

May 6, 2019

Provost Persis Drell
Stanford University
persis@stanford.edu



Homi K. Bhabha | Director
Anne F. Rothenberg Professor
of the Humanities

Dear Provost Drell,

It is not my habit to write unsolicited letters to senior colleagues at other universities on matters that principally concern their own colleagues and campuses. But I have some knowledge regarding the humanities and university presses that might be worthy of your attention. I am imposing on your time, dear Provost, precisely because the flourishing of Stanford University Press is a matter of national and international importance.

The response to your University's initial decision has made this quite plain to you and your colleagues, and whatever your particular views on the business model may be, it must have been a matter of great pride to you and the university that the fate of the press was a matter of such deep concern at a time of the academic year when faculty are overwhelmed with matters concerning the end of the semester.

So, first, let me congratulate you and your colleagues for giving the world a university press of remarkable distinction that has deeply informed all our careers—as students, professors and, most significantly, as intellectuals. Many university presses have chosen to take a more commercial turn or to restrict themselves to monographs of purely academic relevance. Stanford has miraculously maintained—or better still, created—a very distinctive place for itself which bridges academic distinction with intellectual innovation. I have emphasized the remarkable intellectual impact of your press because too often the value of academic erudition does not reach out to the larger issues of our times—ethical, political, social, cultural. Intellectual impact takes the best work of the university into the world in order to provide values and norms that determine our thought and work as cultural citizens involved in transforming the public sphere. The work of the university press, like the work of the humanities, is to build communities *within* the world, and not mere models of it. I can think of no press that has taken this commitment more seriously over a sustained period of time than has SUP.


It is not for me, dear Provost, to speak above my station and tell you and your colleagues how to “balance your books.” I have neither the expertise nor the information to do so. But however you decide to balance them, do remember that the books that have appeared in the Stanford imprint have been the ballast for our profession. We choose our faculty colleagues on the basis of the impact of their writings and the university press is the great mediator that gives us a sense of our colleagues as academics and as teachers. As a college student in Bombay, much before I had any experience of the life of the mind at Oxford, Harvard or Stanford, the books from these university presses were part of my intellectual life. Our universities could not afford their own imprints and it was the great university presses that gave us our early imagining of what a vital education was, and what it could do for you. I ask you to enhance this tradition for a world in which your books make a

difference you cannot quite imagine—a difference that is life changing and feeds those academic aspirations that connect the asymmetric global world in a cosmopolitan conversation. Your press brings Palo Alto to a world hungry for ideas and starved of resources. Secure its flourishing future and we will all be willingly in your debt.

Let me end by returning to what I do know quite well—the situation here at Harvard. HUP is an indispensable symbol of just how seriously Harvard takes the humanities, the social sciences, and the many other fields HUP publishes. You have the very good fortune to have SUP, which should be treated as a treasured asset that must be nurtured in order for its contribution to Stanford, and the world, be manifested in the best way possible.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Bhabha', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Homi K. Bhabha 
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