'experts'' discourse which seems neither to address nor to comprehend the citizens' lived experience. Politicians need, and need citizens to engage and have confidence in, multiple narratives and complex understandings. Society facing all kinds of personal, economic and political instability needs robust, contributing citizens. Edginess comes from liminality, from living on the edge, which as we know breeds terror. Intercultural communication, translation and reception all locate the other, join up the limina in a common if diverse conversation. Confidence and robustness in the face of supercomplex and unstable global systems is needed by all sections of society, at work, at home and at enforced or much needed leisure.

The Humanities inculcate and demand investment and engagement while simultaneously presenting alternative paradigms; 'what-if' narratives; utopias, dystopias and Foucaultian heterotopias. In a soundbite culture with judgmental information pouring out of every interface, the combination of investment and sceptical pluralism forms a humane faculty of discrimination. Citizens at home with multiple narratives can themselves develop a flexible, self- narratised and performative identity which can remain stable in unstable times.

All sections of post-millennial, digitally-complex, global society need, perhaps as never before, the Humanities. As encapsulated in the manifesto delivered to the European Commissioner, the Humanities can contribute vitally

• by offering an alternative to hard science inductive-deductive method, and to what Fabian critiques as positivism-pragmatism;
• by providing experience of and interpretative frameworks for multi-voiced and complex narratives: critical reading, 'envoicing' writing and performance opportunities;
• by attending 'the new rhetoric' issues of audience, addressees, identity, performance (vital in this digitally connected, communication age);
• by working on and with time frames, trajectories and rhythms different from those prescribed by the digital age;
• by offering encountered, disputed, agonistic knowledge; emphasizing non closure, provisionality, disturbance;
• by offering experience of living and working with complexity and supercomplexity: complex and incompatible knowledge systems inscribed in multi-faceted, multi-voiced narratives;

• by reflecting on and offering the Humanities as academic practices and as higher-methods' training for citizens of all disciplinary interests.

That is to say that the Humanities give robust, communicative and intercultural skills. Our hermeneutic is one of multivocal and multilevel analysis of particular, singular texts, events, characters. Our methods work with all the forms of human expression and meaning making that science may preclude: associative, suggestive, illuminative, metaphorical, imagistic, heuristic, allegory, parable, algorithmic…

> We give students and citizens the qualities to deal with, operate and flourish in a fearful and uncertain global world.

Bibliography

Academy of Science of South Africa Report (2011) *The State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies*

Adshead, G http://frontierpsychiatrist.co.uk/exchanges-at-the-frontier-gwen-adshead/

- 2011a 'Thereby hangs a tale: the creation of tragic narratives in forensic psychiatry' *Journal of the American Academy for Psychiatry Law* vol *3*9(3)

- 2011b 'The Life Sentence: Using a Narrative Approach in Group Psychotherapy with Offenders' *Group Analysis* vol 44(2)

Attridge, D. (2004) *Singularity of Literature*, London: Routledge

Barnett, R. (2000) 'University knowledge in an age of supercomplexity', *Higher Education* vol 40 (4) 409-42

Bass, R. et al (2009)*The Visible Knowledge Project Findings and Case Studies: New Media Technologies and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,* Special Issue of *Academic Commons* https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/vkp/

Bérubé, M. & Nelson, C. (eds.) (1995) *Higher Education under Fire: Politics, Economics and the crisis of the humanities*, New York, Routledge.

Baron-Cohen (2011)*Zero Degrees of Empathy: A new theory of human cruelty,* London: Allen Lane

Collini, S.(2010) 'From Robbins to Mckinsey' (http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n16/stefan-collini/from-robbins-to-mckinsey)

Garland R.,(2012 forthcoming) 'The Humanities: Plain and Simple'. Colgate-Emory Special Issue, *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* vol. 11 (3)

Karp, I. (2012 forthcoming) 'Public Scholarship as a Vocation' Colgate-Emory Special Issue, *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* vol. 11 (3)

Law, J. (2004) *After method: mess in social science research,* London: Routledge

Looseley, D. (2011) 'Making an Impact: Some Personal Reflections on the Humanities in the UK', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 2011 vol. 10(1), pp.9-18. 24

Mitchell, W.J.T. (1994) *Picture Theory: Essays on Visual and Verbal Representation* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Monitoring European Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities METRIS report (2009)'Emerging Trends in Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities in Europe', http://www.metrisnet.eu/metris/ pp.21-2

Nussbaum, M. (2010). *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs The Humanities*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Parker, J. (2012)'Editorial: Digital Humanities, Digital Futures' *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* vol. 11 (1-2)

Parker, J. (2008a) **'**Classics' Complex Skills', Council for University Classics Departments' journal *Bulletin* pp.9-14

Parker, J. (2008b) 'What Have the Humanities to Offer 21st-Century Europe? Reflections of a note-taker', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* vol. 7(1)pp. 83-96.

Robson, E. (2011) 'Speaking Out' in Parker, J. 'Editorial: Riot, Exclusion, 'Counter-revolutionary subordination' and Academic Dissent', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* vol. 10(4) pp.371–373

Singletary, K. 'Interdisciplinary intellect: HASTAC and the commitment to encourage collective intelligence', in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* vol. 11 (1-2) pp. 109-119

Svensson, P. (2012) 'The digital humanities as a humanities project' *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* vol. 11 (1-2) pp.42-60

UCLA White Paper ed Presner, T.(2009)*The Promise of Digital Humanities* www.itpb.ucla.edu/documents/2009/PromiseofDigitalHumanities.pdf