



Generosity and the Institutions of the Humanities

» LESLEY JOHNSON

A public controversy erupted at the beginning of 2014 over the Mitchell Library Reading Room of the State Library of New South Wales.¹ Nearly ten thousand signatures were gathered through an online petition calling for a rethink of the library's plans for this historic room. Those plans included the relocation of readers using the library's famous research collections into a smaller, but also historically significant, room. The library proposed this in response to complaints from researchers about noise and distraction from other library users. The Mitchell Library Reading Room was to become solely a public reading room. Users of this space would be able to obtain materials online using their own computers, but not access any of the library's books or research collections. Contributing to public alarm, no doubt, was the fact that reference books on the ground floor of the Reading Room were rapidly and unceremoniously moved to the library's other reading room soon after these changes were announced in late 2013.

(above)

Montage showing the (former) Mitchell Library Reading Room, c. 1911–12, on the right, and the room today (now the Friends Room, since refurbished) of the State Library of New South Wales, photographed in Oct 2014, superimposed on the left.

PHOTOS: STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES & L. JOHNSON

(right)

The Mitchell Library Reading Room at the State Library of New South Wales, October 2014, since refurbished.

PHOTO: L. JOHNSON

Distinguished literary figures and public intellectuals, such as David Malouf and Phillip Adams, were associated with the petition. Its organisers circulated, locally and internationally, an email calling for signatures:

A library without books just isn't a library at all. Yet such a fate could befall the Mitchell Library, if the government goes through with a planned \$25 million

'revitalisation'. Not only is the library's staff being cut. The government is proposing to convert the Mitchell Reading Room into a public space equipped with WiFi but with no books to speak of.

The issue attracted considerable press coverage. Elizabeth Farrelly, a regular columnist in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and an architect by training, wrote in early March 2014:

The \$25 million 'revitalisation' of the Mitchell Library Reading Room is an attack both on one of Sydney's finest rooms and on the minority it nurtures; the last minority that it is OK to trash, writers and thinkers. ...



This grand, glass-ceilinged, book-lined sandstone trove was a rare refuge from godless populism. It still had its microfiche and its card catalogues. Still had its globally renowned Australian document collection — the biggest and most significant in the world — including maps, drawings and journals from the start. Still obeyed David Scott Mitchell's will, providing a space for scholars to read, pore, dream and write.

No longer. The collection will be merged and dungeoned. The beautiful room where Manning Clark and Patrick White wrote will become a wi-fi hub for school-kids with backpacks and water bottles. Nothing sacred will remain.²



Many of the claims being made in this campaign were inaccurate and misleading but in April, as the petition neared its target of ten thousand signatures, the library moved to take the heat out of the situation by making a number of concessions. The major one was that access to the library's special collections would continue to be facilitated in the Reading Room, in a newly refurbished, glassed-off area to provide the necessary security for rare materials. And the reference books were returned to the lower shelves of the room.

I want to reflect here on some of the changes to three kinds of civic institutions over the last fifty or so years, changes that are continually reshaping our ways of working and thinking

about ourselves as humanities scholars. The institutions I discuss are the research library, the university and the learned academy. They serve and influence in important ways the form and content of the disciplinary knowledges associated with the humanities. As well, they provide important spaces in which modes of social exchange, values and ways of thinking and writing associated with these disciplines are shaped and enacted. And, as we have seen with the Mitchell Library, they are also institutions in which various publics, including humanities scholars, invest a considerable amount of emotion.

In discussing the major changes that have impacted on these three institutions, I show that generosity has been fundamental to the norms of the humanities and to how these institutions have served and shaped humanities scholarship in the past. Tracing the now embattled character of this institutional virtue, I argue that a renewed focus on generosity provides us with a way of thinking about what it is we, as humanities scholars, want to protect, recreate or rework in our practices and institutions for the future.³

THE RESEARCH LIBRARY



Before his death in 2008, Greg Dening, one of Australia's most imaginative and humane scholars, often wrote of his love of libraries. In Peter Cochrane's edited collection of essays commemorating the National Library of Australia's first one hundred years, Dening celebrated the experience of being in a research library, communing with its treasures. He paid

(left)

Main Reading Room, Public Library of New South Wales, 1950s.

PHOTO: STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

(below)

'Bird's Eye View of Domed Reading Room, Public Library Victoria', Sear's Studio, photographer (ca. 1950).

PHOTO: STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA



(above, top)

The corridor outside the Mitchell Librarian's Office, State Library of New South Wales, October 2014.

PHOTO: L. JOHNSON

(above, bottom)

The (then) Mitchell Library Reading Room, Public Library of New South Wales, c. 1911–12.

PHOTO: STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

tribute to the work of librarians in manuscript rooms, their experience, professional skills and the imagination required of them.⁴ In other essays and lectures he focused on the pleasures of libraries as physical spaces. In one, he wrote of the State Library of Victoria as a 'magical place', of loving the 'heavy silence' — a silence, he said, 'you could feel on you (sic) shoulders, something like standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon or in the Australian bush.'⁵ He also spoke in the same reverential tones of the Mitchell Library, where he would take groups of Melbourne students for a week each year, to immerse them not just in documents but in the Library itself.

In a lecture given at the Mitchell Library in 2003, he talked of a 'love affair' that had begun forty-eight years ago:

I loved the walk down the corridor past the Librarian's office to the old Reading Room [and] I treasure the memory of coming into that room and seeing the greats of Australian history in their seats: Manning Clark, A. G. L. Shaw, Lloyd Robson, Russell Ward, Keith Hancock, Geoffrey Serle ...⁶

Ironically perhaps, Dening was speaking here of the original Mitchell Library Reading Room, the small special collections room that the State Library had proposed in 2013 to restore to its previous use, not the large one that generated the controversy I outlined earlier.⁷

In the inaugural Greg Dening Annual Lecture on 'History and the Creative Imagination', Tom Griffiths honoured what he referred to as a 'gift of Greg's' — of how he helped us 'be generous in our scholarship and in our scholarly lives'. Just as Dening paid tribute to the work of the curators and librarians in manuscript and collecting libraries, Griffiths drew attention to the way he acknowledged, 'elaborately and discursively', mentors, teachers, colleagues and students.⁸

In writing of his love of particular libraries in which he had worked, Dening, I suggest, was also weaving the effects of those physical spaces into the story of his scholarship, into a reflection on how he thought and wrote. And he was seeking to teach us to do the same, to be similarly generous and recognise the generosity not only of our colleagues but also of these institutions and their physical spaces. He identified the silence, the grandness of the spaces, the community they created, the sense of scholarship and the pleasures of reading that such libraries conveyed and supported.

Libraries, in this sense, are spaces in which the humanities are performed. But they are not just symbolic of certain practices and values that humanities scholars and their audiences might share. As Dening was suggesting, these physical and social spaces have real effects in terms of how we think and work and the forms of social exchange we experience, value and create in such spaces.⁹ For Dening, the library spaces he loved

were generous in their support of humanities scholarship and contributed to the shaping of that scholarship itself to be generous.

* * *

Dening was still writing of his love of the library in the early years of the twenty-first century but, at least several decades earlier, major changes had started appearing in ideas about libraries and how their spaces should be designed and used. In *Future Libraries* (1993), R. Howard Bloch and Carla Hesse invited a range of writers to consider the ‘force field of passions’ that erupted around the Bibliothèque nationale de France and its four modernist towers in the shape of open books built in the late 1980s. A number of essays reflected on the changing architecture, and changes to the uses, of national libraries; others considered the challenges and opportunities created by the move to digitise collections.



their planning — buildings like the Louvre. Generosity in this sense is about the inclusive, democratic character of both the buildings and the institutions they house, the way in which they welcome and serve many different kinds of publics.

Vidler, however, was one of the critics of this new library. For him, it was ‘dominated by the expression of books in storage (in the towers), and books already read ...; the place of reading itself is strangely absent’. He argued that the book was valorised in the symbolism of the towers only as a static object, with the processes of researching and reading effaced. He contrasted this architecture to that of the great reading rooms of nineteenth century national library buildings, such as in Henri Labrousse’s for the French Imperial National Library, a precursor to the Bibliothèque nationale and Sidney Smirke’s British Library Reading Room (subsequently embalmed as an exhibition space in what has become solely the British Museum).¹¹ Clearly, the Mitchell Library Reading Room is also the kind of traditional space Vidler lauds as appropriate for a national or public library, as is the domed reading room of the State Library of Victoria.

Vidler was drawing attention to changing trends in architecture that both reflect and shape different ways of accommodating the various publics who use libraries today. His concern was that the new modern architecture of libraries celebrates and facilitates their democratic openness at the expense of enabling the practices

(left)

The four towers of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

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Conceived by then President François Mitterrand and launched as a project for a new national library in July 1988, the Bibliothèque nationale de France was to be guided by a ‘philosophy of openness — embracing all fields of knowledge, welcoming readers from all walks of life’.¹⁰ In his essay, Anthony Vidler noted that the architect of the modernist towers, Dominique Perrault, situated his work on the library ‘in a line of *grands projects*’ that have combined, in his terms, ‘grandeur’ and ‘generosity’ in

and performance of reading and scholarship associated with books and libraries in the past.

Other writers have pointed to the way in which the digitisation of library collections is having a similar impact on the readerly practices and experiences of their users. Carla Hesse, a few years after the publication of *Future Libraries*, writing about the library in the digital age, concedes that digitisation of library collections ‘holds out the promise of unprecedented possibilities for the expansion of knowledge and



(above)

The Friends Room, of the State Library of New South Wales, previously the Mitchell Library Reading Room, photographed in October 2014, since refurbished.

PHOTO: L. JOHNSON

our power to access it'. But at the same time, she warns, it threatens to undermine any sense that the library once conveyed and facilitated of a synchronous form of community and a space for reflexivity, for the 'slow form of exchange', where there is time and space for reflection and debate.¹²

Building on Hesse's argument, Rey Chow claims that the 'informatization of knowledge'¹³ constitutes a major challenge to the ways in which we acquire, disseminate and preserve knowledge. With book knowledge, she argues, the principle of 'reflective delay' organised the ways of working of humanities scholars, as work conducted through 'the deliberate and reflective search for knowledge'. Today we are in danger of the 'expedient access to information' now defining 'what it means to know'.¹⁴

In 2015, digitisation of library collections continues apace. Those of us who are now enjoying the luxury of being able to access from our homes an extraordinary range of materials from national and international collections only wish the process could be accelerated. In the meantime public libraries — national and local — are buzzing as school students and other sections of the general public use their

spaces to access the web and, to some extent, their reference materials. And at night and during the weekends, libraries are increasingly running events: offering a range of talks and exhibitions in their community engagement and educational roles.

Public libraries today, then, are serving a widely diverse clientele and juggling divergent missions. Changes to the physical spaces of libraries and digitisation of their collections are indicative of their democratic openness as they seek to engage a broad set of publics. But the very busyness of libraries today also suggests that there is an increasing danger of expedient access to information becoming the sole way of knowing in this space. The particular kind of generosity libraries have extended towards scholarly work and the slow and reflective search for knowledge and understanding that they nurtured in the past, appear to be under siege.

Changes to the physical spaces of research libraries and digitisation of collections are both reflecting the emergence of new intellectual and bodily practices for scholars and at the same time shaping them. The deep emotional investment in the Mitchell Library Reading Room that became so apparent early in 2014, articulates,

I suggest, alarm about the loss of a particular kind of intimate intellectual community and a public presence for a set of practices involving reading, silence, stillness and the sort of thinking and social exchange that go along with these. Even though we, as humanities scholars, may be enthusiastic users of the digitised collections of research libraries, it seems many of us are also profoundly invested in the buildings and institutions of public libraries, which symbolise particular ways of being and working as humanities scholars. In the past, their generosity has shaped and sustained humanities scholarship and a particular kind of intellectual community in a specific historical form.

In thinking about these matters, we need to recognise that changes to libraries' organisation and modes of operating are part of a wide range of complex developments impacting on our worlds. Instead of simple defensive responses to such changes, to protect certain traditional spaces and what they symbolise about our idea of the library, we need to consider what we as a scholarly community want of the research library today and what forms its generosity towards its

Australia. In her usual carefully nuanced way, she notes that the training she received as a literature student was predicated on a notion of a consistent and durable vocation. This world is 'becoming unimaginable now'. The 'community of scholars' that shaped her as a student shared an ethos with a range of humanities disciplines and with the university as a whole. It was a world, Morris suggests, that commanded, 'ineffably', a 'life-long allegiance' for the 'very small number of students, by today's standards', who continued on to postgraduate studies at that time.¹⁵

In recent decades, Morris argues, we have seen a reshaping of humanities research and scholarship by 'a science-based model of knowledge', a result as much of 'drastic changes in university funding' as of changing understandings and practices around knowledge production. In this new world, humanities scholars have learnt to 'fake it', acquiring the skills to produce funding applications as a particular genre of writing.¹⁶

In another paper canvassing similar issues about the humanities, Morris suggests that

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different publics might take for the future. I will return to this issue later. But, whatever we think we might want of libraries in the future, we clearly need to work through these issues with librarians as they manage a huge but fascinating set of challenges for their institutions.

The continual transformation of universities as public institutions over the last few decades also poses significant challenges to the values, dispositions, and material practices of humanities scholars, as well as to ideas about and the functioning of scholarly communities. I turn to these now.

THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY

In a number of essays, Meaghan Morris has reflected on changes over the last thirty or so years to the world of humanities scholars in

junior scholars today have not experienced any other kind of academy.¹⁷ At one level this claim is probably true but, I believe, does not acknowledge sufficiently how complex our relationships as humanities scholars are to what is today a very confusing institution. I became more aware of this complexity a couple of years ago at a Cultural Studies Association of Australia conference held in Sydney. There, English academic Rosalind Gill spoke of academics having a 'passionate investment' in the 'idea of academic work' and a 'sacrificial orientation to the myth of autonomy' that 'keeps us working at 2 am'. Our complicit fascination with the ideals on which our idea of academic work is based, she concluded, means that we do not challenge the audit culture that makes us one of the 'most surveilled occupational groups in history'.¹⁸

This lively session of the conference generated considerable discussion from the floor. It made



(above)

The headquarters of the Free University in 1969, located at that time in Oxford Street, Paddington, Sydney.

PHOTO: FREE U. SOURCES, ARTICLES AND DOCUMENTS ON THE FREE UNIVERSITY, THE JOURNAL OF THE FREE UNIVERSITY, NO. 1, 1969

me acutely aware of how dearly continuing generations of humanities scholars, despite the dominance of the audit culture in our universities, hold on to an ideal of the university that I too had committed myself to when I went to Sydney University as an undergraduate in the mid to late 1960s. I did not find the ‘community of scholars’ I had hoped to be part of in the formal structures of the university but found it in my second year in the ‘Free University’. In 1967 this was established by a group of undergraduate and postgraduate students in an old terrace house in Darlington near Sydney University. There we read and discussed a range of literary, philosophical and social sciences texts, often late into the night, in loosely organised groups committed to a climate of intellectual freedom and critical thought and debate, ideals we

thought universities should be about but were failing to deliver.¹⁹

Interestingly, a group of young scholars and PhD students in Melbourne recently set up a ‘Free University’ in 2009. This organisation reflects some of the same idealism that students involved in the earlier Free University had about the university in the late 1960s. Writing in 2010 about his involvement in the Melbourne project, Aurélien Mondon expresses his dismay at how ‘knowledge for its own sake seems to have lost its currency in a world where “outcomes” have become the goal of tertiary education’. Tutoring in French, both before and during his PhD, Mondon learnt that ‘It was clear that universities were no longer what I had dreamt they should be. Most students no longer go there to broaden their intellectual horizons, but merely to get a job.’²⁰ His dream of a particular kind of university is reminiscent of the passionate investment in the idea of academic work that Rosalind Gill suggests haunts academe more generally today, even though the reality is different.

This same dream can be found in the memoirs of earlier generations of humanities scholars writing about their student experiences and what drove their commitment to becoming an academic. Leonie Kramer speaks of her ‘impossible dream’ of going to Oxford University and speculates that it was inspired by several of Matthew Arnold’s poems.²¹ Similarly, Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes of going to Oxford in the 1920s with her ‘head stuffed full of dreams gained from books.’²² And Andrew Riemer, more circumspectly, admits to having had dreams of walking among ‘dreaming spires garnered mostly from old Ealing comedies and *Brideshead Revisited*.’²³ He speculates that the architecture of Sydney University, where he was an undergraduate in the 1950s — ‘Blacket’s sandstone extravaganza’ as he calls it — may have furnished the model and further inspiration for his dreams.

What these memoirs illustrate is the level of investment that earlier generations of humanities scholars had in a particular idea of the university — one in which a community of scholars was driven by a commitment to a particular relationship to knowledge and scholarship. They shared, too, an appreciation



of particular modes of exchange and forms of conduct. But, as I have noted, the discussion provoked by Rosalind Gill's paper also demonstrates that this emotional investment continues to shape the relationship that at least some members of later generations of humanities scholars have to the contemporary university, and, no doubt, to other institutions of the humanities, such as the research library.

Ruth Barcan, in her recent book *Academic Life and Labour* (2013), similarly argues that many contemporary academics continue to see their academic work as a vocation. They hold onto a belief in the university as functioning as a gift economy, one that 'secures the ties and obligations that bind people into a community'.²⁴ Work and life are inseparable in this idea of having a vocation. The individual is committed to such a life because of a fundamental belief in the meaningfulness of the work, a sense of obligation to one's fellow workers and a conception of the university as having a fundamental social mission. But no academic today, she believes, can understand themselves and their work in terms of this single idea. Barcan sees three different ideas of the university operating within our

institutions — the scholarly, the bureaucratic and the corporate — jostling with each other to make a range of contradictory demands on the academic. The values, the forms of accountability and belonging, of these three ideas of the university sit uneasily alongside, overlap or often cut directly across each other. In this precarious world, the modern academic has had to learn how to manage three sets of demands on them and their work, more-or-less successfully enabling this by developing hybrid identities, often, as Barcan documents, at great personal cost.²⁵

As a result, the scholarly practices of humanities academics have changed significantly. In particular, the importance of research grants since the late 1980s in advancing the prestige of universities has meant that humanities scholars have needed to learn how to conceptualise their research in terms of 'projects' and 'outcomes', to undertake more than one 'project' at a time, and to work in teams of researchers. And, in possibly the most profound change, humanities academics have increasingly learnt to conceptualise themselves as 'researchers' for whom teaching is a problem in terms of demands on their time, rather than



(above)

University of
Sydney quadrangle

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a set of practices through which humanities scholarship is performed and furthered.

Has this led to our 'faking' it, as Meaghan Morris suggests? For some perhaps this is the best description. The changes to how we do things and understand our work are certainly profound. But many humanities scholars, including some trained in the 1950s and 1960s, when the idea of a vocation was more dominant, have adapted and learnt to flourish in this modern university. In doing so they demonstrate how humanities scholarly practices are constantly shaped by the institutions in which we work. Indeed, in reflecting on these processes, we need to remind ourselves that earlier ways of being humanities scholars were also historically shaped. The scholar working alone for long periods of time on a major book, for example, who understands him or herself

of humanities research' working locally and internationally.²⁷

Here and in other papers, however, Morris is passionately interested in making clear what humanities scholars should still, without sentimentality, wish to retain of past practices, values and modes of social exchange. Many of these she sees as being too 'exclusive' to sustain on the public purse in the current political context.²⁸ But she has also argued, in various settings, for the need to retain the importance of critique, independent thought, intellectual freedom and a sense of joy in what humanities scholars do. In a 2005 paper she summarised this beautifully as holding onto 'that old, irritating, precious sense of obligation to something more than the market, larger than a profession, and more vivid in its human complexity than a stripped down research "user"'.²⁹



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as a scholar in particular ways, was also formed over time in particular historical contexts (and remarkably recent ones at that). Similarly, the kind of scholarly community that was shaped and performed in institutional settings, such as the public research library of the twentieth century or university humanities departments in the 1960s and 1970s, was also a particular historical form of community, fashioned in and by a more socially exclusive institution than today's.

Meaghan Morris demonstrates a keen sense of this history in an article on the public intellectual co-authored with Iain McCalman in 1998. They trace changes to spaces and institutions, including universities, pointing to how these no longer make it possible to define 'a single omniscient scholar' as the public intellectual. This model 'emerged in its current form at a particular moment in the more recent history of Australian universities — one which is now well behind us'.²⁶ Instead, the work of public intellectuals is now conducted across 'networks of specialised producers and consumers

This sense of obligation to something bigger than ourselves, I suggest, has been shaped historically within the worlds of humanities scholarship by the generosity of our institutions. This is the generosity that Greg Dening both exemplified and celebrated in his writings on research libraries. As a scholarly disposition it has involved a reflective kind of thinking, an openness of mind, a respect for others and a desire to engage with and support one's current and potential future colleagues in a collective commitment to the joys of scholarship and a scholarly life. The institutions that have played a central role in encouraging, supporting and symbolising these virtues, such as the library and the university, have, in the past, provided the spaces for and trainings in this scholarly disposition, just as they have provided a place in which a sense of community and belonging could be experienced and articulated. We need to identify ways in which this sense of obligation to something bigger than ourselves can be sustained and reinvented for the twenty-first century, and in doing so, how the generosity of

our institutions can similarly be retained and recreated where necessary.

I turn, finally, to the learned academy as another institution of the humanities that has been reshaped significantly at various times in its history. I suggest it is also one where we can hold onto and revitalise precisely this sense of obligation to something bigger than ourselves and take a leading role in refreshing the generosity of the institutions of the humanities. The learned academy is a space where we might take the opportunity to define more clearly, as humanities scholars, what it is that we value and want to take into the future in our practices and dispositions, our engaging with the institutions I have called ‘institutions of the humanities’, as well as our ways of functioning as a community.

THE LEARNED ACADEMY

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, in an essay published in English in 1997, argued that Europe was progressively, incrementally, breaking away from the gift economy thanks to the spread of calculation and self-interest as dominating forces in civic institutions. He called for collective investment in institutions that create universes in which generosity and a refusal of self-interest or egoistic calculation are encouraged and rewarded. These civic virtues, he observed, are the product of the pedagogic labour of such institutions; generosity as a disposition needs to be deliberately taught.³⁰

The history of the Australian Academy of the Humanities as a learned academy suggests that it, like the research library and the university, has been a space in which such virtues have been encouraged and celebrated, albeit in particular historical forms. Deryck Schreuder, a former President of the Academy, has drawn attention in a number of contexts to what he refers to as the rapidly disappearing courtly gentlemen of the humanities.³¹ Even though he has not elaborated at any length on this, no doubt ambivalent, lament, Schreuder gave some sense of the world that he sees as disappearing in an obituary written on the death in 1990 of John Ward, one of the Foundation Fellows of the Academy. Ward, a respected historian, was vice chancellor of the University of Sydney

from 1981 to 1990. He died tragically in a train accident shortly after his retirement. In an eloquent tribute to Ward, Schreuder wrote of his ‘character, personality and style’ in relation to his work as a vice chancellor as well as his scholarly work:

He certainly could be confident and courtly, both professional and professorial. Yet he also retained about him an early shyness and a gentle reserve. Combined with a certain endearing ‘unworldliness’, it made him a very human academic. ... The capacity to see life in all its preposterous guises, allowed him the precious qualities of magnanimity and proportion.³²

The image of the ‘courtly gentleman’ as characterising the personal style of Fellows of the Australian Academy of the Humanities is, of course, clearly a gendered one. But I am interested in the way in which it captures a certain disposition — personal characteristics, bodily comportment, scholarly practices, a set of values and an ethic — associated with a particular way of being a humanities scholar, in the past at least. Other obituaries of Foundation Fellows of the Academy elaborate further on this set of traits. For instance, Bill Ritchie describes George Shipp, an eminent classical scholar who died in 1980, as a hugely influential teacher who inspired students with his ‘enthusiasm’ for languages but who was also an ‘extremely modest man’.

Those who knew him were at once impressed by the acuteness and honesty of his mind and by the range of his learning even in areas where he would disclaim expertise, while his personal warmth and humanity won him both respect and affection.³³

Enthusiasm or passion for their area of scholarship is frequently mentioned in obituaries of Foundation Fellows; so is generosity — whether explicitly using this term or not. To give one more example, David Armstrong, who himself recently died, described the distinguished philosopher and public intellectual Alan Ker Stout, who died in 1983, in these terms:

he brought a quick intelligence, intellectual grasp, a flair for putting things simply and clearly, together with a genuine respect for the views of others and readiness to appreciate their point of view. These virtues served him well as a teacher and academic. He was always an approachable person, with something to say himself and wanting to know what others had to say.³⁴

These accounts of the attributes of Fellows in the Academy are of a particular personality shaped in a particular historical moment. They describe a way of being in the world and sensibilities that Ian Hunter has characterised as resulting from a set of practices of ‘aesthetic-ethical self-cultivation’ that arose in the nineteenth century within a minority vocation.³⁵ But in the twentieth century these ‘arts of living’, as Michel Foucault described them,³⁶ began to be more broadly disseminated through popular education and the increasing democratisation of university education after the Second World War.

What interests me in these obituaries are the ways in which they are stories of the generosity of the person — stories about an interest in others, openness to other ways of thinking, a desire to encourage others, warmth and magnanimity. And they are stories about engagement with a larger world, a world of thinking and reflection that can also be characterised as generous in the sense of seeking to engage in something bigger than the individual self’s world, something that requires scholars to be continually open to others’ thinking.

This was, of course, within a relatively small and homogeneous community of scholars of the 1960s and 1970s. As Ian Donaldson observed in his 2009 Academy Address, early European academies were conceived essentially as clubs exclusive to men. Following to some extent in this tradition, he noted, the Australian Academy of the Humanities was proposed to the Queen in 1969 by ten male members of the Australian Humanities Research Council — its predecessor institution — and one female member (Ursula Hoff).³⁷ But what the Academy of that period also exemplified was an institution of the gift economy that still operated

powerfully in the modern university of the time and in other institutions of the humanities that surrounded it. The obituaries of Foundation Fellows provide clear evidence that generosity has been considered a key virtue to be celebrated as characterising Fellows of the Academy and the humanities generally. And these obituaries also constitute one of the ways in which the Academy has sought to educate future generations in the ways of this particular disposition.

In its establishment, too, the Academy as an institution was based on and exemplified generosity. It came into being through the dedication and selfless interest in and love of the humanities, and of scholarship more generally, of people such as Max Crawford, W. K. Hancock, and Dale Trendall. The objects and purposes of its charter focus on advancing and supporting the humanities, assuming a commitment among its Fellows to a vocational attachment, not just to their particular disciplines, but the whole endeavour of the humanities. And the generosity of the key figures involved in its founding has continued over time in the way in which the Academy has relied on the voluntary activities of its Fellows in a whole range of functions. Over the years there have been extraordinary examples of such dedication from Fellows who have made outstanding and selfless contributions for a long period of time.

* * *

Despite its embattled character, I propose that a continuing commitment to generosity should be a guiding object of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, one to be encouraged within the organisation itself and within other institutions of the humanities. As an Academy, we remain a club of a kind, although now based on more explicit and transparent principles of membership than was originally perhaps the case. We do need to continue to scrutinise these principles and to be open to critique from within as well as without. But as an institution of the humanities we can embrace the opportunities the Academy provides in symbolising and disseminating the civic virtues associated with generosity, and the way it maintains the possibility of scholarly activities that are not just driven by self-interest and the spirit of calculation.

How generosity will be practised by and within institutions of the humanities — the individual and institutional forms it will take — will necessarily change over time. But we have some wonderful contemporary examples to celebrate and build on. A particularly interesting one is that twenty-first-century version of a ‘grand project’ called ‘Trove’ — the search engine for locating resources about Australia and Australians. A centralised national service, managed by the National Library of Australia, built with the collaboration of all major Australian libraries, it is democratically generous in its concept, the wealth of material it provides for a broad range of publics, including the scholarly, and in the way it has encouraged a culture of reciprocity, engaging the community generally in its very development and improvement.

I just wanted to say what an amazing service this is. I’ve been making a database and analysing stores journals from the 1910s for a NSW sheep station as part of a household archaeology project and the digitised newspapers have been invaluable. I love the way you can copy citations and really love that you can edit the mistakes in scanned text — it feels great to be able to ‘give something back’ when I’ve accessed this fantastic service for free!³⁸

But generosity can also still be found in much smaller worlds, in the nooks and crannies of our institutions: activities such as academics working together in reading groups, helping each other conceptualise and polish their research grant applications, reviewing papers or editing scholarly journals — activities mostly



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But it has not yet been possible to realise the full potential of this institution for facilitating new forms of scholarly exchange and intellectual communities, ones that support the kind of thinking characteristic of the humanities in the past that we might want to retain today. More resources will be needed for this as well as a broader engagement from the scholarly community in the future of Trove and other digitalisation projects in order to argue for these resources and develop their potential.

The National Library of Australia has some wonderful examples of tweets and emails that demonstrate the passionate sense of attachment users of Trove feel. These suggest an emotional investment similar to the passions surrounding libraries such as the Mitchell. Two examples of the outpourings of emotion that the National Library receives daily have interesting echoes of the language used by Greg Denning about the Mitchell Library, although they are also very twenty-first century in style:

@TroveAustralia, some days I think I love you more than life itself. How did people undertake research before you?!

not counted in any workload formula. The gift economy of the humanities still survives, albeit mostly in hidden forms. We need to reflect, as an Academy, on these practices and institutions in order to identify ways we can support them and ensure that they can extend into the future what we value about humanities scholarship and institutions.

* * *

In conclusion, then, we spend a lot of time these days organising and participating in symposia about ‘valuing the humanities’. But these are geared to how we can more successfully promote the value of the humanities to what is seen as a largely unsympathetic, external world. I suggest it is equally important that the Academy take a lead in ensuring that institutions of the humanities are clear about what it is we value as scholars for the future. The generosity that has characterised humanities institutions in the past needs to be sustained but, more importantly, refreshed and reinvigorated to take historical forms appropriate for our times. In doing so, I think it

(right)
Quotes from
Trove users

COURTESY
MARIE LOUISE AYERS,
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF
AUSTRALIA

'In passing, as a PhD candidate, may I just say that the NLA is simply fantastic. In fact, I have told people that the NLA is the most important building in Australia... bar none. Your newspaper digitizing program is one of the most important projects we historians could imagine. And Trove... well, what can one say about something as brilliant and important as that? Thank you NLA.'

'What a marvellous site you have and what a fabulous idea for editing. I am doing research on the Great Famine – Madras 1876–1878 and you have a wealth of research material. I have just finished some editing to thank you in return.'

'@TroveAustralia, some days I think I love you more than life itself. How did people undertake research before you?'

'I just wanted to say what an amazing service this is. I've been making a database and analysing stores journals from the 1910s for a NSW sheep station as part of a household archaeology project and the digitised newspapers have been invaluable. I love the way you can copy citations and really love that you can edit the mistakes in scanned text – it feels great to be able to "give something back" when I've accessed this fantastic service for free!'

is crucial that scholars and professionals from all institutions of the humanities and, just as importantly, all generations, are engaged in this project together. I think we will find that new generations of scholars, now bearing the brunt of the latest major changes in our universities and libraries, have as much to teach Fellows of the Academy, if not more, as we have them, about how it is still possible to cherish and elaborate a culture of generosity within and of our institutions. 🍷



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and in 2004 Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) at Griffith University, a position she held for just over 5 years until her retirement in 2009. She was made a member of the Order of Australia in 2010 for her service to education as a leading academic, administrator, and author, particularly in the fields of cultural history and feminist studies. She is now working with several colleagues on a history of the humanities in Australia.

1. This article is an edited version of the Annual Academy Lecture delivered in Canberra on 21 November 2014 as part of the Australian Academy of the Humanities' 45th Annual Symposium, 'Look it Up: Encyclopedias, Dictionaries and Atlases'.

2. Elizabeth Farrelly, 'Mitchell Library Malaise Sign of a Deeper Struggle', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 2014, <www.smh.com.au/comment/mitchell-library-malaise-sign-of-a-deeper-struggle-20140305-347fd.html>
3. I wish to acknowledge the work of Rosalyn Diprose in shaping my interests in generosity, particularly in her book *Corporeal Generosity. On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas* (State University of New York Press, 2002).
4. Greg Denning, 'MS 1, J. Holograph Journal', in *Remarkable Occurrences. The National Library of Australia's First 100 Years. 1901–2001*, ed. by Peter Cochrane (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001), pp. 1–19.
5. Greg Denning, *Beach Crossing. Voyaging Across Times, Cultures and Self* (Carlton, Vic.: The Miegunyah Press, 2004), p. 168.
6. Quoted in Elizabeth Ellis, 'An ambitious endeavour. The Mitchell Library in the 21st Century', *Upfront. Journal of the Friends and Supporters of the State Library of New South Wales*, 15, 1 (2003), p. 6.
7. In her *Sydney Morning Herald* article Elizabeth Farrelly makes a misleading comment about the room that great writers such as Manning Clark and Patrick White worked in. She suggests this was what is now referred to as the Mitchell Library Reading Room, whereas in fact, as Denning's talk indicates, they worked in the smaller room that was referred to as the Mitchell Library Reading Room until 1988 when the new library building on Macquarie St. was opened and what had earlier been the Reference Library Reading Room became the Mitchell Library Reading Room. See Brian H. Fletcher, *Magnificent Obsession. The Story of the Mitchell Library, Sydney* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007) pp. 204–14; p. 325.

8. Tom Griffiths, 'History and the Creative Imagination', Inaugural Greg Denning Annual Lecture, University of Melbourne, 11 December 2008, *History Australia*, 6, 3 (2009), 74-9.
9. Germaine Greer also talks of the State Library of Victoria in such terms — of how it formed in her the 'habit of a lifetime'. She celebrates libraries in similar ways to Denning, referring to them as 'reservoirs of strength, grace and wit, reminders of order, calm and continuity, lakes of mental energy, neither warm nor cold, light nor dark. ... In any library in the world, I am at home, unselfconscious, still and absorbed'. Germaine Greer, *Daddy I Hardly Knew You* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 69, 70.
10. Dominique Jamet and Helene Ways, 'History, Philosophy, Ambitions of the Bibliothèque de France', in *Future Libraries*, ed. by R. Howard Bloch and Carla Hesse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 76.
11. Anthony Vidler, 'Books in Space: Tradition and Transparency in the Bibliothèque de France', in Bloch and Hesse, pp. 106–10; pp. 145–47.
12. Carla Hesse, 'Humanities and the Library in the Digital Age', in *What's Happened to the Humanities?*, ed. by Alvin Kernan (Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 114–15.
13. Rey Chow, 'An addiction from which we never get free', *New Literary History*, 36, 1 (2005), p. 50.
14. Chow, pp. 49, 53.
15. Meaghan Morris, 'From "Criticism" to "Research": The Textual in the Academy', in *Comparative Cultural Research: Hong Kong/Western Sydney Exchanges*, <UWS.edu.au/research/lcs/partnerships>, 2002, p. 11.
16. Morris, 'From "Criticism" to "Research"', pp. 19–20.
17. Meaghan Morris, 'Humanities for Taxpayers: Some Problems', *New Literary History*, 36, 1 (2005), p. 118.
18. Rosalind Gill, paper delivered at the Cultural Studies Association of Australia Conference, University of Sydney, 4–6 December 2012; subsequently published as 'Academics, Cultural Workers and Critical Labour Studies', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 7, 1 (2014), p. 22.
19. See, for example, Robyn Dasey's essay 'The University: The Ideal and the Actuality', in *Free U. Sources, Articles and Documents on the Free University, The Journal of the Free University*, 1 (1969), p. 7.
20. Aurélien Mondon, 'Education is Not Just About Getting a Job', *Age*, 4 June 2010. While there are similarities between this example of a free university and the Sydney one of the 1960s, the latter was more political in concept with an emphasis on universities being agents of social change.
21. Leonie Kramer, *Broomstick. Personal Reflections of Leonie Kramer* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), p. 39.
22. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, 'A Cloistered Life', in *The Half-Open Door. Sixteen Modern Australian Women look at Professional Life and Achievement*, ed. by Patricia Grimshaw and Lynne Strahan (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982), p. 125.
23. Andrew Riemer, *Sandstone Gothic. Confessions of an Accidental Academic* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), p. 40.
24. Ruth Barcan, *Academic Work and Labour in the New University* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 79.
25. Barcan, p. 128ff.
26. Meaghan Morris and Iain McCalman, 'Public Culture', in *Knowing Ourselves and Others. The Humanities in Australia into the 21st Century*, vol. 3 (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Services, 1998), p. 17.
27. Morris and McCalman, p. 18.
28. Morris, 'From "Criticism" to "Research"', p. 11.
29. Morris, 'Humanities for Taxpayers', p. 122.
30. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Marginalia — Some Additional Notes on the Gift', in *The Logic of the Gift. Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. by Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 233.
31. Personal communication.
32. Deryck Schreuder, 'John Manning Ward, 1919–1990', Obituaries, Australian Academy of the Humanities, <<http://www.humanities.org.au/Portals/o/documents/Fellows/Obituaries/JohnManningWard.pdf>>
33. W. Ritchie, 'George Pelham Shipp', Obituaries, Australian Academy of the Humanities, <<http://www.humanities.org.au/Portals/o/documents/Fellows/Obituaries/GeorgePelhamShipp.pdf>>
34. D. M. Armstrong, 'Alan Ker Stout, 1900–1983', Obituaries, Australian Academy of the Humanities, <<http://www.humanities.org.au/Portals/o/documents/Fellows/Obituaries/AlanKerStout.pdf>>
35. Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government. The Emergence of Literary Education* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 70.
36. Hunter, p. 96.
37. Ian Donaldson, 'The Idea of an Academy', Academy Address, in *Taking Stock. The Humanities in Australia*, ed. by Mark Finnane and Ian Donaldson (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2012), p. 24.
38. My warmest thanks to Dr Marie Louise Ayers, Assistant Director-General, Resources Sharing, National Library of Australia, for sending me examples of tweets and emails about Trove. My thanks also to Pauline Johnson, Roger Bendall, Katrina Schlunke, Alex Byrne, Rachel Frank and Elizabeth Webby for their very valuable assistance with this address.