

Review by Stephanie Green: 'Arts of Publication: Scholarly Publishing in Australia and Beyond'.

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TEXT review

Lucy Neave, James Connor & Amanda Crawford (eds) *Arts of Publication: Scholarly Publishing in Australia and Beyond*

review by Stephanie Green

Lucy Neave, James Connor & Amanda Crawford (eds)
Arts of Publication: Scholarly Publishing in Australia and Beyond
Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007
ISBN 1740971353
Pb, 206 pages, AUD \$29.95

Arts of Publication was developed from a one-day symposium on academic publishing, held four years ago at the National Museum of Australia. A handbook for emerging academic authors, it combines words of experience and practical advice from a variety of academics, publishers and writers. Some contributors tell the tricks of the book publishing trade. Some give guidance for graduating doctoral students on publication strategies for career development. Others provide research-based discussion of current Australian publishing trends. Indeed, *Arts of Publication* offers itself as a 'wide-ranging mix of academic inquiry, history and commentary, spiced with unashamedly "self-help" advice' (17). Its advice is certainly valuable. The only risk with advice is, like any debutante conduct-book, how quickly it can go out of fashion.

There is no doubt that this book provides a useful resource for any researcher with ambitions to publish. Many of the golden rules of successful authorship are emphasised by the contributors: such as 'write for an audience', 'use clear, non-specialist language', 'don't take knock-backs personally' and 'keep trying'. Two introductory chapters by Lucy Neave provide some background to the topic, concluding that, although the publishing industry is changing rapidly, for the 'well-informed scholarly author, there is a wealth of opportunity today in Australia and overseas' (49).

Amanda Crawford provides advice on how to translate the doctoral thesis into a marketable book for non-specialist readers. Rhonda Black contributes a practical chapter about preparing an effective book proposal. Adam Shoemaker, then Dean of Arts with the Australian National University, endorses these efforts, pointing out that some of the most exciting opportunities to publish may lie outside the sphere of traditional academic publication. He urges young scholars to embrace the kind of story-telling and active writing that readers and publishers alike will find compelling: '... the lightning bolt of communication: the production of theses that are at one and the same time, authoritative and an absolute joy to read.' (159).

Arts of Publication also contains tips for graduate students seeking to build an academic career. In Chapter 5, for example, James Connor, Alastair Greig and Roseanne Kennedy observe that journal articles are 'a key method of communication

for academics: they are the 'gold standard' when it comes to disseminating your ideas'. They also identify completing the PhD - 'those magical letters', publishing a book, good referees and teaching experience as the other four essential ingredients for establishing academic credibility and securing the all important first job (91). In this respect, little has changed since I completed my own doctorate ten years ago.

The work put together here by Neave, Connor and Crawford is not only helpful for the embarking research scholar. There is guidance, as well, for academics and independent researchers at any stage of their career who are keen to maintain a publication profile. Relevant arguments about the changing nature of the author/publisher relationship, the rise of the web as an increasingly significant medium for all forms of communication and changes in book consumption patterns are usefully explored. Russell Smith's chapter on web-based publishing is among the most interesting here in its negotiation of these issues. Smith observes that, while academics 'embraced the internet as an informal means of peer exchange, they were slow to invest in online publication as a serious publishing medium' (69) This resistance, Russell argues, is based on traditional cultural practices within academia and perceived issues of managing quality control (72).

Without question, the publishing industry is undergoing phenomenal change. While more books than ever are printed each year, electronic publishing opportunities are rapidly expanding and evolving. Traditional modes of academic publication have been slow to adapt, according to Smith, but the diversity of possibility offered within the online arena, from specialist research websites to academic e-publishing, is gradually forcing the change. Many universities no longer view the cost of the print-based publishing house as essential for fostering and disseminating scholarship, or as an investment in institutional ambassadorship. As Neave points out, some university presses have adapted for survival. Melbourne University Press, UWA Press and UNSW Press, for example, seek to publish material that has broad public appeal, but is also informed by inquiry, knowledge and ideas.

Researchers are gradually taking up e-publishing options in various forms, although this may mean depositing into databases work that was previously published in print. Some of the most innovative research-based web publishing to date has occurred in cultural institutions, such as libraries, galleries and museums. But web publishing offers considerable opportunity for academics. The material pleasures of the book will always have great appeal for many readers: its portability and familiarity, its presence on a bookshelf, apparent solidity and permanence, are widely cherished. But no book is flood or fire-proof. Paper is heavy and tree-consuming. And, the aesthetics of print publication are hardly essential to the effective exchange of academic content. Web publishing can facilitate peer-review processes just as effectively as print publication, and has potential to achieve a wider and more immediate participation in academic discussion. *TEXT* is one example.

In his discussion of these issues, Smith points out that the number of web-initiated journals is growing rapidly (75) and e-publishing repositories are gradually being embraced and improved. He also observes that there are a number of long term challenges, such as strategies for the survival of digital archives, the need for public access and security. We can anticipate, however, that the future of academic publishing is likely to be increasingly web-based, and that academics will continue to develop online peer research communities within and beyond university frameworks.

Arts of Publication is an essential tool for research graduates, postgraduate

supervisors, established scholars and independent researchers. This book offers vital encouragement for all researchers to write well, understand their prospective audience and communicate their ideas - to the interested public as well as to collegial experts.

This is a budget publication, in the sense that the paper quality is not the best and the design elements are limited. My main reservation is that although some kinds of advice will always be relevant, a good deal of its material will date. Given the scope of its discussion, it seems surprising that we have here a print publication to convey the pearls of the original symposium, rather than a web format devoted to the ongoing dynamics of academic publishing. A cross-institutional web-based project on this topic would not only nurture new academics, it could prompt research, present new information, connect scholars across disciplines, and maintain its relevance as a resource for current and future scholars.

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[Return to Contents Page](#)

[Return to Home Page](#)

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