Part III: Long-Form Scholarship: Monographs and Scholarly Books

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The modes of traditional long-form print scholarship primarily encompass the monograph, scholarly book, critical edition, textbook, and the edited collection. In some quarters a sharp distinction is made between the monograph and the scholarly or trade book because of the differences in their respective audiences and sales figures. The historian and former provost of the University of Pennsylvania Stanley Chodorow makes this distinction by describing the monograph as a "specialized work of scholarship that provides a detailed treatment of a narrow topic within its field" that is also "the product of a large project usually carried out by an individual scholar," while the scholarly book "is aimed at the broadest possible audience within a field and deals with general theoretical issues or offers a general explanation of a general question." [1] For many outside the community encompassing colleges, universities, research libraries, university presses, and learned societies, the distinction between these types of books is "academic." For those in the humanities and humanistic social sciences the monograph is the most important format of scholarly communication, yet many argue that its existence has grown increasingly endangered over the past two decades, prompting cycles of analysis, reaction, and frustration. Sometimes referred to as "the book that won't sell," [2] monographs stimulate debates about the need to reach a larger audience (to sell more copies) and revise the peer-review process to increase use (and sales), and spark fears of further declines in print runs and the number of manuscripts accepted for publication, leading to experiments in electronic books and digital presses, and proposals for alternative forms of economic support, especially of the first-books of early-career scholars.

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In America both university presses and the monograph date back to the last quarter of the 19th century, although the latter has only gained prominence over the past few decades as it began to figure more heavily into the professional certification and assessment of humanities scholars. [3] The form of the specialized scholarly monograph derives "inspiration from the German universities, where strong emphasis was placed on research and publication," [4] according to Joanna Hitchcock, but this form also tends to restrict its readership and limit sales because it does not usually appeal to a general audience. Yet this form of scholarship has become the gold standard for humanities scholars in the promotion and tenure process, and is sometimes considered in hiring decisions. Douglas Armato, director of the University of Minnesota Press, points out that questions about whether the monograph is overproduced, overly specialized, and has too limited an audience go back to at least the late 1920s. Yet its format was not designed to be profitable and instead relied on the "gift-economy" system of the "free" labor of scholars,

supplemented (or supported) by university subsidies to their presses to meet the demands of the academic market. This combined market system began to fail[5] when monograph sales flattened in the 1970s and 1980s as the number of monographs purchased by college and university libraries, the greatest share of sales, leveled off amid budget cuts[6] ...while the number of monographs published continued to climb. This market instability and a feared decline in scholarly communications contributed to the decision of many agencies and funders, most notably the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, among others, to begin evaluating alternate modes of scholarly communication such as experiments in electronic publication in the 1990s;[7] these began with journals but quickly moved into experiments with book-length works.

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By the mid-1990s the continued weakness of monograph sales and flattening or declining acceptances for publication began to be termed a crisis in scholarly communications within academic departments, university presses, and scholarly societies. In September 1997 the American Council of Learned Societies, the Association of American University Presses, and the Association of Research Libraries cosponsored a conference, "The Specialized Scholarly Monograph in Crisis or How Can I Get Tenure If You Won't Publish My Book?" The conference proceedings describe the weakness of the scholarly monograph within an environment struggling to not only adjust to the existence of the Internet, but also to respond to the network being used to distribute digital copies of works and born-digital sources in ways that did not threaten established academic publishers. The conference was convened in response to specific fears: that the number of books published had leveled off, decline in amount-per-title printed (from 1,000–1,500 to anywhere between 200–400), weakening university support for their presses, and fear that "subventions for publishers from agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities had virtually disappeared."[8] Scholarly societies, including the Modern Language Association (MLA) and American Historical Association (AHA), issued their own warnings to members regarding the crisis by the late 1990s and early 2000s. Their more dire predictions went beyond the soft-sales of monographs and greater publisher selectivity, to the possible damage that fewer published books might do to the academic credentialing and hiring processes, as well as further limiting access to scholarship for students, researchers, and the general reading public. Although technology was first used to digitize older books for preservation and to increase access in the early 1990s, the growing challenges to publication moved some to advocate for experiments in electronic books or to argue that the monograph required a new effective means of online publication to be saved.[9] The efforts to create digital manuscripts and electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs) quickly expanded into a variety of ventures in e-books, e-presses, and alternative funding strategies for digital monographs including open access initiatives, but many of these initiatives have since stalled due to pushback from publishers and (often midcareer) humanities scholars themselves.

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research libraries or assessing the financial hurdles to establishing electronic libraries. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation helped fund projects that created digital versions of primary materials ranging from medieval and early modern manuscripts to early American fiction or varieties of cultural heritage materials including letters and diaries. The Mellon Foundation moved from its study of the economics of research libraries to projects such as the Online Books Evaluation Project (1994–2000), which sought to forecast the processes needed to create a digital library, and a number of more recent projects to evaluate digital monograph production. While the foundation began to first consider what kind of infrastructure would be needed to support digital books it also started to explore a variety of methods to produce such materials, including the humanities scholarship most threatened by the monograph crisis. Over the past twenty years a number of projects have helped to produce online long-form works: e-texts and digital versions of texts; digitized print monographs; developing specialized tools and techniques to mark-up electronic texts; print born-digital monographs; the first electronic press software systems; and the early-stage development of digital press infrastructure, some of it aligned with the open access movement.

E-Texts and Digitized Versions of Books

The earliest electronic (ASCII) texts were products of Michael Hart's Project Gutenberg, started in 1971, with later additions to the digital corpus made by projects such as the MIT-based Shakespeare Digital Archive beginning in 1992, but digital monographs lagged behind. The efforts to develop e-texts have grown (if not matured) with the World Wide Web and gained substance from technological innovations in digital media. The Library of Congress ran its pilot program for what would become the American Memory project from 1990 to 1994, when it became the National Digital Library Program and was supported by Congressional and private funds for the next six years of its development; its collections include digitized texts.[10] Shortly thereafter, in their 1999 annual report, Mellon emphasized its continued and growing focus on the impact of information technology (especially digitization) on scholarship, scholarly communication, and libraries. That year the Mellon Foundation supported the American Historical Association's efforts to produce electronic versions of doctoral dissertations with an emphasis on the potential benefit that electronic manuscripts could be more easily used by future scholars. Mellon also helped fund a project by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to digitize a backlist of 500 titles (primarily monographs) and promote a database that would make these works available by subscription. Similar grants helped the Oxford University Press begin its own digital library of 1,500 volumes and the University of Virginia digitize a number of early editions of American literature.[11]

Between the years 1995 and 2000 the number of Internet users exploded from 16 to nearly 400 million.[12] The proliferation of websites and digital resources also grew rapidly, shifting from government and higher education to commercial pursuits until the dot-com bubble burst. Other large-scale projects include what began as the Google Book Search Project in 2002, to become the "Google Print" Library Project in 2004, whose initial collaboration has grown from Google and a small number of university and commercial presses to include over 100 participants drawn from American, Canadian, British, and European members and is now known as the Google service, Google Books.[13]

Digital Monographs

Donald J. Waters, senior program officer for scholarly communications at the Mellon Foundation, pointed to the digital transformation of journals in the late 1990s through the accomplishments of JSTOR and Project MUSE, and work by publishers including Elsevier and Wiley as models for what Amazon, Google, and the Internet Archive did for books in the first decade of the 2000s.[14] A search of the Mellon Foundation's grants database reveals that between 1993 and early 2015 at least 41 of its grant-recipient projects have involved some aspect of digital monograph publication or systemic evaluation and have been at least partially funded with more than 21 million grant dollars.[15] Of these projects involving digital monographs, 33 have been funded since the year 2000, with more than half only begun within the past five years, shortly after the "end" of the "great recession." Mellon's Office of Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities helped fund early digital monograph production assessments at Johns Hopkins and Stanford universities (1994 and 1996), and some of the first texts created as part of the University of California Press's Scholarly Monographs in Area Studies project were funded by Mellon's Office of Scholarly Communications beginning in 1997.[16] Other projects include the ACLS History E-Book Project, a $ 3-million, five-year grant to produce 85 original digital manuscripts that became self-sustaining in 2005, and was renamed the ACLS Humanities E-Book (HEB) project in 2007. As with the ACLS backlist, this online collection of around 4,300 humanities books is fully searchable but only accessible through institutional and individual subscriptions today.[17] Still, this is but a fraction of the total number of scholarly monographs produced in any given year.

E-Presses

Efforts to digitize texts and create digital monographs led to the first forays into developing electronic publishing platforms (software) and a more robust digital press and distribution infrastructure. Digitized texts (PDFs of JPG images) quickly grew more sophisticated to incorporate specialized SGML markup, such as that of the Text-Encoding Initiative (TEI), and to also produce XML with a variety of outputs including Acrobat PDF, ePub, or HTML for web and mobile viewing. In 1997 Mellon supported an experiment in the electronic publication of scholarly monographs by the University of California Press to create 24 monographs in Middle Eastern, African, and South Asian studies. After having matured into a self-supporting producer in the early 2000s, Project MUSE partnered with the University Press E-Book Consortium in January 2012 to launch the University Press Content Consortium, with close to 100 presses participating by 2014 using an e-book distribution model.[18] Most recently, the Mellon Foundation has turned to focus on infrastructure and university press digital capacities for groups of university presses working together based on a multi-part solution, including: "(a) editing; (b) clearing rights to images and multimedia content; (c) the interaction of the publication on the Web with primary sources and other related materials; (d) production; (e) pre- and post-publication peer review; (f) marketing; (g) distribution; and (h) maintenance and preservation of digital content."[19]

The University of California Press announced its Luminos digital monograph press in the fall of 2014, offering not only open access scholarship but also a new way of handling the funds of APCs by "paying it forward." Although UCP requires APCs (traditional subventions) to sustain the editorial and peer review portions of the publishing workflow, rather than hold onto the excess as profits their goal is to give "editors and reviewers the opportunity to put their earnings towards their supporting institution's

OA initiatives or the article processing charges of future authors' submissions to the journal."[20] Another recent innovation is the networked monograph—electronic versions of scholarly works that will be iterative and produced alongside traditional print editions. Among these Mellon-funded projects are Manifold Scholarship, a joint venture of the University of Minnesota Press and the GC Digital Scholarship Lab at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY),[21] and the Enhanced Network Monograph, a three-year project of New York University Libraries and NYU Press to experiment with new publishing workflows and with the capacity for readers to engage the texts online. The University of North Carolina Press is developing its Longleaf Services as an experiment in a collaborative platform that will handle production, operational and marketing task, and free up academic presses to concentrate on the editorial process foremost. The Humanities Open Book Program is a recent joint grant program of the NEH and Mellon Foundation that is again looking to release backlist monographs and scholarship.[22]

International efforts began in the late 1990s with far more of these projects geared toward versions of open access (green or gold) or completely free and open access after the Budapest Open Access Initiative was released to the public in 2002. OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks) was started in 2000 and has grown to become a platform for open access, peer-reviewed humanities and social sciences monographs produced by European publishers. As with many of the other systems, the OAPEN library and publishing platform allows users to browse the full text of its works or by author, series title, or subject, with additional search capability. The Australian National University (ANU) Press, originally founded as ANU E-Press in 2003, changed its name in 2014 because "digital publication has become the norm across publishing, the Press no longer needs to set itself apart as a digital publisher, and so has taken the traditional academic publishing name of ANU Press."[23] The Canadian Public Knowledge Project was founded in 1998, created its Open Journal Systems in 2001, and its Open Monograph Press in 2013, an open source, online environment for editing and producing digital texts. The Open Library of the Humanities, founded in 2013, is developing its own scholarly publishing pilot to complement its megajournal platform.[24]

In the UK, the Knowledge Unlatched[25] pilot project ran from October 2013 through February 2014 as an example of what Eileen Joy calls "graduated OA."[26] Knowledge Unlatched (KU) included a collection of 28 books produced by 13 publishers, that remain available as OA downloads through HathiTrust even though the project has stalled because the OA playing field is in flux and its model depends on a near comprehensive change in the way libraries and publishers interact. (KU required libraries to pay title fees to publishers in order to allow access to these works through a range of Creative Commons licensing agreements.) Also in the UK, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Monographs and Open Access Project began in 2013 and will end in 2015. This is another project founded on the premise that monographs and other long-form publications must move from the traditional publishing model in order to survive. They have received a great deal of pushback against OA publication but their Expert Reference Group is optimistic and is pursuing a middle course that recognizes the substantial issues surrounding both print and open access monographs. However, the group is also considering how advances in digital technologies are creating new opportunities for scholarship while driving cultural changes that challenge the monograph as the preeminent form of scholarly communication.

Alternative Funding Strategies

Over the past 20 years a number of alternative funding and sales strategies have been advanced to produce long-form scholarship. Part of the monograph crisis was and is exacerbated by the distribution of portions of or entire digitized texts, often under fair use for students and scholars, but also through unauthorized (and arguably illegal) channels to the general public. Some contend that unauthorized electronic distribution further reduces sales, others that it diminishes the use of libraries and specialized efforts of curators including librarians.

Alternative funding strategies have been advanced to help promote the timely release of research, especially of scientific works through journals and conference proceedings, but increasingly for humanities and social science scholarship to help many early-career scholars who have a more difficult challenge in publishing their first books. In 1995 Sanford Thatcher offered a number of proposals to change the financing of scholarly monographs, the most radical was for universities to "consider a joint scheme to cover all the up-front costs of publishing in fields with low sales."[27] Thatcher was concerned that support for scholarly monographs would be forced to shift away from the university toward the scholarly societies; in 1997 the MLA began fulfilling this expectation when it recommended that departments support their faculty better because subventions had become a common factor in academic publishing and that university administrations might wish to consider subvention funds as a source of such support.[28] By 2002 the AHA joined the MLA in speaking out against the difficulty of publishing first books and suggested actual dollar amounts for subvention support.[29]

In 2015 these discussions seem to have run through a number of options and returned to their origins. The AAU/ARL Task Force, formed in 2012, developed a First Book Prospectus in 2014 that described a system whereby universities agree to pay a subvention for the first book of new tenure track scholars— the 1% solution[30]—as part of the newly hired scholar's start-up package. In early 2015 the prospectus shifted its focus more toward supporting a digital monograph (long-form argument) for faculty, but not necessarily restricted to the first book. Since 2014 Rebecca Kennison and Lisa Norberg have thrown their efforts into growing the Open Access Network as a solution to convert traditional print and subscription publications, including those of academic journals, books, and monographs to OA by having all institutes of higher education pay a scaled amount (annually or over a period of years) into a centrally managed fund. The Mellon Foundation also developed and circulated an option in 2014 to help institutions of higher education ramp up a system to fund faculty publications using Mellon grants to fund the shift. This "seed fund" plan experienced a great deal of pushback from humanities faculty, and was revised in late 2014 to concentrate instead on growing the digital publishing infrastructure of North American university presses. Carl Straumsheim provided an overview of Mellon's initiative for *Inside Higher Ed* and eight of the grant recipients presented lightning talks about their projects at the June 2015 Association of American University Presses meeting in Denver, including: the University of California Press and California Digital Library; the University of Michigan Press and partners; the University of Minnesota Press and CUNY Graduate Center Digital Scholarship Lab; New York University (NYU) Press and NYU Libraries; the University of North Carolina Press; Stanford University Press; West Virginia Press; and Yale University Press. Many of these projects are experimenting with integrating features, data sources, and interactivity that exceed the early goals of the AAU/ARL Task Force, the Mellon Foundation, and others

to merely provide digital versions of monographs as PDFs or ePubs—these initiatives are beginning to create hybrid and interactive forms of scholarship that go beyond the limitations of print.[31]

Endnotes

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