

TOM SPERLINGER

Are universities for
everyone?





VICTORIA COLLEGE,

—••• BELFAST •••—

THIS PREMIUM

WAS AWARDED TO

Miss *Lizzie Brown*
for ~~proficiency~~ taking First
Place in Junior Intermediate
Class. Division I.

AT THE EXAMINATIONS,

Midsummer 1891

Signed,

H. H. H.





A black and white photograph of Adrienne Rich sitting at a desk. She is wearing a dark, patterned button-down shirt and has her right hand resting on her head. The desk is cluttered with stacks of books, and bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background. The overall mood is contemplative and scholarly.

*TOWARDS A WOMAN-
CENTRED UNIVERSITY*

Adrienne Rich

- (1) Childcare would be available for children of all students, staff, and faculty, with additional places for community children, at a subsidized rate that would make it effectively open to all. This is an absolutely necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the kinds of change we envision.
- (2) Childcare would be of the highest quality; no merely custodial center would be tolerated. The early nurture and education of the children would be as flexible and imaginative as possible. There would be a conscious counterthrust against the sex-role programming of patriarchal society.
- (3) The centers would be staffed, under experienced and qualified directorship, by women and men who have chosen and been trained for this kind of work. They would be assisted by several kinds of people:
 - (a) College students, female and male, who want experience in early education or just want to spend time with children. (Several experienced baby-sitters could work with several times the number of children they ordinarily "sit" with in private homes, and with more expert supervision.)
 - (b) High-school students similar to the college students in (a).
 - (c) Older women and men from the community—"grandparents" with special qualifications, informal or formal.
 - (d) Parents who want to share their children's lives on a part-time basis during the working day.
 - (e) Apprentices from graduate programs in education, pediatrics, psychology, the arts, etc.

The children would thus be in contact with a wide range of

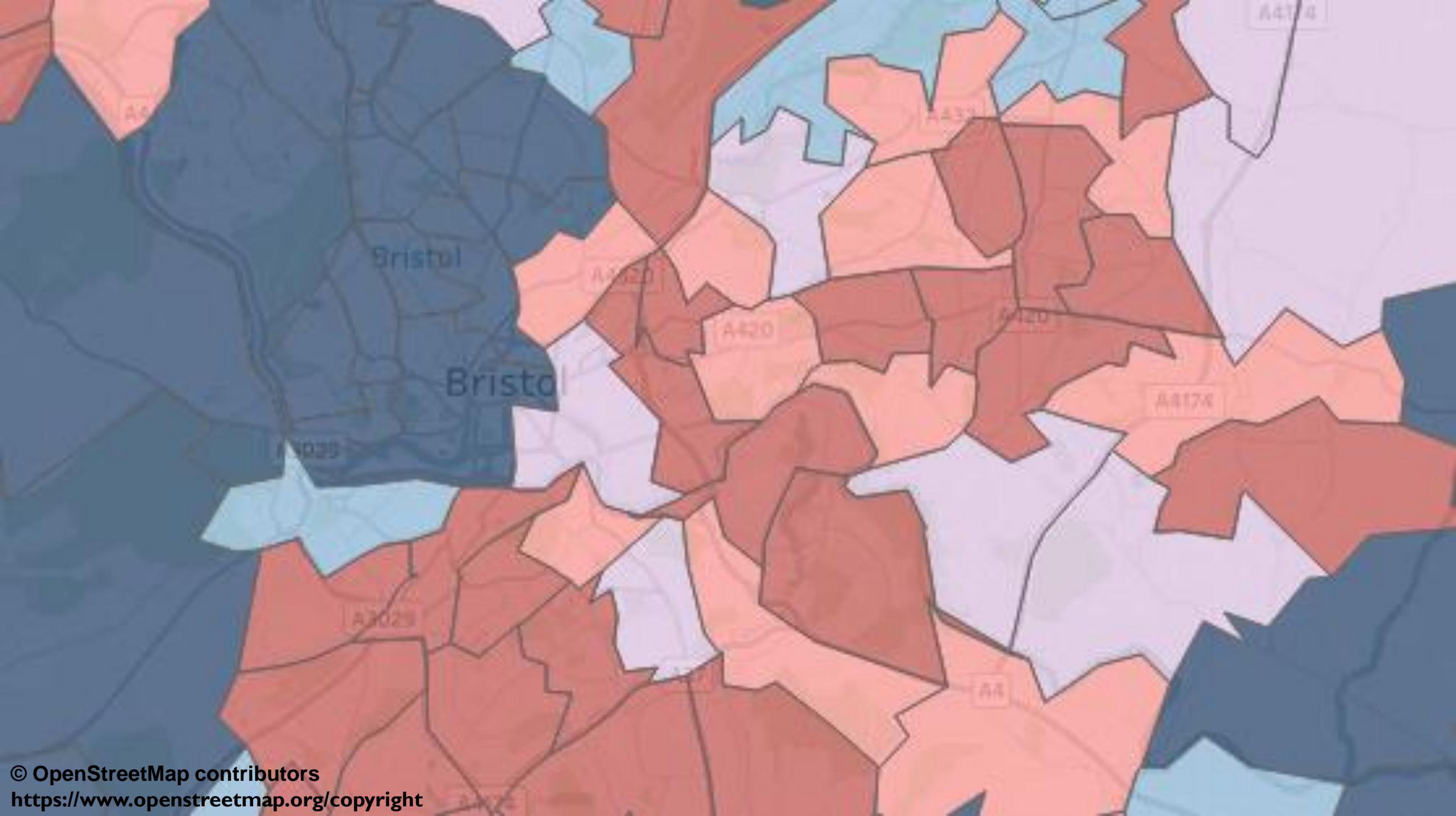
with Michelle Rosaldo when she writes:

. . . American society is . . . organized in a way that creates and exploits a radical distance between private and public, domestic and social, female and male . . . this conflict is at the core of the contemporary rethinking of sex roles. . . . If the public world is to open its doors to more than an elite among women, the nature of work itself will have to be altered, and the asymmetry between work and the home reduced. For this we must . . . bring men into the sphere of domestic concerns and responsibilities.²⁶

- (4) There should be flexibility enough to allow parents to, say, take their children to the university museum or for lunch in the cafeteria if they so desire. Nursing mothers should be able to come and feed their babies.
- (5) A well-baby clinic, with both medical and dental care, should be regularly provided for all the children as a service of the centers. A referral service for mothers with physical or psychic problems should be available.
- (6) There should be opportunities for staff and parents of the centers to discuss, in small groups, ideas of childrearing, criticisms of the running of the center, and ways in which it can better serve its clients.

While excellent universal early childhood care should be a major priority in any reasonably humane society, the primary and moving impulse behind the children's center would be to help equalize the position of women.²⁷

²⁶In M. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1974), p. 42.



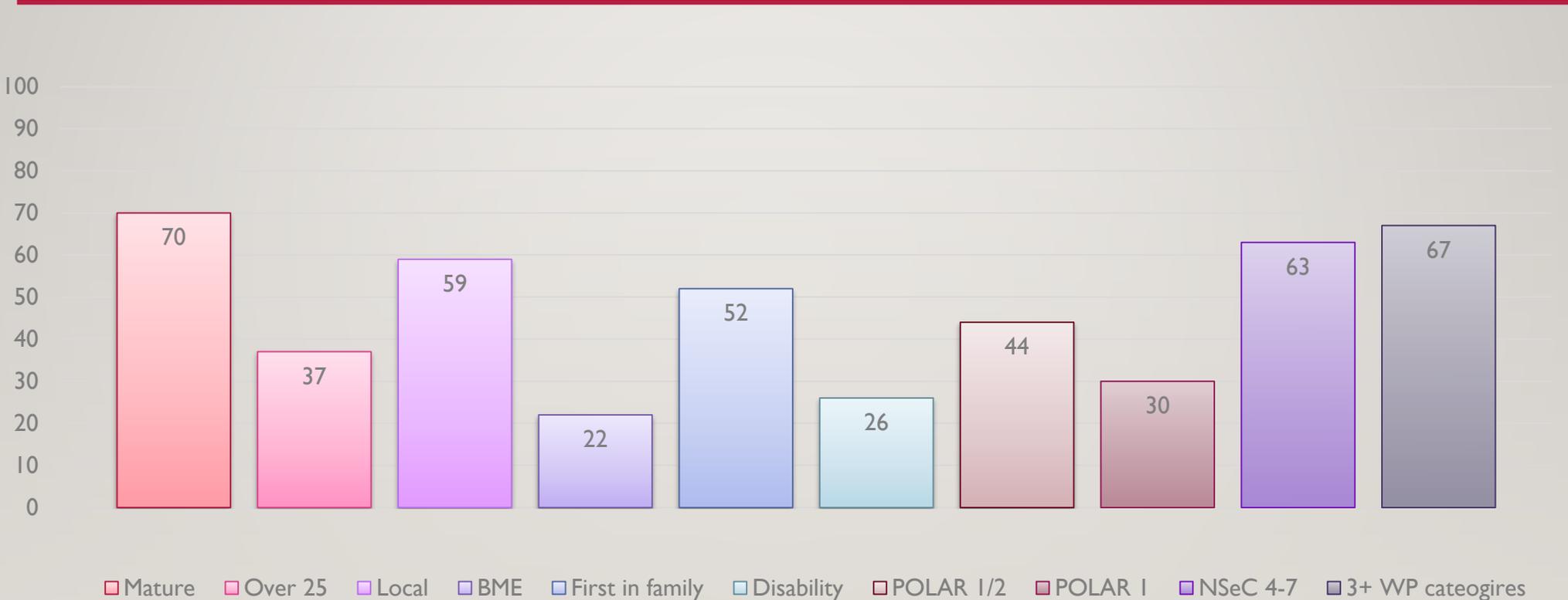
Full
participation

Communities
set priorities

Lifelong
learning

Open
admissions

WHO ARE THE STUDENTS? (2017)



... and 48/52% male and female



WHO IS THE STUDENT?



WHO IS THE IN THE ROOM?

Sometimes, I'd present an idea that's an important idea in [...] my discipline. Just seeing what people [think] who are not primed to understand that idea as important. How does that match, or not match your experience? Or: where does an idea or what someone experiences as a fact come up against what you believe? That was really interesting and being able to make sure that didn't create unnecessary conflict in the space. Two twins who were from East Africa came who talked about how someone had done black magic on them when they were babies. I know enough about the political context that they come from to understand and place this idea but other people in the classroom were like, 'What? You say you were cursed?' [laughs] Another woman was like, 'What if they told you that you'd die?' and I was like, 'Whoa, let me try to help us hold this conversation together.' I get what she's talking about, and it's interesting and I believe her, but I understand your response.

Mwenz Blell, quoted in *Who are universities for?*

WHO IS THE IN THE ROOM?

I saw one of the people from that class recently, I just ran into her. She really liked the class and it had been mind-expanding in that way, which made her want to study anthropology, that she was able to come away from something where she disagreed, with a much greater understanding that was more important than whether or not she disagreed with it. Seeing the way that happened and what kind of responses people had to things was really interesting to me from a research point of view, but seeing we could resolve that was also really important to me as an anthropologist. There's a bigger question – of the possibility of peace – that's in my mind. When we let everybody have a voice, can we get to a place where everybody has spoken and we can still all live with each other?

Mwenzu Blell, quoted in *Who are universities for?*

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

S: They were in a different place [than the university]. So two heroin addicts, no, three, one was like a real East London bank robber, just got out for bank robbery, was completely mad, and two long-term addicts. And I just showed up with some Charles Dickens. And [we] took it from there. I developed a structure to work within and handouts and exercises and encouraged people to [...] go and find something.

Q: And how did you know how to do all of that?

S: I think 50% of it was from my own experience with literature and my intuition with the people I was dealing with, just sussing out where they were coming from and using my experience of literature to see what would fit with them. And 50% of it was what I learnt at the university.

Q: So, it was a real combination of life experience and what the university could offer?

S: Yeah, and because I was representing the university and I always had to remember that. I was a student from Bristol University but I was also trying to get across: "I'm just like you." And I knew that these guys were ... I knew what they were coming with [the attitude]: "This is not for me, ah, it's alright for you". Somehow, they would have seen me as different because I'm representing Bristol University. So, I didn't want to go in there and tell my story like straight away, I wanted the literature to do the work, but over time, bit by bit, I would if I had to. And I have been known to get quite excitable and quite dynamic in a group. So, that transferred onto others in the group.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

Q: So, there's this perception that people at university are different to the likes of...?

S: Yeah, I think there is. I think, you know, and it's completely wrong, you know, but I think a lot of disadvantaged communities are stuck in their own story. It's a poverty story, it's a victim story, it's a self pitier story, it's a limited story. There's no examples, you know, you can't say like "Oh he went on and changed", nobody changes their life.

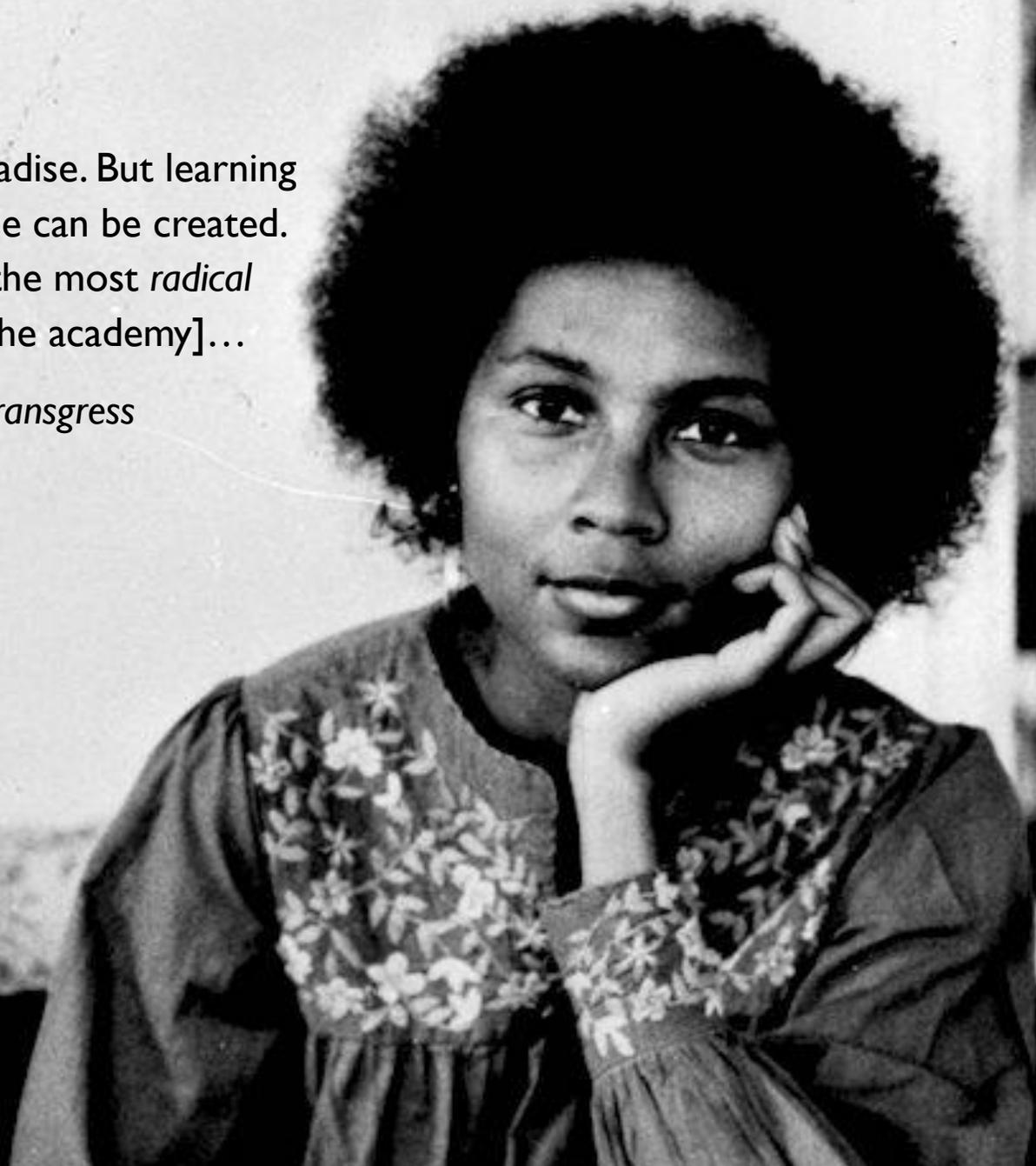
Q: And where does that come from? S: Well if you find yourself in prison over and over and over again, if you find yourself on the streets or if you're a girl who's been abused, domestic violence over and over again, it's just part of it. You start to believe you're no good and, you know, which isn't true but it can be very wearing for them and for everybody else [...] It's like you'd ask them, "What do you think of Bristol University?", and they'd say: "It's nothing to do with me".

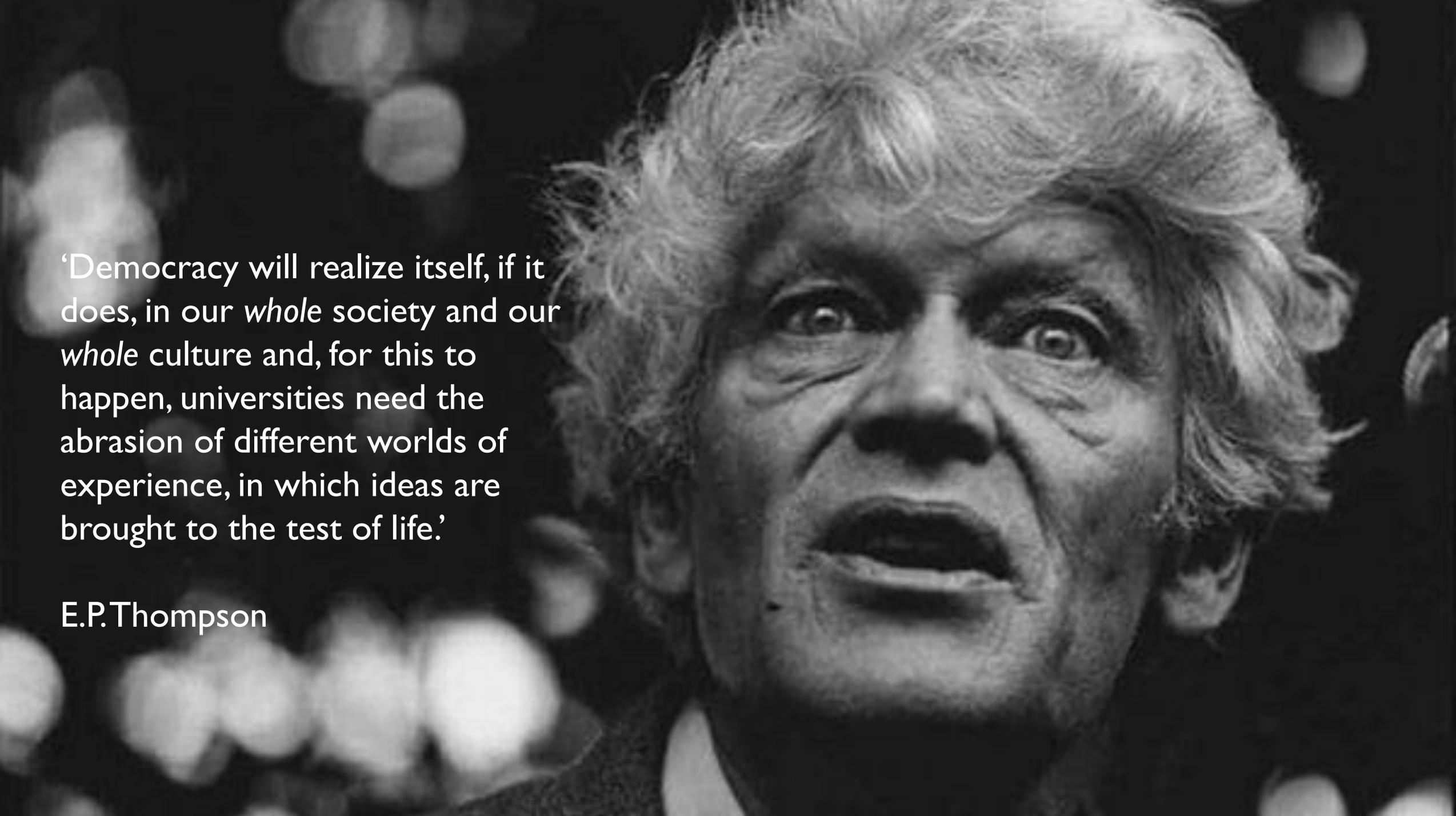
Q: Why is it nothing to do with them?

S: Because, again, it's not yours, it's not for you, you know, somehow you stand out, you know. That's what I felt. It doesn't matter [now]. I can walk in there now to ... You know, I'd feel guilty at first, walking in through by the two security guys. I'm like, "What would they do if I'm in here robbing?" or, "What's he want?" But that's the experience of a lot of these guys if you ask them. They say: "Oh I don't belong here. Somebody's going to tap me: 'Can I help you?'" Well I can walk in here now [head] held high: "Alright guys, good afternoon". I don't need to explain myself. It's my university.

The academy is not paradise. But learning
is a place where paradise can be created.
The *classroom* remains the most *radical*
space of possibility [in the academy]...

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*



A black and white close-up portrait of E.P. Thompson. He has short, curly, light-colored hair and is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some blurred light spots.

‘Democracy will realize itself, if it does, in our *whole* society and our *whole* culture and, for this to happen, universities need the abrasion of different worlds of experience, in which ideas are brought to the test of life.’

E.P. Thompson