IN FOCUS: Scholarly Publishing

Introduction

by MARY C. FRANCIS, editor

When Cinema Journal published an In Focus on publishing’s role in the scholarly ecosystem in 2005, it was billed “The Crisis in Publishing.” The thoughtful contributions to the 2005 feature made it clear where the greatest pressures were being applied to the system and sounded the call to “resist the pull into calamity.”

Did calamity strike in the intervening years? Circling back to the 2005 In Focus had me nodding in greeting about familiar challenges, and there have been many vexing changes since, particularly in the publishing industry as a whole, where Amazon holds ever-greater sway, which is not to say that as a field we have been collectively sitting around wringing our hands. One of the enjoyable things about being a publisher now, at least for me, is experiencing the tremendous amount of thoughtful energy that so many smart people are dedicating to transforming scholarly communication. Have writers and publishers heeded Eric Smoodin’s call in the 2005 In Focus to “take a deep breath” and confront the issues that scholars and publishers can and should control calmly, “with more knowledge and less fear”? I think many have.

In the lead-up to the 2011 Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) conference, Rob White, the editor of Film Quarterly; Matthew Bernstein, of Emory University (and Film Quarterly’s book review editor); and I were discussing scholarly publishing, and our discussion led to Matthew’s and my organizing and cochairing a panel at the meeting in New Orleans. There was tremendous energy at the panel, due in part to the wide range of responses we got from all the grad students, professors, critics, and other editors who attended. This feature grew out of that stimulating occasion. The vibe at the panel was this: if you see a glass half empty, you see a continuing crisis in scholarly publishing, but if you see a glass half full, you see the constant reality of growth and change in the world of scholarship. It is fundamentally true that publishers are still, always, seeking scholarship of the highest
quality, the best, most exciting, and accessible writing in our field that they can find. Quality is the ultimate standard that all publishers seek to honor. Each of these essays makes that point.

These essays also make the point that the path from a writer’s brilliant ideas to the largest, most varied group of readers grows ever more costly and requires ever-greater strategic flair on the part of the publisher. Jennifer Crewe’s survey of the current landscape makes a matter-of-fact case for presses’ need to be increasingly strategic, selective, and nimble, not just for their own continued health but also for the benefit of the writers whose work they disseminate and the readers who seek it. The mission of scholarly communication encompasses many interlocking readerships—scholars, students, the interested general public—and hence requires a careful balancing of the priorities of those readers and, by extension, the priorities of the press as a business enterprise. Leslie Mitchner, whose essay in the 2005 In Focus took stock of the supposed “good old days,” again looks back, this time to examine more closely how we are moving ever further into a world where the norms of online commerce, and the technology required to succeed there, challenge long-cherished ideas about what kind of physical community the world of books should be. These challenges were certainly on the horizon in the pre-Kindle days of 2005, but they are intensifying in ways that younger colleagues and students will soon take completely for granted.

The essays by Susan Bielstein and Ken Wissoker highlight two developments that were also on the horizon in 2005 but were not yet as acute: the accelerating changes in the intellectual property climate and the transformative (and hence, disruptive) power of digital technologies to literally reshape scholarship. As Bielstein points out, fair use has long been a valuable, if frequently misunderstood, tool for scholars in all fields, particularly those concerned with the arts. SCMS has been an early actor in helping rationally define, and thereby protect, the rights of scholars to make use of copyright-protected materials in their work. The society has created useful best-practices guidelines for both teaching and publishing. (If you are not yet familiar with these, it would be well worth your time to visit the SCMS website.) But as for-profit content industries, including the Hollywood studios, struggle to adjust to a world in which anyone with a reasonable amount of network capability can access clips, tracks, and files, scholars and scholarly publishers have often responded with defensive timidity. Bielstein’s call for the SCMS to be more active, and bolder, on behalf of the fair-use rights of its constituency, is echoed in the roundtable conducted by Peter Decherney and his colleagues in this issue of Cinema Journal.

Ken Wissoker’s essay on the exciting and unsettling potential of digital technology to transform the shape of scholarship offers a heartening view of current scholarly communication. Wissoker takes seriously the idea that we now have the potential to bring scholarship to a wide range of readers in virtually any form—or format—that end users might find most useful. The possibilities the essay surveys are in their way a thrilling answer to some of the questions asked in the 2005 In Focus about how tenure might be reconceived to accept a wider variety of intellectual labor and a greater range of types of scholarship. But the same issues arise. How do scholars decide the best, most logical way to convey their findings to readers? How to stretch publishers’ resources in order to encompass these many exciting new options? How to preserve
these innovative new forms of scholarship so that scholarship remains accessible to new readers over the long term? There are many answers to questions like these. As with fair-use issues, many of the most exciting attempts to find answers to these questions (several of them named in Wissoker’s essay) have come from the field of Film and Media Studies. Publishers active in the field are as eager as the readers and writers they serve to continue to experiment and to seek the most effective solutions to the needs of their constituents, although the risks and costs are high. Here the calls from Patrice Petro in the 2005 In Focus for greater institutional and financial support for varied scholarly work, experimentation, and new initiatives should be repeated. Collaboration among all the actors in scholarly publishing is crucial to making a more flexible system of scholarly communication possible for writers, readers, and (lest we forget our allies!) librarians at institutions of all sizes and types.

All of these essays make it clear that there is no magic bullet that will dispatch the challenges that face scholarly communication today. The problems are too varied and complex. Scholarly communication sits at the crossroads of two venerable institutions—higher education and publishing—that face significant economic challenges and radical changes in the habits of readers and writers. But for this publisher, the open questions that face us are a gratifying challenge.

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We’re Definitely Not in Kansas Anymore—But Are We in Oz?

by JENNIFER CREWE

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colightly publishing—indeed, all publishing—is being restructured because of revolutionary changes in the business, first and foremost the technological advances in producing and delivering books in both print and electronic form. These changes have coincided with the effects of the recession; budget cuts at universities, particularly library budgets; and diminished student funds for books. The advent of the system of patron-driven purchasing of scholarly books by college and university libraries and the concurrent elimination of the standing orders for university press books by libraries, present new challenges for the presses, which face significant reductions in book sales.¹

At the same time, e-book sales are rising exponentially, somewhat offsetting the lower sales of print copies but not replacing that revenue.

¹ Patron-driven acquisition, or PDA, is a system whereby a library will purchase a book only if someone searching for that book asks for it to be purchased.
Scholars—particularly young scholars looking for publishers for their first books—face a landscape that is quite different from the one that their mentors navigated. Our procedures for deciding which books to publish have largely remained the same, as have our standards of selection. But some of the processes of publication, and most of the processes of dissemination and making our books discoverable, have radically changed. In the next few pages I provide some thoughts about the role of the scholarly publisher and author in the current climate, and I explain why publishers today must maintain two business models simultaneously.

One thing that hasn’t changed much in the world of scholarly publishing is the way manuscripts are selected for publication. Many worthy manuscripts are submitted to university press editors each year, and many are turned down without a formal review process. I am often asked—or if not asked directly, I sense the unspoken question—“Why didn’t the press consider my book?” Usually the answer has nothing to do with the perceived quality of the book and everything to do with “fit.” It’s difficult to overemphasize the importance of fit in an acquisitions editor’s initial appraisal of a book.

Although acquisitions editors at university presses are usually given quite a lot of freedom to decide which books to consider and how to shape their own lists, they nevertheless must work within certain strictures. Usually the editor, editorial director, sales and marketing director, publicist, director of the press, and chief financial officer all have to believe in the broader goals of a list. For example, a press might have decided to publish books in Film and Media Studies, but certain decisions had to be made and then adhered to: How big will the list be? Two books per year? Five? What kind of revenue can it be expected to generate annually? Will it be largely monographic, or will it include textbooks, or trade books? Will it be broad and include books in the entire field of visual culture? Or will it focus on film only, or on film and television? Will new media be included? Journalism? Radio? If the list is defined as covering film and television only, a book on radio would be rejected without formal consideration. If a series editor is working with the acquisitions editor, together they will come up with a series description and plan. If managed well, a series can be a tremendous help in developing a clear focus for the list, thus drawing authors to the press. Once the parameters of a list have been established and the editor’s colleagues have agreed on them, the press must feel confident that any particular new book under consideration will complement the list’s profile and reach its intended audience.

These decisions have to be made, because if a list lacks focus—if the editor publishes, say, three books a year in the field but just dabbles in this or that sub-area—he or she runs the danger of having a diffuse list that is difficult to characterize. Good editors want their press to be known and distinguished for doing a certain kind of book within a certain subject area. This helps them attract authors who are writing books that are appropriate for the list, and it helps the list develop a strong profile in the field, distinct from the lists of other presses.

Editors at university presses can at times lead a kind of schizophrenic existence. A book that is exciting because of its scholarly innovation and significance as a solid contribution to the field is often—but not always—one that has the lowest revenue projections. This is because many pathbreaking monographs, especially those by first-time authors, are not useful as classroom texts, and neither are they accessible to general
readers, so they can be sold only to a couple of hundred scholars and to libraries. (Today publishers can expect only about 100–150 copies of a monograph to be sold to libraries.) Ask any acquisitions editor and she or he will be able to tell you at least one story of a prize-winning book that everyone in the field not only seems to have heard of but also admires, talks about, and cites but that has sold only 300–400 copies. Editors see many, many manuscripts that are worthy of publication in any given year, manuscripts that are highly praised by mentors or peers of the author or advisers to the editor and that the editors feel are worthy of the imprint of their university. But they must always keep in mind the financial health of the press. So they cannot accept only monographs, which generally do not earn back their costs through sales. (In Film Studies some monographs are also assigned in a few courses, which can increase sales, although the courses are usually upper-level ones, and there may only be fifteen students in a class.) Most university press editors must also publish trade books, whose audience includes general readers, and textbooks and other course books that will be adopted for classroom use, as those usually earn back their costs and produce some extra revenue to support the books that lose money. Some presses also include reference books in the mix.

Once the scope of the list has been defined, the editor’s goal is to publish the best books he or she can within the strictures that have been established. We hope the monographs we publish will be groundbreaking, field-changing, and perhaps award-winning books. In the case of trade books we hope and expect that the readership will go beyond the academy and into the general public, and that the books will be reviewed widely in general media. In the case of textbooks, we work with the author and peer reviewers to develop the book so that it will be used regularly in the classroom, will sell steadily, and will be reprinted for years to come.

Once an editor has decided to consider a book, he or she chooses peer reviewers, helps guide the author through the suggestions and questions raised by reviewers, and recommends revisions that need to be made in response to readers’ reports or the editor’s own sense of how the book may need to be broadened, strengthened, or made more accessible and appealing to its audience. The editor also serves as an in-house advocate for the book and convinces first colleagues and then a faculty board that the press should offer a contract to the author. Although acquisitions is the editor’s primary job, once the contract is signed, the editor serves as both a sponsor and an enthusiast for that book within the press, in addition to helping the author with revisions to the manuscript. The editor explains it to his or her colleagues, helps situate the book in the marketplace, and is involved in all decisions having to do with that book from the copyediting to the interior and cover design, cover and catalog copy, advertising and promotion, publicity, and beyond—reporting sales and review attention to the author for years after publication, answering questions about royalties, and perhaps even prodding the author to prepare a new edition of the book if it has been successful.

All these publishing functions are carried out and will continue to be carried out regardless of the book’s eventual format. And that is why e-books are not much cheaper to publish than print books are. The publisher saves on paper, printing, and binding costs, and on warehouse space. But digital-only books still need the acquisitions editor’s involvement, exactly as I’ve outlined here. They still need vetting and editing;
covers still need to be designed for them, even if they are virtual covers; the interior needs to be designed; and marketing efforts will continue to be necessary, or no one will know the book exists. A publicist still needs to alert review media and set up events, and ads still need to be prepared and paid for. Direct mail in paper form has been diminishing, but direct mail by e-mail still has to be sent, and the book still needs to be listed in a catalog, whether a print or a digital catalog. And sales representatives for the publisher still have to call on the remaining independent bookstores and the buyers at Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and the library wholesalers to pitch each season’s list and secure orders.

Today, an increasingly important part of the marketing effort for books is via online searches that rely, in large part, on metadata. Since the creation of metadata starts with the editor and is not clearly understood by many authors, I want to devote some time to the topic.

The management and dissemination of metadata is increasingly a top priority for publishers’ marketing efforts because a book that cannot be found through an online search cannot be found. The days of spending long hours browsing in a well-stocked scholarly bookstore to discover a book you didn’t know about have mostly faded away. Editors now work with authors to establish several keywords to use in descriptive copy; these words make the book more likely to come up in online searches for the book’s topic and related topics. Although it was always the case that a print book’s title needed certain words in order to signal to the reader its contents, keywords are even more important when thinking of a good title for a book today. The book’s title and the copy describing it—created by the publisher in collaboration with the author, printed in the catalog and on the book jacket, and linked to the electronic record of the book that populates many databases and is scoured by search engines—influence where the book shows up in online searches, so it is important to make sure that relevant keywords are in this copy.

It should be clear to anyone who buys books that bookstores are no longer the primary place people get their books—the independent stores have been threatened for a long time now and have gradually dwindled. In the past ten years we have lost about five hundred independent stores. Borders has disappeared, taking some 650 stores with it. And Barnes & Noble is struggling as more and more customers buy books online (although sales of its Nook e-reader have been a bright spot for the retailer, allowing it to capture 30 percent of the e-book market). The Nook reading device and sales of e-books through the Barnes & Noble stores and site may save the operation. Amazon sales now account for more than 40 percent of many university presses’ book sales, which means that physical browsing in a store is something publishers cannot count on any more. Now, in addition to the traditional ways that readers find out about books (e.g., conferences, advertising in scholarly journals, reviews, electronic mailing lists, mentions on blogs), people increasingly learn about books via search engines and

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2 The American Booksellers Association, a trade group, currently has about 1,900 independent bookstores as members, down from about 2,400 in 2002.

databases, which reinforces the need to use metadata effectively to increase discoverability and optimize search results so that a book can be found by anyone searching on the topic.

Metadata become important not only for search engines such as Google but also for searches on Amazon and the recently established e-book platforms for academic libraries, which will be used by students and faculty looking to access scholarly books, much as they access journals online now. “Books at JSTOR” is one such effort, launched in late 2012. It is an initiative to publish scholarly books online as part of JSTOR, one of the most well known and widely used scholarly resources for journal articles. All the monographs on this platform will be searchable, and books will be linked with book reviews and references in the journal literature. The University Press Content Consortium (a collaborative venture with Project MUSE and the University Press E-Book Consortium) and Oxford University Press Scholarship Online are two other such services already launched.

Another obvious and enormous change to our publishing landscape is the growing popularity of e-books. University presses now must place considerable ongoing investment in digital infrastructure, digitizing and converting current and backlist books into formats for the different e-readers—EPUB for the iPad and other devices, MOBI format for the Kindle, and PDFs. The level of quality assurance and proofreading that is necessary for every format is considerable. And while we are pouring money into this future business, and sales of e-books are increasing and will likely continue to increase, revenue from sales of e-books represents only about 10 percent of our total book revenue. However, I am hopeful that in the future the availability of e-books will allow our overall sales of individual titles to grow and that revenue from the new monograph platforms will offset the decline in revenue from print. One benefit of the increase in sales of e-books and the decline in print sales has been a concurrent decline in the number of unsold books that are returned to publishers by booksellers at the end of the season. These unsold books, or “returns,” are usually not resalable because the covers are damaged, and so they represent costly lost sales for the publisher.4

Thus, for the time being at least, we must maintain two business models at one time—print and digital. And we have pricing pressures in the digital marketplace: the public presumes that e-books are less costly to produce, partly because of intense efforts by Amazon, which puts artificially low prices on e-books sold on its site so as to encourage sales of its Kindle e-reader. As a result, many book buyers tolerate only low prices for e-books. As I mentioned earlier, although e-books do eliminate the cost of paper, printing, binding, and warehousing, all other publishing costs remain (editing, design, marketing and sales, publicity, accounting, salaries), and certain costs, such as editing, with its elaborate coding for electronic display, and the creation of e-reader files, are higher.

4 In addition to revenue from sales of print and electronic books, publishers also rely on other revenue streams to cover their costs of operation. Some presses have journals programs or online database projects and receive subscription income from these products. All presses work to sell translation rights and charge permissions fees to other publishers wanting to use material from their books in other publications. They also license books to library e-book vendors such as Ebrary and NetLibrary.
We will likely live in this hybrid print and digital book world for some time to come. Well-written books with a sustained argument for a fairly broad readership will continue to have an audience in print, whereas those that can more easily be broken up or mined for information will be published in digital-only versions. Soon, many monographs will be published primarily in digital editions. Before we lament the less prominent role of printed books in our universe, we should keep in mind that these digital books will be accessed easily online; will include links to archives and other online sources; and, when permissions can be obtained, will potentially be enhanced by sound and video clips. These enhanced e-books will allow film and media scholars exciting new opportunities for illustrating their arguments and increasing the pedagogical and scholarly value of their books. Printed scholarly books will be handled by very short print runs of 50–200 copies or as print-on-demand only.5 I am sure that as the dissemination of scholarship continues to morph in the digital world, monographs will be somewhat transformed. Conventions about length and coverage may change, and authors of new books should think carefully about length.6 People have less time to read, as they are deluged with information, and when they read online they are also often multitasking, so they are reluctant to buy long books. Longer books are more expensive at every stage, beginning with the editing. Because they are more expensive to produce, their list price is high, and they therefore sell fewer copies than shorter books. Shorter, pithier books that eschew some of the usual conventions of the monograph genre are likely to be more successful. Several university presses are now experimenting with digital “shorts” that are longer than journal articles but much shorter than conventional books. And readers will have the option of purchasing individual chapters of some books rather than the entire work, much as they can buy individual songs now.

In addition, collaborative digital-only projects without a university press imprint will continue to spring to life and be sustained by their users and their home universities. It will be important for universities to establish criteria for assessing these projects, determining how (or if) such projects should provide their authors credit toward tenure and promotion.

The seismic changes in how readers discover books pose new marketing challenges that require new skills. While university presses will continue to rely on traditional forms of marketing—reviews, flyers, catalogs, conferences, advertising, e-mail—most now use Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites to generate interest in a particular book. Promotion of books on electronic mailing lists and blogs focused on a niche audience relies more on direct outreach from publishers working with authors. Unlike the scholarly journal review process, which can take years, these outlets allow for a more immediate and targeted way to promote a book. They also provide the opportunity for conversation among readers, which can further generate interest in the book and help promote it by word of mouth.

Publication of a book is now, as it always has been, a collaborative venture between author and publisher. But a new level of collaboration has become essential in the
digital world, and we count on authors more than ever before to help us make their books visible. The changes we are experiencing at such a rapid pace are exciting and open up many new ways of rethinking the creation and dissemination of scholarly ideas. Publishers and authors will need to work closely together to make the most of technology, but the core mission of scholarly publishing remains unchanged: ensuring quality and enhancing the visibility and accessibility of the best scholarly work. *

“Midnight in Princeton”: Publishing in 3-D

by Leslie Mitchner

As the clock struck twelve, I was sitting in a downtown café, sipping a cappuccino and reflecting on the fact that everyone around me was wired (or powered otherwise), not necessarily on caffeine. The place was packed. No eye contact was made. All faces were riveted on screens in a faux cinematic haze—cell phones, Kindles, Nooks, iPads, laptops. Conversation, if there had been any, was dead. One man read a paperback clutched tightly in his hands, an analog refugee traveling through time in Einstein’s hometown. Sidney Bechet’s sax played on as I stepped into the drizzly night. It was then, on a deserted sidestreet, that a 1920 Peugeot Landaulet 184 pulled up beside me. A mysterious woman in Spanish cloak and hat beckoned me to enter and I did.

“My name is Gillian Pender,” I said, introducing myself as I stepped into the spacious leather-upholstered cream and black touring car. “I know you by your publishing alias,” she said, adding that she had been visiting her papers in Princeton University’s Firestone Library when she came across an article I had written for a special issue of Cinema Journal eight years ago. She had many questions, which tumbled from her lips with urgency. Had the crisis in scholarly publishing lessened since 2005? Would university presses survive? What about films? Had Woody Allen’s movies improved? Then, with poignancy and clear concern, she asked about independent bookstores and how they were faring. As we drove toward Princeton Cemetery, where she had been buried in 1962, I suddenly recognized my companion from old photos as Sylvia Beach, of Shakespeare & Company.

I wondered who I would meet next in this Woody Allen movie. Would my companion, like Gertrude Stein aiding my counterpart Gil Pender, give me advice on the novel I was writing about an acquisitions
Eight years ago, independent stores were already in great jeopardy with the rise of the so-called chains, Borders and Barnes & Noble. At the time, the proliferation of these book warehouses was regarded as a major threat to serious publishers who depended primarily on smaller shops to sell their wares. University presses, which could sell fewer and fewer scholarly books, began to look for trade (general interest) and what were called crossover (from academic to trade) books in order to cover their overhead. Marketing departments more than ever were calling the shots, and desperate authors, with no understanding of publishing, pitched their narrow studies the way we had foolishly trained them to do. Sylvia seemed to be following what I was saying, and she chuckled when I mentioned the Ethan Hawke lookalike at an academic conference who tried to convince me to sign his crossover book on François Villon. Only if Johnny Depp is playing him in the biopic, was my reply.

A mere two years after Cinema Journal focused on the crisis in scholarly publishing, Amazon launched its first Kindle electronic reading device and burned down the publishing house as we had known it. Fast-forward to today. Borders has gone bankrupt. Barnes & Noble may also go under unless its Nook e-reader can compete and the company can revamp itself as an Amazon clone, selling not only books but also electronic devices, clothing, anything and everything else. Nook and Kindle—sounds cozy, doesn’t it? Sylvia shuddered and pulled her cloak tighter around herself. So now, I added, Barnes & Noble, which caused the demise of so many independents, has stopped pointing fingers at Amazon as the villain. Not only that, Amazon and Barnes & Noble have become publishers themselves and are increasingly disinterested in what old-fashioned publishing houses have to offer. Self-publishing is all the rage thanks to new digital technologies. Just as anyone can make a film using digital video technology and post it on YouTube, anyone can publish a book and post it on the Web.

In the academic world, open access is the equivalent. Faculty in any field can simply place work online for comment. In fact, the circulation of manuscripts and articles, including dissertations, is now being demanded by some academic departments and universities. The practice is roughly the equivalent of showing daily rushes or a rough cut of a film in theaters. The contribution that university presses make in developing a manuscript so that it is actually readable and not merely accessible is forgotten in this push to share “content.” Why should a book be subject to possible rejection? Another downside is that with electronic files constantly moving about the World Wide
Web, piracy of both the polished and the unpolished book is increasingly a threat and cannot be policed. Some commentators hail open access without realizing the consequences to be borne if publishers are not supported in some manner other than income from sales.

Showrooming, I added without pausing for breath, is a new verb that has entered the lexicon to describe customers who browse in stores and then go online to order the same books for far less money. Independents suffer the most from this practice, but so do bricks-and-mortar Barnes & Nobles in an increasingly downward spiral. And the near dictatorship of Amazon, which has the lion’s share of all book business, is such that it can force presses to agree to its terms, or it can simply kick off its website those who do not fall into line with the company’s demands, as it has done several times already. Contract negotiations with Amazon are ongoing, laborious, and time-consuming. Other sales channels for e-books, like Apple, are scarcely easier.

Libraries of all kinds, even if they want to buy printed books that they would have to catalog and house on shelves, often cannot afford to do so. Their investment in new technologies and purchases of journals in e-format are eating up their budgets. If the quantities we were selling to them eight years ago were small, they are shrinking even further. Collectives like the University Press Content Consortium, a group of more than seventy university presses, have been formed to sell cross-publishing-company collections of books by subject categories, but in the time that it took to create those groups, the tide has already turned and so-called patron-driven acquisitions (known as PDA) has become all the rage. Why spend money on books that will not be checked out or used, just to have them sit there in print or digital format? Only buy what faculty and students insist upon. I told Sylvia about e-book rentals for mere pennies. I told her about “singles” and “shorts” and e-textbooks that any professor can make and that students can buy for a fraction of what they would otherwise cost.

“But if a mere click of a button is all that is needed to get a book, isn’t that a good thing?” Sylvia asked. “Your film books could have color images at no extra cost and could contain film clips; a reader or student will be able to download films in their entirety, along with interviews with critics and directors.” She was definitely a quick study, but I hesitated to get into the subject of rights and permissions—fair use or not? I then realized that I had forgotten to tell her about the Great Recession of 2008 and its impact on higher (and all) education and the ways in which it had accelerated the decline of financial support for libraries, university presses, and faculty. How could I explain the corporatization of the academy? Rising tuition and the great divide between the haves and the have-nots? I had mentioned gypsy scholars in the 2005 special issue, but the professoriate’s drift to adjunct and visiting professor status, older faculty members’ fear of retiring after their savings were decimated in the crash, the shrinkage of tenure lines to about 30 percent of the whole—all of this was interrelated and complex. My article even in 2005 had referred to the earlier glory years of fierce contract negotiations with author advances and high royalty rates, agents who handled faculty books, and the Hollywoodization of the academy that led to marquee names. “We had faces” then, as Gloria Swanson famously said. In those faraway times, maybe a Peppy could be elevated to stardom as she is in The Artist, but now the stuntmen will largely
stay stuntmen, the chorus girls will stay in the line, and it is highly unlikely that the superstar past will repeat itself. Maybe it was time to change the subject.

I wanted to talk about my novel. It was not about a nostalgia shop as in Hugo and Midnight in Paris, but it was hard not to become nostalgic when I recalled that eight years ago university presses might print only 150 in cloth and 800–1,000 copies in paperback of a new book, a great decline in numbers from earlier decades but far more than they are printing today. With so-called print-on-demand technologies available, many first print runs in 2012 were only 100–125 copies of a hardback and 400–500 copies of a paperback. Marketing pundits no longer dominate the business in their demand for wider readerships, but that department’s needs continue to drive everything we do. Where were the scant available resources going? Scholars, focused on their own legitimate needs, do not realize the hidden costs of all the technology and data entry required behind the scenes. The costs far outweigh the financial benefits. My interlocutor huddled down in her seat, pulling the brim of her hat lower as we followed the publishing process of a hypothetical book, The Amazing Adventures of Sylvia and Me.

Let us say that my manuscript makes it successfully through the reader review process under exclusive consideration, with a very small advance, low royalties, and a guarantee of simultaneous publication in hardback, paperback, and as an e-book. Being experienced, I have prepared it beautifully, and it is ready for copyediting. As in days of old, with the help of an assistant, my sponsoring editor begins what becomes an elaborate data-entry process in which all staff members participate as the book moves along toward publication. The publisher has spent tens of thousands of dollars to buy that database and to have it tailored for that press’s specific needs. From time to time the system needs to be upgraded at additional cost to keep up with industry standards. My publisher needs at least one IT specialist with a high salary to help maintain that database and pays annual licensing fees for every staff member to gain access to it.

The IT position is one that the publisher did not need to fund in previous decades. The database needs care and feeding through every step of the publication process and it ultimately links to outside vendors like Amazon.com that do not prepare their own bibliographic data and files but depend on the publishing house to do that for them. The publisher is, in a sense, working for the vendors so the vendors can make money. If Amazon errs in its posting, the press needs someone on staff to hound them relentlessly and repeatedly until it corrects the mistake. If files are pirated, an employee also has to pursue the pirates to the ends of the earth in what is usually a hopeless attempt to force them to cease and desist. Someone on staff, or many people on staff, also have to prepare special files for other e-vendors, wholesalers, go-betweens, and libraries. Rather than one e-book, there are many differently formatted and coded e-books for five or six key devices and platforms. When the time comes for my publisher to pay my scant royalties, tracking those for the e-book requires special expertise and time because of the way vendors account for such sales. Servers and equipment to host all these data cost a small fortune. Computers and software must be constantly upgraded. Websites must link to databases and to the outside world through Onix and other “feeds” or pipelines. Special expertise is required to manage and upgrade publisher
websites that can cost as much as or more than the databases themselves. Program-
mers have become essential to doing business. Authors know little of the ways in which
their editors have become harassed data-entry clerks à la Charlie Chaplin tightening
widgets on a fast-paced assembly line in *Modern Times*. And the e-system functions
in parallel with the alternate universe of conventional publication of the hardback
and paperback. The e-sales in no way make up for the lost revenue from print books,
even as the costs of everything continue to rise. University administrators, however,
look for savings from electronic publication and, under pressure from state legislatures,
want to cut funding to presses. Much like Hollywood producers, they have persuaded
themselves that the digital process or 3-D will magically save the day, no matter the
outrageous cost.

Sylvia took a small silver flask out of her cape pocket, and we each took a swig. She
wanted to know what I thought she would see if she returned for a visit in 2020. I could
not say for sure, of course. There was much that was positive, especially in a field of
study like Film and Media Studies, which is situated at the heart of all the change. Ac-
cess to digital archives has made innovative scholarship exciting. Authors are trying to
write more clearly and with less jargon (a necessity that all editors put to the fore), and
with their publisher’s guidance they are learning how to help market their own books.
Color images and film or television clips embedded in texts might make those books
more attractive to buyers if rights issues do not get in the way. Bundling of print and e-
books together for a slightly higher cost might be an experiment worth pursuing. More
and larger subsidies for books than I could have imagined eight years ago are now
coming through to help presses defray some of their costs. A few commentators think
independent bookstores will stage a comeback, partly through turning themselves
into community centers and hosting special events. At least the pace of their demise
has somewhat leveled off. Still, university press sales heavily and increasingly depend
on Amazon.

What seems most likely, I said, is that there will be a further contraction of the
expanded universe—even fewer tenured faculty; fewer presses, with each of them con-
centrating more exclusively on fewer fields; a gradual move toward fewer print books
and more e-books; and the further erosion of independents. But, I added, I think when
you return, you will still recognize the basic structure of what has long been in place.
Libraries understand more about the needs of presses than they did eight years ago.
Presses have greater knowledge of the financial pressures on faculty, libraries, and
bookstores. Academics are better educated about what is happening to publishers and
increasingly come to their defense if they are threatened. The conversation is at last
beginning to take place. We all need one another and cannot survive on our own. It
was almost embarrassing to have to say it as she opened the door to let me out, but
until and unless those who control the purse strings figure it out or are otherwise forced
to recognize that education, good writing, critical thinking skills, adventurous research
projects, and not just test taking and future income potential of students matter—re-
ally matter—the universe as we’ve known it might shrink away altogether and then
disappear. As Sylvia did.
In this essay I want to revisit the American concept of fair use, which is currently attracting an abundance of attention from the academy and its publishers, especially because of the digital turn. My goal is to underscore something most media scholars already know: given the many roadblocks they face in publishing, fair use is one of the few legal tools that can genuinely help them improve their lot—and only if—they stand together firm as a discipline.

Put simply, fair use is a principle that allows someone to make use of another person’s copyrighted material without having permission to do so. Fair use in publishing can mean anything from quoting a few words from an e-mail to repurposing an entire film. Some people think that borrowing or appropriating a work weakens its copyright, but that is not true. A work is in copyright or it isn’t: no amount of borrowing can undermine the author’s right to license or otherwise benefit from it.

What everyone wants to know is, how far can I take quotation under the relative safety of fair use, and when have I gone too far? In fact, there is no perfect answer, no single measure of assurance that if one publishes the work of another without permission, one will absolutely be protected under the law. For every legal decision that suggests the liberties associated with fair use are many, there exists another that strives to set byzantine limits.

The reason for the disparity is this: fair use is an equitable rule of reason that tries to balance two seemingly contrary rights guaranteed by the US Constitution: freedom of speech and copyright protection. Thus, fair use comes into play on a case-by-case basis, and context is everything. Since 1976, fair use has been an integral part of the US Copyright Code, and it is there for a simple reason: to encourage

1 The United Kingdom (as well as the Commonwealth of Nations) has a similar concept known as fair dealing, although it is more restrictive than US fair use. See the United Kingdom's Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act of 1988 (c. 48).

2 Bill Graham Archives, LLC v. Dorling Kindersley Ltd. (No. 03 CV 9507 [S.D.N.Y. May 12, 2005]) is an example of the former. The case is described later in this essay. Patrick Cariou v. Richard Prince (No. 08 CV 11327 [S.D.N.Y. March 13, 2011]) is an example of a highly restrictive decision. In brief, the photographer Patrick Cariou won a suit against Richard Prince and his dealer for copyright infringement. Prince had appropriated numerous images from a book of Cariou’s photographs and had only marginally altered them before presenting them as his own work. The judge found that the images had not been sufficiently transformed to qualify as new work and that Prince’s versions compromised the market for Cariou’s work. That decision is currently being appealed.
creative endeavor. The fair-use doctrine lists four factors to help judges and lawyers—and authors and gatekeepers like you and me—assess whether a case of fair use exists in any particular instance:

1. The nature of the copyrighted work—Is the material you want to use factual, or is it creative? Mining facts from a science book and putting them toward one’s own creative project is acceptable because “facts” in and of themselves are not considered works of creative expression. By contrast, criticism and commentary are, as are motion pictures.

2. The amount of the copyrighted work one wishes to use—When it comes to diachronic works such as movies and novels, if one quotes only a small amount of the whole, this normally supports a conclusion that the use is fair. But, obviously, what has traditionally worked for literary criticism and Film Studies does not begin to serve the needs of, say, art historians, who need to reproduce an entire work—a whole drawing, a complete photograph—in order to write about it properly.

3. The effect of the use on the market for the original work—In publishing a few frames of Sam Peckinpah’s *Straw Dogs* in an article or posting a short passage of the film on a scholarly blog, are you undermining the market for it or depriving the copyright holder of income? Of course not. In fact, as the music industry has finally figured out, creative work accrues value by being seen and heard. Furthermore, if a motion-picture studio actually needs the money it earns from reproductions of a few film frames in scholarly publications, its days are worse than numbered. But uses that seem to take the whole heart of a work can certainly affect a copyright holder’s ability to capitalize on it.

4. The purpose and character of the use—If a scholar takes a work without permission and writes about it, has he or she transformed it? In reframing the work—be it a poster or a film—does the critique cast it in a new light? Does the scholar offer fresh insight that changes its meaning in the minds of readers? This factor is extremely significant for those who study visual culture, because showing a work in its entirety with the specific aim of critiquing it often does qualify as transformative.

Such are the four factors that normally inform a judgment of fair use. Judges, in analyzing a situation, often weight one over another. In the 1960s, there were several key decisions that saw the impact on the marketability of the original work as the most crucial factor. But this law-and-economics school of thought, as analysts Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi term it, “simply does not work when noneconomic values are important,” as with scholarly publishing. More recently, courts in America have tended to lean foremost on the factor of transformativeness, asking to what degree the original work is transformed by the reuse and for what purpose.

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3 Although it took until 1976 for fair use to be incorporated into the Copyright Code as a doctrine, it existed in common law before that. The doctrine has been grounded in a large number of court decisions over the years.

For example, in a case that may be relevant to Film Studies, the Bill Graham Archives sued the publisher Dorling Kindersley (DK) for including, without permission, some posters copyrighted by Bill Graham in a cultural history of the Grateful Dead (*Grateful Dead: The Illustrated Trip*, 2003). Dorling Kindersley had actually contacted the archive and offered to pay for the right to publish the images. Permission was denied, but DK published the posters anyway in small format and displayed them on a timeline that established a chronology for Grateful Dead concerts. When the archive sued DK, the judge ruled in favor of the publisher. A court of appeals upheld that decision, finding that the use of thumbnails not only did not compromise the market for the posters (or derivative works such as T-shirts and other novelties) but that they were sufficiently transformed by the reduced size and by the nature of the use, in a biography, which was “plainly different from the original purpose for which they were created.”\(^5\) That the images were not themselves critiqued in the book did not disqualify them from being sufficiently transformed under the doctrine of fair use; importantly, for the film scholar, this might be construed as a legal precedent for publishing long filmstrips without analyzing every frame or for including entire movies in electronic publications.

So that is the *law*. Now to the real world of publishing—an opaque sphere teeming with timid gatekeepers like me. The fact is that publishers will do almost anything to avoid legal battles, even ones we would most certainly win. For this reason we tend to handle fair use gingerly, with a pair of tongs: with few exceptions, if an author does not have copyright permission to use an image, the odds are we will not publish it. Thus, in a sad way, publishers become not the scholar’s friend, but his or her censor. However, when it comes to the field of Film Studies, the situation is different—and better.

The Society for Cinema and Media Studies was one of the first to establish a policy of fair use for its members. The first version of the policy dates to 1993, when the organization was still the Society for Cinema Studies. In the early nineties, the majority of the society’s members were film scholars, and it was essential that they be able to publish film frames in their articles and books. But the fair-use doctrine is quite general; it is not tailored to the mission of any particular community. Thus, it became imperative, for the vitality of the discipline, that its members shoulder the responsibility for interpreting the doctrine in light of their own needs. Thanks to the society’s action, its policy has gone far in clarifying what the majority conscience of film scholars think is responsible quotation in their community. This has not only helped keep the creative juices flowing in the discipline but has also offered some measure of protection when the values of the community have clashed with those of outsiders (such as entertainment conglomerates). Not to be underestimated, the field’s commitment to fair use has also instilled a drop of courage in publishers. To be sure, the threshold for fair use in Film Studies was, until recently, pretty straightforward: publishing a handful of frames from a film composed of many thousands could hardly be considered anything more sinister than pinching a negligible fragment.

\(^5\) Decision by the US Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, on the matter of *Bill Graham Archives v. Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Ltd.*, 448 F.3d 605 (2nd Cir. 2006).
The good news is that other scholarly and professional communities have followed the society’s example by developing codes of best practices tailored to their specific needs. Among these are the Documentary Filmmakers’ Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use, the Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use of Dance-Related Materials, and the Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Poetry. There is a new code by the International Communication Association. And in January of 2012, the Association of Research Libraries issued the landmark Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries. Each of these groups has been assisted in its effort by the Center for Social Media and the Law School at American University.6

And each has been edified by the precedent established in 1993 by the Society for Cinema Studies and by the Society’s 2010 revision of its statement of best practices for Film and Media Studies publishing, which takes into account the inclusion of limited video streams and other media in publications. Today, with new technologies transforming publishing, reproducing only individual film grabs on the printed page hardly seems enough anymore. Scholars and readers are surely better served if they can explore film footage in a digital environment, with freeze-frame capacity.7 Pushing the point further, would not showing an entire film with advanced functionality, in fact, lead to better—or at least different—analysis and understanding?

Obviously, it is the burden of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and other organizations, in collaboration with legal counsel, to sort this out. They will have to do it first, in any case, before publishers will follow their lead. But make no mistake: the business models and technical infrastructures of academic publishing are rapidly changing. When it comes to e-books, for example, sales are escalating geometrically. At the University of Chicago Press, roughly 28 percent of our weekly book sales on Amazon are for Kindle editions. Libraries today often prefer electronic books to printed ones. And as publishers, we are pleased to be able to offer books instantly to scholars in remote locations who cannot count on a UPS truck rumbling up to their door.

Today’s journals offer content and functionality that twenty years ago were only a dream: streaming video and audio, hyperlinks that take the reader into whole new environments (including other journals as well as digitized books and archives), and online sites where people thousands of miles apart can gather to discuss what they have read or seen. None of this is possible with conventional print. And while book publishers have not yet found a viable pricing model for networked books or for including

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6 Patricia Aufderheide is Director of the Center for Social Media at American University in Washington, DC. Peter Jaszi is Professor of Law and Faculty Director of the Glushko-Samuelson Intellectual Property Clinic at American University. All of the mentioned statements of best practices can be found at the website of the Center for Social Media, at http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/fair-use/related-materials/codes.

7 There is an exemption in copyright law that gives instructors the limited right to circumvent the security encryption for a motion-picture DVD and duplicate short portions in order to show them in the classroom for comment or criticism without permission from the copyright holder. Commercial use is strictly forbidden, and the exemption does not serve publishing. See US Copyright Office, “Exemption to Prohibition on Circumvention of Copyright Protection Systems for Access Control Technologies,” http://www.copyright.gov/1201/.
multimedia in e-books and apps, as the technology becomes more efficient and as user demand grows, that day will come—and sooner than one might think.8

Meanwhile, the time has come for the field of Film Studies to make a concerted effort to present its most recent statement of best practices for fair use to the directors, rights managers, and editors of university presses, stressing the opportunities for new and different modes of scholarly expression. Granted, the notion of repurposing an entire commercial film without a license is probably too radical for most of us, but certainly the time is right, as presses aggressively pursue all things electronic, to insist that passages of streaming video become commonplace in scholarly publications, including, eventually, electronic monographs and other digital products, as long as those passages are crucial to the writer’s inquiry.

In conclusion, the more vigorously that organizations reinterpret their codes of best practices in light of the changes that technology brings to their field and to ours, the less need there will be for essays like this one, replete with hectoring, by an editor who would rather spend her time editing than serving as a risk-averse gatekeeper.

8 At the time of this writing it cost about $80,000 to develop a basic app. According to presenters at the annual Rights Managers Meeting at the 2011 Frankfurt Book Fair, revenues from app sales have so far been insufficient for publishers to recoup their investments. The exception seems to be game apps, including crossword puzzles, but this has little relevance (so far) to academic publishing.

The Future of the Book as a Media Project

by Ken Wissoker

If you think about books as similar to other forms of media, it is easy to see that this is a strange moment. Most discussions about “the book” or “the future of the book” still treat it as if the book were one known, unified, or even universal entity, but is it? To answer that question, it’s useful to start by thinking about some of the ways that Media Studies scholars talk about other forms of media.

Scholars have theorized how genre conventions in film, television, games, and music are connected to the medium in which they are seen or heard. A field-defining example in Film Studies would be David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson’s account of classical Hollywood cinema and the setting of standards for commercial film. We could equally think about Jonathan Sterne’s work in sound connecting format and output. The story or the sound changes with the medium. One films a scene differently for television than for film. A
computer game designed for an arcade is different from one designed for a cell phone or a wide-screen television. One would produce the same song differently for a 78 rpm record, a 45 rpm single, an LP, a CD, or a digital download (and even within this last category, one might produce differently for a “lossy” format like MP3 than for a “lossless” format like FLAC). Assumptions about the context in which the song would be heard and the mode of playback are both crucial.

What does that Panavision film look like on television, with or without letter boxing? If the song was recorded as part of a concept album, what does it sound like if it’s heard on a Rhapsody channel or a mixed playlist? If you listen to the exact same Chicago blues recording on the original 78 record and on an LP, they don’t sound the same. The song sounds different again on a CD or in a file on iTunes.

So, when we think of a book as a conventional long-form argument, how much of that is tied to its conventional printed medium? How long is too long? Or too short? How many chapters should there be? How does it begin and end? I would argue that the same approach we use for other media helps us understand the scholarly book as a material object whose format, genre, and conventions have been worked out in relation to its physical form.

For scholarly books, we want the book to be long enough to count in the ways we want a book to count. No one wants to write a whole book only to have someone on an appointment, promotion, or tenure committee think that it’s too short. In contrast, most press editors would balk if presented with a nine-hundred-page manuscript. There are limits to what printers can bind reasonably into a book without requiring the use of Bible-thin paper. How about for teaching? How long a book can be assigned for class without eliciting moans of pain from the students? For books for which the author hopes for crossover readership from scholars in other fields, length is also a consideration. Too long a book can create a monographic audience. “It looks interesting, but do I really want to know that much about Swedish silent cinema?” The long book appears to its desired crossover readership as if it were intended only for other scholars in that subfield—those who need to know all the details. The same narrative or argument in a shorter book can attract readers looking for the methodological or historical payoff.

For those reasons, as an editor, I’m often instructing would-be authors to adhere to a kind of modernism. When I give advice on how to write a book, I suggest starting with the question, what are you trying to convince readers of? Then, what would readers need to see, in what order, so they would be convinced? I recommend thinking about how much evidence is needed for someone to get the point. I’ll contrast this to a more object-centered approach in which each chapter finds its own boundary, determined by the limits of what one has to say about the topic. That amount might be dictated by how much material about a specific issue was available in the archive, or by how much one has to say about a particular film, director, or television series. I contrast the book that keeps the amount of evidence to what is needed for the arc of the larger argument to the object-centered book, which sprawls. I quote the Tom Tom Club song “Wordy Rappinghood,” where in the background someone yells, “It’s okay, I’ve overstood.” As in a film, where the editor takes all the footage and figures out how long each shot needs to be and establishes a scene-to-scene rhythm,
I tell authors to think about what each section is doing and how it fits into the overall rhythm of their text.

This advice privileges certain kinds of readers. It assumes readers start at the beginning of the book and keep reading until they get bored. I counsel authors to put the argument up front, so readers know what’s at stake. The author should tailor what follows to hold on to readers, knowing that we all start books, and then put them down when they become less necessary or compelling. If the argument comes only in the conclusion, a lot of readers will never get there.

Of course, I know that some readers will look in the index for themselves or for their favorite theorist (who might be the same person) and will read only that page. Others will read the chapter on Shortbus and skip the rest of the book. But we shouldn’t write the book for either of those readers, including with each reference a repetition of the overall theoretical argument or having each chapter repeat what other readers would have read earlier in the book. If you want to read by skipping around, it’s on you.

That account of the book is very much about readers, readership, audiences, and institutional value. But that is not the kind of media question that gives rise to current conversations about the future of the book. It is when we think of the book as media that we can begin to see how much this is a transitional, even disruptive and disrupted, moment in the history of the book. To address the nature of the book in the first decades of the twenty-first century, we have to ask further material and media-centric questions. How much of this standard generic editorial advice about writing for readers is tied to readers of paper and the printed book? Does a book’s having four or five chapters rather than eighty have anything to do with its being printed? If so, what about potential digital and new-media substitutes for the (printed) book? I want to think about these possible media-based questions in considering future forms for scholarly writing, the way the forms might be constructed and disseminated, and the genres those material processes might imply.

First, it’s already the case that the same books read on paper can now also be read on Kindles or tablets. In many cases they are also, like scholarly journals, available by site license at a university library. It’s not hard to imagine that they might also be available in an iTunes-like way, where one might make one’s own playlist out of journal articles and book chapters. Each of these very real possibilities will come with its own set of generic implications.

If, as an author, one assumes readers are reading an e-book on an iPad or other tablet, with their e-mail and Twitter stream constantly a click away—not to mention the rest of the Web waiting nearby too—what would one need to do to keep those readers’ attention? The book should be as tight and compelling as possible. Perhaps the same study that would work as a 280-page paperback should be edited down to 75 pages. What do you really need the reader to know? There might also be more of a premium on narrative and style to make the reading experience a more engaging one.

In contrast, if the book is going to be principally found online through a reader’s library, that tightness might not be a concern at all. One could assume that many readers would find the book accidently while searching for a particular topic, term, or tag in a large collection of electronic scholarly materials. Instead of thinking about how
few details were necessary, it might make sense to include every possible detail and
every possible search term to help ensure the maximum readership. Maybe someone
will be searching for the name of the “best boy” or the “second nun” in a particular
film. Why not include all the details, on the assumption that each could be a gateway
for a potential reader? The last thing one might assume for readers finding a book in
an electronic collection is that they will start at the beginning and read to the end. The
measure of success, as with a blog post or an online journal article, will be the number
of hits, not the number of full reads. So, the same book that needed to be cut to 75
pages for the tablet could easily be 750 pages for an online searchable text. If the
main place the book will be housed is on a library server, there will be plenty of space
for all the details.

Finally, let’s suppose that the playlist model were to become dominant for schol-
arly publishing. At Duke, we would love to have our forty-five or fifty journals and all
our books available on the same electronic platform. Suppose, then, one wanted to
make a Lauren Berlant playlist, including journal articles from b2 or American Litera-
ture, chapters from the three Berlant books we had published, plus some of her essays
that had been included in other edited collections. Or perhaps one would prefer an
eye cinema playlist, drawing on anything we published in that area. If that became
a dominant form of scholarly reading, it could change the assumptions of the book
the way iTunes has changed the assumption about how listeners will hear an album.
At present, it would be insulting to the reader to restate the thesis at the start of each
chapter. Does that become desirable or even necessary if one assumes the book will
be sampled and remixed rather than read front to back? Does the monograph then
become a semiquaint genre, like the concept album?

What strikes me most powerfully about these three alternatives is that they are
all equally plausible. Really, they are all already here. Yet their implications for how
a book should be written are completely different. As an editor, I’m giving advice to
people finishing PhD dissertations or embarking on new research projects. These are
books that will come out five years from now. How should they be pitched? Long,
short, ready to be “chopped and screwed”? It’s not possible to say. Like recording art-
ists in the mid-1980s, unsure whether their music would be most heard on vinyl or on
CD, we have to assume that all options are possible. It’s mostly likely in the short term
that readers will want to access books in print, on e-readers, online for searching, and
in parts for particular purposes. But that’s not helpful if one is trying to write for the
predominant platform or medium.

Further, in the context of Cinema Journal this is a very restricted way to imagine the
future. All three of the alternatives I have just sketched are flat texts—PDFs or their
equivalent. They assume writing that runs from beginning to end, presumably with
some heretofore-unmentioned illustrations. That’s a pretty limited future for Cinema
and Media Studies.

Cinema Studies has been invested in more robust forms of presentation since be-
fore it added “and Media” to its name. As early as 1995, Rutgers University Press
had already published Lauren Rabinovitz and Greg Easley’s The Rebecca Project: A CD-
ROM Interactive Book. Around the same time, Marsha Kinder’s Labyrinth Project began
turning out increasingly complex CD-ROM studies, while other Society for Cinema
and Media Studies (SCMS) members collaborated with Paper Tiger Television and other media producers on alternative forms of critical work. In 2005, Tara McPherson and Steve Anderson launched *Vectors*, a journal in which each article is planned in a scholar–digital designer partnership and each requires its own way of nonlinear, interactive reading. More recently, McPherson and Anderson have been at work on the Scalar platform, which would “scale up” the *Vectors* model to short book length, in a form more widely available to authors. The first proto-Scalar experiment was by SCMS scholar Alex Juhasz, hosted and published by MIT Press, about YouTube. So, there is no question that there will be more and more work by SCMS scholars in new digital forms.

My earlier examples—the book on tablet, on a library server, in pieces—all demonstrate how genres might need to change to match the formats in which the work is consumed. The formats themselves are not a mystery; they already exist. What happens when the media and format are themselves much more in question? How will the criteria and values for what makes a good piece of scholarship need to change? At present, even the baby steps in that direction are presenting unexpected difficulties. For many years, blogs and scholarly websites have contained film and video clips. In recent years the clips have been frequently hosted on YouTube or at the Internet Archive. Everyone (at least I would assume most SCMS members) would like to see clips embedded in the e-books we write and read. There is a good fair-use argument for the short clip that is included in an e-publication for the purpose of critical discussion—in the same way that most publishers in the field consider frame enlargements to be fair use. The clip is a small percentage of the full text reproduced for the purpose of criticism. Such clips could finally bring the journal article or book up to the place where Society for Cinema Studies conference presentations were decades ago. Instead of the published version of a scholar’s SCMS talk having revised text but an impoverished visual presentation, both could be more polished in their article form.

However, most Kindles do not have the capacity to show film clips. The format required to view a clip on an iPad is different from the one that would be needed in Google Books. A journal article hosted on Project MUSE or the HighWire platform requires something different, if it is possible at all. Platforms, stability interoperability, and longevity are in flux at this moment.

In essence, when we talk about the “book” and media “embedded” within it, we are in the early days of the railroad, where each company built the rails using its own gauge. It took more than fifty years after the initial government recommendation for all the rail lines in the United Kingdom to be the same gauge. More than a century later, only 60 percent of the world’s rails are standard gauge. Will there eventually be standards and easy transfer among e-book formats, or are we heading for a VHS-versus-Betamax showdown?

Another difficulty with including clips is sustainability. When a publisher sells a book or a journal to a library or an individual, the purchaser has a reasonable expectation to own what he or she has bought. The library that buys this issue of *Cinema Journal* as an electronic site license expects to be able to offer it to patrons in perpetuity, the same way a book acquired by a library in the nineteenth century is still available for readers. Where will those clips be forty or fifty years from now? Given how quickly the
media landscape changes, what do we expect will happen to YouTube or the Internet Archive? Will the links be active? Will the clips still display as intended? What happens when some overzealous rights holder demands the videos be taken down? The online version of the article is left with a lot of holes—and frustrated readers. The whole current format of clips could be abandoned, thus making the illustrations of the future as accessible as a pile of floppy disks.

With Scalar and other such platforms comes a more interesting challenge. In Scalar, each “page” can include some text and some visual media. The clips or photos can be large and centered, with the text presented as extended captions or vice versa: text can be as in a book page, with the visual material as illustration. Each page is linked to others in multiple paths, which can be determined by the author or chosen by the reader. For any given work, there would be multiple ways to navigate, depending on the interest and purpose of the reader. The reader might start on one path and then divert to another part of the way through. Such a text might not presume a normative reader who will read the whole thing. It certainly would not present an argument that depended on a more or less linear presentation of evidence. A Scalar book will be a new genre of writing. If I once characterized my book advice as a kind of modernism, that’s not what we will have in Scalar. It’s too late for postmodernism, but we will have some sort of rhizomatic plurality, something other than a singular outcome.

Rhizomatic plurality as a definition of generic excellence is not guaranteed to please tenure committees or even scholarly book reviewers. Nor does it go very far in helping the author who is trying to write the best book possible. How will we define the genre? How will we know if a Scalar book is good? How does a reviewer for a scholarly press know what to suggest to the author in terms of revisions if we do not even agree on the form and genre to which the author is revising? When is it long or big enough? When is it too unwieldy? What are the guidelines for the copyeditor of a book that is not presumed to be read in linear fashion? Repetition—good or bad? Even the seemingly mechanical parts of the manuscript raise questions. Where is the first citation? How (or where) does such a text begin or end?

Once there are ten or fifteen examples of this new genre, we might know which ones people like more, which ones are more or less successful. Once there are a hundred, and one is not reading for the formal experiment, we might have more of an idea of what makes one a good read or a bad one. There might start to be ideas about what is the best way to write in that genre.

Scalar is only an example of the many possible forms that we can expect to flourish. Some platforms will go the way of the CD-ROM, where whatever best practices were learned for authoring in the genre are now the equivalent of knowing the best way to correct errors on an IBM Selectric typewriter. But each in its own material form of authoring, formatting, delivering, and reading will change the form of scholarly writing and argument. That diversity is not inherently a bad thing, but neither is it a matter of transparency or ease. These are serious questions that make the present time challenging for publishers, authors, librarians, and readers.

Presumably in the course of the coming decade we will be evolving and testing new ideas of what is convincing or not, smart or not, careful or not. We will be making decisions about what kind of work is worth doing and what is trivial or boring. Will the
audience change? Will the relation of what we write to what we read or teach change? These are all important and urgent issues. The answer to them at present? I'd say firmly, with all ambiguity intended, “Without question.”

Contributors

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Mary C. Francis is Executive Editor at the University of California Press, where she has worked since 1999 publishing in the fields of Music, Cinema, and Media Studies.

Leslie Mitchner is the Associate Director and Editor in Chief at Rutgers University Press. The first film books at Rutgers were in the Films in Print series, which brought continuity scripts of key films into the classroom. Following that successful effort, the press started the Depth of Field series, the Screen Decades and Star Decades series, the Techniques of the Moving Image series, and the forthcoming Behind the Silver Screen series.

Ken Wissoker is the Editorial Director of Duke University Press, acquiring books in Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Globalization, American Studies, Popular Music, Film and Television, Race, and Gender and Sexuality, as well as other areas in the humanities, social sciences, and the arts. He joined the press as an acquisitions editor in 1991; he became Editor in Chief in 1997 and Editorial Director in 2005.