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50 YEARS OF THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES

Humanising the Future

THE HUMANITIES CAUSE: REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF THE HUMANITIES

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'... the cause of the traditional humanities subjects is less well served by defensive protests or last ditch stands against barbarism, than by constructive re-thinking of the role of the humanities in a modern Australian university.' R.M. Crawford, *The Future Development of the Humanities and the Social Sciences in the Australian Universities*, February, 1964.¹

Max Crawford was the driving figure behind the establishment of the Australian Academy of Humanities. I want to begin by talking a little about him - about how he conceptualized the humanities cause and how he believed the Academy could and should pursue this cause - as an introduction to the themes I wish to explore in this talk today. I will be drawing on my work on the history of the Academy as part of a broader study, funded by the ARC, on the history of institutions of the humanities in Australia. I am exploring the role of universities, libraries and learned societies in shaping the humanities in particular historical contexts from 1945. In my talk today, however, I will be considering the history of the Academy primarily in its early decades and the history of its predecessor, the Australian Humanities Research Council established formally in 1956.

By way of introduction too, I want to gratefully acknowledge Joel Barnes, a postdoctoral research associate working with me on the project - specifically on universities; and Saskia Beudel who has been helping me with the Academy history. We still have a lot of work to do on these institutions, and for me also on research libraries in Australia, so this is very much a work-in-progress talk.

¹ University of Melbourne Archives, Crawford Papers, Location U28/3, Reference No: 1991.0113, Vol./Box:48; p.v.



(Raymond) Max Crawford

Chair of the Australian Humanities Research Council, 1965-68

Source: The University of Melbourne Archives UMA/I/1954.

A great institution builder as well as a distinguished historian - known as much for the excellence of his teaching as the quality of his research - Max Crawford took over the role of Chair of the Australian Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the predecessor organization to the Academy, in 1965. An eloquent and energetic advocate for the humanities, he wrote many reports and speeches about the issues facing the humanities in the 1960s. And he became intensely committed during these years to transforming the AHRC into an Academy.

Initially, the Council focused on producing a major survey of the humanities in Australia, published in 1959. But from thereon it settled down into handing out small grants for publications until Crawford began to shake them up with his focus on becoming an Academy. Crawford envisaged the humanities cause for his proposed Academy as promoting their role in invigorating the cultural life of Australia and in deepening and extending understanding of our world. His vision drew on what he saw as the traditional values of the humanities but he also sought to modernize the humanities by creating a body that responded to changes in the institutions and society that supported them.

Central to Crawford's concerns in the 1960s was the impact of the growing numbers of university students and the implication of this 'bulge' for how the humanities should be understood and taught. In 1964, writing about the future of the Arts Degree in the 20th Century, Crawford reflected on the changes he had observed in the teaching of history in Australian universities. He acknowledged the work of George Arnold Wood, the first Challis Professor of History at the

University of Sydney, appointed in 1891, as fired by a 'confidence in the public importance' of the humanities. Wood, who Crawford admired greatly, had, he explained, 'no doubt of [history's] utility'. But Wood's 'utility', he commented, was a very different utility to the one he was now advocating. Wood believed, Crawford observed, in a university education that must 'fit and inspire men to accept work of responsibility and greatness'. It consisted in 'moulding the character of rulers'.²

Crawford diagnosed three major changes affecting universities in the 1960s that made such a 'heroic' view, as he called it, of the humanities and liberal education no longer relevant or appropriate: universities were no longer teaching 'an elite of gentlemen expected to exercise authority'; the ideal of a liberal education, as he saw it, had retreated extensively before the advances of technical and vocational education; and the sudden expansion of young people attending universities since the second world war meant that a far larger proportion were coming from homes that had given them little preparation for university study. These changes, Crawford argued, meant that humanities scholars were no longer certain of their role, lamenting that they now 'get by less because of any general faith in our importance than because of inertia'. His main message was that his colleagues should overcome their inertia and move beyond 'the mere adaptation to successive crises towards an acceptance of the responsibility for taking initiatives' that he hoped would prove 'imaginative enough' for the demands now facing them.³ These sentiments drove Crawford's belief in the importance of establishing an Academy and his ideas about how it should function.

Crawford felt the humanities should seek the same status as the sciences were now achieving through their Academy and that they 'could only do so by the same hard way as the Academy of Science had followed' – by Royal Charter. He was to recall in a letter to John Mulvaney in 1990 that the Council's Annual General Meeting in 1967 adopted his proposal for the Academy by a large majority after a 'stormy debate'. This accomplished, Crawford reported, he 'walked over to Keith Hancock's house and asked for his permission to nominate him as first President of the Australian Academy of Humanities'. Hancock's reply: 'I cannot refuse that invitation'.⁴

I have begun, then, to draw out the themes I wish to pursue in this presentation through this brief account of Max Crawford's commitment to the Australian Academy of Humanities:

- What sort of institution was the Academy initially imagined to be and how did this change over its first few decades?
- How did the Academy conceptualize the humanities cause over this time?

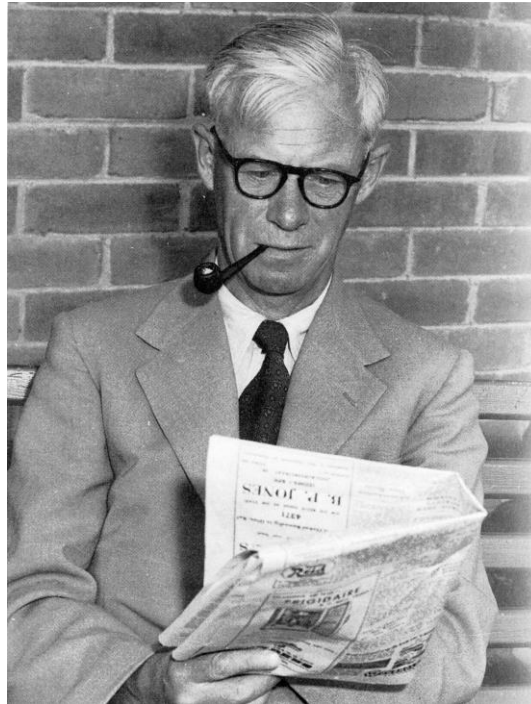
²UMA Crawford Papers, U28/4, Ref no 1991.0113, 8:174, part 2, R. M. Crawford, 'The Arts Degree in the 20th Century', Talk given with the Australian National University, 7th September 1964, 1-11.

³ Ibid, 20.

⁴ UMA, Crawford Papers; 1991.0113,9:28, part 1, letter R.M. Crawford to D.J.Mulvaney, 1 November 1990, 4.

- What does this suggest to us about how the Academy and other institutions of the humanities should conceive of this cause today and into the future?

What sort of beast?



Sir (William) Keith Hancock

Chair the Australian Humanities Research Council 1969
 First President the Australian Academy of the Humanities 1969-71

Source: Australian Academy of the Humanities Archives

W.K. Hancock, as most of you will know, was a brilliant historian and a man of immense gravitas. Crawford had done well. Having achieved his objective of the establishment of the Australian Academy of Humanities and selected a highly respected leader for this new organization, Crawford quickly withdrew from his intense level of engagement with the humanities cause of the previous few years. This was partly due to ill-health but also he wished to return to being a scholar himself. He was to be in Italy – Bellagio - pursuing this ambition when the General Meeting to establish the Academy’s by-laws and elect new Fellows was held in September 1969. A very wise man!

Hancock immediately began his advocacy for the humanities as soon as his proposed Presidency was announced. He was to be a highly skilled advocate, as Crawford had been. He wrote to Sir Robert Menzies, who by now was no longer Prime Minister, to announce that the Academy had been formally recognized by the granting of the Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth II in June 1969. The Australian Humanities Research Council will conduct ‘Operation Phoenix’, he declared, in which the ‘old bird dies in the fire; the new bird rises from the ashes. An Academy is born’. ⁵ Hancock confided that he would be seeking to make the Academy ‘a much more lively society than the

⁵ Australian Academy of Humanities Archives, Record Series 69/6 W.K. Hancock to Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies, 5 August 1969.

Council had been'. 'Planning for the future', he said, was to be 'the chief occupation of the September meeting', but at the same time he acknowledged the past as he invited Menzies 'as our colleague and friend' to join them at their annual dinner.⁶

Hancock was to use this image of the Phoenix again in writing to Menzies in late September 1969 to underline his ambition for the Academy to be more vigorous than the Council had been. 'The phoenix has now risen from its ashes, a lovelier bird and what matters more – a livelier one'.⁷ As Graeme Davison notes in his fine essay on the early days of the Academy, with this glorious image Hancock was seeking to present the new body in a favourable light to the former Prime Minister - and a man who still held considerable influence - while at the same time being acutely aware that not everyone believed it to be an organization without blemish.⁸ A.D. Hope and John LaNauze were concerned, for example, that a significant number of the proposed Foundation Fellows had been members of the Council and, as such, appointed by their universities in the first instance and, thereafter, through a process that lacked the rigor that was envisaged as essential to the credibility of the new Academy. Similarly, concerns were raised about the age of the membership - about the proposed Academy being dominated by, in Hope's terms, 'a chorus of ancient frogs singing the praises of the past'.⁹

While Hancock was concerned with these matters, his chief preoccupation on assuming the leadership role of the new Academy, articulated through his image of the phoenix rising (and at other times a snake with new skin),¹⁰ was to create a much more dynamic organization. Hancock commented to Crawford that the Council had become primarily focused on 'kindness' to its members through its publications grants program.¹¹ He immediately moved to make the Academy a more externally focused body with its main preoccupation being with projects of national significance, several of which had commenced prior to the Academy's formation. The projects were admirable: a dictionary of Australian English, an atlas of Australian place names and a tri-Academy project on environmental control, studying Botany Bay, for which the federal government was to grant 1 million dollars in 1973. These projects point to the way Hancock believed the humanities cause could be best promoted through undertaking 'scholarly enterprises' that brought together a wide range of expertise and engaged with significant problems in the national interest.

While pursuing this agenda for the Academy, Hancock remained a highly regarded scholar, respected for the depth and breadth of his research as well as his moral authority, wisdom, civility and huge personal dignity.¹² As such he personified the traditional virtues of the humanities as they

⁶ Ibid

⁷ AAHA 69/6 W.K. Hancock to Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies, 29 September 1969.

⁸ Graeme Davison, 'Phoenix Rising. The Academy and the Humanities in 1969', in Mark Finnane and Ian Donaldson (eds) *Taking Stock*, 33.

⁹ AAHA Record Series 69/3, Alec Hope to Keith (W.K. Hancock) 18 March (1969).

¹⁰ NLAA MS 5526 AHRC papers, Box 8, File 6/16, 1969 Correspondence, W.K. Hancock to H.C. Coombs, 6 August.

¹¹ AAHA, Record Series 69/6, W.K. Hancock to Max Crawford, 17 February 1969,

¹² See Jim Davidson's interesting discussion of Hancock's complexity as well as his 'aura' in his final chapter of *The Three-Cornered Life. The Historian WK Hancock* (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010) 500 – 513.

had been understood and performed in Wood's time. They were no doubt cultivated in Hancock through his education at the University of Melbourne by Ernest Scott, as a Rhodes Scholar in the 1920s at Balliol College, Oxford, and later as a Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford - an intense education of a particular period as discussed by Jim Davidson in his excellent biography of Hancock.¹³

But Hancock, like Crawford, was acutely conscious that the humanities could no longer rest on an understanding of their role that assumed an elite form of education as their basis. As well as being a man of great moral authority, he was also an exemplar of and advocate for a humanities of professionalized knowledges in which the inner virtues of the humanities scholar were being transformed into a set of methodological prescriptions for the acquisition of knowledge.¹⁴ The authority of the humanities scholar was becoming increasingly dependent in the 20th Century on one's labour and expertise rather than scholarly personae. Hancock pursued a rigorous approach to historical research and placed a great emphasis on the importance of 'discovery' in history, most clearly demonstrated in the title of his book *Discovering Monaro*.¹⁵ This commitment too was no doubt shaped in part by Ernest Scott who had advocated a 'scientific' history, encouraging students to work in archives or, in the early stages of their training at least, on printed collections of documents.¹⁶

Hancock and Crawford, however, were very much aware too of what they saw as the dangers of specialization arising from the new modes of acquiring knowledge that were becoming dominant in the humanities. In articulating concerns about the increasing narrowness of focus in studies in the humanities, Hancock had a strong and continuing commitment to the humanities cause in the form of a modernized liberal education that rested, in his terms, on 'span'. Span, he explained, combines 'the immediate and intense study' of an object with 'a consciousness of the relation of things'.¹⁷ But he placed considerable emphasis too on engaged knowledge. As Tom Griffiths notes, his lexicon of moral and scholarly engagement included 'words such as "attachment", "craft", "justice", "span" and "witness"'.¹⁸ This was apparent in his committing the new Academy to focusing on a range of projects of national significance.

Hancock and Crawford together thus ensured that the Academy reflected and was contributing to a complex reconfiguration taking place in the humanities in the 1960s and '70s in Australia.¹⁹ In their ways of conducting themselves and in their writing and activities for the humanities, they represented, at one and the same time, several different ideas of the humanities cause that drew

¹³ Jim Davidson, 22 – 79.

¹⁴ See, Peter Harrison, 'The natural philosopher and the virtues' in Conal Condren et al (eds) *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe. The Nature of a Contested Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) 202-208.

¹⁵ Tom Griffiths, 'The Journey to Monaro' in *The Art of Time Travel. Historians and their Craft* (Black Inc., Carlton, Vic., 2016) 42-43.

¹⁶ Stuart Macintyre and Julian Thomas, *The Discovery of Australian History. 1890 – 1939* (Melbourne University Press) 3.

¹⁷ W.K. Hancock, *Professing History* (Sydney University Press, 1976) 6.

¹⁸ Tom Griffiths, 43.

¹⁹ Ian Hunter explores different aspects of this reconfiguration in his article, 'The Mythos, Ethos, and Pathos of the Humanities', *History of European Ideas*, Vol.40, No.1, 2014, 11-36.

on the different contexts in which they operated and had been educated. As highly respected scholars they stood for a humanities that was about producing 'men of moral purpose', personal dignity and scholarly excellence. At the same time, as scholars they had adopted a humanities in which professionalized methods of research were increasingly regarded as crucial. But as leaders in the humanities community they were committed too to ensuring that they were responsive to their times, to adapting imaginatively to new demands in terms of student numbers, in modernizing liberal education and, for Hancock in particular, in demonstrating the utility of the humanities in addressing major issues of the time.

The humanities cause, as envisaged by these early leaders of the Academy, then, was complex and expansive, a cause to which they devoted considerable effort and careful thought.

An Activist Academy

The Royal Charter for the Academy as announced in June 1969 stated 8 objects and purposes for which it was to be constituted. Relations with government were not explicitly mentioned in these objects; yet this relationship had been central to the activities of the Council beforehand and would continue to be so in the work of the Academy. Hancock and Crawford were men of social influence and mixed with ease with politicians and other key public figures of the day. This built on a tradition within the Council in which its leaders were highly adept at using their connections to pursue support for this organization. A.D. Trendall, the distinguished classicist and first Master of ANU's University House, was probably the most notable figure in this regard. His membership of various boards and national committees, such as the Council of the National Library of Australia, the Martin Committee, and the Australian Universities Commission, demonstrate how highly respected and successful he was in building networks of influence for the humanities in the early days of the Council. Similarly, Archibald Grenfell Price, one of the most active founding members of the Council, had close connections with Robert Menzies, in particular, which proved immensely important in gaining his support, personal and financial, for the Council in its initial stages.

But networks of influence were changing in Australia. By the mid-1970s, key figures of the Academy were no longer able to draw so effectively on connections with politicians and major public servants. And as John Mulvaney was to observe, nor were Fellows of the Academy on the councils of national cultural institutions to the same extent as their predecessors had been.²⁰ For a time the Academy was to become a 'quiet affair' for various reasons.²¹ But this began to change in the early 1980s as a result primarily of changes in government processes and frameworks but as a result too of developments within the Academy itself.

²⁰ NLAA, MS9615/13/3, John Mulvaney papers, 'Mulvaney on the Clever Country', *ANU Reporter*, 12 June 1991.

²¹ A description used by Graeme Clarke, see: NLAA, Graeme Clarke and Daniel Connell, *Graeme Clarke interviewed by Daniel Connell in the Australian Academy of Humanities Fellows oral history project*, 2014. This assessment is also confirmed by J.A. Passmore, the President of the time, who pointed to the political turmoil of the Commonwealth government making the Academy's relationship 'almost non-existent', AGM 7 proceedings 1976, President's Report; but also note comments by B.W. Smith as President AGM 10 Proceedings 1979 who commented that the AAH was finding it difficult to identify useful business in the 1970s that wasn't already being addressed by universities and other committees such as the ARGs.

After the second world war, the Commonwealth Government had become increasingly involved in research funding for universities and in developing national research policies. This began in earnest in 1965 with the establishment of the Australian Research Grants Committee, to be replaced in 1988 by the Australian Research Council (ARC), and was to become more intense with the reconstitution of the Australian Science and Technology Council (ASTEC) in 1976. As the Government moved to establish a set of national objectives for research through ASTEC, both the Academies of Humanities and of Social Sciences became wary of these developments. They sent a joint statement to ASTEC advocating the inclusion of their disciplines in any such considerations. Within a few years, 'goaded by the subordinate status' still being allocated to their two academies, as Stuart Macintyre notes, they began to intensify their pressure to gain representation on the Council.²²

In 1986 the Government turned its attention to the learned academies themselves – in particular to their funding. This appears to have been prompted by a letter from the then President of the Academy of Humanities, G. A. Wilkes, to the Prime Minister, R.J.Hawke, complaining about the great disparity in the funding provided to the other three academies compared to Humanities (who received just one tenth of the \$600,000 allocated to the academies as a whole he pointed out).²³ The review recommended restoring funding to mid-1970s levels for all academies. But it was also to articulate new guidelines for determining their funding. The draft report was very rigid on this point, proposing a new principle that the academies were to be expected 'to undertake activities which are in the national interest' and 'contribute to broad Government and Departmental objectives'.²⁴ In their responses to this draft report, the Academies were successful in making the final guiding principles more respectful of the purposes for which the academies had originally been established - as organizations promoting research and scholarship in the various disciplines they represented. But this expectation about contributing to government objectives was retained in the final report.²⁵ The Academies were being drawn in to enhancing the government's advisory and policy-making capabilities, to increasingly playing a service role for government.

By the second half of the 1980s a reforming Government and, in particular, a reforming Minister, John Dawkins, were beginning to develop challenging ideas about how to tie universities to economic and social policy. The Academy was now providing responses to an exhausting number of policy papers. Some were from ASTEC that had taken on board the Dawkins reforms related to research. Others came from the Higher Education Council established by Dawkins as was NBEET – the National Board of Education, Employment and Training - under which the ARC operated. Of course the documents that were to attract the most attention and dismay from the Academy at this

²² Stuart Macintyre, *The Poor Relation. A history of social sciences in Australia*, (Melbourne University Press, 2010) 213-215.

²³ AAHA File 1985-86 AAH-Government Relations: Review of Government Relations with Learned Academies. Corresp.; Report (uncatalogued papers), G.A.Wilkes, to The Honourable R.J.L. Hawke, 21 March 1985.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.228.

²⁵ AAHA, File: 1985-86 AAH-Government Relations: Review of Government Relations with Learned Academies, *Review of the Government with the Learned Academies*, sent with covering letter from W.J. Taggart to J.P. Harding, 4 July 1986.

time, were, first, the Green Paper and then, the White Paper through which John Dawkins announced his intentions to transform the system of universities, technical institutes and colleges of advanced education into a 'Unified National System'.

With these reforms instituted by Dawkins, 'a revolution swept through universities ...transforming them from elite institutions into a mass system of higher education'²⁶ that had many implications for universities as well as the institutes and colleges also caught up in these changes. As Ian Hunter has observed, the objective of the Dawkins' reforms was to 'harness universities and colleges to the problems of national productivity and national debt'. This was not something peculiar to Australia, he adds, but it was articulated here more in terms of making higher education a mass education system and focusing on equality of opportunity.²⁷ The implications for teaching and research in the humanities were profound. In the area of research, government requirements that funding be tied to performance in terms of serving national interest became much more clearly articulated and drove policy interventions extensively in universities. They also led to research performance increasingly dominating university policy, system-wide as well as at the level of individual universities. And for humanities scholars it was a very particular model of research that seemed to gain the upper hand in this context: what they have frequently typified then and since as 'the science model'.²⁸

By 1993 the Academy had moved on to some extent from its preoccupation with and alarm about these changes. Deryck Schreuder and John Mulvaney, as President and Secretary respectively, announced that the Academy was becoming 'centrally involved with the character of Australian educational debate, with issues in Australian culture and society'. It was no 'academic club for "old boys" and "old girls", of the academic profession in Australia', they proudly announced. The Academy was now 'very much about a dual mission, of developing fundamental knowledge about the human condition and also about intervention in policy developments for Australia'.²⁹ In his 1993 annual report as President, Schreuder noted the growing demands on the Academy for advice and policy input.³⁰

²⁶ Stuart Macintyre et al, *No End of a Lesson. Australia's Unified National System of Higher Education* (Melbourne University Press, 2017) publisher's back cover statement.

²⁷ Ian Hunter, 'Personality as a Vocation: The political rationality of the humanities' in *Accounting for the Humanities. The Language of Culture and the Logic of Government*, Ian Hunter et al eds (Griffith University, Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Brisbane, 1991) 7.

²⁸ Graham Nerlich made such a comment in letter, 23rd December 1986, to Professor S.A. Wurm then President of AAH in his notes on a submission by the Department of Science to the ASTEC inquiry into Higher Education Research and Development. See AAHA, AAH-Government Relations, ASTEC 1985-86 [check 2nd drawer]. However this concern was also raised much earlier by Ian Maxwell in his essay on 'English' in A. Grenfell Price (ed.) *The Humanities in Australia. A Survey with special reference to the Universities*, (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1959) 138. It is also a claim that continues to be made by Fellows in various contexts.

²⁹ NLAA MS9615/13/6 John Mulvaney Papers, 'Why learning has taken on a human face' by Deryck Schreuder and John Mulvaney, *The Canberra Times*, Wednesday, 27 January 1993, no page number.

³⁰ Australian Academy of Humanities, *Proceedings. 1993*, (Canberra, 1994) 74.



Deryck Schreuder

President of the Australian Academy of Humanities 1992-95

Source: Australian Academy of the Humanities Archives

The Academy was not being captured by government, however; it played an active role in this development as it unfolded. For instance, when ASTEC established a committee in 1992 to examine the 'contribution of the humanities and social sciences to economic development ...', the Academy successfully challenged the initial terms of reference and sought to ensure that they were consulted in this review. As a consequence, Schreuder was to serve on the Reference Group for the committee.

The resulting report published in 1993, *Bridging the Gap – The social sciences, humanities, science and technology in economic development*, opened up a significant role for the Academies of the Humanities and of the Social Sciences by recommending that the ARC commission them to undertake a study of the research effort in these fields and thereafter develop a strategy for research and training in the humanities and social sciences.³¹ From the Academy of the Humanities, the three volume report, *Knowing Ourselves and Others*, resulted.³² Its recommendations were extensive, directed at state and federal governments, government departments, universities, the Australian Research Council, and the Academy itself.

³¹ *Bridging the Gap. The social sciences, humanities, science and technology in economic development*. A report to the Prime Minister by the Australian Science and Technology Council, May 1993 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1993).

³² *Knowing Ourselves and Others, The Humanities in Australia into the 21st Century*, Vols. 1-3 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998).

This report was a forceful statement of a major change for the Academy of Humanities in its relationship with government. Crawford, Hancock and their predecessors in the Australian Humanities Research Council had sought government support for the Academy itself. Now the Academy was increasingly playing a role in developing government policies not just about the humanities but about universities, other related institutions such as libraries, and research more generally. Staff from the Department of Science in drawing up the funding guidelines for the Academies in 1986 saw this as perfectly appropriate, pointing out that they were funded by Government.³³ For the Academy, it meant that the humanities cause became increasingly focused on promoting their social, cultural and economic importance to government.

As an activist body the Academy had then changed significantly in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. The pressures were huge on an organization that was considerably smaller in terms of staffing even than the one we have today but nevertheless a sense of satisfaction could be gained from what was seen as their increased recognition by government. As Schreuder concluded in 1993:

Much of the reason for this increasing load of pressures and actions is a positive reflection of the rising standing of the Academy within the higher education and research policy debates in the “post-Dawkins era”. ... It is also a reflection of the fact that **the Academy, through its Council, has moved to take a pro-active stance by initiating projects in public interventions which advance the case of the humanities.** These are difficult and rather utilitarian days for liberal learning, in which **it is crucial that the Academy takes the initiative. We need to put the view of humanists within the public sphere.** [my emphases]³⁴

It is this final sentence that I want to take as my focus for my brief concluding remarks as it reminds us of a wider sense of the humanities cause that has been retained by the Academy beyond that associated primarily with promoting and serving the humanities through its relationship with government.

A Public Humanities

As I indicated in the first part of my paper, W.K. Hancock was passionate about the need for the Academy to take a lead in creating an engaged humanities. The projects that he established or maintained as core to the Academy’s purpose and as exemplary for the humanities were essential for the ‘snake with a new skin’, a ‘phoenix arising’, that he envisaged. The humanities cause in this sense was about a commitment to what John Frow has called the ‘public humanities’. Frow argues

³³AAHA 1985-86 AAH - Government Relations, Review of Govt Relations with Learned Acads, Corresp; Reports and uncatalogued papers, ‘Government Support of the Learned Academies’, discussion paper attached to letter to J P Hardy, Secretary AAH from R J Badger, Assistant Secretary, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Science, 8 October 1985, p.2.

³⁴ Deryck Schreuder, President’s Report 1993, The Australian Academy of the Humanities, *Proceedings 1993* (The Australian Academy of Humanities, Canberra, ACT, 1994) 74.

that humanities scholars should be utilizing the particular knowledges, methodologies and insights from the disciplines that have been brought together historically in various institutional forms as the humanities to ensure that we engage with the broader community's interests and preoccupations, the 'real world of public representations, of public fantasies, and of public lies'.³⁵

The annual symposia, public lectures and occasional public fora of the Academy are key devices through which it currently seeks to engage with community interests, to sustain and promote a public humanities. As I indicated previously, both Max Crawford and W.K. Hancock were acutely concerned with a humanities cause that responded imaginatively to the social and cultural changes around them. This Symposium has addressed this challenge very effectively. It has reminded us of how volatile and complex this world of ours is. This was very much of a concern of Hancock who believed the historian was bound to accept the complexity and contingency of human experience.³⁶ Ross Gibson has argued recently that we need new cultural forms to help us understand 'our unstable contemporary lives ... buffeted' as we are, 'with ever altering values, opportunities, anxieties, histories and obligations'. He suggests that we need a 're-disciplined capability', as he calls it in another essay - that can bring together intuitive and analytical skills and perspectives to 'allow us to become skeptical and curious investigators of changeable systems'.³⁷ The humanities, in these terms, can be a set of disciplines that bring together imagination as well as analytical skills to help us think about the future.³⁸ To do so we need to think more adventurously about the relationship between the humanities and the creative arts as of key importance in thinking about the sort of humanities that might be appropriate for the future. The relationship between the humanities and the creative arts has been a vexed issue that has been with the Academy since its formation and before that, also concerned the Australian Humanities Research Council. Nugget Coombs, an honorary member and then Fellow, for instance, was adamant that the Academy should be paying far more attention to what he referred to as the 'living humanities'.³⁹ Similarly, A.D. Hope argued for greater attention to be given to 'the muses' rather than the 'middlemen', 'the nurses and handmaids of culture'.⁴⁰

What this Symposium suggests to me is that rather than resting on what are often ahistorical claims about what might be the value of the humanities in this complex world that we live in, institutions of the humanities, such as universities, learned academies, professional journals and societies in association with the GLAM sector, might start to think collectively about what might be required of the humanities for the future. As Sylvester Johnson, Founding Director of the Virginia Tech Center for the Humanities, has suggested, the humanities should no longer just be about critique or

³⁵ John Frow, 'The Public Humanities', Keynote Address to a conference on The Future of the Humanities, St Hugh's College, Oxford, March 2004, pp.278-280.

³⁶ W.K. Hancock, *Country and Calling* (Faber and Faber, London, 1954) 215.

³⁷ Ross Gibson, *Changescapes. Complexity Mutability Aesthetics* (UWA publishing, Crowley, W.A., 2015) 58; 66; Ross Gibson, 'The Known World', *TEXT Special Issue. Creative and practice-led research current status, future plans*, (Oct.2010), 10.

³⁸ I am grateful to Ross Gibson for suggesting I emphasize imagination as part of my argument here.

³⁹ AAHA Record Series 6/66 1969 Correspondence, Nugget Coombs to Keith Hancock, 12 August 1969.

⁴⁰ A.D. Hope, *The Literary Influence of the Academies*, in *Proceedings of the Australian Academy of the Humanities* (Canberra, 1970) 72.

understanding what has been, but should be actively involved in thinking about what it means to be human for the future, what is human identity, about the conundrum of personhood, in this age of intelligent machines and other forms of technology innovation. We need to try to figure out how to use this technology so we are not just waiting for it to happen.⁴¹ This symposium has been engaged in precisely this sort of exercise.

So rather than focusing only on protecting, defending or promoting what the humanities have done or their current expertise as the humanities cause – all of which are important at particular points in time - perhaps the institutions of the humanities could also set out to create a civil conversation about what sorts of approaches the various humanities disciplines might adopt to enhance their utility, take ‘initiatives’ in Max Crawford’s terms, that would be ‘imaginative enough’ for the demands now facing us. This sort of utility would be about ‘fertile knowledge’ rather than ‘infertile’ in his terms.⁴² And this might mean that instead of public conversations about the humanities being confined to those involving attacks on the humanities, perhaps we could seek to create a more positive public dialogue about the humanities.

As Hannah Arendt argued,

We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking it we learn to be human.⁴³

For the humanities to humanize the future - which I take to be the claim that lies behind the title of this symposium - I suggest then the institutions of the humanities need to collaborate and be more active in creating public fora for discussions about what is happening now and into the future – not just about technology but the precarious nature and contingency of our world more generally. And in doing this, I would hope, we can create greater discussion about how the humanities themselves might evolve to understand and yes, humanize this world.

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⁴¹ Sylvester Johnson, EngE Seminar, Youtube video, 25 April 2018.

⁴² UMA, Crawford Papers, 1991.0113, 9:28, part 1, letter R.M. Crawford to D.J. Mulvaney, 1 November 1990, 4.

⁴³ Hannah Arendt, ‘On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing’, transl. Clara and Richard Winston, *Men in Dark Times* (Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1968) 25.

My story today has necessarily focused on outstanding men but I want to finish with photos of Kathleen Fitzpatrick and Margaret Clunies Ross, as a tribute to two great women who played pioneering roles in the Academy.



Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Foundation member of the Australian
Research Council, 1956

Foundation Fellow of the Australian Academy
of Humanities, 1969

Source: The University of Melbourne Archives



Margaret Clunies Ross

President of the Australian Academy of
Humanities, 1995-98

Source: Australian Academy of the Humanities Archives