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Welcome to Number#5 in the Arts Nexus Occasional Papers Series, where we examine critical contemporary cultural issues

The Future of the BOOK

Part 1

At the International Conference on the Future of the Book held in Cairns on 22-24 April 2003, 192 delegates from Australia, Canada, Ghana, Malaysia, NZ, Nigeria, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, UK and the USA gathered in Cairns to address a range of critically important issues relating to the future of the book.

The conference to explore the technological, commercial and cultural futures of the book was supported by Australia's Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources. The conference is a significant part of a major research and development project sponsored by the Department, and undertaken jointly by RMIT University and Common Ground Publishing: C-2-C: Creator to Consumer in a Digital Age (www.C-2-CProject.com).

The book is now 550 years old, if one credits its invention to Gutenberg, or older if one dates it to the Chinese invention of moveable type, or the beginning of writing on transportable media, like message sticks or rocks.

The clearest message from International Conference on *The Future of the Book* in Cairns recently was that it's still *the story* that counts.

It doesn't matter whether we communicate by smoke signal, or post messages into the galaxy to each other via cyberspace as we do today using email or SMS. In our quest for meaning, it's the same old page turner - we all just want to know, *What happened next?*

Regardless of the delivery format, it's the story that matters most. It's what we care about, who we care about - the characters, the narrative and the drama. Movie-makers enamoured of technological wizardry, please take note. News and current affairs media please take note. It's still the story that counts.

In Cairns at the International Conference on the Future of the Book, eminent speakers shared their insights at the plenary session, leaving no doubt that the book is here to stay, even if the form changes. After all, radio did not disappear with the advent of TV, but is better than ever, with a huge following, now that it knows its niche. In other words, all forms coexist.

At 10 billion books/year, never before have more titles been published than now. Libraries did not disappear either, but are now growing in clientele as fast as they can adapt to the challenge of becoming interactive information and community centres, their mission to encourage a love of reading, and the new goals of life-long learning and sharing. Reading Clubs for joint critique over a good bottle of red abound as another phenomenon of the growing popularity of books, or for the elderly, morning tea book chats led by a discussion coordinator are a great new trend to foster a sense of community and exchange.

Over 40 cities worldwide have now adopted 'One Book One City' programs. Brisbane did it last year for the first time with Peter Carey's *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, with 10,000 participating readers who could share a common topic of conversation and/or join structured discussion groups in person or on the web.

Literacy remains a challenge worldwide, and in Australia, where 12% of the population are not literate. Books for children remain an important induction and initial motivator for reading, imaginative stimulus and a vicarious rehearsal for life.

Future trends? If we take the long arc from when humans were pre-speech, first there was *sign*. Once the oral [or *aura*] tradition developed, a priestly caste delivered knowledge ritualistically. The advent of the *written* word gave rise to the publisher, where language became standardised and access to knowledge increased. The contemporary trend is to *visual* literacy and communication. Written words and conformity may wane. Diversity may flourish as the impact of technology puts the means of being a publisher, graphic artist and/or film-maker into the hands of ordinary people through home PCs and video cameras. We are all fast becoming 'authors', with our own intimate and personal stories becoming the genetic material of culture, to self-propagate as vehicles for ideas to flourish.

The Future of the BOOK

Part 2



David Reiter

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Director of Interactive Publications P/L, David Reiter, was invited to address the International Conference on the Future of the Book held in Cairns on 22-24 April. Here he reviews the highlights of the conference.

Did Genghis Khan really invent the e-book? No one at the International Future of the Book Conference in Cairns went so far as to propose that, but it was the kind of conclusion a hot-wired imagination might have come to by the end of this stimulating conference.

Actually author John Man from the UK, in his nostalgic tribute to Gutenberg, gave Genghis a lot of air time and did give him credit for sewing the seeds that led to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and a general preference for memory to memory transmission of culture rather than through the print medium. The old Mongol would have preferred a Lonely Planet guide to Eastern Europe, so when the market demands, business responds.

In the end there really wasn't much of a debate about the future of the book in printed form. No one got up to trot out the stats on how poorly e-books are selling, and my cab driver, in spite of missing all the sessions, was certainly in no doubt that people still prefer hard copy. After all, e-book readers haven't improved much since their inception several years ago, and most of the talent seems to be concentrating on delivering digital content via printed books or surrogate readers that might as well be books.

Jason Epstein, credited with starting the paperback revolution, threw down the gauntlet from the first

plenary session, by suggesting that soon authors would be able to transmit text from the top of Everest to a machine that could print, bind and print a book in less than three minutes at 50% of the cost of the current workflow. Big publishers would be the big losers in this scenario, with authors working closely with literary agents to polish manuscripts and then make them available to the world via intelligent Print-on-Demand [POD] machines as user-friendly to the end user as automatic tellers.

Epstein saw the main advantage of POD as ensuring the 'accumulated memory of the species' would not be lost. Backlists could be maintained indefinitely, and online versions of texts would be available globally, even to readers disadvantaged by geography or their economic standing. Simplifying the supply chain would mean that booksellers and distributors would lose out, resulting in royalties of 30% to authors and margins of up to 30% for publishers.

So what are we waiting for?

Epstein's miracle machine is only in prototype at the moment, and then there is the problem of getting enough of them out there to make the new publishing system a credible alternative to the current one. And Epstein had no doubt that big publishers and printers would not go gently unto that good night.

Indeed he conceded that the system would be better suited to titles that do not sell in huge quantities. Which means that the larger bookshops would probably drag the chain until they could be convinced the sales would follow their US\$100,000 investment in Epstein's POD machine.

Publishing is all about achieving efficiency in the process, and Bill Cope, Director, Common Ground Publishing, sees great sense in trying to convince authors and publishers to work in templates that would make "re-purposing" content easier. Authors can be a feral lot when it comes to applying style sheets—or even going beyond the basics of the word processor—to save time for the publisher and improve someone else's bottom line. And again big publishers already angst-ridden about shrinking margins are less likely to entertain new systems than independent publishers with less to lose.

Professor Göran Ross, from the Centre for Business Performance at Cranfield University, UK, suggested that it was high time for the key players in the publishing process to start working more systematically in managing their "intellectual capital". He was critical of those companies so obsessed with efficiency that they produce things cheaply that nobody wants. What is needed is a greater emphasis on providing *value* in the process. Here, authors become "value shops", with their leverage depending

on their creative ability [having a recognised name certainly helps!]. Publishers form value networks, enhancing the creative output of their authors, under brands they hope will attract business in the marketplace.

Oliver Freeman, Managing Director, RichmondVentures, encouraged us to embrace uncertainty in planning scenarios to meet alternative futures. It's an attractive suggestion to those of us still trying to remedy the mistakes of the past in the shifting sands of the present! The moral here seems to be that once you've planned for the things you know are going to happen there's no time for a coffee break; we need to bring what we don't know into the equation, too. And that means thinking 15 years ahead.

Good advice for organizations that can afford a full-time strategic planner. Not so hot for those that live from year to year on slim margins and shrinking grants.

There were a myriad of shorter sessions as well, including my own: *Synergies between Print and Digital Publishing: Five Years in the Life of an Australian Independent*. Quite independently from Epstein I had reached the same conclusion about the role of small presses in the new publishing equation. Not only are independent publishers better positioned to take advantage of the rapid changes in technology, we are more likely to benefit from them by using them to make our processes more efficient and widen our access to existing and emerging markets. The best example of this for IP is our multimedia work under our IP Digital imprint. Rather than taking months to debate the place of experimental work in a larger infrastructure, smaller companies can just do it, as Nike advises.

The danger is in becoming over-extended, and in that I agree wholeheartedly with Göran Ross' three-pronged advice that companies should only do:

- what they can truly excel in
- what they can be passionate about
- what will enhance the economic engine of the business.

Just to touch on some of the more interesting points raised in the shorter sessions, Dr Simone Murray of UQ's School of English saw fertile ground for the book being the 'handmaiden' of other media. As our screen-viewing options expand, so too will the demand for quality content. Authors may find lucrative opportunities in adapting their own print work, or that of others, to screen versions.

Carolyn Cohn of Blackwell's Book Services, and other speakers from the library sector, acknowledged increasing pressure on library budgets that leaves less

money for purchasing books. More and more libraries depend on "suppliers" who filter available content for them, even select and package their purchases. Good news for larger publishers who have the muscle to have priority with the suppliers; bad news for independent publishers who cannot afford to pay the discounts the suppliers demand to get priority attention with their clients.

Perhaps one session we should have had but didn't would have considered how libraries can restore the balance between the homogenised outcomes recommended by their suppliers and the more innovative titles being passed over when small presses fail to gain access to library collection managers.

For IP, a very good case in point is our own local Brisbane City Council Library Service. Comprising the largest number of branches in Australia, the BCC Libraries have chosen to order through supply channels that, for the most part, have ignored our list. This puts us [IP] in the ridiculous position of not having titles produced in Brisbane available in our own public libraries. When asked, we advise people to go to the Gold Coast, Redlands, Logan, Ipswich and Pine Rivers Regional Libraries, which do stock our IP titles because we meet directly with the collection librarians. Christine McKensie, Manager of BCC Library Services, gave a paper: *Readers and Public Libraries—Are We Keeping Up?* The answer to her question from an IP perspective is a resounding no!

The conference went for three days, and there were many other sessions I would have liked to have attended, many more but couldn't.

Common Ground is to be applauded for bringing so many people of note together to discuss the many themes relevant to the future of the book.

The plan is for the proceedings to be published on CD-ROM, so if you found this survey of interest, I suggest that you check out the conference site:

www.Book-Conference.com

Genghis will be there, in spirit, at least.

David Reiter
Director
Interactive Publications P/L

www.ipoz.biz



Dr Mary Kalantzis

Interview with Dr Mary Kalantzis
by Derek Tipper for Arts Nexus at the
International Conference on
The Future of the Book
Cairns - April 2003

The Future of the BOOK

Part 3

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Dr Mary KALANTZIS is Dean of the Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services at RMIT. She is co-author with Bill Cope of a number of books including *A Place in the Sun: Recreating the Australian Way of Life* [HarperCollins, Sydney, 2000], *Productive Diversity* [Pluto Press, Sydney, 1998] and *White Man Dreaming: A History of Australian Nation Making* [Pluto Press, Sydney, 2001] and recently edited a collection, *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures* [Routledge, London, 2000]. Bill Cope, a Director of the Common Ground publishing group since 1984, is working on the experimental mixed-medium print and internet publishing C-2-C system mentioned below. Common Ground were the organisers of the International Conference on the Future of the Book in Cairns in 2003. The next will be held in Beijing in late 2004.



Derek Tipper is a working and teaching journalist and researcher and is currently a Board Member of Arts Nexus.

THE INTERVIEW

Derek Tipper: I was just interested in the kind of *Common Ground Publishing* ideal, how this might fit into some of the other work that you've done in terms of diversity and community building, restoration and creation of community? I guess there's a perception about the kind of virtual world being a little alienating and maybe even anti-community. I was just wondering how these two ideas might come together?

Mary Kalantzis: I can only tell you my story and how from my perspective these things came together. The C-2-C Project or *Creator to Consumer* Project is to address the question, how do authors get to their community of readers? How do creators of all kinds get to people who are interested in what they are doing?

For Bill Cope and I, from our point of view, it happened as a consequence of both being writers who had produced two books at a point in time when both our publishers who were taking our books in Australia were discontinuing their work. One was Harper Collins. We were just finishing a book with them and Harper Collins closed down their academic publishing. The other one was Macmillan. We were publishing with Macmillan and at Christmas time they let off 5 years staff.

We thought, how is Australia, part of the English speaking world, going to compete? You know the publishers we publish with are multi-nationals, but if all the publishers go off-shore, who's going to be interested in Australian poetry, in Australian politics and in Australian music? Where will poets and playwrights, academics and scientists go? Where will we as Australians be able to talk about the *local* that matters *to us*, as well as get a bigger audience?

It was that thing as writers that got us going. We were really distressed by that. The other thing that distressed us is, in Australia we have this multi-lingual and multi-cultural history including the very complicated relationship with Indigenous and settlers and immigrants, and there are stories to tell. We were always interested in the multi-lingual and how that happened. What happens to those people? Where were they going and how were they going to contribute and get noticed?

So these were the questions that motivated us to start thinking about what the new technology might or might not offer. Was there a democratising potential or was it simply all going to be owned by Bill Gates and the big publishing houses? Were the big publishing houses going to close down every initiative that anybody did, absorb it or buy it out, or would it be possible to bring together a whole bunch of people to think about how to reclaim the means of production?

The old agenda was always if you have the means of production, then you're going to be able to influence the world, whether it was a printing press, the paint brush, the radio or whatever. So if everything was going digital, how did you get into that? How did you get to know it? How did you get to shape it? How did you get it to stay with you?

What we discovered along the way was a whole bunch of people, 'techi-nerds', who were travelling in that same space who wanted the digital world to be open,

an open space. We discovered these people. In fact most of the techies that worked for us have done philosophy degrees or history degrees. They don't come out of engineering - they're people who like that space and want to be creative in that space. They want it open and free and democratic. So we came across people like that.

Then we thought, there's no point dealing with America or England, the 'coalition of the willing' because they're so big and so powerful and they've got a hold on the mass market.

So who would be interested in the democratic space? It'll be little countries like Australia and maybe places like India, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, like *our region*.

Next we thought we'd go and see first what they were doing in New York. So we went to New York for the first *eBook* conference, and that's where we heard Epstein for the first time, the inventor of the paperback, who is now here at this conference.

When we got there we realised the people of New York were not going to let people like us in. They're making so much money out of the big blockbusters, so much money out of the commercial end and the big list, and becoming much more commercial, that they weren't going to be as flexible as they needed to be, so that gave us a sense of confidence that we were on the right track.

Next we went to India and China and places like that. We knew there was a thirst in those countries not to be swamped by English language or the external big culture, so it came together for us. We thought this was the space for the alliance. This is where the alliance would happen. It wouldn't happen with the big American or English groups, it would happen with other places, with East Timor, Afghanistan, and places that didn't want to be swamped.

So how could we relate? What could we do and what could we invent? What did we need to invent? What were the tools? Everyone talks about tools. What tools did we need to invent to allow creators to master that space, and to profit from that space, because they do need to profit. They need to get rewards from that space.

The other thing we discovered, we realised that as linguists and educators perhaps we understood how you develop what might be called the 'technical framework' that ordinary people could understand. Because the technical frameworks, the meta-data, the standard systems, were coming out of technicians, and ordinary people couldn't understand them. So there was this secret world, the virtual world, the secret coding systems that ordinary folk couldn't do.

Next we said, how do we set up coding frames and meta-data systems and tools that ordinary people could

use? And that led to the *Creator to Consumer* [CCP] Publishing experiment. It published a whole bunch of works now in testing with poets and educators.

Next it's going into the university sector because in the university sector we give all our intellectual property away for nothing! In fact we heard yesterday in this conference that only 1% of academics are interested in payment for their publishing. They just publish. They don't think that they need to be paid, so just give it all away to be owned by one company. So now we're working with Australian universities and giving them our system or negotiating our system, which will allow authors to own their own copyright.

So in a funny way we're coming from that diversity, liberation, democratic, multi-lingual, educating, designer, expression - that world in alliance with the creators, publishers and technicians. We've come up with something that seems compelling.

Derek Tipper: Sounds like there's a kind of Keynesian economics thing to it, as if you can make those income streams go, that would sustain it - the idea there is a money interest, a financial interest, a kind of pump-priming side to it as well?

Mary Kalantzis: That's the other thing about the supply chain. Everyone talks about the supply chain, saying that the new technology cuts out some bits of the supply chain, the inventory, the storeroom - all that cost in the real publishing world, the physical publishing world. Seventy percent [70%] of their costs are tied up in warehousing, distribution, inventory, that stuff. So if you can cut that out and have print on demand [POD] and digital books, plus physical books, then that 70% can go back to authors. Or at least more of it can go back to authors. In fact, authors can directly connect with their customers.

But what you also need is quality, and there are two sources of quality. One is the discerning user, but you also have to ensure that somebody looking at your work knows that there's quality in there too. So we've got a peer refereeing system. Committees of practice say we'll publish this because we know it's valuable. You've got to have quality because the digital environment allows you to publish *anything*. So publishers are still important because they can provide that filter of quality, otherwise the ordinary user will provide it anyway but they will not come back to you or buy it. They do want some help so they don't waste their money. These are the issues for which we're trying to come up with solutions.

I don't know whether we'll be able to give authors back more because communities of practice are so small, authors are never going to become rich from communities of practice, unless they crack the global market. But once they go into a site like ours, they also go into amazon.com and they are then open to the world market too.



We're not foolish to think capitalism doesn't work without profits. You have to be able to make sure that people can make a living. Writers and artists are really weird creatures, and although they need to eat, they don't put a priority on that. They're going to do their thing anyway even if they starve.

Derek Tipper: It's the complete democratisation, the Big D democratisation that interests me. Currently there's a consensus that in the era of pre-emption in the world, there's capitalism and that's it, there's only one kind. So anyone who might suggest there might be a way to distribute profit in a different way is immediately labelled something other than a capitalist, and therefore a threat, and therefore marginalised. The way a project like this puts in the Big D democratisation for individual creators is the interesting thing.

Mary Kalantzis: Also not just individualism because they rely on communities of practice. They rely on communities and networks of communities. So there'll be a tight community and a less tight community, and a cascading group over that, so we're not about fragmenting society but enabling society to engage in things that matter to them.

Derek Tipper: Yes, it's a diversity of ideas working.

Mary Kalantzis: It's what we call civic pluralism, which is not just being different and separate but inter-related. What are the means for inter-relationship and understanding each other? How do you make that access available to people? The high quality and beautiful - it needs to be beautiful too. Like, it's not about *scungy*, the new technology allows you to do it in high quality and beautiful, and people love beautiful things.

Derek Tipper: Is that where the culture is currently, the idea of inter-relatedness *and* individualism? There seems to me to be a very strong and loud and vigorous argument going on about these things.

Mary Kalantzis: Diversity creates individualism *and* fragmentation. People will define themselves in different communities and among different things that please them, but they're also inter-dependent. It's both, it's not either/ or.

The bit that we didn't focus on is how we make each other? How men and women make each other in their difference? How Indigenous and non-indigenous make each other. How America and Australia make each other. It's not as if America can be America on its own. Little countries that engage with them impact on how they think, so we make each other in community. That's what sociality means, unless we live in a tube.

Derek Tipper: Are there not many Americas?

Mary Kalantzis: That's right. That's always been our political project which we've called Productive Diversity and Civic Pluralism.

We think that what we're doing here will contribute to that agenda in a different way, so we don't have to be scared of the digital environment. We don't have to see it as a linear shift from one to the other, it's just another set of tools.

All the others will stay, as we've heard in the conference this morning - story-telling, tablets, books, walls, parchments, electronic. It's always the passion *to tell a story*, the passion to communicate and the excellence in resonating which survives. The tools and means will change from smoke in the sky to digital pulses.

Derek Tipper: Thank you.

Mary Kalantzis: Thank you for your interest.

International Conference on The Future of the Book

Conference papers are due to be posted
<http://book-conference.com/>

Common Ground Publishing

<http://commongroundpublishing.com/>