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The future of the humanities – in the present & in public

Since the mid-twentieth century, the professionalization of our disciplines has been a hallmark of higher education in general and the research university in particular. Despite the repeated calls over the past twenty-five years for a renewal of the civic mission of higher education,¹ professionalization continues to hold tenacious sway and is largely understood to contradict the purposes and practices of public scholarship, which, in turn, is dismissed under the demoralizing rubric of service or the paternalistic rubric of outreach. It is only too clear that “there has been a weakening of the informal compact between the universi-

ty and society,” as the historian Thomas Bender points out in his invaluable essay on the American university from 1945 to 1995.² If some twenty years ago it could be asserted in the *Report from the National Task Force on Scholarship and the Public Humanities* that the humanities “are valuable for their own sake and the nation must support and sustain scholarship because that enriches the common fund of knowledge,”³ today the notion of the

1 See, for example, the important work of Campus Compact, founded in 1985 to press for the intertwined values of service learning and the responsibilities of citizenship; Ernest Boyer’s influential writing from the 1990s on the scholarship of engagement; and LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise), the decade-long initiative, begun in 2005, of the American Association of Colleges and Universities to underscore the importance of a liberal education, a primary value of which is civic knowledge and engagement. In 2006 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching announced a new classification that institutions of higher education could elect to adopt: community engagement.

2 Thomas Bender, “Politics, Intellect, and the American University, 1945–1995,” *Dædalus* 126 (1) (Winter 1997): 3.

3 James Quay and James Veninga, “Making Connections: The Humanities, Culture and the Community,” *National Task Force on Scholarship*

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intrinsic good of the humanities is definitely not a part of what is generally referred to as “making the case” for the humanities.

What is public scholarship? In suggesting an answer to this question, I turn to the influential work of *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, a national consortium established at the University of Michigan in 2001 that numbers over eighty institutions across the United States representing the full spectrum of higher education, from community colleges and colleges of arts and design to research universities and liberal arts colleges.⁴ Now based at Syracuse University, *Imagining America* is devoted to expanding the place of public scholarship in the humanities, arts, and design in higher education in the conviction that it serves a democratic purpose. *Scholarship in Public*, its groundbreaking report on the importance of including public scholarship in considerations of promotion and tenure, was released in May 2008. Authored by Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman, the report offers a definition – necessarily abstract and general – of what is referred to as publicly engaged academic work. Public scholarship, the report argues, is integral to the academic area of a faculty member’s research or creative activity. It includes “different forms of making knowledge ‘about, for, and with’ diverse publics and communities,” and “it contributes to the public good and

yields artifacts of public and intellectual value.”⁵ As the report notes, public scholarship exists on a continuum with traditional scholarship and often takes the form of projects that combine research, teaching, and creative activity as well as publication. Recommended is the use of a portfolio in the tenure dossier that might include writing for a non-academic audience, policy reports, and oral histories. Not all work in the public humanities would be considered public humanities scholarship.

At a meeting held in June 2008 at Syracuse University’s Lubin House in New York City to consider the report, discussion swirled around this definition of public scholarship, with a focus on what was understood by “scholarship” itself and with special pressure placed on the keywords *community* and *public* (about which more later). Discussion also centered on the questions that might guide the evaluation of public scholarship, with suggestions including: What constituencies are served? What new interdisciplinary connections have been formed? Is the “translation” of scholarship to larger audiences effective? Is the project innovative? Significantly, however, the report begins not with a definition of public scholarship in the humanities, arts, and design or with prescriptions for evaluation, but rather with a multitude of compelling examples from across the United States, most of which take the form of collaborative projects between faculty in higher education and community groups and institutions

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and the Public Humanities (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1990), 2.

4 *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, <http://www.imaginingamerica.org/>. Julie Ellison was the founding director of *Imagining America*; Jan Cohen-Cruz is currently the director.

5 Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman, *Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University, A Resource on Promotion and Tenure in the Arts, Humanities, and Design* (Syracuse, N.Y.: *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, 2008), 1.

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(among them, K-12 teachers, ethnic and race-based local groups, and museums). Among the examples are historian and architect Dolores Hayden's *Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* and the "Great Wall of Los Angeles" mural in the Tujunga Wash Flood Control Channel, a project of the Social and Public Art Resource Center founded by artist Judy Baca.⁶

Scholarship in Public is animated by a sense of vibrancy and possibility. "The report was inspired," we read, "by faculty members who want to do publicly engaged academic work and live to tell the tale." Few of our graduate students, however – the very people who will become our future faculty – arrive at graduate school with a sense that public scholarship in the humanities is a possible path for them. It is in research universities in particular where requirements for the publication of research in order to gain tenure have increased, and where "the words 'public' and 'scholarship' continue to live on different planets."⁷

This is one of the reasons why, in 2003, in tandem with the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation's Responsive Ph.D. initiative, the Simpson

6 See Dolores Hayden, *Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

7 Ellison and Eatman, *Scholarship in Public*, vii, xii. In "The Associate Professor Project Survey," a presentation on a project of the Modern Language Association, David Laurence reports that the stress on publication as a criterion for tenure in the fields of modern literature and language has basically doubled over the past forty years across the spectrum of Carnegie doctoral universities, master's universities, and baccalaureate colleges, with master's universities and baccalaureate colleges following the lead of Carnegie doctoral universities; Modern Language Association Convention, December 28, 2007.

Center for the Humanities at the University of Washington launched a weeklong Institute on the Public Humanities for Doctoral Students. To my knowledge the first of its kind in the country, the Institute included twenty-five doctoral students and featured presentations by national leaders who have done remarkable work in the public humanities, readings and discussion, project-based work, and site visits. That inaugural year speakers from across the country included Robert Weisbuch, then president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation; Julia Reinhard Lupton, founding director of Humanities Out There at the University of California, Irvine, a program that links university students with students in the largely Latino school district in nearby Santa Ana; and David Scobey, then director of the Arts of Citizenship program at the University of Michigan. We read and discussed work by Dolores Hayden, Edward Said, Robin Kelley, Harry Boyte and Nancy Kari, Michael Bérubé, Gail Dubrow, and Tony Bennett, among others. We also read and discussed reports (yes, reports; I have grown fond of reports over the past few years and think they should be read *and* discussed) from the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Association of Higher Education. We visited Bellevue Community College, the Seattle Art Museum, and downtown Seattle's historic Panama Hotel, built in 1910 in the International District to house Japanese laborers, which today is a tea house and modest hotel. (It possesses the only remaining Japanese bathhouse in the United States.) Leaders of community organizations participated as panelists, as did faculty members at the University of Washington whose projects included a collaboration between university faculty members and high school teachers called Texts and

Teachers; an exhibit of drawings by children of war under the poignant title *They Still Draw Pictures*; and a worldwide network of public forums on matters of urgent public concern held annually in libraries in September, aptly called The September Project.⁸ Tellingly, most of the faculty members were at the rank of professor. (The one who was an assistant professor left the university in the conviction that his work in the public humanities would not be honored here as scholarship and research.) I remember that Institute as a heady experience that opened many doors.

We have continued to hold the Institute every fall. Readings, site visits, and speakers have changed, of course.⁹ But one of the initial guiding purposes remains: to put public scholarship in the portfolios carried by our doctoral students into their future and thus to help bring about structural change in higher

8 For information on Texts and Teachers, directed by Gary Handwerk, see http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/programs_texts_teachers_0809.htm. See Anthony Geist and Peter N. Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures: Children's Art in Wartime from the Spanish Civil War to Kosovo* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), a catalog of the exhibition. For information on The September Project, directed by David Silver and Sarah Washburn, see <http://theseptemberproject.wordpress.com/connecting-the-world-one-library-at-a-time/>.

9 Readings added to the Simpson Center for the Humanities Institute on the Public Humanities for Doctoral Students over the past few years include work by Ien Ang, Lance Bennett, George Sanchez, Debra DeRuyver, and Jennifer Evans, among many others. Regarding the 2008 Institute, see http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/Institute_on_the_Public_Humanities_for_Doctoral_Students.htm. For more information, contact Miriam Bartha, codirector (with Bruce Burgett) of the Institute.

education.¹⁰ We want these future faculty members to arrive at their colleges and universities ready to take up scholarship in the public humanities and live to tell the tale, and *not* to wait until they have been promoted to the rank of professor. Since 2003 one hundred and fifty graduate students have participated in the Institute. Many have fanned out across the country as they take up positions in higher education, and many have gone on to positions with non-profit organizations.

One of my hopes has been that the Institute on the Public Humanities will inspire other centers to create similar programs for their graduate students as well as other programs in the public humanities. For the past thirty-five years, centers and institutes for the humanities on university and college campuses in the United States have served as sites for innovation, as laboratories for incubating emerging modes of knowledge and investigating new objects of study in cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts. Continental theory, British cultural studies, feminist studies, mass cultural studies, television studies, performance studies, animal studies, theories of evidence, critical race studies, theories and

10 For a discussion of the Institute within the local context of other institutional programs and projects at the University of Washington, Bothell, and issues of community-based participatory research, transdisciplinary research, American studies, and cultural studies, see Bruce Burgett, "Mixed Genealogies: Between Cultural Studies and American Studies," in *Reconfigurations of American Studies*, ed. Donald Pease and Elizabeth Dillon (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming). See also Miriam Bartha and Bruce Burgett, "Specifying the Scholarship of Engagement: Using the IA Document to Teach Collaboration Practice and Institutional Development," *Imagining America Newsletter*, May 2007, 10–11.

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discourses of the emotions, biotechnology and culture: these are just a few of the broad areas and subjects taken up by humanities centers and institutes around the country.

We speak of technology transfer. Similarly, we can speak of project and program, model and mission transfer in the humanities. Humanities centers are highly adept at circulating new ways of undertaking research and of learning. And indeed in recent years what has been on the radar screen of centers is precisely the public humanities; in fact the public humanities has been a key ingredient in the creation of many new centers. In 2007 the University of Iowa's Obermann Center for Advanced Studies launched a weeklong annual Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy; it is also planning a conference on models of public humanities for fall 2009. The center at Ohio State University was established in 1997 under the explicit rubric of the public humanities; it is called the Institute for Collaborative Research and Public Humanities, and one of its key missions is to enable the humanities to act as a bridge between the university, the city of Columbus, and the broader public culture. The University of Wisconsin at Madison has long had a humanities center devoted to research. Founded in 1959 as the Institute for Research in the Humanities, it was the first in the country (and in North America) to be dedicated to the support of research in the humanities with resident and visiting fellows, with the originating model being that of individual academic research. Forty years later, in 1999, a new Center for the Humanities was created alongside the Institute for Research as the pivot point of contact between the humanities on the Madison campus and the public. It sponsors a special program, begun as a

pilot project in 2004–2005, called Humanities Exposed, which fosters collaborative projects between University of Wisconsin graduate students and area schools, museums, and neighborhood centers. In 2000 the University of Florida established the Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere, with one of its primary missions being cultural work in the public interest. The tagline for the Humanities Institute at the University of Texas at Austin, which was founded in 2001, is “thinking in community,” and programs include sabbaticals for members of the community at the Humanities Institute, thus supporting scholars *from* the community *in* the academy. In spring 2007 Michigan State University established a Public Humanities Collaboratory. I could cite many more examples from around the country.¹¹

In announcing a virtual forum on “Democracy and Higher Education: The Future of Engagement” in early 2008, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education and the Ket-

11 In “Toward the Practice of the Humanities,” Sylvia Gale, founder of Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) for Imagining America, and Evan Carton, director of the Humanities Institute at the University of Texas at Austin, offer an impassioned account of how their work in the public humanities evolved; they estimate that of the some thirty-five humanities centers at research universities that belong to the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI), two-thirds of them identify the public humanities as part of their mission. See *The Good Society* 14 (3) (2005): 38–44. For information on humanities centers both in the United States and around the world, see the website of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes, <http://www.chcnetwork.org/>. The Consortium was established in 1986 and is now based at Duke University under the leadership of Srinivas Aravamudan, director of the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute.

tering Foundation noted “a sense of drift and fragmentation in the movement to promote community engagement and the formation of democratic citizenship as key institutional priorities for American colleges and universities.” On the contrary, and by all indications, I see the humanities flourishing in public across the United States.¹²

How do people who practice public scholarship describe their role and refer to themselves? In 2004 the Simpson Center received a welcome gift to establish the Simpson Professorship in the Public Humanities. It was awarded to geographer Katharyne Mitchell, whose research up until that point had been located firmly in the academic world. Two of the primary goals of this three-year professorship (it carried significant resources as well as a 50 percent release from teaching) were to model public scholarship to the academic community at the University of Washington (and beyond) and to establish meaningful connections with communities in the greater Seattle area involved in Mitchell’s multiyear project, which dealt with childhood, education, and schooling. (Another goal of the professorship was to underscore the necessity of providing time for a research project over an ex-

tended but concentrated period in contrast to the habitual practice of the sabbatical, which is no sooner begun than is over.) Many public goods emerged over the course of this three-year project under the rubric of “Reclaiming Childhood,” among them editorials by Mitchell in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, a town hall meeting with kids from Seattle schools speaking on how they use digital technologies, an ongoing research cluster composed of University of Washington faculty and Seattle-area writers and educators, and an inventive and exuberant multimedia installation in our University Libraries exhibiting work by young people reflecting on their experience of childhood. And there will be more, including a trade book on how childhood is being stolen from children in America, coauthored by Mitchell, the poet Frances McCue, and Laura Kastner, a clinical associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Washington.

But I want to single out the book Mitchell edited under the title *Practising Public Scholarship: Experiences and Possibilities beyond the Academy*. She asked academics – among them, literary and cultural studies scholar Terry Eagleton (University of Manchester), historian Patricia Limerick (University of Colorado), sociologist Katherine Beckett (University of Washington), public policy biologist Paul Ehrlich (Stanford University), geographer Doreen Massey (Open University), and historian Howard Zinn (Boston University) – to reflect on their experiences of becoming public scholars while remaining within a university system. What different terms do they deploy to describe themselves? Public scholar. Activist scholar. Scholar-activist. Scholarly producer. Scholar-citizen. Scholar-advocate. Academic-activist. Public activist-scholar. Public intellectual. The term “applied humanities”

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¹² “Democracy and Higher Education: The Future of Engagement,” sponsored by the New England Resource Center and the Kettering Foundation, 2008; http://nerche.org/kettering_colloquium/vforum.html. To this we must add the rich variety of programs sponsored by the fifty-six humanities councils that are located in every state and U.S. territory and are funded, in part, by the National Endowment for the Humanities. See www.neh.gov/whoweare/statecouncils.html. See also the State Federation of Humanities Councils, whose president is Esther Mackintosh, at www.statehumanities.org/.

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also appears. It is clear that many of the contributors to the volume are searching for a vocabulary (tellingly, it is often hybrid) to capture the range of their commitments and the work they have done that was virtually unprecedented in the postwar U.S. research university.¹³

The essays in *Practising Public Scholarship* have many things to recommend them, not least of which is the forthrightness of their voices, grounded in experience and offering advice. Some, like scientist Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb* (so titled by the publisher; Ehrlich preferred the more academic *Population, Resources, and the Environment*), have had long careers as public scholars. Ehrlich underscores the importance of making it clear when one is speaking as a scientist and when as a scholar. Ignore interdisciplinary boundaries, he counsels. Others, like Julia Lupton, have only relatively recently adopted the role of public scholar (“scholar-citizen” is her preferred term). She writes about how her experience with UC Irvine’s Humanities Out There changed her professional life in literally every aspect – “from my writing and teaching styles (clearer, more direct, more grounded), to my vision of the university’s relationship to the community (it should be reciprocal, serious, and sustained).”¹⁴ All of the contributors give life to the distressingly bland genre of the university mission state-

ment with its contemporary – and, in my view, flat – rhetoric of “civic engagement.”¹⁵ (Is not a “vision statement” from a university a contradiction in terms?) The volume communicates a sense of openness and possibility, curiosity and drive. It champions experimentation and innovation, commitment and passion, and it speaks to the important relationship between scholarship and advocacy for social justice – of *movement* in higher education. Indeed Julie Ellison has often called the public humanities just that: a movement.

At the same time, I cannot help but remark that some of the conversations about civic engagement, public scholarship, and the public humanities in the United States betray a distinctly anti-intellectual strain. In the two recent reports under the title of *New Times Demand New Scholarship*, from conferences about civic engagement in research universities, the focus is on collaborative partnerships between the university and the private and public sectors, and the word *intellectual* is strikingly absent. We find references to the importance of social development, community development, and economic development, but not intellectual development.¹⁶ The

13 Katharyne Mitchell, ed., *Practising Public Scholarship: Experiences and Possibilities Beyond the Academy* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

14 Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Philadelphia Dreaming: Discovering Citizenship Between the University and the Schools,” in *Practising Public Scholarship*, ed. Mitchell, 49–50.

15 It is notable that a participant at the February 2007 conference held at the University of California, Los Angeles, on the engaged research university remarked that in over twenty years of university work he had never heard a student ask about or use the term “civic engagement.” See Tim K. Stanton, ed., *New Times Demand New Scholarship II: Research Universities and Civic Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges* (Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, and Campus Compact, 2007), 17.

16 See Cynthia M. Gibson, *New Times Demand New Scholarship: Research Universities and Civic*

stress is on the solving of social problems and responding to community needs; the language is, well, lifeless report-language, dull and listless for the most part. (I am intimately familiar with this genre, having written my share of reports.)¹⁷ But in the humanities, communities of inquiry often come into being through the articulating of questions, which are often inchoate in the beginning and can never be definitively answered. Communities are formed around questions; they are communities of the question. In the humanities, inquiry adds context that ever widens and deepens; this is what has been famously called thick description, and to this I would add thick theory. In short, I believe that the work be-

Engagement: A Leadership Agenda (Medford, Mass.: Tufts University and Campus Compact, 2006) and Stanton, ed., *New Times Demand New Scholarship II*; available at <http://www.compact.org>. At a third conference, held in 2008 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, it was decided to establish a network of research universities under the rubric of The Research University Civic Engagement Network (TRUCEN). In *New Times Demand New Scholarship II*, *intellectual* appears only twice as an adjective, one of which is in a quote from Richard Brodhead, president of Duke University and a scholar of nineteenth-century American literature.

17 I am struck by the world of difference in tone and texture between the genre of the university report from the first decade of the twenty-first century and the contributions that appear in an issue of *Dædalus* from forty years ago devoted to "The Future of the Humanities." If today we write about participatory action-based research, in 1969 Herbert Blau, in an essay that bursts with blooded thought, wrote about participatory democracy in the wake of the student revolution. We need to reclaim that sense of intellectual urgency. See "Relevance: The Shadow of a Magnitude," *Dædalus* 98 (3) (Summer 1969): 654–676.

ing done in the public humanities can give life to the uninspiring generalities in *New Times Demand New Scholarship*. In fact, I wonder to what extent the very phrase "civic engagement" is a stumbling block for the idea – and ideal – of the commitment of scholars to larger social purposes and intellectual goods.

The report from *Imagining America* on public scholarship, tenure, and promotion identifies two basic models of public scholarship: community-based projects and the public presentation of knowledge in books, magazines, and forums for non-academic projects. The former are privileged as collaborative and engaged (some identified as community-based participatory research), as eschewing a hierarchy of knowledge and exemplifying the co-creation of knowledge. Unless I have misread the report, the term "public intellectual" never appears in it, and *intellectual* as an adjective is seldom used. Granted, in the United States the term "public intellectual" is often identified with the specific historical cohort of the New York intellectuals – Lionel Trilling, Irving Howe, Mary McCarthy, Clement Greenberg, and Susan Sontag, among them.¹⁸ But I suspect that to some degree this lack mirrors the age-old American tradition of antiintellectualism. (The omission may also be traced to decades of identity politics, with the cautionary lesson of not speaking on behalf of others.) To find such an attitude lodged in the academy itself, particularly within the humanities, is an index, I think, of the institutional intellectual insecurity of

18 The late Edward Said, in his essay "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals," in *The Public Intellectual*, ed. Helen Small (London: Blackwell, 2002), observes that the United States is less hospitable to the use of the word *intellectual* than are France, Britain, and the Islamic world.

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people in the humanities in the United States today even as many of us are trying, with confidence, to reinvent the humanities within the university.

In addition, the very term *public* has been put under decades of pressure, interrogated for its ideological biases (and there are many) by intellectuals (the word is apt) ranging from Nancy Fraser to Michael Warner.¹⁹ (The term *community* has also been subject to critique, but that is another story.²⁰) One of the very virtues of the idea of the public – as opposed to a community which is usually understood as local – is that it is unbounded and general. Michael Warner has called it a “practical fiction.”²¹ I consider it an ideal. But in certain contexts the word *public* has been stigmatized. Consider public housing, for example. More to the point, consider higher ed-

ucation itself: a counterintuitive and disabling shift in our rhetoric about the public and the private has taken place over the last twenty years. Institutions of higher education have conceptualized the “public” as being outside of the institution, as the very rhetoric of civic engagement and the engaged university reveals. At the same time, members of the public, as historian of education William Zumeta has pointed out, have come to understand public universities (or what we now call state-assisted institutions) as providing private rather than public goods – that is, offering individuals degrees for success.²² Concomitantly, as James Duderstadt and Farris Womack observe in *The Future of the Public University in America*, “Federal policy has shifted away from the view that higher education is a public good and toward the view that education benefits primarily the individual.”²³ Thus adding the word *public* to *intellectual* might be considered too hot to handle.

Indeed the figure of an *intellectual*, calling up an individual, can seem to resist an association with *public*. In the academy today the work of the individual, cast as solitary, has become somewhat suspect as the model of cross-disciplinarity and collaboration, bequeathed by the sciences and adopted by administrative leaders, has assumed rhetorical ascendancy.²⁴ In embracing the public

19 See Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992) and Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002). Warner’s reflections in *Publics and Counterpublics* are brilliant and polemical. I take particular issue with his jeremiad against what he caricatures as journalistic simplemindedness. He opposes the functions of intellectuals and journalists, indicting intellectuals who embrace clarity of expression with a desire for fame and unfairly ridiculing the discipline of history in particular for “the fascination with journalistic authority,” 139 – 140.

20 Miranda Joseph, for example, in *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), trenchantly shows how the romance of community – the celebratory discourse about community – appears virtually everywhere. See also Miranda Joseph, “Community,” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glen Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

21 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 8.

22 William Zumeta, “The New Finance of Public Higher Education,” *The NEA 2006 Almanac of Higher Education*, ed. Harold Wechsler (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 2006).

23 James J. Duderstadt and Farris W. Womack, *The Future of the Public University in America: Beyond the Crossroads* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 40.

24 The humanities and arts have their own traditions of collective and collaborative work,

humanities we must take care not to inadvertently set to the side the tradition of reflective and interpretive inquiry on the part of individuals as a practice that is seen by some as suddenly out-of-date.

But others use the terms *intellectual* and *public intellectual* without difficulty. A few years ago literary and cultural studies scholar Michael Bérubé, one of our most animated public intellectuals, pointed to the emergence in the United States of an African American intelligentsia whose prominent intellectuals – among them, Gerald Early, Cornel West, Michael Denning, Lani Guinier, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and bell hooks – write and speak for large audiences.²⁵ The title of Howard Zinn's contribution to *Practising Public Scholarship* is "The Making of a Public Intellectual." The late Edward Said, in my view one of our great public intellectuals, embraced the idea of the intellectual with impunity and the life of the intellectual with vitality, writing in *Representations of the Intellectual* that the intellectual must be pre-

ranging from theater productions and conferences to the creation of dictionaries, but these traditions are rarely invoked. I should also note that, in contradistinction to "professional science" or "conventional science," there is an emerging tradition of "civic science" in community-based participatory research. Tenets include a commitment to respect the knowledge-making practices of community groups and to consider knowledge-making practices that are intended to produce better accounts of the world, may be experiential, may (only *may*) be generalized, and may not translate into solutions to problems. Louise Fortmann, an environmental scientist at the University of California, Berkeley, explored this at the Conference on Expanding Interdisciplinarity from Campus to Community, held on June 5, 2008, at the University of Washington.

25 Michael Bérubé, "Public Academy," *The New Yorker*, June 30, 2003.

pared for "the risks and uncertain results of the public sphere – a lecture or a book or article in wide and unrestricted circulation – over the insider space controlled by experts and professionals."²⁶ Patricia Limerick insists that the receptivity of the public "to scholars who speak clearly, pragmatically, and originally is demonstrably unbounded."²⁷ Terry Eagleton, referring to himself as a public intellectual, tells a small story that illustrates this wonderfully:

Some years ago, I was associated with a worker writers' movement in Britain, and went down to Bristol to speak at a workshop of working-class men and women who were trying to write their life histories. I was speaking to them about the idea of autobiography, trying to keep my remarks as lucid as possible, when an almost-blind woman in her eighties interrupted me in her rich West Country burr to ask rather brusquely: "What kind of language is that you're talking?" I was just on the point of apologizing for any unintentional obscurantism, and for being so remote from my audience, when she added: "Because I'd like to learn it." She went on to publish a magnificent history of her life, to which I added a brief introduction.²⁸

26 Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 87.

27 Patricia Limerick, "Tales of Western Adventure," in *Practising Public Scholarship*, ed. Mitchell, 15.

28 Terry Eagleton, "Comrades and Colons," in *Practising Public Scholarship*, ed. Mitchell, 10. In that same essay (at 7), Eagleton draws a distinction between an intellectual and a public intellectual; he makes a further distinction between speaking as a citizen and as an academic:

Intellectuals need to be fluent in more than one academic discourse if they are to be *public* intellectuals – which is to say, if they want to bring ideas to bear on the political culture as a whole. The in-

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I read this small story as a cautionary parable. As intellectuals we must embrace our knowledge and not dilute it; translate it, yes, but not water it down completely. I would like to see more emphasis in the conversations about the public humanities on the importance of intellectuals writing for publics larger than our professional circles. Consider, for example, the influential and imaginative work of philosopher Judith Butler, historian Mike Davis, legal scholar Patricia Williams, and art historian T. J. Clark.

The growth and development of public scholarship in the humanities across disciplines and institutions of higher education (from research universities to community colleges) is exceedingly uneven. I would hazard that faculty members in doctoral institutions in literary studies and language training in particular are on the whole less familiar with the national conversation about public scholarship (ongoing now for some twenty years, with a long history of the reciprocal relationships between the academy and society before that) than are, say, historians, who can point to the field of public history, or sociologists to public sociology. How many literary studies and language faculty members could refer to the discussion about metropolitan universities?²⁹ Or to ask a dif-

tellectual range, in other words, is determined by the social function – for the word “intellectual” denotes a social function rather than a personal characteristic.

29 See Daniel M. Johnson and David A. Bell, eds., *Metropolitan Universities: An Emerging Model in Higher Education* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1995). The responsibility of metropolitan universities to their communities is a key theme in these essays. See especially R. Eugene Rice’s essay on “The

ferent kind of question: What would public literary scholarship mean?³⁰

If there is a latent insecurity in this essay, it is my concern about the future of literary criticism. I am a reader both by profession and temperament, a professional and an amateur. I understand what Grace Paley means in her poem “Fidelity” when she says she can’t abandon a book she has begun because the characters have become her “troubled companions” and “life had pages or decades to go / so much was about to happen to people.”³¹ Reading has not disappeared. Book clubs abound. But it is a fact that literary criticism is read virtually *only* by other literary critics (and perhaps not that many). That this is not the case with the practice of history prompts me to confess I may be guilty of discipline envy.³² What would public literary criticism look like? Would a public broader than the readership of the *New*

New American Scholar: Scholarship and the Purposes of the University.”

30 The Modern Language Association has taken important steps in the direction of public scholarship. Under the aegis of Michael Holquist, the Presidential Forum at the annual convention of the Modern Language Association in 2007 was “The Humanities at Work in the World.” *Standing Still: The Associate Professor Survey*, a report forthcoming from the Modern Language Association, recommends a more expansive conception of scholarship, research, and publication, one that reconsiders the dominance of the monograph and includes work produced and disseminated in new media. It also recommends public scholarship as an important mode of research.

31 Grace Paley, *Fidelity: Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 41.

32 See Marjorie Garber, *Academic Instincts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) for characteristically witty observations on discipline envy.

York Review of Books, *American Book Review*, *Bookforum*, and the *American Poetry Review* care? In any case, the question may well be moot. It is indisputable that we are moving – have moved – from a print culture to a screen culture (indeed, now often a hand-held screen) and that this tectonic shift has been in the making for well over a century with the cascading accumulation of the inventions of photography, film, television, video, the computer, and the Internet. What does this mean for public scholarship in the humanities?

Over the past few years the exploration of the digital humanities at humanities centers has accelerated at an exponential pace.³³ It is abundantly clear that the advent of the new digital technologies is transforming how scholars in the humanities undertake their research in unprecedented ways. New methods – among them, text mining, visualization, virtual environments, and collaborative digital research spaces – are being invented and tested. New ways of representing our scholarship – integrating text, image, sound, and video – are emerging, as are new ways of disseminating it to ever broader publics. One of our main challenges today is to integrate new forms of digital publication with the wealth of traditional forms of printed knowledge, creating powerful hybrid forms, a synthesis of printed

33 This is not the place to detail the initiatives in the digital humanities that have converged in recent years to produce the quantum leap we are witnessing. But I do want to mention the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC), the national consortium cofounded by Cathy Davidson (Duke University) and David Theo Goldberg (University of California, Irvine) that, with the digital humanities as its focus, has inspired so much creativity in the humanities; <http://www.hastac.org>.

and digital media, knowledge that circulates widely. And here it is that the digital humanities and the public humanities forcefully intersect.

“Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History” provides an inspiring example. Directed by James Gregory (history) with the assistance of doctoral candidate Trevor Griffey (history), this project at the University of Washington began as an undergraduate teaching experiment, with Gregory hoping to motivate his senior history majors by promising to publish on the Web the best of their research on the intertwined histories of racial justice and labor justice in Seattle. The students did original research on racially restrictive real estate covenants. They collected rare photographs and videotaped oral history interviews with people who had been central to these movements for justice. And this is what happened: the course not only turned them into practicing historians, many of them became published historians on an innovative website now archived at the University of Washington Libraries. It provides abundant material about this forgotten chapter in Seattle’s history, including historical overviews and timelines, streaming video of the interviews, activist flyers from the period, and an interactive map of “Segregated Seattle.” Among its many distinctions is the collection of materials devoted to the Seattle Chapter of the Black Panther Party, the most comprehensive collection of interviews, publications, and other materials about any of the Black Panther Chapters. The website thus attests to the project’s success in building trust among the many people involved from the university and Seattle’s communities. Indeed the creation of strong bonds of trust – all-important and intangible – is one of the precious precipitants of the project.

The future of the humanities – in the present & in public

Kathleen
Woodward
on the
humanities

Another of the gratifying results of this project is its very reach. The research has a large virtual audience, both in the Puget Sound region and across the country. The website has an average of ten thousand visits a month, and the project is frequently cited as a source and hyperlinked to other websites. Many area middle schools and high schools use the site as a teaching tool, and the project has been included in instruction modules for police officers and other city employees. It has also brought people together in dialogue in public forums at city schools. "Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History" thus demonstrates the important point that online scholarly publication can generate face-to-face communication. Another measure of the project's success is that it is generating sister projects. Other universities – San Francisco State University, to name one – are contemplating undertaking such research in their communities.³⁴ And similar projects – digital public humanities projects – are in the making. One of them is the ambitious "Redlining California," a collaboration between the San Diego Supercomputing Center's Sustainable Archives and Library Technologies Lab and the University of California Humanities Research Institute at the University of California, Irvine.³⁵

34 "Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History"; <http://www.civilrights.washington.edu>. For more information about the project, see James N. Gregory and Trevor Griffey, "Teaching a City about Its Civil Rights History: A Public History Success Story," *Perspectives on History*, April 2007; available at <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0704/0704tea1.cfm>.

35 See Paul Tooby, "Preserving History on a Humanities Grid for the University of California," *Envisioning the Future: Research Advances 2007* (San Diego: San Diego Supercomputing

In June 2005 *The Seattle Times* featured on its front page the students' research on segregated housing, confirming the fluid circulation of information between media (in this case, the web and print) and thrilling the students in the process. Three years later Jim Gregory, speaking at a meeting of leaders involved in the Carnegie Foundation's Teachers for a New Era at the University of Washington, declared that *he* had been transformed by the project into a teacher for our new era. More than that, his very idea of what it can mean to be a scholar and an intellectual today has changed dramatically.

It is doubtful that in the past the transformative project that is "Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History" would have figured prominently in a file for promotion at a research university. Today, with *Imagining America's Scholarship in Public* in our hands, it is my hope that will no longer be the case. But of course promotion and tenure policies are not the real point. For many people in the humanities, the very idea of the possibility of public scholarship has created a larger sense of meaning where before there had been only a profession, not a calling. As the sociologist C. Wright Mills insisted, "Scholarship is a choice of how to live, as well as a choice of a career."³⁶ Among other things, the public goods offered by many public humanities proj-

Center, 2007); <http://www.sdsc.edu/news/researchadvances.html>. The project directors are Richard Marciano, director of the San Diego Supercomputing Center's Sustainable Archives and Library Technologies Lab, and David Theo Goldberg, director of the University of California Humanities Research Institute.

36 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 196.

ects stretch our affective understanding of the experience of other people and draw us together in a common purpose. In “Seattle Civil Rights” there is outrage at social injustice and hope for a different future to be found. In the “Great Wall of Los Angeles” there is joy captured in collective artistic expression.

There is a long historical tradition of the democratic impulse in higher education in the United States, and we need to reinvigorate that founding vision – it is both noble and pragmatic – of service to the public and work with the public. What is ultimately at stake in the public humanities is a form of scholarship and research, of teaching and learning, that honors commitment and concrete purpose, has a clear and present substance, reduces the distance between the university and life, and offers civic education for all involved, revealing the expansive future of the humanities – in the present and in public.

*The future
of the
humanities
– in the
present &
in public*