



Generous Thinking

A RADICAL APPROACH
TO SAVING
THE UNIVERSITY



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On Generosity

They are trying to tell us. And we need to listen.

—HILLARY CLINTON, SPEECH TO ABE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.

—SIMONE WEIL, LETTER TO JOË BOUSQUET

The last course I took in graduate school was a dissertation seminar designed to help us transition from the sometimes collective and often receptive ways we'd done our work as students—taking classes, listening to discussions, absorbing ideas, and reconfiguring it all into seminar papers designed for an audience of one—to the more independent and more active ways in which we were intended to go forward into the dissertation project, with its presumably larger intended readership. Throughout the semester, each of us brought our draft proposals to the table, to be read and discussed by the group, and we were also visited by a series of slightly more advanced graduate students, each of whom gave us a chapter in progress, which we discussed with them. One of those visitors was a young woman whose dissertation topic I do not remember today at all, though I remember one moment of our interaction at that seminar table with painful

clarity. The chapter she'd given us made extensive use of the concept of the sublime, and something about it hadn't quite settled for me, so I asked her how she was defining the sublime in her project. She rolled her eyes—literally—and said, “For God's sake: awe and terror. It's Sublime 101, Kathleen.”

I tell you this story not because its all too blatant *Mean Girls Go to Grad School* quality makes a particularly good case for the need for greater generosity in academic life (though that too). Rather, the instigating moment—in which I asked for clarification of a term whose usage I did not find obvious at all, thank you very much—is at the heart of intellectual work, and at the heart of our work ahead. The kind of inquiry that scholars and other writers undertake relies on the possibility of a shared vocabulary, which creates the conditions under which we might conduct a conversation about complex and often contentious ideas, in the hope that we might come to some kind of mutual understanding. But note that I've described the status of this shared vocabulary as a *possibility* rather than as something that actually exists; building that vocabulary is a project in and of itself, one that requires continual attention and negotiation. It's one of the places where scholars, and particularly scholars in my corner of the humanities, push back against one another. Some of that pushback is competitive posturing, of the sort that I think that graduate student assumed I was engaging in. In fact, that I'm describing it here as “pushback” rather than as a request for clarification reveals the ways that our internalized senses of competition can cause us to interpret a question like that as aggressive and to respond with shame: if I can demonstrate that you're misunderstanding or mis-using a term I find crucial, I can go on to show why your project is fundamentally flawed (and, not incidentally, why my own work in the area is so much better). But sometimes a question like that

is important, and in fact well-intended: I want to have this conversation with you, but I want to ensure that we're speaking the same language.

For this reason, many scholarly projects begin with the ritual of defining one's terms. I'm about to engage in that ritual, because I want to be certain that we're all beginning this project of exploring generous thinking from, if not the same place, then at least places that are reasonably in sight of one another. But I'm also doing so because I am increasingly convinced that the very act of building a shared vocabulary that can allow us to engage in real conversations both across our campuses and with the world is itself a requirement for generous thinking. Even more: it is an act of generosity in and of itself.

That's the key term that this chapter is going to try to define, of course: generosity. Generosity is admittedly a slippery concept, and particularly in the sense I intend. Is generosity best embodied in acts that we undertake, or values that we uphold? Is generosity something we feel, or something we do? In order to get at what I mean, I'm going to work my way through a series of ideas that bear something in common with the generosity I'm trying to describe but that aren't quite the same. In the process I'll begin to sketch the outlines of what I believe the notion of generosity might do for the university today and how those of us who work in academic environments might put it into practice as a key component of our interactions not just with one another but with the publics we hope to engage.

Acts

For starters, I want to separate the notion of generosity that we're working with from the simple act of giving and any apparent self-

lessness that it may entail. When I say that the relationship between the scholars who make up the university and the public that university serves should be characterized by generosity, I do not primarily mean to say that we should all be doing more volunteer work in our communities, or developing more service learning projects, or engaging in any other form of "giving back" that you might imagine. These are all enormously important activities, some of which I'll draw on as we proceed, and undoubtedly doing more in that vein would be better. The mode of generosity associated with philanthropy or volunteerism establishes the means through which those who have benefited from the advantages conferred by the university can pass those advantages on to many who do not have the same access. These generous acts can, in fact, enable us to create greater access and opportunity for more members of our communities. But there are some notable ways in which focusing too exclusively on this material, action-oriented approach to generosity may cause the transformations that I'm describing to fall short.

One of the reasons that locating generosity within generous acts would be insufficient in transforming the relationships between the academy and the public can be seen in the challenges experienced by those who spend their careers in philanthropic or other socially oriented fields. People who work in public service, and particularly in roles that are associated with a high degree of selflessness—think of social workers, public school teachers, nurses, clergy, as well as those who work for mission-driven nonprofit organizations—are highly susceptible to burnout. It's enough of an issue that the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* publishes an extensive toolkit on its website designed to help nonprofit employees avoid or recover from the burnout associated with their roles. In fact, as Adam Grant's work has explored, while giving is

unquestionably good, and while those who are givers in the workplace—pitching in to help with extra projects, assisting colleagues who need support—tend to be highly successful, selflessness can cause anyone’s internal resources to run low. In a week-long series on the *Harvard Business Review* website, Grant and his colleague, Reb Rebele, demonstrate how a wide range of professionals who are committed to supporting their clients and colleagues run the risk of feeling overloaded and exhausted by that commitment. University faculty and staff are no different: all the work we do for our students, for our colleagues, and for our communities can leave us feeling we’ve got nothing left to give. And emphasizing the virtuous selflessness at the heart of service-oriented professions, as Fobazi Ettarh notes in exploring the “vocational awe” associated with librarianship, can serve as a means of disenfranchising those workers, preventing them from protesting problems in their institutions and insisting that those institutions do better.

Beyond the damage that such an emphasis on altruism as a professional virtue can do to our personal wellbeing and to our relationships with our workplaces, however, approaching generosity as a material, philanthropic act allows us to draw boundaries around our responsibilities to the communities in which our institutions are embedded. In so doing, we risk not only limiting our impact but in fact undermining the very relationships we seek to build. That is, the ability to say that we gave at the office (or in the classroom, or in the community center) turns the generosity I’m describing into something transactional, an exchange with both a defined location and a clear conclusion. As a result, we create specific contexts for our generous behavior that lie outside the center of our working lives. Nothing about that center need necessarily change: we do what we do, and then we bring the good

of what we do to the world. Generosity in this model slips all too easily into a missionary project, in which we provide the understanding derived from our privileged position to the less fortunate around us. And, having done so, we can consider our obligation to the world to be fulfilled.

The question immediately arises, of course: Do we have an obligation to the world? “Obligation” as I used it in the last paragraph seems to bear much in common with *noblesse oblige*, a condescending assumption that we possess gifts that we must bestow upon the less fortunate around us. But *noblesse oblige* stems less from a real sense of obligation than from a particularly self-aggrandizing form of voluntarism, including in the academic environment: when we focus on the knowledge or resources that *we* can give *them*, not only do we deepen the divide between us, but we further entrench our own assumption that we inhabit the true center where such knowledge resides. We may feel that we have to give to those in need because of our station or privilege, but that “have to” is one we can easily walk away from; the commitment is entirely self-selected. This is not to dismiss the impact that many community service projects have; sharing the benefit of my knowledge and resources with those around me is indeed a generous act. The problem arises when that project doesn’t equally transform us, when it remains a unidirectional *act*, of limited duration, one that I can conclude, returning to the rest of my life unchanged.

The obligation that I would instead like us to focus on in the context of generosity is one we cannot conclude, and of which we cannot absolve ourselves. As François Lachance pointed out in the online discussion of the draft of this text, “obligation” derives from the Latin *obligare*, “from ob- ‘towards’ + ligare ‘to bind.’” That is the sense of obligation that I want to explore: that which

binds us together, that which we cannot walk away from without doing grave damage both to ourselves and to the fabric of the whole. Acknowledging that we bear one another obligations does not mean that we don't have a *choice*, as members of voluntary communities, about whether to fulfill them, or that there isn't agency in the kinds of generosity I'm hoping to foster. But our common presence in a space, an institution, a community, obligates us to one another. We owe one another recognition as members of that community. We owe one another attention to the concerns each of us brings to that community. Thus Anthony Appiah describes "two strands that intertwine" in his notion of cosmopolitanism:

One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. (25)

These two strands, for Appiah, exist in an ongoing tension: we bear obligations that bind us together; we take seriously the differences that mean each of us must be allowed to go our own way. That individual, agential freedom does not relieve us of our shared obligations, but nor does the nature of our obligations eliminate the agency that all of us bear in our own lives.

This mode of obligation—one that cannot be discharged through discrete acts of generosity, but that instead must be lived—is at the heart of Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins*. In attempting to define a path out of the morass in which the Uni-

versity of Excellence has landed higher education, Readings turns repeatedly to the notion of obligation and its connection to community. His goal, he notes, is "an anti-modernist rephrasing of teaching and learning as sites of *obligation*, as loci of *ethical practices*, rather than as means for the transmission of scientific knowledge. Teaching thus becomes answerable to *the question of justice*, rather than to the criteria of truth" (154; emphasis in original). That connection among obligation, ethics, and justice leads to his commitment to dissensus—the willingness to dwell in an ongoing disagreement and dialogue rather than forcing a false and oppressive consensus—and to his conviction that "the condition of pedagogical practice is, in Blanchot's words, 'an infinite attention to the other'" (161). This infinite attention is an ethical obligation that cannot be discharged, and an obligation whose infinitude is created in no small part by our being-in-community; "the obligation of community," Readings notes, is "one to which we are answerable but to which we cannot supply an answer" (187).

If we are going to build and sustain the university *as* and *in* communities—that is, as I discussed in the introduction, not romanticized communities, but rather communities based in solidarity, communities based on nonmarket relations of care—then we need to be able to think about our obligations to one another, about our relationships to voluntary communities beyond volunteer work. We need to think about our *belonging*, in other words: what it means for us to belong not just to our communities but to one another as members of them. As Miranda Joseph's exploration of the structure of the nonprofit organization suggests, modes of "community" associated with private philanthropy have come to serve in the age of late capital as a replacement for public commitment to the common good. These organizations do a great deal of enormously important work, but they at times

rely upon a problematic form of noblesse oblige with deep political and economic origins: I as a benefactor am obliged to be generous with what I have precisely because we are no longer committed to one another as members of a shared social structure. We do not belong to one another. Instead, the shift of responsibility for the public welfare toward private entities displaces our obligations to one another in favor of individual liberties.

What I am seeking in generosity as a potential ground for reestablishing that sense of belonging, and in so doing rebuilding the relationship between the university and the public good, then, is not a vast expansion in philanthropic activity, but something seemingly smaller and yet more pervasive. Rather than understanding generosity as transactional, and thus embodied in finite acts, I want to approach it as a way of being that creates infinite, unbounded, ongoing obligation. Generosity lies in part in the force of the commitments that we make to one another, but commitments that are based in an ethical obligation that endures beyond and outside individual agency. It's a commitment that we must continually make the choice to renew, but an obligation that persists regardless of our choice. This mode of generosity bears much in common with Appiah's description of cosmopolitanism: it is a way of being in the world that need not be "an exalted attainment," but that instead derives from "the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association" (30). Generosity, in my sense, both dwells in and grows from this conversation: a generosity of mind.

Focusing on conversation highlights the need for generosity to be continually renewed in order to function. Moreover, it points to the things we owe one another, the things we owe our colleagues, and also the things we owe those publics whom we hope

to engage. Conversation imposes an obligation that cannot be easily concluded, that asks me to open myself again and again to what is taking place between us. Conversation thus demands not that we become more giving, but instead that we become more *receptive*. It requires us to participate, to be part of an exchange that is multidirectional. It disallows any tendency to declare our work concluded, or to disclaim further responsibility toward the other participants in our exchange. It asks us to inhabit a role that is not just about speaking but also about listening, taking in and considering what our conversational partners have to say, reflecting on the merits of their ideas and working toward a shared understanding that is something more than what each of us bears alone.

This mode of generous thinking is thus first and foremost a willingness to think *with* someone. Scholars frequently engage in this kind of work with close colleagues, in various ways—when we read their in-preparation manuscripts in order to help improve them, for instance—but it's an orientation to scholarly conversation that rapidly diminishes as we move outside our immediate circles and turn to the more public performance of our academic selves. In those modes of interaction we often feel ourselves required to become more critical—or more competitive—and we frequently find ourselves focusing not on the substance of what is being said to us, but on the gaps or missteps that give us openings to defend our own positions. That so many scholars do so much work on behalf of their colleagues and their students and the publics with whom they engage indicates that the problem is not that academics are fundamentally ungenerous. It's more that the structures within which we work, and the reward systems that let us know when we have succeeded, limit the locations and relationships within which we are encouraged to practice generosity.

As a result, while we may understand generosity of mind to be a key value within the profession, its actual enactment is not allowed to become habitual, not encouraged to become part of our general mode of being.

Values

What I am attempting to describe, then, is generosity as an enduring habit of mind, a conversational practice. But in suggesting as I did in the last paragraph that such generosity is a key value within the academy, I am suddenly faced with two pitfalls. On the one hand, treating generosity as a value risks reducing a practice to a platitude, something we can all happily claim to espouse and yet do very little to enact. And worse, the abstraction that occurs in treating generosity as a value muddies the concept, drawing it into close association with a host of other terms that I do not mean to invoke.

Many of these terms, these values, are good ones, and many of them are values that we share, or at least that we aspire to share. But being values, they are double-edged: they are the terms through which we represent the best of what we wish to be, but they pose as universals when they are often very distinctly local. The value of these values seems self-evident to those who share them, but they are often differentially applied, and they are too easily wielded as weapons against others. They evade clear definition, relying on know-it-when-we-see-it assumptions, without fully questioning who the “we” is or what position we must be in in order to see it the way we do. These values, however valuable, bear origins and histories and contingencies, all of which can too easily disappear behind assumed universals rather than insisting on our examination. And we must be willing to scrutinize those val-

ues, perhaps especially when we engage with those who may understand them to mean something quite different from what we expect. The challenge of shared values, after all, is precisely that they might *not* be shared, that they might result from assumptions that are far more local than we realize. (One such value, which I’ll explore further in chapter 4, is that of the public good itself: that there should be such a thing feels so self-evident to many of us that it’s shocking to run across others who find that very concept to be meaningless at best, if not an outright imposition on their sense of liberty.)

Perhaps we might see the problem in attempting to establish a set of shared values by looking at something like civility. In an ideal world, we might hold civility up as a kind of aspirational community standard; it would be great to inhabit a world, or even a campus, where everyone interacted with mutual kindness and respect. But in actual practice, the term “civility” takes on a disciplinary force. It has repeatedly been used as a blunt instrument with which to quiet dissent and protest where they quite legitimately arise. And in those moments we have come to see that there are vast differences in our understandings, even within the academic community, much less between that community and the surrounding public, of what civility means and how it should best be enacted. So while civility is a quality I value—I would be very happy if we were able to conduct all our discussions and disagreements in what I think of as a civil fashion—demanding that we behave according to *my* understanding of civility runs the risk of reinforcing inequities between those who already get to speak and those who are expected to sit respectfully and listen passively.

Similarly, in talking about generosity, I do not mean to invoke the range of positive values it brushes up against, values that might

be imagined to make us all a bit nicer to one another, such as optimism or even hope. Personally I am a bit prone toward optimism, though that position has been sorely challenged by recent circumstances. There is perfectly good reason in today's world not to feel so rosy about things. Many aspects of our world are in fact getting demonstrably worse, and some things show little sign of being salvageable at all. And in the face of such circumstances, the need to put on a happy face is both counterproductive and insulting. Barbara Ehrenreich describes the peculiarly American requirement that we be unflaggingly optimistic as "driven by a terrible insecurity" (12), and she explores the ways our imperative toward positive thinking works to defuse and deflect critical attention to issues of inequity and social injustice. In this way optimism, like civility, can too readily shift from an aspirational value to a disciplinary standard used to cudgel the dissatisfied back into line.

Hope, perhaps? In the face of current events and forecasts, I find myself clinging to hope, and not entirely without reason. Authors including Rebecca Solnit have compellingly explored the necessary tie between hope and action: "Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. . . . It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand" (19). Hope is, in Solnit's usage, not the optimistic sense that all will be fine regardless of what we do; hope cannot stand on its own as a form of wishful thinking. Similarly, for Krista Tippett, hope is "a choice that becomes a practice that becomes spiritual muscle memory. It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be" (251). Hope is in this sense not blind, not passive, but is instead linked to action and is in fact that which compels the action.

But other activist authors, and in particular several authors writing about the black experience in America, have explicitly disavowed hope. Ta-Nehisi Coates, for example, has described hope as "specious," and has written powerfully about his inability to comfort his distraught son by telling him that everything "would be okay." Rather than attempting to give him hope, he tells him instead "that this is your country, that this is your world, that this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it" (13–14). Hope, for Coates, denies "the all of it," by seeking instead some better world that for too many does not, and will not, exist. This disavowal of hope does not mean that there are no joys and freedoms in the world for Coates; it is, rather, that those joys and freedoms must be found in the world as it is, rather than through a kind of hope that the dominated are often called upon to perform for others rather than being able to genuinely embody. Tressie McMillan Cottom has likewise argued that hope is an alibi too often used to disclaim the reality not just of the continuing marginalization and oppression produced by structural racism but of the ways they are reinforced, rather than dismantled, by some modes of activism. McMillan Cottom points to a "nomenclature problem" at the heart of the disagreement: "When white allies want us to be hopeful what they really mean is that they require absolution in exchange for their sympathies. And, when black people say that they are plenty hopeful we tend to mean that our hope is tempered by a deep awareness of how thin is the veneer of white civility" ("Finding Hope"). Hopelessness, for both Coates and McMillan Cottom, is not an act of giving up, but instead a deeper resistance, a recognition of and insistence upon the world as it is—a knowledge that the world has long persisted in not changing and indeed may never change, but that you have to make your way in it anyhow.

These two positions on hope are not reconcilable, and yet they not only can but must coexist and speak to one another, dwelling in the kind of dissensus sought by Bill Readings. On the one hand, for Solnit and Tippett, hope is necessary to begin the process of engagement, to inspire action; hope is the grounds, for those taking up the political, for belief that such action might have an effect. On the other hand, for Coates and McMillan Cottom, those who have been born and raised into opposition rather than coming to it as a choice have little reason to expect change, and so must rely on something other than hope as the source of an ongoing commitment not just to resist but to persist, to thrive. Where for Solnit hope is “the story of uncertainty, of coming to terms with the risk involved in not knowing what comes next, which is more demanding than despair and, in a way, more frightening. And immeasurably more rewarding” (40), for McMillan Cottom there is no not-knowing what comes next. What comes next is what has always come next, if in slightly different forms. Hope in this landscape—and in particular hope’s fragility—becomes a potential distraction from the work required. In that sense hope, the belief that something new could happen, is born of privilege.

I present this disagreement not to suggest that those of us inclined to hope should abandon it; in fact, I tend to believe that those who have the privilege of hope should use it toward the good in whatever way we can. But generosity might have less to do with the particulars of whether we are able to be hopeful or whether we are able to persist even in the absence of hope than in the ability to continue thinking together despite our differences. Generosity, like Appiah’s cosmopolitanism, is as much connected to the mutual recognition and honoring of those differences, perhaps especially when they cannot be resolved, as it is to our continuing determination to be in community together.

That people who in many ways inhabit the same universe—the progressive public intellectual landscape of the early twenty-first-century United States—nonetheless experience that universe with radical differences, points to the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of arriving at a set of shared values. But that is not to embrace despair or to endorse giving up in the face of it. Junot Díaz points to Jonathan Lear’s concept of “radical hope,” the will to continue working toward a future that seems unimaginable, arguing that it may provide “our best weapon against despair, even when despair seems justifiable; it makes the survival of the end of your world possible.” Ezekiel Kweku, from a slightly different perspective, focuses on the possibilities that lie just beyond despair:

There is no shame in arriving at despair. It’s human nature. But you must keep going and find the place beyond it. And when you reach that place, you fight not because you are guaranteed to win, or even have a chance of winning. In fact, losing might be inevitable. You continue to fight, even in the face of the inevitability of defeat, because it is right and it is good. The place beyond despair is not hope, exactly, but it is a place from which you may draw nearly unlimited will, because you are no longer afraid of losing.

Whether we individually embrace hope as a compelling force toward positive political action or reject it as a performance that distracts us from the real ground on which endurance and resistance can be built is less a matter of education or priorities or a correctness of perspective—the kinds of things one can be argued into—than it is a matter of something much more basic: who we are, where we have been, what we have experienced. Recognizing that all of these most fundamental differences create deep chal-

enges in establishing a set of shared values is the necessary beginning, however paradoxically, of the process of establishing that set of values. That process will likely never be successfully completed. But only by generously attending to the ways that others define and describe the world and asking how we might be called upon to shift our own perspectives can we begin to establish the ground for continuing our conversation. That is to say, in developing a practice of generous thinking, we are called upon—as I have been in this chapter, and as scholars always are in their own projects—to begin by working toward the possibility of a shared vocabulary.

Feelings

Working toward a shared vocabulary is a process that, perhaps needless to say, will inevitably be fraught with misunderstanding. Lisbeth Lipari has argued, however, that misunderstanding functions not solely as an unavoidable barrier to communication but also as a crucial, and even productive, reason for it:

Misunderstanding reminds us, again and again, that our conversational partners are truly “other” than us; that each of us lives at the center of our own world; that we each arrive independently “on the scene” of communication with different histories, traditions, experiences, and perspectives; that the self is not the world; that perfection is impossible; and that, although human language is infinitely generative, there are important aspects of human existence that are, simply, ineffable. In short, misunderstanding opens the doorway to the ethical relation by inspiring (or frustrating) us to listen more closely to others, to inquire more deeply into their differences, and to question our own already well-formed understandings of the world. (26–27)

Misunderstanding thus has the potential to yank us out of our literally self-centered ways of thinking and encourage new connections with the others with whom we seek to communicate. This ethical relation that Lipari describes might be seen as one based in empathy, or the desire to understand the feelings and experiences of others.

“Empathy” defined in this fashion perhaps lies a bit closer in to the sense with which I use “generosity.” Empathy is generally understood as that ability to bridge the gap between self and other, as that quality of openness that enables greater insight across divides of background or experience. Empathy represents an attitude toward the world that we are encouraged to cultivate—and yet, as Leslie Jamison succinctly notes, “Empathy is always perched precariously between gift and invasion” (16). Empathy has the potential to ground a deeply ethical relationship with the world, and has as well the potential to flatten that relationship into something much more troubling.

So what’s the problem with empathy? First, there are the myriad ways in which empathy has been understood—or perhaps misunderstood—as somehow just being about a replication of *feeling*: your story of loss makes me sad; voilà, empathy. Second, there is the ease with which it invites expression through an appropriation of the experiences of others: “I feel your pain.” Third, there is the extent to which this kind of empathy works to reify the pain of others, to concretize and associate that pain with the whole of their existence; as Jade Davis notes, the dehumanized “they” created by our techniques of empathy “are incapable of dreams and joys of their own because they are the carriers of the pain you cannot face/acknowledge.” And finally, there are the uneven ways in which the call to empathy has been distributed. On the one hand, as Davis points out, empathy is engineered into

technologies within which “the disenfranchised, the marginalized, the at-risk are expected to perform their pain and discomfort for those who know only comfort”; their performances provide the opportunity for the privileged to experience empathy. On the other hand, marginalized and at-risk individuals have been all too frequently told they need to empathize with the situations faced by others, without any reciprocating attempt at understanding. This uneven distribution has led to one of the most bitter divides in the United States since the 2016 presidential election: commentators have repeatedly insisted that “urban, liberal” voters must find ways to empathize with the working-class whites whose feelings of disenfranchisement and economic anxiety led them to vote overwhelmingly for Donald Trump, at the very same time that the commentators fail to empathize with those urban, liberal voters, a group largely composed of people of color whose disenfranchisement has been all too literal and whose very physical safety in their communities has been too often in question. If empathy requires a one-sided experience of feeling for those who have put you at risk, while your own pain has been reduced to spectacle—or, for that matter, if empathy requires you to be able to get fully inside someone else’s head in order to care about them as human beings—it’s possible that it’s the wrong ideal for us to strive toward.

Given this, although we may be shocked when someone like Paul Bloom argues against empathy, as he does in his recent book by that title, it’s worth thinking some about his reasons. Bloom distinguishes, first of all, between emotional empathy, “feeling what others feel and, in particular, feeling their pain,” and cognitive empathy, or “the capacity to understand what’s going on in other people’s heads.” The latter, he notes, he couldn’t be against—a point I’ll return to in a moment—but the former, he believes,

causes far more problems for us than it solves: empathy of feeling is “biased and parochial; it focuses you on certain people at the expense of others; and it is innumerate” (42), encouraging us to make decisions that help particular individuals in the short term but that may be statistically damaging in the long term. Although this mode of empathy may appear to be other-directed, it functions through an appeal to narcissism: How would *you* feel? It privileges feelings that we are far more likely to hold for those who most closely resemble us, exacerbating rather than helping us overcome racism. The mirroring established by emotional empathy creates the inevitability of a kind of colonization: You feel victimized? I feel victimized on your behalf! And, as Davis points out, “To be in the shoes of an Other still leaves you with your own feet,” feet that can step out of the simulation at any time, unchanged by the experience.

Perhaps even more insidious is the degree to which, as Amanda Hess has noted in much political discourse that followed from the 2016 presidential election, empathy has been invoked not as a means of developing a deeper connection to others but instead as a means of figuring them out with a frankly self-interested goal in mind: “it often seems to mean understanding their pain just enough to get something out of it—to manipulate political, technological and consumerist outcomes in our own favor.” This is the empathy of the algorithm, and before that, the empathy of the advertising industry: those who want to know how we feel in order to get us to do something. It’s little wonder that empathy might feel a bit tainted, and that Bloom might decide that we’re “better off without it” (10).

But if, as Jamison notes, empathy is always delicately balanced “between gift and invasion,” there remains the gift to be reckoned with. Jamison’s exploration of empathy leads her to argue that its

good derives from the work that it requires of us—and that this work is never merely an act of imagination but instead a process of inquiry: “Empathy requires knowing you know nothing. Empathy means acknowledging a horizon of context that extends perpetually beyond what you can see” (16). This mode of empathy bears more in common with the cognitive empathy that Bloom declares he couldn’t be against than with the emotional empathy described above, but it’s something more than the bland and at times invasive assumption of “understanding” that Hess describes. As in Lipari’s consideration of the ways that misunderstanding might provoke us to attend more closely to others, empathy here requires putting the self and its assumptions aside. This mode of empathy is inseparable from the curiosity stimulated by imagination, but it requires a desire to understand not just that which you do not presently know but also that which you recognize that you cannot know. That willingness—to acknowledge the ineffable difference of other people and their experiences, to recognize them despite what we cannot understand, and yet to continue to try to understand despite our inevitable failures—begins to lead us away from a form of empathy focused on the vicarious and manipulable experience of feelings, and toward an ethical process that asks much more of us, a process that is much closer to the generosity I am seeking.

Practices

Dominick LaCapra, in *History in Transit*, explores the role of the historian in writing about traumatic events, and in particular the historian’s responsibility for working through, in a psychoanalytic sense, the memory of trauma. This “working through,” however, is not conducted in order to put away the memory that “haunts

or possesses the self or the community,” but rather to allow it to “be remembered with some degree of conscious control and critical perspective that enables survival and, in the best of circumstances, ethical and political agency in the present” (56). The work of the historian in relationship to trauma requires deep empathy, but while that empathy involves, as LaCapra describes it, an affective response, it is not driven by an identification with the self or community that experienced the trauma; it does not call for feeling what the other feels, or for mirroring those feelings. In fact, it’s less about feeling than about a particular kind of thought process. Empathy is for LaCapra “virtual but not vicarious,” requiring the historian to “put him- or herself in the other’s position without taking the other’s place or becoming a substitute or surrogate for the other” (65). Empathy thus becomes a process of working through, an attempt to understand, one that the historian acknowledges will only ever be partially successful, and will never be completed. That process is filled with the inevitable misunderstandings that Lipari describes, misunderstandings that have the potential to open the door to a deeper ethical relation precisely by asking us to recognize the limits of our understanding and yet keep trying. Empathy in this sense is not something we have, not something we feel, but something we must wrestle with, and something we must continue wrestling with, with no expectation of ever fully pinning it down.

Understood in this sense, empathy becomes a practice, and one key aspect of practices is that they must be practiced. Practices are regular and routine, but they are also difficult and at moments feel doomed to failure. Exercise falls into this category for many of us; so does meditating; so, for many, does writing. And LaCapra’s sense of empathy is a practice as well. The thing about practices is that we move in and out of them—we do not seek to exercise

every moment of the day—but we are never fully done with them, either. We do not get to check the “exercise” box off on our to-do list for all time. They become instead part of the structure of our lives, something we return to again and again. Practices are not about perfection but about a continual, impossible attempt to perfect. They are ways of being in the world.

Practices involve action, of course, but they are distinct from acts, in that practices are sustained and sustainable. Even more, they are sustaining; they create the conditions under which they can continue. This is not to say that they are easy, of course. I try to go to the gym every day, I try to meditate every day, I try to write (more or less) every day, and yet more often than not, I still struggle to get myself out of the door, into my chair, focused. But every day that I maintain the practice it becomes that little bit easier, and more compelling, to put that effort forward again the next day.

Understanding empathy, as LaCapra does, as a practice, and considering it along with some related terms like “compassion” and “care,” might enable us to begin to sketch the outlines of the notion of generosity I hope to cultivate. Empathy as a practice rather than a vicarious experience asks us to return again and again to our attempts to understand the position of the other despite the certainty that this understanding will always be flawed and partial; by sustaining this practice, we can begin to improve that understanding. Similarly, compassion—literally “suffering with,” a quality of mind cultivated in several spiritual traditions—asks us to recognize that all beings suffer (including us) and to focus on opening the self enough to acknowledge that suffering, not to wallow in it, but to share the desire that we all may be free from it. And care, held as an ethical principle, asks us to remember the interconnectedness and interdependence of all people, and to make choices about where to place our energies and efforts with

that concern—and particularly a concern for the most vulnerable among us—in mind.

If terms like “compassion” and “care” begin to make the generosity I seek sound distinctly gendered, that is not accidental. These principles are derived in no small part from feminist ethics and praxis as developed in psychology by Carol Gilligan and in education by Nel Noddings and carried forward into today’s public intellectual landscape by scholars and practitioners including Sarah Blackwood, Lauren Klein, and Bethany Nowvickie. The generosity I propose as a foundation for a renewed relationship between the academy and the broader publics with whom we interact asks us to direct our attention to the responsibility that each of us bears toward one another, a responsibility that cannot be absolved through discrete acts but that instead requires our sustained and sustaining attention. This generosity is a shared requirement to look beyond ourselves, our labs, our departments, our campuses, and seek to understand the needs of members of our broader communities, as well as others outside our communities, and even outside our moment in time. But the ties between generosity and care also remind us that such attention may be required very, very locally as well, in our most intimate relationships, and even in our relationships with ourselves. This is how understanding generosity as a practice that is meant to be sustainable helps us avoid the burnout that can result from philanthropic or voluntaristic overload: care for others requires a simultaneous care for the self, precisely so that we can be ready to return our focus to the world around us.

Lest this mode of generosity I am describing come to seem all warm-fuzzies with little practical application to the scholarly mode of being in the world, I want to turn our attention toward a specific practice through which we might begin to exercise

generosity in our work. But first, there's one crucial thing that needs to be said about generosity and our expectations for it: when a person who has been injured or marginalized asks why she should have to behave generously or empathetically toward someone who has either directly or tacitly permitted that injury or marginalization to occur, she is raising a point that deserves our attention. Remembering the ways that upholding civility as a communal value has too often led to its being used as a weapon with which to silence those with legitimate complaints, we must consider the limitations of the notion of generosity that I am describing, as well as the ways that responsibility for such generosity is and of necessity should be unevenly distributed.

In the current political and educational environment, those of us in positions of relative comfort, who are privileged enough to move through our days without having our most basic sense of belonging questioned, who are fundamentally safe, might best serve the community as a whole if we are willing to exercise our generosity, by taking responsibility for engaging with those who disagree with us—not least in order to begin finding those potential allies who actually disagree with us less than they think but feel as if their own positions haven't been genuinely heard. We need to expect, and permit, these attempts at connection to fail, and yet persist in trying. We need to practice great compassion, both for those with whom we want to connect and for ourselves in the difficult act of trying to build those connections.

Perhaps the most extraordinary example of such compassion and generosity that I've come across of late is the research project documented in Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land*. This investigation began with Hochschild's desire to understand the deepening political divide in the United States, a challenge that led her not to bury herself in conventional academic

modes of research (though the book is filled with evidence of that kind of work, too) or to seek out the voices who understand the problem from the same perspective she does, but rather, as she describes it, to try to “scale the empathy wall,” to find out what those on the other side of it think—but even more, to try to understand *why* they think that way. This required an extended and rather remarkable process of deep listening, of struggling to hear and understand what the members of the Tea Party with whom she met were trying to tell her. Throughout the book, we see her asking herself whether the ideas she's forming about her interlocutors' experiences are genuinely derived from the things she's being told, or whether they're based in her own assumptions about and interpretations of what she's being told. She spent countless hours, over the course of several years, listening to their stories and shaping them into a coherent narrative that could explain their worldview—and then, perhaps most importantly, she tested that narrative with them, asking them how well it represented their understandings of and feelings about their lives. In so doing, she may not have persuaded them to change their ways of thinking, but she earned their trust, and created the conditions under which they were willing to hear her.

What surfaces in *Strangers in Their Own Land* is not just an argument about where the ideas of the far Right have come from or how they have gained such purchase in the lives of their adherents, but more importantly an argument about the reasons our forms of cultural understanding (including many of the research methods we bring to that understanding) have failed. Her work demonstrates the possibilities created through a generous engagement with those outside the academic beltway, and the damage that the failure to engage can create. Hochschild's research highlights the degree to which progressive intellectuals believe they

know what's best for those on the Right—evidenced in the “What’s the matter with Kansas?” syndrome—and fail to see how their arguments leave their subjects feeling belittled, demeaned, and misunderstood. It should come as little surprise that those on the Right react to such arguments about their experiences by reflexively rejecting everything that the Left might have to offer. The results of Hochschild’s work—both the heartbreaking portraits she presents of people who have come to feel abandoned and disenfranchised, portraits presented without shrinking from or ignoring some of the aspects of their beliefs that we might find appalling, and the evident trust that she builds with them—reveal a rather extraordinary generosity of mind on her part. That generosity, however, is grounded in a deceptively simple practice: listening.

Listening

The importance of listening as an aspect of communicating with others has long been downplayed in Western culture; as Lisbeth Lipari notes, listening plays a somewhat sad second fiddle to speaking for most of us. In fact we too frequently treat listening as “a means of preparing one’s next move” in our verbal engagements, a technique that serves “the aim of conquest and control” (15). More often than not, we listen to others’ arguments in order to master them, or, even better, to figure out the best means of defusing them, of demonstrating the superiority of our own. Many of us live today in a profound imbalance between listening and talking—and worse, at least in the contemporary United States, yelling. And even when we’re not the ones doing the yelling, the yelling makes it impossible to listen. We tune others out in no small part because we feel bombarded. We are losing the signal

in the nonstop, 24/7, top-volume noise. It’s little wonder that many of us seem to have stopped listening altogether.

That Hochschild’s methodology involved hours of listening to the stories being told to her without judgment was crucial to her ability to connect with and understand the culture she was studying. That listening, moreover, had to be active: not only did she need to take in the experiences being shared with her, but she also needed to ask the right questions in order to elicit further thinking about those experiences, and she needed to frame the deeper narrative underpinning those stories in a way that her interlocutors could hear and agree with. Through this active practice, she was able to demonstrate to the people whose lives she studied that they had really been heard.

Hochschild is, of course, a sociologist; people and their cultures form her area of study, which makes the need for this mode of interpersonal engagement obvious. But connection with others that is grounded in listening may lie at the heart of what’s required of all of us in order to ensure the future of all of our fields, including the humanities, the liberal arts more broadly, and in fact the university as we have known it. Anthony Appiah, in his 2017 presidential address at the Modern Language Association annual convention, points out the importance of conversation in the work that scholars and teachers do, and in particular the need to think seriously about “how to talk across boundaries—how to make ourselves heard by those who don’t know why they should listen.” And yet, if we what we seek to engage in is a genuine conversation, we have to ensure that we are listening as well, even if we don’t know why we should, either. If we do, we might find that what we hear is not that those others don’t know why they should listen, but rather that they, like us, have reasons for having decided they should not. The first step toward getting past those reasons

may be hearing them out. (There are exceptions to this, however, to which I'll return in a minute.)

In order to hear out the disagreements around us, we need to understand more fully what it is to listen, even—or perhaps especially—to those with whom we will *never* agree. Lipari notes that while “listen” and “hear” appear to us to be synonyms, they in fact describe very “different ways of being in the world. Etymologically, ‘listening’ comes from a root that emphasizes attention and giving to others, while ‘hearing’ comes from a root that emphasizes perception and receiving from others” (99). Listening, then, is not just an act of taking-in, but a practice of generously giving one’s focus to another. Jean-Luc Nancy similarly draws a distinction between the “simple” (or perhaps passive) state of the senses in hearing, and the “tense, attentive, or anxious state” of the senses in listening (5). Similarly, composer Pauline Oliveros, in writing about her practice of “Deep Listening,” notes the ways she differentiates between hearing and listening: “To hear is the physical means that enables perception. To listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically” (xxii). Hearing, in this sense, is something that happens to the ear; listening, by contrast, is a cognitive act in which one must participate. So while it no doubt feels like we’re hearing one another all the time, the question of whether we’re really listening remains open.

Nancy, in fact, describes the philosopher—and perhaps, by extension, the scholar in general—as “someone who always hears (and who hears everything), but who cannot listen, or who, more precisely, neutralizes listening within himself, so that he can philosophize” (1). Oliveros likewise notes that her Deep Listening practice derived from her recognition that “many musicians were not listening to what they were performing. . . . The musician was

of course hearing but listening all over or attention to the space/time continuum was not happening” (xvii). The desire that all of us bear to leap from what we hear to our sense of what we hear, or to our own performance, rather than lingering in the at times quite uncomfortable stillness required for listening, has the effect of foreclosing engagement rather than opening it up. So when we say to someone, by way of response to a complaint or a point with which we disagree, “I hear you,” we may not intend to dismiss them, but we are certainly declaring the transaction complete: “I am done hearing you, as I fully understand your point.” By contrast, “I am listening” is a statement that may be too steeped in therapeutic platitudes for us ever really to voice it; as Nancy says, it “belongs to a register of philanthropic oversensitivity, where condescension resounds alongside good intentions” (4). And yet, reminding ourselves that we are listening (rather than piously informing others of that state) forms an invitation to remain open, to adopt a position of receptivity that may lead to an unexpected connection. To listen is to be ready for that which one has not yet heard—and, in fact, for that which one might not yet be willing or able to hear.

This act of listening has everything to do with paying attention, and yet attention itself is a misunderstood notion. Oliveros argues that there are two forms of attention, the focal, which acts “like a lens,” producing “clear detail limited to the object of attention,” and the global, which is “diffuse and continually expanding” to take in the world (13). Her practice encourages the careful development of both forms, as well as the purposeful shift from one to the other. However, while this mode of attention is something that one who practices learns to conduct, it is not an act of control or effort. In fact, as Simone Weil explores, the attempt to pay attention as an act of will undermines actual attentiveness: “If

one says to one's pupils: 'Now you must pay attention,' one sees them contracting their brows, holding their breath, stiffening their muscles. If after two minutes they are asked what they have been paying attention to, they cannot reply. They have not been paying attention. They have been contracting their muscles" (*Waiting*, 60). On the contrary, true attention "consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object" (*Waiting*, 62). Attention requires letting go of the self, relinquishing will, and finding instead a position of radical receptivity that creates the ground for learning, for connection.

None of this is easy. Like all such practices, listening requires practice, as well as a commitment not to let our lapses convince us to stop trying. As Krista Tippett has noted,

Listening is an everyday social art, but it's an art we have neglected and must learn anew. Listening is more than being quiet while the other person speaks until you can say what you have to say. I like the language Rachel Naomi Remen uses with young doctors to describe what they should practice: "generous listening." Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other, and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own best words and questions. (40)

This, as you might guess, is where I have been leading us: listening is at the heart of the generosity I hope to inspire in the relationship between the university and the broader publics with

which it interacts and on which it relies; generous listening is the necessary ground for generous thinking.

However—and this is crucial—listening as a ground for generosity, as a means of working through disagreement, must be mutual, or at least have the potential for mutuality. In recent years, and with increased frequency and intensity since the 2016 US presidential election, the press has been filled with claims that free speech is being suppressed on college and university campuses, as students and faculty protest speakers whose positions they oppose, and as administrations debate whether (if they are permitted by law) to refuse visits from figures known to espouse particularly hateful ideologies. The political Right has used these incidents to claim that they are being "silenced" on campus, suggesting that my clearly progressive-leaning embrace of listening could well be grounded in hypocrisy: we'll listen, and we'll even listen to some things that are difficult to hear, but we won't listen to *you*. What I want to be clear about is this: college and university campuses, and the communities that inhabit them, should not be required to provide platforms for those whose expressed ideologies endanger individual members of those communities or the collectives they form. We are obliged to listen, both to one another and to others, to those with whom we affiliate and to those with whom we disagree, but that obligation must be mutual. We bear no requirement to host those who have no intent of using their ability to speak as an opportunity to listen, but who in fact intend their speech as a weapon. Moreover, Krista Tippett's reference, above, to the vulnerability that listening requires of us means something fairly specific: an intellectual vulnerability more than an emotional one, and absolutely not a physical one. No one should be forced to listen to those who would brutalize them. Listening to those with whom we disagree

is always difficult, and it's a difficulty with which we should be willing to wrestle, but there is a threshold between the difficult and the dangerous of which we must remain aware. Giving our attention to those who would delegitimize us can help them in doing so—and yet, if we do not genuinely listen to positions opposed to ours, we may find ourselves with fewer resources available to counter them in productive ways.

During the period when the draft of this book was open for public discussion, I visited a small liberal arts college where I was told the story of a debate held on campus in the mid-1990s between members of the faculty and a well-known if very often dismissed neoconservative policy maker and columnist, focusing on the proposal to defund the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. As the story goes, the columnist utterly wiped the floor with the faculty, mortifyingly so, in large part because he knew their arguments intimately—he had read them—but they did not *really* know his. They knew the ways his arguments had been described to and characterized for them by those with whom they agreed, but they had not sought out the actual basis for his reasoning, and so he was able to treat their rebuttals like the straw men they were. The problem, as Alan Jacobs might describe it, is that the faculty had long since entered “Refutation Mode,” a mode in which “there is no listening. Moreover, when there is no listening there is no *thinking*” (*How*, 18). Jacobs argues that thinking requires us to confront and resist both “the pull of the ingroup and disgust for the outgroup” (23), a process that must begin with a willingness to listen.

We need, again, to be clear about the limitations of listening as a ground for generosity, and in particular about the different levels of responsibility that we bear for it. And we need to ac-

knowledge to ourselves and to one another that none of this is easy. But it's important for those of us who are disproportionately represented within the contemporary university and who operate with the protections of various kinds of privilege and power at our disposal—racial, gendered, economic, educational—to be willing to set our comfort aside and try to listen to what those with different experiences of and positions in the world might want to tell us. It's important to keep ourselves open to the things that we don't yet know we need to hear. Listening is, in this sense, a profoundly important form of interacting with the world by paying attention to it. It does not imply agreement, merely a willingness to consider. And like the work of building a shared vocabulary that I've tried to engage in across this chapter, listening is of course only the first step in creating the space for a greater mutual engagement and understanding. But perhaps if we can find ways to model listening, to convey that we are listening, at least some others around us might be inspired to stop yelling and just talk again.

But genuine listening is sufficiently difficult, and thus sufficiently unusual, that we often do not know what to make of it when we come across it. It can look like passivity, compromise, appeasement. We might see this in Ezra Klein's exploration, published during the 2016 campaign, of what he referred to as “the Gap” in understanding Hillary Clinton, the difference between the ways she was popularly represented and the ways she was described by those who knew her best. He asked them—both allies and opponents—“What is true about the Hillary Clinton you've worked with that doesn't come through on the campaign trail?” And the repeated answer: “Hillary Clinton, they said over and over again, listens.” Listening, it becomes clear, is such a radically unexpected mode of political behavior, so outside the norm, that

it looks to many—even to a reporter who wants to find it praiseworthy—like a flaw. Klein acknowledges the deeply ingrained gender dynamics at work in such misinterpretations, and the reasons why our political processes today are often unkind to listeners:

Talking is a way of changing your status: If you make a great point, or set the terms of the discussion, you win the conversation. Listening, on the other hand, is a way of establishing rapport, of bringing people closer together; showing you've heard what's been said so far may not win you the conversation, but it does win you allies.

This was Hillary's own refrain in her address to the AME General Conference, delivered in the wake of yet another African American man being killed in a police shooting, pointing to the importance of paying attention to the families and the communities calling for criminal justice reform: "They're trying to tell us. And we need to listen."

Many of us, and for many good reasons, distrust this stated desire to listen. Listening can, after all, be performed for most ungenerous purposes. And I am undoubtedly guilty of looking back on the *what could have been* of the 2016 presidential election with an all-too-starry view. But if that election was in any sense a contest between listening and yelling—between generous thinking and its dark opposite—it's all too evident which side won the conversation. However, it's also clear from the massive marches and protests that ensued that a huge percentage of the American public has not given up on a more generous mode of engagement, and has not given up on its desire to be heard.

As a community, the university, those who work within it, and those who care about it have an obligation to work toward that more generous, more ethical mode of engagement, and that work must begin with listening, with attention. Bill Readings argued in *The University in Ruins* that listening is the primary obligation of the ethical community to which higher education must aspire: "The other speaks, and we owe the other respect. To be hailed as an addressee is to be commanded to listen, and the ethical nature of this relation cannot be justified. We have to listen, without knowing why, before we know what it is that we are to listen to" (162). Whatever it may be that, as Hillary notes, they're trying to tell us, we need to seek ways to listen. In so doing, our work as teachers, as scholars, and as members of the university community can help create the possibility for renewed relationships with the public—relationships that we desperately need today if we are going to be able to keep doing our work tomorrow.

In the chapters that follow, I'll explore different aspects of that work and how we might be more generous within it, inviting those usually outside our circles into our conversations and listening to their interests and concerns. This mode of generous thinking might begin with the very foundation of our work—reading—if we begin by understanding our engagements with the texts we read and with the other readers we encounter along the way as part of an ongoing, shared conversation, a conversation that has the potential to shape our collective experiences of the world.

3

Working in Public

If democracy is to mean anything at all, then experts and laypeople have to solve complicated problems together. First, however, they have to overcome the widening gulf between them.

—TOM NICHOLS, *THE DEATH OF EXPERTISE*

I started blogging in 2002, fairly early in the academic scheme of things. I'd just finished the long process of rewriting the thing that had been my dissertation, turning it into my first book, and I was feeling a little stifled: all that work, years of work, were encapsulated in a Word document that existed on my hard disk, in several backups, and nowhere else, and there seemed the very real possibility that no one might ever read it. And then I stumbled across the blog of a friend from grad school who had moved out of a teaching position to work for a web-based company. His blog was funny and erudite, exploring recent books and culture and bits of anecdote. And *it had an audience*. People read it, and I knew they read it because they left brief comments responding to and interacting with the author, offering their own thoughts and amplifying his. And I thought, wow, that's it.

My blog, *Planned Obsolescence*, which I started out of the baldest desire to get someone somewhere to read something I wrote, wound up doing something more interesting than I expected: it didn't just build an audience—it built a community. I found a number of other early academic bloggers, all of whom linked to one another, commented on each other's posts, and responded at greater length with posts of their own. Among those bloggers was a small cluster of folks who came out of literary studies—the Wordherders, a blogging collective whose platform was provided by a grad student at the University of Maryland, who worked at the Maryland Institute for Technology and the Humanities: Jason Rhody. Jason and the other Wordherders (including Lisa Rhody, George Williams, Chuck Tryon, Kari Kraus, Matt Kirschenbaum, and Vika Zafrin, among others) became my first real online colleagues, and we remain connected today.

Those relationships, which opened out into a growing network of scholars working online, were crucial to me as an assistant professor at a small liberal arts college on the far end of the country. I had spent the previous few years feeling isolated, my work by and large unknown, and I could not figure out how to make the intellectual and professional connections that might help my writing develop and find an audience. *Planned Obsolescence* helped build those connections—and it appears that posts I published there were the first pieces of my writing to be cited in formal academic settings. The blog was read, by people in my field, and by people in other fields altogether.

Fast-forward to the moment in 2009 when I'd just finished the draft of my second book, not-so-coincidentally entitled *Planned Obsolescence*. The thing I was supposed to do—the thing our usual processes provide for—was to send it off to the press, which would

commission two or three experts to review it and suggest improvements before publication. I did that, of course, but my press also agreed to let me post the draft online for open comment.

In the years since, I've been asked about that decision a lot—whether it was worth the risk and how I managed to work up the courage to release something unfinished into the world where anyone could have said anything about it. My answers to these questions are not wholly satisfying, I fear; the truth of the matter is that the risks really didn't figure into my thinking. What I knew was that there were a lot of folks out there, in a lot of different kinds of jobs in a wide range of fields, with whom I'd had productive, engaging interactions that contributed to the book's development, and I really wanted to hear their thoughts about where I'd wound up. I trusted them to help me—and they did, overwhelmingly so.

It's important to acknowledge the entire boatload of privilege that not-thinking about the risks requires. I was writing from a sufficiently safe position that allowing flaws in my work-in-progress to be publicly visible wasn't a real threat. I was free to model an open process not least because of the job security that comes with tenure, but also because I'd been in that open process all along; much of the book grew out of blog posts and public talks that had already produced a lot of discussion, and so I had a sense of how readers might respond. Beyond this, though, it's not at all incidental that it was 2009, not 2018—a much more idealistic, open, trusting hour in the age of the internet. The events of the last few years, from GamerGate to the 2016 presidential campaign and beyond, have made the risks involved in opening one's work up online all too palpable. But my experiences with the blog, with the book manuscript, and with other projects I've opened to online discussion nonetheless leave me convinced

that there is a community, existing or potential, interested in the kind of work I care about, willing to engage with and support that work's development. And—perhaps most importantly today—willing to work on building and sustaining the community itself.

This chapter focuses on the ways that working in public, and with the public, can enable scholars to build that kind of community, both within their fields, with other scholars in different fields, and with folks off campus who care about the kinds of work that we do. By finding ways to connect with readers and writers beyond our usual circles of experts, in a range of different registers, and in ways that move beyond enabling *them* to listen to *us* to instead allow for meaningful dialogue and collaboration, we can create the possibilities for far more substantial public participation in and engagement with a wide range of kinds of academic work. We can build programs and networks and platforms that do not just bring the university to the world, but also involve the world in the university.

There are, of course, several real obstacles that have to be faced in this process. Some of them reflect the shifting and proliferating communication platforms that we use today. Blogs, for instance, do not receive quite the same focus that they did in the early 2000s, and their posts do not receive the same kinds of comments. In part, this decline in attention comes as the result of what a friend of mine refers to as “catastrophic success”; there is such an overwhelming number of blogs and blog-like online publications today that the audience is of necessity dispersed, fragmented, and distracted. And the distractions, of course, come not just from the explosion in the quantity of “content” available online but from the effects of their publishers' quest for revenue—the ads and other intrusions that today render many online

publications all but unreadable. The relative drop in blog-based interaction can also be traced to the decline and death of a few related technologies that kept readers aware of what was happening on their favorite sites, most significantly Google Reader, a highly used personalizable aggregator that enabled users to keep up with the blogs they cared about. And that drop has been exacerbated as the discussions that blog posts engendered have in many cases spun off of the blogs themselves and onto Twitter and Facebook and other networks where readers engage with one another rather than with the author. As a result, online communities of readers and writers are unlikely to develop spontaneously, as they seemed to in the early 2000s; instead, we need to be deliberate in reaching out to potential readers and participants where they are, finding ways to draw them, and ourselves, back into sustained conversation.

And of course the nature of internet discourse has changed in recent years as much as has its location. Trolls are not a new phenomenon, by any means, but they certainly seem to have multiplied, and the damage that they can inflict has escalated. In the weeks before I started drafting this chapter, an assistant professor received numerous rape and death threats based on a political website's mischaracterizations of a column she published online; an adjunct faculty member was fired by her institution for remarks she made in a televised interview with a particularly goading host; and an associate professor was suspended for sharing a controversial online article on Twitter, using a blunt phrase drawn from the article as a hashtag in the process. The visibility involved in taking one's work public can produce significant risk—especially where that work involves questions of social justice, which are under attack by malevolent groups online, and especially for people of color, women, and other already margin-

alized and underrepresented members of the academic community whose every engagement is met by a hostile world.

I do not have the answers to these problems; though I have worked on the development of a number of online communities, I do not have a perfect platform to offer, and I do not know how to repair the malignant aspects of human behavior. I am convinced, however, that countering these destructive forces will require advance preparation and focused responses; as Tressie McMillan Cottom has argued, attacks like these are an organized effort, and academics must be organized, too (“Academic Outrage”). Ensuring that public engagement surrounding our work remains productive will require a tremendous amount of collective labor, and the careful development and maintenance of trust, in order to create inclusive online communities that can be open to, and yet safe in, the world. But there are several other challenges as well, challenges that are less about the state of the internet and more about the ways that we as scholars do our work, and ways that we can draw a range of broader publics to that work, that I want to dig further into in what follows.

The first is the need to ensure that the work we do can be discovered and accessed by any interested reader, and not just by those readers who have ready entry to well-funded research libraries. It should go without saying that it is impossible for anyone to care about what we do if they cannot see it. And yet, perhaps because we assume we are mostly writing for one another, the results of our work end up overwhelmingly in places where it cannot be found—and even if it is found, where it cannot be accessed—by members of the broader public. Making our work more available is the first step in creating a richer connection with readers outside our inner circles, readers who might not only care about what we do but be encouraged to support it.

The second step lies in ensuring that the work is accessible in a very different sense: not just allowing readers to get their hands on it, but enabling them to see in it the things that they might care about. Academic writers often resent the ways that the work they do gets mainstreamed without appropriate credit in popular publishing venues (one might see a discussion of this phenomenon, and its accompanying resentment, in Amanda Ann Klein and Kristin Warner's "Erasing the Pop-Culture Scholar, One Click at a Time"), but a key part of the problem is of course that those academic writers do not do the mainstreaming themselves. We ought to be thinking about ways to ensure that we communicate our arguments—and especially those arguments with broad public interest or implications—in order to engage readers where they are, rather than always forcing them to come find us, in our venues and on our terms.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, if we hope to engage the public with our work, we need to ensure that it is open in the broadest possible sense: open to response, to participation, to more new thought, more new writing, and more kinds of cultural creation by more kinds of public scholars. In other words, we need to think not just about the public's potential consumption of the work that is done by the university, but also about potential new modes of co-production that involve the surrounding communities in the work of the university. These rich, ongoing collaborations might serve as a style of work that our universities can fruitfully model for the rest of our culture: new modes of interaction, new forms of public engagement, and new kinds of writing not just for, but with the world.

My focus in this chapter, then, is on the ways that we might facilitate greater public interaction for scholars and scholarship. To some extent, this involves making the work that scholars do

more publicly accessible, and to some extent, it involves helping scholars understand the potential for their work to enter into dialogue with a range of publics. In part, then, I want to expand the ways we distribute scholarship today, but I also want us to think about the ways that scholars address that scholarship to one another and about the communities that we form in the process. When I say that scholars' work might address or engage a broader set of publics, I do not mean to suggest that there is no place for internal exchange among field-based experts; there is, and should be. But there should also be means for the results of those exchanges to become part of the larger cultural conversations taking place around us. And when I indicate the multiplicity of that "broader set of publics," I mean to steer us away from a sense of the public's singularity. I do not mean that our work needs to address or engage everyone, at all times; rather, different aspects of our work might reach different publics at different moments. Knowing how to think respectfully about those audiences—and, indeed, to think about them not just as audiences, but as potential interlocutors—is a crucial skill for the twenty-first-century academic.

Public Access

This begins in the simplest possible way: ensuring that the readers we might hope to reach have access to the work that we're already doing, in the forms that we're already doing it. A number of related initiatives are working concurrently to make the entirety of the research process more shared and shareable, including the open-notebook science and open-data movements, but the greatest traction and the greatest potential for transformation across the disciplines has thus far emerged from the open-access

publishing movement. Mobilization around the establishment of open access began in the scientific community more than twenty years ago, and has since spread, with varying degrees of uptake, to all academic fields. The conditions for this movement's development were, at the outset, economic: scientific journal subscription prices had risen precipitously in the early 1990s (and have continued escalating since), creating both a crisis for research library budgets and a growing information divide between those with access to such libraries and those without. In order to create a more globally equitable distribution of knowledge, scientists began to debate and organize around a set of possibilities for transforming publishing processes and creating new models for opening scientific journal articles to everyone.

The goals of the open-access movement were never solely altruistic; it was clear even in its early days that science itself would benefit if its communication processes were freed from the commercial channels into which it was increasingly being funneled and access to the research literature were unencumbered. But the links between the social good created by increased public access to research results and the potential for accelerating scientific discovery were established early on. The Association of Research Libraries gathered a cluster of early listserv discussions around these issues into a 1995 volume entitled *Scholarly Journals at the Crossroads: A Subversive Proposal for Electronic Publishing*. In the introduction, editors Ann Shumelda Okerson and James J. O'Donnell argue that "in the interests of science, the law of the market *cannot* be allowed to function. An item with a very small market may yet be the indispensable link in a chain of research that leads to a result of high social value" (1). The escape from the market values that dominated scientific communication, in other

words, would help science progress, and that progress could potentially serve the public good.

The open-access movement was thus established as a means of attempting to ensure that the social value served by scholarly research could flourish. The guiding principles of this movement were originally articulated in the Budapest Open Access Initiative, published in 2002, which gave the movement its name. Following behind the Budapest initiative were the June 2003 Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing and the October 2003 Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Scientific Knowledge. Together, Budapest-Bethesda-Berlin defined the agenda for open-access scholarly publishing:

By "open access" to this literature, we mean its free availability on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited. (Chan et al.)

"Open access," that is, means free access not just in the sense of "gratis," work made available without charge, but also in the sense of "libre," work that, subject to appropriate scholarly standards of citation, is free to be built upon. This is the cornerstone of the scholarly project: scholarship is written to be read and to

influence more new writing. Early mobilization around open access thus targeted not just the economic inequities that were being worsened by the market orientation of scientific publishers, but the resulting restrictions in the creation of new knowledge created by the growing divide between the information haves and have-nots. Open access presented the potential for scholars to help bridge this divide, serving not only their own interests in getting their work into broader circulation, but also a larger public interest.

As the Budapest Open Access Initiative put it:

An old tradition and a new technology have converged to make possible an unprecedented public good. The old tradition is the willingness of scientists and scholars to publish the fruits of their research in scholarly journals without payment, for the sake of inquiry and knowledge. The new technology is the internet. The public good they make possible is the world-wide electronic distribution of the peer-reviewed journal literature and completely free and unrestricted access to it by all scientists, scholars, teachers, students, and other curious minds. Removing access barriers to this literature will accelerate research, enrich education, share the learning of the rich with the poor and the poor with the rich, make this literature as useful as it can be, and lay the foundation for uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge. (Chan et al.)

It's hard not to be moved by the idealism of a statement such as this, and easy to see why the movement's impact accelerated. By the tenth anniversary of the Budapest Open Access Initiative, the open-access movement had spread widely through a dramatic increase in the number of OA journals (the so-called gold road to

open access), including the very public resignations of a number of editorial boards of closed-access journals, who then joined together to start new publications online. Additionally, the open-access movement was profoundly expanded through a growing number of institutional and disciplinary repositories that collect the prepublication version of authors' manuscripts and other materials (the "green" road to open access), as well as an increasing number of institution- and funder-based mandates requiring the deposit of the products of research done under their auspices.

What made this growth in commitment to open access possible, as Peter Suber points out, is the precise convergence of the internet's ability to radically reduce the costs of reproduction and distribution of texts to near-zero with what Budapest calls the "old tradition" of scholars publishing their work without direct payment. That latter factor, Suber notes, "does more than insulate cutting-edge research from the market and free scholars to consent to OA without losing revenue. It also supports academic freedom and the kinds of serious inquiry that advance knowledge" (16). That scientists and other scholars are indirectly rewarded—with jobs, promotions, speaking engagements, and so forth—for the impact of their work rather than directly paid through sales means that they are free to "microspecialize," as Suber puts it, focusing their energies on areas that may be "of immediate interest to just a handful of people in the world, which are essential to pushing the frontiers of knowledge" (16). While some have argued that the public cannot understand and therefore does not need access to such highly specialized work, ensuring that everyone who might be interested is able to find and engage with this work precisely so that those frontiers can be pushed requires making it as fully and as freely available as possible. That is to say, the value of public access is not determined by the size of the potential

public, just as the value of a scholarly field is not diminished by its relative smallness.

However, it is important to note that there have been some significant differences among fields in their abilities to embrace open access. Some of these differences have to do with the obviousness of public impact: the implications for medical research, for instance, in “uniting humanity” in a common quest for knowledge might be obvious, but the role that the humanities might play in contributing to and sustaining a “common intellectual conversation” has been a good bit less so. But some of the differences are more pragmatic in nature: the early open-access movement was clear from the beginning that its focus was on freeing journal articles from barriers to access. This is a relatively attainable goal, insofar as the incentives for authors (increased impact) outweigh, or should outweigh, the potential drawbacks (lost revenue or prestige), and the technologies available for circulating and reading articles online are well developed. In many fields in the humanities and social sciences, however, the most important work is done in book rather than article form. The technologies for circulating and reading books online have been to this point far less suitable to most research purposes; it’s one thing to read and mark up a 20-page PDF file, but 200 pages of PDF—assuming that such a document can actually be obtained and loaded onto a decent reading device, which is a big assumption—reveals that format’s discomforts and difficulties. Moreover, the incentives for book authors are slightly different, and differently delivered, than those for authors of journal articles. Book authors do receive royalties on the sale of their publications, and while the amount actually received may be modest, or even negligible, there remains at least an imagined potential that your book could be that fabled object, the cross-over book, that

is reviewed in the *New York Times* and that sells beyond everyone’s wildest expectations and that generates royalty checks capable of supporting more than a hamburger lunch.

Visible within that fantasy of entering into the mainstream book market, however, is a slightly countervailing incentive, one that is far and away the most important driver of book authors’ publishing behavior: prestige. It is, after all, the *New York Times* whose review we dream of, and not some other rag. Perceived prestige drives many authors’ choice of press with which they seek to publish, not least because of the reward structures presented by most research universities; at those institutions, a university-press published book is a requirement for tenure and promotion, and at the most prestigious universities, the press involved must be a “top” press (a somewhat murky and yet all-important designation). And while moving a highly selective scientific journal online has had no appreciable effects on its perceived prestige, given the ways that prestige is calculated, this is somewhat less true of journals in other, more print-oriented fields, and it is completely untrue of books. Scholars in those fields frequently feel a loss of prestige in any publication that does not result in a printed and bound object, and a book that is produced through such a nonconventional publishing system is frequently not considered to be a book at all. This isn’t just a matter of a retrogressive, out-of-touch field that refuses to let go of its fetish object; it’s about where scholars understand value to lie, and the incentives involved in pursuing that particular form of value. The existence of a book implies that a press, its external readers, and its board felt that the work contained within it was sufficiently important and of high enough quality to make it worth investing the resources required to produce it. The lower the required resources, the lower the value, and by association, the lower the apparent quality.

In other words, a widespread migration of book-based fields to an open-access publishing model has some significant challenges to face, and the financial and technological challenges may be the easiest among them. Lots of great projects are exploring those challenges, and they will likely lead to viable new models, as we might see in new publishers like Lever Press, Punctum Books, and Open Book Publishers; new open-access ventures at established presses, such as Luminos at the University of California Press; new platforms such as Manifold at the University of Minnesota Press and Fulcrum at the University of Michigan Press; new library-based efforts to support open access by providing both publishing services and open-access publishing funds; and new multi-institutional funding models such as the joint open-access monograph publishing initiative of the Association of American Universities, Association of Research Libraries, and Association of University Presses. The major challenge that isn't yet being fully accounted for, however, is the difficulty involved in changing human behavior, especially when it's behavior that has historically been tied to tangible rewards. All of which is to acknowledge that the open-access movement has met with some significant resistance and to argue that it's important for us to examine that resistance head-on, to think carefully about its implications for creating real public engagement with and public concern for the work that is done on campus.

I don't want to make it sound, however, as though all of the technical and financial challenges have been met, and that it's only scholars' recalcitrance or their institutions' backward reward systems that prevent the full embrace of open publishing across the disciplines. In fact, significant challenges remain for funding the open distribution of scholarship. The economic model into which much open-access publishing has settled in the last decade

is, for instance, far more readily suited to the sciences and highly challenging to make work in the humanities and many branches of the social sciences. Rather than the traditional mode of funding journal publication through subscription sales, a model in which the reader (or the reader's library proxy) pays for access, many open-access publishers have shifted to article-processing charges, or APCs, as their primary revenue stream, a model in which the author (or the author's funder proxy) pays for distribution. Because many scientific journals had long required page fees for the production and reproduction of graphical elements, for instance, and because the grants that fund the vast majority of scientific research frequently covered those fees, the transition was relatively simple: publishing costs that enable researchers to make their results available to the world are now written into grants in the sciences. In fact, many granting agencies today require open-access distribution (whether through a "gold" publication or through a "green" repository) as a condition of funding.

In many other fields, however, not only is the available grant funding generally too low to accommodate the inclusion of significant publishing charges, but the vast majority of research is either nominally supported by the scholar's institution or is self-funded. In many cases, the author-pays model would literally mean that the author was paying, a significant new barrier to publication for many. Given that, we need to ask whether shifting the costs from reader-pays to author-pays opens up new inequities, shifting the disparities in access to research publications from the consumer side to the producer side of the equation. Researchers who are working in fields in which there is not significant grant funding available, or who are at institutions that cannot provide publishing subventions, might under such a model not be able to get their work into circulation in the same way as those in

grant-rich fields or at well-heeled institutions. There are alternatives, of course, including “platinum” OA publications that do not require author fees but are instead funded through new collective-action models, such as the Open Library of the Humanities. If the goals behind enabling public access to scholarly publications include basic principles of equity in access to knowledge, we need to create more such models and to guard against the introduction of new barriers to participating in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

These are all real challenges, and it’s important to acknowledge that a large-scale transition of scholarly communication to an emphasis on public access wouldn’t be easy. It would, however, be an extraordinary form of generosity, and a powerful demonstration of the commitment of our institutions of higher education to the public good. Enabling access to scholarly work does not just serve the goal of undoing its commercialization or removing it from a market-driven, competition-based economy, but rather is a first step in facilitating public engagement with the knowledge that universities produce. Generous thinking requires us not to give up in the face of the seemingly insurmountable financial and institutional obstacles to open access and challenges us instead to start figuring out what it will take to get around them.

Public Engagement

The potential for such generous thinking stems from our willingness to engage the public with our work, a willingness that offers much to our advantage where it exists, but that cannot be taken for granted. If we publish our work in ways that enable any interested reader to access it, that work will be more read, more cited, and create more impact for us and for our fields. Admittedly, this

so-called citation advantage has often been contested. Patrick Gaulé and Nicolas Maystre argue, for instance, that a self-selection mechanism is at work; their evidence suggests that authors of high-quality work are more likely to choose open-access venues, and thus their higher rate of citation is more attributable to the work’s quality than to its accessibility. However, studies such as that done by Yassine Gargouri and colleagues suggest that open access nonetheless demonstrably increases citation rates independent of quality. (Steve Hitchcock, in fact, gathered a lengthy bibliography of studies, updated through 2013, of the effects of open access on citation impact.) And it stands to reason: making work more openly accessible enables scholars in areas of the world without extensive library budgets, as well as US-based instructors and students at undergraduate teaching institutions and secondary schools, to use it in their own work. Making work openly accessible also allows it to reach other interested readers in a wide range of careers who may not have access to research libraries. Expanding our readership in these ways would seem an unmitigated good.

Any yet, we must acknowledge the ways in which we resist opening our work to broader publics and the reasons for that resistance. Many of us keep our work confined within our own discourse communities because we fear the consequences of making it available to broader publics—and not without justification. There are times when (and topics on which) the general public seems determined to misunderstand us and to interpret what we say with focused hostility, and that hostility can pose real threats. Campaigns by groups that use watchlists to target faculty they see as indoctrinating students with “left-wing propaganda,” such as Turning Point USA, endanger the livelihoods, and even the lives, of many scholars whose work explores race, gender, sexuality, and

other areas of structural inequity. These campaigns are an extreme, but there are manifestations of much lower levels of hostility toward academic work in our culture that many of us experience every day, forms of resentment and dismissiveness that Tom Nichols associates with a general rejection of expertise in contemporary culture. And because the subject matter of much of the humanities and social sciences seems as though it should be accessible, our determination to wrestle with difficult questions and our use of expert methods and vocabularies can feel threatening to many readers. Admittedly, we at times deploy those methods and vocabularies as a defensive shield, developed to demonstrate our seriousness to those on campus who might find our fields too “soft” or to win points in some conflict within our own discipline. But that shield keeps many readers from engaging with our work fully. They fail to understand us; we take their failure to understand as an insult. (Sometimes it is, but not always.) Given this failure to communicate, we see no harm in keeping our work closed off from the public, arguing that we’re only writing for a small group of specialists anyhow. So why would public access matter?

The problem, of course, is that the more we close our work away from the public, and the more we turn away from dialogue across the boundaries of the academy, the more we undermine the public’s willingness to support our research and our institutions. As public humanities scholars including Kathleen Woodward have argued, the major crisis facing the funding of higher education is an increasingly widespread conviction that education is a private responsibility rather than a public good. We wind up strengthening that conviction and worsening the crisis when we treat our work as private, by keeping it amongst ourselves. Closing our work away from nonscholarly readers and keeping our

conversations private might protect us from public criticism, but it cannot protect us from public apathy, a condition that may be far more dangerous in the current economic and political environment. This is not to say that working in public doesn’t bear risks and require careful preparation for potential conflict, especially for scholars working in politically engaged fields, but it is to say that only through dialogue that moves outside our own discourse communities will we have any chance of convincing the broader public, including our governments, of the relevance of our work.

While increasing the availability of scholarly work online has the potential to make it more read, more cited, and more used by other scholars, expanding its potential to engage a public readership may require different kinds of openness, inviting those readers into discussions they might otherwise dismiss as “academic.” Ensuring that we find ways to issue such invitations has potential benefits not just for the individual scholar but for the field in which she works. The more that well-researched, thoughtful scholarship on contemporary cultural issues is available to, for instance, journalists covering those issues for popular venues, the richer the discourse in those publications will become—increasing, not incidentally, the visibility of institutions of higher education and their importance for the culture at large.

Beyond the ability of openly distributed scholarship to foster this kind of public impact, however, is the fact that engaging readers in thoughtful discussions about the important issues we study lies at the core of the academic mission. It is at the heart of our values. We do not create knowledge in order to hoard it, but instead, every day, in the classroom, in the lecture hall, and in our writing, we embrace an ethic that I’ve come to think of as “giving it away.” This idea comes to me from David Foster

Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and its rendering of the ethos of Alcoholics Anonymous:

Giving It Away is a cardinal Boston AA principle. The term's derived from an epigrammatic description of recovery in Boston AA: "You give it up to get it back to give it away." Sobriety in Boston is regarded as less a gift than a sort of cosmic loan. You can't pay the loan back, but you can pay it forward, by spreading the message that despite all appearances AA works, spreading this message to the next new guy who's tottered in to a meeting and is sitting in the back row unable to hold his cup of coffee. The only way to hang onto sobriety is to give it away. (344)

This requirement to pass on what one has learned has its origins in the program's twelfth step, in which the recovering alcoholic carries the message to others who need it. The sharing that this sense of "giving it away" invokes—the loan that can never be paid back, but only forward—includes that sharing done at meetings, telling one's own story, not as a means of self-expression but rather as an act of generosity that enables the addict to transcend the limitations of the self. "Giving it away" is thus a profoundly ethical mode of engaging with others in a community based around a common need. More than that, though, in *Infinite Jest* "giving it away" appears to be the only means of escaping the self-destructive spiral of addiction and self-absorption that constitutes not an anomalous state but rather the central mode of being in the contemporary United States.

This sense of "giving it away," of paying forward knowledge that one likewise received as a gift, functions well as a description of the best ethical practices of scholars and educators. We teach, as we were taught; we publish, as we learn from the publications

of others. We cannot pay back those who came before us, but we can and do give to those who come after. Our participation in an ethical, voluntary scholarly community is grounded in the obligations we hold for one another, obligations that, as I discussed in chapter 1, cannot simply be discharged, precisely because they derive from the generosity we have received.

Like the stirring sense in the Budapest Open Access Initiative of "uniting humanity in a common intellectual conversation and quest for knowledge," this kind of idealism is all well and good, but it of course doesn't adequately account for an academic universe in which we are evaluated based on individual achievement and in which prestige often overrides all other values. I will explore the institutional responsibility for and effects of that bias toward prestige in the next chapter; here, I want to think a bit about its effects on the individual scholar, as well as that scholar's role in perpetuating this hierarchical status quo. Surveys conducted both by the research organization Ithaka S+R and by Diane Harley and the Center for Studies in Higher Education at UC Berkeley reach the same conclusion: "a fundamentally conservative set of faculty attitudes continues to impede systematic change" in our scholarly communication system (Schonfeld and Housewright 2). Scholars choose to publish in those venues that are perceived to have the highest influence on their peers, and given the ways that competition structures value in the scholarly marketplace, that influence is often imagined to increase with exclusivity. Barbara Fister suggests, in fact, that this form of exclusivity or prestige functions in the academic economy like a "weird sort of fake financial derivative," a second-order market in which we trade not on the quality of the work itself but on the attributed quality of its metadata (Untitled comment). The more difficult it is to get an article into a journal, the higher the perceived

value of—and the rewards for—having done so. This reasoning makes a certain kind of sense, of course, and yet the prestige that it relies upon too easily shades over into a sense that the more exclusive a publication's audience, the higher its value. If we place our work where “just anyone” could see it, it seems, its value would be significantly diminished.

This is, at its most benign, a self-defeating attitude; if we privilege exclusivity above all else, we should not be surprised by the limited circulation that results. And whatever the prestige market might suggest, it is when our work fails to circulate that its value truly declines. As David Parry has commented, “Knowledge that is not public is not knowledge.” It is only in giving that work away, in making it available to the publics around us, that we produce knowledge. Only in escaping the confines of our individual selves and sharing our thinking with others can we pay forward what we have been so generously given. Moreover, approaching our scholarship from this generous perspective requires less of a change than it might initially sound. As Peter Suber and the Budapest initiative noted in remarks quoted above, one of the key determinants in making open access possible is that most of the players in the scholarly communication chain have always been engaged in a process of “giving it away”: authors, reviewers, scholarly editors, and others involved in the process have long offered their work to others without requiring direct compensation. The question is how we offer it, and to whom.

In fact, the entire system of scholarly communication runs on an engine of generosity, one that does not just evade but in its way confounds market principles. As I noted in the last chapter, Lewis Hyde's exploration of the logic of artistic production acknowledges art's simultaneous existence within the structures of the market and the gift economy, but finally concludes that “where

there is no gift there is no art” (11). So too the work of scholarship, which exists both within the commodified world of publishing and within a realm of open exchange that demonstrates through its commitment to the collective the ways that private enterprise can never fully provide for the public good. So rather than consigning our work to the market economy, allowing it to be contained and controlled by corporate actors that profit at higher education's expense, might all of the members of the university community—researchers, instructors, libraries, presses, and administrations—instead work to develop and support a system of scholarly communication that highlights the strengths of the gift economy? What if, for instance, we understood sustainability in scholarly communication not as the ability to generate revenue, but instead as the ability to keep the engine of generosity running? What if we were to embrace scholarship's existence in the gift economy and make a gift of our work to the world?

In asking those not entirely rhetorical questions, I want to be certain to distinguish between this gift economy and the generous thinking that underwrites it, on the one hand, and on the other, the injunction to work for free produced by the devaluing of much intellectual and professional labor within the so-called information economy. A mode of forced volunteerism has spread perniciously throughout contemporary culture, compelling college students and recent graduates to take on exploitative unpaid internships in order to “get a foot in the door,” forcing creative professionals to do free work in order to “create a portfolio,” and so on. And of course there are too many academic equivalents: vastly underpaid adjunct instructors, overworked graduate assistants, an ever-growing list of mentoring and other service requirements that fall disproportionately on the shoulders of junior faculty, women faculty, and faculty of color. Turning professional positions

in scholarly communication, such as the managing editor of a journal, into the kind of un- or under-funded service opportunities that mostly devolve onto early career scholars—perhaps especially where those positions are accompanied by the promise of some hypothetical future reward resulting from the experience—is not generosity; it’s exploitation.

Labor, in fact, is the primary reason that I resist the notion that all scholarly publications can be made available for free online. While the scholarship itself might be provided without charge, many of its authors have been paid by their employers or their granting organizations and will be compensated with a publication credit, a line on a c.v., a positive annual review outcome. Reviewers are rarely paid (almost never by journals, very modestly by book publishers), but they receive insight into developing work and the ability to shape their fields and support their communities by way of compensation. There is, however, a vast range of other labor that is necessary for the production of publications, even when distributed online: submissions must be managed and tracked as they are sent out for review; authors must be communicated with; accepted articles must be copy-edited and typeset or entered into content management systems and proofread; websites must be hosted and designed and promoted. And this labor too often remains invisible. As Martin Eve has pointed out, “The technological imagination that envisages such bright futures for scholarly communications is often not so good at recognizing the labour that would sit behind such possibilities” (“Open Publication” 33). And attempts to deprofessionalize this labor, to wave it off as doable by volunteers, places the entire enterprise at risk. Unless we recognize and appropriately compensate publishing as labor, unless we account for that labor

in assessing the overall cost of publishing, the engine of scholarly communication may cease to function.

Where I am asking for generosity then—for giving it away—it is from those who are fully credited and compensated, those who can therefore afford to be generous: those tenured and tenure-track faculty and other fully employed members of our professions who can and should contribute to the world the products of the labor that they have already been supported in undertaking. Similarly, generosity is called for from those institutions that can and should underwrite the production of scholarship on behalf of the academy and the public at large. It is our mission, and our responsibility, to look beyond our own walls to the world beyond, to enlarge the gifts that we have received by passing them on to others. Those of us who can afford to support generous practices in scholarly communication must commit to making our work as publicly, openly available as possible, and we should commit to supporting and sustaining the not-for-profit organizations that work to help us do so. Doing so requires that we hold the potential for public engagement with our work among our highest values, that we understand such potential engagement as a public good that we can share in creating.

Public Intellectuals

Critics of open access often argue, as I noted earlier, that the public couldn’t possibly be interested in scholarly work, not least because they couldn’t possibly understand it, and that there is therefore no particular reason to ensure their access to it. Some critics go even further. Robin Osborne, for instance, argues that open access could *reduce* the accessibility of scholarly publications

to the general reader, as publications that do not rely on subscriptions for their revenue stream “have no concern for satisfying subscribers or for the number of readers,” and thus are less subject to the kinds of editorial intervention that make publications engaging to a broad readership (103). Running behind this conclusion is Osborne’s rather extraordinary understanding of how the market for scholarly communication functions:

By my choice of a highly specialist journal, generalist journal, university press or a popular publisher, in a magazine for sixth-formers or a political weekly, I signal to whom I think I have made my research accessible. Those who, on the basis of those signals, expect that they will understand and are interested enough in what I think and what I have said, pay for access to my thoughts. (102)

If this were, in fact, the case, there would seem little cause for alarm about the state of contemporary publishing: those who want it and can understand it are willing to pay for it and are supported by my thoughtfulness in tailoring my arguments to the audience at hand. But even leaving aside the question of the public’s willingness to pay for access to ideas (about which a conversation with just about anyone in publishing today might begin to dissuade you), there are two key problems with this line of thinking that we must encounter: first, that the “audience” is not merely at hand, waiting for the delivery of my research results, but instead must be engaged, invited to care about the work. And second, that I am unlikely to have been anywhere near so thoughtful about my choice of publishing venue, or anywhere near so skillful in tailoring my communication practices to that venue, as this model implies.

The fact is that those critics who dismiss open access on the basis that the public cannot understand the work and so does not need access to it may be wrong in the conclusion, but they are not wrong in the premise; our work often does not communicate well to general readers. And that’s fine, to an extent: communication within a discourse community plays a crucial role in that community’s development, and thus there must always be room for expert-to-expert communication of a highly specialized nature. But we have privileged that inwardly focused sharing of work to the exclusion of more outwardly directed communication. Scholars are not rewarded—and in fact are at times actively derided—for publishing in popular venues. And because the values instantiated by our rewards systems have a profound effect on the ways we train our students, both directly and indirectly, we are building the wall between academic and public discourse higher and higher with every passing cohort. One key means of tearing down that wall, of thinking generously about the ways the university connects with the surrounding communities, would be for scholars to do more writing designed for public audiences.

There has been a strong push for this kind of public-facing writing among scientists and social scientists in recent years, and a number of scholars in the humanities have recently moved in this direction as well by developing public-facing publications that bring their ideas to greater public attention; one might see, for instance, the important work and significant impact of the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and *Public Books*. There are also a host of individual and group blogs that demonstrate the ways that many scholars are already working in multiple registers, engaging with multiple audiences. These venues open scholarly concerns and conversations to a broader readership and demonstrate the public

value of academic approaches to understanding contemporary culture.

But these venues present some complications for the ways that we understand our work as scholars. If we are to open our ideas to larger public audiences, we need to give some serious thought to the ways we write, the mode and voice of our writing. There is, after all, something we should face up to in Bruce Cole's anti-intellectual dismissal of much scholarship in the humanities, which he claims is "alienating students and the public" with its "opacity, triviality, and irrelevance." I would personally dispute all three of those adjectives, but must acknowledge that the where the first exists, it creates the possibility of the second and third: because mainstream readers often do not understand our prose, they are able to assume (sometimes dismissively, and sometimes defensively) that the ideas it contains are overblown and insignificant. And it's important to add that this concern about academic writing isn't restricted to conservative critics. Editors at many mainstream publications have noted the difficulty in getting scholarly authors to address broader audiences in the ways their venues require. We have been trained to focus on complexity and nuance, to account for complications, to defuse disagreements in advance. The result is often lines of argumentation, and lines of prose, that are far from straight-forward. Getting past the accusations of triviality and irrelevance requires us to open up our rhetoric, to tell the story of our work in a manner that communicates to a generally educated reader how and why what we do matters.

This is not to say that all academic writing should be published in mainstream venues, or should necessarily be done in a public register. But I do believe that we would benefit from doing more work in ways that are not just technically but also rhetorically

accessible to the public. And when I say "we," I mean as many of us as possible. Tom Nichols, in *The Death of Expertise*, argues for the need for greater communication between experts and the public, but suggests that such public communication might best be channeled through particular voices:

To be honest, I suspect that most experts and scholars would probably prefer that laypeople avoid [reading their work], because they would not understand most of what they were reading and their attempt to follow the professional debate would likely produce more public confusion than enlightenment.

This is where public intellectuals, the people who can bridge the gap between experts and laypeople, might shoulder more responsibility. (205)

I agree without question that public intellectuals should take on more responsibility for communicating scholarly work to public audiences—but I strongly believe that we are all, to varying extents, called to be public intellectuals. Our work in the classroom demonstrates that finding ways to explain difficult intellectual concepts and their expression to nonexpert readers, bringing those readers into our discussions and helping them make sense of the work going on in our fields, is already central to our profession. This movement across levels of expertise might enable greater connection with publics outside the classroom as well, helping to get them invested and involved in the work taking place on college and university campuses and thereby building support for that work. But for that project to be successful, scholars need to be prepared to bridge the communication gaps themselves, by honing our ability to alternate speaking with one another and speaking with different audiences.

In an early draft of this book, I'd described this process as one of *translating*, of seeking ways to communicate ideas to a public that might not speak the language in which they were originally conveyed. Sharon Leon, however, wisely pointed out a need for caution in the use of that term, which in some fields "has taken on a sheen of condescension toward the public," emphasizing the public's inability to understand. And in many fields such "translation" is not considered intellectual work, and does not count as such in their systems of evaluation; it's rather a secondary process associated with popularizing the actual work. Coming as I do from literary studies, I have a somewhat different view of the notion of translation, which has been crucial to making the intellectual and artistic production of one culture available to others. That translation remains undervalued, however, is clear; it is too often imagined to be an algebraic process of substitution whereby words in one language are replaced with words in another, with a kind of transparency as the goal. As translation theorists such as Lawrence Venuti make clear, however, the work of translation requires far more in the way of interpretation than we often recognize; the translator must face the loss of "resonances and allusions" in one language while building new connections for readers in another. Translation is thus itself a process of writing, and one that reaches across and connects multiple cultures. It's for that reason that the concept remains useful to me, though I understand Leon's concern. It's a concern shared by Steven Lubar, who in "Seven Rules for Public Humanists" points to the importance for public scholars of serving simultaneously as experts and as translators, noting that while translation may be important to the work of facilitating public involvement in scholarly projects, the concept too often suggests that we do the real work in one register and then later turn it into something else for the

outside world. For Lubar, "The work of public engagement comes not after the scholarship, but as part of the scholarship." And that simultaneity may be the key: it's not that scholars need to learn to translate their work for more general audiences after the fact, but rather that we need to learn how to move fluidly between the highly specialized languages of our fields and the languages used outside them, to stretch across those languages and find the resonances and allusions that make our work engaging. We need, in other words, to learn a professional form of code switching.

"Code switching" as a term has its origin in linguistics and is used to explore how and why speakers move between multiple languages within individual speech instances. The concept was borrowed by scholars and teachers of rhetoric and composition as a means of thinking about students' need to move between vernacular and academic languages in addressing particular audiences at particular moments. Rebecca Moore Howard has noted that

the linguistic principle behind the pedagogy of code-switching is that all language varieties are equally effective in their communities; that the standard variety prevails in the academic community as well as in the communities of American commerce; that students who wish to succeed in these communities must learn the standard; and that teachers should therefore encourage students of non-standard varieties to switch to the standard in the classroom. (266)

Inescapably, however, code switching in this pedagogical context is deeply racialized. The injunction to code-switch, as Vershawn Ashanti Young has argued, requires students to "recognize the superiority of standard English and the people associated with it"

(55), a requirement that enforces the need for black students and other students of color to maintain a DuBoisian double consciousness in order to belong. Howard argues that the effect of this injunction is “eradicationism” (274), effectively eliminating the languages of the marginalized in mainstream discourse. Young likewise argues that code switching in writing pedagogy is “a strategy to negotiate, side-step and ultimately accommodate bias against the working-class, women, and the ongoing racism against the language habits of blacks and other non-white peoples” by inculcating the dominance of standard English (51).

My use of the notion of code switching in the present context is thus challenging; code switching as a hegemonic pedagogical tool requires displacing a lived vernacular with a dominant variant. The command to code switch in an unequal environment is inevitably a tool of power. But so, I want to argue, is scholars’ assumption that academic English as we perform it is the “standard variety”; in fact, it is as much a lived vernacular as any, but a vernacular based in privilege. Given that privilege, our refusal to code switch, insisting that only our language will serve to explain our ideas, is not an act of resistance. We can and should speak that expert language with one another, but if it is the only language we speak, we exclude the possibility of allying ourselves with other communities. Christopher Long argues, in fact, from the perspective of the field of philosophy, that the anti-intellectualism that scholars find rampant within contemporary American culture is “reinforced by academic professionalism,” which results in the further alienation of the public from the academy (2); our insistence on a professional language may not just keep us from being broadly understood, but in fact exacerbate the hostility we perceive around us.

None of what I am suggesting here is simple; we cannot merely adopt a common language that will make us understood and our work beloved by all. Nor should we abandon the precise academic languages that undergird the rigor of the writing we share with one another. But it is nonetheless worth asking how judicious code switching, as a means of acknowledging the effects of our educational and professional privilege and inviting others into our discussions, could become a more regular part of our scholarly work. Might more scholars, for instance, develop pieces of writing designed for and in communication with public audiences that open up our more internally focused arguments? This mode of public-facing writing—as many editors of mainstream intellectual publications would note—is very different from scholars’ usual mode of professional writing, and by and large it is not something we are trained to do. A number of recent programs present opportunities for such training; these include the seminars conducted by the OpEd Project, which seek to increase the diversity of voices represented in major publications, as well as a series of workshops sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and coordinated by the editors of the *Object Lessons* book series, which focus on helping “scholars and non-fiction authors write for broader audiences while maintaining intellectual rigor and developing their academic profiles” (“Apply to an Object Lessons Workshop”). Workshops such as these can help scholarly authors focus and express the significance of their ideas in ways that help broader audiences engage with them. Many, many more such workshops are needed—and, in fact, this kind of writing instruction (including other practical genres of writing such as the grant proposal) should ideally become part of graduate training across the university.

There has been, perhaps unsurprisingly, a great deal of recent debate about the value of the public intellectual and the role that scholars might play in the development of a healthier public discourse. Mark Greif, for instance, in asking what's wrong with today's public intellectuals, expresses dismay about the degree to which scholars seem to resist that role:

A large pool of disgruntled free-thinking people who are not actually starving, gathered in many local physical centers, whose vocation leads them to amass an enormous quantity of knowledge and skill in disputation, and who possess 24-hour access to research libraries, might be the most publicly argumentative the world has known.

Might be, except that too many of us shy away from taking our debates public, instead arguing with and for one another rather than rather than using our arguments to effect a public good. Benjamin Wurgaft is similarly skeptical about the public intellectual's potential, though less because of the inward-facingness of scholars and intellectuals than because of a more fundamental disjunction between the "public" and the "intellectual" in contemporary culture: "In the face of the widespread rejection of informed or expert opinion," Wurgaft asks, "can thinkers who address the public, not only remind us of the existence of trained and experienced judgment, but give us a feeling for its connection to our mundane lives?" Public intellectuals, in other words, face the challenge of demonstrating that their arguments have some bearing on the lived experience of their readers. But Wurgaft goes on to note that his concern has less to do with "the actions of specific thinkers and writers" than with "the condition of culture." Which is to say that, in order to evoke a sense of

connection in their readers, writers need to understand the increasingly complex, multifarious nature of what we think of as the "public" today.

The relationship that scholarly authors bear toward the public good is in this view riven by uncertainty about who the public is, what the good might be, and what role the intellectual might play in creating and sustaining both. This is not a new problem; the condition of culture is and has always been characterized by divisions and exclusions, making it impossible for any writer to address the idealized singularity of the Habermasian public sphere and instead allowing only for access to a subset of Nancy Fraser's "plurality of competing counterpublics" (61). It's important, however, to examine the possibility that scholars' retreat from engagement with the public—however mythical that unified body has always been—might be a contributing factor to the public's fragmentation. As Alan Jacobs has noted in considering the withdrawal of Christian intellectuals from public engagement, "Subaltern counterpublics are essential for those who have never had seats at the table of power, but they can also be immensely appealing to those who feel that their public presence and authority have waned" ("The Watchmen"). The similar withdrawal of scholars into private discourse has produced a tighter sense of connection and the comfort of being understood, but at the cost of creating an intellectual gated community, removing scholarly issues and perspectives from public view, and removing the potential for using those issues to build alliances and create solidarity among counterpublics. Christopher Long, in fact, argues that public forms of social inquiry, conducted collaboratively by thinkers on and off campus, are a necessary means through which an otherwise amorphous, inchoate public might become the articulated public that John Dewey saw as necessary to the creation of a genuinely

democratic society. And Corey Robin likewise argues that the public does not precede the intellectual, like an audience simply waiting for entertainment or instruction; rather, the public intellectual is for Robin “the literary equivalent of the epic political actor, who sees her writing as a transformative mode of action, a thought-deed in the world.” The transformation that Robin’s public intellectual seeks is, not least, the creation of the public itself, activating that public for further action on its own behalf.

If we are to heed Jacobs’s and Long’s call for a return to public discourse, Greif’s sense of the possibilities for that discourse, Wurgaft’s skepticism about our ability to connect with the public, and Robin’s recognition that our role requires us to help create that public in the first place, we’ll have to contend with the public’s multiplicity. We can only ever speak, at any given moment, with subsets of the public, and this, Jacobs notes, inevitably becomes a problem of writing:

I have felt for my entire career the difficulties of deciding where to speak and how. About a decade into my professional life it suddenly dawned on me that, unlike the people I went to graduate school with and the professors I saw as my mentors and models, I was never going to have a single audience. It would be necessary for me at times to speak to the church; at other times to believers from other religious traditions; at other times to my fellow academics; and at yet other times to the American public at large. This meant that I would not be able to formulate a single writerly voice, a single mode of articulation, a single rhetoric that I could deploy in any and all situations. (“The Watchmen”)

The publics we seek connection with may be different from those with whom Jacobs speaks, and they’re likely different from

those publics sought by our colleagues. The key is to ask ourselves with whom we want to be in dialogue, and most importantly why, so that we can begin to understand ourselves as participants not just in those conversations but in those publics.

We’ll also need to think carefully about the best means and venues for conversations with the publics we hope to bring together. As André de Avillez and his colleagues note in exploring the possibilities for public philosophy, spaces for public discussion are often not readily found:

Even if scholars wish to participate in public philosophy, there remains a noticeable shortage of venues (be they local or online) where members of the public may gather and form communities around the practice of philosophical inquiry: venues where the public use of reason is promoted and where the specialist will not only share research with the public, but will engage lay readers in conversation, become attentive to the community’s own inquiries, and ultimately collaborate with the community as it continues its inquiry. (137)

These are the spaces in which a public, in dialogue with scholarly modes of thought, might begin to articulate itself, as well as spaces in which scholars might begin to better understand the publics with which they are in dialogue. De Avillez and colleagues note the possibility that public intellectual blogs and other online discussion spaces present for such articulation, but they also point to the real difficulty of maintaining productive discussion online, given the omnipresence of trolls and other bad actors, and make clear “the assiduous effort required to cultivate and maintain collegiality in the community” (137). The best venue for public engagement, in other words, is not one that we might simply avail

ourselves of—submit our work for publication, rent out for an evening—but is one that we must build, and maintain.

And all of that work of community building—imagining the publics we want to be part of, developing and maintaining the best means of supporting their organization—needs to be recognized not just as a form of generous thinking, but as work. Scholars must do a much better job of supporting members of their own academic communities who work in public modes by understanding that their work is not just public, but also intellectual. Conventional academic modes of evaluation and assessment such as are used on many campuses are built on a tripartite division among research, teaching, and service, and too often—especially on campuses with a significant research mandate—things that don't meet a relatively narrow set of criteria for what gets considered “research” are filed away as “service,” a distant third in priority. (That this is less true of regional comprehensive institutions, liberal-arts colleges, and community colleges, where teaching and outreach are not subordinated to—indeed, often not separated from—research, is important to consider in the context of the ways that institutions are ranked and hierarchized, on the one hand, and the ways that the public attributes value to them, on the other. I'll take this up in more detail in the next chapter.) As a result, work that does not hew as closely as possible to the dominant form in which scholarship is done is often undervalued or even actively dismissed back on campus. Public exhibitions, online interactive projects, community discussions: too often, these forms of public work are granted far less weight and importance than a peer-reviewed scholarly article. And even when the public-facing work takes the form of published writing, it is often assumed to be less developed, less authoritative, less important, since it probably has not been through academic processes of peer

review. In fact, writing in mainstream publications is likely to have been far more stringently edited than that in most scholarly journals, since editors for mainstream publications often work much more closely with writers and their prose than academic editors. This editing process can hone an idea in important ways, clarifying it for both writer and reader. But clarity is too often mistaken for simplicity. Presenting an argument or issue in a straightforward fashion runs the risk of inviting not just debate but dismissal. And worse yet, the academic universe too often assumes that a scholar who writes for a public market must “dumb down” key ideas in order to do so.

As Mark Greif has pointed out, this assumption affects not only the ways that public intellectual work is evaluated by the academy but also the work that academics want to present to the public. In his experience editing *n+1*, he received submissions from many brilliant writers who

merrily left difficulty at home, leapt into colloquial language with both feet, added unnatural (and frankly unfunny) jokes, talked about TV, took on a tone chummy and unctuous. They dumbed down, in short—even with the most innocent intentions. The public, even the “general reader,” seemed to mean someone less adept, ingenious, and critical than themselves.

This seems to run counter to the argument I made earlier in this section, that academic writers need to learn some mode of code-switching in order to enter into dialogue with broader publics, but in fact it cuts to the heart of the problem: we too often do not know how to speak with those publics, because we do not understand them. We forget that many members of those publics have studied the same fields we have—that, as Martin Eve

reminded me in the public discussion of this book's draft, many members of those publics were once our students, and so have been taught *by us* to engage in serious intellectual debate. And, as chapter 1 suggests, we too often do not understand these publics because we do not genuinely listen to them, and particularly to those publics with which we disagree, with often disastrous effects.

If scholars are to engage as public intellectuals, then, we need to make room for the public in our arguments, in our projects, and in our prose. But we also need to understand that our arguments, projects, prose are merely one part of a much larger, multivoiced conversation. And this is key: Having found a way to connect with a broader audience, having recognized that part of our work is supporting that audience in its articulation into a public, how do we then best help to facilitate the activation of that public to work on its own behalf?

Public Scholarship

Here is where our working in public—creating public access, valuing public engagement, becoming public intellectuals—transforms into the creation of a genuinely public scholarship, a generous scholarship, relying on a diverse set of practices that are not simply performed for the public but that include and are in fact given over to the publics with whom we work. In public scholarship, members of our chosen communities enter into our projects not just as readers but as participants, as stakeholders, and as partners. Public scholarship allows the venues for engaging with those communities to expand beyond the monograph or the journal article to include a range of forms in which the publics with

whom we work can engage directly with the materials of our fields. After all, when de Avillez and colleagues note the shortage of venues in which public thought and deliberation can take place, they mean *publications*, and in that respect, they are correct. But if we broaden our sense of the spaces in which scholarly thought can take place to include museum and gallery exhibitions, interactive web archives, and a range of other projects designed to support and facilitate the exploration and interpretation of all participants—including community-oriented publication models such as that being developed by the *Public Philosophy Journal*—then the number of potential venues grows, as do the possibilities for connection. This growth might allow our thinking to escape the procrustean bed of our traditional publication formats and instead take the shape best suited to its purposes of engagement, over and above those of argument.

Public participation in scholarly discovery is often difficult for scholars to imagine, but recent experiments in what's been called "citizen science" provide some potentially interesting examples. These are projects, such as Galaxy Zoo, that go beyond crowdsourcing by enlisting networked participants not just in mass repetitive tasks but in the actual process of discovery. Galaxy Zoo, which launched in 2007, initially invited interested volunteers to assist with classifying the hundreds of thousands of galaxies contained in a sample from the Sloan Digital Sky Survey. They did that, far faster and more thoroughly than any lab full of grad students and post-docs could have. But those volunteers have also become active participants in significant discoveries that have resulted in dozens of published papers over the last decade. These papers include studies of the project itself, which indicate that volunteers are motivated to participate by their interest

in astronomy, their desire to contribute to research, their hope to learn more about science, and the fun they have in the process (Raddick et al.).

If this is one form that citizen science takes, what might the citizen humanities or social sciences look like? It might look like museum exhibits such as *Pacific Worlds* at the Oakland Museum of California, which engaged members of local Pacific communities in the planning and development processes, with the result that “what you see in our galleries includes not only the input of curators and historians, but of people that are featured speaking for themselves” (Fischer). It might look like *The September 11 Digital Archive*, developed by the American Social History Project and the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, which presents first-hand accounts of the events of that day, along with photos, emails, and other archival materials from more than 150,000 participants, with the goal of “providing historical context for understanding those events and their consequences” by “allowing people to tell their stories, making those stories available to a wide audience.” It might look like the New York Public Library Labs’s *What’s on the Menu?*, in which participants were invited to help transcribe, review, and geotag the library’s massive digitized collection of historic menus, making them accessible for research and “opening the door to new kinds of discoveries.” It might look like the *Baltimore Stories* project coordinated by the Dresher Center for the Humanities at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, which used humanities scholarship as a convening force to bring community organizers, educators, and nonprofit organizations together with the university in order to “help frame and contextualize narratives of race in American cities” (“The Dresher Center”). It might look like the Organization for Transformative Works, a nonprofit activist organ-

ization that brings academic and public popular culture fans together in supporting a web archive that hosts a wide range of fan production, a journal that explores fan cultures and practices, and a range of other forms of advocacy for the creative and critical production of fans (“About the OTW”).

What these projects have in common is that the cultural concern each of them explores is of compelling interest to the public that the project engages, precisely because that concern belongs to them. The work involved is theirs not just to learn from but to shape and define as well. As the Organization for Transformative Works notes in its values statement, the network is defined by a “volunteer-based infrastructure” and a “fannish gift economy,” making clear that the organization is not just for the fans, but fully owned by the fans; the community comes first, in all its complex diversity, before the projects that it undertakes (“What We Believe”). This is a crucial aspect, as Steven Lubar reminds us, of public scholarship. Engaging publics in working with scholars to interpret, understand, preserve, and teach their cultures and histories—work of engagement that must be integrally part of the scholarship—has the potential to connect those publics with the university in ways that can create a vital new sense of belonging, but the university must be ready to understand itself as fully connected and in service to the broader community. I’ll dig further into that requirement in the next chapter.

For the moment, however, I want to think a bit about ways that scholars might see the publics that they seek to engage. The relationship involved in the projects I describe above is not just a matter of “crowd-sourcing,” as the involvement of active public participation in scholarly work is sometimes described. Crowd-sourcing has something of a mixed reputation, in fact. On the positive side, engaging a distributed set of participants in the work

of research—whether identifying galaxies, transcribing and geo-tagging menu items, or enriching our understanding of climate history by “finding and recording historical weather observations in ships’ logs” as in the *Old Weather* project (Blaser 50)—can speed the discovery process and bring a much broader range of perspectives to bear on the material under study by activating public curiosity. However, as the authors collected in the volume *Crowd-sourcing Our Cultural Heritage* (edited by Mia Ridge) demonstrate, projects that seek such active participation must be fully open to the interests of those who participate; as the *Old Weather* project leads discovered, many of the volunteers who were transcribing the ships’ logs began developing data sets that tracked their own interests, thus lending the project not just to tracing historical weather patterns but also phenomena such as the spread of the 1918 Spanish Flu (Blaser 53). A willingness to incorporate and pursue such participant discoveries, as Lucinda Blaser and other researchers who have developed successful community-engaged projects reiterate, is key to the project’s success.

This participant focus is also crucial to ensuring that the publics engaged through crowd-sourcing are not treated as if they were a mere extension of the computerized system that coordinates their labor, as if the “mechanical Turk” metaphor used by Amazon in establishing its crowd-sourcing platform were literal. As a 2016 report from the Pew Research Center demonstrates, “online outsourcing” of research labor runs the risk of exploitation, as projects benefit from the uncredited appropriation of participants’ creative labor and inadvertently contribute to the spread of the so-called gig economy (Hitlin). At the same time, however, the participant focus of genuinely community-engaged scholarship does not mean simply handing over the project to the interests of the crowd. As John Kuo Wei Tchen notes in his

exploration of the founding of the “dialogic” Chinatown History Museum, such “ultrademocratic” tendencies, while laudable, disclaim scholars’ responsibilities for their own participation. It’s not incidental, after all, that the negative side of crowd-sourcing’s reputation derives not just from this potential for abuse but also from the potential for misinformation that can arise from the unruly masses. Tom Nichols, for instance, argues in his defense of the role of the expert in contemporary culture that the assumption that “the Internet can serve as a way of crowd-sourcing knowledge conflates the perfectly reasonable idea of what the writer James Surowiecki has called ‘the wisdom of the crowds’ with the completely unreasonable idea that the crowds are wise because each member of the mob is also wise” (122). This is to say that groups require mechanisms for self-correction in order to manifest and elevate the wisdom they contain. Wikipedia, for instance, operates under a strict set of rules for the review of contributions and changes to the project. Critics have pointed out the many flaws in those rules—the degree to which, for instance, they permit certain kinds of systemic bias to flourish and allow editors with an axe to grind to control the direction of their areas of the project (“Criticism”)—and the problems to which they lead are significant.

But these problems are not inevitable. This is perhaps where the self-reflexivity of humanities and social science-based critique, coupled with the generosity that is at the root of our thinking, might point the way toward better, more generative practices. Tchen points to the importance of ongoing dialogue in community-oriented work, noting that “the authorship of an exhibition, and therefore the authority associated with authorship, should be viewed as a shared and collaborative process and not as an either/or proposition” (297). That shared and collaborative

process must extend to an ongoing discussion and review of the editorial and other principles under which community-based projects operate, enabling public scholarship to develop and maintain structures that are not just self-regulating but also self-critical. As my colleague Avi Santo and I argued in a white paper on open peer review practices in humanities scholarship, successful processes based in communities of practice require carefully developed guidelines that foster the kinds of engagement we seek—and those guidelines, and the community’s functioning within them, must be equally subject to community review as is the work itself. The understandings that guide scholars’ engagement with broader publics require the same guidance and the same commitment to ongoing review.

Open peer review has of course met with resistance to the notion that members of the public can serve as “peers.” It is, however, worth considering the ways that the academy might benefit from a shift away from an understanding of the “peer” as a “credentialed colleague” and toward the recognition that “peer status might only emerge through participation” in the processes of a community of practice (Fitzpatrick and Santo 8). Sheila Brennan, in the online discussion of the draft of this chapter, pointed out the admirable practices of the National Postal Museum in bringing together scholars and collectors in their annual symposium and publications, as well as in thinking through their collections and exhibits, which has led to a broadened sense of engagement with and ownership of the museum’s work; this kind of engagement requires those with different forms of expertise to recognize one another as potential peers. The importance of that recognition should not be underestimated: the way we define the notion of the peer has profound consequences not just for determining whom we consider under that label but also who considers them-

selves to be a part of that category. As I noted in the introduction, Kelly Susan Bradbury has similarly explored this issue with respect to the term “intellectual,” pointing out the ways that, for instance, traditional academic exclusions of the more applied interests of adult education programs from that category results in those who participate in such programs rejecting the notion of the intellectual as part of their self-definition. This rejection inevitably exacerbates tendencies and beliefs in American culture that we perceive as anti-intellectual. Opening the notion of the intellectual, or the peer, to a much broader range of forms of critical inquiry and active project participation has the potential to reshape relations between town and gown, to lay the groundwork for more productive conversations across the borders of the campus, and to create an understanding of the extent to which the work of the academy matters for our culture as a whole.

If the purpose of public scholarship lies in helping members of the public undertake their own projects and assisting them in understanding and executing their roles as authors and interpreters, as Ronald Grele argued of public history as far back as 1981, scholars require an entirely different relationship both to their work and to the communities within which it is embedded. But what would happen if we were to open up not just our understandings of the terms through which we describe intellectual or scholarly work today, and not just our practices in engaging in that work, but the very institutions in which we spend our work lives? What would be required in order to transform our colleges and universities into places where this public-oriented, generous thinking can flourish? This kind of openness was one of the goals in the original establishment of the public land-grant colleges and universities under the Morrill Act, which authorized and supported those institutions in bringing crucial knowledge to the

people of their states. That mission has often been met through extension programs that provide continuing education and outreach to state residents, often in practical areas such as agriculture and engineering. But it is crucial today that we think about what an extension program embracing the entire university, including the humanities and social sciences, might look like, and the ways that public universities might play a key role in bringing not just technical knowledge to the public but the liberal arts as well: not just tools for production, but tools for living. If the university is to win back public support, it must be prepared—structurally, strategically, at the heart of not just its mission statement but its actual mission—to place public service at the top of its priorities. What that might look like, and what that might require, is our focus ahead.

4

The University

American higher education is dominated by a model in which status is attained through the maintenance of scarcity, and academic elitism has become a defensive posture and abdication of implicit responsibility.

—MICHAEL M. CROW AND WILLIAM B. DABARS, *DESIGNING THE NEW AMERICAN UNIVERSITY*

This is not a problem for technological innovation or a market product. This requires politics.

—TRESSIE MCMILLAN COTTOM, *LOWER ED*

Roughly around the time that I first began sketching the outline for this book, I attended a day-long workshop on new models for university press publishing, for which the provost of a large state research university had been invited to give a keynote address. The talk came during a day of intensive discussions amongst the workshop's participants and university press and university library leaders, all of whom had a real stake in the future of the institution's role in disseminating scholarly work as openly as possible. And the keynote was quite powerful: the provost described his campus's efforts to embrace a renewed mission of public service, and he emphasized the role that broad public access