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Manifesto for the Humanities

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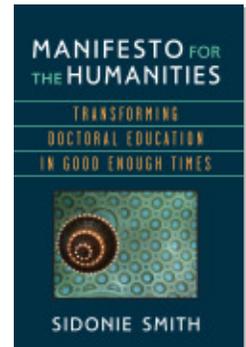
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To Roger Salomon, my revered dissertation advisor

Acknowledgments

What ended up as this long manifesto (perhaps an oxymoronic phrase) began as two short newsletter columns written in 2010 when I served as president of the Modern Language Association. Having watched so many doctoral students struggle through writing a proto-monograph dissertation, I thought, why not reimagine this capstone to doctoral study. That task, of making a case for expanding the repertoire of forms the dissertation might take, became the impetus for understanding what a 21st-century doctoral education in the humanities might look like. Over five years, I've been consumed with this question. But it has not been a lonely task. In fact, it has been a densely peopled, sociable, interactive, collaborative experience for me. And so, there are many thanks to spread around.

Over the years, MLA staff have given me invaluable advice, information, and support as I pursued this project on doctoral education. Executive Director Rosemary Feal exercises her leadership role with unflagging energy and enthusiasm. I was the beneficiary of her advocacy skills and her ability to flow with the criticism and with the opportunities for collaboration. David Laurence, Nelly Furman, Doug Steward, and Kathleen Fitzpatrick have always been willing to share their prodigious knowledge in various areas of the profession of professing. Members of the 2010 MLA Working Group on the New Dissertation, David Damrosch, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Richard Miller, and Kathleen Woodward, all brilliant around the table, helped me achieve a fuller understanding of the historical context, politics, and intellectual significance of proposing an alternative to the proto-monograph. Kathy Woodward, in particular, whom I came to know when she served on the MLA Executive Council, has been a friend and conspirator in transformation for almost a decade now. I benefited from the passionate, yet disparate styles of leadership and lines of approach to the transformation of doctoral education that the MLA presidencies of Russell Berman and Michael Bérubé put on the agenda.

Through 2011 and 2012 I was fortunate to serve as a member of two task forces on doctoral education: one constituted by the MLA, under the leader-

ship of Russell Berman, Professor of Comparative Literature and German at Stanford University, and the other constituted by the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council, under the leadership of Paul Yachnin, Director of the Institute for the Public Life of Arts and Ideas at McGill University. I owe a debt of gratitude to members of the MLA task force: Chair Russell Berman and Carlos J. Alonso, Columbia University; Sylvie Debevec Henning, East Carolina University; Lanisa Kitchiner, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art; Bethany Nowwiskie, University of Virginia; Elizabeth Schwartz Crane, San Joaquin Delta College, CA; Kathleen Woodward, University of Washington, Seattle; and staff liaisons Kathleen Fitzpatrick, director, MLA Office of Scholarly Communication, and David Laurence, director, MLA Office of Research and ADE. So too, my thanks to Paul Yachnin for inviting me to Canada and putting me in conversation with Robert Barsky and Jay Clayton, both of Vanderbilt University; Lesley Cormack, University of Alberta; Rebecca Duclos, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Geoffrey Harpham, National Humanities Center (United States); and Michael Jemtrud, Martin Kreiswirth, Bronwen Low, Christopher Manfredi, Stéfan Sinclair, and Leigh Yetter, all of McGill University. These interlocutors, voluble, visionary, practical, and politically astute, will recognize in this manifesto their concerns, perspectives, and imaginings of transformation.

I've been the beneficiary of numerous discussions with humanities scholars, librarians, and administrators brought together through initiatives funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The Open Review white paper project out of New York University brought me into conversation with Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Monica McCormick, Cathy Davidson, Dan Cohen, Nick Mirzoeff, Lisa Gitelman, Cheryl Ball, Avi Santo, and Eric Zinner. Activities organized by the Scholarly Communication Institute provided occasions to learn about and assess the important work of the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture led by Tara McPherson, *PressForward*, led by Dan Cohen, and the *MLA Commons*, led by Kathleen Fitzpatrick. SCI also cosponsored, along with the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes and centerNet, a broad conversation on the future of graduate education hosted by Kathleen Woodward at the Simpson Center of the University of Washington. The 15-institution collaboration that is the Humanities Without Walls initiative, led by Dianne Harris out of the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, has enabled me to engage with and learn from directors of humanities centers across the Midwest through HWW pilot projects focused on collaborative scholarship in the humanities and expanded professional development opportunities for doctoral students. Through participation here at the University of Michigan in the Mellon-funded initiative on subvention models for supporting scholarly publication in the humanities and humanistic social sciences, I learned

from Paul Courant and Meredith Kahn, both of them deeply knowledgeable about the economics of academic publishing and the new ecology of scholarly communication.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my colleague Paul Conway of Michigan's School of Information. Ever patient and generous, he provided expertise about all things related to digital scholarship in the humanities. He read through parts of Part II with a granularity that was entirely supportive and inescapably demanding. I know I am an observer when it comes to digitally envired and born-digital humanities scholarship; Paul helped make that status less tenuous for me.

Graduate students have also been invaluable colleagues throughout this project. Elizabeth Rodrigues, Emily Johnston, Christina LaRose, and Katy Kidd provided research support through all the stages of researching and writing this manifesto. Katy offered a close reading of Part I, and also taught me how to use Zotero as my bibliographic tool. Cass Adair, Tiffany Ball, and Jina Kim workshopped an earlier version of the introduction and Part I as part of our course Writing for Publication. Their enthusiasm buoyed me at that moment when the stress of staying alert to the implications of my argument and rhetorical tone gnawed away at me. They were particularly incisive in their comments about the multiple audiences to which I wanted to speak; and they sharpened my understanding of what is at stake in the transformation I propose for students alienated from the environment of the academy. I owe thanks also to the graduate student fellows at the Institute for the Humanities at Michigan for their close readings of parts of the manuscript over the past three years; and to students in Peggy McCracken's 2015 Theories of Posthumanism course for their openness to my manifesto.

Two generous readers for the University of Michigan Press understood my project, supported it, and offered close commentary and astute critique. And three peer reviewers, Charles Watkinson, A. W. Strouse, and Carlos Alonso accepted the invitation to read the penultimate version of this book online at the University of Michigan Press Digital Culture Books website. They offered critique and commentary and encouragement for my ideas. I admit I was hesitant to expose the book to open peer-to-peer review; but I knew I had to practice what the book was preaching. Having done so, I would recommend the process to anyone anxious to receive as much excellent critique as possible. My dear friend and coauthor Julia Watson also responded to the call to review the book online. She read the introduction and Part I with her eagle eye and challenged me again and again to peel away material that did not drive to my main argument about change. I recognize the labor all of them put into someone else's project.

I thank Leonard Cassuto for giving me access to *The Graduate School Mess*

as I was making final revisions. And I thank my colleagues here at Michigan, whose commitment to public scholarship and graduate education has changed the environment in which change takes place: Sara Blair, Julie Ellison, Jonathan Friedman, Margaret Hedstrom, Danny Herwitz, June Howard, Debbie Keller-Cohen, and Peggy McCracken. They have modeled for me the life of the engaged and visionary administrator. At the Institute for the Humanities, Patrick Tonks has kept me up-to-date on issues in digital pedagogies and scholarship; and Sheri Sytsema-Geiger and Doretha Coval have protected my time.

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I thank all those, too many to name, who sent me items they read in newspapers, or received in e-mail messages, or noticed on websites. Shards of their messages found their way into the final version. I am inspired by their collaborative spirit. I am appreciative as well of all the audiences I've addressed in the last several years in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Participants in those venues expressed their eagerness for change and voiced their critiques of my vision, especially of my call for expanding forms of the dissertation. I trust all the critiques energized me to make arguments in favor of that change more convincing.

And finally, as ever, there is the appreciation I owe to my partner, Gregory Grieco. He may no longer remember what this book is about; but he has never forgotten to support me lovingly and lastingly.