Alexandra Dane and Millicent Weber, Eds.: Post-Digital Book Cultures: Australian Perspectives

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Jodie Lea Martire¹

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Post-Digital Book Cultures: Australian Perspectives is the fifth volume in the Monash Publishing Series. The first four titles gathered research from the Academic Days of Australia's annual Independent Publishing Conference, which was sadly lost to book scholars in 2020. I suspect that this title was then commissioned from academics and students connected to the University of Melbourne Publishing and Communications program. This source is worth mentioning, as it seems this program—and Melbourne-connected scholars—are coming to serve as the hub for a developing school of thought around digitally mediated publishing practices and book communities. This collection is a fair representation of that “school”. It also seems appropriate that these ideas are forming in Australia, a nation with a short history of print and codices, a small population (and an even smaller bookish one), and vast physical distances that are often best overcome through digital platforms and technologies.

Editors Alexandra Dane and Millicent Weber present “post-digital publishing... as being the expansion of the digital: the second (or even third) wave of digital publishing, wherein digital and analogue book technologies exist with simultaneous relevance” (p. 1). The eight essays in the collection consider post-digital publishing practices and book communities, and many consider their points of intersection.

Dane's own contribution, on the affective labour embedded in the community reading platform Goodreads, sits squarely at the crossroads. It provides a systematic analysis of how emotional work is extracted from Goodreads reviewers for the financial benefit of publishers and platforms. Weber takes Covid-19 as the opportunity to complete a quantitative study of readership patterns, also on Goodreads, and analyses many months of engagement data from 36 titles to investigate reading in

✉ Jodie Lea Martire
martire@fastmail.fm

¹ St Lucia, Australia

pandemic times. (Weber's piece is particularly rich and detailed.) Kenna MacTavish provides a benchmarking article on how the hashtag #bookstagram is used to establish and capitalise on bookish personas and communities on Instagram, in practice primarily for marketing purposes (personal or commercial). Claire Parnell's article is a careful examination of the structures and affordances of the crowd-funding platform Kickstarter and how it has honed its offerings to attract small and independent publishers; her case study is the long-running fine press, Thornwillow Press.

Two other essays consider creativity and publishing that makes the most of digital affordances. Sarah Layton analyses "transmedial" publishing projects "that span across [sic] web platforms, Twine games, print pages, ePub files and animations" (p. 200). The case studies for this essay are Instar's *Videogames for Humans* and Viz Media's *Homestuck*, which Layton sees as novel contributions to the concept of "the book". Eloise Faichney investigates digital literary creation from a personal perspective, considering her own poetic, intellectual and community history within the Tumblr Writing Community.

The remaining two articles are among the strongest in the collection, and focus broadly on exploring the impact of the digital in terms of publishing e-books (Kate Cuthbert) and mapping rights sales from Australia through the use of "digital literary cartography" (Airlie Lawson). Cuthbert, former publisher of Escape (a Harlequin digital romance imprint), writes an autoethnography of the short-lived e-romance boom in Australia (2012–16). Her description of the history and impacts of romance publishing, from self-publishing through e-book imprints to reabsorption by the Big Five, is cogent and informative, and no doubt applies to other sectors of trade publishing. And finally, Lawson steps the reader through the use of digital mapping tools to explore concepts, to illustrate information, and to further explore the complex web of knowledge that is Australian rights sales into foreign languages and territories. While her diagrams can appear intimidating to strongly qualitative thinkers, Lawson's explanations are thorough and this is a valuable contribution from the digital humanities to book history.

Unfortunately, this volume frequently lacks in terms of editorial rigour, and at all phases of the editorial process. One piece was poorly structured and in need of significant work or guidance to make its points clear; another author claimed to protect the anonymity of a case study in the article text, but did not extend this protection to the URLs in the references. Some large assertions were made that required both explanation and evidence, e.g. stating that Bookstagram is "a digital platform and architecture that enables and promotes the production of books" (p. 83), without any further elucidation. Glaring copy-editing errors were present—e.g. in the names of a Booker Prize-winning title and of an organ of the United Nations—and sometimes repeated several times. The whole collection also suffered from erratic styling: in the introduction, the book's own title had different formatting in the body text ("*Post-digital Book Cultures*") and the running head immediately above it ("*Post-Digital Book Cultures*"), and some chapters used single quotation marks ('/') while others used double ("f"). Too often, the footnotes and references were incomplete and inaccurately presented. The range and repetition of these faults made for ironically uncomfortable reading in a title on book cultures and publishing practices,

and it is disappointing that Monash University Publishing did not commit sufficient resources to ensure the editorial quality of this collection.

That being said, the research presented in this collection makes a helpful contribution to the field's understanding of specific digital tools, techniques and trends, and how they are used by—and themselves use—publishers, authors and readers in our contemporary bibliosphere.

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