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Many Great Societies, One Small World: The Humanities in Higher Education

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I am very honored to be speaking today at National Chengchi University. While I am too late to congratulate the university on the eightieth anniversary of its founding in 1927, let me express the hope that your eighty-first year and each year hence will be continuing celebrations of every university's noble calling: to increase and to share knowledge.

While I was preparing today's lecture, I was delighted to find on the university's Web site the banner heading proclaiming: "Humanism, Innovation, Globalization." With *humanities* in the place of *humanism*, your university slogan could well serve as the title of my talk. It is certainly the case that the learning we designate as the humanities now must be in the future a source of intellectual innovation that helps us comprehend complex phenomena such as globalization, and indeed, innovation itself. Your own focus on the humanities and social sciences suggests that you share that commitment.

My title, however, is *Many Great Societies, One Small World: The Humanities in Higher Education*. I chose it with the aim of expanding upon the positions put forth by one of my predecessors in the leadership of the American Council of Learned Societies. Professor Howard Mumford Jones was chair of our board of directors in the late 1950s and a forceful advocate for our cause. In 1959, he published a book titled *One Great Society: Humane Learning in America*, to which I shall return shortly. For the last half century, our Council has sought to present to the American public and government leaders what we hope are persuasive reasons for supporting scholarship and education in the humanities. Today I want to share with you some of the arguments we currently make for maintaining the vitality of the humanities, and for insisting that they are an essential element of any system of higher education that claims to be “higher.”

Let me begin by introducing the organization I represent. The American Council of Learned Societies is a federation of 69 learned societies whose membership ranges from just under 500 to well over 150,000. Our mission is to advance humanistic studies in all fields of the humanities and social sciences and to strengthen relations among national organizations dedicated to those studies. We do this principally through a wide range of fellowship programs and through strategic initiatives addressing key issues in such topics as international studies and scholarly communication. ACLS was founded in 1919 to represent the United States in international academic circles, so it is especially appropriate that I have the opportunity to address you today.

Having described ACLS, I should also try to define what I mean by the humanities. As each country and culture might have a different map of organized knowledge, I can only give you ours. The most common way of answering this question is by providing an inventory of the fields and disciplines included. Such a list includes history, literature, linguistics, philosophy, the study of the visual and performing arts, jurisprudence, and the study of religion. But this inventory can be too restrictive, as there is humanistic inquiry in outlying fields: economic history in economics, for example, or political theory in political science. Much of anthropology, which is given to understanding and interpreting human culture, lies within the humanities.

An alternative approach, then, is to focus on the subjects and methods of research. In English usage, we have imposed a divide between the subjects concerned with human creativity, thought, and expression on the one hand, and the natural and social sciences on the other. The humanities comprise the former; they investigate and reflect about different cultures, texts, and artifacts across space and time. They explore the foundations of aesthetic, ethical, and cultural values and the ways they may endure, be challenged, or transformed. In so doing, humanists help us appreciate and understand what distinguishes us as human beings as well as what unites us. The humanities do have much in common with the sciences, but also some distinct roles and methodologies. The humanities evaluate and analyze evidence, but they are not experimental. They are more often interpretive; indeed, we sometimes describe the areas of anthropology, political science, economics, sociology, and psychology, which we at ACLS support, as “the interpretive social sciences.”

But these descriptions, useful as they may be, do not convey why the humanities matter. It is here where Professor Jones can help us. Under his leadership, ACLS formed a commission of leading scholars and businessmen to deliberate on the role of the humanities in public life. The commission met for two years, and in 1959 Jones published the book-length essay *One Great Society*, drawn from the deliberations I mentioned earlier.¹

The essay opens with a series of questions that a “leading businessman” would ask “if called upon to support scholarship in this field”:

- What are the humanities?
- Why is it that you think the humanities are so important?
- Speaking quite practically, what can the humanities do for me, for my family, for my business, for my community?
- Do the humanities make people better? Do they make people happier? Do they make people more capable? How do you know?

¹ Jones, Howard Mumford. *One Great Society: Humane Learning in the United States*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959. Print.

“These are intelligent questions,” Jones affirms, adding with becoming modesty that “[i]t does not affect the excellence of the questions that some of them are unanswerable.”²

What are the humanities? Jones’s answer is that “[t]he primary business of the humanities is to make the human heritage men look back upon meaningful and available as individual experience rather than as mass and generalization.”³

Why are the humanities so important? Because, Jones notes, “each of us also knows, deep down and underneath, that he is something or somebody neither the doctor nor the sociologist can quite get at.... People live in crowds, societies, and states and we can compute a good many facts about them, but they do not really live in multitudes; they live apart, each in the secret chamber of [the] self.” Furthermore, “The revelations of life, art, emotion, and wisdom gleaned from the records of man are...precisely what the humanities have to give. Theirs is the area where, once we have mastered the language and understood the techniques of artist, writer, and philosopher, we slowly learn ways of facing the unpredictable and reconciling ourselves to what is inevitable. By so doing we transform ourselves and, in the long run, transform society.”⁴

What are the practical benefits of the humanities? According to Jones, “Americans have developed an enormous respect for exact knowledge,” and it is humanistic knowledge that produces most reference books, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. “[W]ithout the activity of [humanities] scholars, about one third of our available information about [the human] would...grow more untrustworthy...and...eventually disappear.”⁵

Do the humanities make people better? Jones’s response to this question is balanced and nuanced, but still forceful and convincing. “The humanities,” he notes, “have no monopo-

² Jones 3–5.

³ Jones 9.

⁴ Jones 8, 10, 59.

⁵ Jones 20, 22.

ly on educational virtue, but they can and do maintain a noble educational end: keeping in view the ways by which individuals can be led to maturity through the development of intelligence and the refinement of sensibility.... The humane person is not merely the product of the humanities, but he is a person who, recognizing the great intent of humane learning, strives to keep his own learning, be it scientific, social or humanistic, truly humane.”⁶

“Perhaps nobody knows how to make any human being better, happier, and more capable,” Jones continues, “but at the very least the humanities, humane learning, and humanistic scholarship help to sustain a universe of thought in which these questions have meaning and in which adults may have the opportunity to work out such problems for themselves.”⁷

Jones resists yielding to the advocate’s understandable temptation to package the benefits of humanistic learning neatly with a promise of easy and early delivery. Humanistic scholarship both enables and requires clear exposition, but “[w]riting is not a ‘skill’ like skating or running a typewriter,” he cautions. “[I]t is a totality of expression involving not only the speech habits of the individual who writes but also the existence of a verbal environment less bare than the language of television shows.... One does not, one cannot, learn to ‘write’ by taking a single course in English composition; only long exposure to the humanities, only the private discovery that mastering the art of communication is in the long run a battle” can develop the writer, rather than simply the writing. “The humanities, rightly understood, are philosophical discourse, not ‘training.’ They furnish a point of view; they do not give out ‘tools’ and ‘skills’ like premiums.”⁸

Finally, Jones clearly recognizes the often competing aims of accessibility and specialization. He argues that public understanding of the humanities is crucial to public support,

⁶ Jones 19.

⁷ Jones 181.

⁸ Jones 191–2.

but he acknowledges “the privileges of expertise. All specialization requires a special vocabulary and cannot go forward without one.”⁹

Much of Jones’s argument was repeated a few years later by the Commission on the Humanities appointed in 1963 by ACLS, the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa. This commission’s report argued successfully for the creation of what became in 1965 the National Endowment for the Humanities.¹⁰

The establishment of a federal agency dedicated to the support and expansion of humanistic learning was a cause for celebration and remains an important element of our national infrastructure for humanities education and research. But as I noted in my presentation at the Academia Sinica a few days ago, financing for scholarship in our fields remains weak. More so than other domains of knowledge, the humanities seem to have only a tenuous claim on public attention and support. The titles of recent statements by leaders in the field convey a sense of incipient crisis. *What’s Happened to the Humanities?* was the question posed ten years ago by a collection of essays by major humanists across the country. More recently, a commission of the Association of American Universities, on which I served, reported on how higher education might go about *Reinvigorating the Humanities*, a hopeful project perhaps, but one that seemed premised on a gloomy past in need of energizing.

What happened between the establishment of the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1965 and the end of the century to create this sense of crisis concerning the academic humanities? One readily available but too facile answer to that question is that the major demographic and intellectual changes of the second half of the twentieth century disrupted the humanities and alienated their traditional constituents. This is the familiar “culture wars” explanation that lays the demise of the humanities at the door of postmo-

⁹ Jones 185.

¹⁰ *Report of the Commission on the Humanities*. New York: American Council of Learned Societies, Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, 1964. Print.

dermism and multiculturalism. We know the story: a previously unified and harmonious canonical field became infected with and disabled by diseases of identity politics and abstruse theorizing.

The intellectual texture of the humanities did change in this period. But in many ways the emergence of new objects of study and new angles of vision—most notably an attention to peoples and social processes heretofore ignored—prepared the humanities for the intellectual challenges of the twenty-first century. Moreover, incisive critical inquiry into the often arbitrary and contingent nature of what might previously have been taken for granted has enlarged the universe of what ought to be taken seriously—a most salutary effect. Howard Mumford Jones could refer to “one great society” in an era when ideological unity and demographic homogeneity were arguably more the norm than the exception in American higher education. Today we need to understand the many great societies that make up our world—their cultures, histories, and philosophies. We need to understand the particularities of diverse human experiences as well as the interconnectedness of those experiences in our one small world, however fraught and tense those connections might be.

More consequential to the humanities were changes in the way higher education is financed that occurred during the last decades of the twentieth century. I cannot go into those changes in detail; what follows is a brief summary. American higher education underwent an epic expansion in the 30 years following the end of World War II. An enormous increase in federal and state public investment transformed a system of elite education into one of mass access and built the world’s leading national research establishment. Beginning in the 1970s, however, economic shocks and political changes gradually reduced the rate of growth in higher education and the governmental share of financing for higher education. Losses in public financing were made up by increased tuitions and private and corporate financing of research and development. These changes especially disadvantaged the humanities. The halt to expansion severely constricted the opportunities for new PhDs, the humanities had little claim on corporate support, and rising tuition levels motivated many students to study only those fields which seemed to

promise assured and lucrative employment. Thus arose the elements of crisis: demoralized faculty, falling student enrollments, and declining public support.

Is there really a crisis? Surveys of available data provide a more nuanced but not entirely reassuring picture. I say “available data” because one symptom of the inadequacy of the humanities infrastructure in the United States is our lack of a systematic accounting for the health and shape of our enterprise, in contrast to what is available in the sciences. We are at work to remedy that, and I can provide you some statistics that suggest that while the humanities are holding our own, we are not thriving.

The absolute number of bachelor’s degrees completed in the humanities in 2004 was greater (120,000) than nearly 40 years ago in 1966 (92,000), but the 2004 figure represents a much smaller percentage (8.5% vs. 17%) of the total number of completed bachelor’s degrees. (I should note that the humanities have not “lost market share” to other arts and science fields; rather, it is the growth of undergraduate degrees in business and other professional fields that has diminished the relative share of humanities degrees.) The number of humanities doctoral degrees completed in 2004 was approximately 5,200, more than double the number awarded in 1966 (2,200), but a slightly smaller percentage of the total number of doctorates earned in all fields (11% in 2004 vs. 13% in 1966). It is estimated that there are nearly 113,000 full- and part-time humanities faculty in American colleges and universities. The median salary of full-time humanities professors in 2004 was larger only than those in the fine arts, but generally less than the salaries of colleagues in every other field—on average, 30% less than those in the natural sciences. Interestingly (but of small consolation), job satisfaction among humanists was reportedly higher than for those in other fields! (Maybe the humanities do make you happier after all.) That’s good news, because it takes much longer to get a doctorate in the humanities than in other fields—almost 10 years, on average, as opposed to 6½ in the sciences and just under 8 in the social sciences.

Public funding for the humanities is, shall we say, not ample. A quick review of President George W. Bush's budget proposals for the FY 2009 can give you some idea of relative priorities. His request of Congress:

- National Institutes of Health: \$29 billion
- National Science Foundation: \$6.2 billion
- National Nanotechnology Initiative: \$1.5 billion
- National Endowment for the Humanities: \$144 *million*

While the humanities receive more support from private philanthropic foundations than from the government, their relative share of private giving is also modest. In 2002 (the most recent year to be carefully analyzed), private foundations donated more than \$335 million to humanities activities, but one-half of that amount went to museums and historical societies, not to scholars. And donations to humanities activities represented only 2.2% of total foundation giving, a share that has been declining over recent years.¹¹

So while the academic humanities in the United States are not on the brink of crisis, no one can be very satisfied with their condition. How might the humanities thrive? As I mentioned earlier, your Web site suggests that the humanities must be recognized as a source of the intellectual innovation that helps us understand complex phenomena such as globalization and innovation itself. In looking to the future, I certainly do not mean that we as humanists should forsake our claim on the past. After all, the humanities are the chief means by which our cultural heritage can speak to us. It is through humanistic scholarship that we can grasp and test the values that have sustained and explained the human condition in societies past and present. As Patricia Meyer Spacks has written, "The study of the humanities reveals in new terms, terms that we can recognize, the enduring vitality and meaning of past achievements, and it encourages the fresh energies of our immediate culture—new ways of thinking, new objects of thought."¹² Interpreting

¹¹National Science Foundation. Division of Science Resources Statistics. *President's FY 2009 Budget Requests 3.4% Increase in R&D Funding* (NSF 08-312). Cited in American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Humanities Indicators Prototype. Table III-8c(1). Cambridge, MA: AAAS, forthcoming 2008. Web.

¹²Connor, W. Robert. "The Director's Desk." *Ideas* 5.1 (1997). Print.

the past lays the groundwork for innovation in the present and future. Daniel Boorstin, historian and former librarian of Congress, once observed that to try to create the future without some knowledge of the past is like trying to plant cut flowers.

Without abandoning our commitment to the past, we can turn to the humanities for help with the future. Our present and future condition is defined by a shrinking world, the complex of phenomena encompassed by the rubric of globalization. The meaning of the term, as Giles Gunn has observed, has become so complicated, contradictory, and controversial that many wish it would just go away, to be replaced by something else. What does it suggest? Is it the spectacle of instantaneous electronic financial transfers? Does it mean rampant free-market capitalism? Has it effected a universal homogenization of culture? Does it guarantee the expansion of Western, by which is usually meant American, political hegemony? Does globalization produce the erasure of all local differences as it integrates more and more of the world's people, as well as of entire sovereign states, into a seamless geopolitical system that inevitably erodes their ability to shape their own destinies?¹³ One thing we know for sure is that globalization, as the anthropologist Sherry Ortner once exclaimed at an ACLS meeting, is "all over the place." And equally certain is the fact that even as people and products from distant or previously unknown locations are now found within the compass of our everyday experience, even as local differences may appear to have been erased, there is no consequent unifying simplification of human variety. To the contrary, and as we all know, the world has become infinitely larger and more complex.

Indeed, cultural particularities persist in demonstrating their enduring power, and the humanities have a special role to play in enhancing our understanding of them. It is the humanist's insistence on local knowledge that can help to focus and clarify the vision of the otherwise monocular globalizing lens. Since the tragedies of September 11th, we've frequently heard the phrase "now more than ever" used to advocate the need for sustained study of languages and cultures other than our own. But hasn't the imperative always been there, as well as our central role in responding to it? I've often quoted the sociolo-

¹³ Gunn, Giles. "Globalizing Literary Studies." *PMLA* 116.1 (Jan. 2001): 16-31.

gist Nancy Rutherford, who said, “Higher education is an aquifer, not a spigot.” Colleges and universities, she argues, “[C]annot be built in response to immediate needs, as the spigot someone can turn on for the expertise they need at the moment...[but] should be conceived as a deep reserve, built up slowly and sustained over the long term, on the assumption that though specific needs will arise, they cannot be anticipated.” This is especially relevant in connection with how we approach the task of enhancing international education. It takes time and commitment. “Deep knowledge of particular parts of the world cannot be produced overnight. It has to be built up over years, supported through real relationships with people and institutions abroad, passed along, invested in, and valued independent of the contingencies, fears, and passions of a moment.”¹⁴ This is why no understanding of the globalizing world can be achieved without a sustained commitment to humanistic study.

Another promising area for the humanities is the terrain opened up by innovations in information technologies. What do I mean by this claim? The answer is a mouse-click away: the Internet “works” through texts and images, two phenomena that are the stock-in-trade of the humanities. It is true that not everyone in the humanities has chosen to cross the digital divide and integrate new information technologies into his or her work. Indeed, organizations like ACLS still have much work to do. We must encourage colleagues to explore how digitization can enhance both their scholarship itself and the ways in which they communicate it. But today I want to turn that relationship upside down—to consider how these new technologies create a demand for the knowledge and skills that are the distinctive contributions of the humanities.

Jerome McGann, professor of English at the University of Virginia and one of the pioneers in applying digital technologies to humanities research, has predicted that “[i]n the next 50 years the entirety of our inherited archive of cultural works will have to be re-edited within a network of digital storage, access, and dissemination. This system, which is already under development, is transnational and transcultural.” And he asks: “Who will

¹⁴ Pratt, Mary Louise, “President’s Column.” *MLA Newsletter* Winter 2003: 3. Print.

be carrying out this work? Who will do it? Who should do it?”¹⁵ Not just the techno-geeks, we can declare, but also individuals schooled in the information gathering and ordering skills of the humanities will and must help meet what will be an ever accelerating demand for serious content in our digital domain.

But even as we develop and deepen the digital environment, we must strive to understand how we work in it and how it changes us. This, too, is a task fitted for the humanities, and many scholars are taking it up. My former colleague at the University of California, Los Angeles, N. Katherine Hayles, is one of the most prominent of those who have sought to bring the tools of literary and cultural analysis to this new realm. Calling our attention to the importance of understanding “the development of distributed cognitive environments in which humans and computers interact in hundreds of ways daily, often unobtrusively,” she writes, “The effect of moving in these distributed cognitive environments is often to enhance human functioning.... Of course, there is also a downside. As cognition becomes distributed, humans no longer control all the parameters, and in some situations, they don’t control the crucial ones, for example in automated weapon systems. Should we therefore hit the panic button and start building big bonfires into which we will toss all the computers?” she asks. No. She suggests that we “think about distributed cognition in historical terms, as something that began happening as soon as the earliest humans began developing technology. External memory storage, for example, isn’t limited to computers. It happen[ed] as early as humans [drew] animals and figures on cave walls to convey information about hunting and ritual activities. Putting contemporary developments in these kinds of contexts will help us...get away from scare scenarios and begin to think in more sophisticated ways about how human-computer interactions can be fruitful and richly articulated.”¹⁶

Professor Hayles’s work on “[s]trategies for understanding how words interact with their physical instantiations” is exactly what we need now, because “[i]n electronic environ-

¹⁵ McGann, Jerome J. “Literary Scholarship in the Digital Future.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 49.16: B7. Print.

¹⁶ “An interview/dialogue with Albert Borgmann and N. Katherine Hayles on humans and machines.” *The University of Chicago Press*. 1999. Web. 24 Aug. 2008.

ments words can swoop and fly, dance and morph, fade and intensify, change from black to red. How do these behaviors affect meaning, and how does verbal signification affect our understanding of these behaviors?”¹⁷

The scope of this change is epoch making. Every year, the world produces five exabytes of new information, and 92% of that production is stored not in print, but on magnetic media. How much, you may ask, is five exabytes? Merely 37,000 times the amount of information in the Library of Congress.¹⁸ It is a marvelous fact that the storage and transmission of that astonishing amount of information is *not* a technological problem. But its intellectual and practical organization is a challenge that our disciplines must engage.

The expanding online environment both requires and enhances the informational, methodological, and interpretive capacities of the humanities. This is a matter of great concern to ACLS. In each of the past five decades our Council has issued a report on how technologies can aid scholarship and teaching. Our 2006 report, titled *Our Cultural Commonwealth: A Report on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, which is available on our Web site, sought to provide decision-makers in higher education, government, and private philanthropy a prospectus for making digital investments.¹⁹

A world of ubiquitous computing with constant access to ever-increasing amounts of information will need the means to organize and contextualize that information, and that means lies near at hand, in our own humanistic traditions. The digital humanities require a special investment because they cultivate more than mere information. Having masses of texts, images, and sound online is not enough. If digitized materials are to be broadly useful, they need to be accompanied by tools for navigating, selecting, and analyzing the information available: they must be tools for turning information into knowledge. Who

¹⁷ Christopher, Roy. “N. Katherine Hayles: Material Girl.” 11 Feb. 2003. Web. 22 Aug. 2008.

¹⁸ “How Much Information? 2003” School of Information Management Systems, University of California, Berkeley. 27 Oct. 2003. Web. 22 Aug. 2008.

¹⁹ American Council of Learned Societies. *The Draft Report of the American Council of Learned Societies’ Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2006. Web.

possesses the ability to do that? It is humanities scholars themselves, who must apply their critical expertise to the selection and presentation of materials and to the development of tools for their use, such as search engines, online references, and standards for classifying data. The humanities provide information that leads to knowledge, as well as methods for creating and organizing new knowledge. As Howard Mumford Jones noted, we've been doing this for centuries: the dictionary and the encyclopedia are examples of the eminent practicality of humanistic learning in making information meaningful, relational, and contextual. The humanities increase our knowledge of knowledge itself. Philosophers ask how we know what we know. Linguists analyze how language structures meaning. Literary scholars explain how reading and writing not only yield meaning but inspire feeling. Scientists, when beginning research on a new problem, often turn to the history of science to understand the work that has gone before. And all of this knowledge—scientific, social scientific, and humanistic—is ultimately interconnected.

The online world should not be just the stage for the presentation of humanistic knowledge; it can itself be the object of humanistic study. If the humanities are about reading, writing, seeing, listening, and knowing, the digital realm is changing how we do each of these, and it will only grow as the means and site of human creativity and cultural expression. If we are to understand the online world as well as we understand the ancient world, humanities scholars will need the tools and capacities for the digital environment. In the United States, we sometimes talk of *the digital humanities* as if that term described a distinct specialization. I hope and expect that this term will become obsolete. In a few years, perhaps, no one will speak of the “digital humanities,” just as no one today refers to “the manuscript humanities” or “the print humanities.”

The phenomena of digitization and internationalization, therefore, both demand precisely the understanding and expertise the humanities provide. Let me exemplify this assertion and move from the general to the particular by presenting a small sample of recent work in these areas supported by the American Council of Learned Societies. Within the United States, our Council is perhaps best known for programs of fellowships and grants that assist humanists in developing and completing research projects of particular promise.

This year, ACLS will award more than \$9 million in fellowship stipends to over 200 individuals. We receive more than 2,500 applications each year for these awards, which are made through a process of rigorous peer review that involves the work of over 400 scholars, who essentially volunteer their time and expertise to evaluate the applications we receive.

We can be reasonably confident that the projects we support represent the vanguard of humanistic thinking in the United States. It is not possible, nor should it be, to characterize easily the wealth and variety of approaches to knowledge creation that are represented among our fellows. Nevertheless, a few salient themes do stand out. Over the last several years, approximately 20% of our awards have concerned the study of cultures and societies outside North America, Europe, and the ancient Mediterranean—cultures, that is, that were once studied principally within the framework of exotic “area studies” and thus outside of what was considered the mainstream of academia. Within this wealth of projects, we have also seen a recent surge of interest in exploring how countries with mixed ethnic, racial, and religious populations have flourished, as well as how trade and commerce have exerted a cultural, as well as economic, impact. We’ve also been struck by the wealth of multidisciplinary approaches to topics, with an especially strong interest in visual studies.

We have provided two fellowships, for example, to Professor Lucille Chia of the University of California, Riverside, for her research on the impact of trade with and migration to the Spanish Philippines on China’s Fujian Province during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Using sources mainly in Chinese and Spanish, she is examining both the local history of southern Fujian and this region’s role in the world’s early modern economy. She believes that patterns of Fujianese migration and sojourning in China and abroad—an early Chinese diaspora, she argues—provide insight into the dynamics of migration and the nature of transnational ethnic identities.

Another fellow, Professor Benjamin Schmidt of the University of Washington, is exploring how an earlier chapter in the history of globalization changed how the agents of that

transformation organized their own formal structures of knowledge. His project is titled *Inventing Exoticism: European Geography and “Globalism” Circa 1700* and explores how, during a critical moment of mercantile expansion, the Dutch produced an unprecedented quantity of works depicting distant peoples and places. These materials coincided, paradoxically, not with an expansion but a contraction of Dutch colonial efforts. This geographical project shaped Europe’s image of the globe and marketed an “exotic” world the Dutch had but a meager stake in possessing, thus questioning the place of power in the production of knowledge.

Other scholars are exploring the phenomenon of globalization as a new cultural form. Ania Spyra is a doctoral candidate at the University of Iowa. Her dissertation project, *Cosmopoetics: Multilingual Experiments in Transnational Literature*, was among the first to be supported by our major new program of early career fellowships for doctoral candidates and recent PhDs. “Multilingual texts inhabit the margins of literary traditions,” she notes. They are “unread and understudied, complex and perplexing like the realities they arise in and describe.” She will undertake an analysis of multilingual writings by a host of transnational authors who, she proposes, offer a new poetics for the globalizing world. Because it underscores the reality of linguistic diversity against the monolingual norms of nations and homogenizing claims of global English, her project describes this mode of expression as “cosmopoetics” and argues that it constitutes the most appropriate idiom of globalization.

Recognizing digital innovation is also important to ACLS. Three years ago, thanks to a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ACLS launched a special fellowship competition awarding support to projects that promised to use digital technologies to achieve scholarly excellence. The number and quality of the applications submitted confirmed our working assumption that the level of engagement with these technologies in the humanities community had reached a critical point, and that sustained support could have a catalytic effect.

Some of the projects we have funded aim to develop scholarly tools that will allow scholars to exploit the power of digital technologies to process data. Professor Yuri Tsivian of the University of Chicago, for example, proposes to complete the online application Cinemetrics, an extensive, multifaceted collection of digital data related to film editing that will provide a comprehensive, multifaceted picture of the factors that affected film editing in the span of its 100-year history. Users will view the correlations that exist among the film's dynamic profile, its genre, and its type of story; access the way in which cultural factors define the tempo of film editing; and grasp the interdependencies among cutting rates, shot scales, staging practices, acting styles, and camera movements.

Other projects we have funded deploy new technologies to “mash up” different forms of data—most notably geographic and historical data—in order to uncover patterns and linkages that help explain how cities, societies, and economies flourished or stagnated. Professor Todd Presner of UCLA, for example, won an award for his project, “Hypermedia Berlin,” which is “an interactive, Web-based research platform and collaborative authoring environment for analyzing the cultural, architectural, and urban history of a city space. Through a multiplicity of richly detailed, fully annotated digital maps connected together by interlinking ‘hotspots’ at hundreds of key regions, structures, and streets over Berlin’s nearly 800-year history, the project brings the study of cultural and urban history together with the spatial analyses and modeling tools used by geographers.”

These are just a few examples of the richness of current work in the humanities. A world—a public culture, a university education—without access to such research would be impoverished and diminished. The reverse is equally true: the academic humanities without a strong public rapport or collegiality within the university will deserve the marginalization those absences will ensure. We must assert that case, and we can.

As we do so, we must be sure not to forget that the greatest value of the humanities is not in the end their applicability to contemporary concerns, important as that is. We need always to assert their intrinsic worth. Professor Don Randel, the past president of the University of Chicago and current president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,

which is by far the strongest supporter of the humanities in America, made this point at the 2006 annual meeting of ACLS. “We [humanists] are engaged in the study of something profoundly important,” he proclaimed. The US government, he noted, is now interested in the study of Arabic, with an obviously practical aim. But those aims, President Randel suggested, are ultimately beside the point. Studying Arabic, he maintained, is “inherently worth doing—one ought to want to know Arabic because it is a beautiful language, and many wonderful things have been said and written in it.”

On this point I wish to conclude by quoting one of the twentieth-century’s most humane leaders, former Czech president Vaclav Havel. Speaking to the Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Paris, President Havel said:

[T]he world cannot just be explained, it must be grasped and understood as well. It is not enough to impose one’s own words on it: one must listen to the polyphony of often contradictory messages the world sends out and try to penetrate their meaning.²⁰

We as a society will not be able to listen to the world’s polyphony if we do not develop, conserve, and transmit to the next generation the learning and knowledge of the humanities. We will not be able to penetrate the meanings of that polyphony if we do not maintain the spirit of disciplined and interdisciplinary inquiry of humanistic scholarship. This is scholarship whose roots do lie in the humanism to which National Chengchi University has dedicated itself. Humanistic education can temper self-love with self-doubt and will balance self-fulfillment with an awareness of our connectedness to others. Humanism must always look backward even as it looks forward. It will be both innovative and conservative, valuing the local and embracing the global. We should ask for nothing less.

²⁰ Havel, Vaclav. *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice*. New York: Fromm International, 1998: 107. Print.