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## ATG Interviews Alison Mudditt

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## Director, University of California Press

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

**ATG:** *Alison, for our readers who may not be familiar with you and your career, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?*

**AM:** I started my career in academic publishing at **Blackwell** in Oxford, UK back in 1988. After three years in marketing, I moved into acquisitions and later became Publisher for the Humanities Division. In 1997, I made my move to the U.S. as Publishing Director of the Behavioral Sciences Division at **Taylor & Francis** in Philadelphia, where I was responsible for the global growth and consolidation of that division, as well as the successful launch of Psychology Press in the USA. I joined **SAGE** in 2001 as Vice President and Editorial Director, was appointed Executive Vice President in 2004 and then spent seven years leading the Higher Education Group's publishing programs during a time of tremendous growth at **SAGE**, including the acquisition of **CQ Press**. I became Director of **UC Press** at the beginning of this year.

**ATG:** *We know that you have been serving as director of University of California Press for close to a year now. Has it been everything that you expected? Has anything surprised you?*

**AM:** Yes and yes! It is an exciting and challenging time to take the helm at one of the world's leading university presses. Many of the challenges **UC Press** faces — such as the rapid move to digital and the way in which large technology companies have taken control of a significant portion of the agenda — mirror those facing publishing more broadly. I have been delighted to find a talented and dedicated staff at **UC Press** eager to embrace the opportunities we have to take a leadership role not only through our influence in critical disciplines but also in the ways in which we add impact to scholarship through new technologies. And joining the university press community has been a very welcoming experience — although many of us compete on certain levels, our shared values tie us together closely and we are beginning to find concrete ways to leverage our combined strengths.

**ATG:** *What prompted your decision to move from working for commercial publishers to a university press?*

**AM:** My career in scholarly publishing has always been firmly rooted in the belief that great scholarship and ideas matter and make a difference. They of course have their own intrinsic value, but they also have the potential to change how we think, plan, and govern. After over 20 years in the business, I remain passionate not only about the business of academic publishing but also the process of nurturing the best work from the best authors, and our ability to connect this work with new



audiences in more fluid and immediate ways than ever before. There are, sadly, fewer and fewer organizations left where these values have the opportunity to thrive in the way they do at **UC Press** — an organization that continues to provide the publishing leadership that is expected of the world's leading public research university.

**ATG:** *Among your many qualities, Daniel Greenstein, Vice Provost for Academic Planning and Programs at the University of California has referred to you as a “keen strategist.” What exactly was he referring to? What strategies do you have in mind to keep the University of California at the forefront of scholarly publishing?*

**AM:** I think that the “outsider's” perspective I brought to **UC Press** has enabled me to bring sharp focus to the three core components of strategic planning: a realistic and credible vision of the future and how our markets are evolving; a clear articulation of the position that we want to occupy in that future; and a set of specific strategies and tactics that will take us there. Over recent months we have focused on the qualities that distinguish **UC Press** and developing ways to leverage these strengths into a clear, distinctive, and realistic strategic path for the **Press**. **UC Press** has a unique advantage by virtue of our region and its social, political, and geographic influence. Building from this, we are working to highlight the progressiveness of our publishing program — its inventiveness, its influence in critical disciplines, and our risk-taking orientation. Underpinning these elements is, of course, a focus on publication of top-tier

quality content for greater access and engagement across all media.

Our emerging strategy has three elements:

- Uncompromising commitment to a set of core values that are firmly rooted in the **University of California's** inclusive public mission and commitment to academic excellence.
- A focusing of our resources on fewer products for a clearer sense of purpose and differentiation, as well as operational economies and efficiencies.
- Better integration of our different departments and resources to increase knowledge and experience, and improve decision-making and allocation of resources.

Our mission remains committed to finding, developing, and disseminating important knowledge in critical fields that make a difference in the world, but we will be doing that in new ways that leverage new approaches and technologies.

**ATG:** *You've said that scholarly publishing faces an interesting and inherently complex set of problems “driven by rapid, revolutionary changes in the ways in which information is disseminated.” What specific problems were you thinking of?*

**AM:** I think that the fundamental problem we face is making the case that we continue to have both value and relevance in a world of online information abundance. I am absolutely certain that we do, but that case has been undermined over the past decade or so both by publishers themselves through certain practices and by the rise of technology giants who frequently have little time or respect for content creators. The only way to survive is to embrace change, and to understand clearly how and where we add value. Most publishers have adapted to the shift in format (print to online) but at **UC Press**, we're trying to understand what comes after that. How is the way in which scholars work changing? What is the impact of the dramatic rise in collaborative and digital research? How are the outputs of this research changing? Our position within one of the world's great research universities provides us an opportunity to explore this from the inside.

**ATG:** *How do you think things like the continued growth of open access and the promotion of “linked open data” will impact university presses and the production of eBooks?*

**AM:** This is a complex and rapidly evolving issue. As a core component of the schol-

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arly communication cycle, university presses have a key role in creating a sustainable system, especially in a world where higher education continues to be undervalued and underfunded. The recent success of journals such as PLOS may pave the way in STEM disciplines (although it is not really clear whether the author-pays model is reducing the cost or simply shifting it), but for those of us committed to also supporting the humanities and social sciences the path is less clear. For university presses, greater demands for OA and the desire to link articles and books to other objects — data sets, audio, visual, etc. — provide opportunities for us to partner with our libraries. Many of us have done so with increasing success. **UC Press** has an extensive partnership with the **California Digital Library** for the delivery of hundreds of backlist titles in OA format, and we're now starting to explore ways in which we can collaborate to support the new forms of publication I mentioned above.

**ATG:** *Some people are talking about the idea of an enhanced eBook where the text is complimented by a variety of multimedia offerings. Is there a place for enhanced eBooks in a university press's catalog?*

**AM:** Absolutely. Although the market for enhanced eBooks is currently a relatively small part of this rapidly growing market, we're experimenting with a few different models at **UC Press** so that we are ready as and when these start to take off. One great example is our enhanced digital version of the 2nd edition of *The Jepson Manual* — the most authoritative and comprehensive identification guide devoted to California plants. This 1,600 page behemoth is “the plant bible of California” — for both for expert and amateur alike. Extensive linking and eBook-friendly illustrations will make it easier for users to learn about plant characteristics and identify all the plants of California, all in a much more field-portable package than the printed book. Using readily available eBook readers, field researchers, students, and amateurs will be able to click on links allowing rapid navigation through keys to families, genera, species, and subspecies or varieties.

**ATG:** *In another interview you mentioned that the University of California Press would be developing two pilot “born-digital” products. What do you mean by born digital? What will these products be like?*

**AM:** I'm talking about products that are not simply online versions of previous print products — those that could not have existed in a print world. In many cases, these will draw on the deep and rich content archive we have at **UC Press**, but will augment this material with new content and tools. One example about which we've been thinking is the *California Natural History Guides*. We own an incredible wealth of content in this area that is currently “locked up” in set-format print books. There are many ways in which

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## publisher profile

### University of California Press

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[www.ucpressjournals.com](http://www.ucpressjournals.com)



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA PRESS

**AFFILIATED COMPANIES:** n/a University of California Press Foundation

**OFFICERS:** **Alison Mudditt** (Director); **Rebecca Simon** (Director, Journals & Digital Publishing and Associate Director); **Anna Weidman** (CFO and Assistant Director); **Erich van Rijn** (Director, Publishing Operations and Assistant Director)

**ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS:** Association of American University Presses, Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division/AAP, Society of Scholarly Publishers.

**KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES:** Scholarly books, course books, trade books, reference materials, scholarly journals and magazines, digital products across the arts and humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

**CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE:** Faculty, students, professionals, academic and public libraries, interested general readers.

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:** 105

**NUMBER OF BOOKS PUBLISHED ANNUALLY:** 180

**NUMBER OF JOURNALS PUBLISHED ANNUALLY:** 37

**TOTAL NUMBER OF BOOKS ON YOUR BACKLIST (IN PRINT):** 4,800

**TOTAL NUMBER OF JOURNALS CURRENTLY PUBLISHED:** 37

**HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR COMPANY/PUBLISHING PROGRAM:**

Founded in 1893, **University of California Press** is one of the most distinguished scholarly publishers and the major nonprofit press on the West Coast. Publishing a world-class list of books, journals, and digital publications across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, **UC Press** advances its core mission by giving voice and impact to important ideas and informing meaningful debate.

Publishing fields include art, music, cinema and media studies, classics, anthropology, sociology, history, religious studies, biological and environmental sciences, food and agriculture, wine and viticulture, public health, and California and the West.

With a forward-looking and risk-taking perspective, **UC Press's** publishing program has brought attention to critical social issues and fostered emerging interdisciplinary fields including women's studies, food studies, and California studies. 🌱

this content could be updated, repackaged, and augmented to create a much more flexible and interactive user experience in digital form.

**ATG:** *With the market for scholarly books continuing to shrink, what can be done to spur growth or at least stop the shrinkage? Are there any innovative outlets that university presses can take advantage of for their eBooks that will help create new revenue streams? Does print play any role in the future of a university press?*

**AM:** The shrinking market for scholarly monographs was initially driven by skyrocketing serials pricing, which has then been exacerbated by the dramatic technological and cultural shifts as information has moved to an online, decentralized, and abundant environment. In this world, the largely static, often print-only, scholarly monograph seems both isolated and out-of-date. While print is undeniably in decline, I think it will always

have a role at **UC Press**. Like many others, I envisage a future in which the electronic version becomes the standard, and print becomes a less frequently produced luxury item. There will always be those of us who want and are prepared to pay a premium for a beautifully crafted print book — such as **Rebecca Solnit's** *Infinite City*, in my view one of the most original and beautiful books **UC Press** has published — but the transition to a digital-first world is inevitable.

There is much to be optimistic about in this brave new world. The new eBook collaborations among university presses — such as **Books@JSTOR**, **University Press Scholarship Online** through **OUP** and **Project MUSE** — provide a great opportunity for presses and their readers, as well as for our library customers. **UC Press** is partnering with **OUP** to launch **California Scholarship Online**

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(CALSO) on the UPSO platform with its first four collections in March 2012, and we are also an active member of the consortium working to develop **Books@JSTOR**. I'm excited about the potential for these initiatives not only to create new revenue streams, but also to help libraries broaden patron access to content and to make scholarly discourse more accessible than it has ever been — a vibrant hub of information and debate that serves not only the academy, but a much wider audience seeking answers to many contemporary problems.

**ATG:** *Why is partnering with OUP to launch California Scholarship Online (CALSO) on the UPSO platform more attractive to you than joining forces with the Books@JSTOR or Project MUSE?*

**AM:** We're still an active member of the JSTOR consortium and are, like the other members, currently reviewing the revised agreement, so it's quite possible we will sign with both. We know that our library customers want and need options in terms of platforms and business models, and are committed to meeting those needs. As we've been evaluating potential partners, we've been considering platform and functionality as well as business models and sales capacity, and feel that UPSO and JSTOR will best meet both our needs and those of our library customers.

**ATG:** *Alison, thank you taking the time to speak to us. We know that our readers will appreciate your many insights.* 🍷

Alison Mudditt

against the grain  
**people profile**

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**BORN AND LIVED:** Born Exeter, UK. Lived Exeter, Bath, Oxford, Washington, DC, Philadelphia, Thousand Oaks, CA, the Bay Area.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** Almost impossible to answer — there are way too many. Instead, I'll mention my favorite fiction and non-fiction books I've read recently. I loved everything about **Barbara Kingsolver's** recent novel *The Lacuna*, an epic and moving story, but particularly delighted in the vivid portrayal of 1930s Mexico and its most colorful figures (**Rivera, Kahlo, and Trotsky**). And **James Gleick's** *The Information* is the kind of non-fiction I really enjoy — encompassing science, history, and biography, it's an engaging synthesis of a huge amount of material that stimulates new ways of thinking.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** I'm reiterating the obvious to say that our industry continues to be driven by rapid technological transformation, and that significant parts of the agenda have been taken over by large technology organizations. Within five years we'll be in a world where digital editions and business models are primary. While print will continue to exist, it will be more of a luxury item for those who can and want to pay a premium. The technology giants will continue to make significant plays in traditional publisher markets — the K12 and college textbook markets seem to be obvious next candidates. Budgets and markets across higher education are likely to remain tight, and it remains to be seen if the current model of higher education in the U.S. is sustainable — all at a time when education is more important than ever for the U.S. to remain competitive in the global economy. But I remain optimistic about the future of publishing and publishers, as long as we can embrace the discovery of new ways to apply our skills in content development and marketing to emerging technologies. For a relatively small player on this global stage, this means that we will need to be highly focused on our core competencies and highly integrated with our customers' and users' workflows. 🍷

**Interview — Knut Dorn**  
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an early adapter. The Internet still holds many secrets for me and I want to use my free time finally to catch up. While at the office at **HARRASSOWITZ** I could not find the time for creative experimentation and was glad that I had a chance to organize an economic way to participate in electronic communication without putting an undue burden on the company. Now as of next year, there will be the chance to engage in a learning process for which there also has never been the time.

Will I have the drive to do some writing? There are lots of ideas and some sketches for projects that go back to my years in academia. When I started at **HARRASSOWITZ** I had the idea of doing the writing for the topics of my interest on the side, expecting that my commitments at the company would allow me to do that. What a misconception that was! The job at **HARRASSOWITZ** took more than what I ever imagined a full-time job would do to you. I do not regret this since I can say that I fully lived up to the expectations of the company and of our customers, and the fun part was that I

thoroughly enjoyed it. So no regrets that I had what you might call a full professional life. Will I be able to muster the energy to go back to what I had intended to do in my formative years at the university? I will have to see.

What I definitely will enjoy is living at a more leisurely pace. It is exactly that leisurely pace that I plan to introduce into my life. For once to fully enjoy the summers in my "club of early morning swimmers" in the fantastic open-air swimming pool on the hill over Wiesbaden very close to my home, without having to rush back for breakfast at 8:00 a.m. and to try to be able to be at the office in time to fit into the schedule of meetings and daily routines. For once it will be time management for me under relaxed circumstances, or so I hope. Even if it is only to watch a soccer game without feeling remorse later that you have again lost two hours that have set you back with your professional reading or with composing texts for correspondence or marketing purposes.

And I will be able to devote more time again to my circles of friends, go to the theater, and arrange for wine tastings and outings with them, all things I used to do but that had taken second place when business trips and professional duties in general had to be accommodated first.

Naturally, my wife **Renate** has ideas for me to devote more time to our grandchildren, **Lavina** and **Helena**, the two daughters of **Nadja** who I have to admit have not been given the amount of attention and time that they deserve. How good I will be at that, will have to be seen. It will definitely be children's books and fairy tales for a while before in a couple of years they will be ready for ball games, swimming, and track and field. I expect that my educational skills will be tested! 🍷

**Rumors**  
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Things were different. This issue, ably guest-edited by the fantabulous **Ramune Kubilius**, certainly illustrates the massive changes in that world and indeed in our world as well. These are great articles. I love music (classical and rock and country, you name it, but not modern) so I was intrigued and fascinated by **Sally Gore's** characterization of librarians assembling an orchestra, this issue, p.25). Don't you love it!

Our **Op Ed** this issue is near and dear to my heart! Reading habits. Anyway, when I am in an airport, a library, a doctor's office, a train station,

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