



The Academic Book of the Future

The Academic Book of the Future is a research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in collaboration with The British Library (BL) and is concerned with how scholarly work in the arts and humanities will be produced, read and preserved in coming years. The project is run by a team from University College London (UCL) and King's College London (King's), with support from the Research Information Network (RIN). The project has built a Community Coalition of more than 100 organizations and individuals.

The project and the Coalition are holding a whole range of events and carrying out research projects on a variety of relevant topics. The key event for 2015 is Academic Book Week, 9-16 November 2015, which has been taken up enthusiastically by the Publishers Association (PA) and the Booksellers Association (BA), as well as the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), and was launched in July 2015 with a large announcement in *The Bookseller*. Events celebrating the diversity, innovation and influence of academic books will be held across the UK, with participation from institutions elsewhere in Europe and also in the USA, Canada, Japan and Australia.

Introduction

The Academic Book of the Future¹ is a research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in collaboration with the British Library (BL), and is concerned with how scholarly work in the arts and humanities will be produced, read and preserved in coming years. The context of the project is one of rapid change: change in the educational landscape in the UK and elsewhere, change in academic careers and promotion structures, change in the political landscape and the funding models for education and learning, along with change in technology.

Run by a core team of five people from University College London (UCL) and King's College London (King's), and led by co-author Dr Samantha Rayner, the project has an advisory board, and the AHRC and the BL have set up a strategy board to support it. The project also uses the expertise of the Research Information Network (RIN), who act as principal consultants². What is particularly important is that the core team has built a Community Coalition of more than 100 individuals and organizations: scholars, readers, librarians, publishers, university departments and booksellers across the UK and internationally, with many more now expressing an interest in being involved in the project. Clearly, this is a timely initiative.

At the heart of our investigations is the key question: what do we actually mean by an academic book? The short answer is that it is a long-form publication that makes an original contribution to scholarship. The gold standard of long-form publications in the arts and humanities has been for many years the monograph. As Geoffrey Crossick points out in his recent report on monographs and open access (OA), 'Academics across a wide range of arts, humanities and social science disciplines see monographs as central to the advancement and communication of knowledge, and they have done so for many generations. Across arts and humanities disciplines, as well as law, good monographs are the equal of good journal articles in terms of the importance that is attached by academics to publishing . . . For a significant part of the UK research community, by some calculations a majority of that community, the monograph and the research book more generally are central to their discipline'³.



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'The context of the project is one of rapid change'

70 In examining the differences between journal and book publication in the humanities, Crossick also points out, 'Books must be understood best as a vehicle for long-term knowledge communication, preservation and curation, rather than solely as an asset for short-term exploitation and with an associated short shelf-life'⁴.

The monograph, however, is not the only long-form publication that we need to consider as an academic book. Collections of essays, critical editions and exhibition catalogues come under the 'book' rubric, and in some of the non-textual disciplines, such as archaeology, anthropology and film studies, long-form publications can be collections of photographs, films, or multimedia presentations. Increasingly, books are produced in digital form: as e-books that are modelled closely on the print format, or as enhanced formats that incorporate media other than the textual, and that link to resources outside themselves.

While open access is currently one of the central debates in the academy, and is of course an area of concern for us, this is not solely a project about OA. There are many other investigations into this currently taking place, such as the research undertaken by Crossick, Open Access Publishing in European Networks (OAPEN)⁵ and others. We are following all of these closely and incorporating their findings into our thinking. Our community is a broad one, and there are many shades of views on all the aspects of the academic book – so, while open access is important, it is only one of many key issues to be considered. In particular, the project needs to take account of the complexity of academic book production and use within and beyond the academy. The academy, after all, is not the only place where serious scholarship takes place. Many freelance writers and journalists produce scholarly works drawing on impeccable research, for example, the excellent historical biographies by Michael Holroyd, Richard Holmes, Claire Tomalin, or Amanda Foreman; the World War Two histories of Anthony Beevor; books on the Crusades by Richard Barber and many more. Academics are not the only people who read works of scholarship, either. As Jonathan Bate remarked in 2014, 'The substantial work of serious scholarship with a wider reach than that of the immediate academic sub-field is a precious thing, at the core of our cultural life and intellectual discourse'⁶.

'while OA is important, it is only one of many key issues to be considered'

Bate's example is Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars*, which had a wide readership beyond the academy, largely due to the imagination of the publishers who promoted and circulated the work to the communities outside academe that were best placed to receive it. There are vast numbers of other works that could be cited in this category; it has always been the case that certain works of scholarship had a broad general readership, and this is increasing with the growing popularity of history, classics and other humanities disciplines in television documentaries and debates, and with the impetus towards an impact agenda. In a recent article in *The Guardian*, Sam Leith claims that, 'The mainstream may be getting dumber by the day, but we are living in what looks like a golden age of publishing for, of all people, the university presses'⁷.

University presses are, he remarks, engaging in 'chewy, interesting subjects treated by writers of real authority but marketed in a popular way'. His argument is that university presses can take risks with books that trade publishers might avoid. The project is watching with interest to see how this trend develops.

'university presses can take risks with books that trade publishers might avoid'

The Academic Book of the Future project: research questions and activities

Research questions

Early on in the project we formulated a series of research questions, which we are constantly refining in the light of discussions with colleagues across all the areas represented in our Community Coalition. These questions range across academic disciplines and apply to all stakeholders. We wish to examine views and perceptions about the changes in the nature of research, the research environment and the research process; changes in the processes

71 through which books are commissioned, approved or accepted, edited, produced, published, marketed, distributed, made accessible and preserved; the roles academic books of different kinds play in the advancement of knowledge both in the academic community and beyond; the legal and economic frameworks, especially in relation to open access; political pressures (the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the push towards OA, the increasing impact agenda, pursuit of research funding); and how academics, publishers and librarians across the rest of the world – especially in the global south and in developing countries – perceive these issues.

In order to interrogate these questions to the fullest extent possible, we are engaging in a whole range of activities, as a project core team and as a wider community.

Activities

From our initial planning phase, even before we were awarded the Academic Book project, we were certain that we needed to involve many different organizations in all aspects of the project. With a small core team, it is impossible to range as widely as necessary, but with the help of the broader community, much can be achieved. Accordingly, we asked for an unassigned sum of money that we could allocate as the project progressed, rather than committing funds right at the beginning. This, we felt, would give us maximum flexibility to respond to new ideas coming in. The core team and RIN carry out a great deal of desk research and analysis; we organize events; we attend and give talks at other events; we commission blog posts, and we meet with people across the community.

Our first action was to direct RIN to carry out an initial literature review, which was delivered in December 2014. This is available online and will be added to as the project progresses⁸. Comments and additions are welcome. RIN is also working with publishers and learned societies to look at publication from the production side, and has held a number of focus groups and meetings. The first focus group for publishers was held at the 2014 London Book Fair, and since then RIN has developed a detailed schedule of questions for interviews with publishers, covering such issues as overall trends in proposals/submissions and publications, including such matters as subject and disciplinary breakdowns, editorial and production processes, trends in sales and marketing, rights issues (including third-party rights), relationships between print and e-books, open access, impacts of changes in roles of other stakeholders and in the wider environment, and plans for the future. RIN has also undertaken a considerable amount of desk research relating to American university presses, including reports from the Association of American University Presses (AAUP). Related to these activities, Anthony Cond, Chief Executive of Liverpool University Press, has proposed a conference for university presses, under the auspices of the project. Cond suggests that the definition of a university press and the plurality of current models of university press publishing present some important questions about best practice, the relationship between presses and their host institutions, and the direction of travel for the scholarly publishing ecosystem as a whole.⁹

'Comments and additions are welcome'

Although the AAUP has held an annual conference for several decades, this will be the first event to focus on the university press in a UK context. There are at present approximately 20 university presses in the UK for whom this event will be an essential forum to benchmark existing practices and map out possible future developments. The conference will also provide a useful primer for the increasing number of UK universities that are considering the launch of their own imprints through library repositories, corporate communications departments or as discrete entities.

'There are at present approximately 20 university presses in the UK'

Simon Tanner (Project Co-Investigator from King's) is undertaking a major analysis of Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 data from the arts and humanities as a means of learning more about the academic books created and deemed worthy of submission in the last REF cycle. Within this panel, the data can be investigated by unit of assessment subject area and by research output type. It is then possible to take a broad slice across the whole

panel or to interrogate by output type, and then look at each subject area in detail. This gives some information on the publishing trends in these subjects and certainly REF submission trends. It will also be possible to find out which books are cited in impact case studies. This might provide an indication of how books connect to the impact factors described in the REF. A series of other possible queries can also be formulated: book format/length, gender of authors, books per submitting institution, number of OA books, etc. This research is at an early stage and we are very aware of the caveats around statistical data and the REF. However, this analysis is yielding some very interesting pathways to follow.

'This might provide an indication of how books connect to the impact factors described in the REF'

We are co-ordinating a whole range of events over the next year, and have a number of embedded projects running or at the planning stage. For instance, we will hold a one-day conference on the visual book at the University of York in October, hosted by the Art History department, and inviting academics, publishers, librarians and copyright specialists to debate the particular problems that visual materials pose for publication. Also planned for October is a symposium at Lincoln University: 'The Impossible Constellation: What might the [Academic] Book of the Future look like in the digital age'? In April 2016 a conference on 'The Academic Book of the Future: The Future Space of Bookselling', will be held at Bangor University. The core project team has a busy programme of meetings and conference attendance, and more events are regularly being proposed by our Coalition.

We funded a workshop on digital ethnography and the 'Ethics of Circulation' in June (of which there is a report available on our website¹⁰), and, also in June, the University of Manchester funded a workshop on the project. In April, co-author Marilyn Deegan and Guyda Armstrong (Senior Lecturer in Italian at University of Manchester and member of our Advisory Board) gave a presentation at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, on the project's aims and objectives and research questions, as a result of which Brown University has now joined our Community Coalition and will be holding events in Academic Book Week. In June, Nick Canty, as well as Professor Claire Squires and Professor Alexis Weedon from our Advisory Board, took part in a round table on 'The Academic Book of the Future' at the SHARP (Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing) Congress in Montreal, and in July Rebecca Lyons spoke at the Eleventh International Milton Symposium in Exeter with another member of our Advisory Board, Professor Tom Corns. All these events – and others, captured on our website – have helped the project's reach to spread and give space for new voices to take part in the debates. It is vital to the team that we give access to these conversations to as many people as possible, given the impact that the subject has to all those engaged in research, or in the production or use of academic books.

The projects that are currently under way are:

- an investigation into new publishing practices, with an emphasis on new technologies, being carried out by the Humanities Research Institute at Sheffield University
- a small research project on the academic book in the developing world, with particular emphasis on Africa, which is being run by Marilyn Deegan and Caroline Davis (Oxford Brookes University)
- The Academic Book in the US, a research project by Anthony Watkinson
- Kathryn Reeve (Bath Spa University) is investigating the role of the editor in academic book production and also careers and changing roles in academic publishing
- Claire Squires (Director of the Stirling Centre for International Publishing and Communication) and Simon Rowberry (Stirling) are compiling a report on peer review
- Susan Greenberg (Roehampton University), the Higher Education Representative for the National Association of Writers in Education, is working with the BL on the discoverability of creative writing PhD theses.

Many more projects are being planned, and we are still receiving ideas from colleagues about new avenues to pursue and new projects to engage in. We are planning a project on the preservation of complex digital forms of academic books which will follow on from the Humanities Research Institute report on new publishing technologies. Also in the inception stage are projects on copyright; the importance of book publishing for early career researchers; the newly reconfigured university library and how students are using 'free' content; sound and audio: non-textual content in the academic book; and bookselling. A joint piece of research is being planned between Australia and Wales on early career researchers, the REF and open access.

'Many more projects are being planned'

Academic Book Week

Our flagship event for the next few months is Academic Book Week, 9–16 November 2015, which is intended to be a celebration of the diversity, innovation and influence of academic books. This has been taken up enthusiastically by the Publishers Association (PA) and the Booksellers Association (BA), as well as the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP), and was launched in July 2015 with an announcement in *The Bookseller*. We hope to increase awareness of the variety and accessibility of the academic book, engaging media and alerting policymakers to its importance as part of the intellectual ecosystem of the UK. We want to make the academic book more accessible to a wider general audience, extend the debate about the Academic Book of the Future and enhance the wider debate about the value of the arts and humanities. The response to Academic Book Week has been extraordinary: we have proposals flooding in for events to be held during that week, not just in the UK. Organizations in the US, Canada, Japan, Europe and Australia all want to engage with us. One key activity is the grand debate, which we are calling 'Opening the Book'. This was proposed by Kathryn Sutherland, Chair of our Advisory Board and Professor of Bibliography and Textual Criticism at Oxford University, and was initially intended as an Oxford University event. However, the themes (the future of the monograph, the Crossick report, OA, digital versus print, etc.) are of such general interest that we decided to make it much more widespread. Oxford participants in the debate will be Oxford scholars and librarians, Oxford University Press, the Oxford Monographs Committee, doctoral students and postdoctoral candidates. The proposition for this Oxford-based 'Opening the Book' debate is the Future of the Academic Monograph with reference to the Crossick report and other projects and publications about open access. The Academic Book Project is extending an invitation to the debate across a number of national and international organizations during Academic Book Week, and will capture and edit together the outputs from the various contributions. Such outputs may take the form of podcasts, recordings, blogs, tweets, Storifys, written reports, etc.. The project will compile a large report (format not yet decided) collecting all the views expressed and making them widely available. The other major output from Academic Book Week will be a Palgrave Pivot publication on the Academic Book of the Future. This will be produced by Palgrave over the month of November under its 'an academic book in a month' model.

'a celebration of the diversity, innovation and influence of academic books'

Other events in Academic Book Week will be exhibitions in libraries and bookshops throughout the UK (and we hope elsewhere), panels such as 'Should we trust Wikipedia?', being organized by Michael Pidd in Sheffield on 11 November, and a Crossover books panel with Greg Jenner (CBBC *Horrible Histories* consultant), Mathew Lyons (historical novelist), Ros Barber (historical novelist and academic) and Kathryn Sutherland (Jane Austen scholar).

Conclusion

The project ends on 30 September 2016, but the debate does not end there. The project team could probably continue running events and research projects for a further two or three years, so enormous has the interest and response been across all parts of the arts and humanities community. However, at the end of the project we will have a very substantial

body of work made widely available in the form of a final report on all our activities, plus the Palgrave Pivot book, blog posts, tweets, Storifys, podcasts, reports from all of the embedded projects and the report of the grand debate in Academic Book Week. This will be widely disseminated and we hope that the momentum will continue and that many of the activities will survive in some form. We especially hope to see Academic Book Week become a regular event. This is a subject that will engage people for many years to come: it is one that matters, not only in terms of jobs, economies and outputs, but also in terms of ethics and the integrity of scholarly communication. Access must come with trustworthy standards of quality, and secure plans for the preservation of all the kinds of books highlighted in the project. There will be plenty of scope for follow-on work for our partners: the future of the academic book is full of complex challenges that tug at systems not yet able to comprehensively solve them. And yet, as Crossick so appropriately reminds us, 'There is much to be gained by working with the grain, and much to be lost by not doing so'¹². In working so closely with all our Community Coalition partners, we hope, at least, that the grain of all initiatives and ideas will be made more visible, and enable the future of academic books to become more accessible, in the widest sense of that term, to our global networks.

'we hope that the momentum will continue'

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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