Editorial

Convergence Special Issue

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This special issue of *Convergence* brings together innovative theoretical and methodological frameworks that explore themes around the academic book of the future in Arts and Humanities disciplines. It is a collection of pieces which follow on from the Arts and Humanities Research Council/ British Library Academic Book of the Future Project, which ran from 2014 to 2016 (see https://academicbookfuture.org/). During this Project, researchers, academic librarians, publishers, booksellers, policy makers, students, and the general public in the United Kingdom and wider afield came together via a range of different mini projects, events, and focus groups to look at how the academic book is produced, consumed, preserved, and defined.

For this special issue we asked for contributions that engage with the academic book from across these communities in academia, bookselling, publishing, libraries, and the wider publishing supply chain, addressing themes including (but not restricted to) production and publication, authorship, peer review, reception, circulation, the Academy, preservation, and access.

Bronwin Patrickson approached this challenge by arguing in her article 'Movable Text: Reconfiguring Gutenberg' that the metaphor of a printed book with its 'pages' is increasingly inadequate for conceptualizing the nature and function of digital academic publications that are self-consciously and proactively situated as part of a larger, networked and potentially part-automated conversation. This theme is further explored in an examination of what O'Sullivan calls 'edge cases'; in 'The Equivalence of Books', O'Sullivan suggests that as academic projects become increasingly disconnected with the codex form, our conception of what constitutes an academic book warrants problematization. This is particularly so with these edge-case projects that look to collate, curate, and create thematically consistent critical insights on topics of relevance to the Arts and Humanities using unfamiliar forms. This article explores a selection of digital projects that might be classified as edge cases and through short surveys with stakeholders seeks to determine why a digital apparatus was favored and whether such outliers can be considered to be the equivalent of an academic 'book'.

Even if scholarly projects become detached from the codex, peer review remains the bedrock of academic work and this issue is explored in 'DIY Peer Review and Monograph Publishing in the

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Arts and Humanities' by Claire Squires and colleagues. Drawing on science and technology studies, the article introduces and discusses an applied example of peer review by examining the route to publication of Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg *Sedo's Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture* (2013). The book's co-authors supplemented the traditional 'blind' peer-review system with a range of practices including the informal, DIY review of colleagues and 'clever friends' as well as using the feedback derived from grant applications, journal articles, and book chapters. The article 'explodes' the book into a series of documents and nonlinear processes to demonstrate the significance of the various forms of feedback to the development of the monograph. The analysis reveals substantial differences between the book and the article peer review.

Paul Spence, in 'The academic book and its digital dilemmas', brings many of these threads together in an article which argues that the future of the academic book has been under debate for many years; the journal has experienced widespread migration to digital, but scholarly monographs in print form have been resilient and digital alternatives have faced significant problems of acceptance, particularly in the Arts and Humanities disciplines. The article asks how, and under what conditions, the digitally mediated long-form academic publication might hold a viable future in an era of emerging digital formats.

One of the Academic Book of the Future's final Project Reports concludes that:

> the academic book/monograph is still greatly valued in the academy for many reasons: the ability to produce a sustained argument within a more capacious framework than that permitted by the article format; the engagement of the reader at a deep level with such arguments; its central place in career progression in the arts and humanities; its reach beyond the academy (for some titles) into bookshops and into the hands of a wider public. (Deegan, 2017: 7)

While this special issue of *Convergence* may not provide answers to the many questions around the future of the academic book, we are certain that the debate around its future will continue: these articles make a useful contribution to these ongoing discussions and underline the core value that the book has outside and within scholarly communities.

Reference

Deegan M (2017) *Academic Book of the Future Project Report*. Available at: https://academicbookfuture.org/end-of-project-reports-2/ (accessed 5 July 2018).