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# Perspectives on the Future of the Monograph

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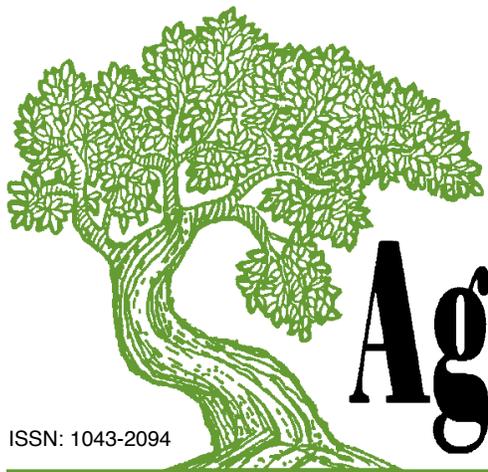
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# Against the Grain

*“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”*

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## Perspectives on the Future of the Monograph

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The theme of this issue of *Against the Grain* is the future of the monograph. It is hard to find anyone who is not convinced that the monograph is important and deserves a future. Certainly none of the contributors to this issue express any doubt about it. Yet the continued role of long-form scholarly output such as the monograph is by no means assured. The articles collected here take a step back from the dizzying vicissitudes of technological and economic change to examine the monograph more fundamentally. For surely we do not want to continue to produce monographs simply because it is economically and technologically possible to maintain them as a system of academic currency. The challenges the monograph is facing are intel-

lectual at least as much as they are economic or technological. What are the implications of regarding the monograph primarily as an intellectual tool? Is it still fulfilling that function? Are monographs actually being read? What pressures are exerted on the monograph’s function?



Libraries experience difficulty in purchasing enough monographs for their faculty and students. Presses experience difficulty in making monograph publishing pay. Authors experience difficulty in getting monographs published. Until recently this constellation of issues was commonly attributed to the

“monograph crisis.” The monograph crisis was the corollary of the serials crisis, i.e., insufficient library purchasing power resulting

from the exorbitant prices charged by the large scientific publishers for must-have journals. Even taking into account the global growth in the sheer number of academics looking to publish their research output, the problem could simply be regarded as a preponderantly economic issue. That had the undeniable benefit of also suggesting where the solution might be found: libraries needed more funding to buy books. More recently, digital developments have furnished a variant on this economic solution to an economic problem: scholars could be given more funding to pay processing fees for open access publication. Whether through pre- or postpublication funding, the monograph may be kept alive at least for a while longer. But with some calling

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## If Rumors Were Horses

You heard it here! I have resigned from my position as Assistant Dean of Technical Services and Head, Collection Development at the **College of Charleston**. I have worked in libraries for 45 years. And decided to finally give up all the evaluations of staff, annual reports, forms to fill out, budget planning, administrative issues, etc., etc. Nothing much will change from the outside. I will continue to have an office at the **Addlestone Library**, I will keep my cofc email account, I will continue to convene the **Charleston Conference** and edit *Against the Grain* and do a few new things!



**Ryoji Fukada and Buzzy Basch** shown having lunch in Fiesole Italy while attending the **Fiesole Retreat** in April 2016.

Speaking of the **Conference**, we had 59 registrations in four hours the first day that conference registration opened — June 6! Gosh! Also the **Vendor Showcase** only has a few more slots left. Be sure and register. [www.thecharlestonlibraryconference.com](http://www.thecharlestonlibraryconference.com)

The theme for this year is **Roll with the Times or the Times Roll Over You!** Be sure and visit the

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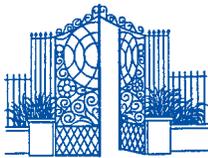
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### Perspectives on the Future ... from page 1

the genre moribund, it seems important to ask why we would.

As editors of this themed issue on the question of the monograph we should like to suggest that insofar as we can speak of a crisis at all — which to be sure not everyone is convinced we can — it is certainly more than an economic crisis. There are all sorts of factors complicating the matter, many originating from outside the academic world. Technologically, the wholesale digitisation of scholarly communication over the last few decades has yielded new publication formats, with other intellectual and economic models. Alternative forms of communication that have received most attention so far have all been non-book outputs, with the result that monographs can be called the least dynamic of the academic resources found in libraries today. That is, if they can be found at all, for discovery is one of the besetting problems of the conventional paper monograph. One notable result of these technological changes has been the massive overall change in reading habits from paper to screen based. Here monographs definitely bring up the rear, way behind journal articles, preprints, blog posts, collaborative work spaces and assorted other digital outputs.

Then over the last decade or so a new phenomenon has added a very different sort of pressure on academics. In an attempt to

justify research spending governments have demanded greater academic accountability. This has been translated into a demand for “valorisation” of research. Its value for society — industry as well as the public at large — must be made more directly visible. HSS scholars, too, feel pressured to court a more general audience beyond their academic peers and students. Given the right format, monographs could perhaps be more suitable vehicles to achieve such valorisation than scholarly articles.

However one weighs these various pressures on the monograph, as all contributors stress, there is an urgent need to digitise. But this unanimity doesn't mean that it is obvious how exactly monographs should be digitised, nor what the intellectual consequences of digitisation might be. In assessing these issues, as our contributors have also found, it is useful to distinguish the scholar-as-author perspective from that of the scholar-as-reader.

#### The Scholar-as-Author Perspective

The monograph remains an important academic currency. In writing monographs scholars have three aims. The first and foremost aim is to establish intellectual communication: to reach — and persuade — peers. The second aim is to gain recognition from superiors and institutions, resulting in a salary, tenure and career advancement. Thirdly, many HSS scholars aspire to reach a wider, non-academic audience. The primary motivation here may have been originally to accrue extra prestige or extra income. The social demands of

valorisation have more recently become an additional factor to consider in scholars' publication strategy. **Agata Mrva-Montoya** calls attention to the first and third of these aims in particular as drivers behind the search for new forms of scholarly output in the scholarly communication ecosystem.

#### The Scholar-as-Reader Perspective

Contributing an overview of the **Mellon Foundation's** support for experimentation with digital formats for the monograph, **Donald Waters** suggests in a careful analysis of stakeholder interests that it is the scholar-as-reader perspective that is most in need of further research. Probably the first and foremost consideration of the scholar-as-reader when it comes to monographs is to find the most relevant — and *only* the most relevant — books to read. In our so-called attention economy, there are two besetting challenges for the monograph reader: that of inclusion (how to discover the titles one does want to read) and that of exclusion (how to negotiate the overwhelming number of titles that are newly published as well as how to deal with their length). Where discovery is concerned, the increasingly online digital workflow of most scholars tends to be problematic when it comes to finding monographs. Here digital formats, including of course Open Access, offer many opportunities.

The interests of the scholar-as-reader are clearly not in sync with those of the scholar-as-author. In the attention economy intellectually speaking underconsumption is as much of a problem for the scholar-as-author as overproduction is to the scholar-as-reader. This conflict of interests is repeatedly identified by our contributors, from a range of perspectives. **Colleen Campbell's** informants don't only evince clashing interests as authors and readers, but find themselves divided even just in their capacity as readers. Dr Jekyll's Ctrl-F requirements — best met by the digital monograph — are at variance with Dr Hyde's desire to engage with monographs in their full paper splendour. As library dean, **Rick Anderson** asserts that regardless of the scholar-as-author's intentions, the scholar-as-reader has always been best served by the monograph as database. The provision of more granular metadata by publishers and vendors will no doubt aid the reader in terms of discoverability, and thus improve use. However, **Geoffrey Crossick** draws attention to the fact that this reader-directed form of access may threaten the monograph's integrity as an extended argument intended by its author.

Rather than offering a ready solution to a practical problem, the articles collected here raise fundamental questions about the identity and usefulness of the monograph as a scholarly format. The monograph is a venerable genre of scholarly writing that has always been deeply influential. But its future — digital or otherwise — is, as **Adriaan van der Weel** explains, by no means assured. 🐘