

# CINEMA JOURNAL

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## In Focus: The Crisis in Publishing

edited by Alexandra Juhasz

The news first came to me on the wind: a close friend of my mother's, a renowned and much-published senior feminist scholar, could not get her latest book published; my junior colleagues could not land book contracts and their associated promotions. Then, the crisis hit at my office door as my most recent manuscript was initially rejected because the marketing department at the press where it was under consideration deemed that my fellow editor, Jesse Lerner, and I had not included enough films with name recognition in our anthology on fake documentaries. (Slightly mainstreamed in content, it is soon to be published.) One reader tried to look up the films we discussed on *imdb.com*, but they were not to be found!

Horror of horrors: people who *sell* books determining what experts in the field should consider; Internet hits determining what texts are worthy of scholarly consideration. Given that my work has engaged with experimental, nonindustrial, little-seen alternative media, this did seem like a crisis indeed. Would I have to start writing on *Titanic*? Would academic writing become no different from the articles in *Entertainment Weekly*? Would the needs of marketing and sales departments outweigh the beauty of our arguments, the subtlety of our prose, the integrity of the texts we most admire? There must remain *some* difference between consumer culture and the values, purposes, and principles of the scholarly endeavor.

So I jumped at the chance to organize this In Focus as an opportunity to hear from, and engage in dialogue with, my colleagues in the field: what had they heard, how was it affecting their work, was there a crisis in publishing? I asked people at university presses, an administrator/scholar, and colleagues across the ranks to address what the "crisis" in cinema and media studies publishing looked like from where they sit.

The five responses suggest that there has been a significant sea change, if not a crisis, in the expectations, economics, and industry of academic publishing, and this is already having effects on the profession. We must respond, and soon. Our authors generously offer up strategies to resist the pull into calamity: from Leslie Mitchner, editor in chief at Rutgers University Press, that universities give \$200 vouchers to faculty for use at university presses; to the call to arms from Associate Professor Kathleen Fitzpatrick that there be a return of intellectual labor to the economy of the gift; to the charitable list from former University of California Press editor, and now professor, Eric Smoodin, of things that might make us stop worrying and love publishing. Smoodin concludes by asking us to "take a deep breath" and engage with the future of publishing with more knowledge and less fear.

While this In Focus can jump-start such a forward-looking process, its contributors also look back and reminisce about the publishing and professional "Golden Years," before what Mitchner calls the "Hollywoodization of the academy." The

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thirty interviewees surveyed by fellow graduate student Jamie Poster imagine, rather than remember, a better time in academe when they are sure that there was not “a dismal outlook for the profession” and scholars made decisions about their research projects based on integrity and not careerism. The crisis begins with the loss of this Eden, an idyllic place and time characterized by reading, thinking, and the publication of lots and lots of books. Then, a meaner, stupider, corporatized, and digitized reality descends upon us all.

How can we return to, or create anew, these lost times and values? Patrice Petro places the burden and blame squarely on us (not the publishing industry) by noting a loss of standards in professional culture, peer evaluation, and faculty governance. She believes that we must adjudicate our peers’ work carefully and rigorously, and stop relying on publishing to make such decisions for us. She argues that rigid hierarchies and outmoded standards for tenure and promotion lead to a diminishment of quality and a weakening of our professional culture. Similarly, Poster yearns for civic discourse, intellectual conversation, and the exchange of ideas to determine our scholarly projects; in fact, most of these five *In Focus* essays center on values statements.

Are these ideals, which brought and keep most of us in this profession, truly lost? I think not. But as the assembled authors remind us, in these hard times, when the reach of corporate culture extends to all realms, we must be practical, and idealistic as well. We must write well and resist the logic of publish or perish. We must take personal and communal responsibility for protecting what Petro calls the “speculative and intellectual thought alive and vital to everything we do.” And we must refuse to become what Poster and our most junior colleagues fear: “desperate, strategic, and careerist” in our publishing practices and elsewhere.

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## “Oy Vey! Is It a Crisis or Is It Just Me?”



by Leslie Mitchner

I chose my title in the hope of getting someone’s, anyone’s, attention. The story of university press publishing right now is a bit like a Woody Allen movie—once it was good, but now you hate to look. Just imagine me as a standup comic, wringing my hands as I go through my routine, hoping to make you laugh even as I tell you one horror story after another. You would hardly believe that things could be so awful. Right? Are you the one who is neurotic and paranoid, or am I? Is it really this bad? And in film studies too?

Let me start by telling you a story. Once upon a time in a land far, far away, let’s say Manhattan thirty-five years ago or more, there were still used bookstores lining Fourth Avenue and their wares spilled over into bins along the sidewalks.

Allen lovingly pays tribute to them in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. There were dozens of independent bookstores all over the city. There were real coffeehouses, no Starbucks; and although there was a Barnes & Noble store, there was no chain of the same name taking over the city and the country, selling Godiva chocolates, coffee mugs, glossy calendars, or peddling its own line of books and pushing other publishers' offerings off the shelves. There was no World Wide Web, unless it was an evil Cold War conspiracy. No one knew what a course pack was. Academics and the vanished species "general reader" bought lots of books. There was some crazy idea, nearly unfathomable now, that the humanities had intrinsic value, that art mattered, and that the way to rise in that exciting world was through reading.

Folks wandered around in labyrinthine library stacks and quirky bookshops, discovering riches they could not "google" or otherwise find as isolated units on a Web site. Students actually read the books assigned to them, and—you'll scarcely believe it—many that were not. They marked them up, making it difficult to sell them in the used book market. They certainly could not sell them to Amazon.com, enabling other students anywhere in the country to purchase the same books at a fraction of their original prices. Journals had not yet raised their prices to such astronomical figures that libraries and scholars had scarcely any money left for book purchases. The so-called gypsy scholar had not yet been invented. Some people may have dressed like gypsies, but that was only because Banana Republic, Ann Taylor, Barney's, and Giorgio Armani had not yet taken them in hand.

And it was still possible to keep up with what was written in any given academic field. Imagine! Was it a perfect world? No, but in terms of what concerns us here, it was a different world and one that was more hospitable to university presses and to young scholars making their way. This was also Woody Allen's better period, when he passed as an intellectual filmmaker—or auteur—in some circles, including among directors in France.

During the ensuing decades, lots of changes occurred. Fast forward to Superstar Scholars, the conglomeratization of commercial presses and of some large academic publishing houses as well. I have always thought of this era as the "Hollywoodization" of the academy. Remember those big posters, plastered with the faces of colleagues or professors, at the Routledge booth at the MLA? You, too, wanted to see your name on the marquee. University presses published record numbers of titles and grew fat on sales for a brief period of time. But then support declined for education from the federal government to the states and, in turn, from state legislatures to universities. Rapidly and steeply rising tuition costs for students followed, then cutbacks in funding by universities to their libraries—even as the libraries had to invest in new technologies. First a boon and then a boondoggle, theory took over, fragmenting academic audiences. And on and on. Just run the film (or story in that first paragraph) backward and you'll get the idea.

What we find now, in the new millennium, is shrinking print runs of all titles (even in film studies, which as a relatively new field used to sell particularly well). University presses face increasing pressures to reduce or do away altogether with subsidies from their parent institutions, even at a time when book buying is way, way down and the cost of doing business is ever rising. Everyone is mesmerized by

horrific national and global events and glued to cable (nonexistent thirty-five years ago) news. It's not *Radio Days* anymore.

You have played by the rules. So have we. You were a brilliant graduate student. You had a great dissertation committee. The members of that committee were happy to recommend you to their own publishers. You got your degree with honors, or you published your first book long ago and need to publish a second one for promotion. Unfortunately, even the big names in film studies are having more trouble placing their work. Theory has been declared dead. The studio or publishing heads can no longer get away with sequels to those books and their clones. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it does not sell books and only rarely sells movies. Your editor may get two glowing reports on your manuscript from other scholars (for them it is enough that you have done your homework and are smart), but the press's marketing department likely asks, "But who is going to buy this?" The book is killed off before the proposal gets to the editorial board. Or, perversely, if it looks too saleable, a member of that board may shoot it down because too many people might read it. God forbid!

Let me introduce some numbers at this point. Thirty-five years ago, I am told (I was just entering graduate school myself, so I take my elders at their word), presses could count on selling two thousand copies of a *hardcover* book to libraries. During the heyday of theory, a film studies title by a superstar author might sell eight hundred copies in hardback and three thousand to four thousand (or even more) copies in paperback.

My, how times have changed. Think of it as declining box-office receipts and an industry that has to find new ways of attracting audiences. There is a lot of competition. University presses (excluding Cambridge and Oxford) published well over 5,000 titles across all fields last year. All publishers combined produced more than 180,000. Today, an average university press title in media studies might sell 200 cloth copies to libraries and 1,000 to 1,250 (likely fewer) in paperback. All the editors are scrambling to find books that can do better, or their presses cannot cover their overhead costs.

The voice of the marketing people, as in Hollywood, has become correspondingly stronger. And, yes, you have to be able to make a pitch for books in a couple of sentences, or, in a more tolerant atmosphere, perhaps minutes. Your editor does too. In the past two years, six small university presses have been threatened with closure. The screens go dark? Oedipus in reverse? Saturn devours his children? A crisis? Not yet perhaps, but one is brewing.

Okay. You probably want to know what would need to happen to change the grim picture. Get me "rewrite." First, please understand that not all scripts should become movies and not all dissertations should become books. Next, recognize that writing for a committee is not the same as writing for a wider audience. After that, look at what you have and figure out if each chapter simply gives another example of your main argument. If this is the case, perhaps the manuscript can be divided up and published as articles. If a lot of it has appeared in journals already, a press editor is unlikely to be interested in signing it. Does the manuscript tell "a story"? Does it break new ground or just review the literature (chuck that chapter), argue with it,

merely inch the argument forward a bit? Movies have their genres; books have their disciplines. Occasionally a film can mix genres and be a brilliant success. Others attempt this feat and fail miserably. Witness some of Woody Allen's best and worst. Marketing departments, like studios, want the *Annie Halls*, not the *Shadows and Fogs*. A successful interdisciplinary manuscript is *essential* reading across those disciplines, not optional reading that merely touches on a boundary between subject areas. Manuscripts should not be overly long; it is a rare book argument that can sustain three hundred pages or more.

Jargon? It no longer flies. Subtitles are fine in foreign movies, but if you need them to read a book in English, you have a problem. Readability matters. Remember that attention spans are—shall we say—compromised these days. Ask yourself, “Will readers think it is more important to pay money for my book than to buy *whatever*?”

Do you have a future in the biz? Editors want to know that. They have become increasingly wary about signing authors whose future in the profession is uncertain. Yes, it's a catch-22 proposition, but I can't help it. Are you going to be on panels at the SCMS meeting and thus in a position to help promote your book? Do you have fans? Will you be in a position to influence the field? Or are you going into banking? Is your manuscript what editors call “a slice of a slice of a slice,” meaning narrowly focused? If so, they cannot afford to care about your brilliance because the potential readership is nonexistent.

The real problem with film studies and some other fields is that they have gone stale—like a certain filmmaker whose name I have often repeated here. In fact, I chose Woody Allen for a reason beyond the wonderfully suitable titles of his films and the worried expression on his face in every part he plays. When was the last time you or I ran off to a theater to see one of his latest ventures? You don't want to waste your time or your money, right? Think about it, even if it is painful.

Review the first section of this little performance of mine and you will readily see what has changed and why editors and their presses (and you) are caught in a squeeze. We want to remain media studies editors. We absolutely love this field and would hate to be forced to abandon it. We want to publish your work if you can recognize our needs. Here are some pleas. Buy books. Do not use photocopies in classes. Make your students buy their own copies of the titles you assign. Tell your university administrators, if you are on a campus that has a university press, that it should get as much financial and moral support as possible. If your university does not have a press, encourage the administration to give at least first-time authors subsidies to help offset some of the costs of production (highly illustrated books do cost more). One of the best ideas I have seen floated is that faculty should be given \$200 book vouchers each year. Everyone would benefit from such a plan, and it would cost an administration comparatively little to provide this assistance. Write books that other people want to—*need to*—read. Badger your legislature to give more money to state institutions. Do the same on the national level in regard to funding education.

The next few years will likely decide the fate of many university presses. There are more than one hundred presses in our professional organization; only a few have active lists in media studies. We hope every press will survive. The smaller

ones that depend on book sales alone are the most endangered. Some of the larger presses subsidize their book divisions through sales of journals. Others have income from reference book publishing or endowments. Even they are in trouble. Many university presses are moving into "trade" publishing in the hope that this magic bullet will save them.

Are we paranoid to be concerned about the future? I wish. Depending on how you define crisis, we are either experiencing one or approaching one fast. A crisis is, however, better than a catastrophe because we have some time left to figure things out. The situation is complex and the result of many factors over decades. The solution is disarmingly simple—better books, more book buyers, higher print runs, and more money for universities, libraries, and presses. The sun rises over Manhattan, jazz plays on the soundtrack, and we are all readers and avid filmgoers again. Woody Allen and all of us make a comeback. It is a fantasy, yes, but a glorious one. We should be so lucky.

### Suggested Reading

- Richard Abel and Lyman W. Newlin, eds., *Scholarly Publishing: Books, Journals, and Libraries in the Twentieth Century* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2002).
- William Germano, *Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato, *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published* (New York: Norton, 2002).

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## Whose Crisis Is It?



by Patrice Petro

Let me begin by sharing the best advice I was given as a young scholar by my first and life-long mentor in film studies, Chuck Wolfe, of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Years ago, when I talked with him about my anxieties and fears about publishing my first scholarly article, he told me this (from his own then untenured position): publish only when you have something to say, when you believe you have something of value to contribute to scholarly dialogue, and when you are sure that what you have written is what you truly think. With this in mind, I would like in this brief piece to address the current crisis in scholarly publishing by asking, for whom, especially, does it present a crisis?

Obviously, declining state and federal budgets have hit universities and hence university presses hard. In this forum, Leslie Mitchner carefully outlines the many changes that have taken place in academic publishing during the last thirty years or more. Needless to say, we are all experiencing the current fiscal challenges facing universities in a variety of ways. These challenges have created a crisis for university

presses and for many editors and staff who are committed to soliciting, publishing, and promoting the best new work.

But the crisis, it seems to me, is also in large part of our own making. While there can be no doubt that the problems of scholarly publishing are at base economic and systemic, and thus outside individual control, a larger set of issues relating to institutional cultures and faculty governance have fueled this crisis, and those are within our control. The crisis in scholarly publishing, I believe, is most immediately a crisis for junior scholars but ultimately is a looming crisis for us all—our students, colleagues, departments, disciplines, and university cultures.

It is the responsibility of tenured faculty and administrators to address this crisis by reviewing the standards for tenure and promotion in an effort to rethink the professional culture we have inherited. This culture is of relatively recent origin and in dire need of serious rethinking, revision, and change.

I am hardly the first person to say this. In his May 2002 letter to the Modern Language Association (MLA), then president Stephen Greenblatt underscored the pressures facing junior faculty who are expected to have a book published when they come up for tenure at the same time as university presses are scaling back production.<sup>1</sup> A year earlier, in 2001, Lindsay Waters, executive editor for the humanities at Harvard University Press, wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about the “tyranny of the monograph” and criticized what he saw as the exaggerated emphasis on the publication of a book to gain tenure.<sup>2</sup> Waters argued that junior scholars should not have to publish books to gain tenure because it places undue focus on professional development and fundamentally diminishes the quality of all academic work. I agree but would add that no one, whether junior or senior, should publish books or articles or deliver conference papers just to fill the pages of their curriculum vitae. This is precisely the kind of professionalism we must resist, not only because we must oppose all forms of packaged (and administrative) thinking but because we must keep speculative, insightful, and intellectual thought alive and vital in everything we do.

Given the criteria for tenure and promotion at most institutions, what can realistically be done? My own experience confirms what I have recently read regarding the intractable views of many senior faculty and administrators nationwide. Many fervently believe that the book is the gold standard, the only standard, for tenure (as is the second book for promotion to the rank of full professor). As evident in written criteria that explicitly state that “a book or its equivalent” is required for tenure (or “a second book or its equivalent” for promotion), there are those who steadfastly believe that a series of articles can never add up to a book because the experience of producing a sustained piece of writing and research can never be “equivalent” to writing a collection of essays. Of course, as a colleague of mine once quipped, there are many books that are not the “equivalent of a book.” And in film studies, many journal essays have been more groundbreaking and influential than most books. Think only of Thomas Elsaesser on melodrama, Laura Mulvey on visual pleasure and narrative cinema, Miriam Hansen on early silent film, Tom Gunning on the cinema of attractions, or Linda Williams on body genres.<sup>3</sup>



I could go on, but my point is not to extol the virtues of the essay over those of the book (although, like Theodor Adorno, I admire the essay form to the extent that it “does not seek the eternal in the transient and distill it out” but tries rather “to render the transient eternal”).<sup>4</sup> There are excellent books, groundbreaking essays, and emergent electronic publications, all of which contribute to our teaching, research, and intellectual lives. In considering whom to hire, tenure, or promote, the issue for me is not the book versus the essay, traditionally produced or online, but that scholarship, in its myriad forms, must be adjudicated carefully and rigorously—by professional peers both within and external to our programs, departments, and universities.

It continues to surprise me that so much responsibility for tenure and promotion recommendations is relegated, implicitly or explicitly, to something or somebody else—to university presses (as Lindsay Waters pointed out) or to external reviewers. It is as if some of our senior colleagues rely solely on the fact that a book has been published rather than on their own reading of the work. Outside reviewers are crucial, don't get me wrong. And in many departments, such as my own, that house faculty in many different disciplines, outside peer reviews are crucial to evaluating the significance of work in specialized fields. Nonetheless, I am still struck by how narrowly some want to define scholarly promise. Published scholarship, in whatever form it takes, is central to assessing that promise, that distinction. But intellectual aptitude and ability cannot be judged based on published scholarship alone. Teaching is also intellectual work. Administrative service to the department, the university, and the profession is too. Teaching and administrative labor (involving the creation of new programs and, even more challenging, sustaining them over time, as those of us in film studies are acutely aware) can have as great an influence as an article, even one that is widely read, and more influence than a book that is routinely produced.

A vote for tenure is a vote about the future. Is the candidate committed to developing a research agenda that informs—and that is informed by—teaching and building a program? In the case of promotion, which is largely honorary, has the candidate demonstrated an ongoing and distinguished record of publication, teaching, and service (and not necessarily in that order) to the department, the university, and the profession? In making these decisions, there is no way of avoiding the burden of judgment and interpretation. Yet it often seems that this is precisely what senior faculty do in relying on the existing criteria for tenure and promotion: assess scholarly promise and achievement by counting to one and then to two.

What happened to thinking critically? When did the humanities opt for quantitative measures over qualitative assessments? When did we lose the ability to evaluate promise or achievement within a wider set of expectations and a longer institutional view? While it is certainly easier to measure quantity than quality, we in the humanities—we who are supposedly facing the direst of crises in scholarly publishing—must reclaim the responsibility, central to our discipline, of thinking critically about what constitutes promise in higher education today. Although the publish-or-perish mentality in academia has long been with us, I believe it is possible—indeed, that it has always been possible—to resist this logic. We do this

every time we review an essay or a monograph for publication and when we act as outside reviewers on tenure or promotion cases. We also do this when we vote for or against giving tenure or a promotion to someone in our departments and when we set expectations for junior colleagues and graduate students.

Those of us who have tenure have an obligation to think through and beyond the current impasse in scholarly publishing and to consider who suffers most from rigid hierarchies and outmoded standards (a short list would include younger scholars, untenured faculty, graduate students, and ultimately ourselves—who sustain the diminished atmosphere for critical thinking and judgment when we adhere to narrowly defined standards of excellence). It is up to us to respond thoughtfully and creatively to the multiple and ongoing crises facing higher education today, since these shape the conditions of our professional, and not only our professional, lives.

### Notes

I want to thank Alex Juhasz for inviting me to contribute to this In Focus section of *Cinema Journal*.

1. Stephen Greenblatt, "Call for Action on Problems in Scholarly Book Publishing: A Special Letter from Stephen Greenblatt," available at <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2002/07/2002070202c.htm>.
2. Lindsay Waters, "Rescue Tenure from the Tyranny of the Monograph," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 20, 2001, B7, available at <http://chronicle.com/prm/weekly/v47/i32/32b00701.htm>.
3. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," *Monogram* 4 (1972): 2–15; Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (autumn 1975): 6–18; Miriam Hansen, "Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?" *New German Critique* 29 (spring–summer 1983): 147–84; Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3–4 (1986): 63–70; Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2–13.
4. Theodor Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1:11.

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## Code Orange: Career Fear and Publishing



by Jamie Poster

At the annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in March 2004, discussion at a workshop on "The Book" quickly jumped to a topic it never left: the crisis in publishing. The workshop was cosponsored by *Cinema Journal* and the SCMS Graduate Student Organization. While book publishing is less immediately relevant for graduate students since it is more a tenure and advancement issue, the messages came in loud and clear: "Things are only going to get

worse, so start worrying now if you're not already" and "here's yet another curve ball to impact the direction you take in writing your dissertation." We graduate students are well aware of the ominous future, but publishing a book is not the only problem we get stressed about. Our concerns move in and out of the publishing arena but only within the larger frame of a troubled job market.

When asked to write from the "the graduate student" perspective, I was concerned that my outlook (a particularly dismal one) might not be representative. Through an informal e-mail survey, I asked other graduate students to think about publishing along specific axes: the job market, publishing venues, and publishing motivations.<sup>1</sup> But most important (and it paid off productively), I encouraged people to use the survey as a catalyst to discuss other concerns. I assured respondents total anonymity, as I anticipated that people would want to say things that they would rather not have attributed to them. A number of sensitive topics came up, particularly on matters having to do with advising. The comments offered were candid and reflected a wide array of attitudes, some vastly different from my own.

Graduate students encounter the publishing "crisis" at their campus libraries. While several respondents appreciated library Web sites and publishing hubs, a few bemoaned that Web counterparts do not provide the spatial and tactile experience of trolling the stacks. Thinking past institutionally organized databases, several discussed the challenges (and benefits) of the unorganized but limitless database of the Web, and the arduous and dizzying process of keyword searching for dependable gateways to legitimate resources. As an aside, and in homage to my favorite book title ever in the subgenre "bibliomystery," I have to ask: *Is Dewey Decimated?*

Most graduate students, however, celebrate the expansion and innovation of online publishing, or, in a more limited sense, the dissemination on the Web of print publications. Many students find access to online versions of print publications (through Project Muse, for example) critical to the research process. Digitization makes access to more resources easier and faster, significantly widening the breadth of research and resulting in more informed writing. The same is true of the slow but steady area of book publishing in electronic formats: "NetLibrary is a convenient pain in the neck. I like the access, but 24 hours [the loan period] is hardly enough time to read an entire book from a computer screen" (e-mail, May 4, 2004).

The impetus behind the digitization of scholarship is not clear to me: Is the crisis in publishing forcing libraries and presses into digitization? Is the development of a new medium saving scholarship from a slow and painful hard-copy death? Or is it both? Behind these questions sits a palpable feeling of reluctance. While we appreciate digital migration and publishing, however imperfect it still might be, we are justly concerned about how the various committees in our future will regard the scholarship we publish in digital formats.

Graduates know that publishing in prestigious journals is the *only* thing that matters, that dissertations are second to top-flight journal articles, that we should publish one article for each year we are in graduate school, that other published works (essays in anthologies, reviews, etc.) do not matter and can actually hinder one's job search, and (in diametric opposition) that one should publish a lot and include everything on the vita. Obviously, these fragments of advice are intended

for students in a range of markets, including those seeking teaching jobs at research institutions, liberal arts colleges, and teaching-centered universities.

Contradictory career advice is neither surprising nor new, but there is a lot to be learned from the consistent focus on quantity and prestige. Mentoring these days is careerist in focus. None of the respondents mentioned having heard any advice about the importance or originality of their work. That does not mean that counsel about quality is absent, but it is symptomatic that scholarly integrity is not a part of the success mantra we repeat to ourselves.

Many of us have been warned by our mentors, by colleagues, in workshops at SCMS, and in articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and elsewhere about how we should approach our dissertations. One student was told to stay away from any topic that is too arcane, because university presses are not interested in esoteric or experimental projects. Many were encouraged to play it safe, to add something new to very established areas. One respondent was told to write a scholarly work that might cross over and sell in the trade market. Another, conversely, was told that cross-over books are the kiss of death. A lot of us are being warned, a couple of years before we need to start seeking out book contracts, that it is going to get a lot tougher to land a contract in the future.

An astonishing number of respondents (more than 85 percent) have heard that having a book before even hitting the market is ideal. This sounds wise, as many of us believe that our dissertation, once edited into a publishable manuscript, will become the book that secures us tenure. But, obviously, this is an uncertain scenario; to write a dissertation with a magic combination of elements that might garner attention and support from a prestigious, cash-strapped academic publisher is hardly easy. In the end, we might catch an eye on a search committee, yet the book might still not be the tenure ticket we thought it would be.

At some universities, books published before getting a tenure-track position do not count toward advancement. Junior faculty (regardless of how many books they have already published) must publish another before tenure review. The widespread concern that we need a published book before hitting the job market (which, in my humble opinion, is completely absurd and excessive) might look good to search committees but sets us up for another round of trying to beat the odds.

None of the survey respondents explicitly accuse any person (or workshop or publication) of giving bad advice. All of us (and mentors in particular) feel the publishing panic. Faculty advisers are flummoxed; they want us to be well prepared for success in an increasingly contracting industry. But what about publishing for the sake of producing scholarship? Contributing to changing and developing conversations? As one idealistic and thoughtful graduate student noted, "What about engaging in 'civic discourse' and contributing to discourses outside of the academic world?"

Many students, despite fears that it might be ill advised, are committed to writing for magazines, newspapers, the alternative press, and the Web. Writing outside traditional academic venues can "keep us sane" and connected to our communities. One graduate student makes all of his writing available on the Web to better facilitate collaboration. In fact, many respondents highly value the Internet's

capacity to speed up and fundamentally change the scholarly process, but such writing is generally regarded as extracurricular. One graduate student summed up the challenge best: "My drive to publish is about jobs, although ideally it would be about intellectual conversation. My drive to write is about scholarship."

My informal survey indicates that graduate students are frustrated, puzzled, and scared, but, overall, we remain ambitious and committed to success in the academy. We speak of our future in the profession (getting jobs, getting books published) in desperate, strategic, and careerist terms. But despite the crisis, the changes in the job market, and the development of electronic publishing, many of us maintain a commitment to the lost purpose of it all. I am inspired by my colleagues' devotion to the exchange of ideas and to the scholarly process in general, even if they (incongruously) feel such lofty goals are separate from what we must do to further our careers.

#### Note

1. On May 3, 2004, I sent an e-mail survey, entitled "Graduate Student Publishing Survey," to SCMSgrad-l and Screen-l, resulting in thirty-four responses. Several of those responses are cited verbatim in this article.

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## From the Crisis to the Commons



by *Kathleen Fitzpatrick*

I want to get the personal stuff out of the way as quickly as possible, and thus I begin with a bit of whining: last December, seventy-two hours after my tenure decision became final, I received a rejection from a press that had had my book manuscript under review for ten months. The note, as encouraging as rejections can be, emphasized that the fault, if fault there were, lay not with the manuscript but with the climate; the press had received two positive readers' reports, and the editor was enthusiastic about the project. The marketing people, however, had declared the book "a bad financial risk in the current economy."

I am writing in a dying field. Or so it seems given the way academic presses treat that field of late. What is interesting about this statement, though, is that my field is not hidebound or traditional. Nor, for that matter, is my field so ruthlessly cutting edge or so radically interdisciplinary that integrating it into current academic categories is difficult. My manuscript focuses on the relationship between contemporary literary fiction and television. More specifically, it focuses on recent novels that suggest that new media are driving literature out of the central cultural position it once inhabited.

In other words, I have written a book that argues that the book is not dying. If ever there were an argument that presses might have a vested interest in publishing,

it strikes me that this might be it. This is not to suggest that my work is so stellar that it is impossible to fathom its getting rejected, but one would think it would be in the best interest of academic presses to promote texts that argue for the continued relevance of print in the digital age. Nonetheless, there is a profound crisis in university press publishing largely revolving around the insupportable economics of the current publishing system. As Patrice Petro notes, in his May 2002 letter to the membership of the MLA, Stephen Greenblatt made many of these issues public, including that presses have radically cut back the number of books published in "certain fields." These fields are primarily in the humanities; numerous presses have ceased acquiring new manuscripts in literature altogether, and many others require hefty subventions from their authors. But the danger presented by this crisis is not simply that fewer books will be published; the crisis is rather, as Greenblatt goes on to suggest, one that directly threatens the futures of many potentially successful academics:

Some junior faculty members who will be reviewed for tenure in this academic year are anxiously waiting to hear from various university presses. These faculty members find themselves in a maddening double bind. They face a challenge—under inflexible time constraints and with very high stakes—that many of them may be unable to meet successfully, no matter how strong or serious their scholarly achievement, because academic presses simply cannot afford to publish their books. The situation is difficult for those in English and even more difficult for those in foreign languages.

We are concerned because people who have spent years of professional training—our students, our colleagues—are at risk. Their careers are in jeopardy, and higher education stands to lose, or at least severely to damage, a generation of young scholars.

Greenblatt's suggestions for ameliorating the situation focus on separating tenure decisions from the book standard, by diversifying the ways that scholars can demonstrate active, successful research agendas and by paying more careful attention to the quality of work (rather than relying on press readers to do so). This is an important topic of discussion, and one I am fortunate my department has paid close attention to.

I want to take a different turn, however, in considering possible solutions to the crisis in publishing. Suppose that instead of abandoning the monograph we make the monograph economically viable. Thus, here, I must reverse the argument of my manuscript: print publishing, at least of scholarly texts, may indeed be dying, crushed under the weight of its institutional production apparatus. The declining viability of print has been highlighted (though not caused) by the rise of various modes of electronic publishing. Journal publishing has already been through this crisis and has created some pioneering solutions, from which book publishing might learn.

Shorter texts (such as articles) lend themselves more easily to electronic delivery, because they are more likely to be read onscreen, but the parallel nature of the crises in publishing—declining library purchases coupled with rising production costs—suggests that there might be parallel solutions. The choice that we in the humanities are left with is to remain tethered to a dying system or to move

forward into a mode of publishing and distribution that will remain economically and intellectually supportable into the future.

The future mode of publishing must of necessity include some form of electronic distribution. But what form? Should academic presses move to a print-on-demand model? Or should they think more radically about an all-electronic delivery system, in which full-length texts are made available in portable formats, readable onscreen, and printable by the user? Or, most riskily perhaps, is there a way to escape the academic press model of publication entirely, moving to some new system of peer review and manuscript editing that sheds the troubled structures of press economics in favor of an open-source, communal mode of intellectual discovery?

If we actually attempted to follow through on this last option, how might we in the humanities set about creating such a system? The move toward online journal publication began in the sciences, where the publishing crisis first became evident; the move toward a new system of monograph publication must begin with those whose careers are most built around the monograph. Unfortunately, humanities scholars are (stereotypically, at least) also the most likely to work within the old system rather than imagining—let alone creating—something technologically and structurally new.

However, creating something new also creates a series of dangers: those pioneers who first make the leap to a new system of open-source electronic publishing risk having traditionalists distrust their vitae. It is perhaps no accident that the first experiments in online journal publication in the humanities were by and large conducted by those whose research took as its object new media and contemporary technologies: scholars who could convincingly argue to promotion committees that the new form of publication itself was part of the research. Moreover, scholars doing research into these fields were more likely to read seriously (and, perhaps most important, to cite) work published online. With the success of journals such as *Postmodern Culture* and *electronic book review*, other fields have gradually been emboldened to follow.

There are instructive details in this narrative: scholars in noncontemporary, nonmedia-related fields will not accept electronically delivered monographs until the mode of delivery has first been proven viable, or, more to the point, until other scholars take material published in such a mode seriously. If there is to be a revolution in monograph publishing, then, it must begin with those working in new media, electronic textuality, the history of technology, and so forth. Only scholars in these fields can reasonably argue that their form must follow their content; only these scholars can reasonably expect that their colleagues will find, read, and take seriously texts published electronically. Only then, when the new form has been demonstrated to be viable, will scholars in other fields make the same leap. And only then, when scholars have begun to make that leap, will the academic publishing crisis truly be averted.

To that end, I am here announcing the founding of ElectraPress, a new electronic imprint that will focus on publishing book-length manuscripts in the area of new media studies. Manuscripts will be peer reviewed, vetted by an editorial board, and carefully edited, ensuring the publications are of high quality and significance.

We hope, moreover, that in the short run we will give aid to the community of scholars caught in the publishing crisis, by developing working relationships between ElectraPress and the humanities/new media editors at the presses we admire. We hope these editors will refer projects to us that they feel ought to be published but that their presses have turned down on financial grounds.

One key difference between Electra and traditional academic publishing will be that all work will be produced on an open-source, Creative Commons model; this system will rely on the volunteer labor of editors, peer reviewers, board members, designers, programmers, and, of course, authors. Authors who publish with Electra will be asked to give back to the community by reviewing and editing manuscripts of other scholars. Most important, the results of this labor will be made freely available to the scholarly community and to other interested readers. What we hope to accomplish is a true return of intellectual labor to an economy of the gift, in which the work is done to *contribute* to the growing body of knowledge rather than, even if illusorily, to *profit* therefrom.

Because of the volunteer nature of the project, at least at first, few manuscripts will be taken on. As the volunteer base grows, and more scholars accept Electra's publication model, progress will no doubt accelerate. I urge anyone concerned about the publishing crisis to participate in this project. Insofar as true solutions to the publishing crisis may be found, they can only arise from within the academic community itself.

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## How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Crisis in Publishing



by Eric Smoodin

I approach the issue of the crisis in publishing from what I hope is an interesting and unique position. I began teaching full-time at a university in 1985. Since then, I have produced books and other forms of scholarship. For three years, though, from 1998 to 2001, I worked as the film, media, and philosophy acquisitions editor at the University of California Press. So, for that period, I was responsible for finding the books that the press would eventually publish in those fields.

From this experience, I believe that, in a certain sense, there really isn't a crisis in publishing. The very word *crisis* implies that there have been decades of publishing paradise for academics, followed by a recent catastrophic shift. Publishing has never gone smoothly; there are always problems in the industry and problems that affect fields (film was not always the relatively desirable field it is today). However, over the last five or ten years, the publishing industry has undergone some significant structural and economic changes that have placed some serious burdens on authors



(don't even get me started on the problems facing philosophers, who would kill for the book publishing opportunities film scholars have).

Let me begin by describing my job as an editor to demystify what it is that editors do and how books get made. Our goal at UC Press, at least when I was there, was to publish about twelve film and media books a year, six each in the spring and fall. We almost never published that many, but that was the goal. To come close to publishing twelve books, I tried to offer at least twice that many contracts, in the neighborhood of two contracts per month. Sometimes I made many more offers, and some months were very dry indeed.

Although I had no set formula, I tried to get books from established scholars, of course, and from junior scholars who had written terrific dissertations. Edited books, although important, were less of a priority, and some books were difficult to classify—screenplays, for instance. Especially toward the end of my stint at the press there was added pressure to sign “trade” books, by commercial writers, for instance.

It would be impossible to guess how many manuscripts, partial manuscripts, queries, proposals, and book titles written on napkins at SCMS conferences I looked at, but there were plenty. As the numbers indicate, though, at least at UC Press there was a commitment to publishing a fair number of film and media books, in spite of the various crises in publishing.

Because of these crises, I looked for certain kinds of books within film studies. Books on American subjects tend to sell better than European ones, so a list top heavy on books about French, German, or Italian movies would not go over well with the marketing people. My sense is that most presses want to publish books on African, Central American, South American, and Asian subjects but not too many—presses are looking for the one great book about Indian film, rather than trying to produce four or five over two or three years. Books that had course-adoption potential were an added plus. Books that claimed breadth, about a genre, for instance, or a nation but that dealt with only thirteen or fifteen films had little value. They reflected the author's syllabus and were useful in a classroom only if an instructor wanted to use those films.

Yet scholars still have a great deal of agency, and are producing books that editors want. Over the years, I have seen any number of junior and senior scholars shoot themselves in the foot because they did not understand this and assume that the myths and legends about publishing were true. I would like to take those myths and legends on directly. Here, then, is my “Top Eight” list of publishing? urban legends.

1. This is the big one, and most others on this list are corollaries. The goal of the editor is to thwart you, to prevent you from being published. Most scholars seem sure that presses and editors are in the business of not publishing, of trying to keep things out of print. I am convinced there is a pathology behind this involving the unique combination of extreme narcissism and low self-esteem that seem epidemic in academia: “My work is too edgy to be published. But, anyway, I'm not worthy of being published.”

2. “I could never approach an editor. Perhaps an intermediary will do it for me, such as a big name who knows my work. Or perhaps an academic who's :

series editor will come to me. Or the editor him/herself will, somehow, and probably mistakenly, come to me to ask me about my work." Editors want scholars to come to them—to send them e-mails and to approach them at conferences. The best way to get work published is to talk directly to an editor. You have to keep reminding yourself—editors need product! They want to hear from you.

3. There is a formal protocol for approaching an editor, with obscure Masonic rules, secret handshakes, and bizarre regulations, because, of course, all editors are trying to thwart you (number 1). There are no formal rules. William Germano, of Routledge, has written everything you need to know about this in his terrific book, *Getting It Published*.<sup>1</sup> Some editors want proposals; some don't. Most press Web sites tell you how to submit a manuscript. But it's perfectly all right to get in touch with an editor via e-mail, with a 150-word description of your book. Make it socko, with someone being killed in the first sentence. Include a table of contents, tell the editor if the book is done or not, how long it is, how many photographs it will need (don't overdo it here!), and provide an honest assessment of its classroom potential.

4. "If an editor publishes my enemy, then that editor will never publish me." I point here to the aforementioned pathology of number 1. Editors do not get into turf wars. If the book by your archenemy sold well, then your book—if it's about a similar topic—might appeal to that same editor. You might think, "Well, if I submit my book to this editor, then he or she will have it read by my enemy, who will trash it." This is where you have a great deal of agency. An editor might well ask you to suggest possible readers for your manuscript. That editor might even say, "You know, so and so might be good." That's when you say, "In fact, that person is my sworn enemy, and, anyway, he is the spawn of Satan." Your editor should then reply, "Well, we don't want the spawn of Satan writing our reports. Whom do you recommend?"

5. This also gets us back to number 1, about editors trying to thwart you. In this variation, authors believe that contracts are just given out willy-nilly and presses do not plan on honoring them. Actually, contracts are given out very carefully and for books that presses fully intend to publish.

6. Presses neglect to advertise their books (of course, because presses are trying to thwart you). There are good marketing departments and bad ones. But, for the most part, if your book is not reviewed in the *New York Times*, it's not for lack of trying. When I was an editor, I spoke with a lot of authors who would tell me that, after working with another press, they were interested in coming to UC Press, because the other press didn't market their books well. I would always cringe, knowing full well that we wouldn't market their books any differently.

7. Readers' reports are all political and all written by the authors' friends. Thus, unless you have friends in high places, you will be thwarted by editors (see number 1). Nothing could be farther from the truth. Nothing is harder to get than a reader's report. People are busy, and editors are always turned down a few times. To help your editor, make up a list of possible readers and a list of people who should not read your work. Reports are not simply produced by members of a select club of people who scratch each other's backs. Presses are serious about getting reports, and editors as well as people in marketing and other departments look at them carefully.

8. "Because editors are trying to thwart me (see number 1), I shouldn't even begin to think about getting my dissertation published until I've revised it six times and it's ready to be etched in stone." Editors know that dissertations need to be revised. Better to submit the dissertation, if it meets certain criteria (see Leslie Mitchner's comments), and then revise according to the readers' reports as well as your own ideas. That is, revise once, not twice.

I am not trying to blame scholars, and especially not junior scholars, for the problems in publishing. Decreased library sales, use of course packets, the bad economy, uncertainty about e-books, the emphasis on trade books, and everything else mentioned in these essays are very real problems. I hope I have reminded you, though, that there are things you can do in the face of these problems. And the more you know about how the academic publishing industry works, the better you will be able to survive as a scholar, however uneasily, so that you don't have to begin to think the unthinkable—applying to law school.

### Note

1. William Germano, *Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

### Contributors

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