

Session title: Keynote Address: Planned Obsolescence Publishing Technology and the Future of the Academy

Presenter(s): Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Time of session: Sunday, November 4, 9-10am

Room: Continental C

Notes on session

Humanities in US context; relationships to scholarly communities in other disciplines

Cass Sunstein Infotopia

Lindsay Waters, *Enemies of Promise*: no way to halt shakeup of university press, it is already underway

obsolescence in ways scholars work in humanities

She's not going as far to say we're facing the death of the book. But is saying that books don't serve us as well for scholarship as they used to

"Cultural wildlife preserve"--book is not dying form;

University presses and effect of first dot com crash on them (2000)

Press needed to make money off book (??!!)

Insupportable economic model from the get-go: university presses came into being to help distribute scholarship that commercial presses wouldn't take risks on. Initially, presses exchanged with each other (or each others' libraries), early 20th century began to professionalize.

Library budget cuts caused further problems for presses, already at risk b/c of dot com caused economic bust

Decline in sales of monographs to libraries (2004)--including university press monographs; 1/3 of what they had been in previous decade.

University press financial models not sustainable; reduce number of titles;

Her book did fine; met expectations

Academic book threatened?? Still being published but not in great numbers; tenure and promotion requirements?

No longer viable, but still required for tenure; "undead"

"Death in livelihood" for universities, the academy

Contrasting 'death' of scholarly monograph with death of other media (recording media in particular) -- predicted death without a viable replacement, alt mode.

Digital texts? Blog--ephemeral form; surprising durability; persists in archives;

Content of book is not what is obsolete; form isn't either; the process/system is the problem

"Why not put it online??"

MLA TF on evaluation scholarship for tenure & promotion

http://www.mla.org/tenure_promotion

Changes need to be social and institutional not just technological

[MediaCommons](#)

Software development always takes longer than you think it will

Rate of change within the academy is glacial

<http://www.futureofthebook.org/>

Change won't happen until scholars really believe publishing on the web is as valuable as publishing in print; institutions need to believe this as well

John Wilinsky, *The Access Principle*

Christine Borgman, *Scholarship in the Digital Age*.

New look at mission of university (social, intellectual and institutional change);

How does peer review fit into this?

Not just change to the way we publish, we also must consider the change to the ways we research, ways we write, ways we review.

Peer review is an important aspect of scholarly work, research and communication.

Part of the system of peer review is broken.

Sciences and social sciences have addressed the problem of the flaws of peer review; personal motivation;

What is peer review? what is it supposed to do? Gatekeeping function.

Sees opportunity for overhauling peer review in networked environment

- misalignment between authority online and the disciplinary (self-policed) academic model

- academic as gatekeeping, arguably necessary in print

Coping with abundance

That abundance still needs appropriate assessment

Self-publication; blogs--need for assessment

Need for post-publication review; how it has been and should be received

Shift from regulation to communication; reviews become part of scholarly record

Need new open, post-publication means of peer review. that says how it has been and should be received

- shift from regulation to communication

- facilitating fluid and productive exchanges

- consider comments, inbound links that show how content is being used

Filters needed, not gatekeepers, to deal with the new scarcity [of the online environment]: time and attention.

Average scholarly monograph sells under 400 copies. Contrast with the volume of hits and

references yielded on open peer review version of Planned Obsolescence.

Change model from individual achievement to building community.

Shift academic publishing from the products to the processes of scholarly work

May publish far earlier in the process? Will be messier. Relinquish certain degree of control of their work because it will be more collaborative. Acknowledge participation of peers.

Publishers--focus on services not on objects;

Changing roles for scholarly societies, libraries

reimagine relationship between

- departments, library, IT, press - for knowledge production in scholar ecosystem

- acad inst and surrounding culture

Notes from D. Askey, McMaster University

The ways that humanists work and rely on the book are rapidly becoming obsolescent. This doesn't mean that books are dead; claiming, for example, that the novel is 'dead' is an effective way to assert its continued existence.

Her book project on the book took a while to find a publisher; publishers liked it, but no one seemed to want to publish it. The feedback was that the manuscript was fine, but the 'climate' was wrong (marketing declared the book a financial risk).

Sales to libraries of monographs were declining hard by 2004, and the situation has only become more extreme. Not surprisingly, some marginal presses are being threatened with closure (or have closed), and others simply publish fewer titles.

Academic books are not dead. They're still being published, but not perhaps in the numbers that the job market requires.

She notes that the book has become 'undead.' Fun metaphor to play with in a talk, zombies and so forth.

The fate of the book tracks the changes to the work life of the humanist. Fewer jobs, more requirements from assessment, underemployment, etc.

She argues that there needs to be a shift from print to digital, but it's not going to be sufficient to save the monograph. The cost savings are not sufficient, and digital publication has its own issues as a material form.

Other digital forms seem to be ephemeral--e.g.- blogs--but in fact they have shown remarkable persistence. Archiving them is fairly straightforward, and the simple architecture of the Web tends to keep them alive in some form even when abandoned by the author.

The content of the book is not obsolete; it's still important to academia, i.e.- the thought processes that go into creating a text. The system, however, is broken and dying.

One scholar suggested to her self-publication for her book. Just slap the manuscript online with the two positive reader reports, and voila. He noted that it wasn't meant entirely seriously.

MLA report called on faculty to consider articles as seriously as books. Also urged them to consider other forms without "media bias." As she noted, this is easier said than done. It's not just about changing how tenure cases are considered, it's about rethinking how scholarly communication happens within the disciplines.

Her projects in this direction include Media Commons (<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/>). Referred to it as 'middle-state' publishing (in media res). Not a blog, but also not a fully formed journal article.

The disciplines, however, lack to some degree the ability to examine its own forms and norms. Self-criticism is hard, change even harder. Scholars need to reach the point where publishing on the Web is as viable as print publication, otherwise they won't risk their careers or futures on what they perceive to be lesser forms.

She feels that the mechanisms of peer review need to be addressed first, not least because everyone raises it as a point whenever alternative forms of publication are discussed. She finds peer review to be broken, and points to the research done in the sciences and social sciences that point out the flaws of the system. Most authors in the humanities have experienced these issues. Peer review is also labour intensive.

Peer review serves primarily a gatekeeping function. In print, it seems necessary since the medium dictated how much could reasonably appear (scarcity of resources). But scarcity is no longer an issue, so why create artificial scarcity. It should serve the function of coping with abundance in the digital environment.

One example: peer review should include a post-publication review mechanism. How was the work received, and what is its impact. She called it peer-to-peer review. Would include metrics such as traffic and comments as indications of impact.

What one needs in the environment of abundance is a filter, not a gatekeeper, since scarcity is now no longer resource-based. What is scarce is time and ability to deal with the information onslaught.

Authors need to accept that new modes of communication mean accepting a certain loss of control over the process. Collaboration dictates that as a necessity.

Toward the end, she noted that libraries have a role to play in discoverability and preservation. This cannot be ignored if it is still important to preserve the record. Should we have conversations about what needs to be preserved, and what can go off into the sunset?

Questions from Dana Peterman (posted post forum)

- If this is the new form of scholarship, how will your pedagogy change?
- As work is necessarily process oriented in the academy, how will you decide when a student has earned a PhD or a Masters. What are the differences?
- Is a “product” really necessary?
- You’ve spoken about the humanities, but what about science and social science trends toward things like data papers? What kinds of changes does this imply in scholarship?